

US visas - a general overview.

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Generally US immigration law distinguishes between nonimmigrant and immigrant visas.

[Nonimmigrant visas](#) are temporary visas which are issued up to 7 years. Some of those nonimmigrant visas allow the visa holder to live and work in the US within the specific conditions of the visa. Among the most commonly used nonimmigrant visas are the B, E, F or J, H, I, L, O, P, R, and TN visas. Those visas allow tourists (B), investors or traders (E), students and trainees (F, J, or H-3), professionals with college degrees (H-1B), journalists (I), international managers or specialized workers of multinational companies (L), outstanding artists, researchers, or professionals (O), athletes or entertainers (P), religious workers (R), and professionals from Mexico and Canada (TN) to temporarily travel and stay up to a specific time in the US. Except for the B visas those visas also allow temporary employment in the US.

[Immigrant visas](#) allow the holder to enter the US to obtain lawful permanent residence, commonly called the Green Card. For most immigrants, lawful permanent residence status can be obtained through one of three ways: (1) through a close family relationship with a US citizen or Lawful Permanent Resident, (2) through an offer of employment in the US, a \$1 million dollar investment and creation of employment in the US, or due to international acclaim and recognition in a field of work, or (3) through the Diversity Visa Program, the so-called Visa-Lottery.

Immigration through a close family relationship may take many years depending on the type of family relationship and whether the relative is a US citizen or lawful permanent resident. Only immigrants who are married to a US citizen can quickly obtain the Green Card.

Immigration through employment may also take many years, since the employer will almost always first have to get permission from the US Department of Labor to employ a foreigner (so-called [Labor Certification](#)). Therefore, US employers often first obtain a nonimmigrant work visa for the foreigner, so that he or she can begin the employment in the US while the Green Card process is begun.

Immigration through the [Visa Lottery](#) is possible if the foreigner is among the annual "winners," and either has a high school diploma or has at least 2 years of work experience in a profession which requires at least 2 years of formalized training or experience.

After obtaining the Green Card, foreigners may apply to become US citizens after 3 or 5 years of lawful permanent residence in the US.

This information is only very general in nature and any more detailed discussion and advice will require a thorough review of individual circumstances. If you are interested in a personalized analysis of your aspirations to come to the US, please send us an e-mail to Pauly@LangstadtPauly.com or call us at +1-305-648-3909 to request a personal consultation either in the Miami, Florida, or the Cologne, Germany office.

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