

Exonians Quarantine Around the World

By ANNE BRANDES and FELIX YEUNG

As Exonians returned to their countries of residence to weather the coronavirus outbreak, many faced government-mandated quarantines, with various tracking and security measures. The following is a sample of some of their experiences.

Prep Clark Wu sat himself down in the corner of a bare hotel room on March 18. In addition to his chair, the room had a desk, a bathroom without soap and a wooden bed. Instead of sheets, a tarp with a hospital emblem covered the pillowless bed. Wu spent 15 hours in a local hotel as part of Shanghai's mandatory quarantine process. He is just one of numerous Exonians who faced such procedures when returning to their home countries.

Wu initially planned to spend his Spring Break in the United States. "I... stayed [in] New York [for] two weeks and worked near a hospital. I'm pretty sure we were all aware of the coronavirus outbreak, yet not a single person wore a mask. I'm an American citizen, but I must say that the loose policies in the U.S. don't work," he said. "I decided to return to China because it's home and it's safer."

In making the trip home, Wu knew he would be quarantined. "My grandparents, who stayed in Shanghai this whole time, were always under self-quarantine. My parents needed to self-quarantine when they returned to China as well," he said. "In Shanghai, there's this whole process from when you arrive at the airport until you close your door at home. Thanks to the publicity, I was able to prepare for most of the trip."

Still, the whirlwind procedures of quarantine struck Wu by surprise. "Quarantining essentially began from the moment I arrived at the airport. Passengers were led off the plane based on the country of departure (not the country of transfer)," he said. "At customs, officials ran multiple tests to check for fevers and other coronavirus symptoms. Everyone also had to fill out health forms. Then, we split into districts [of residence] and representatives led us to hotels for the nucleic acid test, which tests for coronavirus, and an overnight quarantine." Wu had already spent over twenty hours on several connecting flights.

"The hotel room was quite miserable... Since I didn't know if anything was clean, I decided to sleep inside of my suitcase, which I filled with clean laundry. Most of my night, however, I spent lying awake because I had not eaten for most of the day," he recounted. "Thankfully, there were sufficient outlets for me to recharge all my electronics and stay in touch with my parents."

Wu and his fellow travelers were released after their tests came up negative. "Everyone seemed quite miserable when we carried the suitcase down because nobody got enough sleep or food," he said. Officials gave Wu a carton of milk and some crackers as he departed the hotel.

Though his stay in the facility was more than harrowing, Wu's quarantine was not over when he left the hotel. He spent two more weeks in isolation at his apartment. In

Shanghai, quarantines are enforced by household, rather than individually. Thus, Wu's parents had to stay in another apartment in the city to avoid quarantine.

"There's an electronic lock on my door that allows for four exits everyday. When I open the door for the fifth time, the police are notified. There are also officials... who come and take my temperature," Wu said. "My family brings me food for every meal."

Throughout quarantine, Wu kept his spirits high. "I don't have much to do and the emptiness really creeps in on me sometimes. I'm honestly just glad to be able to rest for a while before school begins," he said. "Uncertainty still lurks, but at the very least I'm at home and my family is near."

Senior Matteo Calabresi endured a similar home quarantine upon his return to Italy on March 13. "A couple of days before I traveled back home, the Italian government announced that the entire country was going to be locked down," he said. "What that means is that nobody is allowed to leave home except for [limited] reasons." These valid essential activities are work, grocery shopping and seeking medical attention.

Even the former two essential tasks are severely curtailed. "There is a small number of factories and shops that remain open, although there are several restrictions for them, such as making a reservation to enter a shop and entering these places one by one," Calabresi said. "Grocery stores are open, but only a limited number of customers is allowed inside, and only one person per family can go grocery shopping... For all of the above cases, one needs to fill out a sheet that you can find online, explaining why you are leaving your household."

Enforcement of shelter-in-place has been stringent in Italy, the European epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic. "There are police checks in every other street, and if you do not have [a] sheet with you with a valid reason to get out of your household, you risk a very heavy fine or even worse consequences," he said.

To protect his family members, Calabresi chose to self-isolate at his grandparents' house. "In these difficult times, the most important thing for my family is to protect [each other]. Having traveled (though airports and train stations were completely empty), I am my family's most exposed member to the risk of COVID-19," he said. "Nobody actually believes that I could be infected, but it's better to be safe than to be sorry."

"I do not get out of the guest room unless it is strictly necessary, and if I do, I wear a face mask and gloves. I eat in a separate room everyday. It feels a little lonely, but everyone needs to make sacrifices in this difficult period," he said.

Calabresi recalled returning to an unfamiliar Italy—his home since birth. "When I arrived in Rome, I got on a train to go up to Prato (near Florence), which is where I live. I had a chance to take a look at the very saddening scenario of our streets, emptied of any human being except police officers," he said.

This sense of emptiness had followed Calabresi throughout

his journey. "If it is any interesting, the plane ticket I got was the cheapest I have ever gotten to travel back home, even though I only took it one day before the departure," he said. "Obviously, after Trump's speech, Americans decided not to travel to Italy, so the plane was almost completely empty. The only passengers were Italians going back home."

During this journey, Calabresi noticed far more rigid measures to prevent coronavirus transmission in Italy than the United States. "[John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York] was completely empty, but there was no control for temperature or anything like that. When I arrived in Rome, the airport was also empty, but arriving passengers had to go through a temperature detector machine," he said. "All the passengers in front of me had normal body temperature, but I would imagine that if one had a fever they would stop them for further testing."

"At the train station, I had to go through police checks in which I had to explain my reason for traveling, give my [identification] and declare that I was healthy and never tested

online, I don't really have any place to stay in the U.S.," he said. "The situation in the U.S. is also getting worse and worse, and I think it'll be safer to go back to [Shenzhen,] China, where I live." Xiao left the United States on March 15, preparing to stay in China for the foreseeable future.

Still, this decision came with uncertainty over how he would be treated upon landing. "I discovered I would have to be quarantined a few days before I left the U.S.," he said. "I wasn't sure at the time [about the details], because the Chinese policies on quarantines were changing on a daily basis."

Like Wu, Xiao stayed in a hotel serving as a government quarantine center. However, his experience was markedly more positive. "I was quarantined in a hotel near my house for the first two days, and then at my house for the rest of the two weeks," he said. "The hotel was nice—the room was about as big as the one in Exeter Inn. They also provided free meals that were delivered to our rooms every day."

Xiao noted that the first leg of his journey went smoothly. "I arrived at Hong Kong International Airport. I remember having my temperature checked a couple of times and filling out a health form. Everyone in the airport was wearing masks," he recalled.

His trip to mainland China, however, was more tumultuous. "When I arrived at Shenzhen, I waited for a long time in customs. There were a

living to Hong Kong on Thursday [March 19], after 12:00 a.m. would have to be quarantined—I [arrived] at 6 a.m. that day," she said.

Though Liao alone was quarantined, she was asked to stay away from family members and to wear a coded wristband at all times. The wristband was linked to a government app she had to download.

"During the quarantine period, the Government will monitor whether you are staying at the place of quarantine through this app by detecting and analyzing the environment electronic signals and their respective strengths, such as Bluetooth, Wi-Fi and geospatial signals in the neighborhood," government guidelines given to Liao read. "If a change of such signals is detected, the app may issue an alert and request you to confirm your presence at the place of quarantine by scanning the... code on your wristband." The document stressed that the government's app would receive only location information.

Upon arrival in Hong Kong, Liao was also given a document entitled "Home Quarantine Guideline for Home Confinee." Among other restrictions, she was told to stay one meter away from all family members and in a well-ventilated single room.

Certainly, the experience of wearing a wristband was novel to Liao. However, she made the most of the situation and used her two weeks of quarantine for self-improvement.



Officials check a traveler's health declaration in Shanghai, China.

May Chen/The Exonian

positive for COVID-19. I saw that a few passengers were not allowed to exit the station," he noted. "They probably didn't have a valid enough reason for traveling, and I imagine they were fined."

Calabresi found quarantine more challenging than he expected. "I have always hated doing nothing for more than 30 seconds, and so I constantly need to find something to do. I spend a good part of my day on the phone with my friends and family," he said. "I sleep a lot, work out, watch some Netflix, try to read and learn more about COVID-19 and cook as much as I can to learn new recipes and improve my abilities."

Nevertheless, he stressed that protecting his family was worth the cost. "It's not that bad after all: I am happy that my family is safe and that I am back home," he said. "Quarantine is difficult for everyone, but it is necessary for the well-being of the community, and I am happy to follow the rules."

For upper Tony Xiao, the decision to go home came easily. "Now that spring term [has been] moved

lot of people, and I stood for almost three hours in a line to get my temperature taken," he said. "After that, I was taken to a bus that carried me to my hotel. It was quite disorganized. At one point, we were ordered to get off the bus, and, after twenty minutes of waiting, we got on again."

"The entire trip from the customs to the hotel took almost three hours, it's a thirty minute ride at most," he said. "I think they weren't prepared for the flood of people coming back all at once. On my first night back, all the rooms in my hotel were already full."

Though quarantine comes with spouts of boredom, Xiao is coping well. "After I got back to my house, I spent a lot of time with my family and read some books," he said. "I really look forward to going for a run when [my] quarantine period ends."

Returning to Hong Kong in mid-March, senior Jasmine Liao also experienced a mandatory home quarantine. "Three days before my flight, my mom told me that the government announced that all travelers ar-

"I think this is the time to work on yourself, so I've been reading, cooking, cleaning and spending time with my pets," she said. "And just having good food too."

Upper May Chen encountered lengthy quarantine precautions when she landed in Shanghai. After arriving on an impeccably clean plane, Chen's temperature was taken immediately after exiting the plane. "Everyone cleaned aggressively as soon as we got on the plane," Chen said. "Everyone has masks on."

After Chen entered the airport, her temperature was checked twice and her wrists were scanned. Post this initial examination, she waited three hours for additional testing. When the round of testing had concluded, the passengers were color coded.

The next round commenced after the passengers went through customs and Chen's bags were sprayed down. After finding her district representative, she was sent to the hospital for additional testing.

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