

United Kingdom

Air tickets

Always buy a roundtrip ticket. I bought a one-way b/c I wasn't sure when I'd be returning. When I went to buy a return ticket, I had to buy it in ££ – which at the time, the exchange rate was horrible. I ended up spending about double the price of a roundtrip on my return ticket. If you buy a roundtrip ticket in the US, it's in dollars (better to pay a change fee if you decide to change the return date). I found a good deal on the STA travel website – and change fees were less than through the airline carriers.

Visa

For the visa, be sure you have the letter from the school. If you are staying for two semesters (and the letter is only for one), but sure to request a revised copy before you travel. I had one only for a semester, but was staying for a year. I had an understanding immigration official and showed him other paperwork (and was able to get a passport stamp for the year). Another student had the same letter and didn't ask for the year stamp. She got a revised letter from the school when she got over there, but had to travel to the immigration office and pay some obscene fee (like £250) for the change. With the stamp for more than a 6 month (I believe) stay, you are entitled to work part time (no more than 20 hours per week) and use the healthcare system.

Packing

You are limited to 2 bags checked and one carry on. I used this to the fullest. Be careful on the weight – the airlines will charge you excess fees for going over weight limits. Also remember, you will accumulate stuff while you're there, so keep that in mind. Pretty much just take what you'll need. The summer was warm – t-shirts, etc. The winter is cold and rainy. Best is to layer, so bring sweaters and shirts. You'll need a heavy coat (preferably one that is waterproof). The rain is usually not heavy, but drizzly and constant. Most of the rain is in the winter. Bring a good umbrella (usually very windy and cheap umbrellas won't last a block). Also remember, whatever suitcases you bring will have to be lugged around. If you are by yourself when you get to the airport, public transportation will be a nightmare if you have 2 or three bags. There are express trains from Heathrow (to Paddington station – not too far from school) and from Gatwick to Victoria Station (south side of the city). A black cab from Heathrow to central London is about £60 (roughly \$110) – I found that out the hard way.

What to expect upon arrival and first two weeks

Things will be different. You can't hold anything to the "American" standard. I think it helps just going in with an open mind. When you get there, you'll want to start searching for a place to live. One thing I found about EBS is that the staff in the International Office and student services were very helpful. Feel free to utilize them – whether to recommend an area to live in or to explain the tube system. The Underground (tube) and buses are great ways to get around. Depending on where you live, either method might be more useful. I preferred walking wherever possible (esp since I was only about 30 min from school). Go by student services when you get to EBS and ask for a student discount pass form. Once you apply (and for a small fee), you can get a student discount pass for the buses and tube. If you buy a weekly or monthly pass, you can save a good amount (I think it's 20-30% off). There are several buses that stop at Baker Street (right in front of the tube station). From the tube station, Regent's Park is about 2 blocks behind. From the tube station, it's about a 5 min walk to campus.

I found a good way to get a feel for the city is to take a bus tour. There are a couple of bus companies that have hop-on, hop-off bus tours of the city (like the Big Bus Company). It stops at all the good landmarks in the city (including right in front of the Baker Street Tube station). I found it useful to take for my first exploration around the city (to get a better idea of where I wanted to go and where things are).

Other things to expect – almost everything is more expensive. What I noticed is something that may be \$20 in the U.S. is likely £20 in London (although £20 is more like \$38). Basically....your dollar won't go as far – so keep that in mind when spending money. Exchanging money can be expensive. Best to look around and see who has the best rates. There are tons of places in tourist areas (Oxford Street, etc), banks and post offices. I chose to use the ATM's. I have a U.S. bank that doesn't charge me to use other bank's ATMs...and using ATM's, you get your bank's exchange rate. Don't exchange at the airports (rate is always higher-captive audience)...or at least not too much (if you need some pounds to get by until you can find a better rate). If you exchange here in the U.S. before you go, you probably won't get a good rate. If you have a credit/debit card, use it as much as possible (the bank rate is usually better and no transaction fees).

Academic differences between host university and SFSU

There are quite a few. EBS is similar to a private university here. The tuition is quite steep (equiv to over \$20K a year). The university is small. There were a good number of undergrad students there, but only 50 grad students last year. The grading scale is different. For the undergrad, there are number grades..and not as high as we expect. 90s are rare..and so are 80s. I am not sure where the cutoff is, but a mid to upper 70 translates to an A...and so on. The students at EBS are not as grade conscious..they are required to get a certain percentage to pass (and that is the main concern). The grades will result in ranks of upper first, lower first, upper second and lower second (in that order). It would be the closest thing to GPA in England.

As far as undergrad classes, many are seminar style. I personally took Econ (lecture and seminar), Info Systems (lecture) and Leadership& Mgt (project based). Work for the Econ class was about 4 projects and 4 tests and Info Systems was a few projects and 2 tests. The leadership&management class was unique. It was teaching leadership through managing filmmaking. Student groups divided into teams to make short films which premier at a theater at the end of the semester and have the chance to enter film festivals. There are also groups formed to promote, fund raise, manage budgets, etc. It was a pretty cool class and one I recommend participating in. It is also a way to meet many of the last year EBS students.

I took three grad classes in spring that I enjoyed as well. The grad programs offered at EBS are MA in Global Banking/Finance and MA in Entrepreneurial Mgt. I took more under the Entre. Mgt, which was directed by Dr.Harrison (great teacher!) He teaches at least one undergrad class, so I highly recommend taking his class – you'll learn a lot!

One thing to note, the semester schedules are different for grad and undergrad. Undergrad was late Aug-Dec, Feb-June and Grad was late Sept-early Jan, mid Jan-May. You may want to check out the current schedules before making any arrangements. Also, not all classes are offered each semester – so may want to make sure you get several potential classes approved ahead of time (just in case). You'll have orientation the first day and get a copy of your schedules within a few days of orientation. You'll have the first week to make any changes you find necessary. They don't have predetermined class schedule day/times, rather they create the class day/times based on what students sign up for (and to avoid any time conflicts). The scheduling really caters to getting as many students in the wanted classes as possible (and controlling of class size).

Housing

You have a few options for housing. There are some dorms on campus, but are mostly undergrads and mostly Americans in the EBS/RBS or BAAC (Brit/American College). I chose to find my own place. A good place to look is in the Loot (newspaper with tons of classifieds). Be careful when you are looking – there is a difference between a single room and double room (double room means there are probably two twin beds in the room and they are renting each bed). You can also check with James (housing officer at the school) when you get there. He may have some leads on rooms to rent and can give you a map of postal codes. Many times the ads will read something like “room in NW1.” The map will give you a good idea of the areas. James can also tell you which areas to avoid.

The areas right near campus are pretty pricey (Baker Street, Marylebone, Maida Vale, Primrose Hill, etc.) There are other areas just a bit farther that are a little less expensive. I lived in Camden and shared a four bedroom apartment. Camden is a cool area and was about a 30 min walk (through Regent's Park) or 15

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min bus ride. King's Cross is gaining popularity with all the renovations going on. I also like Shoreditch and Holborn. There are tons of fun areas, just have to find the one that suits you. Of course, the farther away from the school you get, the cheaper it will be (but the longer commute you'll have).

Some good places to look for rooms: the Loot (online also), gumtree.com (many Aussies and New Zealanders go there) and roommates.co.uk. I booked a hostel for a few weeks while I look for a place to live. I think this is a good way. You never want to commit before seeing the place and meeting the people. Plus, you probably want to check out the areas and get a feel for the city before you choose a place. I stayed at the International Student House hostel when I first arrived. Not the nicest of digs, but OK in the way of hostels. If you will be booking hostels/budget hotels, check out hostelworld.com. They are the best when booking hostels in London or anywhere in Europe. You only have to pay a 10% deposit on the rooms (and the rest due on check-in). You can cancel with at least 24 hrs before arrival time and all you lose is the deposit. Hotels are expensive, much more so than in the U.S. – and it's hard to find good deals.

Rooms are typically furnished. If you are looking for an apartment to rent (versus a room), you'll most likely have to go through an estate agent (letting agency). There are usually fees for this and flats are not always furnished. My suggestion – get out there and meet people from other countries and enjoy. Find people with similar personalities that you think would be good to live with. My roommates were Swedish and German. ...and it was so awesome to learn about the other cultures and share mine!

Day to Day life(banking, phoning, shopping, etc...)

Banking - EBS has a deal setup with Barclays or HSBC (can't remember which one) for opening up an account. You can get a letter from the International Office at EBS which you take to the bank. I think they require a lot of stuff to open an account (much harder than in the U.S.). If you are only there for a semester, it's probably better to bring travelers checks and pay your rent in cash (and just use ATM's as needed).

Phones – everyone has a mobile (cell). If you have a cell that works internationally, great. If not, you'll need to get one when you get there. You can't sign a contract for less than a year, so you're only option is pay-as-you-go. It's a bit more expensive, but you can top up as needed. House phones are not standard. We didn't have one in our flat. I had one put in to use internet and it was expensive – so were the monthly charges for usage. Some good cell carriers are O2 (which I had), Orange, T-Mobile and Vodafone. They have retail outlets all over the place. May want to check out the websites before you get there to decide who you want to choose.

Internet - EBS has a computer lab...and connections in the library for your laptop. Also, internet cafes are everywhere...usually about £1/hr.

Shopping – You're in London. There are shops everywhere. It's common to go to the grocery a few times or more a week. Fridges are small and don't hold much. Also, less preservatives are used – so food doesn't last as long (but to me, tastes better). I love Sainsburys (equiv of Kroger or Safeway). There are a few Safeways over there, depending on which areas you live in. Marks & Spencer has a lot of prepared foods..and is good, but a little more expensive. Waitrose has a good variety and is pricy.

The equivalent of Wal-Mart is Asda (owned by WM), but is more in the outside areas of London. Tesco is a pretty similar store, and everywhere. If you need more functional stuff (hairdryers, space heaters, etc.), check out Argos. Otherwise, you can find that stuff in the major department stores (Debenhams, John Lewis, Marks&Spencers, Selfridges, etc.)

For clothing and souvenirs – check out Oxford Street (between Regent Street and Marble Arch). Portobello Road (in Notting Hill) is big on the weekends and the Camden Market (Camden High Street) is good everyday for unusual stuff.

Extra Curricular Activities

You are in Europe – TRAVEL. There are so many great places to see. If you are there for a year, you'll have about a month off in winter and time before/after you finish classes. See as much as you can. Air travel within Europe is pretty cheap. Check for flights through Ryan Air and EasyJet. They mostly go out of Stanstead, Luton or Gatwick airports. Stanstead and Luton are both about an hour's travel outside of the city, but not much of an inconvenience when you consider the air fare savings. There are fun places to go for the weekend as well – Dublin, Edinburgh, Paris, etc. If you want to take the Eurostar to Paris or Brussels from London, see the travel agent on campus (they have an office near the library). They can get you deals on Eurostar or group packages. Also, the school puts trips together throughout the year to fun places (student services). They usually put flyers up around campus and you'd sign up at the student services office. If you like group tours, there are tons that advertise – one located on the 2nd floor of the ISH hostel – not too bad and STA travel offices all over town. If you are a planner and like to venture out, it's easy to make your own reservations. If you want to visit places in England, hop the train. You save a lot by booking in advance, but you can also buy at the stations. Depending on where you want to go, you'll have to find the station where the train departs...ex. the train to Bath leaves from Paddington Station, the train to Leeds from King's Cross Station, etc.

I traveled for a month during winter break and the month of May (when I finished classes). I purchased rail passes from STA travel (the U.S. site). You can get any kind of pass you want and at great discounts – only catch, they'll only mail the pass to a U.S. address. So, as long as you have someone that can mail it to you from the U.S., that's a good option. Once you decide where you want to visit and for how long, find the pass that best suits you (like any travel for 5 days within 2 months through 3 countries in Europe). If you are 25 and under, you can get the youth passes (which are really cheap, but coach class). There are so many wonderful things to see...and so little time.

I also chose to work part time since I was there for the year. I had worked full-time while in the States all the time I've been a full time student...so going from that to only taking 3 classes was hard (I needed more to do). If you are interested in working part time, best to prepare a resume ahead of time. What I found is that most companies in the UK don't hire directly, they go through staffing agencies – esp for part time jobs. I put my resume on UK job sites (monster.co.uk, hotjobs, etc). Many of the staffing agencies post jobs on the sites, as well as some of the bigger ones on their own sites. There are so many of them, so you just have to hunt. If there is a particular company you want to work/intern for, check out their website. They'll normally have a reference on which agency to contact for openings with their company. Many part time jobs are also staffed through temp agencies. Many times, PA (personal assistant) jobs are available – it's similar to an admin assistant job here. Retail jobs don't pay much, PA's are regarded more highly in the UK than in the US (and pay a bit more). I worked for about 5 months as an admin assistant to the director at a publishing company (academic journals division). It was (at times) menial work, but great to get that experience of working at a British company. And, it was nice to be earning a little bit in the local currency.

Best advice – find what you enjoy doing whether it be playing sports, working, volunteering or just seeing the sites. Whatever you like to do, be sure to take full advantage of being in the beautiful city of London!