

Homesick in Houston

# A Transplants' Guide to Home in Houston

**Every year, 70,000+ people move to Houston. What challenges do they deal with upon arrival and how can they satisfy their longing for home around their new city?**

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By [Natalie Harms](#)

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With an influx of people moving to Houston every year, transplants are always looking to find a bit of home, like a spot to satiate a fried plantain fix, in the heart of Houston.

Like many Houstonians, this town has always been home for me. I have left for no longer than a summer, and been a resident of three of its zipcodes. Like some of us natives, it can be a challenge to put myself in a newcomer's shoes, figuring out the neighborhoods and duped into believing traffic sticks to rush hours.

Last year alone about 70,000 people from all over the world began calling Houston home, and 2014 hasn't been any different as far as an influx of new Houstonians goes. Whether they flew halfway around the world for a new job or needed just a road trip from a couple states away, they are all figuring out the trials and tribulations of this special, sprawling city.

Taniushka Tomas-Valeriano, or Tany for short, is one of them. She uprooted her life in Puerto Rico to move to Houston for a job, calling the move "hectic" as four suitcases were all that accompanied her from the island. She shopped and settled in Midtown, finding the move amenable once she finally settled in. "You have everything you need [close by], so it wasn't that bad."

Tany works at a large company doing consulting work and was floored by how many people she meets at work on a regular basis who are just like her, starting life anew in south Texas. "It's very diverse. I like that I'm not the only one who isn't from here. And that's [around] the whole city."

"We're all in the same boat," Tany said. "Last night, I went out [in Midtown] and met at least five people who all have moved here in the last six months."

Tani chose Houston out of several options her company provided because of the similar tropical weather—at last, someone unafraid of a little humidity—and its youth. "Most people [you] meet are young professionals like myself."

While feeling at home in the humidity, she does miss some of the Puerto Rican food ("I have not been able to find green plantains yet!") and a good beach to lounge on—something Australian native Talis Bennett-Verschure, who also moved recently, can relate to.

Beside his beach craving (Talis and Tani both have heard few positives about Galveston), Talis has come across a few things about Houston that have stumped him—traffic cameras, public transportation, taxes, and, especially, getting a social security number. "The day after I landed, I made the realization how difficult it was to do anything without a social security number—to the extent I couldn't even get a phone and a plan."

Talis managed to get a SSN and a phone, but he still faced the challenge of getting to and from work. Two buses and a 90-minute commute were rather inconvenient given his Westchase to Galleria commute. Being a self-identified "Petrol Head," he solved his commute problem with getting his license by taking the simple driving test ("It's so easy, [I almost think] some of these people shouldn't have licenses") so he could purchase a car and actually use it.

"Cars are so cheap here," Talis said. He's got a good basis for comparison, having lived all over the world in the Netherlands, Amsterdam, and his native Australia—all places with prohibitive taxes and price tags on vehicles. His adjustment to Houston has been vastly different than previous moves. His parents had a home in Royal Oaks, so a place to live was already settled. "It's like living in Club Med," he said, describing a particularly funny evening playing croquet with his neighbors. Still, he misses living in a "sharehouse" or with roommates on his own. That's his next goal, which he put off when he bought a new car.

IMAGE: Talis Bennett-Verschure — An Australian native, Bennett-Verschure's nomadic life has taken him to Houston after time in Europe,



Australia and hiking the French Alps [above].

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Now that he has a car, he's been touring Houston and enjoys trying new places (he loves Pappas Burger on Westheimer) but he realized something else Houston allegedly lacks.

“There's no good nightclubs, that I know of—the kind of club that's really gritty and dirty. You go there at the end of the night and you are there until 8 a.m.”

Even if you're not moving from a world away, just crossing the state line can still provide a small culture shock. Oklahoma transplant Alex Aria, who moved near Hermann Park to go to med school at the University of Texas Medical Branch, misses stargazing and traffic-free roads, even though he has stayed in a six-mile radius of where he lives and barely ever drives, a definite perk to city life.

One bastion of home he longs for is his favorite brunch spot, Kitchen 324 in Oklahoma City. Alex's transition from OKC to H-town was expectedly easier than most, but after almost three months here, he feels like he has yet to explore the city—aside from running in Hermann Park and a few nights in Midtown but he vows to do more exploring, if his midterms allow.

Although I can't relate to moving almost 10,000 miles—or even 500, I noticed that what Houston transplants find enjoyable here are the same things I adore: The constant evolution, the constant and diverse stream of new faces, and a friendliness I can only describe as “Southern Charm,” sprinkled with a superior point of pride that comes with the ability to call yourself a Houstonian.

If you are missing some of the same things these new Houstonians' are, here's a guide to finding those slices of home.

**Tany's Sweet Plantain Cravings:** [Amazon Grill](#) in West University is well known for its abundant plantain options. Fried plantain chips pair with a chimichurri or sweet jalapeno sauce and is usually complimentary with chips and salsa as an appetizer. There's also a plantain-crusted chicken entrée and a side of sweet baked plantains. For a DIY option, there's [Canino Produce Co.](#) on Airline. The market has a selection of fresh plantains available from spring to fall, not to mention the weekend markets' where any number of other fruits and vegetables are fresh from the farms.

**Talis' Night Club Fix:** [Red Door](#) in the Fourth Ward may not be entirely gritty—the bathrooms are clean by bar standards, after all—but it is a place for dancing deep into the night. With a young clientele, an outdoor balcony, a rowdy basement dance floor, and a playlist full of EDM and hip-hop remixes, it's still a go-to for dancing in Houston. [Barbarella](#) in Midtown has a more European feel, with 80s nights on Saturdays, light-up dance floors, and music videos projected up on the screen.

**A Brunch Fit For a Med Student:** [Batanga](#) has its very own Tex-Mex version of Green Eggs and Ham, while [Smith and Wollensky](#) allows you to savor pastrami and poached eggs.

**For Talis' Surfing:** The Galveston Seawall at 37th Street or 61st Street is probably the best bet for some waves, but for Tani's beach lounging, [Stewart Beach](#) costs a bit for parking, but you get access to restrooms, volleyball courts and beach furniture from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

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