

# Living and Working in USA

## History

Britain's American colonies broke with the mother country in 1776 and were recognized as the new nation of the United States of America following the Treaty of Paris in 1783. During the 19th and 20th centuries, 37 new states were added to the original 13 as the nation expanded across the North American continent and acquired a number of overseas possessions. The two most traumatic experiences in the nation's history were the Civil War (1861-65) and the Great Depression of the 1930s. Buoyed by victories in World Wars I and II and the end of the Cold War in 1991, the US remains the world's most powerful nation state. **The economy is marked by steady growth, low unemployment and inflation, and rapid advances in technology.** The USA is now the world's third-largest country by size (after Russia and Canada) and by population (after China and India); Mt. McKinley is highest point in North America and Death Valley the lowest point on the continent.

## Ethnic groups

white 77.1%, black 12.9%, Asian 4.2%, Amerindian and Alaska native 1.5%, native Hawaiian and other Pacific islander 0.3%, other 4% (2000)

## Religions

Protestant 52%, Roman Catholic 24%, Mormon 2%, Jewish 1%, Muslim 1%, other 10%, none 10% (2002 est.)

## Economy - overview

The US has the largest and most technologically powerful economy in the world, with a per capita GDP of over £20,000. In this market-oriented economy, private individuals and business firms make most of the decisions, and the federal and state governments buy needed goods and services predominantly in the private marketplace. US business firms enjoy considerably greater flexibility than their counterparts in Western Europe and Japan in decisions to expand capital plant, to lay off surplus workers, and to develop new products. At the same time, they face higher barriers to entry in their rivals' home markets than the barriers to entry of foreign firms in US markets. US firms are at or near the forefront in technological advances, especially in computers and in medical, aerospace, and military equipment; their advantage has narrowed since the end of World War II. The onrush of technology largely explains the gradual development of a "two-tier labour market" in which those at the bottom lack the education and the professional/technical skills of those at the top and, more and more, fail to get comparable pay raises, health insurance coverage, and other benefits. Since 1975, practically all the gains in household income have gone to the top 20% of households. The response to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 showed the remarkable resilience of the economy. The war in March/April 2003 between a US-led coalition and Iraq, and the subsequent occupation of Iraq, required major shifts in national resources to the military. The rise in GDP in 2004 was helped by substantial gains in labour productivity. The economy suffered from a sharp increase in energy prices in the second half of 2004. Long-term problems include inadequate investment in economic infrastructure, rapidly rising medical and pension costs of an aging population, sizable trade and budget deficits, and stagnation of family income in the lower economic groups.

### **Labour force - by occupation (2004)**

farming, forestry, and fishing 0.7%, manufacturing, extraction, transportation, and crafts 22.7%, managerial, professional, and technical 34.9%, sales and office 25.5%, other services 16.3% (figures exclude the unemployed 2004)

### **Climate**

Mostly temperate, but tropical in Hawaii and Florida, arctic in Alaska, semiarid in the great plains west of the Mississippi River, and arid in the Great Basin of the southwest; low winter temperatures in the northwest are ameliorated occasionally in January and February by warm chinook winds from the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains.

### **Terrain**

Vast central plain, mountains in west, hills and low mountains in east; rugged mountains and broad river valleys in Alaska; rugged, volcanic topography in Hawaii.

### **Lifestyle & Culture**

The United States is such an eclectic and diverse country that it is perhaps almost unknowable. There are so many backgrounds and traditions to be found, and, paradoxically, it is this very **diversity** which gives the United States its strong sense of its own identity and its distinctive appeal.

**The United States is the original "can-do" country and has reaped the rewards of steady economic growth, low unemployment and inflation, and rapid advances in technology. The American way of life is just as expansive and is based on an approach to life that believes in realising opportunities and rewarding talent and hard work.**

### **Housing**

American real estate prices for those thinking of emigration:

In elegant Boston, £250,000 will get you a house with four bedrooms, three bathrooms and a three car garage.

In Santa Fe, £110,000 will buy a house with three bedrooms, two bathrooms and two acres of grounds.

### **Education**

United States school education is divided into public (state funded) and private schools from 1st to 12th grade. There are three tiers of education - primary, high school and post secondary. School is compulsory from 5 - 16.