My name is Lucas and I’m a Communications student. I went to Hong Kong Baptist University on an exchange semester in the Fall semester of 2010. To put it bluntly, I had the time of my life. The reasons as to why I went are still blurry to me. I guess one of the reasons for going away to Hong Kong was for me to recognize my roots as yes, I was born there but moved to Vancouver when I was a baby. Although I have been to Hong Kong before on family vacations, going on this exchange experience allowed me for the first time to experience the city for myself, to let the city morph me instead of the city catering to my specific needs – this city changes you.

**Travel and Visas:**

Since I was born in Hong Kong, I was able to attain a Hong Kong Identity Card that allowed me to enter into the SAR without any visas. If any one of you potential students are thinking of going on exchange to HK and are born in HK, I highly suggest you get your HKID card before leaving for HK as that piece of identification lets you go through the e-channel line that lends itself to be an efficient way to go through customs when entering HK.

**Financial Details:**

Before going to Hong Kong, I had set up a joint account with my mom at Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC). HSBC and their affiliate, Hang Seng Bank, are the most popular banks in Hong Kong as demonstrated by their abundance of branches and ATMs all over the city. I would recommend that you set up, either before or after arriving in Hong Kong, a student account with HSBC as cancellation and start up fees are waived for students. If this example is any indication of the food prices in HK, a meal at the HKBU canteen costs 17HKD which translates to just over 2CAD. Of course there are more expensive items on the menu, but food prices are generally less expensive when compared to Canada.

**Arrival and Orientation Information:**

Before you arrive in Hong Kong, the HKBU exchange program does send you an email to ask if you’d like to be picked up from the airport. Although I didn’t take that option as I arrived earlier than the pick up the date, I would highly recommend you take that option if you are new to the city. The reason for my recommendation is that you get a chance to meet the international faces immediately after your long flight which makes for a good time to bond and also make some new friends that may last
you your whole exchange semester. The week long orientation familiarizes exchange students with the logistics of being at HKBU – library cards, printing passes, wireless internet, etc. All those boring seminars (yes, they are quite boring) culminate in a tour around the city that brings the students to all the touristy stops of HK which include the Peak, Jumbo Restaurant for lunch, Repulse Bay, and Stanley Market.

Accommodation and Living:

When compared to the other universities in HK, HKBU’s undergraduate dorms are more spacious, new, and clean. The rooms are shared between two people and the bathrooms are shared between two rooms. The bathrooms are cleaned once a week by the janitorial staff. The room is outfitted with a closet space, a bed, and a desk with drawers and an overhead shelf.
Academic Details:

I have never done so many group projects/presentations in one semester. Maybe it’s the academic culture of HK, but the emphasis in HKBU undergraduate academia is group projects and presentations. The classes were generally pretty small ranging from the smallest class size of 30 students to my largest which was 80 students. The professors I had were from all over the world so it’s not uncommon to hear a different accent with each different course.

Country Information:

In August to mid September the city was humid, oh my goodness it was humid. I remember wearing my jeans during those months and having them soak through because it was just that humid. The city starts cooling down in mid-October with temperatures dropping to a bearable 15 degrees Celsius in December. HK embodies a big city aesthetic with a rural mentality as one can see from the many couture fashion brands that line the streets with the cheap wonton noodle shops that are right beside it. The people are generally nice, but be prepared, if you do not know any Cantonese I suggest you learn some common phrases before you embark on an exchange semester in HK. Although the city boasts that it is bilingual, I can attest to the fact that not a lot of the residents speak English well. If you ask them for directions, they’ll point you in the right way, but anything beyond that you’ll have to learn Cantonese. There are many places to visit in HK such as Victoria Peak, Victoria Harbour, Ocean Park, Stanley Market, 1000 Buddhas, but above all, HK is a springboard for other
adventures in Mainland China and/or South East Asia. I highly recommend you to take full advantage of the exotic travel destinations that are just a two hour plane ride away.

Social and extra-curricular Activities:

There is a smorgasbord of clubs that one can join at HKBU. The orientation seminars familiarize the exchange students with a couple of highlighted clubs. The chapel at HKBU also offers monthly trips to the non-touristy stops in HK such as Pirate’s Island and famous, but well hidden, medicine shops. I, along with some of friends, joined the Kick Boxing/Muay Thai Club. That club was a great one that had a good coaching staff and supportive teachers that taught you the basics of throwing jabs and kicks. HKBU International also organized Global Café’s that were biweekly events which exchange students can learn more about the Chinese/Cantonese culture.
Words of wisdom for other students:

You will face challenges – be it the cultural clashings between you and your classmates, finding classrooms, figuring how to get around the city – but remember to take everything in strides and remember, exchange is suppose to be fun. Remember to pack light as one can easily get more supplies and clothes for very cheap at Fa Yuen Street in Mong Kok or at Festival Walk, which is the mall that’s closest to HKBU. If you don’t know any Cantonese before arriving in HK, I highly suggest you learn some before or during your stay in HK. As with any culture, the natives of the land will respect and be willing to help you a lot more if you too are willing to take the time to learn their culture. Also, learning some Cantonese will help you get around the city a whole lot easier as even some taxi drivers may find it hard to figure out your destination if you say it in English. Immerse yourself in HK, it truly is a city that will change you – from the blinding neon signs on Nathan Road to the crowds of people in Lan Kwai Fong, the city is a world of its own.