

# EXCHANGE REPORT

CORNELL UNIVERSITY

## 2018 SPRING EXCHANGE REPORT

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TIN TSZ WANG CHEVAN

BBA (GBUS & FINA)



# MONTHLY LOG

## JANUARY

Ithaca | NYC

I arrived at Cornell on 17 January, about one week before school starts, to explore the small town. And indeed it is really, really, really small. It is like Narnia when I arrived, deserted and freezing. As the backbone of the economy of the town is education, it is normal that during holidays the town is pretty much dead. (so I'd suggest you not to arrive too early.)

But man, Ithaca is gorgeous. Imagine it's Narnia with all the gorges. And as Cornell is on the hills, it has a 360 view over the whole Ithaca, as well as some of the Finger Lakes region. To be honest I was amazed every sunset (probably just because I'm a sunset person). So don't worry about the study pressure, at least you got some stunning views.



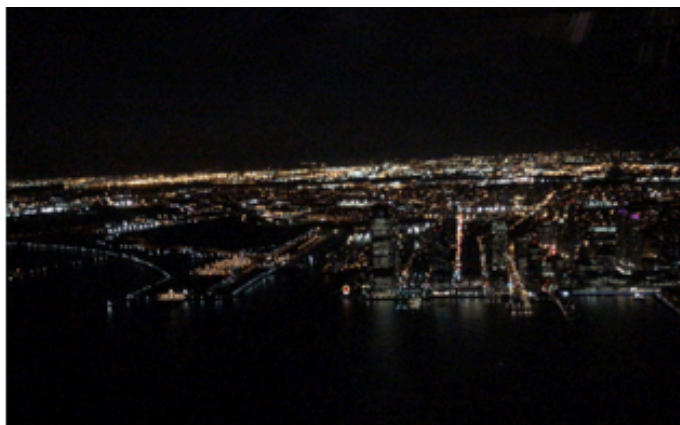
Then I explored around for a few days and orientation started. I met exchange students from all over the world. I also met some exchange students from Hong Kong who later became my closest friends. And of course, my flat mate also arrived at the house. Glad that he is a very nice and friendly German who happens to study Business as well.



And then school starts, the courses were not really that difficult except real estate finance which I did not know anything about it before. Also I had 2 day-offs every week so it was pretty chill.



In late January, I took a 4.5-hour bus ride to NYC to meet my brothers Tony and John, who were exchange students in UPenn. Of course the trip was to celebrate Tony's birthday! We went to all tourist spots in 2 days and had a really great time together. And there went a lovely January.



## FEBRUARY

Ithaca | Asheville | NYC

The most exciting thing about February had to be joining the Glee Club. They are amazing singers! I passed two rounds of auditions, and happened to be the only 6 members to get in this semester. We have rehearsals every Wednesday night and Sunday afternoon, focusing on our tour pieces and vocal trainings. Those were really professional vocal trainings and amazing pieces to perform with such talented group of singers. I would say it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity joining such prestigious singing group of 150 years of history. And I can't wait for the Glee Tour in April!



We have our Spring break during mid-Feb, and I went on a solo trip to the wilderness of Asheville, North Carolina. I tried Couchsurfing for the first time, where the host would let you stay at his/her house for free and typically make a lot of great recommendations for my journey. And very fortunately, she was a really, really nice host, with a big and cozy house and a lovely dog. She even brought me to hike and rock climbing with her friends. I was a really unforgettable experience, especially when I got lost in the woods hiking alone. But sometime we just have to be lost to find, and it was a really overwhelming moment for me when I finally found my way out. Of course, I fulfilled my dream singing in a local bar in an open-mic event in Asheville and cooperated with an ex-Nvay who played the guitar for me!



## MARCH

Ithaca | Washington D.C.

The workload from my courses were actually light (as long as you are aiming at getting a pass :P), and that's why March was not bad. I was playing in the bowling league with several other exchange students from Singapore, Norway, and U.K. every week, eventually coming third as a team, and an individual championship for myself.





Then I grabbed a rideshare and headed to solo travel in Washington D.C. one weekend. To be honest, D.C. was one of my favorite cities in the U.S. The National Mall area was simply amazing, as the State Capitol, Washington Monument, Tidal Basin and all museums were all around there. I have enjoyed the lovely architectures, the rich knowledge from museums (FREE ENTRY), and of course some amazing sunsets (told you I'm a sunset person :P). Another highlight was staying in a hostel for the first time, I have met people from all walks of life, Filipino mechanical engineer in NASA, Law drop-out pursuing real estate, Japanese student studying in Shanghai, Mexican software developer who quitted and decide to travel around the world, etc. I think that's the magic of staying in a hostel. It was truly eye-opening and made me reflect on all kind of possibilities of my future and what I truly want to do.



# APRIL

Ohio | Indiana | Illinois | Wisconsin | Michigan | Ithaca | Washington D.C.

April was crazy. Glee Club Great Lakes Tour began on the 31<sup>st</sup> March and over the 10 days of tour, we went across 5 states to perform at different locations to different audience. It was a wild journey and now I couldn't believe we actually did that when I come to think about it. Bringing several sets of attire, rehearsing before the show, grabbing the 1-hour gap between rehearsal and show time to travel around the place, singing and laughing all along the bus ride... This tour has strengthened my bonding with my fellow Glee Clubbers, and exposed me to an absolutely world-class choir with amazing discipline and musicianship. I have improved my singing techniques and got used to performing at different places, with very limited time to get familiar with the venue. I have also made a lot of good friends from different parts of the world who share the same passion in singing and music as I do, which was really, really precious. After the tour, I went to Washington D.C. again, this time for the cherry blossom. My friend and I really enjoyed the time there.



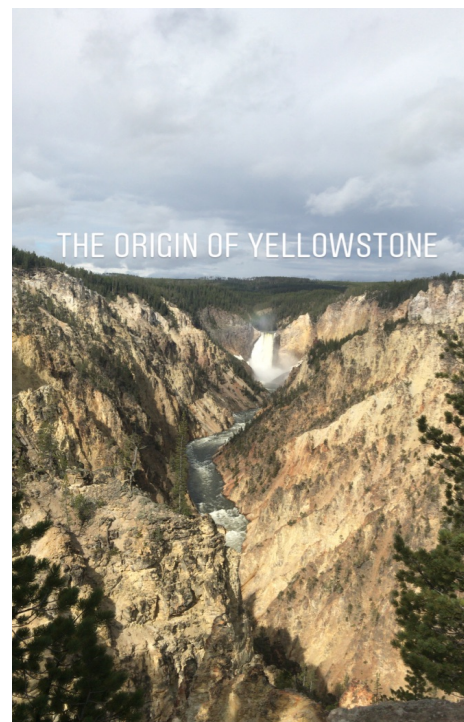




## MAY

Orlando | The Bahamas | Havana | Los Angeles | Las Vegas | NYC | Wyoming | Montana

Semester ended in early May, and my wild trip began. I went to Orlando to enjoy Magic Kingdom and Animal Kingdom. After spending 3 days in Orlando, I went to the Bahamas for some sunshine & beaches. It has the friendliest people and the clearest beaches, I would definitely go back again if I have the chance. After another 3 days in the Bahamas, I went to Havana. It was a wonderful experience, if not the most unforgettable one. We were led by a local tour guide, who found us local accommodation, 1958 classic convertible, and told us about the terrible economy and corruption problems in Cuba. However, given these harsh political and economic environments to stay in, Cuba also had the friendliest people, who were genuinely passionate to everyone. I also got to ride on horsebacks, visit cigar farms, and enjoy dishes and dishes of local cuisine (Gosh they were amazing.) After spending 4 days in Havana, my family came and we went to NYC, LA, Grand Canyon and Las Vegas. To be honest, after the first one or two times, NYC could be pretty boring, and LA could be really scary if you stepped into the wrong neighborhood. Las Vegas was an amazing sin city indeed, pity I was not 21 yet... My last stop was Yellowstone National Park, which was breathtaking. All those wildlife, geysers, rivers, mountains... It all added up to be a perfect symphony of nature. I would say Yellowstone is a must go!





# **EXCHANGE INFO.**

## **1) Visa Procedures**

The entire procedure takes about 1.5 month so make sure you reserve plenty of time. The exchange program director will tell you everything you need. Make sure to check clearly if there are any typos or wrong information once your visa documents are sent to UST SBM office by Cornell. You will then need to pay the SEVIS fee, fill in the online visa application form, and reserve an interview time slot with the US consulate. After the interview, you can pick up your passport there or in any SF Express deliver center. For my case, the passport was ready in 2 days. During the passport verification in orientation, you will obtain a travel signature on your DS-2019 form that allows you to travel outside the United States during your exchange semester.

## **2) Orientation Activities**

From time to time you will receive emails about updates on orientation activities. If you are in CALS, there will constantly be mingling and fun activities for exchange students to know each other, like pizza night, bowling night etc.

## **3) International Services & Activities**

You can always find help from the CALS exchange program office through email, in person, or through Facebook messaging the program director. There is also the International Students Office in charge of all activities.

## **4) Accommodations**

I lived in university off-campus housing in Collegetown Terrace, where most international exchange students stayed. It is a luxurious hotel-like complex cooperatively run by external organization and Cornell. There are 2 rooms in each flat, an open kitchen, oven, 2 toilets, washing machine, dish washer basic stuff like bed and cupboards, and a wonderful gym. However, as it is off-campus, it doesn't come with the West Dining Hall meal plan. If I would go again, I would definitely apply for West Campus dorms, simply because the food there is extraordinary, and the cost covered food so it's much cheaper.

## **5) Course Registration**

The course registration system is basically the same as UST's. You can just login to student centre and there you can register for classes. Just Google Cornell Course timetable and you can find the course catalog. You can always drop or swap classes during the first 2 weeks of school.

## **6) Finance & Banking (including currency / expenses)**

I would recommend opening a bank account and deposit cash with one of the major retail banks once you arrived at the States, namely Bank of America, Chase Bank, or Credit Union. It is hard to give an accurate breakdown of my spending in the semester, and it would not be applicable to everyone too as everyone has different dining and spending habit, which also highly depends on your travelling schedule. In general, dining is more expensive than in HK – a meal costs \$6-10 on campus and over \$15 in restaurant (there is a ~9% tax and it is a courtesy to give >15% tips). There are also meal plan options that the International Students Office will send you.

## **7) Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities**

There will be an Involvement Fair in the first week of class where you can know more about different clubs and societies on campus. For me, I joined the Glee Club, which is also the music course that I was taking. We have rehearsals every Wednesday nights and Sunday afternoons, and a few concerts over the semester. I also joined their spring tour to perform in 6 different states. Hong Kong Students Association is a good pick too.

## **8) Health & Safety**

Medical cost in US is incredibly expensive, so all exchange students are required to purchase a health insurance (Julia will tell you more about that). That would cover most expenses at Cornell Health. Regarding to safety, Cornell is a really safe neighborhood so don't really worry about the safety here.

## **9) Food**

There are many dining options on campus, mostly in dining halls. One of the favourite hobbies for me and my friends is to taste as many dining halls as possible. As there is an app about what food each dining hall is offered every day, it was always very exciting to bounce between dining halls. And that's why having a dorm in West Campus is very, very important.



## **10) Transportation**

Public transportation system in Ithaca is not as well-developed as Hong Kong, but as an exchange student, you would be granted free TCAT bus services. Other than that Uber and Lyft can take you anywhere in Ithaca. But outside Ithaca, if you want to travel, try Zimride, it's a rideshare platform of the Cornell community. You may be able to find drivers going to NYC, Boston, Washington D.C., or even Toronto depends on your luck. Otherwise, Ourbus is the best way to travel to NYC, 4.5 hours ride.

## **11) Climate**

It literally snowed 80% of the days, so be prepared about the chilly weather.

## **12) Communication**

There are several huge telecommunication network providers you can choose from, such as AT&T, Verizon or T-mobile. However, T-mobile offers a better coverage in NY and major cities, with family plan which significantly lowers the cost if you register an account with several friends. However, in rural areas such as Yosemite National Park the reception is very bad. There is Wi-fi everywhere on campus but the connection is often so bad I had to use my data to complete online assignments.

## **13) What to bring**

- Passport, DS-2019 form (and copies of them)
- Business suits
- Electrical adaptors
- Personal laptop, camera
- Sunglasses and hats
- Swimsuits and thicker clothing (for travelling to colder areas)
- Money (you can always buy things you forget to bring)