

SKY-HIGH



Students climb the stairway to get to recess.

SCHOOL

by Kate Carroll

If you ever move to Hong Kong, think vertical. Hong Kong is home to hundreds of skyscrapers. In fact, it's likely that your school would be several stories high too. City dwellers are used to this lifestyle, but for those who move there from a rural or suburban area, this is a stretch — or rather, a climb!

One of these sky-high schools is the Hong Kong International School, or HKIS, for short. HKIS brings 2,600 students together from more than 40 nations. With so many cultures present, students develop respect and appreciation for all people. HKIS demonstrates that the “other side” of the world is closer than you think.



HKIS's two campuses are on the south side of Hong Kong Island. Getting to school can be thrilling — or perhaps terrifying. Winding down narrow roads along the jagged cliffs of the Pacific Ocean is the route to school from the northern part of Hong Kong. If you dare, make this trip in the very first seat on top of a double decker bus. Fair warning — don't attempt this ride with a queasy stomach!

Moving from another country to Hong Kong makes you an expat. Expat is short for expatriate, a citizen who lives outside of his home country. People move to Hong Kong for various reasons, and the average stay at HKIS is about three to four years. As expat stays are temporary, HKIS focuses on welcoming students right away. If you transferred to HKIS, it's likely that your new teacher and classmates would correspond with you before you moved there. Note the time difference. While your new friends would be writing to you during class time, you might be fast asleep. Hong Kong is 12 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time.

Classrooms at HKIS Primary span seven floors. Just as in American schools, kids have recess. But at HKIS, recess is on the roof! Children climb a mountain of stairs to get to their playground. Speaking of stairs, HKIS has a special stairway in the lobby of the school known as the Rainbow Stairs. A large, colorful mural brightens the space and offers a warm hello to all who enter the school. Before students leave HKIS Primary, they paint a picture of themselves somewhere on the mural — leaving their own imprint behind.

Like most school children in Hong Kong, HKIS students wear uniforms. Can you guess the colors of this



Students leave their mark on the school in more ways than one! • • •



American-based school? Red, white, and blue! All shirts must display the HKIS emblem. Families often buy uniforms at nearby Stanley Market where shoppers “haggle” for the best price. Rarely do shoppers pay the listed price for items in Hong Kong.

At HKIS, English is the spoken language, but, how’s your



Mandarin? Although Cantonese is the most common dialect in Hong Kong, Mandarin, China’s national language, is part of daily studies at HKIS. Students learn to speak Mandarin and write pinyin — Chinese character writing.

Rich cultural diversity thrives at HKIS. Classes celebrate many colorful traditions from around the world. The school salutes the customs of India on their annual India Day. Instead of U.S.

Thanksgiving, some class clusters prepare an International Feast Day. The variety of experiences promotes global understanding and acceptance. Depending on the classroom and the current events in the world, you might hear a real kookaburra laugh, or participate in a Spirit Day effort to provide disaster relief to nearby neighbors in the Philippines. During high school, your studies may take you on a week-long experience to places such as Turkey, Singapore, or even the Christmas Islands. No matter what activity goes on at HKIS, Torch, the school mascot, is on hand to cheer his fellow classmates.

Every year, HKIS hosts a World’s Fair. This carnival celebrates the various nations represented at the school. You can taste cuisine, make crafts, or play games with people from around the globe. From Papua, New Guinea to Atlanta, Georgia, the world is the stage during this exhibition.

So, how would you feel about attending a sky-high school in a foreign land? Although you would move far away from home, you would see and do unimaginable things. Just like the buildings in Hong Kong, you would rise to new heights and have once in a lifetime experiences. You would no longer be just a citizen of the United States; your encounters would make you an honorary citizen of the world.

