

Singapore Management University Exchange Program

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Singapore Management University (SMU)

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Part 1 - Monthly Activity Log

January 2022

When I first arrived in Singapore, the weather was really hot and in sharp contrast to Hong Kong. This was very surprising as it was early January, and I hadn't checked the weather/climate in Singapore prior to leaving. I later found out that due to its positioning, Singapore has constant 30-degree humid weather all-year round which I found very unique! Moreover, the Singapore Management University's Campus was also very different. Unlike the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology's campus, it is in the middle of the city, smaller and has an underground system which connects to all the buildings. I was very excited to check out this underground system and soon realized that not only could I avoid the sun, but the entire place was fully air conditioned. It also had a great variety of food places such as Italian and Indian places which I found convenient to eat at during class breaks or for lunch. Even though our orientation was virtual, we got a lot of important information such as the various clubs that were there and information about the city tour. I found the city tour, which was arranged by the university, a great way to go see beautiful and iconic landmarks such as Marina Bay Sands and get a chance to meet other exchange students before classes began! During that tour, near Chinatown, was my first-time trying durian. In fact, I even tried durian flavored ice-cream which was one of the most unique tastes I have ever encountered! I also learnt about hawker centers, which are basically cheap food-court style places, which generally serve local Singaporean food. It was super cool to visit the Newton hawker center in particular as that is the place they used in the popular movie "Crazy Rich Asians"!

February 2022

I visited a lot of malls in Singapore to explore shops. The best ones in my opinion were VivoCity and Suntec City. Apart from the shops, these malls had a lot of food options that aren't even available in Hong Kong. I was very surprised when I found out that several multinational chains had franchises in Singapore but not Hong Kong. I made the most out of it by eating a lot of tasty Domino's Pizza, Dunkin Donuts,

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WingStop, etc. To make sure I burn off the calories, I also made use of one of Singapore's most convenient traveling apps. Apps like "Anywheel" allowed me to find a bike near me and bike to pretty much anywhere I wanted in Singapore. My favorite thing to do was to bike with my friends at night near the Marina Bay harbor coastline. The views were beautiful, and it was cooler during the night. Through a friend I met at the city tour, I was introduced to the rugby team at the university. I decided to join the rugby team and it was one of the best decisions I made during my exchange program. I got to meet over 30 people in the team and enjoyed training and playing games with them. Not only did I have fun on the pitch, but I had an equal amount of fun off the pitch with them. They managed to invite me to several gatherings (such as dinners, etc) in which I met a lot of Singaporean locals and got to know more about their culture. It was particularly interesting hearing about some of the army stories they shared! At first, I had the impression no one wanted to do the mandatory army service, but I was pleasantly surprised to hear many people say they felt proud doing it for their country and learnt important life skills whilst learning to be independent during their tenure there. Moreover, they also introduced local Singaporean food (mainly in hawker centers). My favorite ended up being Singaporean style salted egg chicken rice!

March 2022

I spent most of March going around all the major tourist places in Singapore. For example, it was nice to unwind and relax at the beaches in Sentosa. It was also very cool to see various animals like the African Lion up close in the Singapore Zoo. My friends and I even went on the night safari (managed to catch a bird show there as well) which was a unique experience that you cannot get in Hong Kong. I even decided to sign up for a very creative rock-climbing experience (called "Climb Central"), which was built inside a mall! It was very challenging to do, but it ended up also being super fun.

April 2022

In April, I was mainly occupied with finishing up projects and assignments along with preparing and doing final exams. What made April special was the fact that I got to spend my birthday in a foreign country with new friends. My friends and I ended up going to a place called "Level 33", which is a

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beautiful rooftop restaurant/bar that overlooks the majority of Singapore! During my last couple of days, I made sure to go to a place called Mustafa in Little India to pick up souvenirs and other things for my friends and family in Hong Kong. It was super hard to say goodbye to the friends I made in Singapore but overall, the last four months were a great exchange experience!

Part 2 - General Exchange Information

Visa Procedures

I hold a Hong Kong Passport. The visa procedures were very easy, all I had to do was follow the email instructions received by Singapore Management University and submit basic things such as my passport on the Singapore Immigration website. The total fees were around 600 HKD.

Orientation Activities

Due to Covid-19, only one big orientation was held online via Zoom about a week before classes started. They went over the major things such as some of the clubs available, major school policies, etc. Singapore Management University also hosted a city tour for around 30 HKD which I highly recommend as it is a great way to meet new people and explore Singapore!

International Services & Activities

Singapore Management University made it super convenient for exchange students by hosting the immigration department on campus. This enabled us to get all the important documentation finished for our student pass. They also provided a goodie bag with a variety of different useful items. For example, they provided an SMU-themed umbrella which came in very helpful when tackling Singapore's unpredictable rainy weather!

Accommodations

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Singapore Management University does NOT provide on-campus housing for exchange students. However, they have a partnership with a housing company called “Yoha” about 15-20 minutes away from campus in Chinatown. I decided to go for that (do it early, applications close around November). They have a wide variety of options available. I went for the four-person room that comes in at around 700 SGD or around 4200 HKD per month. There were no meal plans available but lots of supermarkets nearby to cook food at home or can simply eat at cheap hawker centers.

Course Registration

Course Registration is very different from HKUST's system. I had to read the email instructions several times to fully understand how it works. In simple terms, you have to bid for courses like an auction within designated time periods. Meaning, unlike HKUST's system, speed is not important but rather how much you bid on a course (everyone starts with the same amount). Top bidders for courses will get the placement, detailed email instructions were sent by SMU to help exchange students get familiarized.

Teaching & Assessment Methods

SMU has a teaching format that I enjoyed a lot. Their aim is to have small class sizes and put a lot of emphasis on discussion/participation during class time. They even make students have laminated name cards so that the professor and other students can familiarize themselves with each other. As for assessment methods and grading, it is very similar to HKUST's system.

Finance & Banking

In my opinion, the best way to handle money is to create a monthly budget and to stick with it (as everyone will have different expenses during the exchange period). Singapore uses Singapore dollars, one of their dollars equals around six HKD. I recommend setting up an account with a major local bank (either DBS or OCBC) for transaction purposes.

Climate

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Climate in Singapore is like Hong Kong's in that it is hot and humid. However, unlike Hong Kong, it is hot throughout the whole year. The best way to get weather information is to just check the weather app on your smartphone. One key thing to note is that in Singapore, it can really rain at ANY time!

Health & Safety

Personally, I found no issues with health and safety in Singapore. It is very similar to Hong Kong when it comes to this matter. Along with the police, the accommodation I was living in, and the campus had their own security teams in case something happened.

Food

Due to many people of Chinese and Indian heritage living in Singapore, I found food very similar to what we get in Hong Kong and India. It was the perfect combination for me along with being able to enjoy global brands such as Dominos (which you can't get in Hong Kong). My advice is to find the closest hawker center to where you stay as you can get super tasty and super cheap food that you can have everyday!

Transportation

For traveling to Singapore, I used Singapore Airlines as they have very good deals for students. For example, they allowed me to carry 40KG of check-in baggage without any extra cost! Like Hong Kong's MTR, I found Singapore's MRT (and buses) to be very convenient and the best way to commute around the city. I used the EZLink card (similar to the HK octopus) as it is more convenient than buying tickets all the time. As for the fare prices, it is very comparable to Hong Kong.

Communication

In my opinion, the best way to stay connected is to buy a local sim card from Singtel (available at Singapore Airport when you land or 7/11). They offer very cheap deals including good amounts of data. I noticed in Singapore, the most popular messaging app is Telegram. Hence, I recommend people going

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there to download and familiarize themselves with the app beforehand! As for Wi-Fi, it was available in my accommodation and campus for free with speeds comparable to HK's!

Sports & Recreation Facilities

Like HKUST, there were a lot of facilities available for booking like the gym (booking made through a website provided in SMU orientation email) and many sports teams an exchange student can join. Personally, I joined the SMU rugby team in which I met a lot of new friends and had a fun time!

Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities

There were a lot of opportunities to join countless different clubs based on an individual's passion which were introduced in orientation. Personally, I decided to join events hosted by the Indian Cultural Society and the Gourmet Cooking Club in which I networked with people who shared my passion for food!

Cautionary Measures

The only key thing to note is that Singapore is a quite strict place in terms of their laws. For example, a person cannot chew gum in public and they had a lot of social distancing officers who were enforcing the Covid-19 rules.

Part 3 - Items to Bring

<u>Checklist</u>
1. Umbrella
2. Blankets
3. Pillow
4. Bed Sheets
5. Notebooks

6. Pencil Case
7. Chargers
8. Portable fan
9. Camera
10. Clothes for summer
11. Laptop

Part 4 - Useful Links and Contacts

Course Catalog

<https://inet.smu.edu.sg/sites/courses/Pages/Course-Offerings.aspx>

SMU University Website

<https://oasis.smu.edu.sg/>

SMU University Exchange Program Website

<https://www.smu.edu.sg/global/student-programmes>

Accommodation Website

<https://yoha.com.sg/student-hostel-singapore/pearls-hill/>

Singapore Major Attractions

<https://theculturetrip.com/asia/singapore/articles/20-must-visit-attractions-in-singapore/>