“Studying abroad left memories that are truly some of the most memorable in my life and I’m grateful to have experienced them. From the amazing food to the new friends, everything was worth it. I now feel more connected to the world around me, appreciative of the gifts in my life, and inquisitive about what lies ahead. I’ve realized that the importance of not sweating the small stuff, thanking those around me for my blessings, and how to accept challenges as what they are: things that you must overcome in order to grow as a person.”

Practical information

Visa information

In Singapore, you don’t need a Visa. There is something called a Student Pass that allows you to stay in the country studying as a student. The University will send you emails on how to apply for the Student Pass. You will complete registration once you get to NUS and get the Student Pass in around 2 weeks. Some suggestions: make sure that you have ALL of the documents required before coming to Singapore. You can print them once you’re here, but it will make your life much easier if you simply print them before. Also, Singapore has very strict rules about working in the country. Unless your major requires for you to have an internship while abroad, the Singapore government will NOT allow you to work. You can apply for a work Visa, but it can be a hassle.

It is very easy to come into Singapore. You just fill out a disembarkment form (which they will give you on the plane) and then you hand it to the immigration agent. Make sure you keep your stub (which they give you after disembarking) because you will need it to get your Student Pass.

Packing

What did you not bring from home that you wish you had? I would suggest bringing all necessary toiletries. They are available in Singapore, but are VERY expensive. So, if you have room, bring lots! I had enough to get me through about a month, but wish I had brought more. The following is a list of things that I brought that I would HIGHLY suggest bringing:

- **Sheets** – They are easy to find in Singapore, but are rather coarse and can be expensive. It also makes your first night a lot more comfortable.
- **Pillow** – Once again, you can get them in Singapore, but a decent one will cost an arm and a leg.
- **Sweaters** – Although Singapore is a very hot country (i.e. 87˚F almost every day, without the humidity index), but they keep classrooms frigid. So, bring a sweater.

It’s a very western-influenced country, so just about everything is available. Some things that are cheap in the US (like toiletries) are expensive in Singapore.

International office at Host University

NUS was great about getting me settled into the country. A student from NUS met me at the airport and we took a taxi to my dorm (Quick note: you have to pay for the taxi, so have money on hand).

Upon arriving at my dorm, check-in was easy. I got my keys and was on my way. Or so I thought... The dorms at NUS have very strange doorknobs that are opened using an access card. Luckily, I did have my buddy still with me and he showed me how to open the door. Also, I was never told how to work the air conditioning (more complicated than one might think), so I had to ask the office multiple times to help. Overall, the process was easy, but I do wish that my dorm gave me more instruction on the things in my room.

There are orientation activities, and I would suggest taking part in most, if not all of them!! The tour guides will take you to multiple parts of the city and introduce you to new types of foods (always helpful to get a local’s perception of the food). It is also a great way to meet exchange students and form some friendships.

I didn’t have much Interaction with the international office, but they were helpful!

Academics

All of the classes (except for law classes) are in one area. It’s a large campus, similar to Cornell, but there are great bus services that go around all of the campus. The busses are free, so use them! They give you a quick oasis from the heat.

NUS students and Singaporean’s in general are very work/school oriented. But, when they do hang out it is usually in common areas in the dorm. Most of the exchange
students will go out together to eat at restaurants, go to clubs, etc. A lot of exchange students travelled each weekend, since travel is so easy from Singapore.

There are computer labs in each of the dorms. They are easily accessible and you will probably spend a lot of time there. I printed all of my assignments there and often did work in the common areas. There are a few libraries on campus, one in each of the faculties (At NUS, colleges are called faculties). Wifi is only available in common areas, so you need to bring a cable to for internet in your dorm room.

Courses

Pre-enroll happens when you apply to NUS. I would highly suggest looking over the courses beforehand and sign up for courses that you would like to take. Getting into classes at NUS can be competitive, like at Cornell. So, if you pre-enroll, it will make your life easier. Exchange students need to enroll in discussion times after full time students do, which was a little annoying. Luckily, there are a lot of discussion times so you can generally get into the one you wanted. I enrolled in 4 courses; one was a Food Science and the other were in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

Classes had lecture once a week for 1 hour and 45 minutes. Discussion generally met once every other week for 45 minutes. My food science class had lab once a week for 3 hours.

There is little homework at NUS. Most final exams/papers are worth 50-70% of your grade, so little emphasis is put on homework. If I had an assignment, it was worth around 10-20% of my grade.

Exams happen at the end of classes. For my liberal arts classes, the exams were essays and my science class had some short answer questions. They are very similar to Cornell, except that they generally account for a larger percentage of the final grade. You cannot take exams early.

Life Abroad

Banking

I did not open a bank account and found it to be fine. I simply took out money from an ATM. I would suggest taking the maximum out of the ATM and that’ll last you for a while.

Housing

I stayed in a dorm at NUS. It was a new dorm called Tembusu. I would highly recommend staying there. There was a dining hall connected to the dorm, which made eating really convenient.

I needed to apply, but Cornell students are guaranteed housing (spots in Tembusu are limited). I was given the option to live in Tembusu, which is slightly farther away from the other dorms, but I found it worth it.

Everything was clean, there was A/C everywhere, students were very nice, there was a good combination of local and exchange students. It was around $2500-3000 for the whole semester. It was paid in the beginning of the semester.

The meal plan covered Breakfast and Dinner 6 days a week, so I had to get breakfast and dinner out on certain days. There are also a lot of lunch places on campus which are all very inexpensive. I would suggest trying a lot of them. It’s a great way to try different dishes without spending a ton.

Transportation

Singapore has an amazing public transportation system. The metro is extremely clean (you cannot eat or drink inside) and you can access the whole country that way. Buses are also a great way to get around. You can get from one side of the country to the other for $5.

You pay with a metro card that also pays for buses, taxis, and even printing on campus! You can get a monthly pass, but I would suggest getting a “pay as you go” system. You pay for the length of your trip in Singapore, so if you have short trip, it can be very cheap.

Communication

I got a cell phone. I used SingTel, which is the nation’s largest provider. I got a SIM card that was prepaid and didn’t finish the full amount. I would suggest getting $20 of credit.

Social activities

My dorm was very good about introducing exchange students to local students. Also, most of my classes were filled with local students, so I met them through class assignments/study groups.

I did not get involved in any clubs. I wanted to travel as much as possible, so did not have the time to join anything.

I would highly suggest getting to know exchange students with the same interests as you and then travelling with them.

Singaporean students generally just like to watch movies or get dinner. Exchange students would go out together.

Health and Safety

I felt very safe in Singapore and all of South East Asia. You will be very safe in Singapore.

All students (even exchange students) have to sign up for the health system, which was great. It covers a lot of medications
and services. I had an allergic reaction while there and was able to get everything I needed in Singapore.

**Overall Exchange Experience**

Since Singapore is so small, I feel like I saw most of the country. I also travelled a bunch, which gave me a great image of Southeast Asia as a whole. I thoroughly enjoyed Singapore. It was a great combination of Asian culture with many western ways, allowing me to expand my horizons without it being overwhelming. In general, Singaporeans are very focused on work, which confirmed that I need both work and fun in my life.

I feel more connected to the world as a whole. There is a lot of poverty in Asia and to experience it firsthand made me realize how lucky I am. I also realized how many things I took for granted, such as basic amenities.

I think going abroad made me realize that I want to work for a company with international opportunities, so that I can explore more of the world later in life.