

Rebecca Farrell

After a good few minutes of excitedly bouncing around my uni room having been offered a place to study music in Chicago; reality soon set in-that there were going to be challenges to overcome in preparation for studying abroad.

The first, and most pressing, was going to be funding the experience. I had been job hunting in Bath for months, but due to Covid, student jobs were scarce. Perseverance with job applications was key. My first port of call was to visit indeed.com. Using indeed, I was able to use keywords to search for jobs that would fit around my study commitments eg. "Weekend", "casual", "student" and "part-time."

I also used the power of social media to job hunt and I cannot recommend this enough! My student city of Bath is filled with lots of independent businesses. I found that many of these 'Indies' would advertise for vacancies to their Instagram followers instead of relying on larger job sites. In addition, other social media pages such as @batheats (instagram account that promotes Bath's local independent eateries) will repost and advertise local vacancies, being a great option for finding student jobs. This is how I eventually found my own job with an independent café.

Once I had secured a source of income, I used a Monzo bank account to create saving 'pots' for my travels. After being paid, I would immediately transfer 70% of my monthly earnings into my 'Chicago' pot, not to be touched until my travels were imminent.

Another challenge was organising my medical prescriptions. When leaving the UK, it is important to remember that different countries have healthcare systems that differ to our own. I am preparing to go away for 5 months and, after speaking to my pharmacist, I was informed that I could only request up to three months' worth of medication at one time. Due to this, it is important that you organise yourself well in advance of your departure date so that you can order enough medication to see you through your trip; ensuring you have the correct items and avoiding unwanted medical costs overseas. If there are repeat prescriptions or medications you will need during your time away, I highly recommend speaking to your doctor or pharmacist to see whether you can request extra medication. This can also be done by using the NHS App. (<https://www.nhsapp.service.nhs.uk/login>)

Finally, to prevent feelings of anxiety and homesickness, I watched travel vlogs/tours of Chicago on YouTube. I have also followed Chicago blogs and social media pages such as '312food' and choosechicago.com in order to get an authentic grasp of the city's vibe. This will mean that before I even set foot in the city, I will already have a sense of familiarity. I have also ensured that my friends and relatives have access to video call sites such as FaceTime and Zoom so we can always stay in touch despite distance and time zone differences!