

How to Survive a Trip to the US: The Definitive Guide for First-time Visitors to the United States [B1]

Le peculiarità linguistiche e alcune caratteristiche culturali devono essere tenute in considerazione quando si visitano gli Stati Uniti, un territorio caratterizzato dalla vastità geografica e dalla multiculturalità.

You have seen it [countless](#) times on films and TV series, and now you are about to experience it first-hand. You have fantasised about driving a blue Mustang along an endless, deserted highway on your way to the Grand Canyon. You have dreamt of [savouring](#) a [mouth-watering](#) burger or a pile of pancakes in one of those iconic diners where smiling waitresses generously refill coffee [mugs](#) again and again. You might even have booked a couple of surfing lessons in the waters off an idyllic Malibu beach. Yes, it's happening — the American dream... Unless it becomes a nightmare... If you don't want that to happen, keep reading. The first thing you need to know before visiting the United States is that you will need a visa. If you're travelling from an EU country, an ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorisation) will be enough. You can get it online, and it shouldn't cost you more than twenty or thirty dollars.

SUPERSIZED

Secondly, [bear in mind](#) that the surface area of the US is about nineteen times the size of Spain's and thirty-three times the size of Italy's. This means that, unless you have unlimited time and budget, you won't be able to visit the whole country in just one trip. The most realistic thing to do is to choose an area and leave the rest for another occasion. Which takes us to the next issue you should think of: transportation. Americans drive everywhere. This is not an [understatement](#). The [lack](#) of [sidewalks](#) in the US is shocking to European eyes, as is the absence of a well-connected railroad system. If you are visiting one single city, do some research about how safe it is to use the underground there — if it's New York City, don't even bother; just stay away from it. The good news is that transportation apps like Uber work quite well there, so make sure you download at least one of them, [just in case](#). If you are planning a road trip, [bear in mind](#) that renting a car in the US can be an odyssey, since you will need a credit card — debit cards are rejected by most car rental companies — and a ton of [paperwork](#). The minimum age for renting a car in the US is twenty-five, so if you are younger than that, get ready to spend half of your trip on a Greyhound bus. [Yay!](#) Next topic: food. As we

all know, America is the fast-food paradise: burgers, Mexican tacos and burritos, fried chicken, pizza, doughnuts, giant cookies... [you name it](#). This might sound fun and delicious at first but believe me when I assure you that after a week [stuffing](#) your mouth with junk food, you will be [begging](#) for a salad. The massive size of their portions doesn't help; they are so big that you could feed yourself for a couple of days from one individual dish. But of course you will try to finish all the food on your plate because that is how your mother [raised](#) you, and because you won't want to offend the server, who by the way will expect a generous [tip](#) from you. Yes, in the US, customers are expected to leave about 20 per cent of the price of the [bill](#) as a [tip](#) for good service. It may sound like a lot of money if you are travelling [on a budget](#), but [tips](#) are an essential part of the [income](#) of service staff, so you should really, really try to save a few coins for them and dodge the 'rude European tourist' bullet.

STAYING ALIVE

Talking about bullets, if you see someone carrying a firearm in the middle of the street, don't be alarmed (although [on second thoughts](#) maybe you should be!). In many US states it is legal to visibly carry [handguns](#) and even rifles in public spaces; Florida and Washington, D.C. are some of the few exceptions where this is not allowed. As gun violence keeps growing — there were more than 630 mass shootings in the US in 2023 — the gun control debate is more necessary and divided than ever. But the truth remains that firearms are deeply [ingrained in](#) American society. Americans love their guns as much as they love eating burgers and driving. This passion for bullets is one of the enigmas about America that the European mind cannot comprehend, along with the mystery of why their coffee is so [relentlessly awful](#) or how it can be possible to be allowed to drive at sixteen while having to wait until twenty-one to legally have a beer. Still, the chances of you being accidentally shot, being eaten by a shark or falling off Niagara Falls are quite low, so there's no real need to panic. What you should be panicking about, though, is medical [bills](#). If, for example, your [inconsiderate](#) appendix decides to become inflamed during your stay in the US, you could receive a \$20,000 [bill](#) even before you are taken to the operating table. This would probably ruin your holiday and [empty](#) your bank account, so it is a very, very good idea to buy [medical insurance](#) before [setting foot](#) on US [soil](#).

ETIQUETTE

By the way, if you don't want [to stand out](#) as a tourist, you'd better leave your [smart attire](#) at home. With a few exceptions, Americans dress very [casually](#); so [casually](#) that sometimes you will wonder if their house has just [caught fire](#) and they have [jumped straight out of bed](#). Their relaxed style reflects their character, too. Americans are generally [easy-going](#), friendly and curious; they will probably

ask you [what you do for a living](#), where you are from, and they will be happy to share their family tree with you, [just in case](#) you are distant [cousins](#). Americans are also individualistic, practical, hard-working and direct. Unlike British people, who love [a good old](#) euphemism, Americans are straight shooters — not just literally, ha ha — which mustn't be mistaken for [rudeness](#). They tell it like it is. They are also [achievers](#); they like to 'do things', even in their [leisure time](#), so don't be surprised if they don't share your dolce far niente [mindset](#). After all, time is money, and they didn't become a superpower by just sitting and talking while [sipping](#) wine and eating tapas! There is so much more to discover in the US, of course, but these survival [tips](#) can make your stay easier and less stressful. Just a couple more things: check out the [weather forecast](#) for hurricanes — yes, there is a thing called 'hurricane season' in the US —, pack a Type A adapter to plug in your appliances, and don't bother taking ibuprofen tablets with you, you will find them in the supermarket, right by the mac and cheese boxes.

Glossary

- **on second thoughts** = ripensandoci
- **just in case** = per ogni eventualità
- **begging** = implorare
- **tip** = mancia
- **on a budget** = con disponibilità economica ridotta
- **smart attire** = abbigliamento elegante
- **jumped straight out of bed** = saltare direttamente giù dal letto
- **rudeness** = maleducazione
- **countless** = innumerevoli
- **handguns** = pistole
- **medical insurance** = assicurazione medica
- **setting foot** = mettere piede
- **lack** = mancanza
- **caught fire** = prendere fuoco
- **mindset** = mentalità
- **what you do for a living** = che cosa fai per guadagnarti da vivere
- **achievers** = persona di successo
- **leisure time** = tempo libero
- **understatement** = eufemismo, attenuazione
- **Yay!** = evviva!
- **bill** = conto
- **soil** = suolo
- **sipping** = sorseggiare
- **mugs** = tazze
- **sidewalks** = marciapiedi
- **ingrained in** = inculcare in
- **inconsiderate** = sconsiderata
- **relentlessly awful** = implacabilmente terribile
- **cousins** = cugini
- **savouring** = assaporare
- **mouth-watering** = che fa venire l'acquolina in bocca
- **raised** = crescere
- **income** = reddito
- **empty** = svuotare
- **casually** = in modo informale
- **easy-going** = alla mano, rilassati
- **bear in mind** = tieni presente
- **paperwork** = documentazione
- **you name it** = tutto ciò che vuoi
- **stuffing** = ingozzarsi di

- **to stand out** = farsi notare
- **a good old** = i soliti di sempre
- **weather forecast** = previsioni meteorologiche