



Hong Kong University



Study Guide by Students for Students

This study guide is an information brochure created by students for students and is intended to give prospective double degree students the opportunity to benefit from former students' experiences, knowledge, and tips. It will be updated continuously and passed on to students from generation to generation. However, there is no guarantee that its contents are correct or complete.

We hope you enjoy reading this guide and look forward to your constructive input.

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1) Overall impression

The year in Hong Kong is a life-changing experience. Get prepared for diving into a new culture, a common law jurisdiction, a law faculty with a very modern campus, different smells, foods you have never thought about eating before, vibrating nightlife, beaches, skyscrapers, ...

2) Making preparations

Being well prepared makes your start in Hong Kong a lot easier. Book your flights early as they do not get cheaper. Book a second baggage ahead if needed. It is advisable to arrive in Hong Kong some weeks before university starts; at least 2 weeks will give you time to settle down and get used to the climate (it is very hot and humid in August), find out where you can buy the things you need, open your bank account, apply for your HKID, get a sim card etc.

Install the following apps before you leave for Hong Kong and your life will be much easier:

- HK Observatory (Weather app)
- Openrice Hong Kong (the local guide to all restaurants, even the locals “openrice” every place they go to!)
- MTR Planner (Metro)
- EasyRider (Local Buses with Point to Point search).

Most students travel in South-East Asia during their year. Go to the “Tropeninstitut” / Travelclinic at the University of Zurich ahead of your departure, at least 2 months, to allow for additional vaccinations. Although you get all western medicine you need in Hong Kong, prepare enough of your personal medicine before departing.

a. Administrative matters

Having your visa ready when you depart is important. Follow the instructions received by CEDARS from HKU and apply for a student visa through them. It takes some time, but it worked out in the end for all of us. Send your visa application as soon as possible, as processing time is quite long and can last shortly until your departure. Make sure your passport is valid long enough.

In about December, online course selection will start. This is important because HKU will try to hold the courses most students are interested in. Don't be disappointed if some of the courses will not be held – you will need to be flexible. Enrolling in the general master will probably enable you to make the best selection of courses available in the end.

In the first few weeks upon arrival, you will need quite some money (deposit for a flat/room, things to live which have not fitted into your suit case, sim card, etc.). Think about extending your credit card limit before you leave. If your bank has security restrictions for certain countries outside Europe, let your bank unlock your Maestro Card.

Make sure you can use your mobile banking abroad / receive SMS codes abroad which you need to log in. Change your contact details accordingly (+41 etc.).

You will need to apply for a HKID during your stay in Hong Kong. This ID makes your life a lot easier in Hong Kong – e.g. to conclude a mobile phone contract for one year. You can prepare the necessary documents in advance and book your appointment at the respective office online even before you actually arrive in Hong Kong (see below).

Usually, Swiss authorities expect you to unregister at the “Wohnsitzbehörde/Kreisbüro”.

You will need an insurance during your year abroad. It is the easiest if you extend your Swiss health insurance to cover you abroad or add a Swiss travel insurance for one year. Bring copies of your insurance policy with you. Once you are on campus, there is an excellent health centre on campus which provides free of charge or very cheap treatments if you need medical assistance.

In general, it is advisable to have electronic versions / copies of all your relevant documents. Sometimes pictures of your passport and other relevant documents on your mobile phone make your life a lot easier.

b. Finding information

CEDARS is the student organization at HKU. They can help you with administrative matters before and after your arrival in Hong Kong. Their introduction weeks are a great opportunity to meet people when you are still alone in the city.

<http://wp.cedars.hku.hk/web/nonlocal/>

For your visa application, see here:

<http://www.cedars.hku.hk/sections/campuslife/VisaMatters/FormsNotes.php>

For your HKID, see here: http://www.immd.gov.hk/eng/services/hkid/general_info.html

For the Swiss consulate general, see here: <https://www.dfae.admin.ch/hongkong>

The best pharmacy is Fanda Pharmacy in Central, Hong Kong (MTR exit A or B). They speak English fluently and have western pharmaceuticals. <http://www.fanda.com.hk/>

3) Contacts/responsibilities

a. International office

For general questions on HKU, check the CEDARS website first (see above).

For questions on your DD with Zurich / “Urlaubsemester” / Immatrikulation in the second semester abroad, contact the DD-Koordinationsstelle in Zurich.

b. Faculty of Law

The law faculty’s office is very supportive. Write them an e-mail and you will usually get a reply quite fast.

<http://www.law.hku.hk/faculty/contact.php>

4) Finding a room/accommodation

There is campus housing for post-graduate students. Check the CEDARS website: <http://www.cedars.hku.hk/sections/accommodation.php>

For postgraduates, there is a separate dorm on campus. Also, there is St. John’s College where you can apply for single rooms. However, these campus housings are usually strict in the sense that they do not allow guests in the premises and it appears to be tough to get in as a postgraduate foreign student from Switzerland. None of us five students from UZH applied for on campus housing. However, campus housing is a lot cheaper than off-campus housing.

All five of us lived off-campus. Most of us in a one-bedroom-apartment, one even in a serviced apartment. We found our housing through local agents. Agencies are spread out all over

the town. Whenever a successful contract is closed, you and the landlord of the premises pay the agent each 50% of the first rent. Please do not hesitate to contact former students for contacts of reliable agents and / or landlords.

There also is a facebook group “find your room in hong kong”, through which two of us found an apartment/room.

Also, there is a facebook group of all hku students for every year. HKU | Exchange Students (year of studies). Often, people are searching for roommates.

For a start, Airbnb is a good option to rent a room for the first 2-3 weeks until you find your flat or room.

As for rents, expect to pay between HKD 8'000 (absolute minimum in a decent room) to HKD 15'000 for a one-bedroom flat/studio. Check the premises before renting – bathroom (whether the shower is separate or whether it is a wet bathroom), whether the air-conditioning is working when windows are closed (HK is so humid, otherwise you will fight mould). Ask for wifi and negotiate at the beginning that your landlord installs it if it is not yet included in the rent – you as a foreigner cannot have a wifi-contract for 1 year only.

Location wise, closes to university are the areas of Kennedy Town, Sai Ying Pun and Sheung Wan. However, one of us stayed in the area of Causeway Bay. Anything on the blue island line will allow you direct MTR access to HKU.

Finally: Beware of scams. If the offer seems too good to be true, it likely is a fake offer. Don't pay anything online before you have not seen the premises yourself.

5) Arrival

Prepare for hot and humid weather.

Change Hong Kong Dollars at the exchange office – especially for taxis, you will need cash.

To get into the city, the fastest way is to take the airport train to Central at a cost of HKD 100. From there, purchase an Octopus Card (like the London Oyster Card) and change to the connecting MTR; you can recharge your Octopus Card with cash at any time. You can use your Octopus Card to pay at convenience stores, the post office, etc. Btw: You can pay your bills at any convenience store.

From Central, you can also take a taxi. Taxis are cheap and safe. Prepare the address you want to go to in writing and Cantonese (use google maps to translate it) – sometimes the taxi drivers don't understand the address.

6) Telephone

You can buy local sim card (with or without wifi / data access to 4G network) at every 7eleven store. You can recharge the sim-card with cash. A local number will facilitate communications with peers and landlords etc. SMS prices even for numbers abroad are cheap.

Once you get your HKID or a proof of your residential address in Hong Kong, you can conclude a one-year mobile contract. I had good experiences with Smartone. They have an unlimited data package at around HKD 150/month, see here: <http://www.smartone.com/en/mobile-service-plans/sim-only/extracare-plan.jsp>

If you wish quicker data access, you will pay a lot more.

There is wifi everywhere in HK (including cafés and main MTR stations). Also on Campus, you will have very quick wifi.

7) Bank account

You can open a bank account with HSBC. Prepare the following:

- Proof of permanent residency in English (Wohnsitzbestätigung)
- Certified copies of your passport

Go to the branch in Central, their customer service is most used to dealing with expats. Unless you have a regular income, you will not be eligible for a credit card.

With your hsbc account card, you can withdraw cash at any hsbc atm. In Hong Kong, you can wire-transfer amounts within Hong Kong at the atm.

8) Transport

Upon arrival, get an Octopus Card. You can use it on the MTR and on buses. MTR is very reliable and very safe, even at nighttime. There newly is a night service on certain lines.

The bus system is easy to use once you know your stops (see the app mentioned above). Queue at the right lane at the bus stops. If you are the one in front, wave to the bus-driver if your bus is approaching; if you don't, they might drive by. Observe the locals and do as they do ☺

Once you get your student ID from HKU, you can apply for a student Octopus Card provided you are within the age limit. The forms are available at the MTR stations. You will have ½ price fares on the MTR – it saves you a lot of money.

9) General information about the university/university life

Research is very important at HKU. Furthermore, there are numerous talks and conferences which you can attend with very distinguished speakers. Profit from them.

Campus infrastructure is excellent on the new campus. The Chi Wah Learning Commons offers enough space to learn – with computers, printers, sofas, normal tables, etc.

On campus, there are various canteens – from Chinese ones to Starbucks to Delifrance. If you get bored of the offers, use Exits B1 or B2 at the HKU MTR station and you will find plenty of small restaurants within walking distance.

There is a postgraduate students association which organizes various events and gatherings – it is a great opportunity to meet people from other fields of study.

There are different societies on campus – from arts, film, choir, football, German society, etc. For local students, it is a must to be engaged in a board of one of these societies. Joining such a society will enable you to make local friends.

Learning some everyday Cantonese is very helpful in restaurants and shops. Look for language exchange / survival Cantonese classes on campus. Get used to “mgoy”, which means excuse me/thank you.

10) Teaching/studying at university

a. General

Staff and professors are very helpful. Should you have any enquiries, don't hesitate to approach them or your program coordinator.

Teaching is very similar to teaching in Zurich.

b. Degree program structure

You will have two semesters of classes and the possibility to enroll in courses of the January and June Semester. There, they teach intensive courses which are worth-wile to have a look at.

At every start of the semester, there is a course enrollment period. You can add/drop courses during the respective period.

c. Tuition/classes

Classes are smaller compared to UZH. Depending on the professor, classes are very interactive and require preparation.

d. Resources

Most resources will be provided to you online. If you need any book, the professor will inform you accordingly and they will usually order it at the university bookstore for you.

The law library is good and staff is very helpful should you need assistance in searching any book or article.

e. Examinations

Examinations often consist in written research papers or take-home exams. Sometimes they hold in-hall exams. With some effort, you will be able to achieve good results at HKU.

Usually, the professors keep you busy during the semester with papers / presentations.

11) Free time/leisure

a. Culture, information resources, benefits, events, etc.

There are various cultural events in Hong Kong. Stay informed, e.g. via Sassy Hong Kong, by signing up on GeoExpat or Meetup (a great app to meet new people with similar interests).

CEDARS is a good place to start with. They even organize concerts in the great concert hall on campus.

Otherwise, bring a lonely planet of Hong Kong.

There are a lot of western style, hip cafés in Sheung Wan and elsewhere; check openrice for the latest ones.

There are a lot of art galleries in and around Sheung Wan.

b. Going out, parties

Hong Kong is a party paradise with parties suiting any taste. Check out the various rooftop bars.

Always carry your HKID / Passport with you. The clubs may be subject to police inspection, which is a completely normal thing to happen.

Going out is quite expensive in Hong Kong.

c. Excursions

Hong Kong is a hiking paradise. Once temperatures fall a little, check out Meetup and the Hong Kong Hiking Group.

There are numerous beaches that await you. You can even rent or buy tents and camp at a beach.

Go and visit Macau, it is worth a trip!

Needless to say that Hong Kong is an ideal hub to fly to any destination in South East Asia. There are cheap airlines with great offers.

d. Sports

The gyms on campus are very good. They even have classes. Get the information once you are on campus. You will have to use your student ID to get access.

Jogging to the peak is great during winter time.

There also are excellent martial arts studios and bootcamps outdoors.

12) Contact details for former students

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