I spent my summer study abroad experience in Hong Kong, studying at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST). Majoring in Engineering Science, I wanted to take courses I wouldn’t normally be able to take back at SFU. The summer exchange program was held from June 16th to August 14th. On paper, two months seems like a long time, however the time went by too quickly.

Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region (SAR) located in the Southeastern region of the People’s Republic of China. Formerly a British Colony, Hong Kong is a global financial hub with a unique and vibrant culture that has been shaped by both Eastern and Western influences. As a student studying in Hong Kong, a student visa is required, unless you have a Hong Kong identity card. The whole process of applying for a student visa is very simple: HKUST will submit the application once you complete the forms provided to you by the exchange office.

Hong Kong is very hot and humid, especially in the summer months. It is highly suggested to pack light as Hong Kong is a shopper’s paradise. Shorts, t-shirts, and breathable clothing is definitely recommended. There are 9 student halls on campus, students are placed in either rooms of 2 or 3. All rooms come with refrigerators and sinks. Bedding is not included, so students need to provide their own pillows, blankets, and bed sheets. To save luggage space, I’d suggest waiting till arriving in Hong Kong before picking those items up (a mall is a 10 minute commute away from campus).

The HKUST campus is located in Clearwater Bay, Kowloon. The trip from the airport to the campus is quite long. It is possible to take transit although it does involve a few transfers and takes over an hour and a half. I would suggest meeting up with a fellow HKUST summer exchange student and splitting a taxi to campus. Weeks prior to the start of the program, the Global Student Program Office (GSPO) created a Facebook group for exchange students. Any questions you have prior to or during the exchange can be answered by GSPO.

The exchange program is formally known as the “International Summer Exchange Program” (ISP) at HKUST. Every summer, the program takes in students from all over the world. This year, there were over 240 participants in the program. As a student in the ISP program, there are many orientation activities organized by GSPO to help make the transition to the new school and new scene as seamless as possible. I’d highly suggest attending these events as they are great opportunities to meet new friends. These orientation events included a campus tour and a separate introduction tour of Hong Kong. In addition to the orientation events, GSPO organized many social and cultural workshops for students during the first few weeks. Some examples are: Chinese Painting, Dim Sum Cooking, Wing Chun, Hong Kong-style milk tea brewing workshops and tours to Tai-O and Macau.

The whole education delivery process was the same as what one could find at SFU. Courses are offered in a similar fashion to SFU: there are lectures and labs. Courses are managed using Canvas. And similar to the courses at SFU, there were the usual midterms, projects and finals. The only thing I noticed considerably different was that there was less homework given to students.

Aside from wanting to study at HKUST, being able to live and experience Hong Kong was something I wanted to fulfill while on exchange. As my favorite city, Hong Kong never ceases to bore me. There are many streets full of history, unforgettable views, and a contagious flow of energy all around. Depending on the type of person you are there are many things to do to fulfill your heart’s desire: hiking on the Dragon’s Back, haggling in the many different street markets, and eating at a “cha chaan teng” (Hong Kong style café).
Wow, what an amazing ride these two months has been. At first, I did feel a sense of uncertainty about going on exchange as I had never lived on my own. And now, I was about to do so on the other side of the world. But I am extremely glad I decided to go. Along the way, I’ve befriended people from all over the world: from USA to Singapore, China to Scotland. And although we have all gone back to our home countries, I am sure we will see each other again someday.

My education experience at HKUST was nothing but exceptional. From the moment we arrived, GSPO made sure we were comfortable and did everything they could to ensure our transition to our new school and city would be as smooth as possible. The instructors were very knowledgeable and genuinely cared about the students learning. The campus is located on one of the most beautiful properties in the whole of Hong Kong, what more can one ask for?

People go on exchange for many different reasons, some go to travel, some go to learn, and some go to grow. Personally, I decided to go on exchange to gain a sense of independence while being able to live in a world-class city on an entirely different continent. Whatever your reason is, I challenge you to take a leap of faith and go on exchange. It truly is an experience of a lifetime, and like most things in life, how much you get out of it depends on how much you put in.
View from the campus
View of Hong Kong from Victoria Peak
On the Dragon’s Back