

# GEARE's Singapore Logistics Guide



## Summary

This document has the intended purpose of providing a large variety of information to students in the GEARE programming considering or already planning to travel to Singapore for their study abroad semester. Below is a table of contents of many resources that you may find useful for planning your study abroad semester. If there is any additional information not presented in this document that you wish to learn more about, below is also a table with all the author's information consisting of their student information, time abroad, and contact information.

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**About Singapore (Location, Population, Language, and Weather)**

Singapore is a very small country located in Southeast Asian at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula. Singapore is a very small country, taking roughly 1.5 hours by train to travel from the eastside to the westside. For a very small country and a population of roughly 5.6 million people, Singapore is known as one of the densest countries in the world. Singapore is considered a melting pot of all various Asian cultures and has four official languages: Mandarin Chinese, Tamil, Malay, and English. Colloquial Singaporean English is known as Singlish that will be commonly used in Singapore. Singlish is primarily English based with slang terms derived from Malay and Mandarin Chinese. Nearly everyone in Singapore knows English plus an additional language depending on their heritage, so if you are an English only speaker, this will not be an issue. Since Singapore is located very close to the equator, the weather in Singapore annually ranges from 25C to 34C (77F - 93F).

### **Is Singapore Safe?**

Singapore is ranked the second safest country in Asia! Singapore is a country with a lot of strict laws and these laws ensures a very safe country at all times of the day. Being in Southeast Asia however, there are some mosquito-caused diseases that you must be careful about. The precautions for these health issues can be easily treated by doing simple things like wearing bug spray/cream (recommended to find one with 100% DEET). Many places in Singapore also have a misting system built (for example like around NTU campus) which will mist the school and prevent mosquitos or bugs from being a big concern.

Anecdotal from Brandon:

While I understand mosquito born diseases are a very scary topic to us, I can reassure you that in Singapore this is something that you have to worry about at a minimum. Singapore takes very good care of their city and ensures that their city is safe. For example there are signs all around the city telling citizens how to prevent mosquito growth and at NTU campus there was a misting system that occurred in the morning that stops bugs from flying. I rarely had to even worry about putting bug cream while I was in Singapore and never had to worry about being bitten or catching a mosquito born disease.

### **Pre-Departure Preparation**

#### *NUS Housing*

In Singapore, exchange students are able to apply for a place in the Halls of Residences or Student of Residences. The biggest difference between them is the compulsory meal plans for all the halls. If you prefer more flexible food choices, Utown (Student of Residences) will be your first option. There is a big town plaza resides within Utown, which provides a lot of traditional food. Also, Utown offers independent living with opportunities for cross cultural interaction with the international community of students. Never choose halls because they don't have air conditions in the rooms! Yes, you heard it right. (Utown provides students with all their daily

needs, including restaurants, small market, pharmacy, hair shop, gym, pc and mac labs with AC). Prince George's Park is great (cheap and convenient) if you get a room in building 1-5 because you will have air conditioning. You can always say you have a medical condition and they will consider you for an AC room. If you get a room in building 6-30 in PGP then you'd be better off investing in an air conditioner and don't tell anyone about it because you have to pay extra to keep an air con in your room. You will also have to buy a NUS approved and compatible router for your room if you want wifi access on your phone or your laptop without an ethernet port.

### *NTU Housing*

Exchange students have the option to apply for housing in the Halls of Residence (<http://www.ntu.edu.sg/has/Undergraduate/HallsofResidence/Pages/Halls.aspx>). It is advised to register for on campus housing as soon as you are granted the option to apply for housing since living off campus can be rather difficult and expensive in Singapore. You have the option to live with a roommate or live in a single and it is also advised to live with a roommate if you are new to Singapore. The room at NTU provide no wifi or refrigeration. You do have the option to rent a mini-fridge and purchasing a router will be up to you and your potential roommate. There is no meal plan available at NTU; however, there are food courts available all over campus (called canteens) which provide very cheap meals.

### *Visas*

All international students must hold a valid student's pass issued by the Singapore Immigration & Checkpoints Authority during their studies in Singapore. You are required to show your student pass to the customs when you travel back to Singapore. Once you are accepted into your exchange university, you will be instructed to apply for a student pass. The process for obtaining a student pass has multiple steps that consist of filling out paperwork prior to entering Singapore, once you settle into your exchange studies, and during the first 3 weeks at Singapore. It should be stressed that all instructions for obtaining a student pass must be followed to avoid any complications or mistakes for not following instructions thoroughly. It should also be noted that your student pass will only last as long your duration as a student at your university. If you plan on working in Singapore during the summer, you must apply for the necessary visa in order to continue living and working in Singapore. This additional visa will be determined by the employer who hires you, so please consult with them when the situation arises.

### *Finding Summer Work*

The best advice would be to start searching for job opportunities months before you enter Singapore. This will give you the best advantage to set something up earlier and provide you more time when you need to apply for certain visa documentations. During your time at the school, it also helps to attend the university's career fairs. If you want to do research, it helps to look up the professors in your department at NTU/NUS and see what research they work on. Try

to be proactive with the local professors and make the effort to see them in person and talk to them and see if they have anything they can offer you.

### *Course Approvals and Pass Fail Forms*

Getting your courses approved and finding classes you want to talk will be the most difficult thing (in my opinion) you will have to do during your exchange program. It cannot be stressed enough that it is in your best interest to have courses sorted out prior to your departure to entering Singapore. Getting course approval matters sorted out means:

- Knowing what classes you need to take at Purdue in order to graduate
- What classes are available at NUS/NTU that will count for those Purdue courses
- Making sure NTU/NUS will allow you to take that course
- Get an approval from your academic advisor about these NTU/NUS courses
- If you are not taking a course in your major, make sure you get a course approval from that department's respective advisor
- Make sure you have enough credits to fulfil study abroad requirements and in order to graduate on time if that is something of concern for you

For those going to NTU, there is a list of courses that are NOT available for exchange students (<http://www.ntu.edu.sg/Students/Undergraduate/AcademicServices/ExchangeProgrammes/Documents/Courses%20Restriction.pdf>) and in incredibly rare scenarios, they will provide an exception, but this is very hard to do. In addition, in order to search for courses available at the semester you are at NTU the link provided here ([https://wish.wis.ntu.edu.sg/webexe/owa/aus\\_subj\\_cont.main](https://wish.wis.ntu.edu.sg/webexe/owa/aus_subj_cont.main)) gives you a list of all courses available at said time.

In addition to course approvals, a pass/fail form needs to be filled out if you do not wish to have your courses count towards your GPA. The advantages of having your courses count as pass/fail is that you can dedicate significantly less time for your courses abroad since you only need a 70% or above to pass. The disadvantage of having your courses count as pass/fail is that your grade (even if you receive an A) will not count towards your GPA at Purdue. Please plan accordingly and be sure to complete your pass/fail form before the deadline!

### **Useful Apps to Download**

- **SG Now:** find out about events around the city and get information about new restaurants opening.
- **Culture Trip:** a free app that gives you inspiring content and recommendations hand-picked by editors across the globe.

- **Lightning@SG:** With the near constant equatorial heat in Singapore, Lightning@SG can be more useful than a traditional weather app. Besides showing where current lightning strikes are happening, the app also shows you nearby rain patterns.
- **Carousell:** free app where people sell items for pickup or delivery (great app to find extremely cheap textbooks)
- **UberEats** (*for food*)
- **Deliveroo** (*for food*)
- **Chope** (*for food*)
- **bus@sg:** The bus@sg (iOS/Android) app is necessary if you are taking the bus. It shows you the arrival times for nearby and favorite bus stops.
- **Uber:** is the number one pick among the taxi companies simply because it is the cheapest.
- **NUS Extra**
- **NUS Nextbus :** Getting around NUS can be a pain because its super spread out and hilly
- **NUS IVLE** (*for course schedule/announcements*)
- **NTU GO!:** Tracks all the buses in NTU and the 179, 179A, and 199 bus
- **Splitwise:** This app manages all the money that my friends and I borrowed from each other from during all our trips and adventures in Singapore. This app became preferred over Venmo because some of my friends from other countries did not have credit cards that registered with Venmo.
- **Clear Currency:** (Made by Davetech Co.) This was my favorite app to use when trying to quickly convert various currencies and compare prices. If you intend to travel a lot, this is a very nice app to always have on you.
- **MAPS.ME:** When you travel, you might travel to some areas where cellular data or wifi is not easily available. This app will be your friend in these areas. Prior to traveling, you can download an entire country/region's map that can be used offline. Think of this as the offline version of Google Maps and can even provide you GPS directions on how to get to your desired location.
- **WhatsApp:** Very common texting app
- **Telegram:** Another commonly used texting app (think of it as Singapore's version of GroupMe)

### SingaporeUNI

SingaporeUNI is a Facebook social group that connects all exchange students and international student in Singapore. This Facebook group organizes social events, weekly parties, weekend trips, and networking sessions for all students that follow SingaporeUNI on Facebook via <https://www.facebook.com/SingaporeUNI/>. It is advised to join this group.

### Traveling in Singapore

### *Places to Visit*

- Holland Village
- Clarke Quay
- Gardens By the Bay
- Marina Bay Sands
- ArtScience Museum
- East Coast Park
- Saint John's Island
- Pulau Ubin
- Friend's Cafe
- Orchard Road
- China Town
- Little India
- Hawker Centers
- Try Durian
- Try Chili Crab
- Try Bak Kut Teh
- Sentosa
- Zouk
- Attica
- One Altitude
- Jurong Bird Park
- Singapore Zoo
- Bugis Street
- Chinese Garden
- Singapore Botanic Garden
- CÉ LA VI
- Merlion

### *Getting Around Singapore*

The most common methods of traveling around Singapore is by MRT (singapore's train system) or by bus. Both the MRT and bus can be paid with an EZ-Link Card, which you can store credit in like a debit card. Your student ID at NTU/NUS also functions as an EZ-Link Card and can be filled with money at an MRT station, bus station, or at any 7/11 but with a small processing fee. Below is a map of the MRT system and using the MRT is a very cheap and easy method of getting around the country. If all else fails, Google Maps will be your friend on figuring out how to get to certain locations or Uber (but this is usually a rather costly way of getting around).



- Brunei
- Vietnam
- Indonesia
- Myanmar
- Laos

### *Useful Resources/Tips*

While it is recommended to stay in Southeast Asia, if you do wish to travel further North or South (ex. Australia, India, or Japan), cost to travel there will be significantly more expensive. Whether you wish to travel to these locations are up to your discretion.

It is also important to do your research on any country you plan to travel to. Some countries require less time to explore than others and depending on your schedule, plan accordingly. In addition, be sure to do your research on which countries require a visa to enter the country. For example, Myanmar and Vietnam require a visa in order to enter the country that you can apply to a week in advanced. If you do not have a visa during customs upon landing to these countries, you will be immediately sent back to Singapore.

In terms of safety, some of the surrounding countries are not as safe compared to Singapore. However, most of the locations that travels go to in these countries are relatively safer than other locations in said country. Take basic precautions and travel in a group and by doing so, safety won't be a significantly issue to be concerned about.

When traveling to the airport, take the MRT and not a taxi. Taking the MRT will cost you around \$1.50 SGD in comparison taking an Uber/taxi to the airport can cost as much as \$50 SGD. However, the MRT ride (from NTU at least) will take around 1 hour while taking an Uber/taxi can range from 30-50 minutes depending on the traffic.

- If you plan to travel a lot, plan your class schedule so you don't have classes on Fridays or Mondays.
- Purchase travel sized items if you only plan to put your luggage in carry-on (100ml or less is the rule of thumb)
  - Purchasing these items can be done at Watson, Guardian, or FairPrice
- Invest in a light raincoat ( an umbrella cannot save you)
- Don't get scammed by taxi drivers at airports!
  - If they don't run a meter, that's generally a good sign they are trying to scam you
- DO NOT exchange your money at airports! They generally have the worst conversion rates. Always check the market price on your desired currency. It is recommended to do all your money exchange at Singapore prior and after leaving/coming back to Singapore.

- If you are at NTU, Jurong Point is has the best rates for converting your money
- If you don't go to NTU, find a mall that has a money exchanger and make sure their rates are as close to the market price as possible
- Finding cheap hostels to stay at can be done here: <http://www.hostelworld.com/>
- Searching for cheap flights: <https://www.skyscanner.com.sg/>
  - Generally AirAsia has the cheapest airfares
- Do your research on traveling here:
  - [https://wikitravel.org/en/Main\\_Page](https://wikitravel.org/en/Main_Page)
  - <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/>

### **Managing Your Finances**

It is fairly common Singapore to only take cash, so always have cash on you. In addition, when purchasing, there is an option to pay with NETT Flashpay, which is another form of payment where you simply time a NETT Flashpay card on a scanner (a lot faster than using a chip!). Your Student ID works as a NETT Flashpay card and can be filled with money the exact same way you fill up your card for MRT/bus fare.

It may be in your interest to open a bank account to own a local credit card. This may be useful because some purchases that you may need to take will only accept a local card. This doesn't occur very often but when the situation arises, it is a rather difficult situation to get around.

Visheshta says: I took 4000 Singaporean Dollars and it was more than enough for my semester stay. This excludes housing on the NUS campus and flight tickets to and back from Singapore.

For NUS students:

- DBS recommended due to abundance in atms in campus and nation as well
- DBS bank located in campus at Yusof Ishak House
- To open a student account, bring an official ID and proof of student residence

For NTU Students:

- There is an OCBC Bank located at North Spine (on campus) where you can open a bank account
- OCBC Bank is a large bank that can be found almost everywhere in Singapore
- To open a bank account, you must bring your passport as well as proof of student residence, which you must get by asking your Hall admins to write you a letter.

### **Phone Plan**

StarHub, M1, and Singtel are the major three telcos in Singapore. For exchange student, typical phone plan is the pre-paid plan that you deposits a certain amount of money and it covers data

and SMS messages. The Airport has the free WIFI that international phone number can access to but the local MRT station requires local phone number to register for WIFI. There is a StarHub/Singtel store in the airport and if you are concern about going to your school safely, you better buy your plan in the airport so you will have internet access later on. The prices are also same throughout so if you think you can save a couple dollars if you dont buy it at the airport, you might want to rethink it.

### **About NTU**

NTU tends to focus more on the exam performance and thus most of the grades are directly test scores. Final usually covers 60% of the grade and rest of the grades are from midterms. Since there is insignificant emphasis on homework performance, many of the courses do not give homework. Recitation will go over some problems but besides that, you will have to study on your own. Textbook and lecture notes will be a good source. Unless the professor gives you past exams, it's hardly to find other past exams online with solution. Singapore uses a Bell curve to assign letter grade and thus students compete with others for a good grade.

#### *Registering for Classes*

NTU uses STARS to register for classes and you can find the link to login STARS in their website. Adding/Dropping classes are easy to manipulate in the free add/drop period. However, once the free add/drop period passes, and if you want to add a class, the system will automatically put you in the waiting list no matter there is a vacancy or not. NTU uses a system of random selection of granting the student space for courses. The system will make the selection in the night and inform students about the result in the next morning. Students who are lucky to be selected are now granted to add the class. Typically for a popular class, there are hundreds of students in the waiting list and only few spots left for each day lucky draw.

No all NTU dorms have air conditioner. Weather in Singapore is damn hot and humid. If you know you won't be able to live without air conditioner, you should make arrangement before your departure.

### **About NUS**

#### *Transportation around Campus*

1. NUS shuttle bus: your best option around the campus and it's FREE, operates from 7am - 11pm during weekdays and less frequent on weekends
2. MRT: Kent Ridge Station connects to NUS shuttle bus. Riding MRT from airport to this station takes 1.5 hour but is much cheaper than Uber if not in hurry.
3. City Bus: Stations are located within campus as well. Travels out of campus and operates longer than NUS shuttle bus.

### *Shopping and Groceries*

- Clementi Mall: Located at Clementi MRT station, banks, street food, market, cinema
- Harbourfront: Located at Harbourfront station, banks, luxuries, restaurants, cinema

Homework load varies upon each course. However, a lot of courses do not take homework for grade, instead, they serve to help you practice materials for exams. Basically, you will have around two midterms and a final for the whole semester. The final covers 60% - 70% of the final grade, and therefore it's important to prepare well for your finals. Tip: reach out to locals or people who have taken your course for sources of exam practices. Wait till you book your going back tickets until you know when your exams end because exams are spread across the last two weeks.

### *Course Registration*

It is strongly recommended that you are 100% sure of the courses you wish to take. The reason is unlike Purdue, NUS registration offices do not authorize courses changes immediately online. It is common for them to take 1 to 2 working days to process your request. Also, local students have a higher priority when it comes to course registration.

It is recommended to register around 4 classes or 5 at max, since after all, it is a study abroad. Make sure you have enough time to manage course works and also enjoy traveling. Attendance has very less to no points so I wouldn't worry about going to all classes. Also it is very common that a three credit class will meet once a week for three hours instead of three times a week for one hour. So if you are taking three classes you will probably have to go to class three times a week.