

Preparation for Arrival in Hong Kong

Prepared with Input from Members of the Faculty of Arts and Law

1. Flights and Cargo

HKU [provides a benefit](#) for new hires that pays for one-way flights to Hong Kong for you and any immediate family members. It also provides an allowance for shipping personal effects.

It is key to remember that these benefits are calculated based on when you inquire about them to the Benefits Office. So do not inquire about them too early, or they will calculate them on that day and you will have to pay for any increases in costs after that date.

Bringing pets to HK presents few outright prohibitions, but all pets must come through manifest cargo on planes (even if the airline otherwise allows it). For pet importing guidelines and procedures, see [here](#).

2. Identification

Make sure to set-up your [HKU login](#) as soon as you receive your contract and Staff ID. This will allow you to access [many resources](#) before you arrive. Most importantly, the [Staff Handbook](#). A general checklist for new employees is [here](#).

HKU is generally very efficient about getting your work visas issued. You must present this when you first arrive at the HK airport. You can visit Hong Kong without a visa from most countries, so don't make the mistake of not presenting it, or headaches follow. Keep all documentation from this initial immigration process.

If you have any family members, it helps a great deal to submit all the required paperwork for their visas at the same time as your work visa application. Delaying will mean you might have to do this on your own after you arrive. Bringing copies of marriage certificates is something also to keep in mind.

After you arrive, the faster you apply for your Hong Kong resident ID, the better. The immigration office (7 Gloucester Road, Wan Chai) is generally very efficient, and you will need the documents cited [here](#). I strongly recommend you register for an appointment [online](#) in advance.

It is very likely that you will be traveling to mainland China during your tenure. China has privatized its [visa processing](#) unit in HK (151 Gloucester Road, Wan Chai), but some online resources list the old information/process. As the new unit

is close to the HKID office, I would recommend submitting mainland visa applications on the same day. You can get short-term visas at the border, but only at specific locations and the cost is generally much higher than whatever duration your nationality can get you at the visa office.

3. Housing Deposit

The main issue facing those not living in faculty housing is securing a multi-month move-in/security deposit in HK dollars. Unless you are comfortable bringing larger sums of cash with you on the plane, you have these options: 1) apply for an [advance with Human Resources](#), 2) arrange for an advance from local friends/colleagues (this is not as unusual as you might think—ask your Dean), 3) pre-open a HK bank account if your current bank has a HK branch and allows this (HSBC and Citi does), or 4) find a serviced apartment that takes payment in foreign credit cards. Other colleagues have also used AirBnB while they look for a place.

4. Pre-Flight Preparation

The [HK Airport Express](#) is an easy and convenient way to get to Central from the airport (sometimes even better than a direct taxi), but if you have many bags there will be taxis at the airport. You can also use an existing Uber account by calling from the free airport Wifi.

The process will be easier if you pre-order a prepaid HK SIM card. These are inexpensive and available on [Ebay](#) or equivalent websites in your home country; just make sure the provider's LTE bands are compatible with your phone. I would also recommend, especially for frequent travelers, ordering a SIM from [AIRSIM](#), which gives you data passes in most countries in the world at competitive prices. They will deliver abroad. There is a lot of free Wifi in HK, which [this app](#) tracks.

As a smaller tip, just as with anywhere in the world, [pre-downloading](#) the Google Maps and Google Translate packages for the region in advance will make you less data dependent. Also, the Hong Kong Observatory [app](#) is the most accurate for using while in HK and in knowing the weather for when you arrive.

5. Research

HK is full of expats. All the information here is based on my first semester as a faculty member, but there are numerous forums you can look to for advice. The best is [Geoexpat](#), but there are [others](#) as well. There are expat Youtubers with their own channels on most every subject as well.

Transportation

1. Public Transportation

Fortunately, public transportation in HK is generally world-leading. Many/most people live without cars. The [MTR subway system](#) is inexpensive and reaches HKU directly. The [bus system](#) is similarly inexpensive and extensive. There are also a variety of [ferries](#) to other islands.

All of these systems, as well as many private merchants, take the [Octopus](#) prepaid touchless payment card. Getting this ASAP will make your life easier, but you have to go in person to a subway station to set it up. I would also note that there is no initially easy way to reload the card on the internet or via app. You will need to buy a separate card reader on the Octopus website, or head to a 7-11 or other recharge enabled merchants. Once you have a bank and credit card, you can [setup automatic re-loads](#) but this will again require a NFC enabled phone or the Bluetooth reader or a visit to a subway center to set-up.

The best app for navigating all of these systems is [Citymapper](#). If you are extra frugal, I recommend the [MoneySave app](#) as well.

2. HKU Resources

For those in faculty housing or the surrounding area, HKU's Estates Office runs an [inexpensive shuttle service](#). It also has its [own app](#).

[On campus parking](#) is a nice perk if you have access to parking at your residence. The best parking app for off-campus is [Parkopedia](#).

3. Taxis

Taxis are plentiful and comparatively inexpensive in HK. It is important to note that they generally do not take credit cards, only cash (they may soon take Octopus). They also won't use GPS apps and can drive very aggressively. Most taxi drivers will not want to look at your Google Maps directions/location, so I recommend an app which [translated addresses into Cantonese](#), or [Take Taxi](#).

You can call taxis on apps on such as [HKTaxi](#) or [Flytaxi](#), with HKTaxi being my preference. You can prepay with credit cards here for a fee. I have to admit, HKTaxi can be very hit or miss depending on where you live, as sometimes it takes a while for a taxi to accept your ride, and there is a function in the app where you can offer a "bonus" for a pickup. In my experience, without these incentives sometimes no taxi will take your pickup at faculty housing.

[Uber](#) is still functioning in HK, and far more reliable than HKTaxi. It can sometimes include delays as there are fewer drivers, but otherwise has the usual benefits from an ease of use perspective. For your first month, they also offer many discounted ride promotions. However, it is not cheaper than taxis most of the time as there were mandated pay increases as part of the ongoing regulatory back and forth with the government.

If you plan to head to the mainland, predownloading [Didi](#) is recommend. Ironically, in HK Didi is only in Chinese, but is available in English on the Mainland. It sometimes is useful to setup Apple or Android accounts in different countries (home, HK, Mainland) to get access to specific apps.

4. Trips to the Mainland

There are [many ways](#) to get over the border. These include private cars which pass easily through immigration (~800 HKD to Shenzhen), inexpensive buses, [a ferry](#), the [subway](#), and the [high-speed rail system](#).

Remember, on the mainland many apps (especially Google services) will not function. Apple Maps works, but is not very accurate. [Baidu Maps](#) is better, but is not in English. There are many sites which cover this territory extensively, but note that the HK WeChat app works for payments on the mainland and literally almost every financial transaction there can be processed through the app. Just also know that any WeChat transactions of any sort on the mainland are accessible to the government.

There are some dual currency ATMs at border crossings, but I also recommend you get CNY at your bank before you go to be safe.

5. Travel to Shenzhen Specifically

Choosing a transit option really depends on where you want to get to in Shenzhen. Here is a list of the border control checkpoints. I've also described the major crossings and the associated transportation method in more detail below:

https://www.immd.gov.hk/eng/contactus/control_points.html

Lo Wu [羅湖] Checkpoint: probably the most popular and busiest land crossing point via the East Rail Line (linked to the MTR system). Takes you to Luohu Station in Shenzhen, where you can transfer to the Shenzhen Metro (Line 1). From Hung Hom Station to Lo Wu, a standard ticket costs 40HKD and the journey takes around 45 minutes (not including going through all the border formalities to exit HK and enter mainland China).

Lok Ma Chau [落馬洲] Checkpoint: another popular and busy land crossing point via East Rail Line (linked to the MTR system). Takes you to the Futian Checkpoint Station in Shenzhen, where you can transfer to the Shenzhen Metro (Line 4).

Huanggang [皇崗] Checkpoint: a vehicle (bus/car) border crossing located in Shenzhen's Futian district close to the city center on the Guangshen Expressway (the main highway connecting Shenzhen and Hong Kong). This is the only 24-hour border crossing and used for both passengers and cargo. It is accessible via a vehicle authorized for cross-border service.

Shenzhen Bay [深圳灣] Checkpoint: a vehicle (bus/car) border crossing located in Dongjiaotou, Shekou in southwest Shenzhen (a convenient border crossing if you are going to Nanshan District/Bao'an/Shekou).

West Kowloon High-Speed Rail Station: The new high-speed train service (opened in fall 2018) operates between Hong Kong West Kowloon Station and three stations in Shenzhen: Guangmingcheng, Shenzhen North Station, and Futian Station (which is located in the center of Shenzhen with easy connections to the SZ Metro system). Trains depart every 5-15 minutes between 7:30am-10:30pm and the journey takes about 15 minutes to Futian. All border formalities (passport control, customs, etc. for both Hong Kong and mainland China) are handled on the Hong Kong side at West Kowloon Station, so you can just walk off the train directly into Shenzhen at the end of the journey.

Housing

1. Faculty Housing

If you are [eligible for faculty housing](#), I would highly recommend you take it. There are downsides, but the price/size ratio is unbeatable and it makes your transition to HKU much easier. If you do not select it when you are first appointed, you cannot switch over to it again. You also get a free parking spot, and all pets are allowed.

All utilities, except internet, will be setup before you arrive. Electricity is initially deducted from your monthly salary but you will eventually need to pay it as described below in the Household section.

The Estates Office will also provide you with the ability to select furniture. Every Wednesday the Office picks up and delivers from its stock of furniture, so I would err on the side of fully furnishing your place with provided furniture and then replacing it as you acquire other items.

The HKU shuttle runs from faculty housing a few times in the morning and from campus in the evening. There is a public bus stop nearby, but not really the best location for public transportation as the MTR is not accessible.

2. The Housing Subsidy

If you are not eligible for faculty housing, you receive [a subsidy](#) according to your incoming rank. It is pretty straight forward, but remember you should consider how this impacts your taxes as a deduction if you face double-taxation. There are issues if your spouse also works for HKU or receives a benefit from their HK employer, but I know not the details but only to flag it up front.

3. Neighborhoods

Housing is such a hot topic in HK that there are numerous websites [describing](#) the different neighborhoods and their qualities. In advance, I would recommend YouTube again for tours of neighborhoods, as well as the “street view” function of Google Maps to get a feel for the neighborhoods. As job moves are common in HK, you generally do not have to sign very long leases. Some faculty live on Lantau Island, even Lamma Island, or in the New Territories, but as a repeat expat I also advise to be as close to HKU as possible when first starting.

4. Searching

As with most international cities, there is an inverse relationship between ease of online accessibility (in English) and price competitiveness for housing. Again, many colleagues found it convenient to start a [month-to-month](#) arrangement with a [serviced apartment](#) securable online, and then look for other options once they were settled. Geoexpat has its [own listings](#), and more commercial websites to search online include [Squarefoot](#) and [Spacious](#).

After scoping out neighborhoods and their commuting tolerance, colleagues then worked with (multiple is better) agents to find apartments with a better price/size ratio. There are [owner listings](#), otherwise you should budget for paying up to a month's rent for agent fees. Some more adventurous colleagues found their apartments by visiting specific buildings and seeing if there was a language accessible representative on the premise.

While the HK property market is showing the first signs of slowing in quite some time, expat buyers who have been in HK under 10 years face a 30% extra levy on property purchases. So even if this is a long-term goal, I would defer modeling out those scenarios for far after you have settled.

Children, Childcare, and Schooling

1. Childcare

Daycares are practically non-existent in Hong Kong. Attempts to start up a HKU daycare center have yet to make progress.

There are playgroups, preschools, and kindergartens for younger children, but these are almost all part-time (a few times a week, for a few hours at a time). They are also highly competitive and many have long waiting lists, require in-person interviews and even assessments.

Most expat families instead hire a live-in domestic helper to assist with childcare needs.

2. Hiring a Domestic Helper

If you want to hire a foreign domestic helper (the official term used by the HK government), by law the position must be full-time and live-in (providing accommodation can be a challenge with small HK apartments). If you want part-time live-out help, legally you can only hire a local resident.

Because we have two young children (ages 5 & 7 at the time of our move), finding childcare support was a key issue for us. Our school-aged kids needed someone who could pick them up from the school bus at 2:30pm and we also needed help with meal prep and household chores given the long workdays in Hong Kong.

We tried to get referrals from friends and ultimately ended up finding our helper through the HelperChoice website (which enabled us to place an employer ad and also browse profiles of available helpers for a small fee). We sifted through dozens of profiles of foreign domestic helpers (mostly from the Philippines and Indonesia) and interviewed 10 available applicants who were already based in Hong Kong (whose existing contracts were ending) with experience working for expat families with children. The hiring process took nearly 2 months, much of it waiting on the HK Immigration Department to review the paperwork etc.

HelperChoice (online platform for connecting prospective employers and helpers; lots of helpful articles and advice): <https://www.helperchoice.com/hong-kong>

3. Schools

You can place children in the local school system, though for older children the language adaptation can be challenging. There are many private schools with different foci, and at different levels of (often very high) tuition.

For international schools, the highly competitive and brutal admissions process can take up to a year or more and almost always requires in-person interviews, social/language assessments and academic placement exams, and large amounts of cash (for the application fees, international flights for the child and parents to attend interviews and assessment exams in Hong Kong, reservation deposit fees, capital levy charges, and in some cases debentures -- and this is not including the very expensive tuition payments). Debentures are essentially large upfront deposits held by the school (some with a rate of return), which are also required for the social clubs you may hear about.

This for-profit school placement consulting company provides free articles on the processing of finding a school for your children (please note that I'm not endorsing them and did not pay for their services, although I did check out their free articles to gain a better understanding of the school landscape and admissions process):

<http://topschoools.com.hk/articles/>

Here is a list of schools where HKU colleagues have sent their children:

ESF (English Schools Foundation): Hong Kong's largest provider of English-medium international education; network of 22 primary and secondary schools. Tuition was formerly subsidized by the Hong Kong government, but these subsidies ended for students born in 2013 and later. Placement at individual schools based on catchment area, but you need to apply through a unified online application system: <https://www.esf.edu.hk/application-form>

ESF Kennedy School: Located in Pokfulam; the closest ESF primary school to the HKU campus. <https://www.kennedy.edu.hk/>

ESF Renaissance College: One of the private all-through K-12 ESF schools accepting students regardless of catchment area; located in the New Territories at the Heng On MTR station. <https://www.rchk.edu.hk/>

Hong Kong International School: The main private international school in Hong Kong offering an American-style education; grades K-12 with two campuses located in southern Hong Kong Island (Lower Primary and Upper Primary in Repulse Bay, Middle School and High School in Tai Tam). Diverse student population (~50% American citizens, 12% Hong Kong; the rest from elsewhere). One of the highest teacher retention rates in the city given the excellent packages

for faculty and their families. Gives priority consideration to children with American citizenship relocating to HK from abroad.

<https://www.hkis.edu.hk/>

ISF Academy: Bilingual Chinese and English immersion curriculum; grades K-12 with the main campus located in Pokfulam (near HKU campus). Arduous application process requiring multiple interviews and exams.

<https://www.isf.edu.hk/>

The [ISF school](#) has begun to offer HKU staff a 50% tuition discount, and there may be negotiating room elsewhere. Very few English speaking children stay for long periods given the turnover in other expat employment sectors, so the children of HKU staff can be seen as assets. There are schools that require “debentures” as a form of invested deposit, but these are also negotiable.

Chinese International School: One of the most competitive and elite private international schools in Hong Kong; offers a dual-language programme in Chinese and English. Arduous application process requiring multiple interviews and exams.

<https://www.cis.edu.hk/>

American International School: Another private international school offering an American-style education located in Kowloon Tong. Student population mostly local; fairly high teacher turnover. Gives priority consideration to children with American citizenship relocating to HK from abroad. <https://www.ais.edu.hk/>

Yew Chung International School: Another private international school offering a bilingual Chinese and English curriculum. This school is one of the most expensive among all of the international schools because it **REQUIRES** parents to pay the debenture. An academic friend of a friend negotiated an installment plan to pay the debenture and tuition. <https://www.ycis-hk.com/en/>

Household Setup

1. Furniture

There are many options for furnishing your apartment in HK. The easiest option is [IKEA](#), which delivers and from which you can order online. However, there are many [other stores](#) that you can visit for the usual cost/quality tradeoffs.

However, the used furniture market in HK is unusual. There is so much turnover and short-notice moves in the finance and other expat sectors that there is a massive used furniture market, and one where you can often find hugely discounted high-quality items. [Facebook Groups](#) dedicated to used furniture are very active, as well as any [expat forum](#). The [Carousell](#) app is also an easy way to find deals.

Delivery services are everywhere in HK, and most all stores offers one. For private sales, there are delivery services advertised on any re-sale site/group, but, as with most everything in HK, there are apps to self-schedule service. I would recommend [GoGoVan](#).

2. Appliances and Other Furnishings

There is no centralized e-commerce option in HK that makes shopping for appliances or other household goods that simple. But there are many. Examples include [Fortress](#), [HKTV Mall](#), and [AliExpress](#). Even more if you can [utilize Chinese language websites](#) ([Ebay](#) is Chinese only in HK) or [find work arounds](#).

If you are in faculty housing, I highly recommend you inquire in advance if your unit has air conditioning units pre-installed and make arrangements accordingly. You do not want to arrive during the summer without AC. Similarly, apartments do not have curtains pre-installed.

4. Utilities

Your landlord and agent will generally help with this, and the options in HK are limited. Meaning you only have one for [water](#), [gas](#) and [electricity](#).

5. Internet

Traditionally, broadband provision was highly uncompetitive but this has improved in recent years. However, there may only be a few providers for your building.

[PCCW](#) is the oldest provider and everywhere, though rarely has sales in higher priced buildings (there is active price discrimination by address in HK). However, other providers often have promotions with vast reduction in cost (notably [I-Cable](#),

[HGC](#), [HKBN](#), and [SmarTone](#)). There are stores where you can bargain over prices, but your best bet is to research online and then bring those deals to see if they will beat them. Note that HK has strangely long contracts for internet service, but if you are leaving the country they do not penalize you. These may disappear soon, as many mobile providers are moving into the broadband space and providing month-to-month contracts.

Specific to faculty housing, most buildings only have PCCW and I-Cable. I would recommend I-Cable as I have had no problems and it is vastly cheaper. I would recommend you make an order online to install before you arrive.

VPN Note: You do not need a VPN generally, as HK is not behind the mainland's server wall. However, if you want access to country specific media (like Netflix France, for example) a VPN can be useful. This is also useful for managing foreign financial accounts whose providers may be sensitive to overseas logins (something to remember when traveling as well). I use a person-to-person VPN set up with a trusted (family) router in the US, which is the best option if you can set it up.

6. Phone

Similarly to internet provision, the mobile market in HK has become much more competitive in recent years. Many bandwidth resellers have emerged that provide very inexpensive month-to-month contracts, and even have their own overseas day passes available. There may be promotions worth looking at [Three](#), [SmarTone](#), [ChinaMobile](#), or [SunMobile](#). However, in my opinion, there is no better option than [Birdie Mobile](#). With advance planning, you can have SIMs ready for you before you arrive, or shipped internationally. Also, Birdie sells competitively priced overseas data packages in-app, which means no SIM switching needed (AIRSIM covers most of the rest like South America).

Personal Services

1. Groceries

Like any country with a high per-capita income and a high Gini co-efficient, the market for food is very context dependent. If you go looking, you can find most anything and at a wide-range of price points. There are the traditional [“wet markets”](#) as well as more modern version of [“farmers’ markets”](#) for those looking for specific items, especially organic produce.

All the general supermarkets have delivery, and equivalent apps. Popular ones are [ParknShop](#) and [Wellcome](#). [HonestBee](#) delivers from multiple stores (even same-day). For those looking for more upscale items, [CitySuper](#) and [Marketplace by Jasons](#) are available. For online deliver, [Watsons](#) is convenient for toiletries.

2. Laundry and Dry Cleaning

Depending on where you live, these services are likely be most convenient just a few steps from away. If not, then the two main apps for pickup/delivery are [Boni](#) and [Impressed](#). Boni is cheaper but slightly less efficient.

3. Dining

I dare to go into this, as HK is a global foodie’s dream. Unlike some counties, Yelp is not that useful (or Tripadvisor), as the main go to restaurant rating website/app is [OpenRice](#). For reservations, Quandoo is built into Google Maps, but you can earn discounted meals using [Eatigo](#). Other useful discount apps include [Entertainer](#) (you pay a yearly fee for access to big discounts on eating/drinking) and [Mileslife](#) for those who play the frequent flyer game like myself. If you prefer to eat in, [Foodpanda](#) and [Deliveroo](#) rope in most places.

4. Social

Again, HK has no shortage of social activities. Compared to most places I have lived, [Meetup](#) is actually very good for finding things like hiking partners, and there is the traditional expat networking of [Internations](#). There are many relevant bloggers and social media influences trying to gain your attention, with one of the more popular being [Sassy Hong Kong](#).

Finance

1. Banking

There are many banks in HK, though HSBC and the Bank of East Asia have small offices in the main campus which offer specific benefits for HKU employees. Opening a bank account in HK is notoriously difficult: here is an [overview](#) of the challenges and what you will need. If you can, open up your account after quickly getting your HKID as switching from accounts from your passport to HKID is painful. If you are an American, I will say that you will face more delays because of our national financial reporting requirements. For those who can, opening an account with a bank in your home country that has branches in HK can help facilitate this (so HSBC and Citi for US citizens).

In my experience, most of the actual services provided by HK banks are very similar and less than up to international fintech standards but improving. Most banks require higher balances to avoid monthly and episodic fees.

Credit card offerings are generally similar, with a great deal of them in HK revolving around AsiaMiles (the frequent flyer program shared by Cathay). It should be noted that the use of debit cards in HK is very limited, so getting a credit card should be a priority beyond what you pay for with cash and your Octopus card. If you are more of a personal finance geek, [MoneyHero](#) is a good place to start before you graduate to the [Flyertalk](#) forums.

Examples of current best cash back options for cards include:

Bank of China ICard; 4% cashback online/e-wallet
Bank of East Asia: 4.4% cashback (after variable spending threshold);
Also 10% back at fastfood/coffee
ICBC Horizon: 1.5% everywhere (including Octopus reloads)
DBS Compass: 8% cashback at ParkNShop and Watsons on specific days
HSBC Visa Signature: 3.6% on single category of choice
CCB Eye: 2% Payme/WeChat/Alipay (retail payment not P2P)
(Americans: Capital One has 2% cashback cards with no foreign fees)

2. Currency Exchange

You will likely see that most HK banks offer multi-currency accounts, which can be useful. Luckily, the HK dollar is a fixed currency with only minor variations. Yet, your bank will not have good exchange rates. The [best exchange rates](#) are found at retail money changers.

Many will be interested in sending money to their home country. In my experience, [Instarem](#) is the best for USD exchanges and is very easy to use. But depending on your country of origin I would check out [Transferwise](#), [OnePip](#), [MoneyCorp](#), and [Transferrate](#) (in that order). Believe it or not, sending money to the mainland is not that easy, and all transfers are treated as international. Even HSBC and Citi “global transfers” may appear to have no fees at times, but run a simulation at Instarem and others to see how they mark up the exchange rate. I pay 0.25 to 0.30% maximum fee on my HKD to USD transfers at the commercial rate through Instarem.

3. Taxes

Hong Kong incomes taxes are generally low and [easy to calculate](#). You may hear that you will need to [prepay](#) some of your taxes in your first year. It is true that HK has an odd payment schedule, and no mandatory withholding. It is better to think of the assessment as staggered throughout the year. But by April/May of your first year you should have some reserves built up.

There is no consumption/VAT tax or capital gains tax (property taxes drive Hong Kong public spending).

If you happen to be an American, your expat taxes are far more complicated. If you do not know the following terms, you should read up on them: [FACTA](#), [FBAR](#), and [double taxation](#). If you are not personal finance fluent, it is worthwhile to hire someone to help you, or find a friendly colleague who has dealt with the process before. Do not wait until the last minute, and do not neglect asset filing—there are no more exceptions as the system has been up and running for awhile now.

4. Insurance

HK has very good public health indicators, and you will have access to the public health system generally free of charge. On top of this, HKU gives you [private health insurance](#), as well as the option of a hospitalization “[top-up](#)” policy. Finding a good general practitioner is generally a social networking phenomenon.

You can buy [dental insurance](#) or use the [dental clinic](#). Eye care insurance is much less common as most places that sell glasses/contacts give you a free exam.

5. Investing

[HKU](#) gives pre-tenure contract gratuities that you receive at the end of your 3 year contracts, and everyone participates in the Staff Provident Fund after tenure. HK has a mandatory requirement scheme called the MPF, and your contract materials should have the sign up forms. This operates using a small fraction of your salary, and goes into funds determined by HKU. However you, can find ways of [switching](#) into other funds once a year that you find better. As of now, HSBC has the lowest cost ratios. There is also a new voluntary 60,000HKD a year tax-deductible contribution. If you ever leave HK, you get your MPF fund automatically so no worries about investing.

I hesitate to say anything about investing, as if you do not invest in international or national equity index funds I really do not have any other advice. I would recommend you look at what is available at [Interactive Brokers](#) and [Vanguard](#).

6. Mobile Payments

Fintech is slowly coming to HK, and still catching up with the mainland. The active payment wallets are [Alipay](#), [Oi](#), [WeChat](#), and [PayMe](#). Apple Pay is creeping in some places. You can also link up your payments to various merchants through the common [Moneyback](#) system.

HKU Setup

1. Orientation

You will have available to you many excellent HKU orientations when you first arrive – and I recommend you go to as many as your schedule allows. The Human Resources staff is very useful, and you should feel free to bring any issues you have to them.

2. General Navigation

HKU's various campuses are built into a mountain, which means that getting to some buildings (for example the lovely HK Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences) may not have obvious routes. Take some time to learn the various elevators/escalators/stairs to get to where you need to go.

3. Senior Common Room

There are no traditional faculty-only eating clubs at HKU, though there are many restaurants on campus. The main faculty spaces are the Senior Common Room in the KK Leung Building's top floors, and The Bridge on the eastern part of campus in the Jockey Club Tower. You need to [fill out an application form](#), and then a monthly charge will be assessed to your salary along with any charges made. You can technically not apply, but this is where people meet up most all of the time.

3. Research

If you like to work from home, or access library resources while abroad, the HKU VPN is accessible to set up [here](#).

4. Teaching

If you have never used [Moodle](#) before, you should do some preparation before your classes starts. It is no secret that it is less than ideal given the options.

5. Gyms

HKU has a [surprising number](#) of sports and health resources. Depending on where you live, they are worth looking into. Note that the Stanley Ho Sports Centre is great, but requires taking a shuttle. The reward is a track, Olympic pool and a gym that rarely has many students at it.

Important University Policies

NOTE: This is not a comprehensive list of the many university policies that may impact your life, but rather a heads-up based on some of our experiences.

University Leave Policies (up to date as of May 2019, confirmed by SoH School Head David Pomfret and Manager Vivian Chu):

Key types of leave:

Annual Leave (this is equivalent to “vacation”/personal time): Appointees on Terms of Service I or Bands G to J appointed on or after January 1, 2002 are entitled to 22 days per year for the first 10 years service and 26 days per year for 10 years service or more.

NOTE: The 'leave year' runs from 1 Sept to 31 Aug. After that the leave resets and a new allocation is received.

Unused annual leave may be partially carried over as follows:

According to Section 8 of the Annual Leave regulations: “The amount of untaken annual leave which may be carried forward from one leave year to the next shall not exceed the annual entitlement minus 10 days, and shall be subject to a maximum accumulation at any one time of twice the annual entitlement minus 10 days. Any untaken leave in excess of this amount will be forfeited.”

For example, if a colleague is entitled to 22 days Annual Leave in 2018/19 and has not spent any Annual Leave during the leave year, he/she can carry forward 12 days only (22 days minus 10 days) to the next leaveyear 2019/2020. The Leave System would automatically deduct the 10 days. With the 10 days forfeited, the total leave entitlement for 2019/2020 will be 12 days + 22 days = 34 days.

This 34 days would be the “maximum accumulation” for colleagues who are entitled to 22 days of Annual Leave per year.

Professional Leave (you have to apply formally for “professional leave” to attend conferences, conduct research abroad, etc.): For professoriate and academic-related staff, up to 60 days of professional leave may be granted in one year.

Sabbatical Leave: Professoriate staff is eligible to apply for sabbatical leave for academic and research purposes. Sabbatical leave is accumulated at the rate of one-month leave per six month of service and may be granted for a period of up to one year. Authority to approve sabbatical leave application shall rest with the Faculty Human Resource Committee.

Here is HR's official notice about the various types of leave to which you may be entitled: <https://www.hr.hku.hk/benefits/leave.php>

Key Funding Opportunities

Hong Kong and HKU offer many grants for academic staff. These are some of the key grants that I'd recommend applying to ASAP (in the immediate weeks after you start working at HKU):

HKU Seed Fund for Basic Research for New Staff:

<http://www.rss.hku.hk/fund/seed-basic-new-staff>

NOTE: New staff members are eligible to apply within 6 months of appointment and you're supposed to receive expedited consideration though it can take up to 6 months to have your application reviewed and approved post-submission. The max amount is HK\$ 150,000.

HK Research Grants Council Early Career Scheme (ECS):

<http://www.rss.hku.hk/fund/ecs>

NOTE: A new Assistant Professor is eligible to apply within three years of his/her FIRST full time academic job (in other words, you only have 3 chances to apply since the grant competition is held yearly). This HK government grant is considered easier to get than the parallel General Research Fund (GRF) grant and it's an excellent idea to submit an application right off the bat so you can maximize your chances. The minimum amount is HK\$ 100,000. The deadline for submission is generally in October and results of the scheme are announced the following June/July.

HK Research Grants Council General Research Fund (GRF):

<http://www.rss.hku.hk/fund/grf>

NOTE: The GRF is the major external funding opportunity available for full-time academic staff members of Hong Kong UGC-funded institutions. This annual funding scheme is a competitive exercise and applications go through an external review process. All applications must be made online through the RGC's Electronic System (you will need to request a login account from the RSS office). The deadline for submission is generally in October and results of the scheme are announced the following June/July. It's an unspoken rule that you need an ECS and/or GRF to get tenure at HKU.

HKU Conference Support Fund:

<http://www.rss.hku.hk/fund/conference-staff>

NOTE: You can only apply for 1 conference per year, for a max amount of HK\$ 16,500. In order to be eligible for this grant, you need to attend the mandatory HKU Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) seminar (which is generally held twice a year).

Other research funding opportunities: <http://www.rss.hku.hk/fund>

Miscellaneous

[1] Tutorials. Tutorials (or recitations) are not scheduled centrally as they are in other places. Every department probably does this differently so check with your department, but I was two weeks into my first semester before I even realised I was meant to hold tutorials so I hadn't built it into my syllabus.

[2] Expenses for the Seed Fund. Although new hires have a new start up package, if you are applying for a "seed fund" per the general university research scheme I did not know until quite late in the process what we could charge as a general expense under start up funds. You can use it for things like copy-editing services, purchasing books and rare materials etc. Always check before you buy, but worth allocating some money to general expenses as well as staffing and travel.

[3] Departmental/school structures. It can take a while also to learn what is a departmental issue, a school issue, or a faculty of arts issue so always ask if you're unsure. Try to get an organizational chart of where your department fits in and the university administration structure.

Learning How to Speak Cantonese

1. Chinese Language Instruction for Staff

The university offers subsidized courses and tutoring in Chinese (either Cantonese and Mandarin) for University staff and their spouses. For more information on staff language courses:

<http://web.chinese.hku.hk/main/staff-language-courses/>

The Chinese Language Centre will allocate you a classroom anyway. So do not try to find a room, just put down your office.

2. Essential Phrases in Cantonese

NOTE: Cantonese is a spoken dialect of Chinese commonly used in Hong Kong and Guangdong Province. The phrases below are written in Jyutping (the romanization system used in Cantonese courses taught at HKU). The numbers after each syllable/word indicate the tone (relative pitch, of which there are 6 in Cantonese that can change the meaning of the word).

m4 goi1 = thank you (for a service)

do1 ze6 = thank you (for a compliment or gift)

zou2 san4 = good morning (which people seem to use as a greeting all the way until lunch)

mou5 man6 tai4 = no problem

deoi3 m4 zyu6 = (I'm) sorry / excuse me

ngo5 m4 zi1 = I don't know

maai4 daan1 = the bill/check (when you want to pay at a restaurant)

jau5 lok6, m4 goi3 = (I want to) get off, please
[shout this to the driver when you want to get off the mini bus]

ni1 dou6 ting4 (ce1) = stop (the car) here

m4 goi1 ze3 ze3 = please let me get through (useful in crowded elevators/trains)