What facts about the United States do foreigners not believe until they come to America?

I liked that people were shocked to hear that americans SLEPT WITH ANIMALS. as an american who has never had a pet, i was glad to hear that other people thought that was weird and gross.

I am originally from Bangladesh and here are a few things that I find hard to explain to peeps back home.
- Fruits and vegetables are way more expensive than meat and poultry.
- That, generally speaking, the poor is more obese than the rich.
- A lot of couples adopt children, sometimes in spite of having their own, and treat them exactly like their own. (To me, this alone is a marker of a great people)
- By and large, people do not carry cash.
- That you address your boss (and some of your professors) by some abbreviated variation of their first name. And that applies to pretty much everyone, regardless of how much older they are than you.
- Parents can get arrested for physically punishing their children.
- Severe poverty, homelessness, etc, no matter how limited, actually exist. Even in America.
- A name as common and as easy to pronounce as mine is almost invariably incomprehensible to most Americans.
- America is literally HUGE. My home country is roughly the size of Florida, one of the fifty states.
- In spite of the society being openly hedonistic and liberal, the social norms and standards still have very strong conservative religious influences.
- People don't really care about the FIFA World Cup even though USA qualifies.
- The importance of credit rating/ credit score.
- Return policy
- The history behind Thanksgiving
- Black Friday and the frenzy associated with it.
- Amazingly friendly, hospitable and helpful people. Yet, a very conveniently private lifestyle.
- That, American foreign policy is a very inaccurate reflector of public consensus.
- Grinding. The dance form.
- That you cannot purchase alcohol unless you are 21 but can purchase a gun if you are 18.
- That, a product like this is sold in supermarkets:

I'm writing from an Indian point of view, and what struck me as unusual based on what notions I'd built up after watching so much Hollywood and TV series ---

Dependence on GPS - I knew people who went to office every day since the past 5 years and could not tell their way without a GPS. It was amazing! I made some friends there and they were so impressed that I could tell my way back to their home without help from a GPS.

Cashless Society - Coming from India, where we just need cash because cards are not accepted at most places, I was really surprised by the cashless system in the US. Every place accepts credit cards. Even a small picnic I went to, which had an entry fee, had some sort of mobile app and a device attached to accept credit cards. It was amazing.
EMIs for everything - It's like the people there live on EMIs. Cars, phones, everything. And even the lower middle class can afford this stuff. It's like everyone has an iPhone. Which also reminds me of the extremely bad coverage that AT&T provided. I'm used to better coverage in India. Almost forgot! Worst part was being charged for incoming. Calls and messages! It's like a nightmare for Indians.

Baby Car seats, Strollers - The extremely confusing rules and regulations that pervade America were already too much, but the emphasis on car seats and strollers was something new. I don't think there's any such thing as a car seat in India. And parents carry their children; mostly, most people can't afford strollers here. Also the cost of childcare in US is astounding because of these things that keep adding up.

Tipping - Enough has been said about this, but I hated it too, so I'll include it. Specially for services like a haircut. So I pay you for cutting my hair.....and then I tip you because you were gracious enough to cut my hair?!?

Public Toilets - Indian public toilets are usually in unmentionable conditions, and this was a refreshing change. Specially because half the stuff was automated. I remember thinking at first, that Americans are so lazy, they don't want to flush their toilets :D

Cashiers talking to you - Every cashier will greet you with "How are you today? You find everything okay?" with a smile, and you're quite thrown off the first few times. Also, I had this really great cashier at Harris Teeter give me discounts because I always checked out at his counter :) Really nice people! In general also, people were extremely polite, and many just complimented you too! The above point reminds me, that Americans find it very odd if people use different words than them, like British English for eg. people looked at me funny when I asked where the "Chemist" is (Drug Store). Biscuit (Cookie), Billing Counter (Cashier), Coriander (Cilantro), Petrol (Gas) are others.

Awesome Traffic - Coming from India, I found it amazing the way traffic behaved without any intervention from traffic policemen. Just everyone following the rules. It was a bit bad in NYC, but not even comparable to where I live right now (Kanpur, India). People don't try to cut you off. People let pedestrians cross. Also, the parallel parking is really efficient! The roads are so well maintained, and the scenery is always beautiful.

Speed limits - The US has really high speed limits for us people following the metric system. The highest speed limits are around 75mph or 121 kmph which seemed like gross overspeeding to me. But it contributed to great drives!

Foreigners cannot believe how vast the country is. I am from the West Coast of the U.S. and my Italian relatives come here thinking they can visit me in Seattle, plus also see New York City, Miami, the Grand Canyon and Hollywood all in a week--by car. I can't get them to understand that it's 3,000 miles from the Pacific to the Atlantic coasts.

They are amazed when I tell them that it takes five hours to drive east from my home in Seattle to my mom's house in Spokane -- and she lives in the same state - Washington, only the 16th largest of 50 states.

Treatment of dogs. At least until the 1980s in Guyana, dog food was not a thing that existed. Dogs got table scraps and mostly were outside. They are surprised by how in America, people actually avoid feeding their dog "people food".

The amount of food Americans waste. My grandma to this day remembers a story about when she came to teach in California in the 1970s. The students used to get apples along with their lunch. Nobody ate them, so they'd just throw them away or leave them at the tables. My grandma was shocked at how they were able to just throw out good food like that, and that no other teachers cared..

Dessert. Not dessert as in sweet foods, but as in the specific course eaten after dinner. It doesn't exist. Guyanese people eat dinner and then that's it. I remember going to my American friend's house and being shocked that people in real life actually ate dessert.

The fact that Americans don't stay with relatives when visiting them. Many Americans would rather stay in a hotel, or at least the Americans we know. Guyanese people (or at least my family) think it's strange that you would pay money when you have relatives to stay with, even if you can afford it. I remember when we had a family reunion, nobody paid for a hotel, so there were 3 people in my bed, 2 people on the floor in my room, 2 people in the master bedroom, 2 people in the guest room, 1 person on the couch, and 2 people on the floor in the living room. That was considered totally acceptable, whereas my American stepdad thought we were crazy.

That you can return absolutely anything to a store for any reason, sometimes a couple months later (in Russia, at that time, the only way they would accept anything back would be only if it was defective, the return had to happen in the next day or two, and you had to prove that you didn't break it yourself).

That Americans oftentimes do not remove their street shoes at home — including getting onto the bed while still wearing them; or that they do not hesitate to sit down directly on the pavement or on the floor at a public place (good luck trying that on an average Russian street).
That Americans pretty much do not use cash at all (in Russia, at that time, we had exactly one store that accepted debit cards in my entire 500,000-resident hometown).

That American businesses are incredibly excessive on all kinds of packaging — from Amazon shipping a tiny 8” × 8” book in a 20” × 40” × 10” box (I have pictures!!!) to store clerks insistively bagging and double-bagging even the stuff that has built-in handles like orange juice and milk jugs (in Russia, at that time, everybody brought their own bags for shopping — mostly cloth, or "perhaps-bags").

That Americans rely on credit so broadly (in Russia, at that time, personal lending was nearly nonexistent — other than the one provided by organized crime, that is)

That not all Americans live in "traditional American" houses (if you get most of your information about life in the US from Hollywood movies, that's what you would believe — everyone lives in a house).

That you can't get to the edge of the city and hike in whatever direction you want for however long you want — because every swath of land is somebody's property.

That American houses are nowhere near structurally solid (in Russia, we always wondered how strong Terminator must be, given that he is seen throwing people through walls with ease — in Russian mindset, walls are always made of something nearly impenetrable: brick, cinderblock, concrete, or, at worst, tree trunks: good luck attempting to survive a -30°F Russian winter in a drywall house!)

That Americans make what they call "friends" in a matter of minutes — and ditch them just as fast (in Russia, friendship is much harder and slower to acquire, but once there, it is for life more often than not).

1. Why individual houses are so large? We always get into discussion that house is not just a shelter, but also a manifestation of one's financial achievements.

2. Philanthropy. There is no culture of philanthropy in Russia and many view American philanthropy either as a waste of money or as some intricate plot to get some additional benefits.

3. People don't walk places. They go everywhere by a car.

4. There is almost no public transportation except in a few large cities. People actually have to have cars to get places. Cars are necessity, not luxury.

5. Majority of high and middle schools have sport facilities of very high, almost professional quality.

6. Many schools have orchestras, bands, theaters of a very high, almost professional quality. Free.

7. Every state has a lot of autonomy.

8. President's salary is comparable with the one of a plastic surgeon.

9. President doesn't automatically become the richest person in the country.

10. Majority of things in the US aren't controlled or regulated by the government.

11. Children are expected to leave home when they are 18.

12. Students prefer and are expected to live in a dorm and not with parents.

13. When relatives visit they often stay in the hotel.

14. Many children, even in well to do families, work in fast food, car washes and do a lot of other things to get money and it is not an embarrassment.

15. Parents have their babies sleeping in separate rooms almost from the day of their birth.

16. Russians find children 11-15 are particularly absurd, offensive, and egotistical.

17. Many Russians believe that American system of primary and secondary education is very inefficient. As a mother, I have to explain
that it is very diverse and essentially even in the poorest districts there are tons of resources available for children who are willing to use
them. There are also an opportunity for kids to take advanced and extra advanced classes providing they are willing and able to do the
work. And this differentiation is available as early as elementary school.

18. How well elderly live, even those on SSI and Medicaid. How many services are available to them.
19. How open Americans are about their shortcomings and always ready for self criticism.
20. Millions of people don't have medical insurance.
21. Some hospitals look like five-star hotels.
22. Budgets of some hospitals are equal to h/c budgets of small countries.
23. Doctors tell their patients everything.
24. Return policies and free refill.
25. Idea of a liberal art education. In Russia, after high school graduation, a student should decide on vocation: engineer, doctor,
teacher, lawyer, accountant, etc. It seems inconceivable to attend a university and then to graduate without a solid specialty. I often
have to explain that not knowing what one wants to do after high school is an acceptable norm in US. A student can still acquire
marketable skills, expand his horizons, get a job after graduation, and, what is even more surprising, obtain an advance degree in a
totally different field later. Yes, accountant can attend a medschool and become a doctor and musician can go for aa master degree in
computer science.

Peter Mortensen suggested edits to this answer:

When my husband moved here (to Canada) he was a Chilean living in Spain. When he first arrived, he couldn't believe how little we
had to work for such money, and how we had the audacity to complain about being "overworked." “

He was surprised that he could make enough to pay bills, buy groceries, pay rent, and still afford a social life and luxuries like our Xbox
while working as a pizza chef. Back home, he was working 12-16 hour days 6 six days a week, with an extra 6 six hour shift on
Sundays, and he was making half as much. He had to work 8 eight months (while living with his mother) to afford the ~$4000 that
constituted his plane tickets and first two months living expenses.
Now, he is lazy and entitled like the rest of us.

Emily Smith,

When I taught overseas for a couple years (South Pacific island nation), this is what my close friends expressed disbelief over:
1. That I have never, ever, ever seen anyone firing a gun from a moving vehicle. They think this is happening constantly.
2. I wasn't from Chicago, New York, or Hollywood. That's all there is in America, according to movies/l-dont-know-what. They also
assumed that you could run into ultra-famous people, like, in the open market or on the bus; that you wouldn't was unimaginable. The
real problem was a lack of understanding about the enormity of the country itself, and the vast numbers of people here. America. It's
big.
3. That our bathrooms include the toilet *and* the sink.
4. Clothes washing machines. That I'd never washed clothes by hand before going there was comical to them.
5. That our showers are hot water. Always. Boggles the minds.
6. Turkeys. They're huge, and must be a chicken-y explosion of wonder. Actually, no.
7. We think beef is better -- a "higher" quality of food -- than chicken.
8. Wall-to-wall carpeting. The absolutely needless luxury is both profoundly wasteful and absurd. Not to mention hard to clean. I
couldn't agree more.