

SUMMER 2013

Cheap Living...

OPIA's Guide to Affordable Housing, Transportation,
Food, and Fun in Major Cities for HLS Students
Spending a Summer Working in the Public Interest

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Houston

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Congratulations! You've gotten a great public interest internship. You're ready for the challenges and rewards of your job, but are you ready to move to, navigate, and enjoy a new city on a modest salary?

It can be difficult to live cheaply in some of the world's most expensive (and exciting) cities, so OPIA and the 1L Public Interest Section Representatives have put together a guide to give you a few tips on how to get by (and have fun) on a public interest salary. We'll tell you how to find safe, inexpensive housing, get around in the city, eat out or in, hang out, and explore the city's cultural offerings. For summer 2013, we updated guides for the following major cities:

- Cleveland
- Houston
- London
- Philadelphia

If you're working in another city, check with OPIA to see if there is an edition from a prior year.

In compiling these guides, we relied on numerous sources: our own experiences, law school career service offices, newspapers, the Internet, and especially Harvard Law School students. The information in *Cheap Living* is meant to be helpful, not authoritative. No doubt, we have missed some stellar bargains. By listing a feature in the guide, we do not mean to endorse it, other than to say that a student like you has mentioned it as a great deal. *Cheap Living* remains a work in progress. Restaurants and attractions continuously open and close.

A very special thanks to all of the 1L Section Reps who researched and wrote this year's *Cheap Living Guides*. Even in the midst of exams, the Auction, Ames, and everything else that consumes 1L year, they made time to make sure that their classmates get the most out of their public interest summer internship experience. Have a wonderful summer!

- Kirsten Bermingham, OPIA Program Coordinator

**The Houston Guide was updated by 1L section representative Donna Harati.*

WELCOME

Welcome to Houston, "Space City," "the Energy Capital of the World," and the "Capital of the Sunbelt." The fourth largest city in the United States (by population), Houston is marked by its suburban sprawl, which means that having a car here, although not mandatory, will likely improve your quality of life greatly (especially given the fact that the public transportation system is generally poor). The city has some of the best and most varied food offerings in the nation. It also boasts diverse entertainment options including many museums, parks, malls, venues for movies and concerts, and four professional sports teams. There are plenty of places to live in Houston, including various unique neighborhoods. Overall, Houston should be a fun and exciting place to spend your summer.

The city is known for its massive energy industry, for the cutting edge research in biomedical and aeronautics, and for being a politically diverse city in what is on the whole a conservative state. In fact, in 2009, Houston became the first city with over a million people to elect an openly gay mayor when Anise Parker won election. She was reelected in 2011. Despite the summer heat and humidity, it is consistently rated by various sources as one of the best cities in the nation in which to live and work.

Houston is a big city to explore, and you won't be able to experience all of it in a summer. However, with the help of this guide and the resources below, you should be able to experience many of the highlights.

For more general information, consult:

<http://www.houston.org/living-here/>

<http://www.visithoustontexas.com/>

<http://www.houstonpage.com/>

For all things Houston, don't miss Culture Map. A great resource on events, restaurants, etc. <http://houston.culturemap.com/>

HOUSING

Houston offers many viable and affordable housing options. In all likelihood, there will be safe and reasonably priced places to live near where you are working. However, as Houston unfortunately does not have much in the way of public transportation, unless you are living in the downtown or medical center areas (which are fairly expensive), it may not be a huge benefit to live close to where you are working, as you would probably benefit from having a car here for the summer anyway. The following sites can be helpful for finding a place to live in Houston:

- <http://www.rent.com/rentals/texas/houston-and-vicinity/houston/>
- <http://houston.apartments.com/>
- <http://www.apartmentratings.com/rate/TX-Houston.html>
- <http://houston.apartmentfinder.com/default.aspx>
- <http://www.houstonapartments.com/>
- <http://houston1apartments.com/>

If you want to have access to Houston's light rail, then downtown and the medical center areas are the two best options. However, as previously mentioned, these tend to be more expensive, and the light rail won't take you to your job unless you are working around these areas. You may also be able to use the Metro bus system as transportation, which will be detailed further in the transportation section.

Places to Live and Explore:

There are diverse and interesting neighborhoods where one can live and experience Houston. Given the suburban sprawl of Houston, the commuting times from the neighborhoods vary significantly. The following website has helpful summaries of Houston's neighborhoods, including the Galleria Area, Katy, the Medical Center, Montrose, Pearland, River Oaks, The Woodlands, Sugar Land, Rice Village, the Museum District, Midtown, Kingwood, The Heights, Downtown, Clear Lake, and The Heights:

<http://www.houston.com/houston-neighborhoods/>

Visit the above website to learn more about any and all of these neighborhoods.

TRANSPORTATION

Houston is a commuter city where a large majority of Houstonians have access to or own cars. There are viable public transportation options available, but life is much simpler in Houston with access to a car.

Metro (Light Rail and Bus)

Houston's public transportation system is known as the Metro. As previously mentioned, the light rail system runs only in a limited area. Consequently, the bus system may be the only option if you are using public transportation to get someplace. Maps and schedules of the bus system and light rail system are available online at: <https://www.ridemetro.org/Default.aspx>. You can also call customer service for information at 713-635-4000. They are available 6a.m. to 9p.m. Mon.-Fri., and 8a.m. to 8p.m Saturday and Sunday.

Fares

Fares can be paid for in cash (exact change only) or with the Metro Q card. If you will be using public transportation regularly, getting the Metro Q card will be a good investment. Fares will vary, as explained on the Metro's website at: <https://www.ridemetro.org/FareInfo/Default.aspx>.

Cars/Bikes/Etc.

As previously noted, a car in Houston, while not completely essential, is incredibly useful and would generally make life a lot easier in Houston. Biking is possible, although, once again, having a car is simpler and easier because you can take advantage of Houston's highway system and will not spend long amounts of time in transit.

Taxis

Taxis are uncommon in most areas in Houston given the large number of people that have cars. The best way to get a cab if you need one is to call a service such as Yellow cab Houston (713-236-1111, <http://www.yellowcabhouston.com/>)

Leaving Town?

By Air

Houston has two major airports: George Bush Intercontinental Airport and Houston Hobby Airport. You may be able to find cheaper flights into Hobby using Southwest Airlines.

By Bus

The most reliable bus service that will take you out of town in Houston seems to be Greyhound (<http://www.greyhound.com/home/>). Recently, Megabus has expanded service from Houston (<http://us.megabus.com>).

By Car

If you do have a car, there are multiple major cities in reasonable driving distance of Houston, including, Austin (3 hours), San Antonio (3.25 hours), Dallas (4 hours), and New Orleans (5.5 hours).

FOOD

Houston, like most southern cities, is not short on delicious and affordable dining options. It is the home of more quality chain restaurants and MANY more fast food joints than in Cambridge. While healthy fare is a bit rarer (Houston is one of the fattest cities in the nation), health-conscious people can definitely find some options, as well.

A good resource to read up on restaurants: <http://www.houstonpress.com/restaurants/>

SUPERMARKETS

There are three major supermarket chains in the city, as well as a number of larger retail stores such as Wal-Mart and Target, all of which provide food-buying options.

HEB: There are approximately 50 HEBs in the city of Houston, so you should be able to find one close to where you live. These major supermarkets include just about any kind of food you would need, such as fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, and baked goods, as well as processed food. Some HEBs also have a pharmacy. Their website, with a store locator, is available at <http://www.heb.com>.

Fiesta Mart: Fiesta Mart's emphasis is more on international (particularly traditionally Hispanic) food options. There are over 30 stores in the Houston area, so again you should be able to find one in your area if you like a bit less corporate a feel than HEB (or even, to some extent, Whole Foods). Fiesta's also a great place to grab a Mexican style corn on the cob on the go. Their website is at <http://www.fiestamart.com/>.

Whole Foods: There are six Whole Foods in the greater Houston area, specifically in the Bellaire, Kirby, Montrose, Sugar Land, Wilcrest, and Woodway areas. It is a good place for healthy/organic options, as well as international food options, which also means that it tends to be more expensive than HEB. It also has eat-in and take-away healthy eating options, although obviously this is much pricier than buying groceries. The website is available at <http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/>.

Central Market: Central Market is also run by HEB but is a bit more like a Whole Foods – there is more emphasis on locally-produced food as well as organic, more health-conscious options, and international options. There is only one Central Market in the city of Houston, located at 3815 Westheimer in west/central Houston, about 5 miles from downtown, east of I-610 and north of Highway 59. It also has take-away and eat-in eating options (again, very much like Whole Foods), although obviously this is much pricier than buying groceries. Central Market also offers cooking classes. The website is at <http://www.centralmarket.com/>.

Wal-Mart: There are 18 Wal-Mart's in Houston, so it is likely that there will be a Wal-Mart close to where you live. The food selection there is obviously more of the processed variety; see www.walmart.com/.

Target: There are also fifteen Targets in Houston. So, similarly to Wal-Mart, if you're into processed food, Target is a decent place to look; see www.target.com/.

EATING OUT

Eating out in Houston (particularly on the cheap) will typically mean going to chain restaurants or fast food joints. The healthiest food options are probably eating at Whole Foods or Central Market. The following restaurants may have healthy options, but be sure to check out the menu before deciding to go.

Fast Food...

Houston has a lot of fast food options, including most of the fast food chains that you would find anywhere else (Burger King, Wendy's, Chick Fil-A, Taco Bell, McDonalds, Jack in the Box, etc). The following are options that are distinct to Texas or at least to the south.

Taco Cabana: Taco Cabana is a wonderful place for Tex-Mex on the go. It has excellent breakfast tacos in the morning for a couple bucks per taco, and the lunches are similarly cheap (in the \$5 range, including drinks). If you're in Texas for the summer, you should definitely check this place out.

Whataburger: Rather like a much better version of McDonalds or Burger King, this is a great place to get restaurant-size burgers for fast food prices (although a bit pricier than some fast food joints). Also good are the onion rings and shakes.

Dairy Queen: A lot easier to find in Texas than in Massachusetts, this rural fast food favorite has amazing soft-serve ice cream.

Fast-ish Food...

These restaurants are good for a lunch hour – more like a deli than a restaurant. They're classier than fast food (there's no drive-through), but they're still quite cheap.

Berryhill. Quick and fresh Mexican food. Known for their tamales and fish tacos.

Which Wich: A sandwich place where you fill out a little form to select what to include in your sandwich (including dressings/mustard/ketchup, types of meats, veggies, and types of breads). Then they make it to order, and it tastes just like if you made a delicious, toasted, large sandwich.

Jason's Deli: A chain of restaurants that serves good sandwiches and wraps.

Chipotle/Free Birds: Houston has two burrito shops. If you've ever had Chipotle at the Square, you know how that is. Free Birds is similar, but people always have their preferences between Chipotle and Free Birds, so you should try out both.

Denny's, IHOP, and Jim's: All give you the ability to order breakfast 24 hours per day, with the additional option of things like steaks and burgers at Denny's and Jim's. Cheap and relatively fast but not a lot of healthy choices.

Souper Salad: One healthy option for dining, but this is a much rarer chain than the ones already mentioned.

Fuddruckers: Fuddruckers is on the verge of being a restaurant, but it's still a good lunch place. It's probably around \$8-10 for a full meal. It's mainly a burger place, but it also has good veggie burger, chicken, and other options. Good fries and onion rings. There are a few Fuddruckers in Boston, too, so you can check it out before your summer job.

Dine-In...

Dine-in restaurants will be worse for your wallet, but they're probably a necessary evil for dates, etc. They're also good places to request for your go-away lunch from your job or for when your parents visit or whatever... Since this guide is for cheap living, however, it will not deal with the fancier dining options. Also, you may find that many of the chains to be found in the Boston area are also found in Houston.

Mexican/ Tex-Mex

Sylvia's Enchilada Kitchen. Non-greasy enchiladas in reasonable portions.

El Rey Tacqueria. Flavorful and fast Cuban/Mexican food. Great rotisserie chicken and flavored Mexican rice.

El Tiempo Cantina. Great margaritas and crabmeat quesadillas.

Ninfa's. A Houston tex-mex institution. Try the original on Navigation.

Goode Co. Tacqueria. Part of the Goode empire. A family favorite. Great Burgers too.

Escalante's. A slightly more high-end local tex-mex chain. Solid margaritas, fajitas and atmosphere.

Tila's. A fun, lively and colorful local spot with tasty dishes such as crab stuffed avocado and a killer carne asada.

Jarro Café. Every dish comes with five amazing salsas. There's a truck in the front if you want the to-go experience. Solid Horchata too.

Barbecue

The Brisket House. Smoked chicken, ribs, brisket, baked potato salad and coleslaw. Enough said.

Goode. Company BBQ. Great place for a quick and delicious lunch or dinner. Jalapeno bread, all kinds of meat. Try the meat stuffed baked potatoes.

Gaitlin's BBQ. In a house in The Heights, this spot consistently receives rave reviews for its brisket, ribs and sausage.

Italian

Poscol. The perfect date spot. Affordable (you can get a three course meal for \$30/person),

romantic, and high-quality ingredients.

Greek

Yia Yia Mary's. Part of the Pappas Empire. Quick and tasty Greek food in sizeable portions.

Niko Niko's. Crowds flock to this Houston favorite for their well price and sized Greek fare.

Asian

Yum Yum Cha. A hidden gem in the world of Houston dim-sum. This father daughter run Rice Village spot serves up some of the freshest Chinese food in town for incredibly reasonable prices.

Khuy Khan Thai. Very reasonably priced Thai spot in the Montrose area.

Mai's Houstonians are thrilled that this beloved Vietnamese restaurant downtown was able to reopen after a fire shut the original down for months.

Seoul Garden. One of the many delicious Korean BBQ spots on Gessner. This one's consistently reliable.

Mala Sichuan. A Houston chef favorite. The Boiling fish is not to be missed.

HK Dim Sum. Another Houston chef Chinatown favorite. All the dim sum classics can be found here.

Pizza

Star Piz_za. A fun, family-friendly atmosphere and pizzas of the thick-crust variety.

Dolce Vita. Gourmet, thin-crust pizzas (\$10-15 each). Don't miss the pastas or truffle toast.

Indian

Pondicheri. The best and most creative order at the counter Indian food in town. Don't miss their breakfast.

Bombay Sweets. In the heart of Hillcroft, a bastion of South Asian culture in Houston, this spot is not to be missed. Wonderful buffet.

Himalaya. Exotic meat dishes and Pakistani cheeseburgers for reasonable prices.

Middle Eastern

Fadi's. One of the best places to get lunch in Houston. Cafeteria style, unbelievably fresh and varied Middle Eastern food. You can get a sizeable meal (main meat and 2 sides) for \$12 or under.

Darband Kabob. Quick and delicious Persian kabobs on Hillcroft.

Kasrah. A fancier, sitdown spot for high quality Persian food, but dinner will still leave you only \$20 shorter on cash.

Coffee Shops/Cafes- Houston has a number of locally-owned coffee-shops with a nice atmosphere. Here are a few:

Brazil

Empire

Antidote

Inversion

Ice Cream and Dessert

The Chocolate Bar. Everything chocolate! Don't miss the chocolate covered strawberry ice cream.

Dessert Gallery. Board games and dessert- what more does one need?

Amy's Ice Cream. A Houston/Austin ice cream chain with unique flavors.

Local Chains

Pappas restaurants: All of the Pappas restaurant chains tend to be pretty good, including for Tex-Mex (Pappasito's – highly recommended), fish (Pappadeaux), BBQ (Pappas Bar-B-Q), and more. Pappasito's and Pappadeaux probably set you back around \$15-30 per person for dinner, not counting booze, while Pappas Bar-B-Q will be around \$10-15 per person.

Pico's Mex-Mex Restaurant: Good Mexican food. One of the few non-chains listed here, this restaurant has only one location, in Bellaire. Dinner costs around \$15-30 per person.

Rudy's: Famous for Texas-style BBQ; some people even order the BBQ sauce to be delivered to them in other states. You should definitely check this place out, unless you're a vegetarian, in which case it might not be your scene. In fact, there are no real vegetarian options other than sides – this is Texas, after all! The only location in Houston is at 14620 Northwest Fwy.

Macaroni's, Zio's, and Carino's: Three Italian chains of approximately equivalent quality, although people tend to have their favorites. Carino's is particularly renowned for their Italian Ices. Each will cost about \$15-20 per person for dinner.

National Chains

Red Lobster: Decent seafood for around \$15-20 per plate; don't expect as high-quality of seafood as you can find in Boston, though. Still, the warm cheddar biscuits are pretty darn good.

Chili's: Tex-Mex; while there are Chili's in Massachusetts, the ones in Texas tend to have much better quality chips and salsa than you find in New England Chili's.

Cheddar's: This chain is centralized in Texas. It's a lot like Chili's, though.

Cheesecake Factory: Available all around Houston; just like the New England variety - good cheesecake and overpriced (but decent) entrees.

ENTERTAINMENT

Houston, like any large city, has a wide variety of entertainment options, of which the following is only a limited subset. Most of the emphasis here is on cheaper entertainment options.

MUSEUMS AND MORE

Museums: The "museum district" in Houston has over 15 museum options to attend, including 10 free museums. Many of the other ones have free times and days available. The district is only a district in a loose sense – not all of the museums are within easy walking distance from each other, although most are on the Metrorail Red Line. All of the museum information, including hours, cost, and location, is available at <http://www.houstonmuseumdistrict.org/>.

Houston Zoo: A beautiful outdoor area that houses over 4,500 animals. However, going to the zoo has a cost – it is \$11 for entrance for adults, with no apparent discount for being a student. However, buying tickets at Fiesta Mark reduces the fee to \$9. The zoo is located at 6200 Hermann Park Drive.

Houston Space Center: A rather pricey entertainment option, but, unless you work at NASA or an aerospace contractor, it probably provides the only chance to get to see Johnson Space Center, home of Apollo's Mission Control (and current Space Shuttle Mission Control). Unless you're a kid, the attraction itself is probably a bit underwhelming for the \$15-20 price tag (\$15 if you order tickets online), but you can go on a guided tour of portions of Johnson Space Center as part of the price of admission. You can also get a more in-depth tour for \$85, but what public interest law student really has that amount to blow on entertainment (and education)?

Bingo in the Heights. <http://www.lodge88.org/Bingo.html>. The best way to spend your Thursday nights. This Czech lodge's bingo night has become the place to be on Thursdays. 700 Houstonians start lining up at 5:00 pm for the 7:15 pm Bingo games. Bingo pads are \$5.00 each. Take your own food and drinks, but the lodge sells cheap pitchers of beer and cafeteria favorites such as sloppy joes. Cash prizes and guaranteed fun.

PARKS AND OTHER OUTDOORS AREAS

A ton of public parks, pools, tennis courts, hike/bike trails, and dog parks are located in the Houston area. To see a full listing of the public outdoor places, please go to <http://www.houstontx.gov/parks/>.

PERFORMANCES

Miller Outdoor Theatre: <http://milleroutdoortheatre.com/> The Miller Outdoor Theatre offers a number of free outdoor events throughout summer, including Shakespeare in the Park and live Disney productions. In addition to live theatrical productions, the Miller Outdoor Theatre also offers free Summer Symphonies. This is also a good place to go for Fourth of July events. The location is in the Museum District at 100 Concert Drive.

Theater District (including ballet, opera, music, and theater): Downtown Houston is home to the Theater District, where you can go to see the ballet, opera, Broadway shows, and more. According to the Theater District's website, "The Houston Theater District is ranked second in the nation for the number of theater seats in a concentrated downtown area and is one of only five cities with permanent professional resident companies in all of the major performing arts disciplines of opera, ballet, music, and theater." To find out more about the location of all of these attractions, see <http://www.houstontheaterdistrict.org/>.

MOVIES

There are tons of movie venues in Houston; you should just search for one online nearest you. If you're in the mood for going to a movie someplace a little different, here are some options...

Alamo Drafthouse: Sure, you could go to dinner then a movie, or a movie then dinner, but that's just inefficient. Here's a perfect way to combine the two. Oh, and to have a pitcher of beer while you're at it. Alamo Drafthouse plays both popular, recently-released movies and more eclectic options. The only Alamo Drafthouse in Houston is at West Oaks Mall #429 (located in west Houston, west of Sam Houston Tollway), but no matter where you are in the city you should definitely try to make your way over to check it out.

River Oaks Theater. A beautiful and historic art-deco style theater with a great lineup of independent and arthouse films, including special midnight showings of cult classics on Fridays and Saturdays.

Sundance Theater. <https://www.sundancecinemas.com/houston.html> Houston is now one of only three cities that have a Sundance theater. Plush seats that you pick in advance, validated parking and creative cocktails make this a special place to catch a movie.

Imax: There are several Imax's located around the Houston area (mostly in central/west-ish Houston); again, you can check out location listings online for the place closest to you.

Rentals: If you're looking for rentals, Houston is home to the Hollywood Video rental chain, although Hollywood Video stores seem to be closing at a pretty rapid pace. Red Boxes, however, are ubiquitous.

SHOPPING

Probably not a priority for those on a budget, but there are some bargains to be found and window-shopping and bookstore lingering are free as can be!

Barnes and Noble Books/Borders: Tons of these are located in the Houston area.

Half Price Books: Just like it sounds, this place sells books at half-price. It also has a more limited collection of music and sometimes even computer programs and games. Most books are used, but some are new and somewhat damaged. Some are even brand new and in perfect condition; they were just surplus from other, retail bookstores. A great place for buying books that you've been meaning to read but just didn't have the time or money. You can also sell your old books here, but don't expect to get too great of a deal (they need to make a profit somehow). There are six locations within Houston.

The Galleria: A rather large mall that should fulfill all of your shopping (and window-shopping) needs, plus some. It has over 375 shops and restaurants, plus an ice rink. Yes, an ice rink. A pretty good place to go to have some fun with at least the possibility that you don't have to spend any money (if you can resist the urge to buy anything). It's located at 5085 Westheimer Rd., in the center of uptown Houston, at the intersection of Westheimer Rd. and Post Oak Boulevard just off Loop 610.

Other malls, shopping centers: Suburban sprawl means that Houston is the home of many, many other malls and shopping centers. Probably the best way to find the mall nearest you is just to do a Google maps search; there is also an incomplete list of the malls of Houston on Wikipedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_shopping_malls_in_Houston.

BARS AND NIGHTLIFE

Houston's a really big city so, quite predictably, it has a ton of bar and other nightlife options. A really good website listing a lot of the variety of Houston nightlife can be found at <http://www.houston.com/nightlife/>.

Two bars not to miss:

West Alabama Ice House: *picnic tables, dogs, kids, basketball, bikers, yuppies, and a solid beer selection* all in one spot... only in Houston.

Anvil Bar and Refuge. This place began the craft cocktail movement in Houston and has been nationally recognized for the quality of their drinks.

WE HOPE YOU ENJOY YOUR PUBLIC INTEREST JOB

AND SUMMER IN HOUSTON!