

HOUSING TIPS

To protect yourself – and your money – from scams.

Living abroad can be challenging, especially when you have to find your new house from another country. You could end up in an apartment you don't even recognize in comparison with the photos you saw online, or, in the worst case scenario, without even an apartment at all. Here are some tips to help you make your best effort to avoid those situations:

1. The ideal thing would be, of course, to have a look at the actual place before renting. Sometimes photos don't correspond with reality. However, you will likely need to search for housing before you arrive to your study abroad destination. If this is your case, just make sure that the photos you see on the internet seem reasonable (often times when something seems too good to be true, it is). If you are in touch with any UCEAP students who are currently in your abroad destination, or if you have any local friends or family who can have a look at the place for you, that would be best.
2. Make sure you are talking to a real person when negotiating through the internet. Some scammers can invent names and characters to try to fool you. If you see advertisements with a lot of spelling mistakes, with suspicious conditions to rent, and unbelievable photos, consider those red flags! A potential scammer will always avoid real interactions, so if you see this type of behavior, be alert.
3. You should always sign a written lease; don't accept verbal agreements, since those can lead to misunderstandings and problems. If you end up having any issues with the property owner, a written lease is always most valid, as long as both parties sign it. Very important: always ask for a copy of your signed contract!
4. Don't sublease! In most cases, the original tenant is not allowed to sublease, and you could find yourself in legal trouble. If you want to share a place, just make sure to do it legally, by having all of the roommate's names, including your name, on the contract.
5. Avoid intermediaries unless you are sure about the legitimacy of them. The middleman scam is a very current thing; sometimes scammers don't really have access to the place they offer, but they tell people they are the person in charge of managing the deal for the owners. In these cases, as soon as they collect any payments or security deposits they disappear and you end up without your housing and your money. Try to always talk to the direct owner, or make sure the housing agency you contact is real, and any housing platforms you use are reliable.
6. Search for other people's feedback on the internet. A useful tool for your research is the reverse image search from Google, since it allows you to see if the pictures are legitimate or not. If you find the same place under a different city or country name, that is not a good sign. If you find the pictures on a real estate company's website, make sure to look for reviews on them and proof of their veracity.
7. Use rental platforms that verify users, or give secure payment options (Beroomers, Uniplaces, Airbnb, etc.)
8. If you are asked to provide a security deposit prior to arrival, make sure that the terms and conditions of this deposit are included in the contract. The property owner keeps security deposits, usually until the end of the contract. When the contract ends, the property owner checks the conditions of the room. If there are no damages that the security deposit needs to cover, the property owner will return the money to the student. In case you are asked to make this kind of payment just make sure that you keep a copy of the transaction. It is recommended that you never pay in cash. Do it with your credit card, since this allows you to track the money and, in some cases, get your money back.
9. Compare prices presented on various websites.
10. Try not to pay everything in advanced. Ideally, you would only be required to pay a small deposit, and could pay the rest after checking everything is fine after arrival.

11. Whenever paying, make sure to use secure means. Try to follow the payment process recommended by the housing agency, and use a payment process that allows you to keep track of the payment.
12. If you use an online housing platform to look for your place, make sure to always communicate through that housing platform! Scammers may try to make you contact them outside the platform. If you do so, you may lose your guarantee from the housing platform and will not be able to file a claim against them.
13. Make a list with detailed information about the state of everything that comes with the apartment and have it signed by the landlord/housing agency and you, after checking that it is accurate upon arrival. This way you will have notes of any missing items or damages that existed prior to your living there.
14. In case you get scammed, you must report the incident to the housing platform you used and to the local police. In addition, there is a way to report computer related crimes in Spain; here you have the link: <https://www.gdt.guardiacivil.es/webgdt/pinformar.php>

Finally, you need to take into account that it is not the same to arrange housing directly with a private party as it is to arrange housing with a housing agency. When working with a private party, it may be difficult to confirm the legitimacy of the person and the housing arrangements offered. While working with a housing agency, it may be easier to verify the legitimacy of the company, and you may be able to find customer reviews to help you judge whether or not you are willing to rely on their services.

Here is some information about a few suggested housing agencies in Spain:

Uniplaces (<https://www.uniplaces.com>) is an online housing platform, whose only objective and purpose is to connect people searching for housing with people who offer housing. Some conditions Uniplaces offers are the following:

- Right to reimbursement (depending on the policy chosen by the landlord the flexibility can change)
- 24 hour period after entering the house to complain if the place and its conditions are different from the ones shown at the website (in order to obtain the reimbursement and cancelation of the contract).
- You can book a place without being required to visit it in person first.
- Be aware that **this is only an online platform; you should not communicate directly with the property owner outside the online platform** (take into account that you would lose the 24 hour guarantee if you did so). Also, beyond this guarantee, Uniplaces is not a part of the rental contract between the property owner and the renter, so be sure to carefully read the conditions you are accepting before signing or accepting anything.
- You will have a contract with the property owner.
- Uniplaces doesn't have a physical office in Madrid.

Beroomers (<https://www.beroomers.com/>) is an online housing platform. They offer the following:

- Their payment system avoids scams, since they only transfer the payments you make to the property owner once you check the apartment after your arrival.
- They offer a great variety of housing options (complete apartments, host families, individual rooms in shared flats, etc.).
- You can book a place without being required to visit it in person first.
- You would have the security of being able to get your money back if in the first 24 hours after your arrival to the place you find that it does not offer the conditions you saw online.
- The places offered at Beroomers are verified before being offered.
- Cancelation of your reservation is allowed, but the reimbursement amounts may vary depending on the timing and reason(s) for cancellation.
- You will have a contract with the property owner.
- You can ask them for their UC3M exclusive promo code to benefit from a 25% off their service fee.
- Beroomers doesn't have a physical office in Madrid.

Aluni.Net (www.aluni.net) is a company whose purpose is to manage student accommodation in Spain. They offer the following conditions:

- Their apartments have internet and are fully furnished.
- They maintain and clean common areas.
- They organize cultural activities with all residents, so they are also dedicated to making your stay more interesting, socially speaking.
- You will have a contract with the property owner.
- UC3M students are offered 20% discount on the costs of processing the contract.
- Aluni has physical offices in Madrid: in Moncloa, Vicalvaro, and Alcalá de Henares

You can find more options and recommendations at Carlos III International School webpage: <https://www.uc3m.es/ss/Satellite/ApoyoEstudiante/en/TextoMixta/1371215921371/Alojamiento#empresasdealojamiento>