

Selecting the Apartment that's Right for You

By Tracey P. Wood

It is vital to your health and peace of mind to select an appropriate dwelling for yourself and your family. This article gives the before, during and after thoughts that must be pondered in order to make a sound decision. Although this home may be temporary, it will serve as your retreat at the end of a hectic work day, and tiring commute, and it will, literally, shelter you from the world.

BEFORE THE HUNT

To clearly identify your safe haven, you'll need a pencil and paper as you work through this article. Before you begin your apartment hunt, answer the following questions:

- How much am I willing to spend on rent?
- How far am I willing to commute to work?
- How many rooms do I need? And how many do I want?
- Does it make a difference if I'm on the ground floor or top floor?
- Must the apartment come furnished?
- Do I need an apartment that accepts pets?
- Will I need space to park one or two cars?
- Is on-the-street parking acceptable?
- Do I prefer a wooded area or city dwelling?
- What sort of amenities are desired? (i.e. carpeting, washer/dryer, etc.)

Place your answers in the order of importance. Usually the amount of rent and number of rooms are the most important. Begin your hunt within the radius you are willing to commute to work.

THE HUNT

Apartment hunting includes reading rental ads in local publications. Each military installation newspaper has an apartment section, your base guide also includes area apartment listings. And your base housing office can provide information on local apartment communities. Inquiring at apartment complexes, asking friends or using a rental agency are other ways to find an apartment. As you come across apartments that meet your before-hunt qualifications compare them.

- Which ones are closest to work?
- Which apartments include a military clause in their lease?
- Which ones are the least expensive?

- Which apartments have nearby grocers?

Drive through their neighborhoods. Could you picture you and your family enjoying this neighborhood? What is the location and quality of nearby schools, hospitals, police station, fire department, etc?

Drive the routes from the apartment complexes to work. Look at a map. Is there more than one way to get to work? Is there access to public transportation?

SELECTION AFTER THE HUNT

This should have narrowed your choice down to four or less apartments. If your list is still longer than four apartments, call the rental offices and ask a few of the before and during the hunt questions by phone. Do they still have the unit you want vacant? How helpful and friendly was the management office? Their behavior and answers should have assisted you in narrowing your list to four. Now you're entering the after-hunt phase. In the after phase, you are ready to call the rental office for an appointment to view the apartments. Also plan times to drive from and to the apartment during rush hour. Try alternate routes during rush hour, too.

- Is the commute bearable?
- Ask to view the floor plan or actual apartment you'll be renting.
- Turn on the sink and tub faucet while flushing the toilet to check water pressure.
- Ask about hot water supply.
- Are utility bills included? If not, what is the estimated monthly cost?

Ask management:

- What is their turn around time on requested repairs?
- Does the family above your unit have children? How many?
- Is the unit above yours carpeted?
- If you have an allergy to pets, ask if any of the adjacent apartments to your unit have this type of pet.
- Who controls the heat?
- How long and what is the application procedure?
- What information and how much money is needed during the application process?
- How soon could the unit be available for you to move in?

When viewing the apartment check the condition

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Advertising Sales
Nicki Sparks
(301) 948-4364

of the floors, cupboards, closets, and cabinets. If you accept the apartment, to avoid the responsibility for prior damages, list all apartment damages with the rental office within 72 hours of moving in. Inspect the place for damages before you move your things in. Also inspect the place during your move and after you've settled. While cleaning and organizing, record any and all damages no matter how minor. A small wall crack could spread the full length of the wall by the time you're ready to move out.

After viewing the apartment, stick around for an hour or two to look the grounds over. Talk with some of the tenants.

- Do they enjoy living there?
- Any complaints?
- How is management with repairs?
- How long have they lived in this complex?

Ask about the availability of hot water. If the heat and air conditioning is controlled by management, ask tenants if the unit temperature is appropriately regulated.

Besides the questions in this article, ask questions about your own pet peeves you've experienced in past dwellings. It is best to be clear on all the facts before signing a lease for an apartment. Provided you have followed through on all the concerns and actions mentioned in this article, you have reduced your chances of headaches and increased your chances of locating the right apartment to call home.