

Tips on Rental Apartments

Looking for a rental apartment, particularly if you're doing so for the first time, can be very stressful. We thought it would be helpful to provide you with a checklist of key things you need to know before you start your search, initiate the rental process and take possession of your new rental apartment.

✓**Review Your Personal Finances:** Do you have a regular monthly income? Do you have a good credit history? Are you meeting all financial obligations in a timely manner (i.e. credit cards, car payments etc.)? All of these issues will ultimately impact how much you can spend on rent and your ability to find a suitable rental apartment.

✓**Set Your Priorities:** Distinguish between the "essential" and what you'd "like" to have in your new home. You may like a building because it has an indoor pool and fitness centre, but it may be essential to find a building close to public transportation and within easy reach of your office.

✓**Select a Neighbourhood:** Once you know how much you can afford to spend and what you're looking for, choose one or two neighbourhoods and spend a day walking around each to get a sense of what's in the area (shopping, schools, restaurants, services). Have a look at the rental apartment buildings in those neighbourhoods. Do they appear well-maintained? Are their grounds clean and nicely landscaped? Make a note of the buildings that seem the best and narrow your search to those complexes.

✓**Careful Apartment Inspection:** Many renters make the mistake of not asking enough questions or carefully inspecting the unit they're interested in renting. Ask if the rental apartment will be painted before your move. Find out if the floors will be refinished or the carpets cleaned or replaced. Are kitchen and bathroom tiles in good repair? Does the balcony door close properly? Are there screens on all the windows? Are the appliances clean and in good repair? Are you allowed to decorate the unit? Are pets allowed? (A landlord has the right to refuse to rent to people with pets.)

✓**Documentation:** Be prepared. When you call to schedule an appointment to view a rental apartment make sure you ask about the documentation required in order to complete an application. If you don't want to lose an opportunity to rent a great apartment, make sure you have everything you need to complete an application on the spot. Being prepared will give you a terrific advantage and ensure that you get the apartment you want. And remember - read everything carefully before you sign; many landlords will not refund your deposit if you should suddenly change your mind.

✓**Read Your Lease:** A lease is a legal document outlining the relationship between you and your landlord and a critical component of the rental process. Always read your lease as well as any other documentation provided by the landlord and ensure that you fully understand the contents. Never take anything on trust – if you've agreed to certain repairs, free rent, free parking or anything else - make sure you get it in writing, preferably as part of your lease.

✓**Utilities:** In many buildings where utilities are included in rental costs, there's no need to worry about ensuring that your water, heat and electricity are turned on. However, with recent changes in the rental industry, many landlords are sub-metering apartments and require residents to pay their own hydro costs. If your new rental apartment is one of these sub-metered units, make sure you contact the appropriate utility to ensure your service is turned on the day you move in. Also remember that telephone, cable and internet companies may require several weeks prior notice to activate service.

✓**Apartment Insurance:** Many renters make the mistake of assuming that their landlord will cover any losses they incur as a result of a break-in, fire or other unforeseen event. The contents of your rental apartment – your possessions – are not covered under the landlord's policy. Renters insurance is an inexpensive way of ensuring peace of mind.

✓**Cleaning Before Move-Out:** Always leave your apartment in the same condition you found it when you moved in. If you leave a mess behind, you may find yourself with a hefty repair and cleaning bill after the fact.