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It's not as easy as we think. There is a lot involved in the preparations we make to finally go abroad. **Shivani Manchanda** gives you some tips on what to do, or not to do

Planning for your travel - Your local travel agent will be the best person to guide you about the shortest and cheapest route to get to your university. To get maximum value for your rupee, it might be a good idea to call a few agents and check on the prices they are quoting. But don't pay the agent unless you have personally called the airline and confirmed your ticket. A lesson I learned, the hard way, is that some unscrupulous travel agents will put a confirmed sticker on your ticket even if you are on the wait list. And believe me, no hero comes and wipes those tears away!

If you are not among those lucky few who have relatives or friends waiting to pick you up, then it is good idea to arrive in a new country on a working day during working hours. If you need help when you arrive, the system works better for you if the university officials are at work.

Universities abroad do make a lot of effort to make international students comfortable in their first few days. Most of these activities emerge from the International Student Office (ISO) of the university.

While some universities have a coach to pick you up from the airport, others might have a 'Meet and Greet' programme, where if you let them know when you are planning to arrive, they send a current student or member of the local community to pick you up. In fact, some universities, particularly those in small towns, have a welcome desk on the air-

port. university accommodation is a great place to make friends and adapt to your new surroundings, a good rule of thumb is to plan to stay on-campus at least for the first semester. Most university accommodations will be stocked with basic furniture, telephone line, appropriate linen, a TV and maybe even computing facilities. Thus, from day one itself, you can start focusing on signing up for the right courses and meeting your academic advisers.

If you are planning to stay off-campus, be mentally prepared to deal with issues like council tax, utility bills, buying linen, etc. None of these problems are insurmountable, but taking them on definitely means that you will have your plate full with responsibilities from day one. It would be a good idea therefore, to share the apartment with other students from the university. Unless

you are particularly adventurous it is a good idea to book some accommodation in the university, or a hotel close by, before you leave Indian shores, so that you won't have to spend the night at the airport.

Self-Catering vs Catered University Accommodation: If you are the kind who can't learn a few of mom's secret recipes, then definitely go ahead and choose to eat in the dorms. You can enliven the bland food with black pepper and tobasco sauce.

If however, you are willing to be enterprising, then you can tick the next option. You will discover how delicious slightly charred or half-cooked food can taste, especially after you have toiled over it. A great way to get lessons in time management and multi-tasking!

Planning For your Packing

Planning what to take in that suitcase so that you don't send the airline weighing machines in a tizzy, is a task by itself. The first rule for packing is to pit the utility of an object against its weight and possible price in foreign currency.

Even though a pressure cooker is heavy, if you are planning to stay in self-catering style, then it might prove extremely useful. While still on the topic of utensils, a couple of teaspoons, *katoris*, and *karchis* are useful to carry from here. They don't have too much weight and are useful for Indian cooking.

Students all over the world wear casual clothing, so you will find maximum utility for your jeans and T-shirts. For the MBAs, a suit and a tie will definitely will be a

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