Before Your Exchange

Do your research
After you have received a Student Exchange Programme (SEP) offer, do some research if you haven’t done so! Get to know some basic background information of your host institution and the culture of your host country. We recommend checking the information in the Outbound Travel Alert System provided by the Hong Kong SAR Government (or travel alerts issued by your home country) before your exchange journey.

Application to your host institution
Always check your CityU email for updates from the Global Engagement Office (GEO), your home College/Department and the host institution – check the Junk Box or Spam Box as well as some email accounts automatically categorize emails from another country into these boxes. Keep an eye out for the deadlines of your applications. Either paper or online form may be requested for the application procedures. Please allow some time for the host institution to process your documents. The letter of acceptance will be issued by the host institution when it is ready.

Prepare and finalize your course plan
Check the latest course catalog and syllabus offered by your host institution. Discuss your course plan with your programme leader/academic advisor for suitability and credit transferability. Always prepare backup course plan as some courses are very popular. We suggest that you show your final course list to your programme leader/academic advisor for “approval” after you finish registering at the host institution. Inform your programme leader/academic advisor if there are any changes to your course plan even during your exchange.

Housing
Check the application procedure of the on-campus housing in your host institution in advance if that option is available, as some host institutions do not provide nor guarantee accommodation for exchange students. Keep track of the hall-registration procedures and important dates. Check the details of campus location (some institutions have multiple campus sites), hall location, room types, hall facilities, cost and resources to make your decision. It is also important to take into consideration of your life style and financial budget.

If on-campus housing is not available, you need to find off-campus accommodation as an alternative. Your host institution may be able to provide information about off-campus housing, so make sure to contact them first. Popular options for off-campus accommodation are student hostels, student co-ops or renting short-terms apartment. All options have their pros and cons, depending on your overall budget and your priorities, plan accordingly.

Funding
The University offers funding to support outbound exchange: Student Exchange Fund (SEF), Special Fund for Non-local Outbound Exchange Students (SF), and Joseph Lau Student Exchange Awards (JSEA). The Hong Kong SAR Government also offers subsidy to students in need through the Scheme for Subsidy on Exchange for Post-secondary Students (SSE) and the Scheme for Subsidy on Exchange for to “Belt
and Road” Regions for Post-secondary Students (SSEBR). Please note that allocation of funding is subject to availability. For details, please visit the Global Engagement Office website: http://www.cityu.edu.hk/geo/oes_finsupp.htm

You may also refer to the Student Development Services website for other exchange scholarship opportunities: http://www.cityu.edu.hk/sds/web/studentlife_scholarships_oes.shtml

**Visa application**
Students are responsible for arranging and obtaining the documents required for entering the host country. This may include both a valid passport and a visa/permit.

- Do proper research first. Some countries require you to get a student visa/permit to study as an exchange student, while some don’t. Your host institution will normally send you instructions once you have been accepted. You can also find relevant information through the host country’s immigration department or embassy website.

- The next step is to apply for the visa/permit. You should look up what documents you will need for application, as well as what procedures you will need to undertake. You may be required to do a health check-up prior to application, some may even request an interview.

- Keep in mind the amount of time you will need to obtain your visa/permit and make sure you have enough time as some may take more than 8 weeks of processing time.

**Flight ticket**
You may begin to plan your departure arrangements as soon as you received confirmation from your host institution, as air tickets may become more expensive closer to the departure date. Depending on your host institution, you may be required to attend orientation activities or meet with the exchange coordinators at your host institution prior to beginning your studies, so you might even have to arrive earlier than your starting date for studies. We strongly suggest that you will buy your flight ticket only after you have received your offer letter and visa/permit.

**Travel and medical insurance**
It is necessary for students to purchase travel and medical insurance before departure. Some host institution may require you to purchase their specific insurance plan. Otherwise, please choose an insurance plan that best fits your needs. You may also consider the voluntary insurance plan contracted by CityU Finance Office (FO).

**Manage personal finance**
It is impossible for you to carry all your money in your bag. You can bring a credit card or debit card along with you (make sure you can use it to make international purchases!), please check with your bank in Hong Kong to see if they offer any ATM services abroad or if they have branches in the host country you are visiting. You may also consider opening a local bank account to deposit your money. Please keep in mind that there may be certain regulations on opening a bank account as an exchange student; you should check carefully and be aware of the required documents and possible services charges.

**Final reminder before you leave Hong Kong**
Remember to arrange for your tuition payment to CityU before your exchange journey begins.
PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

- A passport (valid for at least six months after your last day of exchange)
- HKID
- A student visa/permit valid through your time abroad (if applicable)
- Offer letter from your host institution
- Copy of your insurance policy
- Air or train ticket(s)
- Basic living necessities (clothes, etc): make sure the clothing is appropriate for the climate to the place
- Enough cash for at least the first two months
- Debit card (with oversea deposit function)
- Credit card (with oversea payment function)
- Useful electronics (phone, smart watch, notebook, etc)
- A list of telephone numbers such as contact numbers of your host institution, the nearest Chinese Embassy or Consulate General, and your insurance company
- Any other necessary documents
Culture shock
Culture shock is a common phenomenon when you are distant from home while experiencing a change in your living environment. Don’t worry! It is a situation that almost every exchange student will face.

Here is a graph to demonstrate the different stages you may experience. First, Honeymoon, which is the beginning of the exchange programme, students will be overwhelmingly positive and excited with the new culture, language and environment.

However, the level of happiness will decline after the first few weeks of settling in, and students will move into a stage of possible Frustration and Anxiety. After the honeymoon period, they will start to notice the difference between the new culture and their home culture. Miscommunication may also happen frequently due to the different culture and students will then start to feel homesick. It could be a difficult time, as students are frustrated and stressed out when trying to resolve problems that they have not encountered before. This is the time when you should proactively reach out for assistance from your host institution, home university, family and peers. Sometimes just hearing a familiar voice could cure homesickness, so call home or friends for a quick chat.

With some time, students will feel less frustrated as they begin to feel more familiar and comfortable with the new culture and environment. During the Adjustment stage, new friends and communities will be established and languages will become more recognizable as long as you put some effort into getting to know your host institution/country.
The last stage is *Acceptance*. Although students might not completely adapt to the new environment, but during this stage, you will develop a greater tolerance and understanding. You will finally feel being a part of the new community and will be able to draw together the resources you need to feel at ease.

The length of each stage varies from person to person. Some people may experience all 4 stages within a week or two, while others will take longer and even only reach the third stage when the semester is about to wrap up. Anyhow, it is important to understand your own needs and look for assistance along the way when you believe it can be helpful, so that you can fully enjoy and learn from your exchange journey.

Culture shock is a normal part of a cross-cultural experience, and there are several ways to help you adapt to the environment more easily:

- Participate in the **orientation events** and other student clubs/activities held by the host institution: you’ll meet a lot of new friends there, including exchange students like you and other local students. Don’t be shy, just take the initiative to say hi and introduce yourself to them.

- Take **language courses**: if you’re not confident enough, it could be a great way for you to practice your language skills. Also, many exchange students will sign up for language courses. Grab the chance to make new friends!

- Don’t skip your classes: It’s always good to know a couple friends who are attending the same class with you.

- Say “Hi” to your neighbour: A good neighbour is better than a brother far away. You can help each other out when problem occurs.

- Contact **international office** (someone like GEO) of your host institution: seek for their assistance when you have queries.

- Stay in touch with your family and friends in Hong Kong too!

- Stay in touch with your exchange coordinator or programme leader/academic advisor at CityU and check your emails.

- Feel free to seek help from the counselling service in your host institution.

**Crime and personal safety**

Students losing their personal belongings or gotten stolen during exchange is not uncommon. You should take good care of your own valuables all the time. On the other hand, you have to be extra careful on some common scams during your travel. Here are a few tips for you:

- Avoid travelling alone: You should always travel with a friend. Being with others can also be a deterrent to criminals who might target you otherwise.

- In case of crime, keep calm and report the case to local police force as soon as possible. Always remember to get a police report after you have reported the case. You will need it for making insurance claims or even getting new identity documents.
• Make sure you have the local emergency numbers saved on your phone or somewhere easily accessible. Here’s some number you may want to save:
  • Local police emergency number
  • Host institution’s security number
  • 24-hour hotline offered by your home country for residents traveling abroad, e.g., Assistance to Hong Kong Residents Unit of the Immigration Department: (852) 1868

**Personal health**
Due to environmental differences, students may experience health problems during exchange period. You are advised to strictly monitor your personal hygiene. Make sure you have your own health insurance because medical expenses in some countries can be very expensive. Here are some tips for you:

• Pay attention to the local announcements: keep an eye on local news.

• Seek medical advice: If you have any health concerns, please visit your family doctor prior to your exchange and ask for a doctor’s certificate if you are bringing medicine with you.

• Protect your personal hygiene: Prepare your own “First-aid Kit” with some general supplies including surgical masks and hand sanitizer to prevent getting sick.
**AFTER YOUR EXCHANGE**

**Follow-ups before coming back**
Before you leave the host country/city, make sure all official procedures have been completed and you are good to leave. If you are obligated to buy health insurance during your stay, do not forget to cancel it if it is a monthly subscription plan. Notify your housing agency/landlord before leaving so that you are aware of all key handovers and potential subletting arrangements. Most importantly, remember to book an appointment for deregistration of your residence permit if you had applied for one upon arrival, some banks require a proof of residence permit deregistration to close your local bank account so it is advised to reserve some time before the end of your exchange to complete these tasks.

**Transcript & credit transfer**
If you want to transfer academic credits from your courses taken abroad, you are required to submit a number of documents including a credit transfer application form and original transcript within 1 month after the completion of your exchange study to Academic Regulations & Records Office (ARRO) Service Centre or your department’s general office, depending on your exchange programme’s level and to-be-transferred courses. The respective syllabus of proposed transfer course(s) may also be required. Please check the email issued by the individual department for details.

Some host institutions might use languages other than English in their official documents and student transcripts. Please consult your academic advisors at CityU and your host institution before departure to allow smooth credit transfer progress. If the set of courses you apply for credit transfer is different from those in your proposed course plan, please make sure you have gotten prior approval from your programme leader/academic advisor. Otherwise, there is a risk they would reject the credit transfer application.

**Sponsorship awards**
For students who applied for sponsorship awards administered by GEO, please be reminded to complete the respective requirements and submit materials such as photos, reviews or letter of appreciation. Make sure you have these documents prepared and submitted on time.

**In your written review,** you may want to cover the following topics:

- What is the learning culture of your host institution like?
- What courses did you take?
- How was the accommodation?
- What are some memorable experiences you had at the host institution?
In your letter of appreciation to award/scholarship donors, please consider including the following topics:

- Reasons for joining the exchange programme
- Information of the host institution
- Your academic experiences
- Your non-academic activities
- What did you learn from the exchange programme
- How did the exchange programme affect your future plan?
- Message to donor

In your photo submission, please include at least 5 quality photos following the instruction below:

Photos should capture a special moment of your exchange, preferably with you in the photo. You may include landmarks of your host country or host institution, celebration of local festivals, cultural representation of your host country or school events with your peers and friends. Please avoid sending selfies!

- Send photos in JPEG format with high resolution (2.4MB or above)
- Name your photos in this order:
  e.g.: 1. CHAN Siu Ming_USA_Purdue UniversityStatue of Liberty
        2. LAU Andy_UK_University of Bath_Eiffel Tower
        3. SMITH John_China_Chinese New Year

Course registration for next semester back in CityU

Generally, course registration starts a few weeks before the start of the semester, so do not forget to review both CityU and the host institution’s academic calendars for important dates. Different host institutions have different schedules for their semester breaks, so if your exchange semester overlaps with the subsequent semester at CityU, contact your academic advisor and inform him/her about the situation to sort things out. For final year students, make sure you have submitted the required documents such as application for final year project and graduation as needed, and double check if you have sufficient credits to graduate.

*LASTLY,*

*AND MOST IMPORTANTLY,*

*ENJOY YOUR EXCHANGE!*