Before

Prep

In terms of visas, the UK website should outline everything you need upon arrival at the airport so make sure you have those, especially the letter of admission into Sussex. The border guards will issue you a passport stamp that will have a date of expiry. The process may be different if you’re planning on working there, but I had the student visa that was free.

Packing

Packing to go on vacation versus moving to a different country for 4 – 6 months are completely different! That being said, pack as lightly as you can. The things you think you need, you may not even wear. There’s plenty of shopping in Brighton (Primark is a life saver and Boots or Superdrug for hygiene essentials), so you’ll never have to worry about not having clothes. Pack some clothing essential (e.g. Sweatets, jeans and boots) for the colder weather as Brighton winters are what you might be used to here. The one must that you should bring (apart from lots of underwear and socks to avoid doing laundry a lot), is a rain jacket. Umbrellas are useless in Brighton because of how windy it is.

Don’t forget convertors for your electronics and a smaller bag/carry on suitcase if you plan on traveling within Europe/the UK.

Travel and Transport

Flying into Gatwick is a lot cheaper and closer to Brighton than Heathrow is, but it’s not impossible to get to Brighton from Heathrow. Regardless of which airport you fly into, taking the train is the cheapest, fastest and easiest option to get to Brighton. A train from Gatwick Airport to Falmer station will you send you right to the university campus.

Taking the bus is the easiest way to get around town. There’s one day, three day and three month bus passes that will work on all buses (but make sure you buy one that will work for night buses), throughout Brighton and Hove. It’s a little bit cheaper to buy a bus pass on your phone, but not by that much. You can also buy a physical card from the 1 Stop Travel Shop along North Street. Definitely look into purchasing a 16-25 rail card from Brighton station as it will cut the cost of your train rides by 1/3 for only £30! This is super useful especially if you plan to travel out of Gatwick/to other parts of the UK.

Financials
The UK isn’t cheap, but don’t let that scare you. Try to cut down on costs by using grocery stores in town (Aldi, Sainsbury, the Open Market for fruit and veg or the student market every Tuesday on campus) versus the Co-op on campus. Eating in and prepping your own food also helps cut costs.

Most of my friends used major credit cards during the exchange and they didn’t have any problems. They tended to take out cash in certain amounts to avoid having to pay fees every time they used it. Santander also offers a session through the student union orientation day to help exchange students set up a British account if you’re looking into that as well. Carry around some cash on you at all times though as a rule of thumb.

**During**

*Arrival and orientation*

I had a different experience living in off-campus housing so I’m not sure if the student union will drive you to your residence if you live in town. For on-campus accommodation, they’ll pick you up from Falmer station and drive you to your residence!

I highly recommend going to the orientation sessions, especially the fish and chips night. You’ll meet other exchange students that way and find out who shares modules with you. The student union also holds other socials and events that sell out fast, so try and go to as many as you can! I can’t stress how much I enjoyed myself on the trips I went on (especially the Harry Potter tour).

*Accommodation and living*

I lived off-campus in a university managed house with 10 other students but I wouldn’t change that experience for the world.

It was a little disappointing at first to hear that I had been placed off-campus, but my housemates became some of my best friends. Having a house closer to town was also nice because I could come and go a lot easier than my friends that lived on campus. It felt more like living in Brighton than simply being on exchange there.

*Academic details*

Lectures and tutorials (or seminars as they call them), are very similar to what you’re used to at SFU. The only big differences that I noticed was that it felt like less work because apart from a presentation in each of my classes, I only had to hand in essays at the end of term. This will probably vary from faculty to faculty, but you’ll have a lot of free time than you may be used to. Just keep up with your readings and you shouldn’t have a problem at the end of term! The second difference was the grading system. Don’t be shocked if you only get below 80% on
assignments back – their marking system is different and anything above 70% is considered excellent. A pass in the UK is 40%.

Country information

Like Vancouver, Brighton and the UK in general, see a lot of rain. Brighton however is still quirky and a city that will quickly begin to feel like home a month or two in.

Brighton is smaller than Vancouver and London, but it has a ton of character. There are tons of coffee shops and cute little vintage stores in the Lanes, so be sure to explore! The sea front is beautiful on a sunny day, and the pier and its penny arcades are something you definitely need to check out. There’s also a really easy hike nearby that’s beautiful and a bus ride away (take the 12X from town) called the Seven Sisters!

The Seven Sister Cliffs

Brighton Pier

The other nice thing about Brighton is that it’s an hour by train to London. This makes for nice day trips or even weekend trips if you can find a good deal at a hostel in town! It’s such a big city that you’ll always find something to do. The university also holds some day trips into London that you should take advantage of if you haven’t been to the city before.

You can find cheap flights to Ireland and Scotland via Ryanair. Flying is definitely cheaper than taking a train to those places, but by taking the train you can see more of the country. If you’re a Doctor Who fan, I’d recommend taking a trip to Cardiff and doing the Doctor Who experience there! It was definitely worth the trek and the money.
In terms of flying elsewhere in Europe, I used Skyscanner to find flights. Accommodation wise, I tended to stay in Airbnb’s because it was cheaper with the amount of people I was with. Depending on the time of year you’re traveling, it may be cheaper than a hostel. Most cities I went to had free walking tours, and be sure to bring your student card places because there may be cheaper fees to get into attractions and sights if you do. If there’s something specific you really want to see in a city, I’d recommend Viator. They provide really good guided tours and there are sometimes deals you can cash in on. My friend and I never would have been able to make it to the Cliffs of Moher for example if we hadn’t gone on a guided tour.

The Cliffs of Moher

Sussex’s Holi Festival

Social and extracurricular

There’s a society for everyone and everything under the sun – don’t be shy and attend what you think will interest you, and I’m sure you’ll find something that will stick. Some sports clubs offer free trial periods in the first week or so of the term so check those out.

The UK is big on its social culture, and there are no shortage of pubs or places to get a drink. Burgers and Cocktails has some good food and great drinks with a nice student discount and happy hour deal. The Globe is a local student pub in town, and The Font has cheap pints on Tuesday. Meanwhile, East Slope Bar and Falmer Bar on campus are student social hubs!
After

- Check your baggage dimensions before flying on budget airlines! They’re cheap (and therefore stingy) for a reason.
- Keep extra copies of your passport just in case.
- Always travel back into the UK with your admission letter from Sussex – sometimes the border guards will ask to see it.
- Google Maps will be your best friend in a foreign country.

It’s cliché and something that every exchange student I have ever met says but: this exchange is something I wouldn’t trade for the world and what do it again if I could. I met friends that I’ll stay friends with forever, saw the world a different way by traveling with my friends, and grew in a way I wouldn’t have been able to otherwise. It seems daunting and scary, but I promise every moment will be worth it!