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Visas & arriving

The main visa routes, settlement and citizenship, and your first few weeks.

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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Which UK visa routes are open to Americans?

THE SHORT ANSWER

Most Americans move on a work visa (usually Skilled Worker, which needs a job offer from a licensed sponsor), a family visa (if your partner is British or settled), a talent-based visa, or as a student. Some Americans are already British citizens by descent. Rules, fees and salary levels change often, so check your own case with a regulated adviser.

This is general information, not immigration advice. In the UK, only regulated advisers can give immigration advice on your own case. We can introduce you to one.

Visiting first

US citizens don’t need a visa for short visits, but you do need an **Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA)** before you travel. A visit doesn’t let you work or live here.

The main routes

Route	Who it's for	The key requirement
Skilled Worker	People with a UK job offer	A job with a licensed sponsor employer, at the required skill and salary level
Global Business Mobility	Staff moved by an overseas employer, e.g. to set up a UK branch	Employer sponsorship, usually for a set period
Global Talent	Leaders or emerging leaders in fields such as tech, science, the arts	An endorsement from an approved body, or a qualifying prize
High Potential Individual	Recent graduates of top-ranked universities	A degree from an eligible university within the last few years
Innovator Founder	People starting an innovative business	Endorsement of the business idea
Family (partner or spouse)	Partners of British citizens or settled people	Proof of the relationship, plus financial and other requirements
Student, then Graduate	People studying in the UK	A place on a course with a licensed sponsor

UK Ancestry visas are only for Commonwealth citizens, so they're generally not open to Americans unless you also hold a Commonwealth citizenship, such as Canadian or Australian.

Already British?

Check before you apply for a visa. You may already be a **British citizen by descent**, for example if a parent was born in the UK. Some people born before 1983 to a **British mother** can register as British under rules introduced to correct past unfairness. A British passport means no visa at all.

Costs to plan for

Most routes involve an **application fee** and the **Immigration Health Surcharge**, both paid upfront per person. Some routes also need proof of savings. Check current amounts on GOV.UK.

Your family

Partners and children can usually come as **dependants** on many routes, though not all. Check this early, because it affects which route works for you.

What to do next

Build your move plan. If you're "not sure yet" about your route, it will point you to the first step.

How do I get settled status and British citizenship?

THE SHORT ANSWER

Most people first get indefinite leave to remain (ILR, also called settlement) after a qualifying period on their visa route, then can apply for British citizenship, usually after a further 12 months. The US allows dual citizenship. The UK government has been changing settlement rules, so check the current qualifying period for your route.

This is general information, not immigration advice. A regulated adviser can check your own timeline.

Step 1: Indefinite leave to remain (ILR)

ILR means you can live and work in the UK without time limits. It's often called **settlement**.

- On many routes, such as Skilled Worker and family routes, the qualifying period has been **five years**. Some talent routes have been shorter.
- **The government has proposed longer qualifying periods** for many routes, with ways to qualify sooner. Check what applies to you before relying on a date.
- You'll usually need to pass the **Life in the UK test**. As a US national, you normally meet the **English language** requirement through your nationality.
- **Time spent outside the UK** counts against you if you exceed the limits, so keep a record of every trip.

Step 2: British citizenship

Once you have ILR, you can usually apply to **naturalize** as a British citizen:

- usually after holding ILR for **12 months**, or straight away if you're married to a British citizen
- with limits on time spent outside the UK in the qualifying years
- followed by a **citizenship ceremony**

Dual citizenship

The UK and US both allow **dual citizenship**. Becoming British doesn't mean giving up US citizenship. But:

- **US tax filing continues** as long as you're a US citizen.
- You must **enter and leave the US on your US passport**.
- Giving up US citizenship is a separate, serious step with its own tax rules.

Keep a paper trail from day one

- every entry and exit date
- your visa decisions and eVisa records
- payslips, tenancy agreements and council tax bills

These make later applications much simpler.

What to do next

See which visa routes are open to Americans, or build your move plan.

What should I do in my first few weeks in the UK?

THE SHORT ANSWER

Set up your eVisa account access, get a UK phone number, open a bank account, register with a doctor, apply for a National Insurance number, and sort council tax and utilities for your home. Do them roughly in that order, because each one makes the next easier.

Week one

1. **Check your eVisa.** The UK now uses **eVisas** (digital immigration status) instead of physical cards. Make sure you can sign in to your UKVI account, and that your passport details are up to date. You'll use it to prove your **right to work** and **right to rent** with a share code.
2. **Get a UK SIM.** A UK phone number makes everything else easier. SIM-only plans need no credit check. See phones, internet and the TV licence.
3. **Keep your US number** active for US banks' security codes, even on a cheap plan.

Weeks one to two

4. **Open a bank account.** See opening a UK bank account.
5. **Register with a GP** (family doctor) near your home. See how healthcare works.
6. **Apply for a National Insurance number** if you don't have one. It's the UK's version of a Social Security number. You can usually start work before it arrives.

Once you have a home

7. **Register for council tax** with your local council. It's a local property tax paid by whoever lives there, and some households get a discount, such as living alone.
8. **Set up utilities**: energy, water and broadband. Broadband installation can take a couple of weeks, so book early.
9. **Get a TV licence** if you'll watch live TV or BBC iPlayer.
10. **Join the electoral register** if you're eligible. It helps your credit file. See building UK credit.

Also in the first month or two

- **School places**, if you have children. See UK schools for American families.
- **Driving**: plan your UK license. See driving on a US license.

- **Tell the IRS and your US providers** your new address.
- **Keep records** of your arrival date. It matters for UK tax. See when UK tax starts.

What to do next

Build your move plan and tick these off as you go. Your plan keeps them in the right order.

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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Our guides are general information, not personal tax, financial, legal or immigration advice, and don't take account of your circumstances. Rules change: check the date of this edition and take advice before acting. We don't give immigration advice; we introduce you to regulated advisers.