



How to Survive in the UK as an International Student



 **ESN**
Erasmus Student Network
United Kingdom

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'How to survive in the UK as an International Student'

Published by: Erasmus Student Network United Kingdom

Authors: Christie Dear, Findlay Currie

Graphic Design: Christie Dear, Findlay Currie

Proofreading: Eilidh Hudson, Jude Waites

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Erasmus Student Network United Kingdom
esnuk.org



Contents

Introduction	3
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Erasmus Student Network (ESN)

ESN UK	5
ESNcard	7

Discover the UK

History and Politics	
History	10
Politics	11
The 4 Nations	
England	13
Scotland	14
Wales	15
Northern Ireland	16
Meet the ESN UK Sections	
Aberdeen	18
Aberystwyth	19
Bristol	20
Durham	21
Edinburgh	22
Glasgow	23
Leeds	24
London	25
Newcastle	26
Southampton	27

Surviving in the UK

Accommodation	29
Bank Accounts/Currency	32
Cost of Living	34
Health, Safety and Well-being	35
Phone Plans	41
Public Holidays/Festivals	42
Pubs and Restaurants	44
Responsible Party and Drinking Culture	45
Supermarkets	46
Transport	47

Introduction

Dear international student,

On behalf of Erasmus Student Network UK, welcome to the UK! We hope you have an amazing time here, discovering a new culture, meeting new people, experiencing study at a new university... and above all, returning home with incredible memories and a new global outlook.

We have prepared this guide for you to support your transition into this experience - in its pages, you will find information on ESN, the UK's history and politics, different cities and universities, accommodation, healthcare, phone plans, and so much more - in short, everything you need to survive in the UK!

We are aware that in recent years, it may seem as though the UK is not a welcoming place to immigrants, but we want you to know that there is a huge internationally-minded community who are so happy to have you here and want to make your time in the UK as enjoyable and meaningful as possible. This is not limited to ESN UK and our sections, but they are a great place to start! You will find our contact details throughout this guide, and we highly recommend that you get in touch and get involved with ESN throughout your stay.

You are now at the beginning of a journey, which may be one of the greatest in your life - seize every moment, you will get out what you put in!

Wishing you an extraordinary adventure,

Christie Dear
President, ESN UK

What is ESN?

Erasmus Student Network (ESN)

ESN is one of the largest student organisations in Europe, and has been active for almost 35 years supporting and developing student exchange and mobility.

ESN is present in more than 1000 Higher Education Institutions in 40+ countries. The network is constantly developing and expanding, with over 15,000 members working on a volunteer basis to take care of international students and advocate for student mobility. We are 'students helping students' - the majority of ESN volunteers are students who have studied abroad, had an amazing time, returned home and wanted to continue their international lifestyle and give incoming students to their home institution the best experience possible.



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ESN UK

ESN UK is a member of ESN and is the link between the universities we work in across the UK, and the wider international network. We promote mobility opportunities to students from the UK and support incoming students who come to the UK. If that's you, ESN UK is here to help!

ESN UK is made up of 15 local organisations or 'sections', present in different universities across the UK. Sections are student societies made up of volunteers called 'ESNers'. At the local level, each section supports incoming students with buddy systems, local partnerships, and social events, which allow international students to meet, experience the local culture, and have a lot of fun!

At the national level as ESN UK, we advocate for mobility and the rights of international students. We also provide events and trips, such as our yearly trip to Edinburgh (pictured), which are open for every international student in the UK to come together - follow our social media to be sure you don't miss out on these!

 @esn_uk

 hello@esnuk.org

 esnuk.org



Later in this guide, we will introduce you to our sections and the cities they are situated in - we hope they will help to make the most of your time in the UK! If you have any questions during your time in the UK, don't hesitate to reach out to your local section, or ESN UK directly using the contact details on the previous page.

If there is no section in your city, maybe you could start one, and be involved in improving the experiences of international students! Get in touch with ESN UK directly to find out more.

Why is the UK still part of the 'Erasmus' Student Network?

We know after Brexit, this can be confusing - but while we have Erasmus in our name, our activities and services have always been and will always be for ALL mobility to and from the UK - whether you're a full degree international student, here on exchange, or even on a traineeship! If you have decided to make the UK your home for some time, we are here for you.





ESN UK's

Edinburgh Trip 2023

10th – 12th November

Join hundreds of international students as we explore the historic streets and culture of Scotland's capital – tickets on sale now at esnuk.org!

Tickets include: Visits to Edinburgh Castle and the Scottish Parliament, city walking tour, optional Arthur's seat hike, pub crawl, ceilidh (traditional Scottish dance), and more!

(Optional) Two nights of accommodation in central Edinburgh

(Optional) Return coach transport from Aberdeen, Aberystwyth, Birmingham, Bristol, London, Manchester, or Newcastle

#ESNburgh2023



Who can buy an ESNcard?

- Exchange students
- International students
- ESN volunteers/alumni
- International volunteers or trainees
- Local students who are buddies to incoming students

To become a member of your local section of ESN, you need to get an ESNcard - the 'membership card of the Erasmus Generation'. With your ESNcard, you will be able to enjoy hundreds of discounts in our more than 500 sections around Europe. You will find some on the local level, like cafes and bars in the city you are living in, as well as on the national and international levels.

More than this however, you will know you are one of the many thousands of people who have benefitted from student exchange, gone out of your comfort zone and embraced an amazing new international world.

ESNcards are valid for 12 months and are sold by local sections - please get in touch with your nearest section for more information on how to get one.

On the next page, we have shared just some examples of the current ESNcard international discounts - it's worth keeping an eye on esncard.org as new partnerships on the local, national, and international level are likely to be announced throughout the year!

We support your next adventure

SAVE 10%

ESNUK

Current International Discounts

 **RYANAIR**

10% discount +
free 20kg bag on
4 flights



10% discount on
annual membership

FLIXBUS

10% discount on
travel



Drops language learning

70% discount on
annual subscription

 **eurosender**

10% discount to
send your luggage

**All discounts valid as of 08/08/2023, please see escard.org for full details*

Discover the UK

History and Politics

Like every country which has existed for hundreds of years, the UK has a rich and complicated history, which still plays into our modern-day politics. Here, we provide a brief overview of the basics you might want to know about the UK while living here.



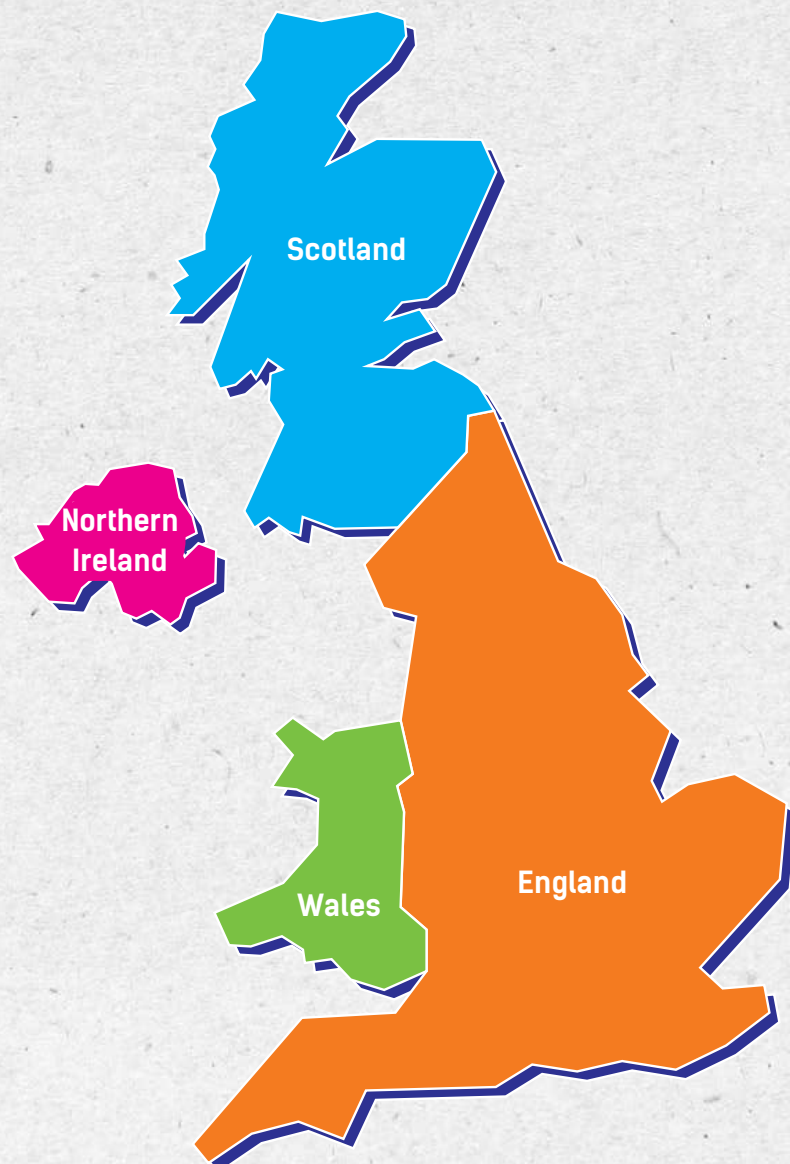
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United Kingdom

History

The United Kingdom (UK) is often mistakenly referred to as 'England' - in reality, however, it is an island nation made up of four separate countries: England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The four countries did not always exist as a union, and thus the UK is the result of an evolution over hundreds of years that often contained a great deal of unrest and conflict. In 1542, the Kingdom of England annexed Wales, and then in 1707 signed a treaty of union with the Kingdom of Scotland. In 1801 the Kingdom of Ireland joined to create the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, however in 1922, the majority of Ireland seceded from the UK and

became the Irish Free State (now the Republic of Ireland, a separate country). Northern Ireland remained in the union which is today known as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The UK has existed as a union for many years; however, it is worth being aware that there are growing movements against the union in some areas of the UK. Nationalism can be a divisive issue but not one which will dominate day-to-day life and certainly not one that you should worry about.



The '4 nations' history is also reflected in current UK politics - Scotland, Northern Ireland (NI) and Wales all have devolved governments and parliaments in their capitals. These governments have a range of competencies from the administration of the Health Service to Education and determining their own budget. However, each is still a subsidiary of the UK government located in England. The UK government and parliament exist with the backing of hundreds of years of constitutional law and granted powers to the other nations only relatively recently.

As of March 2023, the Conservative Party have a majority in parliament and therefore makes up the government. Anyone who serves as a government minister in the UK government is also an elected Member of Parliament (MP) or a member of the unelected House of Lords, which means that all ministers are appointed from within the party that wins the election.

Major UK Political Parties

- Conservatives ('Tories') - Right Wing
- Labour - Left Wing
- Liberal Democrats ('Lib Dems') - Centrist
- Scotland National Party (SNP) - Nationalist (only in Scotland)
- Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) - Pro-union (only in NI)
- Sinn Féin - Nationalist (only in NI)
- Plaid Cymru - Nationalist (only in Wales)
- Green Party - Environmental Party

(There are many of smaller parties across the UK, but these are the main ones to be aware of for a quick overview.)

Discover the UK

The 4 Nations

The terms “Britain,” “Great Britain,” and “United Kingdom” are often used interchangeably (and incorrectly). This is linked to the long and complicated history of the islands. To put it simply: “Great Britain” is the island containing Wales, England and Scotland; “Ireland” is the island containing Ireland and Northern Ireland; “The United Kingdom” is a political term for the union of 4 nations: Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England.

In these pages, we will give you a brief introduction to the geography of the UK and each of the four nations.



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United Kingdom

England

The largest and most Southerly of the countries is England; it is generally low yet hilly, with the highest elevation found in the North. The area of wider London, the capital of the UK, occupies much of the South and is the largest urban economy in Europe as well as one of the largest financial centres of the world. However, there are many thriving, beautiful cities and countryside to explore outside of London. The climate in England is very variable, and the weather is very often a subject of conversation between people as a result.

Population: 56 million
Capital: London
National animal: Lion





The second largest of the four nations is Scotland, which is also the most northern nation and generally the coldest. Much of Scotland's population lives in the so-called "central belt." This belt runs across the middle of the country and includes its capital, Edinburgh, and its largest city, Glasgow. Scotland's highlands (North) are largely uninhabited and contain some of the most scenic countryside and mountains in the world, as well as the highest point in the UK (Ben Nevis). The rolling hills of the lowlands (South) make for a less dramatic but still very beautiful viewing.

Population: 5.5 million

Capital: Edinburgh

National animal: Unicorn





Wales

Again, Wales, the third largest of the four nations, is a country of outstanding natural beauty. It comprises coastal plains and valleys in the South and dramatic mountain ranges in the middle and North. A quarter of the country's landmass comprises three national parks, so there is a lot of wilderness to explore. Wales is also home to the longest place name in Europe:

Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogoch, which we will be surprised if you can pronounce! The capital city is Cardiff, in the South, which has been voted Europe's third best capital to live in and is a varied, exciting place to live. Other notable cities include Bangor, Swansea and Newport.

Population: 3.1 million
Capital: Cardiff
National animal: Dragon





Northern Ireland

The fourth largest country is Northern Ireland, located on a separate island (Ireland) very near to the “mainland” of the UK. Northern Ireland takes up about 17% of the overall island of Ireland. It contains Lough Neagh, the largest freshwater lake in the United Kingdom and a mix of highlands and lowlands. The coast is rugged, and merges with rolling glens and lush forest, and the inlands host wonderful cities such as the capital, Belfast, and Derry/Londonderry.

Population: 1.9 million

Capital: Belfast

National animal: None!



Discover the UK

Meet the ESN UK Sections

There are over 160 universities and even more cities in the UK, so unfortunately we cannot include them all in this guide! But for a start, student volunteers in 10 towns and cities across the UK have prepared their local 'must see's'. Each location has at least one ESN section - a committed team of volunteers working to provide activities and projects to make your time in the UK as fun and enriching as possible. ESN activities are open to all - you don't need to be an international or exchange student, and you can attend events in your city even if the section is from a different university! We have provided the contact details of our sections - check them out!



Erasmus Student Network
United Kingdom

Aberdeen

Aberdeen is Scotland's granite city, credited as Europe's hub for everything oil, gas and renewable energy. It's home to the University of Aberdeen, one of the oldest institutions in the first world, and Robert Gordon University, named after a prosperous Aberdeen merchant. It's a vibrant youthful student-led city with a bustling Scottish scene. The city centre has something for everyone, from theatres to museums, multicultural and local cuisine all within a reasonable distance from Aberdeen's universities.

When in Aberdeen, our section volunteers recommend you don't miss; Aberdeen Beach, the Maritime Museum, or nearby Balmoral Castle!



Top 5 Eat & Drink

- 1) Atik Nightclub
- 2) Shakes n Cakes
- 3) Revolution de Cuba
- 4) Chaophraya
- 5) Grub

Meet our ESN UK sections in Aberdeen:

ESN Aberdeen

-  University of Aberdeen
-  @esnaberdien
-  exchangeaberdien@gmail.com

ESN RGU

-  Robert Gordon University
-  @esnrgu
-  rgu@esnuk.org

Aberystwyth

Aberystwyth is often referred to as the cultural capital of Wales. Nestled on the Cambrian coast between three breathtaking hills, this town is home to the oldest Welsh university and one of 5 copyright libraries in the UK. A bustling town with plenty of charm, Aberystwyth will sweep you off your feet with its unmatched hospitality and plethora of cute cafes and watering holes. Take in the panoramic views of Snowdonia from the top of Constitution Hill or watch the sunset from the castle ruins, and you'll understand why so many people choose to make this quaint little town their home.

When in Aberystwyth, our section volunteers recommend you don't miss; Constitution Hill, the National Library of Wales, or Tan Y Bwlch beach!






Top 5 Eat & Drink

- 1) Medina
- 2) The Glengower
- 3) The Courtyard SY23
- 4) Bottle & Barrel
- 5) Y Gornel

Meet our ESN UK section in Aberystwyth:

ESN Aberystwyth

-  Aberystwyth University
-  @esnaberystwyth
-  aberystwyth@esnuk.org



Bristol

Bristol is a vibrant and diverse city in the West of England. Known for its artistic street art and lively music scene, Bristol has something for everyone and was named the Best Place to Be Vegan in Europe! With growing communities of artists, musicians, board game enthusiasts, skaters, and so many more, this open-minded city will feel welcoming to all types of people who visit it.

When in Bristol, our section volunteers recommend you don't miss; Bristol Museum & Art Gallery - for an art fix, climbing Cabot Tower for a view of the city, or heading to The Old Duke (King Street) - for live jazz music from the locals every night!

Top 5 Eat & Drink

- 1) The Social
- 2) The Love Inn
- 3) St Nick's Market
- 4) Bristol & Bath Rum Distillery
- 5) Bertha's



Meet our ESN UK section in Bristol:

ESN Bristol

-  University of Bristol
-  @esn_bristol
-  esn.bristoluni@gmail.com

Durham is a mining city in the north of England, centred on Durham Castle and Cathedral and located on the River Wear. Both Durham Castle and Cathedral were built in the 11th Century and are UNESCO World Heritage Sites, with Durham Castle being part of the University of Durham. This is the 3rd oldest university in England and is a collegiate - it comprises 17 different colleges, with a student's college acting as the centre of their university community.

When in Durham, our section volunteers recommend you don't miss Durham Castle and Cathedral, the old Durham Gardens, or Lumiere Festival.



Top 5 Eat & Drink

- 1) La Spaghettata
- 2) Paddy's
- 3) Three Bridges
- 4) Klute
- 5) Coviello

Meet our ESN UK
section in Durham:

ESN Durham

- University of Durham
- @esn_durham
- durham@esnuk.org



Edinburgh

Edinburgh is the capital city of Scotland known for its rich cultural heritage, stunning architecture, and thriving arts scene. It is a city of contrasts, with the medieval Old Town and the Georgian New Town providing a fascinating glimpse into the city's past. The iconic Edinburgh Castle, located at the top of the Royal Mile, is a must-see attraction. Students can also explore the many parks and gardens within the city, including Princes Street Gardens, the Royal Botanic Garden, and Holyrood Park, overlooked by an extinct volcano known as Arthur's Seat. Edinburgh is an exciting and welcoming city that offers international students an unforgettable experience!

When in Edinburgh, our section volunteers recommend you don't miss: Calton Hill, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, or the Scottish National Gallery!


Top 5 Eat & Drink

- 1) The Milkman
- 2) Boteco Do Brasil
- 3) Frankenstein Edinburgh
- 4) The Sheep Heid Inn
- 5) Cafe Andaluz



Meet our ESN UK section in Edinburgh:

ESN Edinburgh

-  University of Edinburgh
-  @esnedinburgh
-  esnedinburgh@gmail.com



Glasgow is known for its colourful character, industrial history and incredible art and music scene, and it is Scotland's most vibrant city. With trees older than the dinosaurs and more marble than the Vatican, be dazzled and surprised by all this city offers. Get around easily using Glasgow's subway (the third oldest in the world) and learn about the city's inspiring history from the long list of inventions like the Tikka Masala and life-changing machines and experience why Glasgow was named the cultural capital of Scotland with more than 20 museums and art galleries from some of the world's most famous artists.

When in Glasgow, our section volunteers recommend you don't miss: a cycle along the Clyde, the Botanic Gardens, or Kelvingrove Art Gallery!



Top 5 Eat & Drink

- 1) Tingle
- 2) Bag O Nails
- 3) La Vita
- 4) Kothel
- 5) Firewater

Meet our ESN UK sections in Glasgow:

ESN Strathclyde

🏠 University of Strathclyde
📷 @esnstrathclyde
✉️ esnstrath@gmail.com

ESN UofG

🏠 University of Glasgow
📷 @esn_uofg
✉️ iesn.uofg@gmail.com



Leeds

Leeds is a city in the north of England which has one of the largest student populations in the UK. With a large music and nightlife scene, there are always events going on in Leeds, stretching from the University Campus, in the northern part of Leeds, to the heart of the city centre and surrounding areas. On the outskirts, Leeds quickly becomes a suburban location, following the Leeds-Liverpool canal on a nice nature walk, which complements the popular student areas of Hyde Park and Headingley.

When in Leeds, our section volunteers recommend you don't miss: the City Museum, Leeds Canal, or Grand Theatre & Opera House!

Top 5 Eat & Drink

- 1) The Corn Exchange
- 2) Hyde Park Book Club
- 3) Brudenell Social Club
- 4) Leeds Trinity
- 5) Wapentake



Meet our ESN UK
section in Leeds:

ESN Leeds

Leeds University

@esnleeds

esnleeds@gmail.com

London is the capital of the UK and one of the world's most diverse, dynamic and iconic cities. London is home to nearly 9 million people, speaking over 300 languages and contributing to the largest Urban economy in Europe. The city strongly influences media, commerce, fashion, art and science and has strong public transport connections to all major UK cities. It is one of the financial hubs of the world, and famous sites include Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abbey, Big Ben and the River Thames. With so many people and so much to see, you can never be bored in London! When in London, our section volunteers recommend you don't miss: the British Museum, Hyde Park, The Shard, or St Paul's Cathedral!



Meet our ESN UK sections in London:

ESN City London

🏠 City, University of London
📷 @escitylondon
✉️ esn.citylondon@gmail.com

ESN Imperial

🏠 Imperial College London
📷 @esnimperial
✉️ erasmus@imperial.ac.uk

ESN QMUL

🏠 Queen Mary University
📷 @esn_qmul
✉️ qmul@esnuk.org

Top 5 Eat & Drink

- 1) Camden Market
- 2) Fair Shot Cafe
- 3) The Pickle Factory
- 4) Ministry of Sound
- 5) Sky Garden



Newcastle

Newcastle is one of the best student cities in the UK. It has a renowned nightlife scene and boasts, art, culture, history and of course its passion for football and the friendly nature of its local people, the Geordies. It is in close proximity to many other great cities to visit, such as Durham, York and Edinburgh, being located right below England's border county of Northumberland, the land of castles, countryside and coastline, meaning that students can always have a break from the city.

When in Newcastle, our section volunteers recommend you don't miss: The Angel of the North, the Quayside Monument/Grey Street, Jesmond Dene, or Newcastle Castle!

Top 5 Eat & Drink

- 1) Pani's Cafe
- 2) My Dehli
- 3) The French Quarter
- 4) Blackfriars
- 5) Hana Hana



Meet our ESN UK section in Newcastle:

ESN Newcastle

-  Northumbria University
-  @esn_newcastle
-  esnnewcastle@gmail.com

Southampton

Most famous as the departure point of the Titanic, Southampton is a port town on the South coast of England. You can find Titanic-related attractions throughout the city and lots of other history; you can find the longest surviving stretch of medieval walls in England and many Tudor buildings. You can use the city as a base for travel around the region, such as to Stonehenge, the New Forest, or the Isle of Wight. Southampton is also a lively student city with a bustling nightlife, with the infamous 'Jester's' nightclub known across the UK.

When in Southampton, our section volunteers recommend you don't miss the SeaCity museum, Tudor House, or City Art Gallery.



Top 5 Eat & Drink

- 1) Jester's
- 2) Stag's
- 3) Picolo Mondo
- 4) The Real Greek
- 5) Sobar

Meet our ESN UK section in Southampton:

ESN Southampton

-  University of Southampton
-  @esn_southampton
-  southampton@esnuk.org



Surviving the UK

International Student Life

In this section, we will give you our insider view of day-to-day life in the UK, with a specific focus on life for an international or exchange student coming here to study. Read carefully because we will include many tips and tricks to get the most out of your time here!



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United Kingdom

Accommodation

There are three main types of student accommodation:

University Residences

University residences, often referred to as halls of residence or simply 'halls', are accommodations owned, managed, and maintained by the universities themselves. It is fairly common for first-year students and exchange students to be offered a place in halls, but this may not be guaranteed. The actual accommodation can also vary widely; you will generally have a private bedroom, but this could be sharing kitchen and bathroom facilities with a flat or corridor of anything from 4-9 others. Universities generally offer a range of options at varying prices, which also generally cover all bills, including wifi.

You can also often choose between catered and non-catered accommodation; in catered accommodation, you get three meals per day and use of the communal kitchen, but this of course costs more. One of the benefits of university accommodation is that you will be in the centre of student life and will be more likely to make new friends. They also tend to be very well located for the university, sometimes on the campus itself, meaning you don't have to worry about transport links.

Usually, university accommodation will be offered to you once you have received your place. There are often more students than spots, so we recommend that you apply as soon as you can!





Private Student Residences

Private student residences are very similar to university residences in that they are solely targeted at students, usually include all bills, and often have a similar variety of rooms and options, ranging from studios to shared facilities between many students. On the whole, private residences are generally more modern than university residences, as well as being more expensive. They may be located near the university, but this is not always the case.

Private Renting

The final option is privately renting a property, usually a flat, which most UK students do after their first year of studies. There are many pros and cons compared to university residences. You have much more freedom and flexibility in the type of property you want and in which area of the city you live in. You can choose the size of your flat, whether you prefer to live alone or with friends - living in a 2-bed versus 6-bed flat can be a very different experience!

In private flats, only the flat itself is included - you will have to pay bills on top of your rent and may have to arrange these yourself.

It can take a long time to find a private flat, and in many cities in the UK, it is particularly bad right now. We encourage you to start looking months before arrival - many students will leave their accommodations in the summer months, and landlords or letting agencies may list them even before they leave to secure their next tenants as soon as they can.

Accommodation

If you have a group of people you want to live with, you can search for a flat together, or if you don't want to live alone but don't have someone in mind, you may want to look for a room in a flat. If you're looking for an entire property, look at letting agencies such as Zoopla, CityLets or Rightmove. If you're looking for an entire property or just a room, check out SpareRoom, Gumtree and Facebook - you can often find groups targeted at students looking for accommodation, but beware of scams!

Tips for finding accomm and avoiding scams:

- Don't pay anything in advance without seeing the property or meeting the landlord in person
- Figure out what is most important to you; price, size, location, social spaces, number of bathrooms, etc...
- Where possible, ask locals (through local Facebook groups or your local ESN section) about the best areas to stay, as well as what are reasonable prices - and if something sounds too good to be true, it probably is!
- Avoid listings without photographs or which are poorly written
- Reverse image search the photos in the listing - scammers use pics from other sites, and you may find it's a lovely flat in another city...
- You will generally be asked to provide some documentation to prove you are whom you say you are, that you have the right to rent in the UK, etc. - if you are not asked for this, beware
- Make sure you have a written agreement, which you can read and understand, and which you also have a copy of once signed
- Check if the landlord is part of a registered tenancy deposit scheme - ask the details of which scheme they're registered with and check if they actually are. If they're not, they may be a fake landlord

Bank Accounts and Currency

Bank Accounts

Whilst foreign bank accounts do work in the UK, due to the currency being Pound Sterling (£) it may be advisable to set up a UK bank account to avoid high transaction charges or issues with the exchange rate.

Regardless of what you decide, it is important to research different bank accounts and be sure that you find something that matches your needs and that you are happy with.

The best UK bank accounts for students will depend on individual needs and requirements, but some popular options are:

- Revolut - offers fee-free spending abroad, no monthly or annual fees, and a range of features such as budgeting tools and money transfer services.
- Starling Bank - provides free UK and EU ATM withdrawals, no foreign transaction fees, and a debit card that can be used worldwide.
- Monzo Bank - offers fee-free spending abroad, real-time notifications, and a budgeting tool to track spending.
- N26 Bank - a digital bank that offers fee-free spending and withdrawals abroad, real-time notifications, and a range of budgeting tools.
- HSBC - offers student accounts with an overdraft facility and other benefits, including a student credit card, discounted museum entry, and travel insurance.

Bank Accounts and Currency

A digital bank such as Revolut or Monzo may be convenient for an exchange year or semester. It means you are not tied down to a physical branch, so you can take advantage of the unique opportunity to explore your new surroundings. In general, you will rarely need cash in the UK, but you may wish to carry a small amount.

Currency

As mentioned, the UK currency is Pound Sterling (£). One pound is divided into 100 pence. Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England all have their own version of notes and coins, but they are all valid as payment in each of the four countries and can be used interchangeably.



Cost of Living

Due to recent world events, the cost of living has increased across Europe - this inevitably impacts students, especially international students, so this section will endeavour to give you an overview of day-to-day spending in the UK. The cost of living obviously varies depending on individual spending habits and which part of the country you are in - for instance, London will cost a lot more. Generally, however, eating out at an average restaurant can cost £10-25 per meal, and a weekly grocery shop can cost £50-70.

Below is a breakdown of the average cost of some basic items in the UK as of January 2023:



Milk (1 litre)
£0.95



12 eggs
£2.99



Beer (1 pint)
£3.95



Tomatoes (1kg)
£2.07



Chicken Breast (1kg)
£7



Potatoes (1kg)
£0.78

The NHS and Cost of Healthcare

The National Health Service (NHS) is the UK's state healthcare system which provides most healthcare services. UK nationals can use this service for free - eligibility for use for international students will depend on the length of your stay. Some countries have a reciprocal agreement with the UK which may entitle you to some free healthcare on the NHS - you should check for your country.

If you are studying in the UK for longer than six months, you will have paid the Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS), which costs £470 per year that you study in the UK. This entitles you to use all NHS services in the same way as a UK resident. This charge is mandatory and will not be refunded, even if you do not use the NHS or take out private insurance. You may still wish to buy insurance to cover any health-related costs which are not covered by the NHS.

If you are studying in the UK for less than six months, we recommend buying health insurance to cover any medical fees you may incur during your time here.

In either case, you will need to register with the NHS upon arrival by registering with a doctor's surgery - this is usually referred to as 'GP' in the UK (General Practitioner). Your university should advise you on this and may provide you with a GP or list of GPs to register with, or you can find one nearby where you live on your own. To register, you may have to go in person to the GP with your ID and any immigration documents. If you are bringing any dependents with you to the UK, they will also need to pay the IHS or for health insurance, and register with a GP themselves.

Health, Safety & Well-being

Some dental and eye care are not included in the NHS, so you may need to pay for these out of pocket. If a doctor prescribes you medicine, you will need to go to a pharmacy to collect it, and you may need to pay for this - most items cost £9.35 per item in England but are generally free in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

If you have a serious accident or an emergency, you will need to call an ambulance or go to the A&E department of the nearest hospital with one - check that the hospital has an A&E department before going, as not every hospital does. If you think you need urgent medical care but it's not an emergency or life-threatening, you can call your GP for an emergency appointment if they are open or call NHS24 at any time of day or night (dial 111). Otherwise, for non-urgent medical care, make an appointment with your GP - and be aware that there can be long waiting times (of several weeks) for an appointment.

For sexual health services, you can visit your GP or a dedicated NHS sexual health centre (or 'GUM clinic'). There are also many charities and organisations in the UK which offer free sexual health services and support, including contraceptives, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases, such as [Brook](#) and [Metro](#),



Health, Safety & Well-being

Safety

The UK is generally very safe, but we have a few tips for you to keep in mind:

- Beware of pickpockets in crowded places, especially in tourist areas
- Lock external doors to your accommodation and close accessible windows when leaving to prevent burglary, especially in larger cities
- Avoid walking through dark streets at night, especially alone or after drinking - always make a plan to leave with friends and ensure you all arrive safely home
- Avoid carrying large amounts of cash and flashing valuables around
- Be aware of your surroundings and any unusual behaviour, especially if using a cash machine/ATM
- Make copies of your important documents, such as passports and visa documents, and avoid carrying the originals around with you

In an emergency, for the Police, Fire Department, or Ambulance, call 999

To contact the police if it's not an emergency, call 101

If you think you might need to go to A&E or speak to a medical professional urgently, but it's not an emergency, call NHS24 on 111

Safety and Well-being Helplines

We hope you don't need to use any of the numbers here but we want to direct you to the many free and confidential services available to you. If you have an issue which is not covered by the below numbers and you're not sure who to contact, you can contact your university or ESN UK to be directed to the right support.

Services are listed in alphabetical order.

- [Alcoholics Anonymous](#) - Support for those with alcohol addictions, email help@aamail.org or 24/7 helpline at 08009177650
- [British Pregnancy Advisory Service](#) - For help relating to pregnancy, family planning and abortion, helpline on 03457304030, (8am-5pm, Monday -Friday, 8am-4pm, Saturday and 9.30am-2.30pm Sunday), or email info@bpas.org
- [Domestic Abuse Helpline](#) - Free, 24/7 confidential helpline on 0808 2000 247, as well as live chat on the website 3-10pm Monday to Friday. If you cannot call, you can also find live chat options through the domestic abuse charity [Women's Aid](#)
- [Equality and Human Rights Commission](#) - Advice and support regarding discrimination and human rights issues. Call: 0808 800 0082
- [Frank](#) - Confidential advice and support related to drugs including alcohol. 24/7 helpline 0300 123 6600, text 82111, and email and live chat options through the website.
[Always phone 999 in a drug-related emergency.](#)

Safety and Well-being Helplines

- [Mencap](#) - support for people with learning disabilities and their carers and families. Helpline 0808 808 1111 (0808 8000 300 Wales), or email helpline@mencap.org
- [Mind](#) - mental health support. Infoline 9am-6pm Monday-Friday on 0300 123 3393, or by email at info@mind.org.uk.
- [Muslim Youth Helpline](#) - culturally sensitive emotional support for young Muslims. Helpline or WhatsApp 4-10pm daily on 0808 808 2008, as well as live chat and email through the website.
- [Nightline](#) - student-run emotional support for students. Not present at every university - check yours and find your nightline options [here](#).
- Rape Crisis - free and confidential support for victims of sexual violence and abuse, even if you are unsure or just want to talk. If you are not ready to talk, there are also various resources on their websites.
 - [England and Wales](#) - 24/7 helpline on 0800 500 222, plus online chat through the website.
 - [Northern Ireland](#) - helpline Monday-Thursday 6-8pm on 0800 0246 991, plus email through the website.
 - [Scotland](#) - helpline daily 5pm-midnight on 0808 8010302, or text 07537 410027, chat through the website, or email support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk
- [Samaritans](#) - Free, 24/7 confidential support for those urgently struggling with their mental health. Call: 116 123, or email jo@samaritans.org

Safety and Well-being Helplines

- [Sexwise](#) - national sexual health helpline 9am-8pm Monday-Friday, 11am-4pm Saturday-Sunday, on 0300 123 7123, for support and advice relating to sexual health, pregnancy, contraception, sexual health and domestic abuse
- Shelter - housing and homelessness charity providing emergency support for those at risk
 - [England](#) - helpline on 0808 808 444, 8am-8pm Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm Saturday-Sunday, plus live chat through the website.
 - [Northern Ireland](#) - does not have a helpline, but those at urgent risk should contact the NI housing executive on 034 4892 0900 9am-5pm Monday-Friday, or 03448 920 908 out of hours.
 - [Scotland](#) - helpline on 0808 808 444, 9am-5pm Monday-Friday, plus live chat through the website.
 - [Wales](#) - helpline on 08000 495 495, 9am-4pm Monday-Friday, plus live chat through the website.
- [Shout](#) - Free, 24/7 confidential text messaging support for anyone struggling to cope. Text: 85258
- [Switchboard](#) LGBT+ helpline 10am-10pm daily on 0800 0119 100, and live chat through the website. All switchboard phone operators identify as LGBT+
- [Terence Higgins Trust](#) - advice and support relating to HIV and sexually transmitted illness. Helpline on 0808 802 1221 10am-6pm Monday-Friday, or email info@tht.org.uk

Phone Plans

If you will be staying in the UK for some time, you may wish to purchase a UK phone plan to avoid extra charges. As an exchange student, we recommend you consider some of the phone plans highlighted below, as they include pay-as-you-go/pay-monthly options, which means you are not tied down to a long-term deal. Additionally, some of these plans include good roaming options, allowing you to travel during your time in the UK.

Remember, when choosing a phone plan, it's important to consider your usage needs, budget, and the length of your stay in the UK. Comparing plans from different mobile networks and choosing one that best suits your needs can help you save money and stay connected.

- **Three:** Offers affordable and flexible plans, with options for data rollover, personal hotspots, and free international roaming in 71 destinations.
- **giffgaff:** Provides a range of SIM-only plans with no long-term commitment and the option to change your plan at any time.
- **EE:** Offers a range of pay monthly plans, with the option to add international roaming and fast 4G connectivity
- **Vodafone:** Provides flexible pay monthly plans with options for international roaming and the ability to upgrade your phone whenever you want.
- **O2:** Offers pay monthly plans with free access to O2's network of over 14,000 Wi-Fi hotspots and the option to add international roaming.



Public Holidays and Festivals



Like all countries worldwide, the UK has a number of unique and fascinating public holidays and festivals that can help enrich your exchange experience and gain a deeper understanding of the UK's traditions and customs. We've highlighted a few of the main ones here:

- **Guy Fawkes Night - 5th November.** Marks the failure of the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, when Guy Fawkes and friends attempted to blow up parliament and assassinate King James I. It is celebrated with bonfires, fireworks and food - a big occasion that is certainly hard to miss!
- **Glastonbury Festival - usually at the end of June.** A major music festival that takes place in the UK during the summer, attracting tens of thousands of visitors from around the world. If you enjoy festivals, this is one of the largest in the world - a must-visit if you can make it! But you won't be short of choice in music festivals across the UK over the summer.

Public Holidays and Festivals

- **Saint Patrick's Day - 17th March.** While actually a national holiday in Ireland, it is still celebrated across the UK as a tribute to Ireland's patron saint, with parades, parties and cultural events, or even just dressing up in green. There will definitely be student events across your city to check out!
- **St Andrew's Day - 30th November.** A national holiday in Scotland that celebrates the country's patron saint, Saint Andrew. It is a traditional celebration of Scottish culture, with events such as ceilidhs (Scottish dances), traditional music performances, and parties - almost like a Scottish Saint Patrick's Day!



Restaurants

The hospitality sector is very strong in the UK and accounts for around 4% of the country's GDP. There is a rich and varied restaurant culture across many cities, and you can find food from countries all over the world. Eating out is a big part of life and culture in the UK and can often be enjoyed on a relatively modest budget. It is worth noting that, unlike some countries, the service charge or “tip” is not included on most bills in the UK. As a result, it is encouraged to leave a small amount (around 5-10%) extra for your server. There is also a strong fast-food presence, with around 25% of restaurants classed as “fast-food outlets” - these are definitely a staple of the average British student’s diet!

Pubs and Bars

According to the British Beer and Pub Association, around 8.5 billion pints of beer are sold yearly in the UK - going to the pub is a common social occasion. It is enjoyed by many, often being a large part of student life. It is definitely a cultural experience the UK is famed for - of course, this is not a compulsory activity, and it is also totally acceptable to go to a pub and not drink alcohol. From Irish Bars, cocktail bars, country pubs and many more weird and wonderful concepts, there are many different experiences to try out.



Responsible Party and Drinking Culture

Drinking culture can be big in the UK, especially for students. University societies and sports clubs organise regular events for people to go out, socialise and have a few drinks if they want.

Nights often start with “pre-drinks” or “pres”, which is the practice of drinking before you go out to drink to save money. After “pres” comes the main event, which can range from going to the pub to watch the football to a pub crawl followed by a nightclub. After the main event, you may have an after-party or 'afters', which is a part or hang out after the main party.

Students often attempt to be very creative with their events, so you will find many social activities to participate in and many creative and interesting games or concepts to enjoy - check out your local ESN section to see what they have on!

Responsible Party

Of course, drinking is not compulsory, and you can have a very enjoyable time at events whilst not drinking. You should never let someone pressure you to have a drink if you don't want one.

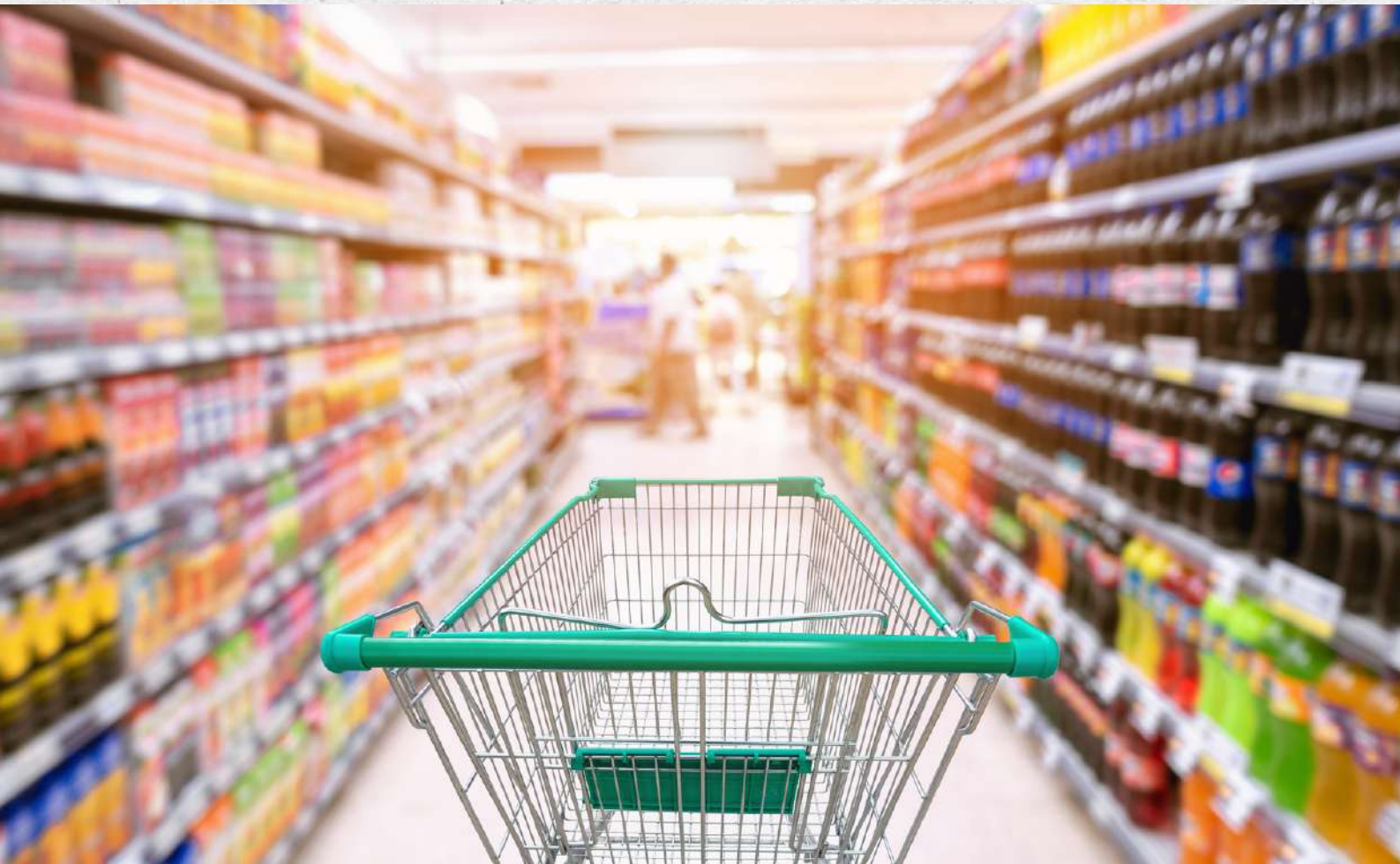
ESN's Responsible Party initiative has been running since 2009 and promotes the idea that events are even better when they are enjoyed responsibly. It encourages people to drink more water whilst at parties or events, reduces binge drinking and distributes important information about the harm that can be caused by alcohol. We encourage you to look into the project more at: <https://www.esn.org/responsible-party>

Supermarkets

In the UK, four large supermarket chains dominate the market: Tesco, Sainsburys, Asda and Morrisons. You will find at least one of these four in most cities in the UK, and they are a safe bet for good quality produce for your weekly shop.

If you are looking for a budget option, Lidl and Aldi have grown in popularity in recent years and offer great discounts on many products. Other chains such as Waitrose, Iceland, Marks and Spencer, the Co-op and more are prominent across the UK.

Outside of supermarkets, you can also find smaller 'corner shops' across cities and residential areas. These are generally more convenient but have a smaller selection and higher prices. In general, even amongst the big supermarket chains, the bigger the location, the less expensive it will be.





Trains

The UK has an extensive train network, and it is often not too complicated to travel across the country by train - for instance, you can get from London to Edinburgh with a direct train that takes just over 4 hours.

We highly recommend train travel as a sustainable and comfortable option to get around the UK. Prices can get expensive but are generally cheaper the earlier you book, so book ahead as soon as you know your journey. Check out [Trainline](#) to compare journeys and prices and find the best train for you. Trainline also works internationally, but it's worth noting that the UK does not have many international train stations or links outside of the Eurostar and from Northern Ireland into the Republic of Ireland.

Anyone aged 16-25, and any mature full time student, can apply for a 16-25 railcard which costs £30 and entitles them to 33% off rail travel and other benefits - search '16-25 railcard' to apply for yours!



Buses and Coaches

Coaches are buses which travel further than local buses, generally between cities. Some of the main coach companies operating in the UK are [Flixbus](#), [Megabus](#), and [National Express](#). With your ESNcard, you even have a 10% Flixbus discount - both in the UK and across Europe! Coach journeys generally take longer than trains and may be slightly less comfortable, but they are also much cheaper on average, so we recommend you check out your options before your next journey.

Transport



You can buy tickets online at the websites mentioned on the last page or at bus stations.

Local buses are the most common form of transport in the UK. Like many things, their operators, and therefore quality and price, do vary widely across the UK. Most cities have a local bus operator; check their website for bus routes and prices and see if you are eligible for any youth or student discount. There are usually a variety of ticket types available on local buses; single (one journey), return (two journeys), and day pass (unlimited travel for one day). In general, the more journeys on a ticket, the cheaper each journey will be. If you are taking buses regularly, for instance, to commute to university, you may be able to buy a monthly or season ticket. Most buses in major cities now accept contactless payment, but this is not guaranteed; you may need to pay with cash on board the bus, and they may not be able to provide change. Also, be aware that bus timetables will often differ between weekdays and weekends; on weekends, buses may run later but will usually be less frequent, especially on Sundays.

Flights

The UK has 24 international airports, and you can get to 10 European capitals from the UK in less than 2 hours! There are also several domestic services across the UK, which can be quicker than taking a train or coach, but can be expensive and are a less sustainable option.



Taxis and Ride Services



Taxis are a very convenient way to get around cities in the UK, and may not be much more expensive than a bus if travelling in a group who can split the fare. Always be vigilant when entering taxis; make sure to use official, licensed services only, particularly those recommended by your university or college. Taxis will generally have a meter running so you can see the price throughout your journey - in some rural areas, this may not be the case, so make sure you know how the fare will be calculated before starting your journey.

It is also becoming increasingly common, and often better value, to use ride service apps like Uber and Bolt - they are not present everywhere in the UK so check out what is available in your city. These have the additional benefit of knowing the cost of your journey before starting it.

Underground, Metro, and Tram



Some cities also have Underground, Metro and Tram networks - it is well worth investigating the options in your host city. In these cities, it is also common to find top-up cards for the metro systems, including student cards which may carry a discount.

Driving and Cycling



To drive in the UK, you must have a valid driving licence and insurance, as well as a car which is registered, taxed, and given an annual MOT if it is older than three years.

Driving and Cycling



Cycling is quite popular in the UK, and some cities offer bicycle rental schemes, which can be for daily or even longer rental. Check out the specifics offered in your city to save money and emissions and keep fit while getting around!

Of course, for both driving and cycling, it is important to remember that the UK drives (and cycles) on the left - please be careful and only do so if you are sure you are comfortable.

Accessibility

The UK is working on making its public transport systems more accessible. Over 200 train stations in the UK have wheelchair-accessible platforms with step-free access, making it easier for trains to be boarded. Service animals such as guide dogs are allowed on public transport.

There are also various discounts available for travellers with disabilities - such as the disabled person's railcard, bus pass, and freedom pass for free or discounted travel on trains and buses. You can also request help during your journey at the station or by calling ahead.

Not all disabilities are visible, and a sunflower lanyard can be worn to discreetly make transport staff aware of a hidden disability or need for assistance on transport.





Bon voyage

Good luck and enjoy your time in the UK!



Erasmus Student Network
United Kingdom