



PROGRAM COUNTRY: USA



STS – more than 50 years of experience in student exchange programs all over the world



The USA is a giant country stretching 4500 kilometers from New York on the Atlantic Ocean to Los Angeles on the Pacific Ocean. It is a whole continent where 50 different

states are joined to form the United States of America. The USA borders on Canada in the north and Mexico in the south. With its great variety of geography, climate, culture and peoples, the USA provides each student with an exciting opportunity to have a unique exchange experience. It is like an ethnic melting pot where citizens of many nationalities and religious backgrounds have settled together. Immigrants have come here from the entire world to build a new life for themselves amongst the vast prairies, corn fields, sunny beaches, mountains, rivers and metropolitan cities. Over the centuries a multicultural society has developed and the golden rule is to give everyone the same chance to succeed; here you can live your dreams and be what you can be.

COUNTRY INFORMATION

Situated: North American continent

Area: 9 372 614 square km

Inhabitants: 305 651 000 (Nov '08)

Capital: Washington, DC

Official language: English (Spanish minorities)

National holiday: 4 July

The American flag represents the country with one star symbolizing each of the 50 states. The flag, called the Stars and Stripes, means a lot to most Americans, who are known for their patriotism. Ceremonies where the country and national symbols are honored are very common. The 4th of July, Independence Day, is celebrated by festivities and fireworks as a remembrance of the independence from England in 1776.

Many of today's Americans are immigrants, some are third or fourth generation, others are newcomers, but today they are all American citizens. They have a need to show this pride in their new country, hence the patriotism.

Some of the world's most famous universities are American: Harvard University (founded in 1636, it is the oldest university in the USA); Yale, Princeton and Stanford Universities are a few examples. Each year huge amounts of money are spent on educa-

tion and research, and many Americans have received the Nobel Prize. The USA is also very successful in other fields such as film and music. Black music, gospel and blues, is the origin of modern jazz and rock music. Ella Fitzgerald, Frank Sinatra and Nat King Cole are unforgettable in their genre. In the field of literature, classics written by authors such as Faulkner, Hemingway, Steinbeck, Bellow and Singer are world-famous. After the Second World War New York has more and more become the capital of art.

The USA is a relatively young nation. Even if Christopher Columbus discovered the continent in 1492, it was not until the end of the 16th century, however, that the real colonization began. Most of the Europeans immigrated to the USA in the eighteen hundreds, so that is only a few generations back.

Each of the fifty states is very independent and has its own governor, statutes, and laws and is in many ways a world of its own. The governor, who is elected by the people, is the state "president" and the board which is a copy of the Congress in Washington reflects the population in the state. This is why laws can vary from state to state even in crucial points and penalties for criminals, for instance, may be different. The school system as well as culture policies are individual in each state.

American history has been the inspiration of many novels, movies and TV series and there are many connections to it in daily life. Americans generally know much about their country's past and American history is one of the obligatory subjects at school.

SCHOOL LIFE

In the USA, every state is responsible for its own educational system, a fact that explains why there are so many differences in regard to the schools across the country. Even in the same state schools differ. However, all schools have Junior High School (9th and 10th years) and Senior High School (11th and 12th years). Exchange students who get to join the last year may have the opportunity to graduate and go to the prom. Each particular school has the sole discretion to determine whether the student may graduate or not.

The school year is generally divided in two semesters or four quarters. So halfway through the semester students get the chance to



PROGRAM COUNTRY: USA



change subjects. The fall semester starts in August/September and the spring semester starts in January and finishes in June/July. Most schools have summer break in July and August.

In the USA schools often have the same schedule every day, with six or seven different subjects each day of which three often are obligatory to exchange students: English, American history and Social Science. There is usually a large variety of other subjects to choose from to fill in the rest of the classes. These subjects vary between schools. There may be Computer Science, Drama, Photography, Ceramics, Journalism, Art, Marketing, International Relations and different kinds of Science. In the English class there are a number of different areas to choose between. Speech is one of them, where the student learns to give a presentation and talk comfortably in front of an audience. Another subject is Composition where the student writes essays, articles and other types of written material. Of course there is a Literature class as well. The school counselor can assist in making the right choices and/or changing subjects or the level of a subject chosen, e.g. to upgrade the student to a more advanced class.

The teachers treat the exchange student just like any other student who, naturally, must work as hard as the other students. There is homework every day, sometimes over the weekend as well. It is important to be well prepared for the classes and tests. Grades will be given no matter what year the student is in. The teachers often write comments about the student together with the grades. The comments can be about the results, how hard he/she works or presence in class.

There are many after school activities to choose from for the students. Sport is an important part of the American school and most schools have teams in many different sports. Popular sports are for instance baseball, basketball, ice hockey and American football. But there are also other things to do in the spare time. A school can have orchestras, choirs, school papers, yearbook groups, or drama groups. The yearbook is a book where all the student photos are printed every year. It also contains photos of all the fun activities with comments. Maybe the school's exchange student will get the "All School Favorite" under his/her photo! It is fun and rewarding to become involved and to get activated! Students should join one or several of the clubs and try out for the school teams. It is not necessary to be very good at a sport to participate! And for those who don't want to be on the team, there are many other activities outside the arena!

One of the most important events in the fall is the homecoming. That is when last year's graduates come back to their old school to visit. This day is filled with different sports competitions and in the evening there is a dance where the Homecoming Queen is elected. In springtime there is of course the Prom. This party takes place around graduation and is a very important event for most people involved. All the girls wear long dresses and the boys wear tuxedos, sometimes even in pastel colors to match the girls' dresses. A lot of photos are taken and the custom is to exchange

placement cards and collect other mementos. In between these traditional festivities, there are a number of other kinds of events. Most schools have drama and music groups who perform now and then. It is quite natural for both students and teachers to remain in the school building even after the school day is over.

The American school can be rather strict at times. Students have to be in time for classes and do their homework properly. Breaks may be short; still students have to get the books in his/her locker before next class. It is not allowed to leave the school area during the school day without a so-called pass. If a student has been ill, the host parents have to sign a paper. Many schools also want students to be properly dressed. There are schools where jeans, short skirts or black clothes are not allowed. The teachers are to be addressed with a polite Mr. or Mrs. When introduced to people of the student's own age it is common to add their first name when addressing them, for example "Hi Jeff, nice to meet you" or "Hello Sarah, how are you?". It is up to the student to make the best of his/her time as an STS student!

HOST FAMILY LIFE

The most important thing is of course to get settled in the family. The student will not be regarded as a guest or a stranger but as a member of the family. That means that it is necessary to make great efforts to adjust to the life and habits of the host family. The American host parents will treat their student as their own child and this means that they will want to know where the student is at all times, when away from home. They will require the student to be in on time and to let them know if he/she is delayed. It is not uncommon in the USA that young people in their late teens have curfews.

American youth do a big part of the household chores, and it will be very much appreciated to offer to help. Of course the student takes care of his/her own room and dirty laundry. It is very common that everyone in the family does the chores together on Saturday morning. Someone mows the lawn, another vacuums and a third washes the car. Afterwards the whole family might go to a drive-in restaurant for a burger and a milkshake or frozen yoghurt. To live in an American family is the best way to get to know American daily life. This way the student experiences things that he/she is not likely to see as a tourist. And this, of course, is one of the purposes with a high school year abroad!

A fact that affects daily life is the large distances. Since two thirds of all Americans live in their own houses it means that they are spread out over vast areas and all families have at least one car. Even so, much time is spent traveling. Most of the shopping is made in huge malls and supermarkets, some of which are open 24 hours a day.



PROGRAM COUNTRY: USA



Take the chance to go shopping with the family, both for helping the family and for the fun of it. The food is relatively cheap and of high quality. Everything is in excess and packed in huge family packages and sold with many "special offers". Fruit and vegetables taste good and are sometimes rather big. Exchange students may want to take the opportunity to taste the famous Idaho potatoes or other local specialties.

The average American does not only eat hamburgers with French fries and Coke, but it is true that time is rather spent on something other than cooking. The favorite food is a juicy steak, sometimes as big as the plate, served with a green salad and a baked potato. Meat and chicken are generally more common than fish, and bread is not the important part of the diet one might be used to. Pancakes with maple syrup may be served for breakfast, together with a bagel with cream cheese or a bowl of cereal. Thanksgiving and Christmas are not complete without a stuffed turkey with cranberry jam and tasty gravy. Americans often dine out. There are lots of small restaurants in the cities which are not expensive. The student may be asked to pay for himself/herself occasionally.

Americans are outgoing and positive and the student will meet generosity and hospitality from his/her American family and friends. Hardworking as they are, Americans also enjoy an active spare time. Sports of all kinds are very popular. Many people belong to different sports clubs and others are members of a church or a political organization. Neighbors and friends are often invited to dinner and barbecues in the garden.

Watching TV is one of the most popular spare time activities in the USA. There are always shows on, day and night, broadcast from over a thousand TV stations.

In the USA there are a large number of religious affiliations and organizations and they play an important social role in society. The church is often the center of many different kinds of activities, such as excursions, ski trips, dances, bazaars and barbecues. Going to Sunday school is natural to most American children. Church is generally more informal than in Europe, for instance, and a certain dress code for the Sunday church service is not necessary; shorts and sneakers are fine. Students who take an active part in American society and church life stand to gain a lot and will not miss out on rewarding experiences due to prejudice or ignorance!

PROGRAM EXTRAS

Depending on the location of your host family home there will be trips offered for school breaks. Usually a trip to Washington, DC, is offered, as well as a trip to Florida including Disney World and Cape Canaveral. Another popular trip generally offered is the one to California with visits to Hollywood, Disneyland and other famous sights.



All information is subject to change.

