

Overview of tips and tricks for your SSE year

Travel

- If you will be spending any time in London, consider getting an Oyster card. There is a refundable £5 deposit required, but it saves you on fares.
- Obtain a 16-25 Railcard - it will save you a third of the cost of rail tickets - if you plan on taking trains at all (and you will...and you should!) You can either purchase at a rail station or order online.
- Plan trips with Skyscanner.com, Kayak.com, Google.com/flights, Hostelworld.com, Booking.com, TripAdvisor.com, Rome2Rio.com, etc.
- Citymapper app is available in many major European cities and is incredibly helpful!
- Travel with your fellow SSE scholars!

Phone

- Investigate your carrier's international plan. If it is not feasible to carry over to the UK, look into pay-as-you-go SIM plans if your phone will work abroad (iPhone 5 onwards, for example, usually do).

Banking

- Consider opening a British bank account when you arrive. It'll make it easier to withdraw money (free withdrawals from all ATMs across the UK, no matter your bank affiliation). In Europe, most credit and debit cards have chips, and some places (restaurants, stores) will not accept your credit/debit card if it does not have a chip. Also note that if you have an American Express credit card, they are not generally accepted abroad except at major businesses.
- Some scholars also suggest using wire transfers to Western Union or the Post Office.

Arielle Paré

Culver Academies, Indiana

Dollar Academy, Scotland (2016-17)

Hi! My name is Arielle Pare, and I spend the 2016-2017 school year at Dollar Academy in Dollar, Scotland thanks to the SSE program. I am not exaggerating when I say that taking an post-graduate exchange year was the best decision I ever made: it opened my eyes to the world in ways that I couldn't have even imagined. Everyone's experience with the SSE program will obviously vary, but I've come up with a list of tips that would have been particularly helpful me in my year abroad. Hope it helps, and good luck!

1. On breaks, or even on class trips with your school, you will likely find yourself travelling to another country besides the UK. In my opinion, this was the best part of the year-- looking back, my highlights were seeing the Colosseum in Rome, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, and the canals of Amsterdam. It can be expensive, though. To cut back on costs, my go-to resources were Hostelworld and Skyscanner. Hostelworld is an excellent way to find cheap accommodation in youth hostels (which, by the way, are totally safe in my experience). You can easily find travellers in your similar situation, and I've made some friends here that I still talk to! Skyscanner is a flight search website, which I like in particular because a) I've found the best deals here and b) it allows you to search "everywhere" to find interesting locations you wouldn't think of at first.
2. Speaking of travelling, don't be afraid to go it alone if that's what you want to do. It can be hard to organize breaks with someone, and if you're like me, it can be stressful worrying if other people are enjoying themselves. It can be an incredibly rewarding experience, if you are prepared-- even if, like me, you are only alone for a day or two. Just to be safe, I called my parents or a friend often to make sure someone knew where I was. I also always carry a mini first aid kit with prescriptions, bandages, cold/pain medicine, etc. You don't want to be stuck without it, believe me.
3. I remember receiving quite a bit of advice from former scholars about phone contracts, but honestly, I used WhatsApp the most to contact my family and friends back home. International phone contracts can be incredibly expensive, and for us, it just wasn't worth it. Just try to call when you are connected to wifi, and it is absolutely free! Of course, for emergencies, our Verizon plan had a travelpass that would cost \$10 a day (but only when activated). You can also use Skype, Facebook Message, and countless other social media platforms. It's a little inconvenient, but helpful if you have financial concerns.

4. Money exchange and managing is another concern for many future SSE scholars, but this is a matter of preference and bank companies. I have one big piece of advice on this one, though-- *don't exchange money at airports*. It's really, really not worth it. Many post offices have currency exchanges, and the rates are infinitely better. And if you're in a larger city with a fair amount of international tourists, there will be some better exchange locations here as well. My favorite is Western Union, which also allows people to send you money. On breaks, my dad would send me a little spending money in this way-- all you need is their address and a code that your sender will receive. Plus, you don't have to convert the currency; for example, my dad sent me euros in Paris.
5. Most scholars will be 18 by the time they enter the UK, which brings a particular subject into mind: alcohol. It is liberating to be able to buy whatever you want in this regard, but I would *heavily* suggest not going overboard. Additionally, most schools have strict no-alcohol policies anyway, and you don't want to jeopardize your amazing opportunities by making a mistake. Some schools will be more accepting than others, and my boarding house even gives us the occasional beer or wine on a weekend. It's part of the culture to enjoy it, after all. Yes, it sounds obvious, but there are most definitely people who take their freedoms a little too far. Be safe, go slow, know your limits, but don't be afraid to have some fun!

Check out Arielle's blog: <http://esuadventures.blogspot.com/>

Daniel Nathan

Lawrenceville School, New Jersey

Ellesmere College, England (2016-17)

Traveling: Don't bring too much stuff; some of my most memorable trips were just with a small north face backpack. This is especially true if you are traveling alone. Although it can be a bit unnerving, it is worth traveling alone at least once. The freedom to make your schedule as you go, and do whatever you want is something you can't get if you are traveling with someone else. Get a [16-25] Railcard as soon as you arrive, the discount is substantial and you will lose more money on the first two tickets you buy if you don't. Train is the easiest way to get around the UK, but it isn't the only way. Because it has been privatized it is fairly expensive. If you have time and would rather save some money, buses are a good option. Get the trainline app on your phone to book trains fairly cheap. Like most places, advance open tickets are more expensive than tickets with a time printed on them, but if you are good with time, it is usually worth buying a ticket for the train you want. Because Europe is fairly small, your school will have people from all over, and so it is definitely worth seeing if you can stay with people. Seeing a city from the eyes of locals is really different. If you are traveling and need somewhere to stay, hostels are a great option. Most are very well run, and have kitchens so you can cook if you want to. The only thing to look out for is some hostels cater to different people. If possible you want to find a hostel with a reputation for young traveling guests. Sometimes you will find a hostel mostly has long term guests, or people staying between renting. This can really change the vibe. Don't be afraid to bail on a hostel either, there is almost always a bed and breakfast or hotel you could also stay at if you feel unsafe. When hostels are good though, they are great, and the people you meet can be really good company. As a final word on travel, the UK has things to see all over the place, from the buzz of London, to the beaches in the south, but I would definitely recommend a trip to Scotland, and not just Edinburgh. Head up on the train to the highlands, stay in a room above a pub and make the most of the adventure.

Phone: I have a contract with Verizon in the US, and so my phone was unlocked. I don't know about other carriers. I got a sim card from Vodafone when I arrived on a pay as you go plan. I think it was one of the bigger mistakes I made. Pay as you go can get really expensive, upwards of £30 a month, and I probably would have been better off getting a SIM-only plan. Where I was, there was almost no signal at school anyway, so the extra money I was paying for Vodafone wasn't really going anywhere.

Bank: My school brought me to the local branch of HSBC when I arrived along with several other students. Just remember to bring your passport with you. I recommend using TransferWise to get your money into that account. The fee is considerably lower than your bank will be.

Cultural: You're might come off as rude when you arrive, Americans tend to be loud and say things pretty straight up. It is worth doing your best to hold your tongue sometimes. Schools are more formal than in the US, at first this can feel a little restrictive. There tends to be many rules that are rooted in the past, but do your best to follow them and get on the faculty's good side. Freedom isn't granted in British school without a little work on your part first. Don't be alarmed though if you get to school and it feels really strict. You will get used to it and it won't be a big deal after a month.

General Tips: Just say Yes!! I'm not huge, but I played rugby because someone asked, it was a blast. I'd never sang, but joined the choir after the director asked if I wanted to. I was reluctant, but the year of singing ended up culminating at singing at the finals of the national youth choir competition at Royal Festival Hall in London. Get involved with things you've never done and have an adventure. My time here is winding down, and I will be so sad to leave, I wish you the best and please give the year everything you have, you may never be able to do something like this again!

Tricia Smith

Ethel Walker School, Connecticut

St. Felix School, England (2016-17)

Tips on travelling: If you plan on travelling in London a lot (say a weekend or more about every month or so) I recommend getting an Oyster card. I also recommend a 16-25 railcard for travelling around the country. It will give you discounts and you can register it with your Oyster as well. Book everything (housing, transportation, museums, etc.) as far in advance as possible for cheaper prices and less stress. Don't be afraid to "shop around" for the best prices. Don't limit yourself to one kind of transportation- trains, planes, buses, and coaches are all good ways to get around. Also, it's important to PACK LIGHT for everything from a weekend trip to your whole school year. This helps you avoid baggage fees (carry-ons for the win!) and is less stressful. As a side note, they call checked luggage hold luggage and carry-ons are cabin bags. Try to travel as much as you can.

Other tips: The UK's weather is pretty mild. If you're going back home for Christmas break, you can swap out seasonal clothes then, but there's never really extreme temperatures. Girls wear black skinny jeans and in general people's clothes aren't as bright as in the U. S. If your sixth form or college says to wear "smart clothes" that's basically office wear, like suits and tighter pencil skirts. Also, keeping a journal is a good way to remember special moments and trips throughout your year.

Websites:

- Trains: <https://www.thetrainline.com/> (UK) <http://www.eurostar.com/uk-en> (UK to rest of Europe)
- Housing: <https://www.airbnb.co.uk/> or <http://www.hostelworld.com/>
- Transportation: <https://www.rome2rio.com/> or <https://www.kayak.co.uk/>

ESU Contacts

United Kingdom

The English-Speaking Union
Dartmouth House
37 Charles Street
London W1J 5ED
+44 (0)207 529 1550

Melanie Aplin, Head of International Programmes & Cultural Exchange
melanie.aplin@esu.org

William Stileman, Senior International Programmes Officer
william.stileman@esu.org

United States

The English-Speaking Union of the United States
144 East 39th Street
New York, NY 10016

Carol Losos, Director of Education
closos@esuus.org
+1-212-818-1200 ext. 224

Cecily Griesser, Manager, School & Teacher Programs
cgriesser@esuus.org
+1-212-818-1200 ext. 246

Taylor Peterson, Education Assistant
tpeterson@esuus.org
+1-212-818-1200 ext. 212