



# LONDON PREDEPARTURE HANDBOOK

2018





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# Introduction

Your upcoming study abroad experience may well change your life. It will certainly change your perceptions and lead you to new thoughts and directions.

As you prepare to leave the U.S., take some time to consider your plans and expectations. It is interesting and fun to compare them before your departure and after your return. Many come true. Others are tempered by the reality of your experience abroad. Flexibility in attitudes and expectations will enhance your ability to enjoy a new culture and to experience another country's lifestyle. Try to be open-minded and don't compare everything to what you are accustomed to at home. Sure, life may seem less luxurious and comfortable, but there are many other things to compensate for this.

What you get from your time abroad will depend on how much effort you put into breaking away from your American group and meeting new people in the communities you're visiting. AIFS will do everything it can to provide you with advice, information, resources and suggestions on how to do this. Make the most of this assistance and get out and see Britain and Europe.

You are sure to have many questions and concerns before the start of your program. You will be able to answer many of your own questions if you take the time to review this pre-departure handbook and do a little extra research before your departure. This will enable you to leave feeling more confident and prepared.

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# Packing

Deciding what to bring and what to leave behind can be a difficult task. Students always find that they have brought more clothing than was necessary. Remember that you have to carry your luggage yourself; there will be nobody to help you and elevators are sometimes scarce. You will not have much closet space to store your clothes and if you are planning to travel after the program you will have to carry your own luggage.

Below is a list of clothing and practical items you may want to consider packing and a guide to the weather to assist you.

## LONDON WEATHER

These statistics show the average sunshine hours, temperate and rainfall throughout the year. Please bear in mind these are for guidance only and the weather is very unpredictable in the UK!

	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Sunshine hours	6	5	5	3
Min Temp (F)	52	47	41	37
Max Temp (F)	68	60	53	48
Rainfall (inches)	2.0	2.7	2.3	2.1

## CLOTHING

Please try and pack as light as you can. Simply bring a few of your favourite clothes that you find comfortable. If you get desperate for additions to your wardrobe there are shops in the UK such as Primark, H&M, Top Shop, TK Maxx that sell clothes at reasonable prices.

## DO BRING:

- Clothing that can be worn layered to adapt to the range of different temperatures and without frequent washes. (For example, jeans, long and short sleeved t-shirts, sweatshirts, sweaters etc.)
- Comfortable Socks and Underwear (White socks are not that common in Europe)
- Comfortable walking shoes (In Europe most people wear sneakers to the gym only, not as everyday footwear)
- An umbrella, a waterproof coat with a hood



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### Tip from Julie, Head of Student Services

When I first studied abroad I had a huge suitcase full of things I really didn't need to take with me – all my clothes (!), photo frames, a year's supply of BN chocolate biscuits...it didn't take long to realise I didn't need half the things I thought I would and now travel much lighter – it leaves more room for souvenirs!

### DO NOT BRING:

- Too many dressy outfits. There are not so many opportunities to wear them. However, if you do like to go out in the evening, many clubs will only admit people who are suitably dressed. Sometimes they do not allow sneakers and jeans.
- Clothing with special washing instructions (i.e. "lay flat to dry" or "dry clean only")
- Clothes you might wear. Only bring things you are sure to wear.

### PRACTICAL ITEMS

#### DO BRING:

- ☐ Basic toiletries - enough to last you through the first few days – you will be able to buy more when you arrive in London.
- ☐ Plug adapters (U.S. 2 Pin→ UK 3 Pin and US 2 Pin→ European 2 Pin). Plugs in the UK are different to the rest of Europe - therefore, your plug adaptors for the UK will not work in Italy. Make sure that you bring a few adapters for the UK and the rest of Europe. You will find them at Walmart and Target.
- ☐ Your favourite cosmetics, perfume or cologne – they may not be easy to replace abroad.
- ☐ Pain-relievers and cold/cough medicines that you typically use - brand names that you normally use back home are not often available outside the U.S.
- ☐ Contact lens supplies, extra glasses.
- ☐ A towel.
- ☐ ATM/Debit card and credit card.
- ☐ Passport size photos.
- ☐ Camera & Charger.
- ☐ Passport pouch/money belt.
- ☐ Photocopies of your passport.
- ☐ A guide book for your destination(s) in Europe.
- ☐ Journal, diary, planner, or address book.
- ☐ Photos of your family and friends.
- ☐ An open mind! Do some research on where you will be staying and where the AIFS centre is – you can look us up on Google street view and get a feel for the neighbourhoods that way.



#### **Tip from Jessica, Program Manager**

It's worth investing in a pair of comfortable, weather-proof shoes which you'll want to wear every day and can walk a lot in. Don't forget to wear them in before you leave!

## DO NOT BRING:

- ☐ Anything that will distress you if you lose it
- ☐ Bed-linen or pillows – these are all provided
- ☐ School supplies
- ☐ Large or heavy electrical appliances
- ☐ Hairdryers & Straighteners – the electrical voltage is different, which prevents US hairdryers from working in the UK. You risk blowing up your favourite straighteners and hairdryer if you bring them along so purchase when you arrive in London instead. Hairdryers are available from £7.50 (\$9).

**\*\*Please ensure that you have adequate insurance for any personal effects such as digital cameras, laptops, etc, that you may be considering bringing.\*\***

## LUGGAGE ALLOWANCE

Visit the website of the airline that you are travelling with to check your luggage allowance and weight restrictions. Most airlines will now only allow you to check in one suitcase for free. For additional bags and excess weight you may need to pay a fee.

## GENERALLY FOR CHECKED BAGS

1 bag/case, maximum of 50 pounds (23kgs). Maximum linear dimensions of all bags: 62 inches (length + width + height).

## GENERALLY FOR CARRY ON BAGS

1 bag and 1 personal item (which can be a purse or a laptop)

Carry-on bag dimensions should not be more than 9" x 14" x 22" (length + width + height) or 45 linear inches (the length, height and width added together).

## LIQUIDS

Remember that there are restrictions on the amount of liquids (including gels and creams) that you can carry in your hand luggage. To avoid unnecessary delays, it is advisable to pack any liquids that you are bringing with you into your checked in luggage. If you need to carry liquid items on board they should have a capacity of no more than 100ml each and you should place them in a Ziploc clear plastic bag. Check with your airline for further advice.



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### Tip from Catherine, Student Services Advisor

Some liquids such as hairsprays and spray bottles are more likely to leak during your flight due to the air pressure. To avoid any leaks, use a square of cling film/Saran wrap and wrap it over the nozzle or opening of the bottle. Then place the lid on top, it will catch any liquid that does leak. You can also pop any bottles into a Ziploc bag to avoid spillages too!

# Money

It's a good idea to get a bit of cash in the local currency (the UK uses Great British Pounds, not Euros) from your U.S. bank before travelling. This usually involves pre-ordering the money at least one week in advance. Once in Europe, using your debit card in an ATM machine to withdraw cash, it is the safest and simplest way to access money.

## USING AN ATM

The most efficient method of accessing your money is the use of an ATM, "Cashpoint" or "hole-in-the-wall"! The American Plus, Maestro, Cirrus and Star networks can be accessed from the cash dispensers of several of the high street banks across Europe, allowing cash to be withdrawn from a U.S. bank account if you have a card which is linked to one of these systems.

## BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE US

- **IMPORTANT:** Inform your bank that you will be in Europe for the next few months. If you fail to do this your cards may be blocked when you try to use them in Europe.
- Make sure you get a four-digit PIN number from your bank before leaving.
- Make sure you have a customer service contact telephone number for your bank to call FROM THE UK should you have any problems with your cards (it can usually be found on the back of your card, but copy it down somewhere else in case you lose your card).
- Set up an online account so that you can access your account to check your balance or transfer funds while in Europe. (Be aware that you may not be able to check your bank balance on European ATMs).
- You should check how much your US bank will charge for each withdrawal before you leave. Your bank may have a partner bank here in the UK that will not charge you or will charge you less to withdraw money so look out for this too.
- Make a note of the details of your cards (account numbers, expiration date, etc.) Therefore, you can cancel them quickly and easily if they are lost or stolen.
- Order some £GBP so that you have some cash handy when you arrive. Approximately £100 is a good amount to have with you in cash for when you arrive.



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### **Tip from Charlie, Program Manager**

It is very rare to see a £50 note and stores often are not keen to accept them as they can be easily forged. If you are ordering GBP from you bank at home, request in denominations of £20s, £10s and £5s. If you do have a £50 note when you arrive we recommend getting it changed into smaller notes at a bank as soon as possible.

## CREDIT CARDS

It is strongly recommended that you get a credit card if you do not already have one. You will need one for example when purchasing flights or making hotel bookings. Major credit cards, Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted in Europe. Please bear in mind that they should not be thought of as a universal answer to every problem. On entering any establishment where you plan to charge your purchase, be sure to ask that you can use your credit card. Most places have a minimum spend if paying by credit card.

American Express is less widely accepted, however cardholders can take advantage of the services offered by the American Express offices in most European cities.

Please also ensure that you have a 4 digit PIN number for your card – you often have to type this into a keypad when making purchases.

Another option is a prepaid credit/debit card such as Visa Travel Money. With one of these you can preload funds and reload at anytime. It's a good way to manage funds and if you do lose it, you a replacement can be obtained quickly, wherever you are, similar to travellers' cheques.

## TRAVELLERS CHEQUES

Travellers' cheques are now a rather outdated way of managing your money when you are abroad, even if your parents think they're a good idea. Some banks will no longer exchange travellers' cheques so we don't recommend you bring them.

## CURRENCY CARDS

Another option is a prepaid credit/debit card such as Visa Travel Money or Revolut. With one of these you can preload funds and reload at any time online, through an app. It's a good way to manage funds and if you do lose it, a replacement can be obtained quickly.

## BANKING

You will *not* be able to open bank accounts during your stay in Europe. Make sure you separate any joint checking / savings accounts you have before you leave the US. Such accounts do not exist in Europe and therefore ATMs cannot access your account details. You will only be able to access money from your checking account so please make sure that you transfer funds as necessary into this account.

Please keep your cards extra safe while in Europe. If they are lost, it can be a complicated procedure to get them replaced. In most cases your bank will only send replacement cards to your American address, not your overseas address, so you could be left without cards for a while.



## EMERGENCY TRANSFERS

If you do find yourself without a bank card then the fastest way to get money transferred is via Western Union-Money in minutes. This can be done online or over the telephone from the US (1-800-325-6000) and you can pay with a Credit or Debit Card. There is no charge to receive funds; all you need is some ID to pick up the money anywhere in the world. For further information and details on charges look at [www.westernunion.com](http://www.westernunion.com).

## FOREIGN CURRENCY

Handling cash will be quite different - coins are used more frequently in Europe (£2 and £1 coins) and bills have different sizes and colours. It is worth taking a minute to familiarise yourself with the currency on arrival. Please don't carry around large sums of cash. If it is lost or stolen, there is no way to replace it and it is not covered by insurance.



TO CHECK THE LATEST EXCHANGE RATE VISIT [WWW.XE.COM](http://WWW.XE.COM)

## TIPPING

Finally, let's talk tipping. As a rule we don't tip excessively in Europe. It's just a cultural difference, most people employed in the service industry are paid a reasonable wage, and therefore Europeans only tip if they have received great service. You are not expected to tip in bars in Europe. The finer points of tipping will be discussed during your orientation when you arrive in Europe...



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### **Tip from Tori, Deputy Program Director**

If you're on a really tight budget plan ahead so that you have things to look forward to and finances don't overshadow your trip. It might be going to your favourite coffee shop once a week, visiting a new area of town or museum (which you can probably do for free) or planning ahead to a trip that you really want to do. Don't underestimate the benefit of your travel card and get as much out of it as you can by exploring the places that Londoners live and not just where your homestay or apartment is.

# Security

AIFS has been arranging study abroad for American students for 50 years and we have had over 1.5 million participants on our programs. As you prepare for this exciting experience, we want you to know that our primary concern is student safety. One of the most frequently asked questions from parents is “Is it safe to study abroad?” I hope the following will help to reassure you that we take our responsibilities very seriously.

1. AIFS provides detailed security briefings to students on behaviour, dress code and general awareness in Europe. We do not display signs saying American or U.S. outside our student centres.
2. All students are asked to register with the American Embassy before they arrive (instructions are in this handbook). We also keep copies on file of passports and photo ID of all current students when they subsequently arrive.
3. AIFS has a 24/7 emergency number that students or their families can use to reach AIFS staff immediately in an emergency. If necessary, duty staff can reach senior AIFS staff instantly. AIFS has an incident response plan and all staff members are trained in how to handle any situation which may arise.
4. All students are given the number they need to call to reach the local emergency services (police, fire, ambulance), in this case 999 (101 for non-emergencies), and are advised to call this immediately in the event of serious incident, illness or injury. We ask that they also immediately contact AIFS staff so that we can provide any additional assistance required. If a student needs to see a doctor or is hospitalised, AIFS staff will accompany/visit them and keep doing so until they are well.
5. We receive and monitor all U.S. State Department advisories and inform students of areas of Europe (if any) that are temporarily not recommended for visits by U.S. Citizens. Parents can look at State Department information at: <http://travel.state.gov/>
6. All students have AIFS medical insurance which provides extensive coverage (see [http://www.aifspartnerships.com/pdf/insurance\\_semester.pdf](http://www.aifspartnerships.com/pdf/insurance_semester.pdf) for details). This includes a Team Assist plan which provides a worldwide 24-hour emergency telephone assistance service. Multilingual help and advice will be provided in any emergency.
7. We go to great lengths to be aware of the current whereabouts of all AIFS students. Of course, we know their addresses in their program location and our Student Advisors are in close contact with them on a regular basis. We also require students to log their travel plans, addresses and contact details with us when travelling outside the city at weekends. We advise students to purchase inexpensive, personal cellular phones and we record their phone numbers so that we can contact them easily.
8. In the highly unlikely event of the U.S. State Department issuing a specific Travel Warning that US Citizens in any AIFS study abroad city should return to the USA (this would be unprecedented), AIFS will suspend any currently operating program, fly the students home (with timing as appropriate to the situation) and rebate pro-rata program fees subject to the usual deductions outlined in our agreements.

# Communication

When you are away from home you will no doubt feel the need to keep your nearest and dearest up to date about what you are doing. Here is some advice about the various ways you can stay in touch while you are away from home:

## Email & Internet

There are dedicated computer and internet facilities for use while you are in London at the AIFS Student Services Office in Bloomsbury. If you are staying with a homestay, they may provide you with internet but this is not guaranteed. There are lots of places in London that you can access free Wi-Fi and there will be information in your Welcome Packs when you arrive listing a few of these. We recommend you bring a personal laptop for use in London. We recommend using Internet apps such as Skype, Facetime and Whatsapp for free and easy contact with your family and friends back home.

Please note that you will not be provided with an email address in London, so it is best for you to use your school email/Yahoo/Hotmail/AOL or similar account while you are abroad. This is important as we will communicate with you on a regular basis via the email address that you have provided.

## Telephones and Mobile (cell) Phones

AIFS recommends that students look into getting an international plan with their current providers or purchasing a UK mobile telephone on arrival in London, if here for a significant period of time. This is a very straightforward way of staying in touch with friends and family back home and fellow students in London.

## INTERNATIONAL PLANS

It can be worth purchasing an International plan to add to your current cell phone plan. This will allow you to use your current cell phone abroad without much extra hassle. Each US cell provider has different

## Red Phone Boxes and Payphones

*You will see payphones in the street and in certain buildings throughout Britain, although they are a dying breed! Most payphones accept coins and credit cards. Just follow the instructions above the phone. Sadly, not all our payphones are in the red boxes but they are still quite common. For your information – all local calls cost money in Britain. Freephone numbers in the UK begin with 0800.*



international plans, so best to check with them if they can provide something that works for you.

#### BUYING A BASIC PHONE IN THE UK

You can purchase a basic "PAY AS YOU GO" phone on arrival in the UK for an initial payment upwards of £15 with a basic smartphone costing around £40. With credit on your phone, you can make calls and send text (SMS) messages. It is also possible to send text messages to the USA, however some US networks do not accept or send texts to European phones.

The biggest difference from the US is that in the UK you do not pay to receive calls. You only pay for the calls you make. Once you have your UK number, you can email your friends and family the details and they can call you! (Remember the time difference!) A UK Pay as you call phone does work across Europe (extra fees will be charged to make and receive calls) and you can use an international calling card as well.

#### BUYING A UK SIM CARD

It is becoming more common for students to simply purchase a monthly SIM card here in the UK, especially ones that have large amounts of data. These are very easy to get a hold of and use, can be cheap and gives you a UK number. To see what type of plans are available and their prices look online, a good network for data is Three ([www.Three.co.uk](http://www.Three.co.uk)) who offer monthly rolling SIM card only plans.

There are some benefits and limitations to getting a UK SIM. On a positive note all data, minutes and texts are now inclusive throughout Europe, meaning there are no fees for using your phone whilst in Europe.

Having a UK number though means it will cost you and anyone back in the States extra if you were to call them or them call you. Though this is becoming less of a problem with apps like WhatsApp and Facetime.

If you are wanting to get a SIM card whilst in London, make sure that your phone is unlocked. Many network carriers in the U.S lock their phones to their specific network, as such if you were to buy a SIM it would not work with your phone. Check with your network carrier in the U.S if the phone is unlocked or can be unlocked without penalty.

#### **Homestay students**

Homestay students should make personal arrangements with their homestay hosts concerning use of the telephone. Please respect their wishes regarding Calling Cards, length of use and time difference with the USA.

## Calling Cards

If you buy a calling card while in the US, please ensure that you ask for an INTERNATIONAL CARD that allows you to call from outside the US back to the US. All of the major US networks (ATT, MCI, SPRINT) provide calling cards that work from anywhere in the world. Just make sure you have the local access number (AIFS student services can help). Calling cards are also available in the UK or online. Please remember the number of minutes varies dramatically depending if you make the call on a Landline, Mobile telephone or Payphone.

## Mail

While it's lovely to receive mail and packages, unless your program is longer than 1 month we would not recommend it. Often packages and letters arrive one students have departed and then it's usually quite a hefty fee to ship letters and packages home. If you are expecting mail, please have it sent to the AIFS Student Services Centre at Dilke House (address is on page 2). Anything that arrives after you left will be forwarded at our discretion (it can be very costly to send large parcels back to the USA so there are no guarantees). Please advise friends and family that it can take several weeks for parcels to be delivered to the UK and not to mail anything to you towards the end of the programme.



You can post items yourself via the Post Office in the UK and various private companies such as UPS and FedEx. More information can be obtained while you are here from the Student Services office.



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### Tip from Charley, Student Services Advisor

For those of you who expect your loved ones to send you packages from the U.S. – have them label the package 'used goods'. This will hopefully avoid you being charged any taxes by customs. Make sure that you don't have any electrical, phones or medication sent to you that will be very costly to recover from UK customs.

# Travelling around the UK & Europe

**We understand that you may want to make independent travel plans, but please note that AIFS does not recommend or endorse third party tour operators or travel service providers. It is your responsibility to review and evaluate any tour company, transportation provider and hotel/hostel accommodation you choose to use.**

You are embarking on a Study Abroad Program, however you might have free weekends in order to travel and explore outside your programme. In order to make the most of your time, it is a good idea to do some research now and have some ideas about where you want to go and how you are going to get there. When you arrive in London the AIFS Student Services staff will be able to give you plenty of advice and assistance. Please check with your school directly if you are permitted to travel outside of London on the weekends. If not, you can consult this information once the program has finished

**You are required to let us know your travel plans** – let us know as much detail as you can by emailing [studentinfo@aifs.co.uk](mailto:studentinfo@aifs.co.uk) with: dates, which city you are travelling to, who you are travelling with, how you are travelling and where you will be staying - in case we need to contact you in an emergency.

## **By air**

Over the last ten years there has been a revolution in cheap air travel throughout Europe. There are six airports surrounding London (Heathrow, Gatwick, London Luton, Stansted, London City and Southend) allowing you to get almost anywhere in Europe at reasonable prices. Heathrow is London's (and the UK's) main international airport, but flying to mainland Europe, you will most likely be using Stansted, Luton or Gatwick, as this is where the low cost carriers fly from. The key to getting cheap deals is being flexible about departure times and booking as early as possible. Ryanair ([www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)) and EasyJet ([www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)) are two of the most popular cheap airlines, but be aware of the details. If you want to compare fares and options it's also worth checking out Skyscanner ([www.skyscanner.net](http://www.skyscanner.net)).

Keep in mind when booking flights from Stansted, Luton or Gatwick that these airports are at least an hour outside of central London, so you will also have to pay for and arrange transport. Easybus ([www.easybus.co.uk](http://www.easybus.co.uk)) offers the cheapest fares (from £2 one way!) if you book in advance. National Express ([www.nationalexpress.co.uk](http://www.nationalexpress.co.uk)) also has bus transfers from many points in London and for a bit more money you can also get a train to the airports from one of several train stations in London.

## **By train**

Across Europe, the train is a great way of travelling, not as quick as the plane but in the current climate, certainly more relaxed, with no luggage restrictions or excessive security. For the

cheapest deals, book in advance and try to avoid travelling on a Friday. In the UK you can look at **[www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk)** to find details and prices of trains. The only discounts for students/young people are with a 16-25 Railcard (**[www.16-25railcard.co.uk](http://www.16-25railcard.co.uk)**). This is valid for a year but does require a one off payment of £30 to get 1/3 off rail fares for the year. It's only worth bothering with if you plan on doing a lot of rail travel in the UK.

A good starting point for train travel in mainland Europe is on **[www.raileurope.com](http://www.raileurope.com)** . They have all the details on Eurail passes, which students have often used for post program travel. Once again, you would have to do quite a bit of travel to get full value and some tickets can only be mailed to addresses in the U.S.



**St Pancras International, the London terminus of the Eurostar**

For details on the Eurostar service to Paris and Brussels have a look at **[www.eurostar.com](http://www.eurostar.com)**.

Look out for cheaper youth fares for people under 25 years of age. This is by far the best way to get to the French capital as it goes from Central London to Central Paris in about 2hrs 15min direct in some considerable luxury.

## By Coach

Often the cheapest way to get around Europe is using the coach. Be warned that it will take a while and might not be the most comfortable way of travel but you will get there, eventually. The UK coach network is vast, even when compared to the States. The coach company National Express ([www.nationalexpress.co.uk](http://www.nationalexpress.co.uk)) is the main provider. Megabus ([www.megabus.com](http://www.megabus.com)) also covers all of the UK and parts of Europe, often for cheaper. Another cheap coach company for Europe is Eurolines, website - [www.eurolines.com](http://www.eurolines.com)

All the coaches have a bathroom, make regular stops and it can be a good opportunity to meet some interesting people! They also pick up and drop off right in the heart of the city.

### Further Research

Have a look at the following resources for further information.

Let's Go Travel Guides – Are aimed at students and are updated yearly.

[www.letsgo.com](http://www.letsgo.com)

Lonely Planet – Make great travel guides and have a useful website.

[www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)

Time Out – Good city guides and you can get newsletters by email.

[www.timeout.com](http://www.timeout.com)

Rough Guides – Good background information and tips.

[www.roughguides.com](http://www.roughguides.com)

As in the USA there is also a network of STA travel agents around the UK. These are based around the student market with all of the staff having travelled extensively.

[www.statravel.co.uk](http://www.statravel.co.uk)



### Tip from Tori, Deputy Program Director

You don't have to leave England to have some fun - walking for the hell of it is a great British past time, exploring the countryside & a great way to take a break from the stresses of urban life and have a proper chat with your friends as you head for the hills and stop for a picnic or pub lunch. Oh and it costs almost nothing! Time Out

do some great guides to walks just outside London which are accessible by train and give you information on distance, start and finish, route to follow and tips on where to stop for lunch...the perfect way to spend the weekend! <https://www.timeout.com/london/things-to-do/country-walks-outside-london-1>



## Where to Stay

**HOSTELS** - Don't be afraid of staying in a hostel, it is the number one choice for young travellers in Europe. Modern hostels are full of the comforts of home; many have private rooms with bathrooms and are great places for meeting people. A good place to start is **[www.hostelworld.com](http://www.hostelworld.com)** as you can read what fellow travellers thought of the place. You may also want to look at Hostelling International (**[www.hihostels.com](http://www.hihostels.com)**); the hostels on offer are slightly more traditional but are still comfortable. It is possible to become a member, offering discounts but not essential.

**HOTELS** - Of course there are a variety of hotels, guest houses, B&B's across Europe. The Student Services staff will give you as much help as possible. Please remember that rooms are much smaller than the US, rarely have air conditioning and if they are booked for one person that is the maximum number! Look at **[www.booking.com](http://www.booking.com)** for some inspiration.



**Whether it be a packed dorm room or a 5 star hotel, London, the UK and Europe are spoilt for choice!**



# US Embassy Registration

For security reasons AIFS strongly advises all its students to register with the US State Department before leaving the US. We are unable to do this for you – you must do it individually online. You will need your passport information before you can do this.

Go to the following website: <https://step.state.gov/step/>

**Smart Traveler Enrollment Program**  
A SERVICE OF THE BUREAU OF CONSULAR AFFAIRS  
U.S. Department of State

Sign In or [Create Account](#) Username Password >>  
[Forgot Username](#) or [Password?](#)

**TRAVELING?**  
Enroll a trip and get Travel Alerts and Warnings

**STAYING AT HOME?**  
Get Travel Alerts and Warnings

**FREQUENT TRAVELER?**  
Create an account

**What is STEP?**  
The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) is a free service to allow U.S. citizens and nationals traveling and living abroad to enroll their trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

**Benefits of Enrolling in STEP**

- ☒ Receive important information from the Embassy about safety conditions in your destination country, helping you make informed decisions about your travel plans.
- ☒ Help the U.S. Embassy contact you in an emergency, whether natural disaster, civil unrest, or family emergency.
- ☒ Help family and friends get in touch with you in an emergency.

**Stay Informed, Stay Connected, Stay Safe!**

You will firstly need to create an account. Click on **Create Individual Account**. Fill out the password and security information – note this down and keep it somewhere safe. Fill out as many details as possible.

- **Passport information.**
- **Emergency contact information** – please enter as much information as possible to allow the State Department to contact your next of kin in the event of an emergency while you are abroad.

- **Privacy information** – this is at your own discretion but it is advisable that you allow family members to have access to this information in the event of an emergency.
- **Confirm your account details** and print for your records.
- This will now take you back to your **Profile Information**. From here you should click on Add a Trip; this will take you to the Itinerary page.
- **Destination Info** – please enter as follows:
 

<u>Country:</u>	United Kingdom
<u>Local Embassy:</u>	London
<u>Type of Visit:</u>	Extended Stay
<u>Date of Arrival and Departure:</u>	please enter the dates of your program
<u>Purpose of Visit:</u>	please enter "Study Abroad" plus the name of your home college
- **Address Info** – please enter as follows:
 

<u>Destination Type:</u>	School
<u>Address Line 1:</u>	AIFS
<u>Address Line 2:</u>	Dilke House, 1 Malet Street
<u>City:</u>	London
<u>Postal Code:</u>	WC1E 7JN
<u>Country:</u>	United Kingdom
<u>Phone number:</u>	020 7636 0761
- **Travellers** – please enter your own information. One form of contact information must be entered here – home address, telephone number, e mail address, fax number.
- **Email list** – add your email address if you would like to be kept up to receive email Travel Warnings, Public Announcements and other information from the State Department.
- You will then see any relevant information recently issued about your destination country.
- Finally you should confirm the summary of information. When you click on Finish it will take you back to the Profile page from where you can logout or add other trips if necessary.

If you have any difficulty with the above process or are unable to complete the registration please contact AIFS in London at **studentinfo@aifs.co.uk**.

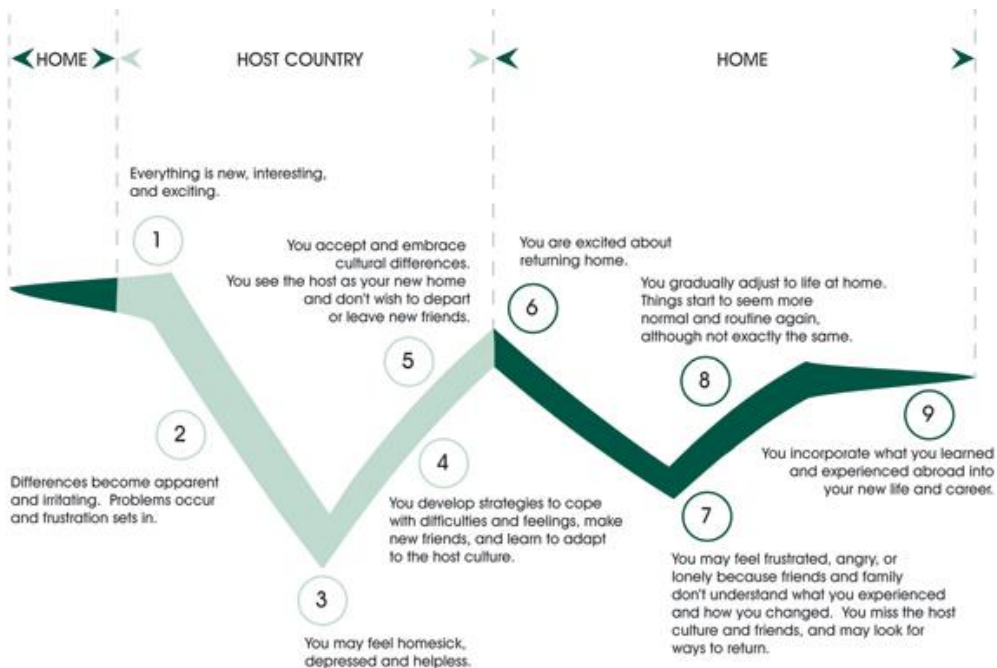
# Culture Shock

Study Abroad can be a wonderfully exciting, rewarding, culturally enlightening and expanding experience, not forgetting what a great opportunity it is for personal growth! However it can, at times, also be a stressful experience. Students are at a stage where a lot of transitions are taking place in their lives, and all students will experience and deal with these transitions in different ways. All transitions have common symptoms and stages - the symptoms may include irritability, frustration, disorientation, helplessness and withdrawal.

In transition experiences, first we may *fight* that which is new, or we may choose to take *flight* to escape the challenging situation. We may literally leave the environment or withdraw internally. What may initially appear to be a crisis is just a normal developmental phase of adjustment known as 'culture shock'. We believe, the more you know about 'culture shock' the more equipped you will be to understand and deal with it. The UK and the US may have many similarities but the famous saying goes that we are **"two nations divided by a common language"**. The cultures, values, beliefs, communications, and way of life of our two great nations can be vastly differing.

What is 'culture shock'? We could list many academic definitions but, to put it plainly, 'culture shock' can be defined as **a clash between our own views of the world (which are determined by our home culture) and our new cultural environment**. It can feel like we have a lack of control, that we are helpless in this new culture. 'Culture shock' is a developmental phase that is common amongst study abroad students; it is normal to experience it. Culture shock is also often described as an adjustment cycle, initially we feel really excited and optimistic about going on a study abroad, we can't wait to get to the country we will be calling home for the next semester. This is the high point of the cycle or, what is often referred to as the 'honeymoon stage'. Then we hit the second phase or the low point of the cycle, 'the disintegration or crisis stage' where all we can see is difference, but not in a positive way; nothing works in the same way, food is different (something you will notice in the UK), it's not like home, we begin to miss our support system and all our creature comforts.

We have to navigate our way through a culture that has different rules, behaviours, food and language (even when initially it seems that we share a common one!), and it can really feel like an uphill struggle. 'Culture shock' is about this struggle to become culturally competent in a different culture. This is perfectly natural, and it can help us to learn and grow from the experience. Because it is a developmental process, how long and how we work through it depends on what resources we have available to us. Some individuals will seem to have no problems adjusting while for others it can be a real struggle. The W-curve (next page) provides a good illustration of the stages of adjustment which one may experience.



- **Honeymoon Phase** – occurs when you first arrive in a new culture. The excitement of being somewhere new and different...I mean, come on it's London!
- **Cultural Shock** - may be noticeable after a few days or weeks. Those initially exciting cultural differences and quirks the British have may now cause you to feel insecure or confused, as you struggle to understand the rules of the new culture you find yourself in. At this stage, you may find you miss your family and home support structures the most.
- **Initial Adjustment** - you may find you feel irritated, or frustrated with the cultural differences you come across in daily life: perhaps with the learning and teaching environment, or in your relationships with staff or other students, or with your accommodation. You will probably find you make comparisons with your home culture and decide you prefer home! You may be consciously or unconsciously assessing your own cultural values and trying to make sense of them.
- **Mental Isolation** - you will by now probably worked out how to operate in your new cultural environment - how to satisfactorily interact with people and make friends, where to shop, eat and socialize, as well as to understand and cope with your new learning environment. You will most likely start to accept the differences between your home culture and those of the UK and Europe and to feel more relaxed.
- **Acceptance and Integration** - brings with it a feeling of self-assurance and more complete understanding of your home and the new culture. Differences and similarities are valued and important and you feel confident about handling most or all situations.



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**Tip from Polly, Administrative Assistant**

The first couple of days may be daunting as you acclimatise to London life. Take advantage of the resources available to you, talk to the staff and get their recommendations on how to adapt to a new place.

It is important to remember not everyone will experience the above, some will for differing lengths of time, and some may only experience parts of the W-curve. To help ease the transition keep in touch with your home country, ensure you take care of yourself and talk to someone about how you are feeling. And remember what you may experience is normal and that other students will be feeling the same way as you.

This is just a guide to help you to understand some of the emotions you may encounter during your time abroad. If you have any questions or would like any further information about dealing with culture shock please email us at **[studentinfo@aifs.co.uk](mailto:studentinfo@aifs.co.uk)** or come and speak to the AIFS staff when you are in London.

The Student Services staff have travelled all over the globe and themselves have experienced the best and worst of exploring new cultures. We can provide for you sound advice to dealing with all aspects of culture shock.

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**Tip from Student Services team**

We recommend reading *Watching the English: the hidden rules of English behaviour* by Kate Fox to get a handle on quirky English behaviour before you get to the UK. It could help you make sense of some of the “odd” behaviours you see and what they might indicate about the person!

# Diversity and inclusion

At AIFS, we support students of all backgrounds, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, physical ability, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Diversity and inclusion are important in every aspect of your study abroad experience. You will be experiencing a new culture, which may have different attitudes towards diversity than you are used to. It may be more open, it may be less. As an individual, it is essential to be respectful of others. This notion applies to the locals you will meet, other international students, your homestay family, and others within the AIFS group.

Your on-site Resident Director has resources to help you throughout your study abroad journey. For example, they can provide information about LGBTQ+ friendly neighbourhoods, help you find places of worship, or connect you with medical professionals that support transgender health. They can make arrangements to accommodate visible and non-visible disabilities. Please keep in mind that these accommodations will vary, depending on the location.

The more information that you can provide, the better we can assist you in preparing for your arrival. Please communicate any specific needs or concerns with your Admission Officer prior to departure. While you are on-site, your Resident Director is your advocate and will do everything they can to ensure that you have a positive experience.

Resident Directors and Admission Officers would be able to provide more details and known resources specific to their city/country in the space below for the following populations:

- LGBTQ+
- Disability (Physical)
- Disability (Mental)
- Mental Health
- Religion
- Veterans
- First Generation college students
- Non-traditional age
- High financial need
- Diverse Identities: cultural or ethnic identities
- Diverse Identities: socioeconomic identities





# Central London Tube Map

Finally, one of the most iconic symbols of the city, the Tube. The London Underground, known as the Tube, is the oldest and one of the largest underground train networks in the world. While you are here you will become very familiar with it! Remember, you are here to learn and enjoy yourselves, make the most of your time in the greatest city on earth!

