




International Students: Travelling to and Arriving in Canada

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



Spring 2025

Travelling to and Arriving in Canada Checklist

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Traveling to Canada

Date: Spring, 2025

This checklist will guide you through the essential steps to take upon arrival, from immigration procedures to settling into your new home. Follow these steps to ensure a smooth transition into student life in Canada.

Port of Entry in Canada & Clearing Customs

When you arrive in Canada, your first stop at a Canadian airport is called your Port of Entry. This is where you must go through immigration and customs before continuing your journey. If you have a connecting flight within Canada, you will need to complete these steps before moving to your next flight. Make sure you have all the required documents ready and verify your study permit details before leaving the airport.

- **Clear Immigration at the Port of Entry** – Show your study Permit Approval Letter passport, and Letter of Acceptance.
- **Receive & Verify Your Study Permit** – Ensure all details are correct before leaving the airport. Check that your study permit has the correct information, including your name, study conditions, and validity dates. If you notice errors, notify the immigration officer immediately to request corrections.

Transit Through U.S. Airport Connections

When planning your travel to Canada, it is crucial to be aware of current U.S. immigration policies, especially if your itinerary includes transiting through a U.S. airport. Recent changes have led to increased scrutiny and enforcement actions by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which may impact international students. Where possible we recommend direct transit through a Canadian Port of Entry.

To minimize potential complications:

- **Review transit requirements:** Ensure you have the necessary visas or authorizations for any U.S. layovers.
- **Verify personal information:** Double-check that all your travel documents, including your study permit approval, Letter of Acceptance, and passport, contain accurate details. Your name, date of birth, and Designated Learning Institution (DLI) number must match exactly across all documents. If transiting through the U.S., ensure you meet any additional visa or Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) requirements.
- **Have official documentation readily accessible:** Keep all relevant paperwork easily accessible, as customs officers may require immediate verification.
- **Stay informed:** Regularly check for updates on U.S. immigration policies that might impact your travel.

- **Consult authorities:** Contact your airline or travel agent to confirm any additional requirements or advisories related to transiting through the U.S.

Taking these precautions can help prevent unnecessary delays or complications during your journey.

Arriving and Settling In

Healthcare and Insurance

Understanding your healthcare coverage is essential for staying healthy while studying in Canada. As an international student, you are automatically enrolled in the International Basic Health Plan and the Extended Health and Dental plan to ensure comprehensive medical coverage during your studies. Student medical insurance at Saint Mary's University is administered through the Saint Mary's University Students' Association (SMUSA).

If you have a pre-existing medical condition coverage may be limited. Make sure you:

- Review your SMUSA health insurance coverage.
- Know your policy details and download your plan cards.
- Learn how to access healthcare in Canada.
- Connect with the SMUSA Health Plan Office if you need support accessing or understanding your health insurance.

Accessing Healthcare in Nova Scotia

Saint Mary's students have access to various healthcare services both on campus and in the community. Understanding how to navigate the healthcare system will ensure you receive the care you need when necessary.

- Complete your [SMU Student Health Clinic registration](#) before your first visit. The clinic is available to students for up to one year after graduation.
- Book appointments with the SMU Student Health Clinic by calling 902-420-5611 or using [Pomelo Health](#) digital portal to schedule, cancel, and communicate with clinic staff. Limited walk-in spots are available for urgent concerns: call ahead to inquire.
- Download the [YourHealthNS app](#) to find healthcare providers, access virtual care, and check wait times at walk-in clinics and emergency departments.
- Check for [Mobile Primary Care Clinics](#) in your area. These provincial clinics provide non-emergency medical care at various locations across Nova Scotia.
- Know where to go for [emergency healthcare](#): call 911 or visit the nearest emergency department for serious or life-threatening conditions.

Being familiar with these healthcare options will help you access the right care when needed.

Housing and Accommodations

Finding a safe and comfortable place to stay is essential to your transition. Whether you're moving into campus housing or renting off-campus, take the necessary steps to settle in and secure housing prior to leaving your home country.

- Check into temporary or permanent housing accommodations.
- Inspect rental property & sign lease agreement (if renting off-campus).

Safety and Emergency Preparedness

Familiarizing yourself with emergency contacts and safety resources will help you feel more secure in your new environment. Take these steps to stay prepared.

- Know emergency contact numbers – [911 for emergencies](#), 902-420-5000 for [campus security](#) emergencies, 902-420-5577 for campus security non-emergencies.
- Download the [SMUSafe app](#) to your smartphone to receive emergency alerts from campus security.
- Keep copies of important documents, such as passports and permits, in a safe place.

Canadian Banking

Opening a Canadian bank account will make it easier to manage your finances while studying. Many banks offer student-friendly accounts with low or no monthly fees.

- Open a Canadian Bank Account – many banks offer student chequing accounts that offer no or low monthly fees.
- Activate or Collect Pre-arranged GIC (if applicable)
- Set Up Online Banking & Mobile Payments

Phone & Internet

Staying connected is important for both academic and personal life. Setting up your phone and internet access will ensure you can communicate with friends, family, and university services.

- Purchase a Canadian SIM Card or Mobile Plan
- Set Up Wi-Fi at your accommodations (If renting off-campus)

Working in Canada

If you plan to work while studying, you will need a Social Insurance Number (SIN) to be eligible for employment.

- Apply for a [Social Insurance Number](#) (SIN) for Work Eligibility.

Academic Preparation

Getting familiar with your academic environment will set you up for success. Attend New to SMU orientation events, meet with academic advisors, and locate important campus facilities.

- Attend [New to SMU](#) student orientation and Welcome Week events to get familiar with Saint Mary's campus, prepare for class and make new connections.
- Apply for and collect your student ID card. You can apply for your student card using the [online ID Card Application](#). SMU ID cards cannot be mailed. You can pick your card up in September from the front desk of the Patrick Power Library and will require photo identification to collect your student ID card.
- Meet with your program's Academic Advisor.
- Check your tuition payment schedule and make payments on time.

- Locate Campus Facilities (Library, gym, dining hall, etc.)

Daily Living

Adjusting to daily life in a new country includes finding grocery stores, arranging meals, and learning how to navigate public transportation.

- Locate grocery stores near campus.
- Register for [Residence Meal Plans](#), if applicable.
- Get your [U-Pass](#) or download Halifax Go to your smartphone to access Halifax public transportation.
- Get your [SMU Identification Card](#), which is mandatory for all students, enabling access to writing tests and exams, visiting the library and computer labs, and accessing The Tower and The Homburg Centre for Health and Wellness recreation centres.

Mental & Emotional Health

Adjusting to a new country can be exciting but also challenging. Take care of your well-being by staying connected with loved ones and accessing mental health resources when needed.

- Stay in touch with family & friends back home.
- Give yourself time to adjust to life in a new country.
- Seek mental health support from The Counseling Centre if needed.



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