

Transcript: Oxford life as an international student podcast

[MUSIC BEGINS]

Ana 00:02

Hi everyone, I'm Ana. I'm from Frankfurt in Germany.

Irene 00:06

Hi, my name is Irene. I am from South Africa.

Tendai 00:11

My name is Tendai. I'm from Zimbabwe.

Isa 00:14

Hi, I'm Isa. I'm from the Netherlands.

Nikita 00:17

Hi, my name is Nikita and originally I come from Russia.

Hannah 00:20

I'm Hannah. I've lived in the UK for a bit, but predominantly, my family is from India and I will always say I'm from India.

[MUSIC ENDS]

Narrator 00:30

Moving to a new country to study at university is exciting. But it might also be a bit daunting. After all, there's a new culture to get used to, new friends to make and new ways of studying as you transition from school to university.

Irene 00:46

So before I started in Oxford, I was really nervous because I just felt that maybe as a South African, I would not fit in. I'm Asian as well.

Hannah 00:58

I definitely felt super nervous because applying to Oxford is just really not something most people consider at the school I was at in India.

Tendai 01:06

Like I sort of had this perfect Oxford student in mind and I wasn't too sure if I fit that role.

Isa 01:13

A lot of it is that you sort of don't really know what to expect.

Narrator 01:18

The Oxford community is made up of students from all over the world from all kinds of backgrounds. So we've asked some of our international students from India, Zimbabwe, the Netherlands, Germany, Russia and South Africa, to share their experiences of what studying at Oxford is like for them. This way, we hope you'll have a better idea of what to expect, how to go about finding communities to help you feel settled once you're here. And where to find any extra support if you need it.

[MUSIC FADES IN]

Narrator 01:52

Whether you've always dreamt of applying to Oxford, or you already have an offer of a place, what studying here is actually like might be a bit of a mystery. And especially if you've heard any unusual stories about Oxford or you have any preconceptions about what studying at Oxford might be like.

[MUSIC FADES OUT]

Tendai 02:09

Before starting, I think a lot of what I did like research on...like gave me this perspective of Oxford being like very over the top and like very fancy.

Hannah 02:21

I'm very much a city girl and I was really worried that there wouldn't be stuff to do, essentially, when I'm here.

Isa 02:27

I think that, sort of, the general preconception about Oxford is that there's quite a lot of like, very sort of posh, intelligent people. So I think that is sort of, in that sense, a bit intimidating.

Narrator 02:41

So did any of these preconceptions turn out to be true?

Tendai 02:45

Well what I found out was that like...everything did sort of feel normal and like all of the things I had like worried about were sort of just nice add ons...like things you could get excited about rather than be afraid of.

Hannah 03:00

I was very pleasantly surprised by how untrue that was. And I think it's pretty awesome that like something that should feel small and maybe a little antiquated, in terms of like the area, really does have very good social life and events, sort of, calendar happening at every point.

Isa 03:19

Of course, everyone is smart and is good at what they do. But also, that doesn't mean that they're, sort of, these mythical beings of intelligence. And I think in regards to poshness like, of course there are, but a lot of people in Oxford are in that sense just normal people. And I've got a lot of great friends.

Narrator 03:39

So it seems Oxford turned out to be a little different to what our students imagined before they arrived. But what else surprised students when they arrived in the UK to study at Oxford?

Isa 03:50

I think something that quite surprised me in a way was the amount of different British accents there are and the difficulty that I had with understanding some of them. I do think that you definitely get used to them and because you are around English-speaking people all the time, you just speak English all day...it does very quickly get easier, but I definitely...some of my friends now, I had a bit of trouble understanding them when I first met them, just because...there's a lot of different accents, and they're not all as easy to understand. It's definitely not something to worry about. But I also didn't really think about it before I went to the UK.

Irene 04:32

One thing was the food. It really surprised me [laughs] when I went to the local supermarket and realised that ninety percent of the vegetables are root vegetables. And what that meant was I had to basically learn a whole new recipe book on how to cook root vegetables [laughs].

Narrator 04:52

Throughout the rest of the podcast, we'll be busting more myths about Oxford. So keep a listen out for 'myth alerts'. You never know, you might hear something that changes the way you think about Oxford for good.

[MUSIC FADES IN]

Narrator 05:05

Myth alert: Oxford is all about academic work and there's no time for anything else.

Nikita 05:10

When I actually got in, you know, I know that all the colleges they have Junior Common Rooms and that, kind of, allows you to do other things on the side, apart from your academic life. That's one of the big myth that, kind of, has been busted.

[MUSIC FADES OUT]

Narrator 05:26

A big part of the settling in process is finding friends and communities that you can feel a part of. Oxford University is made up of lots of small communities. All undergraduates belong to a college, which usually has somewhere between one hundred and five hundred undergraduate students. So this means you'll automatically have your own supportive community. But what exactly is an Oxford college?

Nikita 05:50

Okay, so an Oxford college is a, essentially, a community in its own right that exists within the university, so it's actually semi-independent from the university. And a college is also a place where you spend most of your...most of your time throughout your stay in Oxford. And, you know, the college will be actually, you know, taking care of you throughout your experience in Oxford.

Narrator 06:13

All colleges offer first-year undergraduates accommodation, so it's a great place to meet other new undergraduates to help you to settle into life in a new place.

Ana 06:22

I think most of the colleges make it really easy for you to settle in. For example, there are college families, which is kind of this scheme where the JCR—which is the Junior Common Room, it's kind of the student body within each college—they pair up second years with first years (so incoming freshers). So by the time you get there, you already know at least two or three people who are very happy to meet you and just get you involved in college life.

Tendai 06:57

I think it sort of just helps everything. It makes it a bit easier, because like there's always like a familiar face around. So that just like helps with everything else.

Isa 07:07

I think college does play a very big part in settling in when you arrive in Oxford. Part of that is because of the freshers' week, which is the introduction week when you first arrive in Oxford, which is just a week of activities organised by your college where you can meet all the people from your college. So that is really the first place where most people tend to meet people and where they tend to make friends. And I also think that because college is the place where you live, you usually get quite close with the people you live in the same staircase or the same building with.

Narrator 07:40

There are also lots of clubs, societies, faith and cultural groups, as well as campaigns that you can join. These might be within your own college, or they might be university-wide, and many of these opportunities are free, or heavily subsidised.

Hannah 07:54

Societies are a great, great way to find people that are like you. So I'm in the, basically, South Asian society and that's been really exciting because it's, it's helped me find people that...that, like remind me of home a little bit and definitely helps with the homesickness and the...little bit of worry about not having a community. Same with LGBT soc[iety]. You will find your niches and you'll find the groups where you feel most comfortable in.

Isa 08:23

Some societies that I'm part of are, first of all, the Dutch society, which is what the place where I can meet other Dutch people, which is very nice, also to just be able to speak Dutch sometimes because you do sometimes have a very long time where you just speak English and not your native language, which can feel a bit weird. I think also, sort of, sports societies are a very nice way. I'm on my college's rowing team, which is still only people from my college but it's also meeting different people from college.

Irene 08:54

I found the Turl Street Homeless Action group and this is, effectively, a group of students in Oxford that come together on a regular basis or on a weekly basis to pack various food...I guess packages to take to the local communities in Oxford. Through that I've met various different other volunteers.

Narrator 09:15

With over 400 clubs and societies, I think it's probably fair to say that Oxford has a lot going on and there's something for everyone.

[MUSIC FADES IN]

Narrator 09:24

Myth alert: I thought I'd find it difficult to navigate all the various things I'd need to do when I arrived in Oxford.

Irene 09:32

My college was in very frequent communication with me well before I arrived. There are so many other students who are in the same position as you, all arriving from all over the world and it makes it just much easier then to navigate and find where you need to go.

[MUSIC FADES OUT]

Narrator 09:50

So let's talk now about wellbeing and the support that's there to help you with the logistics of arriving and getting settled in a new place. Hopefully the reality of arriving in Oxford isn't as daunting as it might sound. The University and your college will support you though with arrangements for getting set up in Oxford, including advice on how to access healthcare in the UK.

Ana 10:13

My college sent me this very long freshers' pack before arriving that contained a lot of information, not only about health, health insurance and healthcare, and doctors, also about a lot of social things. But I also think there's a lot of information on the Oxford Uni[versity] website.

Isa 10:37

For stuff like setting up a bank account or registering with a GP, there's a lot of very useful guides out there and if you ever become overwhelmed, every college does have an international representative, which is an international student from an older year. So I find it...I found it very helpful to, when I couldn't figure things out, like registering for a GP, I could just message them and they were like, 'Oh, no worries, I'll just come sit with you. And we can do it together'. And you definitely shouldn't stress about it. Because there's a lot of people willing to help.

Narrator 11:09

But being away from home can be tough at times and almost everyone will feel a little homesick now and then, even our students that live in the UK.

Hannah 11:18

I mean, I'm very much a person who likes to be with my friends at most times, so yeah, I definitely...like, it was in the quieter moments where I'd find that, okay, I've just finished this essay and I know I have plans in, you know, an hour or an hour and a half. But until then I'm just gonna, just gonna sit here and not really know what to do!

Tendai 11:36

I think during the first few weeks was more like, just the excitement of being away from home. But like at a certain point, you do start to like miss being at home, especially being so far.

Narrator 11:48

So what helped our international students when they felt a bit homesick?

Tendai 11:52

I think most of the help I got was just from like, just the people I lived with. So they were like always there to support me, I think, and that was pretty nice to have.

Hannah 12:03

Now we're luckier than ever to be able to call the people back home, so if you have a family that you're missing, even if you have like a pet that you're missing, get that pet on a video call, kind of thing, you'll find that that helps immensely.

Narrator 12:16

As well as the friendship networks you'll build once you get to Oxford, there's also a range of support for your wellbeing at Oxford, from both your college and the University. Just a few examples of this are peer support, the Oxford Nightline and the Counselling Service. But even if you need a bit of support now and then, we hope you'll really enjoy your time at Oxford and that, before too long, you'll come to think of Oxford as your 'home away from home'.

Ana 12:41

How I feel about Oxford now? It certainly feels...feels like home, 'home away from home'.

Isa 12:48

I think all those small things that, you know, knowing what supermarket to go to, knowing how the bus works, knowing...even, sort of, getting used to cycling on the left side of the road. They're all sort of very small things that in the end all add up to make it feel like you are actually at home because everything does become really familiar.

[MUSIC FADES IN]

Narrator 13:10

Myth alert: It's going to rain all the time in England and the sun will never shine.

Ana 13:16

Yeah, I probably have to be blunt in this respect, it does rain a lot. It really does rain a lot [laugh], but also I wouldn't say that you never see the sun.

[MUSIC FADES OUT]

Narrator 13:28

Okay, so the weather is difficult to dispute, but hopefully you've heard enough positive things in this podcast that it doesn't put you off the idea of studying at Oxford. So any last bits of advice from our international ambassadors?

Tendai 13:41

I think if I were to give any advice, I'd say to just have like an open mind.

Ana 13:47

I guess I would just like to, kind of, reiterate or emphasise that Oxford is very, very international. And you should not be scared of applying, or of feeling alone, or of feeling that you're going to be the only international person in a very homogeneous, very English group.

Hannah 14:08

I'd say, engage in your freshers' week however you want to, but do engage. Do make sure that you're making friends, that you're feeling a little bit more comfy. There's a huge temptation when you're in your own room and you're like, 'ah yes, but I would rather be sleeping', to not just...not get up and not do the event.

[MUSIC FADES IN]

Hannah 14:25

But having...having a community and having your people early on can make it just, just bounds easier.

Narrator 14:32

To find out about studying at Oxford as an international student, visit ox.ac.uk/int. For more information on Oxford's wellbeing and supportive community, visit ox.ac.uk/ugcommunity and to see more examples of Oxford's clubs and societies, visit ox.ac.uk/opportunities.

[MUSIC ENDS]