

Before You Leave

Try to get all of the running around and hustle and bustle of packing, goodbyes, research and shopping as done as possible a few days before you actually leave. Preparing yourself mentally and emotionally to be away from home for a year is something that you will need time to process and adjust to, so it's best to leave the last few days before you leave for absorbing the situation that you're about to enter and taking it easy before the stress of jetlag and a new and unknown environment. If possible, make contact with someone who has gone to your study abroad university to ask them questions about their last days at home and their first days in a new country. Without a doubt, this can be a time of anxiety and excitement, and you are bound to have questions.

Packing

Pack with the understanding that England is not like traveling to a faraway planet, and has everything that you could possibly need to buy. Bring the essentials, but don't stress about whether you'll have enough toothpaste to last through the entire year, or whether or not your clothes will go out of fashion by the time your plane lands. I packed one really large suitcase, a small carry-on, and a backpack. In the carry-on, I put my laptop and some clothes and sheets to tide me over in case my large suitcase didn't get to England at the same time I did. Make sure to have copies of all of your important documents—passport, California I.D., bank cards, etc., hidden safely in your bags in case of emergency. I found it helpful to pack slowly over a period of many days, because it really made me more mentally prepared for the new life that I was about to enter. Pack what you really need, not what you think you might like to have around. In other words, I doubt that snowshoes or a basketball are the most practical things to take up room in luggage flying halfway around the world!

Arrival

I highly, highly recommend signing up for the Meet and Greet and International Orientation. Many of my best friends, to this day, are people that I met during International Orientation. Trust me, it will be instant bonding with everyone else as jetlagged as you. Whether or not you find much use for the many lectures and field trips that you will go on this week, the most important aspect is that orientation gives you a whole week to get used to your surroundings before moving into your permanent residence.

Academic Life

Grading is very, very different in the United Kingdom. Instead of the American A-F grading system, they use “firsts” through “thirds.” A 70, unlike in America, is a 1st (like our “A”) and a very high grade. Although the grading system can be confusing, just remember that a 1st, a 2.1, or 2.2 (2's are the “B” range) mean that you are doing well in school. Always ask your teachers if you don't understand, and they'll be more than happy to explain. Courses run very differently than in America. Most likely, you will

take three courses a semester, with one hour of seminar and one hour of lecture each per week (6 hours/week). They expect much more independent research than in America.

Housing

Many international students live in the university halls of residence. Each hall has a different reputation that appeals to different people. Halifax Hall, from my experience, is quiet, attractive, and a good place to spend the year. Ranmoor is known for being rowdier and much more of a party hall. In all honesty it is, to put it nicely, the least aesthetically-pleasing hall as well. I had orientation in Ranmoor, and I found the rooms to be not at all inviting or comfortable. Earnshaw can also be very loud. Each hall of residence has its own pub, where many people go to hang out in the evenings. If choosing to live in halls, pick one based on your personal preferences and needs. Consider study habits, bed time, atmosphere and environment, social needs (how much you do or don't like to party, etc.), whether or not you need a phone or internet in your room, etc. The university should send you an accommodation guide which gives descriptions. These do not mention everything, however, so again, if possible, get in contact with someone who has been to the university to ask more questions. Location could also be considered. The halls, while further from campus (a twenty to thirty minute walk) than most other university accommodations, are in a part of the city that is more quiet and residential, with small neighborhood shops, parks, and a lot of greenery. A lot of the flat/apartment university accommodation, such as Broadlane Court, is very close to the university (a few minutes' walk), but in a much more industrial and busy part of town.

Money and Banking

Some international students chose to open English bank accounts and to transfer their funds. I, however, chose to just keep my American bank accounts and to use online banking to monitor how much money I have in my savings and checking accounts. It is very easy to use your debit or credit card in most places, and ATMs are all and no problem to access. If you would like to open an English account, there are resources on-campus to help you decide which would be best for your particular situation. Make sure to budget your money to have enough for travelling both around the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe. Sheffield can get routine after a while, and you will want to see what else the UK and Europe has to offer.

Health

During orientation week, you will register with the NHS, or National Health Service. This means that if you have any illness during the year, you can see your NHS doctor. There are also many drug stores and pharmacies around (the Boots chain, particularly), which carry the typical medicines such as cough syrups, aspirins, etc. which you may need over the year.

Transportation

Since the bus system is privatized in the UK, Sheffield has several bus companies which run different routes and with different prices. Most everything in Sheffield is, however, within walking distance. You will get very used to walking half an hour to an hour to get

places within and around the city. Sheffield is a very hilly city, so before you know it your legs will be stronger than when the year began! There is also a tram system in Sheffield. Taking the train around the UK is incredibly easy and a great way to see every part of the country. If you plan on taking the train at least a few times over the year, get a Youth Rail card- you will save 1/3 off every train ticket. There is an STA store on-campus where you can buy this card. Use www.nationarail.co.uk to book train tickets. You will learn quickly how to navigate this site. Many students also use taxis for a night out. They can be pretty reasonable, especially when split between multiple people.

Shopping

There are many options for shopping in Sheffield. The city is home to Meadowhall, a huge mall easily accessible by tram. Students living in halls can get much of what they need in Broomhill or on Ecclesall Road, residential shopping centres with grocery stores, clothes stores, restaurants, etc. A lot of things needed at the beginning of the year- bedding, lamps, and such- can also be bought in the city centre or The Moor. The Moor, located right next to the city centre, is a pedestrian shopping area with department stores and market stalls selling everything from socks to strawberries. Shopping here tends to be cheaper. There are also many, many used stores in Sheffield (like Oxfam) that are great sources of cheap clothes and books. I found a lot of the books I needed at these stores for only a few pounds each, not to mention some cute, reasonably priced clothes to supplement the ones I got sick of after a few months!

Travel

There is an unbelievable amount of things to see and do in the Europe. The University of Sheffield runs a program called "Give It A Go" which sponsors bus trips around the country. My first semester in Sheffield, before I was really comfortable here and I understood the ins and outs of getting around, these bus trips were a great, safe way to see the country. Give It A Go tickets are purchased from the box office, in the student union. Once you get used to the trains and transportation, however, all of Europe is at your fingertips. All of the UK is easily accessible by train. I have taken the train to places like York, Bath, Edinburgh, London and Manchester. By American standards, the UK is a very small country. See as much of it as you can! Sheffield is also only a train ride from Manchester Airport and a train/bus ride from Doncaster Airport. Make use of websites like www.ryanair.com, which sells unbelievably cheap flight tickets around Europe. If you make use of cheap airfare, and keep your eyes open for reasonably priced hostels or hotels, travel can be inexpensive. Eat market or grocery store food instead of at restaurants. Remember that absorbing the atmosphere of your surroundings is just as (if not more) important than seeing the museums or statues that your guidebook recommends. You are studying abroad because you want to see the real Europe- make the most of your year by seeing it for what it really is.

Personal Notes from Me...

The UK is well-known for being a place in which drinking and pub life are quite prevalent and popular among the student population. Before coming, I was worried that I would not be able to make a lot of friends or meet a lot of people without partaking in the drinking/pub/disco scene. If this isn't something that you are comfortable with, don't

worry. There are a lot of ways to make friends and meet people outside of this atmosphere, which may seem overwhelming if it isn't what you like. Like I mentioned before, Give It A Go sponsors a lot of fun activities, like yoga, ceramics, language courses, archery, and the like, in which you have chances to meet people. The University of Sheffield is also well-known for having a student union with an unbelievable amount of clubs and organisations. There is even a pirate club! Find an activity that you like and want to pursue, and join the club. I promise, you will make at least a few good friends out of your club.

Also...

Everyone is different, but I found my first days in Sheffield to be quite overwhelming, emotionally and mentally. Be prepared to be excited, sad, happy, home sick and confused... probably all within the same day. Remember that not everything is going to be easy, and not everything is going to work out the way that you hoped it would. England is an amazing country, but don't assume it is all out of *Pride and Prejudice*. Parts of Sheffield are beautiful, other parts are really industrial and run-down. Give yourself time to get used to things- don't expect to be acclimated, adjusted and comfortable right away. Most of all, keep yourself open to experience everything (good, bad, and even the mundanely normal) that your year has to offer. Study abroad is an amazing opportunity in which we get to see another part of the world, day-by-day, beyond the typical tourist. Make the most of it!!

University of Hull
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I sit here writing this essay with only 3 more weeks of the second semester left. The pending farewells spread a sore sensation from the middle of my chest. What is amazing are not the sights you see, the parties you attend, or activities you partook. At least for me, it's about connections that I've had with other people. How this invisible bond forms between two people from different places on this rock is something worth all the trips in your life. How two people travelling at the speed of our modern world could collide brings wonder to my mind. Why us? Will we ever meet again? A topic for some other time.

Before all those wonderful experiences can happen, I will share with you my experiences in terms of the logistics of studying abroad, specifically in the University of Hull.

Before You Leave

As everyone else is probably telling you already, get your visas ready. I have a friend here from Arizona that either had the impression she could just come here and get a visa or that she did not need one. Surprisingly, she's still here. But there was a really angry customs agent when she came back from going home for winter break. She still doesn't have a student visa, and the idea of travelling to other countries in Europe and probably not getting back into the country was quite frightening and prevented some trips. So don't be like her and be sure to get those visas taken care of.

Packing

Organizers or people with experience kept on telling the study abroad students to pack really light and just buy stuff when you get to your destination. Now of course, you wouldn't pack pots and

pans, you can always buy stuff with your roommates and share the cost. However, they recommended the same for clothing. Besides packing light, they also told us that you would want to match the local fashion. Now, I'm not a person that buys new clothes all the time, I keep my clothes for quite a while. So, at least for me, this advice does not make sense. First of all, a lot of people don't like shopping at Walmart for clothes (ASDA's is the England equivalent), and clothing in England is more expensive than the states when it comes to the other regular clothing shops. Maybe it does work, but I didn't do it. Second of all, at least for England, the fashion is not that different. Have some financial space to buy some stuff, but pack your clothes anyway.

And of course, pack basic toiletries or that special something that you like. But house wares can be bought here no problem.

Bring your laptop. The computer labs here are old. Goes with a phenomenon I've observed here - a lot of English people are slow typers. At least around here....

Academic Life

Being a drama major, it is slightly harder to comment on this, since a lot of our work is physical and activity oriented, different from, say, the business school. However, the general consensus I have among my friends of business majors, biology majors, psychology majors, is that the workload in England is MUCH EASIER. You meet once a week, and there is not that much homework. The only problem is they wait until the end of the semester than base your ENTIRE grade on a ONE paper or exam. No extra points for attendance or class participation. Be careful not to fall into the misconception that you have no studying to do. They don't assign it because they assume you are going to research the topic on your own. They do grade differently here, too, a 70 is an A.

With that said, Hull has a fantastic drama department, and the other departments are good too. In the drama department, the teachers and the regular students are quite close and often joke around. Everyone is quite friendly in the department. And also, our experiences as one year study abroad students will be a lot different than the students who have to do the whole 3 years, not to mention they have to write a dissertation to graduate.

Since you only meet once a week for each class, you'll often have only one class a day, which means LOADS of personal time. I'll talk about this in Social Life.

Housing

Student housing is a good option for a few reasons. You're close to other international students, which is good for making friends. You're close to the campus, which allows you to participate more in school and activities. However, there are a few things to look out for. Pay for a large room. A premium large room would be good if you can afford it, but a standard large room is much better than a medium or small room. The format of some student houses leaves some rooms the size of a closet. You'll end up paying the same amount of money as someone who has a bigger and much more comfortable room. The larger rooms are only a little bit more expensive, but it is well worth it. Trust me.

Based primarily on luck, standard room applicants end up living in different levels of comfort. There are houses that have been newly renovated, equipped with washing/drying machines, and then there are houses like mine. The rooms are fine, but the kitchen and bathroom are old, and we don't have a washing machine. It's not bad, we think of it as a house with character. The university doesn't have enough money to renovate all houses at once, so it is a slow process. It is good to know that my house will be renovated for next year, when I can't enjoy any of it. However, over all, we have complaints, but we all have a fun time nonetheless.

Money and Banking

I met a girl before I left that was going to study in London and had this idea in her head of just hopping on the cheap European airways and having lunch in Italy and shopping in Paris-- in the same day! She told me she'd done it before. I don't know if she did in fact live her life like that here, but I can tell you it is expensive. It doesn't matter if you are in London or Hull, get ready to save money. Hull is supposedly cheaper than a lot of other places, but I think Britain is just pricey in general. Get financial aid, take out some loans, you can just pay it back later. It will be worth it, and ten years from now, it will still be worth it. I had to make some long distance calls to sort out my financial aid even though I already sort it out before I left. Bottom line, it still is expensive.

Open an account here. I was one of the ones with Bank of America and just took out cash at the local Barclay's bank's ATM for free. Not a great option. I always got charged international fees if I bought something with my BofA debit card, and some places don't even take it. Not to mention I get charged 40 dollars every time housing takes money from my account. In addition, the ATM at the local Barclay's is unreliable and often breaks down. If you are doing anything besides studying, it will probably be more convenient to have an English or European account or card for buying plane or train tickets online. It's so late for me, that I'm just going to stick with my international charges and tough it out. The whole Bank of America international ATM scheme only works for 6 banks in 6 countries in Europe. It is better just to open an account.

Health

As long as you follow what your advisors say, you will be fine.

Food

Not that great. But they have a lot of Indian food. I ended up going from not knowing how to cook to being a fairly decent cook. You'll have tons of opportunities to practice, and the money saved is a blessing.

Transportation / Travel

Remember that dream of seeing the world with just your train pass? NOT in Britain you don't. Transportation is quite expensive in England. Train tickets are expensive. Book everything in advance or you won't save money. I'm on a budget, so I try to plan out my journeys a few weeks ahead. Sure, it's more fun to be spontaneous, but it will cost you. Hull to London train tickets costs 13.50 pounds if booked in advance.

Europe does have cheap airways, Ryanair being the cheapest and largest of them all. However, it still will cost that girl I mentioned a lot to hop from country to country on a whim. If you book in advance, then you could find very cheap tickets, but beware, the prices can be misleading. If you find a ticket for 99 cents from Ryanair, the tax could be 20 pounds. It will differ from airport to airport as well. Flying to Dublin from Leeds (middle of England) cost me 15 pounds total one way, but the return from Dublin to Doncaster cost me 20+ pounds.

Coaches are cheaper, but sitting on a coach for 7 hours can be a killer.

The most important aspect of the travels is accommodation. I found super cheap travel to Dublin for St. Patrick's Day, but I could not find anything cheap for accommodation. In fact, it was so full, I hardly found ANY accommodation. Hostels are great to meet people, and if you don't mind sharing rooms with strangers that might snore (it might be me), then 8 - 16 or even 24 bed dorm rooms can lower prices significantly. Book online in advance. Online vendors buy at bulk, and sell at their own and often lower prices. I have heard you can find amazing prices if you just go to your destination and look around, but look where? It didn't work for me in London, and I believe the prices online are unbeatable. www.hostelworld.com is a great website, and www.bootsnall.com isn't bad either. Just Googling will give other great sites as well.

With all that said, other countries in Europe seem to be much cheaper than the UK especially since they use a weaker currency, the Euro. Spain for example, should be cheaper in everything. France, however, might be really expensive.

In terms of travelling around your own city, buses and taxis are great. If you have 4 people or more, sharing a taxi is cheaper than the bus. Except in London.

DON'T GO HOME during winter break if you are staying for a year. Spending Christmas with your roommate or friend, perhaps even from another European country, is much more rewarding. I did it. If there is no opportunity like that, plan to travel with some other people, from home or with new friends. You'll see your family in another 6 months. Trust me.

Social Life

Whether you spend majority of your time with other international students or your department, social life is great. I would have liked to spend more time with people in my own department, since I spent majority of it with other international students, but I am happy with my semester nonetheless.

The British have a very different view of social time. Whereas majority of people in the US party on the weekends, for the British it is possible everyday. As I said there is a lot of personal time as a student, and the general attitude is to do work during the day, and the night should be left for leisure. Britons are notorious for drinking, which explains the full size pub on campus. Not to mention the campus nightclub. A nightclub run by the student union. Amazing huh?

HOWEVER, there is a major time difference, pubs close at 12. The new law that just passed allowed stores, bars and clubs to apply for new licences to serve alcohol all day. Clubs all close at 2 - 3 earliest, but generally, it feels like the whole city closes down a few hours earlier than in the US. And it does. Shops, including malls, close at 5 pm. There aren't a lot of places to get lunch around the campus. Pizza is sold after 5 pm as a takeaway. Whereas, people in the US are used to going out at 11, bars and pubs start closing at 11 here, unless they have the new licence. That leaves the clubs. So a lot of people either go out earlier than people do in the states, or they just end up in clubs towards the end of the night. A lot of shops won't sell liquor after 11, so if you are looking for some mood setting beverages, buy it early.

International students are amazing. By definition, all international students are explorers, so a commonality is already present. The international parties have been the best parties I've been to here, so don't miss out.

But don't forget that you are in England, so make sure you hangout with some English people as well. Sounds silly, but it is very easy to stay just with other international students, as have I for the most part. You only begin to understand a culture by being friends with people of that culture. It's really different than hanging out with international students, and in many ways can be more enriching.

And especially if you belong to a department like drama, don't miss out on opportunities to hangout with your classmates. You will have so much fun.

Lastly, I want to comment on experiencing life. When I first got here, I think like most people, I had to idea that experiencing different countries and cultures meant I had to travel and SEE a lot of sights and stuff. I have realized that sightseeing is in fact quite boring for me. If I set out to do some activities, the experiences become much more enriching. Take an art class in France. Take a cooking class in Italy, Or vice versa. Or both. Catch the festivals. Volunteer for a week or weekend. Beer tasting, Food sampling. Go canoeing on a fjord in Norway. HOME STAY. My Christmas in Germany with my roommate and his family was amazing.

Plan your journey around things you want to do, not things you want to see. Life would be much more meaningful. Your experience would be truly memorable. If you are in a department like drama, be sure to audition for some plays. I was scared and I made the mistake of not auditioning for anything until now, when all the main stage productions are gone. Luckily I got into some small productions directed by my friends. Just don't count out academic activities as potentially fun and enriching experiences. It's not all about seeing monuments or dancing and drinking in nightclubs.

I wish you all well, and if you are still deciding whether or not you want to do this, let me answer for you - yes.