

Introduction

The USA is home to several of the world's most exciting cities, some truly mind-blowing landscapes, a strong sense of regionalism, a trenchant mythology, more history than the country gives itself credit for and, arguably, some of the most approachable natives in the world.

The US claims to be the greatest success story of the modern world – a nation fashioned from an incredibly disparate population who, with little in common apart from a desire to choose their own paths to wealth or heaven, rallied around the ennobling ideals of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence to forge the richest, most inventive and most powerful country on earth.

On a short trip, it can be hard work dismantling your preconceptions. So much of the country has been filmed, photographed, painted and written about that you need to peel back layers of representation to stop it from looking like a stage setting. This can make the country seem strangely familiar when you first encounter novelties like 24-hour shopping, bottomless cups of coffee, 'Have a nice day', drive-thru banks, TV evangelists, cheap gasoline and newspapers tossed onto lawns. But you'd be foolish to read too much into this surface familiarity, since you only have to watch *Oprah* for half an hour to realize that the rituals and currents of American life are as complex, seductive and bewildering as the most alien of cultures.

Come prepared to explore the USA's unique brand of 'foreignness' rather than stay in the comfort zone of the familiar.

Destination Facts

Full country name: The United States of America

Population: 285,000,000

Area: 3,618,000 sq miles (9,370,000 sq km)

Capital city: Washington, DC (pop: 570,000)

People: Caucasian (71%), African American (12%), Latino (12%), Asian (4%), Native American (0.9%)

Languages: English, plus many secondary languages, chiefly Spanish

Religion: Protestant (56%), Roman Catholic (28%), Jewish (2%), Muslim (1%)

Government: Federal republic of 50 states

President: George W Bush

For more information, check out Lonely Planet's extensive range of USA books (<http://shop.lonelyplanet.com>).



Contents

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Introduction _____ | 1 |
| Activities _____ | 2 |
| Public Holidays _____ | 2 |
| Spectator Sports _____ | 2 |
| Events _____ | 2 |
| Culture and Life _____ | 3 |
| School Life _____ | 3 |
| Practicalities _____ | 4 |
| Money _____ | 5 |
| Shopping _____ | 5 |
| Communications _____ | 5 |
| Your Well-Being _____ | 6 |
| Resources _____ | 7 |
| Luggage _____ | 7 |
| About Home _____ | 8 |
| Gifts from Oz _____ | 8 |
| Important Information _____ | 8 |

'Most of my teachers love me or my accent! My classes are really fun. I really like Speech and American History. I gave a talk on how to play netball which was really fun because no-one knew what I was talking about! If we have to do groupwork – people ask me to be in their group. I'm not left out. I feel as though my host family grew overnight – it is a really big family and everyone leads busy lives.' (Cassandra Moscos – USA 2003)