

United Kingdom

Advice from Spring 2017

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Preparation

Contact with Your University

The Purdue SA office will already be in contact with your university and will organize your letters of acceptance and anything else. You may be required to apply for housing separately, so keep an eye on your email to make sure you aren't missing any important deadlines.

Packing

What TO Bring

- United Kingdom, and European outlet converters (If you can get one that converts for multiple countries, that's great for travelling)
- Daily contacts
 - If you wear weekly or longer contacts, bringing some daily's can be incredibly helpful for travel as you don't have to carry around contact solution and worry about losing one!
- Travel-sized cosmetics for your trips and for the first couple of days before you've bought actual shampoo, toothpaste, etc.
- Portable phone charger
 - You'll rely on your phone a lot when you travel- don't let it die!
- Clothes that you can mix and match
 - In addition to being able to make lots of outfits, shoot for things you can wash in the same load
- Layers
- Comfortable, closed-toe walking shoes
- Any specific medicine or toiletries you know you need and don't want to worry about hunting down there
- Extra passport sized photos
 - You will likely need one for a metro pass, a student ID, etc. and it can be difficult to find somewhere to print them
- A couple of your favorite pictures of your family and friends to hang up in your room- They take up next to no space and you'll be glad for some decoration and the familiar faces

What NOT to Bring

- Notebooks/general school supplies
 - Every university has a bookstore where you can purchase these things- use that weight in your suitcase for other luggage!
- Rainboots/umbrella
 - It rains so much in England that everyone just wears shoes that water won't ruin
 - Umbrellas are everywhere- buy one for a couple pounds in a convenience store instead of taking up room in your suitcase

- Anything you would absolutely hate to lose
 - Bring everything at your own risk. Especially with traveling, packing and unpacking your things in dozens of random places, items are easily lost, stolen and broken.

Banks/Credit Cards

There are a multitude of options for handling your finances while abroad.

Purdue Federal Credit Union Credit Card

This was what I (William) used while abroad, and it was fantastic. There's a 1% fee on any currency exchange, no atm fees, and you get 1% back automatically. So, essentially there's no fee and it's easy for any Purdue student to get. Also the cards are contactless, which is one of the most used payment methods in the UK, so it was super helpful.

Charles Schwab Investor Checking Account

I (Claire) used this and never had any problems. Schwab has no fees and refunds all of your ATM fees at the end of every month. You have to open a checking account but there is no minimum deposit and no monthly service fee.

Chase Sapphire Preferred Card

Get 40,000 points when you spend \$4,000 in the first 3 months. No foreign transaction fees. Points! Still subject to ATM fees. \$0 first year but \$95/year fee after that.

Capital One No Hassle Card

The Venture cards give you 1.25-2 miles per every dollar you spend. Potentially no foreign transaction fees but I'm not sure. \$0 first year, \$59/year after.

Here are also some helpful links, go do more research yourself!

<http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/avoid-paying-bank-fees-traveling/>

<http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-tips/picking-a-travel-credit-card/>

<http://www.nerdwallet.com/blog/top-credit-cards/nerdwallets-best-travel-credit-cards/>

You can also look into opening a local bank account if you like.

Visa Information

Semester Long Visa

If you are just studying for the semester and then going home, there is no need to fill out any visa paperwork prior to departure. You will ask for a short term study visa every time you enter the country, you show them your information (described below), and they stamp your passport. The passport stamp you'll get at the airport will cover you during the course of your studies.

There is a list of information the person giving you the visa stamp may ask for at Border Control (usually just acceptance letter to your school, but they might ask for international insurance, proof of housing, etc.) . Carry these things with you upon your initial arrival and for any international travel you do while you are studying. I (Claire) left my paperwork behind on an Easter vacation trip to Hungary and had to spend some time sitting in the detainment area of the airport until I could talk the border security officer into letting me through. I (William) forgot mine the first time I went on a trip and managed to pull up my acceptance letter to university on my phone. Luckily the border patrol lady was nice enough to let me in the country.

Student Card Application

- After you have been accepted to University of Southampton you will receive an email which will direct you to the application for a student card. Fill this out before you leave and your student card will be waiting for you when you arrive and check in at the university
- On the Imperial student e service page, one of the steps will be to upload your visa number to be able to apply for classes. However, there is no visa number for short term students, so you should just enter all zeros, and then it'll let you upload a scan of the short term visa. Or, you can just show up to the international student services room in Sherfield hall next to the library, and they will take care of it for you.

On Arrival

Settling In

There are a few organized orientation events and some other registration things you will be informed of and then expected to complete on your own time. There is no break between final exams from the previous semester and the beginning of your semester, so all staff and students will still be on campus for you to check-in with the student office, meet with your professor advisor, etc.

Transportation

London:

London is the queen of transportation systems, and also one of the most expensive. About a week before you leave, apply for a student oyster card. It'll get you discounts on monthly ride passes. It probably won't arrive until about a week or two after you get there. Until then, get a weekly ride card for the first week (about 30 pounds). Once you get your student card, start using that. A monthly unlimited ride pass costs about 80 pounds, but depending on where you live it might be necessary. The best way that I found to get around London, once it got warmer, was the bike system. You pay 2 pounds for 24 hour access and you get unlimited 30 minute rides. On the tube it took me about 30 minutes to get to school, and 20 minutes on the bikes. It was cheaper, healthier, more scenic, and it was honestly the reason I fell in love with London. From where I was staying on Southbank, I could get anywhere in London in less than 30 minutes. It is dangerous because you're riding with traffic, but the British are very polite when it comes to bikers. But, it's still a good idea to get a helmet.

You will also be close to many train stations that can take you all over the Great Britain, and many bus stations that can do the same. Buses are typically the cheapest option, but I'd only recommend them for trips under 5 hours. We took a 12 hour bus ride to Amsterdam overnight and it was one of the worst bus rides of my life. However, we also took a 2.5 hour bus ride to Bath and that was one of the best. It's also easy to take the trains or buses to the airports for fairly cheap. The southern railway has tickets to Gatwick Airport for 7 pounds, and you can use your oyster card. Sometimes, I wasn't even charged, or sometimes they'll give you a voucher for the gatwick express train (which is really nice and more expensive), when the train is down.

As far as taxis go, I took a taxi once, and about halfway to the destination we got out and walked because traffic is so terrible. They're really expensive.

Southampton:

If you're living in one of the farther dorms from campus a semester bus pass will be included in your room and board fees. Take advantage of your bus pass! You can walk to most things in Southampton if you are determined, but the bus system is comprehensive, easy, and quite the experience. If the bus pass is not included in your fees take a couple days to assess how much you think you'll use it and then consider investing in the monthly pass. At the very least, buy yourself a day pass a time or two to ride into down to the quay on the second story of a double-decker bus!

In addition to a great bus system, Southampton has two train stations and a small airport, so if you want to see more of the country or surrounding international destinations, you've got plenty of choices.

General Information

- GoEuro (<https://www.goeuro.com/>) is a great resource to plan your day trips or get a feel for how much transit to a further destination is going to cost you. Choose your destination and travel time window and this site will compare the rates and travel times for trains, planes, and buses
- Skyscanner is also a good app to download on your phone for cheap plane tickets. I know a lot of people who missed flights and bought tickets in the airport on this app because it was a lot cheaper.

Phone Plan

While in the US we rely heavily on normal text messaging, most European countries (England included) use messaging apps like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger more frequently than text messaging. Wifi is not as prevalent as it is in many places in the U.S., so shoot for a phone plan that has quite a bit of data along with calls and texts. It is possible to go a whole semester with only data and no texts or calls (emergency calls are available in all plans), but if having the ability to send messages or call people makes you more comfortable it's up to you.

You can buy a SIM card at vending-machine style distribution centers in airports, stores, etc. quite easily. University of Southampton has many international students, and you will likely have a free SIM card in a welcome package. Once you have purchased a SIM card you can log onto the provided website and purchase whichever plan you think will be best for you.

For you Londoners, I would suggest 3 (Three), because it gave me the best service, it was super cheap, and you can use your data in every European country! Which was awesome for me because I was constantly traveling. I would get the pay monthly plan with 4 gb, 15 pounds a month, and that'll be more than enough. I never used more than 1.5.

Housing

Student Housing

London and Southampton:

Most ERASMUS students just live in the dorms with the domestic students, which is a great way to meet people and make friends. All the dorms are different, some have meal plans, some are closer to campus than others, etc. Details about each dorm will be provided to you so you can request your top 3-5 options.

For London, I would suggest picking one of the dorms in the center of the city. I was farther away from school, but I was a 2 minute walk from the river, where I could see Big Ben, houses of parliament, and the city of London.

Daily Life

Grocery Shopping

WalMart hasn't made it to England, but Asda, Sainsbury's, Tesco, and Waitrose (listed from relatively cheapest to most expensive) are similar options.

Appropriate Attire

People in a city will wear all types of things. These are not rules by any means- wear what you are most comfortable in. But if you are looking for some guidelines, here are a couple:

- Students dress nicely for class. Athletic shorts, yoga pants, and the like are uncommon. You don't need to wear heels and a tie or anything, but most people generally try to look like they woke up with enough time to make themselves presentable.
- If you plan on going out to clubs, be prepared with nice clothes. Most girls wear heels going out and guys wear pants (not shorts) and button downs. You may be refused entry if you are not wearing closed-toe shoes.
 - Word to the wise, in England "pants" means underwear, and "trousers," "jeans," "Chinos," etc. are how you would refer to actual pants.

Primark and consignment shops are great resources for your closet. Remember that you only have as much wiggle room in your suitcase as the extra space you arrived with, so don't buy anything it would devastate you to leave behind when you are expanding your wardrobe.

Whether or not you do a lot of Goodwill-type clothes shopping in America, if you're looking for a sweater or something that may have to stay behind, one that only costs 3 quid and may fall apart before you have to go back to America suddenly becomes a good investment.

Vintage shops are also pretty big in the UK, and there were at least 7 pound sales in London while I was there, where every item was 1 pound. Look out for these because they're fun with friends and pretty useful.

Notes on Culture

- Some English food is a little strange, but don't be afraid to try it! Milk tea, scones, cottage pie, bangers and mash, fish and chips, mushy peas- it's all quite good and at least worth a taste for the experience.

University Life

Classes

English universities give significantly less homework than Purdue, so you're responsible for staying abreast of the material on your own. Midterm exams aren't common, so most of your grade will boil down to the final exam. Students are students, so most people won't start studying for exams until Revisions Week regardless of the percentage of your grade they account for- follow the example of your classmates' study habits and you'll be fine.

Unlike America, students in the U.K. don't really study in groups. There are generally plenty of study spaces in the library, but it's mostly single-desk spots. If you ask people if they'd like to study together they may think it's a little odd, and doing lab reports or coursework in a group is uncommon.

Things to Do

The best way to find the best the city has to offer is to ask a local what you should do before you leave. That being said, some of our favorite spots were:

London:

- Look on TimeOut's website for events going on around you each week that could be really cool. London always has some sort of festival going on, so take advantage of these.
- Look at the groups and organizations list of your university and find what interests you. Email the organization and find out how you can join. I got to hang out and go on trips with the outdoor club at Imperial, and it was loads of fun.
- Heaven and Ministry. These are two of the clubs you should definitely visit. Ministry of Sound has a student night on Tuesdays and it's a huge club. Make sure you buy tickets early because they sell out fast, and you can get special student prices. Heaven is the most famous gay club in the world. Go there at least once.
- Museums. Go to all of them. Especially before April because then tourists start to cram in there. But they are free and really cool. I would stop in some on my way home from school some days and just walk through one or two sections.
- Pub crawls. You're in London! Plan one.
- Check out The Vaults, it's an underground theatre organization and every event is super cool. Their Alice's Adventures Underground is one of the best things ever. It has sold out many times in the last few years, and their regular events are just as cool.
- See a play or two, preferably one by the Royal Shakespeare Company. It's a hugely prestigious play company that puts on great shows.
- Markets: These were my favorite things because I love street food and crafts. The biggest one is Borough Market, the prettiest one is the Columbia road flower market, and the hippest one is the Camden Market. All have delicious food and vibes.
- Travel: It's incredibly cheap to travel through Europe, and this'll be one of the best times to see more of the world. Grab a flight, stay in a hostel (bring a good padlock and a small backpack), take a walking tour of the city you're in (free walking tour. Best way to see any city), and meet some amazing people.

- Chinatown: Eat all the food, oh my god.

Southampton:

- Tudor House and Garden: Right across from St. Michael's (the oldest building in town), this merchant's home from the Tudor era has since been converted to a museum. If the architecture isn't enough to draw you in, it's a great walk-through history lesson if you want to learn more about Southampton through the years.
- Isle of Wight: Just a ferry ride away is the Isle of Wight, which has some lovely scenery and is a common vacation destination for U.K. natives
- Jester's: Frequently rated as "the worst club in the U.K." Jester's is something you should see before you leave. Wear shoes that you don't mind ruining, get a Jesticle (but drink responsibly because no one really knows what's in it) and don't leave before they play the "Baywatch" theme to get the full Jester's experience
- The Hobbit: The Tolkein-themed pub is a good place to start the night with quirky decor and a dozen cocktails named after the main characters of the series. Try all 12 of the signature cocktails and you'll become a member of the Fellowship, which earns you a t-shirt and the right to order The Nazgûl
- SeaCity Museum: Southampton was the port from which the Titanic set sail, so check out the anchor memorial downtown and this museum commemorating the ship and her passengers. There's at least one day a year when admission is free, so do some Google searching before you pay for your ticket!

Miscellaneous Advice

If you can get by with having extra room in your suitcase on the way there, try to make that happen- you'll accumulate a lot of things you'll want to bring home with you! On the same note, pack at least a couple sets of clothes that you've had for a while, your oldest socks and underwear, etc. You'll wash holes in many of your clothes this semester/throw them away to make more room in your suitcase, so don't take anything you'll miss too much.

-Claire Holkenbrink, University of Southampton

Basically, do everything. Some days were just to sit around playing video games and watching movies with friends, but there are too many beautiful things in this country to sit around in your room watching netflix for three months. I had a hard time meeting new people, but don't stop trying. After the first week I put a piece of paper on my door saying "Foreign Exchange student, knock if you want to chat". That day I met the people that I hung out with the rest of the semester, and they were some of the best people. Take initiative, and it could be the best experience of your life.

-William Morton, Imperial College

Contacts

Claire Holkenbrink: cholkenb@purdue.edu

- STUDIED: Civil Engineering, emphasis in Structures
- LIVED: Connaught Hall, a freshmen dorm at University of Southampton
- TRAVELED: Vienna (Austria), Pamhagen (Austria), Budapest (Hungary), Bristol, Bath, Worcester, Bradford-on-Avon, Oxford (England)
- ASK ABOUT: ERASMUS activities, housing options, study habits, how to spend free time

William Morton: wmorton@purdue.edu

- STUDIED: Material Science and Engineering
- LIVED: Xenia Hall in Southbank, London
- TRAVELED: Bath (UK), all of Scotland, Cork (Ireland), Paris (France), Amsterdam (Netherlands), Venice (Italy - during Carnival, so cool), Brighton (UK), Barcelona (Spain),
- ASK ABOUT: International Student Experiences, sports teams, what clubs to go to on which days, and which areas to see in London.