

BRUNEL UNIVERSITY, United Kingdom 2008-09

Introduction

Whilst here in London, there so many memorable experiences that I could speak of—the initial shock of not having your support network of back home and knowing that it's a 10 hours plane ride back to loved ones. I remember waking up one morning in the first month. Looking out the window, it hit me that I was in another country. A country with people who had different values and view points than I. At this time, I figured will I let it get me down and wallow in the pity or will I get up and experience its culture for all it had to offer. Therefore, my friends and I jumped on the tube and headed into central London. When we got off the train at our final destination, (which happened to be Piccadilly circus) I was overwhelmed with the feeling of arrival. I felt like yes the dream finally came true. I was in a place that many have only dreamed of being. I was in a city with much history and culture. I knew at that moment that not only was I here in the UK to study, but more importantly I was here to experience a land that I've only read about in text books.

Preparing to Leave

I would suggest that study abroad students coming to the UK should carry all the paperwork that they had submitted for the study abroad application with them. For example, bank statements, letter of acceptance from Brunel your passport, and visa. I made a copy of everything I turned in with my application for study abroad and gave it all to the customs official when I arrived. The customs official first asked what I was going to do whilst in Europe. I told him that I was here to study. He thumbed through it and asked what I was going to be studying here at Brunel. All of these items should be carried in your carry-on luggage, to avoid holding up the line trying to fetch it from your suitcases.

If you are need to carry medication with, then you need from your doctor a note on their letterhead stating what the medication is (name of drug / dosage) and what it's used for. This way the security agents at the airport won't confiscate the medication.

Check with your bank to see if there are fees for making withdrawals in another country. Some banks will charge you a fee to take out of the ATM, for convergence rate of the dollar to the pound, and other miscellaneous fees. A bank that I suggest to switch to is Charles Schwab. With Charles Schwab, you can use it anywhere in the UK where a VISA logo is accepted. There are no charges for using ATMs, nor are there convergence rates. The most important reason why I opened an account is because Charles Schwab will refund any banking fees (including ATM) to you at the end of the month. It's definitely something to look into.

Climate/Packing

Be prepared for a colder winter. When the weather is cold and not rainy, it's a bit dry. When adjusting to the climate, you will notice that your skin and eyes are drying out.

You will also notice that the water in the showers will dry out your skin and hair. I would suggest bringing some lotion and eye drops to get you started here.

West London and Central London is a lot like the microclimates of San Francisco. You can wear a heavy jacket when at SFSU but have a t-shirt and light sweater on at the Ferry Building. For everyday weather, I would recommend layered clothing.

In the winter, it occasionally snows here. A warm overcoat, beanie, scarf, and gloves will help. I would also recommend bringing thermal under garments for the cold winter days. For the rain, bring an umbrella and shoes that are compatible with rain and water. I wouldn't waste too much room in your suitcases for shorts and summer type wear. Even when it's hot here, it doesn't last long.

A thing that I can't stress enough is the lack of sunshine here in west London. Some may suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder, the lack of vitamin D from sunshine. A sunlamp is something that you may want to invest in, but they are pricey. Another thing that may help are melatonin pills. These type of pills will help in getting your body's clock on the right path. In the US, the pills are over the counter, but you need to have a prescription in the UK.

As I have stated many of us are effected by the lack of sunshine. A service that I felt very useful with dreary days of climate as well as the culture shock was the on campus-counseling centre. A counselor will work with your to navigate through your away from home depression and your culture shock woes. Some other students won't need the services but they are there for use.

Flight Information

Many airlines have limits for the number of luggages each person can check in and charge for additional luggages. I would check with your individual airline to find out what they allow. With your airline, they will have dimensions and weight of acceptable checked and carry on items.

As I said prior, you should carry your passport and packet in your carry on luggage. In the event that your luggage is lost, you have your important documents with you. I would also recommend taking a copy of your bankcards, ID cards, passport and leaving it at home, in your flat, in case you lose it whilst you're here. This way when you get back to your flat, you can cancel all cards and reorder new ones. You should also heed the international office's advice of leaving a copy of your passport and visa with your family in the U.S. You should bring your driver's license with you.

Arrival/Rules and Regulations

Unless you arranged with someone prior to arriving, no one will pick you up from the airport. You can either take a taxi or a bus to Brunel University. The taxi cost about 20 – 30 pounds and takes 15 – 20 minutes. Tell the driver you want to go to Brunel University, Kingston lane. This way he will drop you off at the round about at the school. The bus ride is about 45 minutes long and drops you off in front of the university. The cost is 2

pounds. Take the U3 to Brunel University. A ticker on board will announce where you're at. When you see it say Brunel University, hit the stop button.

When you first arrive on campus, you will need to go to the housing office to get your keys for your room. If you're coming in via the taxi, then it'll be to your left behind the fitness gym (glass building) as you walk down the walk way. They will then give you your keys and map of where to go for your housing. They will also give you a checklist of items. Make sure you fill that out properly and return it to them ASAP. Improper check in will result in an extra charge.

A thing that I can't stress enough is if you don't understand something or why you're doing something, ask questions. Personnel will assume that you understand everything that was proposed to you if you don't have questions.

After settling in, go to downtown Uxbridge and get a cell phone. All you need is a pay as you go cell phone. A place I would recommend going to is Carphone Warehouse. It's in the town centre with a big blue and white sign. I recommend going there because they have different phones, cell companies, and various pay as you go plans. All cell phones receive incoming calls and text messages free of charge. It only costs to send a text or make a call. A service provider I would suggest to go with is Orange. Orange has the best in getting more for your buck. I had a plan of topping up 10 pounds a month with 300 text messages to send and each call was 20p per minute. Definitely worth it since most of your friends call or just text you.

Housing

I would suggest living on campus. This way you are in the central location for classes and studying. There are a few options. There's an ensuite where you have your own room, bathroom, and a share a kitchen. In this kitchen, you will have to supply your own crockery (pots, pans, dishes). The trick is to befriend a flat mate, so you can purchase an inexpensive dish set, pots, and pans and split the cost.

Another option is to have your own room, but share a kitchen and bathroom. The choice is yours as to what you're comfortable with. In the ensuites, the kitchen is cleaned once a week and your bathroom is cleaned once a month by the cleaners. The garbage from your rooms is emptied once a week. The other options of room situations, the kitchen and bathrooms are cleaned daily, and the bedroom trash is cleared once a week.

There is a draw back to living on campus. You are housed with usually first year students. However, an advantage to that is that you will meet a new person and will experience college away from home just as they are.

Academics

I suggest that you ask questions of your teachers. The teaching here is different than that of SFSU. Unlike the close relationship that we have with professors at SFSU, students are required to find the answers themselves. Again, if you don't understand something ask them to explain it to you. In one professor's office, I was a permanent staple. I would ask

him for suggestions on my work and how I could improve. In the graphic courses, students are graded on three or four different assignments. At SFSU, we will work on an assignment and bring it to class for critiques, but at Brunel that isn't done. It's a little different, but you have to get used to it.

You will have your tutor to voice concerns to (he is like our Nancy at SFSU) and Paul Turnock (PT). PT is fond of exchange students and he does everything he can to help you adjust to life at Brunel.

Computer labs are at your disposal here at Brunel. I wish SFSU had labs that were available to us 24/7 as they are here. After your orientation with your tutor, the tutor will tell you which labs you have access to. Remind them that you need after hours access to these labs as some of your work will be done well into the night during submission periods.

Campus Life

Campus life is quite different from SFSU. Many students here are on their first stay away from home and it's their liberation period. There are two pubs on campus. Drinking and socializing is a big part of the culture at Brunel. I would recommend going to the pub and having a pint whilst making friends from the people around you. There are also clubs and organizations that you can join on campus as well. Brunel has younger students than SFSU does, even for the master's program.

There are two pubs here as well as a night club (small in size). Students can enjoy the nightlife well into the morning hours (2am). Unlike SFSU as a commuter school, there are two shops here that you can buy food from and a cafeteria type place as well. There is also a café that sells food.

Social Life

To meet new people, go to the pubs that are on campus and start talking to people. Force yourself to talk to people in your classes. It's a bit overwhelming but think of it as yourself on that first day of school. It was so overwhelming, but once you started talking to people it gets easier. Before you know it, you'll have friends and study partners. I suggest making friends with other international students from other universities. They will know exactly what you're going through in the sense of culture shock. At first English people are a bit standoffish. As Americans we are loud and unruly. Don't let it discourage you. Once you get to talk to them, they will open up and become great friends.

A thing that I can't over stress is to get out of your room and get into central London as often as possible. You're only here for 9 months, so each day counts. Take your camera everywhere you go on campus because you never know when a photo op will pop up.

Leisure

In Uxbridge, there isn't much to see in the way of sights and sounds. Coming from San Francisco, it's a bit of a disadvantage. For this reason I suggest hopping on the tube and

going into central London. There is a must see near the University. There is Windsor, which is home to Windsor Castle. It's a 45 minute bus ride from the tube / bus station.

Befriend as many non-Americans that you can, in order to experience their cultures and customs throughout the year. In time, you will be able to share some of our customs with them (ex: Thanksgiving).

Shopping

There are a couple mom and pop shops scattered around but mainly bigger stores. Clothing stores to look forward to are Top Shop and Primark. Primark is Wal-Mart on steroids. It has better clothing than Wal-Mart but with Wal-Mart prices. It's a win-win situation.

For printing assignments when it's hand in time, there are a couple of options. If you're printing black and white or things that don't mean much in the way of quality I would print on campus, because it's the most inexpensive way to print. I would recommend using Pronta Print here in Uxbridge for your submissions. It is a little pricier than Uxbridge printers but the quality is far better and the staff is quite knowledgeable.

Closing

There's so much to do and so much to see whilst you're here. Take everything in and waste no time. The best advice I can give you is to be a sponge and absorb everything. Absorb the local customs, language (as you will find out it's a bit different from ours), and friendships that you will have for the rest of your lives. You will learn a lot about yourself and how you handle stress and change. It's going to be a wild ride that's going to come to end before you know it. Above anything, remember to have fun.