

# The A B C ' s of American Culture

*Some very basic information to help you with your cultural adjustment to the United States, your community, your co-workers and your employer.*

**A** very exciting and challenging opportunity is about to begin. Soon, you will be living and working in the United States **as a participant in Work & Travel Program**. You will be living and working side-by-side with people in the United States. You will be helping them learn about your country as you learn about theirs. This will be unique and enriching experience for you.

**Cultural exchanges are very rewarding, educational and exciting** for **Work & Travel** participants. The information in this section will help you have the best experience possible. Cultural information, survival skills, and important tips will assist you in learning to live comfortably and be happy in a new environment.

## Keep a Positive Attitude!

The best way to assure your success is to keep a positive attitude. The culture and lifestyles in the US are different from those in your country. It is important that you understand that there will be an adjustment period. **EVERYONE** who lives abroad experiences some kind of 'Culture Shock' at some time during their stay. Keeping a positive attitude will help you more easily accept the differences between our cultures. **SMILING** is a good thing! Do it often! If you smile, people around you will smile, too.

| THINGS TO DO                        |              |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Smile!       |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Be patient.  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Communicate. |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Have fun!    |

Depending on where you are living and working, some people have had a great deal of experience living and working with people from different countries and different cultures, while others have had fewer opportunities. Some people have little or no experience working with someone who is new to the United States or with someone who is not totally fluent in English. Even though you may have some difficulties, it is important to remember that you will be representing your country and that if you are able to keep a positive attitude it will help people have a good impression about your country and its people.

**B** e patient with yourself and with the people with whom you live and work. Work environments are different in the United States than in your country. Rules for employees and the way people socialize at work are also different.

**The culture or way of life in one community is often very different than in another community.** The US is a very large country. The pace of life in larger cities is often much busier than in smaller cities. If your hometown is a small city and your

place of employment is in a large city you will see that things are somewhat different. It may take a little time to get used to the noise and activity of a big city. On the other hand, if your hometown is a large city and you are living and working in a small city, you may feel like there are not as many opportunities for shopping, sightseeing, entertainment, education, etc. Remember to be patient. It takes time to become accustomed to a new environment. The differences between your hometown and your town in the United States will be the things that will make your experience more interesting. You have the opportunity to learn about how people grow to love their hometowns whether they are big or small, in the mountains or in the country, near a beach or in the desert. Wherever you are, you will have the chance to do and see many, many new and exciting things!

***The United States is a very large country. Each area of the country has some culturally unique aspects.*** In fact, each state can be identified by certain cultural characteristics! For example, Florida is the ‘Sunshine State’ and Washington is the ‘Evergreen State’. In Florida the culture of the state focuses around activity in an area with sunny, warm weather and few mountains. In Washington, the weather is much more seasonal and there are many mountains covered with huge Evergreens trees. The culture of every state, community or family is very much related to the environment.

You may have a friend who is in **Work & Travel Program** in another city or another state, or you may know someone who was once a **Program participant**. The experiences and memories that each student has are also very unique. Since the US is so large and diverse, it is not likely that your experience will be exactly like another student’s experience. It is important to remember that wherever **Work & Travel** students have been located . . . large cities or small cities, in the country, or the desert, they have been able to have interesting, exciting, and rewarding experiences.

**C**ommunication will help you build a good relationship with your employer and the people with whom you work. For many years **Work & Travel** students have been working side-by-side with people in the US. Other participants have experienced some of the very same things that you will be experiencing. It is important to be open about learning new ways to do things. It is important to respect cultural differences. However, it is not always easy, and it does take time to build good relationships.

Sometimes misunderstandings between **Work & Travel** students and their employers or co-workers are simply caused by cultural differences. It is important to talk about how you feel. Generally, in the US people like to know if you have a question, a problem or a concern. People respect individuals who can discuss issues in a polite, adult manner. They appreciate having the chance to explain why something happens or why they said or did something. In fact, ‘‘Why?’’ is a very common question in the US! Be respectful and considerate, but be confident enough to express what you are feeling. Misunderstandings often occur when people do not ask questions or explain their behavior.

So, as you begin your **Work & Travel Program**, remember to *smile, be patient* and *communicate!* Most of all, remember to *have fun* and *enjoy* your experience. You are about to have a very valuable, interesting and rewarding experience. Use the information on the next few pages to begin to understand a little more about cultures in the US, your new environment, working in the United States, and your new way of life.

**Be respectful,  
considerate and  
confident.  
Communicate!**

## **Getting to Know the Culture and People of the United States . . .**

The information in this section is to introduce you to some ‘Culturally Unique’ things about the US. When you complete your **Work & Travel Program** you will know many more things about the culture and people in the US. For now, however, we have prepared this information to give you a quick introduction to help you adjust more quickly to your new life in the US. Topics included are:

- At Work in the US
- Cell Phones/Computers
- Conversation
- Diet/Food
- Education
- Family Lifestyles
- Holidays
- Housing
- Manners
- Medical
- Metric System
- Money
- Personal Hygiene
- Time
- Transportation
- Religion
- Renting a Room or Apt.
- Shopping

**At Work in the US**

One of the first questions that people in the US ask when they meet someone new is ***“What do you do?”*** Where people work and/or what type of job they do, defines them to other people. Even though someone may have enough money to survive without working, he or she may feel socially uncomfortable because there is often not a good meaning associated with *‘unemployed’*. Women who stay home with their children instead of working often use a title other than ‘mother’. They call themselves *‘homemakers’*. Older people answer “I’m retired.” It’s more socially acceptable to be *‘retired’* than ‘not working’ or *‘unemployed’*. One reason may be **the traditional work ethic in the United States**. Historically, people have worked hard to maintain their independence as a country and as individuals. Being able to work and live independently is a goal for young people as they grow older. Traditionally, Americans have been proud of being able to work, proud of the company where they work and proud to be able to freely choose the kind of work they want to do.

Employers look for people who are ‘goal oriented’ and want to achieve a better life for themselves. They want people to work for them who feel proud and fortunate to live in a country that allows them to make choices about how their future will be. Employees want employers who will respect them. Employers appreciate the opportunity to commend good workers and reward them for their dedication and loyalty. Of course there are many work situations that are not perfect, but for the most part people are proud to be able to work hard and earn money to support their dreams, their families, etc. ***‘The American Dream’*** has traditionally been to be able to live freely, have the opportunity to make money, and buy a house!

**Employee Handbook**

While businesses in the US are often private, all workplaces must follow certain rules that have been made by the states and the US government. **It is very important that you take time to read the Employee Handbook of your place of employment.** All the rules for your workplace are very clearly explained. The expectations of your employer are printed in the Handbook so that you will know exactly what you should and should not do. If you have questions about information in the Handbook you should ask questions! In the Employee Handbook it will tell you who you should ask if you have questions. It will tell you information about hours of work, what and what not to wear, personal safety, your rights, etc.

Employers also like to hire people who are knowledgeable about the company working for them, Before you leave your country you can **use your computer to find information about the place of business where you will be working.** If it doesn't have a website, you can look up a similar type of business that does. The more you know about the business . . . what it sells, how it operates . . . the better employee you will be.

### **Getting to Know Your Co-Workers**

The most important things you can do are smile and speak English! **How you greet your co-workers and your employer at the beginning of every work day is extremely important.** Typically in the US people are expected to acknowledge the people around them. As people meet or pass one another at the beginning of their work day they say "Good morning" or "Good morning, how are you?" They expect a response like "Fine, how are you?" or "Fine, and you?" People who do not greet one another are often thought to be rude and unfriendly. As **Work & Travel students** you may feel uncomfortable greeting people because of your English ability, but **you should make every effort to smile and make a cheerful greeting.** If you do not, people may assume that you do not like them or are not interested in them. Another important thing to remember, however, is that people generally do not want to hear that you are not good! When they ask "How are you?" they are not really interested in hearing that you are not feeling well, are depressed, or have a hangover! The 'greeting' is more of a formality. This is sometimes difficult for foreigners to understand. Foreigners are often disappointed that Americans do not follow up on their conversations. They sometimes interpret these polite conversational phrases as lies! When someone asks "How are you?", but doesn't listen to the response, foreigners sometimes think the Americans don't really care. That's probably not true. They are just performing a sort of 'greeting ceremony'! They know it takes time to get to really know someone, and that is done during breaks, at lunch or after hours.

**People in the US tend to develop friendships with their co-workers during breaks, at lunch or after hours.** It's true that some people isolate themselves from any group interaction, but for many people these times in the day are a chance to casually chat with other people and learn a little about what they do when they're not working. Sometimes, as the new employee, you will have to make the effort to be open to conversation. **If you chat in your own language with another co-worker, those who do not know your language will possibly be offended.** They feel excluded or sometimes think you are talking about them. Strangely, you are the one who should feel that way as you are the non-native speaker. However, many

Americans only speak and understand English. Right or wrong, you must know that it is best to use English at all times while you are at work. You want to blend in to the workplace, not draw attention to yourself.

**Many businesses have a Employee's Room, Employee's Lounge, and/or lunch room** where people are free to eat, socialize, read newspapers, watch TV, take a nap, etc. These rooms usually have microwaves, refrigerators, coffeemakers, coffee cups, etc. Every business has guidelines for using these rooms. It is important that you learn what you can and cannot do. Sometimes the responsibility for keeping things clean is shared by the employees. They may have a weekly chart for cleaning out the refrigerator, the microwave, dishwasher, etc. You should agree to help.

**Where you eat your meals and snacks when you are at work depends on the place that you work.** Many people bring their lunches to work with them and eat them in the company lunchroom. In an office environment many people eat their lunch at their desks! (These are people who love their work or are so busy that they do not have time to take a normal lunch hour.) Some people *'go out'* to lunch at nearby restaurants or take their lunch to a nearby park. Some businesses allow employees to leave the worksite and others do not.

Birthdays and special events are often celebrated by people in the workplace. Co-workers share the cost of a cake or special dessert and everyone gets together to wish a Happy Birthday to the lucky person and share the cake. Sometimes people bring cookies or special snacks for all of the employees to share. If you see that this is done in your workplace, it would be a good opportunity for you to make some traditional snack or dessert from your country to share with your co-workers. This is a great way to make friends!

**In some workplaces co-workers will make plans to meet after work for dinner, a brief social hour, a few beers, etc.** If you are invited by a group of co-workers it is a very good idea to accept the invitation. If someone invites you individually to go with him or her to a dinner or for drinks it is not necessary for you to accept the invitation, although you should politely decline by saying you have something else you have to do or that you prefer socializing with a group. Dating between employees is sometimes not permitted in some businesses. Again, it is very important that you refer to your Employee Handbook. It is a good idea to keep your relationships with people at work on a professional rather than a personal level.

If you are interested in making friends with your co-workers remember that it takes time. Try not to be overly eager, just be yourself! If you take an interest in your co-workers and share information about yourself you will have a good chance to make friends with people in the US.!

## **Cell Phones and Computers**

As in many places of the world, people in the US love their cell phones! Almost everywhere you go, people are chatting with their friends, families and business associates! Some employers have rules about the use of cell phones in the work place. If you choose to buy or rent a cell phone, be sure you know the rules at your place of employment.

If you want to have your own cell phone while you are working in the US, there are many companies offering cell phone programs. As a temporary visitor, you can pay

for your cell phone fees in advance by 'buying minutes' or 'airtime' prior to using it. It is also possible to rent cell phones. Each company offers different programs or 'packages'. It will take some research on your part, but it will be a good way to learn about how the purchase of cell phones and the cost to operate one compares to the programs and rates in your country.

**Cell Phone Manners** are important. Be sure to use your cell phone in a polite way. Some people do not like people to receive cell phone calls during meals at home or in a restaurant. Some people think that this is rude. Other people think it is OK. Cell phones are usually not used in theaters, libraries and hospitals. When cell phones are not permitted, you will usually see signs asking people not to use their cell phones. Respect the signs. .

**Computers** are, of course, part of the popular culture in the US, too. People of all ages enjoy being able to use their computers to connect to the Internet, do research, send e-mails, etc.

If you have your own computer and would like to connect to the Internet, you may have to do some independent research regarding what services are available. The cost and availability will depend on the size of the community where you are living. Most telephone companies offer dial-up connections and/or DSL connections. Some apartments and rental homes have connections available at a monthly rate. Others, however, do not and may require you to have a connection installed. Installation will probably cost at least \$150.00 and may require a 6 month commitment. There is also an additional monthly fee (\$15.00 -\$60.00) for using the service. Ask co-workers or your landlord for more assistance or recommendations.

If you do not have your own computer you can always go to the local library and use the computer/Internet privately, and for free! Some colleges and universities also have computer/Internet resources. You can find a local Internet café! These provide a great place to use the computer and, perhaps, meet some of the local people!

## **Conversation**

Learning to improve your English Conversation skills requires LISTENING! If you have studied English, then you have probably studied 'formal English'. In businesses, homes, schools and in your communities you will often hear people speaking 'informal English'.

Since the US is so very large, people in different areas of the nation use slightly different **accents**, some variations in **pronunciation** of words, and unique, **culturally-related expressions**. You will have an opportunity to learn about the **slang and idioms** used in everyday conversation in your area. Your co-workers are your best resource! They can help explain the words and expressions that are used in your workplace and in their community.

The list of cultural expression is enormous!!!! You can find books about US slang and idioms in the library. You can buy them at a local bookstore. Be careful what expressions you copy from your co-workers. Phrases and words that employees use when talking with one another are not always used in conversation with an employer. People often say "*That sucks!*" While it can simply mean "*That's terrible!*", a boss or employer might find it somewhat rude. . Some people

frequently say “*Oh, my God!*” while others prefer to say “*Oh, my gosh!*” For some people it conflicts with their religious teachings, for others it does not. Before you ‘*pick up*’ phrases and expressions be sure to learn when to use them appropriately! If you’re not certain . . . say something that you are sure you understand, and that you know is OK!

## Spoken English

The English you HEAR your host family and other people speak is different than formal written English. It is helpful for you to know the difference. You may think you do not understand their English, but probably you just don’t understand their pronunciation!

|                |  |                               |  |
|----------------|--|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>wanna</b>   | Do you <u>wanna</u> go to the movies?<br>Do you <u>want to</u> go to the movies?   | <b>doin’</b>                  | <b>Whadaya doin’</b> this weekend?<br><u>What are you doing</u> this weekend?  |
| <b>ya</b>      | Do <b>ya wanna</b> go to the movies?<br>Do <u>you want to</u> go to the movies?  | <b>dunno</b>                  | <b>dunno.</b><br>I <u>don’t know</u> .   |
| <b>d’ya</b>    | <b>D’ya wanna</b> go to the movies?<br><u>Do you want to</u> go to the movies?   | <b>hafta</b>                  | I <b>dunno</b> , but I <b>hafta</b> study for a test.<br>I <u>don’t know</u> , but I <u>have to</u> study for a test.                      |
| <b>ta</b>      | <b>Dya wanna</b> go <b>ta</b> the movies?<br><u>Do you want to go to</u> the movies?   | <b>fer</b>                    | I <b>dunno</b> , but I <b>hafta</b> study <b>fer</b> a test.<br>I don’t know, but I <u>have to</u> study <u>for</u> a test.                |
| <b>da</b>      | <b>D’ya wanna</b> go <b>ta da</b> movies?<br><u>Do you want to go to the</u> movies?   | <b>would’ja/<br/>would’ju</b> | <b>Wouldja</b> like me <b>ta</b> help <b>ya</b> ?<br><u>Would you</u> like me <u>to</u> help <u>you</u> ?                                  |
| <b>gonna</b>   | No, I’m <b>gonna</b> go <b>ta da</b> baseball game.<br>No, I’m <u>going to go to the</u> baseball game.                                      | <b>could’ja/<br/>could’ju</b> | <b>Yeah, couldja?</b><br>Yes, <u>could you</u> ?   |
| <b>are’ya</b>  | <b>Are’ya gonna</b> go with your host family?<br><u>Are you going to</u> go with your host family?   | <b>yers</b>                   | OK, my house or <b>yers</b> ?<br>OK, my house or <u>yours</u> ?  |
| <b>yer</b>     | <b>Are’ya gonna</b> go with <b>yer</b> host family?<br><u>Are you going to</u> go with <u>your</u> host family?                              | <b>let’chu</b>                | I’ll <b>letchu</b> decide. Whatever <b>ya</b> want!<br>I’ll <u>let you</u> decide. Whatever <u>you</u> want!                               |
| <b>yeah</b>    | <b>Yeah</b> , and some of their friends are going, too.<br><u>Yes</u> , and some of their friends are going, too.                            | <b>whadever</b>               | I’ll <b>letchu</b> decide. <b>Whadever</b> <b>ya</b> want!<br>I’ll <u>let you</u> decide. <u>Whatever</u> <u>you</u> want.                 |
| <b>‘n</b>      | <b>Yeah, ‘n</b> some of their friends are going, too.<br><u>Yes, and</u> some of their friends are going, too.                               | <b>did’ja/</b>                | OK, <b>didja</b> remember that we’re <b>gonna</b> meet Liz?  |
| <b>uh</b>      | <b>Yeah, ‘n</b> some <b>uh</b> their friends are going, too.<br><u>Yes, and</u> some <u>of</u> their friends are going, too.                 | <b>did’ju</b>                 | OK, <u>did you</u> remember that we’re <u>going to</u> meet Liz?   |
| <b>goin’</b>   | <b>Yeah, ‘n</b> some <b>uh</b> their friends are <b>goin’</b> , too.<br><u>Yes, and</u> some <u>of</u> their friends are <u>going</u> , too. | <b>mus’ta</b>                 | Oh, sorry. I <b>musta</b> forgotten.<br>Oh, sorry. I <u>must have</u> forgotten.   |
| <b>whadaya</b> | <b>Whadaya</b> doing this weekend?<br><u>What are you</u> doing this weekend?  | <b>gotta</b>                  | OK. I’ve <b>gotta</b> call her ‘n tell her <b>ta</b> meet us.<br>OK. I’ve <u>got to</u> call her <u>and</u> tell her <u>to</u> meet (must) |

## Greetings . . .

- |    |                         |    |                        |
|----|-------------------------|----|------------------------|
| 1. | <b>Simple Greetings</b> | 2. | <b>Daily Greetings</b> |
|    | Hello!                  |    | Good morning.          |
|    | Hi!                     |    | Good afternoon.        |
|    | Hello there!            |    | Mornin’. *             |
|    | Hi there!               |    | Afternoon. *           |

Hey! \*

Yo! \*

Good evening.

Evenin'. \*

\* Casual/With friends

### 3. Simple Conversation Questions

How are you?

How is everything with you?

How have you been?

What's new? \*

What's happening? \*

How's it going? \*

How's everything? \*

How you been? \*

What's up?\*

What's going on? \*

What are you up to? \*

### 4. Simple Conversation Answers

Fine, thank you.

I'm fine.

I'm good. \*

Okay.

So-so. \*

Not bad. \*

Same as always.

Not so good.

Not very well.

Fine, thanks! \*

I'm cool! \*

Great! \*

All right.

Pretty good.

Could be worse! \*

Same as usual.

Not so hot. \*

Not so well.

## Some important phrases to know for your own personal safety.

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| <b>Can it!</b>     | Don't talk. I don't want to hear you talk anymore.               |
| <b>Back off!</b>   | Don't ask again. I said "No!"                                    |
| <b>Chill out!</b>  | Relax. Be calm.  |
| <b>Cool it!</b>    | Stop doing that. OR Be calm.                                     |
| <b>Duck!</b>       | Move your head down. Something's going to hit you.               |
| <b>Freeze!</b>     | Stop! Do not move!   |
| <b>Halt!</b>       | Stop!  |
| <b>Hands up!</b>   | Put your hands over your head. Someone wants to steal something. |
| <b>Heads up!</b>   | Look! Be careful.  |
| <b>Hold it!</b>    | Stop. Don't go away.   |
| <b>Look out!</b>   | Look for danger. Be careful!                                     |
| <b>Take cover!</b> | Find a safe place!   |
| <b>Watch out!</b>  | Look for danger. Be careful!                                     |

## Some expressions you might hear 'on the job' . . .

### to blow the whistle on someone; to rat on someone, or to snitch on someone

to report that someone has done something wrong

*The mail clerk blew the whistle on her boss who was always 20 minutes late for work.*

### to botch up something; to screw up something

to make a mistake

*The new employee tried to fix the copy machine, but he botched it up and they had to call the company to have it repaired.*

*The boss gave her some papers to file, but she screwed up everything by putting them in the wrong folders.*

### to get called on the carpet; to get chewed out; to bawl someone out

To be reprimanded or corrected for doing something wrong.

The two people who had secretly been dating one another got called on the carpet by the boss this morning! He's really going to chew them out! He told them last week to remember that dating co-workers was against the rules.

**to fall asleep on the job; to fall asleep at the wheel**

To fail to do a job correctly.

Amber was supposed to tell all of the other employees about the meeting, but she completely forgot. She really fell asleep at the wheel.

**to get caught in the act; to get caught red-handed**

Jeff is in big trouble. He got caught red-handed stealing food from other employees. Steve walked into the lunchroom and caught him eating Ann's cookies!

**to get a clue; clueless**

To become smarter and more aware; to be completely unaware.

That girl is never going to be able to keep her job. She is completely clueless! She doesn't even know how to use the cash register, yet.

"Can you tell me what time the Orientation is?" said Amy. "Hey!" replied John, "Get a clue, would you? The sign is on the bulletin board right in front of you!"

**to goof off; to goof around; to goof up**

To play instead of work; to play or relax; to make a mistake.

He lost his job because he didn't take it seriously. He was always goofing off with the other employees and keeping them from doing their work.

Hey! Ya wanna goof around after work? I thought we could go throw some darts and have a beer. Whaddaya think?

"Gosh, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to goof that up. I'll get you the right order.

Just a minute, okay?"

**to see eye to eye**

To agree.

Sometimes employees don't see eye to eye with their supervisors, but sometimes it's better just to do your work than start an argument.

**wacko; nuts; nutty; to be a nut case**

crazy; to be crazy

Everyone thought that Marta was wacko. She was always talking to everyone about all her boyfriends. She said they were all nutty, but maybe she was the nutcase!

**Typically Teenage/Young Adult Expressions**

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| ask someone out         | to invite someone to go somewhere: to ask           |
| someone on a date       |   |
| awesome                 | great!  |
| "Beats me."             | I don't know  |
| bro                     | a male friend                                       |
| bud/buddies             | a friend/a group of friends                         |
| bug someone             | to annoy someone                                    |
| cheesy                  | cheap looking; not cool                             |
| check it out            | look at something                                   |
| cool                    | great!  |
| dude                    | man or guy OR any person, usually a friend          |
| dump someone            | to tell someone you don't want to date them anymore |
| fine                    | pretty, cute, nice-looking                          |
| get a grip              | be calm   |
| gross                   | disgusting  |
| hang out                | be with friends; doing nothing special              |
| have a blast            | have a good time                                    |
| have a crush on someone | to think you really like or love someone            |
| Hello?                  | Are you crazy? Were you listening?                  |
| hottie                  | sexy, really good-looking                           |

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| hunk                | cute guy, good-looking                         |
| kick back           | relax  |
| guys                | people, “you guys”                             |
| kicking             | great, fantastic                               |
| know-it-all         | someone who thinks they know everything        |
| lead someone on     | make someone think you like him/her            |
| like                | “How can I say this?”                          |
| love at first sight | to love someone the first time you see him/her |
| nerd                | someone who is not cool                        |
| phat                | great!   |
| rock                | be great or fantastic                          |
| so                  | absolutely                                     |
| show up             | arrive   |
| stoked              | to be really excited                           |
| sweet               | great!   |
| ticked off          | angry  |
| totally             | extremely; very, very, very much               |
| wacko               | crazy person                                   |
| way                 | very, very, very much                          |
| 24/7                | 4 hours a day, 7 days a week                   |

## **Diet/Food**

The USA is the **‘Fast Food Capital of the World’!** “Fast Foods” offer people living in the US a chance to eat food quickly and conveniently. Besides McDonalds, Burger King, KFC, Pizza Hut and other internationally known restaurants there are many other smaller establishments that offer ‘fast foods’ of all kinds. It is very common for people to have several meals per week in a fast food restaurant. Recently, there have been more news articles and information indicating that too much ‘Fast Food’ can be unhealthy for people. As a result, many of the restaurants are offering some healthier choices like salad and low fat foods.

Eating habits of people in the US vary. Some people select more fresh foods or vegetarian type options, but, for the most part, people cooking in the kitchen will often choose meals that are quick to prepare and easy to serve.

If you are interested in **‘eating out’** while you are in the United States, there are many, many different kinds of restaurants representing the traditional local foods as well as foods from the variety of people who have immigrated to the country. African, Asian, Australian, European, Middle Eastern, South American . . . whatever kind of food you are hoping to find, there is a good chance that there will be a restaurant serving it in the United States IF you are living in one of the larger cities. In smaller cities it is more common to find restaurants offering menus that represent the local area.

## Who Cooks?

In the US men, women and children cook! In many homes family members or roommates share some of the responsibilities of cooking. More and more often, men can be found in the kitchen ... usually cooking dinner foods or barbecuing in the backyard. Some families or living groups make a schedule that has individual members assigned to meal planning, preparation and clean up.

In their homes and offices, people also use microwave ovens to quickly prepare snacks and meals. Supermarkets and grocery stores carry many prepared, microwavable foods, so that people can eat something warm and tasty in a hurry!

**Single people** who live together with friends sometimes cook their own meals and sometimes share buying the food and the cooking of the food. If you are living with other people it is important to talk about 'the house rules'. If there is food in the cupboard or the refrigerator, who does it belong to? Can everyone eat it or is it only for the person who bought it? Who cooks? Who cleans the dishes? Should the dishes be cleaned and put away immediately or can they be washed later?

Take time to talk with the people you are living with so that you will understand their eating style. It is very important that you learn what is expected and what is accepted.

### **Breakfast**

A typical breakfast for many people is often a bowl of cereal with milk. Sometimes they eat at the breakfast table and sometimes in front of the TV! Breakfast bars, fruit, peanut butter toast, fruit juices and yogurt are also common selections. Weekend breakfasts are more likely to include eggs, bacon, sausage, or ham, potatoes, pancakes or waffles. That's because they take longer to prepare and longer to eat!

Many people sometimes skip breakfast completely! They frequently start the morning out with a cup of coffee or hot tea. Some people even drink Coke or a soda for breakfast! It is common for people to 'eat on the run'. That means that they will take a bagel, muffin, breakfast bar, or an apple on their way out of the house! It's not surprising to see people eating breakfast foods in their car on their way to work in the morning! If they eat at home they often have cereal, fruit, toast, muffins, bagels or sweet rolls.

Eating weekend breakfast in restaurants is also fairly common. On Sundays many people go to restaurants for brunch. A brunch is a meal, often a buffet, that combines foods from **breakfast** and **lunch**!

**The US LOVES coffee!** Most everywhere you go you will be able to see an espresso shop. There are large coffee shops like Starbucks and small 'drive-through' ones located on nearly every corner. People love to order coffee drinks such as lattes, mochas and frappachinos! Many people stop to pick up a coffee drink on their way to work. They think it is the perfect way to start a day!

People in the US often drink their coffee '*black*'. That means that they drink it without cream or sugar. It is also very common to find '*decaf*' coffee. This is coffee that has had the amount of caffeine reduced or removed from it. Europeans may recognize some similar coffee terms used in their own language, however, many of the terms are not used in the same way in the US. If you're ordering coffee or an espresso

drink and you're not certain what to ask for . . . be confident and ask the barista or server to help you learn how to order the drink of your choice!

## Lunch

For most people, lunch depends upon their work situation or their schedule. Some people take their lunch with them to work, consisting of salads, maybe a sandwich, cheese, a fruit or other snack, and maybe a dessert! Other people have their lunch at fast food restaurants, small deli's (delicatessens), or regular restaurants. It has also become fairly popular for people to go to their local supermarket and purchase prepared salads, sandwiches, wraps, etc. Another common thing to see is people eating their lunches in their offices at their desks, on a park bench or on the steps of the office building!

## Dinner or Supper

Dinner, or supper, is the evening meal. It is usually the largest meal that Americans eat. In the home the time for this meal ranges from 5:30 p.m. to as late as 9:00 p.m. The time is determined by the family's lifestyle and preferences. In some homes there is a designated time and all family members sit down and enjoy the meal together. In others, however, the meal might be prepared and kept warm so that each person in the family can take the food when wanted. In families with exceptionally busy schedules children might be expected to select something like a frozen pizza and cook their own dinners. .

'Left-overs' are commonly eaten in many homes. 'Left-over' means that some food was prepared for one meal and some was not used. For example, a family might make spaghetti or lasagna for a Monday evening meal. If the family did not eat all of the food that was prepared, then they may choose to have it again on the next night (Tuesday) or maybe Wednesday. Foreign visitors are often surprised by this practice and think that the people are being lazy or not preparing meals correctly. In fact, many people in the US think it is a wise idea to prepare enough food for more than one meal, especially if it is something that their family likes to eat. They think it is a good way to save food, time and money!

People also commonly take 'left-overs' home from a restaurant. If a person hasn't eaten all of the food that he or she ordered, it is taken home and eaten the next day! Eating cold, 'left-over' pizza is actually a favorite food for some people!

## Snacks

Another large part of the 'food culture' of the US is its **big appetite for snacks**. People may eat snacks between meals, at the office, in the car and in front of the TV. Most snack foods have appealing packages and tastes. Many international visitors quickly become accustomed to this aspect of the culture. Candy bars, pop, popcorn, cookies, cakes, pies, potato chips, pretzels, corn chips, and ice cream are some of the favorites. **People in the US eat more than 1 billion gallons of ice cream per year!**

These kinds of snack foods are called '**Junk Food**'. Some people try to limit the amount of junk food that they eat. Some try to select fruits, nuts and other healthier snacks. Learning about popular 'junk foods' will be an interesting experience. You are sure to find some that you will like, too!

## Health Foods

In contrast to the large number of junk food eaters, there are also many people who are more interested in health foods. Some people choose to eat only vegetarian meals. Some prefer to have more fish than red meat. Many people make an effort to have more salads and soup than meat and potatoes. Again, this is another example of how many different ways people live their lives. There are specialty stores where people can buy organic foods, and most grocery stores or supermarkets have special sections selling organic foods.

## Dieting

There is a large amount of information on TV and in newspapers and magazines about how to diet. How to become thinner is an obsession with many people. A lot of people have had poor eating habits that have resulted in their being overweight. Magazines, newspapers and TV promote many ideas about dieting. There are many kinds of diet foods, vitamins, and diet programs to choose from. While it may seem somewhat personal, it's very common for people to chat with friends and co-workers about their diets! However, never ask someone about their diet unless they talk about it first, and never, never tell someone he or she should go on a diet! You'll never make friends that way!

## Alcohol

The use of alcohol varies from person to person. Many people in the US do not drink alcohol. Unlike some other countries in the world where a table wine is frequently served with dinner, many people choose to drink water, milk, sodas, or iced tea with their meals. Beer is popular, but more often it is used with snacks than meals. Mixed drinks and cocktails are served at parties and in bars, lounges and some restaurants.

In the US the legal age for drinking is 21. Each state has different rules regarding the purchase of alcohol. In some states only beer and wine are sold in supermarkets and grocery stores, while 'hard liquor' is sold in specially designated Liquor Stores. To purchase alcohol you must have legal identification verifying your age.

**It is also against the law to drink alcohol and drive a car.** There have been many accidents related to 'drinking and driving' so law enforcement officers strictly enforce the laws. Drinking alcohol in the workplace environment and/or while working is generally not allowed. Make sure you know and understand the rules at your place of employment.

## **Education/Schools**

The school year in the US usually begins in late August or early September. It ends in late May or early June. The majority of elementary, middle schools and high schools usually have a two week vacation during the last two weeks of December and a one week vacation in April. They have a few other holidays during the year which are usually observed on a Friday, giving families a 3-day weekend.

In the US, there are public schools and there are private schools. Public schools are, of course, operated by the government. People in the US believe that everyone should have the opportunity to have a good education. The public school system in

the US is generally well-respected. Most children in public schools do not wear uniforms.

Private schools must follow the same study guidelines as public schools. They, however, are not free. Many private schools are operated by various church groups. It is more common for students in private schools to wear uniforms, but it varies from school to school.

In some cities children ride school buses. If children live in the country, they often ride the school bus for 30 to 40 minutes before arriving at their school. School buses are a bright yellow color in the US and are used to transport children of all ages to and from school. Parents do not pay to have their children go to school at a public school or to ride a school bus.

### Colleges/Universities

The difference between a college and a university is that a college just offers a collection of degrees in one specific area, while a university is a collection of colleges. When you go to a university you are going to be graduating from one of their colleges, such as the business college. People from other countries are often confused between the word 'college' and 'university'. In fact, in the US, most people think of them as synonyms. There are also two-year community colleges that offer some of the same courses as four-year colleges/universities. Community colleges and colleges/universities also offer coursework for community members not working towards a college degree.

Schedules for college and university students vary because many classes do not meet everyday. Also, some classes are held in the daytime and others in the evening. Students earn credits, or units, for each course taken. A three credit/unit class meets for 3 hours during the week.

### **Family Lifestyles**

In the US, as in other places, families come in all shapes and sizes. Some families include a mother, father, and one or two children. Other families may have 4 to 6 children. Some families may include a single mother and her children, or a single father and his children. Sometimes grandparents live with their families, but in the US that is not as common as it is in some other countries. Senior citizens are more likely to live independently.

For many people family relationships are very important. However, **since the US is so large, family groups are often separated with grandparents living in one city, and grandchildren, cousins, aunts and uncles in other cities.** Family groups living near one another may often get together for meals and other activities. Families who are separated may make special arrangements to get together for holidays and special occasions. .

When they are not working, **people in the US seem to LOVE their free time!** For many people in the US the average work week is 40 hours per week. Business offices, banks, smaller retail clothing stores, jewelry stores, doctors' offices, etc. are usually open Mondays through Fridays from 8:00 am – 5:00 pm. Shopping malls are more likely to be open 7 days per week. Many larger grocery stores and/or supermarkets are open 24 hours, as are gas stations, and some restaurants.

Quite a few people enjoy **outdoor activities**. It doesn't matter if they live in a warm area or a cool area; they always seem to find many things to do. People enjoy sports, camping, hiking, and attending sporting events.

**Indoor things that people enjoy doing** include going to movies together or to a shopping mall. Malls sometimes offer other kinds of entertainment like ice skating rinks and video game centers. Some cities have community centers that offer activities for people of all ages to enjoy. Having a membership in a **health or exercise club** is a popular way for people to exercise. It is also a good place to meet people. These facilities offer things like swimming, tennis, racquet ball, volleyball, basketball, weight training, exercise classes, etc.

Many people often take **short weekend trips to the mountains, the beach or other nearby places of interest**. Travel agents, airlines and the Internet are all good resources for learning about places you can visit that are located within a short distance of the city where you are living.

At home, as mentioned before, people spend time using their computers, doing tasks around the home, and, of course, **watching TV!** Some homes have TV's in most every room! Many people, especially men, enjoy watching **professional sports programs** on TV. Baseball, basketball, American football, golf, tennis and soccer are among the most popular sports shown on TV. People get together and often watch 'important' games together, while munching on snacks like popcorn, chips and salsa, or potato chips.

In the US it is very common for people to **share the work around the house**. Children are often assigned jobs like putting things away in their rooms, helping with the dishes, vacuuming, feeding pets, helping with simple yard work or washing the cars. **If you are living with a roommate or a group of roommates it is very important that you share in the work that needs to be done.** Talk with the people you are living with and decide how you will share the day-to-day responsibilities.

When people in the US are not doing more active activities they are frequently **reading and/or enjoying music**. There are many excellent book stores and music stores offering a wide variety of books, cd's, dvd's, etc. Some of the stores offer books, music, etc. in other languages besides English.

To learn more about the **lifestyles of people in the US** you will need the confidence to ask questions, make friends and try new things. Many things are different that they are in your country. That is what makes us interesting to one another. As you meet people, be sure to share information about your country with people that you meet. Help them learn about your country while you're learning about theirs.

## **Holidays**

There are many holidays celebrated in the US. Many of the traditional holidays in the United States have been changed to Fridays, so that people can enjoy 3-day weekends. Some holidays are observed by government agencies, schools, etc., but not necessarily by businesses. For example, schools often close on Veteran's Day in November, but businesses do not. Some holidays are observed in schools and public places and others are observed in accordance with religious traditions. Here is a list of the most recognized holidays:

## Major Holidays Celebrated in the US

|                               |                                    |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| New Year's Day                | January 1                          |
| Martin Luther King's Birthday | January, 3 <sup>rd</sup> Monday    |
| Chinese Lunar New Year        | January or February                |
| Ash Wednesday                 | February or March                  |
| Valentine's Day               | February 14                        |
| President's Day               | February, 3 <sup>rd</sup> Monday   |
| St. Patrick's Day             | March 17                           |
| Good Friday                   | March or April                     |
| Easter                        | March or April                     |
| Passover                      | March or April                     |
| Cinco de Mayo                 | May 5                              |
| Mother's Day                  | May, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Sunday        |
| Memorial Day                  | May, last Monday                   |
| Father's Day                  | June, 3 <sup>rd</sup> Sunday       |
| Flag Day                      | June 14 <sup>th</sup>              |
| Independence Day              | July 4                             |
| Labor Day                     | September, 1 <sup>st</sup> Monday  |
| Columbus Day                  | October, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Monday    |
| Yom Kippur                    | September or October               |
| Halloween                     | October 31                         |
| Veteran's Day                 | November 11                        |
| Thanksgiving Day              | November, 4 <sup>th</sup> Thursday |
| Christmas Day                 | December 25                        |
| Chanukah                      | December                           |
| New Year's Eve                | December 31                        |

## Housing

Even though many people live in apartments, duplexes, townhouses, mobile homes and condominiums, **the traditional 'American Dream'** has always been to own a home. Owning a home is an important goal for many citizens. Owning their own house on their own piece of land has been a dream of Americans throughout the country's history.

The country is very large and there is a great amount of space for people to have homes. Only a few cities are densely populated enough to make having a private home extremely expensive. The fact that there is such a great amount of space is one of the surprising things that foreigners notice when they first arrive. There is space everywhere! To people from smaller countries, the size and scale of everything is BIG! The large size of houses, cars, and other things sometimes seems wasteful to those who visit the US. However, to Americans it just seems normal. Everything is big because it can be!

## The Traditional Dream House

There are, of course, a huge variety of homes across the nation. Homes are different depending on the area where they are built. In the Northwestern states houses are more often built of wood. In the Southwestern states you will find more clay or adobe homes. In some places where brick is less expensive than wood, people build their homes with brick. Homes also differ due to the income level of the owners. The more affluent the homeowner is, the more likely the home will be larger or fancier. However, the typical American house is recognizable across the country. An average, middle-class home in an average, middle-class neighborhood is similar throughout the country. It will probably be a mid-sized building on its own separate piece of land. It will probably be a one-story or two-story structure with a front lawn that is nicely landscaped with flowers, trees and shrubs. There will be a driveway and a garage or a carport. Or, there might be a garage AND a carport! (A carport is a space with a roof, but no walls.) If there is a garage, it will probably be big enough for 2 cars. The house will also have a porch, a swimming pool, patio or a deck. Or, it might have a porch, a patio, AND a deck! Remember that people like to be outside and take advantage of the big open spaces.

Other parts of the homes are interesting to foreigners as well. They are often surprised to see the lack of doors between rooms. It is common to find “shared areas” in many homes. Some homes still have separate formal living rooms and dining rooms, but, it is more common to find family rooms or great rooms that combine living room and kitchen areas, living room and dining room areas, or kitchen and dining areas. Today, most homes are designed to be comfortable and convenient to accommodate the current casual lifestyle of many families.

Inside the traditional home you will likely find 2 or 3 bedrooms. Bedrooms seem to be somewhat large compared to those of many foreigners. One bedroom in each home is usually larger than the rest. It's called the master bedroom. This bedroom is usually has its own bathroom. In most families, the parents are the ones who have the master bedroom. Children sometimes share bedrooms with brothers and sisters, but many children have their own rooms. Children often share a bathroom with brothers and sisters, or sometimes with their parents. Some homes have one bathroom and some have two or more.

**Apartments** are used by a great number of people in the US. The size and style of apartment buildings varies according to the surroundings. **In larger cities** you will more likely find tall apartment buildings with studio (living room, kitchen, bedroom are all one room), one bedroom or two bedroom apartments. These apartments are generally leased for 6 months to a year with rent payable each month. Some people have condominiums which are like apartments, but that can be purchased like a home. Away from the downtown areas, **in the suburbs**, or areas outside of larger cities, apartment buildings are generally only one to three floors/stories high. They are built in ‘complexes’ which are a group of apartment buildings built together that often share exercise facilities, a swimming pool, tennis courts, etc. While some of these have three and four bedroom apartments, it is also possible to find smaller apartments within the same complex.

People also live in **duplexes** (two housing units together) or **townhouses** (two or more housing units together). If you are looking for a place to rent while you are

in the US, these are sometimes priced similarly to apartments. (**See Renting a Room or an Apartment for more information.**)

## ☑ **Medical**

In the US some people are free to choose their doctors, dentists, clinics and hospitals. Others belong to a health plan that chooses the doctors that will care for them. People normally meet their doctor or dentist at least once a year for an annual 'check up'. People also contact their doctor or dentist when they have a problem or concern. In the US if you do not feel well, you do not go directly to the hospital. If an illness or minor accident occurs, people generally call their doctor's office and make an appointment. Some people go to local healthcare/emergency care clinics and receive immediate care without an appointment. Most medical offices are only open Monday through Friday. Healthcare/emergency clinics are open on weekends. Some are open 24 hours. **In the US people only go directly to a hospital if it is a serious medical emergency or there are not other medical facilities open.** Hospital emergency care is very expensive, and many hospitals are very busy.

**If you are involved with someone who is in need of emergency care due to a life-threatening condition you should dial 9-1-1** on the nearest telephone. They will send emergency medical staff to take care of the person.

**Medicine prescribed by doctors** is only sold in **pharmacies**. Pharmacies are usually located in drug stores or supermarkets. They are also located near hospitals and medical offices. 'Over-the-counter' medicines can be purchased in drug stores and supermarkets. These include medicines for headaches, colds, allergies, etc. Never take any medicine that you are unfamiliar with.

**Work & Travel** participants are insured by CareMed. You can find information in your **Work & Travel Handbook** and you will also receive information from the company. It is important that you be familiar with how to use the insurance when you visit a doctor or clinic. Remember that your insurance does not provide coverage for you if you choose to participate in dangerous sports such as martial arts, boxing, rugby, wrestling, skydiving, etc; and it does not provide coverage for accidents caused while driving automobiles, motorcycles or other motorized vehicles

## ☑ **Manners**

Every culture has a set of manners. What is considered correct behavior in one country is not necessarily considered correct in another country. It's also true among families. Some families are more formal and other families are more informal. For the most part, people in the US share the following ideas about manners. However, do not be surprised to see children and adults do things that are shown on the following list! Manners are part of a family's culture, so be prepared to learn more about . . . good manners and bad ones! Some people use 'good manners' in public and others do not.

### **Manners Used in Greetings and Introductions**

- ❖ Most people greet one another very casually.
- ❖ Most people greet each other by simply saying "Hi". A handshake is not necessary.

- ❖ Sometimes "How are you?" is not the same as "Hi". When people say "How are you?" they want you to answer: "Fine." "OK." or "Not so good."
- ❖ Many people hug family and friends when they greet one another. (man : woman; woman : woman; man : man; adult: child ; child: child)
- ❖ Some people hug and give a small kiss on the cheek when they meet family and friends. (man : woman; woman : woman; man : man; adult : child; child : child)
- ❖ Family members often kiss one another. (husband : wife; parent : child)
- ❖ A more formal greeting is the "handshake". Today, this is more common in business greetings and introductions. It is also good when you first meet someone. (man : man; man: woman; woman : woman)

### **Hugging**

- ❖ In the US people OFTEN hug one another. It is a friendly gesture given to people on many occasions. For some people it is simply a way of saying "Hi!" to people that they have met before. Foreigners are often surprised at how often people hug one another . . . parent to child, woman to man, woman to woman, man to man! It is a way of expressing happiness. Your Host Family may even hug your CHI AYP Academic Coordinator! It doesn't mean that they have a closer relationship with the AC than with you do. Your AC will always be fair . . . and may hug you, too!
- ❖ Hugging has become so common in the US it is sometimes considered to be a polite way of greeting. There are 'degrees of hugging'. It doesn't always mean that the relationship is close. It depends on the hug! People who resist hugs are sometimes thought of as rude. However, if you are uncomfortable receiving hugs, it is OK to remind people that you are new to the US and to its customs!

### **Manners to Use When Eating**

- ❖ Usually people wait for everyone to sit down at the table before they begin.
- ❖ Some families say a blessing or prayer before eating. Listen. Wait quietly.
- ❖ Usually people begin eating after everyone has been served.
- ❖ "Family Style" meals are more common. Food is passed around the table. At first, it is better to take a small amount. Make certain there is enough food for everyone. You can probably have more food later.
- ❖ Usually people put a napkin in his/her lap. After eating it is put on the table.
- ❖ People usually do not drink from bowls or lift them off the table.
- ❖ People usually eat quietly, but conversation is encouraged!
- ❖ Slurping and burping are not so good! Slurping noodles is not common.
- ❖ Usually people chew with their mouths closed.
- ❖ Talking with food in the mouth is not so good!
- ❖ People usually put the knife and fork together across the plate when finished.
- ❖ It is nice to offer to help clear the table and/or wash the dishes.

### **☑ Metric System**

The US is the only country that uses a different metric system than the rest of the world! Your **Work & Travel Handbook** has some quick reference information regarding the metric equivalents. For driving you need to know that miles = kilometers, and liters = gallons. If you're shopping or working in the food industry you'll need to know that pounds = kilograms and quarts = liters. For more information you can look in a dictionary under "Weights and Measures" or you can find charts on the Internet.

## ☑ Money

Of course, Americans are good at spending money! They enjoy shopping for food, clothing, sports equipment, cars, furniture, etc. To make their purchases they use cash, checks, credit cards, and debit cards.

### Banks

In the US people use banks to keep their money safe. In some countries banking may not be as safe as it is in the United States. Banks in the US are monitored by the government and it is much wiser to put money in the bank than to try to keep it in your home, apartment, etc. In fact, it is dangerous to keep large amounts of money or valuables in your home. It is a very good idea for you to open a bank account and use checks, debit cards or credit cards. Your **Work & Travel Student Handbook** provides you with information about opening a bank account. Banks often offer free accounts to students or to people who use **Direct Deposit** (the employer deposits your earnings electronically and then gives you a copy of the paycheck for your records). This is a very good way to handle your money.

### Cash

**DO NOT CARRY LARGE AMOUNTS OF CASH!** Typically, people in the US carry cash to make purchases for items less than \$100.00. Many people choose not to carry large amounts of cash, just to be safe. It is easy to lose your cash accidentally, or if someone sees you carrying a large amount of cash you could become a victim of a robbery. It is better to be safe than sorry! Put your money in the bank and use a debit card, checks or a credit card!

### Checks

Until the introduction of credit cards and debit cards, most people in the US wrote checks to make purchases. Today people still use a bank checking account and

write checks for things like, rent, school tuitions, electricity, etc. If you decide to have a checking account, make sure you complete your checks in the correct manner.

|  |                      |                      |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|
| Sara Williams<br>3219 Sunflower Lane<br>Phoenix, Arizona | 2329                 | Date <u>10/31/05</u> |
| Pay to the order of <u>Barnes and Noble Book Store</u>   | <u>\$25.99</u>       |                      |
| <u>Twenty five dollars and 99/100</u>                    | <u>DOLLARS</u>       |                      |
| Union Bank<br>Phoenix, Arizona<br>Memo _____             | <u>Sara Williams</u> |                      |
| :3241937 0320010437: 02329                               |                      |                      |

## Debit Cards

Debit cards can be used to pay for things immediately. You can use a debit card if you have a checking account or a savings account from a local bank. They are used and accepted the same as Credit Cards. However, if you use a Debit Card you must be careful to keep a record of the money in your account. The Debit Card only uses money that is in your account. If you have a Debit Card you can also use it to get cash in an ATM (cash machine).

## Credit Cards

VISA, MasterCard and other credit cards are accepted by many businesses. If you have a Credit Card from your bank in your country you will probably be able to use it in the US. If you have a problem or if you lose it, be sure to tell your bank immediately!

## Sales Tax

Most cities and states have sales taxes. If you buy something it may be taxed. The tax will be added to the total price of what you buy. It is usually between 5% and 15%, but sometimes it can be more. You must pay the tax.

## Employment Taxes

Information about your responsibility for employment taxes, forms and how to get a Social Security number are included in your **Work & Travel Handbook**.

## Tipping and Tax

It is the custom in this country to “tip”. That means to give some extra money to someone for doing a good job. Sometimes it is correct to tip and other times it is not.

### ❖ People to tip:

- Food servers (waiters/waitresses)
- Airport people who help you carry your bags
- Bus/van drivers who help you carry your bags
- Taxi drivers
- Hotel people who carry your bags
- People who cut your hair
- People who give manicures, paint your fingernails, etc.

### ❖ How much money to tip:

- Food servers = 15% - 20% of the total bill
- Airport people = \$1.00 - \$2.00 per bag
- Bus/van drivers = \$1.00 - \$2.00 per bag
- Taxi drivers = 15% of the total bill
- Hotel people = \$1.00 - \$2.00 per bag
- People who cut your hair = 15% - 20% of the total bill
- Manicurists, etc. = 15% - 20% of the total bill

### ❖ When to tip food servers:

- NO in fast food restaurants like McDonald's, Taco Bell, etc.
  - YES in any restaurant where the server takes your order and brings your food to you
  - YES in coffee shops, snack bars, etc., if, at the counter where you order, there is a jar or place for "tips"
- ❖ How to tip:
- If you use cash, no pennies! Some people think giving pennies is rude.
  - If you use a credit card, write the amount after TIP, then add the tip to the total amount.
- ❖ Be careful!
- "gratuity" is another word for "tip"
  - Some restaurants add the tip or gratuity:
  - if you have 5 or more people at your table
  - if the restaurant is very expensive or famous

## ☑ **Personal Hygiene**

How you look and how you take care of yourself influences what other people think about you. As a visitor to the US you will probably see many people who look and dress differently than in your country. Certainly, in the US there is a lot of diversity as far as types of clothing, hairstyles, tattoos, body piercing, etc. are concerned. What is fashionable in one city is not necessarily fashionable in another. What is popular and acceptable with one generation is not so with another. However, for the most part, people in the US notice how 'clean' people are. They notice whether or not people have dirty clothing, exceptionally dirty, oily hair, or 'B.O.' (body odor). Typically, most people in the US **shower or bathe daily or every other day**. While this is not always true in other countries, it is important if you are visiting here that you consider accommodating this cultural norm. This is particularly important when you are working closely with other people or at a social gathering. Think about the odors that are associated with your workplace. If you work in a 'fast food' restaurant will you smell like French fries when you go out for a beer with your friends? If you're interested in dating someone you've met can he or she tell if you haven't recently bathed or showered?

Manufacturers in the US spend a lot of money marketing colognes, antiperspirants, scented shampoos, lotions and soaps. A large percentage of the population buys these products to avoid 'offending anyone'. At the same time, there are many people who are activists for a '**scent free environment**'. That means that they believe the manufactured fragrances (colognes), scented soaps, etc. pollute the air. Many work places have adopted 'scent free environment' rules. These rules are to protect people who are especially sensitive to strong fragrances and to create a work environment that is comfortable for everyone. Fragrances or no fragrances . . . you will want to be socially acceptable, so try to make a good impression and bathe frequently.

In workplaces associated with food-handling people are reminded to **wash their hands with soap and water**. This is especially important in the food industry, but is also important to many people. Various diseases can be transferred from person to person if people do not wash their hands regularly. Make sure you follow the recommendations of your employer, and also remember that it is socially preferred

that you keep your hands clean. Another reason that this is important to people in the US is that it is customary to shake hands when greeting people. For this reason it is a courtesy to those you meet to keep your hands clean.

**If you wear a uniform to work it is also important to keep your uniform clean. It should be washed everyday.** Some businesses have uniforms laundered for their employees, but others do not. If you are responsible for keeping your uniform clean, it is important to do so. Again, people make their impressions about you based on how you look at work and during your free time. Remember that you represent an entire country! If people think that you are unclean, wear dirty clothes and are offensive they are likely to form a stereo-type of people from your country. If you do not shower regularly they may assume that all people from your country are unclean! Of course, this is not realistic, but it is the way people judge other people. You will find yourself making these kind of stereo-typical judgments, too. Be careful. Remember that what you see is simply different to you. Unfortunately many people seem to notice what is different or unusual before they recognize what is the same or familiar.

## **Time**

From country to country people have different ideas about time. What does 'late' mean to you? In some places to be 'late' means to arrive sometime within the hour of the scheduled time. For example, if you were meeting someone for coffee at 9:00am you would wait at least 60 minutes for the person, giving him or her that time to arrive. In the US people will not usually wait that long. If you make an appointment **to meet a friend in the US, people usually expect you to arrive within 15 or 20 minutes.** So, if you planned to meet at 9:00am, your friend would expect to see you no later than 9:20am. **Many people think it is rude to arrive late to meet friends and acquaintances.**

**For appointments with doctors, dentists, hair stylists, etc. people are expected to arrive on time.** If the appointment is at 9:00am, you should arrive at 9:00am. Many times if you are late for an appointment you will have to reschedule. People think that it is rude and self-centered to assume that everyone will readjust their schedules for one person who is late.

**For work related activity it is absolutely essential that a person be 'on time'!** If a person is late for an interview it is considered a sure sign that the person is not punctual, responsible or reliable. For job site orientations and meetings it is also important to be 'on-time'. That means that you arrive at the schedule time. If the interview, orientation or meeting is scheduled for 9:00am you should arrive no later than 9:00am. In fact, you should arrive at least 5 minutes before 9:00am. You should arrive no later than 8:55am! The majority of people in the US do not like to waste their time waiting for other people to arrive for any business activity. People typically like interviews, meetings, etc. to proceed in a timely manner. If they are delayed because of inconsiderate people they will quickly lose respect for those people and certainly not develop lasting friendships. **As a Work & Travel participant you will be representing yourself, and your country. Plan ahead . . . make sure you arrive BEFORE your scheduled interview or meeting.**

In the workplace employees are expected to be punctual. If people are often late for work they risk being 'fired' (losing their job). Some employers have time clocks that

are used for employees to register their arrival and departure times. These machines record the time to the exact second. People who develop a poor record of arriving late or departing early are also likely to lose their jobs. **At your workplace you must be 'on-time'**. It is extremely important to plan ahead. Most people arrive 10, 20 or even 30 minutes prior to their starting time. This time is used to put on uniforms, greet and chat co-workers, 'touch-base' or communicate with the person who has worked the previous schedule, and simply relax a few minutes before one begins work. Hurrying in at the very last minute does not allow one to prepare for work. It makes a bad impression for employers and co-workers. In the US it is very important that you meet these time related expectations.

Sometimes there are problems that prevent a person from being 'on-time'. When this happens people are expected to make a phone call and advise the person or employer who is waiting. The reason for a late arrival should be clearly explained. Most people understand that sometimes things happen that can't be controlled. Regardless, it is important to plan for the worst. What will you do if you miss your bus? How will you get to work if your car doesn't start? What if there is a lot of traffic? Plan how to resolve problems that will prevent you from being late. Make an effort to meet the expectations of your co-workers and employers.

## **Transportation**

In cities like New York, Boston, Chicago and San Francisco public transportation includes subways that make moving about the cities very easy. However, in most other cities in the US the subway systems are either somewhat small or non-existent! **People in the US drive cars!** They love their cars, and as a result public transportation is not used as much as it is in many other countries. Most cities have a public bus system and larger cities have taxi cabs. On the west coast the train system from city to city is fairly limited and is not usually used for commuting. People tend to use the trains more for leisure travel.

Even though the US is considered to be the land of freedom, many foreigners are disappointed to learn how difficult it is to get around without a car! They feel limited by having to depend on other people to make arrangements for getting from place to place!

**Work & Travel Students** are in the US for a fairly short period of time. While it is possible to buy a car (probably a used car) or lease a car, it might be somewhat expensive. If you live in a large metropolitan city you will not have much difficulty getting to and from your place of employment. However, if you live in a smaller community, one that is not served by commuter trains, subways, etc. you will most likely have to take a bus. Most cities have **bus systems**, but not very many people use the bus system. Since the number of people riding the bus is low, the bus schedules are somewhat different than in a larger city. There are fewer busses and fewer bus stops. You must remember to allow an appropriate amount of time to travel from your bus stop to the one near your place of employment. It may only take 10 minutes to travel there by car, but by bus it could take as long as 30 or 40 minutes depending upon the route it has to take. Also, if you miss your bus you need to understand that there may not be another bus for 45 – 60 minutes or more! For foreigners who visit the smaller cities and try to use the bus system it is sometimes quite frustrating! You will need to be organized, understand the schedule and very patient!

**Taxis** are also available in most cities. However, in smaller cities they are more expensive and not as available as they are in larger cities. They are, however, a good way to travel later in the evening, after dark.

**Buying a car**, should you decide to do so, will also be an educational experience! You can find cars for sale at automobile/car dealerships where they sell and lease both new and used cars. You can also find cars for sale on [www.craigslist.org/about/cities.html](http://www.craigslist.org/about/cities.html) .

If you drive a car in the United States you **MUST HAVE INSURANCE!** It is possible to drive with an International Driver's License and it is also possible to purchase insurance with an International Driver's License. The fee is higher than if you obtain a driver's license from the state where you are living. If you decide to drive in the United States it is very important that you review the driving laws. **Each state has its own laws and sets its own speed limits.** A Driving Instruction/Information Booklet can be obtained from the State Department of Licensing which generally has offices in every city. Many states provide driving information on-line.

If you are looking for insurance you can use the local Telephone Book and look under 'Insurance'. There are many different companies and many agents. The cost of insurance is also determined by the age of the driver, the year the car was made, the kind of car and the style of car. You will probably be asked to pay for your insurance for 3 or 6 months in advance . . . even if you are only staying for 4 months. You will receive a refund when you cancel your insurance.

**Motorcycles** are used in the United States, but, perhaps, not as often as they are in other countries. If you choose to buy/ride a motorcycle you will also have to have a driver's license and insurance. In many states the law requires people who ride motorcycles to wear helmets. You can be ticketed for not using a helmet.

**Bicycles** are used by people of all ages. Some people use them to travel to and from work, while other people use them for recreation. Many cities in the US have created 'bicycle paths' or special lanes for bicycles to travel on major streets. If you choose to purchase a bicycle to use to travel to and from work, it is a good idea to also buy a bike lock so that you can keep your bicycle safe while you are not using it. Some busses have carry racks for bicycles so that you can ride the bus to a certain destination and then ride your bike. **In many states there are also laws that require bicycle riders to wear helmets.** Make sure that you know the law in the city where you will be living.

## **Religion**

Religious freedom is one of the reasons that so many people choose to immigrate to the United States. Today religious influences from around the world coexist in every community. Churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, and other religious buildings can be found in every city.

Some people practice their religion on a daily basis. Many people participate in prayer groups, study groups and faith based activities. Sometimes they meet during the week and sometimes they meet on the weekends. Some people attend their church, synagogue or temple, or mosque on a regular basis, while others attend services less frequently. The length of religious services and associated activities can be anywhere from one hour to four or more hours.

People are usually very happy to share their religion with others and will be pleased if you ask questions about their faith. If people talk to you about their religion and you are not interested, it is OK to say that you respect their values, but that you have your own faith.. In return, they should respect your choices. Some people are very comfortable discussing religious issues and others are not. Always be respectful and avoid making negative comments about someone's religious and/or personal beliefs.

## ☑ **Renting a Room or an Apartment**

Many of the businesses that provide **Work and Travel** opportunities also assist with housing. However, for some participants it is necessary to rent an apartment or room independently. Many of the apartments and rooms that are for rent in the US often require people to stay for at least 6 months or a year. For **Work & Travel** participants that creates somewhat of a challenge! There are some landlords (owners/managers) who will rent for 3 or 4 month periods, but for a larger monthly rent. There are also some motel chains (Extended Stay America, for example) that allow people to rent for several months at a time. However, these, can be more expensive than typical rental apartments and/or rooms. Much of your success will depend on the city where you will be living and working.

Your **Work & Travel Student Handbook** provides some information to help you begin a search before you arrive in the US. ([www.citysearch.com](http://www.citysearch.com) or [www.digitalcity.com](http://www.digitalcity.com) and [www.ApartmentGuide.com](http://www.ApartmentGuide.com)) You can also look on the web for local newspapers. You can also find rental information in the Classified Advertising section. Once you are in the United States you can again refer to your Handbook for more suggestions about places to find housing.

A very good resource that you can use before and/or after you arrive is [www.craigslist.org/about/cities.html](http://www.craigslist.org/about/cities.html) . This is a popular site that provides very current and reasonable options for housing (including short term housing), furniture, etc. If you are going to use a website like this one, read the classifieds or 'check out' local bulletin boards to find housing options, it will be important to understand the language! Advertisers often use abbreviations in their advertisements.

For example:

|  |
|--|
| RIVERSIDE DRIVE, 1BR,1BA fpl.<br>furn. \$750/mo. util incl. 932-2780<br>eve. |
|--|

This means that on Riverside Drive there is a one bedroom (1BR) apartment that has one bathroom (1BA) and a fireplace (fpl). It has furniture (furn.) and rents for \$750.00 per month. The rent includes payment for water, electricity and garbage pick up (util. incl.). You should call 932-2780 during evening hours (eve.) (Typically this means from 6:00pm – 9:00pm.)

|   |
|---|
| \$650 priv. rm. w/ BA LaFayette. NS<br>F pref.<br>Kit and Idry avail.<br>Phone 283-2239 |
|---|

This ad (advertisement) is for a \$650.00 per month private (priv) room (rm) with (w/) a BA (bathroom). It is located in LaFayette. A non-smoking (NS) female (f) is preferred (pref.). There is a kitchen (kit) and laundry (ldry) available to use (avail.)

|  |
|--|
| Studio, \$550, 79St. E nr. 1 <sup>st</sup> Av.<br>sep.kitch. a/c beaut.furn<br>278-1234 wknds. |
|--|

This person is offering a studio apartment for \$550.00 per month that is located on 79<sup>th</sup> Street East near 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue. It has a separate (sep) kitchen (kitch), air conditioning (a/c) and it is beautifully furnished (beaut.furn.) Call 278-1234 on weekends (wknds), which means to call on Saturday or Sunday.

Some apartments/rooms ask that you pay for your own electricity/gas, water, garbage and cable TV that you use each month. Sometimes in smaller apartments/rooms that are rented for a short time, the landlord/manager will pay some or all of the fees. **Make sure you understand what fees you will be responsible for paying.** It is OK to ask what the approximate costs have been for that particular apartment in the past.

Rent is usually paid to the landlord/manager on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of each month. Some rental people require cleaning deposits. That is an amount of money (\$150 or more) which can be used by the landlord/manager to clean and/or repair your apartment/room after you leave. Sometimes this money is refundable. If you carefully and thoroughly clean the apartment/room and leave it looking like it did when you first rented it, you will probably have the deposit returned to you.

## **Shopping**

Knowing where to shop for certain items is a valuable thing to know in the US. There are many kinds of stores for you to explore!

### **Drugstores/Pharmacies**

Walgreen's, Rite Aide, Lang's . . . these are a few of the names of drugstores in the US. Drugstores originally carried medicines and healthcare items. Now they sell cosmetics, soaps, shampoo, health and beauty aides, greeting cards, film, magazines, snack food, etc. Some are open 24 hours and all of them have pharmacies. A pharmacy is where you can get medicine that has been prescribed by a doctor. Only pharmacies can sell prescription medicine.

### **Grocery Stores/Supermarkets**

In general, Americans shop for food and other household products at large grocery stores or supermarkets. Americans like the idea of 'one stop shopping'. They can buy all the things that they need on a regular basis in one store! Today these types of stores sell food, health and beauty products, and cleaning products. They have

bakeries and delicatessens (deli's) selling prepared foods, pharmacies, film developing services, and movie/DVD rentals. Many of these supermarkets are open 24 hours a day.

In addition to these stores there are small 'mom and pop' stores in some neighborhoods and gas station/mini-marts that sell basic things like bread, milk, and snack food.

### **Big Box Stores**

A new type of store that is very popular in the US is the 'Big Box' store. Families like to shop at stores like this because they can buy larger quantities of things at discounted prices. These stores sell food, clothing, computers, furniture, auto supplies and household goods. They are very popular. While you're in the US you will probably spend some money at Costco or another similar store!

### **Department Stores/Shopping Malls**

Department stores are large stores that primarily sell clothing, cosmetics, jewelry, bedding, and sometimes furniture. Some department stores are located in city centers or shopping malls.

Shopping malls have many different kinds of stores and are often the place where families go to shop together. They are also often the center of many community events. Shopping malls also have other attractions like movie theaters, ice skating rinks, etc.

### **Factory Outlets**

Factory outlet stores and malls are very popular for shoppers, too. These are stores that carry brand name clothes, sporting goods, luggage, house wares, etc. at very low prices because the articles are no longer being made by the manufacturers, or because they have some small imperfection. Outlet stores are also a way for famous designers to sell clothes when they have made too many in a particular season. You can often buy very high quality things at these stores.

### **Hardware Stores/Home Improvement Stores**

Americans are 'do-it-yourselfers' and they like to do things to decorate or improve their homes and yards. Hardware stores and Home Improvement stores sell products to help people do these kinds of things. Home Improvement stores sell carpeting, lighting, paint, etc. Since some Americans work night shifts and some Americans work days shifts, some Home Improvement stores are open 24 hours for the people who are using their free time to work on their homes!

### **Using Coupons, Reading Advertisements and Understanding Sale Pricing**

Buying food or other personal items will be an interesting experience for you! People in the US are always looking for the 'best buys' in every store. They like to save money and the stores offer many ways to do that.

Coupons are very common. You can find coupons for food products, services, restaurants, entertainment, etc. Coupons offer discounts on the items or services that you purchase. If you do not have the coupon with you when you purchase the item, you will probably have to pay the full price. For example, if there has been a coupon in the newspaper that offers 3 dozen eggs for \$2.00 you will be able to save money if the regular price for eggs is \$1.99 per dozen. If you do not take the coupon to the store you will not be able to save money . . . you will have to pay \$5.97 for the 3 dozen eggs! It is also important to locate the expiration date that appears on the coupon. In very small letters you will find, for example, 'expiration date 2/13/07'. You cannot use the coupon after this date. Many grocery stores/supermarkets change their coupons each week.

Most stores have '*leaders*'. These are especially good sale items that attract customers to the store. The stores believe if they can get you into the store to buy the sale item you will spend more money buying other things in the store!

Stores have many different types of sales. Following are a few examples:

**2/1, 4/1, etc.** = In the supermarket/grocery store these sales mean that you can get two of one item for \$1.00, 4 of one item for \$1.00, etc. Two boxes of soap for \$1.00, or four loaves of bread for \$1.00, etc.

**Buy 1 Get 1 Free** = You get 2 items for the price of one. If cookies are \$1.29 a package you can buy two packages for \$1.29.

**Buy 1 Get the 2<sup>nd</sup> for 1/2 Price** = If you bought one box of sugar for \$1.25 you could get the second box for \$ .75. You would pay \$2.00 for two boxes instead of \$2.50.

**10%, 20%, 30%, etc, Off** = These sales simply mean that you take the percentage off of the price marked on the item. For example, if a shirt is marked \$20.00 and you buy it for 20% Off,

you will pay \$16.00. Sometimes there are sales that take a percentage of 'the last marked price'. So, if a shirt was originally \$20.00, marked down (on sale) for \$16.00 and then on sale again for 50% Off, you would pay \$8.00!

If you want to save money, do your best to learn how to be a good sale shopper! Most store clerks and restaurant owners are happy to help you use your coupons.

## **Remember the A B C's of American Culture . . .**

The information that you have read should help you become more familiar with some cultural aspects of the US. It is only a beginning. It's interesting to note that when we visit another country, in addition to learning about that particular country, we often learn to appreciate our own culture and our own country as well. Comparing cultures reminds us of some of the things we are familiar with that we often don't even think about. During your time in the US, you will have the opportunity to grow, make

friends for life, and realize that people all over the world are the same, yet different. You are participating in an adventure that will change you forever. It is your time to make the best of your year . . .

***SMILE, BE PATIENT, COMMUNICATE AND HAVE FUN!***