United States. So when I found out that the second half of my trip would be spent visiting Hamilton Island and the Great Barrier Reef at the beginning of summer season— the weather forecast predicted 85 degrees and sunny skies all day every day— I knew I had to prepare to endure heavy sunlight. From rash guard shirts to ounces of sunscreen, I was as ready as I could be to take on the harsh conditions, but I was still concerned about the risk I would be taking. I was unsure if umbrellas and shaded areas would be available.

As I arrived on the island, I quickly learned that in Australia, covering up from the sun with umbrellas and sunscreen is encouraged and taken very seriously by all. Sunscreen with zinc oxide was available for purchase at the stores across the island along with massive wide-brim hats and UV-protective clothing. Every boat that I boarded contained plenty of awnings and shady spots to block the harsh UV index that reached as high as 12 most afternoons.

Overall, my trip to Australia was one of the most incredible experiences I have had in my life so far. This was not only because I had the opportunity to visit a beautiful part of the world and avoid getting sunburned, but because I was able to embrace my albinism and adapt to the way of life on the other side of the world.

The Platinum Houstonian

By Nimrah F. Saleem

Squinting in the bright sunlight, I pull out my phone to check Google Maps as I plan my route to work. The estimated arrival time of bus #60 is 15 minutes. I sigh and open my umbrella, attempting to shield myself from the harsh rays of sunlight.

I am a proud Houstonian. I have lived in Houston almost all my life, aside from the four years that I spent pursuing my undergraduate degree in Austin. Although the 100 degree heat and sweltering humidity is not ideal, too much time away from Houston has me missing the diverse cuisine, the bustling midtown night life, and the plethora of job and learning opportunities in the Texas Medical Center, my current place of employment and education. Because I have lived in Houston since I was a baby, I have developed some techniques for coping with the climate and my urban surroundings. Though I speak specifically of Houston, I hope my advice can support those living in other sunny areas.

1. Location, location, location. This may be the most difficult advice to follow, but if living in Houston is your plan, consider moving to housing that is within the loop—
that is, central Houston. You’ll find that by living in the inner loop, you will have access to bus routes and the Metro RAIL train routes. Many of the neighborhoods here are walkable, and if you can get housing close to downtown, you won’t need to depend on a car. The downside is that living in this area can often be expensive, with prime real estate rents that are sky high. For that reason, I have found apartment living to be the most feasible.

2. Hats and umbrellas are fashionable and functional. Buy floppy hats in every color of the rainbow, one for every outfit. I support the Houston Astros with a baseball cap that protects me from the sun. I keep an umbrella clipped to my backpack so that I always have protection from the sun if there’s no shade at the bus stop.

3. Use smartphone apps that will save you time and frustration.

Ridesharing apps have been such a blessing in a city as car-dependent as Houston. Though rides can be expensive, timing and location can get you a more reasonable price. You can track your upcoming rides, notify your driver ahead of time if you have a visual impairment and are concerned about pickup, and even share your ride details with a friend if you want some assurance and safety.

I keep an umbrella clipped to my backpack so that I always have protection from the sun if there’s no shade at the bus stop.

Thanks to Instacart, gone are the days of having to wait for a friend or relative to drive you to the grocery store. Now, get all the groceries you need at the touch of a button. This app lets you choose from a variety of grocery stores, where you can create lists based on your preferences. Delivery charges range from $4.00 to $8.00; groceries are delivered within two hours. NO need to leave your home— a shopper and driver will have all your groceries packed and delivered to you. For added savings, you can subscribe to Instacart Express, an annual $99 fee that allows for free deliveries on unlimited purchases.

And who says that delicious restaurant food is only for those that can drive? Not UberEATS, that’s for sure. This app allows you to indulge in whatever food you crave, within your price range. I find myself shamelessly ordering crepes from my local bakery when I’m craving something sweet or getting a gourmet burger from a delicious diner nearby that would otherwise have not been accessible. Plan ahead and you can find some good deals here too.

4. Incorporate SPF into your daily routine.

Find a moisturizer that has a high SPF— it will protect your skin and serve as a great base for your makeup. My favorite is the Neutrogena Sport moisturizer, which is SPF 100+ and is not greasy at all.
check if there are any housing options nearby that are within your budget. Defining “nearby” depends on both your preferences and what the suburb has to offer. Some suburbs that border larger cities inherit the city’s public transit, be that a bus or rail system. If you’d prefer to walk, define how far would be too far of a commute, especially in case of inclement weather. Be sure that there are sidewalks along the path you’d need to take and light-controlled intersections. If you can’t find housing close enough to commute via transit or by foot, this opportunity may not be the best choice for you.

If you’ve found a way to get to work, excellent! Next, think about your basic needs. You’ll need to eat, so where is the closest grocery store? Grocery shopping can be tricky for non-drivers, so consider investing in a wheeled cart if you’ll walk. Alternatively, check if there are any housing options nearby that are within your budget. Defining “nearby” depends on both your preferences and what the suburb has to offer. Some suburbs that border larger cities inherit the city’s public transit, be that a bus or rail system. If you’d prefer to walk, define how far would be too far of a commute, especially in case of inclement weather. Be sure that there are sidewalks along the path you’d need to take and light-controlled intersections. If you can’t find housing close enough to commute via transit or by foot, this opportunity may not be the best choice for you.

Even though I was disappointed not to be around the corner from a coffee shop, I knew living a twenty-minute walk from my job was more important.