

Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

PLEASE TYPE THIS EVALUATION FORM & EMAIL IT TO VICTORIA ABROAD AS A WORD DOCUMENT

A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Linguistics, Sociology, and Religious Studies
Exchange Institution	City University of Hong Kong
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Trimester 1, 2016

B: Finances

Please detail your basic costs in New Zealand dollars. This will help future students plan their own budgets. (Enter your number rounded to the nearest dollar.)

Books	I only had one required book for my courses (Elementary Japanese I), although other books were recommended. It cost around NZ\$15.
Accommodation	NZ\$1120 a semester for a double room (non-catered)
Return Airfare	NZ\$1200
Local Transportation	Around NZ\$20 a week (predominately using the MTR – remember to apply a student card otherwise this will be twice the price)
Meals	NZ\$10 – \$20 a meal if eating out, though university canteens had NZ\$7 meals. Can be much cheaper if you decide to cook for yourself.
Visa	Around NZ\$50
Health & Insurance	Unsure
Personal Spending	Unsure
Communications (phone, etc.)	Unsure
Other fees (specify)	N/A
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	N/A

How did your financial expenses compare to what you originally expected to spend?

I didn't account for the food in Hong Kong being so cheap, so I did end up spending less than I'd anticipated.

By what means did you maintain your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, foreign bank account, travelers checks, etc)?

Westpac MasterCard.

What financial advice would you give students attending the same university as you?

Be sure to always have cash on you. Hong Kong is very, very cash-based and several places won't accept your card (especially if it's not from a Hong Kong bank).

What was the average cost of a can of coke or coffee in your host country?

Just over NZ\$1.

C: Visas & Insurance **Please note this information is recommended by VUW students & current at the time of their exchange. For all up-to-date visa information you must check with the embassy/consulate of your host university.*

Did you have to apply for a visa? If so, was it difficult? What was the process, how long did it take and how much did it cost?

I did have to apply for a visa. It was a very easy online process. It did take fewer than two months to arrive. See cost in Section B.

Do you have any advice for future students when applying for visas to your host country?

Your visa is likely to arrive late. Or, at the very least, for it to arrive very close to the date you will leave. This is because you will have to wait for confirmation from CityU before applying for your visa (unless you are willing to take that chance). If you contact the university with your arrival date, they will be willing to hold your visa for you if it so happens that your visa would arrive in New Zealand after your arrival date. You will be able to enter Hong Kong using your New Zealand passport as a visitor. As you as the university has your visa, it is easy enough to leave Hong Kong (Macau is usually exchange students' first choice as it is cheap and close) to re-enter using your student visa. Lots of exchange students do this, and its recommended by the university. Don't stress.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance? Or a particular insurance they recommended? If Yes, what was it and how much did it cost?

CityU does require that you have some sort of an insurance. They offered one, which was very minimal coverage. However, it was very cheap to my memory.

What insurance company did you use and would you recommend it to future students?

I used STA. It was good and very comprehensive.

D: Academics at Host University

Which courses did you take while on exchange? Please rate the difficulty of each course (1-5, 1 = Very Easy & 5 = Extremely Difficult) and leave any comments you may have.

Course Title	Language of Instruction	VUW course equivalent or elective	VUW points/credits value	Rating (1-5)	Comments
VUW Trimester 1/2016					

AIS2930: Elementary Japanese I	English/Japanese	Elective	15 points at 100 level	3	I really enjoyed this course, but I probably wouldn't recommend it if you don't understand Cantonese or can't read Chinese. The textbook is in Chinese and students don't focus on kanji because students are expected to know these characters. Additionally, when confusion is apparent, the lecturer will switch to Cantonese to explain.
CAH2996: Basic Cantonese I	English/Cantonese	Elective	15 points at 100 level	1	This is really great course for people who don't know any Cantonese (although prepare to have a lot of content to memorise in a small amount of time and to do a lot of talking in class). However, I already know Cantonese and took this class to fill in some gaps, so I did find it very easy.
LT3209: Syntax	English	LING227: Words and Sentence	15 points at 200 level	3	For those who did LING111: Introduction to Linguistics at VUW, you will initially find this course extremely easy. However, the course is structured in an interesting way that makes the content unnecessarily complicated and has a steep learning curve.
LT3215: Pragmatics	English	Elective	15 points at 200 level	3	This was unlike anything I'd before and was interested as there's no equivalent at VUW. An interesting course. Relatively easy in that a lot of it will be intuitive for English speakers, but is heavily reliant on memorization of terms and definitions rather than

					application.
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Course Registration/Enrolment

Please describe the registration process at your host university. What kind of help was available?

Registering is super easy. It's online and before semester starts, just like at VUW. You can switch as well. This is online or through paper submission. Like at Victoria, each school has its own staff. If you go visit them, they are more than happy to help you.

How successful were you in registering/enrolling for classes you wanted? What advice would you offer to next year's exchange students about registration at your host university?

I was able to enroll in every class that I wanted.

Do you have any advice for future students when choosing and applying for courses?

Just pick the courses you think are interesting! The earlier you get in, the more likely you are to be accepted into the courses you want.

Academic Experience

How did your academic experience differ from your time spent at Victoria? Did the academic experience meet your expectations?

All in all, it was just a very different style of teaching. I enjoyed the academic experience at City University.

How did the style of teaching at your host university compare with that at VUW? How did the workload compare to what you would expect at VUW?

The workload was about the same, maybe a bit less. Like VUW, it's mostly just a couple of weeks in the middle and near the end of the semester when you have a lot of work to do (projects or exams). For Japanese and Cantonese, I completed worksheets and exercises every two weeks instead of having a large project.

The teaching style isn't all that different. I would say that the students at CityU have a very different attitude and often speak over the lecturer during the lecture which makes it extremely hard to focus. There is, however, more of a focus on group work (I was one of the few exchange students who only had one group project). When doing group projects, I would advise being wary of being conned into doing more work than others, as exchange students are often called upon to more than their fair share proof-reading and writing for other students due to their English.

Lesson lengths also tend to be 2-3hrs. They do have tutorials, but they aren't as interactive as the ones at VUW. Overall, students do have fewer contact hours with the lecturers. Each of my courses were only 3hrs a week.

What would you recommend as an appropriate course load for other VUW students visiting your partner university? What specific courses would you recommend to visiting VUW students? Why?

I would say stick to the 60 points. Even though it won't seem like a lot (especially if you usually do 80 points per trimester at VUW), you're going to want to do lots of exploring. Leave time for that. I really would recommend CAH2996 (Basic Cantonese I) for those of you are genuinely wanting to immerse yourself. Locals will appreciate it when you try.

What advice would you give VUW students about succeeding academically at your host university?

Go to class and do the supplementary exercises. In terms of assessments and tests, be sure to pay careful attention to the course outlines because lecturers and Canvas (similar to VUW's Blackboard) won't always remind you of upcoming deadlines.

What was your impression of the computer facilities, library, and internet access at your host university?

There are multiple computers, printers, photo-copiers and scanners that you can use. All are scattered around campus. Printing was great because the printers were very reliable. You were also given printing money and could print a couple of thousand sheets for free. Because of this, a lot of students print off textbooks instead of buying them. Internet access was all over campus as well as on residence.

If you went to a country where English is not the native language, how did you prepare for this? Were there any intensive language courses provided by the host university?

Cantonese is the language of choice in Hong Kong. I was incredibly fortunate to already know a significant amount of the language and so didn't find it a struggle. In terms of preparation, I would advise looking up key terms. This is just to be polite. In some areas, such as markets and boutiques, at least attempting Cantonese will put you on the vendors' good side. However, most locals will speak English quite fluently. If you're learning Mandarin, lots of locals will also speak that. Language courses in both Cantonese and Mandarin are offered. They also have support programs and buddy programs for those who would like a more intensive experience.

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

I stayed in Halls of Residence. I was in Hall 10 and shared a room with one girl. We had a bathroom that we shared with the room beside us.

What were the pros and cons of this form of accommodation?

PROS: Close to the university (5-minute walk to nearest building), close to MTR (15 minute walk), close to a post box, close to a bus stop, easy to make friends with local students, lots of internationals also chose halls so it's easy to meet up with your exchange student friends, many organized events (movie nights, dinner nights, sports, gaming, baking, cultural appreciation), WiFi included, access to piano and music room

CONS: Noisy due to drunk students, difficult to meet people if you come in the January.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

I would definitely recommend Halls for the convenience.

How early can you move into accommodation?

My move-in date was early to mid January, which is about a week before semester starts.

What options were available for meal plans or cooking facilities? How satisfied were you with the food?

They do have cooking facilities in a common room that you share with the floor. Includes two fridges, two freezers, two microwaves, one boiling water tap, and two multi-purpose stove tops. You will have to provide your own pots and pans.

There are a number of eating areas on campus, including three very cheap canteens (AC2, AC3 and AC1 being the most popular in that order) that offer a variety of food. I personally preferred to eat out (this still being a lot cheaper than food in New Zealand). However, many exchange students chose to eat the majority of meals on campus.

Do you have any tips of advice for future students when applying for accommodation?

Go for a double room. Even though it might seem like an inconvenience, it means you already have an instant friend (or, at the very least, acquaintance). You're also likely to quickly meet two other people (your bathroom mates).

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

What was it like making friends? How successful were you at making friends with local (i.e., not international) students?

Since I arrived in CityU's second semester (January), there weren't a lot of meet-and-greet activities in the first few weeks. I was also in what is considered a quieter hall. However, I did become fast friends with my local roommate, some locals on the floor, and locals in my classes.

What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange country/university?

Having already had a lot of exposure to Chinese culture, the culture itself wasn't all that challenging. However, in comparison to New Zealand, it does take a while to get used to how fast-paced and crowded Hong Kong is.

What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging? How would you recommend students to prepare for these differences?

One thing that tended to stand out to other exchange that I spoke to was beauty standards. Beauty standards in Hong Kong and Asia in general are very different and people will openly discuss how you can improve yourself. For females, note that pads in Hong Kong are considered a much more hygienic way of dealing with your periods. Additionally, there is a stigma against taking any form of the pill to regulate your period. These aren't necessarily things that people will find out about you, but if you decide to visit a traditional Chinese doctor or end up in the hospital, people will find out and be very vocal in their dislike of these products.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

One of the best parts about Hong Kong culture for me was the interesting fusion of Eastern and Western.

How were you treated by local people? By university staff and faculty? By students?

At university, both staff and students were welcoming and willing to help if you had any questions. Outside of university, you will attract more attention Kowloon-side (especially in the New Territories) if you don't look Asian. However, when you visit Hong Kong-side you'll find that no one looks at you twice. You are likely to be looked at more for the way you dress (Kiwis having a much higher tolerance for the cold than locals), than anything else.

As far as you could tell, how easy would it be for students with disabilities to study at your partner university? For students who are visible minorities in your host country? For students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered?

The university has great wheelchair access, although other areas of Hong Kong would be much harder to navigate. In terms of ethnicity, most should be fine. That being said, locals do tend to have prejudices against those from South-East Asia, as well as black people. For sexuality, within the university would be fine. There are support groups and events. But again, you may face some prejudice from others.

Did you face any issues regarding discrimination in your host country? What were they, and what advice would you give to future students?

Most locals were able to guess that I was 'mixed', and so I didn't face any discrimination at all. If you're white, I think the closest thing you'll get to discrimination in HK is being ripped off at local markets. If you really are desperate to avoid that, grab a local friend to help you out.

G: Extra-curricular/Social Activities

What organized activities (clubs, sports, etc.) were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

There are a number of clubs available and it's a great way to get to know some local students.

What do you recommend other visiting students see or do on their weekends or holidays?

You're going to spend a lot of time in the city. And so, my recommendations would be to try and get out of it. Visit the surrounding islands – Lamma Island, Discovery Bay, Cheung Chau. Holidays are also a great opportunity to take advantage of Hong Kong's proximity to other Asian countries.

What opportunities were there for students to work on-campus? Off-campus?

Without a Hong Kong Identity Card, they're very strict on what work you are allowed to do. So no, to my

knowledge there were no opportunities to work.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

Internships weren't allowed. You may be able to find work volunteering, helping people with their English. But even that seemed to require a Hong Kong Identity Card. If you're looking to volunteer, I would advise looking outside of the university.

5 things to take to your host country or region

1	A small hair dryer (this might seem unnecessary, but you don't want to be walking around Hong Kong with even slightly damp hair)
2	Sunglasses
3	An adapter and a multiboard/power bar
4	For females – if you're fussy about tampons, bring lots because there's limited variety in Hong Kong, also consider stocking up on the pill if you take it, because it's harder to get access to in Hong Kong as few people consider it a viable option
5	A jacket – even though you might assume that Hong Kong will be very warm (which it is, for the most part), earlier on in the year you might face some much cooler weather

5 pieces of useful advice would tell a VUW student going to your host university

1	Always keep cash on you.
2	Apply for a student Octopus (transport) card as soon as possible. If you attend orientation events, volunteers will let you know how to do so.
3	Always keep an eye on your bag and other possessions
4	Be happy to make the first step to get to know locals
5	Try to learn even the smallest amount of Cantonese – especially if you want to go to the markets and out of the more touristy areas

Top 5 Things to do

What are your 'Top 5 Things to Do' future VUW students at your host university or city/country?

1	Have some egg waffles!
2	Get out of the city and explore the outer islands
3	Embrace tradition and visit some temples
4	Gather as many friends as possible and go for yum cha (the more friends you have, the more you can order...!)
5	Head over to Macau

H: Personal Experience

I really enjoyed my time in Hong Kong. It was a wonderful way to get to know my family, my cultural history, and to experience a different academic environment. I was able to befriend a few locals, eat new food, and experience the city in a way I'd never had before. Excitingly, I was also able to visit other countries during holidays. All in all, going to Hong Kong for a single semester was a great experience. I only wish that I could've stayed longer.