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## ERASMUS REPORT

By now, I have completed an incredibly eventful and enriching period of my life, as I had the opportunity to spend the first semester of the 2022/23 academic year at one of Singapore's top universities, currently ranked 11th in the world, the National University of Singapore (NUS).

Before embarking on this journey, numerous questions arose in my mind regarding the university and life in Singapore as a whole. Starting from the application process, the required paperwork, to what Singapore and NUS are like. Concerning the application, paperwork, and previous experiences, I received a wealth of answers and assistance from Dr. Bíbor Klekner, who deals with BME's international study opportunities outside Europe. She was always ready to help with any problems and questions, which was a tremendous help and made the whole process more manageable, which wasn't always straightforward and easy.





# ARRIVAL

## FLIGHT AND CHANGI

For the first time, I managed to depart from Budapest in the afternoon, leaving most of my packing for the same day – something I don't recommend. I reached Singapore with two layovers; first in Doha, followed by a few hours of layover in Colombo. The flight went smoothly, at least until Colombo. From here, we took a smaller plane to Singapore, and the second half of the journey was accompanied by significant turbulence, leading to a rather uncomfortable final hour with my hand on the airsickness bag. Luckily, I didn't have to use it in the end, unlike several other passengers. After landing, everything fell into place, and around 8 PM local time, I was on my way to the immigration control gates.

Upon arriving at the gates, after a short queue and some nervous moments (since I only had a one-way ticket to Singapore), I presented the necessary documents (IPA, SG Arrival card, passport). After a quick check, they called me aside, which I somehow expected, and after a short wait, they called me to a counter where I went through the same procedure again (documents, fingerprints, photo) before being allowed to proceed.

Knowing that I would arrive relatively late and wouldn't be able to check into the dormitory at night, I had planned to spend the first night at the famous Changi Airport.

Once I was through the checkpoint, my suitcase was already waiting for me, and apart from a few scratches, it arrived in perfect condition. Next task: finding a place to sleep. This went faster than expected. Just a few meters away I found a lounge-like area similar to an IKEA showroom with sofas, armchairs, power outlets, and a TV, but no one was sitting there. I immediately occupied one of the sofas and enjoyed the good Wi-Fi connection and nearby restroom facilities.

Afterward, I tried to sleep, which was more or less successful. However, I woke up around 5 AM and decided to explore the airport and see the waterfall before heading to the university. Passing through customs without any issues, I noticed that almost nothing was open so early. When I reached the airport's main attraction, as shown in the picture above, it wasn't operational at that time. Nonetheless, it looked impressive, and it was immediately evident, as I had read in many places before, how green Singapore is. After getting an overview of the nearly empty and lifeless airport, I went to the MRT (Mass Rapid Transit) station, where I easily reached Buona Vista station using the East-West (green) line. From there, I took bus 196, and after a few stops, I finally arrived at the campus, about 30 hours after starting my journey.



Changi Airport



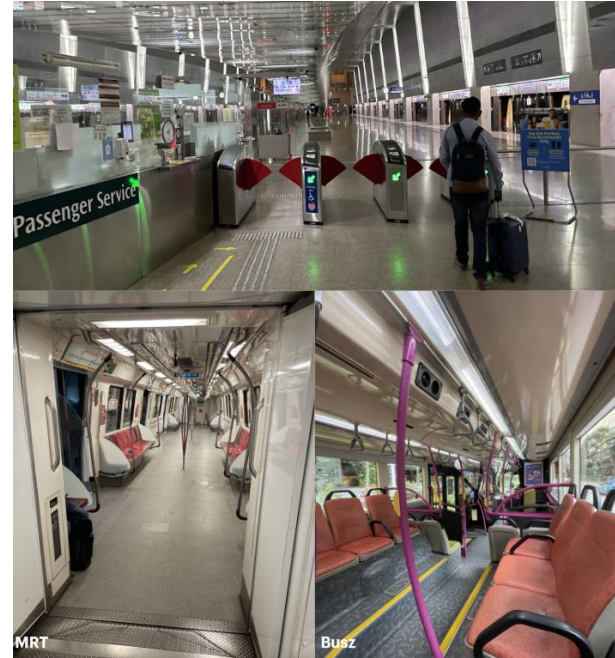


At the entrances to the "metro", you have to pass through such gates, which can be used with any contactless payment method, so it's easy to use with your Revolut card or Apple Pay. There is no need to buy a separate card or any kind of ticket.

However, if you want to save money later on, you may want to consider a **NETS Card** (you can do this at any 7Eleven), as you can save \$0.60 per trip compared to the normal credit card payment.

The card costs \$10, but you get it with \$5 already loaded. It can then be topped up with cash for free at the machines at the MRT entrances. You can also top up via the app (NETS) by credit card, the fee for a foreign card is \$0.50 per top-up.

To withdraw cash using Revolut, use **UOB Bank ATMs**, as they offer free cash withdrawals (at least until the Revolut monthly limit set in our Revolut package).



## CAMPUS

### GREEN AND MODERN

Upon arriving at the campus, I was greeted by spacious areas, green corridors, tall buildings covered in greenery, all of which indicated that harmony with nature was a priority in their design. However, I'll let the pictures do the "talking."

I arrived on a Saturday morning, and the whole area felt strangely deserted, with hardly anyone around. One helpful person even approached me, asking which college I was looking for and then directing me to the exact location. For the semester, I had the opportunity to stay at Tembusu Residential College, which, in retrospect, was an even bigger advantage than I initially thought.









## REGISTRATION

### QUICK AND EASY

When I arrived at Tembusu RC, I went into the common area where the Housing Management office was temporarily set up to welcome newcomers. My appointment was scheduled for 9 AM, and I was there at 8 AM, but that wasn't a problem. There was no one ahead of me, and I was attended to immediately. They informed me about my room assignment, where to find it, and handed me my card and mailbox key. The entire process took about 20 minutes. Afterward, I went up to my room and wondered what to do next.

I didn't receive any orientation or information about activities for exchange students, and I later found out that there had been such activities, but they had just ended when I arrived in late July. However, I quickly made friends in the college. In the first few days, some students from my floor took me to explore Chinatown and have lunch. Making friends wasn't difficult even if you don't have accommodation on campus. You can approach anyone on campus or easily strike up a conversation with other exchange students. There will likely be a large group chat for exchange students, where common events and outings are organized continuously. :)



## USEFUL TIPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Here are some useful pieces of information that would have been helpful for me to know in advance:

In **Singlish** (Singaporean English), they use a lot of abbreviations and filler words like "lah." This can be quite challenging to understand at first, given their accent and their frequent use of abbreviations and other words. For example, a common phrase is "can lah" or "can is can," which means "Okay, sure, I'm in." The names of various important university buildings are also often abbreviated. If you don't know something, feel free to ask, or you can often find answers with a quick Google search.

**Public transportation** is good, and you can easily get anywhere. However, it's essential to allocate enough time for your commute, as even though Singapore is a tiny country, it's a relatively large city, and the university is about an hour away from the city center by public transport. If you're staying on campus and don't want to spend money on taxis, plan to leave early because the last buses from the city center usually depart shortly after midnight. The cost of public transport varies but averages around \$1 per trip, although longer journeys might cost \$1.50 to \$2, and shorter ones less. You need to tap your card at the terminal when boarding and disembarking the bus or train, effectively starting and ending your journey.

Looking back, it would have been worthwhile to open a local, **free bank account** right at the beginning of the semester because it greatly facilitates payments. This is because we can also use the QR code payment method, as in many places (including the university), it's not possible to pay with a regular bank card. Instead, you can only use cash or PayLah (here too, they say "lah"), which allows you to make payments from your local account by scanning a QR code. You can also transfer money for free among locals using this method, which most people there use. I recommend going for in-person account opening because, although it takes more time, they can answer your questions right away, and the process is smoother (for me, online didn't work for some reason). To do this, it's a good idea to first find out what documents are needed (passport, proof of Singaporean residency, etc.). But I think if you have these documents, it's not complicated, and it's worth it because afterwards, you'll be able to make payments everywhere, for food, public transportation (it also works as a NETS card, so travelling won't be more expensive than using a foreign card). Additionally, another reason I ended up opening one is for insurance refunds. During the semester, I had to use the insurance provided by NUS, and to receive a refund for the treatment costs I paid, I needed to provide a local bank

account in my name. This way, I could avoid extra charges due to international transfers. So, I recommend arranging for such a free bank account provided by DBS Bank right from the beginning, and at the end of your stay, you can close it with a zero balance. You can also top up the balance with cash for free.

As for the **courses**, I had three courses, which is the mandatory minimum in terms of credits: LAS1201 (beginner Spanish), GEX1012 (effective reasoning), and ME2102 (engineering innovation and modelling). You can find a lot of useful information about the courses in advance on the nusmods.com website, where you can create your timetable and read course descriptions and reviews.

When it comes to selecting courses, you'll notice that not everything listed on this website will be available. Instead, there will be a list from which you can choose. During the registration process, you can search for and select courses on an official website. It's a good idea to choose courses that you can later have credited at your home university (with at least a 70% match and approval from the subject coordinator). If you can't find such courses, you can also choose based on the expected level of difficulty and your interests. All three of these courses were relatively easy to complete, and I found the Spanish course to be particularly good. Once you have selected and been accepted into the courses, there will still be an opportunity to make changes at the beginning of the semester. So, if you happen to change your mind along the way, there's no problem with that (although the success of this depends on the availability of seats).

During the semester, there were two reading weeks, which essentially provide a one-week break before assessments, allowing for more opportunities (especially for exchange students who are less burdened by the number and weight of courses than local students) for travelling, sightseeing, and studying.

As for **accommodation**, I strongly recommend staying on campus because it greatly facilitates university life. You won't have to commute from different parts of the city to get to campus. Instead, you can simply hop on the internal university bus, which runs frequently and is free of charge. You can also walk to your lectures or tutorials from there. Within the campus, the best choice from a community perspective is a Residential College (RC). These offer organized programs, various events, and (mandatory) meal plans of your choice, making it easier to socialize. The other option is Student Residency, which is also on campus but doesn't provide organized programs, only accommodation. As I mentioned earlier, I was fortunate enough to get into Tembusu RC, and only later did I realize what a significant advantage this was. These colleges have limited spots, so it's advisable to research and apply early. The application process has multiple rounds, and I missed the first round because I didn't research and apply in time. These colleges offer individual rooms, and in terms of value for money (assuming you're staying alone and not sharing a room with others), they are unbeatable compared to other housing options in Singapore. For comparison, in Tembusu, with the mandatory meal plan (breakfast and dinner on weekdays, breakfast on Saturdays, and dinner on Sundays) included, it came to around €680 per month. While this might sound like a lot from here, if you look around a bit, you'll realize that it's a pretty good price in Singapore for a private room on campus with meals included.

I generally had lunch at one of the food courts either on campus or in the city, where you can choose from a variety of **dishes**, mainly Asian cuisine. These options suited my taste well, and in terms of prices, a main dish typically ranged from \$3 to \$8. The cost of drinks varied depending on the place, but they were generally around \$1 to \$2 (for items like half-liter iced tea or lime juice).

Here's a short list, not exhaustive, of places I definitely recommend: MacRitchie Reservoir - Tree Top Walk (this can be a great addition to your trip; you can start at the Mushroom Café for an approximately 11 km circular walk in the park), West Coast Park, Skyville @Dawson (you can visit a rooftop garden for free, offering beautiful views), Gardens by the Bay (it's worth buying a ticket for the skywalk in the evening for a few dollars), Marina Bay, Holland Village, Orchard Road, Changi Airport (it's worth spending time here because there are plenty of things to see), Lau Pa Sat Food Court in the evening, Botanic Gardens, Chinatown, Little India, Arab Street, Fort Canning Park, and Super Ngon (a Vietnamese restaurant with excellent Pho and spring rolls).

Overall, Singapore is a relatively expensive place, but food (if you avoid restaurants) is reasonably priced. Many museums offer free admission with a student card, which you can obtain in the first few weeks of the semester, so I recommend taking advantage of this. Also, I suggest that from the beginning of the semester, you participate in as many activities as possible and visit parks, museums, and different parts of the city because the semester will pass quickly, and you might find yourself wishing you had done more in such a small country like Singapore.

While this brief overview couldn't cover everything, I'm happy to assist with any further questions you may have. :)