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Everyday life

Driving, pets, shipping your belongings, phones, broadband and the TV licence.

Build your free, personal move plan at **yourlandfall.com/plan**: five questions, and only the steps that apply to you.

General information, not personal tax, financial, legal or immigration advice.

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1 · EVERYDAY LIFE

Can I drive in the UK on my US driver's license?

THE SHORT ANSWER

Yes, for up to 12 months after you become resident. After that you need a UK license. US licenses can't be swapped for UK ones, so most Americans need to pass the UK theory and practical tests.

The 12-month rule

You can drive in the UK on a valid US driver's license for **up to 12 months** from when you become resident. After that, you need a UK license.

Getting a UK license

US licenses can't be exchanged for UK ones, so the usual route is:

1. Apply for a **provisional license**.
2. Pass the **theory test**, which includes a hazard perception section.
3. Pass the **practical driving test**.

Test slots can be booked up weeks or months ahead in busy areas, so start early in your first year.

Things that surprise Americans

- **Manual (stick shift) is common.** If you take your test in an automatic car, your license only covers automatics.
- **Roundabouts everywhere**, and driving on the left.
- **Insurance can cost more** at first, because UK insurers can't see your driving history. Some will take US driving records into account if you ask.

What to do next

Build your move plan to see driving alongside your other first-year steps.

2 · EVERYDAY LIFE

How do I bring my dog or cat to the UK?

THE SHORT ANSWER

Dogs, cats and ferrets can come from the US without quarantine if you follow the rules in the right order: microchip, then rabies vaccination, then wait at least 21 days, then a health certificate shortly before travel. Dogs also need a tapeworm treatment just before arrival. Most pets must fly as cargo, not in the cabin.

This covers travel to **Great Britain** (England, Scotland and Wales). Northern Ireland has different rules.

The steps, in order

Order matters: get it wrong and your pet may have to go into quarantine at your cost.

1. **Microchip** your pet. It must be done **before or on the same day as** the rabies vaccination.
2. **Rabies vaccination**, from at least 12 weeks old.
3. **Wait at least 21 days** after the first rabies vaccination before travel.
4. **Animal health certificate**, issued by a USDA-accredited vet and endorsed by USDA APHIS, within a short window before you travel.
5. **Dogs only: tapeworm treatment** by a vet between **1 and 5 days** (24 to 120 hours) before arriving in Great Britain, recorded on the certificate.

Getting here

- Pets must arrive on an **approved route** with an **approved carrier**.
- Most airlines **don't allow pets in the cabin** on flights to the UK, except recognized assistance dogs. Pets usually fly in the hold as cargo.
- **Pet relocation companies** handle the paperwork and booking for a fee, which many families find worth it.

Banned and restricted breeds

Some dog types are **banned or restricted**, including pit bull terrier types and, since 2024, **XL Bully** dogs in England, Wales and Scotland. Check before you plan to bring a dog of a similar type.

Other pets

Birds, rabbits, reptiles and other animals have different rules. Check GOV.UK for your animal.

Once you're here

- **Register with a UK vet** soon after you arrive.
- Dogs must wear a **collar and tag** with your name and address in public, and must be microchipped and registered on a UK database.
- **Pet insurance** is common, because UK vet bills aren't covered by anything else.

What to do next

Build your move plan. Pet travel is included under shipping and logistics.

How do I ship my belongings to the UK?

THE SHORT ANSWER

If you've lived outside the UK for at least 12 months and you've owned and used your belongings for at least six, you can usually bring them in free of import duty and VAT under Transfer of Residence relief. Apply before they arrive. Think hard about what's worth shipping, because US electrical items and cars often aren't.

Transfer of Residence relief

You can usually import your personal belongings **without paying import duty or VAT** if:

- you've lived **outside the UK for at least 12 consecutive months**
- you've **owned and used** the items for at least **six months** (vehicles too)
- you're moving your **main home** to the UK
- the items are for your own use

Apply for **Transfer of Residence (ToR) relief** online **before** your goods arrive. Your moving company will need the reference. You generally can't sell, lend or hire out the items for 12 months after import.

Choosing a mover

- Get **at least three quotes** and check what's included: packing, customs clearance, delivery and unpacking.
- **Sea freight** (a shared or full container) is cheaper but takes weeks. **Air freight** is faster for a few essentials.
- Check the **insurance**: what it covers, and whether it's based on replacement value.
- Make a **detailed inventory**, which you'll need for customs and insurance.

What's worth shipping

Usually worth it: furniture you love, books, clothes, artwork, kitchenware, sentimental items.

Often not worth it:

- **US appliances and electronics.** The UK runs on **230 volts** with **Type G** three-pin plugs. US devices on 120 volts need a transformer unless they're dual-voltage. Most laptops and phone

chargers are fine with an adapter; hairdryers, kitchen appliances and power tools usually aren't.

- **Large American furniture.** UK homes, doors and staircases are often smaller. Measure first.
- **Your car.** Importing a US vehicle means approval tests, changes such as headlights, and registration. Selling and buying here is often simpler.

Things you can't, or shouldn't, bring

- **Firearms and weapons** are tightly controlled.
- **Certain foods, plants and seeds** are restricted.
- **Medicines**: bring prescriptions and letters, and check rules for controlled drugs.

What to do next

Build your move plan. Shipping sits in the "before you leave" stage.

Phones, internet and the TV licence

THE SHORT ANSWER

An unlocked US phone will usually work with a UK SIM. Get a UK number in your first days, but keep your US number for bank security codes. Book broadband early, because installation can take a couple of weeks. You need a TV licence to watch live TV or use BBC iPlayer, but not for on-demand streaming services alone.

Your phone

- **Check it's unlocked.** Ask your US carrier to unlock it before you leave.
- **SIM-only plans** are the easy start: monthly or pay-as-you-go, often with no credit check. Many support **eSIM**.
- UK numbers start with **07** for mobiles.

Keep your US number

US banks, brokerages and the IRS often send **security codes by text** to a US number. Before you move, either:

- keep a **low-cost US plan** that works abroad, or
- move your number to a **US internet calling service** that can receive texts, and check your bank accepts it.

Losing access to your US number is one of the most common headaches for new arrivals.

Home broadband

- **Check what's available** at the address before you sign a lease. Full-fibre speeds vary a lot by street.
- **Book early**: installation can take one to two weeks, longer if an engineer visit is needed.
- Contracts are often **12–24 months**, sometimes with set price rises during the contract, so read the terms.
- A mobile hotspot bridges the gap until it's installed.

The TV licence

You need a **TV licence** if you:

- watch or record programs **as they're broadcast live**, on any channel or device, or
- use **BBC iPlayer**.

You **don't** need one if you only watch on-demand streaming services such as Netflix and never watch live TV or iPlayer. Watching without a licence when you need one can lead to a fine.

US streaming services

Some US streaming services and apps work differently or not at all from the UK, because of licensing. UK versions of the big services have different catalogs.

What to do next

See your first few weeks in the UK for the full checklist.

About Landfall

Landfall helps Americans plan their move to the UK, with free move plans and guides that cover both countries. It's run by Leah Guevara from Edinburgh. Based in Scotland, covering the UK.

Members get dated reminders, templates, a community and time with Leah. When a step needs a qualified specialist, such as tax in both countries, investments or immigration, we say so plainly and can introduce you to people we trust. We're independent and never take a fee for introductions.

Your next step: build your free move plan at yourlandfall.com/plan, or see memberships at yourlandfall.com/membership

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