

Since 1972
Xperitas
Nonprofit Immersion Travel

USA Handbook



CULTURAL TIP

In the United States, air conditioning is very common. You can expect most hotels and host families to have AC.

CLIMATE

- The climate in the United States varies widely depending on the region. Dress in layers to adjust to varying temperatures.
- Summers can be very hot, especially in the southern and central states.
- If possible, check the weather before leaving for the day and bring along your raincoat or umbrella if there is a chance of rain.
- The weather in mountainous regions can be cooler, so pack accordingly.

CLOTHING

- Reference the United States Packing List for advice on what to bring. In the US, teenagers and adults dress casually and comfortably.
- While staying with your host family, you should be fully dressed and ready for the day when coming down to breakfast. No pajamas at the breakfast table.
- If visiting a US school, avoid wearing hats and chewing gum.
- Comfortable walking shoes will be the most valuable item you pack.
- Avoid overly casual clothing such as sweatpants in formal settings.

ELECTRICITY

- The electricity in the United States is 110 volts (compared to 220-230 volts in many other countries).
- Most modern electronics (laptops, Apple products, phone, and camera chargers, etc.) only need a travel adapter. You will need a converter for other electronics such as hair dryers, straighteners, curlers, or razors.
- Electricity is relatively inexpensive in the US, but please be conscious of how much electricity you are using, especially during the family stay.

MONEY

- Keep exchange rates and international processing fees in mind. Use a debit or credit card with a chip, if possible.
- Use ATMs located at large bank branches once in-country. Have \$50-\$100 in cash before you travel.
- Contact your bank in advance. Alert them of your travels and ask for any tips about using your credit or debit card abroad.
- Use smaller bills in small shops and restaurants.
- It's best to pay in cash in small establishments, although most places accept credit cards.
- A backup, emergency card is a good idea in case one card is lost or stolen.

TIPPING

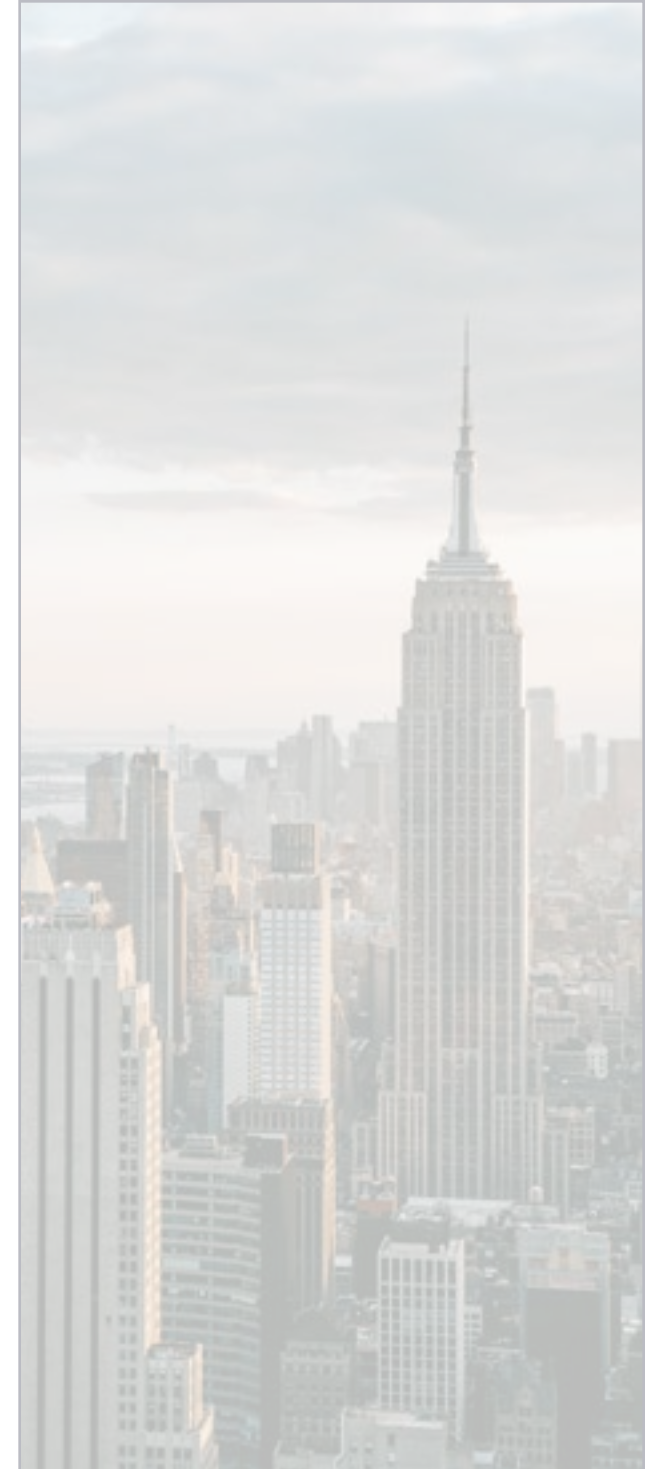
- Tipping in the United States is customary and expected. At restaurants, tip 15-20% of your bill.
- For other services, such as taxi rides, hotel services, and guided tours, tips of a few dollars are appreciated.

FOOD

- While staying at your hostels or hotels, breakfast is included daily. American breakfast is hearty and a great way to start a busy day of travel.
- Travelers can find food for every budget. Most restaurants are comparable in price to Europe. Fast food options are widely available and inexpensive.
- Keep hydrated! Tap water is safe to drink in the United States.
- At restaurants, tap water is usually included for free.
- Mealtimes are similar to Europe, though dinner is usually the largest meal of the day.

Xperitas-Arranged Family Stay Experience®

- Your family is excited to meet you! The family stay is a great learning experience. Be sure to keep an open mind, do your best at practicing your English language skills, and have fun getting to know your family.
- Try to be proactive and engage with your host family by helping cook a meal, offering to go with them to the local market or grocery store, playing a game, bringing a scrapbook of your family at home, asking to explore a nearby park, etc.
- Disconnect from your phone and embrace the time to connect with your host family. This allows you to notice more about your surroundings and be more intentional in your observations. Parents/guardians are encouraged to allow space for their children to disconnect as well.
- If you have any questions or concerns while staying with your host family, please contact your group leader(s) as they can best assist you and work with the local Family Stay Coordinator and Xperitas as applicable.
- Respond as soon as possible when your host family contacts you. Keep your social media profiles clean and get to know your host family through talking to them.
- It is nice to bring your host family a gift from your home state and/or a scrapbook or photos to show them what life is like where you live.
- Leave a thank you note for your hosts at your house on the last day of the family stay.
- Electricity and gas are much more expensive in many other countries than in the United States. Be conscious of how long your showers are and make sure to turn off the lights behind you.



In Country Transportation & Lodging

CAR

- The US has a strong car culture, but for safety reasons, you won't be allowed to drive during your program, regardless of whether you have a license or permit in your home country or if you reach driving age while here.

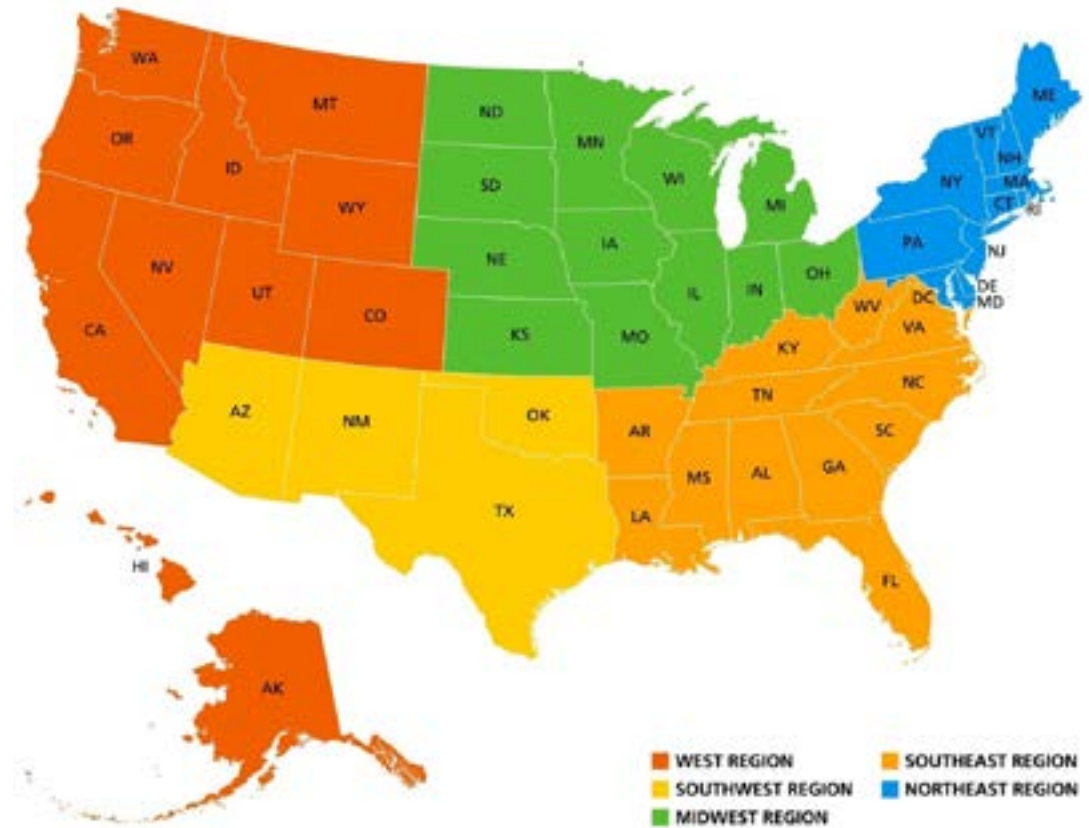
PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

- Despite the large driving culture present in the United States, many cities and regions have extensive bus and subway systems. They often offer daily or long-term passes for cost-effective travel.

CULTURAL TIP

Be patient – while Americans value punctuality, they also appreciate a laid-back lifestyle.

Free Wi-Fi is commonly available in public spaces such as coffee shops and restaurants. Take advantage of this to stay connected.



Health & Safety

- Be sure to keep your passport (and other visas or documentation), most of your money, and your credit cards in your money belt or neck pouch.
- If there is a safe in your hotel room, lock your valuables in there while you are out. If there is not a safe, hide money and valuables in your suitcase. Don't forget to check the hotel safe before checking out!
- Pickpocketing is common in large cities, and they are very good at what they do. Pay extra close attention to your belongings and be sure to keep your valuables close to you at all times, especially when in crowds of people or walking on the street.
- If you have a purse/bag, bring a cross-body purse/bag that zips shut. If you are carrying a backpack, be sure that valuables are not located in easily-accessible pockets. We also recommend wearing your backpack in front of you versus on your back as you may normally do.
- Always travel in groups of three or more.
- Do not travel with valuable items.
- Remember that the Xperitas emergency line is available 24/7, but please only call it when you are experiencing a true emergency.
- Review the travel and vaccine recommendations for travelers provided by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). See Current Health and Safety Updates for information about current world events and illnesses.
- Keep printed insurance card on you at all times.

Communication

- Check with your cell phone provider regarding any international fees. At least one leader needs to have an international phone plan in order to be in touch with Xperitas if needed.
- For students, we advise using WiFi. There is often WiFi (or a computer for public use) available in your hotel, but keep in mind that the connection is often weak. You can download messaging apps, such as WhatsApp, to communicate with people at home for free while connected to WiFi.
- Ask your leader(s) about their policy around technology use while on the program.
- A great way for the entire group to stay in communication with parents/guardians back home is via a blog, WhatsApp group chat, private Facebook group, or group email.
- During the family stay, you may or may not have access to internet. You will have the contact information of both the local Family Stay Coordinator, as well as your group leader(s). If you do have internet, please be mindful of the time spent on your phone and try to focus on engaging with your host family.

CULTURAL TIP

Americans are socially engaged people but might not be super open to political discussions. Don't feel offended if someone does not want to continue a specific conversation with you.