Preparation

Packing

Preparing for this trip was a challenge because I’d never been to Europe before and had no idea what to bring. I’d say definitely pack light because you’re going to buy new things here and it’ll be hard to get everything home if you started out with a full bag (trust me). Definitely bring a warm, waterproof jacket though, even if it takes up room. It rains a lot in Brighton but it’s also really windy so umbrellas are usually pretty useless. A good jacket will be your saviour. Other things not to forget are a converter and a smaller backpack that you can carry on to planes, for when you take trips around Europe! Doing laundry is quite expensive so bring lots of socks and underwear too.

Transportation

I would highly recommend flying into Gatwick Airport instead of Heathrow. It’s smaller, cheaper and much closer to campus. All you have to do is take the train from there to Falmer station. Train tickets can be purchased at kiosks in the airport with cash or card. It might be best to have some cash on you when you first arrive, in case you have credit card troubles.

If you plan on traveling around the UK at all, or taking trips to London or the airport, definitely buy a 16-25 Railcard as soon as possible! They can be purchased online or at the One-Stop Travel Shop in Brighton. The card costs £30 but it gets you 1/3 off every time you buy a train ticket so it pays for itself really fast. My friends that didn’t buy one said they really wish they had!

There’s also a good bus service in Brighton. Again, you can buy a bus pass at the One-Stop Travel Shop. There’s also an app (Brighton and Hove Buses) that can be used to purchase and display tickets. This is a good option, but make sure your phone doesn’t die when you’re out or they’ll make you buy another ticket!

Finances

For the most part, you should be fine using major credit cards in England. If you’d rather have a local account though, your best bet is Santander. Cost of living is a bit high here, and the pound is a lot stronger than the dollar (about 2 to 1), so be prepared for that. You can get much cheaper groceries in town than on campus.
During Exchange

Arrival and Orientation

The student union made my arrival at Sussex really easy and stress free. They pick you up directly from the train station on campus and drive you to your residence, so there’s no way to get lost. The international orientation activities are a great way to meet new people! I would highly, highly recommend going to every single one, especially the fish and chips dinner on the first night, no matter how jet lagged or shy you’re feeling. I met all my best friends in that first week and couldn’t have asked for more amazing people to share this experience with.

Accommodation and living

There are some housing options in town, but I’m really glad I lived on campus this semester. I lived in East Slope, so I had 5 flatmates. We all shared a shower and a kitchen and all my flatmates were boys so yes, it was messy but I loved East Slope. It has a reputation for being a little run down but it’s actually great because (unlike a lot of the more expensive residences) there’s a real sense of community and my flatmates became like a family to me. If you do live on campus though, I’d encourage you to get out and go into Brighton as often as possible because it’s an amazing city and there’s always so much going on!

Academic details

I chose to take 2 classes within my major, and two outside of it. Exchange is a time to try things you wouldn’t do at home so I found studying outside of my area to be fun and exciting. The lectures are very similar to home, as are tutorials. However, you don’t spend nearly as much time in class. I had one or two classes a day, with Thursdays completely off, totaling about 10 hours a week, so you have a lot more free time than at home. However, this comes with the expectation that you’re doing work outside of class. If your class requires readings, DO THEM! There’s nothing worse than getting to finals and realizing you’re 12 weeks behind. Most of my class marks were based on only one or two assessments (presentation or paper, and a final exam). The grading system is also really different here. Instead of an A, you earn what’s called “a first”, which is anything above 70%. To pass you need 40%. However, it’s a lot harder to get 70% here than it is at home so look out for that.

Country information

Brighton is a wonderful, lively, quirky city on the ocean. I honestly can’t imagine a more wonderful home away from home. It does rains a lot but the sun comes out too, especially towards the end of term! Definitely take advantage of that and get some beach days and bonfires in.
London is amazing! It’s easy to take for granted because it’s so close but it’s one of my favourite cities in Europe. Check out the Natural History museum (I went 5 times and still didn’t see it all), the Globe Theater (£5 standing tickets!!) and Camden market. If you have a Railcard, a roundtrip ticket to London with tube service included is only about £12. Great day trip!

London

Law enforcement in downtown Brighton
I’d also recommend the trips put on by Sussex. I went on the Stonehenge trip, the Lion King (in London) and the Harry Potter studio tour and they were all fantastic. You get good value for your money and it beats having to work out travel logistics on your own.

In terms of leaving the country, there are really cheap flights to Scotland and Ireland, though I’d save those for the sunnier months if you can. One of my personal favourites was Amsterdam (if you go, definitely rent a bike)! Hostels are a great way to meet people (check out Hostelworld.com), especially if you’re traveling alone and looking for friends but if you’re with a big enough group, Airbnb can sometimes be a better deal. Most cities also offer free walking tours, which are fabulous, so jump on those as often as you can. (For any Harry Potter fans out there, there’s an excellent free Harry Potter tour in Edinburgh).

**Social and Extracurricular**

I swear Sussex has a society for everyone! There’s Salsa society, Doctor Who, Astronomy, Harry Potter, Wine Appreciation (do it), Mathematics and much more. Join them all at the beginning and then see what you like. I think I joined about 12, no joke, and ended up sticking with 2 in the end.

If you’re into going out for a drink, Brighton is full of cool places. Some of my personal favourites are Casablanca’s (a jazz club with great live music), The Globe (really chill pub with great student deals) and The Pavilion Tavern (lovingly known as PavTav, also with great deals if you go on a Monday or Thursday).

ALSO, football (soccer) if HUGE here. Definitely get yourself down to a Brighton game at some point. There are student price tickets and the stadium’s a 10 min walk off campus. Super worth it!
This semester has taught me so many things. My main advice is to take every single opportunity thrown your way. I know it’s cliché but you might not get the chance again. Also, keep a journal. It’s a pain sometimes but a year from now, you’ll be happy to have a record of what you did, even if it’s just point form.

Studying abroad has been the most incredible experience of my life. I’ve learned so much about myself and what’s important to me and I’ve been to so many amazing places in the last 6 months. The friends I’ve made are incredible and I know we’ll stay close even once we all go home. If you’re on the fence about this, DO IT. You absolutely will not regret it.