

Life in UK Information



General Information about UK

The United Kingdom comprises England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Greater London covers an area of over 600 square miles and has an ever-growing population, currently over 8 million people.

Throughout its history, Britain's own culture has been enriched by many other nationalities. Sometimes by conquering nations! Other times by those seeking asylum or choosing to immigrate here. London, especially, is home to many different nationalities which provide a fascinating variety of culture, food and entertainment.

Climate

The UK has a very varied climate. November to March are typically cold and wet with the possibility of snow on higher ground. Average temperatures are between 0° and 10° C (50° F). The temperature in summer (July and August) can reach up to 32° C (90° F).

Clothing

Whatever the time of year, it is best to have warm clothing with you. During the winter months, a warm waterproof coat is essential. If you plan to explore the UK during your vacations, please remember to bring appropriate clothing, especially if you are travelling to the north of the UK.

Working/Opening Hours

Supermarkets are open from 8:30 to 20:00 throughout the week and usually 10:00 to 17:00 on Sundays. Some supermarkets in cities are now open 24 hours a day.

In major cities such as London, there are many specialist shops selling a wide variety of food so you may still be able to cook up your favorite meal!

Shops are generally open from 9:00 to 17:30 (Monday to Saturday) with some shops opening later on certain days or open for a few hours on Sunday. In some smaller towns "half-day closing" occurs. On one day in the week most shops will close at lunchtime. This no longer happens in larger stores and in cities. Offices hours tend to be 9:00 to 17:00. Banks open from 9:30 to 5:30 (some Banks are opening on Saturday morning).

Public Holidays

There are 8 public holidays when colleges, offices and most shops will be closed.

New Year's Day - 1st January.

Good Friday

Easter Monday

Early May Bank Holiday - first Monday in May.

Spring Bank Holiday - last Monday in May.

Summer Bank Holiday - last Monday in August.

Christmas Day - 25th December.

Boxing Day - 26th December.

Health

If you are planning a short visit to London on a visitor's visa to look at different colleges before applying, please remember to buy health insurance.

If you have come from a country with a health-care agreement with the UK or are staying for more than six months, you may be able to obtain free medical or dental treatment under the NHS.

If you are a long-term student (12 months or more), it is advisable for you to register with a local Doctor. We can provide contact details for doctors in your area. You will need to contact the doctor to see if they are accepting new patients and you will normally need to have an appointment to provide basic information about your medical history.

Public Transport

In London there is an extensive public transport system - trains, buses, underground trains and light railway.

If you use a taxi in London, it is best to use the well-recognised London taxis known as "Black Cabs". They will usually provide a guide to the fare and operate under a proper license. However, public transport is much cheaper!

The Greater London area is divided into six travel zones. Zone 1 covers the main business and shopping districts in the centre of London. You can buy daily, weekly and monthly travel cards which either give you access to the buses or to both buses and underground trains. For month travel cards, you will need a photocard and you can also apply for student discount rates.

Useful information about public transport in London can be found on

www.londontransport.co.uk

www.thetube.com

www.tfl.gov.uk

Outside of London public transport varies from area to area. Most major towns and cities are linked by railway. Cities will have regular bus services but smaller towns may not. Internal flights also operate between major cities.

Social Customs and Leisure

British people are generally reserved and value their privacy. It is customary to shake hands when meeting someone for the first time, whether male or female.

Other physical contact is generally avoided with anyone other than family and close friends.

Good manners ("please" and "thank you") and personal hygiene are valued very highly.

With the wide variety of cultures in Britain, please use your common sense and try to respect all beliefs and customs. In London there is a wide range of activities available to suit all budgets, you can: experience food, music and entertainment from many countries; see a variety of sports in the city's large arenas (which also host musical events); enjoy a range of world famous "West End" shows; visit museums, art galleries and exhibitions to suit all tastes;

Accommodation Renting

Accommodation in another country can be a difficult and frustrating experience, but with some planning and expert advice, the task of finding somewhere to live can be made a lot easier.

You may need reference to rent accommodation, including bank details, a letter from your college or university confirming that you are studying with them etc. Before you start looking for houses or rooms it's a good idea to identify which areas you need to be looking in. The college or university that you are going to study in should be able to give you a list of areas that are close to where you are going to study. They may even have lists of landlords that deal especially with foreign students. This is often the best way to get accommodation, as overseas students very often get the nicest houses. There are free source of information available online to find accommodation to students. Loot.com

Gumtree.com

Rightmove.co.uk

Findaproperty.co.uk

Cost of living in the UK

Particularly London – is expensive compared to many places in the World. The cost of living will of course depend on the individual situation (and tastes!) of each working traveller, but you still need to be prepared financially. Just because you've been working hard to save many thousands of your own currency, doesn't mean it will be quite as many pounds! Check out a Currency Converter to get an idea of what your currency will be worth in the UK. Generally, you should prepare yourself (and save accordingly) for the following costs while in London:

- Accommodation
- Food, Dining and Drinking
- Transport
- Entertainment
- Initial Costs

While it's important to be aware of the costs you will be facing as a working traveller, don't let it put you off! As long as you plan carefully and think about cost-saving strategies the cost of living in England or the rest of the UK need not be prohibitive. In the UK, shared housing and utilising the excellent public transport networks are two significant ways to reduce your costs of living.

Also check out International Money Transfer to and from UK and Opening a UK Bank Account.

Average Cost of Accommodation in London

Flat-Share Rental per month		One Bedroom Flat Rental per month	
East London	£290 - £390 (single), £430 - £600 (double)	East London	£650 - £750
West London	£280 - £430 (single), £459 - £690 (double)	West London	£700 - £800
South London	£280 - £500 (single), £350 - £650 (double)	South London	£600 - £700
North London	£300 - £400 (single), £430 - £550 (double)	North London	£650 - £750

UK cost of Food & Drink

Average weekly grocery bill (including food, basic laundry and toiletry items for 2 people)	£60
Average pub meal	£6 - £10
Average restaurant meal	£12 - £20
Pint of beer	£2.50 - £3
Average bottle of wine	£10
Average meal for two in mid-priced restaurant	£40

UK cost of Transportation

Weekly Zone 1-6 Travelcard	£41
Monthly Zone 1-2 Travelcard	£86
Train trip to Edinburgh	£110 (standard single)
Train trip to Cambridge / Brighton	£17 - £20 (single)

Avg mid-sized car rental for a weekend	£70
Return budget flight to Spain	£120 - £150 (budget carrier)
Eurostar return ticket to Paris	£125 (standard class)
Return flight to Ireland	£50 - £60 (budget carrier)

UK cost of Entertainment

	£7-£10
West End Theatre	£25+
Club/Pub Entry	£5 - £20
Live music/concerts	£10+
Chart CDs	£8 - £12
New release DVD rental	£3.50

Initial Costs

There are also some initial costs that will whittle your wallet down fairly quickly if you don't plan accordingly, especially when it comes to setting up longer-term accommodation. Generally you should budget for the following:

Accommodation when you arrive:

If you haven't already organised accommodation for when you first arrive make sure you have enough money for hostel or hotel accommodation (from £11 upwards per night) or to give to mates who let you doss.

Bond and first month's rent:

This will be your most significant outlay. When leasing a flat or room in a flat-share bond can be up to 6 weeks rent and on top of that you will probably have to pay up to a month's rent in advance. This could be as much as £1000 depending on the price of your rent.

Transport:

Flat and job hunting can take a lot of trekking across the city on Tubes and buses. Make sure you have some cash for public transport or to purchase an Oyster card, see Getting around the UK.

Mobile phone:

If you've brought your mobile phone from home you still may need to buy a SIM card or pay to have your phone 'unlocked' from your previous carrier. Avoid phone contracts if possible and opt for pre-pay calling. Be sure to put aside some cash to buy pre-paid top-ups; not being able to call back a potential employer because you have no credit is not a good look!

Internet access:

You'll probably be using the Internet for job hunting, searching for accommodation and staying in touch with family and friends back home. Internet cafes charge from £1 an hour, but allow plenty of cash for this as you'd be surprised how many hours you can rack up in these places.

Clothing:

Hopefully you packed suitable clothes for the season you're arriving in the UK and if you found room in your suitcase or backpack, suitable clothing for job interviews in your line of work. But, if sneakers won out over suits, make sure you have some pounds in your budget for interview and work-wear.

Eating and drinking:

Your first few weeks are sure to be a blur of eating, drinking and socialising. Eating out in London isn't cheap so try not to have breakfast, lunch and dinner (and those crisps with your pint) while out and about as it will be more economical to buy groceries and prepare your own meals.

There are of course ways of saving your hard earned pounds as a working traveller (you say frugal, we say sensible!) for more important things like skiing in the Swiss Alps and living it up in Ibiza. Here are some cost-saving strategies:

- ▶ **Utilise your student or youth travel card:** You are entitled to many discounts if you have a student or International youth travel card. This includes discounted entry to museums, cinemas and clubs. There are also special deals and discounts associated with Oyster cards (see Getting around the UK), so keep it handy at all times. Remember, a pound saved on a movie ticket is a pound towards another pint!
- ▶ **Buy from Charity Shops:** Walk down any High Street in London and you'll be hard pressed not to see at least a handful of Charity Shops (op shops, or second hand shops). Make these your first port of call for any crockery, utensils or home wares for your pad. Most stock decent clothing and shoes too, so if you don't have a suit for that all important job interview, you can pick up a bargain.
- ▶ **Keep your eyes peeled for specials:** At home you may have cringed when your mate whipped out a 'buy one get one free' voucher, but when you've only a few pounds left in your wallet you'll be cheering for specials. Check the back of your cinema ticket for discounts at nearby restaurants, take advantage of early-bird dining offers at restaurants you normally wouldn't be able to afford and make note of happy hour times at every pub you pass.
- ▶ **Leave things till the last minute:** If you're working casually and can pack your bags at a moment's notice there are some great last minute travel deals to be had. Check lastminute.com for flights, accommodation and package deals.
- ▶ **Book ahead of time:** In slight contradiction to the above point, you can also save loads of dosh by booking your travels well in advance! If you know the best time for you to take off work or when your mates are free to travel, book your flights/trains and accommodation early, this is often when you will get the biggest bargains.
- ▶ **Watch out for swaps and freebies:** The only thing better than something cheap is something for free! There are some kind souls in London who give away stuff they no longer need to struggling working travellers, you just need to be able to go and pick it up. From mattresses and couches to computers and tellies, there's plenty up for grabs.
- ▶ **Join the local library:** Once you're settled in a suburb one of the first things you should do is join your local library. Many have free computers and Internet access and cheap (£1 - £3) CDs and DVDs for hire, not to mention guide books to borrow for all of your adventures abroad!

You can of course save even more money by living outside of London, as the cost of accommodation and day to day living expenses are significantly lower than the capital. Keep in mind though that your UK earnings may be lower (or higher depending on your line of work) and some people may find the lifestyle and travel options can be less vibrant and varied than central London. Of course, it's each working traveller's personal preference where they want to base themselves for what will be the adventure of a lifetime no matter what!

To gain a better understanding of just how far your pounds will go when you're in the UK and when you get home (if you've been lucky enough to save some along the way) check out the OECD Purchasing Power Parities. Purchasing Power Parities (PPPs) are basically a rate of currency conversion that equalise the purchasing power of different currencies by eliminating the differences in price levels between countries. The simplest way of working out your own PPP is to compare two identical products in two different country's currency (the most common products used to calculate PPPs are Big Macs and Coca Cola, basically because you can get them everywhere) and then see how much you would have to spend to obtain the same quantity of the product. So have a look to see how many burgers your savings will allow, although we hope you'll be slightly more adventurous on the food front while you're a working traveller in the UK!