

## **My Exchange at Hong Kong University**

I'm studying International Management at uOttawa, which chose their exchange as Hong Kong University. As my program has specific requirements for exchange, you'll come to understand that where you choose for your destination is extremely important. Firstly, the courses I have to pick have specifications from both uOttawa, and HKU. I would recommend going later in 3rd year or early 4th year as it'll allow you to have more prerequisites, thus more courses available to you. Or at the very least, focus on getting general mandatory courses before exchange and save electives for later. Students going in Winter should be advised that language courses start beginner curriculum in the Fall semester, thus the language courses offered that start in Winter are limited, here they include Cantonese, Mandarin, and Chinese Character writing. The courses I chose are CHIN-9511 Beginner Cantonese, MKTG3501 Consumer Behaviour, STRA3706 China's Business Environment, BUSI2819 Persuasion and Behavioural Change, and IIMT3622 Business Transformation.

Language courses at HKU tend to be structured without final exams (mini midterms and finals will be conducted during class times) and without group work. However, there will be small weekly homework and more deliverables. CHIN9511 seems to be more intensive than my other courses as it requires more engagement to truly learn the language as Chinese dialects use tones. While you won't be expected to know how to write characters, you will be expected to know each corresponding word tone and how to say/hear it. However, this course was directly adapted by HKU including the textbook being written by them, thus it can be very useful for every day. This course is 2 hours, 2 days a week, for a total of 4 hours weekly.

I chose most business courses without a final exam thus they are all structured fairly similarly. Firstly, participation is worth 15-30%, with part of that participation including weekly quizzes or in-class check-ins. You will generally have one group project that includes a presentation and a report, and one individual assignment. While you are required to know the material, the presentation style is laxer here as English is most people's second language, so don't worry about saying um or having cue cards as we would at uOttawa! Furthermore, I noticed that MOST (except for one professor) prefer shorter word counts. Again, English is a second language to most here, although they are fluent. It is hard for people to write over 2,000+ words, thus professors prefer to have shorter reports and less research-heavy. They simply want to make sure that you can apply what has been taught. They will not have you do assignments based on case studies but will ask you to think of your scenarios and apply them to the course content.

The one course I have with an exam, I was lucky to have it known when choosing courses so I picked an early date, May 2nd. Otherwise, you can have exams up to May 25th. In this class, the individual portion is the midterm and final, thus my in-class work consisted of both a group presentation and a report. My business courses are 3 hours, once a week. Another note, unlike 3-hour courses at uOttawa where they will often end early, here they often end right on time or end late. Do not expect to leave your class early every week if you have other obligations at that time, pick a different class.

Hong Kong is great during the Winter semester for an exchange student because there are lots of holidays. Actual classes didn't start until the second week of January (although you should be here a week earlier than that to participate in orientation and get settled... trust me you will need to get

settled!). During the lunar new year, you will have an entire week off, and Hong Kong has the best New Year celebrations in the world. About two weeks after that you'll have a full week off for reading week in March. There will be Easter weekend in April/March, and an extra day off in April. Then, you will get a whole week off in May right before exams. Students looking to book plane tickets should do so in the first week of January, arriving early will allow you to meet more people, make more friends, and get settled/make changes if needed. Go on vacation after exchange if you want, but going before will make you lose valuable socialization time. Registration for classes lasts 2 weeks in January after that and this period is crucial as the system for classes is a lot different than here. You will need to get approval once enrolled in a course and can be disapproved for several reasons. Often courses will allow you to enroll initially but then you will be disapproved. If the class gets too full, they pick who gets to stay in based on a lottery system. Acceptance/disproval of courses happens randomly, but usually daily. Exams start the second week of May for 3 weeks, but you will not officially know your exam schedule till mid-March. For students looking to book tickets earlier than that, try to enroll in courses without final exams, otherwise you will need to be patient.

Upon arrival, you will need to take a taxi to your residence. Make sure you have cash as taxis here will only accept that. Upon arrival, you can sign in take your belongings up to your room, and hopefully get a much-needed rest! Different residences will have other different procedures which will be explained to you during sign-in. Furthermore, make sure you check that everything works upon arrival and have extra passport photos on hand as you will often be asked to submit a photo with registration documents the first month.

Hong Kong University has a student life organization called CEDARS, with branches for non-local students as well. Make sure to follow them and check their website as they consistently put out new events as well as tips for exchange students. Registering for these events in the beginning is crucial as they can help you find friends not in your classes/residences, and will help to show you cool places around Hong Kong. These events will happen throughout the whole semester and will always have free food, so if you have free time, they are usually worth checking out. Usually, as an exchange student, they will send an email updating you with events so make sure to keep notifications on. This will be the same thing for the residents, they will send important information over email.

During the second semester, there is not a club fair, however clubs will still be recruiting. It may be hard to join certain clubs if you don't speak Cantonese or Mandarin, but there are international clubs specifically for International students. One of the best clubs for this is ASTREAS the International Arts Organization, so if you like the performing arts, it is highly recommended to join and check out.

Social events also happen within the residence, as in Hong Kong the residence floor is to be seen more of as a family. The floor supervisor will often arrange events, give out important notices and provide help if needed. Mine helped me out by recommending doctors when I was sick, and my friend's supervisor helped her out with vacation tips! The building itself also will hold events, such as the Lunar New Year, and most importantly: High Table Dinner! High Table Dinner is an important tradition in Hong Kong that I recommend you experience if able.

Studying abroad can be in expensive, and in Hong Kong, even more so. Despite Hong Kong being known as the most expensive place to live in the world, you can get by on a smaller budget. As a student, groceries will be extremely expensive, especially as the produce and selection here are

different than in Canada. Eating food familiar to Canada will cost you a lot of money. For example, a decent pizza here can cost you CAD 25 for a small. Especially as most local students, who are here year-round, will stuff the fridge making it impossible to use for yourself. Thus, your best bet will usually be to eat out. This may sound expensive, but actually, Chinese and local style food in Hong Kong is very cheap and very delicious! Food can be below CAD 10 a meal. Sometimes, I eat out for only \$4! Furthermore, you don't pay for tips, and tax is included. If you're looking to eat out at another style of cuisine (yes, including other types of Asian food) then food can be quite expensive, up to CAD 35 a dish.

Plane tickets from Canada will vary, but a good price is about \$1100-\$1500 one way. I recommend booking one way in the beginning as you may decide you want to travel after, or may not know your exam schedule.

Housing will be cheaper than residence in Canada. Rent in Hong Kong is way too expensive, so you must find student housing unless you can afford it. Newer buildings with better facilities will cost more money, so the price will range between \$2000-4500 for the 5 months. However, this cost will not include the air conditioner and laundry. Residences in Hong Kong do not have heating. If possible, I highly recommend bringing your fan and dehumidifier as these will make it much more comfortable to live in for someone used to Canada's climate.

In Hong Kong, you can get a transport card called Octopus, and you will need this as some food places also only take Octopus as a form of currency. Octopus can only be topped up by cash so it is recommended to have an initial decent amount of cash on hand. Daily travel expenses can range between \$1.5 to \$7 a day depending on where you are going, as the price is measured by distance. However, you will find that transportation in Hong Kong is very useful, as it can even take you to Mainland China, straight to Disneyland Hong Kong, and Macau!

I did not need to pay for any textbooks as fellow students had the PDF version online. Make sure you join the group WhatsApp's as this will be your most important instructional guide and update as to what is going on at HKU and Hong Kong in general.

Vacationing from Hong Kong is inexpensive to the Southeast Asia region and decent from the East Asia Region (at least, compared to Canada). Many budget airlines exist, as well as high-speed trains to get to some destinations. Furthermore, going to mainland China or Macau from Hong Kong is super easy and much cheaper than anywhere else.

Hong Kong can be strict about deadlines so make sure you are constantly checking and keeping yourself updated. Emails can be super long, and sometimes a deadline is only put at the bottom, so make sure you read down and check for dates! The exchange bureau will consistently send out emails for visas, course registration, and housing. It is recommended you consistently check their website and your email for updates. As long as you do those things, by the due dates given, the process should be smooth. I recommend that although they give you a minimum due date, you do it much earlier as there may be slight delays in the process. However, as a Canadian citizen, Hong Kong does not require a visa for a stay of up to 90 days as a tourist. You can enter for tourism then leave and re-enter if needed. However, this does not mean you do not need a student visa! This just means that if you get it a little bit late you should not worry. Housing dates though, will be really strict, definitely make sure to check CEDARS (HKU Campus Life) as they will make you aware of due dates. Also, be aware to make sure to read all the instructions at once.

I live at the newest residence, Hong Kong Jockey Student Village IV, and although I pay more money (about \$4200 for the semester) the facilities are very clean, new, and modern. We have a

beautiful study room, our gym, a games room, a prayer room, a kitchen on every floor, two bathrooms on every floor, and we can control everything in our room with an app! It is a bit far compared to other residences to school but there is a direct bus and we are directly beside Ocean Park (Hong Kong's Biggest Amusement Park – and student annual passes are cheap)! The student population here is nice as well because it is many exchange and international students making it easy to get along. We are also right beside a mall, making it convenient when you first need to get settled in.

On a side note, things in Hong Kong move fast once you're here. I recommend also getting a tourist visa for Mainland China before coming as it is likely you will want to go visit and the procedure here may be more difficult/tedious to get one. This needs to be done a month in advance before departure as they need to take your passport to print the visa inside. I also recommend staying during the Lunar New Year period for festivities, but if not and want to go on vacation, I recommend planning or having an idea of where you want to go before departure as well, as the Lunar New Year comes very fast. Hong Kong will only be cold for one week so you do not need winter clothes, (maybe one jacket) but you should consider the climate of other countries you are looking to travel to as many have to purchase clothes for a trip. Storage space will be small though; have fewer clothes and do more laundry, otherwise, bring clothes you are okay with discarding after.

So far, my time in Hong Kong has been amazing. Of course, there have been ups and downs and you will get homesick. However, the uniqueness of Hong Kong, the things I've been able to experience, and the opportunities I've been able to have due to the scheduling and location have made Hong Kong truly an ideal destination. Indeed, I will never again be in university and able to be abroad like this. I'm very happy to be able to experience what it is like in Hong Kong, but also what it is like to live life here and even be a student. The cultural experience and diversity of people you meet will truly add to your growth and change you for the better. As an international management student, I'm truly happy to put what I'm learning into action.