

# Exchange Report: The National University of Singapore Fall 2015-2016

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Hi! I am Kelvin. I am pleased to introduce to you the National University of Singapore (the NUS)! It is my sincere wish that, this exchange report will help you decide if you want to pick this university for your exchange, or to help you better prepare for your upcoming exchange experience in Singapore! I am quite sure an exchange semester would be a memorable experience in your university study. Do make the most out of it 😊

## About NUS

NUS is one of the top schools in Singapore, maybe even Asia. (Of course HKUST is also good). It aims to be a top global school with an Asia focus, e.g. in terms of teaching. You can find a lot of factual information on the Internet.

NUS has been attracting quite a lot of foreign students to study there, both on exchange and full time basis. You will expect to be exposed to different cultures, especially South Asia ones because Singapore is geographically located somewhere in the middle of South Asia region. You will definitely meet a lot of Chinese, Indian, and Malaysian there. Try to learn a bit of their languages or dialects! I know that quite a few of foreign students, especially Mainland Chinese, who study there on a long-term immigration scheme. In other words, they may abode and work in Singapore after their graduation in NUS.

## Monthly Log

### August

Upon arrival in Singapore in late July, I enjoyed at least two weeks of free time, in which courses had not officially started and I just needed to hang around in campus or in the country. NUS had an exchange team with student volunteers so that they would bring exchange students/ new students (i.e. post-graduate students or freshmen) around the campus and some tourist spots in Singapore. I visited Marina Bay, Bugis and Little India. Marina Bay is equivalent to Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour, and where major national celebration would take place. Bugis is a shopping paradise for cheap things, and for South Asia stuff. Little India, as the names implies, is where you can see a lot of Indian guys and temples. NUS business school also assigns an exchange buddy to me, who is a pretty lady. It is extremely highly suggested that you join these school-organized tours and befriend with your assigned buddy for the sake of knowing Singapore and the NUS, and as importantly, to meet new friends. You just need friends to help out in a foreign countries. Actually student volunteers are typically nice guys and girls, and they really helped out to teach me things and brought me out for visit and food, privately.

## SG50

Upon my arrival in Singapore in August, the nation was busy preparing for the celebration of their independence from Malaysia for the 50<sup>th</sup> year. They termed this nationwide event as “SG50”. (SG stands for Singapore.) By coincidence, their former prime minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, who was by consensus regarded as the father of the nation, passed away in March this year. From my point of view, the two events sparked off the surge of patriotism in Singapore. I was quite amused by their patriotism and loyalty towards their country. People of older generations, for example, those now in their 50s, suffered from poverty and racial unrest during British and later Malaysian colonization and governance. Lee Kuan Yew brought the country to prosperity so Singaporeans in general admire him much, maybe to an extent that I would call “worshipping”.

On 9 August 2015, many Singaporeans and tourists alike gathered on the two sides of the Marina Bay (equivalent to Victoria Harbour in Hong Kong) to watch a full day of celebration events organized by the government. The government organized drama shows, speech from government heads, military demonstrations, with marching soldier, tanks, fighting jets flying faster than sound above the watching crowd. Of course, it was ended by a firework show. The event was certainly memorable, and as a tourist I could feel their enthusiasm and love towards their nation.

By the end of August, you need to finish finalizing your course selections. I will talk about this in a latter section.

## September

Classes started in the third week of August, but the intensity was not very high in the first two weeks. Actually, I enjoyed very much in this month from an academic perspective. I love the course contents on investment, financial markets and real estate. (Yeah, I like money. Haha) Yet I was not yet subject to the stress of mid-terms. So most of the time I just enjoyed my casual fun reading in library. No much that I did in Singapore in September.

## October

I need to say that it is convenient and cheap to travel around South Asia from Singapore. Heading north, you have Thailand. To the south, you have Bali in Indonesia. Looking to the west, you have India and Vietnam etc. All those South Asian countries are for you to consider for a trip on a tight budget. Research well and then go! Remember, go with friends and buy insurance.

In October, I went to Phuket Island in Thailand for a 3-day trip. I played with zoo animals, riding on racing cars, riding on elephant, racing on sanpans (2 times), deep diving to see coral reefs and fish,

parachuting for a few minutes, enjoyed a lot of truly delicious seafood, going to bar and drink, sight-seeing on a little boat. Adding fees for these activities, plus hotel fees and round trips to and from Singapore, guess how much I spent? The answer is.... Just a bit more than HKD\$3000. I guess it's fair price?

### November

Here comes the tough month of study in NUS. In the end of October or early November, you will have a lot of project work and presentations. In my own experience, as I have 4 finance courses, and they by no coincidence share similar progress and style. So all in a sudden, the presentations would cram into the very same week. Also for the final written exams, they were in the same week. I was originally scheduled to have 3 final exams in one afternoon – simply impossible. But I negotiated and successfully rearranged the times. Suggestion: Spread out your time if you foresee workload peaks. But it may be difficult as teammates may not be able to cooperate with your workload schedule. This is life! In this half month, don't even think of travelling 😊

Here comes the essence of my exchange report 😊

For exchange students, they follow a separate route compared to the local guys. **Two to three weeks before you arrive at Singapore,** NUS would request you to go through an online system to select the 10 courses you wanted and rank them in the order of priority. You will highlight, on the online system, up to 10 courses that are necessary for you to take, e.g. required major courses. For those courses, you theoretically would stand a better chance to get enrolled.

We will then be assigned to classes considering: our majors, fulfillment of prerequisite courses, time-table availability, class quota, and our ranking of priority. Think of this as NUS asking you about which courses you want to “pre-reg” into. I remember that not long after I hit the ground in Singapore, I have known the course result. More than often, the result would be likely what you would need. However, if you want to change the assigned courses, you can ask for approval from your respective lecturers whether they allow you to enroll or drop or swap. This will be done black and white, and with department chops, i.e. a bit of physical paperwork. The formal add-drop period in NUS lasted for 3 weeks. Therefore, you have a grand total of more than a month to make up your mind and try out your luck when you compete for courses.

*This long add-drop period is very advantageous for you guys to solve course equivalence issues, because you have more than sufficient time to apply to HKUST ARRO so that they can access new course equivalence recognition which they say may take up to a month. However, you are always reminded that once you have received the offer letter from NUS, even before you take off for Singapore, you are then entitled to the right to apply to ARRO on new recognition for NUS courses.*

*Strategy: If you see a new course/ course without prior recognition, then apply to ARRO immediately and see how it goes. Change your mind in the add-drop period upon the decision by ARRO. Using this method, you don't need to worry much about if any course you take will not be recognized. It is not as wise to wait and apply for course recognitions after the add-drop period, or even after you have ended your exchange semester. In my opinion, it is easy to get courses transferred back.*

For me, I got enrolled into 4 finance and 1 real estate valuation courses. In the *advanced* real estate valuation course, upon the kind suggestion by the lecturer, I changed to a *junior* real estate valuation course of similar context, taught by the same old gentleman. The process was quite simple. (Haha) By the way, I also applied to ARRO for new recognition for this junior course. The process was simple.

### **Visa Procedure**

The NUS will send you instruction on visa procedures. Before your trip to Singapore, you need to apply for a student pass. You will need to submit your identity information, passport information, etc. to the Immigration and Checkpoints Department of Singapore. Of course you need a valid passport to enter Singapore before you do anything else. Upon your arrival at NUS, you will be instructed to apply for a temporary document called Embarkation Card. Everyone will need to queue in an assigned timeslot in the NUS campus to pass through those document formalities which I think was troublesome. Read through their instructions carefully. Tips: Bring some passport photos from Hong Kong to Singapore in case you need them. After two weeks of getting the embarkation card, you queue again to get the student pass, which is a kind of ID card, and lasts for your semester. You will regret if you lose any of those embarkation cards, student pass. I heard that going to their ICA office and queue to get your things done in those peak days were a torture as it would take so long.

### **Accommodations**

You can choose and rank 3 options of student housing. Many exchange students are assigned to Prince George's Park Residence (PGP) due to its huge capacity. I think the best choices are Kent Ridge Hall and Sheares Hall. They are within 5 minutes walking distance from the NUS business school.

## Expenses

Items (Estimates)	SGD	HKD
Air tickets	300	1650
Accommodation	2000	11000
Food	2000	11000
Transport	200	1100
Travelling	700	3850
Others (Groceries, telecom)	1500	8250
Grand Total	6,700	36,850

## What to bring

Short-sleeve clothes only, because Singapore is very hot

Business suit for course presentations

Flip-flops

Of course, travel insurance, if you travel in South Asia a lot

And other usual personal hygienic stuff lah 😊 (in Singaporean English, or “Singlish”)

## Final comments

I just want to wish you a great exchange semester! Make the most out of your exchange! Make new friends! Singaporean are as warm as the weather can be!