



International students about their Oxford life – *Zdziś* exclusive

One should not ask the fish about the life underwater; one should rather consult a tortoise, because it has had richer experience, one of both the ocean and the dry land. Following this logic to its ultimate conclusion, we have asked a number of international students about their impressions of living in Oxford, Great Britain (as opposed to Oxford, Alabama). But getting the answers back was not easy; it turned out that the propensity for procrastination is a universal human characteristic. Stubbornly we stalked our victims, we tracked them, we hunted them down. At the end of the day, we managed to wrangle seven answers out of their throats. We are happy to present them below, for your enjoyment and edification.

Arkadiusz [a.k.a. Arkady], Poland, 1st Year German and Linguistics Student
Olga [a.k.a. Lencz], Poland, 2nd Year Philosophy and Italian Student

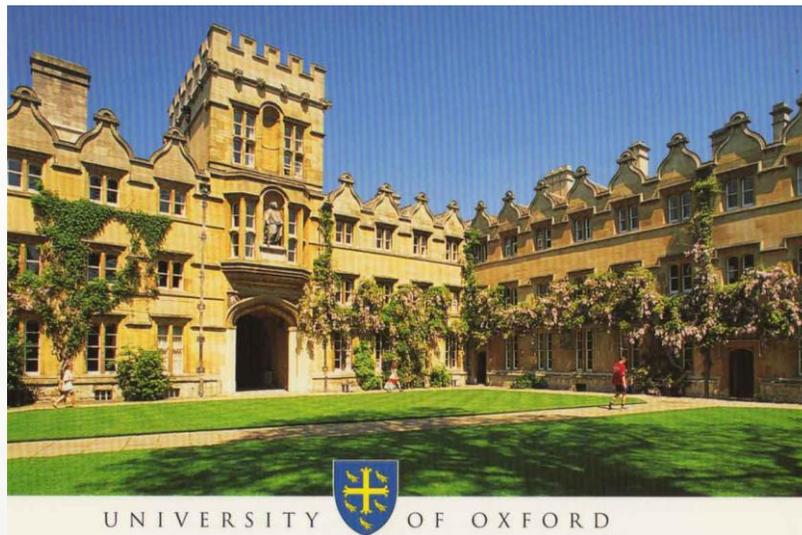




What surprised you the most in Oxford in terms of social life?

Quite frankly, the stereotype of 'the average student' worried me before I came here. To what extent would people follow the 'sex, drinks, and fun' philosophy, especially in a secular Western country like England? To my relief, however, it turned out that not everyone was as 'liberated' as I feared, and even those who preferred to spend their days (nights) on the pursuit of hedonistic pleasures often revealed themselves - on closer acquaintance - as interesting and thoughtful individuals. But what amazed me the most was the vibrant Christian counter-culture going on among the students of Oxford. A wide range of ecumenical services, charity meetings and thought-provoking talks (free lunch provided!) always seemed to take place somewhere, there was always something going on. I've made many wonderful friends that way - wonderful, inspiring people, fit as much for a deep conversation as for a good laugh. It felt great to discover that in a city where almost all colleges are named after saints, there are people who see in this fact more than an empty tradition. And it felt great to attend all the events, too! At one of them, I got to see C.S. Lewis's stepson (who co-produced the first two Narnia movies). His speech was most inspiring; his neatly-trimmed white beard - simply amazing. So yeah. Quite frankly, this is what surprised me most in Oxford.

Tom, Czech Republic, 1st Year German student



Did you find a new hobby in Oxford and, if yes, what kind of hobby?

Politics and debating had for years been my hobbies, but when I then took them up in my Politics, Philosophy and Economics degree at Oxford, I turned to dance. It's a sport in disguise. After a day in the library, it's a great way to unwind, tune into the beat of the music, and concentrate on the moving with your partner. It's beautiful and captivating. I now dance the Waltz, Quickstep, Jive and ChaCha for the university's beginners team and have practices almost every day. Moreover, it makes me live up to local stereotypes - how better than by waltzing across the ballroom in a floor-length dress.

Maria, Poland, 2nd year Politics, Philosophy and Economics student





How do you manage to balance social and academic life?

College is what is supposed to shape one up as a person and help them find their way in the incipient stages of their career. While most course-related information can be obtained in a public library, it is social life and collaboration with the professors that builds strong networks and pays off for the tens of thousands of dollars invested by the average college student into education every year. To me, there's no magic formula on how to balance those out - being good at what I do is what buys me time to enhance my social life. And that's backed up by years of hard work. And dedication.

Victor, Romania, 3rd year Mathematics and CompSci student

How did Oxford change you?

Living and studying in Oxford has definitely made me more independent and self-sufficient; I've stopped relying on my family to get everything sorted out for me and started doing things myself and taking initiative. At times it's hard to get out of bed when no one is there pushing you out of it, but it just makes you a more responsible person, because you realise that what you are doing at university is for your own benefit, and if you don't go to classes you are only hurting yourself. Studying at Oxford University has also made me see how important it is to be involved in extra-curricular activities- everyone here is amazing at doing 10 things at the same time, so that has pushed me to get involved in many different societies and activities that I wouldn't have participated in if I wasn't in Oxford, such as volunteering for charities and playing sports like football.

Sonia, Spain, 2nd year French and Italian student



Do you have a personal and relaxed relationship with your tutor?

Maybe not a "personal" relationship, but I've laughed and joked around with most of them - it's amazing how much they like to gossip. But we never forget that they are tutors and I'm a student. If you've ever had a great bonding moment with a chatty taxi driver - I guess we are that close. That being said, I know of a student who went to a concert with his tutor.

Mycchaka, Argentina, 3rd year Mathematics and CompSci student



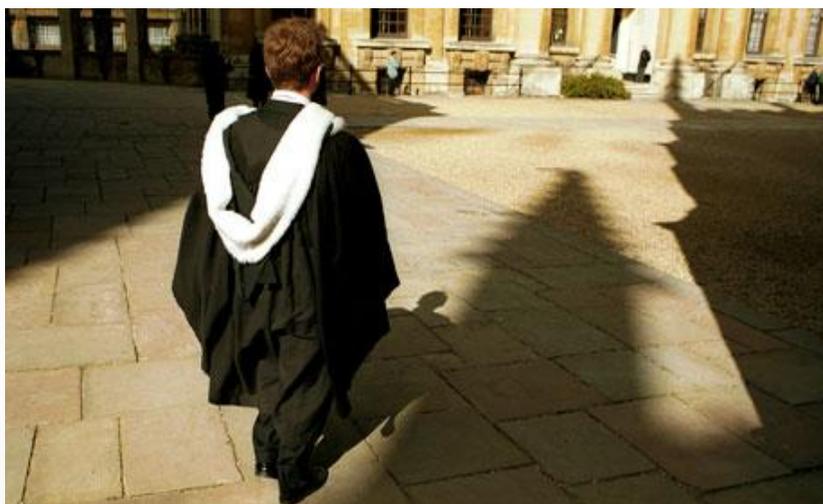
How did Oxford change your world-view?

Oxford made my world-view more definite and stable. I have started perceiving the world more realistically. Its harshness and complexity do not hurt me so deeply as they used to because my skin has grown thicker.

Kosta, Russia/Italy, 2nd year Mathematics student

What is your impression of the British students?

Before moving to England I had all sorts of assumptions (and fears) about what the British students will be like. I wondered whether I would stand out, because I do not play football, have a clearly non-British accent and know nothing about their A-levels. I worried I would feel like an outsider were prevalent. Having been bombarded by mostly North American media, one of the first major things I noticed about the British students was, quite obviously, their accent – their prestigious, desired, high-class, gorgeous British accent... After two days of headache resulting from not being used to all the varieties of British English, I gradually got used to the long 'a' in 'past' and the lack of 'r' in 'car'. From that point onwards it became much easier to communicate with the British students and to get to know what kind of people they are. My first impression was that they're just like any other students. I didn't see much difference between the international students



(myself included) and local students; one exception were those 'internationals' for whom English wasn't such a comfortable language to talk in, and as a result they tended to appear shy and withdrawn. True, there were some words that I wasn't used to, or words that I understood differently (like chips or pants); but all in all, I felt very comfortable around people in my college. One reason for that may be that it is a university, we're more adult, but on the whole, the community I am part of feels much more welcoming, accepting and open-minded than what I've ever experienced before. Apart from the first few days, I rarely felt like a foreigner within the British-dominated student mass, let alone with my friends. Of course everyone can tell from my accent that I'm not English, but not once have I felt aloof, or left out because of my nationality. In that light, my impression of British students is that they are open-minded, accepting, and much like any other students.

Toni, Finland, 1st Year Music student