

Hello,

Here is some advice about starting University in Southampton, as an International student. I experienced all of these things first hand, when I was about to come to the UK.

I hope you find it useful. Bare in mind that I am Indian, so some of my tips may be more relevant to my country than yours!

Regards,

Karishma

Before you get There:

Accommodation

- Get this sorted as soon as you possibly can, *especially* if you plan to arrive early. The months preceding the start of your course are exceptionally busy for office staff.
- Be aware that if you plan to stay in halls before the start of your term, you will be treated as an OTR and will have to pay the relevant fee up front. The Halls Managers are strict about this, so either arrive armed with a credit card or with enough cash to make the payment (don't do what I did – see below under "Banks").

NB: Don't even try and argue to get yourself student prices for accommodation before term starts. There is a strict policy on this – even if your course requires you to be here early, you are charged OTR rates until your accommodation contract starts.

- You are asked to make a deposit whenever you accept a university accommodation contract. Please ensure you have the means to make this payment.

Visas

- Visa applications have been streamlined in India to such an extent that, far from the mile-long queues I would have had to deal with as little as four years ago, all I had to do was drop off my visa application along with supporting documents at the centre, and it was couriered back to my home within three days. Supporting documentation is important – please ensure you have the following:
 - Visa form, duly filled out.
 - Passport sized photos.
 - Passport
 - Acceptance letter from the University (ideally this should also have details of course costs and accommodation status, mine didn't have either, so I wrote to the relevant office, and to the accommodation office asking them to email me the relevant details. I printed out the emails and that was sufficient for the visa officials)
 - School Transcript (if you are a undergrad student) or Degree (post grad)

- Evidence of funds – tricky again. If a parent or anyone else is helping you out – you need to have an affidavit from them stating that they intend to sponsor or partially finance your education. You will need to supply the previous six months worth of bank statements to prove this.
- Records of any assets in your name would be helpful.

Basically visa officials are looking for evidence that you can fund the entire amount of your course fee without relying on any loans etc. once in the UK.

Contacting the university

- If you send an email, you may get a generic reply that indicates complete ignorance of the content of your email. If this happens – my advice to you would be to call. University contacts can be found on the following webpage: <http://www.soton.ac.uk/about/contacts.html>

I realise it is expensive to make international calls but it will save you migraines and general feelings of “I-want-to-kill-someone” later on.

- Keep in mind – if the university staff seem unhelpful or unresponsive, remember that they are busy and so may have overlooked your questions; a gentle reminder in this case would be fine. Rudeness, attitude and/or a sense of entitlement will get you nowhere, believe me.
- If you are unhappy still, do get in touch with the person who has been your main contact at the university. Even if it’s not their particular problem to sort out, at the very least they will be able to either put you in touch with someone who can help you, or escalate the issue to a level where it is NOT overlooked in the frenzy.

Health Check

- This is a fairly straight forward requirement for all international students. It’s a form that will be sent to you about two months before the start of your course. You simply have to fill it out and enter the name and address of your GP (general physician). If you don’t have a GP, have a basic medical examination done and use the name/address of the doctor who treated you.
- You have to pay a nominal fee for the Southampton Health Department to process this form – this fee is about £13.50. Ask your bank to have a banker’s draft made and mail that in along with the form. Please wait to receive the actual form until you have your draft made since the amount mentioned may be different for you.

CRB Check

- I believe government policy requires anyone working with children to have a Criminal Record Bureau check. I know that in India this is almost impossible to get – when I went to the local police station they gave me a completely blank look, and said, “But how are we supposed to know if there are criminal cases pending against you?” Eventually I went to the Head of Police in my district, who (after two weeks of daily chasing), gave me a letter (with my name misspelled AND referring to me as a ‘him’ – outrage!!) stating that I had no cases filed against me for the entire time that I had been living in his jurisdiction.
- If the country you are from is anything like India and you get bemused faces when you ask for a CR clearance letter, try going to your local police station and asking them for a letter stating that you have been living at your present address for “X” years and that in that time, there have been no criminal cases filed against you. In case you have been living at your current address for less than 5 years, it would be a very good idea to go to the local police station of your previous residential area and ask them to do this as well. If you run into trouble with getting

this done, do not panic, call the Student Services Centre and let them know what is going on. Also call the school that has accepted you and tell them of your dilemma.

Student Services Centre's number is: +44 (0)23 8059 9599
The School of Education reception number is: +44 (0)23 8059 3475

X-Ray

- All non-EU/non-UK persons entering the UK and intending to stay for longer than six months require a chest X-ray. I wasn't aware of this, so you can imagine my surprise when after standing in an endless queue at Heathrow; I got to the passport control officer, who told me to report to the Health office. So, thinking, "maybe I've been flagged as a potential rabies carrier or something", I dutifully reported, only to be told to strip down to the waist and, "step over here, love". Turns out all they wanted was a look at my beautiful sternum. Try and have the x-ray done before you leave home, simply to save the extra hour at the airport. Otherwise, it's no problem, the x-ray is free and the staff are friendly.

Banks

- This killed me. Well, almost. Accounts take 5 working days to open, and they require (besides your passport):
 - A letter from the university with the following details (signed and stamped by someone from the uni, preferably from your school):
 - your name
 - date of birth
 - UK address and home address.

It needs to be addressed to the bank, and it needs to state that you are an enrolled student at the University of Southampton at such-and-such course.

- Do some looking around at banks before you decide which one you like. I picked NatWest because they didn't try to rip me off, unlike a couple of other places I visited.

Most banks have branches in the university, in fact there are five different ones just on Burgess Road, so do shop around and pick the one that suits you best.

- Also, before you leave home, figure out how you plan to get money over to the UK. My bank would have charged a hefty percentage for a draft, which would have taken weeks to clear, but a helpful foreign exchange advisor explained that if I chose to transfer by wire, it would cost just £20 to transfer the entire amount, and it would take one working day.

I really hope this helps those of you who are considering joining the University of Southampton - it really is a great place to study.

GOOD LUCK!

Karishma