

Summer in Asia

A Cansbridge Summer
in the Pearl of the Orient



(Left to Right): Met up with Queen's Commerce alumni passing by HK, Egg tarts are one of my favourite treats here, On a boat with colleagues, One of many amazing beaches in Hong Kong.

June 13 – August 5, 2011

There are those moments in life when you can't wipe that stupid grin off your face – well for the past 8 weeks I've had that permanent goofy grin. Thanks to the generous sponsorship and good will of Mr. William Yu & Ms. Diana Liu of Cansbridge Corporation, and the support of Queen's University I have truly had one of the most memorable experiences in my life thus far. I spent a summer working with in Hong Kong, and I would like to share my experience with you so you can discover your own special summer stories abroad in Asia.

I worked for Avantage Ventures, an impact investment advisory firm, focused on social enterprises (SEs) in Southeast Asia. While planning for this summer I knew I had a keen interest in social business and wanted to take advantage of this opportunity to get real experience working within this new, emerging asset class. It has been a phenomenal 8 weeks filled with unparalleled opportunities to undertake interesting projects, play an active role in refining our business model, and receive mentorship from my boss and CEO. Living in Asia also allowed me to develop an authentic, first-hand glimpse of the business climate and cultural lifestyle that no amount of news articles or books could ever give me.

FAQs

How did you manage to find a job?

Well let me just be blatantly honest and tell you that you have to work for it. I think I can speak for all the Cansbridge Fellows when I say we all researched tons of companies before finding our final employers. I would encourage you to think about what fields you are most interested in and then search for industry blogs, websites and forums to get started. As well if you or your friends are on exchange in Asia, tapping into local university networks can be a huge asset! (With that being said, don't let an exchange elsewhere deter you from applying for this program! I was on exchange in France while interviewing for my job via Skype). So you have to work for it, just like

you do for any job, and you have to be a little creative. Feel free to get in touch with us past Cansbridge Fellows if you need help! 😊

What if I don't speak the language?

You'll be really surprised at how universal English really is becoming around the world, most jobs only require English to be spoken in the business setting. That being said, when it comes to living in Hong Kong you can definitely get by with just English, particularly on Hong Kong Island, but part of the fun of being in a new culture is learning little words and phrases...here's a few to get you started (pronounced phonetically):

- Mm'goi – The most powerful word in Cantonese. You will use this to get the attention of waiters, thank people, get people to move so you can get out of the MTR...the list is endless! It means “thank you” in return for favours/service.
- Do jeh – Thank you in return for gifts.
- Hi – Yes
- Mm Hi –No
- Ho – Good
- Mm Ho- Not Good

See you're already on your way!

Was it tough to find housing?

Housing in Hong Kong, and more specifically affordable, temporary housing, is a little tricky to find however it is definitely possible and should not be a reason to deter you. A few other Cansbridge Fellows received housing from their employers, and a couple others who were on exchange in Hong Kong beforehand managed to stay in residence. I had neither of those two options so a little more research was necessary and I'm happy to share some places to get you started.

There are loads of other serviced apartments that you can rent in Hong Kong. If you are looking for some luxury comforts, Hong Kong can definitely provide you with that as long as you have the budget (anything from plasma TVs to maid service to arranging a personal driver!). Google will provide you with plenty options if you search <Hong Kong serviced apartments> ...I personally found finding inexpensive and reliable housing a little tougher so I've listed two recommendations for those of you trying to keep things on a smaller budget.

Yesinn Hong Kong

They rent short-term flats at a monthly rate as well as hostel rooms. I stayed at their Kingston Causeway Bay building in a small room with a private bathroom, and shared kitchen and living space facilities with three others. It was a great experience living with flat mates from Sri Lanka, India, Spain, USA and Singapore as we adjusted to Hong Kong together. I definitely recommend Yesinn as a great option for clean, affordable, and convenient albeit very basic accommodation.

Hong Kong Hostel

I've never stayed with them but I hear they are super clean and affordable...however keep in mind you will likely only have a room and a bathroom. So you have an excuse to eat out for every meal! (Trust me, this will end up happening even if you DO have access to a kitchen. I think I tried cooking for roughly 3 days...)

Okay, let me see some numbers....

For those craving concrete numbers I spent roughly 4000 HKD/month on rent. I ate out quite frequently for lunch and dinner (Hong Kong is truly a paradise for foodies, you can find EVERYTHING here). Prices ranged quite a bit with the cheapest healthy options I found setting me back roughly 15-20 HKD/meal. On average, a meal cost me 40-80 HKD/meal. As of summer 2011 here are some rough estimates of some other costs you might encounter:

1 Loaf of Bread – 10 HKD

1 Box of Cereal – 30 HKD

1 Bag of Apples – 16 HKD

1 Milk Tea – This is THE local drink, you can have it hot or cold or mixed with coffee and usually will set you back around 6 HKD takeaway.

Morning newspaper – Free (Hong Kong has some great morning newspapers distributed daily for free, available in English and Chinese)

1 Chocolate Bar – 8 HKD

1 Pint of Carlsberg at a Pub – 50 HKD

Ok, beside work, what did you do?

Asia is a really special place – life is definitely at an accelerated pace here, people never sleep and there is ALWAYS something going on. Every single Cansbridge Fellow found their own hobbies, passions and niche in Asia. On my end I really took advantage of living on an island and I spent most of my free time hiking, stand-up paddling, swimming, bouldering (there's a few cool places I can recommend) and enjoying the many wonderful beaches. The beauty of living in such a busy city is you are bound to find something you enjoy!

What was work life like? I heard Asia has really long hours...

You heard correctly! Working hours in Asia as a whole are generally longer than what we are accustomed to in North America. That being said, your hours will vary depending on the job and employer. Some Cansbridge Fellows found themselves working standard 9-to-6 jobs, others had very flexible posts while a few worked 6 days a week. In terms of work life I can only speak to my own experience and tell you I honestly had the best time. I worked in a small, young office and formed great friendships with my colleagues. We ate lunch together every day and often hung out after work as well ... I had my first Hong Kong-style karaoke experience, my first junk trip and many other wonderful memories with my team!

That's it for FAQs?! I still have more questions? What was the weather like? Where should I live in Hong Kong? ...etc. etc. etc.

If you find Google unable to answer your questions please feel free to reach out to me. I'm more than happy to share my experiences and help you plan yours! Drop me a line at 8jw@queensu.ca.