Welcome to Sheffield!

This is a short guide to help you get the most out of your time at Sheffield University. It contains tips on where to shop, where to eat and drink, and what to see and do in and around Sheffield, plus a bunch of useful web sites to help you find things for yourself. It is mostly aimed at foreign students but hopefully people from elsewhere in the UK will also find some inspiration from it.

Sheffield may not have the vibrancy of London, the academic reputation of Oxford, or the classical architecture and beauty of York. However, there are many things that make Sheffield a great place to live and study. The people are friendly, the cost of living is reasonable, it is easy to get around the city and out into the countryside, and its central location makes it a great base for exploring the rest of Britain. For a great overview of Sheffield history and scenery, check out  http://wikitravel.org/en/Sheffield. Of course the main reason you are here is study and research, but hopefully this guide will help you get more out of your time at Sheffield than just a degree!
The Student Union

One of the great strengths of Sheffield University is the Student Union, which is exceptionally good and is regularly voted the best in the country. It has several places to eat or buy sandwiches, an excellent shop, a travel agency, coffee shops, banks, and a laundry (tokens available from the union shop). They also show cheap movies in the auditorium on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights, which are a selection of fairly recent releases plus ‘classics’ from the 80s and 90s. They also show family movies on Saturday afternoons. The movie listings are available from the union reception, which is also where you can find boards listing available accommodation and items for sale.

There are loads of student-run societies based at the union, particularly sports clubs, and these are fun to join if you enjoy playing rugby, football or other team sports. These societies place quite an emphasis on their sociability and so they are great places to make new friends. There is also an international student’s society with newsletters, social functions, and a ‘foreign wives club’, and this is the best society to join if you want to meet up with other students at Sheffield who are from your home country.

The union also runs lots of ‘give it a go’ classes, usually in the evenings or at weekends, where for a small fee you can try your hand at various arts and crafts, cooking, writing, performing arts etc. These are superb opportunities for trying something new and also expanding your social circle in the meantime. On some Saturdays the union runs reasonably priced coach trips to popular tourist destinations such as York or Cambridge, which are a convenient ways to have a day out. They usually leave from the Glossop Road side of the union early on Saturday morning and return in the evening, leaving you most of the day to explore.

For listings of events, meetings and concerts, check out the comprehensive weekly ‘What’s on’ guides, available in the Union foyer, and also the union website, (http://www.shef.ac.uk/union).
coastline, sandy beaches popular with surfers, and generally better weather than the rest of England. London is a popular place with tourists, and is filled with things to see and do. However, it is very busy, especially in the summer, and can be very expensive, so the best thing to do is to book travel and accommodation early.

Although places like the Lake District and Northumberland are best enjoyed if you have the flexibility of a car, you can still visit these places on organised trips. There are several coach companies which run 2-7 day trips at reasonable prices, which usually include accommodation in a guest house or small hotel. These companies advertise in the entrance hall of the Transport Interchange downtown and also in the window of the National Express Coach company ticket office there. These tours, which tend to be used by older people, leave from the Interchange and usually explore a general region such as the Lake District, but can also go down to London for the weekend and include tickets to see a West End play or musical. If you are feeling particularly adventurous, coaches leave Sheffield for holidays to popular destinations in continental Europe such as Paris, Luxembourg and Bruges (Belgium). The coach simply drives onto a ferry at one of the coastal ports such as Hull or Dover, then once the ferry docks on the other side you reboard the coach and drive on. Don’t forget your passport!

Sheffield accent

The Sheffield accent can be tricky for foreign people. One of the most confusing aspects is the Yorkshire habit of reducing the ‘the’ in a sentence to just a ‘t’ (almost like a tut) or even dropping it altogether. Also, people often say ‘were’ instead of ‘was’, so for example, someone saying ‘I were going t’ pub’ translates as ‘I was going to the pub’.

SUMMARY

Don’t look back at your time in Sheffield and the UK and wish you had done more. Get out and about, don’t be afraid to get involved, and have a great time in Sheffield!
Pubs

One of the great British traditions is visiting the pub. Sheffield folk love their beer, and consequently the city has an amazing diversity of pubs and bars with something to suit everyone, whether you want a lively downtown bar for a wild Saturday night or a cosy neighbourhood pub for a quiet pint on a Sunday evening. As well as selling beer, many pubs serve food at lunchtime and early evening, and sometimes have quizzes, karaoke nights or live music.

There are several good pubs within walking distance of the university or main student areas, the best ones are probably the Red Deer, the Bath Hotel, Noah’s Ark, the Hallamshire Hotel, the Dog and Partridge and Fagan’s (the latter has a tiny front room known as a ‘snug’, something which is now rare). England is famous for real ale, a type of beer which people either love or hate due to its strong, often bitter taste. For people who develop a taste for real ale, recommended pubs are the Fat Cat in the Kelham Island part of town, which is not far from the Cask and Cutler, a traditional real ale pub with more attention paid to the beer than the furniture. Be careful though – some real ales have a high alcohol content! Some people do not like pubs because of the cigarette smoke, but after July 1st all pubs in England will become non-smoking and thus probably will attract a greater diversity of people. Of course in the summertime you can always sit outside in the fresh air – several Sheffield pubs, including the University Interval bar, have beer gardens, and one of life’s great pleasures is to sit in the sunshine and enjoy a beer with your friends. One word of warning: if you don’t like crowds of drunken youths it is best to avoid the city centre after 9pm on a weekend as it can be a little uncomfortable.

There are two comprehensive web sites for people interested in trying new pubs. The first is http://www.beerintheevening.com; type in Sheffield to access pub listings with maps and reviews. A site run by locals is http://www.sheffieldpub.co.uk which doesn’t have maps but it does have pictures and links to the pubs’ own web sites. Although these sites are fun, why not just take the initiative and try new pubs yourself!

Long distance

If you have more than a few days to spare you should grab the bull by the horns and explore further. Britain’s small size makes it easy to be in completely different surroundings after just 4-5 hours of travelling. The highlands of Scotland are magnificent, and Edinburgh, the capital of Scotland, is a classic tourist destination. The Lake District, in the north-west corner of England, has some gorgeous scenery and would be enjoyed by anyone who enjoys hill-walking, climbing, rambling along the lakeshores, or just pottering around quaint hillside villages. Northumberland, in the north-east corner of England, is a criminally undervisited county, despite having several picturesque old market towns, castles and seaside fishing villages, plus some of the best beaches in Britain. A fair distance away in the south-west corner of England is the ancient county of Cornwall, famous for its rugged cliff scenery and jagged District are friendly towards walkers, provided you clean the mud off your dirty boots! In fact, a rewarding way to spend a Saturday or Sunday is to walk in the hills in the morning then relax at a countryside pub over a beer and pub meal in the afternoon. – this way you feel you’ve earned your food! (Not that you have to go all the way to the Peak District to do this – the Three Merry Lads is an excellent pub with an outstanding beer garden just a few miles out of Sheffield along the serene Rivelin valley).

Try not to make the mistake of thinking that walking is just a summer time activity – the Peak District can be chillingly bleak and beautiful in the winter, especially if it has been snowing, and country pubs become even more cozy at this time of year. Take care if you are out walking in the hills though, as the weather can change quickly and the fog and mist can make it hard to see where you are – always take a map and compass. There are several guide books and maps describing the best walks, and even books dedicated to ‘pub walks’ in the Peak District. Rock climbing is also popular in the Peak District and the union has an popular society for those interested in this and other outdoor activities. Popular climbs are Froggatt and Stanage edge, and there are several indoor walls too.

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setting for the long-running British TV show ‘Last of the Summer Wine’. Harrogate is a old fashioned market town, which has some surprisingly high quality shops and ornate buildings. Fountains Abbey, north of Leeds, is a ruined abbey surrounded by some incredibly tranquil scenery, and is well worth a day out. One of the flagship tourist destinations in Yorkshire is Haworth, a hillside town with cobbled, winding streets, and was the residence of the Brontë sisters. There is a small Brontë museum, but the main reason people come here is to experience the bleak, windswept moorlands that are the setting of Emily Brontë’s popular novel ‘Wuthering Heights’, and hike to the isolated, ruined house which is thought to be her inspiration.

The Yorkshire coastline is very pretty and has several decent beaches to visit on a warm weekend, as well as some charismatic seaside towns. Whitby is a traditional coastal fishing town dominated by an impressive ruined abbey standing on the cliffs overlooking the harbour, and is featured in the book ‘Dracula’ (a difficult place to reach by public transport unfortunately because of its location). Not far from here are the striking vertical cliffs of Flamborough Head, with trails leading down to the beach so you can admire the cliffs from above and below. The cliffs at nearby Bempton are famous for their seabird colonies, and a trip in late May/June would get you close-up views of birds flying back and forward with food for their chicks. This is a great site for all the tourist stuff in Yorkshire [http://www.yorkshire.com].

One of the fantastic things about living in Britain is the extensive network of public footpaths that allows you to wander freely over fields and hills, and the Peak District has an abundance of footpaths and walks whether you just want a gentle ramble on a Sunday afternoon or a more strenuous scramble up some rocky hillside or waterfalls. Hathersage is a good base for relatively easy countryside walks, and a popular base for more serious walkers is Edale, on the train line between Sheffield and Manchester. Around Edale are some dramatic rocky hills and fern-covered moorlands, and there is a great pub in the village, The Old Nags Head, which is popular with walkers and serves nice food. Most pubs in the Peak

Shopping

There is a decent selection of shops in Sheffield city centre, and much of this area is closed to traffic which makes it more pleasant to explore on foot. In the summertime especially, the city centre is quite a lively place to be on a Saturday, with an eclectic mix of street performers, musicians, stalls selling local art, and people hanging around the fountains. There are also several nice spots to sit with a coffee and watch the world go by, especially the City Hall steps and the grassy area in front of the Lyceum theatre.

Sheffield’s most famous shop is the large T.J. Hughes department store at the bottom of West Street. This is probably the best place to shop for anyone on a budget, as it sells a whole range of items at cheap prices, particularly clothes, kitchen equipment, furniture, household goods and electronic appliances. Just across the road from this is Primark, which sells discounted clothes. Another handy place to pick up household goods on the cheap is Wilkin-son’s, which is downtown by the Castle market. Larger household items such as furniture are often advertised on the ‘For Sale’ board in the university union foyer, and also the classified section of local newspapers such as the Sheffield Telegraph. The market is also a good place to buy a whole range of clothes and home accessories, and also a great place to buy fresh foods such as vegetables, fruit, meat and fish. In addition to these standard items, there are market stalls selling an assortment of ethnic foods and unusual items, making it an interesting place to explore on a Saturday afternoon. There is a farmers market on Sundays during the Spring and Summer in the Moorgate area of town, where green-fingered locals sell their own produce.

If you want to furnish your house cheaply, the best places to go are definitely charity shops. These sell items donated by the public and all the money raised goes to good causes (the staff are all volunteers too!). There are several charity shops around the student areas and city centre, the most famous being Oxfam. Charity shops are fantastic places to buy cheap furniture, cups and plates, cutlery and pretty ornaments. If you are feeling lonely or homesick, buying
paintings and pictures from Oxfam is an inexpensive way to brighten up any room! And best of all, you know that the money you spend is going to a worthy cause so it makes you feel good inside! Charity shops are also brilliant places to find cheap music, movies and books; there is an Oxfam on West Street near the university which sells all kinds of books, usually left behind by previous students.

The best place to buy outdoor clothes and any sports equipment you could possibly want is Decathlon, a huge warehouse beside the end of the Moorgate Market shops, down in the south west of the city centre. CCCs is another warehouse devoted to outdoor stuff for hiking, camping and climbing, and is near Sheffield United Football Club. Millet’s is another good place to buy reasonably priced outdoor equipment such as warm clothes and walking boots, which are highly recommended for ramblers and hikers. Black’s sells better quality boots and equipment, but at a price.

If you take the time to simply wander around Sheffield you will be pleasantly surprised by the selection of smaller shops which sell unusual, speciality products. For example, there is an interesting shop inside the newly created Winter Garden, near to the Lyceum and Crucible Theatres, which sells guidebooks to local walks and historical books concerning Sheffield’s more curious local buildings, events and people. Holland and Barrett’s wholefoods, between the City Hall and Town Hall, has appetizing healthy choice and allergen-free foods, as well as an exquisite selection of herbal teas, vitamins and food supplements. The Wicker Basket by the Winter Garden sells similar interesting stuff, and just across the road from it is the Sheffield Scene, which stocks unusual items with a Sheffield connection, ideal souvenirs or gifts for your family.

There are several good supermarkets in Sheffield which stock a wide variety of decent foods, both British and international, and a recent trend is to sell precooked meals, especially Asian foods, which is perfect if you’ve had a long day and don’t feel like cooking. British food is actually a lot better than its reputation, and some of the old towns seem as though they haven’t changed for centuries, making them perfect places to relax in if you have had a stressful week! Most of the Peak District towns are close enough to Sheffield to make convenient day trips, though if you want to spend the whole weekend away in the countryside, breathing in some fresh air and smelling the roses, then there is plenty of accommodation available in hotels, hostels, and bed and breakfasts (see the above websites for links).

There are many places to visit in the peaks so I will only give a few recommendations here. Bakewell is a classic peak district town famous for its puddings, sold at several of the quaint tea rooms. It also has one of the oldest markets in England, which has run since the 1300s. Buxton is a Roman spa town, famous for the purity of its water. An unusual attraction here is the tourable cave system (http://www.poolescavern.co.uk). In Tideswell is the ‘Cathedral of the peaks’, an impressive 14th century church which is open every day and is free to enter. Peveril Castle is a gorgeous ruined castle perched dramatically above the Hope valley just outside of Castleton, which is itself a pleasant town.

Hathersage is a pretty village which is the setting for Charlotte Bronte’s ‘Jane Eyre’, and also has connections with the legendary Robin Hood. Grindleford has a lovely village cricket pitch, and spending a Sunday afternoon out here in the summertime watching a game will give you a real taste of England! A real highlight of the Peak District is the village of Eyam (pronounced ‘Eem’). This village suffered terribly during the Great (Bubonic) Plague of 1665, and the graves of local people who died of the disease can still be found in and around the village, the most poignant being the group known as the Riley Graves. Between Eyam and the town of Stony Middleton is the boundary stone, where people would leave coins to buy goods from visiting traders who refused to enter the village because of the plague.

The Peak District is actually in the neighbouring county of Derbyshire. Yorkshire, Sheffield’s own county, also has some lovely places to visit. Holmifirth is a picturesque rural town which is the
try you are travelling in (Britain has several rail companies, each serving different parts of the country). These bargains may be cheaper travel options such as ‘children travel free’ or ‘two tickets for the price of one’, but may be discounted or even free entry to popular attractions in the area you’re travelling to. Better still, if you book far in advance you can find some real bargains on things that are normally very expensive such as travelling in the 1st class carriage or having a berth in a sleeping compartment for the long overnight journey to Scotland.

Places to visit for day trips

Sheffield is quite close to several other English cities worth visiting. Leeds is just over an hour away, and is probably the best place for shopping in the north of England. It has a beautiful Victorian covered market, the quirky Corn Exchange shops and a mostly pedestrianized city centre with photogenic indoor arcades showcasing some fancy designer clothing shops. Also just an hour away is York, a lovely walled city which is small but brimming with history. Popular attractions here are York Minster cathedral with its famous stained glass windows, the Clifford Tower, the Jorvik Viking museum, the Tudor-era Shambles shopping area and the National rail museum (free!) which is filled with elegant old trains, including the world’s fastest steam train, The Mallard. Nottingham is a smallish city famous for its associations with Robin Hood and also home to Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem, Britain’s oldest pub, which dates back to 1189 and is built into the rock upon which Nottingham Castle stands.

The Peak District National Park, with all its stunning scenery and old towns, is right on the doorstep, and the most popular places can be easily reached by either buses or trains Two superb websites, http://www.thepeakdistrict.info and http://www.cressbrook.co.uk, both have descriptions, images and links to the favourite tourist hotspots, as well as useful stuff like weather forecasts and event listings. Even though many of these places can be reached in just an hour or so, they are a world apart from the busy city. Indeed, many things that are particularly good in British supermarkets are bread, sweet puddings, chocolate, and delicatessen foods, especially cheese. It is possible to save quite a bit of money in British supermarkets by buying the shops’ own brand of goods, rather than pay extra for a particular brand. Another money saving tip in supermarkets is to look for the ‘reduced to clear’ shelf, which is where food which is approaching its sell-by date is moved to. This food is perfectly good to eat, and is often very much cheaper than its original price, so if you’re there at the right time you can get bargain prices on relatively luxurious items such as steaks.

Eating out

Sheffield is a brilliant city to eat out in, with all major types of food represented. A very impressive website to help you find a place to eat is http://www.restaurants.co.uk, browse by county (Yorkshire) then town (Sheffield) to access the listings, which also include maps and customer reviews, useful for avoiding bad places! There are some interesting, if unusual, listings of the Sheffield food scene at http://www.itchysheffield.co.uk/eating.

Sheffield is most famous for its Indian food. Most student neighbourhoods contain an Indian restaurant or takeaway, but decent curry houses near the university include the Seven Spices Balti House, Butler’s Balti House, the Jaflong and the Indian Chef. There are some great ethnic restaurants along West Street and its parallel streets of Devonshire Street and Trippet Lane. WokMania and Nandos on West Street are both popular student hangouts. WokMania sells Chinese food as an all you can eat buffet which makes it good value for money. Unlike most buffet-style eateries, the food here is tasty and fresh, and it is always busy, which is the sign of a good restaurant. Pizza places are common, but notably nice Italian restaurants are Mama’s and Leonie’s downtown and Piccolo’s on West Street. There is a nice strip of trendy restaurants and coffee shops along Ecclesall Road, which is the hip place to be seen on a Sunday afternoon in the summertime.
Before you leave England you should definitely try Fish and Chips! Despite their image, chips are a cheap and filling food, and most chip shops sell sausages, pies and spring rolls in addition to fish. The nearest chip shop to the university is the Devonshire Chippy on Devonshire Street. You may also want to try a doner kebab, which is a classic British post-pub food made of strips of processed lamb and salad in a pita bread. There are several kebab shops around the university, West Street in particular, but note that these can be unpleasant places late at night on weekends because of drunken customers.

Transport and travel

Sheffield is well served by a thorough bus network, and Supertrams are also a cheap and efficient way to get around, although they run to fewer places. To ride the bus you pay the driver once you get on, whereas to ride the tram you simply get on board and a conductor will move around collecting fares. Tram stations are very obvious paved areas and the tram automatically stops at the station if you are standing there. Bus stops are large blue posts with a white square on top. As the bus you want approaches just put out your hand and the driver will stop. There are timetables at bus and tram stops. If you use the bus or tram regularly it works out cheaper to buy daily or weekly passes. Be a bit careful here because Sheffield has more than one bus company, and a ticket for one company’s buses is not valid for the buses run by the other. This is the timetable for buses run by one company, Stagecoach, (http://www.stagecoachbus.com/sheffield/timetables.php), this is the website for First buses (http://www.firstgroup.com/index.php) and this is the Supertram website http://www.supertram.com.

If you want to go further on public transport you have to take either a coach (actually just a comfortable bus) or a train. Coaches in the UK are run by National Express (http://www.nationalexpress.com for timetables and online booking). Coaches are considerably cheaper than trains and run services to cities, most big towns and airports, although they do travel more slowly and risk being caught up in traffic jams on busy roads. However, they are just as good as the train for short trips (e.g. York, Leeds). Coaches (and buses) leave from the Transport Interchange in the city, where there is a National Express ticket office (find map on http://www.made-in-sheffield.com/Places).

Britain has a thorough network of local and long-distance trains, and Sheffield is an important point in this network. The railway station is a beautiful old building to the south of the city centre, quite close to the Transport Interchange where the buses and coaches originate. There is a Supertram stop behind the station (served by both the Blue and Purple line) which is very useful if you are travelling with a heavy suitcase or backpack! Local trains are small and basic, but the long-distance trains are modern and comfortable and usually have a buffet car serving food and drink and a quiet coach where noise is kept to a minimum.

Trains are a rapid way of moving around Britain although they can be expensive, particularly if you travel at peak periods such as Fridays. The best advice for anyone travelling by train is to book in advance! For travel on non-local trains, buying your ticket just before you board the train can be up to four times more expensive then if you had booked ahead. Even buying your ticket one day before you travel will save you money! If you qualify for a student/young person’s railcard this will save you a third on fares too. This great web site gives timetables and allows you to buy tickets online http://www.nationalrail.co.uk. You can use this web site to buy tickets online then pick them up when you get to the station from automated FAST ticket machines. To get the cheaper tickets you have to pick which train time you want and then make sure you get that train as your ticket may not be valid for a later train (though if the later train isn’t busy the conductor usually won’t make a fuss). Another big benefit of booking in advance online is that you get a guaranteed seat, and you can use the web site to try to get a seat facing in the direction of travel, which makes the journey more enjoyable!

A great feature of this website is the Special offers tab, listing bargain deals on certain services according to which part of the coun-