

Exchange Report:

The National University of Singapore



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Fall 2017 Exchange

## Part 1 – Monthly Activity Log

### August

Arriving at NUS, I stayed in Temasek hall for the semester. The rooms are quite spacious and clean. Despite having no air-conditioning, with the ceiling fan and by opening the windows, the room is quite cool. Generally, the rooms are one-person rooms, so there is sufficient privacy. Hall-mates are quite helpful, not only that they helped with our check-ins and luggage, they also helped us to blend into the local society, by organizing buddy programs throughout the semester as well as organizing welcome parties.

There are quite a number of exchange student gatherings and welcome teas for different student societies in the first month. You can meet a lot of exchange students and locals in the gatherings. Lot of exchange students will be looking for their travel buddies in the first few exchange student gatherings, and Singaporeans are very willing to offer suggestions on what to do, where to go, what to eat, or even being your lunch companions.

As Temasek is a sports hall, they have a great variety of sports teams. I signed up and participated in the Squash team, Frisbee team, Table Tennis team and Badminton team. They highly welcome exchange students' participation.

### September

Studying in NUS is getting more tensed. Group projects and presentations are starting, so I have way less time for the sports teams I have enrolled in. However, I still tried to make time for participating in their events as a relaxation.

One most memorable event is the overnight cycling. My hallmates and I did cycling around Singapore overnight. We did check points and had supper, and we enjoyed the scenery. It will be a lifetime memory as it was so fun and tiring.

I also travelled to Batam for two days. Batam is a small island in Indonesia and is only one-hour ferry away from Singapore. Having seafood there is such a delight and cheap.

### October

It is the period for midterms and midterm break. I had quite a few midterm exams as well as assignments, which made me unable to travel and hang out as much. Singapore students are tough and hardworking – they take studies very seriously and will invest a lot of time in it. Hence, I am influenced and dare not be laid-back.

One most remarkable event is the Temasek Hall Amazing Race. We race around Singapore in teams, checking out clues in different locations and race to finish the tasks. I teamed up with other exchange students in the team and we had a lot of fun – especially in the water soccer task. We never expect being able to play water soccer in the hall canteen.

### November

It is the peak season for projects and assignments as the semester is coming to an end. However, I still visited the home of my coursemate. They cooked Singapore style dinner for

me. It is a delight to have dinner with a Singapore family to experience their usual life in their homes.

Their house is quite spacious and comfortable. The facilities in the housing estate are completely free – which is quite different from Hong Kong as all the facilities in the clubhouses in Hong Kong will cost a price.

## December

After finishing all the take-home exams and tests, I did day trips to Malaysia a few times with some locals and some exchange friends. Johor Bahru is a good place for day trip as there are lots of good cafes and prices are quite reasonable there – the price of travelling by grab (similar to uber) is half of that in Singapore. Travelling there by public transport (bus) will cost around 2 SGD only, which is only \$12HKD, so it is quite worth-going.

I also travelled to Bintan, which is another island in Indonesia one hour away from Singapore. Scenery there is perfect however, the prices are quite high as it is a touristy location.

## Part 2 – General Exchange Information

### 1) Visa Procedures

Visa application will take around a week only, which is quite easy and fast. They will email you a step-by-step guideline once they accepted you as an exchange student, so it is quite easy. Upon arrival to Singapore, you will need to take the student visa from the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority, which may take up to half day of waiting and processing.

### 2) Orientation Activities

School, hall and different societies will organize welcome teas and orientation events for exchange students. Details of school orientation activities will be announced via email, where the others are through Facebook groups and Whatsapp groups invites.

### 3) International Services & Activities

The board of Temasek hall organizes activities for exchange students quite often, supper gatherings, hangouts, visits to local attractions, the activities never stop.

ATMs are also available in and near the campus. Hence, if you run out of cash, you may want to withdraw there.

### 4) Accommodations

There are quite a number of accommodations to choose from. A lot of exchange students may prefer staying in utown as it is comfortable and convenient – the GYM and swimming pool, lots of shops and convenient stores are nearby, and they even have 2 canteens. Utown accommodations may have air-conditioning, and bathrooms can be shared among less people as they are apartments.

However, I chose to live in a hall as I want to experience more of a local Singaporean life. Most halls will provide meal plans, for Monday to Saturday's breakfasts, and Sunday to Friday's dinners. Even though there is no air-conditioning nor lifts for halls, I can blend into the locals more easily as I live with them and can enjoy their hall activities as well. There is also a shared pantry in hall, so I can cook instant noodles when I am too lazy to go to canteen for lunch.

### 5) Courses Registration

You will have to choose up to 10 courses when you are filling in the application form for exchange. You may also tick some of the courses as compulsory for graduation, but it is still not guaranteed that you can enrol into the course. I only got enrolled into three courses when semester starts. However, exchange students can fill in a physical form to request for swapping classes or add/drop classes during the add/drop period. With the form, I successfully added 2 extra courses.

## 6) Teaching & Assessment Methods

Different from UST, there are a lot of readings which are compulsory for the lecture in NUS. For most of my courses, professors will take half of the class time for class discussion about the readings. It took me quite a while to get used to reading so much before the lecture.

In class, students are very eager to ask questions. In Q&A sessions, you may easily encounter tough questions as well.

## 7) Sports & Recreation Facilities

GYM and the swimming pool are in utown. In each hall, there will usually be a small GYM room opened 24/7 as well. In my hall, we have squash courts, badminton courts, basketball court, table tennis tables in our hall. However, I am not sure if other halls have these as well.

## 8) Finance & Banking (including currency / expenses)

Singapore uses SGD, which is around 1 SGD to 5.9 - 6 HKD.

Regarding the expenditure, I use around \$20 sgd per week for transportation, and around \$30-50 for food per week, depending on the location I eat. Eating in local hawker centers will be super cheap, it can easily be less than \$5sgd per meal, where eating in restaurants can be quite expensive.

Regarding the air tickets, travelling from Hong Kong can be quite cheap, especially if you take scoot. It can be as low as under \$200sgd for round trip tickets (less than \$1200hkd). But of course, it may not be as comfortable as other premium airlines.

It is not allowed to open a bank account in Singapore as our student visa is only 4 months. Students are only allowed to open a bank account in Singapore if their student visa is 6 months or above.

## 9) Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities

There are plenty of school-wide clubs available for students, including exchange students. Some interesting clubs are Drones Club and Diving Club. There are also plenty religious societies as well. These societies may have weekly gatherings or even two to four times a week, depending on the society.

## 10) Health & Safety

UST will have insurance for all exchange students but there are some terms constraining its coverage. Personally, I bought a full year travel insurance. Singapore is quite safe and secure. My hall-mates never lock their doors even when they are away or sleeping, and the front and back gates of the hall are opened sometimes.

## 11) Food

There is a great variety of food in Singapore, I would describe it as a food paradise similar to Hong Kong. Personally, I am in love with Prata and Laksa.

Food courts and school canteens will serve all sorts of food, from Japanese to Western to Korean, from Indian to Chinese to Vietnamese, there must be over 10 choices in every canteen and food court. You will never run out of choices nor get bored of one type of food.

## 12) Transportation

Singapore is well-connected by its public transports. You can reach anywhere with MRT or buses. However, if you want to be more relaxing, taking Grab or Uber is also a good choice. They always have promotion codes, so it may not be too expensive. Grab or Uber will also be an option when you go back home late, as you may not be able to catch the last school bus.

## 13) Climate

Singapore is humid and hot. I never wear long-sleeves in Singapore and even rarely need any jacket. However, sometimes it may be cool in the early morning or at night, so bringing a super thin jacket will be good.

## 14) Communication

Most Singaporeans speak English and Mandarin, and classes are conducted in English. Some will even understand and talk in Cantonese.

### Part 3 – Items to Bring

Bring more short-sleeves t-shirt as Singapore is super hot. You may sweat a lot and want to change your clothes during the day. Bring flip-flops as well as it may be so hot that you don't even want to wear shoes.

It is also suggested to bring some tempo tissue paper, the tissue quality is worse than Hong Kong (according to another exchange student from Hong Kong who had runny nose for quite long in Singapore).

Bring your own router and lan cable there so that you don't have to buy from the school and that you will also have wifi in your room. However, if your neighbours are good enough to share their wifi passwords with you, you may not need them.

Bring umbrellas, as it always rains in Singapore. It may rain in a sudden so the umbrella you bring better is a light one.

Bring business suit if you anticipate you will have presentations.

## Part 4 – Useful Links and Contacts

NUS Course Search

<http://www.nus.edu.sg/nusbulletin/search-modules/>

NUS Timetable Planner

<https://nusmods.com/timetable/sem-2>

NUS SIS System

<https://myisis.nus.edu.sg/psp/cs90prd/?cmd=login&languageCd=ENG&>