

HKU Students Working Abroad

Internship in Columbia

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AIESEC (Association Internationale des Etudiants en Sciences Economiques et Commerciales) is the world's largest student organisation. We promote friendly relations between nations and develop international understanding and co-operation. Each year, AIESEC organises an International Traineeship Exchange Programme to provide opportunities for practical work experience abroad.

I was one of the eight students selected to participate in this Exchange Programme. I worked as a computer teacher in a private college in Columbia from July 2003 to June 2004.

When I broke this news to my friends, some asked me to reconsider. They thought I would be paying to work (the salary that I got was not enough to cover lodging and transportation), and deferring my study was an unwise decision. I saw the issue from a different perspective. I value learning over earning, and I knew that my time would be rewarded by a network of friends, international experience and significant personal development. I am proved right!

People usually associate drugs and terrorists with Columbia; I discovered more.

A few facts about Columbia:

- Official language - Spanish
- Natural resources - petroleum, gas, coal, iron ore, nickel, gold, copper, emeralds, hydropower
- Economic development - some think the poor economy is caused by the weak domestic and low foreign demand; austere government budgets, and serious internal armed conflict.
- Terrorists: they are everywhere, but their 'deal' with the officials ensures that the city will be peaceful for the tourists

My internship

I was employed by a college to explore bi-lingual teaching. There were a number of challenges which made me want to quit after just one month. It was only the encouragement and genuine kindness of my colleagues that motivated me to stay. These challenges included:

Language barrier: this was the biggest problem. I did not know what I was supposed to do in the first few weeks. Meetings, syllabus and correspondence were conducted in Spanish. I was entirely lost and a poor teacher. Luckily, I had very good colleagues who offered language tuition after work.

Teaching experience: with no training or experience in teaching, I had great difficulties in managing class discipline and motivating the students to learn. Another major concern is my lack of knowledge about the syllabus. I overcame these problems by spending each evening after work surfing teaching materials in an Internet café (the school only had a 26K modem). My approach to class discipline improved over time. With my dedication, I succeeded in improving students' learning attitude.

Life influences life

I was touched by the friendliness of my colleagues and friends. For example, when the headmistress knew that my landlord wanted me out in a week (for no reason!), she fixed a room for me in her daughter's apartment. A colleague bought me a piece of pizza and a bottle of Spirit (these are luxury items). These may sound trivial or insignificant, but it made a great impact on my life. The spirit of giving and helping transformed me into a new person. One day, when I have a stable financial background, I will devote myself once more to serving the community.

A Hong Konger in Beijing

Irene Kin Lam HUI
BA (English Studies and Translation) 4



This summer I participated in the China VacTrain Programme working as an Intern with China Central Television (CCTV), China's largest TV network located in Beijing.

China VacTrain is part of the HKU Worldwide China Programme organised by the China Affairs Office. It provides a golden opportunity for students to familiarize themselves with China's culture and environment.

I spent the first month working as a Public Relations Officer, based in CCTV 5 (Movie Channel) with three other HKU students. We worked closely together to prepare for the movie premiere of Zheng Yimou's 'House of Flying Daggers' (十面埋伏). We were mainly responsible for arranging accommodation and transportation for performers from around the world and assisting the theme song composer Shigeru Umebayashi (梅林茂) in soundtrack audition. Apart from the unique opportunity to shake hands and take pictures with movie stars such as Andy Lau and Zheng Ziyi, we gained a better understanding of the professional PR field.

My dream of working in a front-line position came true a month later when I was given a new assignment in CCTV 10 (Science and Education Channel). And yes, for the first time in my life, I appeared on a TV show - "Outlook English Magazine" (希望英语雜誌). I enjoyed the tasks assigned to me: preparing questions for this nationwide English contest, creating and editing English scripts and assisting in the shooting of the show in the studio. My language training was a big advantage. But when direct translation from Cantonese to Putonghua was required, I sometimes got stuck.

I worked hard and played hard. I explored Beijing and travelled to Tianjin and Inner Mongolia with some HKU friends. Acquiring media knowledge and tasting local life was fruitful. I brought home a lot of good memories: sleeping inside a Mongolian yurt, the flag-raising ceremony in Tiananmen Square on the first of July, being an invigilator in an admission examination in Peking University, crouching in the hotel corridor to eat juicy watermelons, making yummy dumplings in Shihyuan (四合院 the Chinese quadrangular courtyard), and being teased by locals for speaking with a Hong Kong accent! Living like a 'Beijinger' for two months was a memorable experience indeed!

My Magical Disney Experience

Anna Ching Ying CHOI
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Anna (right)

Internship with Disney

After attending the interview coordinated by the Careers Centre and Faculty of Business and Economics, I got an offer of internship from Disney.

Summer 2004 - the first time I left home for an 80-day overseas internship! Working and living in Walt Disney World Resort (in Florida) was definitely the most magical experience of my life.

Working in Disney

I worked in a food fair in one of the theme parks - Epcot. I learnt how fast food shops operate: preparation of food, stocking, cashiering, cleaning, etc. and to co-operate with colleagues of different races. Furthermore, I have greatly improved my English communication skills!



Disney is a truly learning organisation: they provide interns with numerous learning opportunities and help us acquire workplace skills. Business courses and seminars were held regularly for us to develop soft skills and network with senior executives. Through a structured training programme, I got to know more about Disney's vision and its development. I am greatly inspired by its world-class services and culture: to bring magic, joy and happiness to each and every guest. Colleagues' passion motivated me to work hard.

Living in Disney

The most valuable thing I obtained was friendship. My roommates were Americans and my colleagues were from different countries: US, Italy, Cuba, Puerto Rico and Philippines. They taught me a lot about their cultures, from food, music, movies, entertainments, languages, religions to their outlooks on money and current issues. They brought me to shops, clubs, movies, restaurants and see rocket launch in the middle of the night to experience life in the US! This internship enables me to learn and appreciate the differences between cultures, to see things in a broader view, to communicate with people of different races and to make friends with them. It inspires me to scrutinize myself and Hong Kong.

The things I learnt from Disney are useful for life and the friendships will last forever. This experience is truly magical and I will never forget the summer of 2004.

Now, I am ready to taste other cultures!

Tips for an overseas Internship:

- Be open-minded and be willing to learn and try things.
- Expect great differences between cultures. Appreciate and respect the differences.
- Do not stereotype.
- Take the initiative to talk to others.
- Ask questions if you have doubts. This is how you learn.
- Be prepared psychologically for leaving home.
- Finally, enjoy your stay!

International Experience for an Engineering Student

Ken Hui, BEng (IETM) 4



Ken (left)

HKU offers plenty of opportunities for students to gain international experience. However, only those who are proactive, curious and well-prepared will get the chance. I was one of the lucky ones, and have had tried several international experiences.

Academic Exchange in Germany - HKU's Worldwide Exchange Programme, offered me the opportunity to live and study in Bremen, Germany, for 9 months. It truly opened my eyes to the wider world.

ILOP - my global perspective and international understanding were enhanced by two months' work experience in Sydney. The Programme was offered to participants in the Intensified Learning Opportunity Programme.

Work Experience - Under the NUS-HKU Engineering Student Exchange Scheme, the University's oldest exchange programme, I had the opportunity to work in Singapore for 2 months.

International Conference in India - AIESEC, the international platform for young people, provided me with the chance to exchange views with students from more than 14 countries in Agra, India.

Learning through experience

Being sensitive, open-minded, respectful and understanding are extremely important when dealing with people of different backgrounds or cultures.

- "I won't sacrifice my personal time to work OT."
- "You are so punctual!"
- "We seldom talk about politics."
- "You are not my friend, you are just one of the people I know."

The above are just a few examples of the values of my friends from overseas. Each of them reflects a different cultural attitude and understanding. For example, the one who said "You are not my friend" did not mean to upset me. For him the word "friend" has a specific meaning: it refers only to persons you know well and like a lot. Human beings are unique, each has a different personality. The golden rule here is to be open-minded and flexible.

Language sometimes presents a barrier, but it can be overcome. For example, I once ordered a meal in a restaurant, using only body language!

Expectations vs Reality

Accommodation is a troublesome issue. The reality hardly ever meets expectations. Budgeting is another problem. I always spend more than what I plan.

Life is full of uncertainties but if you face them positively, you will overcome them.

Tips for all fellow U-mates

- Before departure:
 - Learn some basic local language (slang); discover the major historical or social issues of your host country,
 - Read local newspapers and watch TV programmes on the internet before departure,
 - Equip yourself with information about Hong Kong and China, to be a better Ambassador.

While you are there:

- Move out of your comfort zone to mingle with the locals,
- The only way to truly know local customs and culture is to experience it first hand.