Shape it up: tips you can follow for a healthier campus diet

Rushing up and down the streets, I often have days when I wonder how I will find the time to eat. This is when it becomes easy for students to turn to fast food. Once you stop living close by or have awkward time gaps between classes, fast food is available at almost every on-campus eatery.

There's no doubt that the university tries to make healthier food readily available. Some cafes have organic foods ready to go and Greenhouse allows students to make almost any kind of fresh salad they can think of. But I have to wonder, why is there so much fast food available? For many students, it's difficult to choose an expensive salad from Greenhouse over a meal from Taco Bell.

To solve the problem of finding healthy food on campus without having to eat salad daily, I do three things: take advantage of meal options I previously disregarded, completely ignore any fast food place and get creative in the dining halls.

First, I take advantage of meal options I had previously disregarded at on-campus restaurants. Being both a vegetarian and interested in a fair-trade diet has made it somewhat challenging to arrange an eating plan while living on campus. With limited options, food gets old fast. I looked closely at menus to see what options I overlooked. On campus, I eat oatmeal and fresh fruit instead of getting smoothies. I try the soup at Greenhouse instead of salad. If I have time in the morning I use an extra swipe and pack a lunch. By including this, I now have something new to eat each day, and I can go an entire school week without repeating a lunch.

As I create a pattern of eateries to maintain a healthy diet without losing interest in the food, it is clear I cannot include every on-campus restaurant in my plan.

This is where my second solution comes in. I have learned to completely ignore fast food. If I linger in front of Panda Express or Sbarro too long, temptation takes over. I started ignoring these places in the middle of fall quarter, and now I can walk by them without a thought. The only way I know to accomplish this is willpower. Of course, that does not mean in any way that you should never allow yourself the occasional visit to these restaurants. Everyone deserves a treat sometimes. I know I can never give up animal-style fries completely.

Finally, I have learned to get creative in dining halls. This can't easily be done outside a dining hall, so it isn't exactly an "on-the-go" solution to eating on campus. Just the same, it can help make meals less boring. I often take a veggie patty and make a wrap out of it, and I use the salad bar to throw on any other toppings I want. I use the microwave to heat up whatever I want in it. If you are a meat lover, you can put the bacon bits from the salad bar or slice a grilled chicken breast to put in soup or pasta.

When living on a college campus, it can be difficult to find a way to eat what you like and what's good for you while trying to avoid a repetitive diet. There are a limited number of options available and the dominance of fast food can be hard to ignore. But if you try out as many places as you can, use willpower and turn on your creativity, you can certainly design your own healthy meal plan that won't feel as if you eat the same thing every day.

1. What does the author think about eating opportunities on campus?

1. She believes they need to provide more organic food.
2. She thinks they do a great job providing salads at a reasonable price.
3. She can't understand why they offer so many fast food choices.
4. She thinks that meals from Taco Bell are too expensive.

Start of college life: how I coped with fear

For the last two years I've been working really hard to pass all my exams successfully and to get accepted to college. And yet college seemed to be the scariest thing that I could think of. Whenever I thought about it, my stomach would immediately begin to spin in circles. Although I was ready to go off and be by myself and meet new people, I was scared to death at the same time. I pictured hard classes that I wouldn't be able to keep up with, people that wouldn't like me, long hikes to get to my classes, and horrible food. I couldn't imagine leaving the security of my own room, my own stuff where I want it, my friends that I've spent practically my whole life with, my family who put up with all my little quirks.

Everyone else that I talked to, however, didn't seem to have this problem. They all were thrilled at the thought of being on their own and not having to worry about their parents telling them what to do or not to do all the time. And, sure, the thought was extremely exciting to me as well, but how would I survive without my family and friends and the things that had taken me eighteen years to get used to?

The summer before I came to college was probably the most fun my friends and I ever had. We all knew that in September things would never be the same again and we had to make the most of it while we still could. As the end of August rolled around we knew that it was time to say goodbye and be on our way to our own independence. I packed up the memories of the last eighteen years of my life into about five suitcases and was ready to go. I still didn't feel like I was just as mature as my older college friends and I thought that I still looked like I was twelve years old.

We finally made it to the doors and began unloading my clothes and the eight million bags of food that my mom had packed for me. I still was unsure about sharing my room and not being able to have the privacy that I had back home. I was worried that the little habits that I had might annoy my roommate and that my roommate might have just as many annoying little habits that I might not be able to handle as well.

After I had all my things unpacked and put exactly where I wanted, my roommate and I decided to go around our hall and see whom we would be living with for the next two semesters. As we went around to different rooms and met different people my nervousness seemed to diminish. I began to realize that not everyone here knew everyone else and most were just as anxious and nervous about being here as I was. It worked. I started to feel better and was actually kind of excited about living here all by myself.

I still miss the security of living at home (and I wonder who would blame me for this feeling) and, most of all, home-cooked meals that are nonexistent here and the friends that I grew up with. But I know that we've all changed and those memories are just that — memories, no matter how pleasant they might be. And when times get too tough, my mom is just a phone call away. But I'm not too quick to call her and have her solve my problems. I've learned that I can usually work things out by myself. I'm glad that I've gone through these changes in myself and it makes me realize that I don't need to fear change, that it's just a part of life that everyone has to go through sometime.

2. The main problem for the author was that...

1. ...nobody seemed to understand her feelings.
2. ...she was not ready for the classes.
3. ...she would miss her family and friends a lot.
4. ...her parents wouldn't help her with advice.

Why I sent Oxford a rejection letter

A little over a month ago, I sent Oxford a rejection email that parodied the thousands that they send each year. Much to my surprise, it has become a bit of an Internet hit, and has provoked reactions of both horror and amusement.

In my letter I wrote: "I have now considered your establishment as a place to read Law (Jurisprudence). I very much regret to inform you that I will be withdrawing my application. I realize you may be disappointed by this decision, but you were in competition with many fantastic universities and following your interview, I am afraid you do not quite meet the standard of the universities I will be considering."

I sent the email after returning from my interview at Magdalen College, Oxford, to prove to a couple of my friends that Oxbridge did not need to be held in awe. One of them subsequently shared it on Facebook* because he found it funny.

I certainly did not expect the email to spread as far as it has. Varying between offers of TV interviews and hundreds of enthusiastic Facebook* messages, it has certainly been far-reaching. Many of my friends and undoubtedly many strangers were unable to comprehend that I'd sent such an email to this bastion of prestige and privilege. Why was I not afraid of damaging my future prospects as a lawyer? Didn't I think this might hurt my chances with other universities?

For me, such questions paint a picture of a very cynical society. I do not want to study law because I want to be rich, or wear an uncomfortable wig and cloak. Perhaps optimistically, I want to study law because I am interested in justice.

To me, withdrawing my application to an institution that is a symbol of unfairness in both our education and the legal system (which is so dominated by Oxbridge graduates) makes perfect sense, and I am reluctant to be part of a system so heavily dominated by such a narrow group of self-selecting elites.

So, why did I apply in the first place? If you're achieving high grades at A-level (or equivalent), you can feel quite a lot of pressure to "prove yourself' by getting an Oxbridge offer. Coupled with the fact that I grew up on benefits in council estates throughout Bristol — not a type of heritage often associated with an Oxbridge interview — I decided to give it a try.

It was only at the interview that I started to question what exactly I was trying to prove. I was well aware that fantastic candidates are often turned down, and I did not believe that this was a true reflection of their academic potential.

Although I share concern that not going to Oxbridge gives you a "chip on your shoulder", I did not write to Oxford to avoid the risk of being labeled as an "Oxbridge reject": I already am one. Last year I made an (admittedly weak) application to Cambridge and was inevitably rejected post-interview.

A year ago, I was in awe of the beautiful buildings of Oxbridge, but today I am in awe of the sheer number of people who, like me, have managed to not take it so seriously. Ultimately, I am not harming Oxford by laughing at it, and it is an amazing feeling to realize that so many people are enjoying my email. Actually, I was amazed to know how many people of different ages bothered to read it and even to leave their comments about it in Facebook*. I had fun reading some of them, too.

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* Деятельность запрещена в России.

3. The letter caused so much response because people...

1. ...fully agreed with the message.
2. ...found the topic very interesting.
3. ...wanted to defend Oxbridge.
4. ...were outraged with the letter.

Women and the maths problem

Women's underachievement in maths may not be due to their poor self-image in the subject, a new report suggests. Researcher Dr. Gijsbert Stoet at the University of Leeds says that the so-called "stereotype threat" theory — which holds that women perform worse than men because they expect to do badly — "does not stand up to scrutiny".

Earlier research had serious flaws, he says, with improper use of statistical techniques and methodology. Clearly, those who carried out this research need to review their own competence in maths. Stoet believes the gender gap may simply be that men and women have different interests from an early age, and says the answer to getting more women into maths and engineering is probably a matter of motivation.

According to last year's results, even though girls perform as well as boys in their maths GCSEs, 60% of A-levels in the subject are taken by boys, who achieve 60% of grade As.

I am an engineer, who has worked in the chemical industry for most of my working career. When I graduated in the 80, I assumed we were at the start of a new era for women in science: I studied alongside intelligent and motivated women, opportunities seemed aplenty, in-roads had been made.

But 20 years down the line, only 8.7% of British engineers are women, the lowest proportion in Europe, compared with 25% in Sweden. So what has happened?

One of the main problems is that careers in science, technology, engineering and maths (known as Stem) are not sufficiently promoted in schools, with fewer children taking up these subjects at GCSE and A-level. Year in, year out, we are told that Britain has a skills shortage. The general lack of interest among schoolchildren in maths and science subjects, together with the underlying social conditioning that still remains — that science subjects "aren't really for girls" — has led to a double-whammy effect, reducing female entrants even further.

Over the past few years, I have been involved in Stemnet, an organization dedicated to promoting these careers by getting people who work in jobs from biologists to builders to talk to schoolchildren about what they do. It's an attempt to debunk the myth that maths and sciences are too difficult or too boring. I was amazed to see hundreds of schoolboys and girls at a recent event at the Science Museum, presenting a range of experiments and projects they had prepared. And the ones prepares by girls were equally challenging and sophisticated.

I agree with the new study that rather than focusing on the problems of stereotyping, we should devote more time to encouraging girls into science and technology: they clearly respond.

But encouraging schoolgirls into university and careers is not all. As is typical in most sectors, I see a number of female engineers at the entry and midlevels of companies, but precious few at the top. This is a huge waste of talent. It also raises the issue of certain professional inequality and a biased attitude towards women. The report has done well to challenge the myths behind women's underachievement in schools, but more work still needs to be done to address the problem of women's lack of achievement in the workplace. At least in the spheres closely related to science and engineering.

4. Last year's A-levels maths results show that...

1. ...boys are more likely to fail.
2. ...more girls take the subject.
3. ...girls do better than boys.
4. ...boys get more A grades.

Chronic lack of sleep affects one in three British workers

One in three British workers suffers from poor sleep, research shows, with stress, computers and taking work home blamed for the lack of quality sleep. Some employees get fewer than five hours sleep a night, only one in seven feels completely refreshed when they wake and more women have poor shut-eye than men. The alarming findings emerged from a study of self-assessments completed by 38,784 staff working in the UK for firms such as telecoms firm, 02, drugs developer, Quintiles and medical technology manufacturer, Medtronic.

A third were dissatisfied with the amount and quality of their sleep, with 8.4% saying they were "very unhappy" with it, and another 24.4% describing themselves as "unhappy". When asked how they felt 30 minutes after getting up, only 15.5% said "refreshed". Of the others, 3.3% said they were "exhausted", 24% said "unrefreshed" and 57.2% were still "a little tired".

While experts say that everyone should ideally get seven to eight hours sleep a night, only 38.5% of the 38,784 respondents did so. More had between five and seven hours (45%), only a lucky 10% reported sleeping for eight to nine hours and one in 100 enjoyed more than nine hours.

When researchers combined those results to give each respondent an overall "sleep score" out of 100, some 33.8% got a mark of less than 30 — the lowest category. That means someone either has, or is at high risk of developing, a sleeping problem. "This research is telling us that a large number of working adults, one in three in the UK, has a sleeping problem," said Dr Tony Massey, medical director of Vielife, the health and productivity firm that carried out the assessments between 2009 and 2011. "A very concerning number of British workers get too little sleep." Britain is near the top of an international league table for lack of sleep. A Vielife study of 116,452 staff in America found that 23.4% scored poorly for sleep.

The extent of inadequate rest has prompted fears that many people are too tired to do their jobs properly, with some so sleep-deprived their brains are as confused as if they had consumed too much alcohol.

"Too few people practice sleep hygiene," said Massey. "That involves little things that people can do without professional help, like ensuring your room is dark and quiet, getting to bed at the same time every night — just like a two-year-old — reading a book, which is a proven relaxant, and not looking at bright screens, such as the TV or computer, for an hour before you go to bed as that will disturb your sleep."

The growing tendency for employees to do extra work in the evenings and at weekends, which may have risen in the recession, also seems to be linked to poor sleep. "More people are scrunching the golden hour before they go to sleep, and they are paying the price in that their sleep isn't refreshing and they end up in a vicious cycle of fatigue, poor productivity and then feeling that they have to do the same again the next day to compensate," said Massey.

The best guarantee of good quality shut-eye is to work five days a week and sleep seven to eight hours a night. Five-days-a-week staff had the best sleep score, while those getting seven to eight hours a night scored 72.7.

"These are very worrying findings because lack of sleep is a risk factor for a whole range of serious health problems, such as stroke and heart disease," said Massey.

5. According to the research, just about ... percent of people have the recommended number of sleeping hours.

1. ...thirty.
2. ...ten.
3. ...forty.
4. ...twenty.

Meat eaters — you are daredevils or dumb. Or both.

I am a vegetarian as well as my parents and all my family members. I've been a vegetarian for as long as I can remember. There have been times during my years of vegetarianism when I've wondered if I may indeed grow out of it. I've wondered if there might come a day when I'll put aside my childish aversion to the thought of dead stuff travelling through my intestines, like a corpse on a raft ride.

However, it could never happen, and not because I'm so enlightened, sensitive or any of the other euphemisms for "whining hippie" usually dumped on vegetarians. My conversion to flesh-eating couldn't happen because, frankly, I'm not stupid enough. As in, I can read.

Analysis of more than 6,000 pancreatic cancer cases published in the British Journal of Cancer says that eating just 50g of processed meat a day (one sausage or a couple of slices of bacon) raises the likelihood of pancreatic cancer by a fifth. 100 g a day (the equivalent of a medium burger) raises it by 38%, 150 g by 57%. Men are worst hit, as they tend to eat the most processed meat. And while pancreatic cancer is not the most common of cancers, it's frequently diagnosed late, with four-fifths of sufferers dying within a year of diagnosis.

It should be pointed out that this is about processed meat. However, many past studies have stated a probable link between too much meat and all manner of cancers and heart problems, as well as links to other conditions, from diabetes and high blood pressure to obesity and Alzheimer's.

If, by now, you're thinking that I'm out to shock you, then you couldn't be more wrong. I'd be shocked if any of this was considered new enough to shock anyone. This information has popped up regularly for years in all forms of popular media — newspapers and numerous TV and radio programs, to say nothing of the Internet. Indeed, in this era of info overload, if you've never come across the "burgers and kebabs are unhealthy" revelation, one would have to presume you've been lying in a coma.

Sympathy is in short supply these days. You can't move for people being blamed for their own miserable situations: smokers who "burden" the NHS; alcoholics who don't "deserve" liver transplants; obese people who "should" pay more for flights. By this logic, people who've been regularly informed of the dangers of meat, particularly the cheap processed variety, but who continue to wolf it down should be held just as accountable.

Yet if these meat eaters are mentioned at all, it's in general poor lifestyle terms, as an afterthought to drinking, smoking, and lack of exercise. You just don't get people making emotional pronouncements about bacon lovers not deserving cancer treatment or kebab fans burdening the NHS.

It's not as if they haven't been warned countless times about the dangers — how willfully ill-informed can people be? Or maybe they're just hard. In fact, when I say I'm not dumb enough to eat meat, I should probably add brave enough. With so much frightening information, so readily available for so long, the modern committed carnivore must have nerves of steel. And yet, we should admit it, meat eaters still predominate and even grow in number. Must all of them be deaf and blind, and immune to a general sense of self-safety?

6. According to the author, how much of processed meat a day is enough to raise the chance of pancreatic cancer by more than a half?

1. 50–100 g.
2. Less than 50 g.
3. From 150 g.
4. 100–150 g.

The Difference Engine: No more addresses

REMEMBER the panic over the "millennium bug", when computers everywhere were expected to go haywire on January 1st, 2000, thanks to the way a lot of old software used just two digits to represent the year instead of four? Doomsters predicted all sorts of errors in calculations involving dates when the clocks rolled over from 99 to 00. In the event, the millennium dawned without incident. That may have been because of the draconian preparations undertaken beforehand. Or perhaps, as many suspected, the problem was grossly exaggerated in the first place, as it often happens. Certainly, the computer industry made a packet out of all the panic-buying of new hardware and software in the months leading up to the new millennium. And who would blame them for this? Business is business.

Well, something similar is about to happen in the months ahead. This time, the issue concerns the exhaustion of Internet addresses — those four numbers ranging from 0 to 255 separated by dots that uniquely identify every device attached to the Internet. According to Hurricane Electric, an Internet backbone and services provider based in Fremont, California, the Internet will run out of bulk IP addresses sometime next week — given the rate addresses are currently being gobbled up.

The Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) will then have doled out all its so-called "slash-eight" blocks of addresses to the five regional Internet registries around the world. In turn, the registries are expected to have allocated all their remaining addresses to local network operators by October at the latest. After that, any organization applying for new addresses will be told, "Sorry, none left".

The issue is real and has been a long time in the making. The Economist first warned about it ten years ago. The problem concerns the address space of the existing version of the Internet protocol (IPv4), which is only 32 bits wide. The total number of binary addresses possible with such an arrangement is 4.3 billion. Back in the 1980s, when the Internet connected just a couple of dozen research institutes in America, that seemed like a huge number. Besides, the Internet was thought at the time to be just a temporary network anyway.

But with the invention of the Web in 1990 came an explosion in popular demand. It was soon clear that it was only a matter of time before the Internet would exhaust its supply of addresses. Work on a replacement for IPv4 began in the early 1990s, with IPv6 finally being made available around 1998. By giving the new internet version an address space of 128 bits, the designers pretty well guaranteed that it would not run out of unique identifiers for decades, or even centuries, to come.

Two raised to the 128th power is an astronomical number. That will come in handy when the "Internet of things" becomes a reality. Already, some two billion people have access to the Internet. Add all the televisions, phones, cars and household appliances that are currently being given Internet access — plus, eventually, every book, pill case and item of inventory as well — and a world or two of addresses could easily be accounted for. And yet, the solution of any problem begins with its verbalization. We are forewarned and it means — forearmed.

7. Which of the following was NOT the reason why the "millennium bug" didn't work?

1. The problem never existed.
2. The new hardware had been installed.
3. The manufacturers had improved software.
4. The users took necessary precautions.

Do you believe in climate change?

This may seem like an odd question for a climate scientist to ask, but it is one I am constantly asked now. The typical discussion starts: "I know that the climate is changing, but hasn't it always changed through natural cycles?" Then they will often give an example, such as the medieval warm period to prove their point.

Those asking the question include a wide range of people I meet in the pub, friends, politicians and, increasingly, even some of those active in sustainable development and the renewable energy businesses. What I find interesting is that I have known many of these people for a long time and they never asked me this before.

Recent studies show that public acceptance of the scientific evidence for man-made climate change has decreased. However, the change is not that great. The difference I find in talking to people is that they feel better able to express their doubts.

This is very hard for scientists to understand. The scientific evidence that humanity is having an effect on the climate is overwhelming and increasing every year. Yet public perception of this is confused. People modify their beliefs about uncomfortable truth, they may have become bored of constantly hearing about climate change; or external factors such as the financial crisis may have played a role.

Around three years ago, I raised the issue of the way that science can be misused. In some cases scare stories in the media were over-hyping climate change, and I think we are paying the price for this now with a reaction the other way. I was concerned then that science is not always presented objectively by the media. What I don't think any of us appreciated at the time was the depth of disconnect between the scientific process and the public.

Which brings me to the question, should you believe in climate change? The first point to make is that it's not something you should believe or not believe in — this is a matter of science and therefore of evidence — and there's a lot of it out there. On an issue this important, I think people should look at that evidence and make their own mind up. We are often very influenced by our own personal experience. After a couple of cold winters in the UK, the common question was: "Has climate change stopped?" despite that fact that many other regions of the world were experiencing record warm temperatures. And 2010 was one of the warmest years on record. For real evidence of climate change, we have to look at the bigger picture.

You can see research by the Met Office that shows the evidence of man-made warming is even stronger than it was when the last report was published. A whole range of different datasets and independent analyses show the world is warming. There is a broad consensus that over the last half-century, warming has been rapid, and man-made greenhouse gas emissions are very likely to be the cause.

Ultimately, as the planet continues to warm, the issue of whether you believe in climate change will become more and more irrelevant. We will all experience the impacts of climate change in some way, so the evidence will be there in plain sight.

The more appropriate questions for today are how will our climate change and how can we prepare for those changes? That's why it's important that climate scientists continue their work, and continue sharing their evidence and research so people can stay up to date — and make up their own minds.

8. According to recent studies of public attitude to climate change, more and more people...

1. ...refuse to accept the scientific proof of warming.
2. ...think that scientists are wrong about climate warming.
3. ...have stopped trusting climate science.
4. ...know that there is no clear evidence of climate change.

Internet

Internet is one of the greatest tools we have today. Billions of bits of information, unlimited ways to connect, games to play, videos to watch, things to learn. There's something for everyone. We Facebook*, tumble, stumble, and tweet more now than ever. Social media is connecting us in incredible ways. You can create communities of like-minded people that would never meet before on the Internet. But, due to this, we are spending copious amounts of time on the World Wide Web, and it's slowly changing who you are as a person.

I went for a long period of time where I didn't read a book. I finally got around to picking up a few new books and as soon as I started reading them, I struggled. I couldn't hold concentration like I used to. I would read a whole paragraph with my mind elsewhere or had this constant anxious feeling to do something else, even when there was absolutely nothing else to do. My mind would jump from one thought to another and I barely could read a chapter in one sitting. A talked to a few people about this, and I even looked to the trusty Internet for my solution. I found that I'm not alone, many people report the same type of concentration shift. The reason for this is the information overload via Internet.

We take in 34 gigabytes of information each day now. That is 5 times more than we did 20 years ago. There is so much going on in our minds that we rarely spend any time on one particular bit of information because there is always something new and more intriguing just around the corner. When we land on a webpage, we spend the average of about 50 seconds, if that, and know that there are at least 5 other links we can click on the page. We can still concentrate, but our minds would much rather be focused on a series of things, not one thought.

Not only is it altering our concentration on reading long works, but it's changing "how" we read. We no longer read; we skim. This is our way of adapting to this information overload. It would take too long to process all this information and we don't need everything. We sift through the information and get to the main point or relevant material.

The way things are written online is changing for us as well. For anyone who has written a blog post, it's a much different style of writing compared to novels and even newspaper articles. The things we read online are as clear and concise as possible. Adjectives are a thing of the past. The information is usually already condensed for you, and is separated into neat headlines that make it easy to scan the page in a few seconds. We don't focus on comprehension anymore, we know what we're looking for and we find it quickly.

The way we are reading things is just the start, the way we are thinking is changing too. Before, we had calm linear thoughts, one thing led to another. Now, our thoughts are jumping back and forth between so many things. We have one thought, which leads to four or five other non-related thoughts, and then some time later we return to the original thought. This is a direct result of our attention being focused on so many things for so little time on the web. There is always a link that can take us somewhere new and start a new train of thoughts.

We've developed a much more fluid way of thinking. And it's not a bad thing. It's making us more creative. You are much more efficient at combing and filtering through ideas, which in essence is what inspiration is. Linear thought is very organized and does not leave room for new ideas.

So, the Internet has become an essential part of our daily lives. But it's also important to disconnect for a while and to take care of your body and mind. Create a balance of time online and in the real world, so you can reap the positive cognitive abilities the Internet is giving you and avoid forming an unhealthy set of habits that will cost you later in life.

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* Деятельность запрещена в России.

9. Why does Internet, according to the author, influence reading concentration?

1. The information there changes too fast.
2. It leaves less time for reading.
3. The bits of information there are very short.
4. It provides excessive information.

Travelling

I've spent the last year wandering around the globe and exploring this wondrous thing called life. Through 26 flights, I've managed to circle the globe twice, and touch 5 of the 7 continents. It's been an incredible experience. The journey led me from scuba diving for a month in Thailand to hitchhiking in African country. I've learned about the world and myself more than any book, teacher or person could tell me.

I've learned that the timing will never be perfect because rarely are we blessed with the perfect time to do something. When I was planning on leaving to travel for a year, it was never the "right time" when everything was going to be put on hold for my travels. I needed more money, or I would lose my job. I realized that I was never going to be "ready" to drastically change my life, as I was always going to have some new commitment or excuse. So I left at the "wrong time" in life and it turned out to be the best thing that happened to me. But once I got sick of missing out on things I wanted to do and see, I started to just do them anyway.

I've also learned that friendships are everything. I heard this one a lot before, but never really believed it that much. When I started looking back on my travels, I started to think "Wow, I've seen a heck of lot of cool places". I tried to think back to my favorites, which ones did I enjoy the most? They were always the ones where I had the best friends and really had nothing to do with where I was. The people around you contribute a great deal to your overall happiness. It was only when I had no friends that I realized their importance.

When travelling, you have complete freedom to literally do anything you want. You can relax everyday on the beach, you can be alone every day in your room, you can eat ice cream for breakfast every day, and you can drink all the time. This freedom can be quite liberating, but many people have a tough time balancing the party/drinking/vacation aspect with truly seeing and experiencing each country, because you have no responsibilities and no one around to tell you when you can't do something. I too fell into a similar kind of trap. I indulged in so many aspects of life. I took everything to the extreme until it had lost its excitement. I realized that balance was the key.

Another lesson I have learned is that life doesn't have to be "normal". Go to school, get a job, or buy a big house. When anyone strays from this path they are considered to be not "normal". It's only when I started traveling that I saw that a fulfilling and happy life isn't always a respectable job, with a big house and lots of money. I began to meet interesting characters from all over the world and saw firsthand how they had gone "against the grain" and succeeded. There are tons of other ways to live a fulfilling and happy life, but most of us have only seen the "big house" scenario. I saw and experienced how happy people are doing something completely different than normal jobs, because they get to wake up every day and do what they want to do in the place they want to be.

So, while travelling I realized that you can read about things, watch them on TV, or hear stories from a friend, but nothing comes close to first-hand human experience. You get a whole new perspective on what really matters and you feel this sense of adventure and excitement that reminds you just how many possibilities you have in life. To anyone who has not travelled, do it. And to those who have, continue to do so. It will teach you more about yourself and the world around you than you could ever imagine.

10. The time for the author "was never right" because...

1. ...there always was an excuse not to do something.
2. ...he wanted to act according to a plan.
3. ...his travels were poorly organized.
4. ...he was afraid of new experiences.

The lure of the screen

I used to tell my parents that the first cell phone I will allow my own children to have will be a flip phone, incapable of Internet access and certainly without the ability to use "apps." I argued that their first phones would have only the capabilities of my first phone — texting and calling — used primarily to contact their parents, and once in a while classmates to ask about homework. Isn't it primarily what we think kids need phones for?

It took me a while to realize how impractical this was because if the first piece of a given technology that I possessed had been the same as my parents', I would have been walking around with a cassette player in a world of iPods (incidentally, I loved my Sony Walkman CD player).

So maybe it was a little ridiculous for me to suggest this, but I think my point was (and is) valid. I look at young kids today and see that they're as attached to mobile devices as their adult counterparts. It has come to the point where kids would rather sit inside and play games on their parents' (or their own) iPads than go outside and play hide-and-seek, or catch, well, do anything.

And while I recall my parents telling me to drop the Legos or even the PlayStation controller and head outside, I, unlike these children, often actually did it, and when I didn't, at least I was capable of breaking away to utter a response.

Today, however, youngsters are becoming so attached to technology at such a young age, as young as 3 or 4, that they are forgetting — if they ever learned in the first place — how to have fun without an iPad — literally.

In April, The Telegraph quoted North Ireland teacher Colin Kinney, who said his colleagues, "have concerns over the increasing numbers of young pupils who can swipe a screen but have little or no manipulative skills to play with building blocks or the like, or the pupils who cannot socialize with other pupils but whose parents talk proudly of their ability to use a tablet or smartphone."

Kinney goes on to say that the "brilliant computer skills" these children possess is "outweighed by their deteriorating skills in pen and paper exams because they rely on instant support of the computer and are often unable to apply what they should have learned from their textbooks."

It is true that we are moving into a world in which the ability to understand the language of computer coding is more important than the ability to read and write cursive. This, however, is not an excuse for the extent to which young children have become as addicted (or more so) to their mobile devices as their parents.

LeapFrog, the popular children's brand is set to unveil a product called the Leap Band; the first wearable tech catered specifically toward children. And although the wristwatch-like product is designed to get kids up and moving, it raises a question for me: How young is too young?

I read that Google is considering allowing online accounts for children under the age of 13 (though giving their parents control over how the service is used).

Because of this cross-generational addiction, this week has been designated as "Screen Free Week" in schools around the country. The week is aimed at getting every member of the family away from computer and device use for just one week and head outside.

For parents, technology is now a dilemma: Give it to their kids at a young age so they are in line with their classmates in terms of computer prowess or withhold it and allow them the gift of social skills... only time will tell, but I fear the former is gaining ground.

11. Which of the following statements reflects the author's views?

1. Parents shouldn't allow their children to play games on iPads.
2. Children are more attached to technology than adults.
3. It's hard to imagine the modern life without mobile devices.
4. Children now prefer their gadgets to outdoor games.

Lazy summer days vs. landscapers

Whether you're a first grader proud of the fact you survived your first year of full-day education or a grad student desperate for a study break, summer vacation means one thing to everybody: sleeping in on weekday mornings. There is no alarm to hit at 6:30 and no bus to chase after. And while days might be filled with summer jobs and day camp, those never seem to start quite as early.

So why is there a conspiracy working against students the minute the final bell rings and the last exam is turned in? And the culprit is visible in any given apartment complex, condo community or public park: landscapers.

I have lived in many towns and in homes of different shapes and sizes in my short, 23 years on Earth. And yet, no matter where I call home, I am faced with the same hardship: trying to sleep in on lazy, summer mornings while the lawn mowers are hard at work on public and private yards.

The townhouse neighborhood I called home when I was a little girl was a jam-packed street. We had more than 250 houses on my block alone. One of the things my mom loved about that house was its tiny yard.

My mother **does not have a green bone in her body**. She has killed every herb garden my sister and I have ever given her. So my mother was thrilled that our front yard was the size of a postage stamp. It, like every other yard on the block, only needed to be trimmed once a month to look good. And yet, every Monday and Thursday at 7:30 a.m., the city-contracted landscaping team would drive down our street and unload two or three industrial mowers and go to work on the little patches of public grass around mail boxes and trees.

Later, when I moved to Michigan, my family and I lived in a condominium complex our first year. As part of the deal, every yard was landscaped with big bushes and tulip patches. But to keep the yards all looking nice and healthy, the owners had full-time landscapers keep up with the maintenance. My mother was thrilled to have a full garden without worrying about killing each plant one by one.

Never having to before, I was thrilled I didn't have to mow this new yard that was 100 times bigger than the postage stamp one we had before. But I was not so thrilled when the mowers showed up on Saturday mornings. Saturdays! Were they serious? Mowing every yard on the street starting at 7 a.m. on a Saturday.

As an adult out on my own, I like that apartments don't come with yards I have to maintain. I am just getting the hang of remembering to buy groceries and having my own mailbox to check. If I had to add watering flowers to my to-do list, I would forget. But what I'm not so thrilled about is that Friday mornings is my building's scheduled mowing day. I live on the first floor of my building, with no way to muffle the roar of the mower against the side of the building when it is directly outside my window. No sleep for me.

I am not so selfish that I don't understand why mowers work in the morning. Landscapers have multiple customers to serve on any given day, and the earlier they start the earlier they can be done. Plus, it is cooler in the morning, and preferable, rather than at noon when the sun is high in the sky. But students work hard all year and look forward to a break from books, tests and alarm clocks.

So, in order to find a common ground between landscapers and students, I send this challenge out into the universe: whoever can build a silent lawn mower will get my undying gratitude, love and affection and whatever else they want, I promise!

12. What is the author complaining about mentioning the landscapers?

1. The quality of their work.
2. The noise they make.
3. The plants they tend to.
4. The size of the yards.

Mind over mass media

New forms of media have always caused moral panic: the printing press, newspapers, and television were all once denounced as threats to their consumers' brainpower and moral fiber. So too with electronic technologies. PowerPoint, we're told, is reducing discourse to bullet points. Search engines lower our intelligence, encouraging us to skim on the surface of knowledge rather than dive to its depths. Twitter is shrinking our attention spans.

But such panic often fails basic reality checks. When comic books were accused of turning juveniles into criminals in the 1950s, crime was falling to record lows. The decades of television, transistor radios and rock videos were also decades in which I.Q. scores rose continuously.

For a reality check today, take the state of science, which demands high levels of brainwork. These days scientists are never far from their e-mail, rarely touch paper and cannot lecture without PowerPoint. If electronic media were hazardous to intelligence, the quality of science would be plummeting. Yet discoveries are multiplying like fruit flies, and progress is dizzying.

Critics of new media sometimes use science itself to press their case, citing research that shows how "experience can change the brain". But cognitive neuroscientists roll their eyes at such talk. Experience does not remake the basic information-processing capacities of the brain. Speed-reading programs have long claimed to do just that, but the verdict was rendered by Woody Allen after he read "War and Peace" in one sitting: "It was about Russia."

Moreover, the effects of experience are highly specific to the experiences themselves. If you train people to do one thing, they get better at doing that thing, but almost nothing else. Music doesn't make you better at math. Accomplished people immerse themselves in their fields. Novelists read lots of novels, scientists read lots of science.

The effects of consuming electronic media are also likely to be far more limited than the panic implies. Media critics write as if the brain takes on the qualities of whatever it consumes, the informational equivalent of "you are what you eat". As with primitive peoples who believe that eating fierce animals will make them fierce, they assume that reading Twitter postings turns your thoughts into Twitter postings.

Yes, the continual arrival of information packets can be distracting or addictive. But distraction is not a new phenomenon. The solution is to develop strategies of self-control. Turn off Twitter when you work and put away your smartphone at dinner time.

And to encourage intellectual depth, don't rail at PowerPoint or Google. It's not as if habits of deep reflection or thorough research ever came naturally to people. They must be acquired in universities, and maintained with constant analysis, criticism and debate. They are not granted by propping a heavy encyclopedia on your lap, nor are they taken away by efficient access to information on the Internet.

The new media have caught on for a reason. Knowledge is increasing exponentially; human brainpower and waking hours are not. Fortunately, the Internet and information technologies are helping us manage and search our collective intellectual output at different scales, from Twitter to e-books and online encyclopedias. Far from making us stupid, these technologies are the only things that will keep us smart.

13. What has life proved about electronic technologies according to the author?

1. Scientists can't do without them.
2. They could increase the crime level.
3. They don't disrupt brainwork.
4. Television influences intelligence.

How to turn failure to success

A lot of authors speak about how true success is overcoming the fear of being unsuccessful. But that is easier said than done. We all face situations where we fail and it feels like everything is going wrong. That coveted job interview that does not result in a call back, that amazing person who doesn't reciprocate romantic interest, that close friend who is not keen on hanging out anymore feature in all of our lives. Somewhere these experiences chip away at one's sense of self, slowly eroding our self-worth.

Carrie Fisher, who had immortalised Princess Leia in Star Wars, had said it beautifully, "take your broken heart and make it into art". That is exactly what 18-year-old Londoner Claudia did. She had received a rejection letter from Oxford, like many other students, in response to her application for a Classics course. However, she was not dejected by it. By the time her mother got home from work,

Claudia had cut up the letter and transformed it into a beautiful piece of art.

When her mum posted Claudia's art on Twitter, it touched a chord among thousands and went viral in a matter of days, having been liked and retweeted more than two hundred thousand times.

Claudia explained her motivations in such a way: "I just thought I had this letter, it's not often that you get a letter dedicated to you from Oxford. So, I thought it would be funny if I made it into something." The letter is pretty much summarised in the phrases stuck into the painting: delivering the news, apologising, wishing her well.

She created the painting very quickly, explaining, "I suppose some of my feelings about the letter went into the artwork. Obviously I didn't know it would go viral as I painted it for myself — but I think the message that it's associated with now is that Oxbridge doesn't determine your worth as a person, and I love that." A lot of people are saying Oxford should now take Claudia on an art course but
that's not really how it works.

She is joining another premier institution — Durham university — soon, leaving behind her brief disappointment from Oxford as she embarks on the new phase of her life. However, there are life lessons that this young girl can teach us on how to cope with rejection.

It always feels a bit hurtful to be rejected, but when you can turn your disappointment into art, it helps you to move on. After all, closed doors hide open ones. It's impossible that things go well all the time. Even for those who seem super successful, there are still low points and adverse situations they have had to tackle. But brooding over what did not work out will only lead to missing out newer opportunities. Success and failure can truly be understood only in retrospect. What seems like heart-breaking rejection might turn out to be the start of the best thing ever to happen to you in another five years.

Letting go is important but what is even more important is letting go beautifully. As the proverb goes — "In the end, only three things matter: how much you loved, how gently you lived, and how gracefully you let go of things not meant for you".

Failure is a part of life. You can call it whatever you want — a setback, an emotional let down, a breakup, a loss, but part of the reason why the experience is so painful is because at some level you feel you failed. The solution here is being open to the bigger lessons of life. After all, learning a new way to see situations can be the very key to your next success.

14. To deal with her failure, Claudia...

1. ...tried to express her feelings creatively.
2. ...took art therapy session online.
3. ...destroyed the rejection letter.
4. ...applied to Oxford once again.

Philanthropy

Philanthropy is defined as the love of humanity. A modern definition is "private initiatives, for the public good, focusing on quality of life", which combines an original humanistic tradition with a social aspect developed in the 20th century.

Growing up in this state, I dreamed of attending a college one day. On fall Saturdays at the stadium, I caught a glimpse of the brick buildings and tree-lined walkways. I knew they led to information, knowledge, and a whole tribe of new minds to connect with. When the day finally came to unpack my few belongings in the residence hall, I knew I was finally where I had always wanted to be. My years on campus certainly lived up to the anticipation. The classes, professors, friends, and opportunities created a life-changing experience.

Philanthropy is a critical part of the life and success of the whole local community, and college in particular. As a board member of the Center for Advancement, I have seen firsthand the joy of our alumni and friends as they make a difference in the life of this institution. **They** are delighted to pay it forward as they understand what college means to them. As a student, one does not always value how much the path was paved by those who have gone before, those who have an ability to give back. Now that my friend and I have made this community our family's home, we have a much better understanding of how vital the longterm success of the college is for our entire state.

Through my involvement with the Center for Advancement, I truly witness the breadth of areas one can support. This institution is doing incredible researching, educating, and programming in so many areas. And our donors can discover their passion and connect in a meaningful way that goes beyond the dollars given. Whether it is the joy of the written word, the connection to firstgeneration college students, the atmosphere of a football Saturday, or a desire to support the cure for a hereditary medical condition, our donors become a part of the life of the college.

I have also seen philanthropy directly affect the life of the college from my experience in the Department of Finance. I work with students who have the opportunity to attend college because of the financial assistance they receive from our donors. Continued support has fostered the enhanced facility we work in today which has been reconfigured to remain relevant to today's needs. The educational experience is much richer because of the generosity of others. Our new auditorium is one shining example that we are proud to support. Not only is this facility a marvel of world-class architecture and programming, it also strives to make the arts accessible to all citizens. These experiences spark curiosity and imagination in audiences, young and old, to remind us what it means to be alive in this era of technology and separation.

Different funds provide a real-life working experience that is as relevant as any internship. Through philanthropy, students and faculty are able to use technology that could not be supported with tuition dollars. Private gifts also allow us to assist our faculty, who are the life of the institution, and provide our students a top-notch education.

Every dollar of support to the university today replays itself over and over as successive generations of learners have an opportunity to develop the skills they need to save lives, shape minds, and transform our future. One of the values we hope to instill in our children is the understanding of the value of giving back.

15. The pronoun *They*, as used throughout paragraph 3, refers to...

1. ...board members.
2. ...former students.
3. ...future graduates.
4. ...the author's friends.

Agatha Christie's secret life as an archaeologist

She is one of the best-known crime writers of all time, but few know the extent of Agatha Christie's archaeological pedigree. What can we discover if we dig into her past?

Married in 1930 to Max Mallowan, an eminent archaeologist, Christie spent two decades living on excavation sites in the Middle East, writing her crime novels and helping out with her husband's work. Travel by boat and on the Orient Express to Cairo, Damascus and Baghdad provided ideas for some of Christie's best-known works of detective fiction, including "Murder on the Orient Express", "Death on the Nile", and "Murder in Mesopotamia".

Now, 3,000-year-old ivory artifacts recovered by Mallowan between 1949 and 1963 from the ancient city of Nimrud, in what is now Iraq, and likely cleaned by his famous wife using cotton wool buds and face cream, are currently on display at the British Museum in London. "Face cream in fact is quite a good thing to clean (artifacts) with. Obviously conservators now wouldn't use that, but I don't think it has done (the pieces) any harm," he claimed, adding that in fact it was quite resourceful of Christie to think of applying her Innoxa face cream to the fragile, dirty pieces. "Agatha, who was very conscious of being fifteen years older than her husband, travelled everywhere with her moisturiser and it was just the right consistency for cleaning artifacts," said Henrietta McCall, the author of "The Life of Max Mallowan: Archaeology and Agatha Christie."

Christie's interest in archaeology, according to McCall, went deeper than support for her husband's work and even formed the backdrop to works such as "Murder in Mesopotamia", in which the culprit turns out to be an archaeologist. Several of the characters in the book can be traced to the people Christie knew from a dig in Ur in what is modern Iraq, including the murder victim, which McCall believes is based on the wife of archaeologist Leonard Woolley. "She made a wonderful quote on archaeology and crime detection, that they are very similar because you have to clear away the debris to reveal the shining truth," said McCall. And Christie's elaborate plotting and clue building came in handy when
piecing together broken artifacts.

According to the archaeologist Charlotte Trumpler, "Christie was of course fascinated by puzzles, using little archaeological fragments, and she had a gift for piecing them together very patiently." Trumpler co-curated a 2001-2 travelling exhibition "Agatha Christie and Archaeology: Mystery in Mesopotamia" alongside Henrietta McCall.

Although Christie played an important role in her husband's work, even financing many of his expeditions, she was, according to McCall, very modest about her contributions. She was fiercely proud of Mallowan, who is often referred to as one of the best-known archaeologists of the post-WWII period. However,Trumpler believes that though Christie never publically mentioned it, her contribution to archaeology was larger than she imagined. Her notes and black and white photographs of excavation sites are used by archaeologists and researchers even today, she said.

Christie's readiness to muck in and help her husband, says Trumpler, stemmed from her desire to be a devoted wife but also from a fascination with the Middle East that stayed with her for many years. "Everyone thinks Agatha Christie was a bit like the character Miss Marple, that she lived in England and was into knitting and looking after the garden," said Trumpler. "Actually, she wasn't ... she
had such a fascinating life apart from being an author."

16. What do we learn about Agatha Christie from the second paragraph?

1. Some of her voyages and journeys inspired her.
2. Her husband's work put her off writing novels.
3. She was responsible for the excavation work.
4. Her husband discussed his discoveries with her.

British food

Foreigners often laugh at the British. They say, "In Britain you get hot chips with everything!" But even the British don't eat chips with their meals. To prove that, we decided to let you read an extract from a letter written by Pete Phrase, the chief cook at Daphne's in London, to his foreign friends.

"...I am always both amused and annoyed when I hear foreign people criticise British food. "It's unimaginative," they say. "It's boring, it's tasteless with totally overcooked vegetables." I have a theory about British cooking, and I was interested to read that several famous cookery writers agree with me. My theory is this. Our basic ingredients, when fresh, are so full of flavour that we haven't had to invent sauces and complex recipes to disguise their natural taste. What can compare with fresh peas or new potatoes just boiled (not overboiled) and served with butter? Why drown spring lamb in wine or cream or yoghurt and spices, when with just one or two herbs it is absolutely delicious?

If you ask foreigners to name some typically English dishes, they will probably say "fish and chips" and then stop. It is disappointing, but true, that there is no tradition in Britain of eating in restaurants, because our food doesn't lend itself to such preparation. British cooking is found in the home, where it is possible to time the dishes to perfection. So it is difficult to find a good English restaurant with reasonable prices.

It is for these reasons that we haven't exported our dishes, but we have imported a surprising variety of cuisines from all over the world. In most cities in Britain you'll also find Indian, Chinese, French and Italian restaurants. In London you'll also find Indonesian, Lebanese, German, Spanish, Mexican, Greek... Cynics will say that this is because we have no "cuisine" ourselves, but, well, you know what I think!"

Traditional British food is usually described as plain, conservative and unvaried. There are many popular jokes about it. "The British Empire was created as a by-product of generations of desperate Englishmen roaming the world in search of a decent meal," remarks American journalist Bill Marsano.

Indeed, classic British dishes are not too dainty, but they are nourishing, natural and tasty, a lot of attention here is paid to the food quality. Residents of Great Britain prefer local food to imported products, so nearly all fish, milk and meat products are produced within the country and vegetables are grown by local farmers.

Meals during a day in Britain traditionally include breakfast, lunch, dinner and supper. Dinner is always the most substantial meal during the day. For dinner the British often have soup and then the main course, such as meat, poultry or fishwith vegetables or mashed potatoes. It is followed by a dessert, for example, the ost ubiquitous apple pie. Meat dishes are presented in British cuisine in a large variety. Probably, the most delicious of them is succulent roast beef, which is grilled and served with vegetables, roast potatoes or Yorkshire pudding. Apart from beef, the British cook steaks of pork, lamb and sometimes turkey or chicken.

Supper in Britain is the last meal of the day, and usually it consists of something light, for example, a bowl of cream soup, naturally, often skipped.

As for drinks, it's impossible to imagine British cuisine without tea. Contrary to popular belief, tea is not always served with milk. The British drink tea with and without sugar, with lemon, cinnamon, honey and so on. But tea and milk is a classic combination, not a favourite of mine, though."

17. According to Pete Phrase, the British haven't invented complex recipes because they...

1. ...appreciate the original taste of the products.
2. ...use a variety of sauces and spices for flavour.
3. ...prefer to use mainly basic ingredients.
4. ...always choose only fresh components.

Are tours really so bad?

I've always been all for independent travel and my friends often ask me: if tours are really so bad, why so many people do them?

Well, I wouldn't be so straightforward. First of all, tours provide higher quality at better value. I've always been trying to break down costs for independent travel in different cities around the world, so it might seem strange when I say that tours are actually a better value. The reality is that in most places, the absolute cheapest way to travel is independently, but that means hostel bunks and street food instead of hotels and restaurants. And in a country like China, the tours are much cheaper than independent travel at any standard.

Of course, the reason for this is that a tour provider can book 20 hotel rooms every week with one phone call, so they get amazing hotel rates that independent travellers couldn't dream of. The same is true with restaurants and even attractions, where large groups are much cheaper per person than singles. Even with a tour provider mark-up, you still get a better deal in most cases.

Another important thing for many of us is that there is little or no stress with language or culture barriers. Even in an English-speaking country, it can be confusing on your first visit, and things like finding hotels and even museums can be headaches. When in countries with other languages, the level of confusion gets multiplied, often further compounded by touts and other illegal sellers who make a living trying to steer you somewhere else. On a tour you'll always have an English speaker who knows the local area well between you and the potential obstacles. It's almost like having an old friend living in the area, who can tell you exactly where to go and whom to ignore.

That leads us to the next point. Tours provide security and accountability. No method of travel is 100% safe and secure, but at least when you are on a tour you know that people who know the risks are working on your behalf. Travelling on your own, if your hotel says it's fully booked, then you are out on the street. But with a tour, it's up to them to find you a new room nearby, which would be far easier even if it did happen.

If you get sick or injured on your own, you are on your own, while on a tour there will be an experienced person there to help get medicine or look after you. I had a large backpack stolen off a train because the luggage area works on the honour system. Had I been on a tour, someone would likely have put everything in a secure place because their reputation depends on clients making it home with all their gear.

And last but not least, itineraries on tours are designed by professionals. Everyone obviously has different tastes when sightseeing, but that doesn't mean that independent travellers always make the right decisions. The typical first-time visitor to a big city will try to schedule 18 hours worth of sightseeing into every day, which obviously doesn't work once you get there. These tour companies that have been around for a long time tend to do a great job maximising sightseeing time but also adding in leisure time, meal time, and sleep time. In the era of ubiquitous reviews not to mention social media, these tour companies can only survive if they provide a product that people feel good about when it's done. Not only can they get you between sights more quickly, but they also know when clients prefer to relax and slow down.

All said and done, I am not writing this to put you off independent travel but rather to make you look before you leap.

18. According to the article, tours may be less expensive...

1. ...if you book them for a group.
2. ...because of individual discounts.
3. ...because of an agency's massive orders.
4. ...if you choose hostels and street food.

New Years' time in Russia

To my mind, one of the best times to visit Russia is before New Year's Eve, as it is a big celebration in Russia. During Soviet times, New Year's Eve became a large celebration, complete with a big sit-down dinner. This tradition has continued today. Christmas is also now openly celebrated in Russia, but on a smaller scale.

As New Year's Eve in Russia is more of a family holiday, you may not find the kind of rowdy parties that you see in other countries on New Year's Eve. If you're lucky enough to be invited to someone's home, be sure to bring thoughtful gifts and possibly your own slippers, although most families will have spares. Russian hospitality is quite fantastic if you have friends who will host you. And be prepared to answer a million questions about traditions in your home country!

A common New Year's expression is "The way you spend New Year's Eve is the same way you'll spend the rest of the year". That's why it's so important for the last day of the year to be free from worries and arguments. You should forgive people, pay off your debts, and clean your home in order to start the new year happy and clean. A lot of Russians will also visit a Russian sauna or at least take a hot bath on the 31st of December to purify their bodies. You definitely should not sleep through the New Year, as it is considered a bad omen and will make the upcoming year sleepy and uneventful for you. Many people will also buy new clothes to wear on the New Year's Eve to celebrate a fresh start.

If you're in Moscow, you can head to several look-out points in the city to watch the fireworks. My friend recommended heading to Moscow State University to have the best view over the city, and I don't regret it. Many tourists head towards the Kremlin for **iconic** beautiful views of the fireworks along the river, although you need to get there early and wait in the cold for hours to see the fireworks.

The New Year is a big deal everywhere in Russia. The decorations are lavish, gorgeous, and so rich that at some places they seem over the top. Shops can be so cluttered and even a little kitschy, it makes you feel like a kid in a huge candy store — with gaudy, colourful packaging, and lots of foil and cellophane... everything is in colour and glistening.

And still, all those heavy decorations somehow fit Russia. In territorial terms, Russia is the largest country in the world, and this affects everything in it. The buildings are enormous, as are the boulevards and the squares. And of course, they are all given a festive look before the New Year.

The facades of the enormous apartment buildings are adorned with huge decorations that light up in the dark and remind you of Las Vegas. Christmas trees are everywhere — on every corner, in front of every shop, every square and so on. What's more, in order to make the atmosphere full of charm, gentle classical music pours through the spaces of malls, restaurants and all other public places. I am absolutely sure that when I was in Vienna, I rarely heard classical music as often as I did in Russia in the winter.

And to finish with my advertisement, I should mention that Russians are people with a highly developed culture, especially musically. I was amazed at their good taste for music. It is impressive how many concerts are performed in Moscow and St. Petersburg, the country's two major cities. At the end of the year, the number of these concerts increases and tickets for the Bolshoi Theatre are sold out months in advance.

To sum up, if you want to see Russia all lit up and covered with winter beauty, dress warmly and embark on a trip in December. But don't plan too much for the last week, as it gets very crowded with people doing last-minute preparations.

19. What does the author NOT advise foreigners to do?

1. Get ready to speak about your culture.
2. Choose presents for hosts carefully.
3. Ask your hosts questions about traditions.
4. Take an extra pair of home shoes.

Stress at college

Stress among college students can negatively affect academic performance, personal relationships, and overall well-being. However, stress can have positive effects if managed properly.

We all encounter the stresses of daily life, and college students in particular struggle with the adjustment to busy schedules and deadlines related to overwhelming courses and exams. The continuous pressure to achieve quick results during our early years of adulthood leads to college student stress, anxiety, and mental health challenges.

Many college students ignore signs of stress and as a result experience a range of physical, emotional, and behavioral symptoms. Increased heart rate or blood pressure, headaches, or fatigue, for example, commonly strain our physical states. The psychological perception of pressure, on the other hand, influences our emotional reactions to unexpected situations.

Significant life events often lead to increased stress levels. However, among college students the causes are often much more subtle. A heavy workload, public speaking, or long work or study hours can lead to hostile behavior and tense reactions to unexpected situations.

By understanding the individual causes of stress, students can better prepare themselves for the academic challenges that lay ahead. College students should consider these tips in effort to reduce stress.

Improve your time management. Instead of focusing on your to-do list each day, focus on the free hour you have before your next class, or the time you can gain from completing a task ahead of schedule. We often push things off until the last minute under the perception that our busy schedules don't leave us enough time. However, what you can do to counter this procrastination is to make things bite size, break up tasks into more manageable sections. Make a designated space for work that isn't your bed. Use a planner to block sections of time throughout your day, but make sure to leave time for yourself to socialize and relax.

Try to think positively. What if you actually scored an A on the exam you thought you failed? Just as easily as your mind imagines the worst-case scenario, it can be trained to imagine the positive. When we experience stress, we tend to interpret situations negatively. Pay attention to these reactions and avoid the unexpected by getting an early start to your day. If you still notice yourself thinking negatively, pause for a second, and try not to engage in those thoughts.

Daily or weekly exercise routines will help balance your mental and physical reactions to life's stresses. According to one study, 85% of college students reported feeling overwhelmed at some point in the previous year by everything they had to do; and 41.6% stated anxiety as the most pressing concern among sleep, improving your mood, and boosting your energy. Try 60 minutes of light walking, or 30 minutes of high intensity exercise. Sign up for yoga, join a gym, go climbing. Keep the routines interesting by combining different variations of cardio with muscle-building throughout the week. Take good care of your body each day. Eating right, exercising and getting enough sleep help your body handle stress much better.

By understanding the symptoms of stress we can learn to detect when the stress is a positive boost and when it is weighing us down. Managing your stress and your health will prepare you for the unknown situations and reward you with an exciting and engaging college experience.

20. The author thinks that students suffer from stress physically because they...

1. ...have heart problems.
2. ...are often too emotional.
3. ...fail to pay attention to stress signs.
4. ...come across unexpected situations.

Living in a dorm

Arriving in a dorm for the first time is a thrilling moment. Living independently away from home, being around so many new people – all that seems like an exciting adventure. However, finding yourself in a small space with a complete stranger (or several strangers) might be difficult at first. If you have ever shared a room with a sibling, you have some idea of it. But that isn't enough, as students come from different backgrounds and have different family traditions, habits, and preferences. Their expectations and attitudes towards what is acceptable or what is not also vary widely.

My first tip is to discuss the ground rules from the start. Sharing your expectations with your roommates can save you all a lot of trouble in the future. Discuss how shared and personal space will be kept, what items are okay to share and which are off-limits, when it is okay to invite visitors or overnight guests, what the study hours are, what the standard lights-out time is, if you should leave the room when your roommate has a call from home, etc. You might even get a set of rules written or printed out on a wall for reference. This may sound kind of lame, but believe me, you won't regret doing it. This doesn't mean that the rules are set in stone. Revise these policies and compromise if you feel something isn't working for everyone in the room.

If you have never shared a room, you might have a lot of arguments over chores. That's why I advise you to assign the chores and discuss how you will keep the place tidy – and hold each other accountable if anything is amiss. Consider keeping a chore board, including washing dishes, sweeping/vacuuming the floor, taking the trash out, etc. Define what "clean" is for every one of you, and come to a definition that all the roommates can agree on. Take turns doing chores or distribute areas of responsibility – whichever suits you all. I used to live with a super-neat and house-proud girl who cleaned the room twice as often as I would. I tried to compensate by cooking for us, washing dishes, and taking the trash out. That worked for us, since everyone did what they liked most.

Probably, the most important thing is to respect boundaries and privacy. The golden rule of communal living is "It never hurts to ask." Thinking of inviting a classmate over for a cup of tea later than usual? Text your roommate to ask if it's okay. Going to use the shower for 40 minutes straight for impromptu SPA treatments? Inform your roommate and ask if you can have a bathroom to yourself for all this time. Want to pick up and read their book? Ask. Planning a party in your room? Ask! Even if your roommate has never been against rowdy gatherings before, this time might be different. They might have an assignment deadline looming. You don't want them o hate you while they sit in the corner with a sour face, frantically searching for paper writers for hire. This approach has another benefit. Your roommate is likely to mirror your behaviour. By asking them about something, you send them a message that such things should be asked of you, as well.

And finally, plan bonding with your roommates. It's always beneficial to get to know the people you are going to live with. Go and have a pizza together, organize a movie night in your room, go to a campus event, or pick any other activity you all will enjoy. You don't necessarily have to become best friends. Sometimes roommates are just that – roommates. You can have different preferences and lifestyles. The important thing is to respect each other's boundaries, have empathy, and be civil and cooperative.

College flies by, so stay positive and don't let anything spoil the experience for you.

21. What is the author's advice about ground rules?

1) Just use dorm policies.
2) Sign a written agreement.
3) Discuss them with a supervisor.
4) Put them in a visible place.