My name is Cesar Nassir and I study Electrical Engineering at KTH. I am a fourth year student currently doing my master’s in System, Controls and Robotics focusing on autonomous systems.

Before Arrival
Before traveling to Hong Kong, a lot of paper work had to be done, such as visa application, applying for accommodation, etc. All of this was done online on the “study abroad” website, which was well structured and easy to follow. The executive officer of HKUST basically holds your hand through every process before your arrival, she was really helpful. The pre-arrival part of my journey was just a chore I had to be done with, nothing complicated.

Hong Kong
Hong Kong is a modern and a very densely populated city. They have big malls and market places with everything you could think of and is a great city if you like to do a lot of shopping or go out during the nights. But there is also a lot of nature and beautiful scenery in Hong Kong, with some of the best hiking places in the world, Dragon’s Back and The Peak are two good ones I recommend.

One of the first things I did when I arrived to Hong Kong was to buy the Octopus card which can be used to pay for all public transits, grocery and food in some restaurants. It’s basically a SL card, but better in every way. Students can also apply for a student version of the Octopus card which gives you 50 % off on all public transportation!

The subway in Hong Kong is called MTR and is the main way to travel around the city. From HKUST campus to central Hong Kong is approximately a 50-minute journey but it only costs students approximately 10 SEK.
There is a lot of good restaurants here in Hong Kong and most of the time it will cost you 80-120 HKD (1 SEK approximately 0.98 HKD). I used a popular app (in Hong Kong) called “Open Rice” to find restaurants which shows you all the restaurants with reviews, menu and price range.

Climate
I arrived to Hong Kong 25 August and during that time until the end of September it was 28-30 degrees Celsius and a lot of rain. I used shorts almost every day all the way to the end of November. During December the temperature was between 16-22 degrees. But 16 degrees in Hong Kong does not feel like 16 degrees here in Sweden it feels colder. Overall the weather was really nice.

Typhoons are also common in Hong Kong during the summer and September (although less frequent), the levels range from 1-10. Usually they are around 3 during September but once we had a level 8 Typhoon, all the classes were cancelled and all shops were closed except for the McDonalds on Campus (yeah, they have a McDonalds). When the warning for a Typhoon is above level 7 it is smart to stock up on food unless you want to stay in a 45-minute-long queue at McDonalds (mistakes were made). You can follow the weather live on an app called “MyObservatory”, it shows everything including the current typhoon level/signal, very convenient.

HKUST
During the first week, HKUST provide introduction events for the exchange students. The activities range from sports, baking mooncakes to sightseeing in the city. During that time, you get a great opportunity to meet the other exchange students.

HKUST campus is located on the mountainside and has beautiful views. It is a “vertical” campus with a lot of stairs and elevators. On campus you will find a grocery store, barbershop, bookstore, several restaurants/canteens among other things. The restaurants include McDonalds and Subway (which opened in the middle of the semester). The food on campus is really cheap especially the canteen food, it cost 20-30 HKD for a big meal. McDonalds is also really cheap in Hong Kong, a Big Mac set costs approximately 30 HKD.
They also have sport facilities that is free for the students to use, I only tried the gym and the outside swimming pool. The gym was a bit small for a university with thousands of students, other than that it had everything you needed.

Accommodation
HKUST offer exchange students accommodation on campus and you can choose if you want to live with a local student, exchange student or someone specific. Then you will be allocated randomly to one of their 9 (Under Graduate) halls on campus. I choose to live with an exchange student because that person would probably be in a similar situation as I, that everything is a new experience, etc. I got a really nice roommate, we became close friends and did most things together.

I lived in Hall I, which is the oldest hall on campus. The rooms are really small, maybe 12 square metres, you also share the bathroom with other people on the same floor. Some of the newer halls have bigger rooms and a bathroom that is only shared with 4 people. However, one of the benefits of Hall I was its location on campus, it was close to everything. We also had our own elevator that lead to the atrium which was convenient in the mornings when everybody goes to class, we didn’t have to wake up earlier because of long elevator queues. Another thing worth to mention is that you have to charge the AC with your student card. You add money to your card and then charge the AC, 1 HKD gives you 65 minutes. My roommate and I took turns charging the AC.
Studies
The study pace was slower in HKUST compared to KTH because all the courses last the whole semester. But the assignments eventually stack up even though they were not particularly hard, at least in the courses I did, which lead to a lot of work sometimes. The courses have midterm examination which is usually 1 hour and 30 minutes long and a final examination that is 3 hours long. The questions are easier compared to KTH but they give you more questions so often time is the barrier rather than your problem solving skills.

I did 3 software courses and 2 non-technical courses, which include Advanced Artificial Intelligence, Data Mining, Image Processing, Introduction to Management and High-tech Innovation and Entrepreneurship. I found the courses overall very interesting except for the management course, the professor was good in that course but most of the topics covered was very basic and just not that interesting to me. The entrepreneurship course was very insightful, the professor in that course has a lot of experience with start-ups, she in fact was one of the founders of the university, I learned a lot in that course. The management- and entrepreneurship course had obligatory attendance. The software courses were fun especially the big artificial intelligence project. However, I eventually stopped going to the software lectures because they were either too slow or not that beneficial compared to reading on your own. The professor in artificial intelligence only had 6 PowerPoints for the whole semester.

Travel Opportunities
Hong Kong’s location gives you a great opportunity for traveling, during my time there I travelled to Taiwan, Mainland China and Singapore. If you are thinking about traveling a lot during your exchange period, I recommend trying to pick courses so that you have either Monday or Friday free. This will give you a lot of chances for traveling. Many students travelled around much more than me.

Last Words
Do exchange studies, trust me you won’t regret it, it will be one of your best life experiences. It doesn’t matter where you choose to do your exchange studies, just do it.