

CISC Checklist for International Spouses & their Families

Extended arrival and settling-in guide

Practical steps before your move, during your first weeks, and as you settle into Pasadena.

Use this as a suggested order, not a deadline. Some steps may take longer or may not apply to you.

Official guidance: Use the [Caltech International Offices website](#) for current requirements, eligibility, procedures, and detailed information.

Community support: [CISC](#) offers volunteer peer support, local experience, and help finding the right resources and offices.

[CISC](#) does not provide legal, immigration, tax, medical, financial, housing-rights, or employment advice.

Before you leave your home country

Documents

See: [International Offices](#) - [Essentials](#) - [Documents](#)

- ☐ Check passport validity requirements for every family member well before travel; renew early if needed. Confirm visa and immigration-document requirements with your International Office. See Arrival in the United States.
- ☐ Keep passports, visas, and immigration documents easily accessible while traveling.
- ☐ Bring translated copies of your marriage certificate and children's birth certificates if you plan to enroll dependents in a Caltech/JPL health insurance plan.
- ☐ Bring vaccination records for adults and children.
- ☐ Bring useful medical, dental, and vision records and information about current medications.
- ☐ If your children will attend childcare or school, check California immunization requirements before leaving.
- ☐ If you intend to work or study in the United States, bring translated/certified diplomas, transcripts, professional certificates, references, and other important career documents.
- ☐ Keep secure digital copies of important documents as well as the originals.

Transportation and arrival

See: [International Offices](#) - [Transportation](#)

- ☐ Decide how you will travel from the airport to Pasadena.
- ☐ If you will initially live without a car, investigate public transportation, cycling, walking, and other local options.
- ☐ If you expect to drive, read the International Offices' information about foreign licenses, California driver's licenses, car ownership, registration, and insurance.

Housing

See: [International Offices](#) - [Essentials & Housing](#) and [Budget](#)

- ☐ Decide whether you want temporary accommodation first or to arrange longer-term housing before arrival.
- ☐ Review Caltech/JPL housing eligibility and the International Offices' housing information.
- ☐ If appropriate, sign up for Caltech Marketplace before arriving; it can be used for housing as well as furniture, bicycles, cars, and household items.
- ☐ Think about your family's daily transportation when choosing where to live - not only your spouse's commute to Caltech/JPL.
- ☐ Make a preliminary budget that includes rent, utilities, transportation, food, health costs, childcare/school expenses, phones/internet, and other family expenses.

Healthcare

See: [International Offices](#) - [Healthcare](#)

- ☐ Find out when your family's U.S. health insurance will begin.
- ☐ If there will be a gap between leaving your home country and the start of Caltech/JPL coverage, investigate appropriate temporary coverage.
- ☐ Check how and when eligible dependents can be added to the employee/scholar's insurance.
- ☐ If anyone in the family needs regular medication or medical care, plan how to bridge the transition.
- ☐ Familiarize yourself with U.S. health-insurance terms such as deductible, copay, coinsurance, in-network, and out-of-pocket maximum.

Children

See: [International Offices](#) - [Family](#)

- ☐ Start investigating childcare early if you will need it.
- ☐ If you have school-age children, research public and private school options in the area where you plan to live. For public schools, check which school district and neighborhood school your home address is assigned to, and familiarize yourself with the enrollment and registration process.
- ☐ Check what documents and immunization records will be required for enrollment.
- ☐ Consider where childcare/school is located when choosing housing and transportation.
- ☐ Explore the family and childcare resources listed by the International Offices.

And from CISC...

- ☐ Read [CISC](#) - Relocation & Integration.
- ☐ Contact [CISC Connect & Support](#) at connect.cisc@gmail.com if you are unsure where to begin or would like practical input from people who have already gone through the move. Tell us your approximate arrival date and whether your questions concern housing, children, transportation, healthcare, spouse/partner life, community, or another practical issue.

Your first few days in Pasadena

Connect with CISC

- ☐ Connect with [CISC](#), join its communication channels, and ask for help whenever you need it. See [CISC Connect & Support](#).

Check-in and orientation

See: [International Offices](#) - [Check-In & Orientation](#)

- ☐ Check your partner's International Office arrival instructions for any steps relevant to your family, and find out which orientation sessions welcome spouses.
- ☐ Make sure immigration and entry documents are safely stored.
- ☐ Check whether your family has any immediate administrative tasks connected to arrival.

Get the basics working

See: [International Offices](#) - [Essentials](#)

- ☐ Get a working U.S. phone connection.
- ☐ Arrange internet and utilities if they are not included with your housing.
- ☐ Locate a nearby grocery store and pharmacy.
- ☐ Open a U.S. bank account when you have the required identification/address documentation.
- ☐ Learn the basics of the U.S. credit system; building a U.S. credit history takes time.

Healthcare and safety

See: [International Offices](#) - [Healthcare](#) and [Emergency Contacts & Preparedness](#)

- ☐ Confirm that health-insurance coverage for you and your children is active.
- ☐ Learn the difference between primary care, urgent care, and an emergency room in the United States.
- ☐ Find out which doctors, urgent-care centers, hospitals, and pharmacies are in your insurance network.
- ☐ Save 911 for off-campus emergencies and the appropriate Caltech/JPL emergency numbers.
- ☐ Familiarize yourself with Southern California emergency preparedness.

During your first few weeks

Housing and household

See: [International Offices](#) - [Essentials & Housing](#)

- ☐ Arrange or continue looking for longer-term accommodation if your initial housing is temporary.
- ☐ Before signing a lease, understand the rent, security deposit, utilities, insurance arrangements, and other conditions.
- ☐ Learn where to find inexpensive or second-hand furniture and household items, including Caltech Marketplace and local reuse options.
- ☐ Review the tenant/landlord resources linked by the International Offices if you have questions about renting in Pasadena.

Transportation

See: [International Offices](#) - [Transportation](#)

- ☐ Decide what combination of walking, cycling, public transportation, ride share, and driving works for your household.
- ☐ Learn the public-transit routes near your home and Caltech/JPL.
- ☐ If you plan to drive regularly, determine whether and when you have to or want to obtain a California driver's license.
- ☐ If purchasing a car, investigate driver's-license, registration, and insurance requirements before buying.

Children

See: [International Offices](#) - [Family](#)

- ☐ Arrange or continue securing childcare if needed.
- ☐ Complete or continue arranging school enrollment if applicable.
- ☐ Learn the school/childcare calendar and daily routines.
- ☐ Start building a local network of other parents and families. See also [CISC's activities](#).
- ☐ Explore local Caltech resources for families, including the [Caltech Women's Club](#) and [Casita](#).

Get involved in the community

- ☐ Attend an activity or social gathering - even if everything still feels unfamiliar.
- ☐ Ask other international families about the everyday questions that are difficult to answer from a website.

During your first 1-3 months

Your own life as a spouse or partner

The [International Offices' Family](#) page includes resources specifically for accompanying spouses, including English-language learning, volunteering, education, employment, family life, and community resources.

Moving internationally is not only about supporting the person who has the Caltech/JPL appointment. It is also important to build your own life in Pasadena.

- ☐ Choose an activity or group that helps you build friendships and interests of your own.
- ☐ Explore [CISC](#), [Caltech Women's Club](#), local classes, or other interests that help you build your own routine.
- ☐ If you would like to improve your English, investigate the English-language resources listed on the [International Offices Family page](#).
- ☐ Consider volunteering if you want to meet people, contribute locally, gain U.S. experience, or create more structure in your week.
- ☐ If you want to study, investigate educational opportunities and the rules that apply to your immigration status.

If you want to work

See: [International Offices](#) - [Dependent Employment](#)

- ☐ Check the International Offices' Dependent Employment information for your specific immigration status.
- ☐ Do not assume that dependent status automatically permits employment.
- ☐ If your status permits you to apply for an Employment Authorization Document (EAD), learn about the application process and current requirements.
- ☐ Use waiting time, where applicable, to prepare your résumé, LinkedIn profile, credentials, references, and professional network.
- ☐ Consider how your previous qualifications translate into the U.S. employment system.
- ☐ Ask [CISC](#) for peer experience and community connections, while directing immigration and work-authorization questions to the International Office.

Once the most pressing tasks are finished

Some questions only become important after you have been here for a while.

Taxes and identification

See: [International Offices](#) - [Tax Information & Resources](#) and [Social Security Number](#)

- ☐ Learn what U.S. tax-filing obligations may apply to you and your family.
- ☐ Check whether you personally need and are eligible for a Social Security Number or other identification.
- ☐ Do not rely solely on other families' tax experiences: immigration and tax situations can differ substantially.

Longer-term settling in

- ☐ Continue building your U.S. credit history if relevant.
- ☐ Review your family's healthcare needs once you understand the U.S. system better.
- ☐ Reconsider whether your housing and transportation arrangements still suit your family.
- ☐ Keep track of immigration-document expiration dates and check official requirements for future international travel.

Remember: settling in takes longer than a few weeks

Relocation does not end when the boxes are unpacked.

New questions can arise months or years later - for example when you:

- move from temporary to longer-term housing;
- renew immigration or other documents;
- prepare for international travel;
- navigate childcare or school changes;
- start looking for work or education;
- adjust to healthcare, taxes, transportation, or other U.S. systems;
- have a baby or experience another family transition;
- look for more community or professional direction; or
- prepare for your family's next transition within or beyond Caltech/JPL.

You can contact [CISC Connect & Support](#) at any stage - not only immediately after arrival.

[CISC Connect & Support](#) can help you identify where to start, find the appropriate Caltech/JPL information or office, connect with other international spouses and families, and learn from practical local experience.

For detailed and official information, always return to the [Caltech International Offices website](#).