

Dear NYU-London student,

I would like to thank those of you who wrote to us, in response to the first “*Letter from London*” sent out last week, introducing the Student Life team and asking if you have any questions you would like answered, with regard to your upcoming experience at NYU here in London. A number of you asked some very pertinent questions that I will get to in a moment, but first I wanted to send you our Cultural Programming Calendar: Fall 2013, please see attached document.

Cultural Programming Calendar: Fall 2013

I hope you enjoy reading information on some of the events we have planned for you this coming semester. As you will read on Page Two of the attached document, our Cultural Programming is offered to all students on a credit value system. You will each be awarded 100 credits to spend as you like on your preferred activities; so for example, if you wanted to do all of the day trips (Brighton, Stonehenge & Salisbury, Bodiam Castle, Cambridge and Bath) and (also) go hiking and biking you could spend all of your 100 credits on these, if you wished. Most people, one would guess, would spread their 100 credits over a range of events, some day trips, some theatre, a rugby game, perhaps – but the choice is yours!

Once you arrive in London you will receive two emails: the first on August 30th 2013 that will allow you to sign-up for your chosen day trips; the second on September 6th which will allow you sign-up for all of the other events.

- ***Why the delay?***

As you will read in the Calendar we stagger sign-up for the cultural programming events as it is important that you have a clear idea of your study schedules (considering add/drop) before committing to events that might conflict with any trips for your class (e.g. theatre visits, co-curricular day trips, etc.). This is less of an issue with the day trips as these are set on dates when there are fewer (if any) class conflicts could occur, so we can send the sign-up surveys out earlier secure in the knowledge that students will not have any date/time conflicts.

- ***Some events have a credit value of “zero”; what does this mean?***

These are open to everyone and unrestricted (in terms of number of seats/tickets etc.). Usually, with events of this type, a general email will be circulated one-week before the event giving students details of all of the meeting arrangements.

- ***Are these the only cultural events on offer?***

No: As mentioned above, many classes at NYUL have trips attached to them. The theatre classes, for example, will go to the theatre, usually one night per fortnight. Other classes will have visits to places of cultural &/or academic importance in-and-around London built into their curriculum. Our Housing department also organizes a lot of in-house events too, things like Thanksgiving celebrations, group meals, cake-bakes etc. You certainly won't get bored!!

This Week's Correspondence

Since writing last week, we have certainly enjoyed hearing from many of you and continue to invite people to contact us (via resourceroom@nyu.edu), if you have any questions concerning your upcoming experience at NYUL.

Quite a number of you have had similar questions that I thought I would try and share (back) with the group, so everyone could benefit from the information. The most popular questions (this week) have been:

“How many people will attend NYU-London in the Fall?”

We will have over 400 students starting in August: 100 of this number will be Freshman students who will be in London until May, before continuing their studies in New York. The remaining 300 will be made up of (mostly) semester-long study-away students and students on year-long programs, e.g. the BPE and our Master’s program. Students from the United States make-up the single largest nationality on the student roster, but we have students from all over the world, so we are quite a multi-national community, which adds to the fun of the place.

“What is the housing like?”

It is very nice! Many of our Upper Classmen students tell me they prefer the housing in London to the dorms in New York!

We have three housing units:

1. Byron Court
2. Guildford House
3. NIDO – King’s Cross

All of the units are within a 20-minute walk of the NYUL Academic Centre and each is well appointed with all of the amenities you will need for modern student living.

The accommodation is split into apartments with a variety of rooming configurations (e.g. twin, triple shared bedrooms etc.) with single beds, a desk per student and closet-space, etc. Bedding is provided. Shower and bathroom facilities are shared with the apartment’s residents, either en-suite or next door to the bedrooms, in some cases. Each apartment has a communal kitchen (pots, pans, silverware, plates provided) and lounge area. Students should note that NYUL does not offer a meal plan, so students will cater for themselves.

Each apartment has its own individual “credit card type” key which (also) operates other communal doors in the residence and grants access, via the front door, to the building. Each residence has Wi-Fi access (same system as NYU), a suite of computer terminals and study rooms. Each building has a TV lounge and laundry room with washing machines (£2.00 per wash) and dryers (£1.00 per drying session) – coin operated.

One final point about housing; we are just about to embark on our allocations for Fall 2013. As you will be aware this process is administered electronically through a survey system called Star-Rez. The allocation process is usually completed approximately two-weeks before the start of term, when rooming assignments will be communicated back to students.

“I am planning to fly in to London on August 24th and stay in a hostel for the night. Do you know of any cheap/safe hostels to recommend, preferably near NYU housing?”

The best hostel to stay in that is close to NYU housing is called the Generator (see: <http://www.generatorhostels.com/en/london>). It is very well located (for everything) and near to Russell Square Tube Station which gives direct access to London’s Heathrow Airport, via the Piccadilly Line.

If you are looking for a convenient budget hotel (as opposed to a hostel) take a look at the Celtic Hotel on Guilford Street. The Celtic Hotel has just gone through a major refurbishment – actually changing its name, from the St. Margaret’s Hotel, in the process – so don’t be confused when you access its website on:

<http://www.stmargarethotel.co.uk/index.html>.

I believe it is now a very nice hotel and very good value, especially for Bloomsbury, this part of London. I have not stayed in the hotel, myself, but one of our faculty members, who lives out of town regularly uses it and tells me it is very good. The thing I can say about it is that its location is very good. It is literally, 100 metres from our Guilford Street residence building and a mere 10/15 minute bag-drag to Byron Court, Nido and the NYU Academic Centre. So it can’t really be beaten.

In Bloomsbury I think the Celtic Hotel would be the best budget option, but if you don’t mind being outside this area, take a look at these other budget choices:

- The Columbia Hotel is <http://www.columbiahotel.co.uk/> is cheap (for its location) but is looking tired these days
- The Ace Hotel in Kensington would be a good value option <http://www.ace-hotel.co.uk/>
- As would the Easy Hotel off the Cromwell Road http://www.easyhotel.com/hotels/london_earls_court.html
- The Holiday Inn Express at Southwark is brand new <http://www.exhisouthwark.co.uk/>
- I’ve heard good things about the Gate Hotel <http://www.gatehotel.co.uk/> in Notting Hill, if you want something a bit more “individual”
- Similarly about the Mitre House Hotel <http://www.mitrehousehotel.com/> in Paddington.

“I’m thinking of doing some travelling at weekends, where can I get help?”

As I said in the blog last week, I can help you! For those of you who will be travelling to Europe for the first time, could I attach a travel guide that will hopefully give you a place to start?

As you will see (from the attachment) the document attempts to introduce people to travelling in Europe, especially if this is their first trip. It also gives some ideas and suggestions of places to go and things to see. I hope you find it helpful.

In past years, a lot of students have been able to organize weekend trips quite easily once they’ve got to London, met up with some other “travelling buddies” on the program and found out (from me) where the best place to stay in Barcelona is or whether they should do the French or Italian Riviera, or why is it that everybody goes on about Ibiza etc. etc. etc.

Last semester though, some students were having problems finding “cheap deals”. This was mainly because they were not able to book far enough in advance to actually get the “cheap deals” – as these are subject to availability and are *always* the ones that go first!

My advice would be to have a look at the following websites:

- www.skyscanner.net for general guidance on budget airlines.
- www.easyjet.com and www.ryanair.com for European destinations
- www.aireuropa.com for Spain
- www.aerlingus.com for Ireland
- www.germanwings.com for Germany
- www.airluxor.com for Portugal

These will give you “a flavor” of what sorts of deals are available at the moment, so you have a “reference point” when thinking about your budgets.

Consider too, there are quite a few good London-based agencies that can help plan and book travel. STA Travel <http://www.statravel.co.uk/> is a great resource for students and I would always see if they can beat any other price you have been quoted. Why STA is so good, is that they can legally discount travel to students and people under 26 years of age. They can also arrange “travel packages” for you, so not just your flight but the hotel and transfers too – so all you would need to do is pop into one of their agencies (there is a very well located one on Goodge Street – which is near to the NYUL Academic Centre) and you’ll come out with your weekend in Milan all booked.

“How should I carry cash to London? Do I need to buy British Pounds in advance? What about money to travel in other countries?”

Good and important questions: My advice would be to have some British Pounds (£) with you when you arrive in the United Kingdom (maybe around £200.00). This will allow you to pay for travel into the city and get you through until you have time to visit an ATM. You can usually buy British currency at your local bank, if you give them enough notice (around 3-4 days), alternatively you can buy it at large international airports like JFK.

Generally-speaking, ATMs are certainly the best way to go in terms of getting cash as you travel around Europe, as their conversion rates are better than most other forms of currency exchange. Check with your bank prior to leaving home that your ATM card will work across Europe; it needs to be part of an international network like Maestro, Cirrus, or Plus. One or all of these logos will be on the back of your card.

When speaking to your bank, ask them about what fees you can expect to pay when withdrawing money from an ATM in Europe? Different cards have different fee tariffs but generally you can expect to pay a withdrawal fee. This might be in addition to a separate fee levied on turning the US dollars in your account in to British pounds or Euros (if travelling). One way to avoid too many withdrawal fees (of course) is to withdraw more money at one time. So you may find yourself withdrawing larger amounts (e.g. £100 or £200) at a time rather than £20 or £40 per visit to the ATM. As I say, ask your bank or credit card company for more information so as you will know what to expect of the ATM card(s) you carry.

If you are planning to travel to a popular European country like France, Italy or Spain, you will need to buy a separate unit of currency called the Euro. As many of you will be buying this currency using a non-European (e.g. American) bank account, it would be cheaper for you to purchase your Euros at your destination rather than in the UK. This is because if you bought Euros in Britain you would have *two* exchanges to make: E.g. US dollars to Pounds and then (these) Pounds to Euros (so incurring *two* transaction charges). You would be much better to visit an ATM as you get off the train in Paris and go to the ATM at the train station – where you would be buying Euros directly from your own (E.g. US) bank account and (therefore) just pay for one transaction; i.e. US dollars directly to Euros. I know this is all a bit confusing, but be assured once you're in Europe it will all make sense and is easy to navigate around.

Another thing to note, is that credit and debit cards are widely used in Europe but MasterCard and Visa are *by far* the most popular types of card, please make sure you have one or both. Other cards like American Express and Diners Club are not accepted everywhere.

One last thing to note is that many of the European countries you might visit will tend to be more *cash-based* societies than you might be used to. In the US, for example, you can probably use your debit or credit card for any purchase, regardless of how little the amount is (e.g. a pack of gum). In Europe, many places that accept cards may have a minimum spend on purchases to use plastic. Also, when paying with cash, try to use the smallest bill/note possible, as change (for some weird reason) in some European countries is often in short supply, France is especially bad for this!

This answers the questions we received, from you, over this week, but keep them rolling in – as we enjoy answering them. I hope to send you another *letter*, at this time *next* week, with all of the questions we receive over this coming week.

I hope you enjoy reading the Cultural Programming Calendar and find the attached travel guide useful.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best regards,

Tony

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