

HONG KONG

“Every time I think back, I can feel the morning ocean breeze and see my Tai Chi master on the seashore. I think of my experience in a Buddhist temple and my train trip to Beijing, the time when I could tell my host family that I loved them in Cantonese—moments that would never leave my mind. Hong Kong is a modern city with pace, but time has stopped in many places. Discovering these hidden corners was one of the most exciting things in my life!” Michael Rosakfrom, sojourner from Czech Republic, 2000-2001

“Hong Kong is, apart from one of the most wonderful and exciting places on earth, one of the best destinations offered by AFS due to its international, cosmopolitan and dynamic features. It is a place where one can see and appreciate a harmonic mixture (sometimes odd, but interesting) between China and the United Kingdom, Asia and Europe, East and West. A city populated with people from all over the world. Hong Kong offers a direct exchange not just with the Asian culture but also with the WORLD.” Francisco Berardo, sojourner from Argentina, 2002-2003

Hong Kong surrounds the world’s busiest deep-water port (“Hong Kong” in Cantonese means “fragrant harbor”), and this emphasis on trade fuels a dizzyingly paced, up-to-the-minute commercialism. At the same time, even though Hong Kong was ruled by the British from 1841 to 1997, the city’s populace is 98% Chinese, and they preserve old cultural traditions. In a city bristling with modern skyscrapers, herbal medicine shops abut trendy clothing boutiques; wheelbarrows are parked next to Rolls Royces; and birds in cages are taken for strolls in the city’s parks past roadside fortune tellers. Hong Kong is one of the world’s most densely populated communities (16,000 people per square mile), which makes jostling inevitable and accepted—but socializing is respectful and formal.

AFS & Your Experience

AFS Hong Kong has been in existence since 1982. Many volunteers are former program participants who work hard year-round to provide you with the most satisfying intercultural experience possible. During the school year, AFS Hong Kong hosts approximately 30 AFSers from 10 countries including Australia, Brazil, Germany and the Netherlands.

AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in your host country you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience abroad.

Landing in Hong Kong

Your flight will arrive in Hong Kong. After the plane lands and you collect your baggage, you and your fellow AFSers will pass through customs and be met by AFS Hong Kong staff or volunteers.

Arrival Orientation

The staff and volunteers will accompany you to your arrival orientation hosted by a local school. After a long and tiring plane trip, you will have three days to relax and get to know other AFSers in the program. During your first week in Hong Kong, while living with your host family, you will participate in a five-day orientation which will give you some basic language training and introduction to Chinese etiquette and culture.

Living in Hong Kong

Lifestyle and Family Living

Energetic and hard-working people have built Hong Kong into a major world trade center. The Confucian ethic of proper social and family relationships forms the foundation of Chinese society, which values modesty and patience over aggressive behavior. Chinese families are bound by strong traditions of loyalty, obedience and respect. It is not unusual for both parents to work. Parents tend to be protective and to prefer that students stay home as much as possible. Parents also expect to know when their children are going out and where they are going. Many families take part in social activities together, especially on Sunday. Most families live in small, urban apartments where personal space is minimal, so tidiness is important. (Tall students should note that beds are not much longer than 170 cm (5'8"). Most Hong Kong families object strongly to smoking among students.

Hong Kong host families, like all AFS host families worldwide, are not paid. They open their homes to students in order to share their community and culture as well as to enrich their own family life.

Dress and Appearance

All styles of clothing, from traditional to modern, are worn in Hong Kong. Bring lightweight clothing for summer. A jacket and warmer clothing are advisable for the winter months, as the climate is damp. In addition, be aware that usually there is no heating, and air conditioners may be used for air circulation.

Bring black leather shoes (boots and high heeled shoes are not acceptable at school). Students should be prepared to buy gym, winter and summer school uniforms (cost about US\$350). Participants are expected to have short, neat haircuts, no visible piercing, and girls are not allowed to wear make-up or nail polish.

Diet and Meals

Rice is a staple and many dishes are prepared with chicken, pork, fish and vegetables. Fruit is a common dessert. Dairy products such as milk and cheese are very expensive and are not a regular part of the diet.

School

School begins in early September and finishes at the end of June. The school system is challenging and participants should be academically motivated. Classes are demanding with examinations twice a year. School discipline and respect for teachers are very important. AFS students are usually placed in government-run high schools in grades 10 or 12 (Forms 4 or 6). Schools offer two branches of study—arts and sciences. Placement will depend on your curriculum at home, but most placements are made in the arts. Classes are usually conducted in Cantonese.

There are many student activities such as sports clubs, debating societies, drama clubs and history clubs. Schools are unlikely to give transcripts but can provide letters of attendance. Students are encouraged to become involved in a community service activity in order to broaden their involvement in their host community and enrich their perspectives of life in Hong Kong.

Teen Life

Movies and television are the most popular forms of entertainment. Beach outings and picnics are also common. Favorite sports include table tennis, soccer, skating, squash, badminton, tennis, swimming and basketball. Teenagers usually go out in groups to enjoy these activities. They also like to shop, sing karaoke and hang out in cafes. The efficient public transportation system makes it easy to move around and get to know Hong Kong.

AFS Activities

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Hong Kong will provide you with several others. AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet (often for a weekend or for a few days) to talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide new information and ways of looking at things while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and educational, bringing together young people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experience.

A post-arrival orientation weekend is usually arranged four to six weeks after your arrival. There will be a mid-stay orientation weekend as well. This orientation will be a good opportunity to catch up on friendships, ask questions and share experiences.

Students are advised to bring extra money for souvenirs and other incidental expenses. A visa to mainland China, for instance, currently costs US\$35. (Although Hong Kong was handed over to China on July 1, 1997, it is still administered as a Special Administrative Region with its own border-control jurisdiction. Therefore, any travel to the mainland, however brief, requires a two-way visa.)

Last, but definitely not least, is the so-called "End-of-Stay." You will get together with other AFSers right before you return home. The "End-of-Stay" is about looking back at your exchange experience and sharing memories with other AFSers. It is also about thinking of the future.

Travel

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in Hong Kong, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to be immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have many opportunities to travel with your host family, school, community organization, local chapter or AFS Hong Kong. We strongly discourage traveling on your own or with friends.

Spending Money

Hong Kong as a city has a very high cost of living. AFS recommends that US\$2,500 should be sufficient as spending money for an entire year. Most international banks have offices in Hong Kong, so parents can choose to transfer funds as needed.

Host families are asked to pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to participate. When you do such things as shopping for yourself or going out with friends, the expenses are your responsibility.

Safety and Support

Hong Kong is a very safe country and you should do well if you follow the normal precautions you would use in your own country.

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as a Hong Kong resident. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

For the welfare of participants, AFS worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medicinal purposes. Any student who violates either of these rules will be automatically sent home. AFS Hong Kong may have additional rules.

Health Precautions

In addition to the precautions mentioned above, AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Hong Kong (which you can get from your government or easily find on the Internet) with your personal doctor, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs.

If you require any medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant, your medical expenses are covered for illness or injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

Documents

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices of your host country, and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. It is your responsibility to obtain your visa and pay the fees. However, AFS will let you know how to proceed and will provide you with the documents you need to apply for the visa.

Program Prices

All participants are required to pay participation fee and do a mandatory fundraising. To get further information, please visit our website www.afscanada.org or contact us.

The program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

Country Information

Geography and Climate

Hong Kong is located on the south coast of China **and spreads over 424 square miles, including the Kowloon peninsula, the two principal islands of Hong Kong and Lantau as well as 234 outlying islands** (many of which are little more than uninhabited rocks). It has a mountainous landscape and one of the great natural harbors of the world. A 70-km-long walking trail offers some of Hong Kong's most rugged landscape, crossing over two of the island's highest summits, winding through forests and offering stunning views of the sea.

Hong Kong has also become home to several important monasteries, including Po Lin Monastery with an enormous bronze Buddha.

Hong Kong is located within the tropics, and its climate is monsoonal. Two seasons dominate the year. One is hot, wet and humid (26-32°C or 80-90°F), and the other is cool and dry (10-18°C or 50-65°F). Hong Kong can, however, experience great variations in the periods between successive monsoons, and the most dramatic variations occur during the typhoon season.

Generally the dry season begins in mid- to late-September and brings three months of pleasantly warm days and brilliantly clear blue skies. Nights are cool, the humidity is low and day-to-day temperature changes are slight. From December through early January, the weather normally

remains sunny during the day but the nights are considerably cooler. Hong Kong's rainy season arrives around the middle of March. Mid-May to September is high summer in Hong Kong and the unpredictable typhoon season.

Population

Hong Kong is one of the most densely populated areas of the world. It numbers about 7.2 million people. Ninety-eight percent of the population is Chinese.

Language

English and Cantonese are the official languages, but Cantonese is the principal language spoken by most people in their daily lives.

Government

After a century and a half of British administration, Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region of China on July 1, 1997 under the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration. The existing economic, legal and social systems are to be maintained for at least 50 years after 1997. Beijing has appointed Hong Kong's chief executive and some members of the legislature.

Religion

The religions of Hong Kong include Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and Christianity.

Launching Your AFS Experience

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that those students who prepare prior to leaving have the best experience. In order to get ready, first make every effort to learn some key Cantonese words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the language.

To familiarize yourself further with life in Hong Kong, make use of your local library and/or the Internet. A lot of general information is available about Hong Kong and its culture.

Although each participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Hong Kong. This person will be an excellent resource regarding living in Hong Kong. If you do not know any alumni, please contact your local volunteer or AFS Interculture Canada office. In addition, AFS Hong Kong will provide you with a special packet of country-specific information.

Hong Kong people will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country.

Curiously Hong Kong

- According to the *Guinness Book of World Records*, the earth's most densely populated island is Ap Lei Chau, southwest of Hong Kong Island. Some 80,000 residents live there on an area measuring 1.3 sq. km. (0.5 sq. mi.), giving the island a density of 60,000 people per sq. km, or 160,000 per sq. mi.—10 times the density of crowded Hong Kong as a whole.
- In 2003, Hong Kong's economy had the world's fastest rate of deflation. The cost of living was estimated to have fallen 2.5%.
- Tiny Hong Kong has 53 daily newspapers, including 26 in Chinese, four in English, seven bilingual and five in Japanese.

How to Apply?

You first have to fill out the Preliminary Application form that you can find on our website at www.afscanada.org. If you don't have access to Internet, call us at (514) 288-3282 or 1-800-361-7248 and we will send you the document by mail.

Quick Facts

Student age (upon arrival)	16 to 18 years old	
Country data	Size	9,596,960 sq km
	Population	7,210,505
	Official Language	Cantonese
	Government	Communist state
	Currency	Hong Kong dollar (HKD)
Useful website	www.info.gov.hk	
AFS Hong Kong website	hkg.afs.org/HongKong.nsf	