



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	National University of Singapore
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester One 2025
Otago degree(s)	BCom/LLB (Hons)
Major(s)	Finance

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
World Music Ensemble MUA3219	English	N/A
The Nature of Language EL1101E	English	N/A
Chinese Tradition CH2291	English	N/A

Total Otago credits gained: 54 points 72 points 108 points _____

Any comments about these papers?

None of these papers had any exams, which meant I could relax/travel during exam season. This does mean they had final tests in the final teaching week, which I found completely fine.

MUA3219: Would really recommend this – you don't need prior music experience however everyone in my class did, and it can really help. We basically got together twice a week for two hours each time and played traditional Balinese and Malaysian instruments in an ensemble. I didn't need to do anything else for the class apart from an easy reflection essay at the end. Workload was therefore completely fine and it was a fun and interesting class, with the 'exam' being a final class performance during the last teaching week.

EL1101E: This is just an introductory linguistics paper, which I took with no prior knowledge of linguistics. It very manageable and interesting, with one tutorial and one online lecture (you can watch this at any time) each week. You are put into/can request tutorial groups and you do

assignments together with this group. Generally exchange students have a poor reputation with locals as they are not the best groupmates, but you'll be fine as long as you pull your weight. The final test does require a reasonable amount of studying but nothing crazy. I'd recommend this paper if you want a paper with little workload and gives you free time in the week to travel and explore.

CH2291: Interesting range of topics covered about Chinese culture and history, including religion, architecture, traditional paintings, cosmology, mythology... cool paper to take. Final test was not bad at all and on Examsoft, so I took it in my own room with minimal stress. There are assigned readings which are chunky, but I didn't do them.

How did the academic experience/ workload/ style of teaching differ from Otago?

Workload is very paper-dependent, but people say that classes are much more discussion based in Singapore generally. I can't say much to this from my own experience because two of my classes mainly involved playing music or an online lecture. My classes were certainly not too trying and pretty enjoyable. Teaching style overall I didn't find much different.

A big difference between NUS and Otago is that lectures at NUS are two hours long. Another one is that you might lack of guidance on exam and assignment guidelines and rubrics compared to Otago, which can be stressful – this is certainly lecturer-dependent, but it may be hard to tell what they're looking for from you compared to Otago. Some also don't release grades for assignments/tests for ages – for my Chinese Tradition class I never even got my first assignment grade back and it was worth 30%. So overall, from my experience and talking with friends, that kind of stuff is not very transparent and can cause stress.

Last tip: depending on your lecture venue, the AC might freeze you if you don't bring an extra layer.

Accommodation

What accommodation did you stay in? What were the pros and cons of your accommodation?

I stayed at Raffles Hall. I could choose a few uni accommodations to apply to and chose UTown and PGP. Raffles Hall was not one of my choices but I am incredibly happy to have been put there. Cannot recommend it enough. Keep the cons in perspective for the following list.

Pros:

- Catered breakfast and dinner most days. Good because you don't have to go anywhere else and importantly, you make friends and meet people at meals. No lunch provided is great because you can eat a delicious meal at one of the campus canteens.
- Social: can meet other exchangers as well as locals. I made my best friends on exchange at my hall. We would travel to other countries together. Can join hall activities (I joined the Raffles Orchestra for example). Raffles put on so many events in the evenings, which involved a great deal of free food and crafts that you can take back as souvenirs – it felt as if there'd be something on every other night.
- Location. Best hall location on campus. Surrounded by 3 or 4 campus bus stops so it is great to get to classes anywhere (bus service is free), and a 5-10 minute walk to Utown.

Cons:

- Hall food was pretty bad – both exchangers and locals would complain about it. Residential Colleges (a different type of accommodation) had better food but the meal plan was more expensive.

- No aircon, since there's no aircon at any hall. But I acclimatised fine enough and just slept without any blanket. You still have a ceiling fan and it was actually too cold for me if it was on max while I tried to sleep.
- Some rooms are nicer than others in Raffles; just luck of the draw. Other residences – I know Helix House was newly renovated and the bedroom I saw was so nice there. A Eusoff Hall bedroom I saw was pretty standard for hall room, not too bad. Mine at Raffles turned out not that great, but at least no squirrels could access my windows and steal my food. I saw a cockroach in my room once in the duration of my stay.

Money matters

Please detail your basic costs, e.g. accommodation, flights, visa, food, insurance

Raffles Hall was about 7000 NZD for the semester.

Food – lunches ranged from 4 to 10 SGD per day.

Visa: free.

Flights:

- Getting there:
 - o Jetstar flight Christchurch to Singapore via Melbourne
 - o Leaving January 12 2025
 - o \$760
 - o Booked on 28 November 2024
- Coming back: I travelled to various different countries on the way back.

What means did you use to access your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, Cash passport, foreign bank account, etc.)

Highly recommend getting a Wise card, and you will need cash in Singapore too. Cash is for eating at hawker centres and canteens on campus.

With the Wise card you get two ATM withdrawals of up to a couple hundred dollars each per month, with no fees from Wise. There might be ATM fees depending on the one you use but the UOB ATMs didn't have a fee in Singapore.

The Wise card is good for travelling to other countries too, though you do need cash for some places e.g. Malaysia, Thailand – which we generally just used the ATMs there.

Getting a DBS account (local bank) is good as well because there are less fees involved compared to using an international card, even including Wise. I didn't do this but I know people who did. It means you can pay by QR code which all the vendors at the campus canteens and hawker centres in the city have, instead of using cash. They generally don't take card. I had to use cash because I didn't have a local bank account.

Transport-wise, for the MRT and buses you can use any Visa card to tap on and off, Wise has good exchange rates though – and a DBS card is best.

Visas & Insurance

Did you have to apply for a visa? What was the process?

I needed a Student's Pass (STP) for studying in Singapore. It was a long process but there was a guide emailed out to me. When I arrived in Singapore I still had to complete the process by going to a registration event. Once it's done at start of your exchange you can forget about it.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Yes

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

What organised activities were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

NUS has all manner of clubs. If you're there for their first semester, great. If you go for the second semester like me then it will be harder to find and join clubs once they're all started but it's definitely doable. You can find a list online and email the ones you're interested. If you're in a hall you can ask to join hall groups e.g. I joined the orchestra, and I know someone who joined one of their hall bands – this was a great way to meet some locals.

What was the university/ city like?

Massive campus, much bigger than Otago – such that there is a free bus service between departments and places on campus. Utown is the nicest place, with canteens, restaurants, study areas, a gym and an infinity pool (which as far as I could tell only exchange students went to).

Singapore city is lively and very developed, with impressive architecture of buildings incorporated with nature everywhere. There's a Chinatown, Little India, and Kampong Glam, reflecting its multiculturalism. Food is great, with many cheap options and different varieties of Asian dishes. Many, many malls which are nice to wander around, and often connected to an MRT station. It's so easy to get around the city and explore it.

Any recommendations for things to do, places to visit, places to eat etc.?

Supper Stretch is a stretch of restaurants near Eusoff Hall by campus where students go to eat late at night. Al Amaan and Niqqi's are my favourites.

Campus canteens: the chicken katsu curry at Japanese place at the Deck; the Asia Wok at Flavours in UTown; Taiwanese place at Techno Edge canteen; the Mala at Fine Foods in Utown.

Malls: Funan Mall and Vivocity are my favourites.

Hawker centres: Chinatown complex, Old Airport road, Maxwell Food Centre

Other food: Queic by Olivia in Chinatown has amazing cheesecake; 3 Meals a Day has amazing salted egg yolk chicken; Ah Chew Desserts is yum traditional Chinese desserts; the 90c ice cream at IKEA is to die for.

Singapore Zoo is really fun, pricey but worth it. Palau Ubin is a little island off the top of Singapore that you can ferry to if you pay 4 dollars – more out of the way but a very nice day trip where you can rent bikes, cycle around and see many monkeys and ecological features. The Singapore Botanic Gardens are also amazing – if you're lucky you can see otters, and you'll probably see monitor lizards as well. The Orchid Gardens are pretty nice if you're into that (as students you pay \$1SGD for entry) – if you go then do not skip the cool house.

Lazarus and St John's Islands of the bottom of Singapore are very peaceful as well. I had a whole beach to myself basically at Lazarus when I went.

Cycling along East Coast Park was one of my top highlights – beautiful place.

Joo Chiat street, Tiong Bahru neighbourhood, Bugis Market, Haji Lane (and the Blu Jazz bar there) are all cool to check out.

Nightlife – better than Dunedin in my opinion. Boat Quay was the place to be for students, especially exchangers. There are always tables full of them. Wednesdays are ladies nights where girls get free entry and one free drink at many clubs, personal favourite is Ce La Vi at the top of Marina Bay Sands. Zouk and Nova were popular too. However, alcohol is really expensive in Singapore. Malaysia as well. But cheap in Thailand and Vietnam.

Any tips for future students?

If you have flexibility with choosing classes, use NUSMods to simulate a timetable and you can choose the best ones for your needs e.g. if you want Fridays or Mondays off to travel somewhere.

Once you get yourself there and make some friends, just let the experiences happen to you and be open to anything. You'll have the best time and make the best memories.

Overall Experience

Please write one paragraph (or more) about your exchange experience. Please include some photos!

I cannot recommend Singapore enough – looking back I really had the time of my life. You get to study at a brilliant campus in a modern city with lots to explore. The easy, cheap public transport makes the city a joy to go around. The local student culture is very social (if you're in a hall) despite how studious they are, and given that there are exchange students at every turn at NUS, you will have no trouble meeting friendly exchange students in your classes or ones wanting to form travel groups.

If you want to travel but don't have a budget for Europe, then Singapore is also great for its proximity to other South East Asian and other Asian countries. There's history, there's culture, there's wildlife, there's nightlife, and many opportunities for relaxed island vacations, or hiking volcanoes or whatever kind of traveller you are, in the continent.

Personally I visited tons of different areas of Malaysia, and I visited Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Lao and China. Some of these were in university breaks, others were long weekends or at the end of my exchange. You can travel Asia for much less money than countries in Europe.

Studying at Singapore in Sem 1 means you'll have a really long break before Otago starts again, which is really nice. I finished studies in Singapore in early May and Otago starts mid-July.

