

# INTERNATIONAL FRESHERS' GUIDE

2025-2026





# Introduction



Hi everyone! My name is Bonnie, and I am your JCR International Student's Representative for this year. I'm an international student from Singapore and am currently a second year studying law at Merton.

I can't wait to see you guys this October! Amidst the excitement and a healthy dose of nerves, I hope this guide gives you some insight into what to expect as an international student at Merton. I'll be here to support you throughout the moving in process.

My main job is helping you guys feel at home in this beautiful new place, especially if you're feeling alone or uncertain at the start. I'll be there for anything administrative as well, just feel free to contact me if you need anything :)

You can reach me at  
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bonbonbonki on instagram or Bonnie Yeo on Facebook any time!





# *Logistics!*

## Before Arrival:

### Visas:

The university should have sent you an in-depth guide on how to apply for your student visa, but generally the process is:

- 1.Fill out the application form (once you have received your CAS number) and pay for your health surcharge
- 2.Make an attend an appointment to provide biometric data for your visa
- 3.Collect your passport with your visa in it!

For more guidance, make sure to take a look at the Oxford webpage [here](#)

### Medical Care

As part of your visa application, you would have paid the Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS), which entitles you to use the National Health Service free of charge (EU students may not have to pay this charge, or may get a rebate, if they have an EHIC -- to see if you qualify check this [link](#)).

You don't need to pay for additional health coverage, as you will be able to use the NHS for anything you might need, and if you choose to, make sure that your insurance is accepted by a clinic near Oxford. In any case, do bring copies of any relevant medical records with you to share with your doctor if you need to (e.g., vaccination records)- Do note that you will have to mention certain medical information when signing up with a local GP regardless



# After Arrival:

## Transport

### Trains

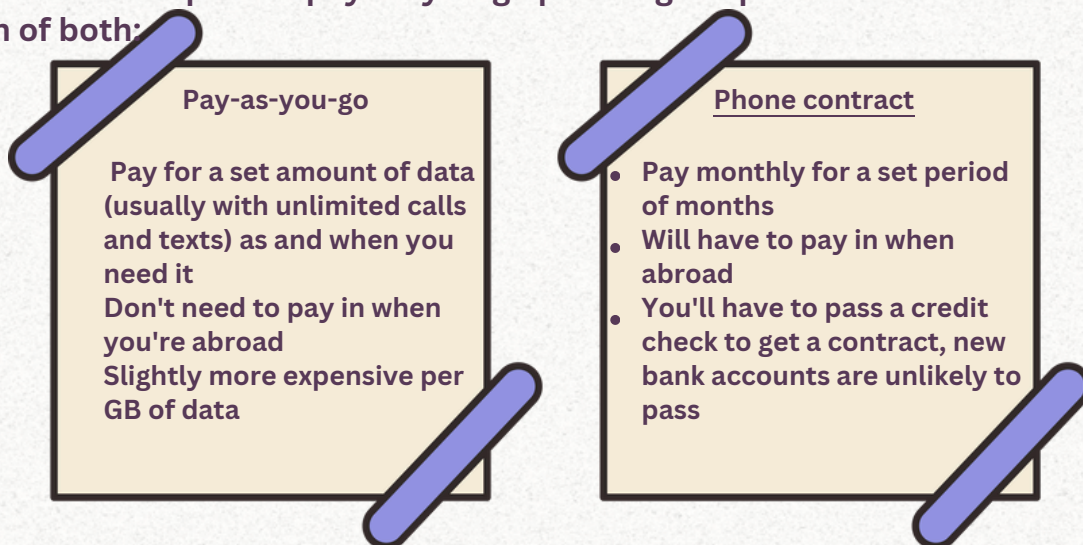
- If you are flying into the UK, you will likely land in London, Birmingham, or Manchester - you can get trains from any of these cities to Oxford railway station Oxford Station is
- about 1.6km from Merton's main site- its around a 20 minute walk, though I would not recommend making the walk with heaps of luggage

### Buses

- if you're entering the UK from London, you can take the Airline coach (from Heathrow or Gatwick airport, linked [here](#)) or;
- the Oxford Tube (from points in London) -- these run 24/7, are fairly frequent, and drop you less than 100m from Merton's main site

## Phone Plans

You will definitely need a UK phone number to sign up for services, and having access to data makes life a lot easier, so I would strongly recommend buying a SIM when you get to the UK. You can opt for a pay-as-you-go plan or get a phone contract -- here's a rundown of both:



There are many companies to choose from, I would recommend doing some research in advance and find a plan that best suits your individual needs :)

## Banking

It is absolutely imperative that you open a bank account in the UK, or at least have access to multi-currency bank account that you can use in the UK, as soon as possible after entering the country to save yourself money and stress. Popular banks in the UK you can choose from include NatWest, HSBC and Lloyds, all of which have branches in Oxford. To open an account, you will need

- a signed letter of enrolment (the letter can be downloaded from Student Self Service, [here](#), and you can get it signed in the Academic Office, Fellows 4:1)
- your offer letter
- Your passport

as a result, you can only open an account once you get to Oxford and set up your university email. In the meantime, bring cash and a card to use when needed (I had to learn the hard way that going around Oxford with just cash is a terrible idea...)



## Finances

### Overview

- Studying at -- and living in -- Oxford can be pricey! Accommodation fees, about 1,550 GBP per term, is paid termly, while tuition is paid yearly, although if you would prefer to pay this in three equal installments, you can ask to do so.
- You may need to come in early or leave late, and vacation residence is billed at around 27 GBP per day, although you might be able to get a refund on that if you're doing something academic during your time. You can find more information [here](#)

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### Transfers

- You will likely have to transfer money from a different currency to yourself often, and one way to do this is through currency exchange apps like Wise (Transferwise)- this generally turns out to be the cheapest and quickest way to do this.
- Other options include transferring money through your bank account or taking cash out in one currency, changing it, and depositing it in your other bank account when you reach the UK.



This was the day Merton treated us to free fireworks! It was spectacular and it lasted for so long:))



Budget was one of the biggest things I worried about in first term. I planned my expenses right down to the penny (yes! like how much to spend on chocolate milk). Glad to say it worked out in the end, and the prices weren't as bad as I expected. At Oxf, I can pack my week full of free social/networking/educational events without having to pay (apart from membership fees at the very start). More than willing to share my expenses if you're having similar worries.



# What to pack + buy?

## Overview

Every international student faces the struggle of what to pack and what to buy for uni- Considering most international students are flying into the country and face luggage constraints, it can often be quite difficult to decide what to bring.

My advice would be to only bring essentials/sentimental items while things like bedding/pillows toiletries etc can be purchased in the UK to save space. Keep in mind that Merton requires us to move out at the end of every term, so you will soon become accustomed with packing and moving your whole life between countries (if you choose to travel back in the break) and will learn how to pack more efficiently as you go on (that's what I keep telling myself everytime I find myself in a packing crisis).

Be prepared for a long walk between your accommodation and the storage room where you will leave your stuff over the vac. But we have a long way to go till then. I'll give more info and help on that later, don't worry about it just yet!

## Essentials



***Valid Passport and national ID (+ Visa)***



***Medicine (though you can buy many here) including glasses + lenses (these can be quite expensive here)***



***Records of vaccinations and other relevant medical documents***



***Cables and adaptors compatible with your devices from home and the UK***



***Warm clothing for UK weather (an absolute must if you come from a country with warm weather and are not used to the cold )***



***Again, contact me if you need more tailored packing advice:"))***



## Other

More details on what to pack + buy can be found in the general JCR guide, including generic things like footwear and a wide range of clothes. However some items that specifically come to mind that may stand out for international students include:

*Mementos from home (pictures, stuffed animal, decoration for the room etc)*

*Umbrella, raincoat, shoes compatible with rainy weather*

*Thermals!!! (recommend buying the ones from Uniqlo)*

*Snacks/food/spices from home*

## Things to buy:

- Pillows + pillow case
- Duvet (10 togs for the duvet will keep you warm in winter but not too hot in the summer)
- Bed sheets (can bring from home too- all beds are single beds)
- Hangers
- Files/stationery
- Toiletries
- Cable Adaptors
- Alarm? stem kids have it rough with their 9ams...
- Tesco club-card (which I have yet to buy)
- Laundry bag/Laundry pods
- Academic Dress (sub fusc) - Can buy this at the secondhand sale in college, or Shepherd and Woodward on High Street for a new one
- Cutlery, crockery, cookware - Would recommend buying these on Amazon for the cheapest options, but also available at Tesco or John Lewis
- Decor - would recommend bringing some mementos but there are cheap options for decor in the UK - the app "Free prints" allows you to print off up to 40 pictures per month for just the cost of postage, and it's a great way to make your room look a bit nicer, as is Primark for throw pillows, picture frames etc

Highly recommend purchasing things like bedding on Amazon as soon as you arrive and ordering them to college (just order to *Merton College Oxford, OX1 4JD*, and put your name in as the recipient), but if you can't wait you can buy this at John Lewis (at Westgate).



# *Intro to Oxford + Merton*

Oxford is a historic and beautiful place, with lots to offer, and Merton is right at the heart of it- arguably the oldest college in Oxford, founded in 1264, Merton is a small close knit college with a small but vibrant international community.

As you'll be able to tell from the map, Merton is very central - you are not more than a 15 minute walk away from your lectures, no matter which faculty you're in, and you're about the same distance from most things you might want to do.

If you're confident enough on a bike to ride it on busy roads, and you'd like to use it as a form of exercise, or you want to travel faster, you can buy a bike, but it isn't necessary.

Other ways of travelling around/in and out of the city include the bus system

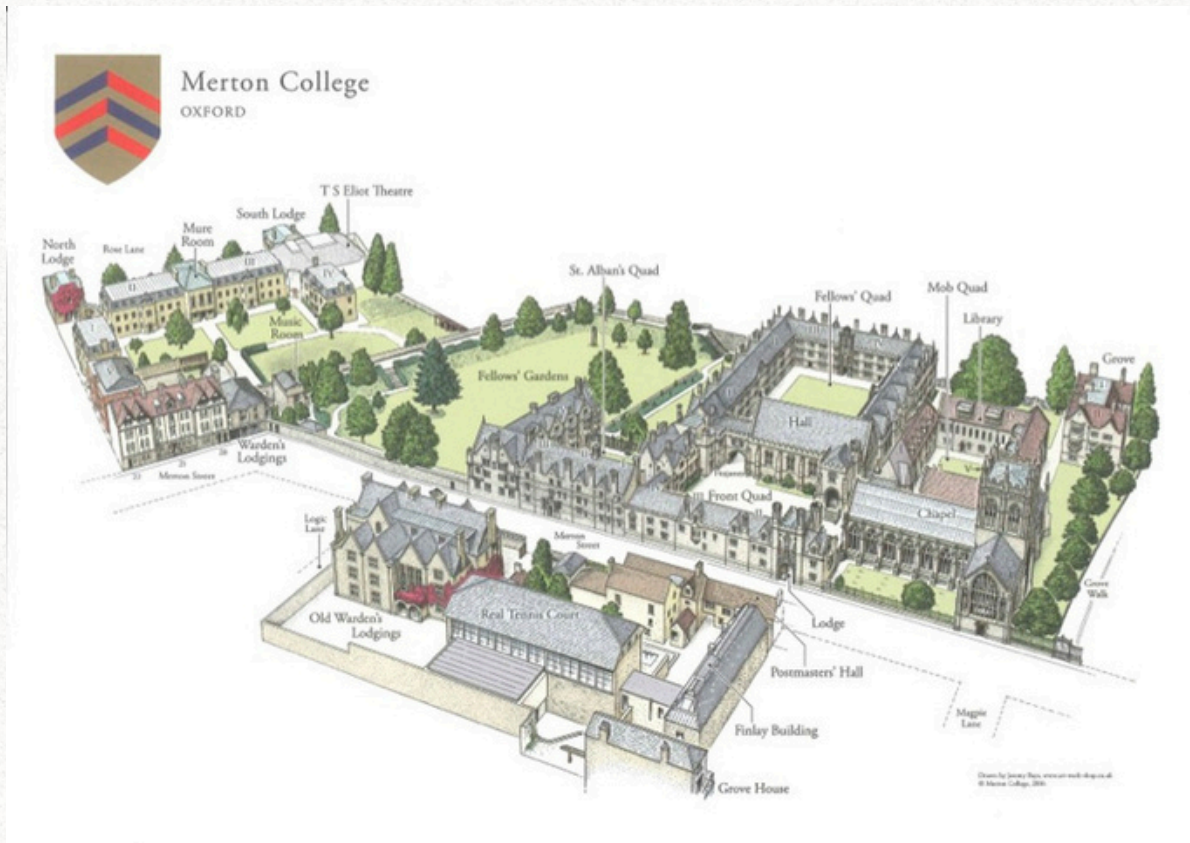
- there are lots of busses in Oxford, and the cheapest way to use them is downloading the Oxford Bus Company app and buying a "day pass" for 4 GBP, allowing you unlimited travel on busses which stay within Oxford otherwise, each journey on a bus will cost you around 2-3 GBP.
- You can get taxis if you choose, but Oxford is a largely pedestrianised city so it might get inconvenient.
- Rideshare apps that operate in the UK include Uber and Freenow





# Intro to Oxford + Merton

While you are a member of Oxford University, you will probably find yourself spending a lot of time in Merton specifically - this is where you'll eat, sleep, socialise (at least in part) and study. Merton arranges your teaching through your degree, so most of your classes will be taught by professors here, with students who also go to Merton. Entertainment and welfare events are also organised by colleges, although there are university wide events (through university-wide clubs) that you can attend as well. With this in mind, it's probably a good idea to understand what Merton looks like!



- **Lodge:** the main entry point to Merton
- **Hall:** in front quad, opposite the entry from the lodge
- **College Bar:** at the junction of Front Quad and St. Alban's Quad
- **Grove:** Grove 1.3 is where the College Nurse can be found.
- **Merton Street, Rose Lane and North Lodge:** first year accommodation (where you'll be living!)
- **JCR:** between St Alban's Quad and Fellows' Garden
- **Old Warden's Lodgings:** known as OWL, this is one of the libraries. the other is Mob, in Mob Quad (the oldest Quad in the world!)



# Adapting to UK life

## Common Culture shocks

### Weather

- By November, the average temperature is under 10° C and it stays like that until April, the temperature being coldest in December-Feb (around 5° C average).
- It rarely snows and the temperature gets up to 25° C regularly by the summer term.
- Hours of sunlight vary greatly from 5 in January to 16 hours in June - it can get gloomy in Hilary, but remember that sunny days are coming soon! (Trinity term in Oxford is beautiful!)

### Health

- It is a relatively lengthy process to be prescribed medication in the UK, and some things which you might get over-the-counter in your home country (e.g. low-strength antibiotics) are prescription only here.
- Do ensure that you have enough stock of any medicines you may need to last you at least 4 weeks, so you have time to set up with a doctor - some choose to bring a term's worth of some medications with them every time.

### Alcohol

- There is a strong drinking/party culture in the UK that you may not be used to, especially given that many of you might have just reached legal drinking age.
- Remember to be safe and careful :)  
Personally, I'm not a big drinker and safe to say, events are just as fun with a non-alc drink in hand! (tbh I had an iced latte in a teacup during an evening social - that might be an extreme but you get the point)

### Opening Hours

- If you're coming from outside of Europe, or from a bigger city, you might want to note that most businesses close by 5pm, especially on Sundays. During the week, Westgate is usually open till 8 and some restaurants too, but past 9pm it becomes significantly more difficult to find a place to eat (unless you go to a kebab van)



A sneak peak of life in Merton!



## Ways to counter home-sickness



**1. Join a club associated with your home country  
most societies run social and cultural events**

**2. Bring snacks from home, cook comfort meals or  
find good restaurants to go to when you're missing  
home**

**3. Make some friends from your home country if  
possible - find a way to celebrate things which are  
important to you**

**4. Socialise with others - people are often in the  
college bar, and it's a nice place to hang out  
regardless of whether you're drinking**

**5. Talk to your family and friends from home  
regularly, and remember that you're never too far  
from a term break! (this was a big one for me)**





# ***Final Remarks***

And after all that, I still don't get to see you guys in person just yet:(( Anyways, Merton is a lovely place with lovelier people, and you have your very own part to play. You have to come and experience it for yourself, so get excited! <3 The going gets tough sometimes but it's a great place for you to make mistakes and grow. No question is too silly, the more you ask the faster you learn, and we'll be here to support you.

We also have a large and capable welfare team. Kate and Tabitha, our student Welfare Reps, are there any time you need to talk. Your college parents are another port of call for advice.

The Chaplain, Welfare Advisor and the Junior Deans for Welfare are always an option if you want to talk to a non-student. We're here to help and remember no problem is ever too small or insignificant.

Don't hesitate to drop us an email, take us aside or give us a call!

## **Some Useful Contacts:**

- **Council for International Students:** A site that has loads of useful information on the life of the international student in the UK: [www.ukcisa.org.uk](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk).
- **Oxford University's website:** Have a look at the Oxford University guidelines and advice: [www.ox.ac.uk/students](http://www.ox.ac.uk/students).



***Enjoy your summer and hope to see you soon!***  
***Yours Internationally, Bonnie***