

Exchange Report

Spring 2024

City, University of London
United Kingdom

LAM Yu Hei

Monthly Activity Log

Write a log of one paragraph for each month highlighting some of your interesting exchange experiences, activities, impressions & places of interest. Please describe your study, learning and life experience. This section should be at least 600 words long.

January

I arrived in London in late January. The weather is super cold and dry compared to Hong Kong. I studied four finance courses at Bayes Business School, including corporate risk, real estate finance, banking institutions, and foreign exchange. I intentionally chose the courses for Monday and Tuesday, so I only had to attend classes two days a week, as I would like to reserve more time to travel around Europe during my exchange. The lecturers at Bayes Business School usually have a lot of real-life working experience in the finance world, which is quite different from HKUST, where our professors usually focus on academic research throughout their entire careers. As a result, the knowledge and the syllabus are more aligned with the needs of business students.

As I still needed to settle down, I did not travel to other places, so I stayed in London in January. I only visited some London landmarks, such as the British Museum, Big Ben, and Buckingham Palace. I usually cook for myself after realizing that the cost of living in London is so high. Since my dorm is located in Zone 1, the cost of living is even higher, and the nearby supermarkets are M&S and Waitrose, which sell higher quality daily products and food at higher prices. However, I enjoy shopping at Waitrose and M&S as the food quality is so high, and it is worth the price. I bought lots of dairy products such as milk, yoghurt, and cheese; the quality is very high and super cheap compared to Hong Kong.

February

I visited Brighton, a southern city in the UK located about 1.5 hours away from London by train. Brighton is a coastal city known for its fantastic seafood and relaxed atmosphere, making it a nice change of pace from bustling London.

I had the exciting opportunity to visit Iceland. The weather was extremely cold and the ground was covered in snow and frozen ice, making it quite slippery. The icy winds made it feel even colder, and I found it necessary to wear gloves to keep my hands from feeling uncomfortable and freezing. Despite the frigid temperatures, the breathtaking views in Iceland made it an unforgettable experience. Everything was blanketed in white, creating a serene and isolated atmosphere. The Gullfoss waterfall and the ice cave were some of the most spectacular landmarks I visited. I also had the chance to visit the lagoons in Iceland, including the Blue Lagoon and the Sky Lagoon. The hot spring water in the Blue Lagoon was uniquely blue, and experiencing a hot spring in such a freezing environment was quite charming.

I celebrated Chinese New Year in London's Chinatown. I had "yum cha" with other exchange students from Hong Kong. It was a unique experience for me because even though I wasn't in my hometown, I didn't feel lonely. There were so many Chinese and foreigners celebrating Chinese New Year in Chinatown, and it made me feel very touched and happy.

March

I went to Italy with exchange friends in March, and we visited Milan, Florence, and Venice. I wouldn't recommend visiting Italy in March due to the bad weather; there was little sunshine and a lot of rain. We were disappointed with the views in Italy, especially in Venice. My favourite city was Florence because of its rich history and numerous art museums. Milan is a great place for shopping; we bought luxurious bags for our moms. Unfortunately, we missed our train to Florence and had to find a hotel for an extra night's stay.

I also visited Seven Sisters, which is a very famous viewpoint in the UK. It is located near Brighton. It's a bit of a pity that there is always no sunshine in the UK and it's super windy, so the camera cannot capture the beauty of the place.

In mid-March, I visited my friend in Durham and toured the filming location of the Harry Potter movie. Durham University is particularly meaningful to me because I received an offer from them three years ago, although I ultimately chose HKUST.

April

I travelled to Paris and Belgium in April. Due to budget constraints, I took a bus to Paris. The bus journey involved going to the port, boarding a ship, and crossing the English Channel to arrive in France. The trip was quite long and tiring, taking around 8-10 hours from London to Paris.

The local food in Paris was much better than in the UK; the duck legs and snails were particularly delicious. The Eiffel Tower and Versailles were beautiful, making Paris a romantic city.

Belgium was a very relaxed place to visit, with no specific viewpoints to see, so my days there were spent leisurely walking around the city. It felt like a place where you didn't need to bring a camera, as there were few iconic landmarks to capture. Due to the limited viewpoints in Belgium, I also took a day trip to Luxembourg, exploring this small country.

I attended a party organized by the school when I returned to London. Most of the participants were US exchange students. During the party, I met two lovely Korean girls who were also exchange students, as well as some US students.

In mid-April, I visited the Van Gogh museum in the Netherlands. The audio tour was very informative, and I recommend it for learning more about the artwork. Many people enjoy visiting the artificial flower park in the Netherlands, but I don't recommend it because it's fully commercialized and not a natural view. While there, I bought many Miffy products as I am a big fan of Miffy.

I visited Stockholm for a two-day trip after going to the Netherlands. It's a very safe and peaceful city, with not many prominent landmarks, but the subway art is quite special. Even though it was a solo trip, one of my friends who is doing an exchange program in Stockholm usually joins me in my itinerary. I came and stayed alone in Stockholm, so I chose a youth hostel. It was my first time staying in a youth hostel, but I'm glad that the hostel is super clean and my roommates are quiet.

In late April, I visited Berlin and Copenhagen. The old concentration camp site is really worth a visit. It's important for the new generation to learn about the sorrowful history. Copenhagen is a super chill city. Walking around Nyhavn and taking a boat tour made me feel super relaxed.

May

After completing two alternative assessments in place of the final exam, I traveled to Malta, Spain, and Portugal in May. Malta is an attractive place with a mix of European and African architectural styles, characterized by yellow buildings and stunningly blue seas. The island of Comino is the most beautiful place in Malta with its crystal-clear waters, although we didn't swim there due to the still chilly weather in May.

From Malta, I headed directly to Barcelona where I visited the awe-inspiring Sagrada Familia, a splendid church and the most beautiful one I've ever seen. Gaudi's architectural work is truly outstanding, and the gasps of amazement upon entering the church were a testament to this. I also attended my first ever football match in Barcelona, despite not being a football fan, it was a good experience.

In Spain, I also visited Seville, which is a stunning city, especially enjoying the Plaza de Espana where my friends and I could relax and chat, and the vibe was really chilled. Seville had fewer tourists compared to Barcelona, allowing for a better immersion into Spanish life.

Finally, in Lisbon, the signature yellow trams were a notable feature, but there were not many surprises. Unfortunately, I didn't enjoy the traditional egg tarts there as much as the ones I've had at KFC.

In late May, I traveled to Southern France, visiting Marseille and Nice. While many people praise the region, I have a different opinion. Nice has beautiful blue waters and a relaxed atmosphere, but not really special and unique. During my visit to Marseille, I hiked to Calanque de Marseille across a perilous mountain without any safety equipment, and the view was not really stunning.

June

While completing my final alternative assessment, I spent a whole week in London and also visited Windsor, Oxford, and Cambridge. In my opinion, Oxford and Cambridge are not worth visiting for tourists as they are university towns with nothing special to offer. However, Windsor is definitely worth a visit. The audio tour there is very helpful for learning about UK history. I particularly enjoyed my time in London, where I visited parks such as Regent Park and Hyde Park. I enjoyed observing the animals like ducks, swans, and other birds that I cannot name. Feeling the chill in London, I spent a day sitting in a cafe with just a book and a cup of coffee, without using my phone. I enjoyed the blend of hustle and chill in London, as well as the mix of modern and classic elements.

During my time traveling throughout Europe, I didn't spend much time studying because the workload was limited and I had plenty of spare time. While in London, I cooked a lot, often preparing Sichuan cuisine such as hot spicy boiled beef; cooking served as a form of mental therapy for me.

Please briefly describe the visa application procedures, including

1) Type of passport/travel document you are holding

2) Type of visa you are required

3) Required documents

4) Visa fees

- 1) HKSAR passport
- 2) No need for any Visa
- 3) Not available
- 4) Not available

As the exchange program is within 6 months, no visa is required for HKSAR passport holders.

What are the course(s) that you have enrolled at the host institution?

1. Corporate Risk Management
2. Real Estate Finance and Funding
3. Banking and Financial Institutions
4. International Finance

Please briefly describe the course registration procedures, such as

1) When did you receive the course registration details

2) What is the course registration procedures

3) Where can you access information related to course registration (e.g. websites)

1. around 2 months before the exchange program
2. there was an online zoom meeting for introduction and a system given for course registration

3. the host institution sent the information through email.

Where did you live during the program?

Off-campus student dormitory offered by the host institution

Please briefly describe the accommodation at the host destination, including

1) What type of accommodation

2) What is the application procedures (If you are staying at accommodation offered by the host institution)

3) How did you search for the accommodation and where did you book your accommodation (If you need to arrange your own accommodation)

4) Facilities in the accommodation

1) It is a third-party-operated dorm for university students

2) wrote an email to the host institution for dorm application

3) no need search

3) laundry room

Please briefly describe the health and safety support provided at the host institution, including

1) Whether there is health centers or clinics available on campus

2) Any safety matters that you are concerned about

1) not really sure because I never took these supports.

2) I was not worried at all, just be careful of the theft.

Finances

How much did you spend (in HKD) on the following items? (Please input "0" if not applicable to you)

Air ticket between the place of departure and destination (round trip)

HKD 10,000

Accommodation (for the entire study abroad period)

HKD 41,000

Program fee (if applicable)

HKD 21,050

Personal expenses

HKD 100,000

Others, please specify

N/A

My Top 3s

Please share with students some of your top 3s. If it is best to provide the information in the language of the host destination, please do so, but provide an explanation in English.

Courses at the host institution

International Finance

Real Estate Finance and Funding

Banking and Financial Institutions

Favourite Food

Chinese food in China Town

Spanish cuisine

French cuisine

Hang-outs places on campus

Library
coffee shop
garden

Must-dos in the city

Hyde Park
Selfridge
China Town

Not-to-dos in the city

No luxury on street
No phone and wallet on street
No vaping and smoking

Useful local apps or websites

Shein
Waitrose
Boots

Words to describe my study abroad experience

fruitful
exciting
busy