

2012-2013

University Attended: Singapore Management University (SMU)

FEEDBACK 1

INDUCTION/ORIENTATION PROGRAMME

Orientation was held in SMU's Admin Building a few days before the start of the semester and included information about Singapore in general, traveling, safety and also a tour around the campus. They also explained the BOSS bidding-system in more detail; how to bid for the courses you wanted, what to do if you didn't get the courses during the first round and what not to do when bidding. The information concerning BOSS was very useful, seemed like no one really understood the system properly and that is why the information and instructions were helpful. We also got a chance to meet the people working in OIR (Office of International Relations), the same people that had been in contact with us before arrival. Orientation was also a good place to meet other exchange students that we hadn't met before.

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

The BOSS bidding system was a bit confusing at first, most of the courses that were offered to exchange students were full or had prerequisites that we didn't have a chance to take back home. Priority was given to local students who were able to bid during the first rounds of BOSS, sometimes taking all the seats and leaving the more undesirable courses for the exchange students.

The style of teaching was different from what I was used to and took me by surprise at first. The small classes that were held in seminar rooms encouraged interaction with the professor and other students and spiced up the 3-hour classes a bit. Participation was usually around 10-20% of the final grade – local students were very aware of this fact and since the grades were adjusted to bell curve, some students were contributing to the conversation/debate in class as much as possible. The teaching assistant would always keep track of who spoke during class.

The final grade consisted of the marks of multiple individual assignments, group projects, the level of participation and a possible final exam. Attendance was compulsory and monitored by the TA. It was common to have a name tent – a name card that students would put in front of themselves – so that the professor/TA could make a note of who was actively participating and who wasn't. Because of the small class sizes, the professor was encouraging the students to email/drop by their office if they had any questions about the course and some professors even gave their personal mobile numbers to the class.

MBS INTERNATIONAL TEAM

I was happy with the quality of information and the level of support that were provided by the MBS team. They were also quick with replying to enquiries concerning course choices and other academic matters during the exchange.

MBS SECOND YEAR MEETINGS

All of the meetings held during second year were useful, especially the one with people who had been in Singapore the year before, and made me feel prepared for my year abroad.

HOST INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

I wasn't in contact with the OIR staff after I got the required signatures for the learning agreement and other paperwork.

I heard from other exchange students that they didn't receive help from SMU's career services when applying for internships in Singapore and weren't notified of the events organised by the office. I feel that this should be changed because it is essential for IM students to get an internship for the summer before their last year in order to get some more experience before graduation.

INSURANCE, HEALTH COVER

I didn't have to get an additional health insurance.

INFORMATION ON ANY ADDITIONAL COSTS

There were no additional costs.

ACCOMMODATION

Finding accommodation turned out to be more difficult than first anticipated – contracts are usually made for 6 months or more so finding a place just for 4 months wasn't easy.

Some exchange students were living in Commonwealth (student housing) and seemed to enjoy themselves there. Having no personal experience of living there, I cannot say much about the place itself but what I gathered from others was that the conditions were improved after the first semester due to the number of complaints from the people living there.

We stayed in two places during the year, first semester in a HDB apartment (kind of like public housing) and second in a condominium. Usually exchange students look for rooms/flats in different condos which are obviously more expensive than HDBs including facilities, such as a swimming pool and tennis courts, that HDB apartments don't have.

The HDB was located in a 'local' neighbourhood, near Tiong Bahru MRT station. The location was very convenient, only a few stops away from university and centre of Singapore. The rent was less than it would've been in a condo but because the air-condition units were old, the electricity bill turned out to be much more than first expected. Still, the apartment was lovely and we enjoyed our time spent there.

The most popular condo amongst the SMU exchange students was City Square Residences (near Farrer Park MRT station) where we lived for the second semester. Our landlord was subletting a number of rooms there and they made it possible for us to stay there only for 4 months. However, because of the rent seems to be increasing every semester, I am not sure whether I would recommend staying in city square next year - my roommate and I were sharing a tiny room and paying S\$800/month and I'm sure that the prices are going up in the near future.

DESTINATION INFORMATION AND OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Transport: the MRT system in Singapore works well and is convenient, trying to get an apartment near a station would be ideal. If there are no MRT stations near, the buses are a good and sometimes even a faster way to get around. Public transport might get crowded during peak times, i.e. in the morning and after work, but I hardly ever had a problem getting in to a train/bus during these times – it just might be a little uncomfortable. There are also a lot of taxis about so getting one is usually not a problem.

You can take a taxi or the mrt from the airport. There is also a shuttle service that can be useful if travelling alone or with a lot of luggage; for a fixed rate of \$9 they will drop you off to or pick you up from any hotel in Singapore.

Travel: traveling around South East Asia was easy and affordable; airlines such as AirAsia, Tiger Airways and Lion Air had reasonably priced flights if booked in advance (try skyscanner.com.sg). We took advantage of both recess weeks and the Christmas break between the two semesters, that's when we did most of our traveling, but if you get lucky with your course choices, you can get away for long weekends as well.

Social life: there are a lot of different small areas where people tend to go to meet up with friends and to have drinks or dinner. Clarke Quay and Boat Quay are located right next to the financial district and are popular places for going out or just to come for one after work. Other areas with lovely restaurants and nice bars that should be mentioned are Robertson Quay, Club Street and Duxton Hill.

Integration with local students: the interaction with the local students depended mostly on the groups that you were assigned to – if the locals were open-minded towards exchange students, the interaction might have extended outside of group work. However, some local students did not want to be associated with exchange students and sometimes even did extra work towards the assignment because they didn't trust the exchange students to put enough effort into the work. Still, the majority of local students were lovely and nice to us exchange students.

Student activity groups: I wasn't a member of any societies in SMU because I felt that I didn't have the time to properly commit to one. Societies are a big thing in SMU, it is compulsory for the local students to join one in order for them to graduate.

DESCRIBE IN ONE SENTENCE YOUR YEAR ABROAD

Without a doubt the best year of my life.

FEEDBACK 2

INDUCTION/ORIENTATION PROGRAMME

What did this involve, how long did it last, was it useful?

Orientation was early one morning before tem started. It started around 8.30 am and ended around 12. It was very useful as you had the opportunity to ask a local student in smaller groups whatever queries you might have. It was also really good to meet other exchange students and get chatting to them! They tell you more about the BOSS bidding system too, which is a bit confusing at first. So yes, it's definitely worth going to!

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Style of teaching, courses, ease of access to courses, methods of assessment, teaching support

The teaching style is more American style. Classes are much smaller and you are graded on class participation. We were a bit apprehensive about speaking up in class at first but it's a great and easy way to boost your grade up. There a big focus on team work, which is kind of annoying but it's a good way to mingle with the local students. They are generally really nice and also understanding of the fact most exchange students wan to travel on the weekends etc.

Courses are selected through an online bidding system (BOSS). We were all totally stressed for the first-come first serve selection that we did from home (UK), but it's really not worth stressing over because there are loads of rounds of bidding and people generally end up with what they want. Basically, don't panic!

MBS INTERNATIONAL TEAM

Level of support, additional information that could have been useful

Good level of support.

MBS SECOND YEAR MEETINGS

Any additional information that you feel could have been provided

We feel that we would have liked to have been warned about how much of a bother it would be trying to find accommodation at the beginning. Good advice was provided in general. *(MBS comment: Students are told that generally they have to find private accommodation at SMU.)*

HOST INTERNATIONAL OFFICE

Level of support, additional information that could be useful for future students

Good, they were very helpful. Jeanine was a bit intimidating about BOSS selection, but to be fair all the necessary information is provided to exchange students, it just takes a bit of time to go through it all and understand it.

INFORMATION ON ANY ADDITIONAL COSTS

This should be information on any extra fees that the University charged but should not include accommodation, books, transport, visa etc.

N/A

ACCOMMODATION

As much information as possible on what accommodation is recommended or not recommended.

We opted for finding our own apartment. We stayed at Sleepy Sams for the first 10 days and that's where we met most of our friends. Definitely book in there and try and get there about 2/3 days before you think most other people will be (they will be posting on the facebook group about arrival dates).

We got an agent from the approved list from SMU and looked around a few. Honestly, it was quite a stressful experience, but you quickly forget about the stress!

We stayed in a hdb apartment for the first semester which was actually really good and also reasonable. There was 5 of us in a 3 bedroom apartment and the total rent was SG\$3, 600 a month, which we split according to room size etc.

Second semester we moved into a condo called City Square, which is super popular with other exchange students and expats. There were a few problems due to the fact we were all sub-letting which is technically not allowed under Management rules and we ended up having to move into different apartments in the condo before our contract actually ended. Again, another stress, but it was quickly forgotten as we sunbathed by the pool!

Commonwealth is quite reasonable and quite fun according to friends that stayed there. We never even visited it though so can't really comment.

DESTINATION INFORMATION AND OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Transport, travel, social life, integration with local students, student activity groups

Transport: MRT and buses are super easy, air conditioned and cheap. Look on gothere.sg for directions to and from places. Taxis are also very cheap which is good for after nights out etc.

Travel: We didn't travel as much as other exchange students to be honest as our finances were more stretched being there for 2 semesters rather than just one, like most other exchange students. We still managed to go to Java, Bali, Vietnam, Philippines, Thailand and Hong Kong...so can't complain!

Social life: Is amazing!! Alcohol is very expensive so make sure to pick up duty free alcohol on your way in! You'll be looking to pay around \$16 a drink in a club (£8) so be prepared and pre drink! We started off going to "the bridge" at Clarke Quay for pre drinks and we met loads and loads of exchange students that way! Wednesday is ladies night so definitely avoid Thursday classes if you can. Go to the Singapore F1 if you get a chance. Tickets are around \$140, but it's a great experience and we really enjoyed it.

Local students: Try and make friends with your group mates. They are usually really nice and want to help and will be willing to take you to try local food and stuff. A lot of them have gone on exchange themselves to Europe/UK and so are very accommodating. Even though exchange students have a bad reputation for putting work in, try and do a bit so there's no tension amongst your group mates. Although some are very easy going and don't care, a lot of them are final year so they have a bit more pressure.

DESCRIBE IN ONE SENTENCE YOUR YEAR ABROAD

Without a doubt, the best year of our lives.