

Curious Cambridge

Cambridge is a well known destination for international students due to its famous university. However, there are many other hidden curiosities waiting to be discovered, as BETHAN NORRIS finds out.

The city of Cambridge has earned a reputation worldwide as a centre of excellence for learning – drawing together a large international community of students each year,” says Michael Gibbens from Aspect ILA Cambridge. “The city itself is built around students’ needs and caters for almost all tastes and interests,” he adds.

Together with Oxford, Cambridge is home to one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in the UK and the life of the city is heavily influenced by this long association with academia. The university itself is made up of 31 different colleges which are spread across the city, and during term time, they are home to over 16,500 students. The oldest college, Peterhouse, dates from 1284, while Robinson was founded in 1977.

Students coming to study at Embassy CES are taken on an organised tour of Cambridge and the colleges at the start of their course in order to learn about some of the city’s many stories. “We visit King’s College, the Mathematical Bridge and go punting on the Cam,” says David Godden at the school, who goes on to narrate one of Cambridge’s best-known myths concerning the wooden bridge spanning the river at Queen’s College. “The Mathematical Bridge was originally built without any nuts or bolts

to hold it together. It was a feat of mechanical engineering as it stayed up by itself. However, it was then taken apart and could

not be put together again so is now secured with nuts and bolts.”

King’s College is popular with visitors and is famed worldwide for its choir. According to Sarah Collard, Principal at LSI Cambridge, listening to the famous Kings College choir at evensong is one of the city’s more unusual attractions.



Punting on the Cam

Punting is a popular pastime with visitors and locals alike and punts can be hired independently or with a chauffeur. The punter stands at the rear of the punt and propels and steers using a long pole

The River Cam, which winds its way through the city, provides another opportunity for students to take part in a typical Cambridge experience. “Punting down the Cam is a must for Cambridge visitors,” says Gibbens, who points out that this is often a highlight of studying in the city for many students. The river provides a good vantage point from which to see the “Backs”, or banks of the river, backed onto by the colleges, which are covered in crocuses and daffodils in the springtime.

Illuminated punts are also available for

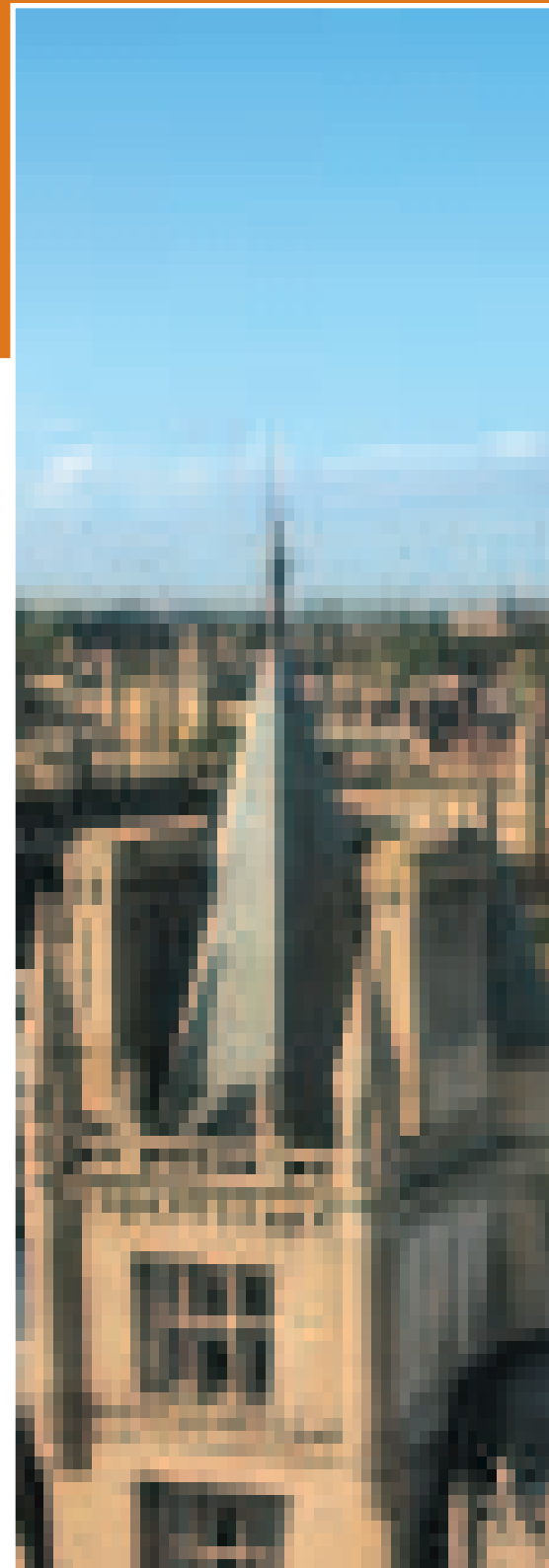
night punting and according to Sarah Schechter from the Centre of English Language Studies at Anglia Polytechnic University, students particularly enjoy “[punting] overnight to Grantchester”, four kilometres away.

Observant visitors on the river will be able to see another Cambridge



Peterhouse College

The oldest college in Cambridge, Peterhouse, dates from 1284 and was built by the Bishop of Ely. It is also the smallest college in Cambridge with just 250 undergraduate students



curiosity on Clare Bridge, where a large slice is missing from one of the stone balls decorating the bridge. While no one knows exactly why this piece is missing, one of the stories is that two university students had a bet as to how many stone balls there were decorating the bridge. To make sure he did not lose the bet, one of the students decided to remove a slice of one of the balls, thereby changing the number of balls from 14 to 13-and-three-quarters.



Agent viewpoint

"Cambridge is one of the most popular destinations and famous for its colleges. Also it [has] easy access to London. [Students] like the atmosphere of the city. There are so many students from all over the world. [They also like] punting on the River Cam and touring the colleges. [It is easier for students to meet locals in Cambridge] than London because the city is small."

Miyako Aoshiba, ICS Nagoya, Japan

"Cambridge is known for the very popular [English] exams and the university.... and is known as a student and university town. [The city] is a cute little place and very attractive for Swiss students. Students like the size of the city and the international atmosphere. It is easy [for our students] to meet other students. The locals are friendly but not generally interested in finding new friends. Students in host families with children of the same age find it easier."

Claudio Ceserano, Globo Study, Switzerland

"Cambridge and Oxford are the second [most] famous British cities after London, in Japan. [Students] like the whole academic and historic atmosphere there, including the old college buildings. [However], they dislike its congestion in the summer. [They enjoy] shopping, punting and meeting good local people."

Junko Sakamoto, Education Exchange Service, UK

PHOTOGRAPHS: TOURISM CAMBRIDGE

for language students to relax in the evenings and mix with their English-speaking counterparts. Collard points out that there are a number of clubs and pubs in Cambridge which are popular with students. "[Students like to go to pubs such as] the Anchor, the Hogshead and the Eagle and clubs [such as] the Fez Club, Life, and Fifth Avenue, all of which have international student nights," she says.

Godden says his school arranges social evenings for his students at local pubs. "On Mondays we have a special deal with a local pub, Pure Bar, where they give discounts to our students," he relates. "Then I generally go with them to a club called Toxic Eight."

The Strawberry Fair is an annual festival of music, entertainment, arts and crafts which is held on Midsummer Common in Cambridge every June and is very popular with both local and international students.

"It is one of the largest, free open-air festivals of its kind in the country," says Gibbens. Shakespeare fans visiting Cambridge in July and August can also attend the Cambridge Shakespeare Festival, during which plays are staged outside in the college grounds throughout the city.

Cambridge boasts aerial views of towering college spires and rooftops

English students studying at the Centre of English Language Studies at Anglia Polytechnic University are encouraged to join some of the university's clubs and societies, where they can mix with other English speaking students at the university. There is also a scheme, called Student Community Action, whereby students can get involved with helping people in the local community. Schechter explains, "For example, [students] can visit an old lady and make her less lonely while they get the chance to practise their English and have more contact with British people."

Many language schools in Cambridge also provide opportunities for their students to practise their language skills with local university students. "We have a conversation

Cambridge is an easy city to get around, according to David Rowson, Principal of Embassy CES, due to "the convenience of the many cycle routes". Many students use bicycles to get around and row upon row of bicycles in stands are a common sight in the city. Rowson also points out, "[Cambridge's] atmosphere is lively and cultured thanks to the young student fraternity."

Cambridge's student-centred nature means that there are plenty of opportunities



Trinity College
The "backs" of the River Cam provide a stunning foreground from which to view some of the college buildings. In the spring, the banks are covered with a blanket of flowers

exchange programme," says Godden. "Students can sign up and be partnered with students from Cambridge University. If there is a student studying Spanish at the university, they will be paired with a Spanish student and they will have to talk to each other in both languages." □