



MIT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS OFFICE

POCKET GUIDE: LIFE AT MIT AS AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT



LIFE AT MIT AS AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT

Welcome to “Life at MIT as an International Student”! This booklet is designed to be your comprehensive guide to navigating your experience at MIT as an international student. From housing options and campus resources to cultural activities and academic support, we’ve compiled essential information to help you thrive during your time here. Whether you’re just starting your journey at MIT or looking to enhance your experience, this booklet aims to provide valuable insights and practical tips to make your transition and integration into MIT life as smooth as possible. Enjoy exploring all that MIT and its vibrant community have to offer!





CONTENTS

Moving In 01

Cambridge + Somerville Neighbourhoods
Finding Furniture
Setting up

Moving Around MIT 21

The "T"
MIT Shuttle
Biking

Food 25

Supermarkets
MIT Grocery Shuttle
Restaurants

The ISO 33

Things to do 37

Parks and Outdoor Activities
Museums
New England Cities and Towns
Must-Watch Events and Activities

MOVING IN



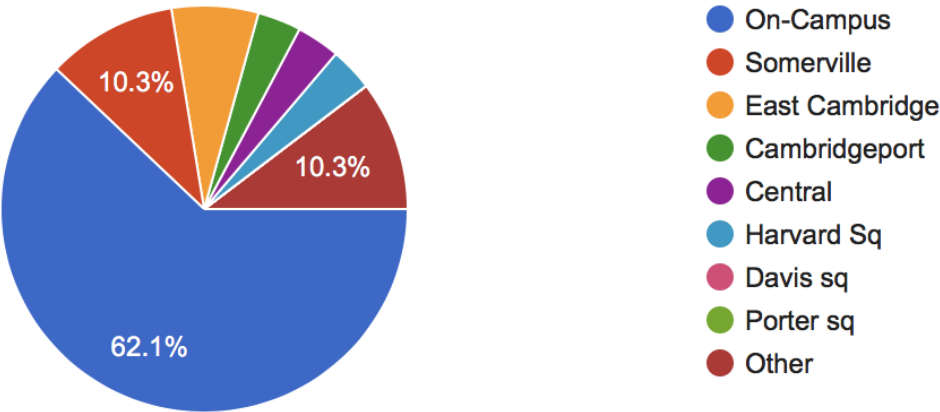
Moving In

- A. Cambridge + Somerville Neighbourhoods
- B. Finding Furniture
- C. Setting up

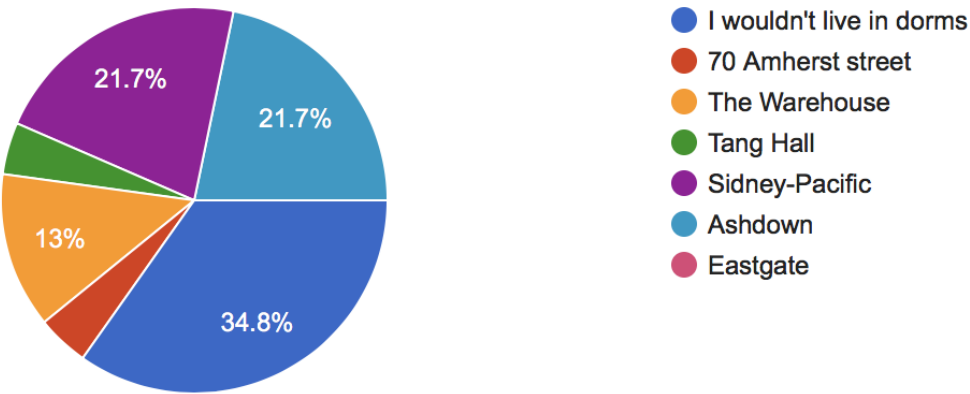
Student Poll
On-Campus Housing

- 70 Amherst Stree
- Sidney-Pacific Graduate Residence
- Westgate
- Tang Hall
- Ashdown House
- Graduate Tower at Site 4
- Eastgate

Where do you live?



If you live or have lived on-campus, which dorm would you live in if you could choose again?



A. Cambridge + Somerville Neighbourhoods

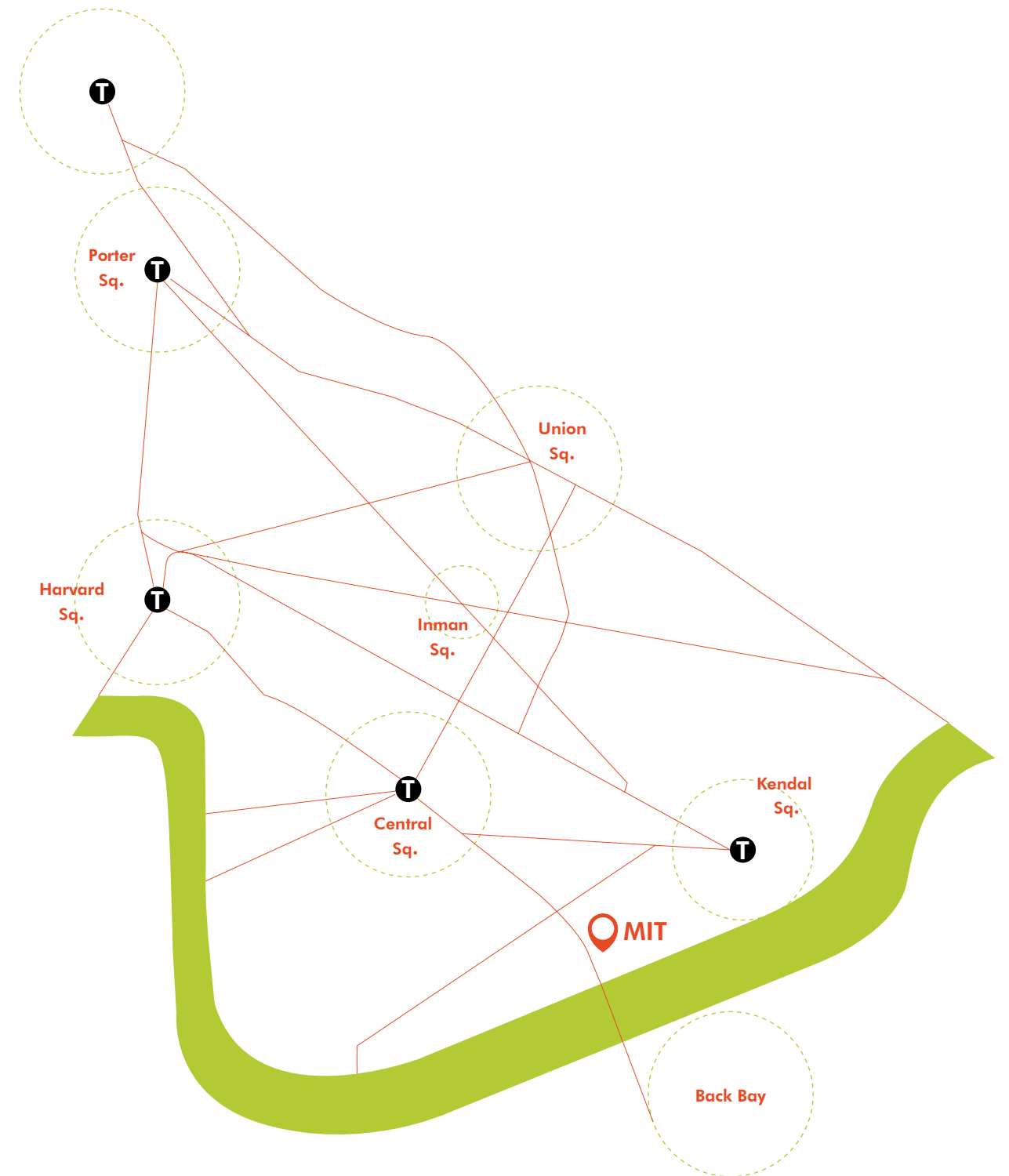
Deciding where to live near MIT really depends on what you're looking for.

As an international student, living on campus for your first year at MIT can be a great choice. It takes away the stress of finding a place to live in a new country and allows you to focus on settling into your graduate life. You'll have everything you need right there—classes, support services, and a community of fellow students who are also navigating their way through MIT. It's a supportive environment that helps you adjust to your new surroundings and build connections, making the transition smoother and more enjoyable. However, there is a limited number of apartments and sometimes it's hard to get one.

Check more information here: <https://studentlife.mit.edu/housing/graduate-family-housing/graduate-residences>

Most students choose to live in Cambridge and Somerville because they're close to MIT and the commute is easy. Each neighborhood in Cambridge and Somerville has its own unique vibe and advantages. Whether you prefer the convenience of being within walking distance to campus like in Kendall Square or Central Square, the vibrant arts scene of Inman Square, or the historic charm of Harvard Square, there's a neighborhood to suit every preference. If you're into trendy spots and nightlife, Davis Square might be perfect, while those seeking a quieter, more residential feel might prefer Cambridgeport.

Ultimately, choosing the right neighborhood is about finding the balance between proximity to MIT, lifestyle preferences, and personal interests. We've put together a quick guide to these squares.



Independent Rentals:

Living off-campus in independent rentals requires thorough research and understanding of rental agreements and local rental laws. Seeking advice from current students in your program can provide valuable insights into the rental process and help you make informed decisions about your housing options.

Finding off-campus housing around MIT can be done through various channels, such as Facebook marketplace, craigslist and dedicated Facebook housing groups for MIT and Harvard students. However, be careful and be aware of scams.

On Facebook groups, members often post available rooms or apartments, facilitating direct communication with landlords or current tenants.

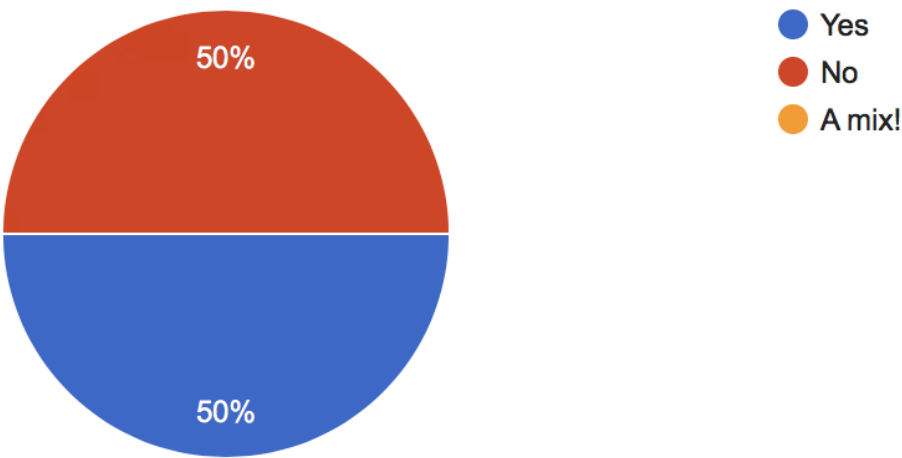
This can be advantageous for international students who don't have a credit score yet to rent a house on their own.

Living with roommates is a common practice among students to share expenses and foster a sense of community. It's important to discuss expectations and responsibilities upfront, including chores, bills, and house rules, to ensure a harmonious living arrangement.

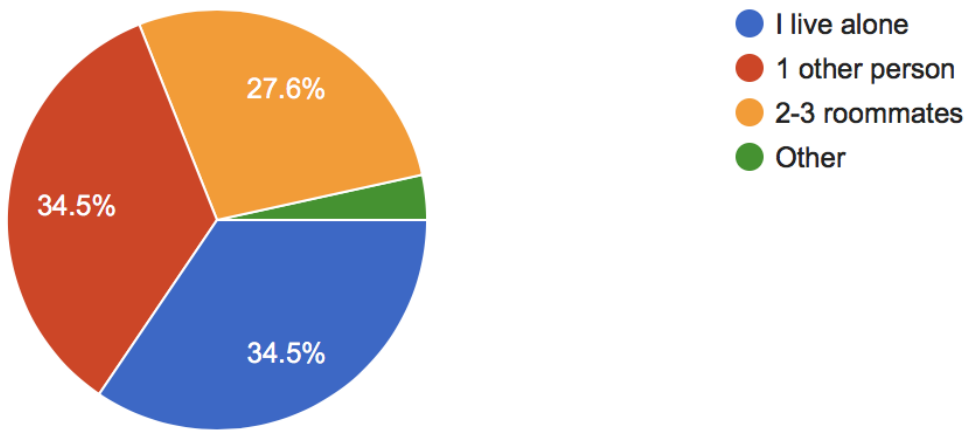
When renting independently, be aware of various fees and deposits that may be required:

Broker fees, security deposits, hidden costs etc.

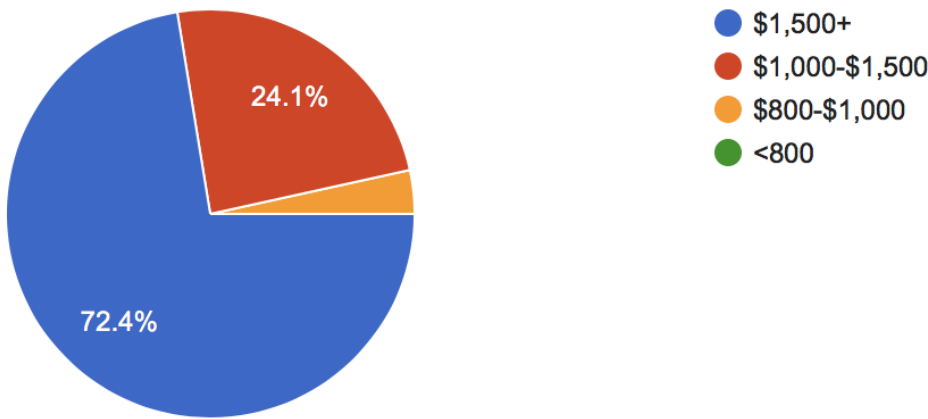
Do you live with an MIT Grad ?



How many roommates do you live with ?



How much do you pay for rent ?



1. Kendall Square:

Kendall Square is very close to MIT, making it a convenient choice for students. It's known for its high-tech and innovative atmosphere, with plenty of coworking spaces and startups. Popular spots include Tatte and the Kendall Square Cinema, perfect for a study break or a night out.

Pros: Close to MIT, high-tech and innovative atmosphere.

Cons: Pricey, less residential feel.

Kendall to MIT: 15 min walk, 9m bike, 15m bus, 8m car

3. Inman Square:

Inman Square, a 30 minute walk or 15 minute bike to MIT, offers a quirky, artsy vibe with unique cafes like 1369 Coffee House and restaurants like Oleana. It offers a more laid-back atmosphere compared to the busier squares. The community is friendly and there's always something interesting happening.

Pros: Artsy vibe, cafes and restaurants, residential.

Cons: Fewer public transportation options, can feel isolated.

Inman to MIT: 20 min walk, 13 min bike, 25 min bus, 10min car

2. Central Square

Central Square is a short walk from MIT and offers a diverse and vibrant community. It's packed with cafes, ice cream shops, music venues, and a variety of restaurants, providing a lively atmosphere. The Central Square T stop ensures easy access to other parts of the city, making it easy to get around.

Pros: Diverse and vibrant community, plenty of cafes and nightlife.

Cons: Can be noisy, some parts feel crowded.

Central to MIT: 10m walk, 5m bike, 10 min bus, 5 min car

4. Union Square:

Union Square features an eclectic mix of local shops, international eateries, and lively community events. It's a bit farther from MIT, the 86 bus line provides a direct connection. It is home to the famous Union Square Donuts and Bow Market, a cool spot for food and artisan goods. Market Basket is a supermarket known for its affordable prices.

Pros: A lot of shops and eateries, lively community events.

Cons: Slightly farther from MIT, ongoing construction projects can be busy.

Union to MIT: 32m walk, 17m bike, 45m bus, 13m car



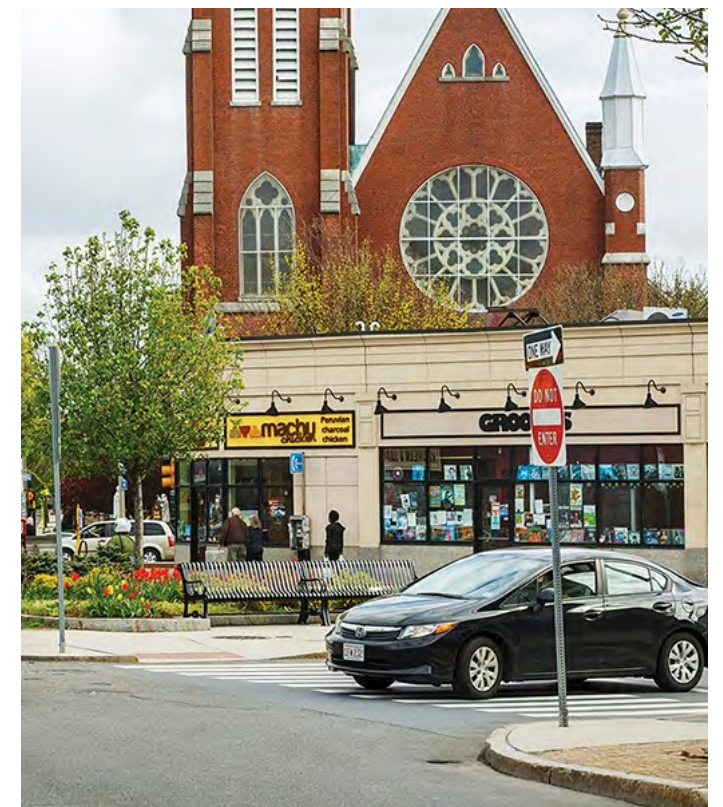
Kendall Square



Central Square



Inman Square



Union Square

5. Harvard Square:

Harvard Square is a historic and bustling area, a 10 minute T ride from MIT. It's filled with a variety of cafes like Tatte Bakery and Flour Cafe, bookstores like the Harvard Book Store. The square's vibrant street performers and historic ambiance make it a lively hangout.

Pros: Vibrant atmosphere with lots of cafes and shops, good public transportation.
Cons: Can be crowded and touristy, more expensive.

Harvard sq to MIT: 33m walk, 17m bike, 15 m T, 13m car.

7.Davis Square:

Davis Square is a trendy area about 20 minutes from MIT by the Red Line. It's a popular spot for young professionals, giving it a vibrant, dynamic atmosphere that feels less like a traditional college town. The square is filled with lively cafes like Diesel Cafe, a variety of restaurants, and entertainment options like the Somerville Theatre. Its vibrant community and regular events, such as the Davis Flea Market, make it a favorite among students and young professionals alike.

Pros: Hip and trendy area, great for dining and entertainment, well-connected by public transport.
Cons: Farther from MIT, can be expensive, busy especially on weekends.

Davis to MIT: 65m walk, 27m bike, 20m T, 20m carmin bike, 25 min bus, 10min car

6. Porter Square

Porter Square offers a mix of convenience and calm, with great public transport via the Red Line. It's known for the Porter Square Shopping Center and cozy cafes. The area is quieter than Harvard Square but still has plenty of dining options, including the popular Ramen restaurant, Yume Wo Katare.

Pros: Good public transportation, variety of shopping and dining options, quieter than Central or Harvard Square.
Cons: Longer commute to MIT, less nightlife.

Porter to MIT: 54 m walk, 24 m bike, 25m T, 19 car

8 Back Bay:

Back Bay, located about a 20 minute commute from MIT via the Green Line, offers an escape from the academic environment. Known for its stunning historic architecture and upscale atmosphere, it attracts those looking to explore beyond campus life. The neighborhood boasts a plethora of clothing stores ranging from boutique shops along Newbury Street to major brands at Copley Place. Additionally, Back Bay is renowned for its diverse dining scene, with a wide array of restaurants ranging from cozy cafes to upscale eateries.

Pros: Beautiful historic architecture, upscale shopping and dining.
Cons: High cost of living, not very close to MIT, can be very touristy.

Back Bay to MIT: 35m walk, 20 m bike, 20 bus, 15 car



Harvard Square



Porter Square



Davis Square



Back Bay

9. Cambridgeport:

Cambridgeport is a residential and quiet area, very close to MIT. It offers good access to the Charles River, providing opportunities for outdoor activities. The neighborhood has a few cozy cafes, perfect for a relaxed study session.

Pros: Residential and quiet, close to MIT, good access to the Charles River.

Cons: Fewer dining and shopping options, can feel isolated, limited public transportation.

Cambridgeport to MIT: 20m walk, 10 min bike, 15m bus, 8 min car



<https://www.homes.com/local-guide/cambridge-ma/cambridgeport-neighborhood/>

Requirements:

Broker Fee: A broker fee is a commission paid to a real estate broker for their services in helping to secure a rental property. In some cases, landlords hire brokers to advertise their properties, conduct showings, and facilitate the lease signing process. The fee can vary but is typically equivalent to one month's rent or a percentage of the annual rent. Not all rental transactions involve a broker fee, so it's best to clarify this upfront when exploring rental options.

Security Deposit: Landlords typically require a security deposit from tenants to cover any damages beyond normal wear and tear that may occur during the tenancy. The security deposit is usually equivalent to one month's rent and is held by the landlord throughout the lease term. Upon moving out, the landlord will assess the condition of the property and deduct any necessary repairs or cleaning costs from the security deposit before returning the remainder to the tenant.

Hidden Costs: Apart from the monthly rent, there are additional expenses associated with renting a property that may not be immediately obvious. These include utilities such as electricity, gas, water, snow shoveling and internet services, which are often not included in the rent and need to be paid separately by the tenant. Some rental properties also charge fees for amenities like parking spaces or access to facilities such as laundry rooms.

First and Last Month's Rent: In the Boston area, it's common practice for landlords to request payment of both the first month's rent and the last month's rent upfront when signing a lease. This means that upon lease signing, you'll need to pay for two months' rent in addition to any security deposit and possible broker fee. The last month's rent serves as a prepayment for your final month in the rental property.

Scams

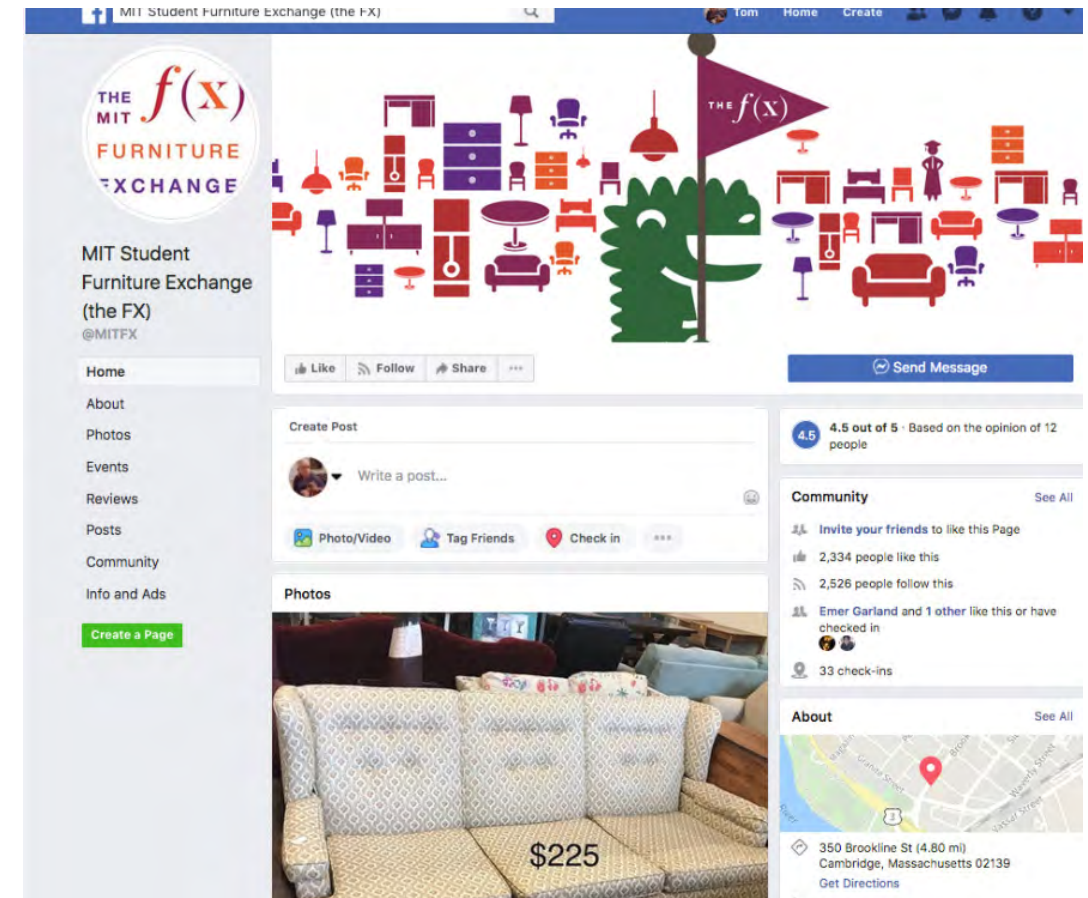
When searching for rentals online, especially from overseas, it's important to be cautious of potential scams. Scammers often pose as landlords or current tenants, offering "too good to be true" deals on apartments that may not exist or are misrepresented. To protect yourself, never send money before visiting the property in person or securing a verified lease agreement. Always verify the legitimacy of the listing, ask for references, and be wary. Using trusted platforms and seeking recommendations from fellow students can also help you avoid fraudulent listings.

Subleasing, or renting out your room or apartment temporarily, can be an option if you need to leave before your lease ends. Ensure that subletting is allowed according to your lease terms, and obtain written permission from your landlord to avoid any issues.

Finding Furniture

Once you've secured a place to live, setting up your new home will be one of your first tasks. Fortunately, Boston offers a variety of options for finding furniture that suit different styles and budgets.

<https://fx.mit.edu/>



Finding Furniture

Ikea

IKEA is a popular destination for students looking for affordable, stylish, and functional furniture. They offer a wide range of products, from beds and sofas to kitchenware and decor. There is one store about a 30 minute drive from Boston; you can also buy online and they offer delivery services if you don't have a car.

Target and Walmart

These retailers are great for purchasing basic furniture and household items at reasonable prices. They have several locations around Cambridge and Boston, making them convenient options for quick and affordable shopping.

WAYFAIR

For those who prefer online shopping, Wayfair offers a vast selection of furniture and home decor. Plus, they often have sales and free shipping deals.

Local Thrift stores

Thrift shops are a great place to find basic stuff like plates, cups and house decorations. These stores are a great way to save money and find unique pieces. Some popular thrift stores in Boston include: [delete: Boomerangs (unfortunately all Boomerangs closed)], Goodwill in Central Sq and Buffalo Exchange in Davis Square, as well as Rasberry Beret and Garment District in Cambridge (the last one can be pricey though).

FACEBOOK MARKETPLACE

For budget-friendly and sometimes even free options, Facebook Marketplace is an excellent resource. Many locals sell their used furniture at low prices, and you can often negotiate or find items for free. However, please be careful and aware of scams.



<https://fx.mit.edu/>

MIT Furniture Exchange

At MIT, Furniture Exchange is a service project of the MIT Women's League where you can discover discounted used furniture and household goods while supporting scholarships at MIT.

MIT FX is open Tuesdays and Thursdays 10am–4pm and the first Saturday of the month from 10am–1pm.

Insider tip: In Cambridge, it is quite common to find furniture left on the street for free, especially during the start and end of academic terms when many students move in and out. This practice might be unusual for some international students, but it's a well-established way to acquire free furniture here. You can find items like chairs, tables, and shelves that are still in good condition. However, it's important to be cautious—never pick up mattresses or upholstered items from the street due to the risk of bedbugs. Always inspect items carefully and clean them thoroughly before bringing them into your home.

Setting Up your phone

As an international student, setting up your phone will be one of your top priorities at your arrival. Having a reliable phone connection is crucial for staying connected, navigating the city, and accessing important information.

Boston offers several mobile carriers with various plans to fit different needs and budgets. Here are some of the most popular options: (maybe take out the descriptions of the carriers, except for the last one?)

Verizon: Known for its extensive coverage and reliable service.

AT&T: provides strong coverage and competitive plans.

TMobile: popular for its affordable plans and good urban coverage.

Mint Mobile: For budget-conscious students, Mint Mobile offers low-cost plans with good coverage. Plans are prepaid and available in multi-month bundles.

<https://www.verizon.com/business/locations/ma/cambridge>
<https://www.att.com/stores/massachusetts/cambridge/158706>
<https://www.t-mobile.com/stores/bd/t-mobile-cambridge-ma-02138-5214>

Prepaid vs. Contract Plans

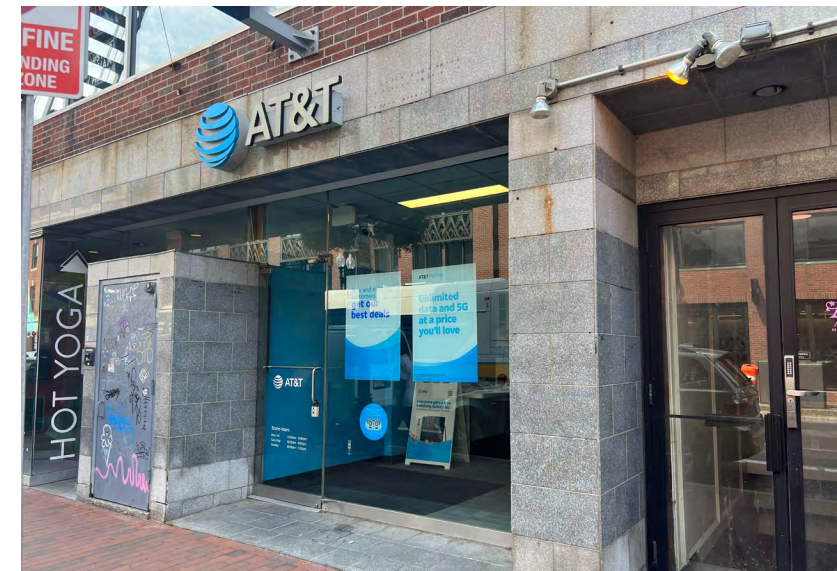
Decide whether a prepaid or contract plan suits your needs. Prepaid plans offer flexibility with no long-term commitment, making them ideal if you plan to stay for a shorter period or want to control your expenses. Contract plans, on the other hand, might offer better rates and phone deals but require a longer commitment.

Bringing Your Own Device

If you already have a phone, check if it's unlocked and compatible with U.S. carriers. Most carriers support bring-your-own-device (BYOD) options, allowing you to use your existing phone with a new U.S. SIM card. You can check compatibility on the carrier's website.



Verizon Store- Cambridge



AT&T Store - Central Sq



T Mobile store - Harvard Sq

MOVING AROUND



Transportation

- A. The “T”
- B. MIT Shuttle
- C. Biking

Navigating Boston is convenient thanks to its public transportation system, bike-friendly streets, and walkable neighborhoods.

Public Transportation: The “T”

The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), known as the “T,” is Boston’s public transit system, comprising subways, buses, commuter rail, and ferries. It’s a reliable and affordable way to travel around the city and its suburbs.

The T’s subway system has five main lines: Red, Blue, Green, Silver and Orange. Each line serves different areas of the city and connects to key destinations. Ideally you want to live in a place nearby the Red Line. This line will take you to downtown, MIT, and the major attractions.

Single Ticket Prices

Subway: \$2.40 per ride with a CharlieCard, \$2.90 with a CharlieTicket or cash
Bus: \$1.70 per ride with a CharlieCard, \$2.00 with a CharlieTicket or cash

Monthly Pass Prices

Subway Monthly Pass: \$90.00 (includes unlimited travel on local buses and subway lines)
Bus Monthly Pass: \$55.00 (includes unlimited travel on local buses only)
MIT Student pass.

For students, MIT subsidizes 50-70% of the cost of an MBTA public transit pass (or “T-pass”), which is available in a variety of options either monthly or – for even greater savings – as a semester bus and subway pass:

More info: <https://web.mit.edu/facilities/transportation/tpass/students.html>



FOOD



Food

- A. Supermarkets
- B. MIT Grocery Shuttle
- C. Restaurants

Exploring and enjoying cuisine from your home country or healthy options is important when moving abroad. Whether you prefer cooking at home or exploring local restaurants, Boston and Cambridge offer plenty of choices to satisfy your cravings.

Supermarkets

Boston and Cambridge offer a variety of supermarkets where you can buy fresh produce, pantry staples, and other grocery essentials. Here are some popular options:

Trader Joe's: Known for its affordable prices and unique products.

Whole Foods Market: Offers a wide selection of organic and natural products.

Stop & Shop: A large supermarket chain with a wide variety of products at reasonable prices.

H Mart: An Asian supermarket that offers a vast selection of Asian groceries, fresh produce, and prepared foods.

Market Basket: Known for its low prices and large selection of international groceries.

Target: Offers groceries along with household items and clothing.



MIT Grocery Shuttle

MIT provides a convenient grocery shuttle service to help students and staff access nearby supermarkets without the hassle of carrying heavy bags. The shuttle runs on specific days and times, providing free transportation to and from popular grocery stores.

Check the MIT Transportation and Parking website for the latest schedule and route information:
<https://web.mit.edu/facilities/transportation/shuttles/grocery.html>



Restaurants

Boston and Cambridge have many places to all tastes and budgets. Here are some recommendations:

Kendall Square:

Cava: Offers Mediterranean-inspired bowls and dishes.

Life Alive: Focuses on fresh, organic, and plant-based cuisine.

Central Square:

The Middle East: Known for its live music and Middle Eastern cuisine.

Toscanini's: A popular spot for some of the best ice cream in town.

Harvard Square:

Bartley's Burger Cottage: Famous for its custom-made burgers.

Orinoco: Offers Venezuelan cuisine in a cozy atmosphere.

Felipe's Taqueria: Mexican food and margaritas.

Maharaja: Indian Food



ISO



ISO

- A. Weekly Newsletter
- B. Check our Website
- C. Advisors
- D. Events/Programs
- E. Travel Signatures

Navigating life as an international student at MIT is made easier with the support and resources provided by the International Students Office (ISO).

Weekly Newsletter

Stay informed about important updates, events, and opportunities through ISO’s weekly newsletter. It’s a great way to stay connected with the international community at MIT and learn about resources and upcoming events.

Check our Website

ISO’s website is a valuable and updated resource for international students. You can find comprehensive information on visa regulations, employment opportunities, cultural adjustment tips, and more. It’s your go-to source for answers to common questions and concerns.

Advisors by Department

ISO provides specialized advisors for each academic department at MIT. [Change to: Each student is assigned an ISO advisor based on department]. These advisors are knowledgeable about visa regulations, employment options, and other issues specific to your field of study [replace with department]. They provide guidance and support throughout your academic journey.

Events/Programs

ISO organizes various events and programs throughout the year to promote cultural exchange and provide social opportunities for international students. These events include cultural events, networking sessions, and workshops on cross-cultural communication.

Travel Signatures

If you plan to travel outside the United States, you need a travel signature on your Form I-20 or DS-2019 to return to the US. Make sure to request a replacement I-20 or DS-2019 on iMIT at least 10 business days in advance (does not include weekends and holiday) to ensure smooth travels.

Contact the ISO

For more information and assistance, visit the ISO website or contact our office directly:

Location: 50 Ames Street, Building E18-219, Cambridge, MA 02139
Email: iso-help@mit.edu
Phone: +1 (617) 253-3795

Whether you need advice on immigration matters, want to participate in cultural events, or simply seek community support, ISO is here to help you make the most of your MIT experience as an international student.

THINGS TO DO

An aerial photograph of a city at sunset. The sky is a vibrant mix of orange, yellow, and pink. In the foreground, a large, classical-style building with a prominent dome is visible. The city extends into the distance, with various buildings and a river or body of water on the left side.

THINGS TO DO

- A. Parks and Outdoor Activities
- B. Museums
- C. New England Cities and Towns
- D. Must-Watch Events and Activities

Parks and Outdoors Activities

Exploring beyond MIT’s campus is essential for experiencing all that Boston and New England have to offer. Whether you enjoy outdoor activities, cultural experiences, or exploring nearby towns, here are some must-see attractions and activities:

Boston and its surrounding areas have plenty of beautiful parks and outdoor spaces, perfect for relaxation and recreation:

Boston Common and Boston Public Garden: USA’s oldest public park and adjacent botanical garden offer tranquil green spaces in the heart of the city.

Charles River Esplanade: Ideal for jogging, biking, or simply enjoying scenic views of the Charles River.

Arnold Arboretum: A 281-acre park managed by Harvard University, featuring diverse plant collections and walking trails (the same landscape architect also designed Central Park in New York City)

Minuteman Bikeway: A scenic 11-mile bike path connecting Cambridge to Bedford, passing through Arlington and Lexington.



Museums

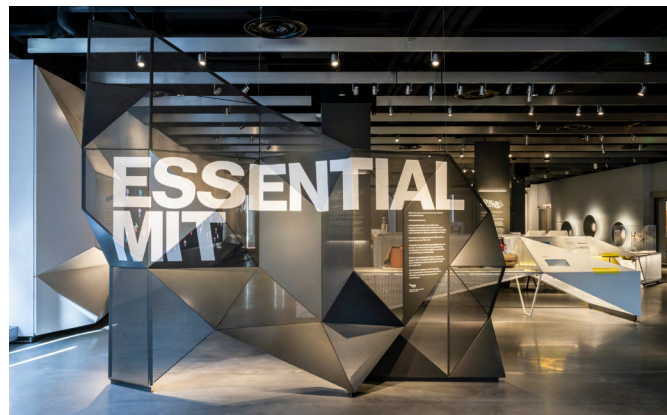
Boston is rich in cultural institutions and museums showcasing art, history, and science:

Museum of Fine Arts (MFA): One of the largest art museums in the United States, featuring an extensive collection spanning ancient to contemporary art.

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum: A unique museum with a stunning courtyard and eclectic collection of art and artifacts.

MIT Museum: Explore exhibits highlighting the intersection of art, science, and technology, including holography, robotics, and architecture.

Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA): Located on Boston's waterfront, the ICA features contemporary art exhibitions, performances, and educational programs.



New England Cities and Towns

Venture beyond Boston to discover charming New England towns and cities:

Salem: Known for its witch trials history, maritime heritage, and picturesque waterfront.

Providence, Rhode Island: Home to Brown University and Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), with a vibrant arts scene and historic architecture. A favorite activity is enjoying Waterfire, an annual art event where vendors offer a variety of food and drinks along the canal, which is lit up with bonfires.

Portland, Maine: A coastal city known for its scenic waterfront, lobster rolls, and vibrant arts community.



Must-Watch Events and Activities

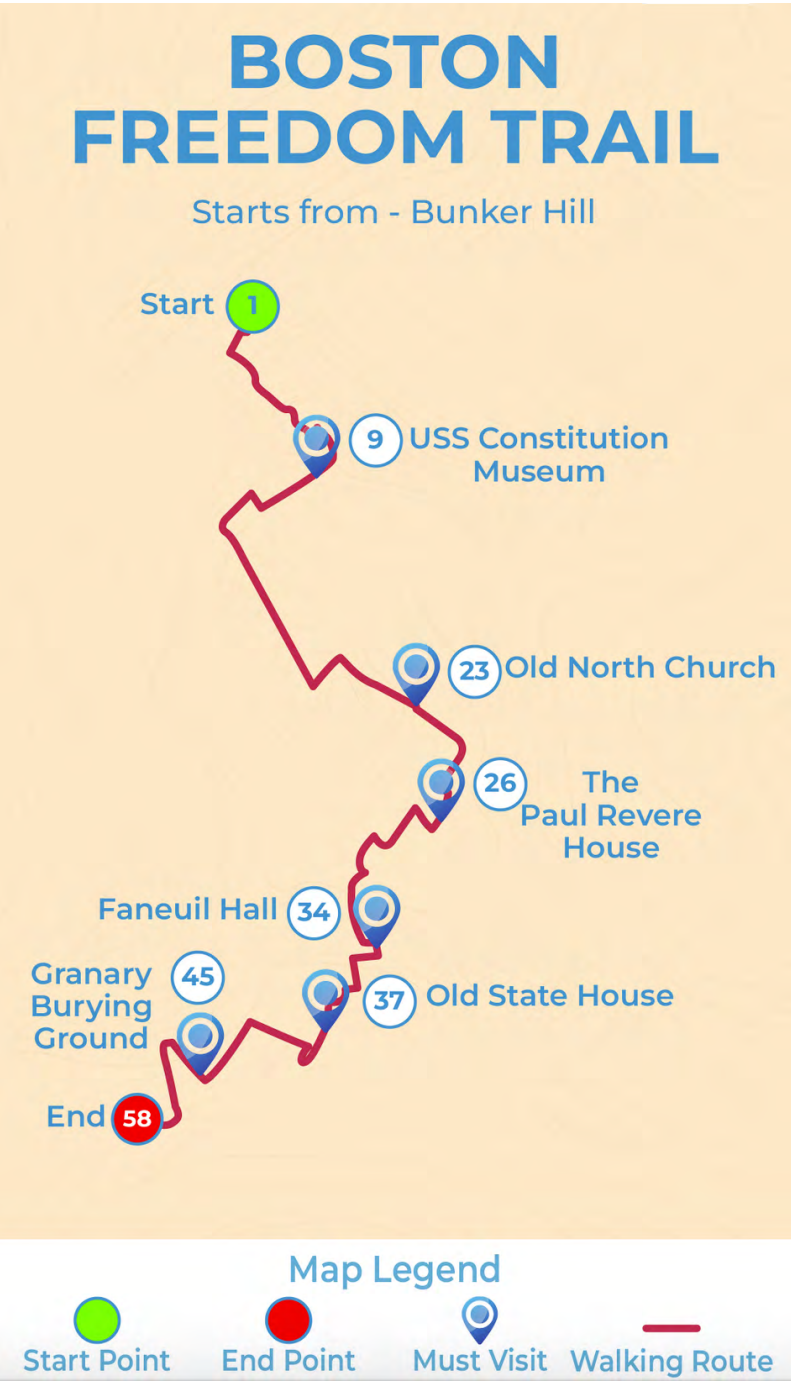
Don't miss these iconic events and attractions in Boston and New England:

Freedom Trail: Follow the red-brick trail through historic sites like Faneuil Hall, Paul Revere's House, and the Old North Church.

Boston Harbor Islands: Take a ferry to explore scenic islands with hiking trails, historic forts, and panoramic views of Boston Harbor.

Fall Foliage: Experience the breathtaking colors of New England's foliage in autumn, especially in rural areas like Vermont and New Hampshire.

Boston Red Sox Game: Catch a baseball game at Fenway Park, one of the oldest and most iconic ballparks in Major League Baseball.





LIFE AT MIT AS AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT

Once again, welcome to MIT, and congratulations on embarking on this exciting journey in Boston! We hope this guide has provided you with valuable insights and resources to kickstart your MIT adventure. Whether you're exploring the city, diving into academic pursuits at MIT, or discovering new cultural experiences, we're here to support you every step of the way.

As you settle into life at MIT, remember to embrace new opportunities, connect with fellow students, and explore all that this city and community have to offer.

We wish you the best of luck and a fulfilling experience at MIT. Cheers to a fantastic journey ahead!

Images Cited

<https://web.mit.edu/about/>

<https://news.mit.edu/2022/mit-welcomes-graduate-students-0923>

<https://www.cambridgema.gov/iwantto/movingtocambridge>

<https://www.cambridgema.gov/>

<https://www.bostonmagazine.com/property/2019/01/22/union-square-neighborhood-guide/>

<https://www.boston.gov/neighborhoods>

<https://www.tripsavvy.com/top-things-to-do-near-harvard-square-4685631>

<https://hathawaylofts.com/porter-square/>

<https://www.masstransitmag.com/home/company/12083939/>

[massachusetts-bay-transportation-authority-mbta](https://www.massachusetts-bay-transportation-authority-mbta)

<https://www.intelligenttransport.com/transport-news/126389/mbta-bus-projects/>

<https://web.mit.edu/Facilities/transportation/shuttles/index.html>

<https://www.meetboston.com/things-to-do/>

<https://actiontourguide.com/place/boston-freedom-trail-self-guided-walking-tour/>