



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	National University of Singapore
Semester & Year of Exchange	Otago S2 2019 (NUS S1 AY19/20)
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Science
Major(s)	Computer Science

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
CS3219 Software Engineering Principles & Patterns	English	COSC345 Software Engineering	18
CS3210 Parallel Computing	English	COSC3~~	18
MA2101 Linear Algebra	English	MATH202	18

Any comments about these papers?

Software Engineering Principles & Patterns had a very hard 40% group project. The Parallel computing assignments were quite conceptually difficult but satisfying.

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

There were more group projects and 2-hour-long lectures instead of 1. The marks were generously bell-graded at the end, but the internal workload was harder than Otago, with more complex systems setup asked for the computing projects.

Accommodation

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

I stayed in UTown Residence.

Pros:

- Fantastic facilities: gym, rooftop pool, convenience stores, 2 cheap food courts, campus bus stop etc
- Clean, well maintained apartments
- Communal area in apartments
- Independent living by being self-catered
- Non-aircon room was good value for money and well ventilated with the fan

Cons:

- Sometimes loud with events
- Inconvenient to get into the city – 20 min away from nearest MRT station by walking or campus bus
- Few social events or sense of community

Money matters

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

All in NZD so subject to conversion rate and fees

Accommodation - \$3,212 covering all utilities and access to pool, gym etc (inc. conversion fees)

Flights – approx. \$700 to Singapore, \$1100 back (flying around Christmas is expensive, try to book return flights if you're going second semester and not leave it until your travel plans solidify like I did...)

Visa – approx. \$100, paid online

Food – SG\$10+ a day for meals from the campus food courts, SG\$4-6 for a hawker centre meal, SG\$20+ for a restaurant meal. You can eat very well in Singapore for NZ\$80 a week, bless hawker centres!

Transport – NZ\$1-2 each way for MRT and bus rides, free buses around campus (including from UTown to Kent Ridge MRT station, NZ\$12-20 for Grab (uber equivalent) depending on demand and distance.

Insurance – NZ\$600 for a policy that covered travelling after my course finished, plus a ~NZ\$70 mandatory student insurance from NUS which can be claimed on doctor's appointments at the University Health Centre.

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

I used a low-fee ATM at the nearest MRT station to get out cash out when the exchange rate was favourable with my NZ FastCash EFTPOS card. I used cash for most transactions and loading my MRT card. I used my debit card for online payments and Grab (uber equivalent).

Visas & Insurance

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

I applied online for my Student Pass, which we received after a paperwork-heavy collection exercise at the university. I was only allowed to stay 90 days in the country before collecting the pass, and had to return it before leaving the country after my studies ended.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Yes – covering me while in Singapore only. I did not draw upon it.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

There were many social events and tours running in the first few weeks before university started from NUS iCare – I would recommend those to meet some people initially and get an idea of how to get around the city. There was also a private organisation that runs parties for international students from all the universities in Singapore – if you like clubbing I'd recommend checking out Hazel's Guestlist. There were university club events often running at UTown, but in general the events petered out as the semester went on – it's important to put the effort in at these events so make a friend group before the workload kicks in.

What was the university/ city like?

The university was very well appointed (though there were renovations going on while I was there so I did not get to use the Central Library or Computing canteen), with frequent buses to cross the large, hilly (but gorgeously green) campus. There were many cheap places to eat or get snacks at all hours (Singaporeans love food!) and the computer labs were a great place to do work. There were not many group study rooms on campus, but this should be rectified with the Central Library opening again.

The city was amazing. Cheap reliable public transport, interesting attractions and landmarks, cheap fantastic Asian food everywhere (and great Western if you have more of a budget), awesome nightlife (alcohol and cover charges are expensive but Hazel's Guestlist and Ladies Night on Wednesdays make it comparable to Dunedin if you're a light drinker) and great weather... once you adjust to the 28-32 C weather and high humidity every day (took me about a month).

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

Travel around South-East-Asia is very easy and cheap from Singapore, but you don't have to go somewhere every month – I enjoyed having a few travel experiences exploring Singapore more than constantly planning logistics for another trip.

There is a huge range of delicious Indian, Chinese, Malay and other dishes I had never even heard of before coming to Singapore. I had great fun making a "to-eat" list and going to hawker centres with friends.

Gardens By The Bay has a student pass that gives you unlimited access to the Flower and Cloud Domes and the Skywalk on top of the Supertree garden. There's also free lightshows most nights at the SuperTree garden.

Holidays bring lots of events around the city (Deepvali at Little India, Chinese New Year and National Day all over the island, Christmas at Gardens by the Bay) and it always pays to do some research to see what's going on at the moment.

There's also a few big sales events in the year, and Singapore has much more range of goods to buy and deals than New Zealand.

Any tips for future students?

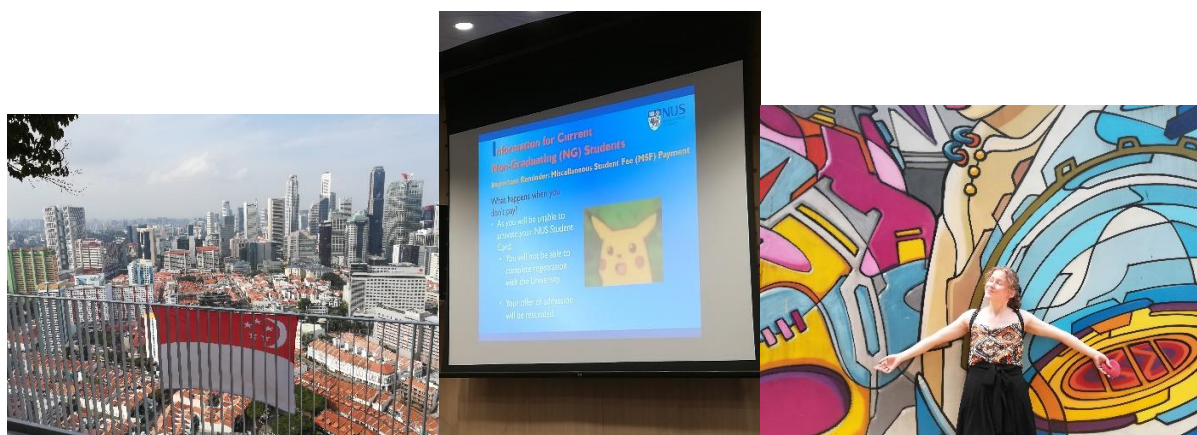
- Pack lightweight, loose-fitting, breathable clothes, a fan, a drink bottle and a messenger bag to avoid the dreaded sweat patches. Though you will need a few light jackets for the lecture halls where they crank up the AC.
- Always pick the flight with extra baggage – it's useful not to have to buy coat hangers, storage, bedding etc there only to discard it 6 months later because shipping the stuff home costs more than it was to buy.
- Adjusting to the heat sucks – drink more water than you think you need to, slow down your walking speed significantly, have cold showers before bed and know it does get better.
- NUS has a heavy focus on group projects – be prepared for that.
- Check your prerequisites and research anything you haven't been taught beforehand – I was caught out by a paper I technically met the prerequisites for but lacked practical experience and knowledge local students had.

Overall Experience

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

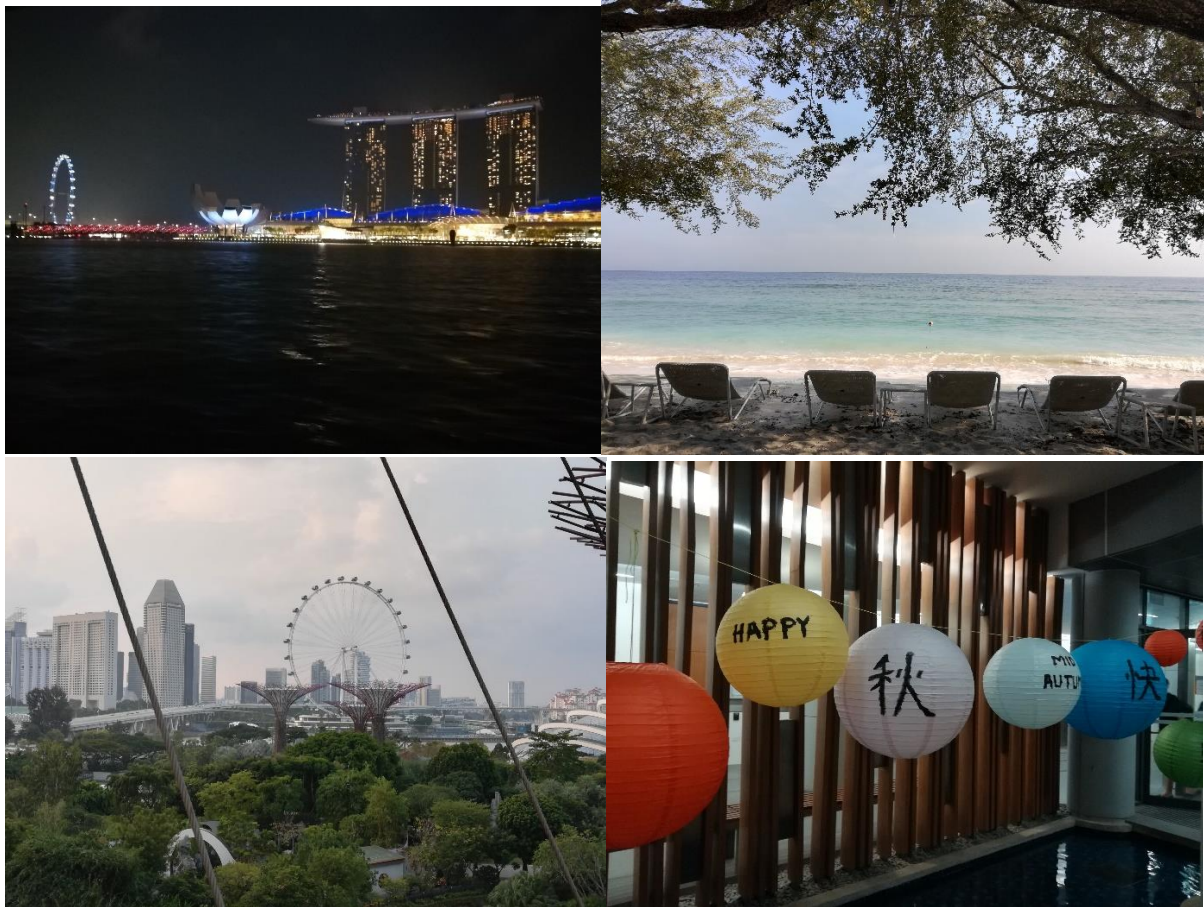
My exchange experience in Singapore was surprising, difficult, rewarding and ultimately the best way I could have finished off my undergraduate degree.

After some last-minute course problems (I had to apply for a new paper in Singapore due to the one I got accepted into being cancelled, luckily there was room for me) and very drawn-out packing, I arrived in Singapore in the end of July 2019. My first few weeks were exhausting but fun, exploring the city, meeting new people and working out the routine of my daily life at NUS. Singapore is a very accessible city and apart from the heat I had no problems adjusting. I'd highly recommend it as the Asian exchange experience to have if you've never travelled the continent by yourself before.



As I got into the semester, however, I realized I was severely underqualified for the 40% group project in my Software Engineering paper due to increased practical emphasis at NUS and not taking the second semester INFO paper that would have given me the experience necessary. I had to deal with a complex project using languages and frameworks I had never heard of, along with 3 Parallel

Computing assignments with heavy workloads, trying to keep up with my Linear Algebra paper, putting the energy in to make friends with the acquaintances I'd met in the first few weeks and exploring the city. The latter three goals fell by the wayside, and apart from a visit from a friend and a trip to Indonesia with my parent in the mid-semester break (half spent working on a Parallel Computing assignment), I didn't get out very much in the middle of the semester.



This was definitely the most academically challenging time I had experienced in university so far, and though most people won't have that level of challenge in their courses on exchange, the negative effect on your motivation and time management in an unfamiliar environment and reduced support system have shouldn't be underestimated. Even if you are on pass-fail, think carefully about your prerequisites, experience, and workload before picking more than one hard paper.

As the semester approached an end, I decided to make more of an effort to catch up with a few acquaintances that I had enjoyed the company of most. This ended up being a much better approach than exhausting myself trying to keep a large friend group, and I had a lovely day on my birthday despite being on assignment crunch time.



After my final assignments, I went to Ao Nang, Thailand for five days with my Kiwi apartment-mate, which was gorgeous, cheap and the perfect way to unwind. It's a great time to travel if you have a few weeks before your exams.



Exams came and went in a blur of cheat sheets, and I had five days to pack up my entire life and say goodbye to my friends and Singapore itself.



I had booked an Intrepid tour in Vietnam for after exams, thinking a full-blown trip with friends would be too stressful to organise myself. Many people I talked to had great times organising long trips with friends themselves, but if you're someone that feels pressure to make sure other people are having a good time, or you're going somewhere with tricky language or logistics, I'd highly recommend one of these tours.



Overall, I had an extremely rewarding experience. I had great travel experiences and met some lovely people, but also learned to deal with adversity and doing the best you can when you feel completely overwhelmed. I fell in love with Singapore's lifestyle and diverse cultures (definitely

planning to work there someday), but also remembered things to appreciate about New Zealand and Dunedin when I'd previously been a bit sick of our university town.

I chose Singapore because I wanted to go somewhere in Asia that was accessible and experience big city living, diverse culture, great food and travel opportunities. It met all my expectations and surprised me in some ways too. I'd highly recommend Singapore as an exchange destination, and NUS as a university.