

**Exchange university**

NUS - National University of Singapore

**Degree programme**

SUPD - Sustainable Urban Planning and Design

## “Winter” semester at NUS

### Before departure

I really wanted to take an opportunity to try another country to study, explore the world and travel around, that's why applying for an exchange semester was not a question. The question however was which university to choose. I ended up having two first choices, Mexico and NUS in Singapore. I was curious about the culture and life on both sides of the world but decided to put NUS as a first choice as I believed it's more difficult to get there, as the university is ranked high. The fate decided for me, and so I got to NUS!

Studies are in English, so no need to prepare anything regarding this. I had to apply for Visa but NUS helped with that, sending us the full step-by-step process, applying on our behalf and you have to do the final steps and payment. Regarding vaccinations, I got tetanus and hepatitis A, and B, however, I think Singapore does not have any vaccination required.

Pack less than you think you need, you will be wearing only light clothes, shorts, and thin T-shirts. Take one hoodie/pullover for crazy strong AC everywhere indoors, it's hot all the time, even at night!

### Upon arrival

I arrived at the beginning of August, during welcome week, however, the welcome week really didn't have much of the officially organised activities. Nevertheless, it is always good to come a few days earlier to get to the new time zone and get used to the place. My accommodation had some welcome week events but I missed those, so check it out before booking the flight when you want to attend.

If you are not in the WhatsApp group, make sure to ask some students to add you. Somebody will be already in, and I have no idea how it spread around, haha.

### Financials

As an international student in Sweden, I didn't get any scholarship or other financial support from KTH or the Swedish government. Therefore, all expenses went from my savings and my parents' help.

Before going, I was really scared that Singapore would be much more expensive than Sweden – and Sweden as you know is already expensive. However, staying at the student accommodation and eating at the canteens comes up cheaper or similar to living in Stockholm's private accommodation and cooking. Public transport is also less expensive in Singapore than in Sweden (or the same - as we can't get a student discount in Singapore).

My accommodation in Singapore costs: 2741.45 SGD ( 1900 €) for the full Semester (until 8<sup>th</sup> of December)

Meals in the canteen: 2.80 – 6 SGD on average  
Visa: 90 SGD (62€)

If you are scared of expenses but you already surviving in Stockholm, you will be totally fine, although you probably will skip eating in fancy restaurants and just exploring hawker centres there.

### **Accommodation**

As an exchange student coming to NUS, you can apply for student accommodation on campus, which I fully recommend. Don't forget to check deadlines and the fact you need to pay the whole semester in advance and complete some of the online "courses" on how to live on campus before it is fully accepted and confirmed. Thankfully, I got the campus accommodation which is much more convenient and cheaper. However, I know some of the students didn't get the accommodation or got accepted after they paid a deposit to private accommodations. Anyway, while most of the students get student accommodation, it can happen that some don't, but you still can find shared flats around the university campus or further for a reasonable price...

There are different options to choose from, AC or non-AC, with meal plans or without as well as a double room shared with another person (I think at NUS you need to apply for the double room with a person you know, and they don't put you in a double room with a stranger). The price varies depending on the type.

U-Town residences are probably the most famous and biggest, where many exchangers stay. There is a pool in this area too and a stage when there is an event. Outdoor spaces for studying, PC room, canteen...

I was staying in PGP – Lighthouse. I actually liked the location more than U-town, as it is closer to MRT station (metro station), even if you arrive later at night (after 11-12 there is no school bus anymore) you can just walk home in 10 mins. There are also many exchange students, always meeting someone at the canteen which shred for Lighthouse, Pioneer house, Helix house and PGPR residence – all these are in the same area. There is a gym and outdoor basketball/tennis fields.

I had a room without the AC, only a fan. If you are Swedish or from other northern countries, used to colder climates, I think AC will be very helpful, also if you want to study in the room – that was usually hot also for me, but at night I got used to the temperature, and at the end, I was sleeping even without the fan 😊 There are single bedrooms, a shared kitchen on the floor, a shared bathroom, and we also had a "Lounge" on our floor with couches, a TV, a desk... Downstairs there is a foosball table and billiard, with a TV with video games and desks for studying.

Regarding food, you can cook for yourself, but everyone just eats at the canteen, as it is quite cheap. There is a fridge and freezer in the kitchen, stove, and sink, but you need to buy all of the tools for cooking and eating. I would recommend maybe having a self-made breakfast and then eating out, occasionally cooking 😊 – when you can't eat Asian food anymore hahah.

### **University and studies**

NUS University is big, and everything is located on campus. There are free shuttle buses which you can take to go to classes, library, your accommodation, MRT station (metro)... They offer courses in all of the subjects, but as a master's student, you need to take bachelor courses – something to consider. Everything is in English.

Compared to KTH, it is bigger, offering more courses, people are eating in the canteen not having their own lunch. There are for sure many activities and talks you can attend, but this side I liked more at KTH, where the atmosphere was more friendly and felt more like community, especially when studying SUPD!

## Courses

When you want to travel during the semester, try to take courses which don't require you to be there on some days, for example, try to make yourself long weekends... Similarly, I was trying to get courses without exams (to finish earlier) but didn't manage fully. There is a process of getting courses, where you need to request the ones you want and there are multiple rounds of assorting them by the school.

As an SUPD student, I took:

**Topics in Challenges of Cities (CDE4501A)** – I highly recommend this course (or any available from NUS Cities), it was fun and most close to KTH courses. The teachers were interesting, there was no exam, and the whole semester you worked on a group project. The focus is not on design itself but on ideas. It was a class mixed with exchange, master and bachelor students from different backgrounds. The course included a field trip as well.

**Living Space: Introducing Social and Cultural Geography (GE2231)** – I loved the teacher. She was very fun and engaging and I kept attending class because of her basically. It is not fully connected to the SUPD programme but you can find some connection in how people are using and understanding their living space. The course had one lesson and one tutorial with attendance taken every second week. The lectures were recorded, so you can watch them later. The course had an exam at the end, handwritten, in-person, essay question-based. No need to worry much about the exam it was okay. There is one field trip as well.

**Nature and Society GE3250** – The professor tried to make the course very interactive and interesting. One of the main topics is political ecology, so if you are interested in this area, maybe you would like the course. There was a take-home exam consisting of I think 4 questions (essay-based), an individual research project and some reading exercises every tutorial. One lesson per week, one tutorial every second week. Lectures are not recorded and the teacher wants you there (however, he also understands exchange students and their travels, haha).

**Natural Heritage Of Singapore GESS1016** – one of my favourite courses. If you like nature and are interested in learning about local fauna and flora, take the course. I also loved the teacher, she was amazing. There are some short tests during the semester and multiple-choice exams at the end of the semester. There is one easy group project. There is a field trip to wetlands and a nature walk around campus. Lectures are recorded.

**Discover South Asia: People, Culture, Development SN1101E** – Don't take the course if you are taking it to learn about people and culture and are not interested in the history and political relationship between countries in South Asia. That's what I did and the first half of the semester was painful for me, feeling like I am back at high school. However, if you are interested in these topics, especially politics and history, you may like the course. I would try to take something else next time; I wasn't a fan of the teaching style of the teacher although as a person she is nice. There is a group project, individual essay and presentation. There was a test in the middle of the semester. For me, the course had too much high-school vibe. Lessons are once per week, not recorded and tutorials once every second week.

## City and country

The city is clean and feels safe. I really enjoyed exploring many parks and nature around Singapore. However, while Singapore likes to present itself as an almost futuristic country, it's certainly not like that, their system works, yes, but it's the country as everywhere else. Many things are better in Europe, many things are better there, it is nice to see and experience it. I will not spoil it for you, haha.

## **Leisure and social activities**

University and accommodation offer many sports activities or other societies. I did not join any so I have not much information about that. However, some of my friends were playing basketball, badminton, running, callisthenics... There are many options for sure. There was a fair at the beginning of the year where you can choose what you like and join the societies.

My free time was spent mostly exploring Singapore parks or travelling around – during the semester mainly to Malaysia, but my classmates went everywhere already during the semester so for sure you can travel a lot while studying!

As a master's student, consider that most of the exchangers are bachelor students around 20-23 years old. I met maybe 3 master students in total and had a bit difficult time finding a group of friends – not sure if it was the age gap or I just didn't have luck at the beginning to be part of one (not sure as I have never had problems to find friends before).

Also, I was surprised how few activities and events the university organised for exchange or new students at the beginning of the semester to get to know each other. Compared to other universities I went to in Europe, this was the least work done from the uni side to help students interact. The welcome week was also only a few limited space events from the university. On the other side, there were many WhatsApp groups of different interests and topics, from which students were going out, for trips... but it was not officially organised.

## **Sustainability**

While Singapore says it's a green country, it does not mean green is sustainable. Yes, they are trying but compared to Europe standards, it is not so sustainable. There is lots of plastic and plastic packaging, not many vegetarian options which was quite a challenge for me in all of Asia, not conveniently located recycling bins... Regarding transport, it can be considered sustainable as you will use public transport.

## **Other recommendations and observations**

In case you are deciding between NUS and NTU, if you can, take NUS! My friend from KTH went to NTU for a research-based exchange, so I have the information from him (but I visited the school as well multiple times, so I experienced it by myself). The location of NTU is quite far from the centre, making it more difficult to get there and back in the evening as the metro stops at 12 and the school bus around 11 (especially if your accommodation is on the other side of the metro station). Their school buses have less frequency and number of buses.

It is more common to share a room with a stranger and my friend had a very bad experience with accommodation there – very very strong mould and a dirty bathroom. Even on the other accommodation, while the room was very nice, the shared kitchen didn't even have a fridge, it was more like a pantry with no storage for your food or utensils. Canteens are however there, near each accommodation block. I don't know about courses and the university itself there.

Enjoy your exchange, travel around, explore Singapore as well as other countries and go to the pool in Utown! (basically, almost only exchangers go there haha), if you don't want to pay for parties, don't buy tickets for these officially marketed exchanger parties, people said they were not so amazing haha.

If you have any other questions, feel free to contact me, I'm happy to help 😊  
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