

Exchange Report

Spring 2023

Singapore



Singapore Management University (SMU)

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1. Monthly Activity Log

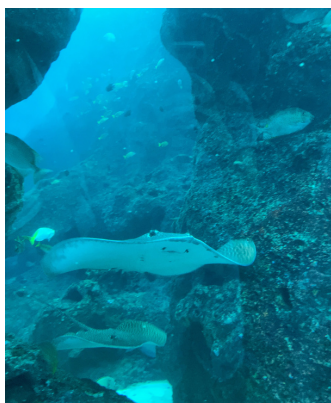
January

The first month was the toughest - had to cancel plans because I fell sick 🤒 but when I wasn't feeling well on the MRT, the staff was really helpful. All my encounters with locals made me feel welcomed and made me grow fond of Singapore!



February

Attended a candlelight concert where Joe Hisaishi pieces were played in the Victoria Concert Hall. SEA Aquarium is a must-visit - you can see stingrays smile when you stand underneath them :) Watched Frozen Musical in Sands Theatre and went on the MacRitchie hike where I met new friends.



Made my first trip to Johor Bahru in Malaysia in mid Feb where we got massages and shopped in Johor Premium Outlets.



2 weeks later, went on the best trip of my life to Phuket, Phi Phi Islands and Bangkok in Thailand during recess week!



March

SMU sponsored us to visit River Wonders with our mentors (another reason why you should sign up!) Visited Universal Studio Singapore and tried the Singapore Sling at its origin - Raffles Hotel. I enjoyed night runs around Marina Bay Sands after a day of hard work. Dined in at Bacha Coffee and saw dinosaur skeletons when I visited National University of Singapore before I embarked on a 3-day trip to Kuala Lumpur.



In the day, we visited the Petronas Twin Towers, Batu Caves and went on water rides at Sunway Lagoon. At night, we tried the Gordon Ramsay Bar & Grill and had drinks at Four Seasons Hotel.

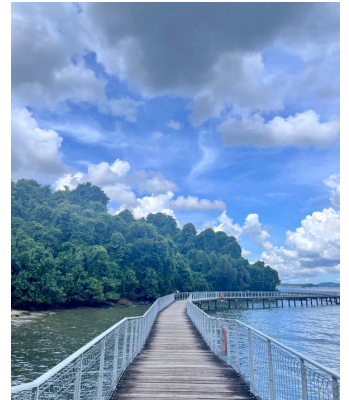


Shortly after this trip, I paid a visit to Melaka, the world heritage city of Malaysia crowned by the UN. It was a posh city with pretty landscapes. March ended with a Chloe Chua violin concert I had been looking forward to.



April

Last bit of fun before finals: East Coast Park had the most stunning views 🥰
How can I miss out on bak kut teh? The ArtScience Museum is a must-go.
Lucky to have seen the Van Goh exhibition at Sentosa as well as immerse myself in nature at Palau Ubin where you can see the fauna of Singapore!



I ended my exchange with 3 trips to Bintan, Penang and Korea. Glamping in Bintan, laksa in Penang, and the sea in Jeju were the highlights of the trips.



2. General Study Abroad Information

1. Visa Procedures

2 months prior exchange, students are required to apply for an In-Principle Approval (IPA) letter from the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) Singapore which costs S\$90. This pass is required at the immigration after you landed so remember to apply asap as the process for approval may take up to a few week's time.

2. Orientation Activities

SMU hosted a virtual onboarding session on Zoom for us in early Dec. There is also a mandatory in person orientation on campus 4 days before semester starts. Be sure to book your flight ahead of time so to be sure you land on time for all these activities!

3. International Services & Activities

SMU has arranged a Collection of Formalities (COF) session for us to collect our student pass and SMU student card at the same time. You could take passport photos on the spot or bring your own. Be sure to check your email for the date, time and venue for COF.

4. Accommodations

You can apply for on campus halls but spaces are limited. You can check out the Excel SMU put together based on where previous exchange students lived. I picked Novena off the list but I would not recommend it. I've written a Google review on it in case you wonder 😊 If you wish to rent a place with other exchange students, you can find potential room mates through the Facebook group SMU put together.

5. Course Registration

As an exchange student, this is probably the most important part you should not miss. SMU adopts a different BOSS bidding system from HKUST. While this may sound unfamiliar and scary (I've been through it too), rest assured for exchange students, we have an exclusive window to bid for courses using e\$. It goes by the rule that the 'highest bidder wins'. If you have done your homework i.e. course mapping before the bidding window, it is possible to get the course you want to take. If you have any concerns regarding course mapping, reach out to your faculty, HKUST as well as SMU.

6. Teaching & Assessment Methods

After you have successfully bid for the courses you wish to take, it's just the beginning. As SMU really values class engagement, almost all IS & Management courses (from my experience) take into account both attendance and participation (you hear me right). It accounts for around 10-20% of your total course grade. As someone who had 9 a.m. classes for 4 consecutive days, I attended almost all classes. For most courses, the assessment format as well as grading is pretty similar to that of HKUST, with presentations, midterms and finals, depending on the course. SMU does provide SMU-X courses, which are interactive courses and project-heavy for students to choose from.

7. Finance & Banking

PayNow and PayLah are the most common ways of payment in Singapore but they require a local bank account so I mostly go by cash/Mastercard instead. The cost of living and expenses is comparable to Hong Kong. Goods and Services Tax (GST) of 8% applies.

8. Climate

Indeed hot and rains almost everyday. Singaporeans are heat-resistant, as a result, a lot of places do not have AC, including hawker centres and common area in SMU. You will survive, trust me.

9. Health & Safety

One pro side is Singapore is really safe. I would even go up and beyond to say it is safer than Hong Kong. So going out alone at night as a girl is totally fine. SMU provides free medical consultations at certain branches. Information is provided at the orientation.

10. Food

What I love about Singapore as a foodie is the cuisines you can choose from. Given the cultural diversity, vegetarian options are readily available at most outlets. From affordable bites at hawker centres, to fine dining with the most spectacular view - you name it! Just note that alcohol is relatively expensive as the government includes tax.

11. Transportation

Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system is equivalent to the MTR in Hong Kong. Bus routes come in shorter distance and connect different MRT stations. Grab is the app for taxi hailing. There is no traffic in Singapore, thanks to the regulated issuance of car licence.

12. Communication

If you plan to travel to Malaysia/Indonesia, be sure to buy SIM card plans that INCLUDES roaming to these countries. I recommend Singtel as the network provider. Join the SMU buddy programme to stay in touch with your fellow exchangers as well as SMU students who will be your mentor. Group projects are also a good way to get to know the locals.

13. Sports & Recreation Activities

SMU has an outdoor swimming pool at the Administration Building and a 2-level gym at the School of Computing and Information Systems building. There are also plenty of sports club you could sign up for.

14. Social Clubs & Networking Activities

I would recommend joining the mentor programme with SMU alumni if you are up for free meals and activities sponsored by SMU. It is a good opportunity to build your network with local working professionals. I bet some exchangers will setup a WhatsApp group for Singapore exchange students where you can get first-hand information from them.

15. Cautionary Measures

As a melting pot, it is expected you are sensible about the different cultures and people you encounter. As a HKUST representative and a global citizen, I believe it is important to respect one another and be open-minded when you meet new friends!

16. Other notes

As this may be the first time living abroad for such a long time, you may want to bring some personal items e.g. pictures, crafts etc. in case you get homesick 😞 In case of emergency, stay calm - reach out to people around you or call International SOS for help (mark down the membership number in your notepad). Lastly, this exchange is probably one of your most carefree times and opens you up to tons of possibilities. You can explore Singapore at your own pace and do not be discouraged if you ever find your exchange to be less exciting than what others are experiencing as this is your OWN journey and up to you to define what these 4 months mean to you.

3. Items to Bring

- In-Principle Approval (IPA) letter
- Passport
- SGD cash/Credit card/Mastercard
- Umbrella
- Laptop/iPad/charger
- Stationery
- Clothes/jacket/shoes
- Medicine
- Personal hygiene items
- Personal items e.g. pictures

4. Useful Links & Contacts

For IPA application and immigration matters:

- [ICA](#)

For academic-related and housing matters:

- isep.inbound@smu.edu.sg

Miscellaneous:

- [What to Pack as an Exchange Student](#)

5. Best Practices of Host Institution

Treat everyone with respect

SMU students who hosted the campus tour reminded us to let street sleepers be them as long as they don't cause nuisance to us - treat everyone with respect.

Name tents

SMU students put up their name tents during class for attendance taking and class participation. Remember to bring your name tents for classes. 🚩