

# Oxford

Oxford's reputation as a seat of learning precedes it, but this fun, friendly city is not just for bookworms, says PAUL EVANS.

For any international student intending to study in Oxford, the image of college buildings and gowned undergraduates hurrying between lectures is probably foremost in their mind. As Graham Simpson, Principal of UTS Oxford English Centre, points out, "A lot of students think that they will study at the university when they get here, and for many it remains a goal throughout their stay."

Suzanne Crafer, Principal of the Lake School of English, confirms that the university has strong appeal for international students. "The students know Oxford as an historic seat of learning, so they cannot help but think of its reputation when they choose to visit." The business of learning the English language here is no less famous. The phrase "Oxford English" is known the world over to mean the best and most precise formal English.

While the renown of the university is hard to escape, the 36 colleges that make up the university – most of which are open to the public – dominate the city's architectural landscape. All Souls College, one of the earliest built colleges, is a magnificent Gothic monument, and one of Oxford's treasured heritage buildings. The city itself, however, is not a dusty artefact but a lively and offbeat community where modern culture is very much alive. Carolyn Llewelyn, General Manager of the International

Study Centre Oxford, says, "Many students think that Oxford will be a tiny medieval village, and are shocked to discover that it is a vibrant, modern city."

There are certainly lots of pubs, clubs, bars and cafés to experience. Carmel Engin, Co-director at the Lake School of English, describes Oxford as "a student city, with an exciting cosmopolitan mix of people that adds to a vibrant lifestyle". The nightlife options are varied, ranging from the mainstream to the eccentric. In one particularly popular pub, the owner collects ties to display on the walls – and a new tie will win the bearer a drink in exchange!

Some of Oxford's many cafés double as jazz venues and even art galleries, with regularly changing exhibitions on show, to keep

visitors entertained. Live music of all kinds is on offer on most nights somewhere in Oxford. Whether students are into jazz, classical or heavy metal music, there's a venue to suit all tastes.

For students with a thirst for learning, there is much of interest during the day too. Oxford's most famous museum is the Ashmolean, the oldest public museum in the country, which houses much of the university's



#### Punting

Punts are long flat-bottomed boats, propelled using a long pole. A typical English pastime, punting along the River Cherwell takes you past magnificent Oxford colleges and immaculate gardens

collection of artefacts from around the world. It also houses some historic British treasures, such as the Alfred Jewel, regarded by many to be the finest example of Saxon art. Llewelyn adds, "The Pitt Rivers Museum,

with displays of shrunken heads and dinosaur skeletons, is a favourite."

There are also a number of ways to enjoy art in the city, ranging from the traditional, such as the permanent collection of Christ Church Picture Gallery, through the modern – the Museum of Modern Art is a nationally acclaimed venue for 20<sup>th</sup>-century art – to the very contemporary, with the ever-popular "artweeks" that run from May to June displaying the work of local and undergraduate artists.

Oxford serves as a great base from which to visit most of southern England, and most language schools organise regular excursions to places of interest such as Bath, Stonehenge and Stratford-upon-Avon,



#### University Museum

This natural science museum includes dinosaur skeletons and the remains of the dodo, and the impressive Victorian Gothic building in which it is housed is an added attraction to visitors



## Agent viewpoint

"Oxford, in particular, has a reputation for academic excellence which is a special attraction for many students. Students enjoy the experience of studying in this historic city and visiting the famous university. Many of the language schools in Oxford work very hard to match the international [reputation] of the city and students get a lot out of the [language] teaching they receive."

**Yancia Wang, Chinabridge, UK**

"One of Oxford's attractions is that it is quite a small city. It can be quite daunting for international students to study in London, for example, and there is less opportunity for them to feel at home in the community. Students always enjoy Oxford enormously because of the hospitality of the families they stay with and the very welcoming atmosphere of the schools. They have to work hard in Oxford, but it is always worth it. I would say without hesitation that the school we work with [Lake School of English] has an excellent quality of teaching."

**Monica Pendlebury, Centro Di Lingue Moderne Di Rovereto, Italy**

"Oxford is a destination that is really appreciated by French students. It's very dynamic and very renowned. It is especially [favoured] for intensive studies. Students like the architecture – the old buildings – the parks and the museums. The drawback is that the city is really expensive. I recommend Oxford for students aged 16 years and over."

**Daniele Delpech, Effective, France**

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Oxford, famous for its honey-coloured buildings and golden spires

Shakespeare's birthplace. With London only an hour away, it's also a great place for students who want to see the capital without the overwhelming experience of living there. As Crafer puts it, "The beauty of Oxford is that you are so well-linked."

There are peaceful pleasures in the city itself. The university-owned Botanic Gardens provide a tranquil haven near the high street, and in the Magdalen College Deer Park, on its riverside walks, it is easy to forget that central Oxford is only minutes away.

Perhaps the most popular – and quintessentially English – pastime, however, is punting down the river, and it seems that almost every student gives this a try at one time or another. Indeed, it provides

the basis of one of Oxford's most exciting and fun events, the Eightsweek, from May to June, in which teams of

eight in a punt compete against each other for victory on the river.

"Last year I was punting on the river with a group of students, when we saw a group of smartly-dressed businessmen in a cruiser floating out into the Thames," relates Engin. "The students punted out to save them and the businessmen gave them instructions as to how to help by reversing the boat. Unfortunately, they had

trouble understanding and very nearly sent the businessmen plunging into the river!"

For an historical English flavour, the May Day festivities are very traditional, with Morris dancers and street fairs, as is the famous Magdalen choir singing in the dawn from the top of the 15th-century chapel's bell tower. Ginny Dummett, Administration Officer at English@Oxford, describes another popular tradition that students can experience, the 400-year-old St Giles Fair. "At the beginning of September, the city centre is closed and the fair comes to town. Roads are filled with rides and stalls, [and] the students are delighted."



### Botanic Gardens

These beautiful gardens, situated opposite Magdalen College, were established in 1621 by Henry Danvers for the study of the use of plants in medicine. They can be visited between 9am and 5pm

