

Faculty of Law, The University of Hong Kong (People's Republic of China)

1. Overall impression

In general, my experience in Hong Kong was very enjoyable and satisfying. One should not underestimate the LLM program as it certainly requires some commitment, but at the same time the year spent in Hong Kong is a great opportunity to discover a vibrant city as well as a different, and extremely important, part of the world.

2. Making preparations (e.g. administrative matters, finding information)

Even after having been accepted to the Double Degree Program by the University of Zurich, it is still necessary to separately apply for an LLM Program at the University of Hong Kong (HKU). In principle, a contact person from the HKU gets in touch with the Double Degree students around December, alerting them that they need to apply before a certain deadline (normally, around the end of January/February, depending on the chosen program) in order to be regularly admitted to an LLM program.

It is important to note that during the HKU application process two recommendation letters are required; at least one of them must be written by a professor (e.g. not by an employer).

In order to stay in Hong Kong it is necessary to apply for a VISA. The application process is not complicated and is explained very well on <http://www.cedars.hku.hk/campuslife/visamatters/policy>. However, one should be advised to apply for a VISA at least 3 months before leaving for Hong Kong as it can take some time to get all the paperwork done.

Further information can be found on the following websites:

- as to the university in general → <http://www.law.hku.hk>
- as to the LLM programs → <http://www.law.hku.hk/postgrad/llm/>
- as to administrative matters for non-local students → <http://wp.cedars.hku.hk/web/nonlocal/>

3. Contacts/Responsibilities

(e.g. important contact persons at the Partner University and Faculty)

For every question concerning the studies and the application process it is possible to contact the faculty office using the following email address: lawfac@hku.hk.

For questions regarding the campus, the VISA application and the life of non-local students in Hong Kong is it possible to contact the Centre of Development and Resources for Students (CEDARS) at cedars@hku.hk.

4. Housing / Finding accommodation

As Hong Kong's real estate market is the most expensive in the world, it is not easy at all to find a cheap and decent accommodation in the city. Against this background, there are basically three different accommodation options:

- 1) One can try to apply for the university housing. This is certainly the cheapest option, but it is also connected with some drawbacks. For instance, the application process is quite complicated and the chances to find a place are not very high; it is even harder if one wants a single room (and not a shared room). For more information see: <http://wp.cedars.hku.hk/web/nonlocal/?p=14#housing>
- 2) The second option is to find a private accommodation through a real estate agency based in Hong Kong. Private apartments are of course more expensive than university halls, but at the same time they give way more choice to those looking for a place where to live in Hong Kong. Prices go from around CHF800 to CHF1'700 (for a studio or a one bedroom apartment), depending on the area of the city in which the building is located. This option's main advantage is also that it does not require any kind of particular preparation before leaving for Hong Kong: it is enough to go on person in one or more real estate agencies once arrived in the city. Doing so, one will normally find an apartment within few days.
- 3) The third option, which is also the most expensive yet the more comfortable, is to live in a so-called serviced apartment. Some examples are: <http://www.shama.com/hongkonghotels.aspx>; <http://www.ovolohotels.com.hk/ovolosheungwan/stay/>.

5. Arrival

The Hong Kong airport is very well connected with the city centre. There are mainly two options to reach the city: by MTR (Airport Express Metro), which takes around 25 minutes, and by bus, which takes between 60 and 90 minutes (but is also cheaper and probably the best option if one must stop in Kowloon and not on the Hong Kong Island). In any case, it is recommended to get an Octopus Card (see below "Transport") before leaving the Airport.

During the two weeks preceding the semester the CEDARS organizes the so-called "Weeks of Welcome", which feature many activities for non-local students. Details are normally provided by email to the students or can be found on CEDARS' website. In addition, a welcome aperò is organized by the law faculty a few days before the start of the semester.

6. Telephone (e.g. costs, carriers)

In Hong Kong, there are many telephone carriers (e.g. CLS, China Mobile) among which one can choose to buy a rechargeable sim card. I personally used Lycamobile, an international carrier which is cheap and convenient as it allows to call all over the world for few cents and to surf on the internet for less than CHF10 per month. Lycamobile's sim cards can normally be found in the convenience stores of the chain 7 Eleven (although it is possible that not every store has such sim cards).

7. Bank account

I personally decided not to open a bank account in Hong Kong. It is not strictly necessary, neither to do payments in favour of the HKU – as it is always possible to do an international wire transfer or to pay cash at Bank of East Asia located on campus – nor to withdraw money in Hong Kong. I used to withdraw money using my usual “Maestro Card” and paying the usual fee of CHF5 for money withdrawal overseas.

8. Transport (e.g. from Switzerland, to the University)

There are daily flight connections (direct flights) from Zurich to Hong Kong operated by Swiss and Cathay Pacific. The Hong Kong Airport is a hub for many flights around South East Asia; in this sense, the city is a fantastic starting point to visit this part of the world.

The public transportation system in Hong Kong works amazingly and the means of transportation are fast, clean and not too expensive. There is no general pass for public transports; on the contrary, it is necessary to pay each time by way of the so-called Octopus Card, i.e. a rechargeable card which can also be used in convenience stores and some restaurants. As a student, one can apply for a Student Octopus Card, giving right to reduced fare on many means of transportation.

The university can easily be reached using either the Metro (MTR, Station “HKU”) or the bus (there are many bus lines stopping in front of the University). In Hong Kong there is also a tram line that crosses the island from Kennedy Town to Causeway Bay. The tram is not convenient as an everyday means of transportation but it is absolutely fantastic for sightseeing.

9. General information about the Partner Faculty and student life

The faculty of law is one of the biggest faculty at the HKU and it is located in the Centennial Campus, i.e. the newest part of the university building complex. The infrastructure in this university's area, from the lesson rooms to the library, is modern and functional, with the benefit of offering a nice view over the city and the Harbour. The faculty of law has its own library which has a large book collection and features many learning spaces for students. As in other libraries located on campus, there are both free and reserved learning tables; the latter can be booked in advance online.

Within the Centennial Campus students are well served: there are different dining options (such as Starbucks, Delifrance, Café Coral, etc.) as well as small shops selling electronics and school supplies. In addition, there is also a small gym which, however, is open only until 7pm. In order to practice some other sport activities (e.g. squash, tennis, football, swimming) it is necessary to reach the Flora Ho or the Stanley Ho sport centres. The university offers also different type of sport courses (see also http://www.ihp.hku.hk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=375&Itemid=378).

As a general remark, it should be noted that although the University of Hong Kong is very internationally oriented, the great majority of students enrolled in the LLM programs come either from Hong Kong or from Mainland China. Those expecting a truly international environment within the program may be a bit disappointed, even though there are classes in which there is a good number of exchange students (i.e. students not doing an LLM but studying at the HKU on exchange).

10. Teaching and studying at the Partner Faculty

(e.g. program structure, methodology, exams, etc.)

Every full-time LLM student must complete 72 credits, which correspond to 8 LLM courses. Depending on the type of LLM program chosen (e.g. General Stream or Corporate and Finance Law or others), there is a higher or lower degree of freedom as concerns the choice of courses.

The faculty offers: regular courses during the first and the second semester – being generally held on weekdays, evenings (6.30pm-9.30pm); intensive courses during the first and the second semester – being generally held on Saturdays and Sundays; intensive courses during the January and the June semester. The list of the courses offered is normally published a few months in advance; however, such list may change until the very last day before the beginning of the semester. During the first two weeks of school it is still possible to change the courses chosen.

In general, students are not assessed by way of in-hall exams (as it is normally the case at the UZH), but rather based on research papers, take-home examinations or oral presentations. On the one hand, this may be positive as it allows students to develop writing skills and to reduce the pressure typically due to in-hall exams. On the other hand, the deadlines for submitting the written assignments are usually very close one to another, making the last 4 or 5 weeks of school extremely intense. In any case, it is important not to underestimate the workload at the HKU: the latter is generally not lighter than that at the UZH.

11. City (e.g. cultural activities, sports, discounts, nightlife, must-sees, short trips, etc.)

Hong Kong is an exciting city, full of life and opportunities. As it is well connected with the rest of Asia, it is a fantastic starting point for short trips to South Korea, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Taiwan and many others. Also, it must be considered that once in possession of a Hong Kong ID Card – which is mandatory for all those staying for more than 3 months – it is way easier to get a VISA to travel in China, a country that is absolutely worth a visit. At the same time, one should dedicate enough time to discover the city of Hong Kong itself, including the area of Kowloon, the New Territories and the southern part of Hong Kong Island.

A couple of must-sees:

- Hiking the Victoria Peak (there is a trail starting exactly behind the law faculty tower)
- Taking the tram from Kennedy Town to Causeway Bay
- Taking the Star Ferry from Kowloon to Central (at night when one can enjoy a wonderful view of the skyline)
- Walking around Mong Kok (Kowloon) on Sunday night, among an impressive crowd of locals

As regards Hong Kong's nightlife, there are essentially three areas of the city which are absolutely worth a visit:

- Wan Chai, especially on Wednesdays for the "ladies night"
- Lan Kwai Fong (LKF)
- Soho