

2020

Guide to Living and Working as a Lawyer in New York

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Nicholas Scott Legal Services

Introduction to New York

New York is one of the largest, most diverse and exciting cities on the globe with an approximate population of 8.4 million.

Some of the most successful and competitive international firms in the world have offices in New York City.

New York, alongside London, is the leading financial centre of the world therefore attracting a high number of foreign and internationally qualified lawyers and there are plenty of career opportunities in New York for an ambitious lawyer.



The Legal Market

The city is home to large law firms which tend to have clients that are global businesses or individuals who can afford the fees the top firms charge. The small law firms tend to the needs of individuals and small businesses who cannot afford representation from the large firms.

There are plenty of legal opportunities due to the growing economy of the city and the globalisation of these firms; this economic growth has meant there is an increasing need for legal assistance.

New York's legal market is split into three sections: leading "White Shoe" firms, international firms and domestic mid-tier/ boutique firms. To work within the US legal market a strong academic background (you will need a copy of your academic transcript) is essential and employers prefer that candidates have passed the New York Bar (for more information please refer to the requalification section).

NB Firms do not tend to hire beyond a 5 Year Call or Qualification Level.

New York is an attractive destination to develop a legal career for lawyers from all over the world, not only due to the size and reputation of its firms and the high profile international deals but also because it provides the opportunity to work alongside some of the world's leading lawyers. This does mean that there is a lot of competition for securing a role in a top New York firm.

Visas and Relocation

H-1B VISA – This visa allows companies to hire foreign workers in specialty occupations.

The visa lasts for up to 6 years so is a popular choice among employers bringing in staff on a long term basis. The visa application would be made by the firm as individuals are not permitted to apply for this particular type of visa. The visa is initially for 3 years but as mentioned above can be extended for up to 6 years.

After the 6 years you can apply for US residency by getting a green card. If you not able to get a green card but want to continuing working with a H-1B visa you would need to live outside the US for at least 1 year before being able to reapply.

With the H-1B visa you are able to take a spouse and any children under the age of 21 to the US with you; they would fall under the H4 Visa category. Under a H4 visa the spouse or child is not permitted to work but they can attend school, get a driving licence and open a US bank account.

L-1 VISA - This visa allows foreign companies to transfer their employees to the US subsidiary, parent, affiliate or branch office.

There is no quota for this visa, unlike the H-1B visa. The employee must have worked for the company outside of the US for at least one continuous year, in the last three years.

L1A visa – for transfers of executives, managers and business owners. (Up to 7 years)

L1B visa – for transfer of specialised knowledge employees. (Up to 5 years)

Salaries

New York is known for being an expensive city but the salaries for lawyers in the top firms compensate for the high cost of living.

Associate Year	US (\$) – most big firms pay higher end of range
Class of 2017	115,000 - 180,000
Class of 2016	135,000 - 190,000
Class of 2015	166,000 - 225,000
Class of 2014	178,000 - 245,000
Class of 2013	191,000 - 274,000
Class of 2012	225,000 - 290,000
Class of 2011	270,000 - 305,000
Class of 2010	300,000 - 325,000



US tax rates 2017:

Taxable Income	Tax Rate
\$0 to \$9,325	10%
\$9,326 to \$37,950	\$932.50 plus 15% of the amount over \$9,325
\$37,951 to \$91,900	\$5,266.25 plus 25% of the amount over \$37,950
\$91,901 to \$191,650	\$18,713.75 plus 28% of the amount over \$91,900
\$191,651 to \$416,700	\$46,643.75 plus 33% of the amount over \$191,650
\$416,701 to \$418,400	\$120,910.25 plus 35% of the amount over \$416,700
\$418,400 or more	\$121,505.25 plus 39.6% of the amount over \$418,400

Associate bonuses can vary in New York with firms paying 30 % and this can depend on either: personal performance or the overall performance of the firm.

Many firms tend to help foreign lawyers with the relocation process, some pay: flights, reasonable costs for shipping personal items, immigration and visa expenses and for a limited time temporary accommodation.

With high salaries and relatively low tax rates it is easy to see why, financially, New York would appeal to international lawyers.

Requalification

As briefly mentioned in order to practice in New York you would need to have completed the New York Bar, in many cases the firm will help with this by offering study leave and financial assistance. You must be 21 or over in order to register to take the bar.

The process is governed by the New York State of Board Examiners this sets out that foreign qualified lawyers need to satisfy the 4 eligibility requirements before being allowed to sit the bar:

1. Have a qualifying law degree
2. The law degree is from an accredited University recognised by the applicants home country
3. The law degree needs to be equivalent in length of that as US degrees recognised by the American Bar Association (3 years)
4. Equivalent to a ABA approved degree

(You do not have to be admitted into practice in your own jurisdiction)

The Bar is taken over 2 days. However simply completing the bar is not enough; in order to practice in New York you must also pass the Multistate Professional Responsibility Exam. Due to having a degree from a foreign university the cost of the bar will be \$750 plus \$80 to register for the Multistate Professional Responsibility Exam.

In 2016 4,852 foreign educated candidates sat the New York Bar.

After work

New York is well known as a city that never sleeps, this is partly due to it being one of the largest and most diverse cities in the world with 800 languages spoken.

There are countless things to do and see with a wide array of bars, restaurants, theatres, museums and events influenced by the large variety of cultures living together in the city. New York also has plenty of popular tourist attractions that are worth a visit such as: Times Square, the Statue of Liberty and the Empire State Building.

Getting around New York is unproblematic with fast and cheap public transport services running 24 hours a day.

There is plenty to keep you occupied and entertained in New York City.



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