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Introduction

Hey party people - welcome to Merton! You must be delighted to be opening another PDF, but don't worry, this will (hopefully) be the least boring document you need to read before you get to Merton, written by your Entertainment Representatives (Entz Reps), Joe and Zander. The aim of this guide is to introduce you to the various social activities that Merton and the City of Oxford have to offer. It's largely based on our own experiences, as well as those of our predecessors, and we will be happy to help you learn from our first year mistakes when we meet you properly, from not understanding your alcohol tolerance in Michaelmas and making a fool of yourself (Zander) to not understanding your alcohol tolerance in Michaelmas and making a fool of yourself (Joe).

Although they say the “F” in Merton stands for fun, we hope - as every generation of Entz reps do - to convince you that this is just an urban myth. There's two things you need to know about Joe and Zander; one, if you put our names together, they spell FUN, and two, we don’t know how to spell. Hilarity aside, we hope this guide will get you excited about getting started here, or at the very least, ease you into life at Merton. Feel free to ask us any questions you have once you arrive, we've been there before. The main thing is to get involved with as much as you can in Freshers’, and you’ll see on your timetable everything we have planned!

Not charmed by our endless wit and charisma yet? Get reading - you'll find plenty of information on the weird and wonderful aspects of life at Merton and Oxford, including club nights, BOPs, the college bar, pubs, charity shops, and all things fun.
The College Bar

Time is money, and you'll spend a lot of both here, opening your phone on countless mornings after to find a few too many separate payments of £3.80 to “Merton College”. But the bar is, for many of us, the centre of college life, and with pints below £3 and a tasteful selection of tunes in the jukebox you really can’t complain. Our college barman, Neal, is the most fun and important member of college, always seemingly juggling 5 different tasks at once and still serving you a perfect pint (just don’t try to ask for any free drinks).

Perhaps the central fixture of the bar is Joe and Zander the Merton College drink. Every college has one, and ours is the Power Pint. It consists of a VK, two shots of Vodka and a healthy top-up of Monster Energy Drink. This may sound revolting, but it is surprisingly palatable and a popular pre-drink for a big night out. With 7 flavours and counting, you’re spoilt for choice (just avoid blue no matter what people tell you, they must put plutonium in that stuff). We of course would love you to drink responsibly, so maybe don’t try to try all the flavours in one night, as one guest found out the hard way - Neal didn’t have too much fun cleaning that mess up.

The bar isn’t just about alcohol, of course. It serves snacks and soft drinks, with cans of Diet Coke working out cheaper than buying them from Sainsbury’s. We also have a weekly bar quiz on Monday nights, organised by our wonderful Food and Bar Rep, Susie, who runs all sorts of events in the bar. In the past these have included karaoke nights, as well as dress-up nights and pretty much anything she can try to photoshop Walter de Merton into. It’s a great place to gather before heading elsewhere too, so even if you’re not hitting the town yourself there’s a good chance you’ll find your friends there. It’s also not uncommon to see Power Pint
fuelled late night library sessions (just don’t let the librarians in on the secret that alcohol, caffeine, and sugar will make you write a great essay - well, they'll make you think you’re writing a great essay!)
BOPs

BOPs (Breaches of the Peace), college socials in fancy dress, are the highlight of the Entz calendar. You'll have your first one on Saturday of Freshers week, and three more in Michaelmas Term. There are several reasons why Merton has probably the best BOPs in the world. Firstly, we provide free drinks at ‘Pre-BOP’, which begins with everyone arriving in the JCR in their best costumes from 8:00pm. We are almost certainly the only college to do this, with ladlefuls of cocktails, VKs and soft drinks all dished out to Mertonians and their guests.

A couple of hours later, we herd you cool cats to Merton’s Sports Pavilion. This is the second reason for Merton’s supremacy. Other colleges have their BOPs on their main sites or in clubs and have to finish early, but at the Pav we can keep dancing and drinking until 2am with Neal bringing the bar to us. We’ve also splashed out on some lovely DJ decks for any enterprising deck-riders who want to show off their skills. The theme for your first BOP is Through the Decades, so get brainstorming a costume to impress all your cool new college friends (hint: “the Decades” don't go back further than 1960, so please no Elizabethan dresses).

Once at the Pav, you will need your University Bod card to get in. To book into a BOP, we use the meal-booking system epos which you will soon get to know intimately, and booking for out of college guests opens a few days after the initial opening. There will usually be a big announcement to let you know when booking opens and it is first come first served, so be there or be square! Your first BOP will also signal the end of your crazy fun, and incredibly well-organised Entz events in Freshers Week and the start of your first term at Oxford!
P. s. Don’t try to look cool or sexy for a bop. We won’t let you in. The reason we both look so cool and sexy in our costumes is because we just are.
Clubs

Oxford's clubs are on the whole welcoming and harmless places for a night out, which means even if you've never been before, you're pretty much guaranteed to have a good time. Experienced veterans from big cities might have to lower their expectations slightly, but if you take nights out with a good sense of humour they are a great time. From cheese to disco to techno to indie there's a place for everyone - you just need to look hard enough. Luckily, your two Entz Reps are fiends of the Oxford scene, and have our wisdom to share on the main clubs that you'll be enjoying all too soon. We've even got a fancy rating system:

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Bridge

**Walking time from Merton:** 20 minutes  
**Biggest night:** Thursday  
**Floors:** R&B/Cheese, House-Techno, Hip hop and a separate bar called Spirit which you'll never go to  
**Info:** Bridge Thursdays are well loved by your current entz reps. A big Thursday night can be absolutely rammed, but make sure you aren't the first ones in, or you'll end up pulling a Billy Idol. The smoking area is huge and social, and a good place to hang out and escape the oft-crowded interior. This is absolutely our personal favourite club, but public opinion tends to fall in favour of the next entry in this list.
ATIK / Park End

Walking time from Merton: 15 minutes

Biggest night: Monday

Floors: Cheese, RnB, EDM

Info: Officially called ATIK, some pretentious students like to still call it Park End. For some colleges, Wednesdays are the favoured nights, but if you’re looking for a cheap night out, try Broke Mondays with (theoretically) £1 entry and £1 VKs. Your current Entz reps don’t have the best relationship with ATIK, finding it sweaty, smelly, crowded, and with a line to get in that gives your mum a run for her money. All that said, the music is good and the disco floor can be a lot of fun, plus drinks are cheap. Go early (and we mean early) and bring shoulder padding.

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Plush

Walking time from Merton: 10 minutes

Biggest night: Tuesday or Friday

Floors: Cheesy RnB

Info: Plush is notionally Oxford’s gay club, but its cheap drinks mean that it is widely attended and the number of creepy old men has increased in recent years. In the vaulted cellars of the Union, you might want to mind your head and wear something you don’t mind getting too sweaty. You’ll also want to watch out for someone carrying a card reader and a tray of Jagerbombs; they’re dangerous, but so worth it. Plush is also wheelchair accessible. The music can be good, although the DJ can talk a tad too much sometimes, but do look out for Drag and Disorderly for a fun night. Our word of advice: stay away from the walls, they drip.

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The Bullingdon

**Walking time from Merton:** 20 minutes

**Biggest night:** Fluorescent Adolescent

**Floors:** Main floor and separate bar

**Info:** Bully is the best place to escape the cheese of the main Oxford clubs. Its late nights presented by local DJs and its termly indie event, 'Fluorescent Adolescent', have a loyal following. It’s also host to many other music nights, including techno and DnB, so can be perfect for the avid ravers amongst you. It can be a bit claustrophobic sometimes, and a little expensive, but it’s well worth a visit for some variety after six weeks of Bridge, or if you want to pretend that you’re cooler than you actually are to friends from other unis.

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The O2 Academy

**Walking time from Merton:** 20 minutes

**Info:** This is Oxford’s small and intimate main gig venue. Also hosts a highly-rated termly Silent Disco. Neither of your current Entz reps have ever been, but look out for Friday night in Freshers when you get to beat us to it.
Bars and Pubs

The College Bar is unbeatable in terms of value, but it’s often nice to have a change of scenery for a drink in the evenings. We’ll organise a few events with other colleges and across Oxford later in the year, but here are a few of our favourite watering holes. Bear in mind that most of these will close at 11, so make sure you get out early, and that an evening of drinking is going to be costly pretty much wherever you go. For those readers who do not hail from London or the Home Counties, prepare for a shock to the system / your wallet the first time you go to a pub or a bar as you comprehend the price of a good night’s drinking in the most expensive city outside London to buy a pint. The college bar doesn’t usually have an ale on, so you’ll also need to find a pub if that’s what you’re looking for.

The Bear

Claiming to be Oxford’s oldest pub, it is also the nearest to Merton and a good place to go for ales and lagers. The floors and ceilings are lined with old college and university ties from around the country, and The Bear is a quaint first stop on a pub crawl. However, it only needs around eight and a half people to be full, so you’ll find yourself walking straight out more times than not, but it has a very spacious outside seating area that often hosts live music! It’s also £6/pint.

The Turf Tavern

Hidden behind some of Merton’s second year housing on Holywell Street, it was in Turf that Bill Clinton famously ‘did not inhale’ when smoking illegal substances as a Rhodes Scholar. Beyond this oft-repeated claim to fame, it’s a very cosy pub and serves excellent food (especially if your parents are paying). Merton owns the land which Turf is on, but don’t let that fool you: it still costs us an arm and a leg to drink here.
The King's Arms
This confusing building on the corner of Holywell Street is where many cool kids hang out (we wouldn’t know). You find a new room to sit in almost every time you go in to KA, and the bar is, once again, well-stocked.

Wetherspoons
Oxford has two Spoons, and they’re naturally the only places that even come close to the value for money of the college bar. The Four Candles and The Swan and Castle are generally very busy, but are well-used by Mertonians. If Mertonians aren’t at the College Bar, they are most certainly at the Four Candles. It’s spoons - cheapish drinks, sticky floors and tables, a suspect clientele and an overworked staff.

The Chequers
One of the best kept secrets in Oxford, and conveniently located for Merton, just tucked away on the High Street, Chequers is the perfect spot for a (relatively) decently priced pint outside of the College Bar. This is where the cool Mertonians hang out, so bring a beret and try to look pale and interesting.

Freud
In the grounds of a classical-style Church, Freud is the perfect venue when you are feeling like you really need to make the most out of all the money you forked out for that suit or dress. It’s just as expensive as it is far away from Merton, but it’s worth the walk (and the overdraft) once in a while, being stocked with fancy cocktails in an even fancier atmosphere.
Food

Hall
Mertonians are blessed with a great Hall. Merton’s lunch is famous around Oxford (probably) for its value and sheer scale, while its Formal Halls are among the cheapest. The food here is obviously great value, and one sneaky way of stretching your hall dollar is to get lunch and steal as many bananas, yoghurts, and snack bars as possible. Your current Entz Reps particularly enjoy the comedic opportunities presented by the hall bananas.

Kitchens
There are four kitchens accessible to first years so there's always space for students to cook for themselves, just make sure to make friends in other blocks, so you can steal their kitchen space. Nonetheless, even with both of us crammed into the Merton Street kitchen, we still found space to cook a feast for ourselves. Even better, there's four branches of Sainsbury’s and a Tesco within a twenty minute radius. Despite all this, even the most diligent chef sometimes fancies treating themselves to a meal out. Here are some of our favourite place to go:

Taylor’s
A fixture of Oxford life, with branches on every street corner, including two on the high street alone, its toasted sandwiches are legendary and always less than £5, while its sweet treats are well-loved. It’s not the cheapest, but it’s a nice treat for when you miss lunch in hall or are walking back from a poorly-timed tutorial across town.
Alternative Tuck Shop

If there’s one place in Oxford you should go for lunch, it’s ATS. The guys in here are so friendly and they get your delicious sandwich done for you faster than you can say ‘matriculation’. Located on the booming Holywell Street, this cosy green-fronted store is well positioned for a stop in between pretty much any two locations in Oxford, and one of your Entz reps (Zander) always makes sure to stop in on his regular walk to the English Faculty. I go so often that they know my order (Chicken satay) as soon as I walk in, which is a better status symbol than the scholars gown.

G&D’s

A world-famous Oxford institution, G&D’s sells a dazzling array of fresh ice creams. Count yourselves lucky international freshers, as you get to sample its delights for free! Beyond just ice cream, it also sells bagels and paninis. Merton’s nearest branch is round the corner on St. Aldates Street, while there’s also a branch on the way to Jericho if you want to pretend you don’t go to Oxford and visit cafés with lots of distressed wood and men with handlebar moustaches.

The Covered Market

The Covered Market is a great place to grab a bite to eat, offering a wide range of culinary experiences, and it’s a nice place to have a wander if you’ve got a bit of time for lunch. There are plenty of spots to eat here, including Pieminster and Sasi’s Thai, which all offer lovely food even if a bit pricier than elsewhere. Sasi’s is probably your best bet for good value and delicious meals that don’t skimp on portion sizes. Ben’s Cookies is also found here, which is a great place to get a comfort cookie during exam crisis.

Kebab Vans

If you were coming to Oxford expecting to be debating high politics, think again, for the humble kebab van is the site of frequent controversy. Previously, Mertonians loyalties lay passionately with Ahmed, positioned a stone’s throw away from 1st-year accommodation in Merton Street. With the arrival of the pandemic, Ahmed had to move and soon a new Kebab van arrived, officially titled “Best Kebab Van” but soon
nicknamed “Fake Ahmed’s”. A polemic soon ensued, newer Mertonians swearing loyalty to Fake Ahmed’s and his unbeatable cheesy chips whilst older Mertonians attempted to vindicate Real Ahmed and his plethora of options. Don't be fooled. Your current Entz Reps spent the majority of their first year besmirching the reputation of Real Ahmed’s, and for good reason, ever since he gave us an upset stomach (and an even more upset toilet bowl).

In light of such conflict, many Mertonians have cast their attention further afield. Hassan’s, with chicken strips and falafel wraps that could bring a nation to its knees, is held by many (Zander included) to be the best van around, and the queues certainly validate this claim. A certain 4th Year by the name of Ethan Prince, however, has declared that he would die for the chips at Solomon’s, located as far as the Ashmolean. One of your current Entz Reps once made the pilgrimage to Mr. Prince’s Holy Land after a particularly sweaty Bridge Thursday. The culinary experience was so cathartic he asks that you keep this haven a sworn secret. Secrets and kebab vans do, indeed, go hand in hand. If you ever find yourself near Pembroke, look out for McCoys, which they will assure you is definitely not a front...

If you are looking for surprises too, you might stumble across a strange metal box on High Street offering the intriguingly separate specials for men and women’s health. I don’t think they’ve quite yet made it into the 19th century.

**Najar’s**

Forgot to book lunch in hall? Sick of lunch at ATS (if that’s even possible)? Stop. I know you are already walking to Sainsbury’s to buy yourself a McCoys, Ribena, and a Twirl - that's not a lunch, quite frankly it's a disappointment. Najar’s is here to save you. For the same price of a meal deal, you can grab yourself a Lebanese wrap packed with falafel, hummus and any (and I mean any) filling you like; a wrap so huge you won’t be able to finish. Being on the front doorstep of St John’s, it makes for a bit of a trek, but
this doesn’t matter too much as every step back to college will deliver another messy mouthful of Levantine culinary bliss. Just mind the queues, and maybe keep it as a treat, because this stuff goes straight through you.

High Street Cafe

Conveniently located just round the corner from Merton Street, High Street Cafe is an establishment which has become popular among Merton students in the past year. We can recommend almost everything on the menu, having tried most of it, from the excellent paninis, to the extensive breakfast menu - especially the pancakes! It’s only a short walk from OWL, the college library, making High Street Cafe the perfect place for emergency coffee trips, and afternoon study breaks.
Other Activities

Balls

Balls are the most sophisticated nights of the Oxford social calendar. They are generally pretty expensive, ranging from around £60 to £200, but always feature unlimited free alcohol and food as well as partying into the night. There are balls every term, some hosted by societies and some hosted by colleges, and it’s definitely worth the cost of a limb to go to one in your first year for what will surely be one of the best nights of your life. Ask people in the years above for advice on specific balls (just don’t ask us, as neither of us have ever been to one), but the most important of the year is undoubtedly Merton’s this November. It’s only held every three years, is white tie, and will have a large range of activities and some well-known headliners, including Dylan. For more info, check the Instagram page @mertonwinterball or ask the ever enthusiastic Milo who wrote your freshers’ guide.

Cinemas

There are plenty of cinemas in Oxford. There are two Odeons round the corner from each other for the blockbusters, a Curzon in Westgate for a classier experience and the Phoenix Picturehouse and Ultimate Picture Palace, which both show independent and international films. Furthermore, Merton has a TV room and a range of DVDs in the library to watch should you opt for a cosier option!

The Varsity Ski Trip

One of the biggest trips in the Oxbridge calendar is the joint Varsity Ski trip at the end of Michaelmas Term, and this year it’s a big one, being the 100 year anniversary. It’s always exceptionally good value with entertainment provided through the week, and you don’t need to have skied before to have a great time. Each college has a Varsity Rep and ours is Emma Clarke! She’ll answer any questions you have about it at the Freshers’ Fair. Look out for the drinks party we have planned at the end of first week!
House Parties
A close study of the Student Handbook will reveal that any gathering of more than ten people on college premises must be approved by the college at least a week in advance. However, with a little bit of organisation and the permission of everyone in a house, larger parties are possible. The most important night of the year for this is Time Ceremony, and you’ll be told how to organise this nearer the time. If anyone wants to know more, feel free to talk to us in Freshers’ Week as we were both loosely involved in the organisation of several last year.

Time Ceremony
Every Oxford college has a strange tradition, and ours, called Time Ceremony, began in 1971. It takes place each October, when the clocks go back. We spend this extra hour walking backwards around Fellows’ Quad, turning anti-clockwise in each corner, in order to preserve the space-time continuum. Dressed in our full academic dress (sub fusc), we also drink port, or other beverages, whilst doing so. There are plenty of normal things about being a student at Merton, but Time Ceremony definitely is not one of them; it is truly bizarre, but a great experience. As mentioned in the introduction to this document, only 50% of your Entz Team were actually present at their first Time Ceremony. Please don’t follow in Zander’s footsteps and miss what is one of the best nights of first term!
The End

That’s the end of our guide to Entz at Merton! Do bear in mind that this is only a taste of what college has to offer, and is generally based on our own experiences - feel free to form your own opinions about the various activities available in Oxford and there are plenty of things out there that have slipped under this guide's radar! We’re certain that you’re all going to have an amazing first year, whatever you get up to.

We’ve packed Freshers’ week with lots of activities to keep you busy, so there really is something for everyone - if clubbing doesn’t take your fancy, look out for Ice Hockey, Junkyard Golf, and more! Freshers’ week, as much as you might fear, is not the time where many long-lasting friendships are formed. Don’t worry about feeling nervous or like you won’t fit in; Merton is one of the most welcoming colleges in Oxford and you’ll soon find your crowd. Friendships at Merton are formed in the flames of countless hall meals, essay crises, and plenty of nights out (or in), and for this reason they’re some of the best. We hope that what we have planned for Freshers’ Week and beyond will give you all a chance to have a well-deserved boogie, but always feel free to come up to us and suggest new ideas. Don’t worry, we don’t bite!

At the start of every term, you’ll get an Entz term card emailed directly to your inbox, which will tell you all you need to know about the formal events we’ve organised. On top of this, you’ll also find us in the college bar most nights of the week persuading you to go to Bridge. For more information, as well as to keep up with what’s happening throughout term, follow our Instagram account @mertonentz. We hope you’re looking forward to Freshers’ Week and ready for a busy term ahead. We can’t wait to meet you!
See you in October,

Joe + Zander

JCR Entertainment Representatives, 2022-23