

# Useful Information for International Students

## Arrival & Orientation

Before you arrive in the U.S., please review [this page](#), which will help you get situated upon your arrival. It includes items like Pre-Arrival Checklist, Getting Here, and Initial Expenses (things you will need to budget for up front), among other things.

## Insurance Information

[This page](#) provides a video overview of relevant information, plus any important terms, definitions, and forms relating to health insurance, immunizations, and local healthcare facilities.

## Tax Information

**When figuring out a budget**, please keep in mind that graduate student stipends are subject to taxation. If you want to know the exact amount/percentage, please contact the NRA Tax Accountant (currently Sommer Hatfield-Nelson) for a tax analysis; her email is [shatfield@fa.ua.edu](mailto:shatfield@fa.ua.edu) and phone (205) 348-8865.

For more information on taxation, you can visit the [Taxes and FICA info site](#), or the [site for information](#) on Social Security Numbers, Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers, and additional tax info for international students.

## Faculty Mentorship

If you are interested in having a faculty mentor, please consider applying to the **Tide Together Program**. You will be paired with a faculty mentor who will help you navigate your higher education journey, and you'll also have the option of participating in a range of academic and social activities with the Tide Together community. You can find more information and apply to be a mentee [here](#) or, for more questions, email [tidetgether@ua.edu](mailto:tidetgether@ua.edu).

## International Student Newsletter

Please consider subscribing to the International Student & Scholar Newsletter ([here](#)) to find out about upcoming programming, any important immigration updates, and other relevant information.

## On-Campus Programs, Organizations, and Community

On [this website](#), you will find information about various programs and support organizations on campus. Some may be more geared toward undergraduates (for example, the student organizations page), but others, like the [International Spouse Group](#) or the [Multi-Cultural Coffee Hour](#), are meant to bring together undergrads, grad students, and faculty (and their spouses).

## Housing/Realtors & Utilities

[This web page](#) has just about all of the information you will need in terms of how to search for on- or off-campus housing, where to find used or rental furniture, how to get your utilities (electric, water, Internet, etc.) set up, and where to find affordable temporary housing.

If you are looking to buy a house, my first suggestion would be to get faculty recommendations for a realtor (a couple of us have used [Dana Oglesby at REMAX](#), but there are plenty of other recommendations as well!). The website listed above also provides a list of some realtors that can help with finding an apartment or house.

## Family Support & Childcare

On [this web page](#), you will find

- Forms for child or spouse dependents;
- Important information for inviting your family to visit; and
- Information about schools and daycare.

Note: If you have young children (younger than pre-school age), it's a good idea to get them on the wait list for the [Children's Program at UA](#) as soon as possible, as the wait list can be as long as three years. This is an accredited daycare program located on campus.

[On this page](#) you can find more information about Graduate Parent Support, and you can sign up for information about family events and other programming.

## Banking

On this [web page](#), you can find

- Information about setting up a checking account (including required documentation);
- Banks located near campus; and
- Recommendations regarding money and banking.

## Grocery Stores

Tuscaloosa has many grocery stores which serve the community, but stores vary in their prices. It is usually best to shop at several stores to decide which has the best prices on the items you normally purchase (compare prices of milk, bread, meat, grains, etc.).

- **Publix**
  - 1190 University Blvd (closest to campus)
  - 2300 McFarland Blvd
  - 4851 Rice Mine Road
  - 1101 Southview Ln
- **Winn-Dixie**
  - 10 McFarland Blvd
  - 4205 University Blvd E
  - 9750 Hwy 69 South
  - 13620 Hwy 43 N
- **Walmart**
  - 1501 Skyland Blvd E
  - 5710 McFarland Blvd, Northport
  - 4201 Hargrove Rd E (Neighborhood Market)
- **Piggly Wiggly**
  - 2731 University Blvd E
  - 1503 Culver Rd.
  - 1721 Greensboro Ave
  - 2001 Lurleen Wallace Blvd
- **Target**
  - 1901 13<sup>th</sup> Ave E
- **Mr. Chen's Asian Market**
  - 514 14<sup>th</sup> Street
- **Manna Grocery & Deli**
  - 2300 McFarland Blvd. E.
- **Asian Market, 205-345-8005**
  - 1910 Greensboro Ave
- **ALDI**
  - 1363 McFarland Blvd E.
- **Mediterranean Market**
  - 1700 Greensboro Ave
- **Fresh Market**
  - 1320 McFarland Blvd E., Suite 100
- **La Cordobesa, 205-553-0863**
  - 3615 University Blvd E
- **World Market**
  - 1320 McFarland Blvd E.

- La Mexicana, 205-553-7815
  - 2825 McFarland Blvd E, #6

## Farmers Markets

Website: <http://www.fma.alabama.gov/Default.aspx>

Providing fresh, locally grown produce and goods. Often, farmers markets are a great cheap alternative to more expensive groceries at chain stores.

- [Tuscaloosa Farmers Market](#)
  - 1900 Jack Warner Pkwy, Tuscaloosa, 205-248-5295
- [Northport Farmers Market](#)
  - 4150 5th Street, Northport, AL 35476, 205-454-5728
- [Homegrown Alabama Farmers Market](#) – OPEN SEASONALLY, MAY – OCTOBER
  - 812 5th Avenue, Tuscaloosa, AL 35401, 205-210-9621, [homegrownalabama@gmail.com](mailto:homegrownalabama@gmail.com)

## Shopping

A lot of the bigger stores (Walmart, Target, Sam's, etc.) you'll find on either McFarland Road or Skyland Boulevard. For a better selection of stores (a big shopping day), you may want to make the trip to Birmingham, which has a lot of malls and shopping plazas, or even the extra 15-20 minutes past Birmingham to the Grand River Outlet Mall in Leeds.

### Downtown Northport

Small old-timey "main street" with antique shops, toy store, hardware store, and a few other little gems.

### Midtown Village

At this outdoor shopping complex you'll find clothing stores like White House Black Market and Loft, as well as restaurants, local boutiques, and a Barnes & Noble.

### Shoppes at Legacy Park

A newer outdoor shopping plaza with World Market, DSW, Bed Bath & Beyond, Dick's Sporting Goods, and other stores.

### The Strip/Downtown

On University Boulevard (and nearby streets downtown), you can find small clothing boutiques and Roll Tide gear, thrift stores, galleries, as well as design boutiques and the charming small bookstore Ernest and Hadley (which often features readings by UA faculty).

## University Mall

Tuscaloosa's indoor mall, featuring department stores Belk and JC Penney.

## The Village on Hargrove Road Shopping Center

Outdoor mall with a TJ Maxx, HomeGoods, Ross, and a few other shops.

## Restaurants

For the best, higher-end restaurants, check out the scene in Birmingham 45 minutes away—it's a fantastic food city with award-winning restaurants like Highland Bar & Grill and Hot & Hot Fish Club. Also, Birmingham has the Pizitz International Food Hall and other fantastic lunch spots. Below are some faculty-approved options for Tuscaloosa, including coffee shops and bars frequented by grad students and faculty.

On campus, there's a large Starbucks and a Dunkin Donuts, as well as a coffee shop in the Gorgas Library (first floor) and behind the English Building in Bidgood Hall. There are many lunch options on campus, most of them in the Student Center but some in Lloyd Hall and other parts of campus.

Note: There are many more restaurants and coffee shops, including popular chains like Starbucks and Zoe's Kitchen, scattered around town; these are just a few select places faculty and grad students tend to enjoy. For dessert/sweets spots in addition to those included below, check out Babe's Doughnuts, Mary's Cakes, and Steel City Pops (popsicles).

## Casual/Cheap Eats, Coffee Shops, & Bars

- [Alcove International Tavern](#) (no food but great bar/hangout)
- [Another Broken Egg](#) (breakfast)
- [Archibald's Northport](#) (location at 1211 MLK Blvd)
- [Avenue Pub](#)
- [Billy's Sports Bar](#)
- [Central Mesa](#)
- [City Café](#) (greasy spoon—breakfast spot)
- [Cravings](#)
- [Edgar's Bakery](#) (they have lunch but mainly celebrated as a bakery)
- [FIVE Java](#) (next to FIVE Bar, coffee shop with lunch/snacks)
- [Fuku Ramen](#)
- [Half Shell Oyster House](#)
- [Heat Pizza Bar](#)
- [Heritage House Coffee & Tea](#) (multiple locations—good lunch food and baked goods, mainly a coffee house)
- [Ichiban Japanese Grill](#)
- [The Lookout Rooftop Bar](#) (more bar/cocktails with small bites)

- [Loosa Brews](#) (no food but great local bar, also sells beer & bottles of wine)
- [Mellow Mushroom Pizza](#)
- [Monarch Espresso Bar](#) (mainly coffee shop, some food and adult beverages)
- [Mr. Chen's](#) (Chinese food with Asian grocery next door)
- [Rama Jama's](#) (more of a breakfast/lunch spot)
- [Reggae Flava](#) (Caribbean food)
- [Session Cocktails](#) (no food, craft cocktail bar)
- [Southern Ale House](#)
- [Sitar of India](#)
- [Thai Basil & Sushi](#)
- [Turbo Coffee](#) (coffee shop with some breakfast/lunch items)
- [UPerk Coffee Shop](#) (lunch and coffee shop)

## Nicer/Date Spots

- [Chuck's Fish](#)
- [DePalma's Italian Café](#)
- [Dillard's Chophouse](#)
- [Evangeline's](#)
- [FIVE Bar](#)
- [The River](#)
- [Side by Side](#)

## Outdoor Recreation

Tuscaloosa has some beautiful parks, lakes, and other nature spots, as well as good outdoor activities for kids. It's also not too far a drive to some impressive spots, like the Cahaba River Park in Birmingham, Cheaha Mountain (highest point in Alabama, some hiking and cabins), and the famous [Dismals Canyon](#) (where you can see caves lit up by glow worms at night in the fall).

### [Bowers Park](#)

Large park with disc golf, tennis courts, playgrounds, trails, and a fantastic outdoor swimming pool (plus more). Pavilion rentals for parties.

### [Hurricane Creek Park](#)

Gorgeous nature park with scenic hiking trails and swimming (in the creek).

### [Kentuck Park](#)

Large park with playground, pavilion rentals, pickle ball courts and more; nicely shaded and location of the wonderful Kentuck Festival of the Arts.

## [Lake Lurleen State Park](#)

Beautiful hiking trails, boat rentals, beach with roped-off swimming area, picnic spot with grills, RV rentals/camping, paddle boarding. Small parking fee.

## [Lake Nicol](#)

Beautiful spot for swimming and canoeing; people also jump off the cliffs on the trail into the water to swim.

## [Lake Tuscaloosa](#)

Mainly part of a scenic drive over the dam; some people fish or boat in this lake.

## [Mason's Place Playground](#)

Great All-Inclusive playground in Sokol Park. Gets crowded on the weekends but definitely one of the best playgrounds in the city.

## Palmer Park Splash Pad

Great splash pad open in the summer with small entrance fee.

## Sokol Park & Trails

This park has soccer & baseball fields, horse-back riding, dog parks, and multiple playgrounds (including Mason's Place), and some walking & biking trails that wind through the woods. You'll probably see deer on the trails. You can rent pavilions here and at other parks for parties or gatherings.

## Snow Hinton Park

Faculty/grad students mainly use this park as a spot to play soccer, but there are some playground spots and what might be the world's scariest looking slide.

## [Tuscaloosa Barnyard](#)

A great place to take young kids. They have a petting zoo, hayride, splash pad, "cow train" ride, and lots more. It's about a 20 minute drive from the center of town.

## Tuscaloosa Riverwalk

Scenic walk along the Black Warrior River; running/walking trail with scenic picnic spots; also features the small Saban's Place Playground (which is in the shade and great in the summer).

## University of Alabama Pool

The best pool in town! UA's rec center pool has a lazy river, a waterslide, and a baby pool for small children. Included in rec center membership (which is \$28/month for faculty), or \$10 entry. Kids under 3 are free.

## [Van der Graaff Arboretum & Historic Bridge Park](#)

Scenic park with nature trails and pavilion rentals for parties.

## Verner Elementary Playground

A fantastic elementary school playground frequented by many families even if their kids don't go to school there. Also has a cool herb & vegetable garden.

## Tuscaloosa Calendar of Events

Fun events throughout the year in Tuscaloosa! Here we've tried to list some of the major annual events, but there are always new ones as well as live music and theater throughout the year (check out the Bama Theater, the UA School of Music, and the Tuscaloosa Amphitheater if you're interested).

### Regular Events

- [First Friday Art Walk](#): Check out the art galleries downtown on Art Night the first Friday of every month.
- [Art Night in Northport](#): Enjoy local artists and vendors, live music, demonstrations, and other fun stuff in downtown Northport on the first Thursday of every month.
- Team Trivia Night: Form a team and play trivia at one of our local venues; a couple popular ones are Black Warrior Brewing on Tuesday nights and Druid City Brewing Company on Friday nights.
- [Farmer's Market at the River](#) (See Farmers Market section)
- [Alabama Sports!](#) Go check out a football, basketball, gymnastics, wheelchair basketball, softball, or other Crimson Tide athletic event. The fans turn out for everything!

### January

Ice Skating in The Plaza

—Ice skating rink set up in Government Plaza

### February

Tuscaloosa Heritage Festival

Tuscaloosa Chili Cook-Off

—Annual event put on by the Exchange Club. The event includes children’s activities, live entertainment, soda and beer, free ice cream, free chili dogs, customized t-shirt and apron sales, and the privilege of sampling thirty-plus varieties of chili and voting for your favorite.

### Evening of Art & Blues

Mystic Krewe of the Druids / Bal Masque (sometimes in March)

—Big Mardi Gras ball and drag show to support Five Horizons Health Services

## March

Tuscaloosa Half Marathon

—Annual half marathon and 5K event.

## April

Mayor’s Cup 5K

—Fundraising event, usually to support local schools

A-Day

—A UA practice football game where the offensive starters play the defensive starters. There are usually a bunch of local events associated with A-Day weekend.

Tuscaloosa Food & Wine Festival

—Usually held at the River Market

Arty Party

—Big fundraiser event for the different Art programs in the College of Arts and Sciences (each year spotlights a specific group, like theater, dance, fine arts, etc.). There’s dinner, an auction, drinks, and entertainment included.

## May

[Druid City Arts Festival](#)

—Multi-day concert and art festival held in Government Plaza (usually costs about \$25)

## June

UA outdoor pool open every day and most of the undergrads are gone. (It’s like this until mid-August).

Live at the Plaza

—Free live music at Government Plaza every Friday in June and July. No cost. (Can bring food and alcohol in accordance with entertainment district guidelines.)

### [Tuscaloosa Black Heritage Festival](#)

—Artisan market and live performances in Snow Hinton Park on Juneteenth.

## July

### July Jubilee

—Fourth of July event downtown with live music and fireworks.

## August

### Football season (and tailgating) begins

—For home games, tailgating takes place [mostly] on the main quad. Usually the English Department will have a tailgate for at least one game.

## October

### [Kentuck Festival of the Arts](#)

—Incredible folk arts festival with 300+ booths, vendors, entertainment/live music, food trucks, and more held in Kentuck Park for two days in October

### [Moundville Native American Festival](#)

—Cooking and craft demonstrations, stomp dancing, storytelling, hoop dancing, and other cultural activities

### UA Homecoming Weekend

—Typically involves a big football game and tailgate, plus a big bonfire in the Quad at night.

### Druid City Pride Festival

—LGBTQ+ Festival featuring live music and entertainment.

## November

### Schoolyard Roots Garden Party

—Usually held either in Smith Hall on campus or at the River Market; a fundraiser featuring local foods and a silent auction to raise money for the Schoolyard Roots program.

### Iron Bowl

—Big football game between UA and Auburn; it alternates being in Auburn and Tuscaloosa. Takes place Thanksgiving weekend.

## December

### Hilaritas

—Festive concert put on by UA's School of Music; students dress up and do a wonderful (and often funny) holiday concert featuring the jazz ensemble, chorus, symphony, and other groups.

### Tinsel Trail

—Christmas trees decorated by local businesses, non-profits, etc. on display in Government Plaza.

### West Alabama Christmas Parade

—Festive Santa-themed parade that ends with the tree lighting at the Court house.

### Ice Skating in the Plaza

—Ice skating rink in Government Plaza, goes until mid-February (previously in the Ampitheater).

### Dickens Downtown

—Victorian celebration in Downtown Northport featuring costumed carollers and revelers, food vendors, horse and buggy rides, and photos with Queen Victoria

### SantaCon Toy Drive & Pub Crawl

—Dress up like Santa and bring a toy to donate. Usually meets at a bar downtown.