PERSÖNLICHER BERICHT
Non-EU Student Exchange Programm
2023/2024

BewerbungsID: 17267

Nominierte Studienrichtung: 033/521 Studienrichtung Bachelorstudium Informatik

Angaben zum Aufenthalt:

Gastinstitution: City University of Hong Kong - (China, Volksrepublik)

Aufenthaltszeitraum: WS 2023/2024

Verfassen Sie bitte einen persönlichen Bericht über den Studienaufenthalt

- **Mindestumfang:** Fließtext 1 Seite DinA4

- **Inhalt:** Gastuniversität, Kurse, Prüfungen, Mitstudierende, Unterkunft, etwaige Schwierigkeiten etc.

BERICHT ÜBER DEN STUDIENAUFENTHALT

My time in Hong Kong was one of the most exciting and surreal experiences of my life. Before I write a few summaries about the different parts of this journey, I want to tell everyone who is considering taking part in a semester abroad that no amount of preparation can make you ready for such a wild ride. It is best to go with the flow and figure things out as they happen and simply enjoy the absurdity of finding yourself in a different world than home.

Application process at University of Vienna & City University of Hong Kong

In general, the application process from both universities can be complex in the number of documents and schedules, however both are very helpful and have an understandable and structured approach. The CityU website provides you with course lists early, payments such as Visa and residence are easy to do and overall, there are no difficulties in language barrier, as the CityU provides every document and guide in English.

However, especially in my computer science bachelor's, you should carefully consider what courses to (not) participate in at the University of Vienna, as in comparison to other studies, it is hard to get courses accepted by the SPL. Thus, you should have all possible courses you aim to do at the CityU get checked by the SPL as early as possible if they align with the home university curriculum and what requirements are needed. In my case, I managed to get enough courses accredited before the start of the semester (NET, HCI, W1 DA, ADS2).

The application process ends around end of April, and you will need to wait until mid-June for final confirmation whether you get accepted into CityU or not. I recommend booking the flights the day you get the acceptance letter and I recommend putting the flight a week before the actual start of the semester. Firstly, because CityU has a helpful welcome week beforehand that makes you get accustomed with the campus, residence, and overall flow of the university. Secondly, the Visa can arrive randomly. Some students reported getting the VISA in the beginning of August, while in my case, I got the Visa the day before my actual flight date at the end of August.

City University of Hong Kong, Student Life & Residence

City University of Hong Kong
The CityU follows the typical American campus system, where the entire university resides in one larger area with no faculties scattered across the city. This makes every part of the university be accessible within short walking distance. The University offers a large library for quiet study, several cantinas and small restaurants and many spaces to rest. You will often see students sleeping in those. Possibilities for exercise exist, as the CityU has a massive swimming pool outside where you can swim for a very cheap entrance fee. In my time the university only had a small student gym, but the information was shared that by end of 2024 the CityU will have a dedicated building for fitness and exercise.
Navigating throughout the campus however can be exhausting in the beginning, as Hong Kong is known for narrow spaces and many twists and turns, so is the CityU Campus. Figuring out the lifts and halls will take time, so make sure to plan in some time to find the lecture halls early enough, especially for exams.
As is common in China, there is a large mall next to the CityU called Festival Walk, which you can also enter from the University side and find a lot more food options, supermarkets and stores for electronics and essentials.

The main focus of the CityU is business, as the University is known for their quality business studies. You will notice this by how many events, career fairs, job opportunities and much more is done by the university. As an exchange student this is highly exciting to have a look in how local students care for their careers and what type of skills are valued in Asia. Besides that, there are events where you get in touch with cultures you will rarely see in the western world. People from Bangladesh, Kirgizstan, Malaysia and many more often participate in cultural events and it's a great way to connect to Asian culture that is most often underappreciated in the west.
There are also many workshops to visit and in the exam period the CityU offered mental health assistance in form of students being able to play with trained dogs and relief stress. Overall, the CityU offers enough to have something to look out for every week, but you can also enjoy your studies without participating in any of those activities as there was never any pressure to visit them.

Due to its focus on international business, you will rarely find yourself in a Chinese only workshop or in need of translation of a document. All types of information, as well as lectures and navigation signs are all in English and there was never a worry of a hard language barrier. Only on one or two occasions where you have to ask for specific documents at an office you might have an awkward conversation trying to figure out how to explain what you want.

Student Residence
One of the most important aspects of the semester abroad is the CityU Residence. It was by far the most valuable part of my stay. You need to apply beforehand and hope you can get a double-room inside the residence. It has a total of 12 halls where mostly undergraduate and exchange students live together with the rare exception of finding a master's and PhD student. Just like the CityU, the residence offers small gyms in the Halls, a cantina, a kitchen for every floor and workshops you can participate in. A highlight every semester is also the sport tournaments where halls compete against each other in various sports like table tennis, basketball, or tug of war. They put in a lot of effort into those and make for a sometimes very competitive experience. You can guess how all these things create a very social and extroverted lifestyle inside the residence. It is definitely a change to home where you can remain in solitude, but in Hong Kong if you want to meet people from all over the world you cannot remain in your dorm room for anything else than sleep and showering. All these things can connect you with ambitious students you can plan trips, hikes, study sessions and night outs with.
Most of my connections come from the aspect of getting to know people around campus, in cantinas or workshops and having a central place with the residence where you can meet and hang out with and make plans, as well as study together. My semester would by far not have been as full of social connections and cultural exchange if it wasn't for the residence. I am very grateful for that.

However, the cheap price of the residence comes for some drawbacks. You are in risk of getting a dorm partner that will not always be d'accord with the air conditioning usage, your sleep schedules or share of resources. I was very happy with my dorm partner; however, I did hear many stories of cold atmospheres inside the dorm rooms. One reason more to socialize outside. The room itself can be quite narrow, so you need to know how to make use for the space inside. I recommend not packing too much and only go for essentials, and visiting IKEA in the welcome week to make sure you have a comfortable start living inside.

Student Life

Personally, I did not prepare myself much for the journey and I recommend figuring things out as they come. Improvisation and confidence are one of the key qualities to have in Hong Kong, as the nature of the city will overthrow all your plans and preparations anyways. With every week I got accustomed to the culture, using university VPNs (Hong Kong is still very western oriented, apps like Instagram and brands such as Apple are very popular), learning the MTR lines and so on and so forth.

The student life in Hong Kong never gets boring and you will be overwhelmed with all the opportunities and choices you can make in this wonderful city.

Enrollment, Study & Workload

Course List

The CityU provides a good number of courses in the computer science curriculum. You are able to do mathematical and technical courses, which can vary from second year courses like database systems or advanced courses done in the last year usually, like in my case, Data-Intensive Computing. Besides that, you are still free to choose any course from the provided list that inhibits all type of studies, like Physics or Business. This way, you can also choose courses to learn about Chinese civilization or Hong Kong's history.

Enrolling in courses

In the course application process in April, you can Wishlist the courses you want to participate in and get confirmation before the semester what courses you will be automatically enrolled in. If you do not manage to get every course, there is a "Add and Drop" phase in the first week where you can try to get into or drop your courses.

The u:space-equivalent at the CityU however is vastly inferior. This entire "Add and Drop" process is chaotic and based on a First-Come-First-Served mode. Many students miss out on courses and as an exchange student you need to wait for special schedules to be able to apply for them. I also recommend e-mailing the professors or talking to them, as most of the time the application system is faulty, and professors need to manually add you. They are usually very helpful in assisting you, as being exchange is seen as a big challenge by everyone.

My tip here: Do not worry if you did not get into every course at first, there is enough time and possibilities to get accepted.

The Moodle-equivalent, Canvas, however, is decent and will feel familiar. Uploading assignments, checking schedules, or connecting with the professor over forums works just fine.

Workload

The workload at CityU is vastly different to my home university. While the University of Vienna prefers to have a lot of individual work and a busy schedule with assignments and deadlines to meet, the CityU values quality over quantity, which is not necessarily easier, but much more manageable for an exchange student. This means that most courses always incorporate some sort of group project, with a mid-term and final exam. You can expect small assignments, however, for good grades, the group project and exam marks matter most. Students at CityU have the mindset of always achieving the best possible grade (A+), unlike most students from Europe where passing the course is usually good enough. As such, minimal requirements for courses at CityU are usually 30% instead of the common 50%. Additionally, many courses try to incorporate helpful tutorials to guide students in the projects and assignments.

To summarize the workload, if you want an A or A+, the workload is exceptionally higher and more difficult to achieve than at home, since you need to deliver exceptional group projects and great performances at the exams. If you aim for B and C marks, the workload is substantially lower than University of Vienna.

Accredited Courses

Multi-Modal Interface Design CS 3483 (HCI)

This course is about the scientific approach to designing user interfaces and the psychology behind user interactions and how to make them inclusive and efficient. The course was divided in a group project (30%), tutorials (10%), an individual assignment (20%) and a final exam (40%). The lecture is led by one professor and is more interactive than other courses, as the professor tries to see the intuition of students when it comes to user design principles like error messages or button placements. Every week is accompanied by a tutorial, which is both

helpful as preparation for the final exam, as well as using it for the group project.

The project can be done by 2 to 5 students and consists of several parts, where you first outline a topic and interface design idea and incorporate at least two types of interface interaction. Further down the road, you create a prototype with tools like Figma and lastly have a prototype presentation in form of a narrated video. This project does not include coding and can be done entirely through visual tools. The individual assignment is implementing an idea from the professor with given tools. In our case it was creating a gesture recognition program in JavaScript where you can manipulate a picture through finger movements. The final exam is about the theoretical aspects of the lecture, where you get use-cases in the exam and explain certain design decisions for example.

Overall, the project can be tedious due to writing long reports, but the workload is kept steadily at a medium effort level with easy difficulty. The final exam is fair and doable. Personally, I can definitely recommend the course, as the group project can be fun and the type of things you learn differ a lot to the typical technical courses of computer science studies.

Computer Networks CS3201 (NET)
This course is very straight forward and will feel familiar to a typical "VO" at University of Vienna. The course is divided in a mid-term and final exam, as well as having 3 assignments of which two are theoretical and one being a team project of coding a network program. The midterm and assignments are worth 30% in total, and I strictly recommend doing those well in order to pass the open-book final exam (70%) fairly easily.

The lecture is very non-interactive, as the professor just explains every detail of networks based on the OSI-Model and the tutorials help to further understand the sometimes-complicated calculations and architectures. Personally, this was the most uneventful course, and the workload will feel very similar to home. However, its exceptionally hard to score high points at the difficult mid-term and final exam, but passing it is very doable as long as you do well in the assignments.

Data-Intensive Computing CS 4480 (W1 DA)
This course was by far the most exciting and study-intense part of my studies. It is a last-year course that includes a mid-term and final exam, as well as a very intensive project which is accompanied by short and simple assignments to get in touch with the technologies discussed in the lecture.

The course is divided into two parts, with a midterm in between. Firstly, you get to know Big Data, the Data Science Lifecycle and Data Scraping. In the second and more important part, you get to learn about parallel computing and its use in the data science world. The main technologies discussed are Hadoop and Spark. The lecture is very useful and is closed off each time with a tutorial that teaches the practical aspects of the theory you just learned and often times gives guides to tools. I really liked this approach of combining theory and practice in one, making a real-world scenario very approachable.

The group project is about coming up with a real-world problem involving data that can be solved with scraping valuable data, machine learning and parallel computing solutions. I really recommend choosing a topic that is not too complex, as the workload grows exceptionally high based on what you want to solve. You need to present the project in the end, so the project involves the entire data science cycle with DE, ML, PC and visualizing and interpreting your results.

This course was by far my favorite, as it was full of new knowledge and the first time mixing several fields of tech and mathematics into one project. The midterm is very easy due to being open book. The final exam can be tricky, as it both asks theoretical questions, as well as having to provide pseudo code solutions or writing code on paper like Hadoop Pig Latin. I recommend studying all material, from lecture to assignments, to be prepared for the exam. Passing the course is doable, but I strictly recommend not to underestimate the group project work.

Voluntary Courses

Apart from the courses I was able to get accredited for the CS curriculum, I signed up for four more voluntary courses to get to know the Asian culture in more detail.

Mandarin for Beginners LC2956
By far the most fun course of my semester abroad. The teacher is incredibly nice and teaches mandarin fantastically. The entire class consists of non-locals with whom you frequently practice mandarin. The course is divided in quizzes and a final oral exam, as well as weekly homework assignments. The pace of the course is fast, and it is not easy to keep up. This was my first time learning a tonal language and a very insightful experience in how different language can work in a society. The class dynamic is very interactive with many types of ways to learn mandarin words, tones, and grammar. The teacher also tries to incorporate a lot of words from Hong Kong, so you get to know how places and food in HK are called in Chinese. I absolutely recommend getting to know Mandarin in such a fun way!

Exploring Hong Kong GE1138
This course is about the interesting and exciting history of Hong Kong and the detailed aspects and consequences of events throughout the history of Hong Kong. It is led by a young professor which was very motivated to teach the very beginnings of Hong Kong, the hardships of colonialization throughout history and cultural developments in the last century and the 1997 hand-over. Personally, I enjoyed this course a lot as you grow your roots in Hong Kong every week by learning the history of the ground you're standing on and the professor is presenting it very well, with specific details such as where the name Hong Kong comes from, many interesting sayings in Hong Kong culture as well as the connections to various English colonizers. I fully recommend taking this course.

Hidden Cities GE2244
Societal difficulties, urbanization, and immigration. This course gives a glimpse at how Hong Kong is dealing with these topics in recent decades and gives future outlooks. The professor is a local that can tell you about the detailed living style of Hong Kong, as well as incorporates guests that talk about the urban developments in Asia. The course started strong but unfortunately did not go in-depth enough to get the full picture of Hong Kong's state.

After five lectures the rest of the course is a group project where you choose to highlight something about Hong Kong that is related to the topics of the course. In my case, we made a 360° presentation of the Wan Chai district with its differences at Day and Night, highlighting how the district consisting of rich apartment complexes, common leisure grounds and vibrant night life behaves at different times of the day. This experience was very insightful, as you get directly in touch with the local population and its activities. Taking this course is a great way to get to know more students, as most that participate in the course have a deeper interest in the place they do their semester abroad, however, the workload and actual knowledge is limited.

Table Tennis PED1603
The university also provides free sport courses of various sorts, with some Asian sports and martial arts that are not common in the west. Learning the Chinese way of playing table tennis was a great experience to get in touch with their most popular sport.

Budget & Cost

Housing
Your spending in Hong Kong can vary by a wide margin. The residence costs 1300€ in a onetime payment for the entire duration of the stay. This is incredibly cheap in comparison with the housing prices inside the city. External apartments with comfortable living standards start from 700€ a month upwards, so this can definitely hurt the budget if you cannot get a place inside the residence. "Weave Studios" is a common rental page I have researched beforehand if you wish for an expensive apartment, which still has the student life type flair.
If the budget is very tight, you can opt in for an apartment in the New Territories, which is the rural jungle area of Hong Kong. This area is still very common for students (the Chinese University of Hong Kong resides there) and the commute to the city does not take long with several bus systems and MTR lines available. It is also a much quieter and peaceful area of Hong Kong, away from the constant hustle and bustle the city is known for.

Transport
Transportation in Hong Kong is incredibly efficient and in comparison to the rest of world much cheaper. The MTR line is fast, and you can go anywhere in the city in less than 40 minutes. Most rides will cost you 0.50c to 2€ through a card called Octopus card. With the Octopus card you can enter and leave stations rapidly and you will quickly get a feel of the transportation costs through the metro. Unfortunately, the MTR never operates at night, so you often need to take night busses which are quite cheap for the service at night but take much longer to get home. Busses in general are a good alternative to MTR, as they can reach more remote places in the New Territories, Sai Kung and so on. The only issue in Hong Kong regarding transportation is Taxis. I always recommend calling an Uber for a fixed price, as Taxis are expensive and often do not drive the most efficient route.

Food & Drinks
For food, CityU has three cantinas in total with several small restaurants on campus, while the residence also has a cantina called "Homey Kitchen". Most of the food is quite cheap in comparison with the city restaurants and you can easily survive on a tight budget, while still enjoying traditional Asian food that ranges from acceptable to good quality.
However, there is a big issue with food in Asia in general. The portions are smaller than in western countries. As Hong Kong can be very exhausting with walking up hills and the constant hustle of enjoying the fast-paced nature of the city and University, I and many others had to rely on western and Asian style fast food to keep up with the energy, which leads to eating 3-5 meals a day. As you also want to enjoy the proper Asian restaurants, you will find yourself quickly in the food markets (Temple Street) or all-you-can-eat Hotpot restaurants. This lifestyle can go rampant on your bank account, so I found myself rarely spending less than 25€ a day for food and drinks. The latter however are very cheap. Any soft drinks cost half of what is standard in the western world, as you also often get drinks for basically free to most meals. However, you cannot drink tap water in Hong Kong and high-quality water is rare and expensive.
Supermarkets are plenty, but you will not find a "have all" supermarket everywhere. Hong Kong has a lot of small shops like 711 and Circle K and medium sized supermarkets like Taste and Wellcome where you can get your groceries or snacks, however, due to the narrow space at the residence, managing the groceries can be tiresome and difficult. Ordering food is very expensive due to high delivery costs, but I can recommend asking students at the residence to order things like meat in bulk from the butcher and cooking by yourself, which can turn out to be much cheaper than restaurants. Overall, I recommend getting used to the food options early on to outline a proper budget plan to spend according to your lifestyle.

Activities
Activities in Hong Kong are usually on the cheaper side. Tourist attractions rarely exceed entrance costs of 10€, most museums are free entry and for people who like to party, there is always some event from student organizations that make great parties possible for little money. As Hong Kong occupies a central spot in Asia, I recommend using the cheaper flights to other countries for the full cultural experience or cross the border to experience Mainland China (from your own pocket of course), as the university gives plenty of free time for such additional journeys.
Overall, besides the housing, Hong Kong lets you choose how much you want to spend. You can enjoy all aspects of your stay abroad with a small budget, as well as have a great time when you are not restricted financially, such as gambling it all away at Horse racing on Hong Kong Island if you wish to do so (I, of course, did not do that).

A semester abroad in Hong Kong

In the end, my stay in Hong Kong did not change me as a person itself, but rather showed me so many new and different aspects to life and made me think how I want to live onwards.
The students and professors had a much more driven and practical approach to solving problems, but on the other side, had less of the intellectual discourse we have at home. Asia promotes a doer-mentality and efficiency which quickly pulls you in and you want to partake in their ever-changing environment.

Apart from studies, I have seen things I wouldn't believe before. Children that were rolling across the train stations acting like the world is in their hands, a story behind every narrow corner where three wrong turns lead you to a Philippian karaoke bar with 80-year-olds dancing like they were in their college years, and questionable engineering solutions where watery holes in the ceilings were fixed with an umbrella. I have experienced the most absurd nights of my life in Hong Kong and its islands, had the most intense deadline days at university and most often felt like I am in an adventurous comedy where all that mattered was to create memories, meaningful connections, and new ways of learning things.

All made possible with the vibrant and eventful style of study by CityU and fast-paced lifestyle in the streets of Hong Kong. It was a vastly different experience to home, but for which I know I was able to have the privilege of not having to be part of the societal difficulties and prejudices of Asia and Hong Kong, and political tensions that always remain. Even with all the joy, intense study, and adventures, walking in districts like Sham Shui Po or feeling the wish for independence amongst the people will not make you forget where you are and what challenges will have to be overcome in the future.

At last, a personal recommendation. Once in the residence or in social circles, ask where to find "the cheap waffles place" and "Mr. Wong's".

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Aufenthaltsbeginn: 04.09.2023   **Aufenthaltsende:** 23.12.2023

STIPENDIUM	
Stipendium Uni Wien gesamt laut Zuerkennung: (inkl. Zuschüsse für Reisekosten und Sprachtest)	€ 2.000,00
	Rückforderung: nein Rückgeforderter Betrag: € Rückforderungsgrund:
Weitere Stipendien (zB Jasso, Studienbeihilfe):	Weitere Stipendien: Ja • Stipendium des Gastlandes: nein () • Bundesländerstipendium: nein • Studienbeihilfe: ja • Sonstiges Stipendium:
Summe weiterer Stipendien:	€ 2.500,00
Gesamtsumme aller Stipendien:	€ 4.500,00

KOSTEN DES AUSLANDSAUFENTHALTS	
Unterkunft:	€ 1.300,00
Art der Unterkunft:	Studierendenwohnheim
Reisekosten:	€ 1.000,00
Lebenshaltungskosten:	€ 3.500,00
Studienkosten:	€ 0,00
Versicherungskosten	€ 250,00
Visakosten:	€ 80,00
Gesamtkosten des Auslandsaufenthalts:	**€ 6.130,00**

Bericht veröffentlichen: ☑