Nanyang Technological University (NTU) – Singapore
What you need to know when studying in NTU, Singapore?

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1 Preparing for the exchange

Why Singapore?

Singapore is a lot different from the rest of the Southeast Asia. It is very modern, clean and filled with expats from all around the world. Even though, there are lot people on the small "red dot" everything is organized and everything works. In my opinion, in Southeast Asia, Singapore is the easiest place to live for people coming from Finland. Still, it is an excellent place to discover Asia further as Singapore is one of the main flight hubs. There are plenty of budget airlines flying every day for various destinations. And if don’t want, you don’t even have to fly as you can reach Indonesia and Malaysia just by taking a bus or a ferry. Choose Singapore as your exchange destination if you want to,

1. Travel and discover other parts of Asia as well
2. Live in modern, clean and beautiful city
3. Have an easy place to live Asia (everyone speaks English, public transportation works etc.)
4. Still discover real Asian culture

Figure 1: In Asia, you have a great chance to see these fellas
Some points before leaving

So you have chosen Singapore to be your next destination and NTU to be your exchange school. Nice choice! Here are some points for you to consider before the exchange. For Singapore, you are going to need **a lot of documents because they love bureaucracy**. But don’t worry; you will get very specific instructions and **a lot of information** about what and when you should send them different documents (actually, they send you so much information that you probably don’t even bother to read them all). After all, they have more than 1 000 international student every year so they pretty much know what they are doing.

Here are some things though you need to do before going to study in NTU

1) **Apply for Student Pass**
   - Application via SOLAR system
   - Needed documents:
     - eForm16
     - Passport picture
     - Fees: (1) processing fee S$30, (2), student pass issuance fee S$60 and (3) multiple-journey fee S$30

When I arrived to Singapore, I was told to have all the papers ready for the customs (letter of enrollment, student pass application printed etc.). But it was enough that I just told them I am coming to study there.

You will complete and get your Student Pass when you are in Singapore. This is organized by NTU but keep in mind that the issuance of Student Pass takes about a month, and while that you are not supposed to leave the country! If you really want to travel during that time, you have to finish the application process by yourself.

All international students are required to obtain a Student’s Pass in order to study in Singapore. Still, you don’t really that pass for anything because tourists are allowed to stay in Singapore 90 days and if you travel outside Singapore you get again the 90 days (“visa run”).

2) **Choose courses and get as many as possible approved via Exchange Portal**

You will also need to apply for courses via NTU’s Exchange Portal. Be careful, there are plenty of **courses that are restricted or prohibited from exchange students** (they provide you with a list of these courses). In general, choosing the courses is quite frustrating.

First, you send them ten courses that you would want to take. I had to send my courses to them two times because they had changed most of the courses I had chosen to prohibited that semester. After all, I got four courses approved out of ten. Still, the
approval of courses doesn't guarantee that you got a place from that course though. So try to get as many courses pre-approved as possible. **Send them more courses for approval after the first result of the course approvals are out.**

Tip: Some of the courses I tried to get approved didn't go through on the first time, but when I tried again, I got them approved.

3) Pay Miscellaneous fee $147.55 (you can pay this once arrived in NTU)
2 Exchange studies

Courses in NTU

Many exchange students try to get lectures from Monday to Wednesday or from Tuesday to Thursday so the long weekends can be used for travelling. **It is not always easy to get the courses that you want** because, as mentioned earlier, there are a lot of courses that are restricted or prohibited. If you really want to study something specific, I would suggest you to choose some other school because in NTU you pretty much just settle for what you can get.

The registration for courses happens during the first two weeks of the school, during so-called Add/Drop –period. **You can only try to register for approved courses!** During the Add/Drop –period, you add to STARS (one of NTUs IT-systems) your approved courses and hope to get them registered. If you get some course registered, it means you get a place from that course. If you get registered to some courses that you don’t want, you can drop them.

Tip: Sometimes it can be also a good idea to send an email to study coordinator or professor and explain why you need that specific course, and they might register you for that course right away (you ”go pass” the STARS system).

Some students are really stressed about this Add/Drop –period but don't worry. Eventually, you will get courses so that you will get the needed amount of AUs (academic units). Exchange students from Aalto University need to have at least 18 AU for the bachelor's exchange.

After the Add/Drop –period I had the following courses (courses last always the whole semester):

**BF2207 – International Finance (4 AU)**

Pretty basic finance course that covers topics like foreign exchange and currency derivatives. The lectures are seminar like with almost no interaction at all. Assessments consist of weekly individual exercises (easy and don't take a lot of time), mid term exam, group presentation about selected financial crisis and final exam. Course was quite easy and didn't require lot workload.

**BF3204 – Financial Modelling (4 AU)**

The most challenging course that I had but I would really recommend this one! All the finance and accounting student should take this course at least. **This course is for those who really want learn more about Excel** (no macros though). The lectures are half seminars and half hands-on Excel exercises. During
the course, there are two group projects and final exam. The course is not too difficult but you do have to make some effort.

BH2603 – Talent Sourcing and Acquisition (4 AU)
Really easy and sometimes even a bit boring course. The lectures were seminar like with little interaction. The professor is nice and laid back (he said no one has ever failed this course). There is only one group report plus presentation and final exam. This course is for those who just need easy credits.

BU8642 – Leadership in the 21th Century (3 AU)
This is the second course I would recommend. First of all, the professor is really good. The course is about leadership and soft skills. In this course, you will learn if you reflect and think about the topics discussed in the seminars but you can also choose this course because it is entertaining and not difficult to pass. During the lectures, there are exercises, videos, case examples, discussions, quizzes and a lot of interaction. The learning method is called a team-based learning and there is no final exam in this course.

LC9001 – Chinese Language Level 1 (3 AU)
Nice and quite easy course for those who want learn Mandarin or want a course that will fit nicely to their schedule (there are many groups). There is mid term exam, a short oral presentation, final exam and final video project. It is also a good idea to take this course if you are planning to travel to China.

Figure 2: Chinese homework
Some pros and cons about studying in NTU and campus area

I would also like to mention a few things about the campus area and NTU itself. Listing is the easiest way.

**PROS**
- The campus area of NTU is quite green and nice.
- Large variety of different food in the cafeterias.
- When I was studying, there was also a lot of renewal going on, so I think the campus will look even nicer for the future exchange students.
- The quality of education is good.
- Free campus bus from Pioneer MRT station.

**CONS**
- The location (second last MRT stop on the East-West line and from there you still have to take a bus). From the campus it takes about one hour to get to the city center.
- There was no proper gym at the campus (maybe after the renewal they have fixed that).
- There was not really a lot of free time happening in the campus even though there is many student clubs and associations.
- There is lot restrictions on the courses what exchange students can get.
- The lectures take usually four hours (!), which feels quite long. Some professors take more breaks than others.
3 Free time and other information

Living off- or on-campus? And what does it cost?

Singapore is rather expensive place to live compare to anywhere else in Southeast Asia. I lived in private condo with six other people near Lakeside MRT station. Most of the exchange students living off-campus lived near Lakeside or Chinese Garden MRT stations because they are quite near the campus. For me, it took 20-40 min to get to school depending on the traffic. Also, apartments are far more cheaper there than in the city center.

In our apartment, we had kitchen, living room, four bedrooms and four bathrooms. The apartment was furnished. I shared a bedroom with other Finnish exchange student from Aalto School of Business. Our living costs were are listed below (per person // total)

**The monthly living cost, off-campus**

- Rent (with furniture) around S$700 – If you want your own room prepare to pay > S$1000 // Total rent S$5 000
- SP Services: utilities (electricity, gas, water) S$40 // Total utilities about S$400
- StarHub: wifi S$7 // Total wifi: S$49

**Some one-time fees from living off-campus:**
- Stamp fee for the rent contract (depending on rent, but still several hundreds of dollars)
- Agent fee (usually half month’s rent)
- Wifi router and installation fee (possible cancellation fee: check the contract before signing!)
- Cleaning when leaving the apartment (we paid from 5-room apartment’s deep cleaning S$320)

It is, of course, a lot more expensive to live in a condo than in a dorm at campus. But still, we had gym and nice pool. Also, you are not able to cook anything if you live in a dorm (at least I enjoyed being able to make breakfast in the mornings by myself). Though, I think you might be able to get also a small fridge to the dorm. One bad thing about living on-campus is also that the NTU is relatively far from everything and there are not many things happening on the campus. Also in dorms, you share a room usually with a local student.

If you decide to live off-campus and find a condo, you will need to use an agent. Also the landlords have their own agents so all the communication happens between these agents. Typically, the agent helps you with all the things related to living, like setting up utilities account, wifi, tenancy agreement etc.

It is relatively easy to find roommates, for example, via exchange student’s Facebook groups because almost half of the exchange students don’t get the on-campus accommodation.

Tip: You can open Singaporean bank account in campus from OCBC Bank’s NTU branch. I opened a bank account to facilitate paying the rent. Many of the exchange students don’t open a local bank account though.

Also, you can pay your bills (utilities, wifi etc.) just by taking the money and the bill to any 7-Eleven.

**Food and transportation**

In Singapore, you have plenty of different, good food! There is large variety of different cuisines (Singaporean, Vietnamese, Malaysian, Japanese, Indonesia, Chinese etc.) in food courts and hawker centers. The dishes are usually between S$2.5-6.
Usually food courts that are outside are cheaper than those ones inside, for example, in shopping malls. Try at least the following food courts:

- **Lau Pa Sat** – The famous food court in Raffles Place.
- **Tangs Market at Tangs Plaza, Orchard Road** – It is a really small food center that only serves traditional Malaysian and Singaporean dishes but everything is really good quality. I would recommend especially their **popiah**s (really fresh, ”Asian burritos”).
- **Maxwell Food Center** – Near China Town.

Tip: Remember to bring your own to tissues to food courts; they don't have those. You can also buy them from street vendors with S$1 for 3-packs.

One restaurant chain, I would also recommend is

- **Din Tai Fung** – They have the best dumplings in Singapore! You can find them almost any shopping mall.

Transportation works really smoothly in Singapore. You can almost travel anywhere with **MRT**. When paying with EZ-card the MRT ride costs between S$0.79-2.07 (adult, because exchange student don't get a student discount). **Taxis** are also relatively cheap in Singapore (from the city center to our condo, 40 min, a taxi costs about S$20). **Uber** works also nicely in Singapore and is widely used. Sometimes when it is really difficult
to get a taxi (like in downtown just after midnight, when MRT stop operating), you can get Uber but it is a lot more expensive then (prices multiple by 3).

**Traveling outside Singapore**

*Singapore is the number one destination if you want to discover Southeast Asia.* Of course, there is a lot to do also in Singapore but still traveling was at least the reason for me to choose Singapore. From the four months that the exchange lasted, I spend two months outside Singapore (*it doesn't really matter if you skip lectures*). Also, there is one-week recess week in the middle of semester and two weeks studying period before the final exam when there are no more lectures. So that already gives you about three weeks traveling time.

![Figure 6: Diving in Bunaken, Indonesia](image)

![Figure 7: Rice wine in Tokyo, Japan](image)
Indonesia and Malaysia are pretty easy destination as they are Singapore's neighbor countries. It might still be a good idea to discover also something else than Bali (unless you enjoy drinking buckets and don't really care of the local culture). And I am not talking about Gili islands either. One of my favorites destinations was Myanmar. Myanmar is an excellent destination as it opened its borders for tourist only few years ago. Also, if you got a chance, visit Japan!

**While not traveling – What to see in Singapore?**

Must see places in Singapore
- **Marina Bay** – Marina Bay Sands, Gardens by the Bay etc.
- **Orchad Road** – Shopping, shopping...
- **Clark Quay** – Bars and clubs.
- **Little India** – Very different from the rest of Singapore. Love the food! Go on Sunday and you will get almost like a real India feeling.
- **China Town**
- **Bugis** – Haji Lane and Arab Street are one of my favorites areas/streets in Singapore. Lot of nice bars, cafes and boutiques.

![Figure 8: Near Arab Street](image-url)
You should also check these, a little bit more relaxed places, with really nice restaurants, cafes and bars.

- Holland Village
- Outram Park
- Tiong Bahru

Since most of people are travelling during the weekends, people enjoy Singapore during the weeks. Everyone goes out on **Wednesdays as it is the Ladies Night** (free drinks for the girls). Just so you know, alcohol is super expensive in Singapore (probably the only
place where alcohol is more expensive than in Finland). You can easily pay S$15 ++
("plus plus" means 10 % service charge and 7 % GST are not included) for one beer in a club in Singapore.

If you go on autumn there are several nice things happening in Singapore. **Singapore’s National Day** is in August. During the national day there is lot of activities as well as amazing fireworks. Also, in September there is **the Singapore Formula Grand Prix**. We bought the whole three days tickets and in addition to formulas, we got to see some pretty cool concerts, like Pharrell Williams, Maroon5 and Bon Jovi.
4 Final comments

Singapore is really easy and one of the safest countries in the whole world. If you haven’t travelled a lot in Asia, this is an easy place to start and nice place to come back after spending nights in cheap hostels.

Some final tips

- **Go traveling** – Benefit Singapore’s greatest advantage; the location

- **Do not over pack** – You don’t really need any fancy clothes too much. People dress up really casual at school (flips flops, shorts and T-shirts). You can one business casual outfit for presentations.

- **Have a small backpack (volume 30-45 l)** that you can take with you as hand luggage because you save a lot when travelling without check-in luggage with cheap airlines.

- **Don’t stress about the school** – You cannot fail the courses very easily. If you want to travel, do it.

- **Long sleeves** - In lecture halls, shopping malls, MRT etc. can be pretty cold because of the AC so remember to pack also some long sleeves with you.

- **Umbrella** – The weather changes fast.

All in all, I really enjoyed my time in Singapore and I wouldn’t change a thing. I hope this report was useful for you if you are planning to go to study in Singapore and NTU. If not, write better yourself!

Peace and love!

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