

THE EVANS LAM SCHOLARSHIP FOR STUDY IN HONG KONG

Summer 2016



In October 2014, a new scholarship was created to offer a month-long summer program based at UR's exchange partner, the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Interest was high, and five students were selected from a very competitive field. Their majors and minors represented the full spectrum of disciplines at UR, and the program was open to undergraduates in Arts, Sciences and Engineering as well as the Eastman School of Music. Preference was given to those with little or no experience in Asia.

The same model was successfully used for the 2016 group. Each student selected two classes from such diverse topics as Mandarin Chinese, Chinese medicine, engineering innovation and entrepreneurship, energy and green society, Chinese foreign policy and urban sustainability. The students will present during International Education Week in November to raise awareness of the program among future participants, stressing the value and importance of Hong Kong and China as education abroad destinations. The students have provided here their brief summary reports of their time in Asia as Evans Lam Scholars.

Andrew Lee

*Chemistry and Biology Major, History Minor, Class of 2019
Astoria, New York*

Studying at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, experiencing local life in various Asian cities, and touring around Beijing has been one of the most unforgettable experiences of my life. It's hard to cover my entire experience in one written piece because so much happened in so little time. I remember arriving into Hong Kong International Airport in awe; we passed over the New Territories and I had the perfect view of Hong Kong Island. Once I saw Victoria Harbour and the breathtaking skyline, I knew I would fall in love with the city. I've been to Hong Kong once before, but I was very young and the only thing that I could remember was the myriad of delicious food, a standard that Hong Kong never fails to live up to.

On my sixteen-hour flight from JFK to HKG, I watched a movie titled *It's Already Tomorrow in Hong Kong*. Despite the plot not being the most exciting, the film had me very excited to wander and get lost in the streets of Hong Kong, and that's exactly what I did. I was born and raised in New York City, with a Chinese, Burmese, and Indian background, so I didn't exactly feel like a foreigner in the streets of Mong Kok. I primarily speak English and Hakka (a dialect of Chinese), and I picked up some Cantonese from living in New York City. I was often mistaken for a local, and I somehow managed to get by speaking a mix of Hakka and Cantonese.

Something I am really grateful for is that living in Hong Kong for a month solidified my Asian identity. I am an Asian American, and I find that I don't really fit in in the United States, and I don't really fit in in Asia. However, growing up in the United States has made me somewhat ashamed of the Asian part of my identity. My experience living in Hong Kong has allowed me to embrace that I am both Asian and American, creating a unique blend of the two cultures. It was nice to be in a place where my Asian identity wasn't looked down upon, and was part of the majority.

At CUHK, I had amazing experiences in and out of the classroom. My roommate was a student from North Carolina, so there weren't really issues between us in terms of cultural barriers. I took classes titled "Fundamentals in Chinese Medicine" and "Mainstream Chinese Philosophical Thought." Both classes have left lasting impressions on me. I plan to become a Western physician, and having learned about the field of medicine from a completely different perspective has allowed me to become opened minded about the body. I came into the class with a solely Western view of medicine, and considered almost all else as "alternative" and non-scientific. However, after going through the class, I learned that there was much more science behind it than what I thought. From my Chinese philosophy class, I got to learn more about how my parents see the world. My parents are immigrants from Asia, so they do not see the world as I do, since I was raised in the United States. I also had the opportunity to discuss philosophy with friends I made through the program, which I found very rewarding.

Besides classes, I had the opportunity to explore the streets of Hong Kong and the natural landscapes present. My favorite areas in Hong Kong were Mong Kok and Tsim Sha Tsui, but I also loved the nature in Cheung Chau and Tai Po. There was such a stark clash between the stillness of the nature surrounding Hong Kong and its bustling streets.

During one of the four-day weekends, I had the opportunity to take a trip to Seoul, South Korea. It was a very different environment and it was definitely much harder for me to get around in Seoul. There was a much stronger language barrier in Seoul, which made me highly appreciative of the English-friendliness of Hong Kong. When I landed back in Hong Kong, I felt like I landed back home. I missed Hong Kong when I was in Korea;

I knew my way around Kowloon like the back of my hand, and I was so glad to be in a place where I could function with ease. I also had the opportunity to travel to Singapore after the program. Despite the fact that both Singapore and Hong Kong are Asian metropolises, they had very different auras. Hong Kong felt very Chinese, despite being a British colony for such a long time, while I couldn't really pinpoint a distinct parent culture in Singapore.

On our tour around Beijing, I got to learn a lot about the differences between Mainland China and Hong Kong. I have never been to Mainland China before this trip, and there was a stark contrast between the two areas. While in Hong Kong, I perceived a strong anti-Mainland sentiment, and Hong Kong felt much more Westernized in both culture and appearance. On the other hand, Beijing felt like "real China" (which seems evident). By this, I mean that Beijing was not very Westernized—almost no one spoke English and you see little American and European influence readily apparent.

I had an unforgettable experience in Asia, and I fell in love with Hong Kong. It is like my second home, and I cannot wait to go back.





Grant Dever

Business Major, Class of 2016 (T5)

Honeoye Falls, NY

Studying at the Chinese University of Hong Kong was the best way for me to spend the summer following my senior year at the University of Rochester. While at CUHK, I studied both written and spoken Mandarin. These studies were incredibly time consuming and challenging. The rigor of the academics enabled me to rapidly improve my Mandarin over the five-week session.

Coming from a small town, living in Hong Kong was a shock to me. It's an absolutely massive, bustling city filled with beautiful modern architecture and excellent public transportation. I couldn't believe how many people were able to wedge themselves into the subway car or how many people would be on the street at 7pm after work ended for the day. I spent hours riding the metro throughout the city and exploring various areas of Hong Kong. It was easy to spend hours getting lost in the city and then find the nearest metro station and make your way home.

Hong Kong is incredibly hot and humid in summer. However, the locals have learned how to adapt to the climate. As we walked down the streets of Hong Kong, you could feel air conditioning streaming out of the stores and buildings, enticing you to come in and shop. Even our dorms at CUHK, the buses, and the subway have air conditioning! This made the heat quite bearable and transportation around the city very convenient.

For me, one of the most important aspects of this experience was the feelings of isolation that I felt. After a year of being incredibly busy and plugged into my communities, it was necessary for me to unplug and take some space. This trip enabled me to reassess my priorities and to consider my values in a different context. Conversations with my new friends, professors, and local Hong Kongers I shared taxis with all helped to change my perspective.

The Beijing visit was one of the most fun field trips. The hotel that we stayed in was absolutely beautiful and our room was very large. Every morning we would all rush downstairs to enjoy the extravagant breakfast buffet that was waiting for all of us. My two favorite excursions were the Summer Palace and the Peking duck dinner. The world-famous Peking duck is one of my absolute favorite foods. I ate a lot of duck in Hong Kong but none of it was as delicious as the meal we ate in Beijing.

I loved the opportunity to travel to Mainland China because it enabled me to have a fully immersive Mandarin experience. In Hong Kong many more people spoke English and restaurants catered to English speakers. In Beijing, however, many of the people working at restaurants do not speak English but I felt empowered to talk to the cashiers and wait staff in Mandarin. I was able to order food, buy beer, pay the bill, and ask for the location of the bathroom. While walking through the city I would hear people using different words that I had studied while at CUHK and it made me appreciate all of the listening practice that we had done in my Mandarin speaking class.

Following the Beijing trip, I spent two more weeks traveling in Mainland China. I flew to Chengdu from Beijing and met up with my friend, Scott Fu '17. I was able to spend a week living with him and his family. During this time, Scott took me to experience many of the tourist sites and must-do cultural experiences in Chengdu. This included eating mouth-numbing, saliva-inducing spicy foods. We ate our way through Chengdu enjoying hot pot, shrimp, fish, and noodles. I practiced my Mandarin with Scott, his friends, and his family during this time. I asked a lot of questions and my vocabulary and pronunciation improved greatly.

After a week in Chengdu, I said my farewells to my gracious hosts and headed to Changchun. My friend, Mac Liu '16, was there visiting his family. We spent the next week eating the most delicious food that I had eaten since I last visited Changchun in 2012. Mac's family ensured that we were perpetually full, treated us to full body massages, and took us on a day trip to a lake to ride jet skis for hours. This was an incredibly relaxing way to end my travels abroad and my summer.





Leyla Mouli

Environmental Studies Major, Class of 2019

Douala, Cameroon

I remember my sister giving me weird glances when she would hear me practicing my mandarin, repeating continuously sentences such as “Nǐ huì shuō yīngwén ma?” meaning “can you speak English?” For me, that was my way of getting ready to study in Hong Kong. Back home in Cameroon, people are not really interested in knowing East Asia in a deeper way. It is not a destination one can choose for vacation. Therefore, we tend to attach stereotypes, such as all Eastern Asians are Chinese and speak Mandarin. And that was the mistake I was making at that moment, since I was learning Mandarin, while Hong Kongers speak Cantonese. Fortunately, I did not suffer much from that, since when I arrived in Hong Kong, I realized that most people could also speak English. Perfect.

At the beginning though, I was a bit frightened about going out, because for me there was just so many people, always, everywhere. There would always be that person commenting about my hair, my skin, and asking to take a picture with me. However, soon enough, I became pretty used to that, and I learnt how to navigate the metro by myself. On a side note, I had never seen trains that clean!

Going to school at the Chinese University of Hong Kong was for sure a different experience for me. I took two classes, Urban Sustainability and Energy and Green Society. Studying environmental studies in China (since Hong Kong is a special administrative region of China) gave me a new perspective on ways to mitigate and adapt to current environmental issues. I was truly amazed by the sustainable housing and transportation put in place in Hong Kong. Since it was a summer school, one would expect class periods to be longer than usual. Indeed, they were. I had my classes three days a week, approximately three hours per class. However, the professors were so passionate about their topic that the classes were never boring.

Out of the classrooms, there was always something to do. I would either go to a school-organized trip to places such as the Big Buddha, Lantau Island, or Ocean Park, or I would hang out with my friend in the city or around a foosball table. I would also sometimes stay in my room and chat with Jess, my Australian roommate, or simply enjoy the calm and serenity offered by the perfect location of the campus.

As for the Beijing tour... well, there was no Beijing tour for me. Due my Cameroonian citizenship, I was unable to get a Chinese visa in Hong Kong. Therefore, I did not get to visit the Forbidden City or climb the Great Wall. However, I took it as an opportunity to visit other places in East Asia. Since I had already been to Macau, I backpacked for a solo trip to Singapore, passing through Philippines. This was by far the best decision I had taken this summer. Being by myself, I had to figure out in an extra short period of time how to navigate in those countries, where to go and when, and how to make friends. I ended up learning a lot about myself without being influenced by someone else, and I think that is really a big point of going for an education abroad.





Sophia McRae

History and Art History Major, Class of 2019

Rochester, NY

There is no doubt that I have experienced some of the best moments of my life during the six weeks I spent in Hong Kong. If someone had told me four months ago that I would spend much of the summer swimming in jungle waterfalls, kayaking through caves in Vietnam, and walking the Great Wall of China, I would not have believed it. I usually spend my summers visiting family and friends in Germany, so travelling was not really a new experience for me. However, I had never been farther east than Poland, so visiting Asia was completely novel.

I feel incredibly lucky to have had this experience; it has opened me up to Asian culture and lifestyle, and I was surprised to be able to call Hong Kong home. Hong Kong itself is incredibly crowded and hot, but it was certainly never boring. I spent much of my free time exploring the city and its many markets, restaurants, clubs, cafes and bars; I even found a few favorites locales with my friends that we kept returning to every weekend. The heat and

crowds were pretty hard to adjust to, but even so, most Hong Kong people I met were very friendly and open to new people, so I never felt too frustrated by it. One neighborhood we kept returning to is Mong Kok. It is one of the most densely populated places in the world, which can be easily felt with the bright signs hanging between buildings and endless crowds of people shopping and eating.

Because there is limited space in Hong Kong, everything is built vertically, resulting in relatively thin but extraordinarily tall buildings as far as you can see. However, just beyond them are beautiful mountains and the sea, which makes Hong Kong great for exploring wildlife as well as dense urban neighborhoods. There are a lot of incredibly beautiful hiking trails that are very accessible around Hong Kong, some ending in beaches or waterfalls, and of all levels of difficulty. One of my favorite days was when a few friends and I went to a trail called Ng Tung Chai, which was a trek that traced three waterfalls. When we reached the top, we jumped into the falls to cool off. It really was good hiking through the jungle with rich vegetation and steep climbs; it is easily one of the most beautiful trails I've ever been on.

Nightlife in Hong Kong is amazing. With a city of its size, it did not surprise me that it felt as if it were always awake. Some neighborhoods were always bustling from evening until sunrise. Night markets were a really fun and new thing for me to experience. Vendors negotiate prices for everything from fake bags and wallets to cheap souvenirs and selfie sticks. There are a lot of great places that are open late, and it was on those nights we met a lot of locals and other international young people who were in Hong Kong for work, study, or vacation. The Chinese University of Hong Kong is a beautiful campus; it is built on a mountain and has a lot of green space. The only tough thing about living there was that we always needed to take a shuttle bus to get around. However, the view from the rooms, the canteen in our college, and the gym made it pretty worth it. The classes I took were Chinese Culture and Society and Energy and Green Society. Though they were a little more labor

intensive than I was expecting, they were both interesting and the professors were impressive and fun. I really enjoyed going to class, and it was a great blend of where my interests lay as a history student with a strong interest in sustainability. I learned a lot, and I found that Hong Kong was a great place to study subjects such as climate change and Chinese social issues, as they are emerging now more than ever in Asia and the world.

The Beijing program at the end of my trip was a very different travelling experience than I had in Hong Kong and in Vietnam (where I spent a fantastic weekend). Beijing was even more crowded than Hong Kong, and it felt a little surreal to be faced with the smog and pollution that I had only seen before online. It was a great experience for me to witness Chinese culture, as it was definitely different than Hong Kong culture. It was less westernized and less consumer-based, and it was really interesting (though a little eerie) to stand in Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. One funny thing that happened throughout the entire trip was Chinese people constantly coming up to us and asking to take pictures with them. They were always very friendly and excited, so I think by the end I took more pictures with Chinese tourists than I did for myself. The Great Wall of China was definitely my favorite thing that we did. Although the visibility was not great that day, it was so impressive to actually be able to stand on it and to see how big it was and how far it stretched. There was definitely a greater culture shock in Beijing than in Hong Kong, but I am so happy that I was able to see and experience China in a different way, and the tour did a great job to help us do so.

Hong Kong was fun, diverse, vibrant, and an interesting blend of Asian culture and international consumer culture. I loved seeing new temples as much as the marketplaces and busy streets. It is difficult to summarize the six weeks in a few short words, especially their impact on my life and my worldview. However, my time was not as much defined by the experiences I was able to have but the people that I shared those moments with. This program allowed me to make strong bonds with people from all over the world, and create memories that I will not forget. My best advice to anyone coming into this program is to stay open-minded and to be encouraged to explore and meet new people. The (very) teary good-byes were completely worth it, and the longer I stayed in Hong Kong the more I fell in love with it.





Susan Ojukwu

International Relations and Health, Behavior and Society, Class of 2017
Franklin, MA

On the morning of my flight to Hong Kong, I sat next to a five-year-old boy in the airport. He fiddled with the zippers on my luggage for a moment, but ran and hid behind his brother when he noticed that I could see what he was doing. He popped his head out from behind his brother's leg and giggled, flashing a smile in my direction with his brown hair falling over his eyes. All around him, his family was talking in their native language, telling stories and laughing from their bellies, trying to savor their last moments together. Static broke over the loudspeaker and a muffled voice stumbled through an indistinguishable message about a plane departure. Suddenly the little boy let out a piercing cry into the shirt of one of his relatives. How quickly his laughter turned to tears as half of his family exchanged hugs and disappeared into the abyss beyond the security checkpoint.

As his family walked away, I thought about the times when I watched my older siblings get on big planes that would take them away for what seemed like an eternity to me. I, like the little boy, would cry every single time, begging for them to pack me in their luggage and take me with them. Thankfully, since then, traveling has become a much less traumatic experience for me- or so I thought. At the end of my six weeks in Hong Kong, as I parted ways with the dear friends whom I had grown to love in our short stint at CUHK, I was once again overcome with emotion. That familiar lump sat heavy in my throat and hot tears rolled down my cheeks as we all parted ways in the Hong Kong airport.

I am so fortunate to have had the opportunity to study in Hong Kong. Prior to the trip, I was working two jobs to save up for the airplane ticket. In my limited spare time I did not do extensive research. That said, I don't believe that any amount of research would have fully prepared me for it. The breathtaking skyline alone was beyond any description that I can articulate. I had never seen anything like this combination of skyscrapers, water, and lush green mountains all at once before. I remember my venturing out to Mong Kok on my second night. I was in shock at the sheer number of people in one place navigating under neon lights. As I walked down the street new aromas filled my nostrils – the pungent smell of street foods lingered in the air. The next week, I found myself surrounded by trees hiking on a verdant trail sequestered from the non-stop bustling city with my friends. We marveled at the creatures and cascades along the way. When we reached the top of the trail we took a dip in the bottom of the biggest waterfall; it was surreal.

In Hong Kong I took two classes: Urban Sustainability and Chinese Foreign Policy. It was an ideal place to study urban sustainability. I learned about the approaches and innovations aimed at meeting the needs of 7 million inhabitants in such small space while minimizing environmental degradation. In my Chinese Foreign Policy class I was challenged to dig deeper and learn more about history's role in shaping the Chinese policies we see today. The classes I took were valuable and engaging.

My experiences while studying abroad, whether inside the classroom or out, were simply incomparable. I laughed, I cried, I studied and I grew. The memories I made in Hong Kong I will cherish forever. Because of my experience, Hong Kong is now a place where I could see myself living or working in the future. None of this would have been possible without your generous donation. Thank you, Mr. Evans Lam for giving me the opportunity to expand my horizon in such a unique way.





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