



A taste of the USA

The northeast states of the USA offer up a mosaic of different experiences, from well known urban epicentres to open swathes of wilderness. GILLIAN EVANS explores the area's of learning and recreational opportunities.

One of the most amazing things about the USA is that, although you may think you know the country, it is full of surprises. US movies and TV programmes mean that many places are familiar to people worldwide, but there are many areas of the USA that are less well known and provide landscapes, people, cities and towns worlds away from the country's celluloid image.

With its broad avenues, famous monuments and classical-style buildings, the country's capital, Washington, DC, is one of those cities that seems familiar to first-time visitors. But, says Karen Decker, President of the International Center for Language Studies in Washington, DC, there is a hidden quality to the city that can be a surprise to visitors. "Everyone knows that Washington, DC is a place to see museums and the inner-workings of government; few know that the capital is a city that offers the best of two very different worlds," she states. According to Decker, although Washington, DC is a "thriving metropolis", with traffic jams and thousands of tourists, it is "balanced by a tranquillity that only a rural setting can offer". She explains, "It is dappled with numerous parks, a proliferation

of flowers, natural green spaces, and rolling terrain which is flanked by the Potomac River to the west."

Another of the USA's most well known places is undoubtedly New York City. Skyscrapers, the Statue of Liberty, Central Park and the subway are all familiar to most visitors. However, many people are under the misconception that New York is an impersonal sprawling city, which according to Rita Capolarello at Inlingua New York, is simply not the case. "New York is actually comprised of several small neighbourhoods, some ethnic, that are like small towns, such as Chinatown, Little Italy, Harlem, Battery Park City, Upper Eastside, Upper Westside," she says. She adds that many students find the city to be cleaner and safer than they expect.

A ride out of the city soon confirms the vast contrasts that make up the USA. Just three-and-a-half hours away, in upstate New York, is Johnstown, home to Fulton-Montgomery Community College, State University of New York. Its rural location near mountains and lakes means that all manner of outdoor activities are on offer. Historic sites are also plentiful as the area was one of the first communities in the USA and the battle site for the Revolutionary War.

Arlene Spencer at the college argues that Johnstown represents "typical America". She says, "Most people in the US live in small communities like ours. We are fairly quiet and laid back – but [visiting] the major cities is easily done. Upstate New York is a largely conservative area but very warm and welcoming to students."

Academic Adventures in America, which organises short-term programmes with or without English language tuition in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, ensures students are treated to a fine serving of American hospitality by providing accommodation with volunteer

"Three young men from Japan arrived for our ESL programmes with a mission (besides studying English): they wanted to eat Maine lobster, but they didn't know which restaurant to go to. They decided to go to the supermarket and ask someone shopping for fresh fish for a recommendation. In their limited English, they asked a woman at the fish counter where they should go to eat lobster. The result? The woman herself took the three of them to a local restaurant, helped them order and joined them for a lobster feed they'd never forget! That's Portland, Maine at its best!"

Bart Weyand, University of Southern Maine

American host families. In this way, says Rose Jackson, Director of the company, "Students get to experience American family life." She continues, "New Jersey is often thought of as a boring and industrial state. Instead, students are amazed at our green parks, our beautiful trees and flowers, and our wonderful mountains and seaside resorts."

Further northwards into the "attic" of the USA is New England, which offers a wonderful assortment of scenery.

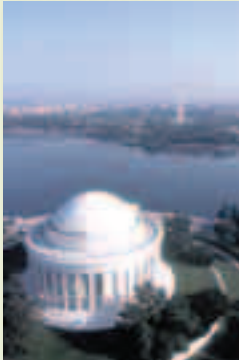
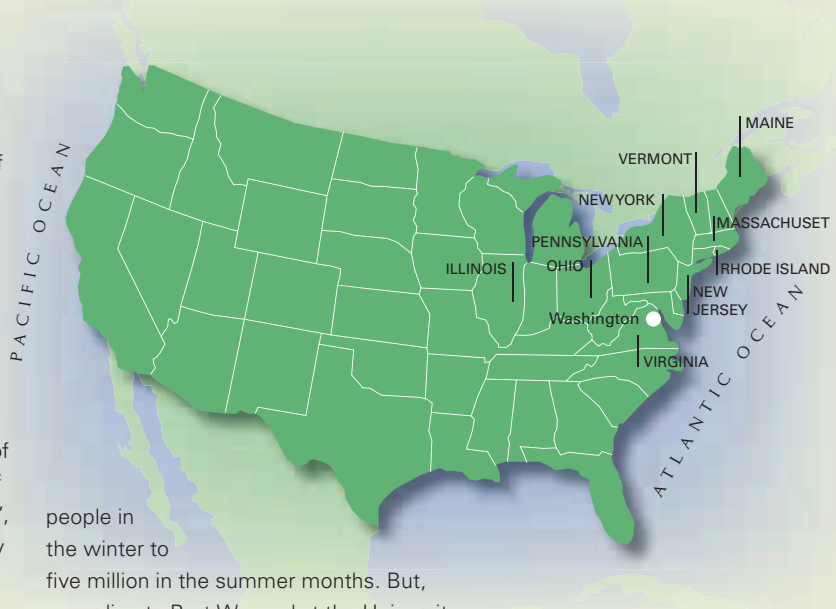
Vermont, for example, is home to the Green Mountains, part of

the Appalachian range. This is just one of its many attributes that makes it "one of the most beautiful states in the country", according to Katy Ramsey at Middlebury College in Middlebury, VT. The college is located in a beautiful New England town, set at the edge of the Green Mountains. "Middlebury has phenomenal opportunities for outdoor activities, including hiking, Nordic and alpine skiing, fishing and swimming," reports Ramsey. The state is famous for its maple syrup, cheddar cheese and Ben & Jerry's ice-cream, but it attracts most visitors for its spectacular autumn leaf display.

Indeed the whole of New England is such a popular holiday hotspot for both Americans and international visitors that Maine is fondly known as "Vacationland". Its population swells from 1.2 million

people in the winter to five million in the summer months. But, according to Bart Weyand at the University of Southern Maine in Portland, MA, there is plenty to do year round, including skiing, snowboarding, ice fishing, swimming, hiking and camping.

One of New England's most famous cities is historic Boston in Massachusetts. According to Jessica Dixon-Streeter, Director of EF Boston, it is the ideal place for study. "Boston is a lively centre of academics and the nation's largest college town," she explains. "The sheer number and quality of its educational institutions, and the virtually unlimited activities that go with them make Boston a student's paradise."



Jefferson Memorial, Washington, DC

Third President of the USA between 1800 and 1809, Thomas Jefferson was the author of the draft Declaration of Independence and the Statute of Virginia for religious freedom



Agent viewpoint



"We send students to New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Virginia, Illinois, Ohio, Indiana and Wisconsin. The most popular is New York, because in China the most well known places are New York and California. The main attractions include location, the reputation of the educational institution, costs and safety. When students choose less popular states, it is usually because of low costs, safety, that they have relatives or friends there or agency recommendation."

Wei Jia Huang, Starglory Overseas Service Co, China



"We send students to New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Virginia and Illinois. Although [some of] these states are less well known in Austria and students have less [knowledge of] what [to] expect, once there they realise these states offer beauty and hospitality. You can discover [the real USA] very well in less touristy areas. Many students are surprised that life in small cities is not oriented towards the next large metropole but there is plenty of everything, even in country areas."

Helmut Hampel, FSTS, Austria



"Massachusetts, New Jersey and Pennsylvania are already very well-known by the French student population because of the existing extended network of US universities they have heard about and the appeal of cities like Boston, New York and Philadelphia – ranking one to three in the French preferred east coast destinations. Maine, Wisconsin and New York are considered to offer a quieter pace and much more natural environment."

Christine de Chanaud, Séjours Homestay, France



Gettysburg, PA

Each year, over two million visitors make the pilgrimage to Gettysburg battlefield, which marks the turning point of the US civil war. The battle lasted three days and claimed the lives of 51,000 people

Away from the USA's northeastern seaboard are many gems to be discovered. Virginia, for example, is famed for its colonial heritage but it also has sandy beaches and the spectacular Shenandoah National Park. Judith Snoko, Director of the English Language Institute of Virginia Tech, in Blacksburg, VA, claims the school is ideal for students wanting to study in a quiet setting. "Located in the New River Valley, among well-kept farms and rugged mountains, the pace of life is slower, and people have more time to say 'hello'," she says.

The USA's Midwest offers students yet another take on American life. In general, it has a small-town character and very hospitable people. Illinois, also known as the Prairie State, is no exception, and the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana offers students the chance to sample this first-hand. "Far from being glitzy and noisy like a big city, this town glows with intellectual and cultural life, and the quiet blending of the traditional and the modern," asserts Silvana Dushk at the university.

If students are in search of true America, however, they should look no further than Ohio, according to Gordon Clark from the Ashland University Center for English Studies in Ashland, OH. "Ohio really is the most American of the states in that it is split right down the middle of political parties. It has both cities and farmland/countryside, manufacturing and services, several universities, [and] both an Eastern and a Mid-Western feel to it," he says.

Ashland is also closely situated to a large Amish community, who live a modest agricultural lifestyle without electricity or other modern inventions. The English centre organises visits to an Amish community as part of its activity programme. "Visiting the Amish village and having a large dinner with an Amish family is unique," states Clark. ●