

J1 Visa Guide: Everything You Need to Know About the J1 Visa

The J1 visa is a great option for people who want to visit the United States. This visa allows you to gain experience by receiving on-the-job training, teaching, or conducting research. The J1 visa allows foreign nationals to visit the United States to participate in programs performing as:

- an au pair
- camp counselor
- college or university student
- government visitor
- intern
- international visitor
- physician
- professor
- research scholar
- secondary school student
- short-term scholar
- specialist
- summer work travel
- teacher or
- trainee

In this guide, I will discuss the important details of the J1 visa. If you have any questions, feel free to email me directly at Info@immigrationlawfirmltd.com. I'm very responsive via email and I would be happy to help you.

Overview:

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2. Benefits of the J1 Visa
3. What programs are available under the J1 visa?
4. What are the requirements for a J1 Visa?
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1. What is the J1 visa?

The J1 visa allows foreign nationals to visit the United States as exchange visitors. As a visitor you can participate in programs as an au pair, camp counselor, college or university student, government visitor, intern, international visitor, physician, professor, research scholar, secondary school student, short-term scholar, specialist, summer work travel, teacher, or trainee. An immigration lawyer can determine if the J1 is appropriate for you.

2. Benefits of the J1 Visa

There are several benefits to getting a J1 visa. Here are just a few:

You can gain experience in the United States.

The J1 allows foreign nationals to gain experience. You can work in a wide range of fields. The J1 provides an opportunity for foreign nationals to improve their English. You can also learn about American culture and learn relevant career skills.

Your dependent spouse and children are eligible to come to the U.S.

Most programs under the J1 visa allow dependents (unmarried children under the age of 21 and your spouse) to come with you with J2 status. People with J2 visas are eligible to work after for an Employment Authorization Document. Please be aware that au pairs, camp counselors, secondary school students, and those conducting summer work travel are not eligible to bring dependents with them.

A wide range of programs are available under the J1 visa.

There are 15 different categories covered by the J1 visa. Some visas are limited to certain nationalities or specified jobs. This is not true for the unique J1 visa.

3. What programs are available under the J1 visa?

There are 15 unique programs under the J1 visa.

AU PAIRS

Au pairs live with an American family and provide childcare for a minimum of 12 months. A 12-month extension is available. In exchange for work, au pairs receive a stipend and room and board. Au pairs must also complete a minimum of six hours of academic credit at a US university.

To be an au pair, you must:

- Receive a job offer from a family
- Be between 18-26 years old
- Be in good health
- Have previous childcare experience
- Speak and understand English
- Have a secondary school education
- Pass a police report clearance
- Have an international driver's license
- Was not an au pair previously

CAMP COUNSELOR

The camp counselor program allows foreign nationals to work at summer camps. Camp counselors receive housing, food, and pay. People in this category are not eligible to work as staff; such as, office workers, cooks, or janitors. The maximum length for this program is four months.

To be a camp counselor, you must:

- Speak and understand English
- Have experience with children
- Be 18+ years old

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY STUDENT PROGRAM

This option allows university or college students to participate in up to 24 months of academic program in the United States. This is different than the F1 visa. On an F1, the primary intent is to complete a full-time program at an accredited school.

To participate in the student program, you must:

- Receive adequate funding
- Have a written agreement between the US and your home country's government
- Or between the American and foreign country's educational institutions
- Be enrolled full-time

GOVERNMENT VISITORS

This program allows distinguished international visitors to come with the purpose of strengthening international relationships. Participants may engage in conferences, meetings, or workshops.

To participate in the government visitor program, you must:

- Be an influential or distinguished person
- Be selected by a US federal, state, or local government agency

INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

This category is intended for people-to-people programs. The program has a maximum length of one year. Participants may observe, collaborate, and train with American organizations.

To participate in the international visitor program, you must:

- Be a leader in a “field of specialized knowledge or skill”
- Be selected by the US Department of State

PHYSICIAN

This program allows foreign physicians to enroll in US graduate medical programs. They also can receive training at accredited US schools of medicine. The program must be focused on observation, consultation, teaching, and/or research and not include patient care.

To participate in the physician program, you must:

- Have a signed agreement demonstrating program acceptance
- Be competent in both spoken and written English
- Have passed either Parts I and II of the National Board of Medical Examiners Examination and Step I and II of the Foreign Medical Graduate Examination, or passed the Visa Qualifying Examination
- Provide a statement of need from the foreign government. This statement would outline the need to learn US medical skills. It should also state that the foreign national will return to their home country upon completion of the program

PROFESSORS AND RESEARCH SCHOLARS

These two programs allow foreign scholars to come to the US. It enables the international exchange of ideas.

To participate in either program, you must:

- Not be a candidate for a tenure track position
- Not have completed a similar program within the last 24 months
- Not have participated in a J-Visa program in the previous 12 months unless:
 - You are currently in a J1 program and is transferring to another institution to continue the program
 - The previous program was less than 6 months
 - The previous program was as a short-term scholar

The main difference between these two programs is the participant's emphasis.

The emphasis of research scholars are: research, observing, or consulting on a research project. However, research scholars may teach or lecture unless otherwise stated by the sponsor.

The emphasis of professors are: teaching, lecture, observing, and consulting. However, professors may conduct research unless otherwise stated by the sponsor.

SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENT

This program is for foreign secondary school students to attend a U.S. high school. Students under this program are eligible to participate in extracurricular activities, including sports. Yet, they cannot work part-time or full-time jobs. Students must live with a host family or a boarding school, and not a relative.

To participate in the secondary school student program, you must:

- Be between 15 and 18 years
- Not have finished more than 11 years of primary and secondary school (excluding kindergarten)
- Not have previously participated in a secondary school exchange program
- Not have attended school in the US on either an F-1 or J-1 status

SHORT-TERM SCHOLAR

The short-term scholar program allows professors and researchers to visit the United States. This program is limited to 6 months. During this time, participants may give lectures, provide training, among other things.

To participate in the short-term scholar program, you must:

- Be a professor, a research scholar, or someone with similar education and experience

SPECIALIST

This program allows experts to come to the United States for up to 1 year. Specialist may observe, consult, or give demonstrations to American organizations.

To participate in the specialist program, you must:

- Be an expert in a field of specialized knowledge
- Not fill a permanent or long-term position of employment in the US
- Not be enrolled in a different J1 program (professor, research scholar, short-term scholar or physician programs)

SUMMER WORK TRAVEL

This program is for students enrolled full-time in foreign colleges to participate in temporary work and travel opportunities. This program has a maximum length of four months. Yet, you can be admitted to the program multiple times. Jobs must be temporary and provide opportunities to interact with Americans. Additionally, there are some regulations on what type of jobs may be included under this category. Sponsors for these positions are responsible for ensuring the safety of the participants.

To participate in the summer work travel program, you must:

- Speak English proficiently
- Be a post-secondary school student outside of the United States
- Have successfully completed at least one semester (or the equivalent) of post-secondary academic study
- Already have a job placement prior to entry (unless you are from a visa waiver country)

TEACHER

This program gives primary or secondary teachers the opportunity to work in the U.S. Teachers are available to repeat the program provided they have resided outside the US for two years. They must also continue to meet the eligibility requirements.

To participate in the teacher program, you must:

- Have sufficient English language skills
- Meet the requirements of the primary or secondary school's state licensing
- Meet the qualifications set in your home country for a primary or secondary school teacher
- Be working as a teacher in your home country OR have completed an advanced degree within the last 12 months
- And have two years of full-time teaching experience within the previous eight years

- Have a degree-equivalent to a US bachelor's degree in either education or the academic subject you intend to teach
- Have a minimum of two years of teaching or related professional experience

TRAINEES AND INTERNS

Internships and training programs must be within one of the following categories:

- Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing
- Arts and Culture
- Education, Social Sciences, Library Science, Counseling and Social Services
- Health Related Occupations
- Hospitality and Tourism
- Information Media and Communications
- Management, Business, Commerce, and Finance
- Public Administration and Law
- The Sciences, Engineering, Architecture, Mathematics, and Industrial Occupations

Most training programs are up to 18 months. Yet, internships, as well as training programs in the Agriculture and Hospitality and Tourism fields, are up to 12 months. Extensions are limited, but are possible.

An **intern** is defined as a foreign national participating in a structured and guided work-based internship program in his or her specific **academic field** and who either:

- Is enrolled in full-time post-secondary institution outside of the United States or
- Graduated from a university no more than 12 months prior to the start date of the program

A **trainee** is defined as a foreign national participating in a structured and guided work-based training program. This must be in his or her specific **occupation field**, who has either:

- A degree from a foreign post-secondary institution and one year of prior work outside the US or
- Five years of work experience in his or her occupation field outside the United States

4. What are the requirements for the J1 Visa?

You must be a foreign national with proof of appropriate qualifications.

To be eligible for a J1 visa, you must have a valid passport. You must also have documentation showing your education and/or relevant work experience.

You must have proof of sufficient financial means to cover your stay in the United States.

All J1 visa applicants must demonstrate that they will be able to cover their transportation, housing, and daily living expenses in the United States. Stipends may be provided by some programs. Although, those on J1 status are not allowed to take non J1 employment.

You must display nonimmigrant intent.

All J1 and J2 visa applicants must show that they intend to return to their home country. Evidence to demonstrate non-immigrant intent can include property deeds, mortgages, lease agreements, documentation of continued enrollment in school, documentation of future employment offers, or other indications of family or community ties.

You must not displace an American worker.

This means that the program cannot negatively affect the occupation status of U.S. workers. The purpose of this is to ensure that businesses do not use these programs to undermine American opportunities. Instead, J1 work should be seen as additional or supplementary to the employer's current workforce.

You must have a sponsor.

A sponsor is required to approve the program and assist with the hiring of a foreign national. A sponsor will only approve specific programs that satisfy J1 program regulations.

5. What is the role of a sponsor?

A sponsor approves a program and oversees the foreign national working in the position. A sponsor often does not work directly with the foreign national. Oftentimes, a host organization or other third party does this. However, the sponsor is accountable for the third party and assuring the program's success. Some of the duties of the sponsor include ensuring that the position satisfies **all** conditions for the J1 visa program, hiring foreign nationals, ensuring that both the program and the J1 visa holder uphold their responsibilities for the program, and updating the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVIS) if there are any changes in the program.

6. J1 Visa Process

Getting a J1 visa is a multi-step process. The following is the general application process, followed by a more detailed explanation of each step. Please be aware the process can vary depending on one's program and sponsor. An immigration lawyer, including myself or another member of my team, can help you through this.

- Find a J1 Sponsor
- Apply for the Form DS-2019
- Complete Form DS-160
- Pay fees

- Interview with US Consulate or Embassy
- Request I-94 Card and endorsed DS-2019 form

Find a J1 Sponsor

In order to be granted a J1 visa, you must have a sponsor. A sponsor provides you with an opportunity to enter the United States. You will need to provide your sponsor with documentation of your qualifications. These documents will be discussed in the following section (Section 7: What documents are required to get a J1 Visa?). For a complete list of sponsors, click [here](#).

Apply for the Form DS-2019, the “Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status”

The DS-2019 requires your biographic, exchange program, and financial information. This form is issued through the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVIS). It enables the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to monitor your immigration status. This document is used to prove you have a sponsor and enables you to schedule a visa appointment with the consulate.

Complete Form DS-160

Form DS-160 is the Non-immigrant Visa Application. This document is required for anyone seeking a non-immigrant classification, such as the J1 Visa.

Pay fees

Before interviewing, you must submit your SEVIS and visa fees. You must also keep a receipt as evidence of your payment.

Interview with US Consulate or Embassy

Even after being approved by a sponsor, you are not guaranteed a J1 Visa. You must schedule an appointment with the consulate. This consular interview will determine if you meet the J1 requirements. You will also need to submit documents to the US Consulate to demonstrate your qualifications. (More information about these documents is provided in the following section: “What documents are required to get a J1 Visa?”)

Form I-94 and endorsed DS-2019 form

After being approved for a J1 visa, you will obtain an I-94. You must also request an endorsed Form DS-2019. These documents are proof of your legal J1 status. Additionally, you should keep your sponsor informed about any changes to your name, address, program departure and change of status intention.

7. What documents are required to get a J1 Visa?

Several documents may be required for your J1. The following is a general list. Please be aware this may not be comprehensive. The documents you may need will depend on your program or sponsor. An immigration lawyer can help you determine the necessary items.

- Form DS-7002: The Form DS-7002 is the Training/Internship Placement Plan. This must be completed prior to the issuance of Form DS-2019. This contains information about the specific goals for the program. It also contains outlines regarding the program's potential skills or knowledge or provided. It should also explain how the foreign national will be evaluated, and the foreign national's role.
- Signed third party agreement
- Copy of biographic page(s) of passport(s) for you and any dependents
- Copy of your resume
- Copy of your educational documents, with translations
- Copy of experience confirmation letters, with translations
- Check to cover application fee
- Proof of enrollment in foreign university

- Confirmation of health insurance
- Confirmation of financial support or budget
- Letter of offer from host organization
- Basic information about the host organization and program
- Evidence of sufficient English skills
- Evidence of sufficient funds

8. J1 Visa Processing Time

J1 processing time depends on many factors. This includes which host organization is used, consulate processing times, and the time of year you apply. An immigration lawyer with knowledge about your specific situation can provide more information.

9. J1 Visa Fees

- At the time of publishing this guide, J1 visa fees are as follows. Make sure to check these fees as they are subject to change.

- Visa Processing Fee: \$160
- SEVIS Fee: \$180 (some sponsors/host organizations cover this fee)
- Other Costs (including transportation, insurance, and living expenses): costs vary from country to country and case to case.

10. J1 Special Programs

There are several special programs under the J1 Visa. These are just two examples:

Korean Nationals internship program:

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs established the Work, English, Study, Travel (WEST) program. Here, Korean university students and recent graduates can spend 18 months in the United States to study English. They can also participate in internships and travel. This opportunity provides participants to learn about business practices and procedures. The host company can be an employer, nonprofit, or academic institution.

To be eligible, you must be a citizen of South Korean. You must also be approved by the South Korean government, be enrolled in or have graduated from a university in the previous 12 months, have proof of financial means, and not bring any dependents with you. For more information about the WEST Program, click [here](#).

Irish Nationals internship program:

The Department of State established the Intern Work and Travel (IWT) Program for Irish nationals. This program is for 12 months to participate in internships and travel. To be eligible, you must be a citizen of Ireland. You must also be enrolled in or have graduated from university in the previous 12 months, have proof of financial means, and not bring dependents with you. Unlike other programs, you do not need to have an approved internship prior to acceptance.

11. Two-Year Home Residence Requirement

Some J1 participants and their dependents are required to return to their home country for two years after completing their program. Both the participant and their dependents may be subject to this requirement. Additionally, those seeking new visa status may be subject to this requirement. Please note that you can ask for a waiver of this two-year requirement. Here, significant negative impact can be demonstrated. Alternatively, you can show that you would face persecution as a result of this requirement. An immigration lawyer can help you determine if you are subject to the two-year home residence requirement and/or qualify for a waiver.

12. Conclusion

The J1 visa allows foreign nationals to visit the United States as exchange visitors and participate in programs as an au pair, camp counselor, college or university student, government visitor, intern, international visitor, physician, professor, research scholar, secondary school student, short-term scholar, specialist, summer work travel, teacher, or trainee. You should now have a

much stronger understanding of the various aspects of the J1 visa, including the J1 visa benefits, the J1 visa requirements, and the J1 visa process.

If you have any questions on any of the information discussed in this guide, feel free to email me directly at Info@immigrationlawfirmtd.com. I'm a US immigration lawyer, very responsive via email, and happy to help you.