

Coming to America

Rebecca Kincade sets her eye on the land of the free . . .

America, like its citizens, is not a shy country. The self-professed 'land of the free and home of the brave' has created for itself a reputation of being an ex-pat's dream, a place where everything is bigger and better and anything is possible. When I remember the times I have visited America, I think of sprawling, bustling cities alive with colour, diversity and culture, endless buffets of fattening food and towering office blocks offering every career imaginable.

For years America has been a destination which appealed to people wishing to leave Northern Ireland and begin a new, challenging and glamorous life in the fast lane. Fuelled by the notion of the American Dream, those who wanted to progress in their career of choice recognised the opportunities available and packed up their bags to leap across the pond.

One person to take this step was Caroline Cree, who moved from Bangor to New York seven years ago. She knew that, in order to earn big bucks in the fashion industry she would have to go to America. Making this move at the right time meant that Caroline has successfully progressed up the career ladder and is now designing handbags for Coach, the number one

handbag and accessories company in the US.

She says: "Back home there aren't the same opportunities in the fashion industry as there are in the States. By moving to New York I have had the chance to work with some of the top designers and gain highly-respected experience."

However, as the global economic crisis affects more companies in America, recruitment in many has come to a standstill and companies which would have been happy to sponsor the right British candidate through the emigration process are now more reluctant to pay the necessary costs. The job market which would have initially tempted so many to make the life-changing move is now rather more challenging and unforgiving.

This said, an increasingly large number of women in Northern Ireland are still enquiring about making the move. So we have enlisted the help of Emigration Consultant Amanda Gillespie to aid you in any Stateside move you may be considering...

Research

America is the third largest country in the world and, depending on which area you

choose to live in, it offers different lifestyles and climates throughout. By visiting an area as a tourist before you make the decision to move, you can familiarise yourself with what it would be like to live there.

It is advisable to fully research any areas that you are considering; with so many varying cultures and beliefs it would be easy to end up somewhere you might feel completely out of place. It would be unfortunate if you ended up trying to settle in the centre of the very conservative 'bible belt' if you did not share similar views...

With New York and LA being the two most popular cities for ex-patriots it is easy to get carried away by the reports of the lifestyles to be had. However, don't base your decision solely on what other people say. What might float their boat will not necessarily be the right thing for you so it is important that you are 100 per cent sure about your area before you move any further.

Caroline Cree says of her move: "I was surprised to discover that New York City is actually an incredibly laid-back place in contrast to the 24/7 reputation it thrives on - so firsthand experience would be beneficial before a move."

Visa Information

For many wannabe ex-pats the most daunting process is the visa application and, with so many new rules being introduced, it is easy to see why people can be put off. Amanda Gillespie says that, to begin with, the best thing you can do is to find out which visa category you are eligible for. With several available it is important to go for the correct one. She says: "Different visas have very different requirements, so what worked for your friend may not work for you. Be prepared for the news that your visa will require a U.S. sponsor; while you don't need to know who that is immediately, it is a key ingredient to the visa process."

Working 9-5

With indicators suggesting that now is not the time to be seeking employment anywhere in the world, it is essential you recognise that you will be facing a hard battle when you get there. America operates on a policy of 'not what you know but who you know', and this is why networking is absolutely vital to open up opportunities for yourself. Industry-run events such as exhibitions and conferences are essential as a platform to get to know people. The

most important thing when networking is learning how to sell yourself properly, expanding even the slightest piece of work experience to ensure that you come across as capable. Ensuring that you stay in touch with any contacts you make will mean that you are not going to be forgotten.

If you are not in America at the time of your job hunt, then use all the internet resources available to contact people in your field and post your CV on relevant websites. By getting your name out there you have more chance of being recognised and put forward for any vacancies that may arise.

Money, Money, Money

With America being so vast, the cost of living differs greatly from one place to another. In the main cities rent varies; but generally speaking you won't get anywhere for less than \$1000 a month. Areas in which rent is cheaper will have a reason for this so do your research before signing any contracts. One month's rent will be asked for up front and a security deposit will also have to be paid.

Costs can add up and, without planning for them, you will be surprised by how much you are spending. Parking spaces close to your home could cost anything up to

\$10,000 a year so most people use the subway on a daily basis, which in turn produces its own additional costs.

Food and alcohol is particularly expensive in places like Manhattan and on top of this it is customary to provide a 20 per cent tip. Electricity is charged at around the same rate as in Northern Ireland; however, with the exchange rate as low as it is at the moment, everything will be that bit more pricey.

The most important thing you can do if you are serious about bouncing across the Atlantic is make sure you consider everything to do with your move in advance. In the current economic climate this is not the right time to just pack a bag and jump on the next flight out. As Amanda Gillespie says: "The people who do best in the USA are the ones who respected their move as a major undertaking - and planned accordingly."

For more information on taking the next step stateside you can contact Amanda Gillespie through her website www.amandagillespie.com or email her at amanda@amandagillespie.com.