

Housing Resource 2017

Strategizing the Search for Your New Home

It can be a challenge to find a place in the Boston area that best fits all of your criteria, especially if you are searching from outside the US. The goal of this document is to provide practical resources to incoming Boston postdocs so they can find a place quickly and with ease.

In major US cities, it is common and more affordable to share a house or an apartment with other people. When visiting a shared house, it is highly recommended that you make an effort to learn about (or contact) your potential housemates to ensure your lifestyles will be compatible, e.g., ask about age, hobbies, work schedule, diet, social life, etc.

In some cases, it may not be possible to find the right place in time for your start date. In this scenario, we suggest first finding a short-term place to stay (for a few days, weeks, or months). Once you are in the area, it is much easier to find, visit, and evaluate long-term options.

The following link explains your legal rights as a tenant in Massachusetts

<http://www.masslegalhelp.org/housing/legal-tactics1>

Lastly, if you have children under the age of six, ask your landlord whether the apartment complies with the Lead Law. Lead is especially dangerous for young children. More information can be found here:

<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/programs/environmental-health/exposure-topics/lead/frequently-asked-questions-about-lead.html#10>

1. Introduction to Boston

This Jumpshell blog post has a nearly perfect introduction to finding a place in Boston:

<https://www.jumpshell.com/posts/how-to-find-an-apartment-in-boston>

Includes:

- ✓ Boston neighborhoods browser
- ✓ Interactive rent estimator tool
- ✓ T (Boston train system) information
- ✓ Explanations of Craigslist
- ✓ Advice on visits & recommending you act quickly

2. Housing websites

Disclaimer: Before we suggest specific websites to help you find housing, we urge you to stay vigilant and keep on the lookout for potential housing scams. This applies especially to persons coming from overseas. In particular, many postdocs successfully use Craigslist to

find housing in the US; unfortunately, this website is also highly vulnerable to fraud.

Please see the following link for more tips and two typical scamming examples:

<http://postdocs.mit.edu/home/campus-services-resource-s-and-tips/housing>

Finally, many people work with a real estate agent, but you must pay a “broker fee” for their services. The fee varies by company and situation; in general, it is similar to the cost of rent for one month.

2.1. List of long-term housing websites

- Boston Craigslist
www.Boston.craigslist.com
A variety of housing openings posted directly by a user (can be a future housemate, landlord, or real estate agent)
- Padmapper
<https://www.padmapper.com/apartments/boston-ma>
Modern web interface (similar to AirBnB), many listings with photos.
- Wicked Local
www.wickedlocal.com
Navigate to Homes > Rentals. Typically posted by real estate agents.

Other sites:

- www.bostonapartments.com
- www.boston.com/realestate
- www.rent.com
- www.apartments.com
- www.bostonforrent.com
- www.zillow.com

2.2. List of short-term housing websites

“Short-term” generally refers to housing for a period less than one year, but can also mean a few days. Many of the long-term websites above also include short-term housing options. Below are additional links

- AirBnB:
<https://www.airbnb.com/>
Room or apartment rental for days, weeks, or months
- Homestay Boston:
<https://www.homestay.com/united-states/boston>
- Sabbatical Homes:
https://www.sabbaticalhomes.com/Home_Type.aspx
Academic community resource for home exchange, home rental, house sitting and sharing opportunities, in addition to finding home tenants and sitters.

2.3. Social media listings

Sometimes students/postdocs exchange housing information on social media platforms. Below is an incomplete list of Facebook groups, which are open to everyone, where you can (1) post what kind of place you are looking for and (2) search for individually-posted room openings.

“Harvard Housing” Group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/harvardhousing/?fref=nf>

“Boston Housing, Rooms, Apartments, Sublets” Group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/673389662794979/>

“Boston Housing & Apartments” Group

https://www.facebook.com/groups/225334081176150/?ref=br_rs

2.4. General email pointers

Below are some pieces of information you might want to include when responding to a housing post. Also keep in mind who you will be speaking with, e.g., landlord, potential housemate, outgoing tenant, real estate agent, etc. **Be sure to mention you’re going to start a postdoc! Postdocs are often perceived as highly responsible, thus desirable tenants.**

First email

- ✓ Bio information: age, gender, nationality
- ✓ Workplace info: job location, start date, contract length, schedule
- ✓ Education background
- ✓ Hobbies and interests
- ✓ Experience living in shared spaces
- ✓ What you are looking for in roommates/housemates
- ✓ Include basic contact information

Subsequent email

- ✓ “It was nice meeting you”, “Thank you for your time”
- ✓ Logistical info: furniture, move-in timeline

3. Housing Search Stories

Housing search processes are highly variable personal experiences. The following stories are intended to give you a more individual look at what the housing search process can entail. We hope these stories mention relatable situations and include instructive strategies.

3.1. Moving from Australia: A couple with a cat

I moved to Boston from Sydney, Australia with my boyfriend and our cat three years ago. The distance alone made this very challenging, but there were a lot of issues we hadn’t anticipated. We arrived in the US with a grand total of four suitcases, just in time for 4th of July. Luckily for us, a good friend already lived in Boston and invited us to stay with her while we found an apartment. Short-term rentals such as AirBnB or hostels are very

expensive here, so I would recommend that any internationals moving here ask their lab or institution about help with accommodation. We also found out that most areas with high student populations have tight timelines corresponding to university semesters. Leases typically begin on September 1st and you will need to start looking early if you are out of this cycle. There is also a very high demand for rental properties, so don’t be surprised if an apartment you see is gone within a few days. The other consideration, of course, is cost. A one- or two-bedroom apartment in the cities of Boston/Cambridge/Somerville can set you back anywhere from \$1600 to \$3000 a month. Most lease agreements will require you to pay at least first and last month up front, but up to four months’ rent is common. You will often have to pay one month’s rent as a non-refundable brokerage to the real estate agent. All of these factors mean that you should be prepared to pay several thousand in your first month here. It was extremely stressful for us in the first few months, as we saw our savings being eaten away. Neither of us wanted a long commute given the nature of labwork, so this was an unavoidable reality. I can’t imagine how much more stressful it would be to make this move with a larger family!

It is really important to find a good real estate agent who is local and willing to help. First, do some research on the neighbourhoods in Boston considering the cost of renting, commute, and lifestyle fit. You will need to decide this early as you need to focus your efforts. We chose Allston for its proximity to the Longwood Medical area, student vibe and relatively low cost. Then, you need to contact agents via email or phone. A good early sign is how responsive and transparent the agent is. We were fortunate to find one that was friendly, focused and honest. Lastly, ask them to shortlist apartments for you to view as soon as you get to Boston and choose one early. Boston has four distinct seasons, so be prepared for the season you arrive in, since you may find yourself moving furniture in multiple feet of snow or the scorching heat!

There are a lot of positives to life in Boston, despite the initial stresses. It is extremely safe and liveable. Public transport, and pedestrian and cycling culture mean that you won’t need a car to commute or get around the city. There is a high population of young scientists and it is extremely easy to meet new people from all around the world. New England also has a lot to offer for weekends out of Boston. Overall, I would say that internationals moving to Boston should do some research on the city and its housing so they can make their move as straightforward as possible.

Welcome to Boston! Get to know us!
Boston Postdoctoral Association (BPDA)
www.bostonpostdocs.org