



YOUR STAY IN BRITAIN

**AN ENGLISH UK INFORMATION BOOKLET
FOR STUDENTS**

English UK member schools, university and further education college centres have been inspected and accredited by the British Council, thus ensuring high standards of teaching, premises, administration, accommodation and welfare.

This booklet is available in English, French, Spanish, Italian, German, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Arabic and Russian.

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A. Before You Leave

Passport and Visas

Most students need a valid passport, but nationals of EU countries who intend to stay for six months or less may use an identity card. Students coming from certain countries will need a visa or entry certificate; check with your travel agent, or with the British Consulate, Embassy or High Commission in your own country, to find out what is required. To make sure, in advance, that you are admitted to the UK (United Kingdom), as a student, you may ask for a 'letter of consent'. You will have to support your application with some evidence, including a certificate of acceptance by the school. The school will send you this after they have enrolled you, and usually after a deposit has been paid. Students who intend to visit other countries during their stay in the UK are advised to get 'Multiple Entry Visas' as 'Single Entry Visas' cannot be changed once in the UK. More information on visas is available from UKVisas, London SW1A 2AH, tel: (+44) (0) 7008 8438, web: www.ukvisas.gov.uk.

Money

The UK does not restrict the amount of money you may bring into the country, but you may need permission from your own country's authorities. It sometimes takes two months or more to arrange for the transfer of funds, so do consult your own bank long before your departure. If you have not paid in advance for your course and accommodation, the school may ask you to pay for all or part of this as soon as you arrive, so you may have problems if funds are not available. Bring with you evidence of these funds, as the Immigration Officer may want to see it. Also, bring with you some cash for the journey, but not a large sum because of the risk of loss or theft.

Most schools will require you to pay before the start of your course or on enrolment. There are a number of ways to transfer money, which include bankers' drafts, international money orders, travellers' cheques in sterling and Eurocheques. If payment is being made by bank transfer, ensure that the amount paid includes all charges for transmission both in your own country and in the UK. Make sure you confirm with your school which method of payment is appropriate.

Insurance

Find out whether reciprocal health agreements exist between your own country and the UK, and ensure that you have sufficient health insurance. Insure your possessions against theft, loss or damage. If possible, insure against paying the cost of course fees should you have to cancel at short notice.

Weather

The weather in Britain is changeable, even during the summer, so bring a warm sweater and a raincoat. In winter, you will need an overcoat.

Your Homestay Family

If the school has reserved homestay accommodation for you, and has sent you the address, it is helpful if you write a short letter to the host family saying when you expect to arrive and how you will be travelling. For example:

Dear Mrs/Mr/Ms

The school has told me that I shall be staying with you. I am flying to airport on flight number arriving at (time) on (date). I will continue my journey by train/bus/taxi and expect to arrive at your house about (time).

Yours sincerely,

.....

B. Arriving in Britain

Immigration

The Immigration Officer may want to ask you some questions. Tell him frankly and truthfully your plans for your stay, the school where you will be studying, and the financial arrangements you have made. Show him your evidence that you have a place at a school, and that you have money to meet the costs of your stay and the stay of any other member of your family for whom you are responsible. The Officer will want to know that you are able to, and intend to, follow a course of study of at least fifteen hours a week, and that you will leave the country when the course is finished.

If you encounter any difficulty, ask the Immigration Officer to telephone your school. If you have not already enrolled at a school, you may be admitted as a visitor, rather than as a student, and your passport may be stamped to show how long you may stay. If you want to stay for a longer period, you must apply to the Home Office for an extension about one month before your permission expires. Ask your school for help: they must supply evidence that you are a regular student. You will also have to show the Home Office that you have enough money for all your needs. Unless you are from an EU country, you may not take employment of any kind (even part-time) without first obtaining permission from the Department of Employment. This will be stamped on your passport. You should also check the stamp carefully to see if you have to register with the police; if so, do this as soon as possible after you arrive at your school. If you need to register with the police, you will need to take two passport photographs and pay a fee.

The address of the Home Office Immigration and Nationality Department is: Lunar House, 40 Wellesley Road, Croydon CR9 2BY, tel. 0870 606 7766 (this is about 16 kms from the centre of London).

Customs and Imports

You should have no difficulty with the British Customs, provided that you answer all questions truthfully, and that you have with you only your personal luggage. Drugs such as heroin, cocaine and cannabis are illegal. Do NOT bring a knife, gas-gun or other weapons, even if intended for self-defence, as almost all are illegal. Because of strict rabies control, you are not allowed to bring ANY live animal, including any type of pet, into the country.

The Onward Journey

Your school will advise you on how to get to the school from your airport or port of entry. Do not take taxis for long distances such as from an airport to a city centre, as they are very expensive. There is usually a bus service to the nearest city centre. If you do intend to use a taxi, be careful of people who offer you taxi services from an airport - make sure they are a licensed operator.

C. Living in Britain

British Culture

- *Politics*

There are three different countries within Britain: England, Wales and Scotland. Together with Northern Ireland, these countries make up the United Kingdom. Each country has its own distinctive character and identity.

The population, particularly in larger towns and cities, is very multicultural. This is because Britain has also received many migrant populations, either seeking political refuge or better conditions for work and education.

The Queen is the Head of State but all the laws are made by the parliament which consists of two Houses: the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The House of Lords does not have as much power as the House of Commons and merely revises and amends laws.

There are three main political parties in parliament, the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats.

- *Cultural Traits*

The English in particular have a reputation for being reserved. This means that they are reserved in their public behaviour and like to keep their emotions private. For example on public transport people do not usually talk to strangers. There will be many aspects of British behaviour which seem very strange to your culture. Within our own culture we feel secure as we can easily interpret the things around us. Unfortunately, this can result in judging outsiders by our own standards which in turn can give rise to prejudice and stereotypes. Keeping an open mind is essential to getting the most out of your time here.

- *Culture Shock*

Culture shock is similar to the feelings we have when we are adapting to a new job or other environment, only more so. When people are surrounded by a different culture where everything (including the language) is new and potentially confusing, they go through changes of mood and attitude before coming to terms with their new environment.

These feelings of alienation can be caused by relatively minor things such as unfamiliar food; differences in routine; differences in travel arrangements and unfamiliar official procedures. They can be made worse by the deeper cultural differences in the family life or language.

Many are initially very excited and positive about the new culture. But as the reality of deeper cultural differences sinks in, this excited feeling wears away. We may then start to miss friends, family and places as we begin to have doubts about ourselves and our new environment.

You should not let the differences distress you. Reserve should not be interpreted as unfriendliness as you will find that most British people are happy to help you if you have a problem or need some information.

- *Language*

You may have difficulty understanding spoken English no matter what level of proficiency you achieved in your country. You will be listening and speaking in English all the time and this is bound to make you tired. Misunderstandings and mistakes are easily made when you are tired and others are speaking too fast. Do not feel frustrated or depressed if you cannot contribute to conversations as you can in your own language. Using a second language throughout the day takes a great deal of effort and may sometimes seem too intense an experience. These feelings are perfectly normal and things will improve as you get used to your situation.

Money

You would do best to exchange money or travellers' cheques at any bank (there is one in each of the larger airports, and several in the main street of every town), and some large travel agencies have exchange desks. Try not to use small foreign exchange bureaux or 'money shops'; even if they advertise a good rate, they usually charge a high commission.

Students who stay for six months or more can open an account at any bank, building society or post office. Ask the bank or building society for advice on the best type of account to open. Remember that banks have restricted opening hours and usually close by mid-afternoon.

International credit cards such as Visa and Mastercard are accepted by most shops and businesses, as well as by some schools.

- *Coins and Banknotes*

The money system is decimal, with the pound (£) divided into 100 pence (p).

- *Value Added Tax (VAT)*

If you spend more than £100 in one shop, you may be able to claim your tax back. Ask the shop assistant for details.

Valuables

You should take care of your possessions at all times. Never leave valuables unattended; do not carry large amounts of cash on your person. You will not need to carry your passport around with you either so it is a good idea to leave it at home; we strongly advise you to take your school's identity card with you at all times.

Communications

- *Post Office*

Stamps are sold mainly in Post Offices and are also available at other shops. All overseas letters must carry an airmail label. If you encounter any difficulty, seek advice

from your school. If you are writing to a country outside Europe, pre-stamped aerogrammes are cheaper than ordinary letters by air mail.

- *Telephoning and Faxing.*

You may find it easiest to use public payphones. You must not use your host family's telephone without permission and you must pay for all calls, including local ones. All calls in Britain are cheaper after 6 p.m. and at weekends. If you want to telephone abroad, you can either reverse the charges (transferred or 'collect' call), or ask the operator the cost of the call after you have finished (ADC). The number of the international operator is 155. International calls are cheaper after 6pm. Calls cannot usually be made at Post Offices, but payphones can be found in many locations. Some phones take coins, some take credit cards and others take phonecards which you can buy in many shops. You may also purchase the Arels/Class Telecommunications phonecards from your school. These offer reduced rates for students and can be used from domestic or public phones. There are also facilities in most towns from which you can send faxes or telexes.

Travel

- *Public Transport*

If you travel to school every day by train, bus coach or Underground, ask at the station about season tickets. There are sometimes different concession tickets available, for short or long periods, day returns for tourist visits, and cheap rates for students. Bring with you a few spare passport sized photos which may be useful when obtaining tickets. Full-time students on courses of 26 weeks or more are eligible for international student identity cards (ISIC), ask your school for more details. Students can obtain ISIC cards before travelling in order to obtain discounts on their outward journeys.

- *Driving*

It is illegal for anyone under the age of 17 to drive a car or motorcycle on a public road in Britain. Mopeds of less than 50cc can be driven by anyone over the age of 16. You must wear a crash helmet if you ride any type of motorbike or moped, even if you are a passenger. You should also be aware of the Highway Code, copies of which are available from most newsagents, and remember that cars are driven on the LEFT in Britain.

During your first year in Britain you will need an international driving licence. If you plan on staying longer you will have to take a driving test in this country. Your school will advise you further on the laws regarding motor insurance and licensing.

Usually car hire companies will only supply vehicles to people over the age of twenty-five.

Double yellow lines on the side of the road mean that you may not park there at any time. A single yellow line means that parking is restricted to particular times of the day - the times are signposted nearby.

Don't forget that in Britain you must wear seatbelts in the car at all times.

Please remember to drive carefully and keep to speed limits. In most towns the speed limit is 30mph/48 kph; on motorways the limit is 70 mph/110 kph.

Never drink alcohol and drive - it is extremely dangerous and the penalties are very severe in Britain.

If you are involved in an accident, you must inform the police and exchange names and addresses with the other driver. Insurance for your vehicle is compulsory in Britain.

- *Bicycles*

You will be able to hire a bicycle in most towns - your school should be able to advise you on this. You do not need a licence or insurance to ride a bicycle in Britain, though students under the age of 16 should have written permission from their parents. The Highway Code also applies to bicycles.

Remember to wear safe visible clothing and even a helmet. You must use lights if you cycle after dark.

Please do not cycle in large groups on the roads; it is very dangerous and obstructive to other traffic.

Entertainment

Details of local entertainment can be found in the local newspaper, magazines, at tourist information points, and often in the local library. Your school will also have a specially arranged social programme for you and will be able to give you more detailed information on the attractions in your area.

- *Sport*

Details of local sports facilities are also available from your school.

- *Theatres and Concerts*

Arrive ten minutes early or more; if you arrive late, you will probably not be allowed into your seat until the interval. The person who shows you to your seat will not expect a tip. Smoking is not allowed.

- *Cinemas*

Here again there is no tipping, and smoking is not allowed at all.

Eating and Drinking

- *'Pubs' (Public Houses)*

Pubs are a great British institution, ranging from small 'locals' to large establishments. They serve mainly cold drinks, both alcoholic and non-alcoholic, and sometimes coffee. Most also offer snacks and sandwiches, and often hot dishes and salads which can be quite cheap. Pubs do not have waiters or waitresses, so you should order your drinks and food from the bar and pay immediately. Children under 14 are not allowed inside pubs (although some have a garden where children can play). No-one under 18 may be served alcohol.

- *Wine bars*

Most wine bars only serve wine, by the glass or bottle, and usually a good selection of meals. They are more expensive and smarter than 'pubs', and can be pleasant places where you can sit and talk.

- *Cafes and snackbars*

These do not usually serve alcohol, and are often cheap. For a complete meal go to a **restaurant**. In some restaurants it may be necessary to book in advance. A service charge is sometimes added to the bill. If not, it is customary to add 10%.

- *Take-away meals*

These are available from some restaurants and Britain offers a range of food of all nations such as Indian, Chinese, Italian etc.

Pubs, restaurants and wine bars are all subject to British licensing laws, which usually restrict the sale of alcohol to between the hours of 11am to 11pm, although some pubs may have different opening hours on Sundays and public holidays. These hours may vary depending on region, and some businesses may close during the afternoon.

Health

Treatment under the National Health Service is free:

- if you enrol on a course for more than six months.
- if you are a national of an EU country.
- if your country has a full reciprocal health agreement with Britain.

If none of these apply, you will have to pay if you are admitted to a hospital bed (unless your illness is an infectious one). Only emergency outpatient treatment for accidents is free. You will also be charged for a consultation or visit by a local doctor. If your course lasts for more than six months, you will be accepted by the NHS (National Health Service) for free treatment for any illness which has developed during your stay, or for a previous condition which has become worse and needs urgent treatment, or for accidents. A pregnancy which began before the student left home is not treated free, except in an emergency. Even if treatment is free, you must pay part of the cost of medicine.

- *Medical Insurance*

If you have not already made your own arrangements, or if you come from a non-exempt country, many schools can offer you an insurance scheme to help pay for some or all hospital expenses.

- *Dental treatment.*

If you need dental treatment you will almost certainly have to pay the full cost as a private patient.

Personal Safety

If you are out late at night avoid walking home alone and try to go with someone else. If you do find that you are out late, keep to busy areas and well-lit streets. Try to remember to carry enough money for the telephone and your bus or taxi fare so you will not have to walk home.

Problems and Emergencies

There is seldom any need to face problems or difficulties by yourself; you should always ask for advice and the school's emergency telephone number will be available. As well as your homestay family, some other people who would always be willing to help are:

The Welfare Officer or the Accommodation Officer at your centre will know the answers to most of the problems students meet, and will have the addresses of local organisations who can offer special help and advice.

The Police: British police have a great reputation for giving friendly help and advice on all kinds of difficulties - don't hesitate to ask them, whatever your problem.

The Citizens' Advice Bureau: there is one in every large town, and they too have lists of addresses. They are especially useful if you need legal advice. Their help and advice is free.

D. Staying in a private home

Many students rightly feel that living in a private home in Britain will be a help to them in learning English, and will also be a rewarding experience in itself. Younger students may feel happier in a home rather than a hostel. Many British people like to be 'host' to foreign students not just because this will bring in some extra income, but because they really enjoy having someone from a different country living in their house and sharing part of their daily life. A 'host family' does not always consist of two parents with children; people like this are often too busy to look after a student in addition to their own children. For example, a widow, or a couple whose children are away at school or grown up, often make excellent 'hosts', with time to spare. Students should try to fit in with the everyday life of the household. There may be minor difficulties and misunderstandings - on either side - but with goodwill and good humour these can usually be cleared up quickly.

Your Room

You will probably be given a key to the house, but it is unlikely that you will have a key to your room, as it is not usual to lock bedroom doors in a private home. You should have a comfortable bed, a bedside light, a table or desk, chair, and adequate storage space for your clothes. Your host is responsible for keeping your room clean, and you will be expected to keep it tidy so that it can be cleaned properly. If you wish to move the furniture in your room, or put pictures or posters on the walls, you must ask for permission first. Drawing pins, glue or sticky tape will damage painted or papered walls. Be especially careful with lighted cigarettes, hairspray, nail varnish, etc., as you would in your own home. If you do break or damage anything, report it as soon as possible. You should offer to pay for this. Please ask before using any of your own electrical equipment; the voltage almost everywhere in the UK is 240 volts.

Heating and Lighting

All homes have some heating in the bedrooms, but your room may be colder than you are used to. Ask for additional covers for your bed, or for extra heating.

Warning: do not leave gas or electric heaters switched on throughout the night or when you are out. This can be a fire hazard. Do not place anything on or near gas fires or

electric heaters. Remember to switch off electric lights when you leave the room as electricity is expensive.

Meals

Meals will normally be eaten with other members of the household according to their custom. If you cannot eat any particular food for dietary, religious or other reasons, you should say so. You will be expected to be punctual at mealtimes, so tell someone if you are likely to be late; or if you will be out for a meal.

Domestic

You will be expected to make your own bed and you might offer to help with small jobs such as clearing the table after a meal. You should not use the kitchen yourself without permission, nor help yourself to food and drink.

Most homestay families have only one bathroom, so arrange the most convenient times to take a bath or shower. If you do not understand how the equipment in the bathroom and toilet works, your host will explain it to you. Of course you will always remember to leave the bath, shower, wash-basin and toilet clean after use.

Sheets and towels are provided, although you should use a towel of your own if you are going swimming. You are expected to look after your own clothes and shoes. Your host will provide access to laundry facilities, they may be willing to wash your clothes when they do their own washing; if not ask your host when and where you can do your own, and where to put the wet things. *Your host may suggest that you use a launderette for any extra items of clothing*, and they will probably let you borrow the ironing board and iron.

Visiting

If your homestay family has invited their own friends to the house, try to be sensitive to their need for occasional privacy, and do not expect always to be included. You must always ask if you want to invite friends. Ask where you should entertain them, and the time they should arrive and leave. Do try to see that your friends are reasonably quiet, and do not disturb the rest of the household, especially late at night. Your teacher will be able to advise you on etiquette if you are invited to visit another household.

Absences

You must say if you are going to be away overnight, or coming home later than normal. If you are unexpectedly absent someone may contact the school or the police.

Notice

One week's notice on either side in accordance with payment dates is a good general rule, or a week's money to be paid in lieu of notice unless there are special circumstances. Ask the Accommodation Officer's advice if you are in doubt about waiving notice. If you have paid for more than one week in advance, the host should be prepared to refund all the extra money if you give proper notice in accordance with the agreed terms.

The secret of your success on your visit to Britain is to be interested and interesting. Being interested means listening to and trying to understand other people's ideas (even if you do not agree with them), and adapting yourself to different customs while you are away from home. Being interesting is to be friendly yourself, and to play your part in the conversation and social life around you. If you make good friends while you are here, your friendships could last a lifetime.

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