I went to Singapore for exchange in Spring 2015, at the National University of Singapore. Here at SFU, I’m in the Faculty of Education. I love both universities!

Preparing for exchange was a mixture of excitement and stress, anticipation and scrambling. There seemed to be too many things to do before leaving, and I had left them all to the last minute. For those travelling to Singapore, I would recommend getting things like pictures and forms completed way in advance so that small administrative details like this don’t bog you down in the few weeks you have left before leaving. Packing is enough to worry about! I would recommend bringing shorts, t-shirts, sandals, flip-flops, sunglasses, and a hat, as Singapore is a tropical country. However, the buildings there are incredibly air conditioned so that it feels like Canada at times! To be prepared for this always bring a cardigan around with you. Also, bring a few dresses (for ladies), because they’re perfect for the hot weather and also great for formal occasions. A pair of jeans would also be useful for those events where you know it’ll be indoor, and therefore air conditioned. Travelling to Singapore is a lengthy journey, and can take up to 25 hours depending on layovers. Mine took around 18 hours with Cathay Pacific. It’s definitely advisable to start looking for tickets as early as possible because they can get pretty pricey. If you don’t mind extra travel time, I would recommend flying with Delta Airlines. They might make you do 3 or 4 layovers, but you’ll pay about half the price when there’s a promotion going on.

Speaking of transportation, one of the best parts of living in Singapore is the MRT - their form of skytrain. It takes you virtually anywhere and is quick and reliable. Their MRT stations are basically all connected to malls, so you’re never in hunger! It’s incredibly convenient to be able to get off the MRT and meet friends right there at the mall or the movies.

I lived with my relatives while in Singapore, so I don’t have much to say about accommodations on campus, but one thing I know is that it’s a bit of a nightmare living at the PGP residences (Prince George Park). It’s at one extreme end of campus that seems very isolated from the rest of university life. It’s also quite old. It’s not the absolute worst conditions, but I would try avoiding a dorm here.

Lectures in Singapore are very similar to the ones in Canada. However, you’ll notice that the students are a lot more attentive. They really care about their grades and doing well. This is great for group projects! But it also makes it hard to get participation marks in class because everyone wants to speak! The grading can also be pretty tough. Everything rides on papers and exams. If you’re not a strong writer, beware of the grading here. Singaporean students are trained very well in writing, so the curve really hits you when it comes to writing papers.

The weather in Singapore is pretty consistent in that it’s always hot and humid. However, as it is a tropical country, it can sometimes be really rainy - torrential downpours! It’s totally different from the rain in Canada, where we have perpetual drizzling and clouds for days on end. In Singapore, it’ll rain cats and dogs for maybe half an hour, and then it’ll go away and the sun will shine again. Some people choose to just wait it out at the mall until the rain ends - that’s how short it lasts. If you do have to be outdoors during these times, I have a strange but useful recommendation for you - wear flip-flops! Sneakers, runners, or flats will leave you with drenched, damp feet for the rest of the day because there’s no avoiding the massive puddles. If you wear flip-flops, your feet and shoes will dry very soon and you won’t have to suffer the rest of the day.

Culturally, Singapore has a great nightlife. Everyone stays up super late, and it’s very common to go out for supper at 10pm. Most families even do their grocery shopping around this time as well, because
Singaporeans are workaholics! It’s an extremely safe city with a very low crime rate (but this doesn’t mean no crime rate, so still keep on your guard!).

One thing you can’t miss out on in Singapore is the food! It’s incredible and so cheap! Eat at the local hawker centres (outdoor food courts) for the best eats and for meals under $5 SGD. My favourite food was the Nasi Lemak (coconut rice with fried chicken) at Adam Road. Look for it if you’re in Singapore!

If you’re looking for some good places to visit while in Singapore, I do have a few recommendations. The Singapore Zoo is one of the best in the world; I went twice and enjoyed myself both times. The Esplanade is where you can see the famous merlion statue, and also watch free plays on the floating stage. The Esplanade food court is amazingly delicious too. Clarke Quay is also a great place to eat and it’s beautiful because a river flows in the middle of it. An excellent hotpot restaurant is Hai Di Lao. The waiting time here is usually a few hours at peak times, but on the plus side you get a free manicure while you wait! For shopping, Orchard Road is the place to go. It’s no secret, and any Singaporean will tell you this is where shopping central is. However, all the malls are great too! If you’re looking for a mini-getaway, there’s Sentosa Island. It’s a resort with a great amusement park, aquarium (one of the world’s best), waterpark, and food. You can take the MRT there so it’s very close to the city (everything in Singapore is close to each other since it’s such a small place!).

Now that I’m back from my exchange, I’ve had the time to reflect on my experience. My time abroad helped me mature in priceless ways and changed the way I think about relating to others. It has helped me understand myself better and taught me to initiate friendships. One challenge I faced was an overloaded schedule! I was constantly meeting up with people and attending social events, so I barely had any alone time for relaxation. Because I was so swamped with activity, I really enjoyed the few quiet moments I had to just relax. However, for those introverts out there, I would recommend being really intentional about setting aside time where you don’t make appointments or attend events. It’s important to allow yourself to recharge, otherwise you’ll find yourself burnt out and just missing home.

My final word of advice is to just use every moment well! Your time will be over before you know it, and there will be so many things you wish you had done but just never had time for. If there’s a certain thing or place you really want to visit, do it as soon as possible without delay or you’ll find that you won’t have time left to do it!

I thoroughly enjoyed my time in Singapore, and I still miss it even though I’ve been back in Canada for quite a while! The people are so amazing and friendly - get to know them, they love meeting foreigners! The city is beautiful - take time to watch the sunset behind the skyline. The food is incredible - try everything, especially chilli crab and laksa. Soak it all in, and enjoy your experience. It’s completely worth it.
This is Marina Bay at dusk.

This is me at the NUS campus.
Gardens by the Bay, Singapore
This is me at the Southeast Asian Games, which Singapore hosted during my exchange.