International Exchange Report

National University of Singapore (NUS)
Singapore

Spring 2010

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Introduction

My name is Eunice and I am majoring Business Administration at SFU. As a fourth year student, I went on exchange at National University of Singapore (NUS) in Singapore in spring 2010. I decided to go on exchange because exchange could not only enrich my university life, but also my life experience in various ways. I chose NUS because of its reputation, its location, some academic reasons, and personal interests in the country.

Pre-Departure Information

Before you go to Singapore, there are some points you need to be clear. First, make sure you have a valid visa and passport to enter the country. Second, bring the NUS offer letter with you because you need it for applying your student’s pass. Third, make sure you received your accommodation outcomes if you have applied for school accommodation. Fourth, do bring some local currency with you to buy daily products and local transportation.

Travel & Visas

You need to apply for student's pass application online once you received email notification from NUS. Please visit http://www.ica.gov.sg/services_centre_overview.aspx?pageid=256&secid=182 for more information. As a Visa-required passport holder (i.e. China passport), you will receive an In-Principle Approval (IPA) Letter via email and you need to print it out as a temporary visitor visa to enter Singapore. Remember to pack wisely, meaning that you do not need to pack too many daily products to Singapore because you can buy them easily once you are there. Another reason is that you will definitely do some shopping during your stay in Singapore, so by the end of your exchange, you can have more space in your luggage for your new goodies. For air ticket booking, I booked my round trip from Vancouver to southern China and one-way ticket to Singapore. Since it was during Christmas, its costs are relatively more expensive and the expenses were around $1700 CAD. I recommend booking your air ticket in advance to save some money.

Country Information

Culture

Singapore is rich in cultures because it has diverse race consisting Chinese, Malays, Indians, other Asians and Caucasians. The majority of Singaporean knows English and Chinese as more than 70% of Singaporeans have Chinese background. Singapore is known as a fine city. Singaporeans behave in good manners and they care and protect their environment together. One of the impressions you get entering Singapore is that it is a clean place with many trees.
Weather
Due to Singapore’s geographical location, it is summer all the year. It takes time for you to get used to the humid weather there. Its temperature is often 33 degrees on average. Once you get used to the hot weather, you will enjoy your summer in Singapore because you can do many sports outdoor.

Interesting Places to Visit

There are several places I recommend to visit while you are there. Singapore is also called the lion city, so visiting Merlion is a must. You can experience the tallest giant sky wheel in the world, Singapore Flyer. Going to the Singapore Flyer in day time and night time could have two different impressions to the country. If you are animal lovers, you can experience the nature in visiting Singapore Zoo and Night Safari. If you are beach lovers, you should go to Sentosa for your day trip in Singapore. On your way to Sentosa, you can visit Universal Studios Singapore for fun. If you want to know more Singapore history and art, you can visit different museums like National Museum of Singapore and Singapore Art Museum. If you love nightlife, you can go to Clarke Quay where most bars and clubs located.

Life in Singapore

Arrival and Orientation
You will receive email about airport meet service offered by NUS students before you go to Singapore, so you can sign up in advance for the airport meet on arrival and they will accompany you to your accommodation. NUS’s orientation session is
essential for exchange students because it provides a lot of useful information such as brief introduction about Singapore and NUS, different students clubs for you to join to have opportunities to meet local friends and have fun, school facilities that you can use, and meeting other exchange students from different countries.

Accommodation & Living
If you want to live in campus accommodation, you need to apply for it when you fill the NUS online application form. However, you are not guaranteed to get the on-campus accommodation, such as halls of residence and Prince George’s Park Residences. You may arrange to live in off-campus accommodations like yo:HA@Commonwealth Hostel, where I lived for my exchange. The Commonwealth Hostel accommodates up to four exchange students on a twin-sharing basis, which means you have more interaction with other exchange students. I prefer living in the hostel since living with new friends is fun and it has location advantages. You can take the shuttle bus offered by NUS to school and it is close to the SMRT station, supermarkets and, food courts. If you want to go out for visiting places, shopping or, partying, you can easily take the SMRT to those places. There are several supermarkets and convenient stores around the hostel, so it is convenient for you to buy daily supplies. Basically, you do not need to worry about cooking food at home because you can enjoy different food in cheap prices in food courts. You can have a great meal for just $5 SGD. If you buy your meals at school, it is even cheaper since I heard that the Government has some funding for foods at school so that students can enjoy some discount buying food. NUS has several canteens for different departments. The engineering canteen is my favourite one since the Indonesian food tastes really good there. If you want to have dinner in restaurants, there are different types of food available. There are many Japanese restaurants in each shopping centre.

Social and Extra-Curricular Activities
Living in Singapore is full of fun because you, as an exchange student, will explore as many places as possible with your friends including your local friends and exchange friends. There is a formal Facebook group for exchange students each term, so you should join the group to avoid missing out fun events. One of the big social activities for exchange students could be nightlife events.
In addition, there will be food events organized by IFG NUS, so you can not only taste different delicious foods, but also meet many local and international students there.

Travel
Traveling around is definitely a big thing for exchange students. In order to travel as many places as possible, you need to plan your trip in advance and pick the right accommodations to save money for your next trip. During my exchange semester, two of my favourite places are Australia and Taiwan. Australia has beautiful beaches in the places I visited like Sydney, Melbourne, and Gold Coast. Taiwan has great food in night markets.

Academic Details
You need to enroll in at least three courses to be a full-time student in NUS. I took four business courses and the teaching and grading style are similar to SFU’s. For most of us, we can just pass the courses to transfer your exchange credits back to SFU. For those who consider apply for graduate school and obtain scholarships at
SFU, you will need your grades for your exchange semester. Local students study very hard and but they are nice to meet new friends. I have group works for all of my courses. Sometimes, group projects may not be favourable for exchange students since many of us want to go out during weekends but due to group meeting, you may need to give up your plan going out at weekends. Time management is essential for you because you want to finish your tasks in advance so that you can have time to hang out with your friends during weekends.

Financial Details
For my whole exchange semester, I spent about $11,000 CAD. It includes the air ticket purchases. I spent a lot of money on purchasing air tickets for my trips, so I picked some relatively cheaper accommodations to save some money.

Conclusion
Favourite and Worst Experiences
Exchange enriches my life experience, opens my eyes to see Asian cultures and lifestyles, and enables me to explore Asian countries with friends. These experiences are valuable and memorable. However, one of the worst experiences that I had is that NUS’s course registration system is not easy for exchange students to manage because you only have two days to register in courses yourself. Afterwards, you need to write the appeal form to request the courses you want to take. Another worst experience for me is that I had skin allergy three times due to sunscreen products and the hot weather, so buy your sunscreen products if you have very sensitive skin.

What I’ve Learned most and Challenges I Faced
I learned how to share our cultures to friends with different culture backgrounds, but sometimes it is challenging to understand some friends because of cultural barriers. Financial management is a big lesson to learn because you want to travel to as many
places as possible by spending as less money as possible. It is challenging, but it is a
great experience to have.

What I Wish I Knew Before I left
I wish to make more local friends because I want to know more about Singaporean
culture and their lifestyles. I wish I could have a bicycle adventure with friends to go
around the whole country.

Words of Wisdom for Future Exchange Students
Get involved in students clubs or groups is an amazing opportunities to meet new
friends and to expand your social network. Exchanging in Singapore is more worthful
than the money you spent on exchange. Keep in touch with your friends who you
met on exchange. Most importantly, have fun in Singapore!