

SURF SUMMER PROGRAM 2026

LOGISTICS GUIDE

Program Logistics Page: https://labcit.ligo.caltech.edu/LIGO_web/students/SURF/logistics.shtml

Welcome to the SURF Summer Program 2026! Below are answers to frequently asked questions to help you prepare for your summer research experience at Caltech and the LIGO observatory sites.

What are the program dates and when should I arrive?

The standard SURF schedule for all students except India participants are:

- Program Dates: Tuesday, June 16 - Friday, August 21, 2026
- Arrival Date: Tuesday, June 16 (housing opens)
- Departure Date: Saturday, August 22 (housing closes)

India Student Schedule

- Late May through the end of July (approximately one month earlier)

How do I learn about the travel process for this program?

All students must attend a mandatory travel orientation session specific to your site led by Eadie Balint, LIGO Travel Coordinator, before travel is booked.

These sessions will cover:

- Travel policies and procedures
- Flight booking process
- Allowable expenses
- Reimbursement process
- Housing logistics

All travel questions should be directed to Eadie Balint, ebalint@caltech.edu.

Important: Please contact Eadie directly for travel questions---do not contact mentors or other program staff.

What are the flight guidelines for the SURF Program?

Because this program is federally funded, all travel must follow federal regulations and Caltech Travel Policies.

- **The LIGO Travel Coordinator books all flights.**
- Travel dates must match program dates.
- **Standard economy/coach class only (no upgrades allowed)**
- Flights booked from home or home institution location to the approved LIGO site only.
- **International travel must comply with Fly America Act.**
- **International flights booked for participants who reside outside the U.S. only. We cannot book flights for international students currently attending an American school and leave the U.S for vacation or a visit home.**
- **International flights booked only after a U.S. visa is in-hand.**

What if I am a local (Caltech) student?

Local students are responsible for arranging their own transportation to campus.

Can I drive instead of fly?

Driving requires **pre-approval** from the LIGO Travel Coordinator.

Important considerations:

- Mileage reimbursement cannot exceed airfare cost. The LIGO Travel Coordinator will assess the cost difference
- You must have your own insurance (Caltech does not cover personal vehicles)
- Daily commuting mileage to the site is not reimbursable
- Program fuel cards cannot be used for personal vehicles

Can I include personal travel in my trip?

Yes, but there are strict guidelines:

- Cost comparisons are required for the flight
- Comparisons must reflect the business travel dates (program dates) only and be captured by the LIGO Travel Coordinator in the form of screenshots on the same day the flight is booked. The difference is the student's responsibility
- Reimbursement is capped at the cost of the business travel dates only
- International flights must comply with the Fly America Act
- Student is responsible for any additional costs

If your itinerary becomes too complex, you may be required to book your own travel with reimbursement. Consult the LIGO Travel Coordinator for more details.

What expenses does the program cover?

The program covers:

- Roundtrip airfare (economy) from your home university to LAX, PSC, BTR
- Ground transportation (airport to site)

- One checked bag
- Housing
- Stipend
- Visa fees (if applicable)

What expenses are NOT reimbursable?

The program does **not** cover:

- Overweight baggage fees
- Health insurance fee
- Pet-related expenses (including emotional support animals)

What if I have an unusual or non-typical expense?

- All non-typical costs must be approved in advance by program coordinator, Jonah Kanner.
- Approval is not guaranteed, so please reach out early.

What should I know about checked baggage?

- The program reimburses **one checked bag**.
- You must pay for the bag at check-in and save your receipt.
- Overweight bag fees are not reimbursable.

How and when do I get reimbursed?

- Reimbursement occurs at the end of the program.
- Save all receipts (PDF format; photos accepted) and send them to Eadie Balint.
- Receipts must be in English and include date, amount, and vendor
- Expense reports must be submitted within **30 days of your travel end date**.
- You will receive a report to review and sign.

Is housing provided, and who manages it?

Yes. Housing is fully covered and it is managed by different people depending on your assigned location.

Caltech Campus Students

- Live in on-campus housing
- Check-in: Tuesday, June 16 (8:00 AM – 4:00 PM)
- Check-out: Saturday, August 22 by noon
- Managed by **Carol Casey**

India Students (Caltech)

- Shared off-campus apartment
 - Check-in: Monday, May 18
 - Check-out: Tuesday, June 16 before 11:00 AM (no exceptions)

- Managed by **Eadie Balint**
- Must **opt in** of on-campus housing starting June 16—contact Carol Casey
- Live in on-campus housing
 - Check-in: Tuesday, June 16 (8:00 AM – 4:00 PM)
 - Check-out: Saturday, July 25 by noon
 - Managed by **Carol Casey**

LHO and LLO Students

- Shared apartments provided
- Check-in: Tuesday, June 16
- Check-out: Saturday, August 22 before 11:00 AM (no exceptions)
- Managed by **Eadie Balint**
- Must **opt out** of on-campus housing—contact Carol Casey

Contacts:

- LHO/LLO & India students: Eadie Balint, ebalint@caltech.edu
- Caltech housing: Carol Casey, casey@caltech.edu

If I am assigned to LLO or LHO, how do I get to the site each day?

- A shared rental car and gas card are available for eligible students
- Carpooling is common—driving is not required

Driver requirements:

- Student must be 21+ years of age
- Student must have a valid driver's license (or International Driver's Permit if needed)
- Must have prior U.S. driving experience

Am I considered a Caltech employee?

Yes. All SURF students are considered Caltech employees and receive a stipend for their research.

How do I receive my stipend?

- Stipends are issued in two payments.
- All students must have a U.S. bank account.
 - International students will open a U.S. bank account within the first few days of arrival, then submit their direct deposit form.
- Complete the Caltech direct deposit form before **June 1**.
 - If the form is not completed, the first payment will be issued by check.
 - Checks will be distributed as follows:
 - **Caltech students:** Checks will be distributed on campus by Nately Reilly, Caltech LIGO Site Administrator.

- **LHO and LLO students:** Checks will be mailed to the LIGO sites for distribution by the Site Administrator. Please allow 1-2 days for potential mail delays.
- For all questions regarding stipend payments, **please contact Carol Casey.**

Payment Schedule:

- India students: May 26 and June 26
- All other students: June 26 and July 24

Do I need to fill out a W-4 form for tax purposes?

No. A W-4 form is *not* required.

When I present my research project?

- Final presentations: Friday, August 21
- India students: Present one week prior to departure.

Do I need to bring my own laptop?

Yes. All students must bring their own laptop. Computers are not provided.

Will there be a group site visit during the program?

No. There will be no group site visits this year.

When do I present my research project?

- Final presentations: Friday, August 21
- India students: Present one week prior to departure.

Does Caltech and the observatory sites close for holidays?

Yes. Caltech and the LIGO observatory sites observe the following holidays and will be closed on these dates. Please plan accordingly, as normal program activities will not take place.

- Monday, May 25 – Memorial Day
- Friday, June 19 – Juneteenth
- Friday, July 3 – Independence Day

Who are the contacts for this program?

Use the contact below for questions about specific aspects of the program.

Jonah Kanner

LIGO SURF Program Coordinator

- jonah@caltech.edu
- Topics: Program, LIGO, your project, mentor

Eadie Balint

LIGO Travel Coordinator

- ebalint@caltech.edu
- 509-372-8127 (w) or 509-378-1292 (cell)
- Topics: Travel, LLO & LHO housing, India off-campus housing, reimbursements, allowable and unallowable expenses

Carol Casey

Student-Faculty Programs

- casey@caltech.edu
- 626-395-2887
- Topics: Campus housing, stipends, health insurance fees