



Dream campus

I AM VISITING Stanford. It is the first time after my graduation in 1978 that I am staying at the campus for an extended period.

Since my time as a student, Stanford's reputation has risen to a truly global level, and in the global public's mind it is right up there in the top five to 10 universities of the world.

Many have written on what a "Stanford education" means, and perhaps more importantly, how to get admitted to the elite university. I wrote an article here before titled *Harvard: Stanford of the East*, but this week I'll write about something that not many people have discussed: the atmosphere and the physical campus of Stanford.

Many things have changed in the 40 years since I left, but the time away has also given me a new and fresh perspective on even the familiar things that have not changed.

Stanford's campus must be among the most beautiful and best naturally endowed campuses in the world.

It has a full-size golf course, the SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory, a sizable hill on its campus with a radio astronomical telescope (the "dish") and a popular hiking trail, a riding and equestrian center, which in fact is Stanford's birthplace (before Stanford became a world-class university, it was a horse farm, and the university is still known as "The Farm" to insiders), a lake on campus where I took sailing lessons, but has since dried up; world-class museums and galleries, and the Stanford Shopping Mall, one of the largest in the Silicon Valley. In fact, Stanford even has its own zip code – 94305 – due to its sheer size.

The campus feels completely different from university campuses in Hong Kong; most of the buildings are low rise – at most three to four stories high.

The campus is also relatively flat. The necessity and the ease have led to the widespread use of bicycles as a means of transportation around campus – Stanford has 19,000 bike-parking spaces. Everywhere you go,

you see mountains and streams of bikes.

The degree of "freedom" on a bike on a campus like Stanford is hard to explain in the Hong Kong context, where bikes are only for weekend recreation. I had one in my student days and on this visit I also acquired a bike, for nostalgia if not for practicality. Alas, bike theft is a major problem: I was told that the campus bike shop is doing good business selling replacements.

Hong Kong universities often pride themselves on being "international," but they are not comparable to Stanford in one particular aspect: food.

The food on Hong Kong campuses is still primarily Cantonese and doesn't cover even other Chinese cuisines too well, not to mention truly international fare.

At Stanford, one not only gets American, but also Italian, French, Chinese, Japanese (also *poke* from Hawaii), Mexican and even Venezuelan (I tried *arepa* – which I have never heard of before).

Stanford has always been a tourist attraction, but



Out of the Box

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walking around campus, I notice a big change since my student days. At least 50 percent of the tourists on campus now look Chinese, and a majority speak Putonghua. When I was a student, there were no visitors from the mainland. Most tourists visit the Stanford Bookstore, which is probably 10 times bigger than HKUST's but has more souvenirs than

books, and it must be doing a brisk business.

Most in Hong Kong are probably familiar with Stanford's academic standing, but many are unaware that it is also a sports powerhouse. The National Collegiate Athletic Association has voted that it has the most successful university sports program for the last 22 years, and the school is the alma mater for greats like Tiger Woods and John McEnroe. Stanford is proof that academics and sports are not mutually exclusive.

Stanford also enjoys one of the nicest weather in the world. It has seasons but little bad weather; many find it warm enough to do outdoor things even in winter during the day.

A dream campus, plus great weather, is hard to beat.