



## Studying Abroad Next Year? Time To Think About Where To Live.

Three Students Share Their Experience And Tips.

### A Jenny Harris, 17, Valencia

You're going to study abroad for a year? Get ready for the time of your life! No, I know, in the first week it won't seem like that. You'll be feeling **homesick** and awkward, and you might even start thinking you've made the biggest mistake of your life moving to a new country where you don't know anyone. But if you choose a homestay, and, if you're like me, after just one week you'll be feeling you've been part of your host family your whole life. When I think back to my year abroad, what I remember most aren't the classes or what I learnt, but how at home I felt in a new culture. When I wanted to know how to get around the city on public transport or how I should reply to certain questions without making a fool of myself, my host mum and her daughter, who became like a sister to me, helped me with everything I needed to know. In fact, I don't think I could have survived without them. There were some **ground rules** that I didn't particularly appreciate, like helping with the cooking and cleaning, unlike in my own home, or not allowing friends or guests to **turn up** at any hour. But we only had a few disagreements in all my time there and we formed such a close connection that we're still in touch regularly. So, if you're going abroad, choose a homestay so that you learn the language, but also all about the country's customs and culture. For example, you can find out the best markets to visit, how to avoid the expensive **tourist traps**, and, on top of that – and importantly in my case – you're saving money because it's always going to be cheaper than renting a flat on your own.

## B Nate Parker, 16, Houston

When I found out I was going to be studying abroad for a whole term, I confess to feeling quite nervous about the situation. I was definitely a **homebody**, so I really wanted to stay with a host family. My study programme didn't have that option, so I found myself in a dorm on campus, much to my initial disappointment. How wrong can you be? I shared my room with a student from Mexico and right from day one we became the best of friends and I started to have the time of my life. I discovered I was more outgoing than I'd realised. And the experience taught me lots of new skills, like doing my own laundry. Sadly, cooking was *not* a skill I picked up, despite having a shared kitchen! In my defence, there was little need to prepare my own meals, since we had easy access to some great places to eat on campus. The rooms were fully furnished and well equipped, which meant I didn't need to pack much. At first, I thought the facilities would be pretty basic, but ... wrong again. We had all the **mod cons**, including hi-tech laundry rooms, an on-site gym and even a cinema, all within easy walking distance. Obviously, you could go into the city centre when you liked but the only thing holding you back was that you were so at home on campus that you didn't really feel like it. That did mean making more international than local friends, but that's also a key part of studying abroad in my opinion. You certainly never felt alone, right from day one, since literally everyone was in the same boat. You're discovering a whole new way of life, but together, feeling the same doubts and fears, and the same thrills and excitement, too.

## C Will Taylor, 25, Paris

My first experience of living abroad was **traumatic**. I was in Paris as part of an Erasmus programme. I was young and I signed a very **dodgy** contract which virtually took away my standard rights as a tenant, leaving me feeling very **bitter**. Once I'd signed, the landlady informed me that there was a clause stating that I had to teach her three young children English! She threatened to kick me out of the flat if she wasn't satisfied with my lessons, despite my never having taught before. She claimed she'd reduced the rent in return – not that I noticed! So, I strongly suggest you check all the **small print** before signing anything. I also advise you not to put down a deposit on any flat based only on your online impressions. What appears to be a large, airy apartment can end up being a tiny little flat with no space at all. When the ancient sink fell right off my bathroom wall and crashed into pieces, my landlady accused me of breaking it on purpose and, initially at least, refused to repair it. So, if at all possible, go and

see the place before handing over any money. I also recommend comparing the price of properties in the same area. Watch out for anything extreme on either side of the average rent. Location is, of course, incredibly important. If it takes ages to attend classes or socialise in the evening, think also about the cost and stress involved. Having said that, it was worth it. After a couple of months in my first flat, I learnt by **trial and error** and found a much better place. Living independently was ideal for me, and my flat was the perfect base for my frequent trips into the heart of an amazing city!