

EXCHANGE REPORT

HEC MONTRÉAL, CANADA



SPRING 2018
OR YIK TING

I. MONTHLY ACTIVITY LOG

DECEMBER

I arrived on the 28th December, and visited Boston about a few weeks before the mandatory orientation commence.

Prior to my arrival in Montréal, I had trouble in finding apartment to live for the spring semester. I joined the Facebook groups suggested by the school, and looked at the agent websites found on the school website. At last, I decided to choose one of the agents recommended by the school. It was private room in a shared apartment. Although it is not at a prime location of the city, considering that it only takes 10-15 minutes' walk to school, I thought it was the one for me. Later I learnt that there are a lot of subletting and vacant apartments in Montréal, and the best time of finding an apartment is usually around 2-3 months before moving in.

I took Uber from airport to the apartment, which took around 30 minutes. It was much easier than figuring out the metro system while taking your huge luggage, and no hassle for the tipping issue.

There is an exchange committee called HEChange who organized a series of orientation activities for exchange students. I joined their welcome week package (they actually organize activities throughout the semester). They organized a lot of fun activities and it was a great way to meet some new friends.

JANUARY

The spring semester started on 6th January. At first it was difficult to adjust for taking classes, as one lesson lasts for three hours. I also got a monthly metro pass (CAD49.75 unlimited ride on metro and buses per month, using student discount), which happened to be super convenient when traveling between school and downtown.

Then I went to open a bank account in RBC and sim card from Fido. RBC and Bank of Montréal are commonly seen in Montréal, some might prefer HSBC because of the convenience of remittance. Phone plans are quite expensive in Montréal, I paid for around CAD60 per month for the data and phone plan.

After I settled down, I went to the national park and tried ice fishing, hiked Mont-Royal and took a typical touristic photo of the view of Montréal, and joined some activities organized by HEChange.

FEBURARY

A friend from Toronto came to visit me, and we discovered many decent restaurants in Montréal. I spent weeks going to those restaurants and had some of the best dishes in my life.

I also went to Igloofest, one of the iconic festivals in Montréal and a must-do winter activity. It was truly a unique experience to enjoy music along with the crowd and coldness. I also discovered some other places in Montréal – the Old Port, Jean-Talon market and Atwater market.

MARCH

At the beginning of March, I visited Quebec City and tried winter outdoor spa and dogsledding. It was really fun to interact with the huskies and I even held one baby husky in my arms!

After the midterm exams, I also visited Vancouver and Seattle. The first time of stepping into the America boarder from Canada. However, there was a problem when I crossed the border. The US visa I applied in Hong Kong did not work when going to the US from the Canada border. They required another document to cross the border between US and Canada, luckily the process was quick and can be made on the spot with a small fee.

APRIL

In April, a high school friend joined me in Montréal and we went to Toronto and Niagara Falls. We bought the adventure pass package and it was incredibly fun – stunning view of the Niagara Falls from the boat, and even walked behind the fall to get a closer look.

After the Toronto trip, I was busy at preparing for projects and final exams. My exams finished at the end of April and I went on a road trip to the US with my friend afterwards.

II. GENERAL EXCHANGE INFORMATION

VISA PROCEDURES

For HKSAR passport holders, visa is not required for people who stay for less than six months. However, you will need to apply for eTA (Electronic Travel Authorization) online. Also, remember to bring the admission letter issued by HEC Montréal when going through the Canadian Custom. You may also want to apply for US visa before coming to Canada.

ORIENTATION ACTIVITIES

There is a group of student committees called HEChange. They organize activities like trips to Quebec City/Boston/Cuba, parties at night, etc. You will receive an invitation to their Facebook group and be notified of any upcoming orientation activities. Their activities take place throughout the semester and some activities like outbound trip would be required to purchase tickets in advance.

ACCOMMODATION

As mentioned above, I rented a room from an agent suggested by the school. There are plenty of resources to look for accommodation, like Facebook groups and agents like Get Your Place, Student Flat, Student Housing Mtl and Irie Location. Although Université de Montréal does offer dormitory for HEC students, they use only French to communicate so it would be hard to get a place at there.

Compared to subletting apartments offered in Facebook groups, agents are generally relatively expensive and some apartments might not up to your expectations. I would suggest to search at Facebook groups or Airbnb 2-3 months before arriving in Montréal. You can arrive 1-2 weeks before the orientation day and visit the apartment before confirming your rental.

COURSE REGISTRATION

HEC Montréal uses a very similar course registration system as HKUST. Normally course syllabus can be found on their website so you could get a picture of what the course is about and prepare for credit transfer application. For new courses, you may contact their coordinator and request to have the course syllabus.

Generally, courses are fairly easy to register. As exchange student has the privilege to register first and English-medium courses usually have vacancies.

TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT METHODS

From my personal experience, I would say HEC Montréal adopts a relatively casual way to interact with students, and they encourage students to actively participate in class and build relationships with the lecturers. Most of the classes I took weight quite heavily in class

participation than HKUST, which includes attendance and contribution. Other than class participation, it is very close to what you would experience in HKUST – 1 or 2 midterms, projects or essays, and final exams.

SPORTS & RECREATION FACILITIES

HEC Montréal does not have sports facilities at their campus. They share a sports center with UdeM which is called the CEPSUM. It is a comprehensive sports center which you might enjoy all sorts of sports there, e.g. swimming, table tennis, badminton and even offer free classes. However, in order to use the gym facilities, you would have to pay for premium. I purchased a 4-month pass with student discount, which costed me around CAD90 including tax. Depending on your neighborhood, there might be better choices operating by other companies to save up some money.

FINANCE & BANKING

There are quite a lot of banks available in Montréal and across Canada. The most commonly seen ones are RBC, Bank of Montreal, TD Canada or even HSBC will do. It would be great to only bring enough money to pay for your expenses in the first few weeks, then open a bank account in Montréal. You may ask your family members to transfer money into your local bank account, note that there could be a remittance fee. To open a bank account in Montréal, you have to bring along your passport and admission letter to visit a local branch (or even better, buy a sim card before you open a bank account so that they can contact you). You may get a debit card from the bank and use that for your daily spending. Paying tax is another important thing to know before coming to Montréal, normally you would have to expect 15% tax and 15% tips for eating at restaurants.

Costs/expenses (approx..)	
1. HEChange	CAD 279
2. Compulsory insurance	CAD 355
3. STM monthly pass (metro and buses)	CAD 49.75 per month
4. Groceries	~CAD 100 per month
5. Mobile plan	~CAD 60 per month

HEALTH & SAFETY

There is a mandatory health insurance which you have to pay around CAD 355 during the welcome week, by debit or credit card only. I have never really used it but from what I know it covers your medical expenses in Canada and the US.

FOOD

There are quite a lot of quality restaurants in Montréal, and different cuisines are available. However as mentioned above, the tax and tip would make dining out quite expensive as you would have to pay around 30% on top of what you ordered at the restaurant. It would be better to do some groceries shopping and cook it yourself.

TRANSPORTATION

STM Montréal offers discounted monthly pass for students, which costs around CAD50 per month. You will have to apply an OPUS card in order to be qualified for the student discount, and it can be used in metro and most of the buses. Uber and Téo taxi are also commonly used in Montréal.

CLIMATE

Climate is a huge deal in Montréal. It is probably colder than other main cities in Canada, for what I have experienced as low as -20 degrees Celsius and snowstorms. It is manageable though, because most of the time you would be staying indoor where heaters are available. It is better to have a good quality coat and snowshoe than having layers and layers of cloth.

COMMUNICATION

For most of the locals you meet in Montréal, their first language is French. But they are mostly bilingual so communication is not a problem. Learning a few essential French phrases would always help. You may consider taking Business French course in HEC Montréal.

III. ITEMS TO BRING

- ☐ Passport (with eTA and/or US visa)
- ☐ Admission letter issued by HEC Montréal
- ☐ Cash (HKD, CAD)
- ☐ Credit card
- ☐ Winter clothes (big coat, snowshoe, scarf, gloves, etc)
- ☐ Other clothes (t-shirts, smart casual, underwear, towel, socks, flip flop, etc)
- ☐ Laptop and charger
- ☐ Adapter
- ☐ Umbrella (often rains in April)
- ☐ Medicine

IV. USEFUL LINKS AND CONTACTS

Canada eTA Application

<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/visit/visas-result.asp?country=HK>

Pre-arrival guide provided by HEC Montréal

http://www.hec.ca/en/international_student/international_exchange/pre-arrival_guide/

HEC en ligne (similar to HKUST student center, remember to use the English version)

<https://enligne.hec.ca/psp/GAPET/HEL/HRMS/?cmd=login&languageCd=ENG&>

Zonecours (similar to HKUST Canvas system, remember to switch to English version)

<https://zonecours2.hec.ca/>

STM transportation <http://www.stm.info/en/info/networks/metro>

MTL Blog <https://www.mtlblog.com/>