University of Hong Kong
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Exchange Report

Phyllis Lai
psl4@sfu.ca
Introduction
Hi everyone! My name is Phyllis. Currently, I am a third year business student majoring in International Business and Entrepreneurship. I am originally from Hong Kong, and many people have asked me “Why Hong Kong and not other countries?” Although I travel to Hong Kong occasionally, this time, I am returning to Hong Kong as a student, an ambassador from Simon Fraser University to learn at the University of Hong Kong. It’s a different experience!

Travel
For those who like to travel, managing transfer flights to different destinations gives you more chances to explore other countries. Make sure you do some research on flight tickets and travel packages because sometimes the travel agencies in Hong Kong offer a cheaper rate, or traveling from mainland China might be cheaper than a direct flight from Hong Kong.

Tip: Book you flight early, especially for those who are traveling during peak seasons and remember to book your return flight after the last day of exams!

All about Hong Kong
Culture
Hong Kong is a busy, fast-paced city. Time flies by quickly without you knowing! The city of Hong Kong is filled with entertainment, you can never be bored as there are many options for people to eat and go to. Locals are generally very modest and they dislike criticisms. On the other hand, when you are familiarized with some locals, they are very sociable and friendly. In additional, HKU students have a high team spirit and like social gatherings a lot.

Language
Although HKU is taught in English, if you know some Cantonese it would help. I would recommend you to take one Cantonese or Mandarin course as you can always get help from your floormates or classmates right away.

Tip: Blending in with the locals is the fastest way to learn the language, cultural and rituals from a foreign country.

Weather
Weather in Hong Kong is unpredictable. Luckily, the winter that I went to Hong Kong was the
warmest winter in ten years. I would recommend you to bring mostly t-shirts, a few long sleeves and a sweater just in case.

**Places to visit**
- Hike to the peak for the view of the entire Victoria Harbor
- Bike in Cheung Chau
- Have FUN in Ocean Park
- Walk up to the Buddha
- Eat seafood in Lamma Island
- Taste the Jumbo Floating Restaurant
- Swim in Repulse Bay
- Watch the Symphony of Lights in Tsim Sha Tsui
- Must visit Temple Street, Ladies' Market, Tai Yuen Street, Stanley Market

**Arrival and Orientation**
Although the transportation system in Hong Kong is extremely *convenient*, it can be quite confusing for first-timers. Different ways to commute include MTR (our skytrain), bus, minibus, taxi, tram... Having a buddy would be helpful to take you to your destination from the airport and to orientate you with HKU. Luckily, my arrival to Hong Kong was quite smooth as I have a ride to the residence hall. I participated in an exchange student orientation organized by CEDARS and I also participated in a one-day tour arranged by the Office of International Students with many other exchange students.

**Accommodation, Social and Extracurricular Activities**
Amongst the many halls in HKU, I was accepted into *Starr Hall*. Starr Hall is located in Jockey Club Student Village I, and the walking distance between the hall and the university is less than 10 minutes. Unlike halls in Student Village II and Sassoon Road, I saved a lot of money and time from commuting to school while live off campus. The closest supermarket is also about 10 min from Starr; it is very convenient. Living on the twentieth floor, I have a superb view in my room and the pantry looking at the city, the ocean and the mountains.

On each floor, there is a pantry—a combination of an open kitchen and a living room—with electric stoves, some eating and cooking utensils, refrigerator and a TV. Inside the room, there is a locked drawer for you to place your valuables.
**Tip:** Each hall has its strong, distinct hall culture. It is very important to find a hall that suits you, do not underestimate the hall culture in HKU. Pay special attention when examining all the university halls, and be very honest with your application so that you can be matched to the right hall.

Living in a hall is a very valuable experience; it is very interesting, interactive and busy. Half of the friends that I meet in Hong Kong are from the hall I live in, all with different cultures and backgrounds, and I already miss them when I am at the airport. Through hall, I was able to participate in floor and unit (a group made by every two floors—a girl floor and a guy floor) activities such as unit orientation, inter-unit swimming competition and basketball match. Also, I joined the hall aquatics team and represent my hall in an inter-hall swimming competition. In additional, I had the chance to learn a little bit of squash and volleyball for a short period of time. Since I can speak Cantonese and Mandarin, my floormates expected a lot from me and see me as a first year local student rather than an exchange student. Yet, I did not regret participating in their activities because I don’t think I would have had the same experience and most of all, I had a lot of fun!

**Tip:** Ask your roommate or floormates if you have any questions! They are glad to help!

**Academics**

The workload in Hong Kong is similar to third level SFU Business courses, and four courses are definitely enough for me. Class sizes in lectures and tutorials are much smaller compared to SFU, varying in between 30-100 depending on your courses. Class duration is about 3 hours per week, a 1-hour class plus a 2-hour class and a possible tutorial. The percentage of participation is relatively heavier depending on the courses you are taking, but it is easier to contribute with a smaller class size.

One of the disadvantages studying at HKU courses is the late notification of the final exam date, which doesn’t come out until a few weeks before the exam. If you have a valid reason for taking the exam early, the professor will try to arrange an earlier date for your exam.

**Warning:** Finance and mathematic courses are harder in HKU!
Finance
In general, everything in Hong Kong is cheaper than Canada due to the exchange rate. Therefore, I prefer to eat out so that I can experience more of Hong Kong’s culture. In case you are wondering, I had to buy my textbooks and there were a lot of fees and deposits that I had to pay to the university and the hall.

Warning: Do not overspend as you might be tempted to do a lot of shopping! Budget wisely!

My Favorite Experience
It has to be Starr Fest—a festival comprised of a series of inter-unit activities and competitions held in Starr Hall every night for a week—including Fashion Show, Water Fight, Singing Contest, Bazzar (a food convention with snack booths prepared by each unit) and High Table Dinner (a formal dinner with the warden and all the students living in Starr Hall). Not limited to the activities that I have listed above, we also had midnight rehearsals and time-consuming preparations of costumes and props starting from one to two weeks before Starr Fest in addition to school and work. It was an intense week filled with tears and laughter when we were disappointed at the Singing Contest performance that we did not do so well on and when we were the winner of Starr Fest in 2009. In the end, it was the process and the time that we spent together that matter the most.

What I’ve learned and the challenges I faced
Through this exchange, I have learned to be more patient and independent. I was able to find out what was important to me and I learned to not take everything for granted. It is my first time away from home and living in a shared room for about four months, I didn’t know what to expect other than having an open-mind. Challenges I faced were mainly trying to balance my time equally to cope with all the meetings, assignments and projects from school, extracurricular activities I was committed to and the social opportunities to enjoy my exchange term.

What I Wish to Know
I wish I have the resource to find out earlier what transferable elective (non-business) courses are offered at HKU so that I can also experience the non-business aspect of HKU.
Words of Wisdom

- Do *thorough researches* before you go on exchange because you do not want to dread through the exchange semester or return to your home university disappointed.

- Take a good look at the *exchange guides* prepared by both of the universities before you go on exchange, they have most of the information that you need to prepare for exchange and know about the exchange university.

- *Do not pack too much* in your suitcase as you do not want to return to Vancouver with overweight suitcases. You can always mail out parcels back home if some of things you plan to bring back are not too urgent.

- I strongly encourage everyone to *apply to a hall* and *participate in their activities, clubs and teams*!

- *Try as many things as possible* and make the most out of your exchange period. One of the things I regret is not joining as many HKU clubs.

My exchange to Hong Kong is a *life-rewarding experience* that I will never regret, and on second thought, one semester is definitely not enough. *Hope you will enjoy yours as well!*