



NUS
National University
of Singapore

Exchange Report

National University of Singapore, Singapore

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BBA Information Systems and Economics

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Part I - Monthly Log

January

The first month was a new adventure for me as this was my first time living abroad. I arrived in Singapore on January 5th, with several days to settle down and explore the campus before the start of the semester.

Together with students I met around the world at the orientation, we explored the must-see tourist destinations of Chinatown, Little India, and Marina Bay.

Along with friends from Germany and the United States, we strolled along the seaside of the Bay and visited the open day of the Prime Minister's office, the "Istana House". We explored Chinese New Year festivities and lightshows of "Gardens of Abundance" and "River Hongbao" at the Marina Bay. I was glad to reunion with a Malaysian friend studying in NUS, who generously offered me and my exchanger friends to a Chinese New Year dinner featuring Penang-style cuisine and culminating with the signature Singaporean Chinese New Year dish "Yusheng" or "Prosperity Toss".

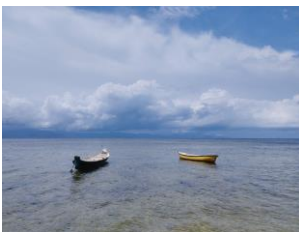


February

I attended a local career fair organized by the Computing School to learn about the technology landscape, to my surprise, Singapore's informatics industry is much more vibrant than in Hong Kong.

I continued to uncover facets of the Singaporean culture with visits to the Fort Canning Park (previously a military base), Chinese Cultural Center that details the languages, behaviors and practices of the many Chinese communities, and Baba House, a cultural remnant documenting the way of life of well-off Peranakans residing in the city in the 1800s.

I bonded with other exchangers through pickleball, floorball and frisbee at the UTown Green grass pitch. Besides the new people from different countries, I am amazed by the variety of niche sports thriving in Singapore. Our group of eight initiated a week-long trip to Bali, Indonesia, during the midterm break before the exams. Indulging in the tropical landscape, snorkeling, rafting, watching sunsets on volcanoes, and exploring local folklore and religions were eye-opening.



March

In early March, midterm exams and projects intensified, gladly, the workload was manageable especially as an exchange student.

I explored the city through the mini-version of the Bangkok Chatuchak Night Market, enjoying a bird's eye view of the city with free entrance at the SkyGarden at the top of the CapitalSpring skyscraper, cycling across the island-nation from the Changi airport area to downtown Marina Bay.

Towards later parts of the month, I explored some very under-rated natural sides of Singapore, cycling on the "railroad trail" connecting downtown Singapore to Malaysia through rainforests, watching migratory birds at the Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, and marveling at Avatar movie like trees at Bukit Brown and granite rock formations at the Bukit Batok Nature Park.

Sadly, in one of my weekend adventures to Johor Bahru in Malaysia in mid-April, after enjoying a seafood lunch with chili crab at a semi-remote area, I suffered a dog bite despite the owner's efforts to control their pets. Unbeknownst to me, with concerns of rabies and wound infection, the bite entailed an experience of the Singaporean healthcare system, two surgeries with general anesthesia, and a three-month long recovery process extending beyond the end of my exchange.



April

Due to the wound, I mainly stayed indoors for recovery and preparations for the finals, except for daily visits to the clinic on-campus for wound cleaning.

Still, I leveraged the clinic visits during weekends as opportunities to try a new dish every meal to gastronomically experience the Malay, Indonesian, Chinese, British influences from Singapore's past as a trading hub. I also explored museums on-campus, and near-campus, including the national history museum, NUS museum, and the Haw Paw Villa.

I returned to Hong Kong shortly after finishing my exams in late April.



Word Count: 613

Part II – General Exchange Information

1) Visa Procedures

I travelled with my Hong Kong passport, and as a student, I applied for the student visa (Student Pass).

To apply for the Student Pass, one needs (see <https://www.ica.gov.sg/reside/STP/collect> and <https://visaguide.world/asia/singapore-visa/student-pass/> for details):

- (1) In-Principal Approval (IPA) document
 - a. To obtain this document, you need
 - i. NUS's acceptance letter
 - ii. Passport
 - iii. Official Academic Transcript
 - iv. Record of courses taken in the current semester/term
 - v. Course syllabus for HKUST courses which you intend to use as prerequisites to the courses in NUS you would like to take
 - b. To have secured at least 12 MCs worth of modules (courses in HKUST), To be offered a place in the "Non-Graduating Program" with coursework (basically registered with classes).
 - c. After you obtained the IPA, you need to pay the student pass fee within 7 days (SGD\$30)
 - d. After acquiring the IPA, you travel to Singapore and enter with a visit pass
 - i. For Hong Kong passport holders, we directly enter Singapore (with 30 days visa-free stay permitted).
 - ii. For countries which require a visa to enter Singapore, the IPA approval letter should come with a visa
- (2) Student Pass card, your Singaporean identity card as a
 - a. To obtain this document, you need
 - i. Your IPA
 - ii. 1 passport photo, fitting the Singaporean standard
 - iii. "Ingested" your COVID-19 vaccine record at the university clinic or other healthcare facilities (SGD\$25.23)
 - b. After submitting the application online, you need to reserve an appointment for the on-campus student pass formalities (organized in the week before the start of the semester), which you need to bring your above documents and payment proof for your student pass (paid online)
 - c. If you missed the on-campus appointment, you would need to book a separate appointment at the Immigrations and Checkpoint Authority (ICA) to complete the formalities. The date for the ICA appointment is usually at least 30+ days beyond the current date, hence you may need to apply for the extension of your Short-Term Visit Pass for a fee (see https://www.ica.gov.sg/enter-depart/extend_short_stay).
 - d. The Student Pass acceptance fee is SGD\$60.

Overall exchange guide: <https://www.nus.edu.sg/gro/global-programmes/student-exchange/incoming-exchangers>

2) Orientation Activities

There are many orientation activities organized by student leaders including around-the-campus walking, hiking the Southern Ridges, and shopping for groceries and bedsheets in the neighborhood nearby (since the student dormitories do not come with bedsheets, blankets, nor pillows).

While none of the orientation activities are mandatory, I would recommend arriving around one week earlier than the start of the classes to join the activities.

3) International Services & Activities

No airport pick-up services are available, but the MRT is already very convenient. Cultural activities are organized periodically during the semester every month by the exchange office.

4) Accommodations

Hostel application is only available after you have received your IPA letter. I applied for on-campus accommodation with the order of preferences as follows: (1) Kent Ridge Hall, Single (Non-AC), (2) Sheares Hall, Single (Non-AC), (3) Temasek Hall, Single (Non-AC). A non-refundable application fee of SGD\$26.25 was paid.

My application for housing during the first round was announced unsuccessful on December 2nd, 2022. In the result letter, the school shared that “As a goodwill gesture to Non-Graduating students from select partner universities who are unsuccessful in their campus accommodation application for Academic Year 2022/2023 Semester 2, NUS is offering a one-off subsidy of SGD300.00 per month for five months. We hope this will help to defray some of your off-campus accommodation cost”. All other HKUST exchange students experienced the same situation, and we frantically sought off-campus accommodation. I began my search for off-campus accommodation immediately, however, by that time most alternatives were not available anymore. Still, I secured off-campus accommodation at Yo:HA Pearl’s Hill at Chinatown (near 45 mins travel time to school) for SGD\$6242.44 for the entire semester, with an SGD\$300 deposit.

Fortunately, perhaps some students rejected their housing offers, I was offered a Prince George’s Park Residence (PGPR) Type C Single non-AC room on January 3rd 2023, only 6 days before the start of the semester. The on-campus offer is charged at SGD\$2317.35 for the entire semester, with no meal plans. Given the proximity to campus and the affordability of PGPR, I accepted the offer and forfeited the SGD\$300 deposit.

The check-in and check-out process to the on-campus accommodation, in my case, was entirely online and without human intervention, and smooth given that my phone was NFC equipped.

You will be given instructions to download and initiate the NUS Mobile Key, your key to your on-campus accommodation. However, if it does work for you, you can still line up and request a physical card upon checking-in.

Housing application guide: <https://nus.edu.sg/osa/student-services/hostel-admission/undergraduate>

Non-campus accommodation guide: <https://nus.edu.sg/osa/student-services/hostel-admission/other-accommodation>

5) Courses Registration

A first round of course registration (CourseReg) in late September is mandatory before we are admitted to the Non-Graduating Program (exchange). Students are to organize their top 10 modules (now courses) before they submit their choices. Contrasting to HKUST's high-stress course registration procedures, students are enrolled based on a non-first-come-first-served enrollment, and according to NUS's internal algorithm, placing preference to students of greater priorities (higher year, major department students).

At least 12 MCs worth of courses are needed to be offered a place in the "Non-Graduating Program with coursework". If 12 MCs are not successfully registered in the initial CourseReg, the department will send you an email notifying you of the problem around November and requests you to engage in CourseReg again.

Around 2 weeks before the semester starts, there is a second round of CourseReg, with a similar format to the first one. If by the second CourseReg the desired courses are not registered, students can engage in appeals, mostly by directly emailing professors. Similar to HKUST, an add-drop period is present.

Course registration guide: <https://www.nus.edu.sg/coursereg/> ; <https://nus.edu.sg/coursereg/schedule-and-timeline.html>

NUSMods is used to view course description, pre-requisites, and lesson and exam schedule: <http://nusmods.com/>

LumiNUS is used to view past course syllabi: <https://luminus.nus.edu.sg/module-search>

6) Teaching & Assessment Methods

There is usually one lecture and one tutorial per week for two hours each. The lecture size ranged from around 10 to 100 students, but tutorials have less than 20 students. Tutorials usually require students to complete a set of exercises first (related to that week's lecture), and attendance is almost always taken.

7) Finance & Banking

Singaporean dollar (SGD) is used for transactions; credit card is mostly accepted (even at the laundry stations on campus), but only cash or the SG-QR is accepted in some small storers. While SG-QR (electronic payments with QR codes) are getting popular in the city, most of them require a local bank account, which is troublesome to set it up as a foreigner (I tried setting up DBS and OCBC accounts, both failed with no reasons provided).

See more about SG-QR: <https://dollarsandsense.sg/sgqr-code-complete-guide-apps-wallets-can-use/>

Estimated expenses: <https://www.nus.edu.sg/oam/apply-to-nus/before-you-apply/estimated-expenses>

8) Climate

Singapore, being one degree north of the equator, has a year-long summer weather pattern. The only "seasons" are the monsoon seasons, featured by frequent rains, and the dry season, featured by less rain and therefore hotter weather. For the Spring January – May period, I would say air-conditioning is not needed, and the weather is even more bearable than Hong Kong's summer because of frequent rainfall, and greater temperature variations between the day and night (sometimes even around 10 degrees Celsius variations)

9) Health & Safety and Cautionary Measures

A \$133.70 of mandatory Student Services Fee (SSF) (Exchange) and Health Service Fees were paid upon admission to NUS

Exchange fees: <https://www.nus.edu.sg/registrar/administrative-policies-procedures/non-graduating/non-graduating-fees>.

Singapore is one of the safest cities in the world, it is as safe or even safer than Hong Kong. However, Chinatown and Little India can get crowded hence please keep your general caution. Geylang is the only redlight district in Singapore hence I would avoid it. Religious and cultural freedom is cherished and there is rarely discrimination.

10) Food

On-campus canteens are very cheap, breakfasts range around SGD\$2-\$5, lunch/dinner ranges from SGD\$3-7 per meal. Dining out can also be cheap, with meals ranging from SGD\$4-\$10 at hawker centers, and upward of SGD\$10 at restaurants.

11) Transportation

Getting around within the campus is costless because of the internal shuttle bus (ISB): <https://uci.nus.edu.sg/oca/transport-logistics-carpark/getting-around-nus/>

Campus Map: <https://map.nus.edu.sg/>

To get around the city-state, you can use your contactless payments (even your foreign cards) directly on the MRT trains (MTR equivalent) and buses. You can opt for an “ez-link” top-up card (Octopus card equivalent) if so desired, but it is not necessary since most stores which accept the ez-link (in fact very little) would also accept your foreign cards.

Useful apps: CityMapper, NUS NextBus, SG NextBus, My Transport.SG, anywheel, SGBike

12) Communication

Telegram is used for all informal communication between classmates and receiving information about clubs and societies.

Data plans are very cheap, my plan with GIGA was SGD\$10 for 10GB of data per month.

13) Sports & Recreation Facilities

All facilities available in HKUST are available in NUS, in greater quantities. There are even multiple grass fields and pickleball courts. Book your courts and rooms with the university’s super-app: uNivUS

14) Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities

Opportunities for social and networking are plentiful, as organized by the exchange office (sent through email), and the innumerable student clubs (which mainly disseminate their information through Telegram or Instagram).

NUS Sync, the app for activities: <https://nus.edu.sg/osa/student-life/student-organisations-directory>

Items to Bring

1. IPA
2. Passport
3. Passport photo
4. Computer
5. Sufficient cash and credit card, SGD\$1000 cash would be enough if you spend most of your transactions in cash
6. Medications
7. Identity card
8. Driving license, if you intend to drive
9. Other items you need for daily necessities