



the

student kitchen survival handbook

The essential guide to living away from home

Salma Conway

THE STUDENT KITCHEN SURVIVAL HANDBOOK

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Introduction

Congratulations! You got the grades, did the waiting (or the orphan-petting synonymous with the gap year), and soon you'll be off to the heady heights of university life. Or perhaps you are already a university student, which is also very commendable. Either way, you're in good company. The Government hopes that by the year 2010, fifty per cent of all Britain's 'young people' will be receiving a university education. Whether or not that target is met, according to UCAS, the current number of students attending Britain's universities and institutes of higher education stands at around a whopping one million. Throughout the duration of their respective courses, one in four of these students is likely to accumulate a debt of over £11,000, a figure that is set only to rise in the years to come, particularly if the suspected increase in the number of 'chav students' significantly alters the average books-to-Burberry spending ratio.

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What does all this mean? The long-term effects of increased student numbers can only be detrimental to the already dire situation that exists in today's student accommodation. In a nutshell, more students means more lazy, inept, downright messy little buggers dirtying up your living space and, most alarmingly, more of the blighters using your crockery and stealing your Jaffa Cakes. Indeed, a nutshell may be all that you have left...

Of course, there is every possibility that you are one of those for whom the prospect of a filthy home, and a filthy kitchen in particular, is not in the slightest bit disconcerting. But the very fact that you are reading this book suggests that you are more likely to be the sort that we shall later identify as the 'kitchen victim' as opposed to the 'kitchen terrorist' (see Chapter Five). Nevertheless, there will inevitably be times when even those with the best of intentions and the cleanest of habits will flagrantly dust their omelette with someone else's black pepper, wantonly pinch a slice of bread or even pilfer a precious tea bag without stopping to consider the inherent hypocrisy of their actions. Desperation mixed with lethargy hits us all from time to time, and this book is here to help you through the pain.

You might be wondering what makes this volume different from the plethora of books already available on 'student cooking' or 'student kitchen diplomacy'. Well, for a start, this is not a cookbook; this is a survival manual. If you are one of those unfortunates who hasn't the slightest idea about how to boil an egg, you will undoubtedly benefit

introduction

from the basic instructions provided by such volumes as Jan Arkless's aptly titled *How to Boil an Egg*. However, if you harbour intentions of cooking anything more complex than a microwavable ready-meal, this book is an absolute necessity. What student cookbooks often fail to address is the fact that you will have to feed yourself three times a day and, more often than not, the mere prospect of having to cook yourself another meal in the conditions available will override even the fiercest pangs of hunger. Cheese on toast again? Oh, no, some bastard nicked all your cheese and yes, the bread is old and mouldy. Before you know it you're reaching for the take-away menus for the fourth time in a week, and, as awesome a prospect as that may sound to some, neither your wallet nor your waistline will thank you for it.

Perhaps you are one of those privileged individuals who will be living in catered accommodation. You might well be under the impression that kitchen protocol is not your concern and, to some degree, you are correct. You will be privy to a delectable smorgasbord of carb-tastic delights every day in the elegant setting of a bustling dining hall. But be warned, the absence of a kitchen and the associated indiscretions therein may result in a shift of negative energy towards living-area and bathroom-based anguish.

Just kidding; you'll have problems in those areas whether you've got a kitchen or not. And let us not forget the joys of moving out of halls and into a student house for your second year, where the condition of not only your kitchen

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but also your living room and bathroom will be a constant source of sadistic disruption between you and your closest friends (unless your name is Alex Tew and you can afford maids and a butler). It is, therefore, the duty of this guide to offer you some added words of wisdom concerning those aspects of survival, in both halls and house, that exist outside of the kitchen.

So grab a cup of tea (providing you've got teabags, milk and a mould-free mug), make yourself comfortable and take the opportunity to learn from the wizened *E. coli* dodgers of yore.



part one



chapter one:

before you leave home

So, you're off to university. You're signed up on a degree course taught by delightfully obliging professors whose ambition is to make sure you receive the best and most comprehensive education possible. It may cost you thousands of pounds but, of course, it will inevitably plonk you directly into a successful and lucrative career the second it is finished. And now you're leaving home, your girlfriend / boyfriend has assured you that they love you unconditionally and no amount of distance between you is ever going to change that. You will be together forever...

before you leave home

Now it's six months into the future. The 'transferable skills' you have gained from your university education so far have heightened your appreciation of the subtle nuances of bitterness and sarcasm. The irony of the aforesaid becomes clear.

OK, that was a bit harsh, but the fact is, going to university is a huge, life-altering experience that might be quite different to anything you were expecting. You will undergo phenomenal highs and occasional lows, you will meet fantastic new people that you never imagined existed and you will meet complete bastards who you will wish had never been born. You're about to enter an exciting and alien environment that is utterly out of your control, but the way you choose to deal with what this new life has to throw at you will bring you out of the whole experience as a new and improved person.

What, then, is within your control in all this chaos? Pencils, spoons and teddy bears. Yes, your belongings are your security blanket – they are your lifeboat in a sea of uncertainty. It's important, therefore, to carry out the right amount of planning to ensure that possession and control of your belongings remains unequivocally yours. Never underestimate the effect that losing track of your possessions can have over the rest of your life. If you're busy worrying about who's using your precious frying pan, or why your collection of forks has mysteriously turned into a solo act, when do you get the time to work on becoming involved in debauched

little love triangles and accumulating an impressive collection of STIs?

The most simple of things to do, therefore, in order to prepare adequately for the university experience, is to pack carefully: it's as simple as that. So, in the name of all things anally retentive, here is the ultimate guide to packing junk for university. Prepare to be dazzled.

packing for the kitchen

The rules of packing for the kitchen are universal, regardless of whether you're moving into a student village, halls of residence or privately rented accommodation (unless, of course, you're living in catered halls, in which case, you might want to skip this section until next year when you move into a house and you realise how inappropriate was all the whinging you did about the food in the canteen). But before we dive into a comprehensive list of what to take, first we must address some fundamental rules on product guidelines, just in case you go racing to your nearest Swedish Box of Horrors before you've finished the chapter.

cutlery

Knives and forks and spoons. Deadly weapons at 30,000 feet, apparently. In the kitchen, they tend to be elusive little blighters. They go missing, they get stuck in concrete,