Welcome!

Congratulations on getting into Cambridge! We’d like to welcome you to what we think is the best university on the planet. Whether you’ve come here as an undergraduate or a graduate student, we assure you that Cambridge will be one of the most fulfilling and exciting experiences of your life.

When you arrive, you might notice that Cambridge seems detached from the world; lecture weeks begin on Thursday and supervision weeks on Monday. Cambridge even seems to have its own language. But don’t worry too much; this guide is here to help. If you still have questions after you’ve read it, then please don’t hesitate to contact me (at international-chair@cusu.cam.ac.uk) or another committee member. As an international student, you are automatically part of the Cambridge University Students’ Union International (iCUSU), an autonomous part of CUSU that looks after your interests and needs, as well as representing your views. We’re here to help; all you have to do is ask. When you get your cam.ac.uk email address from your college, sign up to our mailing list at www.international.cusu.cam.ac.uk to be informed of all our exciting events and other information of interest to you. We’ll also be at the Societies Fair and look forward to meeting you once term starts.

You’re probably daunted by the prospect of starting university and arriving in a strange country; it’s normal to feel uncomfortable. We aim to make this feeling disappear as soon as possible. There should be a committee member ready to meet you at either the train station...
or the bus depot to give you directions and a helping hand with your luggage. In addition to this guide you’ll also receive another CUSU one and others from your college, which deal with more general information for all students. This guide focuses on issues and information important to international students; we hope you find it useful.

For further college-specific details, you can contact your college Student Union; most have an international officer, who can answer your questions. You can find details for the various college JCRs (for undergraduates) and MCRs (for graduates) at: www.international.cusu.cam.ac.uk/reps/

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Frequently asked questions

Can I arrive early to Cambridge? When should I arrive?

Whether you are new to the UK or have lived here a while, we suggest arriving on the day your college residence entitlement begins. This should give enough time to familiarise yourself with Cambridge before the fun and chaos of Freshers’ Week. This will also allow you to get involved in the events and information sessions that iCUSU organises, which can help you settle in, as well as give you plenty of time to sort out bank accounts and such like before everyone else arrives (usually on the Saturday before terms starts). Remember to contact your college’s tutorial or housekeeping office so they know you are arriving early.

Where can I find a foreign exchange office?

If you need to buy currency urgently, we suggest you avoid the airport, as it’ll be very expensive! You’ll find a good rate in Marks and Spencer, which is in Market Square.

Which bank should I pick?

This depends on what you’re looking for. Some banks have better online banking systems, some don’t charge a monthly fee (but usually require a minimum deposit), and some have accounts tailored for international students. There is no ‘bad’ bank, but everyone has had some bad experience with one bank or another. The best thing is to decide what you need. This guide has some introductory information on the banks in Cambridge, and you could check their websites to find out more.

What’s the most convenient mobile phone line for international students?

Just like choosing a bank, picking a mobile phone company depends largely on your personal needs. If you think you’re going to be staying in Cambridge over the holidays, a contract might be a good idea; if you’re not an obsessive mobile user, pay-as-you-go is probably a better idea. If you think you’re going to phone home often, Mobile World offer the best international rates, but this will make calling and texting British numbers expensive. One solution for the tech-savvy is Skype, with calls to land lines around 1-2p a minute for most places in the world, and it’s free to call other Skype users. You can download it at www.skype.com; all you need is a microphone and headphones.

What do I do with my belongings over the holidays?

All colleges have storage facilities you can use over the holidays, but we recommend you take more expensive items (like laptops) home with you. This is free in most colleges, but a couple may charge a small fee per box. Over Christmas and Easter you might be able to leave some belongings in your room (packed up or in a compartment). Note that whilst this is usually quite safe, belongings are left behind at your own risk, and your room may be used by conference guests.
Can I stay in Cambridge over the holidays? Will I be the only person around?

Most colleges let you stay in college accommodation over the holiday (maybe even in your own room), though most colleges charge extra for this. Of course, many students go home, but you certainly won’t be alone; many leave late or come back early to finish projects or start revision, and many international students, especially those who live a long way from Europe, remain in Cambridge over the Christmas and Easter vacations.

Can I have fun in Cambridge even if I don’t drink?

Of course! Although many social activities involve drinking, alcohol is rarely essential to their enjoyment. And there are plenty of people who don’t drink, so you’re not alone.

How can I meet other international students in Cambridge?

iCUSU’s events before freshers’ week are a great chance to get to know Cambridge better and meet people from other colleges in an informal setting. You’ll love your college and make great friends in it, but it’s always nice to know a few people outside!

How can I meet other people of my nationality?

Cambridge has many societies based around national and ethnic groups, listed here: [www.cusu.cam.ac.uk/societies/directory/categories/international/](http://www.cusu.cam.ac.uk/societies/directory/categories/international/). The larger societies may contact you before you arrive; others you have to find yourself. Most will have stands at the CUSU Societies’ Fair during freshers’ week, so you can sign up to their mailing lists and find out more.

Where can I listen to ‘international’ music?

Some of Cambridge’s main clubs hold weekly ‘international nights’, playing music you might hear in clubs outside the UK. Fez has one on Wednesday and Ballare, more commonly known as Cindies, on Thursday. If you get sick of ‘indie’ and ‘cheese’ (staple Cambridge club music) you could try these.

Where can I find food like that back home?

Nowhere will be as good as back home. But you can look for suitable substitutes: Cambridge has Chinese, Italian, Thai, Vietnamese, Indian, Turkish, Greek, Mexican, French, Japanese, Moroccan restaurants, just to name a few. Or you can try cooking yourself. Most college accommodation has decent kitchens. Bring along a rice cooker and a wok, make a quick trip to one of the supermarkets on Mill Road – [www.mill-road.com](http://www.mill-road.com) – for ingredients, and get started!

Would you suggest any place to polish my English in Cambridge?

We offer free English classes to postgraduates – see [www.international.cusu.cam.ac.uk/](http://www.international.cusu.cam.ac.uk/) for details. Undergraduates find plenty of opportunities to practise their English when they hang out with fellow students, or can pay to do so in various institutions around the city. The Language Centre – [www.langcen.cam.ac.uk](http://www.langcen.cam.ac.uk) – is also a great resource and is free of charge.
Freshers’ Week and Events

Get your party hats on before lectures start with some events to help ease you into Cambridge life and make new friends. Freshers’ week is a great time to embrace uni life and meet new people, some of whom you won’t see again until halfway hall (a dinner in the middle of your second year) and some who’ll stick by you for the rest of your life. Your college will organise events to entertain you and probably swing past a CUSU club night at Cindies or Fez, but we at iCUSU figure you won’t have enough on your plate. Party it up multilingual-style at Kambar, visit Cambridge’s pubs on our pub crawl, or come punting with us to experience Cambridge from the river (and brag to your friends about your new-found punting skills). There’s also a City tour to help you get your bearings so you can nod knowingly when you meet someone from another college. On the tour we’ll also give you lots of information about phones, banks, bikes, cheap places to buy food, and answer any questions you have about living in England.

We recommend arriving before the British freshers so you can settle in and buy bikes before all the nice ones are taken. Some colleges organise their own International Freshers’ Week, but even if yours doesn’t, coming up early shouldn’t be a problem. If you arrive by train or bus, someone from iCUSU will be ready to welcome you and help you find your college between 9:30 and 16:00 every day. Just look out for our booth!

Even if you don’t come to any of our events, join our mailing list on our website www.international.cusu.cam.ac.uk. We’ll keep you informed of events we’re organising and provide welfare information to make Cambridge as enjoyable as possible.
“Argh, no! I’ve missed all of the thrills and entertainments that iCUSU has organised for me! How will I survive now??”

Never fear, there’s plenty more happening all year long. Sign up to our mailing list for updates on events, and occasional news that will be of importance to international students. Just visit our website and enter your email address.

**City Tours**

14:00 Wednesday 1st and Thursday 2nd October – Meet at Market Square in front of the Guildhall

Cambridge is a wonderful place with lots to see. Our tours will tell you everything you need to survive. We have lots of useful information for you about banks, phones and bikes etc., and know where important shops and such are. We’ll show you some of Cambridge’s interesting sites (or at least point out where they are), and regale you with some of the nuggets of history and anecdotes we’ve picked up here. This is one of the most useful things you can do before the main Freshers’ Week gets into gear.

**Pub Crawl**

20:00 Wednesday 1st October – The Cow (Corn Exchange Street) – Come on the tour to find out where it is… Or just check a map

Whether you drink or not, come along for a sociable evening visiting some of the 118 pubs, or we might just stay and chill at the Cow. A great chance to meet other internationals, and your iCUSU Committee. As most English pub crawls have a theme, you should try and come dressed in a way that identifies your country of origin (flags, stereotypes, national dress, whatever you fancy).

**Film Night**

19:00 Wednesday 1st October

If pub crawls aren’t your thing, don’t worry. Relax after the stress of your first few days in Cambridge with a film or two and some fellow internationals. We’ll bring a choice of films.

**Club Night**

21:00 Thursday 2nd October – Kambar (Wheeler Street – behind the Guildhall)

Rock out at Kambar – the only club with Tudor-style walls. It’s more relaxed than Cambridge’s other clubs and has a great atmosphere – whether you want to chat with new friends or show us your moves. You don’t need to drink to have an awesome time at this event.

**Punting**

14:00 Sunday 5th October – Magdalene Bridge Punting Station

You can’t study in Cambridge without propelling yourself along the river with a pole at least once. Chances are that come summer, the skills you develop will come in handy – it’s never too early to start.
Weather

Before packing, you should know about the weather in Cambridge. Even if it’s officially the driest city in the UK, you still have to face rain (or at least clouds) much of the time.

The weather here is notoriously unpredictable; there’s some truth in the saying ‘if you don’t like the weather in England, just wait five minutes.’

It’s not unusual to get sunshine, rain, hail and gale all on one day. This may sound gloomy, but when the sun comes out, Cambridge is truly glorious; you’ll never take the city for granted.

**Autumn:** Mostly Rain. 13-18°C/55-64°F. Starts to get quite cold at night.

**Winter:** More rain, sometimes snow (although no more than two days of light snow in the past couple of years). But when it snows, it is absolutely beautiful and the city is transformed. Anywhere between -5°C/23°F and 10°C/50°F. Lasts from end of November to late February.

**Spring:** Ever heard of April showers? More rain! Interspersed with sunshine. 10-15°C/50-59°F. Still quite chilly, but we’re on our way to summer.

**Summer:** Sunny, breezy – Cambridge is fantastic in Easter Term. Around 15-20°C/50-68°F. Still some cloudy days, but you can anticipate numerous punting trips and BBQs.

You can find current (and past) conditions at [www.cl.cam.ac.uk/research/dtg/weather](http://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/research/dtg/weather).

**Clothing:** As it is cold for a substantial part of the year, it’s good to bring lots of warm clothing – a winter coat is a must, preferably waterproof and even better if it blocks the wind, which often seems to come straight from Siberia. Gloves and scarves are useful, especially if you plan on cycling, though you may want to purchase a college scarf (available from Ryder & Amies) when you arrive. To cope with common spontaneous showers, a hat or raincoat is more useful than carrying an umbrella all the time. Dress in layers during winter, as it’ll be heated indoors and you’ll find most people wear t-shirts under their coats and pullovers.

**Footwear:** You need comfortable shoes as the city centre is a pedestrian zone and covered in cobbled stones, so you’ll be on your feet most of the time. And girls – do bring some flat-heeled shoes. Boots are definitely recommended as it gets so cold and wet in winter.
**Formal wear:** You will have matriculation photo and dinner at the beginning of term both of which are for incoming freshers. For these events you are expected to dress formally. Men: Suit with shirt. Women: Dress or blouse with skirt/trousers – some colleges require white top, black bottom formal wear.

Cambridge also has what are known as ‘Formal Halls’ – where your college dining-hall serves a three-course dinner – a big part of the social life here. It’s a chance to dress up, men tend to wear suits and women dresses or a nice top and skirt/trousers; gowns may be required and can usually be bought from your college on arrival.

**Other optional items:** It’s best not to bring crockery, cutlery, and kitchenware if you fly, as they’re heavy and easily available in Cambridge (e.g. at Argos, see page 15). If you bring kitchen appliances (e.g. rice cooker), check with your college this is allowed, as some have restrictions. Most colleges provide bed linen, pillows and blankets, but you can easily purchase your own in Cambridge if you prefer. If your college doesn’t provide one, we suggest you have your own duvet cover – it gets cold at night in winter, and it’s always nice to snuggle in a comfortable bed!
Travel

How to get to Cambridge once you’re through the crowds, and the hustle and bustle of the airports?

This guide is not comprehensive, but covers the most typical routes. Unless you are going into London, we suggest taking the coach from all airports so you don’t have to carry your luggage on the London Underground or change trains. And the coaches take you straight to Parkside Coach Station in the city centre; whereas The train station is about a thirty-minute walk from the centre, so you’ll need a taxi or a bus (which only operates during the day) to your college.

London Airports: You’ll fly into one of London’s four airports: Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted and Luton. All four are linked to Cambridge by bus (National Express) and train.

Timetables: National Express timetables for coaches to Cambridge can be found on our website and at www.nationalexpress.com. Use the Journey Planner to find exact times. You can book your ticket online, but you can also buy tickets just before you get on the bus – they are hardly ever full. E-tickets are only amendable online, with a fee of £3, so it may be wiser to buy a ticket from a collection point, found at any airport (you can use any service).

Ways to save money: We recommend getting either a National Express NX2 card (for coaches: £10 per year or £25 for 3 years) or Young Person’s Railcard (for trains: £20 per year). With these you get up to 30% off tickets.
Even though trains may be faster, the station is much further from the city centre than the bus station. Also, buses serve the airport 24 hours, whereas trains don’t travel regularly at night.

Return tickets are much cheaper than two singles, especially on coaches, provided the return journey takes place within three months.

National Express offers funfares to/from London, allowing you to get there for only £1. See their website for details.

There are regular trains to/from King’s Cross and Liverpool Street Station (day return tickets start from £13). Coaches by National Express travel to Cambridge Parkside station from Victoria coach station in central London (funfare tickets may be bought for as little as £1 or £2 return)
Immigration

If you are a citizen in a country outside the European Union, you will generally need a visa before coming to the UK to study. Please note that from last year onwards, international students from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) have to pay £250 for a postal application for visa renewal (taking up to 13 weeks to process). The premium same-day service for personal callers costs £500. This cost is incurred each time an application is made. There are likely to be changes to this system, but we'll keep you up to date through the iCUSU website.

When you obtain a visa, check whether a police registration is required on landing.

Useful websites
UK Border Agency
www.ukvisas.gov.uk/en/
British Council
www.britishcouncil.org
UK Council for International Student Affairs
www.ukcosa.org.uk

Police Registration
Some non-EEA nationals may be required to register with the Police Force. Check your visa for relevant instructions.

What you need:
1. Passport
2. Two Passport sized photos
3. Approx. £34.00 (this is what the registration costs)

Where you need to go:
Alien Registration Unit at the Police Station (just off Parkers Piece, near the Freshers’ fair).

Time:
Weekdays, 10am-1pm, 2pm-4pm
If you can make it, it is best to go there earlier as only 15 tickets are given out in one session and demand exceeds supply.

Import of foodstuffs
UK has relatively stringent laws regarding import of raw and cooked meats as well as live botanical product (i.e. seeds, plants). A good policy to adopt is to not bring in any food unless you are sure it is permitted.
Health

Chest x-ray
It is advisable to have a chest x-ray in your home country and to bring it through immigration, as you may be asked to present your medical form and x-ray. If you do not have these, you may wait for up to four hours to have a medical check-up at the airport. Students from the EEA may not need this.

Full-time students at Cambridge are covered by the National Health Service (NHS) for medical costs, except eye care (see below). Remember to register with a surgery (a medical clinic) upon arrival so that you have a doctor to go to if you are ill. Check with your college to see if they sort this for you. Dental care is also covered by the NHS, so register with a dentist.

Optical Care
If you wear contact lenses or glasses, you will need to have a British optical prescription before you can buy lenses or glasses. Either bring some from home or have your eyes checked when you arrive.

Pharmacies / Optometrists
Boots: at the Market Square
Specsavers: An eye check-up costs £22.50; the contact lens fitting another £22.50. Under certain conditions you will be able to claim back your money, but these are very particular, so be prepared to pay.

Meningitis vaccination
Some colleges require this; others just recommend it. 18-25 year-olds are most vulnerable to this virus. You can have the vaccination in the UK if you prefer and at no cost. There is more information at www.meningitis.org.

Medical forms
Your College will send you medical forms. Be sure to see your doctor to fill in the form. This is especially important for students requiring visas, as it can serve as a substitution for a medical examination at the airport.
Money

Opening a bank account is probably number one on your ‘to-do’ list. Different banks have different policies; hopefully, you can find one that suits you. Opening hours are 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday and 8am to 12pm, Saturday. All banks close on Sundays and Bank Holidays. You need a letter from your college confirming your Cambridge address and your passport for ID.

Basic or current accounts are available to students who have not been resident in the UK before coming to Cambridge. “Student accounts” are generally available to those who have been resident for at least 3 years immediately prior to opening the account. Savings and other are also available, with more details on their websites:

Barclays (www.barclays.co.uk)
Barclays bank account (current account)
➽ Connect (Visa) debit card

Barclays International (http://www.barclays.com/internationalpersonal/ib_8_student.htm)
Cash Card account
➽ basic features
Student Solutions
➽ Monthly fee of £5, waived if balance greater than £2000 in all accounts
➽ VISA Debit Card

Family Package
➽ Minimum balance of £10,000 in parent’s account, no minimum balance for the student account
➽ VISA Debit Card
➽ Free online money transfer between parent and student accounts

HSBC (www.hsbc.co.uk)
Passport account
➽ Monthly fee of £5, 12-month contract
➽ May be free if already existing HSBC customer elsewhere - check with bank
➽ Maestro Debit Card
➽ Free Mobileworld SIM card with £10 credit

Student Service account
➽ Must have been a resident in the UK, Channel Islands or Isle of Man for three years or have a bank account with a member of the HSBC Group
➽ UCAS fee (£15) refunded with proof
➽ £10 for each friend you recommend
➽ Cirrus Maestro debit card, optional Mastercard
Basic banking account
➽ Free and basic

You may be able to set up an account directly from home, check with your local HSBC branch.

**Lloyds TSB** ([www.lloydstsb.com](http://www.lloydstsb.com))

Classic Account
➽ Visa debit card and cheque book

Cash account
➽ No overdrafts, no cheque book, withdrawals only from LloydsTSB cashmachines
➽ No online application, otherwise normal basic services

Student account
➽ Must have been a permanent UK resident for the last 3 years
➽ Student Mastercard, Visa debit card, free NUS extra card, online application
➽ 1 year’s free mobile phone insurance
➽ £75 cash (on condition)
➽ 1 year free YHA membership, 35 free music downloads from eMusic

**Islamic Student Account**
➽ £75 cash (on condition)
➽ Visa debit card, no online application
➽ Must have been a permanent UK resident for the last 3 years
➽ Non-Muslims also eligible

**NatWest** ([www.natwest.com](http://www.natwest.com))

Step Account
➽ Free and basic services
➽ Solo/Maestro debit card

Student Account
➽ 3 years or more resident in UK
➽ Solo/Maestro debit card

Most banks have an agreement that no charge will be made on cash withdrawal at any rival bank’s cash machine, but there are exceptions as always.
Shopping

**Household goods**

**Argos**
Undoubtedly the best place to get your goods - very cheap and a huge selection. Located at the Grafton Shopping Centre; you can order online to reserve goods at www.argos.co.uk.

**BHS**
An affordable department store selling good quality bed linen and other household goods. Also at the Grafton Shopping Centre.

**John Lewis**
An alternative to BHS. Much closer to city centre (on Downing Street), but more expensive. Sells everything from lamps to cushions, kitchenware to fabrics.

**Marks & Spencer**
Sells most household goods of decent quality; conveniently located on Market Square.

**Supermarkets**

▷ Sainsbury’s (on Sidney Street) is the most central supermarket in Cambridge, but also the busiest.
▷ Marks & Spencer (on Market Square) is also located centrally, and is more up-market.
▷ Tesco (on Newmarket Road) and Asda (on Coldhams Lane) are bigger supermarkets, but further away from town. But they have more choice and cheaper products.
▷ Iceland (on Histon Road) specializes in frozen food.
▷ Aldi (on Histon Road) is one of the cheapest supermarkets, with very low priced products. If you live close by, it may be your favourite shop.
▷ Some specialist supermarkets sell ingredients for food not commonly found in the UK, including the Korean, Chinese and Indian supermarkets, along Mill Road.

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Gowns
Your college may require you to have a gown for occasions such as matriculation photo and formal hall. Each college has its own gown. Sometimes it is possible to buy them in college; you can also buy them from university outfitters such as Ryder & Amies (on King’s Parade) and A E Clothier (on Pembroke Street). Make sure you check with your college though, because some colleges require you to buy the gown from them.

Bicycles
It’s a good idea to own a bike, especially if you have to rush to lectures. At the beginning of each term, the police station holds a bicycle auction, selling stolen bikes at very low prices. Students at the university may wish to sell their bikes to first years, so look out for this as well. There are various bicycle stores:

- Halfords (Bridge Street);
- Ben Hayward and Sons (Trumpington Street and Laundress Lane);
- Mike’s Bikes (Mill Road);
- Cambridge Cycle Centre (Botolph Lane);
- “The Bikeman” (Market Square).

Public Transport
The University runs a cheap bus service, the Uni4, connecting the West Cambridge Site and Addenbrooke’s Hospital via the city centre.
Mobile Phones
Mobile phone companies offer quite good deals. Most of their stores are near Lion Yard, by Market Square. There are five main UK operators: Orange, T-Mobile, Vodafone, O2, 3 Mobile.

Two types of accounts are available: Pay as you go – where you buy credit to use, Contract – where you pay a fixed monthly amount for a limited number of free minutes and text messages.

For the pay as you go SIM card, different service providers offer packages. Detailed information is available from particular stores. Calls are cheaper between phones of the same service provider, so your choice of operator may depend on what your friends have chosen. Carphone Warehouse offers a pay as you go card called “mobile world”, with standard UK pay-as-you go rates, combined with very cheap international rates: www.mobileworld.co.uk. Pay as you go is good when you first arrive as you need a SIM card to call home. As you use your phone more often, this can be quite expensive.

Contracts are chosen by a large number of students. Retail stores often offer promotional prices for a mobile phone with contract tie-ins which can be cheaper than buying from the main operator; look in The Carphone Warehouse and Phones4You. There may also be student deals at the beginning of Michaelmas term (3 Mobile usually have a counter at the CUSU Societies’ Fair so check that out), which can be cheaper than ones shown in store. To sign a contract you need the same documents for opening a bank account (ID, Letter from college) and a UK bank account.

Land Line Phone
Different colleges use different companies; ask your college how to connect the phone. The steps below are the most common. Calls to university numbers are usually free from a land line.
**NTL at Uni**
This is in place at most colleges. Plug your phone into the socket and pick up a prepaid NTL university card from your college. Details on how to place calls, charge your account and receive calls will be explained in the accompanying booklet. You will be given an 0845 number, at which you can be reached from outside Cambridge. This is often charged at premium rate when calling from abroad. You can find out your local 01223 number at www.ntlatuni.com. Calls within the NTL system are free, so this can be very cost efficient. You can buy cheap telephones in Currys (in Lion Yard) or Argos (at the Grafton centre).

**British Telecom**
This is only applicable where NTL at university is not in place. Call BT on 0800 800 150 and they will help you set up a phone line in your room.

We hope you’ve found this information useful, if there is anything we haven’t covered or if you have any further questions, please don’t hesitate to contact us at international-chair@cusu.cam.ac.uk or international-freshers@cusu.cam.ac.uk.

For college-specific details, contact your college student union: most have an international officer, who can answer your questions. Details can be found at: www.cusu.cam.ac.uk/union/affiliates/

We hope you just can’t wait to come to Cambridge now: it’s a wonderful place to study and we’re certain you’ll have the time of your life. CUSU International looks forward to meeting you in October!

International Freshers’ Guide compiled by:
The International CUSU Committee 2008-2009
So much STUFF...

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