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# IENA SUMMER WORK & TRAVEL HANDBOOK

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## IENA SUMMER WORK & TRAVEL HANDBOOK

This handbook includes information on visa rules, tax, social security, accommodations, employment, money, American culture, health and safety, your responsibilities, and general travel hints and tips. Read it before you go and refer to it often while you are in the US.

To view and download important welcome documents, forms, insurance information/claim forms, and other information, log-in to your IENA use account at [www.iena.org](http://www.iena.org).

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## Welcome to the US



### **Congratulations!**

You've made it to another culture! By living and working here, you now can sample American life in a way that a tourist never could. This trip could be one of the best experiences of your life, and one that you will always remember.

When you're not working, on days off and when you're travelling at the end of the program, make it part of your plans to visit US cities, areas of scenic beauty and other places of interest. You are in the US on a cultural exchange visa and should make every effort to see and learn as much about the US as possible. Try to visit some of the National and Historic Parks – the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, Yosemite, the Rocky Mountains and Arcadia are some of the best. Go to a baseball game, visit a local art gallery or museum, go to a country or state fair. You will have fun, have a chance to meet Americans, learn about American life and culture and in so doing you will get so much more out of your time in the US.

We have prepared this program handbook to help you make the most of your stay. Many of the questions you will have while in the US about your visa, program regulations, US taxes, insurance, money and emergency situations are answered in the following pages. We have also included phone numbers and contacts that may be helpful to you throughout your stay.

Some of the information will only be useful and relevant when you are faced with particular circumstances, so it is important to print this handbook and take with you to the US. You can also view it on-line (via your profile on [www.iena.org](http://www.iena.org)). The phone numbers, contacts, and advice will help you in many situations. If you have traveled in the US previously, some of the information here will be familiar to you, but there will also be new information which you need to know. For everyone, this booklet is essential to your trip.

This handbook, along with all the other on-line documents, should be read in conjunction with the other pieces of information you already have. You will never be short of bedtime reading material on this program!

**With best wishes for a fantastic trip,**

**The staff at IENA**

## IENA – Your Sponsor in the US



You will be entering the US on an Exchange Visitor Program visa called a J-1 Summer Work/Travel visa. J-1 visas are only available to participants on exchange visitor programs which have been approved by the US State Department.

Your program sponsor, IENA (International Exchange of North America) has for many years provided J-1 programs for international students. When you applied to the program, you actually applied to IENA, who is the US sponsor of the program. IENA issued the DS-2019 which you used to apply for your J-1 visa.

Ultimately, IENA is responsible for you during your visit to the US, and your primary contact. We are here to help you throughout your stay and are available to assist you with any major problem or emergency. However, before you call the IENA office, please read this booklet. It may save you having to call us!

Finding solutions to your own problems is a valuable part of the international exchange participants' experience and is a reason why most members find it so rewarding. For real and urgent problems – job, financial, medical, personal and academic – don't hesitate to contact us.

Ultimately the purpose of IENA is to assist you. However, we are not open 7 days a week or 24 hours a day. Our SWT office is located in Hackettstown, New Jersey, about an hour from New York City. You can contact us at +1 (908) 628-0527-or by e-mail at [info@iena.org](mailto:info@iena.org). Our regular office hours are 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., East Coast time Monday to Friday. At all other times there is a voicemail which is regularly monitored. Leave a message and we will respond at the first opportunity. Please speak slowly and clearly when leaving a message and make sure you leave a way for us to contact you (your cell phone number, employer's phone number or your email address).

IENA also provides a 24-hour emergency contact system, details of which are on the voicemail. The number is +1 (888) 724-4292 extension 4.

## Packing

The advice of thousands of previous participants is - travel light! Remember that not only do you have to carry your luggage with you the whole season, but that you will probably want to take much more back home with you at the end of your stay.



Generally you are allowed to check in one or two pieces of luggage and you are allowed to take one small piece of hand luggage on the plane with you. However, overall baggage allowances are determined by the individual airlines and they can charge hefty fees for excess luggage. Baggage allowances on domestic flights (i.e. flights within the US) tend to be lower than on international flights and most airlines now charge for checked-in bags. Check with the airline before you start packing.

Please label all your bags clearly with your name and US destination address. A label inside your bag is also very useful in case the outside one gets torn off. You cannot take items such as guitars, knives, or sports equipment onto the plane with you. They must be checked and therefore should be very well packed to protect them during the journey. The airlines will usually carry these larger items free of charge as long as the item is within your luggage allowance. Again, we stress that you check with your airline ahead of time to see what your luggage allowance will be.

We recommend you take enough clothes to last you at least a week (preferably longer) before you have to wash them.

You will probably find a backpack easier to manage than a suitcase, but this depends on how much you will be traveling. Backpacks can get battered going through baggage handling and generally don't provide as much protection as a suitcase. Make sure to tuck in any dangling straps as tightly as possible so they don't get caught in the conveyor belts. You can buy a special bag for your backpack to give it a little more protection.

### **Airline baggage security**

You may lock your checked bags when flying to the US. However, all passengers traveling within and from the US have to leave their luggage unlocked or use special three-dial combination locks approved by the Transport Security Administration. Airport staff hold special master keys to them which enable inspection of locked luggage without damaging the lock or your bag. If you use a regular lock, airport screeners may break into your bag for inspection.

### **Hand luggage**

Check with your airline once you receive your itinerary as to exactly what you are allowed to carry onto the plane. Generally you are allowed one small piece of luggage weighing no more than 6kg (13lbs). This bag must be able to fit under the seat in front of you or in the overhead compartment.

For safety reasons, dangerous articles such as razor blades, scissors and knives cannot be carried in your hand luggage. Check with your airline.

### **Hypodermic syringes**

If you need to inject yourself for a medical reason during the flight, you are permitted to carry syringes in the cabin. You may be asked to produce medical evidence such as a doctor's letter when you check in or at security screening. This letter should be kept with you at all times.

### **Liquids, aerosols and gels**

All liquids, aerosols and gels in your carry-on baggage must be in containers of 10ml or less. These containers must be packed in a re-sealable transparent plastic bag of 1 liter volume (this is a re-sealable sandwich bag like those available at your local supermarket). You are only allowed to carry one such bag in your carry on. The plastic bag must be re-sealable and presented separately from all other carry-on baggage at the screening point. For a full explanation and details on these restrictions when flying to and within the US please see the following website: [www.tsa.gov/traveler-information](http://www.tsa.gov/traveler-information)

We suggest you also check with your own airline regarding any special policies they may have locally.

### **Suggested hand luggage packing items**

As your backpack/suitcase could go astray, we suggest you pack the following in your hand luggage. Most importantly:

- 1) Passport! (containing your J-1 visa stamp)
- 2) DS-2019

**Without these documents, you will not be allowed to fly.**

### **Plus...**

- Your flight information including all onward tickets/e-tickets. and/or policy.
- Traveler's checks (keep the record slip/receipts separate).
- Your insurance information receipt - ID Card, Certificate
- Driver's license (if you have one) - and also an International Driving Permit.
- ISIC card or other form of photo ID. (You will sometimes be asked for two forms of photo ID.)

- Any medication and/or prescriptions you may be taking. You will need a letter from your doctor if you are on prescribed drugs.
- Employer's contact information and contract/job offer letter showing address and telephone number.
- All personal valuables such as camera, phone, laptop, iPod, glasses, contact lenses.
- A pen, notepad, and this handbook!

Please do not leave your luggage unattended at any time even for the briefest period. Don't accept an offer from a stranger to guard them for you.

### **Duty free allowance**

You are permitted to take the following Duty Free into the US: 1 US quart of alcoholic beverages, 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars (not Cuban) or 250 grams of tobacco, gifts up to \$100 (including perfume and up to 100 cigarettes).

In addition you may take in a further \$1,000 worth of gifts on which 10% duty is payable. If you are under 21 years of age, you are not entitled to the tobacco or alcohol allowance.

You may not take fruit, flowers, vegetable, meat, fish or fresh dairy products into the US (however well- wrapped or hermetically sealed), nor switch blade knives, liquor filled candy or products made abroad by convicts.

### **During your flight**

It's a long flight so take something to read and spare batteries for any electronic devices. If you wear contact lenses, you will probably have had them in for many hours even before you get on the flight. You may find they dry out – very painful! Travel in comfortable clothes and we suggest carrying a sweater/sweatshirt as it can be cool on the aircraft. We recommend drinking plenty of water, but beware the effects of altitude when drinking alcohol. If you have food allergies or special meal requests, you should take something with you to eat in case you don't like what the airline offers.

## **Arrival in the US**

### **US Immigration**

You will need to go through immigration after you get off the plane. Due to rigorous security procedures, you may have to stand in for some time before your entry to the US is approved. Be patient.

Immigration officers take their job very seriously and are not amused by jokes or a cavalier attitude. Please treat them with respect and courtesy.

You will need to hand your passport and DS-2019 to the officer. (Important note: If you arrive by car at a US port of entry, you will need to complete an I-94 arrival/departure form.) The officer will ask you several questions. Your answers (as well as the way you answer them) will determine how quickly and easily you will enter the US.

Some common questions are:

Q. Why are you coming to the US? A. As a J-1 program participant.

Q. How long do you intend to stay in the US? A. Until my DS-2019 expires.



The officer will then scan your fingerprints and take your photo (similar to what happens at the US Embassy interview).



They will stamp your passport with the stamp here; DS stands for "Duration of Status."

If you do not receive the stamp, please POLITELY point it out to the Immigration Officer. YOUR VISA IS NOT VALID WITHOUT THE STAMP. Once you leave the airport it is extremely difficult to get the problem fixed.

When the immigration officer has stamped your passport, he/she will return your passport and DS-2019.

The stamp shows the date and place you entered the US and the period you are authorized to stay. This should say "D/S" which means "Duration of Status". This refers to the dates in section 3 of your DS-2019 (plus the 30-day grace period for travel). You must leave the country no more than 30 days after the end date in section 3 or you will be breaking the law and will have overstayed your visa.

\*\* Your I-94 arrival/departure form is electronic. You can print a copy of the form at [www.cbp.gov/i94](http://www.cbp.gov/i94) \*\*

Keep the DS-2019 with your passport at all times. Remember the J-1 visa and DS-2019 are not valid separately. If you lose either, please contact IENA immediately.

### Collecting your bags

From Immigration, you enter the baggage hall where your bags will arrive on the carousel. If you have waited a long time at Immigration, your bags may have been unloaded onto the floor.

You will next pass through Customs. Expect that your bags may be searched. Please remember to be polite and patient if this happens. You hand the Customs Officer your declaration form (which you filled out on the plane), then head out of the hall.

### Lost/damaged/delayed bags

If your bags are damaged or lost, please report it immediately to the airline and get a formal Property Irregularity Report (PIR). You will need this to follow up with the airline and for insurance purposes. Note that the PIR is not a claim form and you will need to obtain one if you subsequently wish to make a claim with the airline. You will need to provide an address in the US for them to contact you. If you know your employer's address, please give them that; otherwise give them the address of the hotel/hostel where you will spend the first night or two. If your bags have not turned up by the time you leave that hotel/hostel, call the airline and give them your next address.

The airlines will not accept responsibility for damaged baggage reported to them after you have left the airport.

## During your stay

### Your J-1 visa, DS2019, and the visa rules



Being granted a J-1 visa is a special privilege – it's one of the few ways you can work legally in the US. However, like all visas, there are strict rules attached to it and if you break any of these, you run the risk of having your visa canceled. A visa cancellation will affect your ability to return to the US in the future, even as a visitor.

Your DS-2019 is a very important document. DO NOT lose it. It is the white document sent to you upon acceptance to the program and is signed in blue ink by your sponsor, IENA. This document allows you to take part in the Work and Travel program for the period indicated on the form. Read this document carefully and if you have any questions, please contact IENA.

You are only allowed to work for the duration shown in section 3 of your DS-2019. After the end date shown in section 3 you have a 30-day grace period that allows you to remain in the US as a tourist. You must leave no later than the end of the 30-day grace period as there are harsh penalties for over-staying, even if only by one day.

#### **What if I want to spend more time in the US?**

Sorry, but your J-1 visa cannot be extended under any circumstances. IENA cannot continue to sponsor you as the program is only authorized to operate during the academic summer months of each participating country. When you joined this program, you agreed that you would leave the US by the program end date. Both the US government and IENA expect you to honor your agreement.

If you are a final year student, there is only one sensible way to extend your stay in the US – leave the US for a short period and then re-enter on another visa. The type of visa you will need and how you get that differs depending on what nationality you are. Before you make any plans, we suggest you call IENA first and we will do our best to advise you.

#### **What if I want to leave the US during my J-1 visa stay?**

You first need to check to see if your J-1 is a multiple entry visa that will allow you to make short visits outside of the US. Check the stamp in your passport. It should say "M" under the word "Entries" on the right-hand side of the stamp. If it does say "M" then it is a multiple entry visa and you can leave the US and return during the dates shown in section 3 of your DS-2019. However, if it says "S", it means you were approved for a single entry only. If you leave the US, you will NOT be able to re-enter on the J-1 visa. In some cases, there may be a number such as "2" or "3"; this means you can apply to enter the number of times shown only. Please note that you cannot leave and re-enter on the J-1 visa during the 30-day grace period.

Next, you need to check the expiration date of your J-1 visa and the ending date of your DS-2019. You will not be able to re-enter the US on J-1 status if either of these documents will expire while you are away.

If you are traveling out of the US **other than to Canada, Mexico or adjacent islands** during this program, you MUST get IENA to sign the "Travel Validation" section of your DS-2019. This must happen BEFORE you leave the US, to indicate you remain in good standing on the program. Because this process requires you to send the original visa documentation to your sponsor to be signed and returned, you must contact IENA at least TWO WEEKS in advance to arrange this.

Please call IENA for further advice and instructions on how to send your DS-2019.

**If you are traveling to Canada or Mexico while you are on this program, please remember to check to see if you also need to get an entry visa for either country.**



**Whenever you leave the US, whether it is to Canada, Mexico or any other country, you MUST take your Passport and your DS-2019.**

## SEVIS – Student and Exchange Visitor Information System

### Visa regulations, validation and your responsibility

Even after your J-1 has been stamped into your passport and you have been admitted to the US, your visa and DS-2019 work authorization are not fully 'active' until they have been validated in the SEVIS system.

The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) operates the tracking system called SEVIS for all J-1 visa holders. Compliance with SEVIS is simple and straight forward. However, failure to comply with any of the regulations could have devastating effects on your current visit and any future travel to the US.

DHS routinely carries out "spot checks" on sponsors and participants throughout the program to ensure that they are compliant with the SEVIS procedures. If you are not at the residence address you provided, and/or are working at an employer that you have not obtained approval for, you will be deemed to be "out of status" and your participation on the program will be terminated. That termination will appear on your permanent US Immigration record and you will experience extreme difficulties if you ever wish to re-enter the US in the future.

### What are my obligations under SEVIS?



You have three main obligations under SEVIS. **Each part is different and must be completed separately.** When you signed the DS-2019 and entered the US on your J-1 status, YOU ACCEPTED THE RESPONSIBILITY to keep your details in the SEVIS system accurate.

The first two stages of SEVIS can be completed online. The third stage regarding your employment cannot be completed online and must be submitted via fax or e-mail.

#### **1. Validation**

This is the first stage of SEVIS. You must confirm your arrival into the US and enter your residential address into SEVIS no later than 10 days after the **start date** of your DS-2019, **and preferably as soon as possible to facilitate your Social Security card process.**

This is simple to do as you submit this information to IENA online. Go to [www.iena.org](http://www.iena.org) and follow the instructions to confirm your arrival and residential address. ***Make sure you have your passport and DS-2019 with you.***

You MUST validate at least 3 business days before you apply for your Social Security number (SSN), or it may delay your SSN application.

#### **2. Report/change your residential address**

Once you have reported your arrival and residential address as above you must then update your residential address **each and every time** that you change your address while on the program. To do this you will go to [www.iena.org](http://www.iena.org) and follow the instructions to change your residential address.

### **3. Getting approval for a second job**

If you wish to leave a job, change jobs or take on an additional job, you must always obtain advance approval from your sponsor, IENA, first.

Please note that if you wish to take an additional job, you will need to get a brief letter from your main employer confirming their approval.

Before you can start work with any employer, the job and the employer must be approved by IENA. In addition, IENA is required to collect the employer's business license and proof of workers' compensation insurance. Please check with IENA to see if your prospective employer's information is already on file; if not, he/she must provide it.

To obtain job approval, you will need to fax or scan/email a completed Employer Job Form (available at [www.iena.org](http://www.iena.org)) and the required attachments listed on page one of the Employer Job Form.

Please read the instructions that come with the form carefully. If you and your employer do not complete all fields as required, your job approval will be delayed.

**This form must be faxed or scanned/emailed to IENA before you start work.**

You cannot enter or get job approval online. The ONLY way you can get your job approved and registered is by faxing or e-mailing the required form to the IENA office.

When the employment request has been approved, you will receive an e-mail confirmation and your SEVIS record will be updated. Call IENA on 1-888-724-4292 if you do not receive the e-mail confirmation within 3 business days.

All the above are simple steps that ensure your continued good standing on the program. However, failure to comply with these regulations will void your visa; you will then have no legal status in the US and will have to leave the country immediately.

**If you have any questions about SEVIS or problems with SEVIS compliance, call IENA immediately at +1 888 724 4292.**

### **Program Monitoring**



Every 30 days IENA will contact you by email to give you up-to-date program information (SEVIS Validation, Social Security, travel during and after the program plus other important information). It is vital, therefore, that you check your email regularly for messages from IENA. Don't forget to check your junk or spam folders as well! It is your responsibility to inform IENA of any email address changes.

The monthly emails will also contain a short questionnaire so we can be sure that you are OK and to give you the opportunity to address any concerns. Your feedback is very important to us, so please make sure that you respond. It is a program condition that you reply – and quickly. Failure to do so may lead to the termination of your program.

Remember, the main purpose of your program is to learn about American culture and share your culture with your American colleagues and friends. Please take time to thoughtfully document cultural activities in which you participated.

## Social Security Number

When you begin working you will be asked for your Social Security number. Payroll systems need this in order to pay you and the SSN identifies you uniquely for tax purposes. Ideally you should wait until 10 days after you have arrived in the US before applying. You must apply in person. IENA cannot make the application on your behalf.



YOU MUST VALIDATE BEFORE YOU APPLY FOR YOUR SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER (SSN); OTHERWISE IT MAY DELAY YOUR APPLICATION PROCESS.

To apply, take the Social Security instruction sheet and your DS-2019 form to your [nearest Social Security office](#). You may want to bring an electronic copy of your I-94 form, but it is not required.

When you apply, be sure to ask for a receipt (Form SSA-5028) which is proof that you will be receiving a card. You can show this to your employer in lieu of the Social Security card. Without this receipt, many employers may be unwilling to pay you.

If you do not know what your US mailing address will be when you apply for your number, please use IENA's New Jersey office mailing address. We will e-mail once your card arrives at the office.

Your Social Security card should be mailed within 14 working days. If you have not received the card by then, please call the number of the office listed on your receipt or visit your local office to see if they can help you.

You must give your Social Security number to your employer as soon as you receive it. If you leave your job before you get the number, you must still report the number as soon as you know it. Not reporting the number could lead to tax problems for you and your employer and jeopardize the job for future participants.

Even though you ~~have a~~ will be assigned a Social Security number, you are exempt from paying Social Security, Medicare and Federal Unemployment taxes. If your employer is deducting these (which may appear under the heading of 'FICA' on pay checks), ask your employer to refer to IENA's *Employer* letter. This cites the IRS publication that explains that you are NOT subject to these taxes. If these taxes ARE deducted, please contact IENA for further advice before your next pay check.

## Income tax



You **ARE** subject to income taxes in the US and you are responsible for paying them. Failure to pay taxes could cause problems in the future if you apply for any visas to return to the US. Income taxes are imposed by the federal, state and (sometimes) city governments. (Federal income tax is about 15%. State and city income taxes vary.) They are withheld from salaries by the employer and paid directly to the government.

You may be able to claim back some of these taxes as a refund at the end of the year, depending on how much tax you paid. If you earn less than \$4,050 in 2016, you will probably be able to claim all your tax back.

At the end of each tax year, each US employer will mail you a W-2 form (a statement of your earnings

and taxes paid, plus any other deductions). Make sure your employer has your full postal address in your home country. You then use the information from the W-2(s) to complete the federal Non-Resident Alien tax form (1040NR-EZ). This form and the instructions are available from [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov).

If your employer does not deduct tax or you don't fill in your 1040, it could affect any future trips you make to the US. Almost certainly, you will also need to file a **State** tax return. Each state has different forms and procedures, but be sure that you use the **non-resident** tax form. Just Google 'non-resident tax forms' to find the forms for your state.

ALL TAX FORMS NEED TO BE SUBMITTED BY YOU BEFORE APRIL 15TH EACH YEAR.

#### **W-4**

When you begin your job, your employer will give you a W-4 form to complete. This is an 'Employee's Withholding Allowance Certificate' and enables the employer to work out how much tax to deduct. Make sure you complete the form correctly. If you don't, you may have to pay more tax to the IRS when you file your tax return. You are regarded as a 'non-resident alien' for tax purposes. A sample W-4, along with instructions is in My Documents on the IENA web site.

#### **I-9**

Before you start work, your employer should ask you to complete the I-9 'Employment Eligibility Verification' form. As stated on the form, a Social Security Number is not required for completion. Full details on how to complete the I-9 are in My Documents.

## Employment

### **Rights**

There is a minimum hourly wage in the US of \$7.25 per hour (higher in some states). The minimum wage for tipped employees is \$2.13 per hour, however, the law may vary where an employee receives most wages through other compensation such as room and board. You cannot be denied wages for the time that you have worked. However, if you walk out before the end of your contract, you will lose any bonuses, may incur housing penalties, and your final pay check may be delayed.



### **Responsibilities**

Remember that employers have certain expectations when they offer you a job. They have a business to run and you are an important part of their operation. When you accept a job, you are making a commitment and it is important for you to act responsibly. If you say you will be working until a certain date, make sure you fulfill this commitment. Employers have problems if they are understaffed at the end of the season. IENA expects you to honor your contractual commitments. If you are unable to do so, contact IENA immediately.

Maintain a positive attitude towards your job. Employers are looking for workers who are enthusiastic and are willing to do whatever is needed. Teamwork is very important. If you were originally hired as a waiter or waitress, you may find yourself being asked to help wash dishes or clean tables - or vice versa. If you're reluctant to do this because "it isn't my job," you may find your employer reluctant to continue employing you!

### **THE ALL-IMPORTANT 'PLAN B'**

If your job falls through, don't despair. Your J-1 visa allows you to take just about any job anywhere, so you can go out and work hard at finding another. It is vital that you be prepared for this

and keep an open mind about jobs. Many seasonal jobs are reliant on the weather (e.g. jobs within a ski resort depend on snowfall – if there is no snow, the jobs will be slow starting). Don't assume that just because you have an employer's letter or contract that you have a guaranteed starting date, number of shifts or period of employment. Read the contract carefully as many allow the employer to delay or even cancel the job offer under certain circumstances.

In case you find yourself in this situation, it is essential that you have a Plan B and the reserve finances to cover your Plan B. You should be flexible enough in both attitude and finances to move to another job (possibly in a different state) if necessary.

Before you leave home, think about where else you could seek work and what types of job you could do. You don't need to have another job lined up, but you do need to know where you will go to look for work if your first job falls through and be flexible about the types of job you will take.

IENA is not an employment agency, so you will not be able to land a job just by calling IENA. However, IENA's experienced staff will assist you where possible and guide you in the right direction. A well-thought out Plan B and the five 'P's - positive, presentable, personable, persistent and patient' - will help you through almost any situation. If you do look for another job, take your passport, the *Dear Employer* letter, your DS-2019 form and your Social Security card (or the temporary certificate - Form SSA-5028).

**REMEMBER TO CONTACT IENA BEFORE YOU LEAVE A JOB OR TO GET APPROVAL FOR ANY NEW JOB.**

## Housing & Accommodations

Many participants have accommodations pre-arranged with their job. If not, you'll need somewhere temporary to stay until you can arrange something more permanent. Hostels, student dormitories or motels/hotels with weekly room arrangements are your best bet when you first arrive in a town to start your job or look for work. Look for somewhere centrally located so it makes your hunt easier. Temporary accommodation can be expensive and use up your money quickly so you'll probably want to find something more permanent as soon as possible.

If you have a job but no accommodation, we suggest you check with your employer who may have suggestions. If not, try fellow workers who may also know of vacant rooms. If you are unsuccessful with those, look around for an apartment to rent, sublet or share. Past participants have gotten together and rented houses or condos, or have posted ads in local newspapers and in local stores.



You will almost certainly be sharing a room with one other person and possibly more.

When you rent somewhere, you should always sign a rental agreement and make sure you read and understand it, including the length of the agreement, before committing yourself. You may have to pay a deposit, which will be returned to you when you leave if there is no significant damage to the place.

If your employer will provide accommodation it will probably be a very basic style of housing. Generally, you will have little choice over the accommodation or your roommates. If you quit or get fired, you may lose your deposit and will almost certainly be required to vacate employee housing immediately. For some houses or apartments, the rent payment includes the cost of utilities (gas, electricity, heat,

water and trash removal). For other rentals, you must pay separately for these expenses. Ask the landlord if utilities are included when you are looking for housing and make sure this is in your rental agreement before you sign it. If utilities are not included, you should find out how much they will cost. The cost of some utilities will be more in some states.

The best place to look for an apartment is in the classified section of the local newspaper. You can also try university bulletin boards, real estate agencies (watch for extra fees, though) and roommate services. You may even be able to board with a family in smaller cities and towns, thus allowing you to get to know American life better.

If you intend to work in a major US city, please check out the accommodation situation in advance. Los Angeles, for example, has limited public transport and you may find it difficult to get to your employer if you are far away. New York City on the other hand has great public transport, but the housing can be very expensive!

Beware of 'too-good-to-be-true' accommodation offers on craigslist.com. If you are unsure about anything, check with IENA before you pay any money, or provide credit card details or personal information.

## Money and banking



Once you settle into your job and have a place to live, you should open a US bank account. Most employers will pay you either by a check drawn on a local bank or by direct deposit into a US bank account. It is not too difficult to open a bank account in the US, but it is a good idea to find out about the different types of accounts available. Services and fees vary greatly from bank to bank so make sure you check it out carefully. Some may require a minimum balance, charge for checks or

automated teller machines (ATM) use.

US banks are not always nationwide so you should cash any checks in the town or city that you receive them. Make sure you cash your last salary check before you leave to start traveling. Most banks do offer bank cards that can be used at 24-hour ATM's. The Cirrus and Plus network are both available throughout the country. Ask about such a card when you open your account.

### Keep your own checklist

**It's probably a good idea to keep your own list of important/ emergency numbers in case you lose any traveler's checks or credit cards.**

**This list should include:**

- **Issuer of traveler's checks**
- **Overseas credit card contact for lost/stolen cards**
- **Overseas emergency phone line for local bank.**

We suggest that you close your US bank account before you go traveling and convert your remaining funds into traveler's checks, unless you're waiting for final checks.

### What to do if it looks like you are going to run out of money

Don't wait until the last minute when you have no money left.

You can draw cash on your MasterCard or Visa card (if you have one) provided you have not exceeded your credit limit. This can be done at various US banks or if you know your PIN number you may be able to get cash from an ATM. (Check with your bank at home before you leave for details.)

If you have reached your credit limit, it may be possible for you to ask your bank to increase the limit. Alternatively, you could ask family or friends to pay some cash into your credit card account for you.

### **Western Union Money Transfer**

Western Union is a company that specializes in money transfers. You can transfer money from anywhere in the world to the US in no more than 15 minutes. The person transferring the money to you just needs to visit or contact any Western Union agent with either cash, bank check, Visa or MasterCard. You can pick up the cash from any of the thousands of Western Union agents across the US. There is a handling charge for this service which varies according to the amount of money sent. You can find out whether or not the money has been sent, and where you can collect the cash by phoning (toll-free) 1-800-325-6000. You will need two forms of ID to collect the cash, one of which must be your passport.

To find out where your nearest agent is in your home country or the US, please log onto [www.westernunion.com](http://www.westernunion.com).

### **Wire Transfer**

This is the process of having a bank in your home country send money to a bank in the US.

You will first have to make arrangements with your US bank to receive the funds. You will need to get your bank details (name, address, account number, routing number and SWIFT bank code) so you can give them to the person in your home country who will be sending you the funds. They will need to give these details to their own bank for them to be able to do the transfer.

If you do not yet have a bank account open in the US, you will have to find a bank that **will** accept the transfer for a non-account holder. Some banks may need prodding up to managerial level before they will do this. Some may not do it all. The instructions from the person sending the money, if you do not hold an account with the bank, should be to 'notify and pay' and should include special instructions to 'identify payee using passport number'.

This service usually takes at least two business days. The charges vary from bank to bank and you may be charged a fee by both the sending and receiving bank.

### **Lost traveler's checks or credit cards**

If you lose your traveler's checks, but have kept a separate record of the serial numbers, amounts and date cashed, you can usually obtain a refund very quickly through the issuing organization.

If you lose your credit cards, you will need to contact the issuer to report the loss and organize getting a replacement card. You will find the phone number of the major credit card organizations in the back of this booklet. Alternatively, you can call your bank back at home. They will generally accept collect calls.

Report any loss immediately to avoid having to pay for any fraudulent use of your card.

### **Sales Tax**

Sales tax varies from city to city and state to state. In some regions, there is no sales tax added to purchases on merchandise or a restaurant bill. However, in communities where sales tax is assessed, be prepared to pay between 3 to 10 percent in addition to the total bill. In many cases the price you see on the shelf or the menu is not the final price you will pay.

### **Tipping**

In the U.S., it is customary to tip service-oriented workers – waiters/waitresses, taxi drivers, hair stylists – 15 to 20 percent of the amount owed for the services rendered. Remember that many service people (and that may include you!) are not always well paid, especially food servers who earn less than the minimum wage. They depend on tips for their livelihoods.

## Health and safety

There is no national health service in the US, which is why the US government requires that you buy insurance. Your Secutive policy provides a very comprehensive package of coverage that has been specifically designed to meet the needs of students on the Work and Travel visa. You will be given an insurance brochure that details the coverage and an identification (ID) card that shows the policy number and emergency phone number you should call if you need help. Please carry the ID card with you at all times.



Please read your insurance booklet carefully to make sure you understand the terms of your policy. Now is the time to read them – not after you have arrived in the US. Like any policy it does have some limitations and conditions. If any of the conditions apply to you (such as for a pre-existing medical condition), please make sure you take out additional cover before your departure.

**Download all insurance information and claim forms in MY Documents at [www.iena.org](http://www.iena.org)**

Always show your insurance ID card when getting medical treatment. For normal medical expenses or routine doctor's visits you will probably have to pay the bill at the time of treatment. You will then need to complete a claim form to claim that back from the insurance company. Medical fees will vary depending on the doctor, the type of facility and its location in the country. (Medical care tends to be more expensive in large cities and in resort areas.)

Your insurance claim will not be settled simply by handing in your insurance ID card to the hospital or medical provider. You must complete a claim form for any claims to be considered.

**Contact Secutive (not IENA) with questions about your health coverage, claims, or bills.**

### **Injuries while working**

If you require medical treatment as a result of an injury sustained while working, your employer should claim the cost of this through their Workers' Compensation Insurance. Please check with them as they may not automatically do this. You should protect yourself by also filing a claim with your insurance company. If for any reason Workers' Compensation does not cover all the bills, and they supply a letter denying coverage, the claim can still be processed by your insurance company.

### **Contraception**

Planned Parenthood is a non-profit organization with representation throughout the US. They can offer advice and guidance on birth control, pregnancy testing, STD testing and counseling.

More information: [plannedparenthood.org](http://plannedparenthood.org)

### **HIV and AIDS**

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). There is no vaccine or cure for HIV infection. To reduce your risk, make sure you take the following precautions:

- Avoid casual relationships; always use a condom
- Don't inject non-prescribed drugs. If you do, never share equipment
- Don't have a tattoo, piercing, acupuncture or electrolysis unless you're sure the equipment is sterile.

More information: <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/stds-hiv-safer-sex>



## Baggage claims

Before you travel, make a list of all the items you are taking with you, their value, date of purchase and if possible, copies of receipts. Theft or loss of belongings should always be reported to the police. As part of a valid claim, you are usually expected to obtain and provide the full Police Report (not just a Report/Incident Number).

## Personal Safety/Baggage Safety

### In the City

Be careful when walking around in unknown areas, particularly around bus stations where there may be pickpockets, etc., waiting for someone just like you. Unfortunately every large city in the world has people who live off what they can take from others, so always be careful. Please remember that until you find your feet in a new country, you are unconsciously giving off clear signals that you are a stranger from overseas.

Until you get to know any new city, try to avoid going out alone, especially at night. We highly recommend that during your first few days in the US you stick to the main tourist areas and remember to exercise some common sense caution while here. Avoid standing on a street corner with an expensive camera around your neck while gazing at a large map. Never carry large amounts of cash with you – traveler's checks are a much safer alternative.

When you first arrive in the US, you might notice that Americans can be very open and friendly people who genuinely want to talk to you and be your friend. We advise you, however, to be very careful of overly friendly people who may be opportunists trying to extort money from trusting people.

Be aware of your surroundings and remember most of America's big cities are as safe as any other place so long as you use your common sense.

### On the Road

On long distance buses, travel as light as possible so that you can keep your luggage inside the bus, either under the seat or in the overhead rack. Check it regularly at each stop. If changing buses, make sure that any baggage you checked changes with you. Don't just accept the porter's word that it will happen, but see that it is loaded onto the bus you will be on (and that it is not unloaded at any intermediate stops). Always insist on a proper claim check for any bags that you check. In most cases it's the only way they can track your bag if it goes missing or handle a claim for reimbursement. Make sure you take all valuables onto the bus with you.



In bus stations, train stations, airports, etc., don't just watch your bags but keep hold of them, especially while waiting to buy your tickets. Take them with you, even if you are only going to glance at the departures board or to go to the toilet.

In hostels, hotels and motels, check all valuables into the in-room safe or a lock box at reception/security. Never leave things like your passport, traveler's checks, cash or other valuables in an unattended room. We suggest getting a neck wallet or money belt for your passport and traveler's checks and wear it on your body. Don't think that thefts and accidental losses happen only to other people.

### Passports

Guard your passport above all other things! If you do lose it, contact IENA immediately. Losing your passport can wreck your travel plans or even prevent you from working at all!

We urge you to make **two** clear sets of photocopies of the passport details page and of each page that has something written, printed or stamped on it. We also suggest making copies of your birth certificate and your J-1 visa. Leave one set of all copies at home with your family or friends where it can be easily found. Keep the other secure and separate from your actual passport so you don't lose both!

On arrival, make a new copy of the DS-2019 and keep it in a safe place.

We also recommend you scan and email to yourself all important documents: your passport face page; J-1 visa; DS-2019; driver's license; flight confirmation; and e-tickets. This way you can access any of them at any time quite easily during your trip.

Please notify your nearest Consulate/Embassy/High Commission immediately if you lose your passport (see page 34). They will be able to cancel your lost passport and advise if you have enough time to get a full replacement passport or if you will need to get emergency travel documents. It can take a very long time and cost you a lot of money to have a new passport issued. Your embassy will take great pains over establishing your identity and you may not find them helpful.

If you lose your passport and have a new one issued, you must call IENA and give them the details of that new passport.

## American people and culture shock

Although you may feel you are familiar with US culture and have seen it in movies and have perhaps vacationed in the US, you can still expect to experience 'culture shock' when you arrive. Everyone experiences this to some extent.



Moving to a new place is not easy. It can be difficult to meet people and in the beginning, you may feel lonely or homesick, but don't despair! Americans are well known for their outgoing personalities and hospitality, so it won't be long before you have new friends.

If you have not done so yet, we strongly recommend that you research the city where you would like to be living and working. Look at a guidebook and the Internet to give you an idea of what the local area is like and what there is to do on your days off, so you won't be surprised when you arrive that the area is more rural than you expected!

While you are in the US, make the most of it. You are here to learn about the people and the culture and really get to know the country. Don't be shy about stepping outside your normal routine and your comfort zone when it comes to people or activities. You're here to discover all parts of America, not just the mainstream.

'American people' includes all kinds of nationalities but certain traits are common:

**Friendliness** - you'll probably find Americans warm and accepting toward you though this doesn't necessarily mean that you will automatically become their best buddy straight away. Deep friendships take a long time to develop, as everywhere.

**Pace** - particularly if you're in a city. It may seem as if everyone is in a rush, but this is typical of any big city. If you ask for help, however, you'll probably find people willing to give advice.

**Silence** - many Americans find silence uncomfortable and will tend to fill any silence if it lasts more than a moment. If you're silent for a long time, they'll probably try to draw you out or ask if you feel alright!

**Assertiveness** - most people make little effort to hide their thoughts and opinions so don't be surprised if people talk to you about their personal lives. It's normal to talk straight to the point. Americans expect straight questions and will respond with straight answers. They can seem blunt sometimes, but this is not intended to be impolite.

## Legal information

You may be a visitor but the law still applies to you. If you break the law, you will face the consequences of your illegal behavior, just as you would if you were at home. IENA does not have any responsibility for your illegal actions or the consequences of those actions. Always remember to be polite and respectful when dealing with the police – no matter who you think is in the wrong.

### Alcohol & drugs

You must be 21 years old to drink legally in the US. When buying alcohol you will usually be asked to provide picture ID to prove that you are over the legal drinking age. This is taken VERY seriously. Many bars will only take a passport or US driver's license. You might be able to get a state ID card from the Department of Motor Vehicles which can also be very useful.



It is also illegal to drink or be drunk in public, and it goes without saying that it is illegal to drink and drive. Enforcement of DWI (Driving while intoxicated) and DUI (Driving under the Influence) laws is very tough in the US. To keep yourself and others safe, don't drink and drive.

If you're under 21, sorry, but it's against the law! American jails are not the best places to spend quality time! In some areas there are local laws governing alcohol consumption, noise levels and group gatherings. It is important to familiarize yourself with the local laws so that you can avoid any unexpected problems.

Illegal possession of controlled substances (drugs) in the US is subject to prosecution by law. Drug penalties vary from state to state and region to region, and are incredibly harsh. Any type of illegal drug use is a serious offence.

### Drug testing

This is becoming more common among US employers. Drug testing is usually undertaken at the cost of the employer and in the form of a urine sample. Some organizations will adhere to the following policies:

- may require you to undergo a drug test
- conduct random testing during your employment
- when probable cause is found, require you to undergo drug testing
- conduct inspections of staff accommodation (if provided)

## Communications

### Telephones

Telephone numbers in the USA consist of a three-digit area code, a three-digit exchange code and a four-digit number. This is usually written as (123) 456-7890. Usually only the last seven digits are used for a local call. Non-local calls within the same area code and long distance calls require a '1', then the area code and then the seven-digit number. To make it more confusing some major cities now require you to dial '1', then the area code and then the seven digit number!

The area codes '800', '877', and '888' indicate a toll-free number. Please note that you still need to dial the '1' before any toll-free number.

### Mobile phones (cell phones)



Getting a US cell phone/number provides an excellent way for potential employers/landlords/etc. to get in contact with you. Please note that cell coverage in the US may not be as comprehensive as back home. There is no coverage in many rural areas. If you are working somewhere very remote, you may not have cell service until you go to a larger town on days or nights off work. Generally most major resort areas will have coverage.

Consumer cellular is a national provider available in most locations and offers plans and cell phones without a contract. Visit <https://www.consumercellular.com/Savings>.

Pay phones

### Phoning home

Please call or email your family/friends to let them know you have arrived safely. From a private phone, you dial directly and the charge will appear on the monthly bill. Note that all phones, both private and pay phones, record the date, time, number dialed and cost. These will appear on the phone owner's bill so don't think a 'borrowed' call will not show up!

When dialing internationally, you must dial the international access code + country code + STD code (minus the leading zero) + number.

Use Skype, Whatsapp, or Facetime to make cheaper international calls.

### Emergency services

To call for Police, Fire or Ambulance services in the USA you dial 9-1-1. Please remember this is only for genuine emergencies and they are able to track the calls in most situations. Give them as much information as possible to enable them to assist you.

### Time zones

There are four time zones in the USA. Once you get to your destination you should establish the time zone that you are in. Note that various areas of the same state may sometimes have different time zones.

## Mail and the US postal system

### Domestic US Mail

Domestic US mail costs 46 cents for a standard US sized envelope. Small postcards are 33 cents and large postcards are 46 cents. We recommend you only buy stamps from a Post Office. Many places that sell stamps only sell standard US domestic first class stamps or they will sell the wrong denominations for international mail.

### International Mail

For all countries a standard US sized envelope or postcard is \$1.10.

### Priority Mail



Although the Post Office calls it a 2-3 day service, it can take double this time. This service is useful if you want to get a document somewhere quicker than normal mail but don't need to insure it. The service costs \$5.60 for up to 1lb using a special envelope which you obtain from the Post Office.

### Express Mail

This guarantees delivery within 1-2 days and costs from \$19.95 for up to 1lb using a special envelope which you can obtain from the Post Office. Express Mail is a good service if you need documents to arrive quickly. Documents are insured for up to \$500.

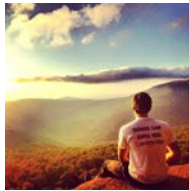
### Courier Services

The fastest way to send mail is to use the overnight courier services of firms such as FedEx or UPS Overnight. In most towns, they will have local pick-up points, or may have a collection service if you call them. Rates are on a par with Express Mail but they tend to offer a better delivery and tracking service.

Some key points to be aware of with regard to the US postal system.

- Mail within the US can be very slow. It may take up to one week for normal mail to be delivered, even if it is being sent and delivered within the same state.
- Write the ZIP code on the mail you are posting. Mail won't be delivered without the ZIP code.
- Make sure you put your (sender's) address on the outside of the envelope.
- If you are staying with friends, be sure to give the full 'c/o' address, including the name of the residents of the house. US and Canadian postal services generally will not deliver mail to a name not listed at that address.
- Ensure that your family/friends know when you are leaving your accommodation/work place so you don't miss any mail.

## General travel



Here is a list of suggested travel sources to help you plan your travel time in the USA.

### Lower fare domestic airlines

Jetblue	<a href="http://www.jetblue.com">www.jetblue.com</a>
Southwest	<a href="http://www.southwest.com">www.southwest.com</a>
Virgin America	<a href="http://www.virginamerica.com">www.virginamerica.com</a>
US Airways	<a href="http://www.usairways.com">www.usairways.com</a>
Frontier Airlines	<a href="http://www.frontierairlines.com">www.frontierairlines.com</a>

### Booking sites that consolidate fares from many carriers

Expedia	<a href="http://www.expedia.com">www.expedia.com</a>
Travelocity	<a href="http://www.travelocity.com">www.travelocity.com</a>
Travelcuts	<a href="http://www.travelcuts.com">www.travelcuts.com</a>
Orbitz	<a href="http://www.orbitz.com">www.orbitz.com</a>
Kayak	<a href="http://www.kayak.com">www.kayak.com</a>

### **Bus and rail**

Greyhound [www.greyhound.com](http://www.greyhound.com)

Amtrak [www.amtrak.com](http://www.amtrak.com)

### **Tour Companies**

Trek America [www.trekamerica.com](http://www.trekamerica.com)

Green Tortoise [www.greentortoise.com](http://www.greentortoise.com)

Lonely Planet [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)

### **Accommodations**

Hostelling International [www.hiusa.org](http://www.hiusa.org)

## **Feedback**

As a program participant, your feedback is very important to us and to future participants. In order that we can continue to offer a high level of service and affordable working holiday overseas, you will be sent an assessment form at the end of your trip. Please fill this in and return to your home organization. Your answers will be treated confidentially.

We are also always pleased to see, and possibly use, any pictures relating to your job or travels. Please send them to: [info@iena.org](mailto:info@iena.org) and remember to identify them clearly.

We look forward to hearing from you!

IENA