

EXCHANGE REPORT 2017

University of Southern California

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MONTHLY LOG

JANUARY

I arrived a few days ahead of orientation to check in at my apartment, and hang around with some friends. We briefly went to the supermarket (see General Info – Food) for some essentials, and some famous tourist spots including the Hollywood Boulevard and downtown LA.

Orientation was held on 7th which was a Saturday. Beside some routine registration processes, it provided plenty of opportunities for you to make friends, or at least say hi to other exchange students. Most of the compulsory registration you need to know will again be well informed by Sean, so no worries for that.

The first month was basically one with countless random, impromptu events, including visits to famous spots like Santa Monica (a very beautiful beach within 30 minutes from USC), Beverley Hills, Korea Town, Staples Center and more. We also went to some of the basketball games that USC played, which I highly recommend even for non-basketball fans just for the atmosphere and top-class sports level that USC is famous for.

We went for our first road trip near the end of January to San Francisco, visiting of course spots like Golden Gate Bridge, Google, the Big Sur and many others.

FEBRUARY

February was another exciting month with many trips. I went early on in the month to New York for a short trip, with other UST friends from all around the States. It was a remarkable experience with visits to the Empires State Building, the Statue of Liberty, 911 Memorial etc.

Not long after going back to LA, I didn't waste time and joined a skiing trip to Bear Mountain. It was only a 2-hour drive from USC and you would be surrounded by thick snow and skiing resorts, which is one of the most amazing things about LA.

Another remarkable experience for me was visiting a gun range. There are a number of them in town and would be easily found through Google. We tried out a number of fire arms and it was truly a unique experience that certainly wouldn't have been possible in Hong Kong.

I also visited must-go places including Disneyland, Universal Studios, the Potato Chip Rock, and various world-famous museums in LA.



Figure 1: Santa Monica Beach



Figure 2: USC basketball match



Figure 3: Golden Gate Bridge



Figure 3: Gun range tryout

MARCH

March was certainly another remarkable month as it was the spring break season. I went mainly to the East coast including Miami, Colarado, and Orlando.



Figure 4: Hiking trip during Spring Break

APRIL

Going to Coachella in April was one of the best decisions I made during my exchange. It is a 3-days-2-nights music festival with countless number of artists from around the world, including stars like Lady Gaga and Kendrick Lamar. It was actually quite expensive at around USD550 for me, excluding accommodation and travelling expenses, which was also something I concerned about before deciding. But personally it was definitely worthwhile and I was thankful for choosing to go ahead and join the event at last, for the once-in-a-lifetime experience and top-class performances.



Figure 5: Coachella

MAY

May was the exam season so a lot of group activities would be postponed to post-semester. I went to Boston for a trip anyway with some friends, visiting places like the Harvard University, marking the end of my exchange semester.



Figure 5: Harvard University

GENERAL INFO

VISA

A J-1 visa will be needed for exchange students. Sean, the exchange coordinator from USC will send a set of detailed instructions so there is nothing much to worry about. Simply remember to check the emails and read it THOROUGHLY, including details and due dates for various fees submission and registration.

ORIENTATION

There will be a number of compulsory orientation events for registration and networking. Of course there will also be plenty of self-initiated orientation events (parties) among exchange students. It's always nice to get to know as many people as you can for the first few weeks, as they will be the people you (mostly) hang out with throughout the semester.

ACCOMMODATION

I highly recommend Lorenzo, a private student housing complex near USC. You would rent a bed space in either a 2x2 apartment (meaning a shared living room, with 2 rooms, each accommodating 2 persons) or a 3x3. The facilities at Lorenzo are top-class, including swimming pools, a Jacuzzi, a gym, a theatre, a sand volleyball court and more. There will also be free shuttle bus service to the campus/ downtown LA.

Although it is considered as quite pricey, the rental fee for Lorenzo is only at around the higher end of the price range for university housing, which is nothing near the resort-like experience that Lorenzo provides.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

I mostly hung out with other exchange students, and occasionally with my local roommates (which is also a big reason to go for a shared apartment). The USC exchange group is actually very well organized with a few local students usually initiating some events/ visits, which include trips to Disneyland, museums and even road trips or skiing trips. So the only thing you need to worry about is not stepping out of the comfort zone.

One caveat however is that alcohol consumption in the States is limited to 21 or above, which is a problem for most of the exchange students (at least for a large part of the semester). So do pay attention to limitations for certain events, clubs or house parties, before joining.

SPORTS & RECREATION FACILITIES

Sports and recreation is one thing that you don't need to worry about in Los Angeles. You will never run out of options, with fitness and sports facilities all over the campus and the city (you will even see gym equipment at the beach), as well as all sorts of recreation including clubs and fraternity houses when you are in the mood, or museums and various tourist spots when you want to chill a little bit.

TRANSPORTATION

Despite being one of my favorite cities, Los Angeles has the worst public transportation system I've ever seen (this is mainly due to the historical background). There are essentially only a Metro (one or two lines even operate above ground unlike MTR in HK, which means they will be affected by traffic) and bus services, with frequent delays, inconsistent schedule and poor security.

What makes it more undesirable is the very well developed ride-sharing applications in LA, including Uber and Lyft, both of which have

a special feature called Car Pool option, which links you up with other passengers. This drives down the charge to a very low price, in some occasions even lower than taking public transport, making it a no-brainer for most of the travelling. On top of that, USC provides FREE UBER services after 7pm everyday, within a certain perimeter near the campus. It also runs its own 'campus cruiser' system, which is essentially an in-house free-of-charge cab service.

Another perhaps even more important thing is to get an international/US driving license (or make friends with someone who does). While it doesn't matter for everyday travelling, it makes a lot of difference for road trips, because driving is actually the only choice in most cases.

FOOD

The food price in LA is generally much higher than that in Hong Kong, despite being home to a (large) number of world-class restaurants, just Yelp or Google and it will be effortless. An alternative, if you want to save some money for travelling, is cooking at home. There is a supermarket near campus named Ralph's, which provide a discount card for free if you ask for it. If you go on the right day(s), you might even get very good bargains, e.g. steaks will be on (pretty ridiculous) sale for certain days of the week.

RECOMMENDED COURSES

Courses I took:

- DSO424: Business Forecasting
Recommended. *This is a quite useful course focusing on data application of the statistical software R. It includes popular models like ARIMA and Box-Jenkins model.*
- ECON318: Introduction to Econometrics
Recommended. Required course for ECON major, and a very useful one per se. It covers basics of econometrics, and is very math/stat heavy, so be prepared for that.
- FBE421: Financial Analysis and Valuation
NOT Recommended. Covers basics in financial valuation, which overlaps a little bit with the compulsory FINA course in UST. It however covers a little bit more in terms of real-life application like valuating a company as the final project. Not very well taught however, and the final group project was a mess because of the lack of effort by other students.
- MOR492: Global Strategy
Recommended. Quite interesting course if you are an outspoken person. Very intensive case studies every week, with a lot of interaction with the professor. One thing to notice is however the attendance requirement as there is only 2 quota of absence of the whole semester.

ITEMS TO BRING

1. DS-2019 form, and relevant Visa Materials.
2. Electrical adaptors
3. Swimsuit
4. Winter clothing, including water-proof ones if you want to going skiing.
5. Small hand carry suitcase