

# EXCHANGE REPORT

## Singapore Management University

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GBUS & IS

Fall 2016



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# MONTHLY LIVING LOG

## AUGUST 2016

The Fall semester in Singapore starts earlier than in HKUST, therefore I flew to Singapore already by the 5<sup>th</sup> of August. Even though the classes were to start only on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, we had to settle some things like issuing a Student Pass, Student Card and undergoing an orientation program beforehand.

Initially I was disappointed that I had to finish my internship in Hong Kong earlier in order to attend it, but in the end these 10 days were a great ways to acclimatize myself to the new place, tmeet new friends before school years starts and just explore the city without time constraints. Since I could not leave Singapore before getting the student visa on the 11<sup>th</sup>, I decided to see the best parts of the city. I would definitely recommend places like the artificially created island Sentosa, a nature park connected with the wavy, wooden bridge called Henderson Waves or the Treetop Walk where you can see a lot of monkeys and tropical flora. After the school life kicked in, it was much harder to find time for this, therefore I would encourage everyone to plan this period well.

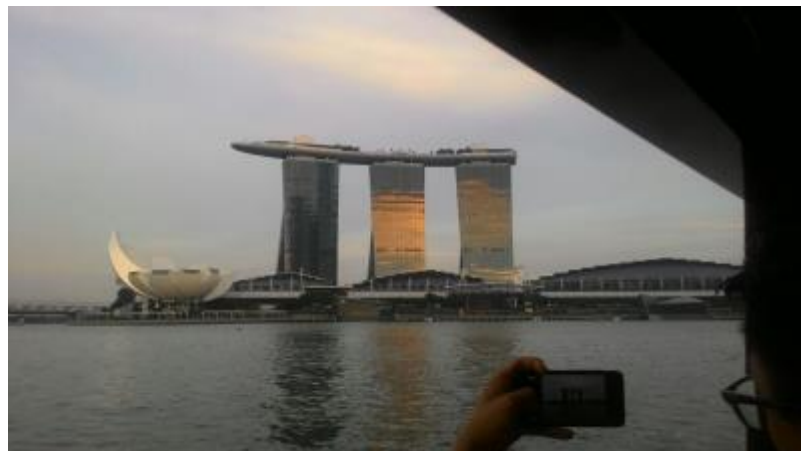


I also took the time in the second week of school to go on a weekend trip to Kuala Lumpur, before the project work started. It was a good idea and I went by bus, which

cost around HKD100 and took me there in 5 hours. Flights are also quite cheap with Jetstar or AirAsia and take just an hour!

## **AUGUST 2016**

August was when the project work started for good. Even though I took only three courses, they were all project-based, therefore it was normal to spend around 50% of course work out of class. I took some great courses which are not offered in UST and I was surprised with the quality of lessons as well. I think the main difference was that all professors were not local, therefore their English was very good. Apart from trying to find out all about the methods of teaching, August was also a very sociable month, when I met a lot of people, also from the local students. I had a Buddy assigned to me by SMU, who was a really great guy and as we went to eat Chinese vegetarian food together, he let me in on a lot of hacks and tips of the local students in SMU.



He also told me some facts about the Singaporean education system, which is more multi-tiered than I thought and recommended me good places to visit on my own. It was really helpful and I indeed explored the city further. I especially liked the area around the iconic Marina Bay Sands, which was just a 20 minutes run from my hostel. It's a great 5-km route for a morning or evening jog as well as for a walk to enjoy the view of the harbourfront.

## OCTOBER 2016

After the first 6 weeks of classes, we welcomed October with a one-week Midterm Break. It is a good opportunity to plan some longer trips around the region and the most popular directions among my exchange friends were Indonesia (Bali and Borobudur Temple), Vietnam as well as Japan. I decided to stay in Singapore, because I was freelancing for two startups at the time and it was a good opportunity to catch up on some work and attend networking events. I need to say that I was not disappointed. Just like Hong Kong, Singapore invests a lot in the startup ecosystem and created places like BASH (Build Amazing Startups Here). It's a unique place that used to be an old factory but was now turned into three big blocks of co-working spaces. A lot of them are free for young entrepreneurs and I could sense that the local students were very open to the idea of a career in this field – with some of them already having their own companies.



Singapore also had a lot of great events (including HKUST MBA Event!) because many speakers from around the world are attracted to this place's reputation and are keen to come over for conferences. I figured that the best way to get into events for free was to offer myself as a volunteer and so I took part in the first Slush (biggest startup conference in the world) in Singapore, Innovation Collider, Millennial 20/20 and Google Startup Bootcamp. Since many companies have their APAC headquarters in Singapore, I also took part in seminar at the Facebook office (with an amazing view!) as well as in the very new, huge office of Google. Thanks to the people I met and ideas I heard, I evolved a lot in the direction of online marketing and design which is what I want to pursue when I graduate.

## NOVEMBER 2016

November was certainly the busiest. This is when all the courses were finished and after a week break, we started exams. The written exams were similar to the ones in HKUST and also graded on a curve. We've also had some great farewell party prepared by the Exchange Office at SMU (called OGL) where we could see with our friends one more time before we leave and re-live the experiences we've had. My personal highlight of the month was a 4-day trip to Ho Chi Minh City, that I took right after my last exam and before I flew back home for winter. It is a very tourist-friendly, cheap place with lots of history and amazing food. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of November I came back to Singapore and on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December my exchange officially finished when I had to give back my student visa at the airport immigration counter!



# **GENERAL EXCHANGE INFORMATION**

## **VISA PROCEDURES**

In terms of the administrative work, the University was a great facilitator, so make sure you apply for the Student Pass through them, rather than on your own. Simply follow their email instructions after you are admitted to the university, as most of the visa application is done online (cost: around HKD1,000). When you come over to Singapore, you will have to come to the University on a given day, hand in the documents and you will get your Student Pass around a week later. If you do it on your own, be prepared to stand in lines even up to 6 hours...

## **ORIENTATION ACTIVITIES**

Do take part! SMU's exchange team is a bunch of very enthusiastic and helpful people, and the orientation itself just takes half a day, where you will learn a lot of survival tips (and stand a chance to win lots of cool SMU gadgets 😊), get a free lunch (helpful when you don't know where to find food on your first days) and have the only opportunity to meet with ALL exchange students in the same place. They also organize walking & eating tours before the classes start and it's a lot of fun.

## **INTERNATIONAL SERVICES & ACTIVITIES**

With such a diverse city like Singapore, you will easily find lots of events, starting from weekly Pub Quizzes, through design workshops to culturally-themed nights. Because

so many cultures reside there, you can easily find religious premises for all major faiths as well as celebrate holidays that you never did like the Indian Diwali.

## **ACCOMMODATION**

I chose to stay in the yo:HA hostel, which is the cheapest option (around HKD14,000/4 months) for a flat shared with 3 other people) and is a private hostel rented out by SMU. Although some people chose to stay in private rented rooms, I think that yo:Ha is a really good pick, because it is located in Chinatown, which is very hip area with lots of food, and it is perfectly connected with the main sights of Singapore. A walk to school would take me 30 minutes (10 min by bus), same for Marina Bay Sands area and the Sentosa island is just two stops away by metro. If you live on the top floor it also offers a great view of the skyline!

## **COURSE REGISTRATION**

SMU uses an interesting bidding system called BOSS. You will be allocated a certain amount of e-money which you can "invest" into courses that you want to get into, based on priority. It may seem confusing at the beginning, but just follow the rules of any auction. You will have 3 rounds, so I would suggest picking 2 courses that you care about the most and bidding a lot on them. If you don't get into all of them, then just bid again in the next round. Do not bid round sums, because sometimes the difference between \$10.21 and \$10 will be your winning \$0.21 ☺ Make sure you go through all the materials and guides sent to you by SMU and certainly speak to local students about best techniques to bid. Each year there is also a table with the "price" levels of each courses from last year, so check it first to have an idea of how much to bid.

## **TEACHING & ASSESSMENTS METHODS**

SMU also uses the bell curve grading system, but it follows a different lecture pattern. Each course only has one lecture per week, which lasts 3 hours and usually there are no tutorials. This means that you spend less time in classroom but you are expected to contribute another 2-3 hours per week on group meetings. It is a project-based approach, so expect more interactions, presentations and team work!

## **SPORTS & RECREATION**



SMU has a great new gym, where ground floor is a free weights and crossfit area and the top floor is a fitness area with many treadmills and light weights. Remember to always take a small towel with you to the gym, because you might not be allowed in without it. Apart from the gym, there is a swimming pool on the roof of the school and dance studios. In general, Singapore is very green and sunny so I would encourage you to be active and try hiking in its nature parks, take part in free street workouts or just go for a jog around Marina Bay.

## **FINANCE AND BANKING**

I did not set up a new bank account because I figured that the costs of maintaining it will be higher than the savings on ATM withdrawals. However, some of the best bets in terms of the bank is probably DBS or ICBC which are the most popular and international banks in Singapore.

## **SOCIAL CLUBS AND NETWORKING**

As I mentioned, Singapore is doing a lot to promote entrepreneurship, so if you look around, there are a lot of free events and conferences surrounding any topic that you could imagine. Do keep in touch with university emails and explore some local event websites for more information.

## **FOOD**

Food is the main attraction of Singapore – it is so diverse that anyone can find something to suit their taste. I would certainly recommend hawker centers, because they have the reputation of the cleanest street food in the world and average dishes cost around HKD30. My personal favorites are **Tekka Centre** (mostly Indian Food from all regions of the country), **Maxwell Centre** (great for outdoors seating area and a lunchtime pick for locals working in the area) and **Albert Centre** (10 minutes away from SMU).

## **TRANSPORTATION**

Buses and metro are the cheapest options (around HKD5 for a ride), although you can also buy a bicycle that starts at HKD300 for a second hand one or HKD600 for a new one. It will save you money if you commute with it and will keep you in good shape with all the Singaporean food! I did it and it was a great idea, because it took me just 15 minutes to get to university from the hostel, the roads are flat and the wind during riding will cool you down against the Singaporean heat. The only catch is that there is no public transport after 12am, so make sure you get the Uber or Grab app!

## **CLIMATE**

The weather in Singapore ranges from 28-32 degrees every day. This is great for outdoors and light clothing, but it can also lead to coughs and runny nose if you do not prepare something warmer for when seating e.g. in the library with strong AC. There are no distinct seasons, but towards November you will experience a lot of violent, but very short storms, usually in the early morning and afternoon. Make sure you have an umbrella when going out, even if it looks sunny – it can be treacherous!

## **COMMUNICATION**

It is a good idea to get a local SIM card and a number. For HKD50 per month you can get 2GB of mobile data and free calls with Singtel, which is just enough to get around the city and call taxis or restaurants. You can find cards on the stalls in Chinatown or in 711 around the city.

## **ITEMS TO BRING**

• Umbrella	
• Mosquito repellent	
• High-protection level sunscreen	
• Light clothes and summer shoes	
• Light formal clothes	
• Big backpack for short trips	
• Couple of warm sweaters for classes and studying in the library	

# USEFUL LINKS/CONTACTS

## EVENTS

Your Singapore - <http://www.yoursingapore.com/en.html>

Time Out - <https://www.timeout.com/singapore>

The Straits Times - <http://www.straitstimes.com/global> (major newspaper)

Meetup.com - <http://meetup.com/>

## OFFICIAL

Singapore Government - <https://www.gov.sg/>

Immigration and Checkpoints Authority - <https://www.ica.gov.sg/>

Office of Global Learning SMU - <https://www.smu.edu.sg/global/>

## FOOD

HungryGoWhere - <http://www.hungrygowhere.com/> (Food Guide)

## JOBS

E27 - <https://e27.co/jobs>

TechInAsia - <https://www.techinasia.com/jobs>

SGCareers - <http://sgcareers.com.sg/>

If more information is needed, get my contact from SBM Exchange Team by emailing at [bmugexch@ust.hk](mailto:bmugexch@ust.hk)