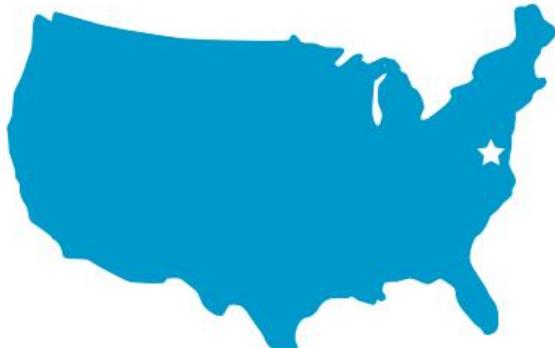


# ICYE USA – United Planet

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*National Profile*  
2019-2020

# THE UNITED STATES



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## About United Planet

### Joint Cooperation

United Planet (UP) is the U.S. North American member of the ICYE Federation, one of the longest running volunteer organizations in the world. As an international, Boston-based, 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to broadening mutual understanding, friendships, and peace among cultures; UP partnered with ICYE to re-establish ICYE's program in the United States and Canada in 2001.

ICYE and UP have been teamed up since 2004 to bridge the gap between North American and Canadian volunteers and the rest of the world. At the ICYE General Assembly in Costa Rica in 2011, United Planet became a full member of ICYE. As such, United Planet will both send and receive enthusiastic and committed exchangees within the ICYE Federation.

### What We Do

As featured on CNN, United Planet provides a diverse and creative range of international, community-based, and online programs to achieve global understanding.

Initiated in 2000, United Planet was officially founded as a non-profit organization in the United States on September 19, 2001. United Planet has expanded its membership and volunteer base to encompass over 100 countries. The response to the quality and diversity of UP's programs has been favorable both in the US and abroad. All UP team members, including the Board of Directors and Advisory Board, are enthusiastic and passionate, and very excited to be working with you on this wonderful opportunity.

### Follow Us

Stay up to date with all United Planet News & Communication @UnitedPlanet



# About the United States of America

## Climate

Due to the size of the United States, it is not possible to define one climate for the entire country. In general we have four seasons: fall, winter, spring and summer. The length of these periods varies according to region. The US is mostly temperate, but tropical in Hawaii and Florida, arctic in Alaska, semiarid in the Great Plains west of the Mississippi River, and arid in the Great Basin of the southwest. Low winter temperatures in the northwest are ameliorated occasionally in February and March by warm winds from the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. Massachusetts and New England States situated in the northern hemisphere cooler months of the year are from November to March, while the warmer months last from April to October. We recommend you consult an online weather group such as [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com) or [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com) for the most current and up to date weather alerts.

## Geography and Citizenry

### Location

North America: bordering both the North Atlantic Ocean and the North Pacific Ocean and, resting between Canada and Mexico.

### Area<sup>1</sup>

Total | 9,629,091 sq km

Land | 9,158,960 sq km

Water | 470,131 sq km

The USA is known as the world's third-largest country. About one-half the size of Russia; three-tenths the size of Africa; one-half the size of South America (or slightly larger than Brazil); slightly larger than China; and, two and one-half times the size of Western Europe

### Coastline

19,924 km

### Terrain

There are vast central plains, mountains in west, hills and low mountains in east, rugged mountains and broad river valleys in Alaska and, rugged and volcanic topography in Hawaii.

### Elevation Extremes

Lowest point | Death Valley -86 m

Highest point | Mount McKinley 6,194 m

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<sup>1</sup> includes only the 50 states and District of Columbia

## Natural Resources

Coal, Copper, Lead, Molybdenum, Phosphates, Uranium, Bauxite, Gold, Iron, Mercury, Nickel, Potash, Silver, Tungsten, Zinc, Petroleum, Natural Gas, Timber

## Land Use

Arable Land: 19%

Permanent Crops: 0%

Permanent Pastures: 25%

Forests And Woodland: 30%

Other: 26% (1993 Est.)

## Natural Hazards

There are tsunamis, volcanoes, and earthquake activity around the Pacific Basin; hurricanes along the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coasts; tornadoes in the Midwest and Southeast; mud slides in California; forest fires in the West; flooding; and, permafrost in Northern Alaska, a major impediment to development.

## Environmental Challenges

Air pollution resulting in acid rain in both the US and Canada; the US is the largest single emitter of carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels; water pollution from runoff of pesticides and fertilizers; very limited natural fresh water resources in much of the western part of the country require careful management; desertification

## Population<sup>2</sup>

326,386,072

Persons in poverty 12.7%

## Age/Gender Structure<sup>3</sup>

Persons under 5 to 19 years | 25.5%

Persons 20 to 64 years | 59.3%

Persons 65 years and over | 15.2%

96.9 Males per 100 Females

## Ethnic Groups<sup>4</sup>

White 76.9%, Black/African American 13.3%, Asian 5.7%, American Indian and Alaska Native 1.3%, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander 0.2%, two or more races 2.6%, Hispanic or Latino 17.8%

## Education

High school graduate or higher 87.0%

Bachelor's degree or higher 30.0%

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.census.gov/popclock/> (December 2017)

<sup>3</sup> [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_10\\_1YR\\_S0101&prodType=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_10_1YR_S0101&prodType=table)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045216>

## **Health**

Individuals living with a disability (under 65 years) 8.6%

## **Culture Aspects**

### **Social Norms**

North Americans are typically friendly and will often plan social visits for new acquaintances on short notice. Do not feel required to accept the invitation. If you are busy, politely decline and suggest an alternative way to spend time.

If a friend has invited you to "drop by anytime" to his or her home, office or school, always call ahead of time just to confirm. While there, try not to stay too long unless otherwise invited.

Invitations are normally given over the phone. If you are invited to someone's home for dinner it is polite to bring a small gift as a gesture of your appreciation (though not required). Gifts such as a bottle of wine, candy, flowers, or small household item are all acceptable, but again not necessary. Many North Americans may invite you into their home and ask you to "make yourself at home." This phrase is spoken to allow you to feel comfortable. You may receive a tour of the house and can be invited to "help yourself" to whatever you want. In general North Americans will extend open invitations to you as a guest, if you are unsure if something is appropriate just ask, North Americans generally are very friendly when responding to questions.

We encourage all of our exchangees to take advantage of the unique opportunity to talk, meet and interact with Americans in various social settings.

You may find, while here in the USA, that social responses vary from your own home. In general, North Americans require more "personal space" than others. Possibly, if you come too close to a North American while in conversation, he or she may feel as if you are invading their space and will try to back away. Try to become aware of any reactions while talking to people and react accordingly. If while in conversation you find another person leaning back or taking a step back, instead of closing the gap, let her set the space and talk from a further distance apart.

Also, North Americans, in general, do not make a lot of physical contact when talking to strangers or acquaintances. Shake hands when you initially meet another person. Americans do not generally kiss or hug when greeting unless the two greeters are close friends.

### **Dress**

In comparison with many other countries of the world, the USA regarding dress is very casual. Common attire for young adults will almost always include jeans, a cotton shirt, and sandals or sneakers. In metropolitan areas, such as Chicago, New York, and Boston, fashion can be much more eclectic and trendy.

## **Religion<sup>5</sup>**

Christian 70.6% (25.4% of which is Evangelical Protestant and 20.8% Catholic)

Jewish 1.9%, Buddhist 0.7%, Muslim 0.9%, Hindu 0.7%, Other 0.3%

Unaffiliated (including Atheist and Agnostic) 22.8%

The US is a secular state, which means that there is no official state religion. In addition, because the US is so multi-cultural, with large populations of immigrants from all over the world, it is also pluralistic. However, it can be surprising for visitors to learn how devotional the population of the US is in terms of religion.

In many states, especially those of the south and mid-west, Christianity, and specifically Protestantism, can be an important social influencer. In metropolitan areas, religion will become less of a social factor. If you have a religious affiliation, you will most likely be able to find a strong and vibrant community that shares your convictions, and if not, you should not feel isolated or uncomfortable. Remembering to be polite and non-judgmental is the most important thing you can do.

## **Typical Spending**

Prices in the United States are normally a lot higher in cities than in smaller towns, thus the great difference in price for the same product. Prices may also vary greatly from shop to shop. Below is a list of typical items and their average cost for an idea of what to expect to spend while abroad:

<i>Item</i>	<i>Price<sup>6</sup></i>
U.S. Stamp within the 50 states	\$ .49
Local one-way bus/subway ticket (Monthly)	\$1.75-\$2.75 (\$88)
Newspaper	\$1.50 (Sunday 2.00)
Basic lunch, including drink	\$14.00
2 liters of Coca-Cola	\$1.92
A 8 oz. coffee	\$1.00-\$4.50
Bread for 2 people for 1 day	\$2.15
3 Liters of laundry detergent	\$11
A month's rent for an apartment 480 sqft	\$1079

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.expatistan.com/cost-of-living/country/comparison/ecuador/united-states>

Cinema ticket	\$12
A pair of jeans	\$47
Train journeys: Boston – New York	\$65
Bus journey: Boston – New York	\$15
1 box of antibiotics	\$17
Box of sanitary pads	\$7
Deodorant	\$3.50
2-in-1 Shampoo and Conditioner	\$4.84
Toothpaste	\$1.78
Package of cigarettes	\$8.00
Hostel accommodation may include breakfast	\$25.00-\$65.00

## Government<sup>7</sup>

The USA Federal Government is divided into three branches

Independence Day: July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1776 (July 4<sup>th</sup> is a national holiday)

### Executive

The executive branch carries out and enforces laws. It included the President, executive departments, independent agencies, and other boards, commissions, and committees.

President Donald J. Trump and Vice President Mike Pence were elected into office November 2016 and, they will serve a 4-year-term.

### Judicial

The judicial branch includes the federal courts and the organizations that support them.

### Legislative

The legislative branch consists of Congress—the Senate and the House of Representatives—and agencies that support congress.

### Political Parties

Democratic, Republican, Libertarian and Other (including Green, Constitution &c.) are representative of the political views of North Americans.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.usa.gov/branches-of-government>

## Language

English is the predominant language spoken by North Americans. Being fluent or near that, in the English language is very most important in helping to integrate into this society. Fluency will enable you to communicate and form personal relationships with individuals at your placement, fellow volunteers, and those people you meet going about your day-to-day activities.

That being said, Americans will take great pleasure in helping you to perfect your English, especially when it comes to slang. If you hear someone speaking and use a word you don't know or understand, always ask to have it explained. The use of slang will be covered during the orientation.

With the increased number of immigrants from Latin American countries, Spanish is spoken in many areas of the USA as well. The USA is a country of immigrants and in larger cities you will hear languages (and dialects) spoken from all over the world.



## ICYE Exchangees

### Eligibility

Exchangees must be between the ages of 18 and 30. However, United Planet is willing to review applications from exchangees over 30.

UP offers full-time voluntary work programs only. NO SCHOOL PROGRAM IS AVAILABLE.

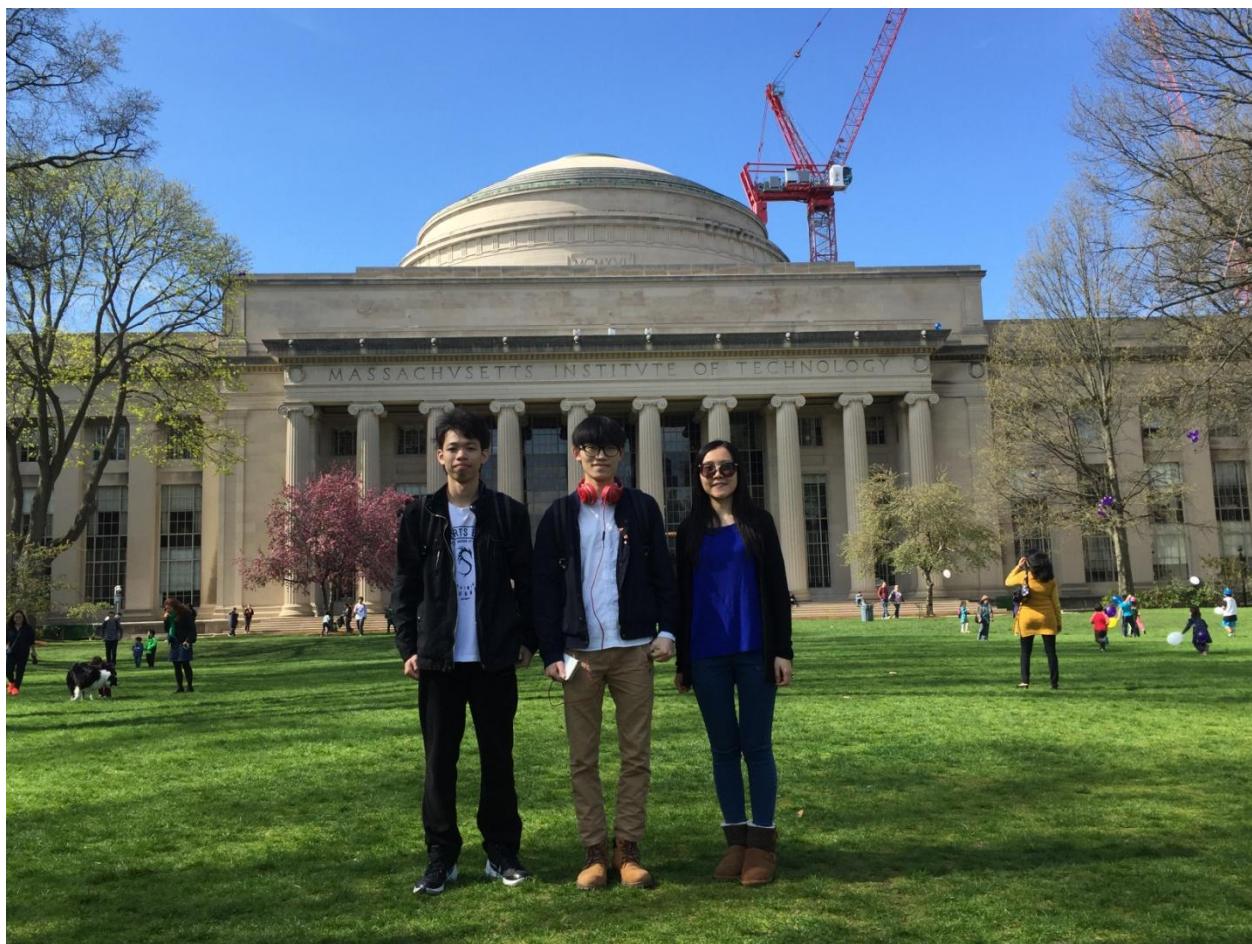
It is very important that before arriving to the United States you have an understanding of English. Exchangees should be comfortable in a working environment with other native

English speakers. Before acceptance, exchangees may be required to have a Skype interview with a project staff or coordinator to confirm English proficiency.

### Certificate of Good Conduct

All ICYE exchangees must be trustworthy, honest, and law-abiding in character. It is *essential* that you obtain a certificate from the police force in your country confirming that you have *no criminal record and that you have no previous criminal convictions*.

All ICYE's projects insist on this certificate in order to ensure a safe environment for those with whom they work, many of them may be vulnerable or at risk. This certificate must be sent to UP with your application form.



### Health & Safety

Here at United Planet, the health and safety of all of our exchangees is of the utmost importance. This is our promise to you:

- 1) All of our program sites and partners are vetted for safety. We will never place an exchangee in a location that is deemed unsafe for living or traveling. We monitor

all of our program sites domestically and worldwide for any incidents or changes to location safety.

- 2) All of our staff are trained in how to respond to issues or needs and this training is renewed bi-annually. You will receive training on how to stay healthy and safe in your new home. You are invited to ask questions any time!
- 3) Even with a good program design and monitoring and safety training for staff and exchangees, things *may* still be challenging. We have a comprehensive emergency procedure plan with resources at our finger tips should we need to enact necessary measures. You have a system in 3 countries supporting you for a safe and successful program.

We will do all we can on our end to make this program as safe as possible for you. What we require of you is to do the same. Ultimately, your health and safety comes down to the decisions you make for yourself. We ask that you make good decisions that do not put you in unhealthy or dangerous circumstances. We are happy to discuss anything with you so that you are 100% confident in doing this.

## **Emergency Relocation/Evacuation Plan**

In the unlikely event of an emergency relocation/evacuation stay calm, use common sense, and follow these steps:

- 1) Get to a safe location
- 2) Go to your host family or, local accommodation if it is safe to do so. If an alternative location has been identified by your USA/United Planet coordinator, this will be explained in orientation.
- 3) The coordinator will meet you or call your host family/ accommodation, if possible and safe to do so. You may also call the UP Emergency number, given during orientation.
- 4) A plan will be made with the coordinator, Boston Office, appropriate embassies, travel insurance company, etc for relocation/evacuation.
- 5) If your host family or accommodation location is not safe to go to; volunteers should follow the lead of their host family and host community as well as announcements on the radio and television. The Boston Office may work with the U.S. Embassy, the Red Cross, and the local police in order to communicate messages via radio, television, individual messengers, and any other available method.
- 6) If you can not be in contact with the coordinator, you may call the 24/7 emergency assistance number for the insurance provider for advice; you are covered for natural disaster and political evacuation.
- 7) If you do not have access to phone communication, and can communicate via other means (ie email, Facebook, or other social media) you should post communication only when you are in a safe location. Getting to safety is always your first priority.

## **ICYE Health Insurance**

As an ICYE exchangee you will be fully covered by a comprehensive health insurance should you experience any health problems or accidents during your stay. Please note this insurance covers you for illness or accidents only – not existing conditions.

Your Sending National Committee/coordinator will provide you with documentation and preliminary information about the coverage. We will be happy to answer any questions during your Orientation in Boston. Please note: you may need to pay for any services at a health clinic or hospital in the U.S. then submit a claim form to the insurance company for reimbursement. Healthcare in the U.S. is expensive, even for short doctor office visits. Please have a credit card or other back-up form of payment should this be necessary. We can help you process claim(s) with the insurance company afterward.

## **Visa and other information**

U.S. Immigration recommends that all incoming ICYE exchangees apply for a B-1 (Temporary visitor for Business) status visa. The B-1 visa is applicable to exchangees working solely as volunteers WITHOUT attending school, college, university or any other tertiary education facility (Note: this does not include private supplemental English classes which may be provided by United Planet). Exchangees are NOT permitted to be employed for wages during their stay. The B-1 visa is valid for up to one year.

Upon acceptance into the program, United Planet will issue necessary copies of the letter of invitation to the exchangee. One copy of the letter of invitation must be presented to the US Embassy in the exchangee's home country. It usually takes at least 2 to 3 months to receive a visa; however, this processing period varies per country. Please take this into consideration and apply early!

All of our exchangees are encouraged to visit the US Immigration website at <http://www.usimmigrationsupport.org> for information on acquiring visas. Exchangees must visit the United States' Embassy in their country of residence.

United Planet must have a copy of your visa before you arrive in the United States.

We recommend that exchangees use the B-1 visa for the ICYE program. However, it is difficult in some countries to acquire the B-1 visa. In this case, United Planet is also able to provide a J-1 internship visa, however the exchangee must meet all requirements before we can consider them as a viable candidate.

At the minimum to receive the J-1 visa, the exchangee must meet these 2 requirements:

- 1) Be currently enrolled in (or have graduated less than 12 months prior) a University outside of the USA.
- 2) Your area of study at University matches the work you will do at the project in the USA. (See our Work Profile for the project options.)

If you fulfill both of these requirements, please contact Human Resources at United Planet to learn more.

## **Upon Arrival**

Upon arrival, you will receive an electric I-94 form (duration of stay date). Please make sure that this date is valid for the duration of your stay: for six months or one year. If the immigration officer questions how long you will stay, please explain your situation – that you will be volunteering unpaid in the country for six months/one year with United Planet and that your food and accommodation will be provided for during the time you are volunteering. Please show the officer a copy of your I-94 invitation letter.

## **Rules and Regulations**

Your residence-visa does not allow you to hold a paying job. If an exchangee is discovered working illegally, s/he will be required to return to their home country immediately.

Exchangees are expected to take an active part in all ICYE orientations and camps.

Travel within the United States during your program is only possible in special occasions (i.e. with your work placement) and never without the permission from your United Planet coordinator, for your safety.

Exchangees known to be using illegal drugs or drinking alcohol if under the age of 21 will be expelled from the program.

The exchange year lasts 6 months or 12 months and after that time all exchangees must return to their home country. ICYE and United Planet have no responsibility for exchangees failing to adhere to this rule.

## Contract for ICYE Exchanges

- 1) I have read and understood UP's National Profile and accept its contents. I have paid special attention to the parts on the project requirements and the pocket money.
- 2) I understand that I will not live in a host-family during my year in the US.
- 3) I will be flexible regarding the type of placement and will not ask to change projects during my exchange year. I will not refuse to go to, or remain at a project due to its geographical location.
- 4) I will live in any place in the US, whether it is in the countryside or in a city.
- 5) I understand why the projects in the US need responsible volunteers who have a certain level of English and confirm that I am able to communicate in English.
- 6) I understand that I will receive my pocket money directly from the project and will not ask United Planet to pay additional money.
- 7) I shall not seek or accept paid employment during my exchange year.
- 8) I will attend the compulsory orientation, mid-year camp, and final evaluation camp as planned and organized by United Planet (unless special exception is granted).
- 9) I understand that I can only take 2 days per week and one week for every 4 months of work as personal days.
- 10) I accept that United Planet is not responsible for providing me with food and accommodation when traveling away from the volunteer host during personal/vacation days.
- 11) I will return to my country after my 6 month or one year exchange program. If I fail to do so, I understand that United Planet can inform the authorities. I have read and understood the above contract and agree to adhere to its content.

Printed Name of Volunteer: \_\_\_\_\_

Country of Residence: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Volunteer: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Checklist

Please ensure that you have:

- A valid passport \*
- Appropriate Entry Clearance / Visa (contact your local United States of America consulate or Embassy if you have any questions)\*
- 2 copies of the invitation letter – one for the Embassy in your country and one to take on the plane with you to give to the immigration official when you land in the U.S.
- A police certificate (certificate of good conduct, see 4.3). This is a certificate issued by the police confirming that you do not have a criminal record\*
- Correctly issued flight ticket and that your flights are confirmed\*
- Have read all ICYE documentation - including this National Profile
- Emergency contact information
- Information about your home country: pictures, brochures, maps, books, coins, recipes, etc.

\*Indicates the following forms must be copied and sent to UP

## Packing List (Optional Guide, Use Discretion)

- Important:** your carry-on should have a change of clothes, toiletries, passport, prescription medication and all important documents in case of lost baggage
- Duffel bags rather than roll-on suitcases
- Backpack
- Sleeping bag
- Seasonal and appropriate clothes
  - Use this profile as a reference
- One nice outfit for special occasions
- Poncho, weatherproof jacket and/or umbrella
- Comfortable, sturdy walking shoes
- Sandals
- Travel size toiletries for the first week (buy more if necessary, once in USA)
- Useful electronics: adaptor, chargers, flashlight
- Camera and journal
- Medication: Prescriptions, Tylenol, etc., as needed
- Small first-aid kit: safety pins nail clippers, Band-Aids, sewing kit, etc.
- Pictures and information from home to share with others
- Music, clothes, calendar, CDs, games, postcards, jokes, books, movies, maps
  - Useful for your presentation during Orientation

Do not bring too much as you will be responsible, solely, for your own luggage.

Exchangees often arrive with a year's supply of toiletries – these are heavy and can be bought moderately cheaply in the US. Just bring what you need for the orientation and buy more when you get to your project.

Backpacks are easier to carry and more convenient to store than suitcases. If you bring a suitcase make sure that you can carry it comfortably. *Tip: pack your bag and then take out half of the stuff – you'll still have more than you need!*



Good Luck!