



Baden-Württemberg
STIPENDIUM®

Personal Report Semester Abroad

An insight into life on the other side of the world

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Period of the exchange from - until:	September 2019 – January 2020
Creation date:	05.01.2020

- I hereby agree to my report being published on the websites of the *Baden-Württemberg-STIPENDIUM* (www.bw-stipendium.de) and of the Baden-Württemberg Stiftung (www.bwstiftung.de) as well as on BWS-World, the portal of the Baden-Württemberg-STIPENDIUM.

1 Introduction

Part of my studies in International Management at the University of Applied Sciences in Karlsruhe, Germany includes the opportunity for students to spend a semester abroad at a university of their choice. As I previously spent half a year abroad in the United States and was able to gain valuable insights into the North American culture, I was set on experiencing life on the other side of the globe as well.

Before my study abroad, I had never set foot into an Asian country before. Therefore, Hong Kong seemed like the perfect city to experience the Asian culture in a rather western environment that would make it easier to communicate with one another. The geographical location of Hong Kong in a warm climate zone with hundreds of skyscrapers surrounded by a stunning landscape mix of mountains and sea was only the cherry on top.

2 Preparation

The general application process for a semester abroad at the City University of Hong Kong is very well described on the website of the institution (https://www.admo.cityu.edu.hk/exchange_visiting/exchange/info/) and is therefore relatively easy to follow. At the University of Applied Sciences in Karlsruhe, students at first have to get in touch with their exchange coordinator (“Akademisches Auslandsamt”) around eight months beforehand to request a space at the exchange institution. About three months later, accepted students receive the confirmation from the exchange coordinator of acceptance at the City University of Hong Kong. Roughly three months before the beginning of the semester, the exchange institution web portal opens and exchange students can start the online application for courses and dormitory. After getting the confirmation for pre-registered courses and student residence, students have to pay the full student residence fee and have the opportunity to change some pre-registered courses, if places are available.

The more difficult part of the whole application process is the application for a visa. Obtaining a student visa is obligatory for every student that wants to pursue exchange studies in Hong Kong. The process of applying for a visa is also documented on the exchange institutions website. For students wishing to apply for a student visa, I highly recommend using the guide provided by the City University of Hong Kong (http://www.cityu.edu.hk/geo/ies_stdvisa.htm).

Before even applying for a specific university, I researched a lot about the city and the courses I could attend there and also the average expenses of a semester abroad in Hong Kong. As Hong Kong is well known as one of the most expensive cities in the world, I knew I wouldn't be able to afford living and studying there for a semester by myself. Therefore, before I even applied at the City University of Hong Kong I considered different financing possibilities. The values and principles of the Baden Wuerttemberg Stiftung fit my expectations perfectly, so I was very pleased when my exchange coordinator announced my profile could be a fit for the scholarship.

I was fortunate enough to receive a scholarship by the Baden-Wuerttemberg Stiftung, which supported me financially in making this experience even possible. For students considering studies in Hong Kong as well, I can only recommend looking at the financial expenses very closely, because it is almost impossible to finance the whole experience solely by oneself.

3 Study at the City University of Hong Kong

The campus at the City University of Hong Kong is located in the district Kowloon Tong, which is north of the center of City. The university is directly connected to the student residence via a bridge, so it only takes about five to ten minutes to get to university, depending on the classrooms a course takes place in. Although the campus of the City University of Hong Kong

is one of the smaller campuses compared to e.g. Chinese University of Hong Kong or Hong Kong University, it is much larger than the campus of my University at home. Among other things, it hosts a swimming pool, a bank, different restaurants, three large cafeterias and even a small hospital. Especially due to a lack of space in Hong Kong, everything is in very close proximity to one another, which makes it very convenient. On top of that, the campus has a large shopping mall right outside the university, which makes it easy to go grocery shopping after class or grab a bite to eat in between classes.

A benefit of attending a large university is definitely the number of courses that you can choose from. Obviously for some courses you need pre-requisites, but City University of Hong Kong offers a huge amount of so-called GE (General) Courses that are accessible to anyone regardless of their academic background. Therefore, I had the opportunity to study courses that weren't directly linked to my studies, like Artificial Intelligence, Smart City or Internet Application and Security. A downside of studying at a large university was definitely full quotas of courses that might be necessary for your studies that resulted of the huge amount of exchange students the university takes on per semester. Nevertheless, the first week of class gives students the opportunity to add and drop courses, so they might be able to get their desired courses after all.

Regarding the workload at the City University of Hong Kong, I would say that it definitely depends on the class students take. Some courses will ask you to submit a lot of assignments during the semester, but you don't have final exams or midterms. Others will only have a final exam or maybe some group projects and some courses have all of it. As for my experience, I would recommend choosing the courses that really interest you, regardless of the workload. I believe if you are truly interested in the topic, it will be easier to study anyways. Some other factors students should consider are the number of courses they take, as well as the schedule. Some courses may collide with one another and a lot of courses have attendance, so make sure that you are able to attend your courses. Furthermore, at my home university I always attended between six and eight different courses. With the study load at the City University of Hong Kong being much larger, I found it really difficult to keep up with all of my six courses during the course of the semester, so be sure to keep that in mind while choosing your courses as well.

4 Life in Hong Kong

As for living in Hong Kong, I can most certainly say that this city is unlike any other. As many other international students right now and before me, I have had the privilege to live in this beautiful city, enjoy its education and get to know many warm, kind and funny Hong Kongers. Due to the fact that Hong Kong has been a British colony for 99 years, a lot of British culture can be found in the city. On top of that, English is the second most widely spoken language in Hong Kong and therefore makes it relatively easy to communicate with most citizens. As I myself have lived in London for a year before, I felt right at home whenever I found similarities between the two cities. For me, Hong Kong is a mixture of Chinese and British influence, modern and historic, innovative and traditional, and altogether a beautiful city surrounded by stunning mountains, beaches and at heart, its wonderful people.

During my stay in Hong Kong, I was very fortunate to have encountered different local groups over time. One young family of five really touched my heart. The family randomly approached my roommate and me on the subway and invited us to have dinner with them in their own home. The day we got there, they prepared different traditional Hong Kong meals for us. Just as much as we were interested in hearing about their way of living, they were hanging on every word we were telling them about our home country, our traditions, history, political and economic situation. It was extremely touching to hear them talk about the development of Hong Kong, their opinion on the protest movement and how they considered moving to Europe because they fear what will happen to their home city in the future. It was right about then

when I truly realized how blessed I am to have so many privileges as a German citizen that people in many other countries in the world can only dream of. Shockingly way too often we take what we have for granted. During a busy day, it is often so easy to forget what we should be truly grateful for. Having the right to speak our mind, go on the street to fight for what we believe in, enjoy almost free education, travel where we want to without the fear of not being able to come back. Short – Freedom. We should always be aware of how lucky we are to enjoy those privileges, as not many can say that for themselves.

At this point, I would like to briefly outline the political situation Hong Kong is in at the moment. Beginning of June, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong rolled out an extradition bill that would allow Hong Kong people to be charged for crimes in Mainland China that they committed in Hong Kong. Since being a British colony, Hong Kong is now a special administrative region of China, therefore enjoying different rights in comparison to Mainland China. In fear of losing those privileges, more than two million Pro-democratic citizens took to the streets to protest against the bill without any success. Over time, as the government didn't indicate any sign of communication with the people, protests started to get more radical and police brutality increased tremendously. By the time my semester abroad started, thousand rounds of teargas had been fired, as well as live rounds and rubber bullets. After a twenty-one-year-old teenager got shot on Monday the 11th of November, protesters in all districts of Hong Kong took to the streets. As the majority of the protesters are still in school or university, they started taking over the universities as their camps to fight the police. At the City University of Hong Kong, my university, they vandalized the university facility, but instead of seeking refuge in the university, they took it to the student residence halls. Therefore, within one day our student residence turned into a battlefield. On Monday evening the protesters started putting up roadblocks and lighting things on fire to attract the police's attention. On Tuesday morning around seven, I woke up in my bed at the student residence because I heard shots being fired. I ran into the kitchen to look outside and I saw around twenty police officers shooting tear gas into our student residence. Within minutes, the gas spread and went through windows and air conditioning into the student rooms. Doors opened and local students ran downstairs to join other protesters to help defend the student campus, but they did not stand a chance against the police. After the police left, hundreds of protesters started gathering at our student residence and building a fortress. That was the last night I spent at the residence. The university was destroyed, most of the MTR system was demolished, the student residence was a fortress, there was no end in sight. The following week, the university announced that all future classes of this semester will be cancelled and that special arrangements will take place to finish the lectures and exams online.

I had the opportunity to leave. That is one thing that stuck with me during my first weeks back home. I was able to pack my bags and leave it all behind and say I am going home. It made me realize that Hong Kong people do not have that privilege. Hong Kong is their home. It is where they grew up. It is where they want to raise their children, grow a family, have a life. Giving up is not an option for them.

If the political situation manages to ever get resolved, I can only recommend staying in Hong Kong from the bottom of my heart. If there is one thing I learned from this experience it is definitely to get more into politics. We should not take for granted what we have in our home country, just because at the current moment everything seems to be alright. Things can change in the blink of an eye.

Regardless of the situation and the fact that the semester ended more abruptly than I expected, I am very fond of my time in Hong Kong and the people I got to meet. I made so many great encounters and so many amazing memories.

One of my favorite things to do in Hong Kong is hiking. Hong Kong offers a variety of hiking routes with stunning views over the city that are definitely worth checking out. Furthermore, I really enjoyed visiting different Chinese temples. My favorite is the Chi Lin Nunnery in East

Hong Kong. It has a beautiful park attached to the nunnery surrounded by skyscrapers that makes it one of a kind. And, of course, one should not forget about the food. Although I have experienced a lot of strange meals, there are some I will definitely miss back in Germany. Dim Sum is one of my favorite traditional Hong Kong dishes and was also the first thing I showed my mother when she visited me. It is very hard to describe, so I would recommend making a trip to Hong Kong to check it out. Last but not least, Hong Kong has over 200 islands and therefore offers an amazing selection of beaches that are great if you need to get out of the busy city life.

All in all, whether for exchange or just a visit, I can definitely recommend Hong Kong. Just make sure you inform yourself about the current political situation in Hong Kong for safety reasons.

5 Personal Conclusion

For the last few months, Hong Kong has been my home. To sum it up, I have had the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience a historic movement from up close. I had the opportunity to get to know the local people there. I have the opportunity now to spread the word of what I got to witness over the past few months. In light of the recent events in Hong Kong, I feel, for all that Hong Kong and its people have given me, it is my duty to try and spread awareness of the current situation and my experiences. That is why after I arrived back in Germany, I met up with other international Scholars from the Baden-Wuerttemberg Stiftung at an organized Christmas event and told them about my experience in Hong Kong. Furthermore, I am organizing an event together with Prof. Dr.-Ing. Hendrik Rust at the University of Applied Sciences in Karlsruhe to share my experiences and spread awareness to students here in Germany about the ongoing events in Hong Kong.

My Baden-Wuerttemberg Scholarship gave me the opportunity to make those memories in Hong Kong. I furthermore got to meet a lot of interesting people back in Germany at events of the Baden-Wuerttemberg Stiftung. One encounter I want to mention here was with an exchange student from Hong Kong that also took part in a Regional Chapter Meeting of Karlsruhe. It was very interesting to share with her what I had experienced and also to hear about her side of the protests as a Hong Kong permanent resident. This showed me again how kind, funny and caring Hong Kongers are and makes it even more important to me to share with others what is happening in Hong Kong.

I can definitely say that my semester abroad was completely different to what I had expected, but I would not change a single bit of it. During my stay in Hong Kong and whilst I was visiting other surrounding countries, I was able to make connections to people and gain experiences I will cherish forever.