



Union of Students in Ireland

Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn

J1 GUIDE

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LIFE, CURRENCY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

So, you've got your visa – now what? The Union of Students in Ireland has produced this resource on working and living in the United States as a temporary foreign worker on the Working Holidays Arrangement (J1). We'll cover some things that you might find useful as you head off on your trip. Let's get started.

The United States is the world's superpower, the engine of the world economy and the home of Twain, Lincoln, and Homer J Simpson. It's a great and proud nation which welcomes people from all over the world to experience the American work ethic and way of life. As a visitor to the USA, you'll follow in the footsteps of millions of Irishmen and Irishwomen who contributed to the creation of the nation. You'll also have ridiculous fun. That's what the pursuit of happiness is all about.

YOU'RE AN AMBASSADOR

This is not literally true – don't even think about trying to claim diplomatic immunity - but as an Irish citizen visiting the United States, you are the best example to US citizens of what Ireland is today. Have a good time, enjoy your stay in the USA, and leave them knowing that Irish people are good to work with, great to socialise with and nice to know.

LEGAL ISSUES

The United States is a free country, which means, as US satirist PJ O'Rourke puts it: "the right to do as you damn well please. And the duty to take the consequences." As an Irish citizen in the United States, you are bound by US law. If you're arrested you'll have to go through the local justice system, which could mean fines, jail and likely deportation and exclusion, and crucially could adversely affect your chances of getting back to the US down the line – like when a 'real job' offer comes through in a few years time...

Claiming ignorance of US law is no defence. Pleading that things might be different at home won't get you anywhere. And be aware that some US laws change from city to city and State to State.

Drugs offences and public order offences are treated very seriously in the United States – zero tolerance policing in some cities means things you think you can get away with in Eyre Square or outside Copper Face Jacks could very quickly land you in jail in the USA.

It is really important for you to familiarise yourself with the laws that will directly affect you during your stay in the US. Always use your common sense and whenever you suspect something might be illegal, ask someone! You do not want to endanger your experience by committing an illegal act that could have easily been avoided.

INSURANCE

- Make sure you take out adequate health insurance before leaving Ireland. The company you are travelling with will be able to help you with this.
- **READ YOUR INSURANCE POLICY CLOSELY.** Total headmelt yes, but you'd never know what sort of exclusions could be lurking in the small print. You need to know what you are covered for – and what you're not. This is your responsibility and yours alone.
- Healthcare in the USA is very expensive. If your insurance doesn't pay up, you can incur massive bills. While the Irish Embassies and Consulates in the USA will do what they can to assist if you fall ill or are injured, they cannot cover your medical expenses. It is a good idea to check out the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Travel advice page before travelling.
- Be aware that your insurance policy may not cover your medical bills etc if the injury you suffer happened while you were drunk. Be sure, too, to check what the policy's definition of drunk is. Chances are it's not the same as yours.
- Bear in mind other drink-related issues too: if you are involved in an incident in a bar, for example, and you are under the age of 21 this may affect what you can expect your policy to cover: being in the bar may itself constitute 'Illegal behaviour' for which your policy could have an exclusion. Again, it is your responsibility to read and understand your insurance policy- so read it!
- Be aware that some dangerous activities (scuba diving, skiing, off-road driving etc) won't be covered by standard insurance policies.
- Be aware that some medical expenses (repatriation of a sick or injured person, or remains) may not be covered by all insurance policies.

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

There have been issues of students on J1 visas being accused of anti-social behaviour in recent years. This has caused damage to our reputation, as well as making things more difficult for those coming out on J1 visas now to get jobs and accommodation.

Let's face it, we all know exactly what anti-social behaviour is – or we'd be quick enough to shout about it if we had the neighbours from hell. The best idea is to avoid behaving in a way that causes hassle to your neighbours or the people around you, creates damage or trouble, etc. The J1 experience can be one of the best times in your life but things can easily go from great to awful if you don't abide by the law, and anti-social behaviour is a sure-fire way to attract the attention of the police. Here are some simple dos and don'ts to keep in mind if you're having a party.

DO

- Do have respect for your neighbours. Make sure you talk to your neighbours and have an agreed time when the party will be over. Make sure you respect that agreement.
- Do try and keep the party inside and keep windows and doors CLOSED.
- Do co-operate if the neighbours complain - their next call could be to the police.
- Do keep the noise down going from the party to town, especially when everyone is getting into taxis.

DON'T

- Don't let people in that you don't know- a sure way to lose control quickly.
- Don't leave your windows open with music on. Noise travels!!
- Don't be rude or hostile if people ask you to keep it down.

SOMEWHERE TO LIVE

Arranging accommodation before travelling can be a good option - just make sure you are dealing with a legitimate rental agency or landlord. Companies offering J1 visas will give you advice on places to stay. Advice from friends can be helpful but may not be up-to-date. If you are in doubt check with the local Irish Immigration or Outreach Center. Often the best solution is to book temporary accommodation in a hostel or an AirBnb first. This will give you a chance to get to know an area and figure out what longer-term accommodation option suits you best. Be sure to avoid dealing with hucksters when looking for accommodation as some Irish students have been caught out badly in recent years: some students were stung by a rental scam where they were asked to wire money for advance payment of rent to someone posing as a landlord before they travelled to the US. Guess what – no apartment on arrival, and no deposit either. Other complaints have featured students meeting someone who shows them an empty apartment which the student pays for as it appears legitimate. When the student then turns up to move in they find out the person they had been dealing with had no authorisation to rent the apartment or had taken deposits from multiple people for one apartment. Get a receipt with a signature – you have been warned!

Just like in Ireland, you have a responsibility to look after and care for the accommodation you're living in when you're in the US. Remember if there's an issue - no matter who else may be involved - if you signed the lease you are liable. In recent years, horror stories of students having done serious damage to accommodation has made it less likely that landlords will rent to Irish students – let's do our bit to show that Irish students are worth trusting.

If accommodation is accidentally damaged promptly report it to the landlord – if you break a glass or smash a mug, replace it.

If something goes wrong in the accommodation, like hot water breaking down or an air conditioner not working, make sure the landlord knows, so they can get it fixed and they know it wasn't your fault.

BEFORE YOU MOVE IN:

Always see the apartment and meet your future roommates before you put any money down, and bring someone with you if you don't feel completely safe

visiting an apartment on your own. Be aware that some housing is very cheap for a reason!

If you are having trouble finding accommodation, consider contacting local colleges to see if you can rent a dorm room over the summer. Another option may be to contact your Irish Immigration and Outreach Centers if there is one locally (this may also help with looking for a job). Bring references from previous landlords/employers – some landlords routinely ask for these.

- Don't sign a lease unless you've read and understood all of it. Get a receipt. Don't pay by cash if possible.
- Double check the amount of the deposit, rent in advance and monthly rent.
- Check the locks on doors and windows. Make sure you know who else has a key.
- Check appliances to see that they work.
- Are there any bills you will have to pay on top of rent? What happens if another tenant leaves owing rent or utility bills?
- Ensure there's an inventory of all utensils and equipment in the accommodation signed by both you and the landlord.
- Where you have concerns regarding the condition of any item in the apartment, raise this in writing to your landlord/agent when you move in.
- Take photos before you move in and time stamp them– when you're moving out you may need them to prove that any damage was there before you arrived.
- Be a good tenant: clean up your mess and be conscious of others living with or around you.

WHEN YOU'RE LEAVING:

Ensure all rent is paid up to date as you leave. This is important; you may have problems re-entering the USA if there are outstanding bills.

If there is anything missing or damaged it must be replaced. Have the landlord or the letting agent come to see the place before you go so as to avoid disputes or misunderstandings.

TAKE ENOUGH MONEY

It could take several weeks before you get a job, or your Social Security Number, so bring enough money to cover yourself until then. This includes enough to cover a deposit for accommodation, and possibly rent in advance.

- Don't keep all your money in one place. Make sure any ATM cards you take have the Visa or Mastercard logos, and remember withdrawal limits apply in the USA.
- Don't forget, also, that when you do get a job you have to let CIEE, InterExchange, or other J1 sponsoring agency know!
- Prepaid credit cards are available from many US convenience chain stores like Walgreens or CVS and are a good temporary option before you open a bank account, they can be registered so if lost they can be replaced.

CARRYING ID

- Some states may insist you carry ID at all times. A police officer may stop and ask you to identify yourself if she believes you are engaged in criminal activity. Passports are seriously valuable documents for criminals, and a big headache for J1 students every year. Keep them safe.
- If your passport is stolen, report it to the police straight away and apply for replacement travel documentation at the nearest Irish Embassy or Consulate. Depending on where you are located this process may take time – time that you may not have if you want to fly somewhere else... It is much easier just to keep the passport safe.
- Keep a photocopy of the ID page of your passport in a secure place in case you have to apply for a replacement passport. Store a photo of the page on your phone and e-mail too.
- Remember that across the US the legal age to buy a drink is 21 – you'll need ID to be served in a bar, even if you look 30.

- If you're under 21 don't even think about tinkering with your passport to try to change the date of birth. Falsifying or altering an Irish passport is a criminal offence under Irish law and a federal offence in the US, punishable by fine, imprisonment and/or refusal of future entry to America. It can also affect your ability to get a passport in the future.
- For safety and security reasons there are restrictions on J1s travelling to Mexico - especially to Tijuana. Check with your sponsoring agency what restrictions may apply to you and if you have travel insurance. If you travel to Mexico and lose your passport there, you'll be in real difficulties – you won't be allowed re-enter the US without a valid machine readable passport. And there ain't no Irish Consulate in Tijuana.

STAYING OUT OF BOTHER AND PERSONAL SAFETY

You won't know the lay of the land in a new city, but you can compensate for lack of local knowledge by not taking unnecessary chances.

- When at all possible at night walk in a group, and stick to busy streets with lots of lighting and traffic. Do not take dodgy shortcuts.
- Try to avoid talking on your mobile or listening to an iPod, as either will make you less aware of your surroundings and also advertise that you have something worth stealing.
- Always make sure someone knows when you're going out, if and when you're coming back, and with whom you'll be. When you're on your way home, let someone know when to expect you.
- If you think you're being followed, go somewhere busy and flag down a taxi. Downloading Uber would also be a good shout!
- Only used licensed taxis and hackneys. Take note of the taxi licence number and key it into your phone or text it to a friend.

When you arrive at your destination ask the driver to wait until you get inside the door before leaving again. Don't accept lifts from strangers.

- Beware of interesting strangers offering to take you to the hottest new late bar on an isolated street. All great fun till you're held up and robbed.
- Don't be afraid to act assertively if you are uncomfortable or if you think someone is acting inappropriately.
- Keep an eye on your drinks.
- Always be aware of who's around you when you go to an ATM. Do not use ATMs at night on isolated streets – always choose those with good lighting.
- Keep an eye out for your friends. Stick together and don't let someone get separated from the group especially if they've been drinking. Make sure everyone gets home safely - even that idiot you've had a massive row with and who you're never going to speak with again.
- If you are the victim of a crime report it to the local police immediately.
- 911 for emergency services

SOCIAL SECURITY

All J1 students need to apply for and receive a Social Security Number by visiting their local Social Security Office. Speak to either USIT or SAYIT for advice on how and when to apply.

To avoid delays it is important to register your US address with SEVIS (the Student and exchange Visitor System) as soon as possible and do not apply for a Social Security number until two days after you register in SEVIS. See www.mysevis.com

Keep your social security card in a safe place. Do NOT carry it around with you.

LEAVING THE US

Don't forget to file for your US tax refund. As a J1 Visa holder, you are obligated by law to file a US tax return. The average US tax refund is \$850 so it's well worth applying. But close your US bank accounts in case fees might attach to accounts left open.

IRELAND IN THE US

In addition to the Irish Embassy in Washington DC <https://www.dfa.ie/irish-embassy/USA/> Ireland has 6 consulates in the US. Keep in mind where your nearest consulate is, as they may be very useful to you in cases of difficulty:

Austin www.dfa.ie/austin/
Atlanta www.dfa.ie/atlanta/
Boston www.dfa.ie/boston/
Chicago www.dfa.ie/chicago/
New York www.dfa.ie/newyork/
San Francisco www.dfa.ie/sanfrancisco/

Feel free to contact us back in Ireland too: we're at
Ceann Áras na Mac Léinn, Portview House, York Road, Dublin 4
01 7099300
welfare@usi.ie
www.usi.ie

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