



WUR Goes Abroad

1. Student Information

Study programme WUR	International Development Studies (free programme)
Exchange semester (dd/mm/yyyy)	07/08/2023 until 09/12/2023
Exchange destination: University	Singapore, National University of Singapore
Faculty	Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Country	Singapore
City	Singapore

2. Motivation for exchange

Why did you choose to go on study exchange?

Most of my friends went on exchange last year, when I could not go due to me changing my BLP major to a free bachelor one. Hearing all the stories of my peers, I really wanted to go too. I love traveling and I wanted to be fully independent for a while, while exploring a completely new country and culture.

What is the reason you chose for this country/university?

At first, I applied for Korea only. This is because I was (am) learning the Korean language and appreciate their culture. After the rejection however, I realized I just wanted to go far from home and really challenge myself by going somewhere where everything was different. I felt more drawn to Asia than any other continent. The partnership between Wageningen and NUS was so new that I had not seen it on the first list. This made me curious and I looked up the university. Then I found out that NUS ranks very high in university rankings and fulfilled all my other requirements (far away, unknown culture, etc.) so the decision was made.

3. Accessibility to reach destination

Do you have any tips to reach your exchange destination?

Since it is very far away, I don't think there really is any other option than to go by plane. I did have a direct flight from Amsterdam to Singapore with KLM which was very nice since I did not have to worry about any layovers. Arriving at Changi Airport is easy as it is the most efficient airport I have ever been at in my life. Within Singapore the MRT system (subway) is very punctual, and you can reach any destination without having to transfer too often. However, after such a long flight I would suggest taking a taxi to your hotel/accommodation. Since the country is quite small this is not too expensive. A more affordable (and still reliable!) option is to download the 'Grab' app and order a taxi from them. This is the Southeast Asian version of 'Uber'. You enter your destination before booking the car and it shows exactly how much it will cost you, with no additional charges. I have used that service a couple of times during my exchange and I would never take a regular taxi in that

country again. Lastly, don't think you will be able to carry all your luggage from a bus stop or MRT station to your accommodation before you arrive if it is not directly in front of where you need to be, even if it is 'just a ten-minute walk'. Trust me, if you have never been in that kind of climate before you will hate yourself for deciding to walk anywhere, it's very hot and humid.

4. University and studying

Could you provide some general information about the followed courses?

	Course	ECTS	Short description of the contents	Appreciation of course: 1(low) – 5(high)	Remarks
1	Doing global visual culture	7.5	About the importance of visuals in establishing culture. From anything like movies to paintings and sculptures to graph manipulation and photographs.	3	While I found most lectures very interesting, I don't really know how useful the things I learned are if I'm honest.
2	Geographies of social life	7.5	Social geography on multiple different scales, the global, nation, city, the home and the body. Very sociology heavy; things like gender theory and colonization are very prominent in this course.	4	I wanted to take this course because I wanted to look at social geography/sociology from a non-Western perspective, at an Asian university. However, most sociologists, geographers and philosophers are the ones you already know if you've taken any similar class in Wageningen. Think of Judith Butler, Foucault and Decartes.
3	Korean 1	7.5	The basics of the Korean language. Very tough course. Starts with just the alphabet and ends with you having full conversations in Korean and having to write a short essay. Learned a lot of Korean in such a short time. Heard from other students that all language courses at NUS are this heavy.	5	Wageningen can rarely approve language courses, so I took this one just for fun
4					
5					
6					

What is it like to study there?

E.g. study forms, academic level, examination, workload, lesson material.

I only took 3 courses, because I only needed one more to graduate. The workload was therefore not too heavy. Most exchangers take 5, and then there are definitely nights where they were studying at the library until it closed. The courses themselves were similar to Wageningen in set-up: lectures and tutorials weekly, group work or an individual essay in between and an exam at the end. Everything is very well-organized and clear from the beginning. The biggest difference is the fact that you have those courses for the entire time you are there, so for 14 weeks, instead of the maximum of 8 in Wageningen. This made the amount of materials you had to study for the exam a lot larger.

What is the culture of the university?

E.g. How approachable are the lecturers, engagement with local students? What are the differences with the WUR?

You can tell that this university is hard to get into for local and international (non-exchange students). People take their studies very seriously and are (in my opinion) more hard-working than the ones I know in the Netherlands. You can especially feel this during class discussions where you can tell people have actually read and prepared everything and actually want to discuss all papers. If you don't plan on taking your exchange seriously in terms of academics, I would not recommend NUS. This does not mean that it wasn't an enjoyable experience. Teachers, staff and peers were very nice and approachable. Especially in the first few weeks people are interested in exchangers.

On top of that, everyone is very involved in different clubs. Three or four at least. These clubs are also very active with multiple events weekly. This was much more intense than the student organizations in Wageningen.

What does the university offer students additionally?

E.g. catering, sports facilities, laundry facilities?

There is on-campus housing (more on that in the next question). There are multiple different food courts on campus and NUS has their own shuttle bus service to get around campus. There are also multiple libraries with printing facilities (charges money). NUS has their own museum which you can visit free of charge. There is a university health centre for any small ailments you might have, and the university hospital is also close by. Furthermore, there are tons (and I mean tons) of different clubs you can join. From the Korean Culture Interest group (which I joined) to soccer, to hiking, to feeding the campus cats, there is something for everybody. There is also an organization that fully focuses on exchange students and they organize something every few weeks for all exchangers at NUS.

5. Housing-travelling-living

What are the possibilities for housing?

E.g. Availability to sign up for a room on campus, private rooms, rent rates?

On-campus housing is available but not guaranteed. There is a selection process a month before you arrive. The rent prices depend on the type of housing you apply for. I had the cheapest single room on campus. This is a non-aircon room with a shared kitchen (with 80 people) and a shared bathroom

(with 12 people). There were 6 washing machines and 2 dryers available for 80 people to share. This type of housing and some others on campus did include a meal plan, so 6 breakfasts and 6 dinners per week. The rent was way cheaper than my one in Wageningen.

For people who didn't manage to get on campus, the rent was a lot less fun. The average rent prices I heard for off campus housing with shared facilities was around 2000 dollars (nearly 1400 euros) a month.

What is the culture of the country like?

E.g. Differences with home, local cuisine, habits, manners?

Overall people in Singapore are more respectful and helpful than in the Netherlands. On public transit people are more mindful of strangers and it's all very clean and organized. Food wise, they eat hot meals 3 times a day. So you should get used to having noodles for breakfast and some very spicy rice and vegetables for dinner.

Could you give some information about public transport infrastructure?

E.g. Cost public transport card, taxi prices, how to travel to the university?)

Like I said before, the MRT works wonderfully in Singapore, as do the busses and taxis. Any part of the country is accessible through public transit. You can buy an EZ-link card which is the same as an OV chipkaart in the Netherlands. However, I would recommend getting a NETS flashpay one, as you can pay for food and groceries with this one as well. You can buy it for 10 dollars at any 7/eleven or other convenience store and recharge it with cash at any MRT station. Overall the transport cost is comparable to Dutch subways and busses, and the compensation I got from the Dutch government for public transit was more than enough.

To get to university I just had to step out of my room. Off campus people took the MRT to Kent Ridge Station. From there you can take the free of charge NUS shuttle busses to any campus building you need. These run from 6 am to 11 pm daily. On the weekends they run too, just less frequently.

6. Expenses

Can you give an indication of your expenses for/during your exchange?

E.g. you can also indicate price differences (higher/lower/equal) in comparison to the Netherlands.

Ticket there: 900 for a one-way plane ticket

Visa if applicable: 60 dollars for a student visa (which you need to have)

Vaccinations if applicable: hepatitis A vaccination 76 euro (a tetanus vaccination I got before for something else and I opted out of a hepatitis B vaccination)

Insurances (extra, if applicable): uitgebreide reisverzekering, ligt aan de maatschappij

Housing costs per month & type of housing/accommodation: 368 euro per month (includes meal plan) (you have to pay all the rent for the whole period upfront when you are living on campus)

Groceries: Since I had a meal plan I only got snacks, so not even 10 dollars a week

Public transport: Same as the Dutch subways and busses

Restaurant/going out for dinner: Cheaper than the Netherlands and cheaper than Singaporean groceries (if you don't go to 5 star restaurants, but to hawker centers and food courts which are very nice)

Daytrips/sight-seeing: a lot of things are free of charge in general. Most museums are free if you show your student visa and with this you can also get decent discounts at other sights.

Additional remarks regarding expenses?

A lot of exchange students go out of the country during the weekends or the two recess weeks in the semester (one in September and one in November). Since Singapore is so small you can easily access the rest of Southeast Asia and I definitely recommend setting aside some money for these trips.

7. Free time

What are must-sees in the area?

E.g. nearby destinations, how do you prefer to travel, when to plan?

You cannot go to Singapore and not see the obvious things like Marina Bay Sands, the Merlion, Supertree grove, the Cloud Forest and Botanical Gardens. All of which I recommend. Food wise you should try every cuisine they have; Malay, Chinese, Indian, Vietnamese, Indonesian, the list goes on. On top of that there are some pretty nature reserves easily accessible.

What does not appear in a travel guide, but is definitely worth a visit?

Most notable attractions are mentioned in any travel guide, since Singapore is so small. But I would recommend going out of Singapore for some daytrips. Johor Bahru is a city in Malaysia just across the border. Here you can shop for very inexpensive stuff and be home before dinner. Batam is an Indonesian island which you can reach and leave during the day too. I also recommend trying all food spots on campus, as this food is insanely cheap (2-3 euros for a full meal) and very enjoyable. Don't just stick to your own faculty!

Do you have general tips and tricks about leisure time?

E.g. recommendations for restaurants, going out?

I think it's most important to take breaks while you are there. The hot climate is very demanding, and I would recommend not going outside for every activity. Singapore has a vast array of malls and

indoor activities. Yes, the nature reserves are pretty, but it is important to listen to your own body. I went to the cinema a couple of times and was mostly at food courts in malls. Also, definitely ask your Singaporean peers for food recommendations! They know best.

8. Challenges & best moment abroad

What challenges did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

I feel like the most common answer is being alone, but this was never and has never been an issue for me. Yes, time zone differences made it hard to contact my family and friends back home sometimes, but I would not consider that a challenge. This may sound insignificant but for me the climate in Singapore was my biggest challenge. Since I had a room with no aircon, it was 32 degrees with a minimum of 80% humidity all day and it only got down to 27 at night. This influenced my sleep, my desire to eat and limited the things I could do outside. I knew I was not a summer person before this trip, but now I know for sure. I definitely severely underestimated how much the climate can affect every aspect of your daily life.

How I overcame this? First, buying a fan, that thing was running 24/7. Other than that, indoor activities. If I went outside to a park or something, that would be my only thing I did that day. Also staying hydrated. After a while you do kind of get used to the heat, but never fully. I also rested when my body told me I needed to, instead of pushing through it.

What is your best memory of your time abroad?

I loved the independence and freedom that came with it. I did things around Singapore by myself, went to Japan with another exchanger, to Thailand and South Korea by myself, and I loved every trip. I definitely proved to myself that I absolutely can do a lot more than I used to think I could. Especially being in Tokyo, with a friend I made at NUS, is something I'll remember forever. At this point I had only known her for a month and a half, neither of us spoke Japanese or had ever been there before. However, we did everything we wanted to do and didn't have any hiccups along the way (no, we didn't even get lost once). I always wanted to travel but didn't think I would really be able to do so without my family. That trip proved I could.

9. Contact details (optional)

Is the reader allowed to contact the writer?	yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
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