

2024

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 meet 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

To work as a lawyer in the US you will need a H-1B visa, this 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 visa. The visa is initially for 3 years but as mentioned above can be extended for up to 6 years. After 6 years you can apply for US residency by getting a green card if you are not able to get a green card but want to continue 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 can take a spouse and any children who are under the age of 21 to the US with you; they would fall under the H4 Visa category. Under an 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.

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 (\$)	Annual Bonus (\$)
Class of 2023	225,000	20,000
Class of 2022	235,000	30,000
Class of 2021	260,000	57,500
Class of 2020	310,000	75,000
Class of 2019	365,000	90,000
Class of 2018	390,000	105,000
Class of 2017	420,000	115,000
Class of 2016	435,000	115,000

US tax rates 2024:

Taxable Income	Tax Rate
\$0 to \$11,000	10%
\$11,000 to \$44,725	12%
\$44,725 to \$95,376	22%
\$95,376 to \$182,101	24%
\$182,101 to \$231,251	32%
\$231,251 to \$578,126	35%
\$578,126 or more	37%

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, 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 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 applicant's 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 an 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; 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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