

Planning

Expectations

My stay abroad in Singapore was part of a special exchange program between my home university, the Technical University of Munich (TUM), and the National University of Singapore (NUS). This program, known as the Entrepreneurship Exchange Program (EEP), combines a full-time internship at a startup in Singapore with academic courses focused on entrepreneurship. For me, this was the perfect opportunity to gain hands-on experience in one of Asia's most economically vibrant cities while also benefiting from academic learning at one of the world's top universities. Although I had never visited Singapore before, I had been fascinated by the country for a long time. Over just a few decades, Singapore has transformed into one of the most important business hubs in Asia and is renowned for its multiculturalism, which deeply intrigued me.

Application Planning

After having been accepted into the EEP by TUM, I received all the necessary information from contacts at both TUM and NUS. There were also meetings organized so that I could connect with the other students in the program before departure. This personalized support was a major advantage compared to a regular study-abroad semester, where one is often left to navigate the experience alone. Although I was accepted into the program in January 2023, my actual stay in Singapore didn't start until January 2024. The application processes for both the startups and NUS began in August 2023. The NUS application process was greatly simplified by our contact person at NUS, who provided clear and timely information about all necessary documents and deadlines. On the other hand, applying for the startup positions proved to be more challenging. This was partly because some companies on the NUS-provided long list offered little information. Additionally, selecting five preferred companies from around 100 options required thoughtful decision-making. The companies then decide whether or not to invite candidates for interviews. If an invitation is extended, the application processes vary significantly between companies. Some require the completion of detailed case studies and multiple interview rounds, while others may extend an offer after a single introductory interview. I highly recommend allocating significant time for these interviews in September, as the most attractive employers often receive many applications, and thorough preparation can help one stand out in the interview rounds.

Financial Support

In addition to funding from the Stiftung der Deutschen Wirtschaft (sdw), I also received support from the Erasmus+ internship program, which has funded non-EU internships since 2023. I submitted my application for this funding through TUM's portal for study-abroad programs as early as August. Since the funding is awarded on a "first come, first served" basis, it's essential to apply as soon as you receive confirmation of an internship abroad.

Program Structure

Although the program is not integrated into my degree, with proper planning, it can be seamlessly incorporated into the study plan without creating any major gaps in time.

Preparation

Linguistic and Cultural Preparation

As part of the preparation, our NUS contact organized various informational sessions on the cultural and linguistic differences in Singapore. I recommend familiarizing yourself with the language beforehand, especially if you are undertaking an internship. Fluent English is essential since it is the official language in Singapore. However, "Singlish", a local variant of English with shortened or omitted words, is commonly spoken. At first, it can be challenging to understand, but you get used to it over time. Locals also speak clear English when needed, so you can always ask for clarification if necessary.

Visa

German students interning in Singapore require a special visa, the Work Holiday Pass. Our NUS contact supported us throughout this process and provided detailed information on all the steps and necessary documents. The process itself is generally transparent and can be viewed on the Ministry of Manpower's website. It's best to start the process a few months in advance as it can take some time.

Accommodation

Unfortunately, just before the start of the program, I and some other students were informed that not all participants would be provided with on-campus accommodation. This led to a last-minute search for off-campus housing, which was significantly more expensive. Eventually, I found a room through the platform "Cove" in a shared apartment. Although the cost was more than three times that of on-campus housing, the room and apartment were much better equipped, so I was ultimately satisfied.

Insurance

I took out the combined health, accident, and personal liability insurance offered by the DAAD (Plan 720), specifically for students participating in an Erasmus exchange. The cost was €38 per month, and the coverage was valid for up to six months worldwide outside Germany, which included travel in Southeast Asia. However, a prerequisite for this combined insurance is funding through an Erasmus program.

Experience in Singapore

Informationen

Our contacts at both TUM and NUS provided all the necessary details about the course structure and internship well in advance. I also discussed specific internship-related questions with my supervisor ahead of time (e.g., preferred dress code, necessary preparations) to ensure I was as well-prepared as possible. Speaking with alumni from previous years also gave me valuable insights into the working culture in Singapore, although none of them had interned at my specific company, so the insights were more general.

Courses

Due to the program's specific structure, we had no choice in the courses, and NUS assigned them to us. TUM students took two courses: "Venture Creation – Process and Mindset" and "Start-Up Case Study & Analysis". The first course involved group work on a business idea, while the second required an individual case study on a strategic challenge faced by our internship company. These courses were designed to be manageable alongside a full-time internship, so they didn't take up all our free time.

Challenges

Time management was a challenge, especially when planning travel activities during the few vacation days. Careful and efficient planning was crucial. Additionally, the high humidity in Singapore took some getting used to. I enjoy spending time outdoors, but in Singapore, this was more exhausting due to the climate. I recommend bringing breathable Dri-Fit clothing!

Cost of Living

Aside from rent, the cost of living in Singapore was lower than expected. Food courts are located throughout the city and offer full meals from morning until night at very reasonable prices (sometimes as low as €3). As supermarket prices are relatively high, I rarely cooked for myself. On average, I spent about €300 per month on food. Public transport is excellent and affordable, with monthly costs of around €50. Most additional expenses were related to

travel, as Singapore is well-connected to many destinations in Southeast Asia, with budget-friendly flights and bus tickets available.

Leisure and Sports

Singapore offers a wide range of leisure activities. In addition to popular tourist attractions around Marina Bay Sands, the city has numerous hiking trails, gardens, and museums. Many museums offer discounted admission for students. There are also plenty of sports facilities. Though I lived far from campus and couldn't take advantage of the many free sports activities, I was able to play tennis for free almost daily with a housemate at a nearby facility. There are also affordable courts for other sports like football or volleyball.

After Returning

Course Recognition

Unfortunately, grades are only released five months after the program ends, so I cannot yet comment on the recognition process.

Final Thoughts

My internship in Singapore was an incredibly enriching experience, both professionally and personally. Singapore's multicultural diversity was one of the most impressive aspects of my stay. In this melting pot of cultures, I was exposed to various perspectives and working styles, significantly enhancing my intercultural skills. Working with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds also highlighted the importance of flexibility and openness in the workplace. Not only did I develop my technical skills, but I also gained invaluable insights into the importance of company culture and intercultural collaboration, which I am sure will benefit my future career.

