

EXCHANGE REPORT: NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY – FALL 2016

Ismael Yerbanga, IBEB student



Singapore's Cityscape

Name: Ismael Yerbanga

Email: ismaelyerbanga@gmail.com

Host University: Nanyang Technological University (NTU)

Country: Singapore

Exchange Period: August – December 2016

Preparation

Soon after I received the confirmation of my exchange I simply followed the steps to accept the offer. A few weeks later you will receive a letter from NTU with all the information concerning the timeline, and documents required for the registration and the visa application. You will also have the opportunity to apply for on campus housing, which will be allocated through a random balloting in June. After submitting all required documents, expect to receive all the results about visa and housing by July. Personally I did not start looking for accommodation before the results of on campus were released and luckily I received on-campus housing, hence it was pretty straightforward to accept the offer and simply move in during the first week of August. Besides visa and housing there will also be a list of courses that you will have to select and submit to the NTU system in July. Make sure the exchange coordinator approves the choice of courses first. The NTU administration will verify that you meet the prerequisite with your transcript and you will be able to register on the NTU Star planner once they have validated the courses for you.

Arrival

I arrived in Singapore around ten days before the date I could move into my on-campus accommodation. I advise to arrive one week before if possible, as it gives you time to experience your new city for the next few months, settle and identify useful spots. During that week I stayed in a hostel near China town, The Bohemian chic hostel, it was really nice and peaceful there. However, if you would like to meet other exchange students in the mean time I can suggest The Green Kiwi Hostel. This hostel is quite popular among exchange students who arrive in Singapore before the start of the academic semester. You will meet plenty of new students and can organize activities together.

I moved in on campus 2nd of August and started studying the courses timetable to see how to best optimize my timetable. After the semester starts, there will be a two weeks add-drop period, in which you can rearrange your pre allocated courses and schedule, using the STARS planner. I ended up taking four courses and I had classes on Tuesday Wednesday and Thursday, thus allowing me weekends of four days.

Courses

Energy Economics (HE3010) 3AU= 6ECTS

This course fundamentally is microeconomics applied to the energy sector. Accordingly expect to learn about the various competition models around the different energy markets, be it gas, oil or electricity. The first two weeks are dedicated to the formal definition of energy, unit of measures and energy transformation. Thereafter microeconomics models are the main components. A group project is also part of the course syllabus. In teams of 4, a research paper had to be compiled and delivered for the end of term. Usually the teacher will suggest certain research questions that you can choose from, but you will be free to also find one topic on your own and discuss it with the teacher.

Investments (BU9201) 3AU=6ECTS

This course sounded good on paper, and that explains why I registered for it. However, the teacher had a particular on his teaching method. He would just tell us real life stories for the first half and subsequently covered topics such as the CAPM model, arbitrage opportunities, bond valuation, interest rates parity, and investment strategies. I believe that the lectures and aim of the course will be fairly difficult to follow if you don't master the Finance 1 course beforehand. Moreover, we performed an investment experiment in groups of five by using an investment application. The goal of this experiment was to let us apply investment strategies learnt in class: fundamental analysis, news-based investing or even technical analysis. Throughout the weeks each group had to create a report explaining the steps taken and motivations, to be submitted in the last week of teaching. A short group presentation explaining the findings and learning experience was also scheduled for the last class.

Equity Securities (BF3203) 4AU=8ECTS

This was the most practical course I followed, it is focused on valuation of equity. You will learn multiple methods on how to value different type of companies, firms with negative earnings, cyclical firms, financial institutions, and so on. During the semester you will have to perform a company valuation in groups of 5. The list of possible companies to value will be provided by the teacher, and will be allocated on a first come first served basis. The project was challenging and time consuming, as there are no boundaries on the project, the limit is your group's motivation. Yet, that valuation project was the best learning experience during the semester abroad, by providing numerous practical and real life related knowledge. If you are interested in finance and concrete valuation beyond the theoretical approach, you will enjoy this course.

Cultural Intelligence (BU8641) 3AU=6ECTS

I was really looking forward to this course. As the course name suggests you will be learning about cultural intelligence, the capability to adapt effectively to a new cultural environment. Even though the entire course was based on a framework it was practical. After the two introductory weeks you will join a culturally diversified group of 4 other students following the course. Throughout the semester you will be given tasks to ultimately finish a short movie showcasing a cultural conflict and a win-win resolution. This course was very interactive and enjoyable. In two occasion instead of classes, each group will have to arrange a group experiential learning, aimed at strengthening the ties among group members and enhancing their CQ knowledge. The downside is that it was a demanding course, with assignments virtually every week, comprising reflection journals, synopsis making and cultural intelligence assessments.

Exchange life

Exchange was one of the best experience in my life. It combines studying with uncountable new experiences abroad. Discovering the Asian life style and experiencing the south east Asian culture on the field was a premiere for me. Living on campus was also a bonus, as you get to meet and interact with local Singaporeans more often and experience a new student life. The NTU campus is huge, and includes all necessary facilities (sport center, supermarkets, hairdresser, canteens, bank office...). The only downside to the campus is that it is quite far from city center, it will take you 1h by public transport or 20-25minutes by car minutes.

Cooking is not required in Singapore, most people in Singapore simply eat out all the time, including breakfast. Indeed, the hawker center business is very well developed, such that there will be a food center within 500 meters from your location most of the time.

Furthermore, my weekends of 4 days have been the deal maker during the exchange, allowing me to travel frequently around in South East Asia. I have been able to travel to Jakarta, Bangkok, Cambodia and Malaysia during the semester and recess week. After all my examinations, I had 3 weeks before my flight back home, I therefore planned trips to Hong Kong and Myanmar. All the destinations have been great, and I would recommend to travel as much as possible during your time there. It has been a challenging task to ally travelling and meeting the standards of studying required by NTU, but it taught me how well time can be managed.

Now financially I was incurring the following monthly living expenses:

On campus Rent 200EUR
Food and drinks 400EUR
Social expenses and phone 150EUR
Transport (metro, bus) 20EUR
Total: 770EUR

Next to living expenses I travelled at my own expenses and I would estimate on average 30-50eur per day excluding flight tickets for travel trip outside of Singapore. Return flight tickets to typical destinations (Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Indonesia) are anywhere between 60 and 200 euros depending on how early you book them. If you plan well in advance you can benefit from advantageous prices on low cost airlines.