



Saint Mary's
University

International Students: Pre- Departure Checklist

Checklist & tips from the Saint Mary's International Student Centre



Pre-Departure Checklist

Preparation for Travelling to Canada	1
Immigration & Travel Documents	1
Financial Preparation	2
Housing Preparation	3
Packing Essentials	4
Travel Preparation	5
Local Knowledge & Safety	6
Academic Preparation	7

Preparation for Travelling to Canada

Date: Spring, 2025

This checklist will help you get prepared before travelling to Halifax, ensuring you have all necessary documents, finances, and housing sorted. Follow these steps to make your transition as smooth as possible.

In addition to the details below, ensure to review the Government of Canada's [Study in Canada as an International Student online guide](#).

Immigration & Travel Documents

Have all necessary documents ready before departure to avoid any travel or entry issues. We strongly recommend having both a physical and digital copy of all the below-listed documents.

- [Valid Passport](#) - Ensure passport is valid for the duration of your stay.
- Letter of Introduction – Issued by IRCC and made available through the IRCC application portal.
- [Study Permit](#) - this will be provided upon Port of Entry in Canada.
- [Temporary Resident Visa](#) (TRV) or [Electronic Travel Authorization](#) (eTA) (if applicable).
- Letter of Acceptance (LOA) from Saint Mary's University (SMU).

- Provincial Attestation Letter (PAL).
- [Medical Exam Confirmation](#) (if required).
- Apply for custodianship (if you will be 18 or younger when arriving in Canada).

Individuals' countries of origin may have additional, country-specific instructions necessary prior to travel. Please visit the [IRCC for country-specific Canadian entry requirements](#).

Financial Preparation

Familiarize yourself with Canadian (CAD/\$) currency and exchange rates, and make sure you have access to funds for initial expenses.

- We recommend having access to around \$500-\$1000 CAD for initial food, transportation and other necessary items. Please note, if you are travelling with more than \$10,000, you will be required to declare this at your Port of Entry.
- Understand [currency exchange rates](#), [Canadian \(CAD\) money](#) and international money transfers.
- Check whether your current bank card is compatible for use in Canada.

Housing Preparation

Secure and confirm your housing arrangements in advance, whether on or off-campus, and plan for temporary accommodations if needed.

- Confirm your living accommodations in Nova Scotia (N.S.) before travelling to Canada and arrange for temporary accommodations if needed.
- On-campus accommodations information can be found on [SMU Housing & Residence](#).
- There are a variety of community resources available to explore off-campus accommodations options, including the following:
 - [Nova Scotia - Happipad](#)
 - [Kijiji](#)
 - [Facebook Marketplace](#)
 - [Rent Donkey Apartment Search](#)
 - [Rent Seekers](#)
 - [Zoeken Canada](#)
 - [Places4Students.com - Helping Students Find a Home Away from Home](#)

- [Rentals.ca](#)
- [Rent Faster](#)
- Ensure to familiarize yourself with important information pertaining to off-campus accommodations, such as the following:
 - Average rent in Halifax, N.S., as well as rent price trends and cost of living.
 - Research local [rental laws & tenant rights](#)
 - Arrange utility & internet setup (if renting off-campus).
 - Learn how to spot and avoid potential rental scams. Visit [Rentals For Newcomers](#) for helpful tips.

Packing Essentials

Pack strategically with weather-appropriate clothing, necessary electronics and personal items to make your transition comfortable. Consider including relevant items from the following list:

- Weather-appropriate clothing and accessories. Nova Scotia experiences a wide array of temperatures and weather events including snowy winters with temperatures averaging from about -9°C (16°F) to 0°C (32°F), contrasted by warm, often humid summers with daytime averages around 20-25°C (70-80°F).

While temperatures can occasionally reach 30-32°C (86-90°F) with humidity. If you do not already own appropriate clothing and accessories for N.S., it may be more practical to purchase as needed after arrival.

- Personal and cultural items to feel at home, ease homesickness, celebrate cultural and religious observances, etc.
- Electrical adapters & converters for devices. Canada uses type A and B outlets for electrical devices and operates on 120 volts (120V) and 60 Hertz (60Hz).
- Medications and other essential toiletries. It may be more practical to obtain these items after arrival; however, we recommend packing the essentials to get you through your travels and initial days after arrival.
- Academic materials such as electronic devices (laptop, desktop, tablet), notebooks, etc. These items can also be sourced after arrival.
- Copies of vaccination records and prescriptions for medications and other treatments. If you will be in Canada for a short period of time, ask your doctor if you can have three to four months' worth of your prescription to take with you.

Travel Preparation

Book travel, arrange airport pick-up, and review baggage policies to ensure a stress-free journey.

- Book travel tickets factoring in connection and layover logistics. Where possible it is a good idea to arrive a couple of days before classes start to give yourself time to settle in and prepare.
- Apply for the International Student Centre (ISC) [free airport pick-up](#) service to have a member of the ISC team pick you up at Halifax Standfield International Airport. If you are securing your own transportation from the Airport, there are taxi cabs located outside of the arrivals section of the airport, as well as [bus and shuttle options](#).
- Check baggage allowances and restrictions specific to the airline/s you are travelling with.
- Review [Government of Canada's Entering Canada](#) information.

Local Knowledge & Safety

Familiarize yourself with Canadian culture, safety resources, and key locations near Saint Mary's University.

- Familiarize yourself with Canadian laws, cultural and societal norms to ensure a smoother integration into Canadian society, avoid legal issues, and foster a positive experience.
- Expand English language abilities with Nova Scotia language partners such as:
 - [Canadian Language Learning College](#)

- [International Language Institute](#)
- [Oxford International Career Colleges](#)
- [Apex Language and Career College](#)
- Familiarize yourself with the area around [Saint Mary's](#) to locate necessary resources such as grocery stores, hospitals, Service Canada, etc.
- Know emergency contacts such as [SMU campus security](#), [Halifax Regional Police](#), [emergent and non-urgent healthcare](#), your country's embassy etc.
- Share travel details with family or trusted contacts

Academic Preparation

Set up your university accounts, review your course schedule and prepare for your academic journey at Saint Mary's. For many of these tasks you will need your "A number", also known as your Banner ID number, which is provided on your SMU letter of acceptance. If you do not know your A number, review [A number support information](#).

- [Activate your SMU account online](#). Once you activate your account you will receive two login credentials: your [SMU email address](#) and your S number. Both credentials are required to access SMU systems necessary for your academics.

- Once you have your credentials, familiarize yourself with [Banner Self-Service](#) and [Brightspace](#). Banner Self-Service (often referred to as Banner) is an online service that allows students to look up and register for courses, access courses and exam schedules, and view transcripts and grades. Brightspace is an online Learning Management System used to facilitate online collaboration including receiving course materials, submitting assignments and engaging in online learning activities.
- Begin [selecting your courses](#) and reviewing your academic schedule using [Self-Service Banner](#) and the Class Search tool. Be sure to review your [first-year course requirements](#).
- Apply for your [SMU Identification \(ID\) card](#). You can pick your card up in September from the front desk of the Patrick Power Library. SMU ID cards cannot be mailed. Please bring a photo ID with you when picking up your SMU ID card.
- Explore supports, resources, involvement and social opportunities on [SMU Student Life](#) to help build community and set yourself up for success.



International Student Centre

305 O'Donnell Hennessey Student Centre

Email: international.centre@smu.ca

Phone: 902-420-5525