

Report on Internship Experience in Hong Kong

July 3, 2023, to August 11, 2023

Department: Applied Biology and Chemical Engineering

Application Process

In January 2023, I applied through the IAESTE platform, and a month later, I received an offer for a Research Intern position at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University's analytical laboratory from IAESTE Hong Kong.

For the application, I needed the following documents:

- Motivation letter
- Resume (in English)
- Transcript of Records (in English)
- Current enrollment certificate (in English)
- English language proficiency certificate
- Passport

After submitting my application to the IAESTE HK, I had to wait for the university's admission letter to apply for a visa.

In April, I received my admission letter via email from the IAESTE committee in Hong Kong. I then prepared the necessary documents for the visa and forwarded them to the IAESTE Hong Kong committee, which handled the visa application.

Within 2-3 weeks, I had to submit the following:

- Confirmation of Acceptance (N/5-b) + Insurance and Liability Policy
- Insurance certificate (DAAD Tarif 720/A)
- Training Visa Application Form – ID 992A (Fee approximately 230 HKD ≈ 28 EUR)
- Passport photo
- Proof of Financial Support:
 1. Personal bank account statement in English over the last 3 months with an average savings amount of more than 2000 USD
 2. Letter of Financial Support from parents declaring their support for your expenses in Hong Kong, including a copy of birth certificates, parents' passports, and parents' bank statements

Pro Tip: Banks may be hesitant about translating documents into English, but visiting them in person with prepared documents often helps. You can also request a sample letter from IAESTE HK.

- Letter of Confirmation of student intern (Form for your own university to fill out, best to forward to the International Office of your university and department and ask for it.)

The process took longer than expected due to missing documents (English (!) bank statement and Confirmation Letter from my own university). However, I managed to submit them in time, and I received my visa through IAESTE Hong Kong at the end of June, a few days before my departure. Therefore, it's advisable to start looking for flights a few weeks (preferably a few months) in advance, with the option to cancel or change, as prices can quickly increase.

Important Pre-Departure To-Do's

Before your trip, make sure to:

- Complete the Personnel Record Form (provided shortly before departure by IAESTE HK) and bring a passport photo for the first day.
- Have a Visa or Mastercard, and pack some Euros just to be sure. I had some trouble in the first day with mine. You can exchange money at exchange offices in Mongkok.
- Get an ISIC (International Student Identity Card) as some museums offer discounts with it.
- Consider vaccinations for Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Tetanus, Diphtheria, Polio, Typhus, Rabies, and Japanese Encephalitis (transmitted by mosquitoes in summer). You can seek reimbursement from your health insurance.
- Bring medical supplies: anti-diarrhea and constipation medication, cough medicine, pain relievers, cooling gel, insect bite treatment, electrolytes, disinfectant, band-aids
- Bring cosmetics like makeup, deodorant, shampoo, toothpaste, as these can be relatively more expensive in Hong Kong than in Germany. Low-foaming laundry detergent is also useful due to frequent washing of clothes because of the high humidity.
- If you don't want to use dorm bedding (which costs around 10-13 Euros in the dorm), bring your own. I brought a small pillow and a duvet cover, which was sufficient given the humidity.
- Carry a good umbrella and a quality raincoat since sudden rain showers are common.
- Pack lightweight clothing for summer, such as linen and cotton.
- Bring a well-insulated water bottle; cold water is much more comfortable in the heat.
- Install useful apps like Google Maps, Hong Kong Observatory, City Mapper, Openrice, Drops, Splitwise, and get an adapter and a reliable power bank with already built in cables for different phone types.
- Optionally, some small gifts for hosts or friends.

Arrival and Accommodation

A few days before my arrival in Hong Kong, my Study Helper from the Polytechnic University of Hong Kong and the IAESTE HK Team contacted me to answer questions and coordinate the pickup. I landed at the airport on a Friday, the weekend before my internship started. I withdrew some money at the airport for food and transportation and I purchased a bus ticket at the ticket counter for my journey to Hung Hom, as it was the most cost-effective option (38 HKD \approx 4-5 €). Metro or taxi could be also an option but they are both more expensive. The bus ride takes about 90 minutes with the Airport Bus A21 to my accommodation. There I was met by my Study Helper, Waris, who was immensely helpful during my initial hours in Hong Kong. He assisted me in obtaining my SIM card, Octopus Card, cash, food, and more. Upon arrival at the dormitory, I paid for my six-week accommodation, including a deposit, and received my access card. Then, I was shown to my room. IAESTE Hong Kong organized accommodation for all interns in a student dormitory, which was a 15 to 20-minute walk from our workplaces.

The girls occupied the fourth floor of a 21-floor building, complete with a kitchen and dining area, while the boys were on the third floor. There were four double rooms with views of the swimming pool. Each room had a bed (be warned because they are really hard), cupboard, desk, shelves, and a fan. Bathrooms were shared with an adjacent room and included two sinks, a shower, and a toilet. Not all residents in the flats were IAESTE interns, but as far as I know, roommates were always IAESTE interns. We paid HK\$106 (\approx 12-13 €) per person per night for our stay. Additionally, we had the option to use air conditioning, which incurred additional charges based on usage. The dormitory provided kitchens, washing and drying machines on each floor, and various common rooms, including bigger washing and drying rooms for both genders, a study room, a swimming pool, a silent room, two gyms, a game room, a dance room, and more.



Abbildung 1: Shared Room and the view from my room at PolyU Student Halls of Residence (Hung Hom)

Given the summer heat, the swimming pool became one of our primary meeting points in the evenings. We also organized pizza and movie nights in the common area. I was very satisfied with the accommodation, and it was great that all the interns lived together, making it easy to stay connected. In the days leading up to the start of my internship, I explored the city and got to know my fellow interns.

Work

On my first day of work, the IAESTE HK team showed us our workplace and the university facilities, including the library and cafeteria. We were also issued Staff Cards for the duration of the internship to access the campus and library.

During my six-week internship, I had the privilege of working at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University within the Department of Applied Biology and Chemical Technology. Prior to starting, I had been in contact with my supervisor for 1-2 weeks to understand the specifics of my laboratory work and how best to prepare. Communication was in English, which posed no issues. For the chemistry field, having your own lab coat and safety goggles is helpful, but these can also be ordered there.

Long, breathable pants and shirts are advantageous for lab work, but there are air conditioning systems throughout the university, making it advisable to also carry a jacket. In the first week, we all had to complete safety-related online seminars for laboratory work. My work usually started around 9 or 10 a.m. and ended around 6 p.m., which sometimes made exploring Hong Kong challenging.

However, I had the opportunity to learn about the work of various employees, as well as Hong Kong's culture through them. They even invited me to join them for lunch during the internship. I also had the option to dine at the university cafeteria every day with the other interns, which was convenient as I didn't have to cook during the week.

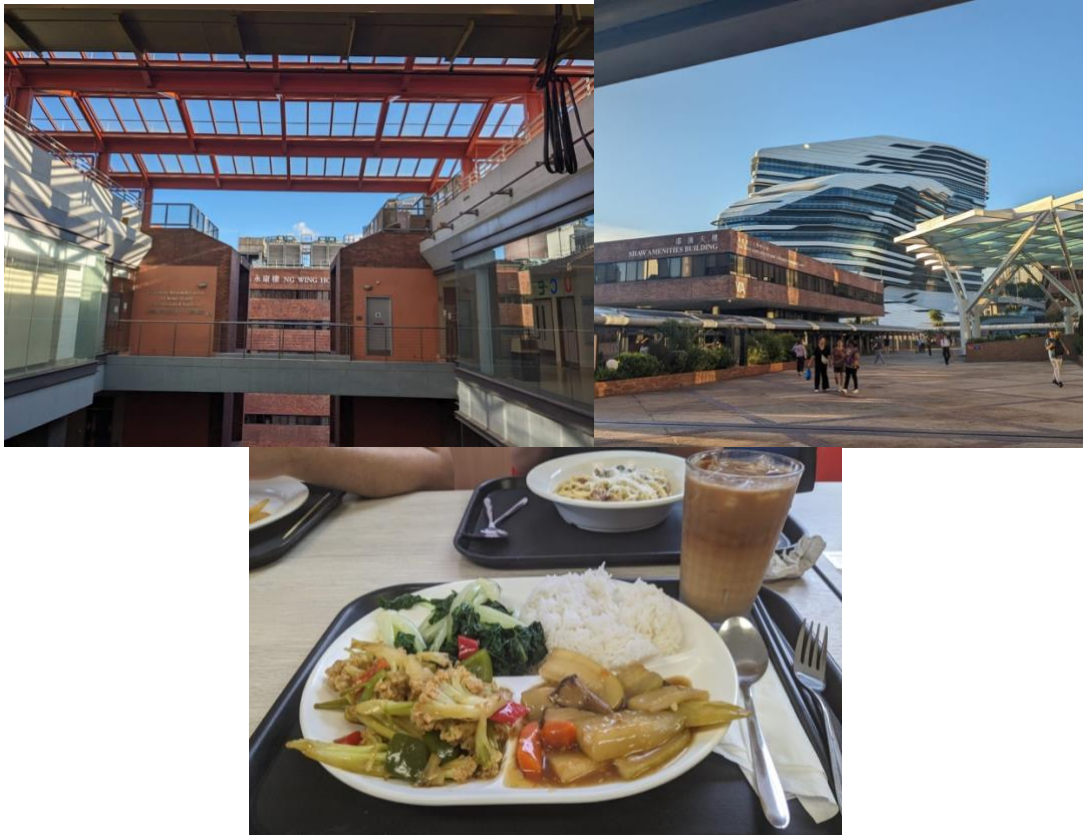


Abbildung 2: Departement of Applied Biology and Chemical Technology (left), Campus at PolyU Hongkong (right) and vegetarian food in the uni staff cantine

My focus during this **research internship** was primarily on the field of analytical chemistry. Specifically, I was involved in a project centered on the **synthesis and analysis of various structural hemiindigos as potent photoswitches**. The main goal was to reduce side reactions caused by harmful UV irradiation while enhancing signal penetration into biological tissues for applications in photomedicine. Working closely with a dedicated PhD student, our primary task was to identify the optimal compounds and solvents for irradiating these samples.

Throughout my internship, I had the opportunity to expand my skill set and explore various techniques related to the preparation and synthesis of these compounds. This project allowed me to gain hands-on experience with techniques such as UV-Visible spectroscopy, differential scanning calorimetry (DSC), and fluorescence spectroscopy. These experiences not only deepened my understanding of these analytical methods but also broadened my practical knowledge in the field of analytical chemistry.

While the subject matter of this internship did not align precisely with my primary area of interest, I found the entire experience to be incredibly enriching and fulfilling. Exposure to research, the collaborative environment, and the chance to learn from a dedicated research group were invaluable aspects of my time at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

Experience and Discover

Hong Kong is undoubtedly one of the most expensive places in the world for students to undertake an internship, primarily due to the very high rental costs. My stay was financed through four sources: DAAD scholarship, monthly salary from this internship, and personal savings. While it's possible to find slightly cheaper accommodation options (shared apartments), the cost of living in Hong Kong is generally high. In Hong Kong, cheap options for student can still be found; you just need to figure out how and where to find them. However, if you're not careful, expenses in Hong Kong can quickly add up. You can also find everything you're accustomed to in Germany and more. However, living and **eating locally** can be more cost-effective. Also for vegetarian food, it is also not easy to find! For vegetarian **food** I would look up some option on Openrice or try out in (in worst case) some indian restaurants. Wellcome and ParknShop are also good for basic groceries, and 7/11 stores are convenient for emergencies and are found everywhere. To access **internet** on my phone, I utilized the SoSim card I purchased at ParknShop, which cost approximately 33 HKD (as of June 2023) for a one-month plan with 50 GB of data.



Abbildung 3: Nan Lian Garden (left), Big Buddha (right) and View of HK from Victoria Peak (Bottom left)

Public Transportation is highly efficient in Hong Kong. An Octopus card is required for all public transportation and can be obtained at any 7/11 or MTR Metro station. The Octopus card cost 200 HKD (24 Euros), with 150 HKD credited. Metro fares range from 4 to 15 HKD depending on the distance traveled. It can be also used for restaurants and the convenient stores.

The **English proficiency** of Hongkongers varies widely. Some speak impeccable English, while others may not speak English at all. Consequently, communication could be challenging at times (especially if you don't speak Cantonese). Still, people are friendly and try to communicate using Google Translate or sign language, ultimately making understanding possible.

Hong Kong experiences very hot, humid, and unpredictable **weather** during the summer. Typhoons, storms, and extreme heat occur alternately. Therefore, it's advisable to always carry water bottles and an umbrella.

Then it is time to fully **explore the city**. The city itself is stunning and diverse, with a mix of nature and skyscrapers, offering countless things to explore. Even during my internship, I couldn't see everything, despite going on trips almost every day. In our free time, we organized and planned trips through our IAESTE Hong Kong WhatsApp group. We had a large group of interns from all over the world working at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, including people from Brazil, Thailand, Poland, Austria, India, Germany, Norway, Spain, Turkey, Slovakia, and Oman. We quickly became close as we were all in the same situation, arriving in a new country without knowing anyone. We made the most of every free moment to explore different parts of Hong Kong, including Macau, various beaches, and islands like Cheung Chau, Lamma Island, and Lantau Island. We also indulged in a wide variety of Hong Kong cuisine and the night scene. I made friends with incredible people from around the world and created unforgettable memories in Hong Kong. Some of these friends, I have already met and traveled with in different countries. I would also recommend extending your stay after the internship to explore and hike in different areas of Hong Kong like the Geopark and also visit various temples. It's worth it, and the dorm can accommodate an extended stay. I also had some time to explore the city alone and as a girl, **safety** is always a concern, but I felt comfortable walking alone in the city. With CCTV cameras everywhere, there's little need to worry about thefts or attacks.

For those who adapt to the city's rhythm, Hong Kong is truly lovable. You can reach the beach in ten minutes, enjoy beautiful hiking trails within minutes, shop to your heart's content, and have access to both Western products and living standards. Additionally, Hong Kong's strategic location makes it an excellent starting point for exploring Asia.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I am incredibly glad that I took the bold step of doing the internship in Hong Kong. Initially, I had reservations because I had originally planned to visit another country, and I had limited knowledge about Hong Kong. However, this journey allowed me to immerse myself in a different culture, enhance my English language proficiency, bolster my self-confidence, adapt to unforeseen challenges, and become more self-reliant and spontaneous. I also had the amazing opportunity to meet incredible people from all over the world and make unforgettable memories.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to IAESTE Darmstadt and IAESTE Hong Kong for their unwavering support throughout the entire preparation process and during the internship itself. IAESTE helped us secure our visas for our internships in Hong Kong and, when possible, sent them to us in advance. They also organized our accommodation in Hong Kong and provided on-site support. I felt welcomed from the very beginning and knew that I was not alone. Thank you for that!