Discovering
The USA

The United States of America (USA) is a land of boundless opportunities. Spanning across North America, it stands as a country defined by its diversity, innovation, and resilience.

With 50 states, the USA is the third-largest country in the world by both land area and population, offering a dynamic mix of cultures, landscapes, and ambitions.

From the bustling streets of New York City to the tranquil beauty of its national parks, it's a place where people come together to build, create, and inspire.

Known for its leadership in technology, business, and culture, the USA is a beacon of hope and progress. Rooted in the pursuit of freedom and equality, its rich history continues to guide its journey toward a brighter future for all.

Activity Level
Low level

Visa Process

UK, Australian and New Zealand citizens can travel to the United States without a traditional visa under the Visa Waiver Programme (VWP), provided they secure an approved ESTA prior to travel.

This permits stays of up to 90 days for tourism or business. However, those with certain criminal records, previous US entry refusals, or who have visited Cuba after January 2021 must apply for a visa. For further details, consult the US embassy website.

Credit Cards

Credit cards are widely accepted in the United States. Major brands like Visa, Mastercard, American Express, and Discover are commonly used at shops, restaurants, hotels, and other businesses.

However, it's always a good idea to carry some cash for smaller establishments or in case of card minimums.

Currency

The currency used in the United States is the US Dollar (USD).

Air conditioning and heating

Air conditioning is commonly found in hotels across the USA, especially in warmer regions or during the summer months. Most modern hotels, particularly in cities and popular tourist areas, offer air-conditioned rooms for guest comfort.

Dining

Food in the U.S. is diverse, reflecting its multicultural heritage with influences from indigenous, European, African, Asian, and Latin American cuisines.

Classic dishes include burgers, BBQ, mac & cheese, fried chicken, and apple pie, while regional specialties range from New England clam chowder to Louisiana gumbo and Tex-Mex.

International flavours are widely embraced, with popular adaptations of Chinese, Italian, Japanese, and Middle Eastern dishes. Modern trends focus on farm-to-table dining, plant-based alternatives, fusion cuisine, and a thriving food truck culture, making American food a dynamic and ever-evolving experience.

Plug Sockets

The United States uses Type A and Type B plug sockets. Type A has two flat parallel pins, while Type B includes a grounding pin in addition to the two flat pins. The standard voltage is 120V, with a frequency of 60Hz.

If you're travelling from the UK or Australia, you'll need a plug adapter and may also require a voltage converter for devices not compatible with 120V.

Pharmacies

Pharmacy opening hours in the USA can vary, but most pharmacies are open from 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM, Monday through Friday. Many larger chain pharmacies (like CVS, Walgreens, and Rite Aid) also have extended hours, with some open 24 hours a day, especially in major cities.

On weekends, pharmacies typically open later, around 10:00 AM, and close earlier, around 5:00 PM or 6:00 PM. It's best to check with the specific pharmacy for their hours.



Summer in the USA is typically hot, with temperatures ranging from 20°C to 35°C (68°F to 95°F). The South and Midwest are humid, the Southwest is dry and hot, and coastal areas are milder. Thunderstorms are common in the Midwest and Southeast, with hurricanes possible along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts.



Summer Average	Winter Average
21-26°C	4-14°C



Summer Average	Winter Average
18-27°C	-3-2°C



Summer Average	Winter Average
13-20°C	7-13°C



Summer Average	Winter Average
15-26°C	8-18°C



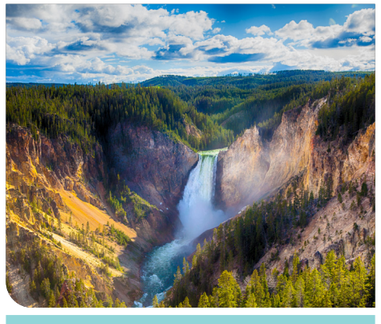
Summer Average	Winter Average
27-38°C	10-16°C

Check-in process

You will be required to present your passport when checking into your hotel, please have this ready. In most hotels in the USA, check-in time is typically between 3:00 PM and 4:00 PM. However, this can vary depending on the hotel. It's always a good idea to confirm the specific check-in time when making your reservation. If you arrive earlier, you may be able to check in early if the room is ready, but this is not guaranteed.







Emergency

In an emergency in the USA, call 911. This number connects you to police, fire, or medical emergency services. It's available 24/7 and should be used for any urgent situation requiring immediate assistance.

Gratuities

In the USA, tipping is an important part of service culture, especially in restaurants, where waitstaff often rely on tips to supplement their income. Here are some general guidelines:

Restaurants: Tip around 15-20% of the bill before tax. For exceptional service, you can tip more.

Bars: $1-2 per drink or 15-20% of the total tab.

Hotel staff: $1-2 per night for housekeeping, and $1-2 for bellhops per bag.

Taxis and rideshare (e.g. Uber): 10-15% of the fare.
Valets: $1-2 when your car is returned to you.

Tour guides: $5-10 per person for group tours, or more for private tours. Tipping is generally not included in the bill, except in some larger groups or high-end establishments, so always check the receipt.

Cultural Norms

Cultural norms in the U.S. vary by region but generally emphasise individuality, direct communication, and informality. Here are some key ones:

Individualism – Americans value personal freedom, independence, and self-expression.

Punctuality – Being on time is important, especially for work, meetings, and appointments.

Direct Communication – People tend to be straightforward and appreciate honesty, even in business and personal interactions.

Informality – First names are commonly used, even in professional settings, and casual dress is widely accepted.

Tipping Culture – Tipping (15-20%) is expected at restaurants, bars, and for services like taxis and haircuts.

Diversity & Inclusivity – The U.S. is culturally diverse, and respect for different backgrounds, identities, and beliefs is valued.

Personal Space – Americans generally prefer about an arm's length of personal space when talking to others.

Small Talk – Casual conversations about weather, sports, or current events are common, especially with strangers.

Patriotism – Many Americans take pride in their country, with national symbols like the flag and anthem holding great significance.



What to pack

Essentials:

Passport & Visa: Ensure you have your passport, visa, and any necessary travel documents.

Travel Insurance: Always a good idea for unexpected situations.

Money: Cash (especially small denominations) and credit/debit cards.

Health Kit: Any prescription medications, over-the-counter medicines (Ensure that you travel with these in your hand luggage).

Clothing:

For summer in the USA, pack light, breathable clothes (cotton and linen), swimwear, comfortable shoes, a hat, and a light jacket for evenings.

Please keep in mind the hot temperatures, and pack accordingly for both comfort and protection.

Personal Items:

Toiletries: Basic items like toothpaste, shampoo, soap, and any specific personal items you use.

Sunscreen & Sunglasses

Insect Repellent: For extra protection.

Electronics:

Phone & Charger: With a local SIM card, you can have better connectivity and avoid high roaming charges.

Camera: To capture your travels (with extra memory cards and batteries).

Other Useful Items:

Small Backpack/Daypack: For day trips and carrying essentials.

Hand Sanitiser: For cleanliness on the go.

