



“Rivendell was the perfect house, whether you liked food or story-telling or singing, or just sitting and thinking best, or a pleasant mixture of them all. Merely to be there was a cure for weariness, fear and sadness.”

— J.R.R. Tolkien, *the Hobbit*

LODGING & TRANSPORT

LODGING

Hotels

- In 2026, we will be staying at [Housel Bay Hotel](#), a very nice hotel in Cornwall.
- In 2026, we will be staying at [Rewley House](#), which is part of the University of Oxford and has rooms similar to those of the university colleges.
- While staying in hotels, generally each traveler will have one roommate (of the same sex).
- Usually while in hotels we can put couples and/or parents-children in the same room.

Hostels

- In 2026 we will be staying at [St Briavels Castle](#), a 1000 year old fortress that has been converted into a youth hostel.
- While simple, the hostels we choose for our trips are clean and safe.
- We purchase sole use of hostels for our groups whenever feasible.
- Hostel rooms are sometimes dormitory style, but your room will only have travelers from our trip in it, and only travelers of the same gender.
- We try to offer couples and travelers with small children private rooms.
- We obtain rooms with ensuite bathrooms whenever possible.
- Nearly all of the hostels we stay in include breakfast and internet access.
- Most hostels will have self catering kitchens and lounge space.

AirBnbs



- Although we prefer hostels, we will sometimes find AirBnb's that are just too cool to pass up, such as the time we stayed in an Irish castle with a secret passage and swimming pool.
- AirBnbs will usually have the same amenities as hostels, but with some added comforts of home.

Other Lodgings

- We may occasionally stay in other types of lodgings, such as host homes with our local connections.

Roommates

- Due to the layout of some lodgings (i.e. castles), Inklings Abroad cannot always guarantee roommate requests. IA prioritizes giving married couples their own rooms and has been successful at this the past several years.

TRANSPORTATION

A Cautionary Note About Passports

- The only real way to ruin your trip is to forget or lose your US passport. Without a passport, it is impossible to leave the USA or return. To avoid passport disaster, adhere closely to the following advice:
 - When you sign up for the trip, check to make sure you have a passport, and that your passport will not be expired at the time of the trip **or within 6 months of leaving the US.**
 - If you need to order or renew a passport before the trip, do not procrastinate. Just knock this one out.
 - Passport services are usually offered at post offices, libraries, and universities. You will need to provide documentation and a photograph in order to get your passport processed. Check your passport center's requirements carefully before arriving.
 - We recommend ordering your passport at least 4 months in advance, although it is possible to get it sooner.
 - If for some reason you need a last minute passport, you may be able to pay a special fee to get your passport expedited. It is



also possible to visit a US government passport center (usually in your State's capital) to get super-expedited processing.

- Your passport should always be the first item you pack and the last item you double-check before walking out the door. Consider setting an alarm to remind yourself to pack your passport.
- During the trip, you should always know where your passport is at all times. One way to protect your passport is to keep it in a money belt on your person.
- Be especially careful about your passport when we are changing lodgings. It is easy to put it somewhere and forget to repack it. For this reason, we do not recommend taking your passport out of your luggage unless you are going to hold it or otherwise keep it on your person.
- If you do encounter passport difficulties of any kind, please [contact a leader](#) ASAP. We may be able to offer assistance.
- If you are sending a minor on this trip, review with them the importance of protecting their passport.

New ETA Requirements

- Starting 2025, you **MUST** get authorized to fly to the UK before boarding your flight.
 - See the rules on this [here](#).
- This process is similar to a visa, but is done entirely online. It costs about \$10.00 and should be done a week before your trip.

Returning to the US at the end of the trip

- This also requires your passport, so don't lose it!
- This [app](#) can speed up the customs processing for returning Americans.

Planes

- Travelers are responsible for booking their own roundtrip international flights from the USA to the United Kingdom. Most travelers will fly in and out of London Heathrow most years, but check the itinerary or with a leader to make sure.
- **Google Flights** is a fantastic resource for scanning flight prices. If we are flying in and out of different cities (for example, into London but out of Dublin or Edinburgh), then use the **"multi-city"** feature to get a combo deal. You can also purchase a roundtrip from London and then pair it with a cheap one way hopper flight from Dublin/Edinburgh to London.



- A few other travel apps we use are: Hopper (phone), momondo.com (website), and kayak.com (website).
- Triple check all data you input while booking your flight.
- Leaders are happy to help you find or book a flight if you are having difficulties. Leader contact information is posted [here](#).
- Leaders will frequently post low flight fares in [our group chat](#), so make sure you are in the chats and have your notifications on. Our group has a full membership with Scott's Cheap Flights, so we get notice of all their relevant deals. If you find a good flight deal, please share it with the team.
- Typically, any flight lower than \$1000 is a good deal. You can occasionally find fares \$800 or less if you are vigilant.
- Flights are a frequent topic of conversation in trip meetings.
- Usually the best flights can be purchased from October to March in the months prior to the trip.
- If we fly from England to another country during the trip, that flight will be included in your trip cost. You do not need to book this flight on your own.
- If your flight is delayed or canceled, don't panic. It happens almost every year. Just work with your airline to catch the next flight and contact a trip leader about your status. Because we usually spend the first few days of the trip near London, it should not be too difficult to connect with the team even if you arrive late.
- Flights to the UK from the USA will almost always be overnight. You will lose 5 hours of time flying to the UK. Try your best to sleep on the plane. Sleeping on the plane is the best way to reduce the effect of jet lag on your first day. We recommend an eye mask and white/noise earbuds for this purpose.
- Flights from the UK to the USA will usually be during the day. You will gain 5 hours of time flying back to the USA.
- We encourage travelers with the time, resources, and travel know-how to fly to Europe early or stay late. There are so many other amazing things to see and do.
- On arrival day, it is best for your flight to arrive earlier in the day, so that you have more time to meet up with the group.
- On departure day at the end of the trip, it is better for your flight to leave later, so that you have more time to get to the airport. This is especially true if we are flying out of a city without a major airport.

Airport Tips

- Arrive at the airport 3+ hours early for international flights.



- Arrive at the airport 1-2 hours early for domestic flights.
- Security can take an hour or more, especially during major holiday weekends.
- Airlines usually close the plane doors 30+ minutes before the scheduled flight time. Arrive at the gate early, and be careful about leaving the gate once the plane starts boarding.
- You will go through customs upon arrival after an international flight. This sometimes involves answering questions from a customs agent about the purpose of your trip and making any customs declarations. There should not be anything to declare for customs during Inklings Abroad, but check with a leader if you have any questions about this.
- While going through security, keep a careful eye on your passport, phone, and wallet.
- Removing shoes is not usually required while going through security in European airports.

Direct Flights versus Flights with Layovers

- A “layover” means a stop in another airport before your ultimate destination. If your flight has a layover, you will have to leave the plane, walk to another airport gate, and then board another flight. You should not have to go through security again unless the layover involves changing airports within a single city.
- Be careful with layovers that use more than one airline. If the first flight is delayed and makes you miss your second flight, and the flights are with different airlines, then the airlines will not usually be responsible for the missed second flight. Either give yourself at least 3 hours for your layover or fly a single airline.
- A layover in a northern city such as New York or Baltimore can sometimes save you \$200+ dollars. But this may necessitate taking an additional day off work.
- We advise against using super budget airlines such as Turkish Air or IcelandAir which require a layover in a third country. The \$400+ you save will often be paid back in pain and suffering.

Arrival Day: London to Oxford

- Most flights from the US arrive at London Heathrow airport (LHR).
- After clearing customs upon your arrival in LHR / London on the first day of the trip, your first step is to head to Paddington Train Station in London.



- The easiest way to get to Paddington from LHR is to take the Heathrow Express. Use Google Maps, ask an airport employee, or follow posted signs to find your way to the Heathrow Express station within the LHR complex. Expect a long and winding walk to reach the station.
 - The Heathrow Express and associated signage are bright purple. The station is underground.
 - Other trains come to the Heathrow Express station, so be careful to board the correct train. If you accidentally board another train, it should be ok, since they all go to Paddington. But the Heathrow Express is significantly faster since it does not make any stops.
- You may choose to explore London before heading to Oxford. Leaders are happy to recommend tour routes and strategies. If you tour London first, then you should plan to store your luggage at Paddington Station at one of the luggage storage companies. Be prepared to pay and deal with sometimes unfriendly employees to use the luggage storage facilities. Still, it beats carrying your luggage around London.
- At Paddington Station you can purchase a ticket to Oxford from a kiosk or from a station employee. The station can be a little overwhelming. Google Maps is pretty helpful for finding your way around, but if you get lost, ask a station employee for help. If you miss your train, don't sweat it. They run every hour or so.
 - Your route **may** require changing trains at Reading or some other station on your way to Oxford. Be careful not to miss your change.
 - Upon arrival in Oxford, walk or take a taxi to our lodgings (usually Rewley House). All lodging addresses are in the itinerary. The city is very walkable, but you may be tired after the long flight. Taxis usually loiter outside the train station.
- **Alternative:** Book a taxi directly to Oxford. This is actually more cost efficient than a train if done with 4+ travelers, but you will see less of London.
- **Alternative:** Take a bus from the airport to Oxford. Information about how to do this can be found [here](#).

Trains

- We take trains whenever we can. They offer a unique way to enjoy the beautiful British countryside.
- Many trains have trolleys and cars that serve refreshments.
- Some trains have quiet sections, and even in regular cars, it is good to be respectful for locals who might not be used to a bunch of rowdy Americans on their trains.



- Some trains will utilize a reservation system, indicated by green and red lights on a screen above a seat. Leaders will let you know if we have reserved seats on a train. Be careful to not take a seat that is reserved for another individual or group.
- Some trains will have standing room only. This can be unpleasant, but we just have to make the most of it.
- Pay attention to leader instructions when traveling by trains. It will sometimes be necessary to change trains, sometimes multiple times, in order to reach our final destination. Try to sit in a car with at least one leader or experienced traveler so that you do not miss a train connection. The train intercom and the [group chat](#) are great sources of information during train journeys. Be mindful that it may be necessary to cross from one train platform to another using a bridge or tunnel.
- Be careful getting on and off trains. This is when travelers are in the most danger of losing their luggage, passport, or other belongings.
- Trains are a great time to have conversations with British people who are curious about our group. Some conversation topic ideas are [here](#).
- Some trains will only have access to the platform from certain cars. In such circumstances, move along the train to the car with access.
- Always be careful while on train platforms. Failure to “Mind the Gap” between the train and the platform can result in a quick and painful death.

Busses

- In more rural areas, especially Cornwall, trains will not be available and we will charter buses.
- Check the itinerary for bus arrival and departure times so that you do not get accidentally left behind.
- **Travelers who get motion sick have priority for the front of the bus.** If you do not get motion sick, please do not take a seat in the front few rows or take up more than one seat. If you get motion sick but there are no available front row seats, please speak to a leader and we will make room for you.
- In some more rural areas, it will sometimes be necessary to walk a ways to/from a bus pickup spot. We try to get the bus as close as we can to our lodgings, but this is not always possible, depending on the bus size.
- Bus drivers are a great source of information about local landmarks and are usually happy to answer questions while we travel.

Cars



- We will sometimes rent cars for smaller group outings, such as on “free choice days.” These rental cars will be driven by leaders with experience driving on the left side of the road.

Boats

- Sometimes there will be boats, such as ferries or private charters.

Walking

- Every day will involve a few miles of walking. We recommend walking 2 miles a day in the month leading up to the trip so that you are ready to hit the ground running.
- If you cannot walk long distances, you can still do the trip, but talk to the leaders in advance so that we can make the trip more accessible for you.



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