



Tips on Studying Abroad at the Hong Kong University of Science & Technology in Hong Kong

Want to know what it's like to study abroad? Want to know what your peers think? Your fellow Georgia Tech students who have previously gone on this exchange program gave their opinions so that future participants have the inside scoop on their host institution and host country.

Preparation & Getting Started

- It took some leg work running around campus just before I went abroad, but I got all the necessary signatures. My school and faculty were familiar with me since I was a third year, so I didn't have any problems.
- It can be a little difficult getting into classes because there are more students than space. Choose your classes well in advance!
- Registering for courses at HKUST was a bit challenging. The internet there was spotty, so it was hard to find a good connection. You can only register during certain hours of the day as well, which was a bit frustrating. Once you get into the classes, you have to get the pre-requisites overrides, but the professors are usually accommodating.



Classes

- Registration is online and the program contact is helpful.
- Professors give little homework and it's not counted in the grade. Grades are based on mid-terms and finals.
- Courses don't seem as rigorous as Tech's but the bell-curve grading scale makes it competitive. You have to get used to the system.
- Some exchange students have difficulty understanding the instructors' Chinese/British accents.
- Engineering classes have a lot of local and mainland China students. Management classes have mostly Chinese students and exchange students from all over the world.
- In my experience, the classes were pretty fun. Mine were small for the most part, with the classes being roughly 50 kids. The professors were nice, although some were hard to understand because they did not speak English as a first language.
- I took mainly major-based electives, which were somewhat difficult. There were only 2 exams in each class, along with a few homework assignments (no more than 5 for the semester). The classes are graded entirely on a curve, with the class average being set at a B-. As long as you stay close to the class average, you will pass easily. Most kids take 15 hours on average, but 12 hours is the minimum and 19 hours is the maximum, I believe. I recommend taking less hours so that you have more time to travel and enjoy the area.



Housing

- Hall 6 is the newest dorm and houses most international students. Hall 3 has more of a local atmosphere and is very fun.
- You can choose to live with a local or exchange student.
- Housing is very affordable—one semester of housing in Hong



Kong was about the same as one month in Atlanta.

- Halls are very "open", so you could just run the fan and open the windows to cut down on A/C costs (window units).
- You apply for housing from Georgia Tech, and the university is accommodating in that regard. All you have to do is fill out the application and fax it, and then once you arrive in the university, check in and pay for it on the following business day. The dorms are located a few minutes away from the classrooms, right on the sea. The view on a non-smoggy day is amazing.
- The room is similar to the ones at Tech, but a bit smaller. The rooms come with a desk, internet connection, bed, closet, cabinets, and a few drawers. The university usually gives you another exchange student as a roommate, and the exchange students are usually grouped together in bunches in the rooms, with many exchange students being neighbors.
- It might be good to bring a British-style plug adaptor, because they are very hard to come by in Hong Kong. Voltage converters might be useful as well, but that's really only if you're bringing something other than your laptop, as many laptops come with one already.

These comments do not reflect the views of GT's Office of International Education. They are based on students' personal opinions and are, therefore, not necessarily reflective of all student experiences.



Transportation & Travel

- Use www.kayak.com or STA Travel for your plane ticket.
- Local transportation is excellent; the Octopus card is very versatile and can be used to pay for the subway, buses, or at some convenience stores.
- Hong Kong is a good hub for regional travel to Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, etc. Use www.hkaero.com for cheap place tickets.
- You'll need to investigate visa requirements for regional travel. Try to get multiple entry visas from the Chinese Embassy before you leave as it's harder and more expensive to get these later.
- Buy a plane ticket well in advance, or else you might not be able to get a flight on the day you want. Also check at different times and on different days in order to try and get a cheaper flight. As for flying to different countries from Hong Kong, it is simple. There are non-stop flights to any country in Asia from Hong Kong, and if you use a site like zuji.com, it is very cheap. Most countries only require a passport, but not all, so check before you go.
- As for traveling around Hong Kong, using the MTR (train) and the buses are the best way to go. It is simple to do, as long as you have a Octopus Card, which you can get at any MTR Customer Service Desk for a deposit of HK\$50, which is about US\$6.50. You can use it on the minibuses, the regular buses, the train, and in some restaurants. It might be worth it to get a student card, which gets you half-price on the trains.
- It isn't that difficult to get a visa or a passport. Just make sure that you give yourself plenty of time in case something goes wrong.



Packing

- Definitely pack sunblock and an umbrella!
- You'll need a warm jacket if you're going to be there in December.
- It's always humid, so be prepared.
- Try to pack light and buy clothes there in order to fit in better with the locals.
- Pack light- you will buy more gifts and local items that you won't be able to fit it all in your suitcase for the flight home. Pack only necessities, and leave most everything else at home. Even stuff like umbrellas can be left- most of the time Hong Kong doesn't full-out rain like we're used to in the US (it's more of a mist in HK), so a hoodie will suffice most of the time.

Lifestyle

- It seems that most exchange students socialize with other exchange students because the locals are very reserved and tend to stay in. However, it depends on which hall you live in.
- There are many fun student traditions that you should try to get involved in.
- On-campus activities include sports (such as dodgeball) and hall-specific events.
- If you want to learn the local language, you need to make it a priority.
- Most of the international students were very amicable, and socialized with each other a bunch. The local students usually kept to their little groups, but some of them like to fraternize with international students, and they are pretty fun to be around. Most of the local students study a bunch, but also do some pretty crazy things when they aren't. Let's just say they are a little *too* involved with their club activities and publicizing them.
- The local language is a bit difficult to learn, and as long as you learn how to say the university's name in Cantonese (pronounced "fo die"), you'll be alright, because most people know enough English to get by. It might be good to bring someone with you that knows Cantonese just in case- sometimes it is very useful.



Communication

- Use Skype, IM, MSN, or e-mail to keep in touch with family. The time difference makes it hard to call home.
- If you want to use a cell phone, they are cheap and easy to get. Calls to the U.S. are not expensive. Use “People”, a cell phone provider.
- There are internet connections in every dorm room, but the connection may be slow.
- Many of the cell phone companies in Hong Kong give you the option of having an international plan on your phone for an extra \$20, but instant messaging services such as Skype, AIM, etc. are the best way to communicate with people back home (since each dorm room comes with free internet), and a Hong Kong cell phone is the best way to communicate with the people that you meet there.



Food

- Food both on and off campus is good and affordable, less expensive than in Atlanta.
- There's a BBQ pit on campus that is very popular with local and exchange students.
- The “western café” is better than the Chinese cafeteria.
- Try the dim sum specials on the ground floor restaurant .
- The on-campus food is very cheap, being about half the price of the food in the US. Once you leave campus, the prices go up slightly, depending on which distract you go to. I personally liked most of the food, and dim sum is also good to try before you leave.

Finances

- Hong Kong is very affordable, which makes it easy to spend more than you anticipated.
- Debit and credit cards are accepted in most places. It's best to use your cards to withdraw money and pay for things with cash.
- In total, I spent around \$4500. It helps to budget your money, just to keep track of how much you have spent and how much you have left. In Hong Kong, it is very easy to spend too much, since everything is so cheap.
- I personally received a scholarship to go, but this isn't the norm. It is cheaper to go abroad, but just remember that you will have to pay roughly \$500 for housing, about \$3 or \$4 per meal, and \$2 per load of laundry, as well as money for gifts, travel, and other miscellaneous things.
- As to how to pay for things, use your Octopus card if you can, but cash is the best way to pay for things. It is easiest to set up a bank account there, as there is a bank conveniently located on campus. Many places will take credit cards if you're in a crunch, but cash is really the best way to go, as it is universally accepted.

Participant Profiles

Please see information of contributing students below. If a blog or website is listed, feel free to take a look! Also, if an e-mail address is listed, you may contact that student if you have any questions about their study abroad experience.

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Cultural Differences

- Local students tend to stay in and socialize whereas the exchange students go out more often.
- Take American music to swap—it's a great way to learn about other cultures!
- It was a bit different adjusting at first, but it isn't hard to adapt. Many things are similar enough that you will hardly notice a difference. The biggest difference I noticed was with food- everyone in the party is combined onto one bill and then splits their costs from there, and the food is brought out once it is done cooking, instead of together.
- The people in the street market and where prices are not already set will try to rip you off, because many assume that you are a tourist and that you are probably an American. Many people there will assume that you are an American and that you have bunches of money to throw away.