

NORTH AMERICA · CITY BREAKS · ROAD TRIPS · HIKING · FOOD · NIGHTLIFE · WILDLIFE



United States

The United States is really dozens of trips in one: New York's skyline and museums, the red-rock canyons and geyser basins of the national parks, the music bars of New Orleans and Nashville, and road trips down the Pacific coast. Distances are vast, so the best time to visit depends heavily on the region you choose.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for United States and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 18 August 2026.

 CAPITAL Washington, D.C.	 CURRENCY US dollar (USD) £1 ≈ US\$1.34	 LANGUAGE English, Spanish	 BEST TIME May–Jun, Sep–Oct
 DAILY BUDGET £90–£420 £££ Expensive	 PLUGS Type A, B 120V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 8h direct ~£400–£850 return	 TIME ZONE UTC-5, UTC-6... standard time

The United States spans six time zones and almost every landscape imaginable, from Alaskan glaciers to Florida's Everglades and the deserts of the South-west. Most first trips focus on one region rather than attempting the whole country. The classic combinations are New York with Boston or Washington, D.C. on the East Coast; a California and South-west road trip linking San Francisco, Yosemite, Las Vegas, the Grand Canyon and Los Angeles; Florida for theme parks and beaches; or a Deep South music route through New Orleans, Memphis and Nashville. Yellowstone and the Rockies reward a separate trip in summer.

It is not a cheap destination: hotels in big cities and near national parks are expensive, prices are shown before sales tax, and tipping adds 18–20% to restaurant bills. Car hire and fuel are good value, though, and motels, diners and camping keep road trips affordable. Summer brings crowds and, at some popular parks, timed-entry reservations, while spring and autumn are calmer and cooler. Visitors are often surprised by the sheer scale — a 'short drive' can mean four hours — by the friendliness of strangers, and by how different each state feels, from New England villages to Texas cattle country.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

NATURE

Grand Canyon National Park

Carved by its river over millions of years and more than 1.8 km deep, the canyon is best seen from the South Rim's viewpoints at sunrise or sunset. Fit hikers can descend the Bright Angel Trail, but never attempt rim-to-river and back in a day in summer.
- 2

WILDLIFE

Yellowstone National Park

The world's first national park sits on a supervolcano: Old Faithful and Grand Prismatic Spring steam near grazing bison, while the Lamar and Hayden valleys offer some of North America's best chances of seeing wolves and grizzly bears.

3

NATURE

Yosemite Valley

Sheer granite walls rise around this glacier-carved valley in California's Sierra Nevada. El Capitan, Half Dome and Yosemite Falls — at its most powerful in late spring — are the icons, and the Mist Trail climbs beside thundering waterfalls.

4

CULTURE

New Orleans' French Quarter

Wrought-iron balconies, live jazz on nearby Frenchmen Street, beignets and Creole cooking fill the grid of the original French settlement, founded in 1718. Time it for Mardi Gras or the spring Jazz Fest, or simply come to eat.

5

HISTORY

National Mall, Washington, D.C.

Between the Capitol and the Lincoln Memorial stretch the monuments of American history and the Smithsonian's museums, among them Air and Space and Natural History, all free to enter.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

New York City

≈ 19.9 million people

The Statue of Liberty, Central Park, world-class museums, Broadway and neighbourhoods from Harlem to Brooklyn make New York essential; budget carefully, as it's among America's priciest cities.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Los Angeles

≈ 12.9 million people

A sprawling metropolis best tackled by car: Hollywood, the Getty, Griffith Observatory, beachfront Santa Monica and Venice, and some of the country's best Mexican and Korean food.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Chicago

≈ 9.4 million people

America's great architecture city sits on Lake Michigan, with river cruises past landmark skyscrapers, the Art Institute, blues clubs, deep-dish pizza and a long lakefront cycle path.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

Holiday regions in United States

These areas have their own season and weather — see their guides for sea temperatures, resorts and flights.

**Florida**

United States Best: Feb–Apr, Nov 9h 30m from London

Sea up to 31°C ~£200/day

**New York City**

United States Best: May–Jun, Sep–Oct

8h from London ~£240/day

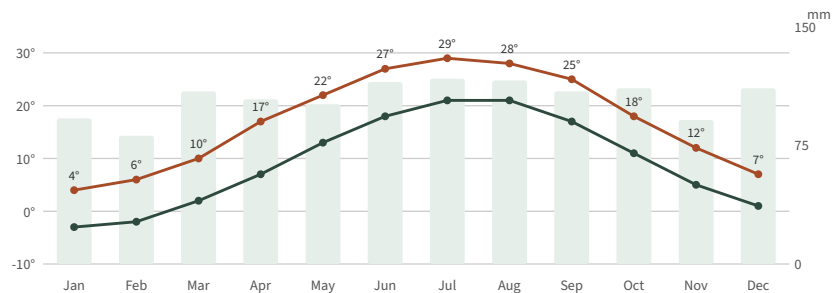
When to go to United States

Best time: **May–Jun, Sep–Oct.**



Average climate in New York City

— High °C — Low °C — Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Feb–Mar

Mardi Gras

New Orleans' carnival season peaks on Fat Tuesday after weeks of parades, elaborate krewe floats, brass bands and bead-throwing; book accommodation months ahead.

Jul

Independence Day

On 4 July the country celebrates with parades, barbecues and fireworks, from small-town main streets to Washington's National Mall and New York's waterfront.

Oct

Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta

For nine days in early October, hundreds of hot-air balloons rise together at dawn over Albuquerque's high desert in one of the world's largest ballooning events.

How much does United States cost?

SHOESTRING

£90

per person / day
≈ US\$120

hostels, street food, buses

MID-RANGE

£200

per person / day
≈ US\$267

3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis

COMFORTABLE

£420

per person / day
≈ US\$561

4-star+, guided trips, private transfers

Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Cheeseburger

Every diner and roadside stand has its take, from thin smashed patties to thick chargrilled burgers; chains like In-N-Out and Shake Shack have cult followings.

Barbecue

Slow-smoked meat in fiercely regional styles: beef brisket in Texas, pulled pork in the Carolinas, ribs in Memphis and burnt ends in Kansas City.

New England clam chowder

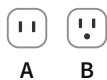
A creamy soup of clams, potatoes, onion and salt pork, served with oyster crackers in harbourside shacks from Boston to Maine.

Getting around

Distances are huge, so domestic flights save days between regions. For national parks and road trips you'll need a hire car; book early and check one-way drop fees. Amtrak trains are useful on the Boston–New York–Washington corridor and scenic but slow elsewhere, while Greyhound and FlixBus cover long distances cheaply. Cities like New York, Chicago and Washington have good metros; elsewhere use Uber or Lyft.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



120V — bring a UK-to-A/B adapter

DIALLING CODE

+1

TAP WATER

Generally safe to drink

TIPPING

Tip 18–20% at sit-down restaurants, \$1–2 per drink at bars, 15–20% for taxis and rideshares, and a few dollars a night for hotel housekeeping.

ETIQUETTE

Queue patiently, respect personal space and expect friendly small talk from strangers. Steer clear of politics with people you've just met, and carry photo ID — the drinking age of 21 is strictly enforced.

MAIN AIRPORTS

John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK), New York; Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), Los Angeles; Orlando International Airport (MCO), Orlando

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Telephone: **911** (ambulance, fire, police).

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

TIME ZONES

UTC-5, UTC-6, UTC-7, UTC-8, UTC-9, UTC-10 (standard time)

DRIVING

On the right

Visas & entry for United States

Shown for a British passport.

Apply online before you go (travel authorisation)

To enter or transit through the US, you must have either an Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (ESTA) or a visa.

The US State Department has more information on visas.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Rabies

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in United States

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Wed 11 Nov 2026	Veterans Day
Thu 26 Nov 2026	Thanksgiving Day
Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Mon 18 Jan 2027	Martin Luther King Jr. Day
Mon 15 Feb 2027	Washington's Birthday
Mon 31 May 2027	Memorial Day
Fri 18 Jun 2027	Juneteenth National Independence Day (observed)
Sat 19 Jun 2027	Juneteenth National Independence Day
Sun 4 Jul 2027	Independence Day
Mon 5 Jul 2027	Independence Day (observed)
Mon 6 Sep 2027	Labour Day
Mon 11 Oct 2027	Columbus Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Know before you go

- Healthcare is extremely expensive, so buy travel insurance with generous medical cover before you go; even a minor emergency-room visit can cost thousands of dollars.
- Non-US residents now pay a surcharge on top of entry fees at 11 of the busiest national parks, including Yellowstone, Yosemite and the Grand Canyon, unless they hold the non-resident annual pass.
- Book lodges and campsites inside popular parks such as Yosemite and Yellowstone many months ahead, and check whether timed-entry reservations are required for your dates.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.