

# HKUST Exchange Report

Indiana University – Spring 2017

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# Monthly Activity Log

January



My semester starts on 9<sup>th</sup> of January, but IU requires me to arrive at Bloomington by 4<sup>th</sup> of January. Alongside with the fact that my residential apartment only opens for registration starting from 4<sup>th</sup> of January, in order to save additional accommodation costs, I scheduled my flight so that I would arrive at Indianapolis exactly on 4<sup>th</sup> of January. It was a very cold night, as I could recall. Due to the reasons I have just mentioned, there were quite a number of students (around 4-5) arriving at Indianapolis on the day. Since we have already reported our arriving dates to the IU office beforehand, the IU officer actually came to drive us to Bloomington. It was a one-hour drive. I was very glad that I got to join the batch as I am pretty sure I would not be able to figure out the way to Bloomington on the first night.

The first week was all about exploration. I went to explore different bus routes in the town. As Bloomington is a college town, all the transportation business focuses on the school. We were reminded to apply for a Student ID as soon as possible during the drive as by possessing the card, we are entitled to enjoy free ride for all the bus routes in the town. So

after I have got the student card, the first thing I did was to go around the town and look for the fastest routes to my friends' houses as well as the grocery stores. Overall everything was very user-friendly so it was very easy for me to finish everything by myself.

The second thing that I did in the first few weeks was to fill up my apartment. I lived at Evermann Apartments which is one of the apartments that IU offers. I personally would not recommend any future incoming exchange students to pick this apartment as it is pretty old that you will always have to deal with bugs, especially bees and cockroaches, and the apartment was located far from the campus, so it takes, on average, a 15-minute walk to go to class. Another push factor of choosing the Evermann is that only one bus route will pass by the apartment, which makes your social life very difficult as the frequency of buses of that specific route is excessively low. Back to business (filling up my apartment), I actually spent quite a long time getting all the necessary stuffs for my residence. In spite of the fact that Evermann claims to offer “furnished apartments”, those apartments only provide beds and sofas and a few desks. There were still a huge chunk to do in order to make the apartment “livable”. I have to get all the cooking utensils so that I could cook myself.

## February



I went to New York in one of the weekends in February. To be honest with all of you, NYC is not that impressive. As a person who has been living in Hong Kong for his whole life, I would say the entire atmosphere at NYC was very much similar, apart from the fact that the price level there was much higher and the quality of underground metro was much below Hong Kong's standards. A few points to compliment though: the food at Chinatown tasted pretty good and people are generally very friendly towards Asian students. Overall it was a very average experience, but for the sake of having been to NYC and not being challenged by your family and friends why you did not go to NYC, I still think the upcoming students should give it a try.

## March



Bloomington is a very boring place. You always have to look for somewhere else to go in order to have fun, and March is a great time – here is the almighty Spring Break. During the Spring Break, I went on a trip with my other friends, from UST, exchanging in the US. We travelled to three places in the trip: Orlando, Miami, and Denver.

For the Orlando part, the main highlight was, without a doubt, the Disney part, which was not quite impressive either. I basically left the planning part of the trip for my friends, so I had to follow what they had planned. We chose Disney over Universal Studio for some reason. The whole thing at Orlando was called the “Disney World”, which comprises of a few “Disneylands”. We chose the particular Disneyland that resembles the one in Hong Kong, for some reason. Everything was essentially the same, except everything's bigger. We went to the Disney Waterpark the next day, which was a much better experience, because there is not a similar place in Hong Kong. The ticket price to enter any of the Disneylands is ridiculously high though.

As Orlando and Miami are pretty near and one of my friends had a international driver license, we drove for the transition. The only thing to highlight the Miami part is the beach part. As there are a lot of college students from different parts in the US gathering at Miami for the Spring Break. However, every single local student there works out a lot. Make sure

you have a great body before you go there. I do not have a great body, so I did not enjoy much.

We flew to the last stop of the trip – Denver at Colorado. We particularly focus our trip to Colorado Springs as we originally planned to ski. However, on the day we planned to ski, there was a hill fire so we went to hike on another mountain instead. The view was stunning. I would genuinely consider the days at Colorado Springs the best part of the whole US trip. In fact, I have never seen sceneries that amazing. I would definitely go there again.

### **April**

Here comes the project-assignment-intensive month. For the whole month, I literally just stayed at Bloomington and work on assignments and projects. To be honest, not much efforts are required as the level of intensity among IU students is much much lower than that at HKUST. I studied for the final exams just one or two days beforehand and still managed to be the top in my classes.

### **May**

The days in May were just the cleaning-up of the trip, including closing out the bank account, stopping the phone plan, cleaning up the apartment. Then I went to Europe to meet my other friends.

## ***General Exchange Information***

### **Visa procedure**

Fill in the application form online and make an appointment with the US Consulate. Make sure you bring all the required documents on your interview day, you would not want to go there again, as the location of the Consulate is pretty inconvenient. You could pay some of the fee at 7-11, please make sure you check which way you would deem the most convenient.

### **Orientation activities**

The IU office will organize a few orientation activities where you could meet other exchange students from different countries. I think you should really try to know them during those activities as it is always good to have companions when you want to find somebody to dine with during the exchange. Basically in the orientation activities, the office will brief you on the useful contacts and who to find when you encounter specific exchange issues, there would also be a mini campus tour.

### **Accommodation**

You have to apply for accommodation around a month before arriving at IU. The IU office would send you the contacts of the housing office at IU. As I mentioned before, I would definitely not recommend Evermann. Basically if you want to know more local students, please do opt for halls

instead of apartments, although halls are generally more expensive. You could also find a lot of other cheaper options which are private estates that are not regulated by IU, but overall they are dirtier as you might have to share your apartment with some very irresponsible roommates.

### **Courses Registration, Teaching & Assessment Methods**

Again, the IU office would send you a list of course offerings in the semester around one or two months before you arrive. You will then have to ask her for detailed syllabus on specific courses that you are interested. Most of the courses at IU require attendance-taking, so you do not really get to cherry-pick. Another point to note is that most of the courses are graded absolutely, i.e. your grade is independent of the performance of other students. Teaching methods at IU are very similar to those at HKUST, so I am sure all of you would quickly adapt to the environment.

PS Do consider taking a music class at IU, as the music school at IU is actually ranked no.1 in the world. I took a beginner piano course, and I would say it was indeed pretty fun.

### **Sports & Recreations Facilities**

The gyms at IU are much better than those at UST, do take this opportunity to enjoy the most advanced gym facilities.

### **Finance & Banking**

Most of the exchange students would open a bank account at Chase, so did I. Just bring your student ID, passport, and the initial capital you would like to put in the account, then the bank staff would do the rest. They are very helpful.

You will receive a debit card, similar to EPS in Hong Kong, basically everyone pays everything by debit card. But do reserve a bit of cash to put into your student ID so you could use it to do printing or use the washing machine at IU-operated halls or apartments.

### **Health & Safety and Transportation**

The insurance that UST offers for you has covered all the health insurance requirements at Indiana. If you are qualified for that insurance plan, please do not purchase the 1000-USD insurance that IU offers. Basically they will keep sending emails to you to ask you to confirm if your plan is valid, and trust me, it is valid.

There is a bus network at Bloomington, and if you have a IU student card, you do not have to pay any bus fee.

### **Food**

Food is very expensive in the US. I gave up eating out after a month because I used too much money. Buy some chicken breasts from Kroger, some eggs and bacon maybe, pasta would be good as well. If you somehow want to have instant noodles, there is an Asian market next to Kroger which definitely has everything that you want in Hong Kong, ranging from Indomie to all kinds of Chinese sauce.

### **Climate**

It is very cold in January and February, the temperature could be as low as -20 degrees Celsius, whereas it is pretty warm starting from March, with the max temp. being 26 degrees Celsius, as I remember.

### **Communication**

Well, English – of course.

## ***Items to bring***

As mentioned before, you will experience both warm and cold during the exchange period. Bring warm and easy clothes.

You do not need to bring any food from Hong Kong, you could essentially find everything at the Asian market.

## ***Useful Links and Contacts***

One.IU. (Classifieds) <https://one.iu.edu/task/iu/classifieds>

## ***Best Practices of Host University***

Free in-town transportation.