

Exchange Report
HKUST Business School
Hong Kong
Fall 2015



Prepared by:

Sajal Sinha

ssinha14@schulich.yorku.ca

Visa Process:

I am an international student at Schulich from India. The HKUST MBA team helps a lot in obtaining a study visa. They send an email at around 3rd week of May detailing the process to get a study visa for Hong Kong. The mail also contains information about the insurance, course enrolment, course planning, accommodation and costs. The visa procedure is pretty straightforward; the HKUST MBA team will send you a list of documents to be couriered to HKUST MBA office before the deadline. The MBA team will handle rest of the application process. The documents list include VISA application form, photocopies of travel document (passport), photographs, proof of financial support, photocopies of grade report and undertaking of payment for a student visa. The cost of visa was HKD \$400 (around CAD \$70). Once the visa application is processed, the MBA office sends the visa label by registered mail. It takes around 6-8 weeks for visa process to get completed.

As mentioned earlier, students should obtain a study visa for studying in HKUST MBA. For travelling outside the host country, a tourist visa is required which can be applied from Hong Kong.

Insurance:

HKUST requires every exchange student to purchase insurance from them. They made it clear that the students who to adhere to and comply with the insurance requirements will not be able to register officially at HKUST. The cost of the insurance was HKD \$985 (CAD \$174). I believe that coverage was adequate for minor health issues as it covers all the cost of doctor's appointment and medication. There is also a medical clinic on campus where you can just walk-in for medical consultancy. Fortunately, I did not use any insurance during my stay in Hong Kong, so I do not have all the information. However, I would recommend the exchange students to meeting your doctor before leaving for exchange.

Financials:

I would recommend all the exchange students to secure their accommodation in advance and based on that you should carry the amount with you while arriving in Hong Kong. The students who took on-campus housing had to pay the accommodation charges for the whole exchange term at once before leaving for Hong Kong. However, for students like me who did not prefer to use on-campus housing had to carry the rent as well as other expenses while arriving in Hong Kong. I would recommend that besides the rent amount, the student should carry around HKD \$1,000 - \$3,000 (CAD \$200 - \$500) at the time of arriving at the airport. As there is no restriction on the amount of cash that once can carry in Hong Kong, you can carry as much as you want. Moreover, I found out that there is quite a bit of difference in the exchange rate offered at the Toronto airport and the Hong Kong airport. So, I would suggest students to convert most of their money at the Hong Kong airport only. I would also recommend exchange students to carry multiple credit cards while travelling as then you will not have to carry so much cash around. Credit cards are widely accepted in all of the Hong Kong, so you will have any issue with your cards.

I am not sure whether opening a bank account would be a good option as it takes quite a bit of time to open a bank account in Hong Kong. However, if one already has a bank account in HSBC, then the process is much quicker I guess. I used a forex card to withdraw money in Hong Kong. My bank back in India issued me a forex card for withdrawing money abroad and I used the same in Hong Kong. I would advise all the students to speak to their respective banks way before leaving for Hong Kong. I felt that using the forex card or travel card is the best option as the exchange rate while withdrawing is reasonable, and the service charge was very minimal (around CAD \$1.5 per transaction).

Arrival/Airport:

I did not face many difficulties when I arrived in the Hong Kong. The visa stamping process was very smooth, and they don't ask you many questions. I would recommend the exchange students to purchase a local sim card from the 7/11 at the airport. It will make it easier for students for communication with the concerned people. For travelling from airport to your accommodation, there are many options available such as metro (subway), buses, taxis and Uber. I had booked a hotel (Regal Kowloon Hotel) for first two nights, so I took the shuttle provided by the hotel to reach the hotel. If you are living on-campus, you can take the bus A29 from airport to Hang Hau, which will cost you around HKD \$42. For travelling in a bus, please carry the exact amount of change. Otherwise, the remainder of the cost will be considered as a tip. For travelling from Hang Hau to HKUST campus, you can take either a taxi or a bus (11M). Most of the taxi drivers and bus drivers do understand English, so I would recommend the students to write down the address clearly on a piece of paper and show it to the taxi driver or bus driver. Moreover, I would also recommend taking the phone number of the contact person as they can help in translation and directions.

Registration Process:

The HKUST MBA will provide a list of courses that you can choose from way before you arrive in Hong Kong. It is advisable to select your classes beforehand and to have course outline of all the courses that you have taken in the first year. As many of the courses offered by HKUST has some prerequisites, these course outlines will help you to satisfy the minimum requirements to take a course. All the course registration happen online, so I would recommend preparing a tentative schedule beforehand and then start enrolling in courses as soon as the course enrolment begins. Many of the courses get filled very quickly, so it's essential to be prepared so that one does not miss out on some important class.

HKUST MBA offers a vast number of courses for exchange students. However, most of the courses offered are Consulting or Finance related. As I was looking to do more finance courses, so I had many options to choose from, but students from another stream might not have so many options. I was able to enroll in almost all the courses that I wanted to enroll, and I missed only a couple that too because of course timing clashes. If you planned the registration process properly, then you will not get much trouble when you are trying to enroll. However, some of my exchange colleagues faced issue

during enrollment because of poor planning. I would advise for the exchange students would be to plan your tentative timetable before and start enrolling in the classes as soon as the enrollment starts.

Courses:

Most of the courses offered by HKUST were off 2 credits while some of them were off 1 credit only. As far as I can remember, there was only one class which had 3 credits, and it was because students had to management the HKUST Investment Fund in that course, and hence it involved a lot of work. Almost all of the 2 credit courses had 8 classes, and each class would run for around for 3 hours and 20 minutes. The courses with 1 credit had just the half number of sessions as the courses with 2 credits. All the courses had more or less same difficulty and it mainly depends on the instructor and your classmates. Similar to difficulty, the workload of the course largely depends on the instructor. Some of the courses were had a heavy workload while some of the others were quite light. If you are concerned about the workload, please try to do a bit of research before taking any course. Most of the courses that are open for exchange students are open to part-time MBA students. Hence, almost all of the classes will be held in the evenings during the weekdays and in the daytime during weekends.

HKUST MBA is one of the most famous and renowned MBA program in Asia and hence it is suitable for all the MBA students. However, the HKUST MBA is mainly known for its finance department because they have some great faculty members in the finance department, and also, as Hong Kong is the financial hub of Asia, so most of the graduates get finance related jobs. However, in past few years, HKUST has changed its focus and is now one of the leading business schools for entrepreneurs and consultants.



Classroom:

The class size of all the courses is pretty average which means around 50 students in a class. There were hardly any BBA students in the class and also the number of full-time MBA students opting for the course was quite less. The classes were mostly filled with part-time MBA students and exchange students. The mix of the exchange students coming to the HKUST was very diverse, and students came from many different countries such as US, Canada, Brazil, Mexico, England, France, Spain, Germany, Switzerland, China, Japan, and South Korea, etc. Yes, the students carry laptops with them in the class.

Teaching:

I found the teaching style of HKUST quite similar to that of Schulich. The teaching was very case-focussed and incorporating a lot of discussion surrounding the content of those cases. It was incredibly interesting to hear the different perspectives of individuals in a very global classroom regarding the material discussed. The material was covered at almost a similar pace like that in Schulich, but much more in depth. The quality of teaching I thought was extremely high, especially because of the prestigious qualifications of many professors leading the class. There were lots of guest lecturers coming to the class, and most of them were leaders in the industry that they were working.

Language Courses:

HKUST offers a lot of language courses, and most of these courses had some fee attached to it. The students will get a lot of emails regarding the language courses so it will be difficult to miss these emails. Personally, I felt that English was sufficient to tackle all the language barriers as it is easy to communicate in English with most of the people in Hong Kong. Hence, I did not take any language courses in Hong Kong, and thus, I have very limited knowledge about the language courses offered.

Language Outside of the Classroom:

The primary language of Hong Kong is Cantonese. However, most of the people in Hong Kong has a good working knowledge of English, so it is not difficult to communicate in English with local populations. Sometimes, it was difficult to communicate with the bus drivers and cab drivers as they didn't understand much English. Moreover, I faced some issues in few of the restaurants as the whole menu was in Cantonese, and hence, it would be beneficial for the students to have a basic knowledge of Cantonese. Nevertheless, the local people are very helpful there, and they will help you if you are facing some issues.

International Services:

Yes, the HKUST MBA team organized an orientation program for one full day where we met our fellow exchange students, Associate Dean of the HKUST MBA program and other relevant members

of the HKUST MBA team. The program was said to be mandatory, but some of the students were not able to attend the program because of their prior commitments, and there was no penalty for the students not attending the orientation program. I would recommend all the exchange students to attend this orientation as it is a good way to meet your fellow exchange students, some full-time MBA students and other important people in the HKUST MBA team. Did I mention that they provide free lunch, one T-shirt, and one sweatshirt to you? Our coordinator for the orientation program was Michelle To, and she had been very helpful to us since we got the admission letter. Michelle was the go-to person for all of our problems. The orientation program started with the address of the Associate Dean and then the introduction of the HKUST MBA team. Then, there was a team building exercise where we got to know our fellow exchange students. After that, we went down to have lunch where we met and interacted with some of the full-time MBA students. Lastly, in the night, there was a networking event organized where we got to interact with the current students as well as the alumni of the HKUST. Unfortunately, there was no “buddy program” at the host university, but it was okay I guess.

Housing Arrangements:

HKUST provides on-campus accommodation for the exchange students. However, they mentioned that they have limited availability of on-campus housing. Nevertheless, all three students who applied for on-campus housing got the accommodation. However, two of the students decided to leave the accommodation after the first two weeks as most of the classes were scheduled in the Central Campus and it used to take around 1 – 1.5hrs to travel one side from HKUST Campus to HKUST Central Campus. The housing was available for the whole of the exchange period.

HKUST also provided some tips to find off-campus housing arrangements but for finding the off-campus accommodation you have to do most of the work yourself. HKUST had a Facebook group where you can interact with the other incoming exchange students. So, we formed a group of three students and started looking for housing for ourselves. We mostly tried to search for apartments online through Airbnb although there are many other websites through which you can search for the house. One of us went to the Hong Kong almost a month before the exchange program started and started looking for apartments there, and finally, we got a 3BHK apartment for ourselves before the beginning of the exchange period. All the necessary services were included in the apartment such as the internet (paid), washer (free), cable (free) and a housemaid (paid). We were only three students living in the whole apartment, so it was as per our requirements. The university campus was pretty close to our apartment, and it used to take us around 10-15 mins to reach the school by bus. However, the central campus was a bit far, and it used to take around 45 mins to reach the HKUST Central Campus. All of the Hong Kong is very safe, and our place was no exception.

Campus Facilities:

The campus of HKUST is gorgeous, and located on the side of a mountain and overlooking Clearwater Bay in the Northeastern part of Hong Kong, the views from any building on campus are spectacular (especially the sunrise from down by the beach). The best place to study is the library

which is huge and is very spacious. There are also common areas in Lee Shaw Kee (LSK) Building where students can study although these areas are not as quite as a library. If I didn't mention earlier LSK Building to HKUST is similar to Seymour Schulich Building to York University, even though LSK is more beautiful and more spacious. There are many recreation facilities available on campus, and most of them are free of cost. These services include a swimming pool, gym, almost all the sports facilities, rock climbing, and many more. Most of these facilities are free of cost and the university also provides sports equipment free of charge. There is a health clinic on the campus, and the cost is covered by the insurance you buy before coming to the exchange.

Food:

Meals on campus are very affordable and range from CAD \$3 to \$6. There are many 'canteens' that sell food on campus, thus providing a large variety of food options. There is also a McDonalds, Starbucks, and Chinese Restaurant on campus. The only drawback is most of these canteens get closed pretty early in the night at around 8:45 PM, so it is advisable to store some food in your dorm if required at night. Off campus, meals can range from \$5 upwards to \$100, but are about \$10/\$15 on average. Food costs all depend on how often you go out to the city and the restaurants you visit. Buying groceries is also an option, and most dorm rooms have mini fridges you can store your food.

Costs/Expenses:

The total cost of on-campus housing for the whole exchange period was around HKD \$28,000 (CAD \$5000). Accommodation in Hong Kong is very expensive, and the students living near Central Campus used to pay much more than those living on-campus. My rent was pretty less (HKD \$4000/month or CAD \$750/month) as I was living in the remote location of Hong Kong, which is not very expensive. Everything apart from accommodation is cheaper in Hong Kong than in Toronto. Please find below the estimation of the cost of my expenses in Hong Kong:

Accommodation	HKD \$4000/month or CAD \$715/month
Textbooks	HKD \$100 (CAD \$18) per course
Transportation	HKD \$1500 (CAD \$270) per month
Food and Groceries	HKD \$4000 (CAD \$715) per month
Entertainment	HKD \$2000 (CAD \$350) per month

Departure:

The departure from Hong Kong was as smooth as the arrival in Hong Kong. I did not have any items to leave behind in Hong Kong as I was living in a fully furnished apartment, so all the facilities were provided by the landlord. I did not face any issues while departing from the Hong Kong, and there was no departure tax.

What to Bring:

The list of things to bring to Hong Kong are:

1. Passport and VISA documents
2. Unlocked cell phone
3. Cash and credit cards
4. Medicines if required

All the other things are easily available in Hong Kong at low prices, so you don't have to worry much about other things.

Culture Shock:

I am originally from India, so I did not face much of a cultural shock. However, you are traveling to Asia for the first time then you might find some culture shock. Many people get scared by the population of Hong Kong. For me, it took me some time to adjust to the local food of Hong Kong, but I cooked a lot in Hong Kong. However, in the end, I got the hang of the local food of Hong Kong and started enjoying it as well.

General Impressions:

I thoroughly enjoyed my stay in Hong Kong, and this experience was one of the best experience in my life. I met a lot of people from many diverse backgrounds and made a lot of good friends during my stay in Hong Kong. I enjoyed the scenic beauty of Hong Kong and also loved the nightlife of the city. Regarding academics also I learned a lot during this exchange period, and I am pretty sure this experience will help me a lot in my career as well as in my life.