

British Studies Program Q&A

Friday, 19 June 2009

International Center Room 101

Agenda

KEEP YOUR HANDBOOK ON YOU AT ALL TIMES...

This Q&A does not replace your orientation on-site.

Pre-departure

Travel and Important Documents to remember:

- Passport
- Entry Letter
- ISIC card
- King's College Office number (which is located in your handbook)

You should carry with you at all times the following, no exceptions:

- **Passport**
- **Entry Letter**
- **BSP Student Handbook**

Packing

Two words: Pack light! You and you alone, will carry your luggage. There are no porters at the airport or the Residence Hall.

It will be warmer in the day than it is at night. Nights will be "cooler" in comparison to MS standards.

It will rain. Often. Plan on rain. Because it will.

Clothing: Think in layers. Unless you're in the Business Studies class you shouldn't need more than one "nice" outfit. Breaking it down...2 slacks, 2 jeans, couple of dresses (girls), 10 tops to mix and match, socks, undergarments, 2 pj's – you can buy your toiletries in London.

You don't need to fill any larger than a large rolling suitcase, and include a smaller bag when you pack! This will be for your mini-break travel AND to take back with you (full of items you will purchase in London).

ONE suitcase is plenty. Avoid carrying on liquids or gels unless they all are 3 ounces or less and can fit comfortably in ONE QUART SIZE clear plastic zip-top bag.

Pack your **walking shoes!** If you must bring heels, wedges are preferable for the cobblestone in London. Flip flops are not walking shoes, nor are they appropriate rainy day footwear, and it will be chilly, remember.

You might also pack some shower shoes for your shower – yes, you have a shower/toilet/sink in your single room.

Jewelry should be brought minimally (if it is absolutely necessary)

Electrical items from the US will not work in London unless they are DUAL voltage (in fact, they will blow up). It might be a better idea to purchase items that use a large amount of energy (hair dryers) when you are there.

Towels are provided at King's upon check in, but bring one with you for your mini-break travel, and bring a couple of hangers for your “nice outfit” at King's.

Prescription medication – pack it with you and bring copies of the prescription – carry-on any medication you may need during the flight.

Money matters

Take some cash to exchange at the airport, or buy pounds from your bank in advance – no more than \$200

INFORM THE BANK of your planned international travel so that your debit/credit cards are not frozen. It is a precaution the bank will take when they notice sudden international charges coming through on your card.

The flight

...Will be long and tiring – so **dress for comfort!** Go for informal clothing.

Consider packing a toothbrush and toothpaste with you, and a change of clothing just in case your luggage decides to take the next flight.

Prepare to wait, be patient and be cognizant of those around you – do NOT decide to start the party early and drink too much on the flight just because you can. Once you land in the U.K. **you are responsible for yourself**, you are a guest, and the Immigration Officers have every right to put you on a flight back home if you are acting inappropriately in any way.

Upon Arrival

Stay with the group, be patient

Report lost luggage *before* exiting the Custom's Hall

Dr. Mackaman and a group of professors will be at the airport to greet you, direct you to the coaches, and they will pass out pertinent information for your first day in London regarding check-in, etc. Unless we can convince them to wear a snazzy BSP t-shirt, they will absolutely have a “BRITISH STUDIES” sign for you to look for.

When crossing the street, **LOOK RIGHT and ONLY CROSS AT CROSSWALKS!**

When you arrive at Stamford Street Residence Hall you will check in with Jess and Holly at the courtyard.

Unfortunately we will NOT be handing out internet cards on arrival day – they will however be available the next morning.

Please don't promise your parents you will call them as soon as you arrive, because you likely won't (be able to). If they call the office we can verify your arrival. Bear in mind there is a SIX HOUR time difference...we might not answer the phone at 3:00 am.

Jet Lag & Culture Shock

Plan on being exhausted. And keep in mind that everything is amplified when you're exhausted – you might find yourself easily irritated.

Try NOT to sleep when you first arrive, no more than a short nap or you'll take longer to adjust to the time difference

Observe and enjoy the different culture, don't be so critical

Refrain from drinking on the flight and during your first day in London, jet lag is far worse when you're exhausted and alcohol will only worsen the fatigue. Remember that alcohol in the UK has a seriously higher alcohol content, not kidding.

Remember that this Q&A does not replace your required attendance at the official BSP orientation Saturday morning at the King's College Residence Hall.

Questions and Answers...

What about laptops, should we bring one?

There is no wireless access in your room. So, unless you're in a course that requires a laptop for projects while in London, we recommend you don't bring one. There are WiFi spots in London you can find if you're up for it, but you will have use of the computer lab across the street (24/7) and there are internet cafes you can make use of around the city.

I heard somewhere that they'll be able to tell I'm American by my tennis shoes...

The truth is, even if you don't stand out in your attire as an American, you will when you speak – don't worry about it. The best advice we can give if anyone is worried about "dressing too American" is: people are going to know where you're from, no matter how you dress – but, unless you want to get involved in some potentially intense discussions with the Brits, it's best not to wrap the American flag around your body every day before you go out! Baseball caps are typically a sure-fire give-away. But

again, it's OKAY that people know you're American, they are going to know regardless – it's how you *act* as an American that will matter...remember to set a good example ☺ That brings up another 'packing point': Dress in London the way you dress at home. If you have items in your closet that you don't wear in the U.S., you won't wear them in London, so don't pack them – take what you are used to wearing.

If we go to a club, how should we dress?

Clubs typically have a dress code, which generally in a “fancier” attire than we might be used to in the US. You will not be able to wear your tennis shoes in the club if you go out late night.

Side note: Tennis shoes are called “trainers” in Britain.

What should we take to class with us?

Unless your professor states otherwise, generally a note book and something to write with will be plenty.

Do we need to bring all our books for WWII with us?

From Dr. Wiest himself: The textbook wouldn't hurt, to get ready for the test...I'd for sure read the book on Normandy before you leave. One person could bring a textbook, and several could share it.

How do people spend money in London?

Keep into consideration, if you pay \$2 here for a coke, you'll pay £2 there, but that's \$3.50.

People spend money eating out! But remember, there is a kitchen in your flat – and you should make use of it! You can purchase inexpensive plates at the store, and we probably have pots and pans lying about for you to borrow (but there are not enough to go around!) otherwise you can purchase them at the store as well – and your entire flat can share.

People spend money at the pub! Keep in mind that pub life is part of British culture – and just because you go to the pub every day does not mean you go to drink yourself silly every day – it's a social gathering place where students and professors alike will spend quality time.

If you have a hard time here, and you spend a lot of money, you will likely spend the same in Britain.

Do we need a special bank card in London?

Your debit cards here will work 99% of the time in London. Talk to your bank before you depart! Every year there is a special small time bank that doesn't allow international debit – but that is the exception. Just be sure to talk to your bank – *even* if you're only bringing a credit card for emergency purposes and don't plan to use it, tell the bank you will be in London for a month (or longer if you plan to travel after) and to not worry when they see charges come through on your account.

Who do Southern Miss students (using their GOGold card) call to allow access on it?

There is a phone number on the back of your card for HigherOne – call and discuss traveling abroad with them.

What about converting from GBP to Euros?

Your card will automatically pull out the currency of the country you are visiting. So, if you are in France, you will automatically withdraw Euros. Some ATMs in London give you the option to collect Euros rather than GBP – this might be convenient for those of you traveling to Europe with your class, if you want to take out Euros before you land on the continent. BUT – you can wait; ATMs abound in all airports, train stations, etc.

What do I do if I miss the bus, (from the airport or at a rest stop)?

Hop in a cab. You'll likely beat the bus back. It will cost you about 50 GBP more or less, and if you don't have that money upon arrival: kindly ask the cab driver to wait at the entrance, come find Holly and Jess, and we'll take care of it then sort it out later.

The address to King's College Residence is in your HANDBOOK!

What do I do if I miss my flight?

Before you leave the airport, please call the office number here at Southern Miss to let us know. We will start working with you, AND you can also call the number on your ticket jacket to Magnolia Travel agency who booked your flight. They will also be able to help you. This is why we book with an agency. Or, go to the American Airlines travel desk and tell them what happened. They can help you call any of these numbers as well.

If your flight takes off without you, we will likely not be ecstatic about it – but we will work with you to figure things out.

If the whole flight is cancelled, well, we'll be working on that anyway from our office and we will let you know what to do.

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU KEEP US INFORMED AND CHECK IN WITH US IN EVERY OFFICE POSSIBLE.

If I'm flying out of Jackson, MS, will there be someone from the BSP at the airport?

There will be a Magnolia Travel Agent representative at the airport with your ticket. They will have a sign, look for them. Do not panic if you can't find them right away, they will be expecting you and will find YOU if you don't find them first.

If I'm a deviation (flying out of a non-group departure airport) then there won't be anyone at the airport to greet me?

That is correct. You should receive your ticket in the mail. But if you don't, don't worry. It's an e-ticket and all you need at the airport is a form of ID to check in and collect your boarding pass.

What about cell phones?

Don't plan to use your blackberry or your iPhone over there unless you're cool with a large bill. If you are on a global plan (AT&T, TMobile, Verizon, etc.) your phone will

work, but again – it is very expensive to use unless you have a special plan (but even then, for some reason U.S. International plans are still relatively expensive and not all-inclusive, as in, they still charge per the minute rather than give you a bulk of minutes to use up and then start charging you).

You can purchase a pay-as-you-go British cell phone the day you arrive – and Holly and Jess have hand outs you will receive at check-in with directions to various places around town, including a cell phone store. With a British cell phone you can receive calls for free – even international calls (of course, your friends and family at home will be charged) and text your friends in-country for less than using your American cell phone internationally.

The best thing to do if you're looking for free phone calls: go to an internet café and use Skype.

What should I expect upon arrival?

Expect culture shock. It will happen in various ways, and prepare for it. Everyone reacts differently and you might not notice it at all. Some people become physically ill with a cold, or headache – some people immediately land and think they want to go home (don't!), and some people become extra irritable. Whatever your reaction (or lack of reaction) just know that you are not crazy, culture shock is real, and it will pass.

Will my belongings be safe in my room?

Well, to get into the building from the outside, you have to swipe an access card. Then to get from the entry way of the building to the hallway in the building, you have to swipe the access card. Then, you swipe the card again to get onto your floor, then use a key to get into your flat, and then again to get into your room. So, yes, your money is safe, your passport is safe, etc. The residence hall takes these security measures so that you *do* feel safe, and can feel comfortable leaving your belongings there.

The people that work in the residence hall are just like your RA's and staff on campus. They do this for a living. Please respect them. None of these people are going to try and harm you or take your things.

Side note: If you don't have toilet paper, or sheets, or your room is not vacuumed – please don't call mom and dad at home to complain about it – because then we will hear it from them instead of you, which takes longer. Come to the office and let us know, and we will talk to the staff. OR, walk down to the cleaning lady's room to kindly ask her for toilet paper.

Are there bathrooms in our actual room?

The bathrooms ARE in the room. But they are closet-size small. In fact, one year a student misinterpreted the look of the door for a closet and insisted there was not a bathroom unit in his room until a professor showed him. Everything *will* get wet when you shower so don't take anything in with you that cannot get wet. We recommend you bring shower shoes.

What's proper attire for going to the theater?

You'll see people dressed in many ways. People dress up, they dress down. So dress however you want to! Have fun with it and get fancy, or if you find a cheap ticket while you're in your jeans, don't worry about it.

Advice on theaters: Check to make sure your theater has air conditioning. If it's NOT air conditioned, you'll want to be in a T-shirt/light clothing. If it does have AC, you should feel comfortable about dressing up!

Advice on air-conditioning – be prepared for heat. Average weather says it should be cool, BUT a few years ago there was a heat wave...and air-conditioning is not abundant. We have fans students can rent with a deposit – or purchase their own at the store.

Is there a place for us to do laundry?

Yes, in the building we will live in there is a laundry facility. You do have to exit the building to get to the laundry room, but it is in our same building. You do have to pay for laundry. Last summer it was £1.20 for the washer and £.50 for the dryer.

Should we already have our ISIC card?

Yes. If you do not have your ISIC card yet make sure you mailed in your application. If you marked on the application that you would pick it up, then it is ready for you to pick it up. If you asked that it be mailed to you, and more than two weeks has passed, it should have arrived – please call the office to inquire. If you forget to pick up your card before departure, we will have it for you in the office in London.

Should we book our travel for the mini-break before we leave or can we do that when we're there?

We typically have a travel Q&A in London to advise students on how to book arrangements, etc. on-site.

You can certainly book before you leave or while you are in London.

Show your ISIC card everywhere you go, especially tourist sites – you will get discounts!

Should we pack a bathing suit?

Sure! Why not? It's small enough to fit in a shoe! You likely won't swim in Britain, DO NOT SWIM in the Thames...but if you're planning to go to the beach in France, you'll want it!

How would you recommend we carry our important documents during the mini-break?

Think about what you're used to here, and what you're comfortable with – because if you go with a brand new, handy, triple enforced, fanny pack super duper wallet safe keeper – but you don't know how to rumble through it without getting lost inside of it

and then end up looking like an easy-target tourist...well, you're asking for it. Holly and Jess both take the regular every day purses they use in the U.S. It's important while you're traveling to be AWARE of your surroundings, and your habits. Don't put your purse down *anywhere*; even if it's resting on your foot...it will get taken. It happens every year.

The reason we ask for a copy of your passport is not just to book flights for London Away – it's for that just-in-case scenario that you lose it and you have to take the copy to the American Embassy to apply for a new one.

If you're going to be back-packing it, we recommend getting a pouch that you can put your passport, some cash, ISIC card, and credit card, etc in – under your shirt. Then your hands will be free.

What are you guys (Holly and Jess) doing for money?

Holly is carrying cash with her during the flight, and will use her debit card the entire time she is in London. Jess bought all the pounds she plans to use for the month in GBP traveler's checks, and will cash a few each week to try and budget herself, with her credit card as back-up.

What's the difference? Well, there really is no right or wrong way – plastic or paper you are going to spend money, so get comfortable with that idea. But when you have to spend it, why not do it in London, right?

The only plausible difference is that if the exchange rate severely increases between now and the weeks we are there, Jess doesn't have to worry about her dollars losing value because she's already bought the pounds. But, if the opposite happens and the exchange rate gets better for the dollar, Jess has to deal with it and Holly is better off because she buys pounds at the current exchange rate each time she withdraws from an ATM.

Again, there is no right or wrong way to budget your money, and if you talk to Jess – she'll probably admit this is the first time in her life to use traveler's checks and decided to experiment this go-round...CAN she stick to her budget? We'll see!