IT-UNIVERSITY TRAVEL REPORT
MARKUS E. HAUGAARD

Host University: Singapore Management University (SMU).

Study Programme at IT-University: Global Business Informatics, 5th semester.

Exchange Agreement or Study Abroad: Exchange Agreement.

Exchange Period: Fall Semester 2018.

Courses Studied Abroad: Globalisation & Transnational Sociology, Intercultural Communication,

Supply Chain Management, and Business Capstone.

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Feel free to contact me through my student mail if you have any questions regarding studying

abroad in Singapore or with the process in general.

YOUR STAY ABROAD

What was it like to study at [the university] (including choice of courses, academic level, social life at campus)?

The academic level at Singapore Management University (SMU) is at the highest level in Singapore. Some of the students considered themselves as the elite of Singapore and would proudly say this, but this is more a cultural side of the locals. But, it can be seen in the lectures that they aim for a high standard of education with expectations and criteria of readings, hand-ins, participation, and collaborating with the peer students. In some courses, the grade was based on 20% predication and professionalism, 40% group project, 40% term test, and six written reports there were considered pass or fail, the percentage varied based on the professor and the course. When studying at SMU you will, at some point, feel stressed, and especially when you share a flat with five other students. So to support the homework and group projects outside of the lectures the university provides a wide range of locations and facilities of projects, rooms, libraries, canteen, and 24/7 sleep areas.

As a preparation for my semester, I had to correlate my studies with the program at ITU. My goal was to focus on courses with a similar level of academic standard as in Copenhagen. When picking the courses, you might have to do some last-minute changes or prepare for alternative courses, as SMU frequently change, rearrange, or remove their courses, due to elements such as lack of participants, fall / summer semesters, or fully booked by students with priority. At SMU, the courses are earned through a betting system, which is ironic, as they heavily promote anti-gambling campagnas at SMU. To choose a course you would have to login to their system, and bet on the courses you want, the highest X out of Y wins, and you will be given 100 eCoins to split.

Compared to the course in Denmark, the students in Singapore are much more engaged in the university and their courses – This is mainly due to the cultural differences. Most of the courses are based on group work, some more than others, and students often meet in their groups during weekends to discuss important subjects, such as the final exams project or spend six hours on a Saturday morning downloading and implementing a specific font for the Power Point presentation, while you zone-out do to hangovers from partying the night before…

What I'm saying is, that in some cases you might feel that the group meeting could have been void, but it is a cultural thing, as many of the students often prefer to work at SMU, due to the fact that

they live with their parents in small houses or flats. On the other hand, it is a hit or miss situation depending on the group you get delegated.

The social activities after class are some of the key elements in the Singaporeans' student life, as you will often see them out in the halls practising dance routines, martial arts, or going to one of the many local clubs at campus. One of the clubs I chose to join was the Business Intelligence and Analytics Club, with focus on coding, networking, and meeting with other students from the other schools at SMU. The reason that I chose this club was due to it extended on some of the knowledge I had from my lectures at ITU and to get some contacts inside the industry in Singapore. The networking part is the most interesting part of these clubs as SMU often have CTOs or employees from big companies such as Panasonic, Visa, Grab, etc. presenting and doing Q&As at the events held by the club.

In general, the academic level at SMU is considered high in Singapore and with a shorter semester compared to ITU - and with frequent tests and presentations. The lectures focus on the students who interact doing class and award these students with an extra credit on their final grade. The professors at SMU are also interested in the students, and often ask into feedback from the courses and are open for questions after class.

What was your initial motivation for going abroad and did your stay meet your expectations?
I have always wanted to study abroad doing my studies, as I want to learn more about other cultures and expand my network outside of Denmark. One of the more personal challenges of the exchange, was to step out of my comfort zone and challenge myself to travel to the other side of the globe. What was great about Singapore, is that it is the perfect Asian country for people how want to live or explore Asia. and still be able to interact with the locals, as the first language in Singapore is English. The country is a great hub for a further step into the Asian culture and life.

Please describe what you got out of your stay, both personally and academically, and how do you expect it to contribute to your further studies?
From my stay in Singapore, I became better to understand cultural diversity, as the country and the other students consisted of a wide number of people from all around the world. As a Global Business Informatics students, this has been a great experience for the future projects when building or understanding international relations at work or while traveling.

ARRANGING YOUR STAY

How did you arrange practicalities such as accommodation?

Prior to my semester in Singapore I spoke with the Study and Career Guidance at ITU, and previous exchange students, to learn more about Singapore and what to expect and where and how to find a place to stay at in Singapore.

Approximately two months before I got my acceptance letter from SMU they had sent me an e-mail with a link to a closed Facebook group for students attending the semester. In this group, people shared and posted subjects, such as events and accommodation, to openly ask peers to join them. I joined the group early and only had to contact three people before I found one with the same expectation for accommodation. She was a girl from France, and we both wanted diversity at our flat, so we contacted and got contacted by people from various countries. Within a few days we were already a diverse group of six persons, who were willing to stay together, being from Denmark, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, and Mexico. When it came to find a place to stay, the girl from France had already contacted an agent from Singapore Housing Company and got us an offer for a place near SMU where we all six could stay.

The company was easy and responsive to help us to find the right place for the right price. But on the day I was leaving for Singapore, I got a message from our agent that there had been some difficulties with the landlord, and they could not rent us our place of choice. This was two months after we signed the contract with the agency. As I had to board the plane to Singapore I could not communicate, so I had no idea about what the agency and my flatmates had agreed upon. After the 15.5 hours flight, I arrived at Changi Airport in Singapore, where the agency had arranged for a driver to pick me up and take me to a replacement flat. Luckily the driver was an employee from the agency, so he knew where the location was and how I could enter the flat, because at this point in time (midnight) I was still blank about my address. But all worked out fine, and we were given a bigger flat for less rental, and with a swimming pool, bowling alley, gym, and with only two minutes of walking distance to the local mall and the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT). One problem however; on the first day, I was stopped by the security when I tried to enter the residence, as our contract had not been changed by the agency, which, according to the law meant that I was not a legal residence at the flat. This was hard to prove when my passport and documents were in the flat I was not granted access to, and I had been the first student to arrive. After a few hours and phone calls I was given a new rental contract, but it took three weeks before we could get our key cards –

which didn't even work for the half of us, but at least we did not have any problems with security after that. Heads up, bring a few copies of your passport for a situation like this – and also for the registration at SMU and residence.

EXPENSES AND FINANCING

Please comment on expenses connected to your stay abroad:

For the accommodation, staying at the City Square Residences the monthly rent was S$967 (≈ 4,650 Dkr) and a one-time fee of S$30 (≈ 145 Dkr) for an access card for the main entrance. From what I learned from my peers in Singapore, most people who stay five to six persons in a flat, pay a rental of S$950-1000 per month. Whereas people in single accommodations pays S$350-500 monthly rent, but the downside of the single rooms is that you will not able, in most cases, to have windows or a private bathroom and kitchen.

When it comes to food Singapore is probably one of the most attractive countries in the world for foodies, as there are food courts and restaurants at every street corner. Singapore is a very multicultural country and offers food options from all around Asia, the Middle Eastern, and the West within walk distance. On a regular weekday, I would spend around S$8-20 on food from the food courts, as groceries in the country can be very expensive. This is mainly due to the lack of agro-culture in Singapore, which mean that meat and vegetables are frequently imported.

Transportation in Singapore is easy as they are very proud of their Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system. A journey from my flat to SMU would cost S$0,77 if traveling with an EZ-Link card, which is a MRT card (like the Danish Rejsekortet) you can buy at the stations for S$12 (S$5 for the physical card and S$7 on the card to travel for). Besides the use for the MRT, it can also be accepted for things such as the buses, vending machines, and printers in Singapore. Outside of the operating hours of the MRT, which ends at midnight, other transportation options would be to catch a taxi or Grab (Über in Asia), which was very useful and cheap when you are a group of students who are going out.

Pre-drinks and nights out - Alcohol is expensive and shops are restricted from selling alcohol after 7pm. When you buy alcohol at the stores within the legal time frame, the prices for the cheapest six-pack starts at S$10 and a cheap vodka at S$38-50. Club entrances and prices are dynamic, as

standard prices can be from S$20-50, depending on the hour of the day or can be free if you for instance join an organised event, e.g. through Hazel's Guestlist, or if you are a girl. They take their men-to-female ratio very serious at the clubs. At the bars and clubs the drinks can be as pricey as S$15 for regular beer and S$20-25 for a cocktail. Side note, there are strict dress codes for men to enter the clubs in Singapore. You should wear long pants, no sports cloth, no sandals, or hoodies. Most places will inform you about the dress codes on their Facebook site – but in some cases, they don't care and think you are a silly tourist.

If you want to explore more of Asia, you be lucky here, as Singapore is in the heart of Asia. This means that it is easy and cheap to travel. Flight tickets to other Asian countries can be as cheap as from ca. S$80-230 - if ordered in advanced, and easy to plan with your friends. Besides taking a plane, there is also the option to travel by car or ferry, e.g. my flatmates and I booked a private chuffer to drive us from our flat in Singapore to a harbour in Malaysia where we took a ferry to Tioman Island, for approximately S$60 per person turn-return (excluding ferry tickets).

Did you apply for scholarships and would you recommend any ones in particular?
I applied to different organisations for a scholarship, some through Legatbogen and others from connections – But didn't get any response. One reason could be due to the fact that I did only apply at larger organisations and secondly I should have been more open to apply for smaller scholarships.

Recommendations for other students:
- SMU also provides students with medical care, student guidance, and an internal students office.
- Open a bank account while you are there at the Frank by OCBC on campus. Its free and it can save you some fees while you are in Singapore or traveling in Asia. I used TransferWise for the transactions between my Danish and Singaporean accounts.
- Be safe while you travel, inform your friends or family where you are going. We had serious problems with a student disappearing on a trip.
  - You can use the website The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark to check details about safety in the country or the city you are visiting, as well as inform the ministry about your travel plans.
- If you can find space for it; bring a quality camera.

EXPLOREIT