

# Finding your own Accommodation

If you decide not to use Frances King accommodation, here is some advice we would like you to know before you give anyone your money! Renting property in London is expensive and there are lots of legal considerations. Find out as much as you can before you agree to anything.

## PLACES TO FIND ACCOMMODATION

- Estate agents or letting agents – a more expensive but more reliable way to find studios and flats. They will often have longer minimum rental periods and you will need to pay a fee to the agent. Some letting agents specialise in renting for short periods. You will normally have to pay a higher price for short-term rents. Always use an “accredited” estate agent or letting agent. They have a set of rules that they must agree to, so are much safer and more reliable.
- Websites such as:
  - [www.spareroom.com](http://www.spareroom.com) – Good for renting a room in shared accommodation. Sometimes the owner lives there, sometimes there are other tenants living there.
  - [www.airbnb.co.uk/](http://www.airbnb.co.uk/) – Good for short term rents directly from the owner. You can choose a room in a shared accommodation or you can rent a whole apartment for yourself. Can be expensive if you stay more than one or two weeks.
  - [www.gumtree.co.uk](http://www.gumtree.co.uk) – Good for renting directly from the owner or for finding flat shares with people who are already living together but someone else is moving out so there is a room free. Be careful with this website though. The people offering properties through this website may not have been checked in any way at all.
  - Ask friends which websites they used to find their accommodation. There are loads of websites and it is always better to use one that you have been recommended.

### Be Careful

There are lots of fake websites that pretend to be official renting companies, then take your money and disappear. Be very careful choosing a site. Try to use a well-known site or one that has been recommended to you by someone you know. Look for a good rating on Google with lots (1000+) of reviews, not just 20 reviews.

Avoid illegal sub-lettings – where someone rents a property from a respectable landlord and then they rent out the rooms to other people, which is illegal. Anyone who asks you to pay cash and refuses to give you a contract is usually doing something illegal and you should not use them.

## CHOOSING A PROPERTY

- Never sign a contract or pay any money until you have seen the room/flat. You need to make sure it is real, and that it looks like the photographs. You also need to see the area it is in, and make sure you feel comfortable walking in that area. Pay attention to how much noise there is – you won't see this in a photograph on a website, but if it is near a busy road or train line it might make it very difficult to sleep.
- Be careful of offers online that look incredibly good or cheap. For example a flat in central location with designer furniture for a low price, especially if they ask for money in advance to see the flat or ‘secure the room’.
- Find out who will have access to the accommodation apart from yourself and what is shared and what is only for you. Landlords who do not live in the property cannot just go there whenever they want. They have to tell you in advance.

- In a shared flat/house, try to meet all the flatmates before you decide to take the room.

### VISITING ACCOMMODATION

- Always try to visit the accommodation before you agree to anything. This may not be possible if you are looking from your own country before you arrive. If you have friends in London, maybe you can ask one of them to check it out for you. If not, perhaps it would be better to arrange something short-term for when you first arrive, such as a hotel, Air BnB or Frances King accommodation for when you first arrive, and then look for a longer-term rental property when you get here.
- When arranging to visit accommodation it is always a good idea to take someone with you.
- If you have to go alone, make sure that you tell someone where you are going, who you are meeting and what time you expect to return. Let that person know when you have left the accommodation safely.
- If you start to feel uncomfortable or worried when viewing accommodation tell the person showing you around that your friends know where you are and are coming to meet you very soon. You can just say “Thank you, but this isn’t right for me” and then leave – it is always OK to say no!
- Don’t feel pressured to agree to anything when you visit the apartment. A landlord or agent might say that someone else is interested, but if you sign now he will give it to you instead. This is a sales technique; don’t let anyone push you.
- If you can, travel there from school, so you can see what the journey is like. It might be a nice apartment but if the journey is horrible, you might not want to live there!

### THE LAW

- You should be given a contract to sign. This is to protect your rights and the landlord’s rights. However, remember that this is a legally binding contract. If you sign a contract for 1 year, you cannot just leave after 2 months.
- Do not pay any money to the landlord or letting agent without signing a contract first. The agent may charge a fee to show you properties, but they will give you an agreement to sign for this first. Deposit and rent should only be paid after you have the contract.
- Check contracts before signing them and paying any money. Make sure you look at the small print: are there penalties you might have to pay? Do you have to pay a cleaning service at the end of your stay, if so how much is that? Is there a “break clause”, which allows you to leave the property earlier than the end of the contract? How much notice do you have to give to end the contract?
- You will be required to leave a deposit. This should be held by an independent company, and not paid in cash to your landlord. Find out which company will hold your deposit and the terms for getting it back when you leave. Your landlord must provide you with a certificate showing where your deposit is being held.
- Find out exactly what your rent includes and what extras you will have to pay (e.g. council tax, gas, electricity, Internet, phone line, TV licence fee).
- Every home with a TV must have a TV licence. If there is a TV there, make sure you find out who pays the licence. If you are the only people living there then you are responsible. You also need a TV licence to watch BBC iPlayer on a laptop or mobile device. If you do not pay you can be

fined a large amount of money. You can find out more information here:

<https://www.tvlicensing.co.uk/check-if-you-need-one/for-your-home/tenants-and-lodgers-aud2>

- If the accommodation has furniture, then the landlord is legally responsible to make sure that the furniture meets fire safety standards.
- The accommodation must have a gas safety certificate from a registered gas maintenance engineer and the landlord must provide you with a copy of this.
- Any electrical equipment provided by the landlord must be safe.
- Landlords will normally carry out an inventory when you move in – listing all the furniture and equipment provided and saying what state it is in. It should also show if there is any damage to the property – such as scratches or marks on the walls, stains on the carpets etc. Make sure you go through this inventory with the landlord and check/agree to everything. If anything is damaged/missing when you leave, then they can charge you for this and take money out of the deposit.

### USEFUL ADVICE

- If you don't know the people you are living with, be careful of your property. Your room may have an individual lock or it may not. Keep your valuables locked in your suitcase and your suitcase under your bed or in your wardrobe.
- Always lock the property (doors AND windows) when you go out. Make sure everyone else in the apartment does as well.
- When you leave a property at the end of your contract, make sure you leave the place in the same state as you found it. This may require you to pay for a professional cleaning service. Sometimes the service is stated in the contract and you will have to use a particular firm that the landlord chooses.
- If you remove anything from the property – for example if you don't want one of the wardrobes and you ask the landlord to take it away – make sure you agree to everything in writing (e.g. by email) so there is a record of it and they cannot deny it later and try to charge you for the missing wardrobe.
- Take photographs of the property when you move in, and then take photographs again when you move out, so you have evidence about the state of the property. If the landlord tries to keep money from your deposit you will have to come to an agreement with the deposit protection service and they will want to see evidence.

### MORE ADVICE

- There is some more detailed advice on the UKCISA (UK Council for International Student Affairs) <https://www.ukcisa.org.uk/Information--Advice/Studying--living-in-the-UK/Looking-for-housing>

There is lots of really good information there, so it is definitely worth reading.