



University of Essex for Dummies

Introduction

Welcome to The University of Essex! We know you freshers¹ are all just geared up and shivering with excitement right down to the tip of your toes about coming to Essex (You'll be shivering with cold when you get here!). However we know university life can be a very scary experience, not to mention leaving the familiar, warm, roti canai-filled shores of home for the cold, dreary, unfamiliar, (potato-filled) streets of London. We've been there ourselves, blur as sotongs. That is why we, the Malaysian Society here at Essex, are at your disposal to help make your transition into University life and life in the UK as smooth as possible. We'll even tell you where to get roti²! Please do not hesitate to contact us for more information.

The Pre-departure

Before you board that plane, here are some things you should do first while you are still on Malaysian ground.

Medical Check-Up

- Go for a medical check-up at any clinic or hospital and ask for a medical report. Let the doctor know you are going abroad to study. A sample copy of the medical examination form can be obtained from the British High Commission. **A chest X-ray is required.** You will be made to take one at Heathrow Airport if you do not have it with you on arrival
- Obtain a certified copy of your vaccination records. A meningitis vaccination is required. This can be obtained for free from the NHS in Colchester town or on campus during fresher's week; however you may want to have it done locally. Check with your doctor that the vaccine you are receiving is the same type as the type given in the UK.
- Dental Check-Up.
- Eye Check-Up (remember to pack a spare set of spectacles/contact lenses & solutions).

Visa Application

Since Nov 2003 all Malaysian students entering the UK for education purposes are required to apply for a UK Visa. Visa applications can be made at

Visa Facilitation Services (VFS)
UK Application Centre

¹ "Freshers" = first year students

² Malaysia Hall, Queensborough Terrace, Bayswater, London

Suite 19-05
19th Floor
Wisma MCA
163 Jalan Ampang
50450 Kuala Lumpur

Tel: (03) 2164 9323

Email: info@vfs.com.my

Website: www.vfs.com.my

Please refer to their website for the necessary documents needed for your application. Application forms can be downloaded from the website or obtained from their office and students living out of Kuala Lumpur can send in their applications by post.

You may also like to visit the British High Commission site for more details (www.britain.org.my). Or call British Council at (03) 2723 7900 for advice.

IMPORTANT: Make sure you get a 3 or 4 year visa (depending on how long your course is). Reapplying for a visa in the UK will be a long and painful (not to mention expensive) process! Wait for your official acceptance letter from the University of Essex. The unconditional offer letter from UCAS is **not** the official acceptance letter. You should also bring along your accommodation invoice as proof that you have accommodation there. For a financial statement, a bank statement showing that you have enough finances for at least 1 term's tuition fees and living expenses for 1 year (at least £5000) or an official letter from your sponsor will suffice.

OPTIONAL: If you do not wish to go to the VFS office yourself and go through the hassle of queuing, you can do it through an agency. Quite a few of these exist; one such agency is AusEd. It costs approximately RM10 extra for handling fees, but it does save you some trouble. There should be quite a few of these agencies around – ask around to see which is the best and most reliable. Remember, any dealings you have with these agencies are at your own risk – the Malaysian Society is in no way affiliated with any of them.

Financial Matters

- These days, it is rather difficult for international students to open student accounts with banks in the UK. However, students can still open overseas student accounts or similar account types with various banks in the UK which include NatWest, HSBC, Lloyds TSB and Royal Bank of Scotland. There are two banks on campus, Barclays³, and NatWest⁴. If you already have an HSBC account for a period of 1 year, or your parents have a premium account with them, you can ask the manager for a recommendation letter which will net you a local student account
- Cash/Traveller's Cheques (approximately £500) will cover your expenses for the first 2 weeks while waiting for your bank draft to clear.

³ Square 4

⁴ Square 3

- Opening an account (especially at the beginning of the year when a lot of freshers are trying to open accounts) can take up to three weeks, so make sure you have enough money to survive for that long. Try not to bring large amounts of cash.

Miscellaneous

- In the event that you have not received the letter from the accommodation office stating your allocated halls of residence (please allow up to 2 weeks before you arrive), do not panic and call/email the accommodation office immediately. The contact details are as follows:

TEL: +44 1206 873156

FAX: +44 1206 874028

E-MAIL: accom@essex.ac.uk

- Learn to cook! This is an essential survival skill (and you'll be a favourite among us) as cooking for yourself will be significantly cheaper than eating out. At the very least, learn how to boil rice and cook instant noodles
- Your travel agent might offer you a free student card (Usually the International Student Identity Card – ISIC), which can be used as proof of your student status anywhere you go. It is a very useful thing to have, and can be used even in Malaysia. For a full list of benefits, visit <http://www.isic.org/sisp/index.htm>. An ISIC card costs £7 to make in London. Even if your travel agent does not offer you one, you can get it done on your own in Malaysia, which is usually cheaper than in London. You will need the official acceptance letter from Essex Uni and a passport photo. Visit the above website for more information.
- Friday 7 September 2007 is the deadline for New undergraduate students whom are eligible for an accommodation guarantee at the Colchester campus to make their application. Applications received after this date are not guaranteed accommodation.

The Packing

Packing is often the most frustrating part of preparing for that long journey ahead. What should you chuck into that suitcase and what should you throw out? You don't want to be seen emptying the contents of your suitcase and repacking at KLIA. Before you start packing, check your flight ticket for your weight allowance. (MAS usually allows 30kg for students, however check with your travel agent and request for more if you are given less). If you are travelling in a group and intend to pool together your allowed weight, note that MAS has placed a 30kg limit on each piece of luggage, so distribute your weight evenly.

Below is a list of suggested items. It is not a must to bring everything on the list, do speak to your seniors on their experiences (or nightmares) with regards to packing. The average price of items in the UK is indicated in square brackets "[]" and is just a very rough estimate, and is only meant to be a reference.

Personal Necessities

- Casual clothing: T-shirts [£8], long sleeved shirts/blouses [£15], jeans [£25], shorts [£10], track suits [£35], gloves [£7], sport wear, socks [£3].

Tip: You might think the UK is cold all year round compared to Malaysia, and it generally is. However, summers can get pretty warm, and in 2005, temperatures went up into the low 30s, which is comparable to Malaysian temperatures. Bear this in mind – you might want to consider bringing some (but not much) warm weather clothing

- Winter clothing (Expect temperatures of about 15°C when you arrive and probably -3°C degrees at worst in winter): Sweaters [£15], jackets [£20], thermal undergarments/long johns [£10]. 1 or 2 sets will be sufficient. Get at least 1 water proof layer as rainy days are common in the UK.

Tip: We recommend that you buy most of your winter clothing in the UK as there are more choices and are definitely cheaper (especially during the Christmas sales). Besides, winter wear is heavy and bulky to pack! Do, however, bring at least one piece of thick clothing to help you get through your first few days here!

- Formal wear: A suit [£100] for men, evening dress/gown/traditional dress [£40] for women.

- Footwear: Sport shoes [£25], soccer boots, men's leather shoes, ladies dress shoes, sandals/slippers [£5].

Tip: Do bring good, comfortable footwear, as you'll find walking is the most common form of transport in Colchester!

- A school bag would be useful to carry your files and folders, relatively expensive in London.

- Toiletries: Bring some travellers' size shampoo & soap to last you for the 1st week. You can get most toiletries here at affordable prices.

- Moisturising lotion and lip balm

Tip: In our experience, VERY essential items, as the weather here tends to be cold and dry. Cracked lips and dry skin can be a very painful ordeal!

Documents

These are **MUST HAVES** that must be packed into your **hand-carried bags, and NOT your checked-in luggage**. You will need these to get through immigration, which comes before collecting your luggage.

- Your passport. (Make sure it is valid for the duration of your stay)
- Medical report & chest X-ray.
- Acceptance/offer letter from The University of Essex stating the course you are taking and the duration of the course.
- Bank draft for living expenses and paying your tuition fees and/or statement from your bank or sponsor.
- Address of your accommodation in University/Colchester. (A copy of your accommodation letter which should be posted to you should suffice)
- Some cash or traveller's cheque (around £500)
- A few passport-sized photos.
- Directions to get to university (if you intend to make the trip to uni on your own, and are not taking the university-chartered bus from Heathrow airport)

Linen, Home ware, Stationery.

- Single sized bed sheets [£5], duvet covers [£10], and pillow covers [£3].
These are easily obtainable and reasonably priced in Colchester town, and may take up space in your luggage... but if you MUST have your favourite Winnie the Pooh bed sheet...
(You can either buy your own duvet [£8] and pillows [£5] in Colchester town or get a bedding pack from the accommodations office, but be warned they may be a little overpriced for your convenience.)
- A set of towels
- A bathrobe. Useful for those sharing bathrooms, but relatively expensive in the UK.
- Cutlery: spoons, forks, knife, plates, bowls, cups, chopsticks.
These items may take up space, and can be easily obtained in the UK in sets. A cheaper option is to buy a 5 person cutlery set in London and share among friends.
- Cooking utensils: Rice cooker/slow cooker, wok, frying pan, pots etc.
Electrical items are expensive in the UK so it is advisable to bring your own to showcase your culinary skills! At the very least bring a simple saucepan or even a mess tin to make simple meals – it'll save you a whole lot of money in the long run!
- Food: Instant noodles [£5], local food, local spices, etc.

Most local (Malaysian) food stuff can be found in London, but is obviously more expensive. However it isn't necessary to pack a big bottle of your favourite sos cili maggi. Pack small, light cooking spices (dry sambal, fried shrimps, curry powder, gula melaka etc.)

- Stationery: pens [£1], foolscap paper [£1], files/folders [£1]. Refer to the department list for more information.

- Text books: Although text books are usually cheaper in Malaysia, and you often only need one or two books from the entire recommended reading list, you will need to consult your seniors in uni to find out which ones are those. I'd recommend that you buy them in the UK second hand off seniors in your department, or off amazon.co.uk during your first week in uni. There's also the option of borrowing text books from the library, but copies are often limited.

Medication

- Students studying in the UK are granted free medical consultation and prescription under the coverage of NHS (National Health Service). However, bring along some basic medicine e.g. flu tablets, Panadol, Nin Jiom Pei Pa Koa, etc in case of emergencies. If you have sinus problems, antihistamine is very useful, especially in springtime.

Other Useful items

- Laptop: Most students bring their own personal laptops as it will come in handy for all courses for typing lab reports and communicating with friends and family! Engineering and Computing students would need laptops with enough specifications to run mathematical programmes such as Matlab and programming (Borland Delphi, Haskell, Java etc.). These will require at least a Pentium III processor, Windows 98 and 256 Mb RAM. Some software can be obtained for free (<http://www2.essex.ac.uk/cs/documentation/installing/default.htm>). You may also want to invest in a lock for your laptop. Break-ins in university accommodation isn't very common though.

Note: High-speed Internet connections are provided in all university residential units. Copyright infringement is dealt with severely by ICT. Read the ICT Usage Rules for more information.

You might also want to consider obtaining antivirus software as without it, your computer will quickly become infected and then blocked by ICT. Free copies of antivirus software⁵ are available here – (<http://www2.essex.ac.uk/cs/virus/default.htm>).

Do also bring any recovery CDs that were provided with your laptop, and if not, bring the important CDs that will help you restore your computer in the event of a breakdown. A LOT of people learned that the hard way this year, so don't repeat our mistakes.

⁵ At time of this publication, Sophos Antivirus

- Printer: Some students bring their own personal printers for their own convenience, however all computer labs and the library have several printers. Labs B, C, D, G & I are open 24 hours a day. Note that ink refills and paper are rather expensive in the UK and the cost of printing in the labs is 5p per page. To print in the labs you will need to buy printing credit beforehand by purchasing a voucher from the Campus Shop or Help Desk, or by doing it online (<https://www2.essex.ac.uk/secure/cs/printcredits/>). I'd invest in a printer if I were you. A brand new one will cost about 30-40 pounds, but you can get a second-hand printer off other students for half that price.

- Electrical products: Discman/MP3 Player, camera & film [£4], rechargeable batteries and charger, alarm clock, hair dryer. Note that electrical items are very expensive in London.

- Compact Discs (Music/CD-R), box of diskettes (rarely used if you have a pendrive), pendrive/flash memory device (this is the most common and convenient memory storage device among students).

- Family photos, stuffed toys, other personal keepsakes to keep homesickness at bay.

- Sports equipment:
Tennis/Badminton/Squash racquet, table tennis bats, swimwear, etc.



Don't forget your best friends for those cold, lonely winter nights!

The Arrival

Upon touch down, those flying via MAS/SIA will land at Heathrow Terminal 3 whereas those flying via BA will land at Heathrow Terminal 4. Proceed to the immigration section. After clearing immigration you will be required to go through a health screening where your medical documents and x-ray will be checked. Have your passport, official college letter and accommodation address ready at all times. If you have all your documents, you should be able to clear customs without much hassle. If you ever get into trouble, stay calm, keep smiling and try to explain your situation to the officer.

Getting to Colchester:

<http://www2.essex.ac.uk/stdsup/intstuds/handbook/colchester/travelling.shtm>

The Paper work

When you are quite sure that you've managed to get every part of you and your luggage safely into Colchester, it will be time to settle some official stuff.

- Collect your keys and move into accommodation. You can collect your keys from the Accommodations office by the North Towers (for all accommodation units except the Quays. If you're staying in the Quays, you should collect your keys from the accommodations office located in Hawkins Quay House 1), along with your bedding set (if you requested for one). The accommodations office should be open from 9am till 5pm daily. If you arrive outside of those hours, for the first few days (30 sept – 2 oct) key collection can be done 24hours. Further details can be found on the accommodations office website. If you intend to arrive after 2 oct, please get in touch with the accommodations office to let them know.

You can move in on Sunday 30 Sept 2007. If you are unable to arrive then, your room will be held until mid-day on Tuesday 2 October 2007, after which your room will be assumed to be no longer required and thus, offered to other students.

- Register with the University. You will be allocated a time slot to register at the Sports Centre during Freshers Week (2 Oct- 5 Oct). During this registration, you will get your student ID, and also the chance to pay your academic and accommodation fees. Further details on this will be forwarded to you by the university.
- Register with the National Health Service (NHS). You will find an NHS pack in your hall of residence with forms to fill in.
- Register with the Malaysian Student Department. This is a requirement under Malaysian law and is for your own personal safety and welfare in case of emergencies. You can register online at www.masduke.com.
- Open a bank account. Banks are open from 9.30am - 4pm, Mondays to Fridays. There is a NatWest branch on Square 3 and Barclays is on Square 4. Other banks like HSBC can be found in Colchester Town. HSBC is the only bank which has branches in Malaysia. Note that banks may take up to 3 weeks to open an account for you depending on your luck. However, if you don't encounter any problems, your account should be ready within a week

The little details

Here is a list of things freshers tend to worry about, just to put your mind at ease.

Hand phones: There are several hand phone deals available from a wide range of mobile phone service providers such as Vodafone, Orange, O2, T-Mobile and Virgin. You can view them online at some of these suggested websites:

www.mobiles.co.uk

www.mobile-phones-uk.org.uk

www.phones4u.co.uk

www.carphonewarehouse.com

To obtain a contract line (post-paid) however, you would need to produce a bank statement from a local bank or a credit card. You can also obtain prepaid sim cards with no prior conditions. These are called 'pay as you go' and can be easily topped up at all mobile phone dealers, ATM machines and even online. The most popular mobile phone dealers are Carphone Warehouse and Phones4U and are located all around the UK. You are strongly advised to talk to your seniors (get to know us! We're nice people!) to find out which would suit you best.

Bicycles: If you are thinking of cycling as a way to beat the expensive transport fares, you can buy a bike. It's a good investment if you're staying off campus.

Phone cards: IDD calling cards are one of the cheaper ways to call back home with relatively clear lines at as low as 1p or 2p a minute. You can buy these cards from several shops in town like the China Centre and Tara Traders. Alternatively, you can just use Skype and buy credit to chat from pc to phone.

If you wish to use the phone in your room in the University accommodation units (often cheaper than pay-as-you-go mobiles) to call local lines or IDD access numbers, you will need a Dog-and-Bone card. This is a prepaid phone card usable on either your room telephone or any other line. You can get one from the campus shop or the post office on campus.

Drinking water: Tap water in the UK is generally speaking, drinkable. However, this picture shows tap water which was rated drinkable. Notice all the sediment at the bottom. It IS drinkable, if you're comfortable with the idea of all that, but you might want to consider investing in a water filter (a decent one can be obtained from Argos for ~£10, and you'll need to change the filter which costs about £3 each every month and a half or so). All tap water in Colchester is hard water, which means you might find soap difficult to lather and scale forming on your crockery. Scale can be cleaned by scrubbing at it with a lemon sliced in half.



Religion

Don't worry about not being able to practise your religion – the University of Essex Students Union has societies for most major religions. You can find a list of such societies (and others) at the Union website (<http://www.essexstudent.com/sportsandsocs/societies/>). If they're not quite what you're looking for, you can either form your own, or go to the Chaplaincy who can put you in touch with people who share your faith, regardless what that faith is. Do be careful of people who might try to entice you to join their sects or cults. If you are unsure, speak to the Chaplaincy (<http://www2.essex.ac.uk/chaplaincy/>) who can advise you on such matters.

Questions?

Get in touch with the Malaysian Society here – www.essexmalaysians.blogspot.com

Other useful websites are as follows:

<http://www2.essex.ac.uk/stdsup/intstuds/prearrival.shtm> - a pre-arrival guide to all international students. Contains links to several informative documents – the international students handbook and the freshers handbook. Both will be posted to you shortly after confirmation of your acceptance into Essex.

<http://www.educationuk.org/pre-departure/> - British Council's pre-departure site

<http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/pages/advice.htm> - UK Council for International Student Affairs guide to international students
