

Country and Education Guide : United States



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Country Guide



General Country Information

The United States of America, also known as the United States, the US, the USA, or America, is located on the continent of North America, bordering between Canada and Mexico from north to south and between the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean from east to west. It comprises of 50 states and one federal district.

Name of country: United States of America

Capital city: Washington, DC

Key cities: Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Washington DC

Population: 315,332,307 (January 2013 U.S. Census Bureau)

Language: English

Currency: United States dollar (\$ or USD)

Time zones and climate

Time zones

Continental US

Eastern Standard Time (EST; UTC* -5 hours):

Atlantic Coast and parts of the Ohio Valley

Central Standard Time (CST; UTC -6 hours):

Gulf Coast, Mississippi Valley and the Great Plains

Mountain Standard Time (MST; UTC -7 hours):

States around the Rocky Mountains

Pacific Standard Time (PST; UTC -8 hours):

Pacific Coast plus Nevada

Outside continental US

Alaska Standard Time (AKST; UTC -9 hours):

Alaska

Hawaii-Aleutian Standard Time, better known as
Hawaii Standard Time (HAST or HST; UTC -10 hours):

Hawaii and most of the Aleutian Islands

Atlantic Standard Time (AST; UTC -4 hours):

Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands

Samoa Standard Time (SST; UTC- 11 hours):

American Samoa

Chamorro Standard Time (ChST; UTC+10 hours):

Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands

Daylight Saving Time (DST): Starts on the second Sunday in March and ends on the first Sunday in November each year.

* UTC = Coordinated Universal Time



Climate

The US has a diverse range of climates, from tropical Hawaii and Florida to arctic Alaska. However, most of the weather in the country is temperate, generally mild.

Region	Full year	Summer (Average temp.)	Winter (Average temp.)
East Coast (New York)	-3 - 28°C	24°C	0°C
South Coast (Miami)	15 - 32°C	28°C	19°C
West Coast (San Francisco)	5 - 22°C	17°C	9°C
Great Lakes Region (Chicago)	-6 - 28°C	23°C	-2°C
Central Region (Salt Lake City)	-7 - 34°C	25°C	-3°C
Hawaii	18 - 32°C	26°C	20°C

Telecommunications

Calling United States

IDD	Major cities' code
country code : 1	New York (212, 917, 646)
	Boston (617)
	Chicago (312)
	Los Angeles (213, 323)
	San Francisco (415)

EMERGENCY NUMBER: 911



Transportation

Getting around

Americans are fond of their cars and the country has an excellent network of highways and scenic country roads that make driving convenient. However, traffic jams are quite common in large cities. Car rentals are available at major airports and can be booked in advance online or via toll-free numbers. Most of the country drives on the right side of the road.

Given the size of the US, air travel is the best option for long distances. The rail network connects some 500 destinations, with more stops on the Washington to Boston route. Carriages are spacious, with on-board dining available on long trips. Long-distance bus services are clean and comfortable.

Cost of living

The cost of living in the US varies greatly depending on the location. Costs are usually higher in big cities.

Average cost of living

	USD
Daily transport	3 to 8
Newspaper	2 to 4
Fast food set meals	7
Fresh milk per litre	2.50 to 5
Movie ticket per person	5 to 8
Museum entry fee	10 to 19

Above costs are indicative only and current.



Health and medical



Healthcare overview

Health insurance is necessary as medical care in the US is provided by the private sector. There are several types of medical insurance. Major medical plans allow patients to see any doctor but patients pay up-front and send the bill to the insurer, after which a portion of the bill is reimbursed. Policies taken with Health Maintenance Organisations offer less flexibility but patients incur fewer costs.



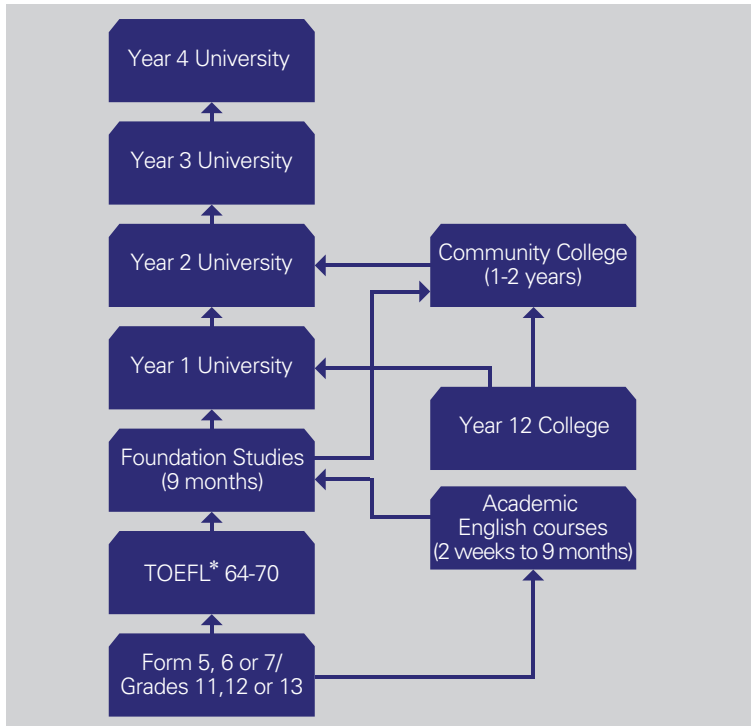


Education Guide

Education in United States

The US ranks #1 in the world in terms of education standards and has 35 percent of the world's top 500 universities. The US offers a relaxed study environment as well as a flexible system that reduces student stress. Universities in the US can be divided into two categories: state universities and private universities. There are around 1,500 public institutions and 1,600 private institutions, both following a four-year education system. Parents and students should use the list of university rankings as reference only and focus on the curriculum, campus, tuition fees and location when choosing a university.

Education system overview



* Test of English as a Foreign Language





Education system overview

The United States education system requires students to complete 12 years of primary and secondary education prior to attending university or college. This may be accomplished either at public (or government-operated) schools, or at private schools. Graduating high school students are awarded the high school diploma, which is a requisite for entry into most American colleges and universities.

The 12 years of schooling (or their equivalent) may also be completed outside the USA, giving foreign students an opportunity to obtain a quality American education and pursue the US system's benefits. Such international students must have completed coursework that is equivalent to what is taught at an American high school.

College or university takes four years to complete, and is referred to as undergraduate school. These schools typically offer the four-year bachelor's degree in a specific course of study (known as the major). There is also an alternative pathway for students who have chosen to first undertake the two-year associate degree at college or university. In this case, they would need to advance their studies by enrolling at a four-year school, eventually completing a bachelor's degree.

Holders of bachelor's degrees can then continue their education by pursuing one of two types of further qualifications. The first is the master's degree, a two-year degree that is highly specialised in a specific field. Students are normally admitted to a master's program only if they have a bachelor's degree in a relevant field. However, there are exceptions, such as for those wishing to pursue a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) degree. Students who want to advance their education even further in a specific field can pursue a doctorate (PhD) degree, which can take between three and six years to finish.

Certain courses of study are only available at the graduate school level in the United States, most notably law, dentistry, and medicine.

Tuition fees

Fees vary widely according to the institution and the course. Tuition costs at some of the top universities can be considerably higher.

Average tuition fees per annum (for reference only)

Institution	USD
Secondary School	20,000 - 50,000
Certificate/Diploma	N/A
Foundation Studies	11,000 - 18,000
Community College	9,000 - 18,000
University	24,000 - 54,000
Living Expenses	12,000 - 25,000

Above fees are current as of the 2013 - 2014 school year.



Student accommodation

Accommodation Types	Description	Price Range
On-campus	<p>Living on campus is probably the best option as it offers easy access to all school facilities, such as libraries, laboratories and sports centres. On-campus housing, usually in “residence halls” where a room is shared by two students, is usually cheaper and helps build friendships, making the transition a great deal easier. There is also increased safety as campuses are patrolled 24 hours a day by security guards. Another key convenience is the school cafeteria as cooking facilities are not available in residence halls. Some universities offer a range of living options and it is advisable that you find out what is on offer before making your decision.</p>	<p>Public Institution: USD8,535 per annum</p> <p>Private Institution: USD9,700 per annum</p> <p>You should note that residence halls will often close during the summer. If you will not be returning to your home country during that time, you will have to find alternate housing.</p>
Off-campus	<p>Off-campus living offers greater independence, the benefit of being able to cook your own meals and convenient access to shops and restaurants. Students usually share a flat or a house and share the costs of utilities such as electricity. Phone and transport costs should also be factored in when considering this option. The off-campus option is favoured by postgraduate students.</p>	<p>Living costs vary widely and depend on individual lifestyles. Expenses are highest in the larger cities of California and the Northeast. Costs can be much lower in the South, the Midwest, and other areas. If you are considering living off campus and getting your own apartment, you will also need to calculate the cost of furnishing that apartment.</p>

Secondary education

The US offers a wide range of options when it comes to schooling. There are a variety of public schools, private schools and religious schools.

Public schools

Neighbourhood public schools are the most common choice of American parents as they offer a network of friends from the same suburb. Charter schools, meanwhile, operate with freedom from many local regulations and therefore offer greater flexibility with the curriculum. There are also magnet schools which focus on a specialised area such as science or the arts. Some school districts offer virtual schools – online learning via an organised curriculum. In addition, there are specialised public schools that offer advanced placement or International Baccalaureate programmes. These are rigorous academic courses that are recognised worldwide.

Private schools

Private schools fall into two key categories: religious schools and secular schools – and both have boarding schools. The majority of non-public schools have a religious affiliation: Catholic, Protestant, Baptist, Jewish, Muslim and many others. The secular private schools often have an elite reputation and can be expensive. Some of these schools are designed to prepare students for university. Private schools are usually the choice of international students.





Higher education

A US university education is prized by many and admission to the top universities can be very competitive. Higher education can be divided into two categories: two-year colleges and four-year colleges and universities.

Two-year colleges

Two-year colleges usually offer an associate degree, which is used as a stepping stone for admission to a four-year university where another two years of study lead to a bachelor's degree. Entry to two-year institutions, some of which are community colleges, is easier than to university, and fees are lower.

Four-year colleges and universities

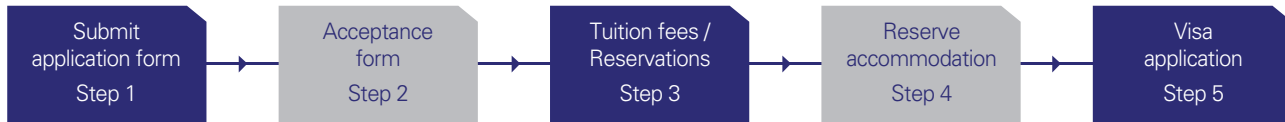
Typically, four-year colleges are undergraduate institutions that offer a greater range of studies than their two-year counterparts. Studies lead to a bachelor's degree. Four-year universities provide both undergraduate and postgraduate education, are usually research-oriented and offer a range of disciplines – from engineering to business to the arts and humanities. They encourage a high level of teacher-student interaction and classes are taught at a full-time faculty. Undergraduate programmes lead to a bachelor's degree while graduate programmes lead to a master's degree or doctorate. Research is a key component of these universities. Different units within universities are commonly known as colleges or schools instead of faculties and some colleges are divided into departments.

Applying to schools

The US adopts an academic credit system where students graduate when they have accumulated a certain amount of credits which the course requires. This is usually around 120-180 credits. There is no time limit for accumulating credits, but a minimum of three years is required to obtain the credits.

General process

Applicants may go through the following process:



Documentation

- 1 College/university application form
- 2 Application fee
- 3 Public English exam results or the institution's own English exam results (original/certified copy)
- 4 School report (recent 2 years)/Secondary school public exam results
- 5 Passport (original/copy)
- 6 One recent photo

Student visa application

International students need to obtain a student visa. The two visa categories are known as the F and M visas.

Applicants for an F-1 or M-1 visa must:

- Be enrolled in an "academic" educational programme, a language-training programme, or a vocational programme
- Be enrolled as a full-time student at an institution approved by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services
- Be proficient in English or be enrolled in courses leading to English proficiency
- Have sufficient finances for the entire course of study
- Maintain a residence abroad

F-1 Student Visa

The F-1 Visa (Academic Student) allows you to enter the United States as a full-time student at an accredited college, university, seminary, conservatory, academic high school, elementary school, or other academic institution or in a language training programme.

M-1 Student Visa

The M-1 visa (Vocational Student) category includes students in vocational or other non-academic programmes, other than language training.

Applying to schools

Required examinations

Secondary Schools

The Secondary School Admissions Test (SSAT) is required for admission to boarding schools and some private secondary schools. The SSAT has two levels: lower and upper. Applicants for eighth grade or above take the upper level exam.

The Independent School Entrance Examination (ISEE) is a requirement for admission to private middle schools and high schools. The ISEE has three different levels: lower, middle and upper. Applicants for ninth grade or above take the upper level exam.

Undergraduate

- SAT – formerly Scholastic Aptitude Test
- SAT Subject Tests
- ACT – formerly American College Testing Program or American College Test
- THEA – Texas Higher Education Assessment
- GED – High School Diploma Equivalent
- Test of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL) – if English is not first language

Postgraduate/Professional schools

- Miller Analogies Test (MAT)
- Graduate Record Examination (GRE)
- Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT)
- Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)
- Dental Admission Test (DAT)
- Optometry Admission Test (OAT)
- Pharmacy College Admission Test (PCAT)
- Veterinary College Admission Test (VCAT)
- Allied Health Professions Admission Test (AHPAT)
- Law School Admission Test (LSAT)
- Test of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL) – if English is not first language



Frequently asked questions

1. Can overseas students studying in the United States work part-time?

Yes, they can. Overseas students in the US are allowed to work part-time up to 20 hours per week but only within school boundaries.

2. Do I need to get medical insurance if I study in the United States?

Yes, international students staying in the United States are required to have medical insurance before they leave home and must prove their insurance coverage before they start school. Students should be aware of the coverage and know how much they need to pay if certain medical situations arise.

3. What are the differences between college and university?

Basically, a four-year college is no different from university and both offer bachelor degrees. Colleges are relatively smaller, teachers and students have a closer relationship and there are fewer students in each class. Community colleges are government-owned two-year institutions where students can obtain a qualification which is equivalent to an associate degree and continue their studies at a university or four-year college. Students should ask the institution for more details.

Acknowledgements

The content and information in this guide is largely provided by EF Education First, a world leader in international education.

About EF Education First



Founded in 1965 in Sweden, EF Education First operates 400 schools and offices in over 50 countries and has a network of more than 35,000 teachers and staff. To date, EF Education First has helped over 15 million people to learn a new language, discover the world, or earn an academic degree.

As part of their mission to break down barriers in language, geography, and culture, EF Education First works with renowned organisations and educational partners on a global scale. Some of their collaborations include University of Cambridge ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and being named the official learning provider for the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2014 World Cup in Brazil.

Besides the diverse range of overseas academic education programmes EF Education First offers, including escorted language tours for young students to cultural exchange and university connection courses with guaranteed placement, the institution also provides tailor-made career courses for working professionals.

For more information, please visit their website at www.ef.com.

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