

Transportation in the U.S.A



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Before you embark on your journey to the U.S., it's important to learn a little more about the city or town, state, and general region in which you will be living. The U.S. is a very diverse and expansive country, and is made up of major cities, convenient suburbs, and rural communities. The more familiar you are with your host city, the easier it will be to learn your way around!

The Cultural Compass section of our website has general information about all 50 states as well as recommendations for activities you can do when you visit.

Locations

Big City Living

Examples: New York, Boston, Miami, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C.

What to Expect: Depending on where you live, there will most likely be multiple options for transportation. Most major cities have a subway or metro system to get around the city quickly and easily. Most will also have an extensive bus system. It's up to you to find the best option for your commuting needs. Check out some of the resources at the end of this post to figure out how to get to your office. It's also a good idea to ask your co-workers or friends in the area what they recommend in terms of getting around the city.

Suburban Spots

Examples: Bethesda (Maryland), Westchester County and Long Island (New York), New Jersey, and Evanston (Illinois)

What to Expect: If you're living in a suburb away from a major bus line, commuter train, or subway stop, you will most likely need a car. Public transportation is more limited in the suburbs, and most residents don't live close enough to walk where they need to go; a car becomes a necessity. If you're not sure how close the suburb is to a major city, check with your host employer to find out where most people at the company live and how they get to work. It may be possible to ride a bike or take a bus to a larger train station for your commute into the city. If you are living and working in a suburb, a car is probably your best choice since the public transit system in a suburb is usually designed to get people back and forth to the city center – not around the suburb itself. If you are living in a major city but working in a suburb, you will do what is called “reverse commuting” and can probably take a train or bus to your office outside the city. If your office is not close to a bus or train stop, you may need to drive or use a combination of bus/train and walking/biking.

Rural Regions

Examples: The Midwest, Southern States, Northern Florida, Pennsylvania

What to Expect: Some of the most beautiful places in the U.S. are in the countryside. Living in a rural area is a great way to immerse yourself in American culture and meet locals. People in the countryside are known to be the friendliest Americans. You will almost certainly need to have a car if your program is in a rural area. Even if there is public transportation, such as a bus line, it may not run often enough to get you where you need to go. Also, if you plan to explore the area and not just commute between work and home, you will need a car to get to those places – such as restaurants, grocery stores, and local entertainment. Ask your co-workers how they get to

work. A lot of companies will have a “carpool”, when members of a group take turns driving the group to and from work.

Types of Transportation

Car

Unless you live in or close to a major city, you will probably need access to a car. If you do plan to drive in the U.S., it is recommended that you get an international driver’s license before you arrive, as you cannot get one once you’re in the U.S. While driving in the U.S., you must always understand and adhere to the local, state, and federal driving laws. The best resource for driving laws and for obtaining a driver’s license is the DMV (Department of Motor Vehicles) for the state in which you will be driving. The American Automobile Association, also known as AAA or Triple A, is a membership organization that provides services such as travel and automotive support – for instance, when your car breaks down – and insurance.

Subway/Metrorail

Only major cities in the U.S. have subway systems. Their efficiency depends on the city. If you will be living and working in a major city, this is most likely the way you will travel to work. Subway fares depend on the city, but most will have options to purchase weekly or monthly passes, a certain number of trips at a time, or a specific dollar amount. You can do a Google search to find a subway map for your city, and tourism centers will also have maps.

Local Bus

Depending where you live, taking a bus to your host employer’s office or to get around town might be the best option. The majority of major cities will have bus lines, but the frequency and routes of the buses will vary. Generally, you can buy a pass or ticket for the bus, but if you pay cash, you will almost always need to give the driver exact change in coins.

Biking

Riding a bike is a wonderful and environmentally friendly way to get around. Always wear a helmet and be aware of your surroundings. Always ride in the direction of traffic and wear reflective clothing and lights when riding at night. It’s also important to ride in designated bike lanes. You should have a bike lock, too, to keep your bike safe while you are at your host company’s office.

Long Distance Bus

For traveling to other cities or distances under eight hours by car, you may want to consider taking the bus. This is a great, inexpensive way to travel between cities without taking a train or plane, which can be costly. Some of these companies have low fare specials. You will book your ticket online and print it out for easy boarding.

Train

While train prices have risen significantly in the last several years, trains are a fast and more comfortable way to get from city to city. The nationwide train system is Amtrak. Enter your departure and destination cities and see your options for travel.

Air

If you're looking to travel long distances, flying generally makes the most sense. If you book your ticket far enough in advance, you can usually get a good deal; however flying is definitely the most expensive form of transportation.

Source:

www.interexchange.org