

**Life in Cambridge**  
**A Guide for MIT Students**

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## Introduction

I'll always remember my first view of hall—portraits of the old masters looking down from the walls, chandeliers hung from the high ceiling, and the table set for a five course meal. And I'll remember punting slowly down the Cam, the constant ringing of bells, twistingly narrow streets, massive and beautiful stone buildings, and perfect, checkerboard grass.

Time stands still in Cambridge. Perhaps it's inevitable in a city with so much history—you're standing in a court where Newton stood, your college boasts of alumni from Oliver Cromwell to Lord Tennyson, you're attending service in a chapel which dates from the 1100s, when the Normans invaded in 1066. "Old" means something completely different.

Consequently, you feel the weight of tradition. There is a atmosphere of "we've always done it that way," and always, in this case, could mean 800 years. When I arrived here, I felt that it was now my time, my turn to participate. The portcullises and closed doors are a constant reminder that Cambridge was, and still is, for members only.

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On the other hand, it's easy to get bogged down by such pompous romanticism. Cambridge is also a community of 15,000 students each term, 11,500 of them undergraduates. It's as good a definition of "college town" as any. Students aren't now, and probably never were, utterly grave and somber scholars (okay, there are a couple exceptions). What this means is a flurry of activity. Being at Cambridge also means running from lab to rehearsal to dinner to John's to hear some jazz, and then over to a pub to meet some friends. And not once does it cross your mind that some peasant may have been walking down the same street 600 years ago.

Cambridge is thoroughly contemporary in other ways too—witness the Gap right down the street from one of the city's three Starbucks. With all the idealism and ivory towers, it's easy to forget that Cambridge also refers to a flourishing, modern city, though it may still be quaint by American standards.

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So Cambridge is a paradox. A modern city with modern students, inhabiting a tradition-bound, formal University. But however you define Cambridge after your time here, one thing is certain: it is a place unlike any other, and an experience you'll never forget.

## **CAMBRIDGE: THE BASICS**

### **1. The University and Colleges**

One of the main differences between MIT and Cambridge is that MIT is centralized and cohesive (or at least pretends to be!) whereas Cambridge is made up of many separate, almost self-sufficient entities which are nonetheless intertwined.

Cambridge University, according to its webpage, is a “loose confederation of faculties, Colleges, and other bodies.” It’s probably easiest to understand this within the context of the founding of Cambridge, and then I’ll try to explain how this affects your life.

#### **History**

The area which is now the city of Cambridge has been alternately invaded and populated by Celts, Romans, Vikings, Normans, and other warlike groups. In 1209, the town was invaded by yet another—and probably most terrible—group: scholars who had fled Oxford, which was in turmoil due to peasant riots. They wasted no time in setting up an academic community under the tuition of accredited masters and under the administration of various officials.

The traditional course of study during this time consisted of the liberal arts: three years of studying the Trivium (Latin, logic and rhetoric), which led to a Bachelor’s degree, followed by the four-year Quadrivium (arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy), which led to a Master’s. After completing these studies, a Master could then study divinity, law, medicine or music for his doctorate.

As housing became more of a problem (the scholars were constantly at odds with the townspeople—sounds a bit like MIT), “houses” and “halls” were established to accommodate the scholars. These houses became the basis of today’s colleges. (For example, Peterhouse—never Peterhouse College—has kept its ancient name.) In the mean time, the Doctors were busy establishing “faculties,” which were organized societies that taught in their respective areas of expertise. Not surprisingly, these were the basis of today’s faculties and departments.

The University set standards for all teaching which took place in the different halls and faculties. To the outside world, it also presented a united front of the amalgamated, yet independent, academic communities.

#### **Today**

The *University*’s main purpose is to “examine and confer degrees” and it is responsible for overall administration. But it is hard to put a finger on what the University is and what it does.

This is an esoteric analogy, but Cambridge is a bit like Hinduism. The University is Brahman, the one universal spirit; the Colleges and Faculties are the avatars, or the divinities, which are separate and different, yet all forms of Brahman. To put it in pop culture terms: the University is like the Force in Star Wars. It’s in and around everything, but it takes a Luke Skywalker or Yoda (a College or Faculty) to make things happen.

The *faculties* report to the University, which is therefore responsible for centralized teaching. Faculties are the departments (like the Faculty of Music or the Department of Engineering). Each has their own set of buildings, administration and teaching and research staff. However, many lecturers of the departments (and therefore the University) are also senior members of the Colleges, which further muddles the distinction.

When you attend lectures, you'll head down to your department and be in classes or labs with students from all over the University. And at the end of the year, probably much to students' dismay, the University administers the examinations.

If you play a sport at a very high level, you may wish to try out for the University team. Likewise, dedicated musicians, debaters, actors, etc. will find people from all Colleges in the high-caliber University societies.

*Colleges* are privately endowed, independent bodies which provide accommodation, support, academic help through supervisions, and most importantly, a community. Each college has its own grounds and facilities, including a dining hall, Anglican chapel, library, music and computer rooms, bar, and JCR (Junior Combination Room, which is a lounge where undergrads can "combine" with each other and watch TV, read papers, sometimes play pool or foosball).

### **Support**

Support, both welfare and academic, is provided through the College. In most Colleges, students have a Tutor who meets with them once a term to see how things are going, and to whom they can go if there are any problems. The Dean of Chapel is also available for consultations (religious or welfare). In any case, you have to ask; except for the meetings with your Tutor, people won't usually seek you out to see if you need help.

Academic support is in the form of a Director of Studies, who is also a member of your department. His or her role is similar to that of an MIT advisor. The College will also arrange supervisions, which are typically one-on-two sessions with a faculty member. In first and second years, the supervisor is usually a Fellow (senior member) of the College. However, at least in third-year engineering, the supervisor may be a member of the department not in the College.

### **Comparing Colleges**

Each College is different. There are advantages and disadvantages to being at each one, but ultimately all will give you a Cambridge experience. And no one can objectively rank the Colleges as individual preferences do vary. Colleges have stereotypical descriptions but they are just that; it is impossible to paint an entire community with the same brush. And since the Colleges accept a wide range of people with different backgrounds and interests, you shouldn't have any problems find people like you in your College.

Cambridge students could only apply to one College and therefore, though most say their choice was arbitrary, are fiercely loyal. Cambridge students would first identify themselves as members of their College rather than as members of the University. Sport rivalries with other Colleges are deep-seated, important, and fun. People also show their loyalty by wearing all sorts

of College paraphernalia—the most evident is probably the College scarf, which are brightly colored wool scarves. Some Colleges have truly garish color combinations, but everybody wears them anyway.

## **2. Who's Who**

### **In the *University*:**

Chancellor: the ceremonial head of the University, currently Prince Philip.

Vice-Chancellor: essentially the CEO; runs the affairs of the University. Similar to the President of MIT. Sir Alex Broers.

### **In the *Department*:**

Professors: Similar to a full professor at MIT, only they are rarer at Cambridge.

Reader: Similar to an Associate Professor at MIT.

Lecturer: Similar to an Assistant Professor at MIT.

### **In the *College*:**

Master: acts like the Chairman of the Board. According to Prof. Robert Mair, Master of Jesus College, “responsible for the ‘vision thing.’” In other words, sets the agenda and decides which direction the College should move.

Senior Tutor: supposedly responsible for the welfare of all students (acts in loco parentis). Also runs the day to day operations of the College.

Domestic Bursar: controls finances. This is the person you usually have to write to when you want to request permission to keep your things in storage or, if your College is willing, to keep your room over the holidays (there may be an extra charge).

Dean of College: who I call the “mean dean.” The disciplinarian.

Dean of Chapel: A minister of the Church of England. Runs the chapel services and is also available for counseling for people of any religion.

Director of Studies (DoS): your advisor. At the beginning of term, your DoS will get you set up in all of your classes. At the end of term, when your supervisors fill out reports on how prepared they think you are, your DoS will let you know. Most seem to only want to see you if there is a problem.

Fellows: senior members of the College. Most are members of departments as well.

Tutor: ironically, they have no academic function. In some Colleges, each student is assigned to a tutor, to whom they can go for counseling or to talk about problems.

Supervisor: a small-group recitation instructor—you meet once every two weeks. Typically, a senior member of your College but this is not always the case by third-year.

Porter: it is hard to put all their jobs into one description. First, responsible for security (all entrances to Colleges have a Porter's Lodge, or P'lodge, where the porters keep an eye on all suspicious characters via closed circuit television). Also, they sort the post, rent out cots, inspect the grounds of the college, break up unauthorized parties, etc.

Bedder: a very Cambridge thing. Empties your rubbish bin twice or three times a week. In some Colleges, makes your bed.

### 3. Living Accommodations

#### Your Room

You'll either be living "in college" in a dorm or in College houses that are outside the grounds. College dorms are made up of vertical communities called "staircases," which have a couple rooms per floor. By the second and third year, students block together in groups of friends and share a staircase or house. Because you will be exchanging places with a Cambridge second or third year, you will most likely get the room they would have had. As they have preference over the first-years (and get to choose their housing earlier), the rooms should be some of the nicest the College has to offer.

But even if you are in a fresher building, without a doubt, **you will have a much better room than at MIT**. Rooms are huge, and each has its own sink. Some have fireplaces (now walled up and replaced by space heaters). Music students will have pianos. The type of room varies, however. Some people were in ancient, but remodeled buildings, and had a suite of two rooms, a sitting room and a bedroom. On the other hand, my room was in a very 1960s building, but nonetheless it is about two times the size of my McCormick single last year. It also had a balcony and a wall of windows and an en suite bath.

In the summer, your College will send out a freshers' guide that will give more specifics on what to bring. Most rooms will come with pillows and either a blanket or a comforter/duvet (but with no cover). Some College's bedders will supply and change sheets once a week. (But even if your bedder doesn't change your sheets, she will empty your rubbish bin). However, sheets, lamps, etc. are easily purchased in Cambridge, so unless you are very particular, don't worry about bringing any.

#### Kitchenette

All rooms have a small kitchenette nearby, with **a small refrigerator, a hob with two burners, and a sink**. You can pretty much cook pasta and soup, but anything else might be cramped. The houses and some of the nicer rooms have kitchens with ovens.

#### Laundry

**Laundry facilities will be in College** as well. Prices vary; in my College, the washer is £1 and the dryer is 60p, but at John's it was free. I thought that British detergent and stain remover didn't work as well as American detergent, but according to Dr. Good, that is because I was

washing my clothes on warm/cold (Brits use very hot water). For what it's worth, the most popular detergent brand is Persil Colour Care.

### **Moving out**

The other thing is that **you will most likely have to move out of your room during vacation** times because the college rents out its space during vacations for conferences. So, be prepared and hopefully you won't have too much stuff or live on too high a floor! One note: **there are no elevators** in most staircases, even the modern ones. Colleges do provide a limited amount storage space but you may have to apply for it ahead of time by writing to the domestic bursar.

## **4. Stuff**

### **Bring from home or buy in Cambridge?**

Deciding what to bring and what to buy is a difficult decision; while the cost of living is higher, it may be worth purchasing some things here to free up space in your luggage for more important things. As a general rule of thumb, expect to pay what you would in dollars, but in pounds (instead of spending \$9 for dinner, you'd be spending £9, which is about \$13.50).

Cambridge is a market town and so the selection is pretty good; there are many boutiques and stores. However, they are the ones you'd find on Newberry or Boylston—rather upscale.

*Clothes:* more expensive by the pound instead of dollar rule, except for British brands (Clarks, Doc Martens) and dinner jackets (DJs—what we call tuxedos). But many stores have good sales, like seasonal clearances in January.

It is COLD in England, and I say that as a native Minnesotan. England is damp and Cambridge is by a river; the clamminess and the wind is a miserable combination. As Dr. Good says, "Cambridge's wind is a lazy wind—rather than go 'round you it goes right through you." It also rains a lot, usually once a day. You will need:

- a. Warm coat. I had a wool peacoat, which was fine, but if you're from California you might want to consider a parka.
- b. Dark trousers. It gets muddy, and if you ride over puddles with your bike, you're going to get spots on everything.
- c. Waterproof shoes. Self-explanatory.
- d. Waterproof coat (like a Columbia jacket or a raincoat). Especially for people who ride bikes.
- e. Windpants (waterproof trousers). To put over your normal trousers as you ride your bike in the rain.

In Cambridge, the average indoor temperature is colder than in the U.S.—maybe about 60-65° F. Dressing in layers is practical.

There are also more occasions to dress up.

Women will need:

- a. Business Casual (several outfits). I mean nice shirts with skirts or dress slacks—for the matriculation photograph, Formal Halls, church (if religious).
- b. Semi-formal dress. This you may or may not need; there are some dinners and events which require Black Tie for men, and for which a semi-formal dress (i.e. not an outright ballgown) seems appropriate. Other times you may be able to get away with business casual.
- c. Ballgown. For May Balls at the end of Easter Term. Must be full length dress, and go all out if you wish—men are in White Tie (which means tails). I'm sure the style changes from year to year, but the balls are in June and there were a lot of spaghetti strap gowns with long scarves. Colors also vary but one word of advice: the May Balls take place on the grounds of the Colleges with a lot of people milling about with food and drink, so white is not the best option.

There aren't many stores in Cambridge that carry dresses like this; you might try Monsoon (though it is popular and no doubt a fair number of people will have your dress on the night!). Also there are a couple department stores in the Grafton Centre.

If you have time, you might try looking in London; one department store with a lot of formals is Selfridges, on Oxford Street. There are also many boutiques. Prices really vary; London is a fashion capital. You could find anything from £125 for a in-house label dress to £300 for an off-the-rack Versace to over £10,000 for a couture creation.

Of course, it isn't necessary to spend as much on a dress as you would to buy a car. What I'm trying to say is: a ballgown will cost more than a normal formal. Also, May Balls are worth the extra expense; they are glamorous, special nights, unlike anything you've ever seen. Some people go all out, and if you are one of those people, by all means do—it will be worth it. But if you aren't, don't feel pressured to spend over your limit because most people won't be either.

Men will need:

- a. Suit/Sportcoat. For matriculation photograph, Formal halls, etc. Actually at some formal halls you can get away with a shirt and tie, and sometimes not even that dressy if you are wearing your gown.
- b. Dinner Jacket (DJ). What we'd call a tuxedo (i.e. shiny lapels). For everything Black Tie (society dinners). Essential for musicians.

If you don't have a DJ, you might want to buy it in Cambridge. Though this is not a particular area of my expertise, I have heard that it is much cheaper. Moss Brothers in Lion's Yard, for instance, has a package deal where you can choose a DJ (including 100% wool Pierre Cardins), shirt, tie and cummerbund for £199 including tax. But perhaps you will find a better deal in the U.S.

- c. White Tie. You may or may not need this for your May Ball; most say White Tie Preferred, so you can get away with wearing a DJ. If you do want to wear this, rent from Moss Brothers (£50-£60). Moss Brothers also lends DJs at £30-£40 per occasion. However at that rate you might as well buy one.

If an invitation says “Lounge Suit or equivalent” or “Lounge suit and day dresses are worn” that means men need to wear a suit jacket that they would wear to work or one that is slightly more casual. For women, the equivalent to a lounge suit is a semi-formal dress, a day dress is a semi-formal that isn't black. But this is just my best guess from seeing what other people wear and asking around, so you might want to check with your friends. Nothing is really that strict (usually if you dress “smart” you're fine) but I was curious anyway.

The way you dress here says more about you than in the U.S. Don't worry about it (i.e. don't go out and buy a whole new wardrobe) but you might want to be aware. It's part of the first impression you make, and that counts for a lot. See “Making Friends.”

*Books and CDs:* more expensive. Paperbacks run £7-9. A set of four paperback Harry Potters cost £25. CDs on sale are £11 (sometimes 3 for £20) but usually are £12-16. Border's and Waterstone's near Market Square, and Heffer's, across from Trinity, have a huge selection of books. The Cambridge University Press has a shop opposite Caius, and students get a 10% or 20% discount. A good selection of CDs of Cambridge music groups (including College choirs) may be found at Heffer's Sound.

*Dishes and Utensils:* I would buy dishes in Cambridge because they are cumbersome to pack. Also since you are probably only going to need one or two sets, it won't be that expensive. Woolworth's is good.

If you need frying pans and other cookware, a fair amount can be found at Woolworth's, but see what you can borrow from your English friends who are probably bringing a lot from home. There is also a yuppie, upscale place called Lakeland Limited which has quality stuff (i.e. ceramic bakeware, not disposable pans) but is relatively expensive.

*Appliances and Electronics:* England runs on 240V and 50 Hz. Buy your alarm clock here (your American clock, which runs on different speed, will wake you up in the middle of the night if you use it) or bring a travel alarm that is loud enough to wake you. Everybody seems to have an electric kettle which can boil water in 30 seconds for tea and coffee. They cost about £10. Again, Woolworth's is good for these kinds of things.

I found it handy to have an iron around (my business casual outfits needed it), but others might find it unnecessary.

A camera is essential, but film is twice as expensive here. Bring a lot; I went through five or six rolls over the first eight weeks. Also, processing is expensive so you may wish to wait until you get home. If you can't, Boots is the cheapest for developing.

Or if you can afford it, or your parents and friends are feeling particularly nice, get a digital camera. Kenny had one this year, and I thought it was awesome that he could take pictures, see what he took, and then post everything on the web. You can email the pictures too, and I'm sure people at home would have liked visuals along with the emails.

A couple people bought speakers here to plug into their computer. Those cost around £30 at computer stores.

### **Computer**

Six of us brought laptops with us. Most colleges and departments have computer labs, but they do not compare to MIT's, both in terms of quantity and quality, although Jesus is an exception. You won't need your computer for any work that they assign (i.e. solid modeling or Matlab) because all that will be done at the department. (However, you can use Hummingbird or Exceed to get into the Unix server from your home computer, which is very slow but sometimes convenient).

The main reason most of us used our computers was to check email and use IM and ICQ from our rooms. Thus, it is non-essential, but convenient.

Every college room has an Ethernet drop. There will be a fee, typically £16 a term, which will go on your college bill.

### **School supplies**

England uses A4 size stationary (not 8.5"x11"), so you'll want to buy all folders, ringbinders, etc. in England. Woolworth's, Ryman's, and even Sainsbury's stock school supplies. Ryman's is the most expensive but has the biggest selection.

### **Your textbooks**

I brought many of my textbooks and notes from home, and I have to say it isn't worth it. You can find textbooks and references in the library. What might be best is to leave books and you think you can't live without at home with your parents, who can ship them later if necessary.

### **Medicine**

Advil, Nyquil, Tylenol... you won't find them here. And I thought the cough syrup didn't work that well. Unless you are familiar with the ingredients of the medicine you take, you might want to bring the brands you trust. (One note, Nurofen is ibuprofen.) The main pharmacies are Boots and Superdrug, and you can also find a limited selection at Sainsbury's.

### **Bike**

This is impractical to ship from the U.S.—Kristen said it costs around \$400. But chances are you will need a bike. Though Cambridge is small (you can walk across the city center in 10 minutes) a bike is a real convenience. And even if your College in the city center, you may want to go for rides in the countryside or visit friends in not-as-central Colleges. I also remember one terrible day when my bike was broken and I had to walk from Fitzwilliam (one of the northernmost Colleges) to Engineering (on the south side of town)—it was a 40 minute walk. Both ways.

You can purchase a bike, new or used, at any number of stores. Shop around. Some have deals in the beginning of the year—if you can find a used bike for around £60 that is pretty decent. But expect to pay anywhere between £50-£100. There is an auction of all the abandoned bikes held by the police during the second weekend in October. Bikes here are supposed to be cheap

but in poor condition, and if you think can get around on it for a year, then you might consider getting one.

A basket on a bike is a real convenience, especially when you have a lot of groceries.

You can get your bike repaired at any shop, or there is a bike repairman in Market Square whose prices are reasonable.

Aside from getting used to riding on the left side of the road, you should also keep in mind that:

- The city center is closed off to cars and bikes, Monday to Friday, 10 am-4 pm
- There are crazy tourists everywhere who stare up at the spires as they walk and don't watch where they're going.
- It's against the law to ride at night without lights.
- Cambridge is old, so the streets are narrow and twisted. Most are one way. Be careful.

If you know you are going to get a bike, then bring your helmet, lights and D-lock (bike thefts are the most common crime in Cambridge). If you don't have a helmet or lights, a booth at the Freshers' Fair has a deal (both for around £20) or you can buy them at the bike shop.

## **5. Communication**

### **Phone Numbers**

Phone numbers have an area code which starts with a "0" and then a six digit number. The area code can have four or five numbers, but in Cambridge there will be five. When dialing from the U.S., you do not dial the zero. England's country code is 44, and dialing internationally requires a 011. Example:

(07761) 588 915 within England

011 44 7761 588 915 from the U.S.

Cambridge landlines (i.e. standard phones) have the area code (01223). If you are on a landline in Cambridge, you don't have to dial the area code, just like in the U.S. On the other hand, if you are on a mobile, you have to dial the area code regardless.

### **Phones**

The phone in your room will not automatically be connected; you have to set up an account with NTL, the phone service. It costs £5.50 a month, and £7.50 for additional services (like voice mail). You get free calls within Cambridge, but there are charges for calling long distance as well as mobiles.

### **Mobile phones**

Many people here (nearly all) have mobile phones for several reasons:

- a. you pay for your landline, and if you don't use your phone much, it can be cheaper to just get a mobile.
- b. they are very convenient, because people are scattered about a larger area (a city, not a campus)—you can't always go knock on doors.

- c. email isn't nearly used as much as at MIT.
- d. with a mobile, you pay the same for a local call as for a national call.
- e. you don't pay for incoming calls.

Mobiles are a bit confusing. You'll purchase a phone with a service (Orange, BTCellnet and Vodafone are the most common). There are two kinds of plans: monthly charges (and cheaper per minute rates) and "pay-as-you-go" (you only pay for the time you spend on calls you make, but the rate is higher). But, since the monthly charge plans often require you to sign a 12 month contract, they might not be worth it.

For the "pay-as-you-go" plans, you buy vouchers (available in quite a few stores including Sainsbury's, W.H. Smith, etc.). Then you enter a number from the voucher into the phone to "top up" your calltime. It's relatively painless.

It costs a different amount to call a landline (least expensive), another mobile of the same service (varies), and a mobile of a different service (most expensive). Then it matters what time you are calling (peak or off-peak or weekends).

On the whole, mobile phones are very expensive, as much as 35p-50p a minute during peak times to another mobile. But off-peak and on weekends, they can be quite reasonable (my phone service, BTCellnet pay-as-you-go, is 2p a minute on weekends, so that's when I make most of my calls to friends in Oxford and London). It is cheaper to call people who have the same mobile phone service, so if you plan to get one, ask your friends what kind they have.

The phone itself will cost £20-£30 (or might be thrown in free in a promotion). It won't work back in the States (different frequencies) so don't spend too much. For that matter, your phone plan might have something called "roaming," which means you can use it in Europe. If you have the option, don't rely on your phone when you travel—it is very expensive.

A lot of people here have both a mobile and a landline, but that's up to you. I got by with just my mobile, and some people got by with just a landline.

[www.orange.co.uk](http://www.orange.co.uk)  
[www.btccllnet.co.uk](http://www.btccllnet.co.uk)  
[www.vodafone.co.uk](http://www.vodafone.co.uk)

### **SMS**

You can also receive text messages (called SMS—Simple Messaging Service) for free, and send them from a phone for around 10p. Or, anybody can send you free messages off websites like [www.lycos.co.uk/service/sms](http://www.lycos.co.uk/service/sms).

### **Calling Home**

There are a couple ways to deal with this. I used [www.dialpad.com](http://www.dialpad.com), and if you have a good microphone in your computer and a headset, the quality's not bad. When I used it last year, it was free but they have started charging and I don't know the rates.

If you have a landline, you can also get a phone plan. I think there are some with the rate of 6p a minute to the US, which is pretty good. You can also get calling cards from touristy shops on King's Parade, as well as BT phonecards from Sainsbury's and other stores, which have varying rates.

Finally, you're probably not going to want to call home on your mobile. There are only two carriers (Orange and BTCellnet) which even allow you to call out of the country. Of those two, Orange charges 16p a minute and BTCellnet a whopping £1.50.

(When I was choosing which mobile to get, I narrowed it down to Orange and BTCellnet specifically because I wanted a phone which I could use in emergencies to call home. I got a BTCellnet phone because its UK rates were better than Orange and I had the internet option for calling home normally.)

### **E-mail**

You will receive a Cambridge e-mail address, which will be your initials and then a number, followed by .cam.ac.uk (mine was [gk231@cam.ac.uk](mailto:gk231@cam.ac.uk)). The Colleges all have computer rooms that only members can access. Your College should have an orientation in the first week to let you know how to get all your passwords and also to set up the Ethernet drop for your room.

You can access your Cambridge account several ways. At the Department, you'll log in by Telnet (hermes.cam.ac.uk). There is also a secure website off of the Queens' College webpage ([www.quns.cam.ac.uk](http://www.quns.cam.ac.uk)). Finally, you can set it up in Eudora, Outlook, Mulberry or another mail program on your computer.

### **Post**

The address of your College will just be the name of the College, Cambridge and then the postcode. You can find this on the College website if you want to let people know before you leave. Example:

Gina Kim  
Jesus College  
Cambridge CB5 8BL  
United Kingdom

When mail comes into the College, the porters sort it into peoples' pigeonholes. You'll also get announcements and flyers about events and other things going on in Cambridge. Inter-college mail is sometimes called the "pigeon post" and it is free.

If you want to mail something nationally or internationally, you have to go to one of the many post offices. The most convenient ones are across from Trinity, across from the Engineering department, and next to Robert Sayles. They are easily recognized by their red oval signs with "Post Office" in yellow lettering. Mailing internationally is rather expensive but Kevin says that if it contains a birthday card, it is cheaper.

## 6. Getting your stuff here

### Storing/Getting your stuff out of MIT

If you're lucky, your dorm or FSILG will let you store some of your things over the school year and summer. However, if you aren't, you will have to make some provision to get your stuff home or elsewhere:

*a. Store at MIT*

If you have a friend who will be in Boston during the summer when you return, or is willing to move your stuff for you that summer, this is really convenient—obviously, you won't have to worry about shipping things back to MIT. This can be a good option for big things—desktop computers, stereo systems, etc.

*b. Get things home*

Your parents could drive out and load up the van. Or, you could pack as much as possible into suitcases and ship the rest. Shipping domestically costs \$1.20-\$1.60 per pound, which may or may not be cheaper than shipping to England, depending on what service you are using.

*c. Ship directly to England*

If you're going to do this, plan ahead; the slower the service, the cheaper it is. The best websites to check out are:

[www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com)

[www.parcelforce.com](http://www.parcelforce.com)

[www.ups.com](http://www.ups.com)

### Baggage

Most international flights allow two pieces of checked luggage, not to weigh over 70 pounds each, one piece of carry-on luggage, and one purse/laptop/backpack. You can fit quite a bit in there. If you bring two large suitcases, I'd recommend putting a carry-on in one of them so you have something smaller you can travel with if you make a short trip to, say, Paris. For this trip, I also bought a large backpack with an internal frame so I could go backpacking around Europe. Again, **Cambridge buildings rarely have elevators** so the more stuff you have, the harder it will be to move in.

### Packing

Here's how I would pack: divide your things into "essentials" and "possibles." Pack all the essentials into your luggage. If there is stuff left over, pack that into a box and ship it with enough time so it will be waiting for you when you arrive or better yet, a day after you arrive (the porters have limited space to store packages). Pack all the possibles into boxes, which you can leave with a friend or your parents. They can ship them if you need them. Possibles might include heavier winter clothes, speakers, textbooks, notes, etc.

## 7. Health

### General

As a resident of the UK for over 6 months, you will be eligible for the National Health Service (NHS), which is Britain's government-run health-care system. (Remember that thing Bill Clinton was trying to push through Congress a while back?) You'll have to register with a private practice which serves your College and then all your health care is free or subsidized. You can expect to get the same coverage which you'd get at MIT Medical. Cambridge's main hospital is Addenbrooke's, which has emergency care.

Registering with the doctor is simple. They will take height and weight measurements and ask you questions about your diet, exercise habits, level of sexual activity, possible health risks, etc. They also asked about immunizations but didn't ask to see the official yellow card.

911 in England is 999, except from mobiles, where it is 112.

There are two concerns that people seem to have about coming to England: Meningitis (inflammation of the membranes around your brain) and BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy).

### Meningitis

Meningitis is also a concern in the United States, particularly on college campuses. Your risk is probably no greater but awareness in the U.K. is much higher. You'll see posters and other information everywhere. Students are required to have the Meningitis C vaccination, which you can get from your NHS clinic, but I got before I arrived.

Meningitis is rarely fatal unless you're very young or elderly, but while we were at Cambridge (2000-2001) an American student at Oxford died. The main signs are not being able to touch your chin to your chest (i.e. stiff neck), headache, nausea, dislike of bright lights and also developing septicemia, or a rash from blood poisoning. There is a glass test—press a glass firmly on the rash, and if you can still see the rash through the glass, you should contact a doctor. However, not everybody develops septicemia, and since the other symptoms are similar to a hangover, it is better to be safe than sorry if you are concerned.

Check out [www.meningitis.org](http://www.meningitis.org) for more information.

### BSE

So, is the beef safe? No one can seem to give a clear answer. BSE, or "mad cow disease" is linked to Creutzfeldt-Jakob syndrome (CJS), or degeneration of brain matter by mutated prions.

There are two theories as to what happened: either cows ingested feed made from sheep that had scabies, or a single cow spontaneously mutated and the prions, which are not killed by normal processing, contaminated the rest of the meat by causing the other prions to mutate. The first known case was in 1986, after which the government instituted strict regulations. However, it takes about 14 years before CJS shows symptoms, and in the last several years, over 100 people have been diagnosed.

BSE has also spread to the European continent, which has made the French, Germans and everybody else rather displeased with the U.K.

If you believe that government regulations are stringent enough, and also that BSE is not a widespread mutation, then eat the beef. Most of my British friends believe that since it has been 14 years since the first diagnoses and the first preventative measures, the beef is now safe. Some people will eat choice cuts of meat (like steak) but not ground beef, which may contain nerve matter. Most British traditional dishes involve some kind of beef (Steak and Guinness pie, Roast dinner, Yorkshire Pudding, etc.). Also, angus beef from Scotland is world famous, so you may miss out.

If, on the other hand, you are risk-averse, there are plenty of other dining options. A few of us swore off beef entirely and gloated to our friends that we were going to live to see 40. But they countered with “you’re only young once” and “we take risks every day.” It could go either way.

## **8. Money**

Cambridge doesn’t allow students to work while they are up at University (though you are legally allowed to work up to 20 hours a week), so you will probably be living off your savings or your parents.

You should open a bank account here—every bank has student account, which are usually free. Some Colleges have special deals with certain banks (for instance, Trinity has a deal with Barclay’s). The advantage of having an account is that you can write checks. This is important if you play a sport or are in a society (they will need you to write a check (“cheque”) for the membership fee) or if you want to order tickets for a May Ball. The disadvantage is that you have to get money into the account anyway and there might be a fee to exchange it.

You will definitely need a credit card. This is good for a couple reasons; first, everybody takes Visa and MasterCard, and second, you’ll get a bank-to-bank exchange rate without a fee, saving some money. It is probably easiest if you work out an arrangement where your parents pay the bill for you and you pay them back later. Otherwise, you’ll have to send a check from overseas, and that isn’t worth the postage.

You’ll also want a debit card for cash. Banks here are not allowed to charge fees at their ATMs (“cashpoints”) for non-bank cards so that isn’t a problem. However, your bank at home might charge you for non-bank transactions. (My bank gives me four free transactions a month, and so I just used my debit card from home).

It is possible to get by without an account if you just have a credit and debit card. In the rare situations when I needed a check I just had a friend write one for me and paid them back in cash. Also, I try to charge as much as possible, especially meals in restaurants. That way my friends can pay me in cash and I don’t have to worry about going to the cashpoint and the exchange rate.

There are a lot of banks, here are largest:

Natwest: [www.natwest.co.uk](http://www.natwest.co.uk)

HSBC: [www.hsbc.co.uk](http://www.hsbc.co.uk)

Barclay's: [www.barclays.co.uk](http://www.barclays.co.uk)

Lloyd's: [www.lloyds.co.uk](http://www.lloyds.co.uk)

£1 is about \$1.50.

## 9. British Culture

Although you are probably familiar with the Queen, the Beatles, and Madonna's fake British accent, you may wish to learn more about the culture before you arrive.

My approach is probably weird; I've liked English history since I read a biography of Elizabeth I in seventh grade. In the summer before I left, I read parts of the Norton Anthology of British Literature and a few biographies of British monarchs. I also got a book about Cambridge at the library. There were definite moments when I was able to relate what I had read—for example, about Henry VI during the War of the Roses—to buildings or historic sites in Cambridge and London.

However, if find history to be dry, you might want to pick up a book on architecture (you'll see many styles in here), fine wines, real ales, or even a guidebook. And though this isn't strictly British culture, the night sky is really clear and amazing from Cambridge, so brushing up on your constellations might be fun.

In high school everybody read Shakespeare and Jane Austin, but you could also look up a famous author from your College just to get a connection. Examples: Salman Rushdie, Zadie Smith (King's), Lord Byron (Trinity), Samuel Coleridge (Jesus), etc. And you could read biographies of famous alumni—some are very descriptive of the way Cambridge was.

And if all of this doesn't appeal to you, there is British pop culture. But it's hard to come up with a pop-culture list—British entertainment is so varied—after all, James Bond, Monty Python, Radiohead, and Harry Potter from the same country? Dr. Good suggested Martin Amis and Nick Hornby for possible authors. I thought *Bridget Jones' Diary* was fun but you've probably already read that. *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, perhaps for a taste of dry British humor (humour). British film is also undergoing a renaissance so keep your eyes open (I won't suggest anything because my suggestions will probably be out of date!)

My British friends suggest *Notes from a Small Island* by Bill Bryson, an American traveling in Britain. And *Neither Here Nor There* about travels in Europe.

If you're at all interested in classical music, picking up a CD of King's College Choir or other English church choirs might introduce you to their extraordinary sound.

You can also read British papers online, which will give you an idea of what issues matter to people as well as the opinions they hold. [www.thetimes.co.uk](http://www.thetimes.co.uk) and [www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk) (conservative), [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk) (liberal), [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk) (you guessed it). There are also magazines: the Economist is very good for international and political news. [www.economist.co.uk](http://www.economist.co.uk) The BBC streams news online ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)) so you can practice understanding the accent.

## CAMBRIDGE ACADEMICS

I was a Course 2 student in the Department of Engineering and my experience will not be representative of everybody's, but some things about the ethos of Cambridge apply to all.

### 10. Cambridge Ethos

Towards the end of my matriculation dinner at Jesus College, the Vice-Master rose and gave a short speech. He congratulated us for our entry into the College and University; indeed, many students with equal academic qualifications had been turned away. But we the first-years (well, except me) had made the cut by passing interviews which asked questions like “What do Alexander the Great and Winnie the Pooh have in common?” “Their middle names.”

After the laughter died down, the Vice-Master turned serious. He said, for the sake of the students who were turned down, we should make the most of our time in Cambridge. We should work hard, and in particular try to become an expert in something, try to know more about that one thing than anybody else. It wasn't important what that something was, as long as we pursued it with all of our energy.

That speech captured the ethos of Cambridge, though his conception is an extreme—and rather idealistic—dream. After hearing that speech, I pictured a scholar spending long hours in the library, or a solitary figure walking along the Cam pondering a problem. “Knowledge for knowledge's sake” seemed too much a cliché to my MIT mentality. At least, in the academic setting I was used to, research seemed to be driven by practical considerations, like applications to industry. And for some, even being at MIT was merely a means to an end—a stepping stone to med school, or a job at Goldman Sachs. It seemed impossible that British students wouldn't have the same considerations.

And yet. Cambridge's power is the suspension of time. While there, you don't really think about the future, you think about the past and the present. For many of my friends, getting to Cambridge was the fulfillment of one of their life goals. The feeling is arrival, not transition. Of course my friends are thinking about the future, where and what they would do after graduation, but all that seems far off and unimportant compared to the here and now.

The drive to learn doesn't come from career aspirations or grades, which seem mundane compared to Acquiring Knowledge. And that means doing it by yourself, as thoroughly as possible, because you want to—and you are given the freedom to do so. Or even if your other ambitions drive you, you feel they shouldn't; it isn't the Cambridge way. But if your motivation is not strong enough, whether for knowledge or ambition, it will be difficult to shield yourself from the distractions of Cambridge life.

It is a paradox: we are supposed to learn individually because we are self-motivated, yet there must be a standardized curriculum. Cambridge compromises by having the supervision system. You have both lectures and supervisions; in lectures, general material is presented to everybody the same way. Then the supervisions, the one-on-two meetings with faculty, are extremely personalized. That hour with the lecturer is spent covering the things you don't understand. Dr.

Good explained it this way: Textbooks are one-size-fits-all, lectures are off-the-rack, and supervisions are tailored.

However, there are drawbacks to the Cambridge approach. Change comes slowly. The thought of creating a joint program with MIT was controversial here; some believe MIT is too close to industry and not purely academic. The Engineering curriculum hasn't changed noticeably for the past four years. I miss working in groups; all that self-motivation means that students work by themselves. And as much as I like supervisions, I learn a lot in MIT recitations if other people ask good questions I never would have thought of. Most of all, I miss the palpable excitement of MIT's fast-paced, forward-thinking drive.

I am almost certainly painting Cambridge and MIT at opposite extremes; the truth is somewhere in between. Cambridge has its share of brilliant research, and MIT also promotes idealistic learning. But being surrounded by this ethos and this way of thinking has made me reevaluate myself and the way I learn—ultimately, the most important part of being here was not academic.

## 11. Cambridge/MIT Comparison Table

Cambridge and MIT are almost opposites when it comes to teaching philosophy.

	MIT	Cambridge
<b>Teaching</b>		
Lectures	approx. 3 hours per class per week	2 hours per class per week
Recitations	approx. 2 hours per class per week	--
Supervisions	--	Usually 3-4 per term
Office Hours	Once a week, if you need them	Can arrange extra supervisions
<b>Material</b>		
	Covered more than once in lectures and recitations	Material covered once in lectures, discussed at supervisions
	Many sample/example problems given in class	Very few examples problems. What's covered is mostly theory.
	Expected to use computers (Matlab, Solidworks, etc.) and calculators (TI-85s, for instance)	C++ taught, but other computer skills (solid modeling, etc.) not taught until 4 <sup>th</sup> year. Can only use specific, non-graphing calculators
<b>Assessment</b>		
	Problem sets turned in and graded every week	Go over examples papers with supervisors, who give you the "cribs" or solutions afterwards
	2-3 tests during the term, sometimes a final	2/7 of grade based on labs rest is final exams at the end of the year
<b>Terms</b>		
	Two 14-week terms, one 4-week term which is non-academic	Three 8-week terms, with 6-week breaks in between. Students are expected to study over holiday.
<b>Approach</b>		
	"Parquet Floor"—each class taught from the ground up. The combination of classes can make an interesting pattern	"Laminate"—highly structured curriculum. Basics introduced in first year, increasing complexity in following years. (Thanks to Dr. Good for these analogies)

	<b>MIT</b>	<b>Cambridge</b>
<b>Attitude</b>		
	Get the problem set done because they count to your grade.	Get the problem set done because you'll look like an idiot in front of your supervisor if you haven't tried the questions
	Have something to turn in, even if it isn't your own original work (i.e. work in groups or copy) because it counts.	Struggle with problems individually, and if you can't solve them, ask the supervisor questions so you understand
	All the problems should be doable after looking at notes and textbook	Notes don't include all the information. May have to go to library to find reference books.
	Learn all the material because it is eventually tested	Selectively choose material (not ideally, of course) because you only have to answer 5 out of 8 questions on an exam.
<b>Test Strategy</b>		
	Write up crib sheet (helps to consolidate ideas and review) to use on the test	Pre-printed data books full of information on materials, math formulas, structures, etc. which you can use on the exams
	Study psets and do sample problems, perhaps one sample exam which the prof wrote up	Go over past exam papers. Note similarities and patterns, study accordingly.

Since the systems are so different, it is hard to compare them. The emphasis on individual learning means that a student has to be self-disciplined and motivated. I thought this was difficult since at MIT the motivation is sort of done for you in the form of deadlines. In Cambridge there is no pressure to get problem sets done from week to week.

There are also no textbooks. Rather, the lecturers will make up notes with fill-in-the blanks (not words here and there but spaces to write equations, etc.). They will also have suggested references, if you need them, but there is no textbook you can follow and have all the information and example problems in one place. So again, if you need a different point of view, you need to talk to a supervisor or go to the library to hunt out a book.

If you feel behind or you need more support, you can schedule extra supervisions, and your supervisors will probably be more than happy. This is especially useful as finals approach—learning what the graders are looking for is key to doing well on exams. Your College will schedule these for you—talk to your DoS.

## 12. Cambridge Students' Background

Secondary school students here take tests called the A-levels to get into University. The tests are like the Advanced Placement tests but more advanced. They are in offered all subjects and issued by a national board. Most universities, including Cambridge, require students to take at least three A-levels. Students study for these tests in the Sixth Form, which is the last two years of secondary school.

What this means is that Cambridge students chose, back when they were 16, what they wanted to study in University. To do engineering you'd obviously have to take physics and higher maths, just like people thinking about MIT might believe AP Calc is more crucial than AP U.S. Government. Not only that, the secondary school education in England seems much more rigorous in the sciences and mathematics. A-levels include Organic chemistry and multi-variable calculus. And since everybody entering Cambridge has taken these tests, they start off with pretty much the equivalent of MIT's freshman year complete.

That means that they start on their major right away from the first year. And they don't take classes outside of their requirement, which might explain why in England, a S.B. only takes three years.

The first two years of Cambridge Engineering curriculum are broad. It's like taking English in high school—each year has increasing complexity. A-levels introduce the basics, and each successive year covering the same material but more in depth. There is a high level of structure and not much individual choice. They cover the basics in everything, including electrical engineering and computer programming. At the end of the first year they are given the option to switch to the Department of Chemical Engineering. At the end of the second, they choose whether they want to do the Electrical and Information Science Tripos (EIST), Manufacturing Engineering Tripos (MET), or the standard Engineering Tripos.

(A Tripos, in case you're wondering, is named after a three-legged stool that students used to have to sit on during oral examinations, back in the day. But now it refers to the three-year course that people have to complete to get a degree.)

## 13. The Third-Year Course

The difficulty of this year is supposed to be comparable to MIT's fourth year, which makes sense considering that this is their last year before they get their S.B. (though they are required to stay four years for a Master's).

Within Engineering, for the third year, there are a variety of papers, G1-G13, and people tend to specialize in one area. G1-G3 are civil engineering. G4-G7 are "dry" mechanical engineering subjects-what most of us took. G8-G10 are "wet" Mech E subjects (fluids, etc.) Finally, G11-G13 are the more HASS-y subjects—econ, management science, and a society and technology course. Check out [http://www.eng.cam.ac.uk/admissions/course/third\\_year\\_eng.html](http://www.eng.cam.ac.uk/admissions/course/third_year_eng.html) and [http://www.eng.cam.ac.uk/teaching/tripos/3&4year\\_options.html#1](http://www.eng.cam.ac.uk/teaching/tripos/3&4year_options.html#1)

Cambridge students may have had material that you haven't covered before (I haven't done any programming). On the other hand, you may have deeper knowledge in the areas you've already studied at MIT. At any rate, you'll have to adjust and pick up the background on topics you haven't covered.

#### **14. Lectures**

The pace of the material is similar to MIT, only Cambridge lecturers go over the material once, instead of several times. It is really important to go to lecture because if you miss one, you'll be losing out on 1/32 of the course. That doesn't sound like much but it can add up.

Lecturers will usually hand out packets of notes with large gaps in them, which you're expected to fill in. I like this approach—you have organized notes but you still have to pay attention in class. They'll typically write on overheads of the same packets, so you know exactly what to write. (The few lecturers who hand out packets and then proceed to write haphazardly on the board are reviled by Cambridge students, but do exist).

Lectures are about the size of MIT Course 2 lectures (50-75 people).

Like at any school, the quality of the lecturers will vary. But you can always get a different point of view in your supervisions.

Cambridge covers less material in a year than MIT, but that's because we're in school for fourteen weeks a term and they are for eight. It's still a formidable amount, however.

#### **15. Supervisions**

Supervisions are one-on-two sessions with a lecturer or professor in the department. You'll either meet at the department or in the lecturer's college office. They're a great opportunity to get your questions answered. The personal attention and constant contact with faculty is a distinctive hallmark of the English system.

You'll go over your examples papers at the supervision. You are expected to try everything first, and then be prepared to discuss what you have learned. Don't think of examples papers like an MIT problem set—the emphasis is not on finishing, but learning.

Struggling through the psets (most likely independently) is important—there are only four in the term, compared to one a week at MIT. What this means is that at MIT, material is repeated. Even if you copy someone else's or work in groups, after enough repetition something is bound to set in. Here, the examples papers not only are less frequent, they cover material that isn't in the notes. So, you really need to work on it and get a feel for the material, instead of just trying to get it over with. If you can do this in groups (through discussion and teaching each other), then that will surely be helpful here too, but ultimately on the exams you may be faced with unfamiliar types of problems and you will have to know your stuff.

If you come to a supervision and you haven't finished, but have mulled over a problem for an hour and can ask good questions, you've done your job. But try everything at least once before you go in, or else you'll be wasting an opportunity to learn. It is embarrassing to go in and not know what you're talking about.

In some classes, we MIT students were in the same supervisions, I think because they weren't sure what our background was. That may happen again next year.

If you need an extra supervision, your college can arrange it for you.

## **16. Studying**

What was hardest for me was getting used to having so much time on my hands. It's easier to plan a schedule and stay on task when you're busy—you know you must study right after class before going to rehearsal if you're going to get something accomplished.

It didn't help that the Cambridge work ethic only kicks into high gear during the holiday before Easter term. There are a lot of parties and events going on during Michaelmas and Lent. People may go out every night during the first month. It's easy to say "hey, the exam's not for another six months, I can go out too." And you can and should, but only to a degree:

Keep in mind that most students at Cambridge are used to cramming independently for important exams; they've done it before with A-levels—and the people who got in are obviously the ones who do well under this system. And by the time they get to the third year, they are pros. When Easter Term rolls around, some people literally sit in the library for eight hours a day to revise (review). As MIT students with a one-day reading period before finals, doing this for a month is trying. You might not have the stamina.

Also, for third-year engineers, exams are almost immediately after the start of Easter term. That means you're going to have to revise during the holiday. But it's hard to do when nobody is around to set a good example and guilt you into working (it's easier for the first year engineers who take their exams in June, since they see everybody cramming). And you might want to travel for a couple weeks.

The point of this is that it's really, really important to keep on top of your work and learn the material as you go. Though you see Cambridge students leaving it all until the end, you might not be as successful without having the same background and study habits.

Your lecturers and supervisors will tell you to go over past exam papers as you go through the term. I didn't do this and I wish I had; it would have helped cement the knowledge in my head, and also given me an idea early on of what I needed to learn well. The exams papers don't change that much from year to year, and frequently if you go through five previous papers, you'll learn the tricks. The papers and solutions (cribs) are posted on the web at <http://www.eng.cam.ac.uk/DesignOffice/tripos/part2a/index.html> and you can get paper copies in the Department.

I felt I wasn't getting as much feedback as I did at MIT. Though students get reports from their supervisors, they are not as concrete as grades on problem sets. The types of problems on the examples papers are different; examples papers don't cover everything and are supposed to help you think through the concepts and eventually apply first principles to any problem. So, unlike MIT, where the problem sets cover the material which will be on the exams in the style it will be asked, how well you do on the examples papers may not be indicative of your eventual exam performance. Don't assume that because your reports are good and the examples problems are easy that you'll do well on exams; the level of understanding in the examples papers is the bare minimum you will need to pass.

My advice to people going next year is to set up a regular schedule of studying and stick with it. And ask your supervisors for constant feedback—some will offer to set up extra supervisions. And, as mentioned above, do the past exam questions ahead of time.

I can say unequivocally say that May is absolutely gorgeous, perhaps a direct result of having exams.

## **CAMBRIDGE LIFE**

All of the CMI MIT '01 students helped me put together this compilation of our experiences. In other words, although my main activity was music and I am a member of Jesus College, you won't just be reading my viewpoint, even I wrote most of this section in first person. My English friends also read over the guide, and gave me advice on the "Making Friends" part. Since we all had decidedly different experiences, I hope that this section gives an broad, MIT-student take on Cambridge life.

### **17. Colleges**

There is a general description of Colleges in "Cambridge, the Basics, The University and Colleges." What I want to talk about here is not the support system but life as a student.

Your College (one of 31 in the University) is the center of your social life. Most of your friends will probably come from here—you'll eat dinner in Hall, you'll join a lot of societies, and you may row or play another sport for your College.

Colleges are like MIT dorms, only larger and more diverse. Although people select their College when they apply, at the same time, the College is selecting them. So you have a wide variety of majors, and a wide variety of interests. There is nothing wrong with hanging out with math and science people all the time (and indeed, MIT students usually have pretty intense extracurricular interests) but it makes conversation really interesting when your friends are studying everything from Anthropology to French to Physics.

The community of the College system is a really wonderful thing—Kevin especially got into it in Corpus, a smaller College. Larger Colleges may not have that family feel, but you will still find your niche. On the other hand, the closeness could also a drawback—if you meet people from other Colleges, you have to go out of your way to see them, unless you are in a University Society together. Perhaps the large influx of MIT students will change that—because you'll have MIT friends all over Cambridge, you'll definitely become familiar with quite a few Colleges.

### **18. Societies**

Extracurricular activities is one of the priorities of Cambridge life. Because people have so much independence, they have time to pursue their interests, and often at very high levels. There are two types of societies: college and university.

#### *College*

College level is like intramurals in sports; typically, if you want to play, you can. In rowing, for instance, a college might field three to five boats to accommodate everybody who wants to row. The orchestra will take anybody who shows up. The exception is the college choirs, usually audition only.

During Freshers' Week, the colleges will hold some event where members of clubs will have sign-up sheets, so you can get your name on mailing lists. Also, they will organize "squashes" (going out to dinner with members of clubs) and that is a good way to get involved and meet people. Just look out for posters announcing squashes for activities you want to do.

The Bumps, held in February and May, are probably the most visible College sport competition. Competing boats are lined up front-to-back with only a boat and a half distance between them, and when the cannon goes off everybody rows frantically trying to catch up and "bump" the boat ahead of them. And the entire population of Cambridge comes and cheers them on.

### *University*

University societies are for serious amateurs. There will be tryouts for sports teams and auditions for the orchestras in the beginning of the year. The level is quite high, considering that Cambridge has about 10,000 undergraduates who are the best that Britain has to offer. But it is probably equivalent to MIT's level; Kristen played University water polo, Liam played Lacrosse, and I'm in the Music Society. The time commitment for a University sport is probably equal to that of a varsity sport at MIT—a couple hours of practice a day or a game.

If you play in the game against Oxford and win, you'll get what is called a "Blue" or "Half-Blue"—an honor like a varsity letter but better.

At the beginning of the year, there is a "Freshers' Fair" held at Kelsey Carriage, where you can see what kind of societies there are, get on University mailing lists, ask for information, etc.

Websites:

[www.cam.ac.uk/societies](http://www.cam.ac.uk/societies)

[www.sport.cam.ac.uk](http://www.sport.cam.ac.uk) (also has inter-college information)

### *For musicians: scratch groups*

If you are a serious musician and join the university symphonies or chamber orchestra, your name will be on an email list. If you are in the chamber orchestra or seated highly in the first symphony, people will probably email you asking you to perform in student-led orchestras. Rehearsals are typically four nights in the week of the concert, so time commitment is low and the quality, since you're playing with the best musicians, is excellent.

## **19. Food**

From fresh baguettes to elaborate dinners, Cambridge has everything. Just like at MIT, you'll have the option to cook or eat in College, or choose from a various restaurants around the city.

### **Caff/The Buttery**

"Caff" is for cafeteria, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner. If you don't wish to cook, you'll probably eat in here most of the time. The food is the same institutional food you can get at any university (although *every single* meal has potatoes), and like any cafeteria, there are set hours for the meals. In some colleges, instead of serving these meals in hall, there is a separate dining area called "the Buttery."

You will have a Kitchen Fixed Charge on your college bill, probably around £200 a year. It's to encourage you to eat in College; you pay it regardless of whether or not you eat in Caff. Then you are charged for whatever you eat, and it is usually very cheap (£2 is probably the cost of an average meal in Caff, not including averaging the KFC over the number of meals).

### **Formal Hall**

Formal Hall is an elaborate three-course meal which is held in hall several nights a week at most Colleges. College members must reserve tickets in advance and can usually bring one to four guests. Members also have to wear gowns (like graduation gowns) at the dinner.

The senior members of the college have their own tables on a raised platform at one end of the room. The traditions (prayers in Latin, standing when the fellows enter or exit, the gowns) and the setting of the candlelit hall make formal hall a fantastic experience. At its best, it is good food, good wine and good conversation. It is also a tradition unique to Cambridge and Oxford.

A note: not to shatter any idealistic dreams, but reality is a little more rowdy than the genteel image you may have gathered from the above description. For some students, formal hall is also an excuse to drink an entire bottle of wine over the course of the meal. Many of the fellows feel the emphasis on extreme drinking shows disrespect for tradition, and in all formal halls, disruptive people are asked to leave. But for the most part formal hall is a reasonably good meal with your friends, sports team, or society, and pretty fun..

The cost may range from £3.90 (at Jesus) to £8 (Robinson and some graduate halls). However, price is not always an indicator of quality.

Formal Hall usually starts around 7:30pm, after Caff.

### **Grocery Shopping**

The most popular grocery store in town is Sainsbury's. It's incredibly crowded after classes get out on weekdays and on weekends (one of my friends overheard one lady saying to another in a bookstore, "I swear, every student in Cambridge is in Sainsbury's at this very moment"). The best time to go is Monday morning.

In addition to all the usual grocery store fare, you will find a large selection of tea and cheese and a bakery so you can get fresh bread every day. Sainsbury's has its own house brand, and from our experience the quality was usually comparable with more expensive brand names. They're open until 10pm except for Sundays, when they close at 6pm.

There's also Marks and Spencers on the market square. It's a bit more upscale but has more hard-to-find items.

The market has fresh fruits and vegetables in season and a variety of merchants who sell everything from spices to baked goods. It's usually cheaper the grocery stores.

## **Restaurants**

Cambridge has a ton of restaurants. Some of our favorites:

£3-£6:

Sam Smiley's (on Trumpington, right across from Corpus), and Nadia's (all over the place): great baguette sandwiches. Sam Smiley's has an awesome baguette called Chicken Tikka; try it. They usually run out of the good sandwiches by 1:30pm. Nadia's, in addition to sandwiches, has great desserts.

Tattie's: jacket (baked) potatoes, with any topping you could possibly want. Popular toppings are (Baked) Beans and Cheese. Also great because you get a student discount with university card.

Pret-a-Manger: a chain store with gourmet sandwiches.

Trockel Ulmann and Freunde: A German café with good soups.

Dojo's (Silver Street): Asian fusion noodle bar which plays techno.

£6-£10:

La Margherita: Italian restaurant near Magdalene. Portions are Boston-sized (i.e. you're left comfortably full).

Pizza Express: Not the greatest pizza (soggy middle). Still, one of the cheaper sit-down restaurants.

Anatolia's: Fantastic Turkish food.

Most pubs also serve cheap food (fish and chips, for instance).

Tipping: a flat 10% at every meal, sometimes included in the bill as a service charge.

## **The Vans**

Ah, the vans. Who doesn't get hungry at 11pm, stumbling out of a pub or at 2am, after a night of clubbing? Fortunately, the Vans sit on either side of Market Square, serving chips (fries, remember?) usually with salt and vinegar, but also other condiments (ketchup, mayo (!), bbq sauce, etc.), burgers, kebabs, soda... everything for your post-clubbing/post-pubbing needs. There is also a peculiar entrée called a "Chip Butty"; this is a pita filled with chips, topped with salt, vinegar and mayo and the answer to the question "how much starch/cholesterol/fat can you handle?"

The Van on the north end of the square is known to Cambridge students as the "Van of Life." Thus, the Van on the south end is by default known as the "Van of Death."

## **Vegetarians**

Vegetarians will have no problem in Cambridge. At least one vegetarian entrée will be served at each meal, and possibly a vegan one too. The quality is about the same as the other entrées, and sometimes more appealing. If you don't like the entrée, you can always fill up on the side dishes (potatoes, other vegetables, etc. although these are usually steamed to a pulp). At Formal Hall there is always a vegetarian option. There shouldn't be a problem in restaurants either, though you may have some trouble finding food to eat in pubs.

Salad here is not great, but you can get fresh vegetables and fruit yourself from the grocery stores or the markets. Proteins like tofu or hummus are very common.

## **20. Making Friends**

We can't entirely generalize our experiences and tell you what to expect. However, in any new culture the feel of social situations will be an adjustment. It is important to be aware of the differences between Cambridge and MIT social systems and go in with an open mind.

You've all had the experience of having to make friends in a new community—after all, most of us arrived at MIT without knowing anybody. MIT leads a very structured orientation with many organized activities so you can get to know people. Similarly, your College student union will have pub crawls and other activities during Freshers' Week and this is a great opportunity to meet the first-years and become familiar with your College. Although you'll be taking second or third year classes, you're still a fresher to your College—so go to all of them.

Your College will probably have a “big brother/big sister” program, where you are set up with a College “family”—two second or third year “parents” and several first year “siblings” (this can make for some interesting paradoxes, like how Kristen was older than her grandfather). Your family will have teas and lunch and things like that, and also the parents who are friends will have joint activities with all the children, so you can meet a lot of people.

As a junior with two years of MIT under your belt, you might think hanging out with freshers is beneath you—but think again. About half of these people have taken a gap year (a year out between secondary school and university) and might be surprisingly mature, and possibly older than you. They will, no doubt, regard you as a curious phenomenon: a 20-year-old who can't legally drink in your own country.

Also—and this is a generalization—if you are in first-year housing, it tends to be harder to get to know second and third-years here. For most of us, the first-years we met turned out to be some of our best friends. However, because you will be taking the rooms of your third-year counterparts, this probably won't be the case for you.

But the stereotype is that the British are reserved—and to some extent we did find that to be the case. Americans tend to be more open to conversation. Not that the British aren't extroverts—they are, but only after you get to know them. Introductory conversations are often terse—during that first week, you are going to tire of all the conversations. Like all small talk, the conversations center around questions like “What College are you at?” “How do you like

it?” “What do you study?” “How did you decide to do that?” And for first-years, “What A-levels did you take?” And I can’t tell you how many times I discussed the difference between England and the U.S., and this was after being in Cambridge for two days.

The general consensus is that it just takes British people longer to open up. It is easy to mistake reserve for aloofness, but Dr. Good believes that most people are delighted that someone has gone out of their way to talk to them (they certainly wouldn’t have) and will recognize that you are trying to make an effort.

The other intimidating thing for any person in a new situation are the cliques (think of the new kid in your junior high). It makes sense that the typical Brit, who doesn’t go out of his way to make friends, would rely on a small, but extremely close, set of friendships. And these tend to form quickly among British first-years (really within the first two weeks, possibly sooner) which is why it is so important to try to make friends in those first few days. Force yourself (or maybe you don’t have to force yourself) to take every opportunity to be social—if there is a suggestion to go to a pub after dinner, etc. And always accept if someone invites you to their room for a cup of tea or a drink—invitations into personal space are always a good sign.

The second and third-years in your department will have all taken the same classes together, and although most work is done independently, the study groups would have formed before you got there. And no one talks in lecture, and everybody races home afterwards anyway to eat lunch at their College. (This is more true of a large department like Engineering—a smaller department like Materials Science actually seems to be very close.) Try to get to know the people in your non-MIT supervisions—you’ll at least have that time waiting in the hallway for your supervisor, and also the time it takes to get outside to strike up a conversation (you could ask for advice on how to study, or if he or she wants to form a study group, etc.).

In addition, physically there aren’t many common areas in the departments or even in the Colleges to hang out and meet people (there is the College bar and the JCR, but people usually go to these with their friends, not to make new ones. Also, some people choose to cook in their houses instead so you don’t even see them in Hall). Instead of huge hallways with fifty people of all classes and majors and a lot of lounges, like an MIT dorm, Cambridge living groups are vertical communities with four to twelve people from the same year. Hopefully you’ll click with your house or staircase—you’ll see them a lot, since you’ll share a bath and kitchen—or one nearby.

Outside of your department and living group, your activities are a great opportunity to make friends. The easiest way to make friends is to have something in common, and activities are a great thing to show that. Also most clubs go out for social events—curry, formal hall, pubs—so it can be a really comfortable situation. Again, the first events are the most important if you want to get to know people—at these events the Brits are conscious that they have to meet the new people and are pretty friendly. Music was really great for me—participating in College and University-wide groups meant I met a lot of people with similar interests.

Finally, the most comfortable way to meet people in England, as in the U.S., is to be introduced by mutual friends and as you get to know a couple people, you’ll soon expand your social circle.

But press to be introduced—some British people, oddly, regularly forget to introduce their friends. There have been times when me and a couple British friends will run into someone one person knows, and the rest of us will stand around while the other person chats. It may be weird (especially since your other British friends may be staring at their shoes) but try to get your friend to introduce you, or failing that, introduce yourself.

So to summarize:

- British people tend to be comfortable with their group of friends, so they don't actively seek friendships. But this doesn't mean they aren't open to more.
- Try to meet as many first years as possible. These are the people who haven't formed groups. And try to as many beginning-of-the-year meetings, curries, etc., when people are social. The first few weeks are really a window of opportunity which seems to close as people get busier and fall into a routine.
- The stereotypical reserve is there, but you just have to be confident in yourself. That is, don't take aloofness personally—it isn't you, it's the culture. (Of course this won't always be the case. If someone really doesn't want to talk it should be apparent.) The danger is that you will feel intimidated and shut yourself off—if you are friendly and make an effort, you'll slowly get results.
- Practice your conversation skills, because you're going to need them. If you come off sounding like an interviewer at least you'll be Diane Sawyer. Asking for advice is always a good conversation starter.
- Everybody knows you're American from the moment you start speaking, and Americans are known to be extroverted, so people will probably understand if you are assertive. You might be the one who says "who knows a good pub around here?" or "let's go find a good place for breakfast." And making commitments for future events, like lunch the next day, also cements a relationship (leave nothing up to chance meetings, with the lack of common areas it isn't going to happen). Or if there are things you like to do—going to jazz concerts, etc.—see if other people want to come.

Remember that all of this advice is based on stereotypes anyway—the first person you meet might be a completely engaging person who knows everybody in the College. We definitely got to know people like this too.

And after you get used to it, you'll see the culture in a different light. The living arrangements, with small close knit communities, is actually fairly common in America: what close group of friends, if given the option, wouldn't want to live together? The lack of common areas points to how quickly English friendships grow: you'll hang out in peoples' rooms a lot, not just meet them at activities and go to restaurants. And, you might start thinking like the English, who view Americans as insincere—completely sociable and open on the surface to everybody but reserving judgment with no intention of getting close.

Main point: friendships may take more effort to form, but when they do, they are well worth it. It is also important to be open-minded: you might have trouble finding people you think you can be friends with. But when since we are the ones in a different culture, we should step back and reevaluate what we look for and be flexible. That's one reason we're here, after all.

I once asked one of my friends how two shy British people get to know each other. He replied, “slowly, and with many conversations about the weather.”

## 21. Nightlife

[www.adhoc.co.uk](http://www.adhoc.co.uk) is a good site for what’s going on.

### **Pubs**

Perhaps the most English of things to do is to go out to a pub. All the pubs have different feels, and usually students of a college will frequent a particular pub (or pubs). This is solely by proximity, and no one is going to kick you out of the Bun Shop (a “Jesus pub”) if you’re from King’s.

Pubs are typically smoky places where you go with friends to have a drink. They have a rustic feel, probably from the wooden beams and low lighting. The most popular drinks are Guinness and real ales like Old Speckled Hen. They usually don’t serve cocktails. If you don’t drink at all, you can get a Coke or other non-alcoholic beverages.

A note about drinking: since people can drink in England starting at age 18, alcohol forms a large part of the social life. Beer is to the English like coffee is to Americans—“Let’s go to the pub” is about the same as “Want to get coffee?” Generally, the emphasis is not on the drinking itself, which is usually moderate, but more on having a good time with friends. (However this is not always the case, especially at sports initiations, formal halls, etc.) And, like in the U.S., there are the people who do consider getting drunk as having a good time with friends. But as always, you should never feel pressured. You will always find people who think like you do.

If you object to drinking, especially for religious reasons, you may find some people who feel the same way. Nonetheless you should be willing to go to pubs and get something else. Otherwise, you’ll be missing out on great conversations and a lot of fun, and also part of the culture—this is where people hang out. On the other end of the spectrum, if you do plan to drink, be responsible. Besides all the stuff about being in a foreign country where you are unfamiliar with medical care, you might not be used to drinking this much (I certainly wasn’t). So know your limits.

And while we’re talking about pubs:

A note about smoking: Europe doesn’t have non-smoking laws, and that means that you’re going to be breathing in a lot more smoke than usual (smokers as well as non-smokers). But it is just something you’ll have to live with if you’re going to go out anywhere.

## **College Ents**

Most Colleges will have Ents (entertainment)—College-sponsored parties. They usually charge £3-£4 for entrance fees, and Clare's and Queens' are renowned.

Colleges also have jazz; Jazz at John's is every Friday night, and other Colleges will have concerts as well.

## **Formal Hall**

As already mentioned in the Food section, Formal Hall is a nice meal served in college. Since it's cheaper than eating out, and anyway, a very Cambridge thing to do, this is a common social activity. Rowing clubs will arrange meetings with other rowing clubs, typically mixing male and female boats (i.e. John's seconds and Clare women). There are also drinking societies—societies of people who drink quite a bit and start off the night at a Formal Hall somewhere.

You usually meet up with your group in the College bar before hand, and then bring your own wine to formal hall. Bring a corkscrew just in case, but typically someone will be on hand to uncork the bottles for a minimum fee. Also people do get rather drunk. "Pennying" is a Cambridge custom where if someone drops a penny into your glass, you have to down it. But how much you drink, like in any situation, depends on with whom you go. Sometimes everybody drinks a lot, but there are also times when we don't drink at all or share a bottle of wine among four or five people.

It's fun to go to other colleges' formal halls, and since you'll all be scattered about the university, you have the perfect opportunity.

## **Clubbing**

Cambridge has several clubs. Each club specializes in a different type of music on different nights. For example, Life has cheesy music (80's music that nobody wants to admit they like but everyone sings along and has fun) on Thursday nights. There are also student nights when you can get a discount with your University ID card. Generally, people go to clubs in big groups after formal hall.

## **Movies**

Cambridge has two main cinemas: the Warner Brothers Palace at the Grafton Centre (blockbusters, stadium seating, tickets with an ISIC card are £4, and can book tickets online at [www.warnervillage.co.uk](http://www.warnervillage.co.uk) (fee of 50 p)) and the Arts Picture House (like Kendall Theater, has reserved seating so book early. Also has stadium seating, and has student prices before 5 pm every day and all day on Monday. [www.picturehouse-cinemas.co.uk/site/cinemas/Cambridge/local.htm](http://www.picturehouse-cinemas.co.uk/site/cinemas/Cambridge/local.htm))

## **Classical music**

Classical music is much more popular in England than in the U.S. There are, on average, two or more concerts a night going on in Cambridge, usually in different College chapels, and also at the Faculty of Music's concert hall in West Road. Concessions (i.e. student tickets) are usually £3 pounds.

## Theater

There are a lot of amateur theatre groups around, some affiliated with colleges and universities. One in particular is the Amateur Dramatic Club (ADC) on Jesus Lane. Alumni include Emma Thompson, Ian McKellen, Derek Jacobi, and John Cleese. So you know you're in for a good show. [www.cam.ac.uk/societies/adc](http://www.cam.ac.uk/societies/adc)

## 22. Some British and Cambridge Slang

Bill: check (see Cheque)

Bin: garbage/trash can

Bit: definition is the same—a small piece of something (but is used to describe everything)... “a bit of paper” etc.

Blimey: Whoa! (this is Cockney, no one uses it, we just like it)

Bloke: guy

Bog Roll: toilet paper

Bonnet: hood of a car

Boot: trunk of a car

Brilliant: get used to using this. Everything is “brilliant.”

Buttery: where you get food if you're not eating in Hall (not all colleges have a buttery)

Caff: cafeteria

Cane: get done (in the context of cane a project)

Carpark: parking lot

Cheeky: mischievous

Cheque: check (see Bill)

Crikey: see Blimey

Come up: arrive in Cambridge

Cor: see Blimey, and usually used in the context of “Cor, blimey!”

CompSci (comp-ski): people studying COMPuter SCIENCE

Dodgy: sketchy

DoS: Director of Studies. Your advisor.

Doss (adjective): “doss class”=easy class, “dossier”=someone who doesn't do any work.

Ents: for Entertainment. A college party (also use ‘bop’).

Fit: good looking (“fit bird”=good looking girl)

Formal Hall: fancy, 3 course meal, lots of wine, and you have to wear a gown.

Fresher: a first year.

Git: person you don't like, i.e. “bloody git”

Go down: leave Cambridge

Gormless: temporarily vacant, spaced out.

Hall: the chapel-like dining hall in every college. Some colleges serve all their meals in here, others only serve formal hall here.

Hold thumbs: cross your fingers (for good luck).

Knackered: tired

Lift: elevator

Loo: toilet (e.g. “I need the loo” = “I need to use the bathroom”)

Mathmo: people studying maths

Maths: math

Meant to: should be doing (as in “I was meant to be studying.”)  
Minging: sucks. (“that was minging.”) also, ugly (i.e. “he was minging”) also noun, “minger.” (“what a minger.”) also, smelly.  
Naff: tacky  
NatSci (nat-ski): people studying natural sciences  
Pants: underwear. Learn to say “trousers.”  
P’lodge (plodge): Porter’s Lodge  
Pissed: Drunk. (Not angry; “pissed off” means angry.) c.f. wasted, trashed, trolleyed, off yer face, oiled up, hammered, lashed.  
Postgraduate/’grad’: graduate student  
Pull: make out  
Punt: a long flat boat, propelled by pushing a stick along the bottom of the Cam.  
Queue: Line  
Reading: majoring in  
Rubbish: terrible (“that’s rubbish”, “a rubbish essay”) and trash/garbage.  
Straight away: right away  
Sent down: expelled  
Take-away: to-go (i.e. “for eat-in or take-away?”)  
Tip: mess. “My room is a bit of a tip.”  
Wicked: very very cool. like in Boston

### **23. Touristy Stuff**

(Or where to take your parents.)

King’s: [www.kings.cam.ac.uk](http://www.kings.cam.ac.uk)

Definitely in competition for the most impressive grounds and buildings, especially the chapel. Hence, usually crawling with tourists, who have also come to hear the world famous (and my favorite) choir.

King’s College was chartered in 1441 by Henry VI, and construction on the chapel started soon after. The chapel is known as the pinnacle of English gothic perpendicular architecture, whatever that is. But everybody can appreciate it for its magnificent fan-vaulted ceiling. The painting at the altar is the Adoration of the Magi by Peter Paul Reubens.

The Chapel is open to tourists until 3:30. University members with appropriate ID and two guests get in for free.

**The choir sings at daily services: 10:30 and 3:30 on Sundays, 5:30 on Tuesday through Saturdays during term**, and it is worth hearing them at least once. One perk of being at King’s is that you get preferential seating in the Chapel during services. University members also get preferential, but less good, seats. Still, get there 15 minutes in advance, because if you’re late you have to sit in the Antechapel and you can’t see a thing, not to mention the sound isn’t good.

It used to be that only graduates of Eton could come here (both Eton and King’s were founded by Henry VI, the king deposed at the start of the War of the Roses), and they didn’t have to take exams either. But after they changed that, King’s became extremely liberal, to the point where

there isn't even high table in their hall. The common belief is they used to be rich but lost all their money in a stock market crash.

Trinity: [www.trin.cam.ac.uk](http://www.trin.cam.ac.uk)

The richest of all the colleges (supposedly they are the third largest landowner in England after crown and church), it also has the most impressive list of alumni. Newton, Lord Byron, A.A. Milne... more Nobel laureates than any university in the world. In Trinity's chapel are statues of famous alumni. They also have an **excellent choir, which sings on Sundays at 10, Tuesdays and Thursdays at 6:15.**

Trinity has the **Wren Library**, which has a permanent exhibit of things like Eleanor of Aquitaine's prayer book, Isaac Newton's walking stick, a first edition of Shakespeare's Folio, etc. They only allow 10 people in at a time, and they are open from 12-2:30 on weekdays or something like that.

Trinity was founded by Henry VIII, though its gates have the arms of Edward III and his six sons because there used to be a college called Michaelhouse, founded by Edward III, on the site. To the right of the gate is an apple tree, supposedly a descendant of the one that gave Newton a concussion.

St. John's: [www.joh.cam.ac.uk](http://www.joh.cam.ac.uk)

Rounding out the schools with excellent choirs, St. John's is next door to Trinity. Tourist fodder includes the **Bridge of Sighs** (a copy of the Venetian; for that matter, Oxford also has a Bridge of Sighs but theirs isn't even over water!) and some of the most gorgeous land along the Cam.

John's has a reputation for being aloof. Maybe it is best said by the song: "I'd rather be at Oxford than at John's." No one really knows why, but John's seems to have rivalries with every college (Trinity, Jesus, Magdalene...) It's also the second richest college.

John's Choir rivals King's and their evensong is at 6:30, so you can rush from King's to John's and catch both.

Queens': [www.quns.cam.ac.uk](http://www.quns.cam.ac.uk)

Queens' (spelled that way because it was re-co-founded by Margaret de Anjou and Elizabeth Woodville, get someone to explain it to you) has the **Mathematical bridge**. Supposedly Isaac Newton designed it to hold together without nails or bolts. Sadly, the story isn't true. This, however, doesn't stop people from standing at the next bridge down to stare and take pictures.

Queens' also has a famous sundial in their old court.

Jesus: [www.jesus.cam.ac.uk](http://www.jesus.cam.ac.uk)

Jesus was built on the site of a former nunnery. In fact, its official name was The College of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Saint John the Evangelist and the glorious Virgin Saint Radegund, near Cambridge.

**Jesus Chapel** is the oldest building in any Cambridge college, built in 1138. It's right next to a beautifully preserved Cloister Court. There is also a vast outdoor sculpture collection, sometimes in the most unexpected places. The horse in First Court is supposedly worth \$750,000 and students can get sent down for attempting to ride it.

During Easter Term, junior members of the college are allowed to walk on most of the courts, which makes it a superior college in my highly unbiased eyes.

**Postcards: cost 40p to mail to the U.S.**

The other Colleges are well worth seeing too—get a guidebook (that's where most of this info is from anyway).

## **24. Guests**

There seem to be rather stringent regulations but honestly no one seems to follow them; most involve signing a guest in and the number of days a guest can stay in your room. Check your College's website for the policies.

Many Colleges rent out camp beds (what we call cots, but "cot" here means a baby crib) for a minimum fee.

Some colleges also have guest rooms, but most are only available for fellows to reserve, so check into this anyway. These are about the level of a 2 star hotel or better. Towels, sheets, soap, etc. are provided, and sometimes breakfast as well. These are convenient because of their location, and also they are cheaper than a bed and breakfast.

Cambridge has many bed and breakfasts and hotels. Most hotels in the center of town have rates around \$150-\$200 a night, while a bed and breakfast outside of town might be \$50. There is also a youth hostel that belongs to the International Hostel Association near town.

## GETTING OUT OF CAMBRIDGE

Because, face it, one reason you wanted to go on this exchange was to see the world. Well, here's your chance.

### 25. When to travel

This really depends. Michelle hit Paris and Budapest on consecutive weekends during Michaelmas. I spent four days in Italy in December (the Mediterranean climate is still gorgeous then—60 degrees and sunny), a week in Paris in January, and a couple days in both Holland and Germany at the end of Easter term. Kenny and Kevin hit 15 cities in 17 days during the first three weeks of Easter Break, while Kristen and Nina made it to Spain for a week during the same break. After the year was over, Liam headed to Oslo and the rest of Europe. We all took Saturdays to go to London.

So, there is no “best” time to go. If you want to carry a huge pack and see a lot at once, go for the Kevin, Kenny and Liam approach. If you'd rather get to know one country well, go for the Kristen and Nina approach. Or, if you're lazy like me and don't want to cart your stuff around, spend a week and really get to know a city.

### 26. Guidebooks

You can either get an all-in-one “Europe” guidebook. This is good if you're going to be traveling around or don't know where you are going to go. Still, a book like that is huge and heavy and has information on countries you won't be going near. So, if you know you are going to be traveling and you are undecided as to where, get one of those. Or if you know you have to visit Paris, get a more specific Paris guidebook with specialized information. You can also buy the guidebooks here once you decide where you are going to go.

I wouldn't recommend any expensive guidebooks which are written for the normal vacationer or business traveler in mind... if you're going to carry a book around with you in your backpack, you want to make sure it has relevant information. Your guidebook should have a lot of maps and recommendations of hostels, since that is what you're most likely to use it for.

“Let's Go” are good for students since they have a lot of cheap attractions and rate good hostels. If you're on a budget, this is a good way to go.

“Lonely Planet” give you the more offbeat look at local life.

You can also get guidebooks which give you a more in depth look at a city: Dorling Kindersley's Eyewitness Guides, for instance. These are good if you want full color pictures and cutaway drawings and want to know a little about the history or architecture.

## 27. Getting around England

It's possible to get almost anywhere in England with a minimum of fuss. Trains run pretty much outwards from London to major cities, and coaches (buses with airline seats) run almost everywhere.

In general, coaches are cheaper and more reliable (for now with all the problems with rail services, but this may have changed by the time you are there). Trains are nicer (wider seats with legroom, well lit, you can walk around, no stale air or highway fumes), and can be faster, especially when you're taking an express (but only if they are running on time).

Neither trains nor coaches require reserved seating, so, for instance, your train ticket to London is valid on any train to London that day (or month, depending on what kind of ticket you buy).

If you plan to take the train a lot, I recommend that you get a Young Person's Railcard (YPR). This costs £18.00 but gets you a third off of most rail journeys. To get one, go to a train station with a passport picture and a photo I.D. (a student card or something with your age). You can fill out the form there and they'll make it on the spot. It's valid for one year. There is a similar deal for coaches (National Express Student card) which costs £10. You can register at any coach station.

One-way tickets are called "singles" (as in "a single to London, please.") and a roundtrip ticket is a "return."

Schedules and fares may be found on the websites:

Coaches: [www.gobycoach.co.uk](http://www.gobycoach.co.uk)

Trains: [www.railtrack.co.uk](http://www.railtrack.co.uk)

## 28. Getting to/from Cambridge

### Coaches

Coaches (National Express) run directly to Cambridge from Heathrow and Gatwick airports. It takes about 3 hours from Heathrow (a single is £18), and 4 hours from Gatwick (£20).

- Advantages: Good if you have a lot of luggage (no transfers). Drummer Street bus stop is near city center.
- Disadvantages: slow. And all the general things about riding in coaches.

### Trains

Heathrow and Gatwick both have express trains to London that take 15 and 30 minutes, respectively. They also have non-express trains which take longer, not surprisingly. The Heathrow Express arrives at Paddington Station, and the Gatwick Express gets into Victoria. Then you have to take the Underground (subway) to King's Cross Station (single fare is £1.50), where you can catch a train to Cambridge. A single fare with a YPR is £9.50.

- Advantage: fast.
- Disadvantages: Transferring in London can be hectic if you're not used to large subway systems. The underground has a lot of steps. The train station is a half mile away from the city center, so you'll have to take a cab or a bus. On the other hand, if you have luggage you'd probably take a cab anyway.

I usually take the coach.

## 29. London

### Getting to London

Again, there are trains and coaches. But what's especially nice about the trains is a deal called a **"day return,"** which is a return ticket plus a One-Day Travelcard. (A One-Day travelcard is an Underground pass you can use for a day in any London zone, so it's good for tourists.) So you go in the morning and return that night—it only takes 45 minutes on an express train. A day return only costs £1 more than a single, so it's a really good deal, considering you get the subway pass (usually £4.00) thrown in for free.

The Cambridge express runs from King's Cross Station, which is on several Underground stations. The last train from London runs around 1 am, and the first one is around 6 am.

### Getting around in London

This is the easy part: almost everything in London is within walking distance, or accessible by the Underground (called the "tube.") You can "see" (but not go into) everything in one day. Also the London Underground is not that complicated to figure out; you just need to know if you're going east, west, north or south (the only place this gets confusing is on the circle line, but the stations are well marked). Singles cost £1.50, and travelcards are worth it if you plan to take the subway more than three times in a day.

I've taken the bus, but only when with a native Londoner. You may need to know the city quite well, though the buses usually travel along one street and then turn around. Your travelcard will work on buses too.

### *Illustrated Guides*

I liked buying illustrated guides at the sights I went to. Most places have them, and the pictures, since they are shot professionally in good lighting, are better than anything I could take.

### Sights

Too many to list! I would go get a guidebook to see what you want to do. But here are my favorites:

Tower of London: although expensive (£7 or £8 for students), really awesome. Appropriately foreboding, the tower has been royal residence, prison, and site of executions. While the main attraction is the crown jewels, what had most resonance with me was seeing the Traitor's Gate, where Princess Elizabeth once eloquently complained "I come in as no traitor but as true a woman to the queen's majesty as any now living..." Right next to the Tower, spanning the river,

is Tower Bridge, where, among other things, the heads of the newly executed were displayed on pikes.

Houses of Parliament/Big Ben: for that “look ma, I’m in England” shot, take a picture halfway down the bridge. Big Ben (actually the name of the bell inside the North Clock Tower) rings its distinctive carillon on the hour. Watching Parliament is also supposed to be fun, but I haven’t had the chance to do that yet. While here you can also go find No. 10 Downing Street, the residence of the Prime Minister. The Millennium Eye, a Ferris wheel, is across the river.

Westminster Cathedral: Just north of the Houses of Parliament, it is full of tombs, statues and memorials to British royalty, statesmen, authors, poets and composers. They charge admission, but evensong, at 3:30, and is free

Buckingham Palace: From Westminster it is only a short walk to the Queen’s residence. The Changing of the Guard is at 11am but get there really early to get a spot along the fence. You can only take a tour during the summer months (July-August).

St. Paul’s: The largest church in England. Designed by Sir Christopher Wren after the Great Fire of London in 1666, you can climb straight up to the top (538 steps, but should be no problem after all the stairs you climb at Cambridge). If the day is nice you have a great view. If you don’t make it that far, the dome is known as the whispering gallery: if you talk towards the wall, someone can hear you on the other side of the dome.

## **Museums**

The great thing about London is that all the museums and galleries, national and recently even private collections, are free, though they request a donation. Museums are a nice thing to do especially if it rains (which it most likely will). Again, London has numerous museums and most you could get lost in for days. My favorites:

The British Museum: whatever Ira Gershwin may have said, I don’t think this place will ever lose its charm. They have the best historical collections in the world (mostly stolen from all the civilizations they ravaged during the Empire), including the Rosetta Stone, Elgin Marbles, etc. And they have native British stuff too—Elizabeth and Robert Browning’s wedding rings, etc.

The National Gallery: at Trafalgar Square. The best thing I saw here was The Execution of Lady Jane Grey painted by Paul Delaroche. They also have that Holbein’s The Ambassadors, with the distorted skull you have see from the left side.

The National Portrait Gallery: also at Trafalgar Square, in fact, right around the corner from the National Gallery. This was a lot of fun; they have portraits of famous British people, from the coronation portraits from Tudor times to Richard Branson. Get the audio guide; it gives a brief biography of the people you are looking at.

Tate Modern: On the south bank, next to the Globe Theatre. An old converted industrial building. The audioguides here and at the Tate Gallery cost a pound, and they are worth it, especially if, like me, you don’t really see what the fuss is about modern art. I feel this is the

first modern art museum I've been to which tries to teach and make you appreciate what you're seeing. I especially liked the room of Rothkos.

### **Shows**

"Time Out" is a weekly magazine which has listings of every play, concert, club, and event going on in London. If you are looking for something to do, look here first.

Plays: If you've ever heard a theatre-loving New Yorker talk about the Brits invading Broadway, you may already know that the West End is home to blockbuster musicals, fringe plays and everything in between. Check out the half-price ticket booth at Leicester Square: you can get cheap tickets on the day of the show to see plays and musicals (don't go to any of the side vendors; the "official" one is actually in the square itself). They close at 3:30pm and have tickets for both matinee and evening shows.

Classical concerts: There are many orchestras in London. The only one I had a chance to see was the London Symphony Orchestra ([www.lso.co.uk](http://www.lso.co.uk)), which performs at the Barbican. Any seat in this hall is a good one, so if you get £10 or £15 tickets, the sound and view are great. Most places have rush tickets (or "day seats"). But if you really want to see a concert I would recommend booking in advance, because if you're paying £10 to get to London from Cambridge, you want to be sure you get in.

Royal Opera House: My home away from Cambridge. The Royal Ballet and the Royal Opera alternate performances. Tickets for the ballet can be as cheap as £4 for upper slips. They sell out very quickly, so if you want tickets, you may have to check the website [www.roh.org.uk](http://www.roh.org.uk) and see when you can start ordering tickets online (booking for fall (Oct-Dec) starts in July or August, booking for Winter (Jan-Mar) starts in November, and booking for Spring (April-June) starts in January). The productions are worth seeing; these are two of the most renowned companies in the world.

If you're going to get seating in the upper slips (£4-£10, and four tiers up, on the side), ask for AA or BB (first rows), with the lowest number possible given the side of the house you're on. Or just ask for the best seats possible. If you get, say, AA 10 and 11 it is possible to see almost the entire stage by leaning over a little. Sound here is excellent. But you are very high up and far away, so bring binoculars.

I also bought tickets for the amphitheatre (18-20 pounds). The sound here is decent (not great) since you are in a recessed area, but the seats are full view. This might be better for ballets. You are far away but again, with binoculars, you won't miss a thing.

The large box in the Grand Parterre on house right is the royal box with a throne chair (it isn't called the Royal Opera House for nothing). Also, the opera house displays pictures, set designs and costumes from prior performances, which can be very interesting.

### **30. Paris**

As it only takes 3 hours to get from London to Paris by the high-speed train (Eurostar) there is absolutely no excuse why you shouldn't go (well, okay, it is pricey, but since you don't have to pay for a flight to France, even with a £75 return ticket on the Eurostar, you're coming out at least \$400 ahead which you can promptly spend on one handbag at Louis Vuitton.)

The French take great pride in their nationality, and with good reason: they have the best wine and the best food. Especially the food, after a couple months in England!

Remember that Paris is an hour ahead of London.

#### *Getting to Paris*

##### Eurostar:

By far the most convenient and fastest way to get to Paris is to take the Eurostar TGV from Waterloo station in London to Gare du Nord in Paris. You go from one city to another without having to get to and from an airport.

Tickets are £75 return. You can change the return segment once if you decide you need to leave earlier or later.

You may need to book ahead of time, especially during the peak times (like rush hour). Find out more about the Eurostar at [www.eurostar.com](http://www.eurostar.com)

##### Ferry:

Another way to get to France is to take a ferry from Dover to Calais. None of us did this so I don't have any details, but it's supposed to be a nice crossing of the channel unless the seas are rough. The crossing is also cheaper, but once you factor in train travel from London to Dover and then Calais to Paris, it might end up being more expensive.

##### Plane:

You could also fly from London to Paris, but you will have to take a train from Charles de Gaulle to Paris.

#### **Getting around in Paris**

The Metro is not for beginners. But since you've all had practice in Boston and hopefully in London too, it shouldn't be a problem. Here's the official website:  
<http://www.ratp.fr/Eng/index.htm>

The cheapest, and easiest way to buy tickets was to get a carnet, or a packet of 10 one-way tickets.

You can also connect with the trains and commuter rails on some Metro stations.

#### **Sights**

Again, get a guidebook. The most famous sights are probably:

Cathedral de Notre Dame de Paris: make sure to climb the towers to get up close to the gargoyles. And stop at every display they have and take as much time as you want; it is supposed to be one-way and they frown on people who turn around and push back into others.

Eiffel Tower: You can take the stairs only to the first platform, and from then you have to take the elevator to the top (not that anybody's complaining). The price of the ticket depends on how high you go, but it is well worth going to the top to get the view.

Latin Quarter: Paris's bohemian area, with the University of Paris (Sorbonne), used bookstores, lots of cafés.

Champs Elysee: the avenue stretching from the Arc de Triomphe to the Louvre. All those expensive stores you have to dress up to go into.

Versailles: Louis XIV's monument to the absolute state. The palace is divided into different sections, and you have to pay admission to each one. It is so extensive plan on being there for at least a day. If you have time to read an account about the peasants storming Marie Antoinette's quarters and how she had to flee along a passageway to the King, the palace may take on special resonance.

## **Museums**

The Louvre: the Louvre is a huge complex (with a pyramid by I.M Pei, MIT '40), and much too large to see in one day. You could just pop in and see the Venus de Milo or Mona Lisa if you wished. If you want to spend more time, there are extended hours on Monday or Wednesdays, where part of the museum is open until 9:45pm, and it isn't very busy. On other days, except Tuesday when it is closed, the hours are 9am to 6pm.  
<http://www.louvre.fr/louvrea.htm>

Musée d'Orsay: A stunning converted train station which houses one of the most prestigious impressionist collections in the world. They sell a pocket guide which hits 40 or so highlights from the collection.  
[www.musee-orsay.fr/](http://www.musee-orsay.fr/)

Centre Georges Pompidou: If you like modern art, this is a must.  
[http://www.centrepompidou.fr/english/infos/infos\\_pratiques.htm](http://www.centrepompidou.fr/english/infos/infos_pratiques.htm)

## **Nightlife (okay, opera)**

"Time Out" is also published in Paris, with a small section of English listings in the back.

Going to the opera was the only thing I did in Paris at night other than going out to dinner, so that is what I have info on:

Opera Garnier: The Opera Garnier is an ornate and beautiful theater and is the home of the Paris Opera. The Phantom of the Opera was set here. Rush tickets, sold right before the show, cost about \$4. Get in line early, because you could get the fourth seat in a box.

The programs, which cost about \$10, have a brief summary of the opera in English.

Opera Bastille: This is the other home of the Paris Opera. Tickets here cost \$12, but you get whatever seats were not sold, so you can get very good seats for your money.

## **31. Rest of Europe**

### **Budget airlines**

Ryanair and Easyjet are the two most common budget airlines. Ryanair, an Irish airline, flies into London Stansted, which is only 45 minutes from Cambridge. Easyjet flies into London Luton, which is an hour and a half. It also flies into Gatwick, but as that is four hours away, it's impractical.

How cheap are these flights? Ryanair's last minute deals are astounding. Sometimes they will offer roundtrip flights for £5 (but then you have to read the restrictions carefully and pay £20 in taxes, but that still works out to a \$45 round trip flight to Pisa). However, Ryanair flies into secondary and tertiary airports which may be miles away from the city you want to get to. But there is usually a shuttle from the secondary airport to the main one though it might cost a little. Once you're at the main airport you can usually find a train or subway.

If you'd rather fly into the main airport to save yourself time, Easyjet is a good option. The cost of the trip depends on when you fly; if you choose an early or late flight, you could pay £20 each way, which is a decent price. It varies and the prices change constantly, so check it out.

[www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)

[www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)

### **Eurail/Interrail Pass**

If you know you are going to travel around Europe for a couple weeks, you should get a Eurail pass, which allows you to go on all the trains in most of Europe (does not include UK). The most common is to get unlimited use for a month, but you can also get a Flexipass, which allows you to travel 8 days in one month or 4 days in one month, etc.

If you have been a resident of the UK for 6 months (i.e. if you are planning to travel in June) you qualify for the interrail pass, which is about half the cost of the Eurail pass (about \$650 for a one-month pass, but the Flexipasses are cheaper)

[www.eurail.com](http://www.eurail.com)

## **32. Advice**

### **Documents**

Once you are in a European Union country, you don't need any visas to travel to other EU countries. This also means that you have to ask them to stamp your passport if you want it.

**Money**

ATMs are the easiest way to get cash in different countries; like in England, there may be an exchange fee. You can also pay for most things by credit card. On January 1, 2002, the hard currencies of 12 nations (Belgium, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, and Finland) switched over to the Euro. That means that you will just need to convert your money into Euros you're on your way.

This will not affect the British Pound, at least not until 2006.

**Calling/E-mailing Home**

An international calling card from your long distance company may be nice in case of emergencies. There are Internet cafés all over the place too—EasyEverything, owned by the same company which runs EasyJet, is probably the most common.

**ONE FINAL NOTE**

Never, ever drop a coconut out a window. You never know if there is going to be a 19th century lamp below.