



alliance abroad group®

PARTICIPANTS Handbook 2011



WORK/TRAVEL PROGRAM IN THE USA



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INTRODUCTION TO ALLIANCE ABROAD GROUP

Alliance Abroad Group (AAG) was founded in 1992 to provide unique educational travel programs to people around the world. We became a U.S. Department of State-designated Program Sponsor for the Work/Travel Program in 2002. Our company offers a variety of programs:

PROGRAMS IN THE USA:

WORK/TRAVEL PROGRAM (J-1 visa up to 4 months)

- Overview: The Work/Travel Program is a unique opportunity for international university students to experience life in the United States first-hand through work experience with American host companies.
- Type of visa: J-1 visa.
- Length of program: Up to 4 months during university-designated vacation period.
- Participant profile: Full-time university students from 18 - 28 years of age with conversational to advanced level of English.

SEASONAL WORK PROGRAM (H-2B visa up to 10 months)

- Overview: The Seasonal Work Program offers international participants paid, unskilled jobs with American host companies that have a peak labor need during specific times of the year.
- Type of visa: H-2B visa.
- Length of program: 4 - 10 months, depending on host company's seasonality; visa may be extended up to three consecutive years.
- Participant profile: Individuals at least 18 years old with a conversational to advanced level of English. Participants are not required to be students.



INTRODUCTION TO ALLIANCE ABROAD GROUP

INTERN/TRAINEE

- Overview: The Intern and Trainee Programs place qualified candidates in their field of study, providing valuable professional experience to launch or build upon their chosen career path.
- Type of visa: J-1 visa.
- Length of program: Length varies; up to 12 months (Intern) or 18 months (Trainee).
- Participant profile: University students or young professionals with advanced English from 18 - 35 years of age with educational and/or work experience in the chosen field.

TEACHER EXCHANGE

- Overview: The Teacher Exchange Program places certified and experienced international teachers in American classrooms from Kindergarten through 12th grade.
- Type of visa: J-1 visa.
- Length of program: Up to 3 years.
- Participant profile: Fully certified educators with a degree that meets program regulations, at least 3 years of classroom teaching experience and fluency in English.

PROGRAMS OUTSIDE THE USA:

Work, Teach, Intern and Volunteer placements in Asia, Australia, Europe, Central and South America through our sister organization, AIDE.

YOUR ASSIGNED REPRESENTATIVE

One of the best reasons to travel with Alliance Abroad Group is our full service support. **You are assigned an AAG representative who can help you with:**

Arrival information (how to get to your workplace)

Job issues and questions that you cannot resolve with your supervisor

- Social Security questions
- Housing help
- Emergency assistance

You will be given the name and contact information of your AAG representative prior to your arrival in the United States. If you do not have this information, please be sure to ask for his or her name and telephone number at orientation. Your AAG representative will be in touch with you and your employer during your program, and you may call or email him/her when you need help or advice. Your AAG representative will contact you by email throughout your program, so make sure you check the email address you provided AAG at least once a week while you are in the U.S.

Please note that you may not change jobs or leave your assigned job early without the permission of your AAG representative. Before you make any change in your program (change of address or job, etc.), it is critical that you talk to your AAG representative to determine the best action. Changing jobs or your address without contacting AAG is a violation of program rules and will result in you being reported to the USCIS (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services) as being out of visa status and no longer part of the program.

KEY CONTACTS AT THE ALLIANCE ABROAD GROUP

If you need help from Alliance Abroad Group, please contact your AAG Representative first. If you have an emergency after business hours and AAG offices are closed, please call our free emergency number: 1-866-IM-IN-USA (1-866-464-6872). You will be connected to an AAG Staff Member who will be able to help you.

EMERGENCIES

The following are true emergencies, and you should call AAG right away if:

- You are arrested
- You are hospitalized with a serious injury
- You are the victim of a violent crime (call 911 first)
- Another participant needs urgent help

For these issues please contact your AAG representative or, if unavailable, Alliance Abroad Group headquarters (1-866-IM-IN-USA or 1-866-464-6872).

During office hours (8:30 am - 5:30 pm Central Standard Time) you will reach our staff. After hours you will reach our answering service staff who can help you.



KEY CONTACTS AT THE ALLIANCE ABROAD GROUP

NON-EMERGENCIES

For the following problems which are NOT emergencies, please contact your AAG representative or the AAG headquarters during office hours:

- Loss of documents; Loss of Social Security Card
- Loss of passport (Contact your home country's consulate)
- Housing concerns (overcrowding of housing, rent or deposit disputes, destruction of property, condition of housing)
- General information about jobs and housing
- General questions about your program or program status.
- If you are a victim of theft or loss (lost valuables, luggage, etc.)
- Employer / employee concerns; U.S. Payroll Tax Questions, Social Security card hasn't arrived, etc.
- Need to return home (unless you are leaving immediately with no advance notice)

HEADQUARTERS:

Alliance Abroad Group
1221 South Mopac Expressway,
Suite 100
Austin, Texas 78746
Ph: (1) 512.457.8062
Fax: (1) 413.460.3502
Toll-Free number: 1.866.6.ABROAD

Feel free to call our toll free number listed above 24 hours a day/7 days a week, or you can reach AAG staff member at one of the following email addresses:

Support Services Department
supportinfo@allianceabroad.com
or
info@allianceabroad.com

GOVERNMENT RESOURCES:

U.S. Department of State
Office of Exchange Coordination and Designation
ECA/EC/PS - SA-44, Room 734
301 4th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20547
Telephone: 202 203-5096
Email: jvisas@state.gov



TOP FACTS TO REMEMBER

1. SEVIS Registration:

- Register with SEVIS on the AAG website (www.allianceabroad.com/sevis) to confirm your U.S. home and work addresses within 7 days of your program start date. You cannot register before you arrive in the U.S. or before the start date on your DS-2019 form.
- SEVIS will not accept P.O. (Postal Office) boxes. If you do not provide this information, you will put your visa status at risk, and you will also delay your social security card, which will not be sent until we validate you in the system.
- If you cannot access a computer or have problems, please call us at 1-866-IMIN- USA (1-866-464-6872)
- If you move, you must register again with your new address.
- If you have entered all of the information correctly, you will see the word CONFIRMED on the screen.

2. Go to your assigned job!

- You must go to your assigned job or your visa will be at risk. The employer will be expecting you within 2 days (48 hours) of arrival in the U.S. and as close to the start date on the contract as possible.
- You should find arrival instructions to your host company in the job offer provided by your local agent. This information will have details about important contacts, how to get to your host company and when to contact them.
- If you arrive late at night or on a weekend, you may have to arrange your own stay until the following business day.
- Do not arrive before the start date on your job offer. Your employer will not be expecting you and your housing probably will not be available!

3. Don't leave your job!

- You may not change jobs or leave your job without permission from both AAG and your employer.
- AAG will generally only give permission to change jobs if the employer cannot or does not honor the contract (not enough hours, etc.) and you and the employer have tried to find a solution.
- If you leave your job without permission or if you leave before the end of the contract without permission, your visa will be at risk of termination.

4. Housing:

- AAG or the employer has provided you with temporary or permanent housing options. In certain cases, you will be responsible for reserving temporary housing before you arrive, and neither AAG nor the employer can make the temporary housing arrangements for you.
- If you have housing arranged by the employer, be sure you know what the requirements are for deposits. If your job includes housing, you may not need to find your own housing.
- If your housing is participant-arranged, you must secure housing based on the information provided in the housing section of your job offer.
- Once you make a commitment to housing, please understand that you are legally obligated to pay rent on time and through the end of your contract.
- If your job offer requires “participant arranged” housing, you are responsible for securing it before your arrival to the United States. Your employer will not be able to help you after you arrive. If you do not make arrangements before you arrive, the housing options might not be available when you arrive.

5. Bring enough money!

- You will not be paid for at least 2 weeks after you have started working, sometimes more.
- Some companies cannot pay you until you have received your social security card.
- Bring at least \$1000 with you to cover living costs until you are paid. This does not include the cost of domestic travel from orientation to your job site or any start-up housing costs.

6. Bring your job offer!

- The job offer tells you what to expect (hours, wages, conditions etc.) as well as housing arrangements (if applicable).
- If you are not getting what is written on the job offer, talk to your supervisor at your host company. If your supervisor cannot help you, please call Alliance Abroad Group for assistance.

7. Insurance:

- Your coverage is effective for the dates on your DS-2019 form.
- You are allowed to travel in the United States for a period of up to 30 days after the end date on your DS-2019 form. You are not insured for this period. Contact AAG to purchase additional insurance.
- If you plan to go snowsking or participate in extreme sport, please go to www.allianceabroad.com/participants to purchase ski insurance for \$15/month.



WORKPLACE PROTOCOL

YOUR COMMITMENT TO YOUR EMPLOYER

Before arriving in the U.S., you signed a job offer that includes complete information about your placement, which you agreed to. Information includes employer details and contact information, a detailed description of your job and its requirements, housing, transportation, and other information about social security and cultural components.

Please make sure you have read and understood the job offer before coming to the U.S.

If you have been placed in a job that AAG found for you, you have made a contractual commitment to that employer. The contract is valid for the entire length of time on the job form that you and the employer signed. You may not leave that job without permission from the employer AND AAG. Leaving a job without permission is a violation of program rules and the Terms and Conditions that you signed.

If you do so, you are at risk of being terminated from the program and having your visa cancelled, which is a very serious matter both now and in the future. If you are having problems with your job, you should first try to talk to your supervisor at work. If you cannot resolve it with him or her, you should then call your AAG representative. Generally AAG will only consider releasing you from your contractual obligation if the employer is not fulfilling the contract (not giving you the promised number of hours, etc.) and if you have tried to resolve the problem without success. In that case, AAG will try to help you find another job or allow you to move to another job. You may not leave early from the job (before your contracted time is complete) unless you have permission from the employer and AAG. Leaving your job early can also put your visa status at risk, especially if you have not discussed your plans with AAG.

THE AMERICAN WORKPLACE

Work/Travel participants may not be employed as domestic employees in U.S. households or in positions that require them to invest their own money to provide themselves with inventory for the purpose of door-to-door sales. The American workplace may appear less formal than what you may have experienced in your home country. Socializing on the job is common between workers of different levels, and this is the American way of achieving a pleasant working environment. To understand how these informal relationships work, observe your employer and co-workers to learn how to gauge your own on-the-job behavior.



WORKPLACE PROTOCOL

Remember to:

- Be respectful and courteous to clients, customers and co-workers.
- Be on time to work (arrive 5-10 minutes early) and take your company's policies seriously.
- Dress appropriately for the job (wear proper uniform, shoes, etc.).
- Smile!
- Focus on work during work hours.
- Attend to personal matters on personal (non-work) time.
- Practice American hygiene standards. In the U.S., body odor is considered very offensive. Please take a bath or shower every day and always use soap and deodorant.
- Respect members of the opposite gender and avoid inappropriate conversations or physical touching that may be considered sexual in nature and offensive to those around you.

If problems should arise: identify the source of the problem; know specifically what your concern is.

- Approach your immediate supervisor in a calm and polite manner, and explain your concern. (This is culturally acceptable in the United States.)
- If the concern is not resolved to your satisfaction, please phone your AAG representative for assistance.

If you are suddenly fired or laid off:

- On the rare occasions when participants have been fired, it has usually been due to behaving in an uncooperative or inappropriate manner. If you are fired, you should contact your AAG representative immediately.
- If a company has financial difficulties, it is possible that the company will "lay you off" (eliminate your position). If this happens, you will need to contact your AAG representative for advice.

Injuries on the Job:

In the event that you are ever injured at work, you **MUST** report this immediately to your supervisor. You may be entitled to Workers Compensation Insurance to treat your injury, and if this is the case, the workplace insurance would be responsible for paying your medical bills. Please call your AAG representative if you are injured while on the job.



WORKPLACE PROTOCOL

PAY

Workers will receive no less than the federal minimum wage set by the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). Federal Minimum Wage is \$7.25/hour. Employers of “tipped employees” must pay a cash wage of at least \$2.13/hour if they claim a tip credit against their minimum wage obligation. If the total of the hourly wage of at least \$2.13 plus tips does not equal the minimum hourly wage (\$7.25), the employer must pay the employee the difference.

International workers will be paid the equivalent of their American counterparts. You should receive the hourly wage indicated on your signed job offer form. If you are receiving less than the amount on the signed form, contact your company’s Human Resource personnel. If they cannot help you, then contact your AAG representative for assistance.

Most employers will require notice confirming that you have applied for your Social Security number before they can pay you for time worked. In some cases, employers may require the actual number before they can add you to their payroll. You should be paid for all the hours you have worked in every case. If you have any issues with receiving payment from your host company or applying for your Social Security number, please call AAG immediately. You will receive your pay once a week or once every two weeks. Please note that your first paycheck may not be issued for 3 weeks, or after you are entered into the payroll system. Your host company should give you a statement (pay slip) with your check which will explain which taxes are being deducted from your check. As a J-1 exchange visitor and non-resident, you should not have Social Security (FICA), Medicare or Medicaid taxes deducted from your check. You will see deductions for federal, state, and local taxes, as well as for uniforms and housing, depending on your agreement with your host company. All host companies are required by law to offer breaks during your shift and all workers are legally obligated to take the breaks. Your host company may or may not include break time in your pay, depending on the length of the breaks and on the laws in that state. Unpaid breaks will be deducted from your pay. Ask your host company about their policy on paid and unpaid breaks so that you will not have a surprise when you receive your check.



WORKPLACE PROTOCOL

OVERTIME PAY

Overtime pay is defined as additional pay for hours that are not included in a normal work schedule. These hours can be paid at a somewhat higher rate, and they are definitely never guaranteed. Most seasonal companies are exempt and do not pay overtime hours at a higher rate. Please be sure to verify your company's overtime policy with your host company representative before working overtime.

DRUG TESTING

It is within your host company's legal right to request and require you to take a drug test before you begin work and at anytime during your employment period. Testing positive is sufficient grounds for being dismissed from your job without warning.

SECOND JOB

Participants in the Work/Travel program may work at a second job if it does not interfere with the duties of the job on the signed job offer. You are not permitted to work at a high risk job or work in someone's home; please check with your AAG representative if you are not sure if the job is high risk and make sure that you fill out the Second Job form on the AAG website (participant's section).

www.allianceabroad.com/participants_helpful_info_second_job.asp



PROGRAM RULES AND REGULATIONS

PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

To participate in the Work/Travel Program, you must:

- Be a post-secondary student and currently enrolled full-time in a course of study leading to a degree at an accredited educational institution in your home country.
- Be registered for a full-time course load for the semester following participation in the Work/Travel program. (A few exceptions for recent graduates may apply.)
- Participate during your principal university vacation: you cannot leave school early or return to school late in order to participate in the program.
- Possess sufficient English language proficiency - at least an intermediate level of English.
- Be 18-28 years old.

SECURITY PROCEDURES – SEVIS

You signed AAG Terms and Conditions relating to the Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) which tracks all exchange visitors entering the United States on an F, M or J visa. This system was implemented January 30, 2003 and will be strictly enforced. It is very important that you understand these regulations. **Failure to comply with SEVIS regulations could have serious consequences, such as cancellation of your current visa and denial of any future visa applications for you or your family.**

- You must inform AAG of your actual address (where you will live, not a PO Box or the host company address, unless you are living in on-site company housing) within 7 days of arriving in order to maintain your visa in good standing. You must also provide your Host Company's address and contact information on the same web page, just below your home address information. Please make sure that you fill out the appropriate form at (www.allianceabroad.com/sevis) to provide us with that information.
- If you move at any time during your Work/Travel Program, you must inform AAG of your new address within 7 days of that move.

PROGRAM RULES AND REGULATIONS

- If you leave your workplace without the permission of your Host Company **and** your AAG representative, you will be reported to the USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services) as 'out of status' on your program. If you are not sure what to do, CALL your AAG representative.
- You must complete AAG's online orientation prior to your arrival to the U.S. We will send you the link via e-mail. We expect you to read through the orientation material carefully and submit your confirmation that you have completed the requirements for orientation.
- You must attend a pre-departure orientation in your home country, hosted by your local agency. Both AAG's orientation and the pre-departure orientation are designed to help prepare you for your Work/Travel program and will cover very important information all participants should need to know for ensuring a safe and successful program as well as the rules and regulations of the J-1 Work/Travel visa.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

To work legally in the U.S., you will need to enter the country with the following documents, all with valid dates. All U.S. government forms are lettered and numbered in the lower left-hand corner for easy identification.

- DS-2019 form "Exchange Visitor Program, Certificate of Eligibility"
- Passport with J-1 visa stamp or sticker
- I-94 Form (small white card that you receive on the airplane)

Travel Tip: Make two copies of all your documents, including your passport before you leave home. Keep all of your original documents with you (in your carry-on luggage), and put a set of photocopies in your checked luggage.

THE DS-2019 FORM

You will be issued a DS-2019 form by Alliance Abroad Group, a designated Exchange Visitor program sponsor. This U.S. Government form will be mailed to your agency in your home country. Your local agent will instruct you on how to fill out the DS-2019 form and advise you on visa application and other necessary documentation prior to applying for the J-1 visa at the U.S. Embassy or U.S. Consulate in your country. Section 3 of the DS-2019 form confirms the exact dates you are permitted to work at your host company.

The DS-2019 form is a very important document which you must keep throughout your program. The front page has a bar code printed in black ink and is signed by the AAG Responsible Officer or alternate responsible officer. The instructions are on the back page. You must make sure that the Immigration Officer returns the original document to you.

PROGRAM RULES AND REGULATIONS

It is very important that you keep this document safe. The DS 2019 is your authorization to work in the U.S. for the specified dates that appear in Section 3.

The J-1 Visa

The DS-2019 form, which certifies that you have an official sponsor for the Work/Travel program, is required in order to apply for the J-1 visa. The J-1 visa can only be authorized by a U.S. Consular Official at an Embassy or Consulate. Do not purchase your travel tickets before you have the visa. Visa requirements vary by country, and your local agency can assist you with specific information about requirements in your country. As security concerns in the U.S. have increased, it may be more difficult to obtain a visa. You will be required to have a personal interview, and you will need to prove to the Consular Official that you meet the requirements and have no intention of staying in the United States after the program. You will need to provide:

- Proof that you are expected to return to your university by a specified date.
- Proof that you have a current bank account with sufficient funds
- Proof that you have a home, apartment or family members awaiting your return.
- Proof of any other commitments that would require your return to your country.
- Embassies charge different fees in each country for the visa and sometimes even for the interview; please be sure to check with your US Embassy or your local agency to find out the details.

The SEVIS Fee Receipt

The SEVIS system (Student Exchange Visitor Information System) was implemented in 2003 to track J-1 and F-1 visa holders during their time in the United States. You must pay a fee towards this system before your J-1 visa will be processed. In most cases, Alliance Abroad Group is paying this fee on your behalf, and the receipt (I-797) will be sent along with your DS2019. Be sure to have this receipt with you when you go for the visa appointment. Be sure to keep a copy of this document at home and bring it with you for your program.

I-94 Form

At the airline check-in counter or in flight, you will receive an I-94 form, which is your arrival/departure record. This form is very important and should be kept inside your passport because you will need it for immigration, when applying for Social Security and when leaving the U.S. Please make a photocopy of this form and keep it with the copy of your passport in a safe place. Make sure you fill out the form clearly; spell your name as it appears on your passport. Also, make sure that the Customs representative marks you as a J-1 visa holder when checking your documents.

PROGRAM RULES AND REGULATIONS

U.S. VISIT PROGRAM

What does VISIT stand for? Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology, which is a biometric tracking system that tells U.S. Immigration authorities when a non-US citizen enters or leaves the country. Students will be required to follow the steps below and present their receipt before boarding the airplane.

At the airport, the machine looks like an ATM and operates as follows:

Step 1: You insert your passport or visa as shown

Step 2: You place your left index finger on the button

Step 3: You place your right index finger on the button

Step 4: You hold for a digital picture

Step 5: You take your receipt from the machine

WORK DOCUMENTS

I-9 Form: Employment Eligibility

Host companies will ask you to fill out an I-9 form related to work and work authorization.

This is a form that U.S. workers must also fill out. Here are some helpful tips for you on how this form should be completed:

Section 1:

- Write your host company's address
- Write your Social Security number if it has been issued.
- Check the box "an alien authorized to work until _____ (enter the end date on your DS-2019)".
- For the "alien # or Admission #", enter the number from your I-94 form.

Section 2 (List B):

- Write "valid passport from _____" (name of your country).
- Passport number.
- Passport expiration date.

Section 2 (List C):

- Write "DS-2019 number _____" (The number is in the upper right corner of the DS-2019 form.)
- Write "I-94 number _____".
- Enter the same date as you did in section 1 concerning work authorization.

W-4 Forms (for taxes)

Host companies should ask you to complete a W-4 form, which will be used to determine how much tax will be withheld from your pay. Please follow these instructions for filling out the W-4 form:

- On line 3, check only "single" marital status (regardless of marital status).
- On line 5, claim only one withholding allowance.

PROGRAM RULES AND REGULATIONS

- On line 6, write “Non-Resident Alien” or “NRA” above the dotted line.
- On line 7, do NOT claim “Exempt” withholding status.

Important: The above rules must be followed to avoid over-taxation or having to pay tax to the U.S. government in the future when you file your tax declaration form. Do not follow the instructions provided on the W-4 form. These instructions do not apply to “non-resident aliens,” which means they do not apply to Work/Travel participants.

Please note: Tax information is subject to change. If you have any doubt, verify this information with the IRS or the U.S. Embassy in your home country (if tax service is available).

30-DAY TRAVEL PERIOD

You are allowed to travel in the United States for a period of up to 30 days after the end date on your DS-2019 form. After that date, you may not work, but you have 30 days to travel within the U.S. or make arrangements to return home. You may not exit the U.S. to travel to Canada, Mexico or any other country during your 30-day travel period. If your DS-2019 form date has passed, and you leave the country, you will not be able to reenter.

You are not insured for this period unless you contact AAG and make arrangements to purchase the necessary insurance coverage. Please contact us at least 1 month in advance.

You may not travel or take vacation during the time of your work contract. Your Host Company is counting on you for that time, and if you leave the company without the company’s and AAG’s permission, you will be out of status and will be reported to the USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services). If you are not sure what you are allowed to do, please talk to your supervisor at work or call your AAG representative.

PROGRAM FEES

All students pay a program fee to a local home-country agent. This fee, which has been approved by the Alliance Abroad Group, includes the following services from AAG: DS-2019 form documentation and sponsorship which allows you to work legally in the U.S., job placement (unless you applied to the program with your own job), orientation in your home country before departure, online orientation and program materials, medical insurance, support and 24-hour emergency assistance while you are in the U.S. It may also include extra services offered by your home country agent. If you believe you have been charged an unreasonable fee, please consult the Alliance Abroad Group staff.



INSURANCE

Alliance Abroad Group has secured a comprehensive emergency travel insurance policy for you to ensure that you will have access to necessary medical treatment during your program through a company called Bulstrad Life (part of the Vienna Insurance Group). Alliance Abroad Group is not your insurance company. You have limited health/accident insurance for each injury or sickness. Please read the insurance policy brochure you were given or visit our website (www.allianceabroad.com/participants/insurance.htm) to learn more details of what is and what is not covered, and what the limits of the coverage are. If you did not receive an Insurance Policy brochure or flyer, please ask your AAG representative for one. Dates of Coverage: Your coverage begins upon either your arrival in the U.S. or the day before your start date on your DS 2019 form, whichever occurs later. Coverage ends either upon your arrival back in your home country or the day after the end date on your DS 2019 form, whichever occurs earlier. You are not insured for the 30 days of travel at the end of your program or before your program, should you arrive more than one day before your program start date. If you wish to purchase additional insurance for this time, please contact AAG at least one month in advance.

For all services listed below, you will need pre-approval:

- Accident or sickness medical coverage (up to \$50,000 per incident)
- Medical evacuation (up to \$10,000 per incident) Repatriation of remains (up to \$7,500)
- Travel expenses of a close relative in the event of serious illness of the insured person (up to \$1,500 per incident)

YOU ARE NOT COVERED FOR

- Pre-existing conditions, including any illness that begins before your arrival in the destination country.
- Routine medical check-ups
- Dental and eye care are
- Injuries from hazardous activities, including sailing, diving and skiing (water and snow).
- Psychiatric care
- Physical therapy

Please consult the AAG website for all details of coverage. Ski insurance can be purchased separately and we strongly recommend this if you are going to be skiing or participating in extreme sports during your program.

PRE-APPROVAL PRIOR TO TREATMENT

If you need medical care, please call the toll-free number for the insurance company (1-866-646-7887) to get authorization for treatment and the names of approved medical providers in your area prior to going to a doctor or clinic for treatment. In most cases, the Assistance Company (Mondial) will make the appointment for you. If you do not call for pre-approval, your coverage may be reduced or even denied, and you will be responsible for any medical costs. The Assistance Company can also help you decide if you should be going to a clinic, doctor or hospital.

In a medical emergency, you need to call as soon as possible after seeking treatment.

Please call Mondial Assistance Company at:

1-866-646-7887

They are available 24 hours per day, 7 days a week.

WHEN YOU GO TO THE DOCTOR, HOSPITAL OR URGENT CARE CENTER

- Always bring your insurance card, booklet and claim form with you! If the Assistance Company has made the appointment for you, there should be no problem with the billing.
- Go to the approved doctor or clinic or your costs will be higher. If your condition is not an emergency situation, it is best to go to a walk-in clinic rather than the emergency room.



INSURANCE

The deductible for emergency room treatment is higher than the normal deductible if you are treated and released. If you have to go to a Doctor/Hospital which is not part of the Bulstrad/Mondial plan and which will not accept this insurance, you should always ask them to call the insurance company to see if something can be worked out. If they absolutely refuse to accept this insurance, you will need to pay the bills yourself and then use a claim form found at AAG's website (www.allianceabroad.com/participants/insurance.htm) to seek reimbursement.

DEDUCTIBLE

You will need to pay a deductible or co-pay the first time a doctor treats you for each accident or sickness. The deductible amount is your responsibility for each doctor's visit.

The standard deductible amount is \$100 for the first visit and \$25 for each follow-up visit you make for the same illness. The deductible for treatment at an emergency room is \$250. If you are admitted to the hospital, the amount will be waived. Typically, you need to pay this amount when you are at the doctor or hospital, though in some cases, they will send you a bill. You must pay this bill when you receive it. Failure to pay will result in a negative report to the authorities and can affect your ability to return to the U.S. in the future. Give the doctor or hospital your home address. Do not send medical bills to AAG.

SKI INSURANCE OPTION (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)

If you are working in a location where you will be skiing on your days off, or you plan to visit a ski area during your time on the Work & Travel program, you must purchase additional insurance for \$20 USD prior to your program start date. If you are in a skiing accident, and you do not have this additional insurance, you will be responsible for paying all of your medical bills. Contact AAG to purchase additional insurance or visit our website (www.allianceabroad.com/participants/insurance_Bulstrad.htm#ski).



SOCIAL SECURITY CARD

YOU MUST HAVE:

- A Social Security number to work legally in the United States. You must apply for a Social Security number upon arrival to the U.S., but at least 10 days after registering with SEVIS. The Social Security office will not process your application until you have been validated in the SEVIS system. Validation happens when you arrive at your host company and register on the AAG Website (www.allianceabroad.com/sevis).

This needs to be done within 7 days after your DS-2019 start date. If you do not register, we cannot validate your status and your Social Security application cannot be processed.

PLEASE REMEMBER:

- You must go to your assigned host company, as we will not validate your status if you are not where you are supposed to be. If your status in SEVIS is validated and all requirements of the Social Security Administration (SSA) are satisfied, you should receive your Social Security number/card within a few weeks. Be sure to write your Host Company address as the mailing address on your Social Security Application. **The Social Security Administration recommends that you always wait at least 10 days after registering with SEVIS to apply for your card to be sure you are validated in SEVIS.**

- While ten days after SEVIS registration is the earliest you may apply for a Social Security number, you cannot apply any later than two weeks before the end date on your DS-2019 form. Therefore, if the end date on your DS form is 12/15/2010, you must apply for your Social Security number before 12/1/2010. However, we do not recommend waiting this long. You should apply as soon as possible because it may take up to 6 weeks to receive your number/card.

- If the Social Security Administration cannot verify your status, they will mail a notice of explanation to you (at the address you have provided on the Social Security application). The letter will instruct you to contact AAG and ask that your documents and/or SEVIS information be reviewed to ensure that they are accurate. You should wait 48 hours before re-applying for your Social Security number. If your Social Security card has not arrived after a few weeks, please check with AAG to be sure that you are validated in SEVIS.

SOCIAL SECURITY CARD

- The verification process required for you to get your card may take longer than in the past, and your host company may not be able to pay you until you have received this card (although you must be paid for all time worked). You should bring sufficient funds to cover living expenses during this period, which could be at least one month.

Applying for your card after arrival at your workplace:

Please be sure to wait at least 10 days after registering with SEVIS before going to the Social Security office. If you have a Social Security card from a previous visit to the U.S., you need not apply again.

The telephone book (in a special section on government listings) has the number and address of the nearest Social Security office in your area, or call toll-free 1-800-772-1213. This address is also provided in your job offer.

You must go in person to the Social Security office and bring the following documents with you (originals and one photocopies of each on separate pages):

- Passport/ Visa
- Sponsor letter
- Job Offer Letter (Company Specific)
- DS-2019
- I-94 form
- Birth Certificate or at least one official picture ID (identification document) that is at least one year old. (If the passport and other official ID, such as a driver's license, are both less than one year old, a birth certificate is required.)

The mailing address on the application should be the host company's address, because the Social Security card will be mailed approximately 6-8 weeks later to your employer. You should ask the Social Security officer for a Form SSA-5030 proving that you have applied for the card. Host companies may use temporary numbers in their payroll system (zeros) if the actual number is not available before the first payroll. If your employer is not sure how to report your wages before you have received your Social Security number, please ask them to go to the Social Security Administration's website at (<http://www.ssa.gov/employer/hiring/htm>).

Be sure to request a Letter of Receipt of Application to take with you before you leave the Social Security office. This is your proof to your Host Company that you applied for Social Security.

Frequently Asked Questions: Social Security Issues and Lost Documents

Question:

What should I do if I lose one or all of my immigration documents before I apply for a Social Security Number? What if I lose these documents after I apply?

Answer:

You will not be able to apply for a Social Security Number without your passport, DS-2019 or I-94 forms. If your documents were stolen, you must first file a police report before replacing the documents.

Apply for the necessary replacement documents below as quickly as possible:

- To replace your passport, contact your country's Consulate in New York or Los Angeles.
- To replace your DS-2019, contact your local (AAG) Outreach Coordinator.
- To replace your I-94 form, contact U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) (www.uscis.gov). Your I-94 form is essential for the SSA to verify your status.

If all three documents are missing, apply for all documents at once instead of waiting for the documents to be replaced one at a time. If you lose the documents after you apply, you should quickly pursue the same process listed above.

Question:

I have lost my I-94 form. What should I do?

Answer:

To replace an I-94 form that has been lost or stolen, you need to apply for a replacement I-94 with an I-102 form, Application for Replacement/Initial Nonimmigrant Arrival Departure Record. The I-102 can be downloaded from the USCIS website (www.uscis.gov).

Make photocopies of the application before sending the originals to the USCIS local office. If you must leave the U.S. before the new I-94 is received, you should retain the photocopy of the application and keep your boarding pass as proof of exiting the country.

Do not go to the Port of Entry (airport) for a replacement I-94. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) can fix mistakes in I-94s but will not issue replacement forms.

Question:

Why would the Social Security office reject my application or say it cannot be verified in the system?

Answer:

In some situations, your name or date of birth may be correct on your I-94, but incorrect in your record at the Social Security Administration office. In this case, the local Social Security office can request secondary

SOCIAL SECURITY CARD

verification through a special Department of Homeland Security (DHS) office in Los Angeles. The office in Los Angeles checks SEVIS. However, if you do not write your legal name or date of birth accurately on your I-94 form, these errors must be manually corrected by a DHS immigration official at the nearest international airport. It is important to write your legal name and date of birth clearly and legibly on your I-94 form. Your legal name should match your name in your passport. DHS keys the handwritten data into the DHS system. If the handwritten data is not clearly legible, there is a chance that it will be entered incorrectly.

Question:

What if the Social Security office rejects my application due to incorrect information on the application?

Answer:

Typically, applications are rejected when there are name misspellings, birthdates listed in the wrong order, incorrect ending dates or other errors made at the port of entry (airport).

If your application was rejected, contact the Social Security office that rejected it. The Social Security office should verify that their database is inconsistent with SEVIS by faxing your information to the DHS office in Los Angeles.

If you do not receive help from the Social Security office as directed above, you need to visit the nearest international airport to correct the documents. Visit the Customs and Border Patrol website at http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/toolbox/contacts/deferred_inspection/ to determine the location & hours of the deferred inspection site and if an appointment is needed.

Question:

What should I do if I have been waiting for my Social Security card for over six weeks?

Answer:

Please keep in mind that some Social Security offices are much slower than others. For instance, if you applied at the Social Security office in New York, you might have to wait longer than participants who applied at Social Security offices closer to their employment.

If you would like to check on your Social Security card status, call the national Social Security Administration number (1-800-772-1213) or visit <http://www.ssa.gov/locator> to determine your local office. You may then call your local office to check on the status of your card or determine whether or not there is a problem with your application.

You should also review each of your documents for possible errors in the spelling of your name, date of birth or visa type. If you find a mistake on one of your forms, contact your local Social Security office immediately to correct the mistake instead of waiting for a rejection letter.

SOCIAL SECURITY CARD

Question:

What should I do if my Social Security application is rejected for not having a signed sponsor letter?

Answer:

You should have received a signed sponsor letter in the documentation sent to you before you depart from your home country or at your orientation location. If you have lost or never received a sponsor letter, contact your AAG Outreach Coordinator for assistance. He/she will contact the appropriate AAG program director and have a new sponsor letter sent to you immediately.

Question:

What should I do if I have to leave the United States at the end of my program before receiving my Social Security number? Or, what if I never completed the application process for a Social Security number?

Answer:

You may be able to obtain an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number from the U.S. Embassy in your home country. If not, when you complete your U.S. income tax return, you should also download Form W-7 Application for an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) website at www.irs.gov. Submit your completed W-7 form and all required documents along with your income tax return to the IRS.

Question:

What if I make a mistake on my forms at the airport?

Answer:

You will need to contact the Social Security office where you applied for your Social Security number. They will be able to help you determine the mistake and then correct the problem.

Question:

What if I leave the United States without giving the customs agent the I-94 card?

Answer:

The original I-94 card must be surrendered when returning to your home country after your program is complete. If you fail to do so, the original I-94 should be sent to:

ACS, Inc. ACS-USCIS

1084 South Laurel Road OR PO Box 7125 London, Kentucky 40744 London, KY 40742, USA USA

This must be transmitted with proof of departure which should include a copy of the arrival stamp in one's passport and the boarding pass from the flight. In addition, it is vital to keep copies of any documents submitted. Without this proof of the departure, there is no guarantee that the information will be entered into their system. Finally, we advise that copies of the documents sent should be kept during any future travel. This provides a way for persons who turn in their I-94s late to confirm that the departure information was properly entered into the system.



INCOME TAX IN THE UNITED STATES

All J-1 Exchange Visitors must pay all appropriate federal, state and local taxes. However, a large portion of the taxes which have been withheld from your paycheck can be refunded to you, provided you correctly file the necessary tax forms. The deadline for declaring all taxes paid in the year you worked is April 15 of the following year. If you work in the U.S. during two different years, you must file taxes twice. If you do not file your tax declaration, you will not receive a tax refund and you could also have problems on future trips to the United States. Please note that as an exchange visitor (J-1 visa), you are exempt from paying Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid taxes. Be sure to keep your pay slips and other paperwork from the program. You will need them at tax time. Please visit the AAG website for further resources.

W-2 FORM: YOUR WAGE AND TAX STATEMENT

In January, your host company is required by law to provide you with a declaration of the total amount of money you earned the year before and the total amount of each tax that you paid. This statement is called a W-2 form, and it is used to file your U.S. Federal Income tax return. Make sure your employer has your address in your home country so that they can send you the W-2 form. It is recommended that you provide your employer with a self-addressed, stamped envelope so that they can send your W-2 form to you. If you do not receive your W-2 form by February, please contact your employer.



AMERICAN CULTURE

CULTURE SHOCK

Some international participants may experience culture shock at some point during the program. Culture shock is “initial discomfort and disorientation when exposed to a new culture or lifestyle.” Culture Shock usually begins 1-4 weeks after arrival and lasts 1-4 weeks.

Common symptoms of culture shock include:

- Homesickness
- Feeling isolated and lonely
- Reluctance to speak English
- Reluctance to adjust to the new
- Schedule, foods, lifestyles, dress, etc.
- Lack of motivation and energy
- Depression
- Crying and sleeping excessively

Culture shock is temporary and will pass. The more involved you can become, the more quickly you will adapt and become comfortable in your new surroundings. Ideas that may help you feel better:

- Get involved as much as possible in company activities and attend social activities, clubs, etc.
- Find something from home that is comforting: a book in your own language, a favorite food from home, music from home, etc.
- Seek out new friends when you are lonely.

CULTURE SHOCK IS VERY NORMAL, BUT IT CAN BE VERY SERIOUS. IF YOU TRY THE ABOVE ADVICE AND IT DOES NOT SEEM TO BE WORKING, PLEASE CALL YOUR AAG REPRESENTATIVE.

ABOUT THE UNITED STATES

Culture in the United States

What is American culture? There is no one answer to this question. The reason is because the United States of America is a diverse land. Covering more than 9.6 million square kilometers, the U.S. is home to more than 290 million people. While there are values that unite Americans, you will find that a large, urban area like Los Angeles, California has a very different culture and way of life than a small town like Oxford, Mississippi. When nearly three thousand miles separate people on the west coast from those on the east coast, there are bound to be differences! Continue reading to learn more about what to expect when you arrive in the United States.

Useful Information about Living in the US

Climate: The US is a large country and the climate varies drastically between states. In general, the northern part is cooler than the southern part. Be sure to research the climate in your area during your time there so that you are prepared for the weather! A great resource is www.weather.com.

Greeting: A handshake with direct eye contact and a smile is the standard greeting. Americans do not generally kiss or hug unless they are close friends or family.

Language: While English is the language of the U.S., accents and words can vary greatly between regions. For example, when addressing a group of people in the South, it is common to use “y’all” (short for “you all”) while in the north you might say “you guys”. Another common example is the many words used to describe a soft drink—soda, pop, or Coke (even if it is not referring to a Coca Cola!)

American Core Values

While American culture is diverse, there are certain core values that unite most Americans. While these are common to many US citizens, they do not apply to everyone.

Individualism: Americans stress individualism. Each person is responsible for himself. As a result, there is less of a sense of community and less reliance on family members as you find in other nations. Each individual wants to make it on his/her own. You are expected to find a solution to problems or seek out someone who can help.

Equality: Americans believe strongly in the equality of all people. However, it took many years for equality to come for all races. Today the U.S. has “equal opportunity” laws prohibiting the discrimination of individuals on such things as race, nationality, gender, religion, age or disability.

Competition: Americans believe that competition brings out the best. In school and at work, competition between individuals causes them to strive for the best. Schools honor those students who do best and companies will honor the workers who work the hardest. As a result, competing against others, even against friends, is normal.

Value of Time: Americans are very time oriented and believe that time is precious. As a result, promptness is of the utmost importance. If you have an appointment or meeting, you should plan on arriving early. Being late, even for good reasons, often minimizes the likelihood of you getting what you desire. There is a common saying “To be early is to be on time. To be on time is to be late. To be late is to be dead”. Another common saying is “Time is money”.

Being Direct and Honest: Honesty is of great importance, even if you are bringing bad news. Being indirect when sharing bad news will frustrate Americans.

Privacy: As they say in the US, “mind your own business”. Most Americans do not want advice or assistance unless they ask. On a larger scale, Americans demand that businesses respect their privacy and that the government not intrude in their lives.

Personal Space and Touch: Standing within an American’s personal space will cause them to feel uncomfortable. How close is too close? Studies have found that most prefer to keep a distance of 19in/48cm between people. That is about an arm’s length distance. Because of this space distance, physical touch is rarely appropriate for your initial interactions with someone.

Cleanliness: Any form of body odor will be a problem as you seek to get to know Americans. Simply bathing daily and wearing deodorant will prevent you from having this obstacle to friendships in the US.

Eye Contact: When speaking to someone, making direct eye contact is a sign of respect and honesty. Avoiding eye contact makes you look like you are not interested in what someone is saying. If you are talking and not looking at the person to whom you are speaking, they may think you are not telling the truth.



AMERICAN CULTURE

American Holidays **National Holidays**

There are 10 national holidays each year when government offices & some businesses close:

- New Years Day - January 1st
- Martin Luther King Day - Third Monday in January
- Presidents' Day - Third Monday in February
- Memorial Day - Last Monday in May
- Independence Day - July 4th
- Labor Day - First Monday in September
- Columbus Day - Second Monday in October
- Veterans Day - Second Monday in November
- Thanksgiving Day - Fourth Thursday in November
- Christmas Day - December 25th

Many of these are distinctly American. Martin Luther King Day is a time to reflect on the civil rights movement and focus on equality for all people. Independence Day is a celebration of America's independence in 1776. Thanksgiving Day is a time to remember the early settlers receiving help to make it through the winter from the Native Americans, and to celebrate all of the blessings that Americans enjoy.

Other Celebrations while not official government holidays or religious celebrations, Americans have found many other days on which they celebrate. Mother's Day in May and Father's Day in June are Sundays when children honor their parents. Valentine's Day on February 14th is the "holiday of love" and is a time when Americans show their love for special people in their lives. Giving flowers and candy is very common among couples, and children exchange cards and candy at school. In addition, many individuals celebrate Halloween on October 31st. This is a time when children dress up in costumes and go door to door asking for candy.



EXPENSES IN THE U.S.

HOUSING

Rent is approximately \$850.00 USD a month for a 1 bedroom apartment. Added extras such as washing machines and clothes dryers, swimming pool, sauna, etc., will increase the price. The location of the housing will also affect the cost. (City centers are more expensive.) When you rent for a short period of time, rent prices are usually higher. Also, you need to consider the cost of utilities (electricity, gas, water, etc.) and furnishings; so your cost is likely to be higher.

UTILITIES

Utilities are generally not included in the rent. Electricity, water, garbage collection, etc., are approximately \$60.00 USD per month in the winter. With constant use of air conditioning during the summer, this cost can go as high as \$100.00 USD per month. Basic cable television service (no movies) costs approximately \$60.00 per month.

PHONE

Basic telephone service is approximately \$35.00 USD per month. You are typically charged a connection for hooking up the phone line in your residence. If there is no telephone in your housing, you will have to buy a telephone. Cell (mobile) phone service costs approximately \$30.00-\$53.00 USD per month with a basic 250-minute package. Some cell phone providers require a social security number and will have you sign a contract which will cost money to end early. Prices will vary depending on service provider and minutes of talk time in the package. INTERNATIONAL phone calls are not included in packages and cost more money per minute than local calls. Price will vary depending upon your country.



EXPENSES IN THE U.S.

INTERNET

Is there internet service at the property? Is WiFi (wireless) also available if you buy or bring a laptop? If internet is not included, where is internet service available and how far away is that? Most telephone service providers also offer internet services for an additional charge.

FOOD

Food will cost approximately \$250.00 USD per month. Organic fruits and vegetables are more expensive. A meal at a fast food restaurant costs approximately \$4.00 USD or more for a sandwich, French fries and a soft drink. It is always cheaper to cook at home than to “eat out” (in restaurants). Look for store-brands or generic brands too, as they are always less expensive!

LAUNDRY SERVICE

It will cost approximately \$1.00 USD to wash and \$1.00 to dry a load of clothes. Laundry soap costs approximately \$6.00 USD per bottle or box.

TAXI

Taxi cabs cost approximately \$2.50 USD or more for the first mile then \$0.25 USD per ½ mile. You may also have to pay road or bridge tolls which can vary from \$0.25 USD up to \$2.00 USD.

LEISURE

Movies cost approximately \$8.00 - \$10.00 USD, but are often less expensive if you go before 6 p.m.



MONEY MATTERS

BANKING AND AUTOMATIC TELLER (ATM) CARDS: CASH MACHINES

Most U.S. banks provide bank cards that can be used at 24-hour automated teller machines (ATMs). Banks may charge a fee of \$1 - \$2 per withdrawal for using an ATM of another bank.

CURRENCY

The basic American unit of currency is the dollar (\$1). Be careful as all U.S. bank notes (bills) are green in color and can look alike. Many shops and stores do not accept bank notes (bills) larger than \$20, so it is best to get smaller bills from a bank.

CREDIT CARDS

It is a good idea to have a credit card available for emergency situations (including dental problems, theft, and fire). Credit cards are accepted by most stores and businesses, and they are much safer than carrying cash as they can be replaced easily if lost or stolen.

TRAVELERS CHECKS

Travelers checks are replaceable if lost or stolen, and can be purchased at any bank. Make a separate list of check numbers, and buy small denominations. Most stores and businesses accept travelers checks; but ask before you shop. You will usually need to show your passport to use a travelers check.

BANK ACCOUNTS

We suggest you setup a bank account and deposit your paychecks. It is unsafe to carry large amounts of cash. You will need to have your social security number to open a U.S. bank account.



HOUSING

Housing arrangements are different in each location and for each job. Short-term housing can be very expensive and hard to find in some resort areas. Alliance Abroad Group will generally provide you with housing leads or ideas for temporary housing, but we cannot make your housing arrangements or sign a contract for you. Please understand that housing will probably cost you more than the rates that you see in the local newspaper, as you are not committing to a year-long lease (contract). Short-term rentals are always more expensive. Landlords often do not like to rent to international visitors because they do not have a credit history in the United States, and because other international students may not have always shown respect and taken good care of the property.

If your housing is participant-arranged, you must contact the housing leads listed on your job offer as soon as possible in order to secure housing. Your host company will not be able to help you if you arrive without housing arranged. Please be sure you have completed this step before leaving your home country.

Some employers will either provide housing or will help you to find housing. That information is included on the job offer form. Be sure to note whether a deposit is required and if it needs to be paid in advance. If your housing is exclusive to the Host Company, you must live in that housing. With exclusive housing, the employer may be paying for the apartment in advance (on your behalf) to be sure that you have housing, so it is very important that you respect the contract. If you do not show up, or if you leave early, the employer still has to pay for the apartment, so they are really doing you a big favor.

Damaging your apartment or failure to pay your rent on time may be cause for termination from the program. If you find housing on your own, you are usually asked to sign a lease and to pay a deposit. This is a legally binding commitment. You will not be able to leave before the end of the lease (contract) or you could have legal charges brought against you. If this happens, and AAG finds that you are at fault, your program will be terminated, and there may be legal consequences. Housing is a serious matter and can make or break the success of your program.

Please take this responsibility seriously. If the housing is participant-arranged, first contact the leads listed on your job offer as soon as possible to secure housing. If your host company does not find housing for you, and you were not able to secure housing prior to your arrival in the U.S., you are responsible for finding temporary housing while you search for an apartment. Apartments can be found directly through advertisements, by word-of-mouth or through apartment brokers. The apartment broker might charge you or the landlord a fee, depending on the locality. Make sure there is no misunderstanding about who pays the fee. Craigslist.org is a good website for finding housing and/or roommates in many cities. You can search and post for free!

Finding roommates will probably make your rent cheaper and you will also have someone with whom to split the utility bills.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN AN APARTMENT

When looking for an apartment, pay attention to the many factors (other than neighborhood, size of rooms or price) that will affect your enjoyment of the apartment:

- Is the apartment in good condition?
- Do you have to sign a contract? If so, for how long? You will want something that is month to month if possible.
- Is this a smoking or non-smoking room or apartment? If nonsmoking, is there a place outside your house for you to smoke?
- If it needs to be painted, will the landlord pay for it?
- Do the windows work properly?
- Are there laundry facilities in the building?
- What about security? Do you feel safe?
- Are pest control and extermination services provided on a regular basis?
- Is there a regular superintendent or building staff to take care of repairs?
- Are the mail boxes secure?
- How will you get to work? Is a public transportation route accessible?
- How close is housing to food and clothing stores?
- Can you borrow a bicycle for the first week, or get rides to stores to buy food and clothes if stores are not nearby?

WHAT IS INCLUDED

Most apartments in the United States will include a stove, refrigerator and sink in the kitchen, a toilet, bathtub or shower and sink in the bathroom, at least one lock on the apartment door, and a private mailbox. In addition, some apartments will have air conditioners, dishwashers and waste disposal devices in the kitchen. An outdoor parking space or indoor garage space may be included in the rent or offered at an extra charge.

In some apartments electricity or gas service is included in the rent. Telephone service is never included. You will probably want to find a

furnished apartment, which will usually cost more than an unfurnished apartment (without furniture). There are companies that provide rental furniture for a monthly fee. Ask the apartment manager about furniture rental.

BEING ACCEPTED AS A TENANT

Once you find an apartment to rent, you will have to convince the landlord to rent it to you. Most landlords will require you to fill out an application and show some credit and employment history, which as an international student, you probably do not have.

Most rental properties need to have rent paid from the beginning of each month until the end of the month, even if you arriving mid-week or leaving before the month is over. Rent is due on the first of every month for that month.

DEPOSIT

Most landlords will ask for a security/damage deposit to make sure any damages, late arrivals, or early departures are covered. The security deposit is an agreement between you and the landlord which means the landlord is going to reserve the housing for you. Your part of the agreement is that you will pay for the entire amount of time in which the housing is reserved for you.

You are responsible for all damages, even if you did not do them. Any violations of the rental agreement will result in not receiving your security/damage deposit back.

Inspect the apartment for any damages before you sign an agreement and put these damages in writing with the landlord to prevent being charged for them later.

If the deposits are being mailed back to you after your departure, make sure to give your landlord a self-addressed and stamped envelope with your current home address in your home country. If you make a mistake on the envelope, this will cause a very long delay in getting your deposit back to you.

If the landlord is returning your deposit after all the tenants are out of the rental property this could take 4 weeks after the last tenant leaves. The landlord will take an inventory of what is missing from the property, look for any damages, and get the total repair or replacement costs for damaged or missing items. That cost will be deducted from your security deposit. The landlord also may need to wait until utility, cable, or telephone bills are received.

Keep in mind if you leave the rental property early, and there are damages, or the property is not cleaned and left in its original condition, you will probably NOT get your deposit back OR it could take one to two months after the last student leaves to get back any money owed.

LANDLORDS AND PROBLEMS

The landlord will be responsible for most of the building maintenance. You will be responsible for keeping your apartment in reasonably good condition. If you damage the apartment beyond ordinary “wear and tear” the landlord might be justified in keeping your security deposit after you move out.

If you don’t pay the rent for a certain period of time, the landlord may remove you from the apartment by going to court and getting an eviction order. This can take some time. If you have a legitimate grievance (complaint) with the landlord, you might be entitled to withhold rent but you will have to follow certain rules depending on your area; you can’t simply stop paying. If you cannot afford a lawyer to help you, many local government agencies can give you free assistance. If you feel that the landlord is violating your housing rights by overcrowding a residence or for any other reason, please contact an AAG representative for help.

UTILITIES

The term “Utilities” refers to basic electric, natural gas, electricity, water and garbage services and is subject to special government regulation.

Some utilities, such as water, heating, natural gas and electricity may be included in your monthly rent. Some houses and apartments are all electric and you must pay for the electricity in addition to the rent. Please be sure to ask if any utilities are not included in the rent and how much they will cost. Once utility service is connected, pay your bills on time to avoid late charges and to maintain good credit.

PAPERWORK

Utility companies will want basic information about you, your credit history and your employment. They might demand a deposit to assure payment of bills, especially if you do not have an established credit rating or employment background.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

All utility companies have customer service telephone numbers you can use to get service started. The utility company will give you a date their installer can come to your home to connect the service. They will rarely consider your convenience, or give you an exact time of day. Make sure to be home for them in order to avoid delays.

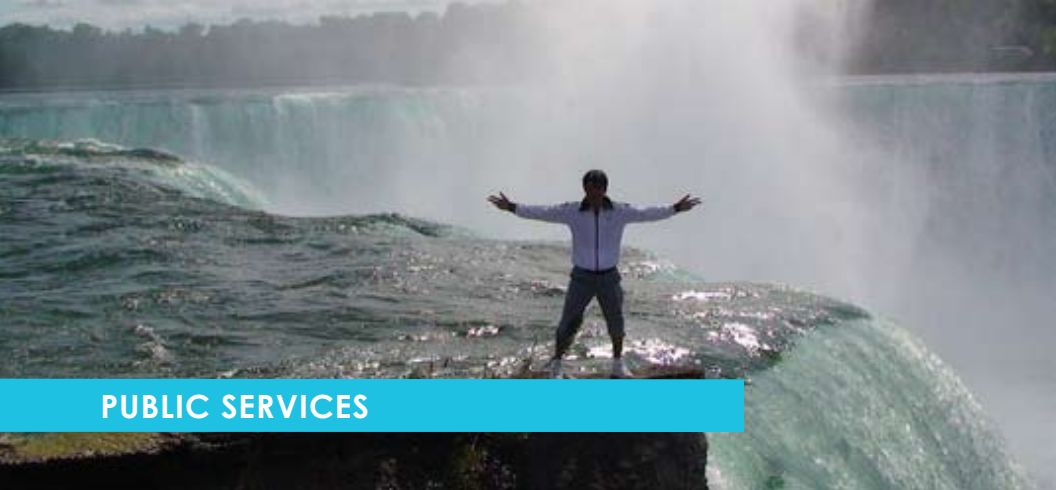


HOUSING

HOUSING TERMS

- Sublet: a place for rent by someone who is already on a lease that is looking for someone to temporarily replace them. This is a good option since you will not have to sign a lease and will pay an agreed upon amount for an agreed upon period of time to the person who is on the lease.
- Rent: a specific amount of money you pay to live in a place; usually paid weekly or monthly.
- Lease: a contract that defines the terms and conditions under which you rent a place. It is a binding document so be sure to read it carefully or else you may face financial or legal penalties. If you do not understand something, it is very important to ask. See below for a sample housing contract.

www.allianceabroad.com/participants/downloads/participant_downloads.zip



PUBLIC SERVICES

THE YELLOW PAGES

The “Yellow Pages” are telephone books, available in every locality in the United States, that list businesses alphabetically by type. In smaller communities you will find the Yellow Pages at the back of the local telephone directory, while big cities may have an entirely separate Yellow Pages book. (The regular telephone book, which lists telephone numbers alphabetically rather than by business type, is known as the “White Pages.”)

The “Yellow Pages” will list businesses in the area. In addition, many businesses purchase advertisements in the Yellow Pages. If you want a particular product or service, you can go through the main body of the “Yellow Pages” in alphabetical sequence until you find the appropriate section. If the product does not have a section of its own, look in the index, usually at the rear of the book, to find out in which section the product or service you are looking for is located. You may also find helpful local resources on the internet.

NEWSPAPERS

Commercial businesses often advertise their products, services, special sales and events in local newspapers. Many stores have sales at certain times of the year where you can save money. A careful reading of the community’s main daily, weekly and Sunday newspapers will give you a good idea of the products and services available. Most newspapers contain classified advertisements as well as larger display ads. Classified ads can be placed by businesses but may also be used for something as simple as a child selling a bicycle or a person selling a used car. Many good products can be obtained through classified ads, but of course there is no guarantee as to quality.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The public library is your best source for information about practically anything. Visit it just to familiarize yourself with the facilities. If the library offers an orientation or tour, attend one as soon as you can. If you have any trouble finding or using any of the materials in the library, please ask a librarian to help you. Most libraries have consumer information collections, books on getting the most value for your dollar and free consumer-oriented publications and pamphlets. Often a library will offer free internet access if you live in that town.

HOURS OF OPERATION

Stores generally open between 8:00 am and 10:00 am in the morning and stay open until 5:00 pm or 6:00 pm Monday through Saturday. Depending on local laws, stores might be open Sunday for part of the day. American stores never close for lunch. Some retailers will remain open until 9:00 or 10:00 pm several days a week, and many discount stores remain open late every day.

It is common in shopping malls for all stores to remain open late several times a week or every weekday. Supermarkets usually remain open until 9:00 pm. Convenience stores and some restaurants are open 24 hours a day. Note, however, that most offices close at 5:00 pm; banks generally close earlier, in some cases as early as 3:00 pm.

THE POST OFFICE

The U.S. Postal Service is operated by the federal government. Post offices are located in every town and are usually open from 8:00 or 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. weekdays, noon or 1:00 p.m. on Saturdays and are closed on Sunday. Some large city post offices have a section that never closes where you can buy stamps and deposit mail at any hour. The postal service delivers mail to homes and businesses every day except Sundays and official national holidays. International Packages: If you are sending an important item out of the country, the best strategy is to wrap or package it, label it very clearly, then ask the post office clerk how you should send it. The clerk will weigh the package and tell you the cost of each shipping option.

THE TELEPHONE

Telephone numbers in the United States have ten digits. The first three digits are the area code. In written or printed telephone numbers, area codes are often placed within parentheses like this: (212) 555-1234. Each area code will serve a few million people; this might be an entire state or just part of a large city like New York or Los Angeles. If you are dialing a



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number in the same area code as the telephone you are using, you usually do not have to use the area code, though this is also changing. If you are dialing a number in another the area code, you probably have to dial the number "1" or another numeral before area code. Check with the local telephone company or a knowledgeable local resident to see if you need to dial the area code first. It is confusing even to Americans!

LONG DISTANCE SERVICES

There are many long distance telephone companies in the U.S., such as AT&T, Sprint and Verizon, to name a few. These companies offer special plans for saving money on long distance or international calls. You can find these calling plans advertised on television, radio, the internet, and your local newspaper.

CHOICE OF LONG DISTANCE

When you have a phone installed by the local telephone company, they will ask you which long distance company you want to use. The local telephone company will include the long distance company's charges on your bill. You can choose the long distance company whose TV or radio commercial you like best, or ask someone who already has the service. The major long distance companies have toll-free "800" numbers which you can dial to get basic information. Even if you have signed up with a particular long distance company, you can still use any of a number of discount long-distance companies that require you to enter a series of digits every time you call.

PHONE CARDS AND CREDIT CARD CALLING

Phone cards and credit cards can be used to make long distance telephone calls, especially if you are away from home. You can apply for a phone card through your local phone company, a long distance telephone company, or through your credit card company. You can also purchase calling cards at the AAG orientation or at convenience stores. With one of these cards you will be able to make a long distance call from a telephone booth- -often a special credit card slot-without having to carry or deposit money. You will have to dial a special number to activate this service, and sometimes

PUBLIC SERVICES

it can cost twice as much as calling from a regular telephone. If you are at someone else's home, and you need to make a long distance call, it is courteous to use a phone card if you have one. A direct call to your home country without a calling card will be very expensive.

SUPERMARKETS OR GROCERY STORES

The primary outlet for retail food in the United States is the supermarket. Supermarkets carry a large number of brands and products in several sizes. In suburban areas supermarkets can be very large with pharmacy departments, on-site bakeries, even sections where you can buy motor oil and hardware. Small supermarkets in cities often offer less variety. In America, a trip to the supermarket can be a major expedition. Financially astute consumers often make shopping lists in advance, and take advantage of discount coupons and weekly specials. Supermarkets offer products under their own brand names as well as national brands. The supermarket brands usually cost less. Supermarkets also offer "generic" or "no name" products which cost even less. Often these products are exactly the same as the more expensive, nationally advertised brands.

PERSONAL HYGIENE

In the United States, cleanliness is an important part of the culture. Americans have elevated personal hygiene and cleanliness to an obsession. While you are in this country, it is important to follow the personal hygiene practices common to the culture.

- Take a shower or bath every day.
- Use an underarm deodorant or anti-perspirant.
- Practice good dental hygiene by brushing teeth twice a day.
- Do your laundry frequently so your clothes and uniforms are clean.

SMOKING

Americans are not very tolerant of smoking, so it is very important to be careful about smoking around them until you are sure of their views on it. Most workplaces and nearly all public buildings are non-smoking environments. Smoking is also banned in restaurants and bars in some cities and states. If you smoke, it is important that you always smoke in designated smoking areas. When with co-workers, friends, customers or others, ask if you may smoke around them. Many landlords will prohibit smoking inside the house or apartment.



ILLEGAL CONDUCT TO AVOID WHILE IN THE U.S.A

While you are in the U.S., you are subject to U.S. laws. Your best defense against legal problems is to educate yourself about the laws of the United States and follow them. If you unknowingly break a law, your ignorance cannot be used as a legal defense. You are obligated to take responsibility for any crimes or violations that you commit. Alliance Abroad Group can verify your J-1 status and can advise you on a course of action, but there are limits to the help we can offer. Program participants have the same rights as a U.S. citizen if accused of a crime. Being arrested can be cause for immediate termination from the AAG Work/Travel program.

A few illegal acts that you must be aware of are:

- Underage drinking of alcoholic beverages (The legal drinking age in the U.S. is 21.)
- Drinking alcohol in public places
- Purchasing alcohol for anyone under 21
- Driving after drinking alcoholic beverages. Also called Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) or Driving Under the Influence (DUI)
- Illegal drug use and/or possession
- Disturbing the peace (making excessive noise late at night)
- Threatening another person or touching another person in any undesired way
- Disorderly conduct (talking back to the police)
- Property damage
- Having a sexual relationship of any kind with someone under 18
- Theft (stealing goods or anything that is not yours)

IF YOU ARE ARRESTED:

First and foremost, always treat police officers with respect. A bad attitude will certainly change a bad situation into a nightmare. You have a right to be represented by an attorney (lawyer). If you cannot afford to hire a lawyer, the court may appoint (provide) one for you. Ask your attorney (lawyer) for professional advice. AAG cannot give you legal advice and cannot provide you with funds (money) or an attorney.



SAFETY

The United States is considered one of the world's safest countries. Despite the attacks of September 11, 2001, and other terrorist threats, there are few countries that are safer.

However, you have to do your part to keep yourself safe. Wherever you are - on the street, at work, or waiting for a bus - stay alert and aware of your surroundings. Show that you are calm, confident, and know where you're going. Trust your instincts. If something or someone makes you uneasy, avoid the person or leave.

On foot:

- Whenever possible, walk with a friend.
- Stay on well-traveled, well-lit streets. Avoid shortcuts through dark or wooded areas, parking lots, or alleys.
- If you think someone is following you, change direction or cross the street. Walk toward an open store, restaurant, or lighted house. If you are scared, yell for help. If you have to work late, make sure there are others in the workplace with you and ask someone (a colleague or security guard) to walk you to your car or transit stop.

On Buses and Subways:

- Use well-lit, busy bus stops and stations.
- Stay alert! Don't sleep or daydream.
- If someone harasses you, don't be embarrassed. Loudly say "Leave me alone!"
- If that doesn't work, use the emergency device (alarm).
- Watch those who exit with you. If you feel uneasy, walk to a place where there are other people.

SAFETY

If Someone tries to rob you:

- Don't resist.
- Give up your property; don't give up your life.
- Report the crime to the police. Try to describe the attacker accurately. Your actions can help prevent others from becoming victims.

TROUBLE SPOTS

- Stairwells and out-of-the-way corridors: don't use the stairs alone. Talk to the building manager about improving poorly lit corridors and stairways.
- Elevators: don't get into elevators with people who look out of place or behave in a strange or threatening manner. If you find yourself in an elevator with someone who makes you nervous, get off as soon as possible.
- Restrooms (toilets): attackers can hide in toilet stalls and corners. Make sure restrooms are locked and only employees have keys. Be extra cautious when using restrooms that are isolated or poorly lit.
- After hours: don't work late at night alone. Create a buddy system for walking to parking lots or public transportation or ask the security guard to escort you. Use caution in bars and clubs; do not trust strangers and do not accept drinks from strangers.

EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

In an emergency situation, dial 911 for the police or other emergency service (this is a free call from any telephone). Answer all questions clearly and carefully. Follow all emergency directions.

Call 911 in case of:

- Death or medical emergencies
- Fire
- If you are a victim of a violent crime

If something is stolen from your car or room, call the non-emergency police number found in any local phonebook.

USEFUL LINKS

For useful links and information about the state that you will be visiting, please visit our website at: (http://www.allianceabroad.com/participants/city_guide.htm) and click on the participant's section.



TRAVELING

TRAVELING OUTSIDE THE U.S.

If you want to visit your home country or any other country (including Canada and Mexico) and then re-enter the U.S. **please note the following requirements:**

- It must be before the expiration date of your J-1 Visa in your passport and the end date in section 3 of your DS-2019 form must be valid.
- You must have a multiple entry visa (the letter "M" will be indicated under the word "Entries" on the J-1 Visa)
- You must have the Travel Validation Section on the front of your DS-2019 form signed by a Responsible Officer of AAG. One month (minimum) is necessary to obtain the required signature.

SEND THE DS-2019 FORM WITH THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION TO: WORK/TRAVEL DEPARTMENT

Alliance Abroad Group
1221 South Mopac Expressway, Ste. 100
Austin, TX 78746

If you leave the U.S. during your 30-day travel period at the end of the program, you will not be able to re-enter the U.S.

Please include:

- A self-addressed, stamped envelope
- A letter stating the proposed destination and reason for trip, date of departure and date of re-entry
- Your phone number and email address
- Your original DS-2019 form

TRAVELING

VISITING CANADA OR MEXICO

- Some participants have had difficulty with entering the U.S. Please consider if this trip is really worthwhile.
- Call the nearest Canadian or Mexican consulate in the United States to find out if you need a visa for entry. Visa requirements change and are not the same for all foreigners.
- You should follow the procedures outlined above.
- Tell the border official that you will be re-entering the United States within a few days, and show your valid passport, DS-2019 form and your I-94 card.

TRAVELING WITHIN THE U.S.

- If you camp or stay in hostels, take buses and prepare your own food, you could feasibly explore the country on around \$50 USD a day. Staying in motels and eating at modest cafes will mean you'll spend approximately \$100 USD per day, and enjoying the convenience of a rental car will push your daily budget up to \$150 USD. You must be at least 25 years old to rent a car and you will need to have a valid international or state drivers license.
- If you intend to carry your money in the form of traveler's checks, you'll save yourself a lot of hassle and expense if you buy them in U.S. dollars. Restaurants, hotels and most stores accept U.S. dollar traveler's checks as if they were cash.

Major credit cards (Visa, MasterCard, Discovery/Novus, American Express) are widely accepted and you'll find it hard to perform certain transactions (such as renting a car or reserving tickets over the phone) without a credit card.

Depending on your home-country banking network, you should also be able to access your bank account using U.S. ATMs.

TIPPING

Some workers in the U.S. depend on tips for a large portion of their salary. Tipping is expected in restaurants and better hotels. The standard rate in restaurants is 15%-20% of the bill excluding the sales tax; never tip in a fast-food or self service environment.

Taxi drivers, bartenders and hairdressers depend on similar-sized tips (also called "gratuities").

TRAVELING OUTSIDE THE U.S.

SALES TAX

Visitors to the U.S. are surprised when a product costs more than the marked price. This is because sales tax is added to the price marked when you pay. Sales taxes vary from state to state but are typically 5-9%, though some states, have no sales taxes at all. In some cities and states, a bed tax, which can be as high as 15%, is added to hotel bills. It's worth checking whether quoted prices for lodging include all relevant taxes.

AVERAGE COSTS

Lodging (Accommodation):

Budget: \$20-30 USD *Mid-range:* \$30-80 USD *Top-end:* \$80 USD and up

Meals:

Budget: \$3-5 USD *Mid-range:* \$5-20 USD *Top-end:* \$20 USD and up

Bus:

The least expensive mode of travel around the United States is with Greyhound, the largest bus company in the U.S. For information visit the Greyhound Website (<http://www.greyhound.com>) or phone the Greyhound toll-free number 1-800-231-2222. Ask about the "Ameripass" for exchange students.

Train:

Amtrak is the national railroad and offers a pass for 15 or 30 days. Contact Amtrak at 1- 800-872-7245 or visit the Amtrak Website: (<http://www.amtrak.com>).

The Discover America website may also be helpful: (<http://www.tourstates.com>).

OFF TO YOUR ADVENTURE!

Alliance Abroad Group is committed to providing you with a satisfying experience from the time you arrive to the day you return home. It is important that you keep an open mind to new experiences and different cultural norms.

Americans are very open, so please don't hesitate to ask people to explain things to you or to express your concerns. You will have difficult days and wonderful days, but we believe that the overall time you spend in the U.S. will be one of the most positive times of your life. If we can make the program better, please do let us know. Our programs are only as good as the people who make them, so the rest is up to you.

Good luck!



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www.allianceabroad.com/employers

WORK/TRAVEL PROGRAM IN THE USA

