



Living & Learning  
in Britain



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A practical and cultural guide to  
students visiting Britain to learn English

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## Welcome!

Being a student in another country is a great opportunity. These pages will help you to enjoy your stay and make the most of your learning experience in Britain.

Chapters 1, 2 and 6 give you information and advice on important practical matters such as travel, money, insurance, health and so on.

Small differences in the way people do things can make a big difference. Part of your learning experience will be to notice, understand and deal with cultural differences. It helps to be prepared. How much do you know about life in Britain? If you like, log on to the Web and try the quiz on [www.kestrel-books.co.uk](http://www.kestrel-books.co.uk) and click on 'Brit Quiz'.

It is not easy to be a foreigner in another country. For example, Americans speak the same language as the British and watch British films and TV programmes. However even Americans can be confused by British customs, behaviour and use of language when they visit the UK.

*'America and Britain are two countries divided by the same language.'*

*George Bernard Shaw, playwright and author*

You will spend a lot of time with a host family or in a student residence. If you stay with a host family you can learn a lot from them. In a student residence you can become lifelong friends with students from other countries. It is important to be 'open' to the possibilities. Chapter 3 will give you some ideas on how to make your stay as pleasant and rewarding as possible.

Educational culture is different in every country. In British education, teachers expect students over 16 years old to be independent and self-motivated learners. Chapter 4 explains what this means in practice and how you can make the most of your time in the classroom or other learning environments.

Meeting people and making friends is not always easy, especially when you are from another country. Chapter 5 explains how this works in Britain, and suggests ways for you to enjoy your free time.

We hope you enjoy your stay in Britain and that you gain the knowledge you want. More than that, we hope you return home with many fond memories.

*Anthony Cutler and Jill Doubleday*

### **PS A further reading tip**

If you would like to read an entertaining magazine-style introduction to life, culture and learning in Britain, try 'Just Connect - a guide to living and learning in Britain', written by Robert Teed and illustrated by Felix Bennett. Kestrel Books, 2008. ISBN 978-0-9548840-8-6. 96 pages with 95 illustrations.

You can buy it online at [www.kestrel-books.co.uk](http://www.kestrel-books.co.uk). For best prices send an email to [info@kestrel-books.co.uk](mailto:info@kestrel-books.co.uk) and say that you are a student. Or you can buy it from Waterstone's, Blackwell, John Smith bookshops or online from the Bournemouth English Book Centre.

# 1 Taking Off

## Before you leave, think!

Ask yourself and answer these important questions before you leave for Britain.

- Is my passport valid?  Yes  No
- Have I got the visas I need?  Yes  No
- Do I need a single visa or multiple visas?  Single  Multiple
- Have I got a 'Letter of Consent' from the school or college in Britain?  Yes  No
- Have I arranged somewhere to stay?  Yes  No
- Do I have enough money for my time in Britain?  Yes  No
- Can I prove to the British authorities that I have enough money for my stay?  Yes  No
- Do I have addresses and telephone numbers for both my school and host family in Britain?  Yes  No
- Do I have the telephone number of my country's Embassy in Britain?  Yes  No
- Do I know how to get to the school when I arrive in Britain?  Yes  No
- Do I have enough money to get to the school or host family when I arrive?  Yes  No
- Have I told my host family and the school about my travel arrangements and arrival times?  Yes  No



If you have positive answers to these questions, you are ready to travel.  
For more information go to [pages 23-27](#).

# 2 Touching Down

If you are from a European Union country you should not have to answer many questions at the Immigration desk when you arrive. But if you are from another part of the world this is your first chance to practise your English in Britain.

When you answer questions from Immigration Officers it is important to be clear and to tell the truth. Make sure you have these documents to show to the Officers:

- o Your passport with the visas you need.
- o Your 'Letter' or 'Certificate of Acceptance' from the school.
- o Any documents from your bank to show that you have enough money for your stay in Britain.
- o Try to speak clearly and slowly. Be polite, and don't worry!

Here are some key questions that Immigration Officers usually ask. Notice that they could ask the same question in different ways. Practise your answers.

What is your name?  
What's your name?  
What's your first name?  
What's your family name?  
What is your last name?

What is your date of birth?  
When were you born?

How long are you staying?  
How long do you intend to stay?

What is the purpose of your visit?  
Why are you here?

Have you got a letter from the school/college?  
Do you have a letter from the school/college?

Have you paid the school fees?  
Are your school fees paid?  
Have you paid a deposit?

Have you got a return ticket?  
Do you have a return ticket?

Where will you stay?  
Where are you staying?  
What's your address in the UK?

Is this your first visit to the UK?  
Have you been to the UK before?

Will you be working in the UK?  
Do you intend to work in the UK?  
Are you planning to get a job here?

Have you got enough money to live on?

Do you have enough money for your stay?



(For more on immigration see [page 24](#) in the Important Information section)

## Language tip

All languages have words and expressions that show politeness and respect. British people use 'please', 'thank you' and 'thanks'. It doesn't matter if you are speaking to someone younger or older than you. In Britain it is important to be polite and show respect to everyone you meet. The Immigration Officer may say 'thank you' when you give him or her a document. Say 'thank you' when the Officer gives it back.

English speakers usually add *please*, *thank you* or *thanks* when they accept or refuse an offer.

Would you like a drink? Yes, please./No, thanks.

Just saying 'yes' or 'no' sounds rude to native English speakers in Britain.

## Study tip

It is a good idea to buy a notebook so that you can make a record of your stay in Britain.

Carry the notebook with you and write down all the things that are strange or interesting in some way. Watch what people do in different situations. Is it similar or not to the way people behave in your country? Write down any common words or phrases that people use when they speak to each other. You can then ask your British friends, host family or teachers when and why people use these expressions in these situations.



At the end of your stay you will have an interesting record of how you experienced language, customs and life in Britain.

# 3 Feeling at Home

Your host family will do their best to make you feel 'at home', but some things will seem strange at first. The same is true if you are staying in a student hostel or residence. The important thing is to be 'open' to the new culture.

## British families

Families in Britain may be different to families in your country. For example, women usually have a job, even when they are married. Many women go back to work after having a baby, and they often do most of the housework and cooking. Some host families are older people whose children have left home.

## Your host family

What will your host family try to do for you?

They will...

- o do their best to make you feel at home and treat you as a member of the family.
- o encourage you to speak English as much as possible.
- o give you a clean and comfortable room where you can sleep, relax and study.
- o make sure you have enough to eat.
- o show concern for your health, safety and welfare during your stay.
- o respect your cultural background.
- o be sensitive to your needs.
- o keep in touch with your school and help with any problems you have.

**Notice that not all host families have computers with internet or broadband connections. If you really need an internet or broadband connection, ask your school or college to arrange this before you arrive.**

As a new member of the family you will take part in the normal routine of family life in Britain. You will probably meet other members of the family, as well as friends and neighbours. These will be good opportunities to practise your English.

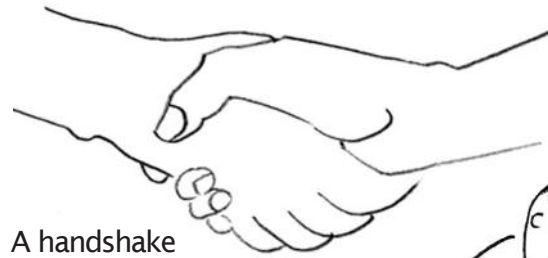
## Greetings and names

British people often greet each other with a handshake when they meet for the first time. Friends and relatives often give each other a hug. Your host family may ask you what is usual in your culture, so that you feel comfortable.

Ask the family members what you should call them. Most of them will be happy for you to use their first names.

## Study tip

Watch how British people greet each other. Listen to what they say. Can you tell how close or friendly they are by what they say and do? How does this compare with your culture?



A handshake



Close friends and family give each other a hug.

## How can you fit in with your host family?

Every household has its rules about what members should or should not do. Therefore it is important to be sensitive to the rules of the house. In some households the fridge door is a place where you will find lists of school timetables, house rules, shopping lists and other important reminders.

The most important rule is to be considerate. Always consider other people's needs and feelings. Here are some general tips on how to fit in with your host family.

## Punctuality

Punctuality, or 'being on time', is important in the UK. If your classes start at 9am it is important to be there at 8.55am ready to begin. In the same way, it is important to be on time for meals with your homestay family or at the hall of residence. If you have other appointments make sure you turn up on time.

In the UK punctuality is not so important for some social occasions, such as parties. Hosts will often say 7 o'clock meaning that it's OK to turn up at 7.30. If you are not sure, ask your hosts what time they would prefer you to turn up.

# 3 Feeling at Home

Remember that you are sharing a home, not staying in a hotel.

Ask if you should wear slippers, not shoes, in the house.

Do not smoke anywhere in the house. If you are a smoker, ask where you can smoke. You may have to go into the garden or somewhere else outside.

If you are going to be late home, or plan to stay away overnight, tell your host family.

Your host will give you a key or keys to the house. Look after these keys and try not to lose them. If you are the only person at home, always shut the windows and lock the doors when you leave.

If you want to invite a friend home, ask your hosts if it's OK with them.

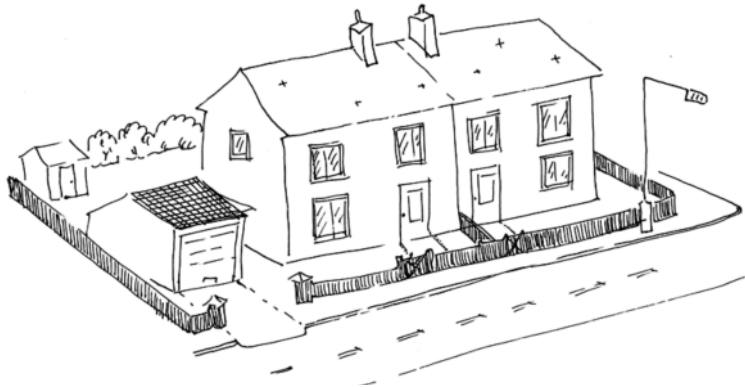
Your host family may invite friends for dinner or a party, and they may invite you too. However, sometimes they may not.

Respect their wishes.

If you are not sure about something, just ask. You can begin: 'Is it OK if I...'. Remember that British people can be quite indirect, so when they say 'Well, not really' they mean 'Absolutely not!'

## A house tour

Now let's take a tour round a 'typical' British home and look at how people interact in the rooms.



## Your room

Most houses in Britain have two floors and your room will usually be upstairs. You may have a room to yourself or a shared room with another student. Your hosts will make sure that you have a comfortable bed and space to store your clothes and belongings. You may also have a bedside light, a table or desk, a desk lamp and a chair. Your hosts will usually be happy to clean your room, but you can do this yourself if you prefer. In any case you should try to keep your room tidy. Your hosts will give you clean bedclothes (duvet cover, sheets and pillowcases). They may change the bedclothes for you, or you may have to change them yourself. If you want to know what your room will be like, ask the school for details before you arrive.

## Things to remember about your room

You will not have a key to your room. You will be in a family home, not a hotel. Homes in Britain do not usually have locks on bedroom doors.

You must keep your room clean and tidy.

Don't forget to make your bed each morning and tidy the floor area.

Different countries have different heating systems. Most homes in Britain have central heating, so you will have a radiator in your room. The heating will run on electricity, gas or heating oil. To save energy and heating costs, the heating will be off during the night when you are asleep. If you are cold, ask for extra blankets.

If you want to move any of the furniture, ask your hosts first.

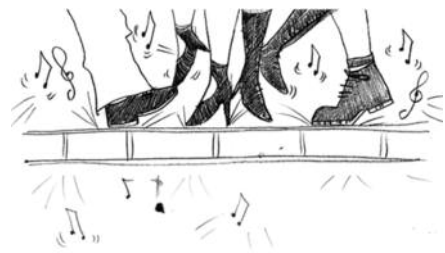
If you have brought electrical items with you, always ask before using them. Your hosts will check to make sure the voltage is correct. The voltage in the UK is almost always 230 volts.

Also ask permission if you want to put posters or pictures on the wall.

It's OK to listen to music in your room, but don't play it too loud.

Be careful with furniture and other objects in the room. If anything breaks, tell the host family immediately. Offer to pay if you are responsible.

If you want to bring friends home, ask your host first. If you go to your room, be considerate. Do not make a lot of noise as this may disturb other members of the family.

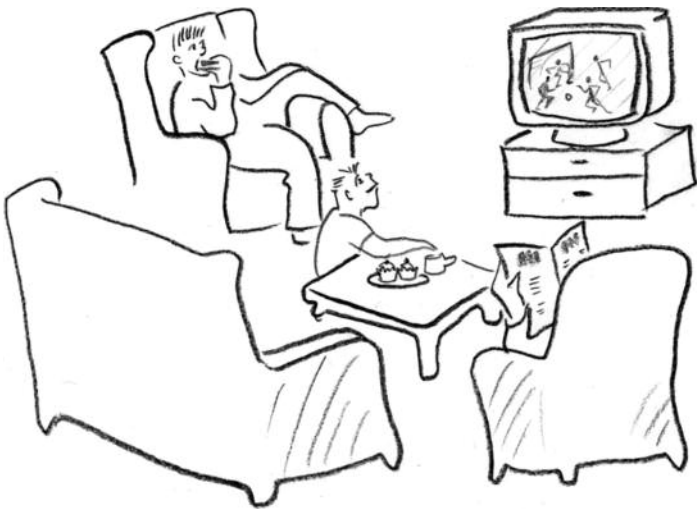


# 3 Feeling at Home

## The living room

This is where many families relax, read the newspapers, watch television, and entertain their friends. Some people call it the 'sitting room' or 'lounge'. Family members may have their favourite armchairs.

Part of the living room may be a dining area. Some houses have a separate dining room. Some families eat most of their meals in the kitchen, but use the dining or living room on special occasions. Sometimes people eat while watching television if a favourite programme is on at the same time.



## Things to remember about the living room

- o Find out if family members have favourite chairs or armchairs.
- o Use the chairs you are offered.
- o Don't put your feet up on the furniture.
- o Always ask if you want to turn on the television or change the channel.
- o If you read books or newspapers, put them away tidily when you have finished.
- o If you eat or have a drink in the living room always take the cups, plates and cutlery to the kitchen when you have finished.

## The dining area

Mealtimes, especially evening meals, are opportunities to talk. Your hosts may be interested in what you have done, seen and learnt. Don't miss this opportunity. Ask them about anything new, unusual or strange that you have seen or heard. This is usually a good time to ask them questions and practise your English.

It is important to be on time for meals. If you are

going to be late, phone and explain. Your hosts will keep a meal for you. Tell your hosts if you will be eating somewhere else that day.

## Language tip

When you don't know people very well, two very useful words when making requests or offers are 'could' and 'would'.

Could you pass the butter, please?

Could I have some bread?

Would you like some orange juice?

## Study tip

Notice how people make requests or offers in English. Write down some examples in your notebook. Can you tell how well these people know each other? Are some people more direct to each other? Why is this?

What language would you use to make requests or offers to different English speakers you know?

## Things to remember when eating in the dining area

- o Don't sit in someone else's favourite chair. Ask which chair you should sit in.
- o It is polite to wait until everyone has their food before starting to eat. There is no special word or phrase that everyone says before eating. Your host may say something like 'Please start' or 'Do begin'.
- o However, it is not rude to be the only person eating, so you do not have to stop when everyone else has finished.
- o Be considerate. Pass things like salt and pepper, bread and butter, when people need them.
- o Use a napkin if you have one. Spread it on your lap. You can use it to wipe your lips and fingers when necessary. British people don't use a hot towel to wipe their hands at the table.
- o When you have finished, place your knife and fork side by side on your plate. Fold the napkin and place it beside the plate.
- o You do not have to eat everything on your plate, but it is polite to eat most of it.
- o Always offer to help clear the table. Take things into the kitchen area until the table is clear. Men and women, boys and girls help with this in most families.



# 3 Feeling at Home

## Study tip

In what ways are table manners different in Britain? Observe and make notes. Your host family may not be typical, so observe other people in cafeterias and restaurants. Are there any manners you like or dislike? Write down what they are and why.

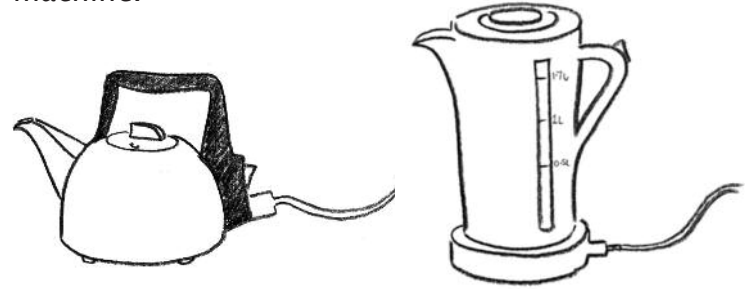
## The kitchen

Some families eat most of their meals in the kitchen. They only eat in the dining or living room on special occasions. There will usually be a washing machine and there might be a dishwasher. In some homes there will be separate areas for cleaning materials and equipment for doing the laundry (washing clothes). These are often called utility rooms. There may be a separate larder or cupboard for storing some food.

## Things to remember about the kitchen

- o Ask your host what you may or may not do in the kitchen. Usually you will be allowed to make hot drinks and snacks by yourself, but don't take food from the cupboards or fridge without asking first.
- o Keep the kitchen clean and tidy. If you have a drink or a snack, put glasses, cups and plates away when you have finished.

o A very important item in most British kitchens is the electric kettle. This boils water for tea and coffee. Teabags and instant coffee are very popular because they are quick and convenient. On the other hand, your hosts may prefer to make tea in a teapot. They may make coffee in a filter machine, a percolator or an espresso machine.



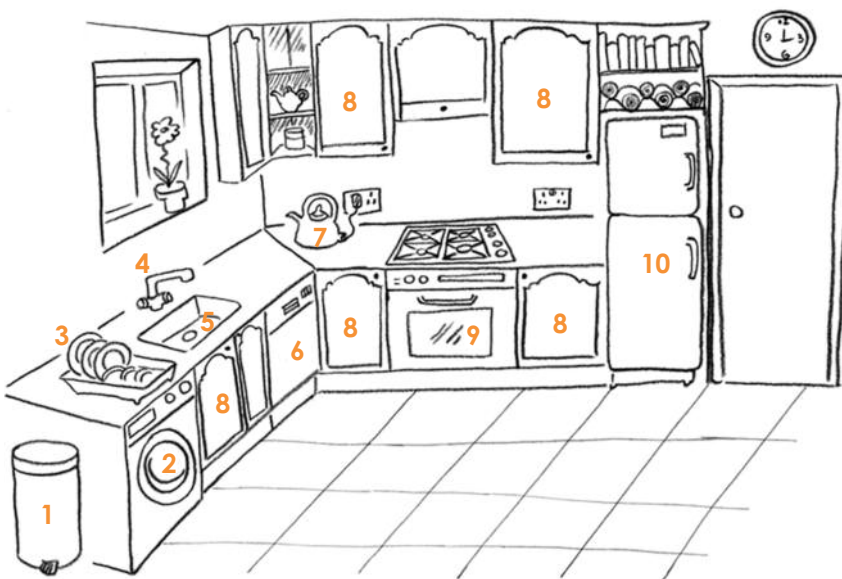
Two styles of electric kettle – a very important part of a British kitchen

- o Offer to wash up or dry the dishes after a meal. Both males and females do this in Britain.
- o In Britain, people don't always rinse the dishes with clean water after they have washed them.
- o Some families have a dishwasher. Offer to help load or unload the machine when necessary.
- o Put things back in cupboards and drawers in the places where you found them. If you drop or spill anything, clean it up.
- o Always ask what to use for the cleaning.
- o Don't forget to put things back in the fridge and cupboards when you have finished with them.
- o If you break anything, apologise and offer to pay for it.

## Recycling

You may be surprised at how little is recycled in Britain, but things are getting better! For example, the British now recycle some, but not all, plastic products. Your country probably recycles all kinds of plastic. The usual household items for recycling are glass (bottles and jars), tin cans, and paper (newspapers, magazines, etc).

Check if your family has separate bins for rubbish to be recycled.



1 rubbish bin 2 washing machine 3 drying rack 4 mixer tap 5 sink 6 dishwasher  
7 electric kettle 8 cupboards 9 cooker (gas or electric) 10 fridge-freezer

# 3 Feeling at Home

## Food

Many visitors to Britain find the food boring and bland. Bland means without spice, taste or interest. The British often boil vegetables until they are soft. They roast, grill or fry meat, often without spices or herbs. That's why the British use salt, pepper and sauces such as tomato ketchup, mustard and gravy.

The good news is that British people eat food from other countries too, especially Italian, Chinese and Indian dishes. In large British cities you will find restaurants offering foods from many different countries. *Chicken tikka masala* is as popular as fish and chips these days. Although this is an Indian-style dish, it was invented by an Indian chef working in Glasgow.

Many Britons, both men and women, take an interest in food and cooking. Recipe books are bestsellers and cookery programmes are very popular. TV chefs are some of the most famous people in Britain. On the other hand, many people eat 'fast food' such as pizzas and hamburgers. On average the British work more hours a week than most other Europeans. People don't have much time to shop for and cook fresh food. Supermarkets sell 'convenience food', pre-cooked dishes that can be heated up and served in 5 to 20 minutes. The British also buy a lot of frozen and tinned food. The microwave oven is a great time saver in many homes.

'In the home where I stayed the family didn't sit down together for meals. They just took whatever they wanted from the freezer, cooked it in the microwave oven and ate it in front of the television.' **Marta from Slovakia**

'I had heard that British food was awful. But the family I stayed with loved good food. They bought fresh vegetables and meat, organic if possible, and spent time experimenting with new and interesting recipes. I took some recipes home with me and introduced them to my family.' **Ryota from Japan**

In short, the food scene in Britain is mixed. Here is an idea of what you might expect during a normal week. Notice that meal times may differ from those in your country.

## Breakfast

This is often a quick meal, usually between 7am and 8am just before people leave home for work or school. Some people eat it standing up if they are in a hurry.

**Light breakfasts** are common, especially during the working week. They include:

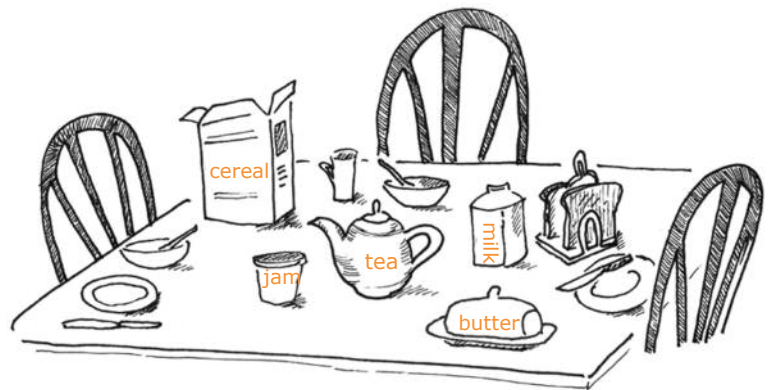
Cereal (such as cornflakes, muesli, etc) with milk

Toast and jam or marmalade

A glass of juice (orange, grapefruit, etc)

Tea or coffee. Tea is usually black with milk added and sometimes sugar.

**Notice** that this is a cold food breakfast. If you are used to warm food for breakfast you may prefer the cooked breakfast.



**Cooked breakfasts** are less common, but some people eat:

Eggs – boiled, scrambled, poached or fried, with toast.

Notice how the British eat boiled eggs with a teaspoon.

A traditional breakfast: a choice of fried sausages, bacon, eggs, tomatoes, mushrooms, baked beans and bread. This is a big meal and people usually eat it when they are on holiday or staying in hotels. Some people may eat it if they have physical jobs and need to eat a lot for breakfast.

# 3 Feeling at Home

## Mid-morning break

Usually a short break for a snack and a hot drink at about 11 o'clock. Tea or coffee with biscuits, a chocolate bar, crisps or fruit. You will notice that British people eat a lot of snacks between meals, such as fruit, biscuits, crisps ('potato chips' in American English), and chocolate bars. Eating snacks in the street is quite normal.

## Lunch

Lunch is usually eaten at some time between 12 and 1.30pm. Lunch usually lasts 30 to 60 minutes. Some families call this 'dinner'.

Most people eat a light lunch on working days. You may get a packed lunch from your hosts to take with you to school. This usually includes sandwiches, some fruit such as an apple or orange, and a biscuit or chocolate snack of some kind. Your host will ask what you prefer. You can then buy a hot or cold drink to go with it. For lunch most Britons choose from:  
Sandwiches/ Pizza/ A bowl of soup/ Cold meat with salad/ A jacket potato/ Baked beans on toast\*/ A burger/ A heated 'ready' meal\*  
(\*These lunches are usually prepared at home)  
To one of these many people add a packet of crisps, fruit or chocolate.

## Mid-afternoon break

Another short break for a hot drink and snack. Remember, British people eat a lot of snacks.

## Dinner

Usually early evening at any time between 6pm and 8pm. Some families call this meal 'tea' or 'supper'.

What do people usually eat for dinner?

## Traditional British food

Meat (beef, chicken, pork or lamb) or fish with potatoes, boiled vegetables and gravy. The meat is usually roasted, fried or grilled. Meat pies are also popular. For example, chicken pie, steak and kidney pie, and shepherd's pie (with minced meat and mashed potato). In general you may find that the British eat more meat than in your

country. The potatoes may be boiled, mashed, roasted or baked. Chips are popular in Britain, especially in families with young children. People buy them in plastic bags and keep them in the freezer. They cook the chips from frozen in deep fat fryers, pans or ovens. Common vegetables: carrots, peas, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, broccoli, green beans. In the winter, stew is popular. This is like a thick soup, usually with meat and vegetables. For dessert: apple pie, ice cream, cake or fruit. The British often eat dessert as the last part of a main meal.

## International food

- o Pasta (Spaghetti Bolognese, lasagne, ravioli)
- o Pizza
- o Curry with rice

## Takeaways (collected from a shop or restaurant and eaten at home)

- o Fish and chips
- o Chinese food
- o Indian food
- o Pizza
- o Hamburgers

## Meals at weekends

Meals and meal times may be different at weekends if people are not working. Some families like to enjoy their free time without having to spend a lot of time cooking. Takeaways are popular time savers at weekends. Other families may enjoy cooking and having a big family meal. This used to happen on Sundays, but more and more families now have a meal with the whole family together on Friday evenings. Outdoor barbecues in people's gardens are also popular during warm weather.



# 3 Feeling at Home

## Special diets

More and more people are becoming *vegetarian*. This means they do not eat meat. Others are *vegan*. They do not eat anything connected to animals, such as meat, cheese, milk and eggs.

Some people have allergies to wheat or dairy products and cannot eat them.

Others do not eat certain foods for religious reasons.

*If you cannot or do not want to eat certain foods for any reason, tell your school about it before you come to Britain. The school can then choose the right family for you.*

## Study tips

Watch what, how and when British people eat. Do you notice differences between British families? How are eating habits different from your country? For example, what fruit do the British generally eat and how do they eat it? Make notes.

Also write down recipes that you would like to take back to your own country. Ask your host for recipes or copy them from recipe books.

Ask other students about their eating experiences in Britain. Is their experience similar or different to yours?

## Things to remember about food and eating with your hosts

o Expect the food to be different. Try to be 'open-minded'. Take the opportunity to try lots of new, different foods. You might like them.

o Be prepared to try everything once. You only have to taste it. If you don't like it, you won't have to eat it.

o Tell your school and your hosts *before you arrive* if you have a special diet, especially if you are a vegetarian or cannot eat certain foods. They will be happy to help you.

o Tell your hosts what you like and don't like. They will not be offended.

o If you have any difficulties with the amount or quality of the food you get with the host family, speak to the Welfare and Accommodation Officers at your school or college. They will be able to advise and help you.

o If you really miss food from your country, offer to make your host family a meal. Most supermarkets sell international food and spices.

o Cold water from the tap is perfectly safe in Britain. However, many people prefer bottled water.

## Language tips

Here are some polite questions and answers you can use while eating with your host family.

**Question:** Would you like a second helping? (= would you like some more?)

**Answer:** Yes, please

OR

**Answer:** No, thank you. That was very nice but I'm full up now. (= I can't eat any more)

OR

**Answer:** No, thank you. That was delicious but I want to save some room for dessert.

**Question:** You haven't eaten very much. Didn't you like it?

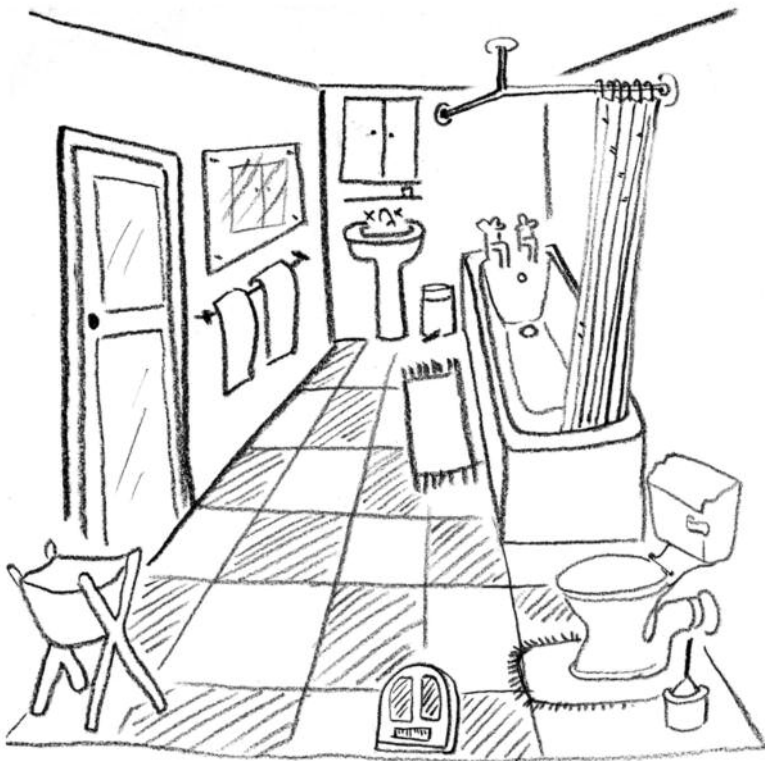
**Answer:** It was lovely. I had a big lunch/I don't feel very hungry tonight.

# 3 Feeling at Home

## The bathroom and toilet

Look at this drawing of a typical British bathroom. How is it different from bathrooms in your country?

If you share a bathroom with the rest of the family it is important to know the house rules or customs. For example, in the mornings, people usually have a routine. That is, they use the bathroom at about the same time every morning before having breakfast and going off to work. You can ask your hosts what times are best for you to use the bathroom for a shower or bath. Again, the most important rules are to be considerate and to be sensitive to other people's needs.



## How do British people keep clean?

They wash using soap, a flannel or a sponge. They take a shower, especially if they don't have much time. They take a hot bath. This is often used as a method of relaxation. Some people have a quick shower after their bath.

## Using the bathroom

Just as you do at home, think about others. Families have slightly different ways of doing

things.

Ask what time the bathroom is free, and how long you should spend in there.

Tell someone when you plan to have a bath or shower, especially if the only toilet in the house is in the bathroom.

Ask about hot water: in many homes the British heat water as they need it, to save electricity, gas or oil. In some homes they use a timer to heat the water at fixed times.

Many bathrooms have separate hot and cold taps. Be careful! The water can get very hot from one and very cold from the other.

Try not to waste water. Some homes have a water meter, and families have to pay for the amount of water they use.

Many British bathrooms have carpets or mats on the floor. Some bathrooms have mats to protect the floor or carpet from water. Use these in the same way as your hosts.

Try to keep the floor dry: don't fill the bath up to the top and remember to keep the shower curtain inside the bath tub.

Only use your own towel in the bathroom, and ask your host family where you should put it to dry. Don't leave it on the floor - remember you are not in a hotel!

Rinse out the bath and basin - leave them clean for the next person. Try to leave the floor dry.

Ask your host family where to keep your toiletries. Don't leave medicines where young children can get them.

Remember to lock the bathroom door!

## The toilet

There are some very important things to remember about using the toilet.

Always flush the toilet after you have used it. Put *all* soiled paper in the toilet.

Wrap sanitary items in a plastic or paper bag and put them in the waste bin which will be beside the toilet.

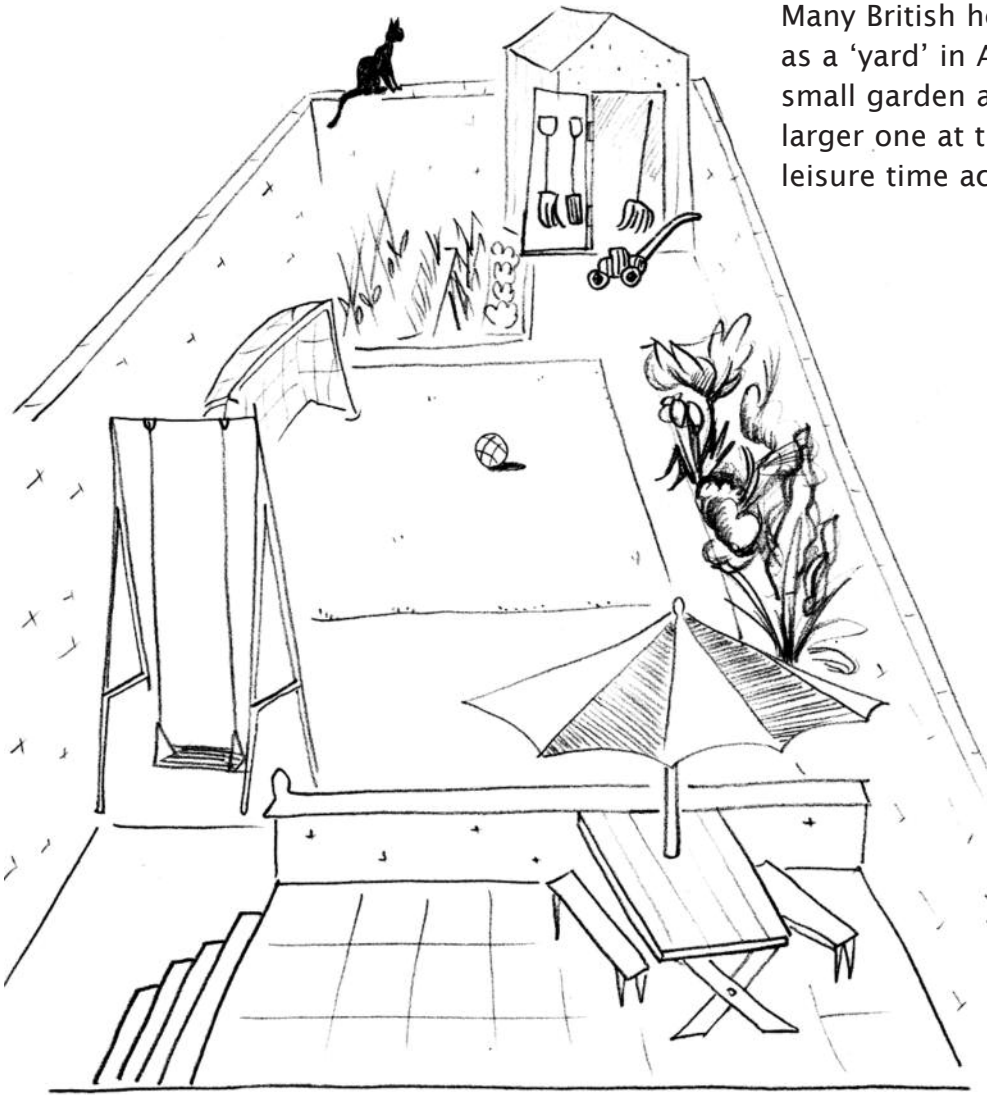
If you use the last piece of toilet paper, put another toilet roll in the toilet roll holder, or tell your host that another is needed.

Remember to follow any instructions your hosts give you about using the toilet.

# 3 Feeling at Home

## The garden

Many British homes have a garden (also known as a 'yard' in American English). There is often a small garden at the front of the house and a larger one at the back. Gardening is a common leisure time activity for many people



## Pets

Pets are popular in Britain – nearly 50% of homes have one. If you don't like pets, tell your school in advance so that they can choose a family without pets for you.

The most popular pets are fish, cats, dogs, rabbits, budgerigars, hamsters and guinea pigs.

'I was amazed. People keep pet animals in my country. But the British treat their pets like children!' Alicia from Chile

# 4 Learning in Britain

Every country has its own educational culture.

Studying in Britain is not just a question of *what* you will study but also *how* you will study it.

British teachers expect learners to become responsible, independent, autonomous and self-motivated. What does this mean in practice?

- o Most teachers in language schools in Britain are informal. You can call them by their first names.
- o Learners should follow the course and complete their homework or assignments on time. If you are ill or have other good reasons for not finishing work on time, your teachers will be understanding and give you as much help as they can. However teachers cannot help if students don't do any work.
- o Teachers appreciate students who know what their goals are. This could be to learn your subject for a special purpose, to pass an exam, to qualify for a job, or to study the subject as deeply as possible. If you are clear about your goals, your teachers can advise you on how to achieve them.
- o British teachers will not tell you the answers to questions. They will not give you some material and tell you to memorise the contents.
- o In Britain you can find information to help with your studies in many places - in libraries, bookshops, online, and through television and radio programmes.

Teachers will tell you where you can find information and how you can use it. They will give you advice on how you can explore your subject and make discoveries for yourself. However you must be willing to go to teachers and ask for their help and advice. If you do, teachers will be happy to help, but they expect you to do the work.

- o Questions are the key to education. If you ask your teachers good, relevant questions you will show that you are interested in the subject. This also makes the classroom a more interesting place for learning. British teachers like being asked questions. Your fellow students are glad if you ask questions because it helps them learn too.
- o Teachers will ask you to speak during classes or seminars. This is part of the learning process, especially in language classes but also in other subjects. Speaking will help you form opinions and share them with others. When you speak, your teachers are not judging or testing you. They are giving you a learning opportunity. The more you speak, the more you will improve, especially if you

are a language learner.

- o Do not be surprised if your teachers make jokes. Many teachers like to create a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom. Studies show that many people learn better when they are not worried. It is also natural in Britain to make or share jokes during both work and leisure.



'Have you heard the joke about the visitor to Britain who had trouble pronouncing words like cough, enough, and though? He gave up when he saw a newspaper headline: Exams pronounced tough.'

- o British schools and college timetables have 'free' study periods. During this time you can study alone and make use of resources such as libraries and computers. Teachers expect you to make the best use of your time without being told what to do. Of course, you can always ask teachers for advice on how to use resources during these 'free' study periods.
- o Every group of students is different. Every class you are in will offer you learning opportunities. Your teacher will sometimes encourage members of the class to work together, in pairs, groups or the whole class. This might include work outside the classroom. These will be good learning opportunities. Think of your classmates as 'learning resources'. They can help you learn. You may also discover interests you have in common and become friends.

## Study tip

Watch how British teachers teach. Make notes. Ask yourself the questions below. The answers may change and develop during your stay.

- o Do British teachers create a relaxed and informal atmosphere in class?
- o If so, how do they do this?
- o Does this make learning easier or more difficult?
- o Is this different from your educational culture?
- o Which styles of teaching and learning suit you best?
- o Has your time in Britain helped you become a better learner?

# 5 Social Life and Society

## Living with a family in Britain

The family you stay with may be different from your own family in many ways.

In families with two parents and one or more children, the cost and pace of life usually mean that both parents have to work. They take young children to nursery schools, or pay carers to look after them during the working day.

Related families do not always live near each other as they did in the past. Even when families live close by, some people don't spend much time with their relatives. They rely on the friends they have made at work or through their social activities and other interests.

**'Friends are the family you choose for yourself.'**

**A new saying in Britain.**

The extended family, with three generations sharing the same home, is now rare in Britain. Social services, family members and private carers help elderly and disabled people to stay in their own homes for as long as possible. When this is not possible, the elderly move to care homes, also known as 'old people's homes'. Many older people say they prefer this because they can be independent and make friends among the other residents. On the other hand, elderly people can also be very lonely, and the care they receive is not always the best.

**'In my country families are close-knit. They spend time with each other every day. It's not like that in Britain.'**

**Dolnay from Turkey**

There are now many single-parent families in Britain. Children are cared for by one parent, usually the mother, for most of the week, but have time with their other parent on some weekends or some holidays. Sometimes the children have almost no contact with the other parent.

Many visitors to Britain think that British parents treat their offspring more like friends than children. It is true that relations between parents and children are generally more relaxed and less strict than they were in the past.

Young people often leave home to live in rented accommodation or their own houses and flats when they finish their education. Their parents may help them with money, but most young people try to become independent as quickly as possible. If they go to college or university, they may wait before getting married or starting a family. Those who leave school and get a job immediately may decide to start a family very quickly. That is why you will see some very young mothers in Britain.

You may stay with a retired couple, or you may be with a widow or widower who is living alone. Being a host to visiting students may be a way for them to earn some extra money and have some company.

However, it is quite possible to find yourself in a family with two parents, two young children, and plenty of relatives visiting regularly. Grandparents may look after children. You may meet lots of aunts, uncles and cousins, as well as family friends.

In short, family circumstances vary a lot in Britain today.

Here are some points to remember when spending time with British families.

- o Other nationalities often think the British are reserved. This is a first impression. The British may not embrace and kiss you on both cheeks when you first meet but, in time, they can show themselves to be very warm and considerate.
- o At first the British use 'small talk' when they don't know somebody well. This may include talking about the weather. But 'small talk' is often just a way of finding out what you have in common. It can quickly become 'big' or 'interesting' talk.
- o In some countries it is not the custom to say that you feel ill or upset. This is not so in Britain. If you are feeling unwell or upset, it is OK to say what the problem is. You will find most British people concerned and ready to help if they can.
- o As a general rule British women are good at talking about feelings. British men, on the other hand, like to think of themselves as problem solvers, finding practical solutions to practical problems.



# 5 Social Life and Society

- o Men and women are treated equally. Men do some housework, and women often do heavy work like gardening and small building jobs around the house. Boys and girls do some household tasks, such as clearing the table or helping to prepare meals.
- o Most British people like a good discussion or debate. You can express your opinion and the other person will respect it, even if they disagree with you. However, some opinions will be difficult for most Britons to accept. These include racism, sexism or not respecting women, and being unkind about people who have a disability.
- o The British have a reputation for a good sense of humour. British film and TV comedies are famous all over the world. The British like 'word play', stand up comedy and satire. It is often said that the British don't mind laughing at themselves.
- o Remember that not all the British are English. The United Kingdom (of Britain and Northern Ireland) is made up of four countries: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. People in the UK can have more than one national identity. For example, people can think of themselves as British and English, or British and Scottish. Some people are very proud of being Scottish, Welsh, Irish or English. For example, many people in Wales speak Welsh, not English, as their first language. Each of the countries has its own international sports teams, and the most hotly contested matches are between British sides. Therefore, do not think that all people in Britain are English. Some people can get quite annoyed if you do.

Of course, the points above are general. They do not apply to everybody. You can test whether you think they are generally true or not during your time in Britain. Remember that your English teachers at your school will be happy to listen to your experiences of life in Britain. They will also try to explain different sorts of behaviour.

## Study tip

Observe and listen to British people. Make notes in your notebook. Ask yourself these questions.

- o How emotionally 'warm' or 'cold' are British people?

- o Is British 'small talk' a complete waste of time?
- o How equal are British men and women in the home?
- o Are British women better at offering emotional support than men?
- o Do the British treat their offspring more like friends than children?
- o Do the British respect free speech and others' opinions even if they don't agree with them?
- o Do you think the British generally have a good sense of humour? What makes British people laugh?
- o How important are national identities within Britain? Do people consider themselves English, Scottish, Welsh or Irish first, and British second? How do they show their national identity?

## Making friends

Many people think that the British are, in general, reserved and unfriendly. For example, you may notice that strangers usually do not speak to each other on trains or buses. However, it is possible to make friends with British people and below are some points to help you.

- o You may find friends in your host family, especially if members of the family are close to your own age. They may suggest some free-time activities, such as sports or going to pubs and clubs. Remember, try anything once. Even if you don't enjoy it, you will learn something about life in Britain. If you do enjoy it, you can do it again and perhaps make more friends.
- o You may find that you do not enjoy the free-time activities of young people in Britain. It is true that many young British students spend a lot of time at college or university 'having a good time'. This can involve a lot of drinking and going to clubs. Many students do little work in their first year at college, but you may prefer to be hard-working from the very first day. In that case it is important for you to choose your friends and free-time activities with care.

*'When I first went to college in Britain, I was shocked at how many students were late for classes because they had been in the pub the night before. In my country students work much harder.'*  
Xiao Xiao from China

# 5 Social Life and Society

'In my country it is shameful to be drunk in public. But in Britain young people go out with the purpose of getting drunk. It's like a sport. To be honest, I hate this attitude, and that's why I have hardly any British friends of my own age.'

Panayiotis from Greece

- o A good way to meet people is to join clubs. If you are at college or university this is easy because there are many clubs to choose from. If you are at a language school, you can ask your Social Activities Organiser or Welfare Officer for information about local clubs.
- o Which club should you choose? If you play a sport, join a sports club. If you don't like sport, there are clubs for people who like art, music, local history and many other things. Don't worry if the people are not your age – they will still be friendly!
- o Many British people take evening classes once a week in all sorts of subjects. Music, dance, arts, crafts, foreign languages, information technology, yoga, photography, and many more. Find out what courses are available by asking at your local library or searching on the Internet. Some courses are cheap; it depends which one you choose. Many take these classes to meet new people, as well as to learn. Courses take place at colleges, schools, community centres and other places. If you enrol on one at a college, an extra bonus is that you may be able to join the National Union of Students. With an NUS card you can get cheaper cinema tickets, clothes and haircuts.
- o Your school may be able to arrange some volunteer work for you. This could be something simple such as visiting elderly people in a nursing home, just to chat to them. You could join or work for a charity, or go along to your local church.
- o Many Britons enjoy watching sports. The main spectator sports are football and rugby in the winter months and cricket in the summer. If you enjoy watching sports you can join others in front of a television at home or in a pub which shows 'live' sports on big screens. Although football is the biggest spectator sport in Britain, rugby and cricket have many fans right across the English-

speaking world.

- o Pub culture is very important to British life and there are many pubs to choose from. In town and city centres, you will find pubs that show 'live' sport on TV and play music CDs or have a jukebox. Many also have 'live' music, karaoke or quizzes. Some also have games you can play, such as darts and pool (similar to billiards). You can also find pubs that serve excellent food and are perhaps more about eating than drinking. Local pubs (pubs outside city and town centres) are often good places to make friends, as the same people go there night after night. Bigger towns and most cities also have gay-friendly pubs. Many pubs have areas for quietly eating and drinking with friends, and other areas for watching sports, playing pub games and listening to music. Therefore you should be able to find a pub, or part of one, that you like!

**Notice that all pubs and clubs are non-smoking. If you want to smoke you'll have to go outside.**

## Leisure activities

As in any country, there are many different leisure activities to choose from. Some of the most popular are:

- o Watching TV
- o Going to the pub
- o Watching football and other sports
- o Playing sports
- o Shopping
- o DIY and Gardening
- o Evening classes
- o Restaurants, the cinema and the theatre

## Watching TV

In Britain there are 5 terrestrial channels which everyone can receive, but many people also have cable or satellite TV. There are also additional digital channels. Most channels are commercial. That is, they receive money for showing advertisements or commercials during breaks in the programmes. The BBC channels, on the other hand, do not show commercials. The BBC receives money from the government to make programmes. That is why everyone has to pay a TV licence fee each year. This pays for 8 interactive TV channels, 10 radio

# 5 Social Life and Society

networks, over 50 local TV and radio services and the website [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk). If you buy a TV in Britain you will have to buy a TV licence. See page 22 for further information.

TV programmes tell you what is popular in Britain. For example there are shows about DIY and home improvement, as well as sports, gardening and celebrities.

## Going to the pub

In the 'Making friends' section you read a little about pubs in Britain. They may be different to bars in your country. In particular you will notice:

- o Both men and women drink in pubs.
- o Most pubs do not have waiters to bring drinks to you. You must go to the bar to order your drinks and you pay for them as soon as you receive them. You do not need to leave a tip.
- o You do not have to drink alcohol. Pubs offer soft drinks such as cola, lemonade, orange juice and water. Some pubs also serve tea and coffee.
- o You should always have a drink in front of you. It is not OK for only one or two people from a big group of friends to have a drink. If you take all night to drink one drink, the staff in the pub may ask you to leave!
- o Smoking is not permitted in pubs. Both smokers and pub owners can face a fine if people smoke there. If you want to smoke you'll have to go outside.

## Watching football and other sports

Most people watch sports on TV either at home or at the local pub. Many go to watch 'live' sports, especially football, rugby and cricket. Horse racing is also very popular, and many people like to gamble on the results of the races. They do this in a shop called a bookmaker's, where you can also bet on other sports. Football is very important to some British people, and there can be friction and arguments between supporters of rival clubs. The biggest rivalry is usually between two clubs from the same city, such as Liverpool FC and Everton, or from nearby towns, such as Portsmouth and Southampton. It is not a good idea to go into a Portsmouth pub wearing a Southampton football shirt, for example.

People also enjoy watching snooker, golf, motor racing and darts.

## Playing sports

Amateur football is popular and many towns and cities have a Sunday League for local teams. There is a wide choice of other sports to take part in, such as tennis, squash, swimming and exercising in the gym. Most towns have Leisure Centres that are much cheaper than gyms or health clubs, but the facilities may not be as good.

Ask staff at your school, college or university about opportunities to take part in sports.

## Shopping

In Britain, most inner-city or town-centre shops are open seven days a week, but large stores can only open for 6 hours on a Sunday. Most open from 10.30 am to 4.30 pm or 11 am to 5 pm. Some supermarkets in bigger towns are open 24 hours, but most smaller shops close at 5.30 pm. This is probably much earlier than in your country, but remember that shops usually open at 9am and do not close for lunch. In summer and before Christmas, some shopping centres will have 'late night' opening until 8 or 9 pm.

You will not see many small independent shops in town and city centres. It is less common than in the past to find bakeries or butchers, because most British people buy bread and meat at the supermarket. Town centres are now filled with chain stores, and if you visit other town centres you will see the same shops again and again.

You may also be surprised by customer service in Britain. It is not usual for someone to say 'hello' to you when you walk into a shop, and sometimes shop assistants can seem unhelpful and unfriendly. Of course, some shops are better than others. In all shops though, as everywhere in Britain, you will need to queue up to pay.

Most shops in Britain do not ask you to hand in shopping bags before you walk around. However, do not put anything in your bag or your pockets that you have not paid for. The security staff will think you are 'shoplifting', which means trying to steal. Use a shopping basket or trolley provided by the store.

# 5 Social Life and Society

## Shopping online

More and more Britons shop online. You can find low prices and good deals with fast delivery services. Remember that when you buy something online you have the *right* to send it back *for any reason* within 7 days of receiving it. If you do send anything back, inform the suppliers by email or phone and keep the postal receipt. If you have any problems with shopping online, ask staff at your college or your host family for advice.

## DIY (Do It Yourself) and gardening

British people are proud of their homes, and many like to spend time making them look nice. They also like to change the colour of the walls or the arrangement of the furniture from time to time. This is DIY, and it is most popular with the over-40s. On Sunday mornings DIY shops and garden centres are very busy, as couples buy wood and paint for their house and plants for the garden. On Sunday afternoons they may put up new shelves in the house or work in the garden.

## Evening classes

As you read in the 'Making friends' section, evening classes are popular in Britain and you can enrol in all sorts of subjects from flower arranging to car repair, from foreign languages to dancing. Ask staff at your school or college for more information.

## Restaurants, the cinema and theatre

Most cities have a wide selection of restaurants, but you might find it difficult to find one specialising in British food. The most common ones are Chinese, Indian and Italian. Some people eat out regularly, and others only do this on special occasions, such as birthdays or wedding anniversaries.

Cinemas might seem expensive in Britain, but you can often save money if you go before 5pm Monday to Friday, or if you have a student card. Some people prefer to rent a DVD or video, as this is much cheaper.

It's important to realise that the advertised starting time isn't the time the film starts; you will see around 20 minutes of adverts and trailers

(advertising future films) before the film starts. Sometimes you can sit anywhere, but in other cinemas you may be asked to choose a seat when you buy your ticket. Most large cities have smaller cinemas that show independent or foreign films, as well as large cinemas showing blockbusters.

Going to the theatre to see concerts, comedians or plays is also a popular pastime with some people. It is not usual to dress up in special clothes, although some people might do this.

## Study tip

Make notes on how British people spend their leisure time. Ask yourself these questions:

How much time do British people spend watching TV?

What are the most popular types of programmes? Do the people you know spend more time playing than watching sport?

How do British shopping habits compare with those in your country?

How important is the pub to social life in Britain?

## Relations between men and women in Britain

Nowadays, almost all women continue to work after they get married, and many do the same after they have children. This is not only for financial reasons: women in Britain enjoy their independence and freedom. This means that many women do not expect men to pay for things, such as meals in restaurants. They do not wait until they are married to leave home, and just as many women as men go to university.

Some men still think of women as 'the weaker sex' but most show them respect. You should not be surprised to see women doing many things that men do, such as playing football, driving buses and drinking pints of beer in pubs!

It is common to see men and women walking hand in hand, perhaps even hugging and kissing in public. However, you won't see many same-sex couples holding hands, and 'straight' men don't usually touch other men, except to shake hands. In Britain, if two men kiss or hold hands, people think this means they are homosexual, or gay.

# 5 Social Life and Society

Homosexuality is not illegal and if you live in a big city there will be at least one gay pub. Some people are quite relaxed about homosexuality, and on television there are several popular gay comedians. However, other people are unpleasant, and sometimes violent, to gay people. This is why many prefer to keep their sexuality secret.

## Clothes and the weather

The weather in Britain changes from day to day and season to season, so you may need some new clothes. Temperatures can go below 0°C in winter and up to 30°C in summer, but these are extremes. The average high temperature in London is 21°C and the average low is 12°C. It often rains, but not every day, and strong winds can make it feel colder and wetter.

However, Britain is not a cold country compared with, say, Sweden or Norway in winter. In cold and wet weather most people wear a pullover or fleece and a light waterproof jacket. A small umbrella that you can carry in a bag is often useful.

## What people wear

There is not really a 'British National Dress' that everyone wears on special occasions, and the image of a businessman in a suit with a bowler hat and umbrella is out of date.

Many British people of all ages dress very casually. Men and women of 60 or older may wear jeans, trainers and T-shirts. For work, of course, many men wear suits and ties. Women wear suits with either skirts or smart trousers.

Fashions change very quickly in Britain and young people often wear new styles for short periods of time. Do not be frightened by these styles of dress or by tattoos. Some people may have tattoos, shaved heads or unusual clothes, but this does not mean that they are criminals. A lot of older people who now wear business suits used to be influenced by certain fashions or were members of teen tribes, such as Mods, Rockers, Skinheads, Punks, Goths and fanatical football supporters.



'Who are those people, Grandad?'

'That was Grandma and me in our twenties.'

## A democratic society

Britain is a democratic society. All adults over the age of 18 have the right to vote. Each Member of Parliament (MP) is elected to represent the people in an area of the United Kingdom. The MPs sit in the House of Commons at Parliament in Westminster, London. They represent the interests of the people who elected them and decide on new laws for the country as a whole. The Prime Minister is the head of the government. He or she is usually the leader of the largest Party elected to the House of Commons. No Prime Minister can govern for longer than five years without calling an election. The monarch, at present Queen Elizabeth II, is the head of state.

Voters elect Councillors to carry on the business of local government. Elections take place every four years.

There is a right to free speech in a democracy. British people have the right to express their opinions freely. However, it is against the law to express racism and religious hatred or to encourage violence against others.

# 5 Social Life and Society

Newspapers, TV and radio also have the right to free speech. Like everyone else, they must not break the law. You will find a variety of newspapers in Britain. Some, like 'The Times', 'The Guardian', 'The Independent', and 'The Daily Telegraph', aim to cover important stories in a serious way. Others, like the 'Sun', the 'Daily Mirror', and the 'Daily Mail' aim to be more popular and sensational. For example, they print gossip and stories about celebrities, or famous people. The newspapers are privately owned and they are free to express opinions about the Royal Family, politicians and political parties.

## Study tips

To get an idea of free and open debate in Britain you could watch a TV programme like 'Question Time' on BBC 1. This is usually shown on Thursdays at about 11pm. Or you could listen to 'Any Questions' on BBC Radio 4, at 8pm on Fridays or 1.15pm on Saturdays. A good idea would be to record the programmes on video, DVD or audio tape so that you can stop and go back if you want to listen to something again. This will give you a good idea of the main topics of interest in Britain each week.

Look at a variety of British newspapers and decide which one you like most.

## The state, public services and the law

British people pay taxes to the state and to local government. In return the state provides services. These include the National Health Service (NHS), education, the police, state pensions and welfare benefits for people who need them. Local government services include road repairs, rubbish collection, and leisure facilities such as swimming pools and playing fields.

The police are there to serve and help the public. If you need directions you can ask a policeman or woman. If you find yourself in trouble you can telephone the police for help, or you can go to a police station. Remember, they are there to help you.

Many branches of British government, such as social services, the legal system and the police, are

there to protect people who are vulnerable or not safe in some way. They try to protect children from violence, women from discrimination, and minorities from racial or religious hatred. Therefore it is important to treat and respect women as equals. It is also important to respect people with different customs or religious beliefs.

In Britain it is said that one can judge a society by the way it treats its most vulnerable citizens. That is why it is very bad manners in Britain to be unkind to anyone who has a physical or mental disability. On the contrary, most people try to be kind. For example, they help people in wheelchairs to cross busy streets or go through doorways.

## Obeying the law

It is important to obey the laws of any country you visit. For example it is against the law in Britain to drive a car without tax, insurance or an International Driving Licence. The British traffic police work hard and catch a lot of illegal drivers every day. It is also illegal to offer money to a police officer.

It is also against the law to rent a flat and leave before the date agreed in the contract. If you are not sure how long you will stay, talk to the landlord or flat owner before you sign a contract. Remember that the staff at your school or college are ready to help if you need advice about signing legal documents. If in doubt, ask before you sign.

## Important!

You must be at least 18 years old to sign a contract in the UK. If you are not 18 you should ask staff at your school/college or your host family to help you.

Every person with a TV set must buy a TV Licence, which is £145.50 for colour and £49.00 for black and white. From April 2011 the prices will be £148.50 and £50. If you decide to buy a TV set, the shop assistant will ask for your name and address so that the TV Licensing Authority can check you have a licence. Even if you are staying with a host family, you need to buy a licence if you buy your own TV or watch TV on your laptop.

For more information [click here](#)

# 6 Important Information

## Before taking off

Applications, passports and visas

- o Apply to the school or college where you want to study.
- o When you are accepted and have paid a deposit at the place you decide to study, ask for a 'Certificate of Acceptance' from the school.
- o If you are from a non-European Union country (EU), check with the British Embassy, Consulate or High Commissioner in your own country. Take your 'Certificate of Acceptance', if you have one, and find out what else you need. You may get a 'Letter of Consent' to make sure you can enter the United Kingdom (UK).
- o If you are a national of the European Union (EU), you do not need a 'Letter of Consent' because you do not need a visa.
- o If you want to visit only the UK during your stay, you can ask for a Single Entry Visa. If you want to visit other countries during your stay in the UK, ask for 'Multiple Entry Visas'. Single Entry Visas cannot be exchanged for Multiple Visas when you are in the UK.
- o Make sure your passport is valid and will continue to be valid during your stay in Britain.
- o Nationals of EU countries may use an Identity Card instead of a passport if they stay for less than six months. However it is a good idea to carry your passport as well. British Immigration Officers may like to see both.

For more information you can [click here](#)

## Money

- o Find out how much money you are allowed to take out of your home country for your stay in the UK.
- o The school or college will almost certainly ask you to pay a deposit (part of the fees and accommodation costs in advance).
- o Ask which method of payment is most suitable.
- o It can take time to transfer money from one country to another. Ask your bank how long it will take. Give yourself enough time to start and complete the process in time.
- o Remember that you may have to pay the rest of the fees and accommodation costs when you

arrive. It is important that your money is ready and waiting in Britain.

- o Don't forget to take evidence of your transferred funds with you. Carry the bank documents in a safe place. Immigration Officers may ask to see them when you arrive.
- o Carry enough cash for your journey and for a short time after your arrival until you can access your money at the bank. Do *not* carry a lot of cash. You may lose it or it may be stolen.
- o If you carry a credit card, keep it safe. Do not let anyone else know or see the personal identification number (PIN) for your credit card.



## Prices

The prices you see in the shops are fixed. You cannot ask to pay a lower price. If you don't like a price, you may find it cheaper somewhere else.

'Discussing the price' in English is called bargaining. The British do not bargain about the prices in shops. However, you can do this in some open-air markets and car boot sales, or when you buy something which is used or second-hand. But don't try to bargain with staff at your school or college or with your host family. It may upset or embarrass them.

# 6 Important Information

## Insurance

- o It is important for you to have health insurance during your stay. Check if there is an agreement between your country and the UK to provide health care for each other's nationals. This is called a 'reciprocal health agreement'.
- o If there is not an agreement, you can take out health insurance before you leave your country.
- o You can buy insurance to recover the costs of fees and accommodation in case you are unable to complete the course.
- o You can insure your possessions against loss, theft or damage.

## Information about your arrival

- o If you are going to study at an English language school it is important to tell the school or college about your travel arrangements. You can do this in a letter or an e-mail.

## For example...

Dear Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms (last name)  
I am enrolled on your (subject) course starting on (date).  
I am arriving at (name) airport on Flight No (number) on (day and date). My plane should arrive at (time). I will continue my journey by train/coach/ bus/taxi and I expect to arrive at (time).  
Yours sincerely,  
(Your name)

- o If you are staying with a host family make sure you have their contact details (name, address, e-mail, telephone number) so that you can tell them your arrival times and method of travel. You can write to your host as follows...

Dear Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms (last name)  
I understand I will be staying with you during my studies at (name of school or college).  
I am arriving at (name) airport on Flight No (number) on (day and date). My plane should arrive at (time). I will continue my journey by train/coach/ bus/taxi and I expect to arrive at your house at about (time).  
I will contact you if there is a delay or problem.  
My mobile telephone number is (your number).  
Yours sincerely,  
(Your name)

## Immigration

As soon as you decide to study in Britain, visit your nearest British Embassy or High Commission in your own country (or visit their website) to find out exactly what the visa and immigration rules are for you.

To find your nearest British Embassy or High Commission [click here](#)

You can also find a lot of up-to-date information on the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) website. You can click on the 'Advice for International Students' button after logging on [here](#).

To go straight to UKCISA advice on immigration and visas [click here](#)

## Working in the UK

You may be allowed to work in the UK while you are a student. Check what the sticker in your passport says. You can ask staff at British Embassies, High Commissions or your school/college/university in Britain to explain if and how long you may work in the UK. Remember that it is important to understand and follow the rules.  
For a good online guide [click here](#)



# 6 Important Information

## Documents you will need

The documents you will need to present to Immigration officials in the UK when you arrive are:

- o Your passport and visa.
- o The 'Letter/Certificate of Acceptance' from the school or college.
- o The bank documents that show you have enough money for your stay.
- o If you are travelling with a member or members of your family for whom you are responsible, you must also show that you have enough money for their stay as well.

## After touching down

When you speak to British officials it is important to tell the truth. Give them straight answers to straight questions. Never try to give them money or gifts.

If necessary, decide how you will write and sign your name in English. Do not change that spelling and signature while you are in Britain. Make sure that other people use the same spelling if they write down your name. This will avoid confusion.

## Going through Customs

If you have only your personal luggage, you should have no problems with Customs. Do not try to bring any of the following into the country.

- o Weapons such as rifles, pistols, air- or gas-guns, knives, and martial arts equipment. They are almost all illegal in Britain.
- o Drugs such as heroin, morphine, cocaine, amphetamines, barbiturates, LSD and cannabis.
- o Counterfeit and pirated goods, such as watches, clocks and CDs, and any goods with false marks of their origin.
- o You can bring the following with you, but they are restricted items. You will have to meet certain conditions if you want to bring them into Britain. For more information [click here](#)
- o Live animals must normally have a British import (rabies) licence and must be put in

quarantine for six months. But dogs or cats that meet the conditions of the Pet Passport Scheme can be imported without quarantine. Live birds, including pets, must normally have a British health import licence. For advice call DEFRA Animal Health, 00 44 (0)20 7904 6000 or [click here](#)

- o Certain plants and their produce, including trees, shrubs, potatoes, certain fruit, bulbs and seeds. For more information [click here](#)

- o Radio transmitters such as CB radios that are not approved for use in the UK. For advice call The Radiocommunications Agency, 00 44 (0)20 7211 0463, or [click here](#)

- o Endangered species, including birds and plants, whether alive or dead, and goods made from them. This includes such things as fur, ivory or leather taken from endangered species. For more information [click here](#)

- o Certain meat and milk products. For more information [click here](#)

- o For other DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) contact details [click here](#)



# 6 Important Information

## Travel in Britain

o If you take a taxi from the airport to a train or coach station, or to the town where you will study, try to find out in advance how much this should cost. The *Welfare and Accommodation Officer* or the *Enrolment Officer* at your school or college should be able to tell you. You can ask by letter or e-mail.

o Local public transport in Britain is reasonably priced and you will be able to buy tickets for the day, week or month, which is cheaper than buying tickets for each journey. When you arrive ask your host family or staff at the school or college for advice.

o Train journeys, on the other hand, can be expensive, especially at certain times of day. Ask at your school or college about how to get cheaper tickets, but do this one week or more before you need to buy them.

o You may be able to hire a bicycle, motor scooter or car. Ask staff at your school or college for advice on getting a good price. However, if you drive a car, motorbike, scooter or moped, make sure you have the necessary road tax, driving licence and insurance. It is illegal to drive without these. Punishments include large fines and, in some cases, even imprisonment.

## Your Safety

Britain is quite a safe country, but you still need to be careful. In your country people may be more honest and helpful in some situations. The following tips should help you to enjoy your stay:

o Mobile phone theft is becoming more common, especially in big cities. Do not walk along the street talking on your mobile phone.

o Never leave your coat or bag on your seat in any public place, such as a cinema or café or on the train. If you go to the toilet, take your valuable things with you. Don't ask a stranger to watch them for you.

o In some town and city centres, you may see a lot of drunken people, particularly on Friday and Saturday nights. Most of them will not say or do anything, but one or two may be unpleasant. The police are working hard to improve this situation. If you feel uncomfortable, don't get involved - just walk away. Ask staff at your school or college about which places are safer and more friendly than others.

o Never walk alone late at night or in the early morning, especially along quiet streets, alleyways or through parks.

# 6 Important Information

## More Useful Links

### **News, information, education and culture in the UK**

The British Council - [www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org)

For news and much more - The BBC - [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)

### **Going Places**

National Rail - UK railways - [www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk)

Stagecoach - coach and bus travel - [www.stagecoachbus.com](http://www.stagecoachbus.com)

National Express - bus and coach services - [www.nationalexpress.com](http://www.nationalexpress.com)

Visit Britain - where to go, where to stay - [www.visitbritain.co.uk](http://www.visitbritain.co.uk)

National Trust - places to visit - [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)

Youth Hostels - [www.yha.org.uk](http://www.yha.org.uk)

### **What's on?**

A guide to what's on in the UK - [www.timeout.com](http://www.timeout.com)

### **Free online information for international students**

For information in clear English about British life, culture, things to do and places to visit - [www.ukstudentlife.com](http://www.ukstudentlife.com)

Language learning and cultural information - [www.okey-dokey.co.uk](http://www.okey-dokey.co.uk)

### **For excellent general and detailed advice for international students**

[www.ukcosa.org.uk](http://www.ukcosa.org.uk)

### **Government Departments**

For information about visas - [www.ukvisas.gov.uk](http://www.ukvisas.gov.uk)

The Foreign Office - know where your Embassy is - [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)

The Home Office - for information about British law and the legal system - [www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk)

### **Personal Safety**

For advice on staying safe in the UK - [www.britishcouncil.org/accreditation-safety-first.pdf](http://www.britishcouncil.org/accreditation-safety-first.pdf)

### **Help!**

To call the emergency services for police, fire brigade and ambulance or paramedics the telephone number is **999**. You can call the same number for coastguard, mountain and cave rescue services.



**A practical and cultural guide  
for students visiting Britain to learn English**

Anthony Cutler and Jill Doubleday

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