



Your Guide to Living in the United States of America

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You're Coming to America!

Congratulations on receiving your green card! Get ready for a new and exciting adventure in America!

Now that you have received your green card, but before leaving for the United States, you need to know what to pack, the essential documents to bring, and other information about the United States that will help you prepare for your arrival and get acclimated.

Packing Your Luggage for the U.S.

Most airlines will allow you to check two bags per person free of charge if the bags do not exceed the airline's specified weight limit. Airlines usually charge extra for additional bags or if the airline's weight limit is exceeded (typically 50 lbs or 22.5 kilos). Since baggage policies vary by airline, you should check directly with the airline you will be traveling on for its baggage restrictions and charges.

Essential Items to Pack: U.S. Immigration Documentation

The following documents should be with you at all times while traveling. Keep them with you or in your carry on luggage. Make a copy of every page of each of the following documents for your records. Bring the copies with you to the U.S., but store them separately from where you keep the originals.

- Passport.
- Copy of Immigrant Visa Application and Alien Registration: Copies of these documents should be provided for yourself, your spouse, and your children.
- Copies of Diplomas, Resume, and Certifications.
- Military Service Record: You must obtain a military service record for service you performed in any country.
- Original Police Certificate: This is required for each applicant over the age of 16. You must provide a police certificate for each country where you have lived for at least one year after the age of 16.
- Birth Certificate: Obtain a long form birth certificate complete with both of your parents' names on it. Your spouse and any unmarried children under 21 years of age must also obtain long form birth certificates.
- Adoption Certificate (if applicable)
- Marriage Certificate (if applicable)
- Divorce Decree (if applicable)
- Change of Name
- Change of Name Certification: If you have changed your name, bring the document certifying your name change.



Financing Your Activities Upon Arrival in the U.S.

Money: Check with your bank to determine if your ATM card will work in the U.S. Make sure to bring enough money with you to last at least one week. You will need to have your money converted to U.S. dollars once you arrive in the U.S. Traveler's checks are always a good idea instead of cash.

Credit Cards: If you do not have a credit card, you should get one before you come to the U.S. You should bring all of your credit cards with you. If you wait to get a credit card once you arrive in the U.S., it could take up to a year to establish the required credit to obtain a credit card.

Other Important Items...

Uniforms: You should wait to buy your uniform until you arrive in the U.S. since medical facilities have different uniform requirements. Your employer will be able to tell you where to purchase a uniform

Clothing: Before you pack for the U.S., you should find out what the weather is like in the area where you will be living and working. Then, pack accordingly.

Linens: You should bring a bed sheet, pillow case, blanket or comforter, and towel for each person based on the number of people in your family. If these items are too heavy or take up too much space in your luggage, there are plenty of stores throughout the U.S. that sell reasonably priced linens. These stores include Bed Bath & Beyond (<http://www.bedbathandbeyond.com/>), Linens-N-Things (<http://www.lnt.com/>), Target (<http://www.target.com/>), WalMart (<http://www.walmart.com/>), Kmart (<http://www.kmart.com/>), and IKEA (<http://www.ikea.com/>), to name a few.

Electronics and Appliances: It is likely that your electronics and appliances will not conform to U.S. standard voltage requirements of 110-115 volts. You can purchase an adapter once you arrive in the U.S. Alternatively, all electronics and appliances, including hair dryers, stereos, radios, DVD players, CD players, televisions, and VCRs, can be purchased for reasonable prices at many stores throughout the U.S. (U.S. Videotapes are not in PAL format. If you bring videotapes from abroad, they many not work in U.S. VCRs.) Examples of stores where you can buy such equipment include, amongst many others, Kmart (<http://www.kmart.com/>), Target (<http://www.target.com/>), WalMart (<http://www.walmart.com/>), Circuit City (<http://www.circuitcity.com/>), and Best Buy (<http://www.bestbuy.com/>).

Personal Items: These items can include photographs of friends and family, an address book with contact information of people back home, or any other item that will make you feel at home in America.



Hello! Welcome to the United States!

Upon arrival in the U.S., there are some essential documents you must apply for and receive before you start working and to get you started in your new home in America.

American Money

First, it is a good idea to convert foreign cash to U.S. dollars. If you use traveler's checks, you will receive change in the form of U.S. dollars, which is divided in the following increments.

American bills are all the same size regardless of their value. The most common denominations are \$1, \$5, \$10, and \$20. Most bills are green in color, although some of the new \$20 bills have some peach and light brown coloring in them.

American coins are different sizes. The smallest coins are pennies (worth 1 cent), which are copper colored. There are 100 pennies in \$1. Nickels are bigger than pennies (worth 5 cents) and silver. There are 20 nickels in \$1. Dimes (worth 10 cents) are also silver, but smaller than pennies and nickels. There are 10 dimes in \$1. Quarters (worth 25 cents) are silver and larger than nickels. There are 4 quarters in \$1.

Social Security Number

A social security number, or SSN, is assigned to all residents of the U.S. It is required for many applications, and it is sometimes impossible to get credit, open a bank account, or enroll in school without it. Utility companies sometimes require your SSN to start your utility services.

Once you arrive in the U.S., you can check the local telephone book or go online to the Social Security Administration (<http://www.ssa.gov/>) to find the social security office closest to you. Your passport, visa, and birth certificate are required to apply for your SSN. You should also bring other identifying documentation, such as your marriage license or your children's birth certificates. You should make sure to provide the social security office with a proper address where they can send your social security card to you.

In some states, you will receive a social security number on the day that you apply for it. Other states may take a few weeks to send you the actual card. You will receive a receipt that you can use until you receive your card.

Social Security Number for U.S. Born Child

A child who is born in the U.S. is considered a U.S. citizen. You can apply for a social security number for your child upon birth. The state will then send the information to the Social Security Administration, and your child will receive a card in the mail. If your child is older, the application process must be completed at your local Social Security Administration office.



Banking and Money

A bank is a safe place to keep your money. Banks protect your money from being stolen. Any bank where you deposit funds should be FDIC (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation) insured. This is special insurance that most banks have through the federal government that insures deposits. There should be a small logo displayed at the bank teller window if the bank is FDIC insured.

A checking account allows you to deposit money, withdraw money using an ATM card, and write checks against funds you have in the bank. When you deposit money into a checking account, the bank will give you checks that you can use to pay for items in a store, to pay bills, or to withdraw cash. Not all stores accept checks. You can deposit your paychecks and any other checks or cash directly into your checking account. You can often do electronic transfers online. Many U.S. banks now issue debit cards with a Visa or MasterCard emblem on it, which allows you to use the card to make purchases against your account in almost any store and online.

A savings account allows you to gain interest on the money you keep in the account.

You should ask the bank whether they offer interest on checking or savings accounts and what the minimum amount is that you must keep in the accounts. The bank may charge a monthly service fee for the use of a checking or savings account and an ATM or debit card. It may also charge you a fee if you order checks. Some banks only charge fees if the minimum amount on the checking or savings account drops below a specified amount.

You should ask the bank whether they offer overdraft protection. Overdraft protection means that if you accidentally write a check, but do not have the funds to cover it, your bank will pay the check and you will not be charged a check bouncing fee. The bank may charge you overdraft fees.

You should also ask the bank how long it takes to clear a local check, an out of state check, or foreign funds, meaning how long it takes from the time the money is deposited in your account until the time you are allowed to withdraw it. In some states, banks hold onto money for days or weeks. In other states, banks give the money right away or within one day.

When you decide which bank to use, bring your Social Security Card, passport, and driver's license (if you have one) or other official correspondence with your address on it. Most banks require a minimum of \$100 to open a checking account.

There are many banks to choose from throughout the U.S. Some of the most recognizable banks are Washington Mutual (<http://www.wamu.com/>), Wells Fargo (<https://www.wellsfargo.com/>), Bank of America (<https://www.bankofamerica.com/>), U.S. Bank (<http://www.usbank.com/>). You can find local branches of these banks and other banks in your local telephone book or online.



Sending Money Outside the U.S.

If you want to send money outside the U.S., there are reputable agencies, such as Western Union (<http://www.westernunion.com/>), which can be used to transfer your funds. Sending money or cash through the mail service is illegal.

Banking Alternatives

If you have a few thousand dollars, you can consider money market accounts, certificates of deposits or CDs (deposits made that are guaranteed a certain rate of interest over a period of time), or stocks and bonds, which a bank representative or investment advisor can explain to you. These options often give you a larger return on your money.

A U.S. State-Issued Driver's License

You should obtain an international driver's license in your home country before you leave. This will typically allow you to legally drive in the U.S. for at least 30 days. You should apply for a driver's license issued by the state where you will reside in order to continue driving legally in the U.S.

To apply for your driver's license, you will first need a social security number. Once you have a social security number, you can check the local telephone book or go online to find the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) office closest to you.

Each state has its own testing requirements to obtain a license. You may have to pass a written examination, vision test, and driving test. You can obtain a free booklet from the DMV that covers the material you will need to know for the written examination. You should then enroll in driving lessons. It is a good idea to have driving lessons since there are so many different traffic rules and road conditions. Make sure that your driving lessons include insurance.

To apply for your driver's license, you will need two forms of identification, such as a passport and birth certificate. You should also bring your immigrant visa, or green card, and any paperwork you have received from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Public Transportation

Some major U.S. cities, such as New York, Washington D.C., and San Francisco have reliable public transportation systems, including buses, subways, or metro systems. Many smaller cities and even some major cities do not have established public transportation systems and you will need a car to get around.



Renting a Car

Once you arrive in the U.S., you can rent a car for a few weeks using your overseas credit card. This will allow you time to become familiar with the car buying process and to find a good deal before buying a car. Check out: www.enterprise.com, www.avis.com, www.budget.com

Buying a Car

Buying a used car in America is a relatively inexpensive process. However, since you will not obtain credit in the U.S. immediately, you should be prepared to have the full cash amount for the used car purchase.

If you want to buy a new car, you can do so through International AutoSource (<http://www.intlauto.com/>), which is a worldwide marketer of vehicles to foreign nationals. International AutoSource has an arrangement with Audi, Ford Motor Company, Chrysler Corporation, and Volkswagen, where it can provide access to preferential financing rates through these U.S. manufacturers' finance institutions, even to foreign nationals with no U.S. credit history.

Automobile Insurance

Automobile insurance provides coverage for you when you drive, promising that if you get in an accident, the insurance company will replace or pay for repairs on the car you are driving, medical costs for anyone who gets hurt, and other vehicles that are damaged. It can also cover other drivers who drive your car.

In most states, you need a driver's license to get car insurance. Some states require liability insurance before issuing a driver's license. Although this may sound confusing, an insurance company or a DMV representative should be able to help you with determining how to obtain the necessary documentation. Often times an international or foreign license will be sufficient to obtain car insurance.

If you buy a car, you will need to purchase insurance for that car. Even if you do not have a car, you can buy non-owner insurance for a small fee, which will cover you when you drive someone else's car or when you rent a car.

There are different car insurance companies throughout the U.S. Some of the most recognizable companies are AAA (<http://www.aaa.com/>), Progressive (<http://www.progressive.com/>), Geico (<http://www.geico.com/>), State Farm Insurance (<http://www.statefarm.com/>), and Farmer's Insurance (<http://www.farmers.com/>).

Taxes

In the U.S., the law requires that everyone earning an income pay Federal income taxes. There are also state and other local taxes, which are specific to where you live in the U.S.

If you work as an employee, your federal and local taxes are taken out of your paycheck. At the end of the year, you must complete tax returns to document all your earnings and any earnings of your spouse and dependents.



You will need your W-2 forms from employers you worked for during the year. You usually receive the W-2 forms from employers in the mail by January. If you do not receive them, you should contact the employers immediately.

You can obtain information and download federal forms from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) at <http://www.irs.gov/>. You will also need to file state and/or local tax forms. Your local post office or library will often have information for you on these forms.

The IRS forms and procedures are confusing. Most Americans receive tax assistance from the IRS automated telephone systems at (800) 829-1040 or (800) 829-4477, through an accounting firm such as H&R Block (<http://www.hrblock.com/>), or an online service, such as Turbo Tax (<http://turbotax.intuit.com/>).

Make a copy of your tax return and keep it for 7 years. Send your returns online or by certified mail, return receipt. If you owe money to the IRS, include a check. If the IRS owes you money, provide your address so you will receive the check. All tax forms must be sent by midnight or the last local postal pick-up on April 15th of each year.

Health Insurance

Most full-time employers offer health insurance coverage where you will be covered with little or none of your own financial contribution. Some employers also offer dental coverage. Organized professional organizations or unions may offer insurance coverage plans. Be sure to ask about coverage for your spouse and children. Medical expenses are very expensive. Some hospitals will treat you even if you do not have health insurance, but you may experience delays, less adequate service, and thousands of dollars in medical bills that you will be responsible for paying.

If your employer does not provide health insurance and you purchase your own, then you will pay a monthly fee to the insurance company. In return, the insurance company promises to cover your health care and medical expenses.

Sometimes there is a deductible, which is the amount you agree to pay on your own before the amount your insurance will cover. Other plans have a co-pay, which means that you might pay a small fee per visit, but the insurance company will pay the rest, no matter how expensive.

There are two common types of health insurance plans. Health Maintenance Organizations, or HMOs, give you a list of doctors and hospitals you are allowed to see. You must usually get permission to go to a specialist or to have any medical procedures performed. Preferred Provider Organizations, or PPOs, are similar but much less restrictive in the doctors and hospitals you can visit.

eHealthInsurance (<https://www.ehealthinsurance.com/>) and netQuote (<http://www.netquote.com/>) provide ways for you to explore health insurance options.



A Place to Call Home: Finding a Place to Live in the U.S.

Preparing to Rent a Place to Call Home

In the U.S., many people rent an apartment or home to live in. Renting means that someone else owns the property. You would pay a monthly rental fee to the owner, or landlord, of the apartment or home. Most rental properties include a kitchen with a stove and a bathroom with a toilet, sink, and shower and/or bathtub. Some rentals come with a refrigerator. You can rent or buy a refrigerator if it is not included in your rental unit.

Once you find a place that you like, you will need to submit an application, often with a small application fee. If your application is approved and the landlord agrees to rent the place to you, then you will usually need to sign a standard leasing contract or rental agreement, which is a legally binding document that promises you will live in the apartment and pay the rent for a certain period of time specified in the lease (usually one-year). The landlord is responsible for maintenance and repairs that need to be done on your rental property.

Many landlords or owners require payment of the first month's rent and a security deposit, which is often equivalent to rent for one month. The security deposit can be used to fix any damage you cause to the property during your rental time. Any unused portion of your security deposit will be returned to you at the end of your lease period.

Landlords or owners usually want to run a credit check on your credit history before renting their property to you. If you have recently arrived in the U.S., you will not have a credit history. You can be prepared for this situation by having references and recommendation letters from people in your home country, possibly even people you rented property from abroad. You might also need to give a larger security deposit than the landlord or owner normally requires from renters.

Subletting a Place to Call Home

Subletting occurs when a person who is renting an apartment or home needs to move someplace else for a while, but is responsible for the rental property. That person may rent the property to someone else during the time he or she is not living there. This could be a good arrangement for you because approval can be quicker and easier and the term of the lease may be shorter. Make sure that the landlord or owner allows subletting before you agree to sublet the rental property.

Finding a Roommate

Similar to a sublet, sometimes you can find a roommate, or someone who rents an apartment or home but needs another person to rent a room. If you are single or a couple without children with little cash and no credit history, finding a roommate is ideal because it is probably the easiest way to rent a property. Often times, someone looking for a roommate does not require a credit check, it is generally less expensive, and it often includes furniture. In addition, it is a good way to get to know people in your community.



Finding a Rental

You can find a rental property online, in the local newspaper's classified section, or in local real estate rental guides. Craigslist.org (<http://www.craigslist.org/>) and ForRent.com (<http://www.forrent.com/>) are great sources for finding apartments to rent in almost all areas of the U.S. ForRent also publishes a rental magazine, which can be found for free at local grocery stores.

Buying a Place to Call Home

If you have a substantial amount of money to put down as a down payment, you may wish to buy a home or condominium unit instead of renting property. One of the benefits of buying property is that when you sell it, you may make a profit on the sale. In addition, during the time you own the property, your equity, or real estate collateral, on it will help your credit. You can take out a mortgage, which is the monthly payment you make on the property. You will get a tax break on your mortgage payments.

Every community in the U.S. has a local real estate guide, one or more real estate offices, and classified listings for homes and condominiums for sale in the area. Make sure to inspect a property for sale more thoroughly than you would a rental and conduct research on your local market before buying a property.

You generally need excellent credit and a good job history to purchase property. If you do not have these, which you may not if you are new to the U.S., you may want to rent until you can build up a savings, good credit, and a strong job history.

Utilities

Once you have found a place to live you must open accounts and typically pay a deposit for electric, gas, water, telephone, and cable television services.

Shopping for Groceries and Home Supplies

There are many grocery and home supply stores throughout the U.S. Some of the most commonly known grocery stores are Safeway or Vons (<http://www.safeway.com/>), Albertsons (<http://www.albertsons.com/>), Ralph's (<http://www.ralphs.com/>), Publix (<http://www.publix.com/>), Whole Foods (<http://www.wholefoods.com/>), and many others. Smaller cities may also have less well-known grocery stores that will likely provide the same products as the big chain stores.

Home supply stores include Home Depot (<http://www.homedepot.com/>), Bed Bath & Beyond (<http://www.bedbathandbeyond.com/>), Office Depot (<http://www.officedepot.com/>), Target (<http://www.target.com/>), WalMart (<http://www.walmart.com/>), Kmart (<http://www.kmart.com/>), IKEA (<http://www.ikea.com/>), and many others. Smaller cities may also have less well-known home supply stores that will likely provide the same products as the big chain stores.



What School Will Be Like for Your Children

If you have children who will be starting school in America, the following information will be useful for you.

Public Education in the U.S.

Education is important to people in the U.S. Free public education is available for children who live in America. Public education is funded and administered through state and local tax dollars. In public schools, there is no tuition or cost to attend and textbooks are provided, but you are expected to provide notebooks, pencils, crayons, and other items that your child will use during the school year. Children in the U.S. usually begin attending school around age 5 by going to kindergarten. Children are legally required to attend school until age 16 in some states and age 18 in other states.

Elementary school is first through fifth or sixth grade in most areas of the U.S. Children then go to middle school or junior high school for sixth through eighth or seventh through ninth grades. High school is ninth or tenth grade through twelfth grade.

The curriculum in the public school system is determined by a state committee or local school officials. Most school districts will have courses that include reading, writing, English grammar, literature, math, science, history, social studies, geography, economics, civics/government, computers, keyboarding, and physical education. Students are also allowed to choose electives, such as art, drama, computer science, home economics, or other classes.

English as a Second Language Programs

If your child does not speak English as his or her native language, and the language barrier is great enough to make school difficult, he or she will be placed in an ESL (English as a Second Language) program with teachers who are specialists in helping children adjust to their new culture and language. This helps many children ease the transition of moving to the U.S.

Private Education in the U.S.

There are usually private schools available in most areas. Private schools are not subsidized by state or local tax dollars. You would pay a yearly tuition for your children to attend private school. Some private schools are college preparatory academies, and almost all of the students that graduate go on to college. Many private schools have some affiliation with a religious denomination and will include some form of religious instruction as part of their curriculum. Other private schools are military schools that include some form of military training in their curriculum.



Preparing Your Children for College

Before entering college, students in the U.S. take a test called the SAT (Standardized Achievement Test), which tests subjects including English reading and comprehension, vocabulary, and math. (Details about the SAT are available at <http://www.collegeboard.com/>.) Colleges often look closely at SAT scores and the student's overall grade point average from high school, to determine whether the student will be accepted. Students apply to a variety of colleges during the fall or spring of their senior year and then they wait to see which colleges accept them.

There are many colleges to choose from in the U.S. Every state also has a state university, which is usually much less expensive to attend than private colleges or out-of-state schools if you live in the same state where the university is located. Most areas also have small, community colleges, which award a two-year associate's degree. Many students who attend community colleges study their first two years at a community college and then transfer to a four-year college.

In college, your children can study literature, languages, art, philosophy, business, finance, accounting, administration, political science, mathematics, chemistry, biology, anthropology, and many other subjects.

A great source for information about U.S. colleges is the U.S. News and World Report's college rankings, which can be purchased at your local bookstore and viewed online (<http://www.usnews.com/>). Peterson's (<http://www.petersons.com/>) is another good source. Also, if you are interested in your child receiving financial assistance you will need to fill out a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) application – visit www.fafsa.ed.gov for online assistance.



Are You Having Fun Yet? Get Ready to Have Fun in America!

Now that the essentials are aside, get ready to have fun in America! There is an abundance of great activities to participate in when you arrive in the U.S. whether you enjoy playing sports or watching sporting events, shopping, eating at new restaurants, hiking, camping, listening to live music, going to the beach, or just about anything else. Joining a club or team or attending classes can be a wonderful way to meet people in your new community.

Showing Your Athletic Ability

Most cities in the U.S. have sports clubs and teams that you can join, including baseball, basketball, volleyball, football, tennis, and soccer leagues. You should contact your city's recreational department for information about joining one of these leagues. There is often a local organization, such as the YMCA (<http://www.ymca.net/>), which will have information on sports activities. Craigslist.org (<http://www.craigslist.org/>) is another source that provides activities and classes in your area. Sometimes local high schools and colleges have recreational facilities and classes that are open to the community during certain hours, such as tennis courts or aerobics classes. You can find local community colleges or high schools in your local yellow pages and call them to find out about these options. Larger parks often offer athletic recreation activities and may have community recreation classes. They may also have hiking, biking, and riding trails, and other outdoor activities.

Cheering for Your New Favorite Team

If your interest in sports is as a spectator, many cities have their own sports teams. You can attend games by calling the ticket office and purchasing tickets for your local team. You can also check TicketMaster.com (<http://www.ticketmaster.com/>). In addition, local high schools and colleges will have sporting events that you can attend.

Shop 'Til You Drop

Most cities will have at least one mall. Big cities, such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta, and Dallas, have multiple malls and large stores for your shopping pleasure. A mall consists of a group of stores congregated together. In warm climates, malls can be found outdoors. In climates that experience cold weather, malls are usually under one roof in case of bad weather. Some malls cover very large areas, such as Mall of America located in Minneapolis, which is one of the largest malls in the world. Some malls are much smaller, but still contain at least a few larger stores, which may include stores like Sears, JC Penney, or Macy's. Malls also have smaller specialty stores where you can buy items such as gourmet candies, shoes, cooking supplies, greeting cards and stationary, candles, bath accessories, jewelry, and more. Most malls also contain food courts where you can have lunch, a snack, a cup of coffee, or fast food. Some malls also have good, upscale restaurants.



Fine Dining or A Casual Night Out

If you enjoy eating out at restaurants, do not like to cook, or simply like trying new cuisines, there are usually many eateries to try throughout the U.S. Big cities will have a wide variety of cuisines to choose from, while smaller cities may be more limited in choices.

Finding good restaurants to try is often accomplished through word of mouth from co-workers, neighbors, friends, or other people in your area. You can check your local paper and other local publications that provide reviews on restaurants. You can also purchase the Zagat Guide at your local bookstore. It rates restaurants in your area. Zagat Guide details can also be viewed online (<http://www.zagat.com/>). The Entertainment Book (<http://www.entertainment.com/>) is also a good source and it includes coupons to many delicious restaurants. Another source used to find good restaurants is City Search (<http://www.citysearch.com/>).

America is also filled with fast food restaurants. These restaurants are inexpensive places you can stop for usually five minutes or less and get a meal to go or dine at the establishment after retrieving your meal at the counter. Popular fast food restaurants include McDonald's, Burger King, Carl's Jr., Jack in the Box, Taco Bell, Del Taco, Arby's, and Wendy's.

Enjoying the Great Outdoors and Beyond

During a weekend or vacation, you may want to consider traveling to other parts of the U.S. or the state where you are residing. Some beautiful places in the U.S. are part of the national and state park system. You can call your local state park office to find out the parks that are closest to you. You can also view the national parks by state online (<http://www.nps.gov/>). Many parks include lakes with beaches, picnic areas, hiking trails, bike riding trails, fishing areas, and scenic sites, such as Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona and Yosemite National Park in Northern California. You can camp overnight at most parks for a small fee.

It is also fun to take a trip even if just for one day to explore the sights near your home. Most cities have incredible sights within a few hours driving distance. You can look in your local newspaper or other periodicals to find out about these sights or upcoming parades, art fairs, circuses, farmer's markets, and more in your area. Your state's capital, local beaches, historical sites, and other places are always interesting to see and explore.

Many cities have zoos, wild animal parks, or botanical gardens where animals, plants, and flowers are on display to be viewed by the public.

Theme Parks

The U.S. has some of the best theme parks in the world, such as Disney World, Disney Land, Magic Mountain, Raging Waters, Sea World, and many others. Smaller cities have smaller amusement parks that include roller coaster and amusement rides and water parks with water slides, wave pools, and swimming pools. You can find local theme parks or amusement parks in your area by checking local newspapers and other periodicals and the yellow pages.



Hotels

If you travel for more than a day trip, you may want to stay at a hotel. There are a range of hotel types from low budget motels or hostels to expensive, luxury, five-star hotels. Guide books such as Lonely Planet (<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/>), Fodor's (<http://www.fodors.com/>), and Let's Go (<http://www.letsgo.com/>) can be purchased at your local bookstore and can help you find suitable accommodations in a variety of price ranges.

You should try to make reservations ahead of time, especially on weekends, over holidays, and during summer months, since hotels become busy and may be booked. Reserving rooms ahead of time also helps to preserve a better rate.

Playing or Listening to Live Music

If you enjoy playing music, you can look in your local newspaper, yellow pages, or on Craigslist.org (<http://www.craigslist.org/>) to find musicians to play with in your area.

If you like to listen to live music, most cities have venues, such as the city's amphitheater or civic center, where bands and solo musicians play concerts or play casually for viewers to enjoy. Sometimes these events are free. Other times, you can purchase tickets by calling the venue where the band or musician is playing or checking TicketMaster.com, (<http://www.ticketmaster.com/>). Most cities also have nightclubs that feature local musicians.

Going to the Theater or Dance Performances or Participating Yourself

Most cities have theaters that produce plays, musicals, operas, symphonies, or ballet, classical dance, or other dance performances regularly. To find out about these performances, you can contact your local ticket office or civic center or look for information in your local newspaper.

Local theater groups also offer some form of drama classes and some will allow people to try out for a role in a play. Tryouts are posted at the theater company's building and are usually announced in local newspapers and other periodicals. Local community centers often have dance classes available to the public. You can look in your local newspaper for information about these classes.

Museums

Most cities will have multiple museums, including an art museum and a history museum, amongst others. Some locations have specialty museums dedicated to one topic, such as photography, aviation, music, automobiles, or science. Some museums are hands on for children to learn.

Art

There are often art classes open to adults through local colleges and community centers. These classes can include art appreciation, pottery, painting, crafts, or drawing classes.



The Melting Pot Culture

America has traditionally been known as a melting pot based on the variety of cultures infused in this country. There are great regional and subcultural differences in America making American culture very mixed. America's traditions came from immigrants bringing their traditions with them to the U.S., which is most noticeable in cuisine and during holiday months. In America, traditions are passed through the generations. The traditions that are most eminent in U.S. society are citizenship, American holiday celebrations, entrepreneurial spirit, competition, leadership, and positive attitude. Americans have equal rights under the law and expect to be given equal opportunities as all others. Few Americans speak multiple languages fluently, and many only speak English.

Quirks About Americans

Americans shake hands with each other when they first meet or meet again. Social kissing, as a greeting, is sometimes exchanged between people who know each other well. American men rarely embrace each other or kiss. Americans do not usually talk, especially above a whisper, when in a movie theater or at a play, musical, or other performance, besides a concert.

American Parties

When invited to a party, you should ask how to dress. For some people, informal attire means blue jeans and t-shirts. For other people, it can mean sports jackets and ties. You should ask specific questions about whether you need to wear a dress or jacket and tie. The phrases formal or black tie mean that men should wear tuxedos and women should wear evening gowns. If you are invited to someone's home for dinner, it is customary to bring a small gift like a bottle of wine, candy, or flowers. If it is a special occasion like a birthday party, engagement party, or baby shower, then a substantial gift, such as a gift certificate to the person's favorite store, a nice bowl or set of dishes, or a blanket or stuffed animal, is more appropriate.

Some parties are called pot luck, where everyone brings a dish to share with the other people attending the party. The dish each person should bring is usually assigned ahead of time. Other parties are card parties, which are common in America. Bridge and poker are the two most popular card games played, usually for small amounts of money. Still other parties are to play games, such as charades, Monopoly, Trivial Pursuit, Pictionary, or Cranium.



Adjusting to Life in America

It may take some time to get adjusted to the U.S. since you will be assimilating into a new culture. You can utilize resources available to help you, such as a language class or local community groups, which can give you a chance to communicate with people in your native language to help lessen any loneliness you feel while adjusting to the United States.

It will help if you get involved with Americans through a hobby, sports team, volunteering, art or aerobics classes, or other activities where you will be doing things with people, which will boost your comfort level in the U.S. and around Americans. Meeting new people will also help lessen your loneliness and diminish the extent that you miss your home country. It might also help to set goals for yourself, such as asking a co-worker to lunch by the end of the week, memorizing the route to your work, or learning at least ten words in English weekly.

Winter Celebrations

The winter season is a very celebratory time for people in the U.S. Many Americans celebrate Christmas. Christmas colors are red and green. You will see Christmas trees, poinsettias, nativity scenes, Christmas wreaths, mistletoe, many Christmas candies and cookies, and snowmen all around during the winter months.

Hanukkah or Chanukah is the Jewish festival of lights, which is also celebrated during the winter season. Kwanzaa is an African American holiday celebrated in December. Ramadan is celebrated in winter by Muslims who spend one month asserting their dedication to their religion and self-reflecting through fasting.

Holidays

Some holidays in America are federally recognized by the government. These holidays include Christmas Day, New Year's Day, Thanksgiving Day, Independence Day (Fourth of July), Veterans Day, Labor Day, Memorial Day, Columbus Day, Presidents' Day, and Martin Luther King, Jr's birthday.

Thanksgiving is an annual one-day holiday to give thanks for the things you have at the end of the harvest season, or more modernly, to give thanks for everyone and everything you have in your life. In the U.S., Thanksgiving is celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November. During Thanksgiving, people usually get together with family and friends and make traditional dishes, such as turkey, mashed potatoes, stuffing, and gravy. It is traditional to go around the dinner table and say what each person is thankful for.

New Year's Day is always on January 1, one week after Christmas. It marks the end of the passing year. Radio, television, newspapers, and magazines usually publish year-end articles that review changes that occurred during the past year, most commonly related to politics, natural disasters, music, and the arts, along with a list of significant or famous people who died over the past year. Many Americans celebrate the New Year on December 31, or New Year's Eve, with a party or celebratory dinner, where couples kiss when the clock strikes midnight and the New Year has officially begun.



The Fourth of July, or Independence Day, celebrates the adoption of the Declaration of Independence when America declared independence from Great Britain. Many people in the U.S. celebrate the Fourth of July by having parties or barbeques, especially at the beach if you live near or in a beach town. There are traditionally fireworks shown in the early evening as an end to the Fourth of July day.

Memorial Day is observed on the last Monday of May. It commemorates U.S. men and women who have died while performing military service for America. Veterans Day is a holiday honoring military veterans. It commemorates the anniversary of the signing of the armistice that ended World War I. Veterans Day is a time to thank living veterans for their service and acknowledge their contributions to U.S. national security.

Labor Day takes place on the first Monday in September. It originated to create a day off for the working man. It marks the symbolic end of summer. Columbus Day commemorates the date that Christopher Columbus arrived in the New World.



Requirements of Green Card Holders

Alien Registration Cards, also known as Green- Cards, or Permanent Resident Cards (Form I-551), are issued to foreign nationals who qualify as lawful permanent residents. You should make sure to always carry your green card with you, the same way you carry your driver's license and credit cards with you daily. The green card serves as a permit for employment in the United States and as a visa. You may use the card to return to the U.S. after a temporary absence abroad not exceeding one year.

Green cards expire after ten years and need to be renewed before expiration. Children who obtain permanent residence prior to the age of fourteen must apply for a new green card after their fourteenth birthday. Expiration of the green card does not mean that you are no longer a permanent resident, but an expired green card cannot be used to establish employment eligibility or as a visa for traveling abroad.

Green cards are machine readable and contain your photograph, fingerprints, signature, and optical patterns to prevent counterfeiting. It is highly recommended that you make a photocopy, front and back, of your green-card for safekeeping in the event that it is lost. If your green card is lost, mutilated, or destroyed, a replacement card can be issued. If you are naturalized, permanently leave the U.S., are deported, or die, your green card must be surrendered to U.S. immigration officials.

Maintaining Permanent Resident Status

Permanent residence can be lost if you are deemed to have abandoned it. If more than one year passes before you return to the U.S. from abroad, your green card is no longer valid as a Reentry Permit.

If you have been outside the U.S. for more than one year but less than two years, you must obtain a Reentry Permit from the U.S. CIS. You must be physically present in the United States when you file the Reentry Permit application. The Reentry Permit may then be sent to a U.S. Embassy or Consulate or a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) office abroad for you to pick up. You must specify this when you file your reentry permit application.

If you are outside the U.S. for more than two years, you must obtain a special immigrant visa from a U.S. Consulate or Embassy abroad, usually after establishing that you have not abandoned your permanent resident status. If you intend to apply for naturalization in the future, absences from the U.S. of one year or more will generally break the continuity of your required continuous residence in the U.S. It is recommended that you file Form N-470, Application to Preserve Residence for Naturalization Purposes.



To maintain lawful permanent resident status while abroad, you must demonstrate the intent to remain in the U.S. as a permanent resident. U.S. CIS generally considers the following factors:

- Length of and purpose for your absence
- Whether or not you continued to file U.S. tax returns
- Whether or not you maintained a U.S. address
- Whether or not you maintained a U.S. bank account
- Whether or not you maintained a U.S. driver's license
- The location of your close family members
- The location and nature of your employment.

Absences from the United States

The length of time that you spend outside the U.S. is a primary factor in determining your intent to maintain permanent resident status. Absences of more than six months from the United States raise a rebuttable presumption that you intended to abandon your permanent resident status. Absences of more than one year invalidate the green card as an entry document, unless you also hold a valid Reentry Permit. If you are continuously outside the U.S. for more than one year, you may still be a U.S. permanent resident, but a return resident visa from a U.S. Consulate will probably need to be obtained in order for you to re-enter the U.S., unless you possess a valid Reentry Permit. (Prolonged absences may also adversely impact U.S. citizenship eligibility, unless you have a Reentry Permit.)

Filing U.S. Income Tax Returns

Failure to file U.S. income taxes as a permanent resident is considered persuasive evidence that you intended to abandon your permanent residence and, unless corrected, will almost certainly result in loss of permanent resident status for immigration purposes. You must continue to file U.S. tax returns as a resident, even during a stay abroad, in order to maintain permanent resident status.

Filing for a Reentry Permit

A reentry permit is usually granted for two years from the date of issuance and serves as recognition by U.S. CIS that you do not intend to abandon permanent residence in the U.S. despite a prolonged absence outside of the U.S. The application must be submitted while you are physically in the U.S., and must be used for re-entry prior to the expiration of the document.



Maintaining Other Ties to the United States

It is generally helpful to continue ties to the U.S. such as a keeping your driver's license, credit cards, bank accounts, club memberships, and others things current. The possession of residential or other property in the U.S. is also helpful.

U.S. Selective Service Registration

Foreign national men between the ages of 18 and 26 must register for Selective Service within 30 days of becoming permanent residents. Since there is no active draft presently in effect, this is strictly a registration requirement. Registration can be done at most U.S. post offices.

Children

If an unmarried child under the age of 21 does not obtain U.S. permanent residence simultaneously with his or her parents, the child must complete the process prior to turning 21 in order to receive permanent residence on a follow-to-join basis. Otherwise, the child will likely have to pursue permanent residence through a family-based second preference petition filed by his or her parent. These second preference petitions are subject to lengthy quota backlogs of many years. The child loses eligibility in this category if he or she gets married.

Change of Address

You are required to notify the U.S. CIS of a change in your address by filing Form AR-11 within ten days of changing your address. The change of address form, Form AR-11, can be downloaded from the U.S. CIS website (<http://www.uscis.gov/>).



Your Next Move: Becoming a U.S. Citizen Through Naturalization

Naturalization is the process you must go through to become a U.S. Citizen.

To be eligible for naturalization, you must generally reside in the United States continuously for 5 years following your establishment of permanent residence. The required 5 year time period is reduced to 3 years if you are married to a U.S. citizen. You must also possess good moral character, have sufficient English and U.S. civics knowledge, and pledge to uphold the United States Constitution. (As discussed above, if you are absent from the U.S. for more than 6 months but for less than one year, the continuity of residence is broken unless you can supply a reasonable explanation for the absence. An absence of one year or more destroys the continuity of residence unless you take appropriate steps prior to the expiration of the year.)

You may file for naturalization up to 3 months before you have met the continuous residence for 5 years requirement. You must complete Form N-400 and send it to the appropriate U.S. CIS service center along with two photographs, the filing fee, and other necessary supporting documents.

After filing your naturalization application with the U.S. CIS, you will receive an appointment letter with the date and location to get your fingerprints taken. The U.S. CIS sends your fingerprints to the FBI to perform a criminal background check on you.

The U.S. CIS will send you an interview notice in the mail that will tell you the date, time, and place of your interview. If you fail to bring the necessary documents to your interview, your case may be delayed or denied. During the interview, your ability to read, write and speak English will be tested. You will also have to answer a set of civics questions to test your knowledge and understanding of U.S. history and government.

At the time of applying for citizenship, you will be required to list each absence from the U.S. since you became a permanent resident. It is recommended that you keep a log of the day, month, and year of each departure from and return to the U.S. during your time as a permanent resident.



Useful Website Links

The following websites will be useful to you once you arrive in the U.S. Amongst these websites are many great nurse websites that have information about being a nurse in the U.S., networking, and continuing education classes.

U.S. Government Websites

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (U.S. CIS)

<http://www.uscis.gov/>

U.S. Department of State

<http://usembassy.state.gov/>

U.S. Embassy and Consular Information

<http://usembassy.state.gov/>

U.S. Social Security Administration

<http://www.ssa.gov/>

Internal Revenue Services (IRS)

<http://www.irs.gov/>

FirstGov

<http://www.usa.gov/>

The U.S. Senate

<http://www.senate.gov/>

The White House

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/>



Other Websites

American Nurse Association

<http://www.ana.org/>

National Council of State Boards of Nursing

<https://www.ncsbn.org/>

National League for Nursing

<http://www.nln.org/>

Newspapers Online

<http://www.newspapers.com/>

N.Y. Times

<http://www.nytimes.com/>

Business/Finance

U.S. Chamber of Commerce

<http://www.uschamber.com/>

National Weather Service

<http://www.nws.noaa.gov/>



The Benefits to Becoming a Proud American

The United States Constitution is one of America's most important documents and delineates how the U.S. government is run. It also guarantees certain rights to all people living in the United States. Some important freedoms guaranteed to people in the U.S. are freedom of religion and speech and the right to a fair trial if accused of a crime.

U.S. citizens are eligible for many additional benefits. Some of these benefits are: the right to vote and have a voice in the way the government is run; the right to hold elected office, except for the offices of President and Vice President, which can only be held by people born in the United States; the right to hold certain government jobs; the ability to petition for immediate relatives to join you in the U.S. without being subject to visa limits; and certain types of public assistance.

As a U.S. citizen, you also receive protection from forced removal from the U.S. As a permanent resident, you remain within the authority of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and the immigration courts and can be removed for illegal activity. As a U.S. citizen, you have the right to an attorney and a fair trial without being removed.

Another benefit is that permanent resident children under the age of eighteen who are in the lawful and physical custody of you as their naturalizing parent automatically become U.S. citizens when you are naturalized.

Finally, as a U.S. citizen, you are not restricted on the time you can spend outside the U.S. As discussed earlier, as a permanent resident, you can lose your status if you leave the U.S. for 6 months or longer. For extended absences, as a permanent resident, you must obtain a Reentry Permit. As a U.S. citizen, you can skip this process and live abroad without jeopardizing your citizenship status. Travel is also more convenient because many countries do not require visas from U.S. Citizens.

If you have any questions after reviewing the information in this e-zine guide, please feel free contact us at Immigration Compliance Group, where we have affiliated attorneys and professional staff ready to help you with your immigration and naturalization needs.

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