

# Welcome to Vancouver: A Guide for International Students



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# Welcome to Vancouver: A Guide for International Students

This guide provides essential information for students, covering housing options, communications services, childcare resources, and more. Whether you're looking for affordable accommodation, or support for personal well – being, this handbook offers valuable resources to help you settle into life in Vancouver. Explore the options and tips to make your experience here smoother and more enjoyable!

## Cultural Differences and Norms in BC

As an international student in Vancouver (BC), understanding local cultural and norms can help you integrate and make the most of your time. Vancouver (BC) is one of Canada's most diverse provinces, with a rich mix of cultures, backgrounds and traditions.

Here are some aspects to keep in mind:

### **Social norms:**

Canadians value respect, punctuality, and personal space. Social interactions tend to be casual and friendly, but Canadians are also quite private.

Politeness is a key, and you'll often hear "please" and "thank you" in conversations.

Appointments and scheduling are also taken seriously, so if you need to cancel or reschedule, it's courteous to give ample notice.

### **Cultural diversity:**

BC is one of the most multicultural regions in Canada, and Vancouver is particularly diverse city. It is a multicultural society that welcomes people of all backgrounds and beliefs. It's important to be respectful and open – minded toward all people.

Language: Vancouver's main language is English, but many others are spoken, including Cantonese, Mandarin, Punjabi, German, Italian, French, Korean, Japanese, Spanish and Farse, as well as indigenous languages.

### **Casual and Relaxed Atmosphere:**

Vancouver has a more casual and laid–black atmosphere compared to some other places around the world. It's common to see people wearing casual clothing such as jeans, t – shirts, or hoodies in many public settings (including some workplace and universities)

### **Environmental Awareness:**

People are very environmentally conscious. Recycling, composting, and minimizing waste are integral parts of life here. You'll often see separate bins for recycling, compost, and garbage in public spaces, and it's expected that you'll use them correctly.

BC is known for its natural beauty, and many people enjoy outdoor activities like hiking, cycling, and skiing. Taking care of the environment is deeply ingrained in the local culture.

## Cost of Living in Vancouver (BC)

The cost of living can vary depending on the region, lifestyle, and personal preferences. Cities like Vancouver and more densely populated, tend to have higher living costs compared to smaller cities or rural areas.

**Note:** *The costs outlined in this guide represent average estimates and can vary depending on various factors as your specific lifestyle choices. It's important to remember that these figured are not fixed, and your actual expenses may be higher or lower depending on your individual situation.*

Expense	Estimated Cost (per month)
Accommodation (shared room)	\$1,200- \$1,500
Groceries	\$300 - \$500
Transportation (Public transit)	\$100 - \$180
Health Insurance	\$75 (MSP) / \$100 (private)
Cell phone	\$40 - \$70
Entertainment & Miscellaneous	\$100 - \$200
<b>Total Estimated Monthly Cost</b>	<b>\$1,815 - \$2,825</b>

## Daily Life Information

### Transportation

Vancouver offers a robust public transportation system managed by TransLink. The options making it easy for international students to navigate daily life.

- Buses – covering almost every neighborhood in the city, as well as the surrounding areas.
- SkyTrain – Connects downtown to surrounding areas, including Vancouver international airport
- SeaBus – A passenger ferry that connects downtown Vancouver (Waterfront station) to North Vancouver (Lonsdale Quay).

- West Coast Express – A commuter train service that connects Vancouver to suburbs in the Fraser Valley.
- Public bike share – Provides a bike – sharing option throughout the city.

### **Payment Methods:**

- Compass Card / Tickets / Fare Zone

## **Internet, Phone and Cable Services**

There are many service providers in Metro Vancouver that offer internet, mobile phone, landline phone, cable television, etc. You may be able to get a discount for being a student or by bundling together several services from one company. If a contract is required, make sure that you fully understand it before signing.

### **List of Local Service Providers**

*This list is provided for informational purposes only. We do not endorse any of these particular companies nor do we take any responsibility for any interactions students may have with them.*

- [Freedom](#)
- [Public Mobile](#)
- [Koodo](#)
- [Shaw](#)
- [Telus](#)
- [Fido](#)
- [Bell](#)
- [Virgin Plus](#)
- [Rogers](#)
- [Novus](#)
- [PhoneBox](#)

## **Banking Services for International Students in Vancouver**

There are several banking options available to students, and many local banks offer services tailored specifically for international students.

### **Setting Up a bank account**

- 1- Required documents:
  - Passport or government – issued ID
  - Study permit or student visa

- Proof of enrollment from your Canadian Educational institution.
- Canadian address
- Social Insurance Number (SIN)

### List of Local Banks

*This list is provided for informational purposes only. We do not endorse any of these particular companies nor do we take any responsibility for any interactions students may have with them.*

- [Vancity](#)
- [Scotiabank](#)
- [Coast Capital](#)
- [Bank of Montreal \(BMO\)](#)
- [Toronto Dominion \(TD\)](#)
- [Tangerine](#)
- [Royal Bank of Canada \(RBC\)](#)
- [CIBC](#)
- [HSBC](#)

### Child Care Options

For international student parents in Vancouver, several childcare options are available to support your educational journey while ensuring quality care for your children.

- YMCA Metro Vancouver – Operates four early learning centers with a play – based curriculum. Notable centers include:
  - Citygate
  - Crabtree Corner
  - Emma’s and Leslie Diamond Centres. [Child Care | YMCA BC](#)
- Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre (WRCC)  
[Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre](#)
- Vancouver Community College (VCC) Child Care  
[Child Care - Vancouver Community College](#)

### Emergency and Non-Emergency Contacts

In case of emergencies or non – urgent matters, it’s essential to know the correct contact numbers and resources in Vancouver. Here’s an overview.

Keep these numbers handy and stay informed to ensure peace of mind throughout

- 911 – This is the number for emergency services across Canada.
  - Police
  - Fire Department
  - Ambulance Services

#### NON – EMERGENCY CONTACTS

- Vancouver police Department (VPD)  
Phone: 604-717-3321
- BC Ambulance Services  
Phone: 604-872-5151

## Housing Costs and Availability

Housing costs in Vancouver can vary significantly depending on the location, type of accommodation, and amenities. Below are typical price ranges:

- **On-Campus Residence:** \$1,200 per month
- **Shared Off-Campus Apartment:** \$1,500 per month
- **Private Off-Campus Apartment:** \$2,000 per month

Rental prices typically range from \$850 to \$2,300. Keep in mind that housing near major universities and in popular neighborhoods can be in high demand, so competition may be fierce.

## Housing Search Tips

To secure the best accommodation, we recommend the following tips:

1. **Explore Multiple Options:** Don't limit your search to one platform—explore all available resources.
2. **Plan Ahead:** Start your housing search well in advance to avoid stress and last-minute decisions.
3. **Use University Resources:** Many universities offer housing services and resources to help students find off-campus accommodation.

## Off-Campus Housing Options in Vancouver

1. Homestays

2. Student Residences

3. Apartment Rentals

### **Resources for Finding Off-Campus Housing**

Here are some trusted resources to help you find off-campus accommodation in Vancouver:

- **Casa Student Housing:** Offers furnished apartments and houses for students.  
[Visit Casa Student Housing](#)
- **VanMates Accommodation:** Provides furnished apartments and rooms for rent.  
[Visit VanMates](#)
- **BCIT Off-Campus Housing Resources:** Includes a list of search engines and other sources for rental properties.  
[Visit BCIT Housing Resources](#)
- **UBC Student Housing:** Provides information on living off-campus and various housing types.  
[Visit UBC Housing](#)
- **Apartment Rentals:**
  - o [Unique Accommodations](#)
  - o [Hollyburn Properties](#)

### **Tips to Avoid Housing Scams**

Be aware that unfortunately there are bad actors out trying to steal money from other people. A common scam involves fraudulent housing listings that often appear “too good to be true” and require payment to be sent in advance. When the victim arrives in Canada, they realize the place that they paid to rent doesn’t exist and the money along with the scammer are nowhere to be found. For your own well-being, we advise against transferring funds for housing before you travel to Canada unless you are absolutely sure that you can trust the other party involved.

Learn more about [rental scams](#) from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

### **Tenancy Rights in British Columbia**

As a tenant in Vancouver, you are protected by the **Residential Tenancy Act (RTA)**.

#### **Support and Assistance for Tenants**

There are several organizations in BC that provide support and assistance for tenants:



- **Residential Tenancy Branch (RTB):** Offers resources, information, and dispute resolution services.
  - Contact RTB: 1-800-665-8779 (Toll-Free) or 604-660-1020 (Lower Mainland)
- **Tenant Resource & Advisory Centre (TRAC):** Provides free legal information and representation for tenants.
  - Visit: [tenants.bc.ca](http://tenants.bc.ca)

## Tenant Insurance

While tenant insurance is optional in Vancouver, it's highly recommended to protect your belongings from theft, fire, or damage. A typical policy starts at around **\$15 to \$20 per month**, depending on coverage.

### What Does Tenant Insurance Cover?

- *Personal Belongings:* Covers items like clothing, electronics, and furniture.
- *Temporary Housing:* Covers the costs of staying in a hotel if your apartment needs repairs.

### Recommended Insurance Providers:

- Insurance BC - [Visit InsuranceBC](#)
- Westland Insurance - [Visit Westland Insurance](#)
- Sonnet Insurance - [Visit Sonnet Insurance](#)

### Tips for Choosing Tenant Insurance

- Evaluate Your Belongings
- Compare Policies
- Review Terms

## Health Insurance for International Students

### BC Medical Services Plan (MSP) Program

The British Columbia (BC) Medical Services Plan (MSP) is the BC-government run public health insurance plan. You are required to enrol in MSP if you will be in BC for more than 6 months.

BC MSP covers doctor visits, hospital visits, and medically required services.

Review the [list of medical services](#) that MSP covers.

There is a 3-month waiting period to be eligible for MSP, starting with the balance of your month of arrival in BC, plus the next 2 calendar months.

As long as you apply upon your arrival in BC, you should be covered from the first day of your 4th month in BC until the expiry of your study permit, unless you leave BC for an extended period.

As of January 1, 2020, all international students with study permits must pay a \$75 health care coverage fee per month. You will receive a bill from the British Columbia government and must [pay the BC government directly](#). You can [pay online](#) and set up online services, such as seeing your balance, setting up paperless invoicing, and autopayments.

If your family is with you in Canada, they will only be charged the health care coverage fee if they also hold study permits. If they hold work permits or are here as visitors, they will not be charged the fee.

These fees are subject to change. Check the [MSP website](#) for the most up-to-date information.

You must apply for MSP online for yourself and any family members who come with you **as soon as you arrive in BC**. Processing your MSP application could take several months. Once processed, you will receive your [BC Services Card](#) (formerly known as “BC CareCard”) by mail.

You should register for the [BC Fair PharmaCare Plan](#), which might provide additional coverage for prescription drugs, medical devices, and pharmacy services. As of October 2022, you can register for the BC Fair PharmaCare plan at the same time you apply for MSP. It is also possible to [register for Fair PharmaCare](#) separately.

If you will be in BC for 6 months or less, you are not eligible to apply for MSP coverage.

If your family (spouse, partner, and/or dependent children) will be with you in BC for 6 months or more, they may be eligible to enrol with the BC MSP.

## Local Community Integration Supports for International Students in Vancouver

Below is a guide to various community engagement programs, student, religious, cultural, and sports groups here are some programs and resources in Vancouver that support the integration:

## **Programs Offered by PICS (Progressive Intercultural Community Services) Society:**

- Intercultural Volunteer HUB (IVH)  
[Volunteer - PICS](#)
- International student Support Program  
[International Students Support Program - PICS](#)

## **Religious and Faith-Based Groups**

- SFU's Multifaith Centre hosts various faith groups, including the Muslim Students Association and Jewish Student Association.  
[Multifaith Centre - Simon Fraser University](#)
- Vancouver Christian Fellowship:  
[Mountainview Christian Fellowship | Church in Vancouver, BC](#)
- Buddhist Temple:  
[Vancouver Buddhist Temple](#)

## **Community Groups and Cultural Clubs**

- Le Centre Culturel: [ACCUEIL | Le Centre Culturel Francophone de Vancouver](#)
- Latin American Cultural Association of Vancouver:  
[Home - Latincouver](#)
- Vancouver Chinese Cultural Centre:  
[Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Vancouver Chinese Language School | Vancouver BC](#)

## **Sports and Recreation Groups**

Sports and recreational activities provide a great way to meet new people, stay active, and engage with local community.

- **City of Vancouver Fitness and Sports Activities**  
[Fitness and sports | City of Vancouver](#)
- **UBC Recreation:**
  1. Public Access – Include fitness classes, drop – in sports, and another recreational activity.
  2. Membership rates
  3. Eligibility for Community services card (CSC)

## Crisis Support 24/7

Get help if you or someone else is in immediate danger, or at risk of harming yourself or others. Call [911](#) or visit your [nearest emergency room](#).

If you or someone you know is feeling hopeless or at risk of harm, contact a crisis responder:

- Call or text [988](#) toll-free any time to reach the [988 Suicide Crisis Helpline](#).
- Chat online with a crisis responder at [Crisis Centre BC](#) during select hours.

## Addiction and Overdose Support Resources in Vancouver

If you or someone you know is struggling with addiction or facing the risk of overdose in Vancouver, there are many resources available to help.

### **Health Link BC (8-1-1)**

### **BC Campus - Addiction and Mental Health Resources**

#### **Services Offered:**

Mental Health Resources: Information and links to addiction recovery services.

Online Workshops and Support: For coping with stress, addiction, and mental health issues.

Contact Information:

Website: BC Campus - Mental Health & Addiction Resources.

## Other Resources for Newcomers

Learn more by visiting the following sites:

- [WelcomeBC](#) – detailed information about the many resources available for newcomers to BC
- [WorkBC](#) – job listings and information about BC's economy and labour market
- [HelloBC](#) – local travel information
- [MOSAIC](#) – a registered charity serving immigrant, newcomer and refugee communities in Greater Vancouver for the past 40 years