

J-1 Exchange Visitor Pre-Departure Orientation Handbook



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Congratulations on being selected for a J-1 Exchange Visitor Program. We are confident that you will benefit immensely from your experience in the United States both professionally and personally.

Please read this guide as soon as you receive it and use it as a reference throughout your program. The handbook provides information on the J-1 visa consular application process, pre-departure procedures, housing, transportation, and safety, as well as your rights and responsibilities as a J-1 exchange visitor. Should you have any questions before, during, or after your program, do not hesitate to contact SHRM. We strive to ensure that you have a rewarding exchange visitor experience.

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PRE-DEPARTURE

About the J-1 Visa

Created by the US Department of State to foster international understanding, the J-1 visa trainee and intern programs provide opportunities for foreign employees and students to visit the US for practical training and cultural education. It has been a successful component of US public diplomacy for more than 50 years.

The Department of State has designated the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) as a J-1 visa sponsor for the trainee and intern categories.

All J-1 visa programs are temporary by design, and participants must depart the United States at the end of their exchange program. To this end, the program is intended to expose participants to US techniques, methodologies, business practices, and expertise as well as to help them gain a better understanding of US culture and society.

Note: The U.S. Department of State restricts J-1 Exchange visitors from engaging in any activity deemed inconsistent with their visa status within 90 days of entering the United States. This includes:

- Getting married to a U.S. citizen
- Engaging in work activities without proper authorization
- Enrolling in school when such activities are not permitted by the visa

If this occurs and there is determined to be a willful misrepresentation of the nonimmigrant intent, the Department of State may revoke your J-visa and could bar you from any future readmission into the United States.

Applying for Your Visa

As a J-1 exchange visitor, you must have a valid J-1 visa stamp to enter the United States. To obtain a stamp, you must schedule a visa appointment with a US consulate or embassy once you receive the J-1 visa application materials package from SHRM. The specific J-1 visa stamp application procedures can be found at the website for the consulate at which you will be applying for a visa. Below is a list of the general materials that each applicant must submit to the US embassy or consulate:

1. Online Nonimmigrant Visa Electronic Application, Form DS-160. Form DS-160 is submitted electronically via the Internet. The link to Form DS-160 can be found on the US embassy or consulate's website where you are applying for your visa. Note that as 5/31/19, you will be required on the DS-160 to list social media handles, email addresses, and phone numbers utilized by you in the previous five years.
2. A passport valid for travel to the US and with a validity date at least 6 months beyond the applicant's intended period of stay in the US.

3. One 2" x 2" color passport photo (Note – many consulate now require digital photos with the Form DS-160 instead of bringing hard copy passport photos to the appointment. Please confirm what is required for your particular post).
4. Original DS-2019 form (provided by SHRM).
5. Original DS-7002 form (provided by SHRM).
6. SEVIS Fee Receipt (provided by SHRM).
7. Original Letter of Support from SHRM to the US consulate (provided by SHRM).

In addition to these items, you should check the website to determine if other documentation is required by the US consulate or embassy at which you will be applying. Please visit www.usembassy.gov/ for a list of US embassies and consulates abroad.

*Note: Under INA 212(a)(1)(A)(iii), an arrest and/or conviction for driving under the influence or while intoxicated indicates a “possible visa ineligibility for a physical or mental disorder with associated harmful behavior that is likely to pose a threat to the property, safety, or welfare of the applicant or others in the future.” As a result consular officers may deny a nonimmigrant visa application to individuals that have had previous arrests and/or convictions or require additional vetting before a final determination is made by the consulate on whether to issue a visa.

Visa Interview Tips:

- Demonstrate Home-Country Ties: Under US law, all nonimmigrant visa applicants are viewed as intending permanent immigrants. You must therefore demonstrate that you have sufficient home-country ties or reasons for returning to your home country after your J-1 program. Examples of home ties can include family, employment, financial assets, and other commitments that require you to return to your home country.
- English Language Proficiency: The visa interview will be conducted in English, and you must be able to answer questions relating to your home-country ties, your training/internship program, and your objectives as a J-1 exchange visitor.
- Know Your Program and How It Advances Your Career: You should be able to explain why you are coming to the US and how the J-1 program furthers your career objectives.
- Cultural Experience: J-1 exchange programs must have a robust, integrated cultural experience. As such, remember that cultural exchange and immersion is a central goal of your program. Your program is designed to both expose you to US culture and enhance your professional expertise under a structured training or internship program. Your host organization is aware of the J-1 cultural component requirement and will provide you with opportunities to participate in various cultural activities during your stay in the US. You are expected to engage in cultural activities as a regular and integral part of your J-1 experience in the United States.

Bringing Family Members on J-2 Visa

Spouses and unmarried children under 21 years of age can accompany J-1 exchange visitors on a J-2 visa. Each dependent must have their own DS-2019 form issued by SHRM and should apply for a J-2 visa at a US embassy or consulate abroad.

If a J-2 dependent permanently departs the United States prior to the scheduled end date, SHRM must be immediately notified so that the J-2 visa can be closed out accordingly.

Visa Denials

In the event of a visa denial, notify both your host organization and SHRM immediately, providing as much detail as possible as to the reason for the visa denial and any denial documentation you received from the consular official.

Cost of Living in the US

During your program, you must have sufficient financial resources to cover all of your expenses in the US (and those of any J-2 dependents). Evidence of sufficient financial resources is required as part of the J-1 application process before SHRM will approve J-1 visa sponsorship.

It can be difficult to determine how much money you will need as the cost of living varies widely from US city to US city. When estimating the cost of living at your training/internship location, your intended supervisor and your host organization's human resources (HR) or relocation services department can be helpful resources. Additionally, the following websites can help you *estimate* the cost of living at your training/internship site:

www.numbeo.com

www.bankrate.com

www.infoplease.com

<http://livingwage.mit.edu/>

As part of the J-1 sponsorship application review process, SHRM reviews each program to confirm that J-1 candidates (and their dependents) will have access to sufficient financial resources to support them throughout the duration of the exchange program. Personal needs and spending habits vary from person to person, so it is important that you create a personal budget for both you and any dependents that reflects your particular needs.

Entry into the United States

You may not arrive more than **30 days** before the program start date shown on your DS-2019 form. We recommend that you enter the US at least one week before your program start date to settle in, become familiar with the local area, and recover from jetlag. You must notify your host organization and SHRM immediately if there is any delay in your program or if you are not able to enter the US by your program start date. **Please note that you cannot start your training or internship program until the start date listed on your DS-2019 form.**

Housing

If you are responsible for securing your own housing during the program, we encourage you to start this

process as soon as you have confirmed your program participation. Your host organization's HR or relocation services department as well as your intended supervisor can be helpful resources when you evaluate housing options. Additionally, SHRM is available to address any questions you may have. Please note that your residential address should be within 50 miles of your primary site of training.

Rental costs and terms vary widely from city to city, but they should be clearly defined in the rental agreement. Please be sure to read and fully understand all terms of a rental agreement before signing it. If you have any questions as to the terms of the rental agreement, please do not hesitate to ask.

Generally, rental agreements require a security deposit prior to move-in. A security deposit is money paid in advance to finance repairs in the event that you damage the residence during your stay. Security deposits are often equivalent to one month of rent; if you damage the residence during your stay, the landlord will deduct money from the deposit to pay for repairs. The rental agreement will define the terms of the security deposit and, most importantly, what qualifies as damage. For example, tenants may not be responsible for damage resulting from normal usage (e.g., a broken hinge). Thoroughly inspect the residence and note any defects and problems before you move in. After you move out, you will be refunded the security deposit minus the cost of repairs, if any.

Individuals renting an apartment or house should consider purchasing renters insurance to provide coverage in case of an accident (ex: fire), burglary, or most natural disasters. In some states renters insurance is required for all renters, while in other states it is optional. Please check with your landlord to see what is required in your location. Coverage levels and exclusions can vary based on the policy and the location, so it is important to review your policy thoroughly to ensure it covers all necessary items. You can obtain quotes for coverage from most major insurance providers.



Tips to narrow your housing search:

- **Cost:** Research the price range in your area and determine your budget.
- **Commute:** Find a place that is close to your training or internship location. Determine how you will get around—by car, public transportation, or walking. Many US cities do not have robust public transit systems. Talk to your host employer for details.
- **Neighborhood:** Determine your neighborhood preferences. Would you rather live in a quiet suburb or in the middle of a city?
- **Rental Terms:** Understand and pay attention to the terms of the rental agreement.
- **Furnishings:** Look for a furnished place so you don't have to worry about getting furniture.

The following websites can help you find and evaluate housing options:

www.zillow.com

www.apartmentguide.com

www.apartments.com

www.craigslist.org

www.airbnb.com

Mandatory Health Insurance

US federal regulations require that every J-1 participant and their J-2 dependents have medical insurance coverage with the following minimum benefits for the entire duration of their program:

- Medical benefits of at least \$100,000 per accident or illness;
- Repatriation of remains in the amount of \$25,000;
- Expenses associated with the medical evacuation of the exchange visitor to their home country in the amount of \$50,000; and,
- A deductible not to exceed \$500 per accident or illness.

SHRM must have proof of insurance coverage before we issue any sponsorship documents. Failure to possess and maintain insurance coverage that meets these required levels will result in termination from the J-1 program and will negatively impact the trainee or intern's ability to obtain future visas.

All Exchange Visitors, including any dependents, may be subject to the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Information on the ACA can be found at <http://www.hhs.gov/healthcare/rights/>. Exchange Visitors should discuss with their host organization's human resource (HR) department whether their programs would be subject to the ACA.

Going to the Doctor

SHRM recommends that you have eye, dental, and general physical examinations before entering the US. Bring any prescription medications, eyeglasses, and medical records with you.

You can purchase medication or fill prescriptions at national pharmacies (CVS, Walgreens, Rite Aid), major regional supermarket chains, and other multi-purpose retailers (Wal-Mart, Target, Costco).

Unlike in other countries, US health care facilities and hospitals are largely private enterprises. Many doctors have their own private offices located outside of hospitals. If you get sick and need to see a doctor, you must schedule an appointment with a doctor. Your insurance provider will be able to give you a list of doctors who are in your area.

If you require urgent attention, you can visit an urgent care facility or walk-in clinic, which don't require appointments. You can find them by contacting your insurance provider, or by searching "Urgent Care" or "Walk-in Clinics" on the Internet. You can also visit an emergency room at a hospital.

In emergency situations, you should **call 911 immediately**.

What to Bring with You

Below is a list of the documentation you should bring with you when you travel to the US. DO NOT pack these documents in your luggage, as you will need to present them at the port of entry.

- Passport with J-1 visa stamp
- Original DS-2019 form
- Original DS-7002 form
- Training/Internship program offer letter

- Residential housing or hotel documentation
- Host organization’s and SHRM’s contact information
- Passports with J-2 visa stamps for any spouse/dependents along with copies of birth and marriage certificates

Don’t forget to bring these other important items:

- Your prescription medications, if necessary, and the prescriptions with translation if not in English
- US currency to cover taxi fare, food, and other initial expenses
- Weather and office-appropriate clothing. Weather in the US varies widely depending on the region. Please check the local weather at your training/internship site to determine what type of clothing you should bring (information can be found on sites such as www.weather.com). Moreover, you should also determine your host organization’s office dress code. Some offices require formal business attire, while others permit casual dress.

Create Your Own List of Additional Items Here:

At the Port of Entry

At the port of entry, a US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer will review your travel documents (passport, J-1 visa, and original DS-2019 and DS-7002 forms) and ask about your planned stay in the US. It is important that you inform the CBP officer that you will be a J-1 exchange visitor. Be prepared to provide the name of the host organization and the training/internship address for your program.

As part of the enhanced entry procedures, CBP officers will scan both of your hands with an inkless device and take a digital photograph of you. The CBP officer will use this information to determine whether or not to admit you. These enhanced procedures will only take a few seconds. Please visit CBP’s website at <https://www.cbp.gov/travel/international-visitors> for travel tips, a travel smart checklist, and a list of prohibited and restricted items, as well as information on what you must declare when entering the US.

If you will be entering the US by air or sea, CBP officials will scan your passport to create an electronic arrival record (Form I-94). Once the electronic record is created, you will need to print a hard copy of the I-94 arrival form. The electronic form can be accessed at www.cbp.gov/I94.

After a successful inspection, the officer will stamp your passport and annotate the date of admission, class of admission, and admitted until date. For J-1 programs, this stamp should list J-1 as the class of admission (or J-2 in the case of dependents) and D/S (Duration of Stay) as the admitted until date. Before you leave the CBP counter, please review the admission stamp to verify that all of the recorded information is correct. If not, return to the officer to complete or correct.

Sample CBP Stamp:



WHEN YOU ARE IN THE UNITED STATES

Arrival Verification

After you enter the US and begin your program, you must either mail or email the following documents to SHRM within 10 business days of the program start date listed on your DS-2019 form:

- Completed and signed Exchange Visitor US Address Verification Form (enclosed with your sponsorship documents)
- Copy of DS-2019 form
- Copy of I-94 record, which if done electronically can be printed from www.cbp.gov/I94.
- Copy of J visa stamp from passport
- Copy of certificate of completion for SHRM's participant orientation
- Copy of DS-2019 and I-94 records for all J-2 dependents (if applicable)

After receiving your arrival verification documents, SHRM will validate your program. If you do not send these materials, you are at risk of entering into “no-show” status, which will negatively impact your ability to enter the US in the future. “No-show” status reflects that you have abandoned your J-1 program and could be subject to removal from the United States.

Applying for a Social Security Card

If you're on your U.S. host organization's payroll, you will need a Social Security Number (SSN) for tax purposes. To apply for a SSN, you must:

- Send your arrival verification documents to SHRM.
- Wait for up to 10 calendar days after SHRM validates your program.
- Complete [Form SS-5: Application for A Social Security Card](#).
- Bring the completed application and the original documents listed below to the [nearest Social Security Administration \(SSA\) office](#):
 - Original DS-2019 form;
 - Passport; and
 - I-94 form.

The SSA office will mail your number and card as soon as it has verified your documents with the issuing offices, usually within 10 days.

Taxes

J-1 participants receiving a salary or stipend from the US host organization's payroll are subject to federal and state taxes throughout their program. However, J-1 participants on internship and training programs are exempt from paying Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) and Federal Unemployment Tax Act (FUTA) taxes. For more-detailed information, please speak with your host organization's HR department or a tax professional. April 15 is traditionally the due date for filing your federal individual income tax return.

Notification Requirements

All exchange visitors are required to notify SHRM within 10 days if there are changes to any of the following items:

- U.S. Residential Address
- Site of Activity Address for any phase of the training/internship
- Program dates of the training/internship
- Email address of the J-1 and any J-2 family members over the age of 18
- U.S. phone number of the J-1 and any J-2 family members over the age of 18
- Supervisor for any phase of the training/internship
- Scope of training/internship as approved on the DS-7002 form
- Permanent departure of any J-2 family members prior to the scheduled end date of the training/internship program

In addition, all exchange visitors must notify SHRM as soon as possible of any potential issues related to their health, safety, and welfare while they are participating in the J-1 program.

Evaluation Reports

All exchange visitors must complete and submit Training Evaluation Reports to SHRM at the end of their program. If your program is longer than 6 months, you must also submit an evaluation at the mid-point of your program.

Traveling Abroad on J Visa

To travel outside the US and re-enter while on a J-1 visa, SHRM must endorse your DS-2019 form for international travel. To receive this endorsement, please send your original DS-2019 form along with a pre-paid return envelope (UPS or FedEx) to:

Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)
ATTN: Exchange Visitor Program Team (Global)
1800 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314 USA

We recommend that you send your DS-2019 form at least one month before planned international travel. Travel validations last for 12 months, and participants in active programs longer than 12 months can send

their DS-2019 back to SHRM for a second validation.

Participants traveling internationally must also ensure that their J-1 visa passport stamp is still valid and permits multiple entries (M). Participants who travel internationally with expired J-1 visas must obtain a new J-1 visa stamp before they can re-enter the US. Some exemptions exist for visitors to Canada, Mexico, or islands adjacent to the United States. Confer with SHRM before making travel plans which would require reentry into the United States.

For all international travel during their programs, exchange visitors should not spend more than 30 consecutive days outside the United States.

Banking

SHRM recommends that exchange visitors open a checking account with a US bank or with a home-country bank with widespread US banking operations. This will help you avoid carrying large amounts of cash or paying international ATM withdrawal and currency exchange fees.

Below is a list of large US banks with multiple locations in the US:

- Bank of America
- Wells Fargo Bank
- JPMorgan Chase Bank
- Citibank
- PNC Bank
- SunTrust Bank

Cellphones

Check with your host organization before purchasing a cellphone. Your home-country cellphone plans are most likely different from cellphone plans in the US. Since your period of stay is limited, avoid registering for standard two-year contracts. Month-to-month and prepaid plans are the best options for exchange visitors.

Below are links to some of the major cellphone carriers in the US:

www.att.com

www.verizon.com

www.t-mobile.com

www.sprint.com

www.virginmobile.com

Internet and Technology Resources

There are few Internet cafes in the US, but many coffee shops, public libraries, and Wi-Fi hotspots provide Internet access. Additionally, you should check with your landlord or concierge for information about Internet at your residence. If you need to print, copy, or fax documents, shipping (FedEx, UPS, DHL) or office supply (Staples, Office Depot) stores often offer these services for a small fee.

Obtaining a Driver's License

Exchange visitors are eligible to apply for a driver's license or state identification card. The requirements for obtaining a driver's license and auto driver's insurance may differ from state to state. Visit your state's Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) website to find the nearest DMV office and state-specific information. Make sure you apply for your driver's license **after** you send your arrival documents to SHRM. In general, you will need to present the following:

- Passport.
- Original form DS-2019.
- Copy of I-94 record.
- Proof of residence (e.g., a copy of your lease, utility/phone bills with your US address, etc.).

Some states allow exchange visitors holding a valid home country driver's license issued by a foreign country to operate a vehicle up to a certain time. Please visit www.usa.gov/Topics/Motor-Vehicles.shtml to check the driving rules in the state(s) you'll be visiting to verify that you can use your non-US driver's license. The document commonly referred to as an "international drivers license" is actually a legalized translation of the home country license and so requires that you carry both it and the home country license. You should keep the insurance and car registration forms in the car at all times.

Getting on the Payroll

In the United States, employers are required to complete Form I-9 to verify the identity and employment authorization of every new employee (both citizen and noncitizen). J-1 trainees and interns are authorized to work only under the terms of the Exchange Visitor Program and must complete and sign Section 1 of Form I-9 no later than the first day of employment and the employer completes Section 2 with you by the third day of work. You will need to bring your passport, DS-2019 form, DS-7002 form, and a printed copy of your I-94 card to complete the I-9 Form. Your host organization's HR department will retain a copy of your documents.

Tourism and Visitor Centers

Many US cities have visitor centers where you can find maps as well as information on public transportation, restaurants, lodging, and local attractions. We encourage you to visit your city's visitor center or visitor bureau website to learn more about your new community and the resources it offers.

Volunteering

Speak with your J-1 representative at your company about possible opportunities to volunteer in your host city. Volunteering is another great way to acclimate yourself with American culture. Some companies have volunteer projects already in place. You may want to see about speaking at a local elementary or middle school to share about your native country and culture.

Shopping

The US features an expansive and vibrant retail industry giving consumers access to an array of stores and products. While local markets vary, there are some broad national trends:

- Large grocery stores are regional in scope, but some general retailers have national grocery operations (Walmart, Target, Costco).
- Clothing, electronics, furniture, home appliances, and other durable goods retailers can be found just about anywhere. Malls are common and provide a convenient centralized location to shop for a range of products.
- Stores are typically open 7 days a week but tend to close early on Sundays.
- Many stores have return policies where you can receive a refund for unsatisfactory or unwanted and unused goods.
- If you are looking for a good bargain, try to shop at the end of seasons or during holidays to take advantage of sales.

As noted, retail market dynamics (including store hours, brands, and products) vary from place to place. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask a colleague. This can be a great way to learn about your local community and develop office friendships.

Public Libraries

Many cities have local libraries that are accessible to the public and offer more than just books. Check out your local public library for computer and Internet access, newspaper and magazine collections, movies and DVDs, free classes, book clubs, and quiet meeting spaces.

Recreation Centers

Most cities and towns have recreation centers providing swimming pools, gyms, computer labs, party and game rooms, and other recreational activities at no or minimal charge. Recreation centers often offer free or low-cost classes for English language, cooking, and dancing, among other subjects.

Local Chambers of Commerce

Business owners in towns and cities often form local chambers of commerce to promote and support local businesses and to communicate plans and agendas to the community. You can learn a lot about US business practices and network with business owners by attending events organized by your local chamber of commerce.

END OF A J-1 PROGRAM

Program Evaluation

At the end of your program, both you and your supervisor must complete a training and evaluation report. This is required by US federal regulations, and the final evaluation must be completed and sent to SHRM.

Leaving the United States

Provided you successfully complete your full program, you have a 30-day "grace period" to settle your affairs and leave the US after your program end date. During this grace period, you may not continue your training/internship program or otherwise engage in employment. Every exchange visitor must depart the

US by the end of the grace period to avoid violating your visa status. You can lawfully travel around the US during these 30 days, but you cannot depart the US and re-enter on the J-1 visa.

It is crucial that all J-1s and their dependents do not overstay the 30-day grace period, as they will be out of status and at risk for removal from the United States. SHRM is required to report overstays to the Department of State, and foreign nationals that overstay their visa may be limited in their ability to obtain future visas. If you have extraordinary circumstances that might prevent you from leaving the US within your 30-day grace period, you must notify your host organization and SHRM immediately.

Two-Year Home-Country Physical Presence Requirement

When you participate in the Exchange Visitor Program, you will be subject to the two-year home-country foreign residency requirement if your exchange program meets any of the following criteria:

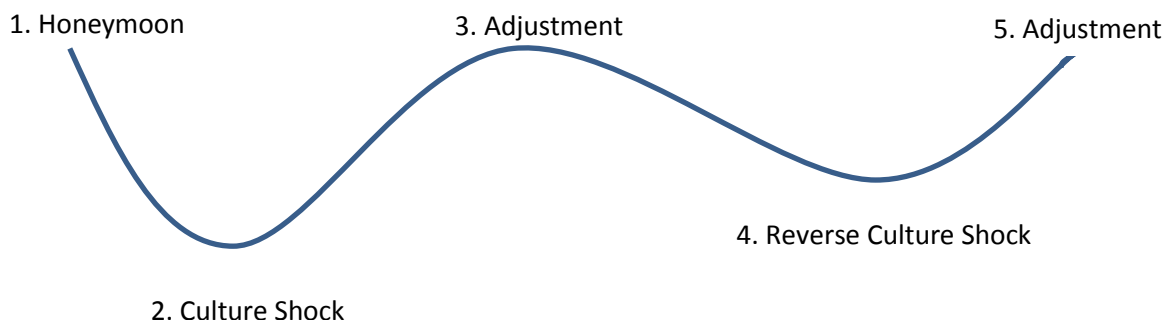
- The program is funded directly or indirectly by either your government or the US government;
- The program involves specialized knowledge or skills deemed necessary by your home country (as determined by the [Exchange Visitor Skills List](#)); or
- The program is one involving graduate medical training (which would not be the case with any SHRM-sponsored programs)

Your DS-2019 form will be checked either “Not subject to the two-year residence requirement” or “Subject to two-year residence requirement” on the bottom left side. In addition, your J-1 visa stamp will also be noted either “Bearer is not subject to section 212 (E)” or “Bearer is subject to section 212 (E).” If subject to the foreign residency requirement, you must return to your home country for a cumulative period of two years after the end of your program. You are not prohibited from traveling to the US during this period, but you will not qualify for certain employment- and family-based visas until the foreign residency requirement is satisfied.

UNITED STATES CUSTOMS AND CULTURE

Be Ready for Culture Shock!

Culture shock is the feeling of disorientation and homesickness when a person moves or visits a new country, or simply experiences a different kind of lifestyle and environment.



1. The honeymoon period is usually experienced in the first few days after you arrive in a new place. Observed differences in culture and lifestyles are exciting and intriguing.
2. Culture shock is experienced as you struggle to adjust to a new time zone, language, culture, and physical environment. At this stage, you may want to return home and may experience anger, frustration, and loneliness. This emotional response is common and will eventually recede.
3. After some time, you will get used to the new environment as you establish a routine with training and daily activities. At this stage, you have accepted the cultural differences and feel independent, comfortable, and relaxed.
4. When you return home after your program, you may experience reverse culture shock after acclimating to life in the US.
5. After some time, you will adjust to your old lifestyle as you reconnect with friends and family.

Tips on Dealing with Culture Shock:

- Immerse Yourself in US Culture: Become familiar with the local community, sightsee, make new friends, and expand your knowledge of English by learning local dialects and idioms.
- Focus on Positives: You're improving your English, advancing your career, and learning new skills that will help you in your future.
- Stay Busy: Visit tourist attractions, try new foods, and excel in your training program.
- Maintain the Familiar: Talk to family and friends abroad, prepare your traditional food, share your culture with American colleagues and other members of your community.
- Connect with Fellow Foreign Nationals: Meet other exchange visitors and international assignees.
- Connect with Colleagues: Learn about the US from American colleagues.
- Be Patient: Adjusting to life in a new place may take some time.
- Be Prepared: Learn about the US and the community where you will be living before your trip.

US Culture

US culture is diverse and hard to define. But there are some common characteristics:

- Individualism: Americans value self-reliance and independence. Consequently, you are expected to make your own decisions and take responsibility for your own actions.
- Diversity: The US is incredibly diverse and open to other cultures. Don't be afraid to share your culture or learn about new cultures.
- Equality: Social status is less important in everyday life in the US. Economic, social, demographic, and cultural differences are not emphasized openly.
- Punctuality: Americans like to be on time and do things as efficiently as possible. Provide advance notice if you are going to be late for an event or meeting, business or social.
- Greetings: Don't be surprised if strangers say "Hello" or "Hi" and smile at you. When people ask "How are you?" they don't expect a negative answer. You should answer "I'm fine, thanks" or "I'm good, how are you?" or something along those lines.
- English Language: People may automatically assume you can speak English like a native speaker. Don't hesitate to politely ask the other person to slow down or repeat what they said if you don't understand or missed something.
- Religion: Religions are practiced openly in the US, but people don't usually talk about religion in the workplace.

US Work Culture

- One's career or livelihood is very important. "What do you do for a living?" is a common question when you meet new people in the US.
- Men and women are treated equally and fairly, and they share the same responsibilities and expectations.
- Businesses value quality, quantity, and efficiency.
- Americans tend to be relatively direct (getting to the point quickly) when doing business.
- Although direct communication is used generally, indirect communication is used when making requests and giving feedback. "Would it be possible for your team to finish this by 5 p.m.?" is considered to be more polite than saying "Finish this by 5 p.m."
- When providing feedback, Americans typically try to mix negative with positive feedback and provide constructive criticism. Try to give a complete assessment, mentioning areas of strength along with areas for improvement.
- Physical contact is generally avoided in the workplace except for handshakes when greeting someone for the first time or when you conclude a meeting.
- Americans use informal style when addressing colleagues. Age and hierarchy don't play an important role in communication, and it's acceptable to call your boss by his or her first name.
- It is considered rude to answer a cellphone call during a meeting. If you must take a call during a meeting, politely excuse yourself from the meeting to answer your phone in another room.

Dining

Breakfast (early morning): Consists of but is not limited to coffee, juices, milk, cereals, eggs, sausages, bacon, muffins, and donuts.

Lunch (midday): Lunch is typically a quick and lighter meal. People at work don't consume alcoholic beverages during lunch hours.

Dinner (evening): Heaviest meal of the day with meats, sides, and desserts.

Tiping Etiquette

At a restaurant, always leave a tip. Tips can vary from 10% to 25% depending on the type of service. Below is a list of the typical expected tip:

Waiter: 15% to 20% of the bill; 25% for extraordinary service

Bartender: 10% to 15% of bar bill

Coat check: \$1.00 per coat

Car attendant: \$2.00 to \$5.00

Remember to tip on the total amount before any discounts, coupons, gift certificates, etc., but not including taxes.

Drugs, Alcohol and Cigarettes

Laws vary from state to state, but generally it is illegal in the US to purchase, possess, or consume alcohol if you are under 21 years of age. Generally, it is also illegal to have an open alcoholic beverage in a public space and automobiles. It is also illegal to buy alcohol for individuals under 21 or to buy cigarettes for individuals under 18. Nationwide, it is illegal to drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs. If you get caught driving under the influence (DUI)*, drinking in public, or buying alcohol and cigarettes for minors, you'll risk losing your visa and getting deported.

Many US employers require their employees to take drug and alcohol tests before they offer employment with the company. Employers may also ask you to take drug tests randomly during your program.

Generally, smoking is not permitted indoors in the US. Consider others when you smoke and only smoke in designated smoking areas. Smoking near building entrances, bus stops, and crowded areas is considered rude.

**Starting on November 5, 2015, the U.S. Department of State requires consular officers to “prudentially revoke” the nonimmigrant visas for foreign nationals arrested for, or convicted of, driving under the influence, while intoxicated, or similar such arrests/convictions within the previous five years. In cases of a DUI or DWI arrest or conviction, the Department can revoke J-1 visa of the individual and any associated J-2 family members while they are in the United States. If this occurs, the foreign national cannot depart and re-enter the United States without reappearing before the consulate and obtaining a new visa. Also, SHRM may be required by the Department of State to terminate the originate program in the SEVIS system following departure from the United States.*

Major Holidays and Celebrations

- New Year’s Day—January 1
US federal holiday commemorating the first day of the year on the modern Gregorian calendar.
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day—Third Monday of January
US federal holiday honoring Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a civil rights leader.
- St. Valentine’s Day—February 14
US cultural holiday where lovers, couples, and spouses express their love to each other by giving flowers, chocolates, and cards.
- Presidents Day—Third Monday of February
US federal holiday celebrating the first US president, George Washington.
- Memorial Day—Last Monday in May
US federal holiday in honor of the men and women who died while serving in the US Armed Forces.
- Independence Day—July 4
US federal holiday commemorating the adoption of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.
- Labor Day—First Monday of September

US federal holiday celebrating workers and their achievements.

- Columbus Day—Second Monday of October
US federal holiday celebrating Christopher Columbus' arrival in the Americas.
- Halloween—October 31
US cultural holiday where children wear costumes and masks and go door-to-door to "Trick or Treat," and people are expected to give them candy.
- Veterans Day—November 11
US federal holiday commemorating those who have served in the US Armed Forces.
- Thanksgiving Day—Fourth Thursday of November
US federal holiday which celebrates the first harvest of the year. Families and friends gather and enjoy a turkey and large meal.
- Christmas Day—December 25
US federal holiday where many Americans celebrate by giving gifts and decorating trees.

Check with your host organization as to which of these are deemed to be days off during your program.

If you would like to learn more about US customs and culture, please visit:

www.culturecrossing.net

www.studentabroad.com

www.everyculture.com

Tip: We encourage you to share your own culture and holiday celebrations with American friends and colleagues as part of the J-1 cultural exchange.

SAFETY AND EMERGENCY

Call **911** immediately in emergency situations and notify your employer and SHRM as soon as possible. Here are some useful safety tips that all exchange visitors must be aware of:

- **DO NOT DRINK AND DRIVE**. It is illegal and can result in criminal charges and loss of visa status.
- **DO NOT CALL/TEXT AND DRIVE**. Distracted driving (driving while using a cellphone) is illegal in many states and very dangerous.
- Always buckle your seat belt when in a car. Police will stop and fine you for not buckling your seat belt. This also applies to passengers.
- Always wear a helmet when you're riding a motorcycle or a bike.
- Be aware of which directions to look when crossing the road. Also, remember that in the U.S. cars drive on the right side of the road.
- If you are stopped by a police officer while driving, **DO NOT** get out of the car. Stay in the car and wait for the officer's instructions.
- Avoid walking alone at night.
- Walk in lighted areas at night. **Always be aware of your surroundings.**
- Avoid carrying large amounts of cash and use caution when using the ATM.
- Don't accept rides from strangers.
- Don't let strangers into your building or "buzz them in."
- Do not leave valuables in a vehicle or any other unsecure or public location.
- **NEVER** share your ATM/debit card pin number or leave around your ATM/debit card.
- Please use caution where you swipe your credit/debit card. **Immediately** report any unauthorized purchases on your debit/credit card to your bank or credit card company.

Important Numbers:

Life-Threatening Situations: 911

24-hour J-1 Participant Hotline:

1-888-330-4686

SHRM:

1-703-535-6365

YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Before coming on the program, please read the [Wilberforce Pamphlet on the Rights and Protections for Temporary Workers](#). The U.S. Department of State created this informational pamphlet to educate exchange visitors about their rights and protections while working in the United States. If you are mistreated, you can call the National Human Trafficking Hotline number: 1-888-373-7888.

You Have the Right to:

- Be treated and paid fairly.
- Work and live in a safe environment.
- Not be discriminated against because of your gender, race, national origin, color, religion or disability.
- Report abuse without retaliation.
- Seek justice in US courts.

You Are Responsible for:

- Sending your arrival verification documents to SHRM within 10 days after your arrival in the US.
- Notifying your host organization and SHRM immediately if there is any change in your training/internship plan.
- Submitting program evaluation reports at the conclusion of your program and, if your program is longer than 6 months, midway through your program
- Obtaining travel validation from SHRM before traveling abroad.
- Maintaining valid medical insurance coverage for the entire duration of your stay for you and any dependents.
- Notifying your employer and SHRM if your rights have been violated.

Contact SHRM when you:

- Move training sites or residential locations.***
- Plan to travel abroad during your J-1 program.***
- Lose your J-1 documents.***
- Become seriously ill.***
- Cannot finish your program.***
- Plan to extend your program.***
- Have any questions!***

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