

# Tips to feeling more like a local when studying abroad <http://tinyurl.com/y9b9lf3>

As a student studying abroad in a foreign city, you obviously would like to see all the tourist hot spots. You definitely want to learn and see all the things that attracted you to pick that city. But where there are tourist attractions, there are lots of tourists. Often doing things and activities that the locals do gives you the student more insight into the people and culture of the city in which you are temporarily a member. The following are easy (and cheap!) ways to immerse yourself into the city you are learning in.

**1. Get a newspaper.** Just like papers that circulate here, there are sections dedicated to telling the reader what entertainment is happening for the week i.e. shows, local bands playing in parks, flea markets, etc. Many of these things are free or relatively cheap.

English Newspapers in Hong Kong:

South China Morning Post: <http://www.scmp.com/portal/site/SCMP/>

The Standard (paper copies are free!): <http://www.thestandard.com.hk/>

Or, grab a Chinese newspaper and use it to help with your learning of the language. The newspaper is an excellent source to help improve your language skills.

**2. Ride public transit.** Taxis are not only expensive, but they offer little interaction. Hop on a bus and just ride its route. You can not only people watch and observe, but you also can see a lot of the city that you might not have seen otherwise.

## **BUSES/TRAINS**

- Buses and the Mass Transit Railway (MTR) are likely to be your most common modes of transportation.
- Buses operate on a regular schedule, with reduced services on weekends and public holidays.
- Commuter cards or frequent ride passes may be available.

## **FERRIES**

- Ferries are extremely popular modes of public transportation in Hong Kong, particularly for crossing the main harbors
- Ferries can be cheaper and quicker than buses and the MTR.

## **TAXIS**

- You can also use a taxi to get you where you want to go.

- Metered taxis are red with silver tops (and green with white tops in the New Territories). They're inexpensive compared to other big-city cabs, but the MTR can often be better value and quicker.

**Octopus cards:** <http://www.octopus.com.hk/home/en/index.html>

The Octopus is a smart card that can be used on all forms of public transportation (except taxis and red minibuses). You can add money to it at a number of different locations, including MTR stations, convenience stores, and some grocery stores. Besides public transportation, the Octopus can be used at vending machines, and at a variety of stores and restaurants.

**MTR website:** [http://mtr.com.hk/eng/homepage/cust\\_index.html](http://mtr.com.hk/eng/homepage/cust_index.html)

**Bus Websites** (these can be helpful for searching for routes):

Kowloon Motor Bus Company: <http://www.kmb.hk/en/>

Citybus & New World First

Bus: <http://www.nwstbus.com.hk/home/default.aspx?intLangID=1>

**Minibuses:**

Minibuses are a popular form of transportation in HK, as they usually provide very direct routes and service areas that are not directly accessible by the MTR. They carry 16 people, and will not stop for more passengers once they are full. Green minibuses run on standard routes, and accept payment via the Octopus card. Red minibuses often travel further distances and usually only accept cash payment to the driver when passengers get off. Minibus routes can take some time to figure out, and knowing some basic Cantonese is helpful for telling drivers when you want to get off. Still, minibuses are often the fastest, most convenient form of transportation, so give them a try, and ask a local friend for help if you are feeling intimidated.

**3. Shop at flea markets.** In flea markets, many handmade and home grown products can be found. You can get many unique pieces at these markets and for very cheap.

**Markets in Hong Kong:**

**Ladies Market:** Located on Mong Kok's Tung Choi Street (the section between Argyle and Dundas Streets), this popular market has a mix of local souvenirs and cheap knock-offs.

**Fa Yuen Street:** Another popular Mong Kok destination (between the Mong Kok and Prince Edward MTR stations), Fa Yuen Street has market stalls that are great for buying fruit, traditional candies, clothing, etc. On either side of the street, you will find shops full of inexpensive

factory run-offs -- clothing meant for the Western market at highly reduced prices.

**Flower/Bird Market:** Also located in Mong Kok, these colorful, lively markets are a great place to visit, even if you are not intent on finding a new pet or house plant. Located on Prince Edward Road and Flower Market Road, the Flower Market carries a beautiful variety of fresh flowers and plants, often at wholesale prices. At the end of Flower Market Road, you'll find the Yuen Po Street Garden where the Bird Market can be found.

**Temple Street Night Market:** A popular tourist destination, this after-dark market runs along Temple Street, between Jordan and Yau Ma Tei. You'll find the usual souvenirs here, as well as a large number of authentic and copied antiques. Temple Street is also popular for authentic local outdoor dining, with a number of restaurants (specializing mainly in seafood) can be found at the Jordan end of the street.

**Wanchai Street Market:** Shop where the locals shop! This traditional local market, located mainly in Tai Yuen Street in Wan Chai, is a great place to experience the authentic sights, sounds, tastes and smells of Hong Kong cuisine and culture.

**Stanley Market:** Stanley Market is located on the South side of Hong Kong island and is a 45-minute bus ride from Central (Buses 6, 6A, 6X, 260 will take you there). It is a popular day-trip destination, as this open-air market full of souvenirs and factory run-offs is very close to the Stanley beach, complete with a variety of al fresco dining options.

**4. Eat food from a street vendor or hawker.** Food from street vendors may sound questionable, but it is often quite delicious. Do be cautious though, and wait until you have fully adjusted to local cuisine before trying street vendor food. Use your best judgment! Here are a few things to try:

1. **Fish balls** (*yuet dan*): Processed fish never tasted better! These are a local favorite, served plain or with curry sauce (*ga lei yuet dan*) and often skewered on a stick.

2. **Sui Mai:** These little yellow dumplings are a dim-sum classic that have become a popular snack. They're often served on a skewer with a dousing of soy sauce.

3. **Waffles** (*gai dan jai*): Fresh from the waffle-iron, there are few things more satisfying! The name of these waffles translates as "little egg," a reference to the bite-sized waffle spheres that you can pull off and pop into your mouth. Also try the more traditionally-shaped waffles, which are

served smothered in peanut butter, sugar, and sweetened condensed milk.

4: **Others:** You will surely see more interesting street-food delicacies to try, ranging from tripe to fried dumplings, to sweet potatoes. Don't be shy -- many vendors speak some English, but if not, pointing and sign-language can work wonders. Or tag along for snacks with a local friend -- they will probably be impressed that you want to try HK snacks. When asking for a savory snack, you will probably be asked if you would like it with chili sauce or not. Knowing how to ask for spicey (*laat*) or not spicey (*mm laat*) can be helpful if you have strong leanings one way or the other.

#### **Other foods:**

1. **Dim Sum:** Dim sum (or *yum cha* -- literally "drink tea") is a Hong Kong institution and a must-try while you're here. Though this is typically a brunch-type meal enjoyed before noon, you can find some restaurants and vendors who serve dim sum all day. A traditional dim sum experience includes various carts of food pushed around the restaurant by waitresses hollering out the names of the goodies they are offering. Though there are a few restaurants that still serve dim sum this way (City Hall Maxim's Palace is one), most restaurants have opted for a more efficient ordering system. Many will have English menus complete with photos, but if not, just ask an English-speaking staff member to help you order. Here are some traditional favorites: BBQ pork buns (*cha sui bao*), shrimp dumplings (*ha gao*), *siu mai*, fried spring rolls (*chuen guen*), steamed sponge cake (*ma lai gou*), egg tarts (*daan taat*). Dim sum is best enjoyed shared as a group, which allows a large variety of dishes to be tried. As you may have gathered, most of the delicacies are made with some sort of meat (mainly pork and seafood), but some a few vegetarian options do exist. Some vegetarian Chinese restaurants specialize in serving vegetarian versions of popular dim sum dishes.

2. **Tasty, quick meals:** You will likely notice quite a few restaurants with various cooked meats (including whole ducks and geese) hanging in the window. Try the BBQ pork with rice (*cha siu faan*), or the chicken rice (*gai faan*) for a very authentic local meal. Or stop at a local outdoor noodle shop (*dai pai dong*) for wonton noodle soup (*wun tun meen*).

5. **Walk and wander.** Though riding public transit is part of the experience, walking is an adventure all in itself. You will come across a variety of shops, eateries, clubs, etc. You will find things you did not know existed. As well as discovering hidden treasures, exploration will help you better acquaint yourself to the city. In no time, you will be able to easily find your way around town and may even be comfortable enough to give directions to others. Then you will really feel like a local and less like a tourist or visitor.

**Parks and good areas to wander:** Urban Parks: Kowloon Park, Hong Kong Park, Zoological and Botanical Gardens, Chi Lin Nunnery/Nan Lian Garden.

Country Parks: It may come to a surprise to most, but about 70% of Hong Kong's land area is countryside, and there are over 20 designated Country Parks, each with a number of hiking trails running through them. Some trails to check out and try: Hong Kong Trail, Maclehorse Trail, Wilson Trail, Lantau Trail.

These are just five simple actions you as a student can do to “fit-in” and learn about everyday life for locals in the city you are studying abroad in. These are cheap and easily accommodating ways to feel like a local on a student budget. When not popping around the city with a camera, take a break and do as the locals do.