

U.S.A.

Getting Started



When to Visit

It's always the perfect time to visit the [U.S.A.](#) If you want beaches and resorts in the south the weather is perfect nearly year round, particularly in [Hawai'i](#), [Florida](#), and southern [California](#). If you want snow and skiing, Alaska never closes and during the winter months much of the north, the Rocky Mountains, and the Appalachian Mountains are covered.

Due to its vast size, temperatures in the U.S.A. vary greatly. Parts of [Hawai'i](#) average about 76° F (24° C) year round, whereas Anchorage, Alaska's biggest city, only averages 58° F (14° C) in their hottest month of July, while the months of November-February rarely get above freezing in Anchorage (32° F (0° C)).

The busy tourist season for Americans (traveling both around the country and abroad) is between Memorial Day (last Monday in May) to Labor Day (first Monday in September), which roughly matches when schools are out. Because of this, most locations are best visited during the spring or fall months, although most big cities, like Washington DC, [New York City](#), [Chicago](#), and [San Francisco](#) are busy year round.

A final point to consider before planning your travel is local holidays. Holidays can make travel either more attractive, such as for large festivals, or less attractive, due to tourist site closings and more expensive transportation options. See the [U.S.A.'s Official & Unofficial Holidays](#).

Weather

Although weather can be generalized based upon years past, for more up to date weather patterns and predicted future weather patterns, visit

NAME:	United States of America
CAPITAL:	Washington D.C.
LANGUAGE:	English & Spanish
RELIGION:	Christian & others
CURRENCY:	US Dollar

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weather websites like weather.com; many local news sources also have information for international weather forecasts.

Tours & Cruises

If you're looking for a pre-arranged trip, that involves little effort on your part, then you should consider going on an organized tour or cruise. Organized tours and cruises vary from all expenses included to only daily tours and perhaps hotels included in the price, but all the options below will help you arrange all the details so you don't have to worry about finding the best deal or right hotel.

[Caravan Tours](#): In business since the 1950s, Caravan offers tours too all ages, but there are few young people on many of their tours.

[Carnival Cruises](#): Cruises for all ages and families.

[Contiki Tours](#): A tour company that only offers tours to 18-35 year olds; known as offering fun and social tours for young singles and couples.

[Disney Cruise Lines](#): Cruises open to everyone, but filled with families and plenty to keep children occupied.

[Gap Adventures](#): Known best among young adults, Gap Adventures provides local transportation, housing, and food, which cuts costs and introduces the local culture, but can also be challenging for those seeking luxury.

[Holland America Cruises](#): Cruises for all ages and families.

[Intrepid Travel](#): Boasts more "off the beaten track" destinations; do your research though since some tours are very adventurous and involves camping and local hotels.

[Norwegian Cruise Line](#): Cruises for all ages and families; less formal than many cruise lines.

[Princess Cruise Lines](#): Cruises for all ages and families.

[Road Scholar](#): For older adults, Road Scholar offers tours with an educational emphasis; formerly known as Elder Hostel.

[Royal Caribbean](#): Cruises for all ages and families.

[Trek America](#): Offer fun, freedom, & flexibility; they cater to independent travelers with a sense of adventure.

Guidebooks

If you are just traveling on business and have little free time or are already familiar with the [U.S.A.](#), you may not need anything more than this guide! However, if you need more detailed and up to date information, there are a number of great country-wide, region-wide, and city-wide guidebooks available for travel in the U.S.A.

[Eyewitness Guides](#): Incredible pictures and detailed maps of popular tourist sites including museums. Those living abroad can't put these books down.

[Fodor's](#): Good maps and information for the major tourist locations, but has little information for anyone heading off the beaten track. Great for those on organized tours.

[Frommer's](#): Incredible number of lists, which divide travel into various categories based upon your interests. Travelers looking to spend most of their time in a single location or on organized tours enjoy these books.

[Lonely Planet](#): Great maps and updated often with comprehensive housing information, restaurants, & transportation options. Backpackers and adventurers love these guidebooks.

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Culture

Personality, Culture, & Identity

The [United States](#) is the big kid on the playground who bosses others around... and he's big enough and powerful enough to do so. For the other kids and parents at the playground, some see the US as an egotistical bully, others see him as a growing kid whose body outgrew his maturity, others view him with a sense of awe and jealousy, and others just don't pay any attention to him, but as soon as they ignore him he finds a way to get their attention whether that be by showing off or punching them in the stomach.

No matter what others say, the [U.S.A.](#) tends to use his bulk and power to protect those he loves, beginning with his mother ([England](#)) and his little brother ([Canada](#)), despite the fact that neither of them want or need protection. However these two mean the most to the U.S.A. and when one of them disagrees with the U.S.A., he is disappointed, stops, thinks, tries to convince his family otherwise, then continues on his own path with a bit of shame and sadness.

Because so many kids chose to join the big kid on the playground, the U.S.A. is now a mix of everyone: every race, every religion, every culture, and every nation. Some of these people hate each other so divide as others embrace the diversity and unite. However, no matter the individual, most of the [United States](#) is made up of immigrants and their descendents who have chosen to leave their lives behind in order to find economic opportunity, gain religious freedom, own land, have the freedom to start their own business or live out their dream.

Americans prioritize how they identify in thousands of ways from first seeing themselves as a member of a religious group, by the color of their skin, by their language, and by their ethnicity to being a member of their city, state, or nation. For so many cultures, "ambition" is a word of greed and selfishness, for Americans, it is the story of their history.

History

American history begins with the Native Americans or Indians. These people, which spoke hundreds of languages and clung to multiple different identities and histories varied from the nomadic people of the Great Plains to the fishermen and women of the Pacific Northwest. With the arrival of the [Europeans](#) most of these people were killed by disease, treated as second class citizens, or (a rare few) intermarried with the immigrating Europeans.

The early European immigrants found themselves in this "New World" for a number of reasons, from fleeing religious persecution to seeking the fortunes of gold and silver. As the Indians were pushed further and further west, the [European](#) immigrants found land for the taking, started farms, and soon after discovered the profit in producing cash crops. Unfortunately, these crops required a large amount of labor and the population was sparse, so the African Slave Trade expanded from the Caribbean into modern-day U.S.A.

In 1776 the colonists revolted against the ruling [English](#) crown, protesting their lack of representative rights in Parliament, yet still being controlled by English laws. After a war, the [Americans](#), with the help of the [French](#), won independence and their focus continued to shift towards internal affairs and economic opportunities.

Over the next 150 years the country experienced massive growth through purchase ([Louisiana](#) and Alaska) and war (much of the American West and southwest from [Mexico](#)). However the social atmosphere in the country also continued to change and fights over slavery and state versus federal rights eventually led to the American Civil War (1861-1865), which was won by the north and ended slavery, but not segregation or racism.

After the Civil War, the U.S.A. continued on its path of westward expansion and faced further social growing pains with huge immigration by Europeans fleeing political instability or famines, and the former slave population moving from the south to all parts of the

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country. With this new labor pool and the help of the industrial revolution, savvy businessmen used these immigrants as cheap labor, which led to a series of legal changes to protect the worker, improving the quality of life, healthcare, communication, and transportation networks.

WWI and WWII forced the [U.S.A.](#) onto the international stage despite their best efforts to remain a hermit. This period proved the U.S.A.'s power on the international stage and soon the country became a world power and a leader in innovation from mass production of the car and the production of the airplane to exploiting the usefulness of mass communication networks like television and movies.

Today the [U.S.A.](#) continues to change and grow as migration has repeatedly shifted: from abroad to the U.S.A., then from rural to urban, and finally to suburbia, in which nearly every family has their own house, land, and car.

Dress & Behavior

There are few dress or behavioral restrictions in the [United States](#). The only issue to be aware of is that, unlike many beaches in [Europe](#), nakedness and women going topless is restricted and offenders will be arrested for public indecency, even if you're only sunbathing face down.

To learn about dining etiquette in the [United States](#), continue below.

Food

Dining Etiquette

Dining in the [U.S.A.](#) varies from highly sophisticated to extremely informal and, fortunately, usually falls closer to the informal side of the spectrum. With a fast food culture growing and eating on the run popular, eating as you walk or in the company of others isn't considered rude. While eating in quick service restaurants essentially means there are no true dining rules.

In more formal settings, place your napkin on your lap, wait to eat until everyone is served, and use your silverware (cutlery) from the outside in. These rules also apply if you're a guest at anyone's house, although there may be appetizers you can snack on without waiting, plus some people are extremely informal so just follow your host's lead.

If dining as a guest at someone's house, always arrive on time, bring a small gift (or a dish if asked), and follow the host's traditions; this could mean a pre-meal prayer or toasts, which are typically limited only to the host, but if others join in, all are welcome to participate. It is also not considered rude to turn down a dish that does not appeal to you, however do so quietly and ask for another dish instead. Once you have food on your plate, it is considered polite to finish everything you have taken; leaving food can imply that the food was not satisfactory, unless of course, you're on your third helping.

If dining out, who pays for dinner varies greatly based upon the company. For business dinners the inviter typically pays the entire bill. For a more informal or friendly meal there are no set rules. Although the host may pay the entire bill, you should offer to contribute money and, many times, the offer will be accepted or the bill will be divided evenly among all guests.

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History & Influences

[American](#) food begins with the American Indians (Native Americans), who primarily lived off the land and farmed basic crops. They ate whatever was native to their particular region, from berries and fruits to small game animals and buffalo.

When the [English](#) arrived, they tried to copy their traditional foods from England and, through trade, did a fairly good job in this goal. However, they also made a number of substitutions, eating local meats and fruits if they were similar to what they were used to. They also brought with them cooking styles from the British Isles.

As technology grew and life became more hectic, mass food production hit the [U.S.A.](#) by storm. Cereals became popular, fast food restaurants popped up, and the coffee craze hit the country. During this same time, the U.S.A. has been an immigrant destination, causing modern American food to be little more than alterations on ethnic dishes or combinations of these same dishes. Today, quick service restaurants can be found everywhere, every large city boasts dozens of ethnic restaurants, each region claims local dishes and specialties, and more upscale restaurants claiming they serve "American Fusion" can mean just about anything.

Staple Foods

Being a country of immigrants, there are no staple foods that exist across the [U.S.A.](#). Many of the immigrants and American Indians, however have staples, from rice for many [Asian](#) immigrants to corn tortillas for Hispanic immigrants.

Regional Varieties & Specialties

BBQ - popular everywhere, but centered in Memphis, Tennessee; Kansas City, Missouri; & [Texas](#)

[California](#) - fresh ingredients and Asian foods dominate here

[Chicago](#) - famous hot dogs, Italian sausage, and deep dish pizza

[Hawaii](#) - focused on pork products and a local root called taro, today Asian immigrants have altered the food even more

[Louisiana](#) - Cajun cooking (essentially French influenced with more rice and seafood) rules here and includes *po'boys*, *jambalaya*, and *gumbo* to name just a couple

Midwestern - known for their meats, cheeses, and dishes based on [Germany](#), Irish, and [Polish](#) foods

New England - on the sea, their food is based on multiple fish and shellfish

[New York City](#) - well known for their Kosher delis, pizza, hot dogs, and ethnic foods

[Philadelphia](#) - *cheese steaks* rule here; traditionally served with beef, fried onions, and cheese whiz on Italian bread

South-Western - similar to [Mexican food](#), but typically with more meat and more inventive as each chef tries to create his own dish

Southern - also known as *comfort food*, some of the favorites include cornbread, pecan pie, and fried chicken

Tex-Mex - a name given to foods that are influenced by Texas and Mexico; popular in Texas, the southwest, and California

Drinks

[Americans](#) drink just about every type of alcohol depending on personal taste; wine, beer, and hard liquors are popular.

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Practical Information

Visas

Many foreign nationals need a visa to enter the [U.S.A.](#), however the requirements for citizens of different nationalities varies. To learn more about who need visas, what type of visa is needed, what requirements are needed to obtain a visa, and visa costs, please visit the [U.S. Department of State](#).

Health & Insurance

Every part of the world has different health concerns and diseases, including the [U.S.A.](#). Before traveling, consult with a physician to learn more about your destination and what steps you can take to prevent illness. At the time of writing, the U.S.A. didn't have any health immunizations that are required prior to arrival for visitors, although a number of immunizations are strongly recommended.

Many health insurance providers don't cover health care that is provided outside your home country. Before going abroad check with your health insurance to see if they cover international care. If not, consider purchasing an international medical insurance option, preferably from a company that specializes in international medical insurance.

Transportation

Unless you're on an organized tour or working with a travel agent, you will have to arrange some transportation. The below links can greatly help you start your planning, first by finding a flight to the [U.S.A.](#), then with domestic airlines and car rental agencies. If you don't know where to begin, try the "Flight & Rental Car Search Sites" to learn competitor's prices during your trip.

Largest International Airlines: [Air France](#), [American Airlines](#); [British Airways](#); [Cathay Pacific](#); [China Southern Airlines](#); [Delta](#); [Emirates](#); [KLM](#); [LAN](#); [Lufthansa](#); [Qantas](#); [Singapore Airlines](#); [United Airlines](#).

Largest American Airlines: [American Airlines](#); [Delta](#); [Southwest](#); [United Airlines](#); plus dozens more; search the below "Flight & Rental Car Search Sites" for more options.

Largest Rental Car Agencies in the U.S.A.: [Avis](#); [Budget](#); [Dollar](#); [Enterprise](#); [Hertz](#); [Pay Less](#); [Thrifty](#); plus dozens more; search the below "Flight & Rental Car Search Sites" for more options.

Flight & Rental Car Search Sites: [Expedia.com](#); [Farecast.com](#); [Kayak.com](#); [Orbitz.com](#); & [Travelocity.com](#).

Housing

Housing options are numerous in most tourist destinations, but every individual seeks out something different when it comes to housing. The below links should help you get started, with low- to high-end hotels, hostels, and camping options.

Popular International Hotel Conglomerates: [Accor Group](#) (various price ranges); [Choice Hotels](#) (low- to mid-price range); [Hilton](#) (various price ranges); [Hyatt](#) (high-end to resorts); [InterContinental Group](#) (mid- to high-price range); [Marriott Family](#) (various price ranges); [Starwood Hotels](#) (high-end); [Wyndham Hotels](#) (low- to mid-price range).

Hotel Search Sites: [Expedia.com](#); [Kayak.com](#); [Orbitz.com](#); & [Travelocity.com](#).

Hostels: Although there are many hostel websites, some of the most popular and reputable include [hostels.com](#), [hostelworld.com](#), & [hostelbookers.com](#).

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Camping: The best starting point for [Camping Options in the U.S.A.](#) can be found on the U.S. National Park Website. Although there are dozens of camping locations throughout the country, some of the best are in the U.S.A.'s National Parks.

Opening Hours, Expenses, & Tipping

The [U.S.A.](#) is on the same time schedule as much of northern [Europe](#) and [Canada](#). Shops and tourist attractions tend to open at about 9:00 am and close at about 5:00 pm. While shops only tend to remain open Monday-Friday, tourist sites often times are open on the weekends (Saturday & Sunday) and typically with extended hours on Saturdays.

Restaurant hours vary depending on what they serve and the time of day. Most Americans eat breakfast prior to work, have lunch between about 11:30 am and 2:00 pm, and dinner anywhere from 5:00-9:00 pm. Bars, pubs, and dance clubs tend to open for dinner (or later) and remain open until about 2:00 am.

The [U.S.A.](#) can be very expensive and making it a budget destination is a challenge. Due to its size, most trans-national transportation must be through flights and this often begins at about \$150 for a one-way flight between major cities. A meal can cost anywhere from \$2-3 at a grocery store or market to \$50+ in a nice restaurant. Hotels tend to start at about \$80 for low end and there are relatively few hostel options, which can be as inexpensive at \$20 a night. In some locations (including most State and National Parks) camping is permitted and if you have your own tent, can provide cheap housing among some of the nation's best scenery.

When eating out at a sit-down restaurant a tip of between 12-20% is expected (depending on the quality of the service). Unlike in Europe, waiters and waitresses get low pay and are reliant on tips as a supplement to their income. In bars a tip of \$1 per drink is standard, and for bell hops in hotels \$1 a bag is appreciated. Other services, like taxis expect a tip, however typically around 10% or rounding up to the nearest \$5 increment if that's close to 10% or the fare.

Crime & Safety

The [U.S.A.](#) is very safe so long as you use your common sense and don't go wondering into a city's wrong neighborhood or find yourself alone in the wilderness. Most crime in the U.S.A. is based in the major cities and more particularly in certain neighborhoods. The biggest threats to the traveler are petty theft like pick pocketers in major cities and leaving valuables in an unlocked car. Credit card fraud is also present, but you shouldn't have any problems at reputable hotels, restaurants, and shops.

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