

**Exchange university**

Nanyang Technological University Singapore

Degree programme

Sustainable Technology

Teh C Kosong Peng- New Cultures, New People, New Courses, New Experiences

Before departure

I applied for exchange studies because I think it is the perfect opportunity to get to know another country. Not just as a vacation destination, but it enables to really dive into the culture, live under completely different conditions and step out of your personal comfort zone. Studying abroad means learning in many different ways, at university, about people, about culture and mostly about yourself. That is why I have chosen NTU in Singapore as my destination, as I have never been to Asia before, and I wanted to see something new. Moreover, the courses at NTU seemed to be suitable for my programme at KTH. I expected to get to know what life is like in Singapore and to use the location of Singapore as a starting point to travel through Southeast Asia. As the courses are taught in English and English is one of the officially spoken languages in Singapore, I didn't need to take a language course. I applied for a visa through the university, which made it quite easy as I didn't have to organise it by myself. I had a vaccination counselling session before I left for Singapore and I got some additional vaccines. Moreover, there was some more organisation to do, mainly for my course choice, housing, health insurance, passport, credit card, international driver's license, suitable clothing and memories from home to take with me.

Upon arrival

I arrived during the recommended arrival time, which was approximately one week before the courses started. There were multiply welcoming events which made it easy to get to know new people and to get to know the campus. Moreover, there are many student clubs to join, e.g. cultural, recreational as well as competitive sport associations.

Financials

I did not have a scholarship from KTH, but some schools at KTH offer travel grants. In general, the living costs are quite similar to Sweden, but accommodation can be very expensive if you do not stay on campus. However, if you stay on campus, it is cheaper than in Sweden. For the university, there is a mandatory administration fee to pay. Another financial aspect to consider is the food, as it is not common to cook by yourself, it is common to buy food at stalls on campus where each meal is around 3€-5€. Moreover, if you travel a lot, which most of the people on exchange in Singapore do, this can also get quite expensive. Many attractions in Singapore are also quite expensive, but as a permanent resident there is a discount and there is still a lot to do for free as well. However, there is no discount for students for public transport.

Accommodation

Luckily, I got provided with accommodation from the university because otherwise it can be quite hard to find accommodation in Singapore and it is also very expensive. However, almost all exchange students I know got accommodation on campus. It is common to share a room with one other person which is assigned randomly, you cannot choose. The rooms are small but with a wardrobe, a bed, a table and a chair they are equipped with the most important things. Depending on which room you get, there is AC available and also the size, condition and possible spatial separation from your roommate varies. The bathrooms are mostly shared with the people living on the same floor and they are cleaned every day. Be aware that there are basically no kitchen facilities except for a water dispenser and a microwave and that there are mostly no fridges.

University and studies

NTU is a big university with 31000 Students and many different fields. Most of the fields are somehow technology related, but there is also a school of business and medicine for example. The university campus is really big which made it difficult to find my way around at the beginning. The way of teaching really depends on the course and the professor. Some of my courses had more a high school teaching style while others were classical lectures. Group work and home assignments are mostly a big part of the courses as well. All my courses were held in English, but there is also the opportunity for different language courses. The most common language course for exchange students to do is Chinese.

Courses

I chose my courses based on the ability to transfer the credits to KTH. Thus, I tried to find courses with equal subjects as the ones at KTH. In general, it was a little bit hard to find postgraduate courses, as it is not that common to do a Master's in Singapore. But if you are not a Direct Master's Student (Direct Master's Student: you have done your Bachelor's at KTH as well) you are only allowed to take graduate courses! At the end I found some conditional elective and some elective courses: ES7001, ES7029, ES7030 and MT6101. Three out of my four courses were courses which were taught to undergraduate and graduate students in combination and just some of the assignments differed. The course ES7001 was about natural hazards, the implications on society and what can be done to mitigate the outcomes. This course consists purely of lectures and an exam at the end. The course ES7029 was a GIS course which included a GIS assignment every week and a group work or an individual assignment for graduate students at the end. The course ES7030 was about urban resilient systems which consists of lectures, presentations and group work or an individual assignment for graduate students. The course MT6101 was a project management course with the last couple of lectures focusing on maritime project management. The course consists purely of lectures and an exam at the end.

City and country

Singapore is a very diverse country as the people who are living here have diverse cultural backgrounds and they also live various religions. It is promoted that all the people live together in peace and all the festive days of the different cultures are celebrated, however, racism does still exist. Besides the culture, the landscape is very diverse as well. There are highly urbanised areas with huge skyscrapers on the one hand, but on the other hand there are a lot of parks, nature and jungle. It is very interesting to just walk around in the different parts of the city and experience the different atmospheres. Singapore has a lot of things to impress visitors as daily light and water shows for example and also other concerts or events. However, the working attitude is quite different compared to Europe as people are really focussed on working and also the local students at NTU have a really high workload. Thus, there is a downside of all this glamour. As earning a lot of money is a major goal in life for many Singaporeans, a life work balance does not seem to be existing. People are working a lot and especially immigrants sometimes struggle to find a proper job. Some people and especially also elderly people are working under rather poor working conditions in construction, as cleaning staff, in the hawker centres or in the canteens without much free time. As housing in Singapore is very expensive all the local students mostly live at their parent's place until they are married, and they commute to NTU every day.



Singapore National Day

Leisure and social activities

There are a lot of things to do in Singapore itself, besides walking around and soaking in the urban lifestyle there are a lot of attractions as well. This includes different museums, shows, theatres, musicals, nature walks, shopping and bars and clubs with some really nice views on Singapore. There are even some beaches to relax on the Island Santosa. But a disadvantage of NTU is that it is located quite far out of the city so that it always takes a lot of time to go downtown. On campus there are a lot of associations you can join and there are also many one-time events which you can book a couple of days in advance. The most common thing to do as an exchange student in Singapore is travelling. As Singapore's location is a perfect travel starting point, people travel to basically any reachable country. This can be Southeast Asia for extended weekend trips or even Australia, Taiwan, Hong Kong or Japan for longer travels.



View on Singapore harbour

Sustainability

Together with the good travel location there comes the need to take airplanes, if you want to see the mentioned destinations. There are some destinations reachable by train and bus, which mostly includes

destinations in Malaysia or Indonesia, but for the most other countries it is necessary to take an airplane as it would take too much time to get there in the mostly short amount of vacation days. However, there is one vacation week in the middle of the semester which is mostly used for travelling by exchange students and also a good schedule can give the opportunity to combine many destinations in one trip. In general, I feel like sustainability is not a big topic in everyday life. Travelling by airplane is mostly not considered problematic. There are huge amounts of plastic used for everything, reuse of cups is not a thing and there is basically no waste separation. It is possible to get food to take away everywhere which is packed in a lot of plastic and even for eating in the canteens sometimes single use plastic cutlery and bowls are used. Regarding food it is quite difficult to eat vegetarian or even vegan. Basically, all of the dishes include meat or fish except for Indian food or some other rare exceptions. There is no possibility to give things like your bedsheets and pillows to the next person living in your room, so it will probably all be thrown away. Most of the rooms are cooled down by air condition which is necessary in this climate but takes a lot of energy. Singapore itself promotes sustainability especially through the integration of nature in urban areas which is implemented, however, I do not feel like sustainability is a topic people are aware of or integrate in their lifestyle. At NTU there is one student association which is called earthlink which is dealing with sustainability on campus.

Other recommendations and observations

The warm climate is really an important thing to keep in mind, just bring light, breezy clothes as anything else will be too warm to wear. Warmer clothes are just needed if you plan to travel in regions with colder temperatures. Moreover, it is good if you bring your own router as you need it to get Wi-Fi in your room and buying a router here can be quite expensive. As already mentioned, the course choice can be challenging, thus make sure that you have agreed on the credit transfer with your course coordinator. It is common that you will not get into the courses of your first choice, thus, be prepared to have some backup courses as well. If you are lucky and you have the choice you can take courses which lead to a benefitting schedule for travelling. Regarding travelling it is also important to know that the health insurance from KTH only covers treatment in Singapore itself. Thus, if you plan to travel, it is best to take out an additional long term travel health insurance when you are still in your home country. If you get health problems while staying at NTU, there is a health care centre directly located on campus where you can see a doctor and get medication quite easily. The treatment itself only costs 2€. The medication needs to be paid privately but mostly it will be refunded by the health insurance from KTH if there are no special circumstances.