

## **Student Article**

### **From the U.S. to the UK: My Exchange Experience**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This article describes one U.S. student's experience of her exchange from the United States to the United Kingdom. She is a third year visiting student studying Marketing. In the following, she analyses the cultural differences and difficulties she has found in her time so far.

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#### **Host Family**

I have been living in the United Kingdom for the three months with a host family. They do not live far from university, and the family is comprised of a single mother and a nine year-old son. I did not expect many differences in lifestyle considering that the U.S. and the UK are arguably similar. However, I have learned a great amount about the British family from living with a host family, and there is a surprising amount of subtle differences between cultures. I have had the opportunity to eat authentic British meals, receive local and international travel advice from my host family, and learn new British language terms. I have embraced the hospitality and mannerisms of the UK, even if I do sound a bit funny saying “cheers”. My host mother and I often enjoy comparing cultures over dinner, especially with regards to food, government and school systems. Living with a host family has truly allowed me to become immersed into British culture, and I believe it enhances my experience.

#### **Language**

Although the United States and United Kingdom both speak English, sometimes it seems as though we are not speaking the same language at all. Because of the variations in terminology, I have been in conversations where I had no idea what my British friends were discussing. This was not something that I had anticipated. I knew that I would encounter small term differences such as the term “wellies” for what Americans call “rain boots”, but there is a whole new set of vocabulary for activities, foods, and slang that does not exist in American English. For this reason, I have occasionally felt lost in conversation due to the terms and strong accents. It is a strange thing to listen to a language I know and feel like I do not understand it at all. Luckily,

most of my misunderstandings are clarified with slower speech and repeated questions. After realising all of the vocabulary differences, I have eagerly learned each new word I encounter and have even started using them myself.

### **People**

So far, I have met a wide variety of people. Brighton itself is known to be incredibly diverse, and I am even shocked by how many different languages I hear spoken on the bus every day. At the university, the amount of diversity is no different. We have an incredible mix of students from many countries, and it has given me the opportunity to experience more cultures than just the British culture. In fact, most students that I have met are also international students. There is a caveat to this; because most of us enter after the first year of university, most British students have already formed their group of friends. This is a separate issue in its entirety, but I have managed to meet a few British pupils in my classes. Generally, everyone I have met has been incredibly friendly, and I am appreciating the diversity of people with which I get to build friendships.

### **Transportation**

After using the bus system in Brighton and the train system in London, I may never want to return to public transportation in my home city. The ease with which a person can get from one end of a city to another in England is amazing and quite a rarity in most American cities. Although we do have our outliers, the tube in London is far more comprehensive. I cannot imagine how beneficial this must be for business people who do not own cars or do not want to drive their cars into the city. My experience with the transportation systems here has been quite a treat.

### **Style**

Before arriving in the UK, I had heard that British people were more fashionable than Americans. After being here for a month, I can definitively say that British people more often dress nicer than Americans on a day to day basis. The British are incredibly stylish as well, and the shopping is something I have been enjoying. It is clear to me how British people can tell travellers from locals just by the way they dress.

## **University Classes**

Among various discussions about country differences, the university system has been a prominent topic of analysis. The structure of the university system in the UK is significantly different than that in the US. While I am used to attending classes twice to three times a week for an hour and a half each session, I am only in class once for two hours a week per class at the University of Sussex. This has taken some adjusting, considering I am used to spending more face to face time with the tutors. Additionally, there is relatively more reading required for each class, especially when the class does not have a textbook and is only based off of a selection of articles. As a result of a combination of these two aspects, this term has been heavy in independent learning.

Another different aspect is the assessments. There are far fewer assessments here in the UK and they are, in turn, weighted much more. This is intimidating for me as an international student and rather stressful. I am learning to do pre-reading for these essays and assessments and hoping to learn the British style of writing so that I may succeed in my assessments coming in December.

Finally, I have experienced a bit of a culture “shock”, even moving from the United States to the United Kingdom. Everything from unexpected differences in language to anticipated differences in learning style have been incredible to experience. Living with a host family and attending university in the UK has allowed me to truly become immersed in the culture here. I would not have it any other way. I value my time here and I cannot wait to expand my experiences as I finish my term at the University of Sussex.

## **CONTACT THE AUTHOR**

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