

In-Country Tips provided by Whitaker Grantees

The comments below are provided by Whitaker Grantees and are not a reflection of the opinions of the Whitaker program.

Australia

VISA

You will most likely need either an Australian “occupational training” visa if you are working for a professional institute or company, or an Australian “student visa” if you are working at a university. Contact the bureaucracy of your host institution as soon as possible to figure out what type of visa they will sponsor you for. In one instance, the visa negotiation process took almost 2 months, and the grantee was just trying to figure out what visa to file for. (The grantee wasn’t even waiting on approval.)

If you are at a university, try contacting both the administrative head of your host department and the study abroad office. Your visa type ultimately depends on the classification that your host will sponsor, and this may contradict the visa class that you are recommended if you call the Australian visa bureau. UNSW would not sponsor the grantee for an occupational training visa because they were not paying the grantee’s salary. They would only sponsor the grantee for a student visa despite the fact that the grantee insisted she was not seeking any academic credit or a degree. Because she was on a student visa (and listed as a full time neuroscience honors student, which consists of a full course load of research credits), she was required to pay full tuition at international student rates. Whitaker adjusted her original grant allocations such that it included a tuition reimbursement, but they need a couple weeks to make this adjustment, so start this process early. Student visas approved almost instantly once you are given the student registration number from your host institution. The grantee has heard that non-student visas take longer to approve. Note that if you are on a student visa, you will most likely be required to pay for the compulsory Australian student medical insurance (~\$500), despite proof of existing insurance through Whitaker/CISI. The grantee tried to argue this and recommends that you try the same, but she was unsuccessful.

If you happen to be stationed at UNSW and you are not having any success with procuring your visa, a grantee recommended emailing Kate Bennet from the study abroad office. Kate resolved the grantee’s visa issues - k.bennet@unsw.edu.au.

Note for anyone that comes to visit you while you are abroad: They do not need a visa to visit Australia for less than 90 days, but they do need an electronic travel authority (ETA), which can be obtained online.

Flights

Check student travel authority (STA) for discount Qantas flights. Qantas flights allow 2 checked bags free of charge. Many other carriers only allow 1, so check with your airline. You will need to purchase an international student card (ISIC) for \$25 with your STA flight if you do not already have one, but this card will get you discounts on many hotels, hostels, museums, and restaurants around the world, especially in Europe. www.statravel.com

If you are looking to travel domestically within Australia, the cheapest airlines are Jet Star and Tiger.

Customs

Australian customs is quite strict compared to other countries. In addition to the usual restrictions on fresh food, etc., you will be asked if you have any wooden articles. (One grantee noted that customs was concerned about them harboring bugs like termites.) It is fine to bring wooden items to Australia, but (this is a general rule) it is best to declare every item you bring so that you are not accused of hiding anything and to pack all items in a place where you can easily take them out to show the customs agent. They will also ask if you have brought over any soil remnants, particularly on shoes or camping gear. If you have a dirty pair of hiking or tennis shoes, clean them thoroughly before you pack them.

There is also a clause in Australian customs regulations that states that you cannot bring more than \$900 AUD of goods into the country without paying the 10% Australian GST on those goods. This clause is mostly ignored unless you appear to have lots of brand new electronics with you. (The rule is in place to prevent people from bringing in lots of new goods from foreign countries, particularly from Asia, to sell tax-free.) One grantee brought a musical instrument, her laptop, her iPhone, her camera, and all of her personal belongings for the year and did not get questioned. If you are stopped on this clause, request Customs Form 46 for temporary imports. With this form, you will still have to pay the 10% GST tax on any goods that exceed

the \$900 AUD total limit, but you can reclaim the tax money when you leave the country if you were in AUS for less than 1 year and you still have the taxed goods in your possession at the time of departure. See these Australian customs webpages for more details:

<http://www.customs.gov.au/site/page4355.asp> : customs website on temporary imports

http://www.customs.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/Form_46.pdf : the actual pdf of Form 46

Housing (most applicable to Sydney)

Housing in the Sydney area is very expensive and can be difficult to acquire. Expect to pay at least \$1100 AUD/month for your own bedroom in a shared 2 or 3 bedroom apartment and at least \$1400 AUD/month for your own apartment. Note that rent is typically collected weekly or biweekly, so the housing rates advertised are *weekly* rates.

There are almost no apartment complexes with rental offices in Sydney. Apartments are individually owned in most Sydney apartment buildings (more like what we call condos), and these apartments are rented through real estate agencies. To view real estate agency listings, use a website like www.realestate.com.au or www.domain.com.au. However, note that the real estate agency lease process is long and competitive. Agencies typically only have public apartment viewings for 15 minutes at a time. If you apply for an apartment, the agency will probably request lengthy documentation including proof of employment/income, proof of visa, and proof of an Australian bank account. They may even request proof of past rental history or letters of recommendation from former landlords. The agency may then take a week or more to get back to you with a decision after you have submitted your application.

One grantee started her housing search with the real estate agency process, but after little success, she decided to look for an apartment share from someone who had already signed a lease.

Look for apartment shares on www.gumtree.com.au, which is the AUS equivalent of Craigslist. Alternatively, check to see if there is any campus housing available at your university. If you happen to be stationed at UNSW, it is recommended to look for housing in Randwick, Coogee, Clovelly, Kensington, or Surry Hills, which have easy access to the university via the bus lines. You can purchase inexpensive new furniture at the Sydney Kmart and IKEA (IKEA delivers for a \$50 fee), or buy used items from Gumtree. Also note that if you sign a new lease for an unfurnished apartment, the apartment will probably not have a refrigerator, either.

Transportation (most applicable to Sydney)

Sydney is very well connected by public transit. You should not need a car. Bus and train tickets are very reasonable for students. Bus passes are sold at most convenience stores and some pharmacy and grocery stores. It is cheapest to buy bus passes in groups of 10. There is a zoning system in Sydney, so check online to see if your commute spans 1, 2, or 3 zones. If your commute spans 1 zone and you are a student, you should request a “MyBus 1 (or 2 or 3, depending on the number of zones), 10 pass concession card.” Train/metro tickets are sold at the train stations, and there is also a student rate available. An alumnus that did their grant in Adelaide found that public transportation is not convenient, and a car is required.

Bank account (and bills)

You will most likely need an Australian bank account to make rent, utilities, or tuition payments. You may also need to show proof of an Australian bank account just to get housing or a cell phone plan. Most payments in Australia—even payments to individuals—are done via EFTPOS, where you transfer money directly from your bank account into the bank account of the company or person you are trying to pay. This takes the place of checks, which are all but completely obsolete in Australia.

Alumni have suggested setting up an account with National Australia Bank (NAB) because there is no fee to start a checking and savings account and there are no account minimums. Alternatively, check to see if your US bank has any Australian banking partners. (Mine didn't.) You can wire money from your US account to your AUS account, or (this is one way that checks can be used) you can bring your American checkbook to Australia and write yourself checks to your AUS account from your US account. If you plan to do wire transfers, make sure that you have everything arranged with your American bank before you leave the country.

Phone

Cell phone plans are surprisingly reasonable in Australia, and there are many prepaid options or month-by-month contracts. You should not have to lock into a year or two-year plan. Vodafone (<http://www.vodafone.com.au>) typically has some of the most reasonable plans (that are cheaper than comparable plans at Telstra), and the grantee has found their coverage fine in

Sydney. Grantees have brought their iPhones from the States and used a SIM-only \$35/month monthly contract that includes unlimited texting, 750 MB of data, and roughly 3 hours of talk time. If you plan to use your own phone from the US, make sure that you have your American cell phone carrier unlock it so that you can put an Australian SIM card in it.

Expensive Things to bring from home

Most things are more expensive in Sydney than they are in the States. Try to bring as many of your basic living needs from home as you can, but especially consider saving some room for these items, which are significantly more expensive in Australia: All electronics; Tennis shoes; Make-up (bring refills); Towels and sheets (try to pack 1 of each if you can fit it); Outlet adapters (including, perhaps, 1 universal adapter since you will travel to Europe for the midyear Whitaker seminar); If needed, a voltage converter; A wetsuit and snorkel gear? –Sydney has great swimming and snorkeling, but the water was cold for me as an East Coast girl. The grantee bought a wetsuit and snorkel set in Sydney, but it would have been cheaper to buy them in the US.

Notable Stores

Coles and Woolworth are the major grocery chains. Check out Harris Farms grocer for great prices on produce. Discount Chemist usually has the best deal on pharmacy items. Bunnings is a large hardware store. There are Targets and Kmart in Sydney.

Tipping

Unlike Americans, Australians may not tip if the service is just average or poor, and they almost never tip more than 10%.

US Income Taxes

Please carefully read the IRS regulations yourself to decide which tax laws apply to you and your specific grant. It is worth mentioning that if you stay in Australia for more than 330 days of any 12-month period, you may qualify for the “Foreign Earned Income Exemption”, which you can file for using Form 2555. If your 12-month period covers 2 tax years, you may need to file for the Foreign Earned Income Exemption Extension, which allows you to wait to file your taxes on your grant money until after your 330 days abroad are met. You can file for the Foreign Earned Income Exclusion Extension using Form 2350. Any tuition reimbursement money that you receive from Whitaker is probably tax free, but again, please carefully read the IRS regulations to assess your own situation.

Denmark (Each bullet is a separate grantee response)

Preparation/VISA

- To get your Danish visa, you will likely have to travel to New York, Washington DC or San Francisco, so be prepared to schedule/budget for travel to arrange your visa. If you are planning enough in advance, you can schedule an appointment to go to the Danish Consulate in New York while you are there for orientation. That is the easiest way to go through the visa process. Otherwise you will have to appear at the Swedish Embassy in DC or the Norwegian Embassy in San Francisco and you will have to complete your application upon arrival to Denmark.
- Apply for the residence permit before going to Denmark! Although you can enter and work in Denmark (for up to 3 months) without a residence permit, you will not be able to get a cpr-number (very important, see below in bank) until you have a residence permit.

Housing

- Ask your host if they can help find an apartment before you arrive. It's difficult to find one in central Copenhagen without local help. If you cannot find one before you arrive, the University of Copenhagen provides new international staff and guest researchers temporary accommodation (Researcher Hotel) while looking for permanent accommodation
- In Copenhagen, Nørrebro, Østerbro and Fredericksberg are great central neighborhoods to live in and are close to the University campuses. Nørrebro is where I lived and my favorite neighborhood. Cheaper housing can be found in Vesterbro (also a great neighborhood, but farther from the Medical/Bioscience campuses) and Amager, which is a separate island.

Transportation

Plan on buying a bike, it is by far the best way to get around the city. You can also get two- and three-zone klippekorts to move throughout the city.

CPR

- Register with the Borgerservice as soon as you have your CPR-number. You need a CPR number to do anything, i.e. get a cell phone, join a gym, open a bank account, take Danish classes, etc., so get that as soon as possible.
- Without a cpr-number, you will not be able to open a bank account, get a university ID, sign up for cell phone contract & internet. So it is important that you get a cpr-number and a "Yellow Card" as soon as you arrive in Denmark. To get a cpr-number you must have your residence permit and a permanent address in Denmark.

Bank

Once you have a cpr-number, you can open a bank account. Ask your colleagues for a specific branch representative, and call/email to make an appointment. They'll tell you what you need to bring (e.g., CPR letter, employment contract). There are different kinds of bank cards, but the best one is the Dankort/Visa Card (It's most widely accepted in Denmark and EU). They don't like to give out Dankort to new customers, but try to ask for one anyways.

Language

With a cpr-number, you can sign up for free Danish lessons (www.studieskolen.dk).

Tips

Rain jacket - maybe the most useful thing you can bring with you to Copenhagen. It rains quite a lot.

France

Tips

Alumni that went to France emphasized how important it is to establish and maintain a close relationship with your host lab. In France the bureaucracy is ridiculous, and even if you are 100% fluent in French it would still be difficult to get things done. The grantee's lab was instrumental in helping him set up his life in Grenoble. They help him set up his bank account, cell phone, housing, public transport, visa, etc. So BEFORE arriving insist via email for your lab to help you set up all those things (and they will be very happy to do so) – specific to Grenoble.

One alumnus that studied in France emphasized that France works at a much different pace than the US, and that future grantees should keep this in mind when considering the feasibility of their project. Having all protocols already established before starting their grant also helps immensely.

Those attempting to find housing in Paris should be aware that as a foreigner, they will likely be charged more than a native.

Students may need a translated and certified copy of their birth certificate to open a bank account in France; this is much easier to obtain at the French embassy or regional consulate in the US than it would be in France.

Students will need someone (or a bank) to co-sign on their housing lease.

Germany

Visa

In Germany there is a very specific order of which paperwork needs to be filled out, and the timeline (start date of the grant) needs to line up with these timelines. Grantee example: "In my case, I asked to start my grant in mid-July, but the semester in Germany does not start until October. I was not able to register as a student and supply the appropriate documents to apply for my student visa until September, and I cut it close, with less than a week left being allowed to stay in the country on a tourist visa before receiving my student visa."

Bank Account/Payments

Previous grantees have generally not had any difficulties transferring funds from the US. Many have done wire transfers from

US bank account to accounts in Germany, and even though there are fees, the transfer is secure. A few grantees setup an account with Deutsche Bank which has an agreement with Bank of America, thus no fees were charged for withdrawals and using the ATM.

Germans generally don't use credit cards or checkbooks. Bank-transfers or cash are the most common way to make payments.

Housing

For apartments, on top of the monthly rent and deposit there can sometimes be a commission fee. In cities such as Munich and Berlin, housing can be scarce so start looking before you leave for the grant.

Italy

Visa

CALL the consulate beforehand to find out what you need in the application: The Italian consulate was a pain and they did not have an updated list of what you needed online. Make copies of EVERYTHING and assemble the originals and the copies in the order that they are on the list and place into two separate folders: if you did not have everything in the folders (even if you had it with you) they would not allow you to add it to the application. They turned you away and you had to make another appointment.

Bank Account

Bank of America has a sister bank in Italy called BNL. They do not charge any fees for withdrawing money from your American account

Language

Learn it before you go. Since English is the language of science, Italians will speak English to you but they likely will not speak it to each other, leaving you a little out of the loop. The grantee recommends the Rosetta Stone and Rocket Italian language programs.

Travel

It is so easy to get around Italy by train, take advantage of it as much as possible. The website to use for booking tickets is <http://www.trenitalia.com> or <http://www.italotreno.it>

The Netherlands

Tips

Grantees who have studied and done research in the Netherlands advise learning Dutch; one grantee advised taking a class. This will give you a much better understanding of their culture. Despite English being spoken by most university educated Dutch, learning the language will help integrate with the department/university, as well as give you a better sense of the local culture.

One grantee commented that clothes dryers are not common in many Dutch apartments, and that this is in line with local attitudes towards energy efficiency.

New Zealand

Preparation

For obtaining a student visa (for some Fellows), you must get accepted to the degree program and acquire certain documents and letters prior to applying for the visa. Note, because of the time difference, corresponding with people in New Zealand took days even for short threads of emails because they generally work only within business hours.

New Zealand (cont).

Visa

Once everything at the University is taken care of, the student visa can be very quick. One grantee's visa took one week from sending the materials to the embassy until she got back everything with my visa approved. Also, if you are unsure of specific requirements of the documents, call the embassy and ask. They do not seem to enjoy receiving phone calls, but it turned out saving me quite a bit of time by simply calling up and asking my questions.

Housing

Housing in Auckland is fairly expensive, and it depends what kind of living situation you are looking for. The University offers several options which include power, water, internet, and cable within the price. You can, though, find nicer and cheaper places (not including all utilities) by looking for a flat. Trademe.co.nz is one of the best websites to look for flats.

Transportation

Public transportation is quite good in Auckland, and the buses are fairly easy to navigate. The website <http://www.maxx.co.nz/> is really good for helping to plan routes and times.

Bank

Setting up a bank account is also quite simple. You just need to go to the bank with your student ID and passport. Also, the grantee got a bank account with TD Banks in America. They offer a student checking account which is free and does not charge an overseas charge fee. You will get charged \$2.50 for ATM withdrawals, but most things can be paid for with a card.

Food

The cheapest place to buy groceries is the Pak n Save, but if you are not near one, Countdown has seemed to be the second best. Queen Street is the main road for shopping in Auckland, but everything there is quite expensive, so in most cases it pays to walk or bus a little further to find better prices. The Warehouse is the New Zealand equivalent of Walmart, and it is a fairly cheap place to get most items, but groceries, shampoo, and other personal care products will generally be cheaper at the actual grocery store.

Tips

There is a lot of rain in Auckland so do not forget a rain coat because they are quite expensive in the country. Also, the locals are friendly and don't mind answering your questions. Finally, although there is not a language barrier, there are several words which are different and may be confusing at first. Flip flops are called jandals (Japanese sandals) here, and you shouldn't wipe your hands on the tea towel because that is only for dishes. The Kiwis are pretty serious about their coffee, so if you like coffee you will love the coffee in New Zealand and at the Auckland Bioengineering Institute in particular.

Spain

(Each bullet is a separate grantee response)

Visa

- Make sure you start this in advance. Each consulate in the US told me different things and I even heard different things on different visits to the same consulate. When you are staying more than 6 months, you will apply for a student visa, but only be granted a 3 month visa that they put in your passport. You then take paperwork that they give you to the office of foreigners (oficina de extranjeros) once you are in Spain. You will need to collect additional paperwork such as a documents showing where you are living, and fill out another application for a NIE which is a national identification card for foreigners. This will allow you to enter and exit the country freely for the length of your grant. Most likely you will need to visit the office in Aluche to first make an appointment, and then you will need to return for the appointment to submit your application. Finally after about 40 days you will need to return for your ID card.
- Keep in mind all the Gov't offices close around 2pm.

Flights

- Obviously booking round trip saves you lots of money. I used the STAtravel website which got me a really good deal on my international flights.

Spain (cont.)

Housing

- This is for people that are going to find housing by themselves (e.g. not a student dormitory). It is standard practice for landlords to hire an agent to rent out properties for them. However, keep in mind that if you find an apartment through an agency (and chances are you will have no choice but to go through an agency!), you have to pay the agent a fee as well. This fee is usually 1-2 months of rent!! So, to move in, you're looking at the first months rent + deposit + agent fee (minimum of 3 months rent if you are lucky, but could be as much as 5 months rent!!).
- As soon as you find a flat, get your National Identification number by first taking your passport with visa and a bill (water or electric) to the local government to obtain the 'empadronamiento', or letter of confirmation of residency. This is necessary to go to the central government to get your identification card and number. There are good descriptions of how to do this online, and although you have some 30 days after arrival to take care of this, I recommend getting on it early since cutting through the red tape takes time and patience here in Spain.
- Madrid is fairly cheap, especially if you live with roommates. I recommend living in a flat with 2 or 3 roommates because it lowers the cost as well as makes it easier to deal with bills and your landlord if one of them speaks Spanish. Also helps you get acclimated to Spanish life. Great areas for students to live is near Universidad Complutense in Moncloa, Arguelles (where I live), or even Cuatro Caminos. These places have good, affordable housing and are in safe neighborhoods. I know people that live in the city center but it's more expensive and super touristy. A lot of students also live just south of the center which is cheaper but its older and not the safest part of the city.
- Barcelona living, El Raval is really the only part of the city in which I would not recommend living, as it is seedy and noisy. Each of the sections has its own charm, from the hipster El Born to the latin- inundated Poble Sec. Ciutat Vella is also incredible, if you are ready to live in the middle of it all and can put up with the non-stop revelry. I came early for my grant and stayed in a hostel for about 5 days while I tried to lock down housing, which was stressful, but certainly important if you want to get to know potential roommates before moving in. I recommend living with Spaniards, but be careful if you are looking to speak Spanish, since likely Catalan will be spoken in a flat with all Catalonians. Better to find a flat with other Spaniards or even Portuguese or Italians, since they tend to speak good Spanish.

Transportation

- Madrid: If you are under 23, definitely get the monthly pass which I believe is about 32 euros. I walk to work everyday so I just get the 10 pass card each time but it works for metro and all of the buses. For longer trips, Madrid is the center of Spain and the hub for the rail and bus networks. Rail is really nice here but book more than a month in advance because it can get expensive quick. While the buses back home are not too pleasant, they are much better here and perfect for overnight, cheap travelling. You can book these last minute and not pay very much.
- Barcelona: For the majority of people, the T10 card is the best transportation option to get. As of May 2013, it costs 9.80 euros for this 10-ride ticket that can be used within 1 zone centered on Barcelona. One ride is less than a euro, and it includes transfers in the same direction. The metro in Barcelona is great, and if you are under 25, the T-Jove is worth the 100e for a 3 month transportation (metro, bus, tram) pass. Also, as soon as you find housing, sign up for the Biking program, which gives you a year-long subscription to the public bike service here which is endlessly useful.

Bank Account

- With the struggles of the Spanish banking system I opted not to open an account here. But I have a Charles Schwab account in the US which is very useful because they do not charge you ATM fees abroad in any country and they do not add extra fees so it was very cheap and convenient.
- Several larger investment banks (Morgan Stanley, Charles Schwab) in the US offer ways to get around fees required to change money over and get cash, which is the best way to operate in Spain. Schwab offers refunds for all foreign transaction fees on their debit card and Morgan Stanley has a fee-free transfer program to put funds into an account here. If you don't already have an account with one of these companies, I am not sure how easy it is to get one quickly, but it's worth a look. Otherwise, I would recommend transferring a large amount into a bank here, as the fee is likely to be flat, as opposed to 3% every time as it would be using a debit card to take out Euros.

Spain (cont.)

Phone

- If you have a smart phone, definitely get it unlocked and get a new SIM card here. I used Orange just because it was easy to understand the plan. But after talking with people around here, Yoigo and Movistar seem to have the best deals. There's a place called Phonehouse that sells plans and cards for all these companies so it's a nice 1 stop shop for everything.
- There are two types of contracts in Spain - permanent and temporary. The problem with permanent contracts is that they tend to have an 18 or 24 month commitment period, with a hefty penalty for breaking the contract early. Furthermore, you need to have some documents from your bank that may be difficult to get in order to get a permanent contract. I recommend getting a temporary contract (called "tarjeta" by some companies), which you can open with just a passport.

Food

- Mercadona, Carrefour, and Simply are my favorites. There are so many small fruit shops, bread shops, etc that are super tasty and local. You will have no problem on this front.
- Grocery stores are plentiful, but I recommend buying bread at a local bakery and fruits at a stand near your flat. They are almost always better quality and similar price to the products in the big stores. Also, the store Bon Area is the best for meat and cheese products, you never know what you'll find in the refrigerator!

Restaurants

- In Madrid, La Latina, Tribunal, and Arguelles are my favorites and there are some more posh places over near Serrano.
- In Barcelona, for restaurants, stay as far away as possible from Las Ramblas to eat, as they are just preying on naïve tourists. Head instead to El Born for dinner at 'Mar de la Ribera' or to Poble Sec for food on Carrer Blai, and particularly pintxos at 'Blai Tonight.' Gracia is also ripe for exploring, with lots of local spots for good food.

Language

- Barcelona: Deserves its own section, due to the presence of Catalan. You can survive in Barcelona with a limited knowledge of Spanish. The locals, of course, appreciate a willingness to learn at least Spanish, and all the Catalans will push their language too. If you are intermediate, I would recommend taking a course at first, since the accent here is very different, and if there are Catalans in the lab, you will hear Spanish only some of the time. It is by no means immersion in Spanish. There are websites, too, which specialize helping people find language exchanges to improve their language, but those are hit or miss. I highly recommend finding flatmates with whom you only speak Spanish, so that important business in the lab can be conducted in English.

Tips

- Barcelona: The biggest turn-off for many people here is the petty crime. Many tourists fall prey, true, but even the locals are susceptible as I have heard from stories in the lab. The best advice is to keep your wits about you at all times in crowded places and trust no one who comes up and asks for anything besides directions. The bottom of Las Ramblas near the metro stop Drassanes is particularly seedy late at night. Basic advice: wallet and phone in front pockets, even better to stick your hands in them too. Ladies, keep a close eye on your purse in bars and restaurants, and don't ever turn your back on your luggage in the train or bus stations. With a little common sense, you won't have a problem.
- Short travel: Within day-trip distance and highly recommended is the town of Tarragona, on the coast south of Barcelona, as well as Montserrat inland with its monastery on the hill. Each can be done in one (long) day and offer some outstanding sights point have I felt physically at risk.
- One grantee said that the largest transition was the schedule. Work is carried out at 10:00 AM to 7:00 PM, with lunch at 2:00 PM.

Sweden

Preparation/VISA

Communicate with your host to determine which visa is best for you. If you are taking courses or admitted to the university, you can have a student visa. You CAN work on a student visa. There is also a very specific visiting researcher visa that has been used by Whitaker fellows in the past. Information on visas can be found at the Swedish Migration Board website http://www.migrationsverket.se/info/175_en.html.

Visa approval was emailed to a grantee, and she printed that out when she traveled to Sweden. Once in Sweden, the grantee went straight to the Migration Board to apply for my residence permit. The next step is to apply for a personnummer, or personal number, at the Tax Office, but you are only eligible if you are staying longer than 12 months. This number is used for identification for paying bills, hospital visits, etc.

Transportation

Public transportation is very convenient in Gothenburg. The trams and buses are very clean and safe and used by many of the locals. In the summer months, it is easy to get around walking or by bike, but in the winter the grantee used 3 month transit passes for unlimited rides, for about \$50 a month.

Switzerland

Preparation/Visa

Bring copies of all identifying documents, 4-6 passport pictures, US health insurance in addition to what Whitaker provides. Switzerland is a land of efficient administration and rules. They like concrete proof of just about everything. A passport picture must be provided for almost all things you apply for like your residence permit, transportation passes, student ID, etc.

You need to register with the Kreis Buro and immigration office within two weeks of moving in (see site below). <http://www.stadt-zuerich.ch/content/prd/en/index/bevoelkerungsamt/personenmeldeamt.html>

Visas: Start early! The consulate takes a while to process the working visa, typically around 3 months.

Housing

HOUSING IS REALLY HARD TO FIND! Don't stress, things usually work out at the last minute, but be proactive and start sending emails. In Zurich finding an apartment is often like finding a job--you send an initial interest email, then show up for an interview. It is not uncommon for 20-50 people to show up or interview for one room, especially in the fall. The website below is really helpful for finding a flat: http://www.wgzimmer.ch/wgzimmer.html?wc_country=ch. People understand how difficult it is to find housing in Switzerland. If you are struggling, definitely email the institute secretaries or other people in the lab for some help--maybe they know of someone renting a room or will be willing to let you stay for a few days.

Transportation

Buy a Halbtax and Gleis 7 (if you are under 25) from the main train station as soon as possible (about 250CHF, but it pays off very quickly). Transportation in Switzerland is very expensive, and buying the half-tax card will allow you to pay half-price for any trains and most forms of transportation (trams, ferries, buses, etc.) Also--upon arriving try to use public transportation from the airport (network directions are all available on google maps) -- Taxis are ridiculously expensive!

Bank

Opening up a Swiss bank account is highly recommended in addition to being cool to have. Many transactions are expected to be done online which is easily accomplished through Swiss banking. There are a couple of options the easiest probably being PostFinance. Otherwise, CreditSuisse (offered on university campuses) and UBS are great options but a little trickier as an American to open because of bank privacy issues between the two countries.

Set up an account with PostFinance (the Swiss post office). It is very easy, so just stop by and ask about setting up an account. You can pull money out of an ATM and deposit it into her PostFinance account. With PostFinance it is very easy to pay bills or rent electronically. Cash is widely used for purchase over credit cards in Switzerland.

Money saving tips

Half-off card (Halbtax or Demi-tarif) is about 200CHF but every form of transportation is subsequently half off which pays off very quickly; After 7 card (Gleis 7, Voie 7) is free transportation between 7pm and 4am which again costs about 200CHF but worth it; all of these passes are for those under 26 years of age; if you know what day you are intending to travel, each commune at the population office offers a limited number of day passes for around 30CHF which is especially worthwhile if you have guests visiting or you intend to travel to the opposite end of Switzerland (must have a Swiss address to provide and go in person to the office to purchase)

General Information

Each commune has a different office with different regulations that abide by the rules of the specific commune and canton so what was applicable to one person in the commune of Crissier right outside of Lausanne in the canton of Vaud might not be applicable to a person in Zurich. Regardless of where you are, there are a few procedures they share in common. You must apply for a residence permit within days of finding your housing. This will cost you money! Be prepared with as many identifying documents as you can, passport picture, proof of health insurance, proof of affiliation to the university, the Whitaker fellowship acceptance, etc.

United Kingdom

(Each bullet is a separate grantee response)

Preparation

If you need an ATAS certificate, apply for one ASAP as it will take the max amount of time (28 days exact) to process. Submit all completed paperwork on the self-service page ASAP - the sooner you do so, the sooner you will get your CAS number. Work with your department. If you need to pass the CRB check, submit a background check to the FBI (or all the states you have lived in) ASAP, no later than the spring. This is an incredibly complicated and time-consuming process.

Visa

- Go to the UK border agency web site (<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/visas-immigration/>). Follow the directions carefully and with AMPLE time to complete all of the necessary documents. Personally, I am not a degree-seeking candidate in this fellowship year, therefore I have a tier 5 migrant worker visa.
- As a student I got a Tier 4 student visa which was pretty straight forward. I didn't have any issues and the university made it clear which one to get.
- This is an unnecessarily complicated procedure. You will have several options here; however, the most inexpensive option is the Tier 5 (Temporary Worker - Government Authorised Exchange) visa under the points-based system, which costs approximately 200 GBP. All of the information you will need to complete this application is on the UK Border Agency Home Office website, found here: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/visas-immigration/working/tier5/government-authorisedexchange/>. Despite the relatively quick published processing times, it is recommended that you start this process as early as possible.
- As a 2 year postdoc in the UK, one of the major problems is the Visa situation. Most people will have to enter on a sponsored Tier 5 Visa. These visas are only available for EXACTLY 2 years which makes it very difficult to move to the country, find a place to live, sort out your life and then start and complete a 2 year contract with Whitaker, plus you probably need a little time to sort yourself out before moving home. As a result, most of us have had to apply to get an additional Visa to complete our time at the University. It would be my recommendation that people either get their 1st Visa for 14 to 16 months and then get the 2nd one for however much longer they will need to be in the country to finish up, travel, move home, etc...

Housing

- The housing market moves very quickly in London and finding decent affordable housing can be difficult. NEVER give a deposit on a flat without viewing it first (either yourself or by someone your trust). This being said, you may not be able to secure housing before you arrive. If this is the case, I would recommend getting short term accommodation for 2 weeks and spending everyday viewing flats and contacting people. You will surely find

something. Gumtree.com is a website with flat shares, but be careful of spammers!! If it looks too good to be true, it probably is. Flatshare.co.uk is another good website. You can also set up appointments with a real estate agent to take you to a number of flats. As a ballpark, my rent is 141 pounds per week (~\$1,100/ month) and this is very reasonable for the area. I am in zone 2 in a single room in a very small flat on the 4th floor with great access to transportation.

- Finding housing is challenging in London because it's a really fast market. People tend to not look for housing in advance so if you contact people who are renting they are expecting you to be able to see it and move in within the week or so! Thus it's hard to do while still in the US although I guess it might be possible. I came to London without knowing where I was going to live and then viewed a whole bunch of flats the first couple days and picked one from that. It's really expensive unless you live far away so don't be shocked and don't expect to be able to live on your own. Personally, I didn't want to live outside of tube zone 2 which means it's expensive and I live with one other person in a small two bedroom flat but I really like the location (Islington) and it's not that far from lab.

Transportation

- The tube and bus system is wonderful. Get an Oyster Card. I get unlimited monthly rides for ~112 pounds per month, although if you prefer walking or biking mostly, you can get cheaper options like unlimited bus only, or pay as you go, which would only be worth it if you take it less than twice a day.
- London boasts one of the best public transport systems in the world, so take advantage! When you first arrive, be sure to purchase an Oyster Card for £5 to receive major discounts on Tube and bus rides. If you anticipate daily Tube travel, it is likely worthwhile to purchase a monthly or yearly pass. These can be purchased at most Tube stations. Students receive a discount on these passes, so be sure to visit tfl.gov.uk to set up a student travel card.
- Public transportation is great in London and good in the rest of the UK. The tube, buses, and trains go pretty much anywhere. It is a little pricy though so if you're commuting via tube I would definitely recommend getting a yearlong or monthly travelcard pass. Definitely get an Oyster card and if you're a student, be sure to get the student discounted one. If you going to be doing any traveling around the UK by trains, get a 16-25 years old railcard that will save you 33% on all fares.

Bank Account

- Upon arrival in London, it is very helpful to set up a bank account in order to pay rent and other expenses via direct deposit. Today, most institutions in the UK prefer to exchange money in this way. Typically, you will need to secure housing prior to opening an account (so you have an address to provide to the bank). If you are registered as a student, it is possible to set-up a Student Account at Barclays Bank. (Barclays are available throughout London and the UK in general, so it is a pretty safe bet.) To open a student account, you will need proof of housing (such as a copy of your lease), proof of enrollment as a student (this can be obtained from Imperial), and your passport. To open an account, you must make an appointment with Barclays, so it is best to call prior to heading out. Bank of America is in the Global Alliance with Barclays bank, meaning that if you withdraw money using your BofA debit card from a Barclays ATM, then there is only a 1% charge.
- If you do not open a bank account, get a credit card without foreign transaction fees, preferably with a chip since swipe cards aren't so easy to use in Europe. Bank of America has a travel credit card with both features, all CapitalOne cards are 0% fees but don't have the chip.

Academic Tips

- Try to pay any/all bench fees or tuition before leaving the US. In my case, since my grant was split across two academic years, I had to be about 80% of tuition after moving here. If this happens to you, make sure you know how to handle this with your bank (e.g. grant your parents access to you account so they can transfer the money).
- If doing an MPhil, be warned that there might be a viva examination after submitting your thesis. In the case of Imperial, the viva cannot be scheduled until the thesis is submitted, and usually takes place several weeks after submission. Thus, it's a bit tough to plan your return home or starting a job, grad school, etc. Keep this in mind when deciding whether or not to do a degree with your grant!

- The UK in particular highly values independence in research almost to the point where no guidance is provided at all, which has its advantages and disadvantages. There is a great sense of satisfaction in designing and conducting a graduate level thesis entirely on your own.
- The Oxford system places emphasis on a single round of exams covering the entire year's course material. The research culture is also much more self-driven.

Phone

- If you and a lot of people you talk to are smart phone users, you can find a really good deal at T-Mobile (now it's in EE stores) of getting a pay as you go SIM card plus a monthly internet booster that is 5 pounds. This gives you pretty much unlimited internet that you can use to iMessage, Whatsap or FaceTime with other smart phone users. However if you're going to be using lots of regular texting or calls this isn't a good deal because for those you have to pay per minute or per text which is pricy.

Currency

- The pound is much stronger than the dollar, and thus things are quite expensive in London. I would recommend that if you need to pay bench fees or tuition, pay first and then be reimbursed after so that you have the exact amount post conversion rates as per your bank. In my situation my bank gave me a much higher rate than Whitaker had estimated, therefore I lost \$300 transferring my bench fees.

Food

- Main grocery stores are Tesco, Sainsbury's, & Waitrose. There are tons of smaller branches and stores, but they are often more expensive. I would recommend the large Tesco on West Cromwell Road just north of the Earl's Court tube station.
- Favourite Grocery Stores: Tesco! They have the lowest prices and the biggest selection (particularly the super stores). If you can't find something at Tesco (niche foods or "American" foods) check out Whole Foods on High Street Kensington, pricey but okay for an item or two. In addition to grocery stores, London is filled with delicious markets such as Borough Market or smaller
- A few recommendations are: Nando's, Siam Central, Ben's Cookies, Wahaca

Things to Do

- Tons of free museums (my favorite is the Victoria and Albert). Some really great markets (Borough market is my favorite). Lots of festivals (keep an eye on Time Out magazine)
- If you haven't heard of the website www.meetup.com you should definitely look into it. London has a ton of groups that you can join and do activities with. I did some hiking trips outside of London that were really great!

General Comments

- The UK is a relatively simple adjustment because the language barrier and cultural barrier is not too great. However I would caution, as in all countries, that there can be negative stereotypes about Americans. Do your best to be a positive example of the American student and to get rid of these stereotypes.