

How to Rent an Apartment



Renting your first apartment might not be easy, but definitely it will be a good learning experience. The following will give you an overview of your housing options.

If you want to live on-campus, usually you can apply for campus apartments online. So please refer to your university website and search for housing. You can start doing that in Egypt before departure. Usually on-campus residences fill up pretty fast so you have to plan ahead. Please be aware that there is housing for single and married families, graduate and undergraduate so be careful when you choose.

Usually you can rent on campus apartments, some of them are furnished, on semester bases so it is a good opportunity to have 4 months to search for other off campus apartments if you do not feel like on campus housing.

To look for off-campus apartments, we advice you to do the following:

1- Define your needs:

What size of apartment are you looking for (studio, 1 bedroom, 2 bedrooms or more), what extra services etc Please be advised that some states enforce laws that require a minimum number of bedroom apartments depending on your family status. For example:

- Married Couple: Studio. Or 1 bedroom apartment
- Married couple + 1 child: 2 bedroom apartment
- Married couple + 2 child: 2 bedroom apartment, if the 2 children of the same sex.
- 3 bed room apartments if the 2 children are of different sex (a boy and a girl); you may want to consider renting a duplex or town house.

2- Search:

Look and find the right apartment for you. This might not be easy especially in big cities. It might take even weeks.

There are several ways to start looking for an apartment:

Airport: try to find the apartment guide before you leave the airport

Personal references: Egyptian colleagues might know apartments which are suitable for you.

Newspaper: This is still the most widely used advertising medium. The Sunday edition of your local paper has a thick real estate and rentals section.

Supermarkets, grocery stores very often have at their exits free newsletters and classified ads and publications which can be a good source to find an apartment

Walking around, If you are moving to a relatively small town, you can walk around in the neighborhood and look around for vacancies. You will find apartment complexes. You can go in, ask about vacancies, prices and even you can get an application. If the office is closed, write down a phone number and call them next day. Internet is the easiest and fastest to reach the rental office. There are several websites specialized in apartment renting (see below).

Internet: before you leave to the USA you can use the internet to look for housing. Sites: <http://www.forrent.com/search/> it is one of the few websites that allows you to make searches based on a wide variety of search criteria. This is very convenient if you want to find an apartment in a limited neighborhood. In the US the zip codes (postal codes) define a quite small area, usually not more than a few blocks. Thus searching based on zip codes only is the easiest way to find something in a few blocks distance. Plus the site offers a wide variety of information about each selected complex; you can specify the number of rooms, number of bathrooms, maximum price level and other parameters

Another good site is <http://www.apartments.com/>. This a good place to look for short term lease. If you are moving temporarily in a location and looking for complexes with monthly leases, this is a good place to start with..

Whichever apartment you pickup, it is important to do two things at this point:

A. Call the complex or send an email and ask a set of preliminary questions. These include:

- What kind of vacancies do they have available?
- How much is the monthly rent? And how much is the security deposit? Is the deposit refundable? Deposit is usually a one month rental value.
- What amenities come with the apartment (like refrigerator, microwave oven, dishwasher, washer, dryer, fireplace, ceiling fan, garbage disposal etc?)

- What utility costs are supported by the complex? Quite often you don't have to pay for some of the utility costs including water, sewage, trash pick-up, TV Cable because it's included in the monthly rent. Make sure you ask about this.
- What facilities does the complex offer? Covered parking, CATV, garage, balcony, extra storage space, laundry facility, clubhouse with computer and internet access, pool, spa, sauna etc. are examples. Which of these is for free?
- If you have children: Are children permitted in the apartment? Where is the nearest childcare facility located? Where are the nearest schools and is there bus service?
- What is the minimum lease period you should commit yourself to? This varies drastically from community to community. Sometimes they require signing up for a year, sometimes for 6 months, sometimes you renew your lease month by month. Obviously if you plan to stay in one place for a shorter time you are not looking for a complex which requires from you a full year commitment. You should also ask: How much notice must be given before the lease is terminated?
- Is subletting allowed? What procedures are followed, if subletting is permitted?
- What is the penalty if you move out earlier? Many complexes penalize you if break the lease agreement and move out earlier. Sometimes you lose your security deposit, sometimes you have to pay a full month rent fee, or even more. Ask about it before you apply.
- Do they have a pet policy? Some communities accept pets, others don't at all. Some communities accept only small pets, like cats and dogs up to a certain weight, others have no limits.

B- Make a physical inspection of the neighborhood and the apartment

- Check the appearance of the neighborhood. Walk around the complex, drive in every direction a few blocks and look at the neighborhood as a whole. How are the houses? Who are the people who live here? What feelings the neighborhood generates in you?
- Check the complex the same way. What is your impression? Does it look and feel safe?
- Even if the price is right and the neighborhood looks OK, always inspect the apartment you are willing to rent. Check the external appearance. Check from inside the painting, the amenities. Is the carpeting clean? Any smells in the apartment? Any spots? Everything looks right?

If the look and feel satisfies you, can ask for an application, fill it out and submit it. If you will rent the apartment with your wife it is a good idea to take her with you because she will need to fill out and sign her own application.

3- Submit your application:

Things you will need in order to submit an application:

I- Application form: every person above the age 18 who intends to live in the apartment must fill out an application form. Every apartment complex has its own dedicated set of forms, but the information you fill out on these are mostly the same. These include most or all of the information below:

A- Personal information: your name, phone number, driver's license number, Social Security Number etc.

B- Rental history: in America most management companies will check your previous rental references. If you rented before, give that information. If you didn't give the address of your friend where you lived before and ask him to serve as reference or a co-signer, if the management company will call him

C- Employment information and history: in order to ensure proper quality tenants, and to insure you can afford the apartment, the management company might check the prospective tenants' employment background. If you attach enough employment and income evidence to your application (letter of financial support form the Egyptian Cultural and Educational Bureau or a letter from your university about your income, will be enough)

D- Financial information: can include the name of your bank, the type of accounts you have, credit cards you have, major loans and obligations etc. if applicable. This helps the management company to have a clear picture of your financial background. Usually they don't call your bank and check your financial information.

II- Credit check fee/ Application fee: when you apply for an apartment they will run a credit check on you. The credit check fee varies it is usually about \$25-50 per person or \$40-100 for a couple. All the persons who intend to live in the apartment will have to have their credit checked. Usually they won't accept cash; just money orders.

III- Proof of income: letter of financial support form the Egyptian Cultural and Educational Bureau or a letter from your university about your income, will be enough. As a rule of thumb, usually your monthly income should be at least 2.5- 3 times higher than your monthly rent to qualify.

IV- A holding deposit (Sometimes): some companies in order to process your application might request a deposit. Now if you don't qualify and your application is not approved you will get your deposit back in full. However, if you qualify and change your mind and decide still not to move in, you will lose your holding

deposit. If you decide to move in, the holding deposit will go toward the first month's rent.

4- Move in:

If your application is approved and you agree and accept their terms, sign the lease contract and move in.

I-Once accepted (approved), you should find out:

- What your new address is.
- What your total move-in cost will be. Usually you pay the monthly rent in advance plus one time security deposit. Security deposits are refundable upon move out (minus the amount needed for the realty to fix the damage you might have caused in the apartment). Security deposits differ from complex to complex and from person to person based on credit history. The first months rent plus the security deposit together total your move-in cost.

II- Get familiar with the rules of the house including:

- Rent payment. Usually the rent is due between the 1st and 5th day of the month. For late payments you will be charged a fee, a certain percentage of your monthly rent. If the rent is not paid by the 10th of the month the management company will make the necessary steps to evict you.
- Parking rules and regulations
- Lost key replacement fees, or lockout charges after business hours
- Emergency maintenance services, whom to call if you need them

Do You Know?

1. Normally, apartments provide basic kitchen appliances like cooking burners, oven, and refrigerator; some come with dishwashers.
2. Mostly all the apartments are equipped with AC/heat.
3. Electric switches are operated in the opposite direction, i.e. upside-ON and downside-OFF.
4. You can rent furnished / unfurnished apartment. If you rented an unfurnished apartment you can buy furniture from yard sales (do not forget to buy Friday news paper it will have all Saturday's yard sales in the area). When you buy from a yard sale, you buy used furniture from families that are leaving their homes.