



Photo taken by Celine Leong

OXFORD UNIVERSITY FRESHER'S GUIDE 2018-19

FOREWORD

Hello Freshers!!

Congratulations on receiving your offer to Oxford :)

If you're anything like me, then I'm sure that right now you're feeling a complicated mix of emotions: excitement at the prospect of starting a new adventure, apprehension about what University life will be like, and maybe even a tinge of fear at the idea of living away from home for the first time. Nonetheless, the most important piece of advice I have for all of you is to make the most of your time here: studying in Oxford, with its wacky traditions and picture-perfect libraries, is an experience unlike any other. Time will no doubt pass much faster than you expect, so be prepared to get out of your room and chase all the opportunities that Oxford has to offer. From formal-surfing to attending talks by leading experts or watching a performance at the Oxford Playhouse, there's definitely something out there for everyone!!

In the meantime, the purpose of this guide is to help answer some (of the many) questions that you no doubt have about studying in Oxford. Although there's a limited number of topics that we can cover in this guide, please don't be afraid to Facebook message anyone in the committee if you have any further queries, or even if you'd just like to chat and want to get to know us better! If you'd prefer to remain anonymous, you can also either submit your questions on [Ask.fm](#), or drop me an [email](#) :)

Anyway, I think I've said enough for now – I'm really excited to finally meet all of you and can't wait to welcome you guys to the OUMSSA community!! While I can't guarantee that your journey here will *always* be smooth-sailing, what I *can* promise is being part of OUMSSA is somewhat like having a large extended family of uncles and aunties who are all keen to give you advice and help you feel welcome in this foreign city. Enjoy the rest of your holidays and I hope you find this guide even a teeny bit helpful :')

Love,

Celine Leong

Welfare Officer

OUMSSA Committee, '18-'19

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PRE-DEPARTURE

Getting Your Visa

International students need to apply for a student visa to study in the UK. **You will be applying for a Tier 4: (General) Student Visa.** For Singaporeans, click [here](#) for all the information you need about visa application. **However, before you apply for your visa, you will need your Confirmation of Acceptance Studies (CAS) Statement.**

Receiving your Confirmation of Acceptance Studies (CAS) Statement

The CAS Statement is an email sent to you approximately 2 to 3 months before you begin university certifying that you have an unconditional offer to study at the University of Oxford. **If you do not receive an email regarding your CAS statement by the end of July, please write to your college Admissions department to enquire about it!**

Before the actual statement is issued, you should receive a draft statement. Please check that:

- a) Details (i.e. your name and passport number) in the CAS matches that in your passport
- b) Your CAS was assigned no more than 6 months before you apply for your visa

Following this, your official CAS Statement will be sent to you, along with your CAS number, which is a **14-digit number that serves as an ID for your CAS Statement.** Do save / keep your CAS Statement and Number in a convenient location, as these are essential for the online Visa application.

Online Visa Application

The online visa application can take a while, but is relatively straightforward! However, there are two sections – listed below – that can be slightly problematic:

- a) **Filling in the countries you have travelled to in the past 10 years:** have your old and current passports, as a record of where you have travelled to, on hand
- b) **Your immunisation record:** use your medical booklet, your mother's SingPass account or email the [National Immunisation Registry](#)

Towards the end of the online visa application, you will be asked to pay for **National Health Insurance** – part of the UK's National Health Service (NHS) – for the number of years you will be spending as a student in the UK. You only need to pay for the NHS once, and the Embassy will not require another payment if for some reason your visa application does not go through and you need to re-apply.

Collecting your Visa

Before you go to the Visa Application Centre, make sure you bring the following:

- Printed copy of CAS Statement
- Printed copy of your visa application form and appointment confirmation

□ **Current and old passports**

You should have your old passports on hand as proof of where you've been or resided in the past and you will also need to ensure that your current passport is in order with at least one double-sided page free for the visa vignette.

□ **At least 1 passport sized photograph**

This should be in colour and taken against a white background. The UK Border Agency photograph guidelines can be found [here](#).

Please also note that **the actual photograph** used for the visa page of your passport and your Biometric Residence Pass **is taken on the day of your visit to the embassy itself!**

□ **Visa application fee**

£328 to be paid at the visa application centre, in Singapore dollars!

□ **Additional notes**

Previously, educational certificates and qualifications mentioned in your CAS (e.g. A Levels, O Levels) as well as evidence of funds had to be provided. However, the UK Border Agency has since streamlined the application process and classified Singaporean students as "Low Risk Applicants" who do not need to provide these documents. However, in true Singaporean fashion, I imagine that most of us would feel better to have them on hand!

Also note that although the UK Border Agency introduced a new English language proficiency on 21 April 2011. Singaporean students are not usually asked for proof of English language proficiency. In the case of any exceptions, your college would have discussed this with you when preparing your CAS statement. Click [here](#) for more details.

During this visa collection process, you will **submit your passport to the Applications centre** and fill in a form to apply for your **Biometric Residence Permit (BRP)**. You will also be asked where to collect your BRP. This requires some planning, as you can choose from 2 venues:

- a) **St Aldate's Post Office** (102 to 104 St Aldate's)
- b) **Examination Schools** (High Street).

Waiting times at both locations are usually the same, so just pick the one closer to your college!

Your passport – which should have an official visa vignette printed on the back pages – can be collected / mailed to your address within one week or 10 working days. Once you have your passport, it's probably good practice to photocopy the page with your approved UK visa vignette. This will be useful in the event that your passport gets lost/stolen.

Preparing for your Flight

Documents

Make sure you have the following documents in your hand-carry luggage:

GP's form

You'll need medical documentation as a student in the United Kingdom. Anything at your GP's discretion should suffice. Tell him/her that you are travelling overseas for studies, and they will know what to provide you with.

Vaccination form

Your college is likely to require some proof of vaccination, usually against Meningitis ACWY and MMR. This can be done at Tan Tock Seng Hospital's Traveller's Clinic, and they will provide you with the necessary documentation.

Taking a flu-jab is also recommended, although it really can't guarantee that you'll ward off your inaugural bout of Freshers' Flu!

Letter(s) of acceptance

These would include:

- A printed copy of your initial UCAS Track (Remember that? The UCAS page that was your first record of your acceptance into Oxford!)
- Your CAS Statement
- Any letters addressed to you from your college

Money

You will need some British currency (GBP) on hand as setting up a student bank account will take some time. **You should have enough cash to last you about 2 to 3 weeks or more.** Do budget for expenses incurred while settling-in, such as buying bedding, textbooks, toiletries and other items you did not manage to pack. **Bringing around £600 to 800 is a good estimate.**

In addition, you can consider applying for a supplementary credit card through your parents, which is a useful in case of emergencies.

From collective experience, it is unfortunately the case that the time taken to set up bank accounts may vary. Some banks, such as Lloyds TSB and HSBC, have special counters set up in 0th Week just to open bank accounts for students on the spot. On the other hand, you might find yourself at the other extreme, entangled in a battle with your bank for weeks. Remember that although payment of battels (college bills for accommodation) may be delayed for a bit, some colleges may charge interest. Battels are also due usually within one or two weeks so it's best to settle your bank account early if possible!

Administrative Matters

Accommodation

Do inform your college of the date of your arrival, and confirm that your accommodation will be ready by then. This is necessary if you are arriving earlier than Sunday of Freshers' Week.

Some colleges might not be able to provide you lodging before Freshers' Week but if you need a place to stay feel free to contact your OUMSSA parents or keep an eye on the [OUMSSA Marketplace](#) as many of us have houses/flats/college rooms where you can bunk in/ rent.

Renewal of passport

Passports should continue to be valid for at least 6 months after your arrival in the UK. However, it is advised to simply renew your passport so that it is valid for the entirety of your stay in the UK: this enables you to avoid the hassle of having to renew your passport while in the UK, and needing to travel with two passports – since you will need the expired one which contains the visa).

Exit Permit / Deferment from Reservist Duty

This is applicable for Singaporean men or those who have signed on with the Singapore Armed Forces. Information can be found, and applications can be done online [here](#).

MFA eRegister

You might also like to register with the Singapore High Commission in London so they know of your presence in the UK [here](#).

Insurance (optional)

If you wish to apply for insurance, AVIVA and NTUC Income provide special plans devised for students. Medical expenses should largely be covered by the NHS after you arrive at Oxford. However, for those 19 and above, you will have to pay a standard £7 charge for consultation with your college doctor if you require a prescription. For more information about the NHS, click [here](#).

Packing

This is a general overview of where to find all your university essentials!

Things to Buy in Singapore:

1. Computers and electronics

Computers and electronic gadgets are generally more expensive in the UK, so consider bringing these over from Singapore. Your laptop bag doesn't count as an additional piece of hand luggage, so stuff all you can inside it!

Items such as digital cameras, travel adapters, extension plugs, LAN cables, thumb drives and external hard drives are generally useful and light enough to carry. You can purchase bulkier items such as printers, speakers, and computer monitors in the UK at very reasonable prices.

2. Clothes and accessories

All colleges have laundry facilities: usually a number of shared washing machines and dryers. The general rule of thumb is to bring enough clothes to last you a week or a week-and-a-half. However, this depends on how often you see yourself doing a round of laundry, especially when assignments pile up.

Sub Fusc

Men are advised to bring a **dark suit** ("dark" can refer to dark grey or navy in addition to black, and subtle pinstripes and polka dots are allowed), at least 1 **white shirt** and a pair **black leather shoes** for their **sub fusc**, or the official dress / uniform for all University formal events such as examinations and matriculation.

Women are advised to bring at least 1 **white blouse**, a pair of **dark** (again, dark grey or navy is fine) **trousers** or a **dark skirt**, **stockings** and **court shoes**.

Formal Attire

Some of you may wish to bring dressier outfits (i.e. black-tie attire) for formal dinners, balls and special occasions. While most balls happen only in Trinity Term (towards the summer), formal dinners begin as early as Freshers' Week! Pack what you feel comfortable wearing!

Thermal Wear

While you can find Uniqlo in Oxford, it's a lot cheaper to purchase thermal wear (tops, tights and socks) from Singapore.

3. Food and cooking appliances

You might want to bring food that you may miss, because (good) Asian food can cost a bomb in Oxford! The Chinese supermarkets in Oxford can be quite far from your accommodation, and prices can be exorbitant by Singaporean standards. Asian groceries are relatively limited, but you can find the following at either **Tesco's**, **Sainsbury's** or **Marks and Spencer's**:

- a) Fresh Asian vegetables, unfortunately limited to beansprouts and bak choy
- b) Sauces and pastes such as soya sauce, sesame oil, sriracha (decent substitute for chili sauce) and bottled Indian and Thai curries
- c) Snacks such as rice crackers (a good brand is *Bin Bin*, similar to *Wang Wang*), mango pudding, seaweed (this can be a bit pricey) and papadums

- d) Noodles such as instant noodles (from Indomie to Shin Cup), la mian, bee hoon and kway teow

The two relatively accessible Asian supermarkets in Oxford, **Lung Wah Chong** (OX1 2EP) and **Jingjing** (OX4 1UE), sell a wide range of Asian groceries; most notably a wider selection of vegetables, snacks, frozen food and utensils (even hotpots!). However, prices are a tad steep. Amazon, eBay as well as the online [OUMSSA](#) and [Oxford-wide Marketplaces](#) might offer good deals on Asian food or utensils as well!

4. Stationery

While pens, highlighters and post-its etc. can be easily purchased from **Ryman Stationery** (OX1 1ER), they're generally around double the price of those here in Singapore.

Things to Buy in the UK:

1. Home essentials

Generally, most household items can be bought from physical stores such as **Primark** (OX1 1PE), **Boswells** (OX1 3AG), or **Robert Dyas** (OX1 2DP). Boswells and Robert Dyas also have a **student discount**, so don't forget to bring your university card along! Additionally, online shopping is very convenient in the UK, so I would highly recommend checking out **Argos** (order online & collect from OX1 2RP) and **Amazon**. Note that Amazon even offers [6 months of free Prime](#) (1-day delivery services) for students. Consider sharing your account with friends so that the free trial period covers the length of your degree :)

Some items that I would recommend picking up within the first week of university include:

- **Hangers:** free with purchase from Primark, or buy from any of the stores listed above
- **Brita water filter:** water from the kitchen sinks are drinkable, but if you'd like to drink the water from the sinks in your room/ toilet, then it might be safer to run it through a filter first. [Cartridges](#) last approximately 1 month each and can be purchased separately from the [water jug](#)
- **Cutlery:** strangely enough, it's cheaper to buy this [24-piece set](#) from Argos than it is to buy individual pieces of cutlery from anywhere else
- **Cooking utensils:** if you intend to cook quite often, it might make sense to buy this [8-piece set](#) from Argos. Otherwise, you can buy individual ladles and spatulas etc. cheaply from Boswells or Flying Tiger Copenhagen (OX1 3AD)
- **Grocery tote bag:** supermarkets here charge 10p for each plastic bag, so it might make sense to stock up on free tote bags during events like Fresher's Fair
- **Plates, bowls, mugs, saucepan etc.**
- **Kettle**
- **Laundry bag**
- **Bedding**

2. Clothes and accessories

Sub Fusc

The remaining components of your sub fusc – the Commoner's gown, white bow tie or black ribbon (normally the bowtie is purchased by men, and the ribbon by ladies, but you have the freedom to choose!) and mortar board – can be bought in Oxford. Some Colleges offer deals with the tailors, resulting in discounted prices for these items!

Winter Clothes

Nylon or wool-blend sweaters can be purchased cheaply from shops such as Primark or New Look. While it's possible to buy a winter coat from High Street brands, for something more functional, a student favourite is [Mountain Warehouse](#) (OX1 3AJ) as they have some really good deals during sale periods. It's generally a good idea to buy a waterproof and hooded coat so that you avoid the hassle of bring out an umbrella when it's drizzling (which will be often). For women, I'd also recommend buying some heat-tech stockings in case you need to wear formal attire during the winter months – I'm personally a fan of those sold by [Marks & Spencers](#) (it's survived months of washing!), but those from Primark are a good and cheap alternative as well.

3. Books

Books are generally cheaper in Singapore and you should try and bring the books you need from home! Students reading subjects with no fixed textbooks may find it far more convenient to rely on Oxford's excellent library system – the Bodleian Libraries, College Libraries and Search Oxford Libraries Online (SOLO) portal – and the clandestine Singapore inter-college book-lending scheme. Also, the renewing system for books in most colleges means that one could potentially hold on to the books needed for a whole term. It may still however be necessary to purchase a few main textbooks now and then. I was able to purchase almost all my 1st year textbooks second-hand from seniors, so do ask your OUMSSA/ college parents for advice, as well as take a look at the OUMSSA Marketplace!

Additional Words of Advice

1. Arrive early

Arriving early helps with getting over jet lag so that you can hit the term running and get involved with the social activities during Freshers' Week. It also gives you time to familiarise yourself with the general environment so you can focus on getting in touch with the other aspects of life as a student in Oxford once term begins.

2. Enjoy your time before Oxford

While life at Oxford is very exciting and fun, things can get very fast paced and intense because terms are so short. Do take some time to enjoy your break: enjoy time with your family and friends, eat good food (whether it's local or otherwise) when opportunity avails itself and hang on to the things about Singapore you enjoy the most!

If you are assigned some light preparatory reading or work by your college tutors, take it seriously and complete it as soon as possible. You might want to do some preparatory reading as well. But please, **don't spend so much time on work before term**. Do enough preparation to feel comfortable, and balance this with your existing commitments and quality relaxation time!

3. Attend OUMSSA Freshers' Tea and Chalet

We've all been there before: anxious/ nervous about the prospect of being alone in a vast foreign land. To dispel this anxiety/ nervousness, the OUMSSA Committee has put together two exciting events – first, **Fresher's Tea on 14 July**, and next the **Fresher's Chalet from 17 to 19 August** – where you can meet fellow incoming freshers headed to Oxford and make some great Singaporean buddies for your adventure!

4. Get a hair-cut before you leave

Haircuts in the UK are notoriously expensive, so most people try to keep the number of times they need to visit the hair salon as low as possible!

ON ARRIVAL

The Road to Oxford

Hurray! By this stage you would have braved a 13-hour flight (not including any stop-overs!) and have arrived at either Heathrow or Gatwick Airport. The cheapest and most convenient way to get to Oxford is by bus, namely, [The Airline](#) operated by the Oxford Bus Company.

Tickets can be bought either online or from the bus driver before boarding. I would advise buying a period return ticket (£30, as opposed to £23 one-way) which allows you a return trip from Oxford to Heathrow within 3 months from your initial trip. Even if you don't end up needing the return ticket, don't fret as there will be plenty of people on the OUMSSA Marketplace who will be keen to buy the ticket off you!

To board the Airline, head to either:

- a) The **Central Bus Terminal** or the **Terminal 5 Bus Bay** at Heathrow Airport
- b) **Stands 1 and 2 at Gatwick South Terminal**, or **Stands 4 and 5 at Gatwick North Terminal**

The bus-stop to disembark at depends on your college. You'll want to ask your seniors / OUMSSA parents / Google whether it's more convenient for you to alight at the **High Street bus stop** or the **Gloucester Green Bus Station** (the last stop of the journey).

If you happen to be coming to Oxford from London, airports, consider taking either the [X90](#) or the [Oxford Tube](#). Tickets can be purchased from the bus drivers, or via websites such as [MegaBusUK](#). If you book your tickets early (a few weeks in advance) from MegaBus, you can get a one-way ticket for as little as £1!

Another alternative is to take the [train](#) from Heathrow or London. If you foresee yourself travelling by train frequently, it might be worth investing in a [16-25 Railcard](#). It costs £26 for a year and gets you 1/3 off most rail fares. You can also get a 3-year railcard online, with one of the additional benefits being the ability to order a replacement card more easily in case of loss or damage.

Settling In: Initial Administrative Tasks

After arriving at Oxford, the first thing you should do (after grabbing a nice meal or coffee if need be!) is to probably begin initial registration with your college. Head to your college and proceed to the Porters' Lodge (a security post or office near the main entrance of your college), where a member of staff or a college senior will be there to assist you with the initial registration. While the administrative process varies among the colleges, you should get a short introductory tour of your college or accommodation grounds and, more importantly, the keys to your new room! You should also receive a welcome pack with helpful maps, booklets, freebies and a schedule for the rest of Freshers' Week.

The most important administrative documents / items you need to get during Fresher's Week are:

- a) Your **BRP**: Remember that form you filled in at the Visa Application Centre? That form was used for your Biometric Residence Permit and is a key piece of evidence that you are in the UK on a student Visa.
- b) Your **University Card**, also affectionately known as your **Bod Card**: If you did not scan or mail a University Card application form to your college before leaving for Oxford, you may need to fill this in upon arriving at your college, so be sure to have some passport-sized photos on hand! This is important proof that you are a student at Oxford, so get this either on the day you arrive or in the days shortly after.
- c) A **printed letter confirming your arrival and acceptance into your respective college (the Oxford Student Enrolment Certificate)**: It is imperative that it is stamped with your college's official stamp, and signed by a relevant member of staff. This letter is crucial for registering for a bank account in the coming days, which will be elaborated on more in the next section (Settling In: Banks).

During Freshers' Week, there will be library or department inductions and tours, which may or may not be compulsory. These sessions can be very useful, as they involve registering you under your relevant libraries or departments, and introducing you to processes such as how to borrow books. Even if you do miss an induction or tour, the people in your college, department or relevant University library are all very friendly and will be happy to help a (slightly confused or lost) Fresher!

In the hustle and bustle of Freshers' Week, you might also want to find time to meet up with fellow Singaporeans from your college/ that you knew previously in Singapore/ from your OUMSSA family or any friendly face (and familiar accent) you run into on the street! The Singaporean community is relatively small and well knit, and there are always people to talk to or reach out to for help of any sort! Most of all, there is no pressure to mingle with Singaporeans, or students of any nationality, so do what makes you feel comfortable!

Settling In: Accommodation

Everyone's rooms vary across colleges, but here are some important things to take note of when you first arrive:

- a) **Your bed:** As mentioned in the section on **Packing**, check whether your college has provided you with a pillow, duvet and / or bed sheets
- b) **Your heater:** Some Freshers have reported that their room heaters were not turned on during Fresher's week. Do inform your Porters or Accommodations staff if this is the case! A tip would be to check whether the dial pointing to the strength of the heater is facing towards or away from you!
- c) **Your desk:** Make sure the room is equipped with a sturdy desk and at least 1 chair (another may be provided as a sort of sofa or recliner). The desk should also come with a lamp, so check whether this works!
- d) **Your cupboards:** If you're a bit more particular about hygiene, you might want to give the shelves a bit of a wipe-down before placing your stuff inside. In addition, check whether your college has left you with a decent number of hangers, especially ones for suits, dresses and formal wear.
- e) **Your sink / toilet:** Most rooms come with at least a sink, mirror and power port (for shavers). Make sure both taps work. Some rather dirty / opaque water may come out of the hot water tap at first, but leave it to run and see what happens. Do inform your Porter if this problem persists! Lastly, check whether the light above your mirror works, that the mirror is free from cracks and that – if you're lucky enough to have a full toilet to yourself – everything about your bathroom is in order.

As for your rent: a ballpark figure for college accommodation is somewhere from **£800 a term** (8 weeks) to an **extreme upper limit of £1500 a term**. Should you choose to stay beyond the school term, the college will probably charge you around £20 a day.

Settling In: Banks

Banking will probably be one of your main priorities. Setting up an account is not a very difficult task if you can provide the bank with the required documents. The greater concern is choosing which bank to set up an account in for the most convenient, hassle-free set-up process, best interest rate and other promotions. While the university has its own [banking guide](#), everyone gets the same copy), this guide aims to offer a Singaporean perspective when it comes to money wrangling matters.

Initial documents

You will need the following documents to set up a bank account:

1. **Oxford Student Enrolment Certificate.**
Print this online from Student Self Service; if you are unsure, ask your college IT personnel or bursary staff. If not, ask for this as soon as you settle into your accommodation.
2. **Proof of residence**
Only HSBC needs this, but it is good to have. You need a letter addressed to your address in Oxford, i.e. your college, to confirm that you do live in Oxford and the United Kingdom.
3. **Passport and BRP**
4. **CAS Statement or any other Unconditional Offer letters**
Bring this just in case.

A Brief Introduction to the Banks

In this section, we will provide a brief overview of the 4 largest commercial banks in the UK – the Big 4 – and the ones Singaporeans tend to open bank accounts in the most frequently:

a) **HSBC**

Address: 5 Cornmarket St, Oxford OX1 3HY, UK

A significant portion of Singaporeans bank with HSBC, which is hardly surprising if one were to consider its huge presence in Asia. Like all the other “Big 4” banks in Oxford, HSBC has its main branch at located on Cornmarket Street. It is also one of the largest banks (both in terms of size and handling capacity) in Oxford. However, HSBC staff may not be very friendly.

With HSBC, you can either open your account in the UK, or before your flight in Singapore!

1. **How to open a HSBC Bank Account in the UK**
Stringent proof is required to open a HSBC Current Account. This can usually be supplied by providing the 4 initial documents mentioned earlier. However, there may be a chance that staff insist that you are only eligible for the HSBC Passport account which costs £8 per month. In this case you should stand your ground and insist on setting up a Current Account!
2. **How to open a HSBC (UK) Bank Account in Singapore**

A HSBC (UK) Current Account can be opened from Singapore as long as you are an existing HSBC customer. A fee of S\$150, but this can be waived if the you or your parents are HSBC Premier members, with assets over S\$200,000. If your parents are not HSBC Premier members, it is recommended that you do not pay this initial fee, as it is not that much of a hassle doing it in the UK. Please also note that this process can take up to 2.5 months, so start early!

Once your account has been set up, you can start transferring money from Singapore to your account in the UK! If you are a HSBC Advance customer, there is a S\$10 transaction fee is applied for every transfer from Singapore to the UK. For HSBC Premier customers, transfers are free!

For more information, please click [here](#) and [here](#).

b) Lloyds

Address: 1-5 High St, Carfax, Oxford OX1 4AA, UK

Lloyds is conveniently located at Cornmarket Street-High Street junction, and is the 2nd most popular bank amongst Singaporeans. Its basic account (Current Account) has:

- a) No monthly fee,
- b) Comes with a savings account (an account with a slightly higher interest rate)
- c) Free weekly text updates on your fiscal situation

In addition, Lloyds generally has friendly staff and is relatively efficient in establishing a bank account during Freshers' Week. However, you should note that Lloyds does have an overdraft policy, and charges a fee and interest when you withdraw more than £25 than what you hold.

Lloyds also offers an upgrade to Club Lloyds, which offers a substantially higher interest rate on your Current Account balance. While the upgrade has a monthly fee of £3, it can be waived if you arrange 2 Direct Debits (e.g. your favourite charities) from your Current Account, and if you transfer £1500 into your account each month (which can be withdrawn again!).

International money transfers cost at least £5 per transfer, and you likely need to pay a higher amount if the amount of the transfer exceeds £100.

For more information, please click [here](#) and [here](#).

c) NatWest

Address: 43 Cornmarket St, Oxford OX1 3HA, UK

After merging with RBS, NatWest has also emerged as another popular bank used by students in Oxford. Despite being infamously known as "the bank that suffered a system crash in June 2012", NatWest offers rather decent value-for-money packages. Most people would start with the most basic current account known as the "Select Account", which offers:

- a) No monthly fee
- b) Online and mobile banking,
- c) Fee and interest free overdrafts

- d) Emergency cash
- e) Fraud alerts

Across all accounts, each international transfer of up to £100 (or an equivalent amount in another currency) is charged £1. Transfers above £100 or currency equivalent are charged at £7 each.

Click [here](#) for more information.

d) Barclays

Address: 54 Cornmarket St, Oxford OX1 3HB, UK

Unlike the other three Big 4 banks, Barclays offers an international retail banking service called the iBank Account. As potential globe-trotters in the future, the iBank Account may be quite appealing as it allows you to set up a bank account in Singapore before heading over to the UK (just like HSBC, but even better since you can use this retail banking account in places where Barclays has a presence). However, it comes at a monthly fee of £10 (from 4th September 2012) and has few additional perks (e.g. mobile phone insurance and travel insurance etc). More importantly, you are required to deposit £5000 right at the start.

Click [here](#) for more information!

Factors to Consider for your Bank of Choice

You could choose your bank based on the following factors:

1. Convenience

The 4 banks are all located very close together, so their exact location in Oxford is rather immaterial. Furthermore, you can withdraw cash from any bank's ATM at no additional cost. Instead, you should focus on what arrangements your prospective bank has for international money transfers, in case you need require more money from Singapore.

2. Interest Rates

Naturally you want your money to earn money. The savings account offers better interest than a current account and you can transfer money in between them easily.

3. Additional details and perks

You should check whether your prospective bank has an overdraft penalty, where you are fined if the amount of money stored in your account falls below a certain amount. On the other hand, some banks offer interest-free overdrafts (where you draw more money than that stored in your bank account) up to a certain amount. In addition, banks can offer you attractive promotions such as discounted Rail Cards and subsidised movie tickets!

After you decide on your bank, make sure you bring the 4 initial documents with you, and go during an off-peak hour, preferably earlier during Fresher's Week to avoid a large crowd of confused Fresher's and their parents. The entire process, from the setting up of an account to receiving your debit card and cheque book, should not take more than 2 weeks, and can be completed as quickly as within a week!

Settling in: Mobile Networks

There are plenty of telcos and networks in the UK, with GiffGaff, Three, EE, Vodafone, Orange, O2 being major providers.

Unlike Singapore, 3G networks in the UK – regardless of the telco – are relatively slow. In addition, GiffGaff and O2 users can experience slightly weaker signal strength in certain parts of Oxford. However, there will always be “blindspots” where you may not receive any signal in some parts of Oxford. Do check with your college seniors before you commit to any one telco. Lastly, when in London, don’t expect to get any phone signal when you are travelling on the Underground.

For payment methods, there are three broad categories:

- 1) **Pay-as-you-go (PAYG)**
- 2) **Short term monthly plans**
- 3) **Long term (12 to 24 month) post-paid contracts**

If you intend to go with the post-paid option, do bear in mind that there are certain constraints. First, you will have to continue paying for this even when you are not in Oxford. In addition, phones bought on these contracts may be region locked to the UK provider. You might also be required to set up a bank account first (for the regular payment of phone bills or pay a deposit) and to get a letter of proof of residence before signing your contract. However, long term plans also tend to have additional benefits such as free overseas roaming, personal hotspot allowance and larger data allowances.

If you have trouble finding a SIM card at first, do check with your seniors before flying off, or check with seniors that are in Oxford! GiffGaff has a scheme which provides free starter SIM cards that have £5 of credit (more than enough to last you before you sign up for your regular plan), and using these earns the donor of the SIM card referral points so don’t hesitate to ask for these!

International Phone Calls

Even with Skype and WhatsApp, you might still want to make international phone calls on your mobile. One way is to look for stored-value International Calling Cards (ICC) at post offices and convenience stores which allow you to make cheap international calls. If you have an ICC, you can use it from public phones, or even from your room phone (use the dial access number for BT phone lines), although this is slightly more expensive.

Settling in: Computers, Electronics and Software

For wifi, the 2 University level networks available to you are **eduroam** (also found in most Universities internationally, such as NTU in Singapore!) and **OWL**. Most students use eduroam, as OWL is reserved for visitors. However, you can access OWL through a University approved [Virtual Private Network client](#).

The University does have 2 requirements for software:

- a) The University expects that you update your anti-virus software and check for new patches from time to time. For those of you who need it, the University provides its own anti-virus software called **Sophos**. Download it for free [here](#).
- b) You should not use University networks to browse websites with inappropriate content; e.g. pornography. You are allowed only 5 attempts to access blocked sites; if you exceed this, your Internet access gets cut off (however, this depends on specific rules at your college).

In addition, some colleges prohibit the use of P2P (Peer to Peer) programmes such as BitTorrent. Always check before you arrive! In addition, fines will be imposed on illegal downloads so do ensure you do not fall foul in this regard.

To improve your internet connectivity, you can buy a LAN cable, However, keep in mind that as some Colleges do not have LAN ports in their rooms, and you'll need to depend on WiFi.

While the University previously had a ban on Skype, it has been lifted! However, you may need to configure it according to the [OUCS regulations](#).

Settling in: Transportation

Getting around Oxford

In Oxford, everything is fairly walkable (personal note: I survived the entire of first year without a bicycle), but you may need time getting used to the cobbled streets (which look very romantic or charming, but take some getting used to). Put on a sturdy pair of shoes and get walking!

Another highly recommended mode of transport is by **bicycle**. You can purchase a first-hand bicycle from several stores in Oxford, and prices range between £100 and £300. But, if your budget is smaller, the OUMSSA Marketplace and the larger University “Swap and Shop” are your best chances of getting a decent second-hand bicycle, which may even come with accessories! Prices tend to range from £40 to £100. Here are some essential accessories you should purchase with your bike:

- a) A helmet
- b) A bike light, which is extremely important for safe riding at night. The £50 fine is another good reason for having a bike light!
- c) A D-lock. This is a much better than a chain lock, as it is far harder to break or cut through, and bike theft can be quite common in some parts of Oxford

Other options for getting around are taking the bus or taxi, which are good if you need to make longer journeys with heavier loads.

Getting out of Oxford

If you do need to travel out of Oxford, you can either:

- a) Board a bus at a relevant bus stop, and purchase a ticket from the driver.
- b) Take a train from the Oxford Train Station
The train station provides access to other parts of the UK, but an alternative might be to take a bus down to London, from which it is much easier to travel to different parts of the UK. Trains tend to run usually on-time, but can be very expensive if booked last-minute. For the best deals, plan ahead and purchase “Advance” tickets. To purchase train tickets online, click [here](#) or [here](#).

Settling In: Food

While the food scene might not compare to Singapore, there's always food to eat in Oxford! Your first option would be to eat in college at your dining hall. While the prices (of course) vary between colleges, you can expect the following meal prices:

- a) **Breakfast:** from £1 to around £3 or £4
- b) **Lunch:** from £3 to £5
- c) **Dinner:** from £3 to £6

There are formal dinners (Formals), guest nights and other special events hosted in college where a fancier dining setting and (hopefully) fancier food is served. These can cost anywhere between £5 and £13.

For groceries, be sure to check out:

- a) **Supermarkets:** generally, Tesco's has the best prices, followed by Sainsbury's, and lastly by Marks and Spencer's. Use whichever you feel comfortable with!
- b) **Asian markets:** Lung Wah Chong and Jing Jing supply more specialised Asian ingredients
- c) **Gloucester Green** market on **Wednesday** (and occasionally Thursday): there is a farmer's market where a wide assortment of fruits and vegetables will be on sale for incredible prices. Do check this out for a cheap fix of fruit and vegetables!
- d) **The Covered Market** (Market Street): while ingredients can be more expensive compared to supermarket prices, the groceries here are definitely of good quality, and promotions can even bring the prices below those offered in supermarkets!

Light Meals

The Alternative Tuck Shop (OX1 3SB), **Taylor's** (OX1 4AH) and **Morton's** (OX1 3AX or OX1 2DW) are also popular with students especially when an essay is due. Baguettes and sandwiches range from £2.50 to £4, and Taylor's has a rather impressive selection of customisable pasta, curries, soup and salads that cost from £3 to £5.

Take note of the special closing time offers at Morton's (**£1.50 baguettes from 4.45pm to 5pm**) and Taylor's (**£1 sandwiches close to 6pm**) for a truly delicious budget experience!

Midnight Pick-me-ups

If you're feeling hungry close to or after midnight, pop over to your nearest kebab van! Other than the ubiquitous kebab (shredded meat, vegetables and glorious sauce, held lovingly together by a wrap / flatbread), you can get all types of fast food, such as burgers, fries (or 'chips', as they like to call it) and chilli con carne. Prices are around £2 to £5, though as always it depends on what you order. The more popular ones are **Hassan's** (Broad Street), **Hussein's** (St Giles), **Ahmed's** (High Street) and the newly opened **Solomon's Grill** (St Giles Street, usually right next to Hussein's.)

Cafes

Aside from the ubiquitous chain cafés: **Starbucks**, **Café Nero**, **Costa's** and **Pret a Manger**, there are a couple of other quaint and arguably better options for a chat with a friend over a coffee and a sandwich. Some choice picks include **The Missing Bean** (OX1 3DQ) – known for its good coffee,

Olives (OX1 4AP) – known for making healthy and delectable sandwiches, in particular, the Parma Ham and Buffalo Mozzarella baguette (you cannot go wrong with this!!), and the **Alternative Tuckshop** – which also serves a variety of gourmet sandwiches (I recommend the paninis, especially turkey cranberry or chicken and mozzarella), pasties (stuffed puffs), pastries and deserts. There is also **G & D's**, a popular home-grown ice-cream establishment that can only be found in Oxford, which serves bagels and sandwiches as well. The **Nosebag** (OX1 2DU) is a good place to go to for desserts and tea (try the storm tea!) outside of meal times!

If you fancy the idea of afternoon tea, various cafés along High Street, try the **Grand Café** (OX1 4BG), **Patisserie Valerie** with their amazing 4-for-£10 cakes, **Vaults and Gardens** (opposite Radcam) and **The Rose** (OX1 4AS). **The Rose** has arguably some of the best scones in all of England. The desserts at the other two cafés are good too, but forgettable. Tip: if you order the scones set, one pot of tea is perfectly adequate for two to share.

Italian and/or Western

We are spoilt for choice when it comes to Italian food; it appears that every alternate restaurant you walk past in Oxford serves Italian but not all serve good or even decent Italian fare. Some of the better Italian establishments in town are **Franco Manca** (OX1 2AF) and **Bella Italia** (OX1 2AF). Do note that Bella Italia offers a 50% discount to students from Sunday to Thursday, provided everyone at the table has a valid Bod Card.

Pierre Victoire (OX1 2HP) is a very good bet for French food, as is **Brasserie Blanc** (OX2 6AG). A slight notch down, there's **Café Rouge** (OX1 2HP). As for Spanish, there's **Al Andalus Tappas Bar** (OX1 2HP). Other options include **Loch Fyne** (OX2 6AE) which does excellent seafood, and **Browns Restaurant** (OX2 6HA). These are all located at or near near Jericho. Be sure to check out their value-for-money set menus! Prices range from £10 to £20, depending on what you order.

Asian

The Chinese food in Oxford is generally decent. Some of the more popular options in the City Center include **Sojo** (OX1 2EW), **MySichuan** (OX1 2BN), and **Opium Den** (67 to 69 George St). Finally, there is **Zheng's** (OX2 6EA), which serves Singaporean and Malaysian food, such as zi char, nasi lemak or hor fun!

Thai food is another common choice if you're looking for some familiar comfort food. One of the most frequented restaurants is **Angrid Thai** (OX1 2BJ) for its balance between good food – pad thai, duck panang and moo ping are among the more popular dishes – and affordable prices (15% off for students!). Another Singaporean student favourite is **Sasi's Thai** (Covered Market), again with good food and good prices. A lesser known secret would be **The Old Tom's** (OX1 1BT), a pub (yes, a pub) that has pad thai that can rival that sold at Angrid Thai! Establishments such as **Chiang Mai Kitchen** (OX1 4DH), **Thai Street Kitchen** (OX1 2DU) and **At Thai** (OX1 4DF) offer marginally better food and ambience for higher prices, and are still worth going to! **Thaikun** (OX1 2BJ) has steeper prices, but has marvellous food and wonderful interior décor.

For Japanese, **Sooshe**, a tiny stall tucked in a corner of the Covered Market that offers really good sashimi at a relatively good price (about £4.50 for 4 really fat slices). It is, however, difficult to find seats. Along Holywell St, there is **Edamame** (OX1 3SA): a family-run restaurant that has a welcoming, homely atmosphere and delicious Japanese fare! However, their opening hours can be quite variable, so do check their [website](#) before making plans, and always go there early to

avoid long queues! British-run Japanese food chains **Itsu** (OX1 3EZ) and **Wasabi** (OX1 3EX) sell decent Japanese food at relatively affordable prices, and both offer a 50% discount on all items 30 minutes before closing time (go 15 minutes before this, and hope your food!). Another great option is **Sushimania** (OX1 1JD) – there is a 50% lunch promotion on the entire menu everyday!

If you fancy some Indian food, Oxford has you spoilt for choice! **Chutney's** (OX1 2EB) has very attractive Executive Set Lunches, and a discount for students every Monday!

Last but not least, every Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday there is a farmer's market at Gloucester Green, with plenty of Asian food stalls available. Although the roster may change from time to time, some constants are a Japanese stall selling fried food and gyoza, Chinese stalls selling dumplings and noodles and various Indian stalls.

Miscellaneous

If you're craving a good burger, look no further than **Byron's** (OX1 2AY) and **Gourmet Burger Kitchen (GBK)**, (OX1 2AY): they serve everything from juicy, classic cheeseburgers to tantalising items such as chicken katsu sandwiches or duck confit burgers. More importantly, for GBK you can get a 25% discount from Sunday to Thursday if you download the GBK app!

There are also hidden gems inside the Covered Market: **Browns Café** does a delicious all-day English breakfast for £5, **Moo Moo's** serves an impressive range of milkshakes, and **Ben's Cookies** has delicious huge chewy cookies in various flavours.

Settling In: Nightlife

Clubs

If you like to dance and party, there're clubs scattered all around Oxford, with the more popular clubs being **Emporium** (OX1 1PU), **Bridge** (OX1 2EW), **Park End** (a.k.a ATIK – OX1 1JD) and **Plush** (OX1 1HU). You will probably get emails with more information about which clubs do which nights from college Entz reps, but in any case, you will also hear plenty about them from friends.

Bars

For bars, the more popular few include **House** (OX1 4EE), **All Bar One** (OX1 4DF), **Duke of Cambridge** (OX1 2HP), **Raouls** (OX2 6AA), **Angels** (OX1 2HS), **The Purple Turtle** (inside the Oxford Union) and **The Varsity Club** (OX1 4DB), with a stunning view of the town!

Bars generally serve beers, cocktails, liquor and mocktails (good for those averse or allergic to alcohol). Check out their websites for the respective Happy Hours. Be prepared to spend anything from £5 to £10, depending on the number of drinks you get.

Pubs

For pubs, the more popular or well-known ones would be **Four Candles** (OX1 2BE, with different deals most days of the week), **King's Arms** (OX1 3SP), **The Turf Tavern** (OX1 3SU), **The Eagle & Child** (OX1 3LU), **Chequers** (OX1 1JP) and **Lamb and Flag** (OX1 3JS), each with their own distinctive character. Aside from drinks, they also do decent meals in the day. Prices for drinks range from £3 to £5, and for food, £7 to £15. Some of these places also serve mean Sunday Roasts!

Settling In: Sightseeing

No one should fault you for being a tourist in Oxford, not when everything is so breath-taking. If you happen to spare the time, or would like to have a look around with your parents/guardians before term starts proper, here are a couple of tips:

1. Start with the colleges

Oxford is best known for being a university town, and of course, this means the bulk of its charm lies in the distinct architecture of colleges here. Popular traditional colleges include Christ Church, Balliol and Magdalen but interesting colleges like Keble (known for their red-brick) or more modern colleges like St. Catherine's are a mere 10 to 15-minute walk away!

2. Experience the town

Sometimes it is easy to forget that Oxford is more than just colleges, libraries and departments. Central part of town, especially along High Street, Queen's Street and Cornmarket Street, have plenty of shops and well-recognized brands. The Covered Market has a wide range of unique, specialized items and delicious food. There are plenty of small lanes and shops, and each part of Oxford has its own unique character and charm!

If you feel more adventurous, you can explore what lies beyond the familiar yet unmarked "boundaries" of the Oxford University town, exploring areas such as Deep or Temple Cowley, Summertown and Headington.

3. Venture out

A couple of days in Oxford can bore after a while. Fulfil that wanderlust by taking a ride down to **Cotswolds**, **Bath** (pictured below) or **Stonehenge** - all within a 30 to 60-minute bus ride from Oxford.

Settling In: Staying Fit

Now that you've settled down into Oxford, some of you will have concerns regarding exercise. Most colleges have a gym of sorts, but for some smaller colleges, this may only be reserved for members of the College rowing team. Nevertheless, you have 2 main options for gyms outside of college.

- a) **PureGym** (OX1 1PT): a commercial gym that is 24 hours, well equipped and has a rate of approximately £22.99 per month, or as low as £19.99 if you subscribe to a 12-month package. Find out more [here](#).
- b) **Pulse and Powerlifting Gyms at Iffley Sports Center** (Iffley Road): this is the University's gym, and is fairly well equipped with a dedicated Powerlifting gym. Most colleges will give you free membership to this gym if they do not have their own, so please check with your colleges first. In addition, it can be a bit of a trek/ cycle to get here from colleges in the North of Oxford or City Centre.

If you're looking to do some running or jogging, try to run in parks, such as **Christchurch Meadows** (at Christchurch College, open to all!), the **University Parks** (South Parks Road) or even **Angel and Greyhound Meadow** (Boulter Street, access this via St Clement's St). Don't forget the track at the **Iffley Sports Center** (aka the Roger Bannister Running Track) for all your sprinting / HIIT needs!

For swimming, the **Iffley Sports Centre** has a pool, but you may have to subscribe for an additional membership. More information regarding the facilities at Iffley can be found [here](#).

Lastly, during Fresher's Week there will be many different fitness- or sports-related clubs and societies for fitness that will be advertising membership at an event called Fresher's Fair, where you will have an opportunity to join these groups!

Settling In: Cheapo Tips and Tricks

Living in Oxford is expensive, but here's some tips to make the most of your student allowance!

1. Register for an account on student discount websites

- [Student Beans](#): offers a large range of discounts on popular food chains (e.g. Dominoes, BananaTree etc.) and shopping brands (e.g. Topshop, Mountain Warehouse, Chi Chi London, Charles and Keith etc.)
- [UNiDAYS](#): the app enables you to enjoy discounts at a large range of student favourites, such as at Boost, Pizza Express, Itsu, Zizzi, Urban Outfitters, Asos, New Look, Missguided and Schuh etc.

2. Make the most out of your telco/ bank benefits

- For Three users, check out the [Wuntu](#) app: check the app regularly for a large range of good deals! Past offers include £5 (or even £2) meals at Bella Italia/ Café Rouge, free Costa coffee, or even a free cupcake from Patisserie Valerie!

3. Register for loyalty cards

- [Sainsbury](#), [Tesco](#), [Co-op](#), [Boots](#) and many others: loyalty cards for these brands allow you to collect "points" for your purchases and convert them into cash vouchers or rebates! It might not be much, but every cent counts :)

4. Consider getting a Monzo card

- [Monzo](#) is a new UK-headquartered bank that offers unbelievable perks such as unbeatable exchange rates for overseas spending and world-wide usage. It's a great travel card, and makes bank transfers highly efficient and convenient (akin to Singapore's 'Paylah' or 'Paynow')

5. Consider sharing accounts with friends

- [Netflix](#): 'torrenting' or illegal streaming is strictly policed in the UK, so subscribing to a website like Netflix is a popular option for many students! Consider sharing a Premium account (which works on up to 4 screens simultaneously) for £9.99/ month as it's a lot cheaper than paying £5.99 for a Basic plan (which works on just 1 screen)
- [Amazon Prime](#): make the most out of the 6 months free trial period for students!! The account also enables you to access a large number of videos, movies and TV series under "Prime Video", and is a great alternative to subscribing to Netflix

FRESHERS' WEEK

What to expect

It's been a while since you've had to relearn your environment, connect with new people and do so effortlessly. Instead of going into it blind, here's a brief snapshot of what it'd be like:

1. No 'orientation games'

Unlike many local and US universities, UK universities do not do explicit 'orienteeing'. There may be events such as "speed dating" (don't get your hopes up, it's not really dating), "tea" (a general term for a light meal of snacks, the actual caffeinated beverage may not really appear) with your course mates and small introductory sessions with people on your floor, but no games, cheers or dances that you'd see in local universities. While it can be refreshing, the lack of orientation games means you may need to make more of an effort to get to know other people in your college. Don't worry, meeting people during Fresher's Week isn't half as scary as you think, because people are likely just as nervous as you (makes for a good conversation starter!). Just be open and friendly and things will go smoothly!

2. Introductory talks

What Oxford does have are introductory talks – about general academic structure, welfare and support in college, responsible partying and subject-specific meetings with your tutor. These are informative and definitely helpful for the Oxford student experience.

3. Social drinks

There will be occasions where you will be invited for drinks with your fellow Freshers, seniors and even tutors. These events allow you to introduce yourself to your peers and tutors, and for the to, likewise, introduce themselves to you! If you do not drink, feel free to ask for something non-alcoholic and do not feel pressured!

4. Clubbing

Clubbing is also a common Entz (abbreviation of Entertainment) activity and there will probably be a couple of 'club nights' in Freshers' Week.

Although generally painfully awkward at first (especially with people you've only just met), it is a unifying experience where everyone agrees on how painful awkward the situation is. Of course, there are also accounts of positive first-time experiences and some swear it gets better as you get the hang of it.

And as always, only go for clubbing events if you feel comfortable going! It doesn't matter whether it's your first time or not, but please do remember **clubbing is not compulsory**, and **don't be peer pressured into going!**

5. Sport & Clubs (in the other sense of the word)

If clubs are not your thing, fret not, there are plenty of other extra-curricular activities for you at the college or university

At college level, there are usually opportunities to take part in sports such as lacrosse, Ultimate Frisbee, croquet (in the summer), badminton and much more. In addition, there are film societies, drama clubs and drawing sessions that you can join!

At university level, there is a great variety of sport, interest groups, community service opportunities, theatre/musical communities etc. These can range from more recreational (slightly more serious than college level societies) to competitive or 'Blues' (after the University's official colour, Oxford Blue) societies.

As mentioned earlier, you will have opportunities to join these clubs and societies at the University level during Fresher's Fair, located at Examination Schools. Do try and figure out what you want to join before going for the best results. Look out for our OUMSSA booth!

LIFE BEYOND FRESHERS' WEEK

Now that you're a seasoned fresher, well-versed in the art of quality banter and strange Oxford terminology, you're ready to embark on a wonderful adventure.

The road is not always easy, especially if you're away from home during tough times.

Oxford has an amazing support network - so reach out if you ever feel down in the doldrums, because there's nothing that can't be solved - of which OUMSSA is a part. We organise many activities during term time which help connect the Singaporean-Malaysian community, but if you need a more personal touch, feel free to approach the Welfare Officer or any other committee member for a warm cup of tea and a lovely chat.

Enjoy the journey ahead!

Love,



OUMSSA Committee
2018/19

Special thanks to earlier Committees, OUMSSA members and all others for their valuable input!

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