

# Exchange to National University of Singapore (Spring term 2022-23)

Country: Singapore

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## Monthly Activity Log

### **January:**

The first month of exchange was one of the most eventful as everything was new and there were so many things to try out and see. I landed in Singapore during the art week where they have several exhibits all over Singapore to appreciate local artists, something I loved and had a great time visiting.

There were also several orientation activities for exchangers to meet each other and within the first month itself, I found a great group of friends from all over the world that I would later spend the rest of my exchange with. Some of the exchange activities were a welcome dinner with local Singaporean food, campus tours and even a Japanese Cultural Appreciation Day. The campus tour was much needed as the NUS, though beautiful, was huge and we needed buses to get from one end to the other (it was about 2-3 times the size of HKUST).

Since air travel from Singapore is so easy and it is well connected to South-East Asia, towards the end of January, I took my first trip to Vietnam! It was an amazing and eye-opening trip since it was my first time visiting Vietnam and I absolutely loved Ho Chi Minh City, the people and especially the food. The best part was that I was travelling with my Vietnamese friends, so I was able to get a very local experience.

### **February:**

After coming back from Vietnam, I wanted to travel as soon as possible, and a friend asked me to come along with her to Melaka in Malaysia the following weekend. Though it was short, it was a very memorable trip since Melaka had amazing Malaysian as well as fusion foods and some of the best night markets I have ever seen! It was also a quick bus ride over, so it was quite a convenient trip as well. After coming back, I got the opportunity to explore more of Singapore and one of the best experiences was the amazing Art-Science Museum which had some of the coolest and extremely interactive exhibits I have seen.

After the first few weeks, NUS gives students a week-long break right before midterms to prepare and to relax a little but since I barely had any midterms, I once again got the opportunity to travel- going back to Vietnam but this time to a different city and with a different group of friends! My second Vietnam trip was not only memorable in terms of experiencing the culture, but I also became much closer to the friends that had come along with me and by the end, I felt like I had known them for much longer than a month and a half. Since most of my friends were from the US, UK and Canada, I got a very

different perspective listening to their stories and their university life, one that is quite different from Asian universities.

### **March:**

March started with midterm season. However, since most of the courses I had taken were extremely interesting with an Economics elective course and some major required courses, I did not have to study extremely hard in the last few weeks. One thing I particularly like is that NUS not only had amazing teachers but also emphasized the importance of revising the concepts by questioning us every week on lecture materials, making it much easier to prepare for the midterm. As soon as my midterms were over, I attended my first concert that was organised by NUS and it was one of the best experiences that I had at the University! Even though the concerts were student-led, the performers were extremely talented, and the concert showcased various genres including math rock.

I also got the chance to experience the nightlife in Singapore and went to one of the coolest bars I have seen called Ce La Vie at the top of Marina Bay Sands which had a stunning view of the Singapore skyline.

I also took another short trip to Bangkok, Thailand at the end of the month which essentially ended up becoming a shopping trip but was quite fun, nonetheless.

### **April:**

By the time April rolled around, I decided to take a much-needed break from all the travelling and focused on catching up on my university work while preparing for my final exams and projects coming up. However, I still managed to explore a lot more of Singapore in my free time - going to free concerts at the Esplanade (which is a theatre hosting events, performances and concerts), exploring Arab Street and eating some of the best Middle Eastern food I have eaten. One thing I loved about Singapore was how it was a melting pot of cultures, and I could try so many varieties of food every day.

### **May:**

Finals were a bit more stressful since I had 2 exams back-to-back, but I received a ton of help from my professors and TAs who gave out past papers, held several revision sessions and answered all of my questions promptly. The day after my finals finished, I took my last trip with my exchange friends to the Philippines, a trip that was one of the best ones that I have ever taken and helped me get even closer to my friends - especially because it was the last time, I would be meeting them. I realised that exchange helped me create so

many great memories with amazing people around me and I was able to grow much more in terms of experiences, knowledge and cultural awareness. It was definitely one of the best experiences of my university life.

## General Study Abroad Information:

### **1. Visa Procedures:**

NUS reached out to us for our visa procedures ahead of time. However, the process is quite long and requires several steps so it's important to note down important dates. Incoming students will not get the official visa before entering Singapore but instead are issued an In-Principal Approval letter that can be used for a single entry into Singapore. After arriving, students need to have an appointment with the immigration officers for all the details to be verified and to receive the student card. To make the process simpler, NUS invites a couple of immigration officers on campus itself, so students do not need to visit the immigration office.

NUS send over the required documents which require personal information and student photographs for the visa application, and it also required an SGD120 fee.

Incoming students are also required to ingest their vaccination records by showing proof of vaccination at either the University Clinic (which incurs a cost of 40SGD) or Government clinics (locations can be found online).

### **2. Orientation Procedures:**

NUS held several orientation activities for exchange students starting with providing us with a buddy to help us settle into university life, having a campus tour and a welcome party in NUS itself. There were also several trips organised to IKEA to help us furnish our dorm rooms.

### **3. International Services and Activities:**

The exchange office was quite prompt in providing pre-arrival resources such as emergency contacts, public transportation details and directions on getting to the university. They also had several activities which promoted cultural appreciation such as inter-cultural film screenings and inclusivity fests. They also hosted food culture tours and overnight biking for exchangers.

#### **4. Accommodation:**

There are several on-campus accommodations available which are divided into 2 categories: Halls of Residence and Colleges. HKUST students only got the option to apply for Halls of Residence, some of which have meal plans, and some don't. All the details for meal plans are mentioned on the NUS accommodation website along with the costs of halls and meal plans. It's important to note that HKUST students do not have guaranteed housing and several of us did not receive an offer for housing in the first round. However, most of us received an offer in subsequent rounds. Even if a student did not receive an offer, NUS provided us with a list of student hostels that they have an agreement with to help us secure housing. However, those spots also fill up fast.

#### **5. Course Registration:**

NUS provides all information regarding course registration via email along with procedures. Students are required to select 6 courses before the semester starts for which they meet the pre-requisites, out of which they will be allocated 3. The minimum requirement to enrol into the exchange program is 3 courses so it is advised to choose the 6 options carefully and ensure all prerequisites are met. Students can then enrol into additional courses/make changes through an appeal once the regular term starts. There is also a list of course restrictions that vary by school and exchange students are not allowed to enroll in several modules. The list of restrictions is updated every semester and is either mentioned in the brochure or can be searched on Google by typing in "Course restrictions for incoming exchange students to NUS". Students can read descriptions of the course as well as workload information and some reviews on a website called NUSMods where they can also create their timetable. As of my registration, there was no centralised platform for course reviews but several students have uploaded blogs online so the student can search the course names followed by reviews.

#### **6. Teaching and Assessments:**

The quality of teaching for me was quite high and I was able to understand the concepts taught in class quite well. I found the teaching and assessment style quite similar to HKUST with midterms, finals and group projects varying across each course. The class size also varied across each course, and most were in person however, some were held in blended mode with online lectures and in-person tutorials.

## **7. Finance and Banking:**

The currency is denominated in Singapore Dollar or SGD. It is recommended to open a local bank account while on exchange which many exchangers like me did as most of Singapore is cashless and the main payment method is through QR codes that can only be scanned by local bank accounts. Students will mainly have to use cash on campus as most catering outlets do not accept credit/debit cards. The main banks in Singapore are DBS/POSB, OCBC and UOB.

The procedure to open a bank account requires the Student Pass (Student Visa) so it is recommended to wait until after the student receives it.

Students can also use other apps such as WISE to pay in foreign currencies which can be used to pay at some catering outlets on campus.

## **8. Climate:**

The climate in Singapore is extremely humid and it rains quite frequently (almost daily) so carrying an umbrella is recommended. However, it does not get too hot or cold and it does not get as windy as Hong Kong. The weather also stays pretty consistent year-round.

## **9. Health & Safety:**

The university has a health centre on campus which is open on weekdays but is also situated next to a hospital (NUH hospital) in case of emergency as it has a 24x7 emergency centre. There is also security on campus with halls having a security guard all the time. Singapore is one of the safest cities in the world with very low rates of crime.

## **10. Food:**

Some halls of residence, as well as colleges, have meal plans which provide breakfast and dinner within the hall itself (with halal and vegetarian options available). Other halls as well as most schools have canteens that operate on a pay-per-meal basis. There are a variety of cuisines and options available all over campus with several vegetarian and halal options. All halls also have a pantry to cook but students will need to bring/buy their utensils.

## **11. Transportation:**

NUS has its bus system which covers all schools as well as the MRT (Mass Rapid Transit) station close to the University. It is free of charge to use and students can keep track of the bus timings using the NUS NextBus app. The quickest way to get around Singapore is using the Mass Rapid Transport (MRT) system but buses are also widely available. Students can use the transportation system

that can be paid for using either a credit card or EZLink cards which can be bought at MRT Stations.

### **12. Communication:**

Singapore is a very well-connected city with good connectivity almost everywhere so students can easily stay connected with friends and family back home. The most widely spoken languages in Singapore are English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil and a very large majority of Singaporeans speak and understand English so it is quite easy to communicate if students do not speak any of the other languages.

I would recommend buying a prepaid SIM card for use in Singapore- students can choose from either Starhub, Singtel, M1 or Simba. Simba offers the cheapest plans but its connectivity is not as good as the other companies. I used Starhub as I was planning to travel a lot and it provided roaming in most countries in South-East Asia. The cards can be bought at either the airport, local stores or the convenience store on campus (which provides only Singtel). There is also WIFI connectivity all across campus and in the halls.

### **13. Sports & Recreation Facilities:**

There are several sports facilities available for almost every sport with 2 sports complexes in the university, each of which has a gym, climbing wall, pool and more. Facilities should be booked beforehand but I do not know much about the procedure as I did not use many of them. More information is provided on the website:

[https://reboks.nus.edu.sg/nus\\_public\\_web/public/facilities](https://reboks.nus.edu.sg/nus_public_web/public/facilities)

### **14. Social Clubs & Networking Opportunities:**

There are numerous clubs and societies that are present in NUS ranging from sports to school societies, hall societies and so many more. Most societies have booths to introduce themselves to new students and many of them also set up booths during the welcome party for exchangers. There are a limitless amount of opportunities for exchangers to join societies and network.

### **15. Cautionary measures:**

One thing to keep in mind is to be respectful of the traditions and cultures of the local people. That is particularly the case with the food as there are many halal options available and it is important not to mix up the utensils with the non-halal ones. There will be people around to help while picking these so feel free to ask and make sure they are the right ones. Other than that there are

several cultures present so it is important to be open-minded and respectful of all the Religions and Cultures present.

**Items to bring:**

Be sure to bring an umbrella, mosquito repellent, light and breathable clothes (linens and cotton) and sunscreen. Most items such as pillows and bedsheets can be bought in a package provided by the university or at IKEA or other furniture stores but can also be brought.

**Useful links and Contacts:**

**Questions regarding registrations and visa applications:** [nghelp@nus.edu.sg](mailto:nghelp@nus.edu.sg)

**Course information:** <https://nusmods.com>

**Immigration:** <http://www.ica.gov.sg/>

**Campus Security:**

Kent Ridge Campus Telephone: 68741616 ,

Bukit Timah Campus Telephone: 65163636

**Counselling & Psychological Services:**

Mainline Telephone: 65162376,

Lifeline NUS Telephone: 65167777