Exchange Report

Introduction

I spent my Spring 2017 semester in the National University of Singapore (NUS) as an exchange student. Having a rich cultural history, Singapore recognizes four official languages and is truly a place where I can experience cultural diversity. I hope to gain cultural sensitivity and polish my communication skills through making connections with students from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, I picked NUS as my first choice for exchange.

A picture taken at ION Sky in Singapore.

Pre-departure Preparation

(i) Student Visa and Housing

There are a few things that exchange students should know before leaving for Singapore. First, it is important to make sure that your passport is valid for at least six months after the final day of travel. Although there is no need to apply for a tourist visa if you hold a Canadian passport, you will have to apply for a student visa. The student visa application consists of two parts, it will be completed online for part one and in person for part two. You will need the admission letter from NUS and your passport for the online registration. Part two will be done in NUS and more information will be given during the orientation. Apart from applying for visa, students should also follow up with NUS housing department to see if any on campus housing is provided. If not, it is better to seek other alternatives earlier to ensure that
(ii) **Travel and Transportation**

Since there is no direct flight from Vancouver to Singapore, I booked my tickets separately from two different airlines. The first set of round trip tickets I booked was from Vancouver to Hong Kong and I flew with Cathay Pacific. Then, I took Singapore Airline from Hong Kong to Singapore. In order to save money, it is important to compare prices from various websites and see what the ticket prices include. Although some tickets might be cheaper, they often do not include any meals or checked-in baggage. Tickets are generally more expensive if you are going to Singapore in December or January as it is the peak travel season. Hence, I recommend you to book your tickets in advance to save cost. Also, Singapore has a lower HST than Vancouver so there is no need to pack too much toiletries. You can find them in local grocery stores and IKEA. However, you should make sure that you have your passport, laptop, and other documents needed with you.

Once you arrive in Singapore, you can either take Uber or MRT to NUS. Uber is very convenient and much cheaper than the traditional taxi. MRT is the cheapest option but it takes around one and a half hour to get to NUS. If you decide to take the MRT, you will get off at Kent Ridge Station and there is a free shuttle bus provided by NUS to connect you to the campus.

(iii) **Financial Details**

It is fairly common for people to use both credit card and cash in Singapore. Nonetheless, I would recommend using cash as there’s no additional service charge and most food stalls in hawker centre or on campus do not accept credit card. A typical meal in Singapore costs around SGD$5. Unless you are staying in UTown Residence or off campus, you will be required to purchase a meal plan.
During Exchange

(i) **Country Information**

Singapore is a small country located right beneath Malaysia. People generally speak English and it is a very multicultural society (just like Vancouver!). The weather in Singapore is very hot and humid year round. Rain comes and goes quickly so make sure you pack an umbrella with you! In terms of public safety, Singapore is probably the safest country and people have high integrity. If you see any tissue packets on the table, please do not remove them! Singaporeans put tissue packets on the table to save seats and it is considered as rude if you just put them away and take their spots.

(ii) **NUS Life**

The orientation for exchange students usually takes place a couple days before the semester starts. Although it is not mandatory, it is important to attend the orientation since it provides a lot of useful information about NUS. During my exchange semester, I took three business courses and they are similar to SFU courses in terms of workload and lecture format. All courses are curved in NUS and local students are relatively competitive, and thus it is important to let your teammates know about your travel plans if you have any group projects that will be conflicted with your personal plans.
(iii) Travelling in Southeast Asia

Located in the middle of Southeast Asia, many exchange students and locals take advantage of Singapore’s geographic location and go on vacation throughout the year. Unlike Singapore, many Southeast Asian countries do not use English as their primary language and there might be language barriers. Despite the language barrier, most people are nice and will try to communicate with you. It is important to use your body language and use simple words so the locals can understand you better. I would say travelling with friends that I met at NUS is the highlight of my exchange! During my exchange semester, I had been to five countries (seven cities) in total and it was amazing to experience different cultures.

![Pictures taken in Bali, Indonesia.](image)

Post-exchange Reflection

I thoroughly enjoyed my time in Singapore and Southeast Asia. My last advice would be to enjoy yourself as much as possible while being on exchange. A semester seems long but it will fly by and end before you know! Do not be afraid and try to step out of your comfort zone. Through meeting people from different countries, you will experience their cultures and have better cultural awareness. Through going to school events and travelling, I have made friends from all around the world and I’m so grateful that we got to complete one another’s journey. The last but not least, there’s no place really like Singapore – safe, multi-cultural, and international!