

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge MA.

I stayed in Cambridge for four months to do research for my Master's thesis at MIT as a visiting student. All in all, the process of getting there was kind of exhausting, but in the end, it was worth filling out all the forms and writing motivational letters.

My stay was four months from July to November, 2017. I did my research at the "Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering" in professor Herbert Einstein's research group focused on rock mechanics.

First, I will write about my impressions of Cambridge and Boston. Since I could not get student housing because my visit was during the summer break and not during the beginning of a semester I stayed at an AirBnB house in Cambridge (25-minute walk to MIT) that had three floors, each floor with four rooms and a kitchen. I enjoyed living there because it was full of students who did research or internships in the area. The people in this house all had different cultural backgrounds. To name a few, there were Indians, Chinese, Italians, Belgians, Russians, French, Indonesians, and Brazilians. For me, it was the first time renting accommodation via AirBnB. After carefully reading all reviews I booked this nice place. Whenever I ran into a problem the landlords were there to help and answered my texts in an instance. However, it needs to be mentioned that living expenses in Cambridge and Boston are extremely high. My room had about 16 m² with a private bathroom. For this, I had to pay € 1.400 per month. In general, although during my stay the Euro was strong, I have to say that living there was very expensive. Especially when buying groceries or eating out, I noticed the difference between the USA and Austria.

I really enjoyed spending my weekends in Boston. It is a very lovely and clean city where there is always something going on. Especially the harbor area with its Italian quarter is a fun place to hang out but also the back bay area with its lovely brick wall houses and nice shopping street (Newbury street) is worth a visit. To first get a sense of the history of the city I recommend the Freedom Trail. You walk across the city following a red line on the pavement that guides you to all the historical sights. Boston is famous for the Red Sox (a very successful baseball team). Their stadium, Fenway Park, is epic and it was fun and interesting seeing them play). MIT offers discounts for the tickets. With the Boston subway, the T, you can even make your way out of the city to a beach. I had the opportunity to visit a sand sculpture festival there. For runners, the Charles River running through Cambridge and Boston is the best place. There is a bike lane following the river that is perfect for running. However, this is not the only popular sport in Boston. Harvard and MIT are very proud of their sailing and rowing teams. There is always a lot of traffic on the Charles and it is fun to watch the rowers train in the morning or all the small sailing boats during the day. In autumn, it is very popular to go apple picking outside of the city. Its concept is similar to the "Erdbeerland" in Austria. You harvest your own apples at a farm and pay a relatively low price if you want to take some apples home. Since New York City is not far from Boston (5-hour bus ride), a weekend trip to NYC is great idea.

At MIT, I did research for my Master thesis. I shared an office with three other students but had to use my own computer. Settling in was quite easy since my office colleagues and my professor were very helpful. Throughout my time at MIT I always felt welcome and as a part of the research group. Besides from my research, I learned a lot because the department had a weekly speaker series where scientist from all over the USA presented their research. I especially enjoyed our Monday morning group meetings where the work from the last week was discussed. There often was a lot of brainstorming going on, and everybody tried to help each other with their problems. And of course, we had donuts. Since lunch was too

expensive for me, I was very thankful that almost every office had a microwave for you to warm up your food. During summer, lunch was often taken outside in MIT's parks. Sadly, I had to learn the hard way that at MIT it is common that things get stolen. My laptop was stolen out of my office. It is necessary to keep everything locked away when leaving the room.

My general impression of the USA is that people are very friendly and helpful. You will always find somebody to chat. However, as an Austrian I really missed our coffee and restaurant culture. There are not a lot of places where you can hang out for hours and chat with your friend. Everything is "to go" and nothing ever stands still.

For future visiting students, I have some advice. Try to plan your stay as soon as possible. There are so many things that need to be considered and organized in advanced that it easily can get stressful. As a visiting student, it is required to have insurance. MIT offers health insurance but this is very expensive. I signed up for insurance at home (using Allianz Auslands-Krankenversicherung für Studierende). It is way cheaper and fulfills all requirements.