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# **Choosing your Accommodation**

**Understanding University, the  
Ultimate Uni Podcast - Episode 7**

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## **Karina**

Welcome to Understanding University, the Ultimate Uni podcast. My name is Karina, and I am a Collaborative Outreach Assistant at the University of Essex and I work closely with our Aspire and Aspire Higher programmes.

## **Katie**

My name is Katie and I also work for the Outreach team. If you have any questions about any topics we discuss please use the hashtag #UnderstandingUni on Twitter, or you can email outreach@essex.ac.uk.

Some students decide to move away from home when they go to university and with the huge variety of choices, it can be a little overwhelming.

In today's episode, we hope to share the choices that may become available to you when you are making your university decisions and the unsaid rules about sharing accommodation with other students, which will be particularly handy if you have never lived with anyone other than your family before. Our guests today our current students and ambassadors Diego and Verneicia who will also be sharing some top tips on how to make your student room feel homely and what to pack when you first move away.

So, would you like to introduce yourself? We will start with Diego, if you could just mention who you are, what you study and maybe a little bit about your accommodation experience, please.

## **Diego**

Yeah of course Katie. Hi everyone, my name is Diego, I am a third-year student currently doing a BA in International Relations. My experience with university accommodation comes from the fact that in my first year I stayed at Josephine Butler house, which is an accommodation on campus and my second year I stayed in South Courts.

## **Katie**

Thank you and Verneicia.

## **Verneicia**

Thank you, Katie. So yes, I am Verneicia and I am in my final year studying Business Management. My accommodation experience is that I stayed in Harwich Court that was on campus during my first year and throughout the rest of my university experience I have stayed off campus.

## **Katie**

Thank you. I am hoping during this episode we'll hear a bit more about those different types of experiences, but I think it'll be great to share with our listeners a little bit more about the different accommodation, that might be available at a range of different universities. For starters, there is accommodations called 'Halls of residence' or 'flats'. So Diego, would you mind just sharing what does this mean, so our listeners can fully understand this, this word, please?

## **Diego**

So, as far as I know this just refers to share accommodations so basically each student gets his or her own room, which is usually individual, but may also be shared and then some facilities are shared that will be usually the kitchen and, in some cases bathrooms as well.

## **Katie**

Thank you, and I think for in some accommodation there's something called an en-suite bathroom and obviously this is completely different to shared bathroom. So what does an en-suite involve if you're lucky enough to get one of those?

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**Diego**

Well, it basically just refers to a bathroom that is adjoined to your bedroom, which means that it's private rather than shared.

**Katie**

Nice and, did you have experience of an en-suite?

**Diego**

I myself did in both years, I stayed in university accommodation. I just prefer the privacy, so I requested that both years.

**Katie**

And Verneicia, would you mind sharing some other types of accommodation that might be available? So we've talked a little bit about halls of residence or also, known as flat and the different types of facilities, you might have which might be an en-suite or shared, what other accommodation could students potentially apply for?

**Verneicia**

Yes, yeah, including with the en-suite and share facilities as well on campus. You get to share your kitchen, you get to share living spaces, you get to share the bathrooms as well, too. There are some situations on campus as well, where you have to share like your room as well with some other students and some accommodations it's possible for that. But yeah in other places, you have to have your own, you have your own an en-suite, you have your own living spaces where there's like studio flats as well too in some of our new accommodation areas as well, so you can have your own living space for yourself, but most of the accommodations on campus do have either en suite or share facilities as well.

**Katie**

Nice and how many students should you expect to share with in a flat?

**Verneicia**

Some go to like six and most go so much as up to like 15 so it really varies on your preference. Do you want a space, where it's just a small group of people, or do you want to go all out and have like a big room full of flatmates? It is all up to their preference.

**Katie**

Yes, definitely, thank you. And so, some other types of accommodation that students might come across include catered accommodation, which is where you're provided with either vouchers or a card and instead of cooking your meals, you have to go onto campus, and you purchase them from the restaurants and cafes or food that the university have. This can be really great for students who are worried about cooking so that, in their first year they know that there's going to be food ready and available for them, and they can get that when they need to.

And also types of accommodation that might be more suitable for wheelchair users and in terms of accessibility, there are plenty of options available at different universities, but that's something that would be really important to look into when you're doing your research.

So, after your first year, you may or may not want to live on campus in a flat or something similar. Lots of second year and third year students, then go off and share a privately rented house with other students. Diego, would you mind talking a little bit about that?

**Diego**

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Yeah so in particular at the University of Essex once you're out of your first year, it becomes a bit harder to get on campus accommodation. Now it is obviously convenient because you're located very close to where class you're going to be in so some people might still prefer to do that. But in my case once my third year had come around, I figured it was time to look for something off campus, so I ended up sharing a house with I think, three other people in Wivenhoe, which is fairly close and it was a nice walk to campus.

**Katie**

Nice and was it easy to make that decision when you decided to come away from on campus accommodation?

**Diego**

I think it was more a product of the circumstances. In particular, I wasn't sure exactly how long I'll be staying in the UK in that particular year, so I figured I would prefer to have a shared contract, rather than something where I was the sole tenant.

**Katie**

Verneicia, your experience of second and third year accommodation, would you mind just sharing a little bit about that?

**Verneicia**

Yeah sure! So yes, my second and third year and my final year off campus at the moment. My second year, to ensure that I was finding the right accommodation, I wanted to ensure that I was close to campus as possible, like applying some with great transportation availabilities, requirements. So, what I did was like scan around the area to make sure I found somewhere, that is accessible to the uni but also as well, affordable to me because I am a international student. So you know it comes with bills, it comes with rent, it comes with wondering who I'm going to live with of course, but it's really just the bills and accessibility to campus. So I looked and I found off- student housing and where I lived with two other people, it was mainly females, of course, and I really enjoyed the experience I had there so far.

**Katie**

Thank you, that was really, really helpful.

**Karina**

Thank you for sharing your experiences and you sort of lead on to our next sort of topic area. So, Diego I'll start with you, what do you think are the good things to sort of start thinking about when choosing your accommodation? And maybe, what are the sort of questions that students can ask if they're able to view accommodation at, for example, an open day or an applicant day. What do you think are the good things to consider?

**Diego**

I think the most important things are probably cost, number of occupants and proximity to campus, at least in my opinion. Obviously, if you get the chance to view different types of accommodation on an open day that's the best but even if you don't get the opportunity to do that, usually you will be able to find photos online and sometimes the floor plans which can be really useful.

**Karina**

Yeah, I think that's really, really good advice and just to add on top of that, I would also say, if you do get a chance, view all of them, view all of the different types available and don't cut yourself off and think "Oh, this this is exactly what I want". Try out different things, see what you like the look of, you might discover something you didn't know existed, so you don't know whether you like it or not. You can also talk to current university students about their accommodation

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experiences so definitely explore those areas too and Verneicia, how important do you think it is to consider travel and distance to lectures and facilities when you're looking at your accommodation choices?

### **Verneicia**

Thank you it's definitely important because when it comes to like traveling to and from campus, especially if you live off campus you have to consider your modes of transportation, such as biking, such as walking, such as traveling through the bus, if you're driving a car, you have to consider those things. Then the cost that comes with it as well too. When it comes to like car parking and then, when it comes to like getting tickets for the bus as well. You have to consider especially costs annually, weekly, daily. Those important stuff definitely because definitely your bank account will thank you later for that.

### **Karina**

That's a really good point. Thank you so much. But yeah cost is definitely something that we've mentioned already, that we sort of need to think about. For our listeners accommodation costs will vary depending on the type of accommodation so you'll want to consider this when making your decision, and you can view all of these costs on all of the different university web pages. So, if that is something that's the primary thing that you want to consider you can access all of that ahead of time on different university web pages. Now our Colchester campus is what is known as a campus university, because the accommodation, lecture rooms and other facilities are all in one little place. Whereas a city university is spread across a whole city, so you may have to travel to the different facilities, while living in a sort of city university.

### **Katie**

What Verneicia was just saying there about considering your budgeting, when you when you do have to travel to your lectures that's particularly important to think about if you're going to a city university, no doubt you will have to travel and I'm not entirely sure if you'll be able to walk everywhere. So that's definitely something to consider but even if you do go to an on campus university there may be some point at your time in your university experience, where you are a 10, 15 minute bus ride away because you're living in that rented accommodation with friends now in a local village. Cost is definitely something to consider and also the distance between those.

So I'd quite like to share with our listeners the application process when it comes to choosing your accommodation and making that accommodation application process. Where does this come, sort of, you know where you want to go to university, you've made that UCAS application, where does accommodation come into this? Diego, do you mind sharing?

### **Diego**

So, usually if you get accepted into certain university and you'll probably get an email from them about accommodation. If you don't get an email that's okay, you can usually log into, whatever your university portal is. Usually, there's some sort of applicant portal and there should be an option under there for accommodation right because that's a pretty common thing for prospective students to want to find out more about. When you're in that portal, or even in the email that you get you can check out the different deadlines and different options and the application process as well and usually, at least in the case of Essex they'll ask you to rank your accommodation according to your preferences by a certain deadline, then as soon as you've done that you'll probably hear back from them in a bit about the outcome.

### **Katie**

Lovely, thank you so much. So yes, there usually is a deadline. It's really important to make sure that you meet this deadline, because you may or you may not get the accommodation, the preference that you've put or you may not even get accommodation at all, depending on how

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much accommodation your university has to offer. So do keep an eye out for those important deadlines, when you receive emails and notifications from your university.

Okay, then, so how did you know what to pack and to bring to university, because for a lot of students, this is a first experience of moving away from home, it can seem a bit overwhelming, do you take everything, do you make a list, where do you start Verneicia?

### **Verneicia**

I wish someone would have told me this when I first moved on to campus because I'm international so I came from another country. So a lot of things going through my mind. Oh, my gosh, especially the weather, the weather here changes so drastically. So I was thinking oh my gosh I know I need to pack like some clothes, so I brought like two suitcases full of clothes and it was mainly like summer clothes, because I know like the summer weather is going to be okay-ish or so. And I was like I'll purchase some winter clothes up here. Mainly if you want to pack, especially for students commuting as well too, if you live in the UK. Don't pack too much clothes, because you'll have more stuff in regards to like computers and oh another thing as well cookery-ware too. Bring cookery-ware too such as frying pans, pots and pans and like your favourite kettle. Yes, your favourite plates and stuff as well too.

### **Karina**

Yeah I think I really agree with what you just said, especially about the clothes, before I moved to uni as well, I just took everything. If you live close to home, and you can travel, then you can sort of switch out seasonal clothing. For some reason, students seem to forget that when you arrive at university, you will still be going to shops and buying clothes and all of that stuff so you don't need to bring your whole wardrobe with you definitely. So yeah that's a really, really good tip. Do you have any more or Diego do you have any other tips?

### **Diego**

I don't think there's anything, in particular you need to pack aside from winter clothes, obviously, the UK gets pretty cold, especially if you're coming from another country that might not be something that you're used to. But aside from that yeah don't have too many clothes and don't let your mum talk you into packing too much.

### **Katie**

Perfect. I was just reminiscing about my university experience, because I made the same mistake as well and I pretty much packed everything. And one thing I didn't actually consider packing was cutlery and this wasn't something I realised until I actually had moved in. I put everything in my room and then my parents were about to go and I just went, what am I going to eat with? I haven't got any cutlery and luckily it's fine, because obviously, you can just go to a shop and can get some. Or, I was lucky enough that my, people I was sharing accommodation with were so lovely and friendly and said don't worry I've got spare so I did make do. So these things happen it's absolutely normal but definitely talk, maybe talk to current students to see what they packed to help you with that process, and writing a list obviously always, always helps. So Diego, when you moved into university was there anything you did to make your room feel homely and do you think that's something, do you think that's important?

### **Diego**

I think there's a topic where your mileage may vary. In my case, I didn't do much to my room I pretty much left it as it was. But I think that's also a bit of a guy stereotype so again your mileage may vary and you may want to do other stuff to your room.

### **Katie**

That's alright thank you. Verneicia do you have anything to add that?

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## **Verneicia**

Yes, I did the exact opposite of what Diego did. I literally decked out my room, as much as possible. I love colours so I made it as colourful as possible. Posters, wall hangings, fairy lights. Various colourful light to put across the ceiling and everything, I did that. I did pictures of my family, pictures of some good friends, I had those as well. Some of my favourite like plushies I brought from home too. I made sure I put those in the bed. I made it feel as if it was my room back home as well because homesickness definitely will hit you whenever it can. So just having that little taste of home will be very good to me.

## **Katie**

That's really nice and I think that's why it is important, or it might not be for everyone, as Diego has said, to add in those little things to make it feel like home because if you do experience homesickness, having those familiar items around you might put you at ease, so thank you for that Verneicia.

## **Karina**

Thank you so much Katie and thank you guys for sharing sort of what you'd pack, the things that you did to make your room feel a little bit more homely. If any of our listeners are interested, there are loads of blogs, YouTube videos and loads of other resources, where you can find lists of what to pack, available online. So definitely have a look into that, speak to our student ambassadors, speak to everyone to sort of find out what are the little things that you might forget about.

So for our last section of the episode, we're going to cover the unsaid rules about sharing accommodation. So for a lot of people going to university this is the first experience of living with people other than their families. We know that this can be exciting, but also a little bit daunting and it's definitely a learning process. The unsaid rules are things that you'll become accustomed to but we'll be asking our ambassadors for their advice so that you can feel a little bit more prepared. When sharing accommodation, how can students ensure that communal areas aren't left to one person to clean? Diego, would you have any advice on that?

## **Diego**

Yeah, that's definitely something usually discuss upfront with your flatmates so there's no confusion going forward. I think it's a bit different from being at home, because you need to remember that these are, at least in the beginning strangers, so you need to I think treat them with a little bit more consideration. Not that you shouldn't treat your family with consideration, but I think when we're among the loved ones we sort of let some things slide that we wouldn't with strangers, and so just be mindful of that. Clean up after yourself, don't use other people's stuff without asking and just practice I think basic courtesy.

## **Karina**

That's perfect. Thank you so much, and Verneicia do you have anything to add and sort of do you have any tips, for what you as an individual can do to ensure you're doing your part?

## **Verneicia**

Yeah basically just adding on to what Diego said. Like have courtesy, you know because you're living in a space with strangers, well soon to be supposedly friends, well hopefully so yeah. Do your best, clean up after yourself anytime you use the facility so it can ease up the stress as well when it comes to figuring out, you know who is responsible for what. Do it like the first time, really, it will be very nice if you like, sit down with everybody to get like a feel of what's going on with the situation and possibly like see if you can like have like a little rota to have like any responsibilities each week for a person or so. That'll be very helpful because if that doesn't happen, chaos might per se in the future.



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**Katie**

Yeah that's a really good idea and everyone or every group of students will be different, so that might work for some and that might not work for others. I had student friends who did something very similar and they kept a little table on their fridge and assigned roles to each other. So yeah, that's a really good piece of advice. What about students who are worried about noise levels, then so students obviously known to have parties and stay up late. But what if there are students out there who aren't necessarily interested in that sort of thing and are worried that they might be kept up by the noise and what can students do to deal with that or ensure that they're also being respectful if they're interested in having parties. Diego?

**Diego**

If you do have a party and you're in the common areas of shared accommodation I'd say again be respectful you know, maybe just keep it down a little bit. If you're on the receiving end of the party that's a bit too loud maybe go there talk to the people ask them to keep the down and I think the most important factor, as I was saying earlier, just being courteous with other people, it can make things a lot easier. Thank you.

**Katie**

What about if a student is a bit too nervous to speak to a student or they've done it before? Verneicia is there someone else they can speak to?

**Verneicia**

Yes, exactly if someone is nervous to just go in there and speak to the student they can actually speak to their RAs, their resident assistants, yes resident assistants which are located within their accommodations and where they can speak to them and the residence assistants can take it up as well with their flatmates to these situations.

**Katie**

Thank you so at the University of Essex we have a support system that ensures that students living on campus have someone to reach out to and and speak to if they are experiencing problems, and they are called Residence Assistants. So yeah, that's someone at the University of Essex that you can go to and there will be other support systems in place at other universities. There will always be support, so if there are issues and good or bad, you will always be able to speak to someone. Another example, I've thought of is shared bathrooms. If you're sharing a bathroom and there's someone continuously spending a long time in the shower and you need to get in there as well, to get to your lecture. But you all need to get to your lectures, how do you make that compromise? How do you approach that conversation? This is probably very similar to the sharing responsibilities when it comes to cleaning but are there any other words of wisdom or tips in that situation, Diego?

**Diego**

I think, even though it is important to be respectful and polite, it is also important to stand up for yourself, especially if you're sharing a room with someone that's a lot more intimate than just sharing say a kitchen. If you're sharing a room, or if you're sharing a bathroom with other people. I'd say make clear from the start, that certain boundaries have to be respected and that you do expect, that your use of that space, be considered by other people, just as you would consider their use in that aspect.

**Karina**

Just to add on top of that, as an ex-student who lived in shared sort of facilities, where you are sharing the bathrooms and showers. I don't think it was that much of an issue, but we all just sort of spoke about, Okay, who has the morning lectures, who has the evening lectures who prefers to shower in the mornings, who prefers to shower in the evenings? And you sort of work it out.



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For us, it was quite easy because we had a pretty even split of who likes to shower in mornings vs. the evenings. I personally didn't have any morning lectures, so I would just shower the night before. So yeah you sort of just split it that way, and it does work out pretty evenly. So again looking at people's timetables and when people prefer to use those facilities, but yeah just having a talk to them really with everyone in the flat really does help.

**Katie**

Thank you all for that information, I really hope our listeners will feel more prepared hearing your experiences which will hopefully help them to settle in when they first move away.

Verneicia what can students look forward to when it comes to sharing accommodation?

**Verneicia**

Some good things is that you get to meet so many people of various backgrounds, various cultures from within the UK and around the world too. You can get so many insights on where people are from, you can get so many interesting facts about their culture and backgrounds and plus you think you might like get some forever friends as well too. Living on campus is such a great experience and I would recommend it to anybody and everybody.

**Katie**

Thank you, and another nice thing about that, and when you were saying about meeting people from potentially all over the world. You might one day, if you do create a nice friendship or relationship with that person. They might even invite you to their home country or hometown so you might be able to experience some other places in the world that you might not have if you hadn't met those people so yeah that's really lovely. Diego and what else is nice about sharing accommodation?

**Diego**

Well, I think it's pretty much been said. Accommodations starts with you, moving in with a bunch of strangers, and some of those people may end up being friends for life and I think that's very valuable and of course, meeting people from different backgrounds. Some of them you will get along with great. Others you don't have to right? It's just for the year.

**Karina**

Yeah, I think I think that's the exciting part, especially while you're making friends with them as well, the activities that you take part in so whether it's a cooking night or, The University of Essex has actually their own like sort of mini cinema so going away to there or going to Colchester Zoo was something something that we did with our friends. And another sort of feature is Su homes, which is actually a letting agency as part of the student union at the University of Essex. And they offer support for students, looking to rent private accommodation. So other universities may offer similar things to this to help you and your experience of finding a home, whether it's alone or with your friends.

And a good tip to remember is to book in viewings for this type of accommodation with plenty of time to spare as other students will be doing the exact same thing, and you want to make sure that you get the right place that suits you and suits your friends as well.

**Katie**

Thanks Karina, you want to make sure that you're comfortable so again, we did mention that deadline when it comes to applying for your on campus accommodation, when you first start university and it's the same for your second and third year as well, accommodation is quite a big thing, it's a big part of your university experience, so you want to make sure it's right and suits you. So do make sure that you meet the deadlines and for your second and third year if you're moving off campus get those book in those viewings as soon as you can.

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So we hope today's episode has helped you to think about everything you need to consider when choosing your accommodation. And also given you a better idea of the type of accommodation, you might like to go to when you go to university. We've also had some great tips from Venetia and Diego today about what to pack, and some unshared rules about how to share your accommodation, how to approach those difficult conversations, but also some really nice positive things about meeting potentially lifelong friends.

So, once you begin university you'll learn your own lessons when it comes to sharing accommodation, but you'll soon adjust to student life, just like every university student.

And, but if you want to chat to current students at the University of Essex go to [www.essex.ac.uk/life/chat](http://www.essex.ac.uk/life/chat) where you can ask them questions about their accommodation and their student life.

### **Karina**

If you have any questions about this episode don't forget to send them in via Twitter using the #understandinguni or send them an email to [outreach@essex.ac.uk](mailto:outreach@essex.ac.uk)

Additional resources will be posted on our website and sent to you via email if you're a registered listener, thank you for listening to today's episode don't forget to share with your family, friends and colleagues.