

Singapore Report

Owen Atherton

Introduction

Hi! My name is Owen and I did my year abroad at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore in 2022/23. This was one of the best years of my life as I had such an amazing experience living there and I highly recommend anyone who's going to study abroad to do so in Singapore.

Living in Singapore

Singapore is hot. Very hot. Most days are above 28 degrees and the shade doesn't shelter you from the heat because it's so humid. The best way to cool down is to find somewhere with AC such as malls, stations and classrooms in the university. The rain is also very heavy and often will flood some areas on campus. I found it better to just wear sliders sometimes and get my feet wet rather than trying to keep my socks and shoes dry. Most of the time when it rains it's also stormy; open areas have sirens that go off during the storms telling you to get under shelter and there were several times when I was woken up in the middle of the night to lightning hitting my halls. I found the storms to be very beautiful however, especially when you can see them in the distance.



1 East Singapore with a storm cloud overhead

I stayed in a double room that I shared with a Singaporean maths student, shared two bathrooms with my floor (around 30 people), and I had AC, however the AC costs about 20 cents an hour so I didn't leave it on overnight. Rent for my accommodation was incredibly cheap: the current price for my halls is SGD403 a month which comes to around £2200 for the entire year. There are lots of bugs so don't be surprised to find big moths, beetles and sometimes cockroaches in the bathrooms or halls, most of which have direct access to outside. At my halls we also sometimes saw otters and macaque monkeys and there were small terrapins in the pond along with all the beautiful birds that can be seen in the trees.

There is a very small kitchen with a hob and a microwave if you want to cook your own food but most students will eat from the canteens on campus. Food on campus costs between 2 to 6 pounds for a meal and there is an amazing variety of cuisines including Chinese, Malaysian, Indian, Japanese, Korean, and Indonesian. There are also Western stalls which sell pasta dishes, chicken and chips, and lamb chops along with other dishes however they are not as good as the other stalls in my opinion. The canteens close at around half 8, 9 o'clock so if you want food later, I recommend going to the 7-Eleven on campus and getting a ready meal. Food off campus is a little more expensive if you go to hawker centres, and a lot more expensive if you eat out. Hawker centres are a lot like the university canteens with small stalls selling set meals for a very good price. They are a big part of Singaporean culture, the most famous being Lau Pa Sat.



2 Lau Pa Sat Hawker Centre

The MRT (Mass Rapid Transport) is Singapore's metro and is an affordable and effective way to travel around. The network is very well-connected meaning you can get almost anywhere you need to on the MRT alone, but if you need to, you could also take the buses that are very reliable and just as easy to use: just tap your card to let yourself in and out of the station or bus. If you're going from the airport to NTU, you can take the East-West (green) line to Pioneer station changing once at Tanah Merah.

Singaporeans are very friendly. At first the Singaporean accent was hard to understand but eventually I picked it up and now I recognise it whenever I hear it. There are several words that are unique to Singlish but they are also quick to pick up.

Drinking in Singapore is very expensive. A pint of lager on average costs about £9 and cocktails are normally about £15. Clubs will normally charge an entry fee as well. Drinking also isn't a big part of university culture in Singapore unlike in the UK. Having said this, there are lots of very beautiful rooftop bars with stunning views of the city, especially Ce La Vi at the top of Marina Bay Sands.

There are lots of cool places to see in Singapore. My friend and I took a boat over to Palau Ubin and saw some amazing wildlife including wild boars, monkeys, and monitor lizards. We went to the artificial beaches on Sentosa island a few times. It's easy to get there: just take the green line to Buona Vista then the yellow line to Harbourfront where you can get the Sentosa express monorail. Another friend and I went to the Halloween Horror nights at Universal also on Sentosa. It's the same price as regular tickets if you get it on a Thursday! I would recommend just inviting people in the group chat to go with you to places in the first couple of weeks, there's sure to be people who are interested.



3 Singapore skyline as seen from Marina Bay Sands

University

In truth, I found the classes at NTU to be less challenging than at Warwick, but that doesn't mean they're easy. I found that NTU focused a lot more on group projects than Warwick as well, which allows you to meet more Singaporeans.

There are lots of sports to choose from at NTU and you can play at a variety of different levels. I joined the bowling society as I wanted to improve my skills. Some sports clubs and societies will have a cost but they're subsidised.

The NTU campus is very beautiful and has lots of study spaces if you don't want to study in your room. Everywhere on campus is walkable (albeit up and down hills) but there are also two free buses that circle campus in opposite directions and a third one which goes from Pioneer station to the centre of campus.



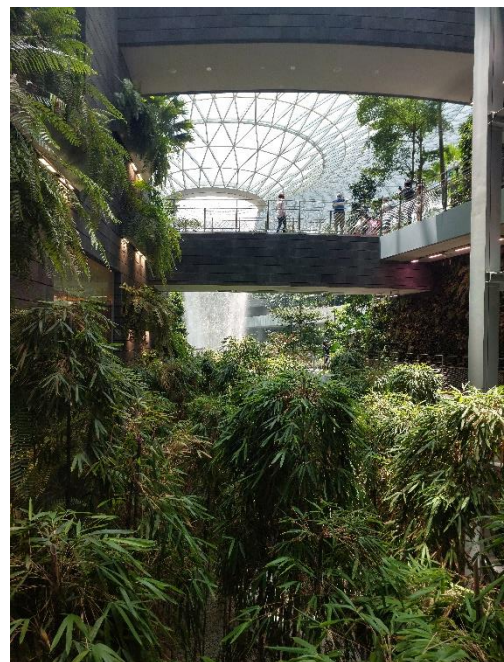
4 An NTU building called the Hive

Travelling

Singapore is a brilliant hub for travelling all around South-East Asia and beyond. Due to rent and food being so cheap I was able to travel almost every weekend on cheap Scoot and AirAsia flights. I went to Kuala Lumpur, Bali twice, several places in Japan, Phuket, Bangkok, Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, Malang in Indonesia, Hong Kong, Ha Giang in Vietnam, Borneo, Philippines, Seoul, and Laos. In second semester, I only needed to be present in one of my Thursday lectures so often I would fly out on the Friday and come back on the Monday or Tuesday, doing the rest of my uni work on my laptop while I was travelling. I highly recommend every single one of these places, especially Japan, Malang, and the Philippines.

Changi airport is also by far the best airport I've ever been to. It is so modern, and the security is very efficient and (mostly) stress free (in Terminal 1, the security is at the gate).

I recommend staying in hostels and airbnbs if you are travelling as they're incredibly cheap and you'll meet lots of backpackers.



5 JEWEL at Changi Airport

Tips

Most things you need can be found in the malls. I recommend Jurong Point from NTU as it's only a bus ride away and has a fairly large FairPrice (Singapore's main supermarket) if you want groceries.

Open up a Singapore bank account. I went with HSBC because I'm with them in the UK but I would recommend DBS as they have an app called Paylah! that allows you to send money and pay for things very easily. This is especially good for the campus canteens as their card readers don't accept Visa nor Mastercard, only something called NETS which your Singapore bank card should use. It also will save you money in the long run since your UK bank won't charge you.

Join a buddy system if it's offered to you where you're paired with a Singaporean student. They can give you tips and show you some areas of Singapore you might not have thought to.

Some food places I recommend are: the Indian stall at Saraca & Tamarind Halls' Canteen, El Carbon near Clementi MRT station for Western food (try the baked pasta), hans im gluk in Vivo City for amazing gourmet burgers at a good price, Sushi Express for affordable and well-made sushi, Seoul Garden for unlimited Korean-BBQ.

Singtel and Starhub are Singapore's biggest mobile retailers, so they get the best data coverage. I would suggest going to one of their stores (there are some in Jurong Point) to pick up a sim card once you arrive.

Get yourself an umbrella you can collapse to fit into a backpack as rain will come and go very quickly and so it's useful to have one on hand to stop yourself from getting soaked.

Conclusion

I'm so very glad I got to go to Singapore on my year abroad, it was just enough of a culture change to put me out of my comfort zone without making things too hard. I hope you also choose to go to this incredible country and that you also have a fantastic time there.

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to email me at owen.atherton@warwick.ac.uk.