



AmeriCorps



AmeriCorps Guide

Houston Region



Table of Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Introduction | 3 |
| Frequently Asked Questions | 4 |
| Getting to Know the City | 7 |
| • Mission Possible: Moving to Houston | |
| • The Landscape of Houston | |
| • Houston’s Seasons and Climate | |
| • The People of “Space City” | |
| • Houston: So Much to Experience! | |
| • A Year in Houston at a Glance | |
| • H-Town Sports & Teams | |
| • Houston Colleges and Universities | |
| • Houston Media: To Keep You Informed | |
| • Driving and Cycling in Houston | |
| | |
| The Houston Area | 1 |
| | 4 |
| Day Trips | 1 |
| | 6 |
| Money-Saving Tips | 1 |
| | 8 |
| References | 2 |

Introduction

Congratulations! You've been selected to join a wonderful AmeriCorps Program that provides quality, research-based literacy instruction!

You're going to live in Houston, the most ethnically diverse city in the U.S.! Here you can enjoy authentic international cuisines, fantastic musical performances, a surprising number of outdoor activities, a vibrant art scene, and so much more!

We hope that this guide will help you to find a place to live in Houston and enjoy the city once you're here!



Frequently Asked Questions



1. What are the demographics of Houston?

One of the fastest growing cities in the U.S., Houston has approximately 2.31 million people (10 million in the Houston-Metro area). Throughout the Houston area, over 145 different languages can be heard on a daily basis.¹ The largest age group (22.1%) is 5-19 years old and the median age is 31 years old.²

2. How safe is Houston?

Because Houston is a major city, there is crime. Unlike many cities, Houston's crime-ridden areas are not located in just one part of the city; it is extremely common to have a very nice neighborhood right next to a high-crime part of town. Before you decide on a place to live, check out [the Houston Police Department's crime website](#) to search for crimes. One of the most common crimes in Houston is theft. Try to park in well-lit, visible areas. Never leave valuables in your vehicle and make sure to lock your car, house, etc.

3. What's the weather like?

Houston is located in a humid subtropical climate zone. Houston's temperate climate sustains tropical vegetation and allows the city's residents and visitors an enviable outdoor lifestyle. Summers in Houston are long and humid, and winters are mild with temperatures reaching freezing only a few nights of the year.³ Houston averages only 18.0 days per year with temperatures of 32°F or less and 99.6 days with high temperatures of 90°F or more, with daily averages above 77 °F.⁴ The months of June-August are known as especially hot ones, so be prepared to stay hydrated in the heat. Still, bring a warm jacket, rain jacket, and good pairs of shoes and water boots. Hurricanes are also known to occur in this area from June to November, with the peak months being August and September. Hurricane disaster info and preparation tips can be found here:



<http://www.readyhouston.tx.gov/>

4. What's the cost of living in Houston?

Houston has the third lowest overall cost of living among the nation's 20 most populous metropolitan areas, and the cost of living here is 4.4% less than the national average. For those earning minimum wage, Houston is an affordable city. Expect to pay around \$800 - \$1100 per month for a 1-bedroom apartment .

5. What's traffic like in Houston?

Houston has an exceptionally deep reliance on its roadways; past research by the Center for Houston's Future found that the city's population swells by over 30 percent daily because of people driving into the city for work every day. Almost half of city workers spend more than an hour commuting each day. To alleviate the stress of Houston traffic, allow yourself enough time to get to work and back home. To cut through traffic, consider using major city streets instead of driving on the highways and freeways.

Note: Much of Houston utilizes toll roads like Katy Managed Lanes, Sam Houston Tollway, Westpark Tollway, and the Hardy Toll Road. Owning an EZ TAG gives you the freedom to travel non-stop on Texas toll roads, saving you both time and money!



6. How's the public transportation system?

Houston has an extensive public transportation system that includes both local METRO buses and the METROrail.

- Buses typically run on city streets, making stops at every other corner along the designated route; cost is \$1.25 one way. Commuter buses (designed for long-distance commuting) offer service from twenty-eight different Park & Rides and twenty Transit Center locations across the region; cost varies per zone.



- The METROrail, another public transportation option, is a light-rail network featuring 23 miles of fast and efficient light-rail service near or around popular parts of Houston like downtown, midtown, the Museum District, and the Texas Medical Center. Visit <https://www.ridemetro.org/> for information on routes and fares.



7. Where are Houston's airports?

Houston is served by two commercial airports: George Bush Intercontinental Airport (north of Downtown Houston, between Interstate 45 and Interstate 69/U.S. Highway 59) and William P. Hobby International Airport (located south of Downtown Houston, near I-45/Gulf Freeway).

8. What is the Houston area like?

Houston is the culinary capital of the South and the fourth-largest city in America. It is home to NASA, Fortune 500 companies, the largest medical center in the world, and an unparalleled music scene. Much of Houston was built on flat marshes, swamp, or prairie, making flooding a recurring problem for its residents. The city stands about 50 feet above sea level—the highest area within city limits being 90 feet. Houston stands out among large metropolitan areas for its vast amount of vegetative cover¹.

9. Where's the best place to live?

Many previous Members agree that living near your placement is ideal. However, while searching for a place to live, keep in mind access to public transportation or highways, crime rates, etc.

10. What's the deal with utilities in Houston?

Some apartments may include utilities in the rent, while others may not. It is important to verify what is included in your rent so that you can budget utilities accordingly. If you must pay for utilities separately, here are some things to keep in mind:

- When it comes to electricity, there are multiple companies to choose from. This allows you to shop around for the lowest rates and save some money.
- However, only one company (CenterPoint Energy) exists for gas. You can set up your gas at www.centerpointenergy.com or by calling (713) 659-2111.
- Water is usually managed within the City of Houston, but some areas of town may also offer water services so make sure you verify this when you look for housing, too.
- A multitude of providers exist for phone and internet; the most popular and cheapest providers include AT&T and Comcast.



Getting to Know the City

Mission Possible: Moving to Houston! It is strongly encouraged that you find a place to live as early as possible. It is also HIGHLY recommended that you get to Houston at least a week before the program starts in order to move in and get settled before everything begins!

Here are some tools you may choose to utilize to find housing in Houston:

- To simplify your apartment/housing search, consider working with apartment locators.
- Check out Apartment Living Locators: <http://www.apartmentlivinglocators.com/>
- Use the Houston AmeriCorps Google Group and Houston AmeriCorps Housing and Networking Facebook group to find housing and potential roommates.
- Craigslist is an excellent source of rental and potential roommate listings in the Houston area, make sure you meet potential roommates and see housing before making any form of payment.
- Cooperative Housing: Houston Access to Urban Sustainability Project. Check out their website: <http://www.hausproject.org/>
- If you arrive to Houston before you can move into your apartment/house, there is inexpensive temporary housing available through Hostel International - Houston.
- Additionally, AirBNB is a room sharing website that is becoming very popular for temporary stays. You create and build a profile with references and search the website by neighborhood, price, and profile of the renter to find a place that matches your needs.

What to Know About Housing in Houston:

- Due to a fast-growing population, rent is rising and the number of available units and homes is declining.
- Because of high traffic levels in Houston, it is suggested that members find housing near areas within reasonable distance of their placement sites.
- Generally, you should spend no more than 30% of your monthly allowance on housing. Living with others housemates greatly reduces the cost of living.
- You may need to address the issue of needing a cosigner or guarantor to secure apartment lease.
- If you make living arrangements via phone, e-mail, or fax, make sure to VERIFY the move-in date, so that you don't show up to Houston and not have a place to move into!
- To easily and inexpensively furnish your new dwelling, check out thrift stores, garage sales, Craigslist, or Facebook Market Place.
- Houston is a mildly bike-able city. If you have a bike, consider bringing it. Most Metro buses also have a bike rack on the front to encourage biking around Houston.

The Landscape of Houston: The Greater-Houston metropolitan area has a total area of 10,062 square miles. The area is located in the gulf coastal plains biome, and much of the metro area was built on forested land, marshes, swamp, or prairie—all of which can still be seen in surrounding areas. Most of the Houston metropolitan area is very flat, making flooding a recurring problem for some areas.¹

Houston's Seasons and Climate:

Summer: The months of June, July, and August are very hot and humid in Houston and often have scattered afternoon showers and thunderstorms. There are normally 102 days per year above 90 °F and the average level of humidity typically ranges from 60 to 90 percent, resulting in a heat index higher than the actual temperature. Heat stroke can result from staying outdoors for long periods of time during summertime, so it is essential to keep hydrated when working or spending any amount of time outside.

Autumn: Fall in Houston is warm, with temperatures averaging in the upper 60s to lower 80s °F during the day and in the 50s to lower 60s °F at night. Cool fronts that move through the region during the fall often bring rain. This season also includes hurricane season that may result in heavy rains and high winds from the Gulf of Mexico. However, most years see little or no significant hurricane activity.

Winter: Winters in Houston are very mild. The average high in January, the coldest month, is 62 °F and the low is 43 °F. Cold fronts during the winter drop nighttime lows into the 30s but usually above freezing. Usual Houston winter weather includes a month-long period with temperatures in the low 30s to mid-40s.

Spring: Spring comes with a gradual warm up from winter and usually lasts from late March to May. Temperatures are generally not hot yet, averaging 75–82 °F in the day. Spring thunderstorms are common occurrences in Houston.⁴

The People of "Space City": Houston is highly diverse and multicultural. Over 145 languages are spoken in the city. It also has one of the youngest populations in the nation. According to Census data, 50.5% of Houston's residents are White with 25.6% of the total population being non-Hispanic White. Blacks or African American residents make up 23.7% of Houston's population. The remaining 25.8% of Houston residents breakdown demographically as follows: 0.7% American Indian, 6% Asian, 0.1% Pacific Islander, 3.3% individuals from two or more races and 15.2% of residents utilize the Other category on the census. People of Hispanic origin, regardless of race, made up 43.8% of Houston's population².

Houston: So Much to Experience! There's always something to do in Houston, from sporting events to free movie screenings. Here are some websites to check out that post about what events are going on around town:

- Houston Events: <https://www.visithoustontexas.com/events/>
- 365 Houston: <http://www.365thingsinhouston.com/>
- Houston On The Cheap: <http://www.houstononthecheap.com/>
- Meetups around Houston:
<http://www.meetup.com/cities/us/tx/houston/>
- Bayou City Outdoors:
<http://www.bayoucityoutdoors.com/ClubPortal/ClubStatic.cfm?clubID=3&pubmenuoptID=18138>

Entertainment (low-cost or free):

- [Free Things to Do in Houston | Attractions, Theater & Tours \(visithoustontexas.com\)](#)
- Not necessarily free, but good info: [Houston Events Calendar - Jun 2022 - CultureMap Houston](#)
- Like international food? Try a weekend stroll through these places:

- o [99 Ranch Market](#)
- o [El Rancho Supermercado](#)
- o [Fiesta](#)
- o [H-Mart/Super H-Mart](#)
- o [Katy Asian Town](#)
- o [Mahatma Gandhi District](#)
- o [Phoenicia](#)

Fresh Produce/Farmers Market Items (at a discount):

- [Urban Harvest](#)

Furniture/Furnishings:

- Houston Furniture Bank -- Houston Furniture Bank doesn't work directly with clients, so connect with a partner agency in order to receive vouchers to get furniture. Partner agencies can be found here:
<https://houstonfurniturebank.org/need-furniture/#nflIndividual>.
 - o YMCA and Harris Center would be good agencies to contact first.

Multiple Services:

- Food, Rental Assistance, Mental Health Services, etc.:
 - o Call "211" or go to 211texas.org or FindHelp.org for referrals to free resources near you

A Year in Houston at a Glance:

- January: Martin Luther King Jr. Grande Parade; Chevron Houston Marathon
- February / March: Texas Lunar New Year Houston; Mardi Gras! Galveston, Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo
- March: Bayou City Art Festival (Spring), Tour de Houston
- April: MenilFest, San Jacinto Day Festival and Battle Reenactment, Art Car Parade, Japan Festival
- May: Texas Crawfish and Music Festival, Houston Dragon Boat Festival, Comicpalooza, Mediterranean Festival
- June: Free Press Summer Fest, Pride Houston, Juneteenth Celebration, Carnival Houston Show+Parade
- July: Houston's Official July 4th Festival: Freedom over Texas!
- August: Theater District Open House, Houston International Jazz Festival, Houston Shakespeare Festival
- September: RE/MAX Ballunar Liffoff Festival, Untapped Music and Beer, Houston Brazilian Festival
- October: The Original Greek Festival, Fiesta Italiana, Texas Renaissance, Annual Puerto Rican & Cuban Festival
- November: Thanksgiving Day Parade, International Quilt Festival, Day of the Dead, Texas Championship Native American Pow Wow, Ice at Discovery Green
- December: Mayor's Official Downtown Houston Holiday Celebration, AdvoCare Texas Bowl: Big 12 vs. SEC

H-Town Sports Teams: Houston is home to many major sports teams. Major professional teams include Houston Astros (baseball), Rockets (men's basketball), Texans (football), Dash (women's soccer), and Dynamo (men's soccer).

Houston Colleges and Universities: University of Houston, Houston Baptist University, Rice University, and Texas Southern University are all located in the city of Houston.

Houston Media: To Keep You Informed: The Houston metropolitan area is served by a public television station and two public radio stations. KUHT (HoustonPBS) is a PBS member station and Houston Public Radio is listener-funded radio with two NPR member stations. The Houston area also has the *Houston Chronicle*, the only city-wide major daily newspaper with wide distribution. Other major news outlets in

the city are such as Fox News, NBC, ABC, and CBS (all of which offer local news coverage).

Driving and Cycling in Houston:

Houston's freeway system is extensive; the freeways are heavily traveled and often under construction to meet the demands of continuing growth. The Greater Houston area has a hub-and-spoke freeway structure with multiple loops. The innermost is Interstate 610 ("The Loop"), forming approximately a 10-mile diameter loop around downtown. Beltway 8 (Sam Houston Tollway) is the next loop, at a diameter of roughly 25 miles. A proposed highway project, State Highway 99 will form a third loop outside of Houston. Currently, a completed portion of State Highway 99 runs from U.S. Highway 290, northwest of Houston, to U.S. Highway 69 (formerly Highway 59, Southwest Freeway) in Sugar Land. Freeways also include I-45 (Gulf Freeway), I-10 (Katy Freeway), Highway 6 and Westpark Tollway.

Uber or LYFT may also be a transportation option you choose to utilize. It allows you to use an app to connect you to a taxi, private car, or rideshare around the city in minutes. You can download the app on your smartphone to access these resources or visit <https://www.uber.com/cities/houston> <https://www.lyft.com/rider/cities/houston-tx> for more information.

Alternatively, Houston also has one of the largest number of bike commuters in Texas with over 160 miles of dedicated bikeways. The city is currently in the process of expanding it's on and off street bikeway network. A new Bicycle sharing system known as Houston [BCycle](#) currently operates 99 different stations in downtown and neighboring areas, with the intention to expand to 100 stations with 1,000 bikes available by the end of 2020. Houston is a mildly "bike friendly" city. Here are a few websites to check out if you are interested in Houston biking:

- BikeHouston, a non-profit bicycle advocacy group: <http://www.bikehouston.org/resources/>
- Houston Bikeways: <http://www.houstonbikeways.org/>
- Houston Bike (and Hike) Trails: <http://houstontx.gov/parks/hikeandbike.html>



Map of Houston



Copyright Condos of Houston 2010

Because Houston is such a large city, different parts of Houston are often referred to by more location-specific names. This map is a good reference for the many different areas of Houston.⁹

The Houston Area

1. Sugar Land

About: Sugar Land is one of the fastest growing suburban cities in Texas, with a population of around 88,485. It was founded in the mid-1800s as a sugar plantation, though it is now a full-service municipality providing police, fire protection, water utilities, waste collection, recycling, a regional airport, and other services.

Cheap things to do: Town Center, Houston Museum of Natural Science-Sugar Land, Saturday morning Farmers' Market at Imperial Sugar, Constellation Field

2. West Houston

About: West Houston has something for everybody. The area of town closest to the AmeriCorps Sites is home to a number of energy corporations like BP and Exxon/Mobile. It also boasts a number of eateries and shopping opportunities.

Cheap Things to Do: City Centre Plaza, Buffalo Bayou Bike Trail

3. Spring Branch

About: Once a German farmer settlement, Spring Branch is now one of the most ethnically diverse areas of Houston.

Cheap Things to Do: Marq-E Entertainment Center, Texas Rock Gym, Baseball USA

4. Galleria/Uptown Houston

About: This area serves as the center of Houston's business district and also houses Houston's premier shopping center: The Galleria.

Cheap Things to Do: Bayou City Adventures, Houston Arboretum and Nature Center, Miller Outdoor Theater, Galleria

5. Bellaire & South West Houston

About: While this area is largely residential, there are many cheap restaurants and other things to do in close proximity to Bellaire. It is a widely diverse area that has an abundant immigrant population.

Cheap Things to Do: Brays Bayou Trails, local eateries

6. 290 Corridor

About: Northwest Houston is a largely-growing area of the city with lots of restaurants and easy access to the city.

Cheap Things to Do: Cinemark Tinseltown, Sam Houston Race Park

7. The Heights

About: Located close to Downtown Houston, this is one of the city's first planned residential communities. Local mom-and-pop eateries exist here and its prime location makes it popular among those working downtown.

Cheap Things to Do: Fitzgerald's, Torchy's Tacos, various local restaurants, Woodland and White Oak Parks

8. South East Inner Loop

About: This area is home to two of Houston's universities: University of Houston and Texas Southern University. It is also very close to the world class museum district of Houston, where there is always something to do.

Cheap Things to Do: Houston Zoo, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Hermann Park, Miller Outdoor Theater

9. South Houston/Pasadena

About: This area of town is highly historic. The Battle of San Jacinto, the last battle in the Texas Revolution, took place near modern Pasadena and it is often nicknamed the "birthplace of Texas."

Cheap Things to Do: Battleship Texas and San Jacinto Monument, Ellington Field, NASA Space Center Houston

Day Trips



*All distances are from downtown Houston

1. Old Town Spring (23 miles)

Historic buildings, museums, art galleries, boutiques, and restaurants near Houston makes for a nice excursion. The town is also rumored to be a robbery victim of Bonnie and Clyde⁷.

2. San Jacinto Monument and Battleship Texas (25 miles)

The San Jacinto Monument is 567 feet tall and serves as a memorial for the Texan men who died during the Texas Revolution. Battleship Texas, only a short distance away, took part in some of the most significant naval battles of the 20th century, both in World War I and World War II⁸.

3. Kemah Boardwalk (35 miles)

With rides, carnival-style games, and a variety of restaurants, the boardwalk offers beautiful seaside views near the city of Houston.

4. Lake Houston (35 miles)

The options are endless at Lake Houston. There is overnight camping, hike and bike trails, kayaking, fishing and horseback riding.

5. Brazos Bend Park (45 miles)

Another park with endless outdoor options, Brazos Bend State Park offers camping, picnicking, hiking, biking, horseback riding, and fishing. It is well known for its large population of American Alligators. The George Observatory, located inside the park, also offers spectacular stargazing opportunities.

6. Galveston Beach (50 miles)

Beaches, historic buildings, seaside restaurants, and a lively shopping scene draw Texans to Galveston year-round.

7. Sam Houston National Forest (60 miles)

Hiking, camping, fishing, and hunting are among the most popular attractions at Sam Houston National Forest. There are also several recreation centers within the Park that include other amenities.

8. Brenham (70 miles)

In the heart of the bluebonnet region, Brenham is home to the Bluebell Creamery and other quaint, small-town attractions.

9. Bolivar Peninsula (90 miles)

Another beach option near Houston is in Bolivar Peninsula, Texas. Beachfront camping, swimming, and relaxing are among tourist favorites.

10. Traders Village (21.8 miles)

Great shopping, food, riders for kids! There are also festivals and planned events year round including, Chili & BQ Cook-offs, Bayou Cajun Festival, Halloween Boo Bash, Native American Indian Pow Wow, Cinco de Mayo Parties and the Traders Village Comicon

Money-Saving Tips

As an AmeriCorps Member with only a modest living allowance, you will need to be creative with spending. To live stress free while on a tight budget, you will need to think outside the box. Here are some money-saving tips to help you:

Food & Dining

While the Houston area has many wonderful restaurants, it's important to develop a budget for spending on eating in and eating out.

Eating In

You can save a tremendous amount of money by cooking your own food. Here are some tips and suggestions for planning meals.

- Cooking in large batches can lower cost of an individual meal and provide for multiple meals.
- If there are exceptional bulk deals on normally expensive items, take advantage and freeze the food.
- Substitute expensive ingredients in recipes with cheaper alternatives. For a list of substitutions, check out <http://www.foodsubs.com>.
- Make a list of what you need before going grocery shopping and stick to it.
- Utilize the shopping/bonus cards offered by supermarkets.
- Find print and online coupons to use.
- Potluck! Having dinner potluck-style with other AmeriCorps Members is a wonderful, money-saving option.

Farmer's Markets

- Shopping at farmer's markets in the Houston's area is a great way to get your fresh produce and support local small businesses. To encourage healthy living, some farmers markets even accept SNAP benefits!

Eating Out

- Your modest AmeriCorps budget will limit your spending on eating out, but there are many resources that can help you find affordable alternatives.
- For example, the number and variety of food trucks are growing in Houston. If you find a food truck that you like, see if there's a way to follow it on social media to know if it will be in your neighborhood.
- Websites such as Groupon also offer frequent restaurant deals, so keep a look out for those deals/coupons.

Money Saving Ideas

- Re-evaluate and track your spending habits. Seeing if there are places you can cut down on spending will help you save money in the long-run.
- Shop at thrift stores and sell clothing you no longer need to consignment shops to earn some extra cash.
- Attend auctions, flea markets, yard sales, or estate sales to find cheap furniture, if your housing does not include any
- Buy food in bulk.
- If public transportation or biking is convenient, use it instead of driving to save money.
- Use a public library to check out books, DVDs, and CDs.
- Barter for goods and services
- Cook meals at home and pack your lunches at home.
- Clip coupons from newspapers and find other coupons online
- Reuse and recycle as much as possible
- Get a rewards card at grocery stores, points add up!

Budget Tools

- Building a budget is a very important tool to utilize when managing your finances.
- You can use a basic template from Microsoft.
- Top Apps for Budgets: Mint, YNAB, Personal Capital, Quicken
- 360 Degrees of Financial Literacy is a free program of the nation's certified public accountants to help Americans understand their personal finances through every stage of life. <http://www.360financialliteracy.org>
- Mint.com is the free online software that offers a budget tool and allows you to establish savings goals, automatically analyzes your spending habits and can offer suggestion on how to cut back. <http://www.mint.com>. Note that this is also a Mint app, as mentioned in the Top Apps section.
- MyMoney.gov is the US government's website dedicated to teaching all Americans about financial education.
- PearBudget is a really simple budgeting and expense tracking service. This is good for those especially new to budgeting: <https://pearbudget.com/>



References

- ¹ "Houston (city), Texas." *State & County QuickFacts*. United States Census Bureau
- ² "Houston Facts and Figures." *About Houston*. The City of Houston
- ³ "Houston Weather." *The Official Visitors Site for Houston*. Visit Houston, Texas, n.d. Web. 10 June 2015.
- ⁴ Houston, Texas Average Weather. 2010. Raw data. Bush Intercontinental Airport, Houston.
- ⁵ "Living Cost Comparison." *Houston*. Greater Houston Partnership, May. 2020. Web. 4 Aug. 2020.
- ⁶ "Old Town Spring." *Old Town Spring*. At Harpers, n.d. Web. 15 June 2015.
- ⁷ "Battleship Texas State Historic Site." *Welcome Aboard!* Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, n.d. Web. 15 June 2015.
- ⁸ "Test Map." *Condos of Houston*. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 June 2015.