STANDARD GUIDE

The Standard OCONUS PCS Guide

Screenings, passports, split shipments and host-nation rules for any overseas move.

BOARDING PASS

FROM	TO	GUIDE
Your current duty station	Anywhere overseas	Standard
START	DOCUMENTS	TRAVELER
6+ months out	Passports, screening	_____

SERIES OCONUS PCS

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

- How an overseas move is different
- The OCONUS process at a glance
- Your six-month timeline
- Screening, sponsorship and documents
- Shipments and storage
- Vehicles and pets
- Housing, allowances and money
- Schools, medical and family life
- Living overseas: SOFA, culture, NEO
- Where to get help

READ THIS FIRST

How an overseas move is different

The biggest difference: your family can't just pack up and go. They need approval, screenings and passports first — and each of those takes time.

TOPIC	STATESIDE MOVE	OVERSEAS MOVE
Family travel	Dependents on orders	Command sponsorship and overseas screening required
Documents	Driver's license, IDs	Passports (often two types), visas or residence permits
Shipments	One household goods shipment	Split: household goods, unaccompanied baggage and storage
Housing pay	BAH	OHA, COLA and move-in allowances
Vehicles	Drive it there	Ship one, buy local or go without; local license test
Pets	Vet visit and a road trip	Host-nation import rules, possible quarantine, limited flights
Medical	TRICARE stateside	TRICARE Overseas; screening checks care is available
Daily life	Familiar rules	SOFA status, host-nation laws, evacuation drills

Three things set the pace

Screening

Who can come

Medical and educational review for every family member.

Passports

How they travel

Often the slowest piece of the whole move.

Pets

What they need

Import steps can take months to complete.

START HERE

The OCONUS process at a glance

Overseas moves add two stages up front — screening and documents — that hold up everything else if they start late.

01 **Orders**
Confirm tour length, accompanied status and report date.

02 **Screen & sponsor**
Overseas screening for each family member; request command sponsorship.

03 **Documents**
Apply for no-fee passports and any visas; renew tourist passports.

04 **Plan**
Schedule split shipments, decide on vehicles and pets, research housing and schools.

05 **Prepare**
Sort belongings into ship, carry, store and sell; finish pet import steps.

06 **Out-process & travel**
Clear your installation and fly — often on the Patriot Express or a commercial flight.

07 **Arrive & in-process**
Newcomer briefings, local driver's license, housing, school and medical enrollment.

08 **Settle in**
Receive shipments, set up phones and money, and learn the local culture.

The stages overlap
Screening, passports and pet paperwork all run in the background while you plan. Start all three the week you know you're going overseas.

COUNTDOWN · PART 1

Before you go

Passports and pet paperwork set the pace — both can take months, so they start the day you know you're going overseas.

Start the long-lead items 6+ MONTHS OUT

- [ ] Start overseas screening for every family member
- [ ] Apply for no-fee passports; renew tourist passports with under a year left
- [ ] Start pet import steps: microchip, vaccines, blood tests
- [ ] Request command sponsorship through your service
- [ ] Contact your sponsor and the gaining unit
- [ ] Research the host country and base

Make the big calls 4–5 MONTHS OUT

- [ ] Attend overseas move counseling
- [ ] Sort belongings: ship, carry, store, sell
- [ ] Look into spouse employment rules and remote work
- [ ] Decide: ship, store or sell your car
- [ ] Register kids with schools; request records

Book it 2–3 MONTHS OUT

- [ ] Schedule household goods, baggage and storage pickups
- [ ] Arrange temporary lodging at the new base
- [ ] Review phone plans, banking and cards for overseas use
- [ ] Book flights and pet travel space
- [ ] Set up powers of attorney; update wills

If your orders came late

Less than six months? Start screening, passports and pet steps the same week, and tell your sponsor and transportation office about your short timeline.

COUNTDOWN · PART 2

Go and arrive

The last month stateside and the first month in country are the busiest stretch of the whole move. Keep this page handy.

Wheels up FINAL MONTH

- [ ] Complete required online training, like a local driver's test
- [ ] Pack carry-on documents: orders, passports, IDs, medical and school records
- [ ] Pack a 30–60 day suitcase for life before shipments arrive
- [ ] Get pet health certificates within the required window
- [ ] Out-process, clear housing, close or transfer utilities

Boots on the ground FIRST MONTH IN COUNTRY

- [ ] Attend newcomer orientation and in-process
- [ ] Start housing in-processing — no leases without approval
- [ ] Register pets with the base vet clinic
- [ ] File travel and temporary lodging claims
- [ ] Get a local driver's license; register any vehicle
- [ ] Enroll in medical care and schools
- [ ] Register for evacuation (NEO) programs

Your suitcase is your first home

Household goods can take weeks or months to arrive overseas. Pack like you'll live out of those bags — because you will.

THE GATEKEEPERS

Screening, sponsorship and documents

These three items decide whether — and when — your family can travel.

STEP 1

Overseas screening

1. Every family member gets a medical, dental and educational review.
2. It checks that the care or school support your family needs exists at the new location.
3. EFMP families: start immediately — results can change assignments.

STEP 2

Command sponsorship

1. Official approval for your family to live with you overseas at government expense.
2. Unlocks family housing, DoD schools, medical care and travel entitlements.
3. Get it on your orders before you leave — adding it later is much harder.
4. Without it, families usually pay their own way and lose most on-base support.

STEP 3

Passports and entry documents

DOCUMENT	WHO NEEDS IT	NOTE
No-fee (official) passport	Family members, sometimes the service member	For official travel; apply through your installation
Tourist passport	Anyone who wants to travel for fun	Separate from the no-fee passport
Visa or residence permit	Depends on the country	Some countries require one for family members
SOFA stamp or ID	Depends on the country	Shows your legal status in the host nation

Apply early

Passport processing is often the slowest part of an overseas move. Start the day you have orders, even before every other detail is settled.

YOUR STUFF

Shipments and storage

Your belongings usually travel in separate pieces that arrive weeks apart. Plan what goes where before the movers show up.

ARRIVES WITH YOU

Carry-on and suitcases

Documents, meds, clothes and essentials for the first weeks.

ARRIVES SOONEST

Unaccompanied baggage

Kitchen basics, bedding, kids' items and work gear — often weeks after you.

ARRIVES LATER

Household goods

Furniture and most belongings — often 6–10+ weeks, depending on location.

STAYS STATESIDE

Storage

Items you won't need overseas wait for your next move.

Before you sort a single box

- [ ] Ask about weight limits — they may be lower with small or furnished housing
- [ ] Overseas homes can be smaller — big furniture may not fit
- [ ] Check host-nation customs for restricted or banned items
- [ ] Many countries use 220V; small U.S. appliances may need converters
- [ ] Base loan closets lend basics until shipments arrive
- [ ] Photograph valuables and keep a home inventory for claims

Sort into four piles

Ship, carry, store, sell. Decide each item's pile before pack-out day so the crew isn't deciding for you.

WHEELS AND PAWS

Vehicles and pets

Both need early decisions: vehicle rules differ by country, and pet import steps can take months.

Your car: four options

OPTION	PROS	WATCH-OUTS
Ship it	Familiar vehicle; government may ship one	Weeks without a car; may not meet local standards or fit narrow roads
Store it	Ready when you return	Storage rules, plus battery and insurance upkeep
Buy locally	Available fast; suits local roads	Resale at the end of your tour
Go car-free	Many overseas areas have great transit	Harder with kids or off-base housing

- Most locations require a local or SOFA driver's license and test
- Some locations limit who may own or drive a car
- Check that your insurer covers overseas, or plan to switch

Your pets

- Many destinations are rabies-free, with strict microchip, vaccine and blood-test timelines
- On-base housing usually limits the number of pets and some dog breeds
- Use a vet familiar with military moves
- Pet space on flights, especially the Patriot Express, is limited — book early
- Register pets at the base vet clinic shortly after arrival
- Get the host country's requirements in writing

One missed step can cost you

A pet that doesn't meet import rules can face quarantine at your expense — or be refused entry. Start pet paperwork the week you get orders.

WHERE YOU'LL LIVE

Housing, allowances and money

OHA covers your actual rent up to a cap, instead of a flat amount like BAH.

OHA

Overseas Housing Allowance

Covers actual rent up to a rank-based limit, plus utilities. Shifts with exchange rates.

MIHA

Move-In Housing Allowance

One-time help with off-base setup costs.

COLA

Cost of Living Allowance

Offsets higher local prices.

TLA

Temporary Lodging Allowance

Helps while you wait for permanent housing.

Double-check your rates — OHA and COLA change often.

OHA: travel.dod.mil/Allowances/Overseas-Housing-Allowance/OHA-Rate-Lookup/

Overseas COLA: travel.dod.mil/allowances/overseas-cost-of-living-allowance/overseas-cola-rate-lookup/

Housing basics

- Many bases assign on-base housing first; off-base living may need approval
- Use the housing office's approved realtor list — leases and deposits differ from the U.S.
- Ask about appliances, voltage, heating and parking before choosing a home

Money basics

- Open an on-base bank or credit union account for local currency
- Use cards with no foreign transaction fees off base
- Expect exchange rates to shift your budget month to month
- Many local apps need a host-nation phone number

Don't sign anything yet

Never sign an off-base lease before the housing office approves you to live off base.

YOUR FAMILY

Schools, medical and family life

Command sponsorship is usually what gives your family access to on-base schools and medical care overseas.

Schools

- Most large overseas bases have Department of Defense (DoDEA) schools
- No DoDEA school nearby? Families may qualify for the Non-DoD Schools Program
- Register before you leave; bring transcripts, shot records and any IEP or 504 plan
- Local or international schools and homeschooling are other options

Medical and dental

- Families enroll in TRICARE Overseas and use base clinics first
- Off-base care uses host-nation providers in the TRICARE network
- Not every overseas base has a hospital or 24/7 ER — know where the nearest one is
- Bring paper medical records and a 90-day supply of prescriptions

Family life

- Spouse jobs off base may be limited by the local SOFA; on-base and remote work are common
- Family support centers offer newcomer tours, language classes and culture briefs
- Child care waitlists can be long — request care as soon as you have orders
- Time-zone gaps make calls home harder; set a family schedule early

Pack the records, not just the kids

School and medical records travel in your carry-on, not your household goods. You'll need them in the first week.

GUESTS OF THE HOST NATION

Living overseas

Overseas, you and your family are guests of the host nation, and local laws apply off base.

SOFA status

- Sets your legal status in the host country
- Shapes driving, working, importing goods and taxes
- Rules differ by country; your newcomer brief covers them

Evacuation (NEO)

- Many locations require families to register
- Some hold regular evacuation drills
- Keep a go-bag ready at home

Culture

- Learn basic phrases and etiquette before you arrive
- Expect new trash, recycling and quiet-hour rules
- Download local map, transit and translation apps

Your go-bag

- [ ] Passports (no-fee and tourist) for everyone
- [ ] Copies of orders and command sponsorship approval
- [ ] Medical, shot and pet records
- [ ] Two weeks of medications and chargers
- [ ] Military and dependent IDs
- [ ] Birth and marriage certificates, powers of attorney
- [ ] Cash in U.S. and local currency
- [ ] Comfort items for the kids

Culture shock is normal

The first few months are often the hardest. Lean on your sponsor, unit spouse groups and the family support center — and get out and explore. Travel is one of the best parts of an overseas tour.

YOUR SUPPORT TEAM

Where to get help

More moving parts means more people whose job is to help.

On your installation

OFFICE	WHAT THEY HELP WITH
Transportation office	Overseas shipment counseling, storage and claims
Passport office	No-fee passports and visas
EFMP / overseas screening office	Family screening and special needs
Finance office	OHA, COLA, TLA and travel claims
Family support center	ACS, A&FRC, FFSC or MCFTB: relocation help, loan closets, culture classes

Online

RESOURCE	WHAT IT'S FOR
Military OneSource	Moving resources and free consultations
MilitaryINSTALLATIONS	Overseas base contacts and newcomer info
OHA Rate Lookup	Check your current Overseas Housing Allowance
Overseas COLA Rate Lookup	Check your current cost-of-living allowance
DoDEA	Overseas school registration

READY FOR THE FULL PLAYBOOK?

Go step by step with the kits.

Checklists, shipment planners, trackers and a ready-to-go binder for every stage of your move.

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