

PART 2

LIVING IN

HOLLYWOOD

As we all know, it's one thing to visit a place, it's quite another to live there. Coming out to Los Angeles to go the beach, Universal Studios and Disneyland whilst on a two week holiday is a totally different experience than renting an apartment in Hollywood and trying to navigate the freeways in rush hour traffic while you slog from meeting to meeting. The next section of this book deals with how to be able to live in L.A and actually living in L.A, day to day, as an Angelino.

VISAS

I live overseas? How can I live in L.A? Do I need a visa?

Yes! If you want to live in Los Angeles on a more permanent basis and not just on holiday (where your stay would be a maximum of 3 months during which you are unable to work); you will need a visa.

GREEN CARD

Ultimately the visa you need to be a permanent resident is the Green Card (a permanent resident visa). This visa enables a person to live anywhere in the U.S where they can work for anyone without restriction. The visa lasts for ten years and is renewable (although most likely by that stage you would then apply for citizenship).

To get a Green Card, you would have to be in the US on another visa prior unless – you are getting married (Remember the movie Green Card!) or have family in America; have taken part in the Green Card lottery which is the U.S's diversity government program where they encourage people from certain countries that have low rates of immigration to the U.S. (unfortunately this does not include people from the UK or Canada).

The O-1 VISA

The general visa for those in the Entertainment business has always been the O-1. The O-1 is for foreign nationals who have an extraordinary ability in Sciences, Arts, Education, Business or Athletics – it's often called 'An Alien of Exceptional Ability'. Whatever happens though, your prospective employer needs to file a petition, which must be approved by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) before you can even apply for a visa.

Applicants for the O-1 must have extensive documentation showing national or international acclaim and recognition in their fields of expertise. Such applicants do not have to have specific job offers, so long as they are entering the U.S. to continue work in the fields in which they have extraordinary ability.

The O1 visa paves the way for established foreign artists to showcase their talents in the US markets. The visas are valid for three years and can be extended in increments of one year for their ongoing projects.

O1 Visa Petition and Evidence Requirement

The applicant should provide evidence that he/she is a winner of internationally recognized awards or demonstrate at least three of the following:

1. Published material about the work undertaken by them.
2. The individual is associated with any organization that would require its members to have outstanding achievement.
3. Scientific, scholarly or business related contributions which has a significant impact on different fields of study.
4. Having authored articles in any type of major media or professional journals.

An intending O1 visa applicant applying on grounds of being in the movie business should show that they are winners of any internationally acclaimed award like Academy Award or Grammy awards or by demonstrating any of the three:

1. Lead or starring role, or established in organization with reputation.
2. Any record of major commercial or critically acclaimed success;
3. High salary in relation to others in the field.

Comparable evidence can also be submitted if the above standards do not apply to the applicant to establish eligibility for

the O1 visa. An applicant should also provide a contract between him and the employer and if possible an itinerary of the scheduled projects or events.

The J-1 VISA

The J-1 visa is part of the Government's exchange visitor program which offers various programs to enable foreign nationals to come to the U.S. to teach, study, conduct research, demonstrate special skills or receive on the job training for periods ranging from a few weeks to several years.

For interns, there is an intern program available for those who are either still in education or for those who have graduated no more than 12 months prior to the exchange visitor program date.

Training programs also fall under this J-1 visa where the government allows foreign professionals to come to the United States to gain exposure to U.S. culture and to receive training in U.S. business practices in their chosen occupational field.

What you need for a J-1

You will need one of the following:

1. A Bachelor's degree or a professional certificate from a foreign post-secondary academic institution and at least one year of prior related work experience in his or her occupational field outside the United States;

Or

2. Have five years of work experience outside the United States in the occupational field in which they are seeking training.

OTHER VISAS:

There may be other routes available to you if you do not qualify for any of the above. We have listed some below but we suggest the best route would be to talk to an immigration lawyer here in the U.S., who will be able to advise you properly. Here are some examples of other visas that you may qualify for:

1. Visas for representatives of Foreign Media.
2. Visas for Australian professionals where you fill a position that has been qualified as a specialty occupation.
3. Visas for those who are working in a company that has affiliated offices overseas to a U.S. based company and the company can bring you over to work for them in the U.S.
4. Visas for those who wish to invest a substantial amount of capital (showing at least 50% ownership) in either purchasing an established business or in creating a new bonafide business.

Check the website <http://travel.state.gov/visa/> to see what visa might work for you. If you're serious about going ahead with a visa, then the first step would be to talk to an immigration lawyer in Los Angeles.

Bernard Sidman - Immigration Lawyer

Q - What visas are open to filmmakers coming to live (and work) in LA?

Bernie - Generally the visa that most filmmakers would aspire to would be the O1. If you don't have sufficient credits to qualify for that visa then the J1 would be an alternative (if they qualify for that).

Q - What information should one be gathering for the visas?

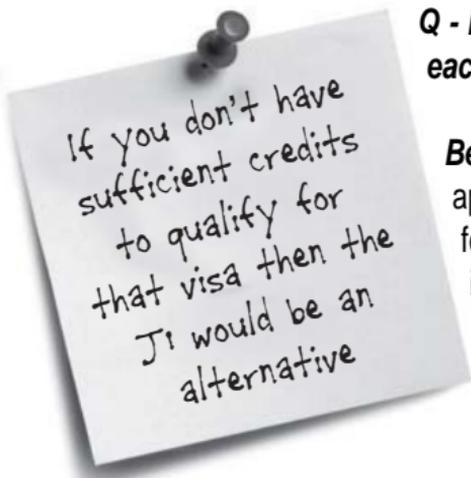
Bernie - Information would be press coverage of their work, reviews, references from experts, awards etc.

Q - How long does each visa take to complete?

Bernie - Typically it takes 4 to 6 weeks to get the visa if we get Premium Processing otherwise about 3 months. J1 visas take a few days.

Q - How much approximately does each visa cost?

Bernie - The cost of both visas is approximately \$5000 including filing fees and advisory opinions. The visa is applied for by the manager, agent or production company, not the filmmaker.



If you don't have sufficient credits to qualify for that visa then the J1 would be an alternative

Q - What advice would you give someone seeking a US visa?

Bernie - My advice to anyone looking for a US work visa would be to come to the US for a few weeks to visit and make sufficient contacts to find someone interested in sponsoring them. The big thing to remember is that to get an O1 visa, a deal memo for an upcoming project is a necessity and it is much easier to get one of those if you are actually in the US.

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

Once you have your Visa, then you'll be able to get the all important I.D. number that is your Social Security Number. You NEED this to be able to do absolutely anything. Get a driving license, open a bank account, get a credit card, signing up with a doctor, renting a house, buying a house, pay taxes etc.

Remember to keep your number safe. Identity theft does happen and once someone has your social security number, it can be difficult to repair all the damage. Unfortunately the number that everyone gets has become that all horrendous identification number. As you use it for absolutely everything, it is also related to your credit score which is used everywhere to reflect your financial value. Do you pay your bills on time? How much income do you make? How much debt do you have? Remember the movie GATTACA? We're not quite there yet but employers do look at your credit scores.