

# Victoria Abroad Evaluation Form

PLEASE TYPE THIS EVALUATION FORM & EMAIL IT TO VICTORIA ABROAD AS A WORD DOCUMENT

## A: Student Information

VUW degree(s)	Masters of Architecture (Prof.)
Major(s)	Architecture
Exchange Institution	National University of Singapore (NUS)
VUW Tri & Year of Exchange	Trimester 1, 2016

## B: Finances

Please detail your basic costs in New Zealand dollars. This will help future students plan their own budgets. (Enter your number rounded to the nearest dollar.)

Books	\$0 (Course uses no textbooks, library has plenty of precedence books for design research)
Accommodation	\$135 Per Week, \$2430 Total/ Whole Semester (18 Weeks) - Utown Residence
Return Airfare	\$2000
Local Transportation	\$3 - \$4 per Day
Meals	\$12 - \$15 per Day (Three Meals)
Visa	\$90 (Student Pass done through NUS)
Health & Insurance	\$200
Personal Spending	\$50 per Week
Communications (phone, etc.)	\$20 per Month
Other fees (specify)	\$4000 (Personal Spending/ Travel Money)
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	<p>Transport and food were relatively cheaper compared to Wellington, although clothing etc were roughly the same, due to the currency being almost 1:1 Meals on campus were all cheaper for students.</p> <p>Personal spending was higher than expected, due to extra travels alongside a family vacation after the semester finished.</p>

How did your financial expenses compare to what you originally expected to spend?

The financial expenses for the duration of the trip was more or less the same as I had predicted prior to leaving. As the exchange rates and my current mode of living was the same and did not change once I had left home. Some aspects such as food and transport was cheaper than anticipated, but due to my prolonged travels after the semester that I did not account for, the financial aspect balanced out in the long run.

By what means did you maintain your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, foreign bank account, travelers checks, etc)?

Since Singapore and the majority of the Asian countries I had visited preferred cash as a means for paying, I signed up for a Reloadable Cash Passport from ANZ, and topped it up with cash from my main bank account whenever I would run low on funds, then get cash out as there were no offshore charges. Also the handy thing about a Cash Passport, is that I would frequently log on to my online account and 'drag and drop' my NZD to other currencies that I needed, which was always handy to avoid the fluctuating exchange rates while travelling.

What financial advice would you give students attending the same university as you?

Sign up for a Reloadable Cash Passport before leaving, and always get cash out on campus. But if you are willing to exchange NZD or cash in general, avoid the airport and go downtown to exchange money as they have better rates. I went to Orchard Road, to exchange mine.

What was the average cost of a can of coke or coffee in your host country?

More or less the same as NZ, so roughly \$2 - \$3

**C: Visas & Insurance** *\*Please note this information is recommended by VUW students & current at the time of their exchange. For all up-to-date visa information you must check with the embassy/consulate of your host university.*

Did you have to apply for a visa? If so, was it difficult? What was the process, how long did it take and how much did it cost?

A Student visa was required, but through the enrollment process with NUS, it is easy to follow and several processes were done online, and the latter half is done when you're actually in Singapore as all exchange students have to go through the same process at the start of every semester. Although there was a processing fee that I didn't anticipate - \$90

Do you have any advice for future students when applying for visas to your host country?

Patience is key. Also there are a specific set of deliverables to provide. Such as passport photos that have to be a specific size and background.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance? Or a particular insurance they recommended? If Yes, what was it and how much did it cost?

Yes, there was student insurance and is mandatory. - \$60

What insurance company did you use and would you recommend it to future students?

The mandatory NUS insurance scheme, along with my Southern Cross Travel Insurance for outside Uni.

**D: Academics at Host University**

Which courses did you take while on exchange? Please rate the difficulty of each course (1-5, 1 = Very Easy & 5 = Extremely Difficult) and leave any comments you may have.

Course Title	Language of Instruction	VUW course equivalent or elective	VUW points/credits value	Rating (1-5)	Comments
<b>VUW Trimester 1/YEAR</b>					
AR4102 – Design 8	English	ARCI 411 – Architecture Design Research	30	4	Normal architecture workload, although deliverables were more than expected in short periods of time. Culture shock due to the design processes and emphasis were different.
DEP5102 – Urban History and Theory	English	ARCI 451 – Architecture History and Theory	15	4	Very enthusiastic professor, engaging content, although heavy on readings. Core paper for another major, I was an exception for this course.
AR2225 – Reading Visual Images	English	400 - Elective Equivalent	-	2	Filler elective paper, was equivalent to a 2 <sup>nd</sup> year paper, but content was interesting, mostly art/ fine arts content.
<b>VUW Trimester 2/YEAR</b>					

## **Course Registration/Enrolment**

Please describe the registration process at your host university. What kind of help was available?

The registration at NUS is mostly online and pretty straightforward, although was very confusing at times when registering for a specific course/ module as some aren't available to exchange students. This is due to their system in classifying the courses in to 'non-graduating' and 'graduate' course. I personally had a stressful time selecting masters' level papers to take as most of the courses that were equivalent to VUW were considered as 'graduate' courses therefore only applicable to NUS graduates.

How successful were you in registering/enrolling for classes you wanted? What advice would you offer to next year's exchange students about registration at your host university?

Initially not I wasn't successful in getting accepted into the History course that I needed to get to transfer over the core credits I need for my program, but with some persistence with emails, getting a hold of the course coordinator and getting his approval for my DEP5102 course I managed to pull through. Another way to guarantee smooth registration at NUS, is to physically go the department office once in Singapore to personally fix the problem.

Do you have any advice for future students when choosing and applying for courses?

Double check if the modules/ courses you would want to get into, and check if it is a 'non-graduating' or 'graduate' program. But if you are initially denied, often going to the department office or emailing the course coordinator about the issue helps, and they will sort it out for you. Also have a lot of patience during this period but once it's over you're free to go and travel/ study at the same time!

## **Academic Experience**

How did your academic experience differ from your time spend at Victoria? Did the academic experience meet your expectations?

It was more or less the same academic experience in terms of workload. Although students seem to be more reserved compared to VUW and less open, treating class as a competitive scene. But I was lucky to have very open studio colleagues during archi class/ studio as it is our nature to be open to everyone, to share ideas etc. Students were also more inclined to physical model, whereas I had been taught with an emphasis on digital. Along with that difference came with a different emphasis during the design process. More pragmatic rather than concept driven – which isn't a bad thing. But moving onto the graduate module that I had taken, the class seemed to be composed of a tight knit group of people and the professor was more engaging in terms of discussions and exercises during class.

How did the style of teaching at your host university compare with that at VUW? How did the workload

compare to what you would expect at VUW?

The styles were more or less the same when it came to the Architecture design class, although students are given the benefit to choose their own project briefs and each supervisor would have differing teaching styles which was a plus. Studio is more presentation and discussion based, throwing ideas around to get feedback. Lectures are the same along with tutorials. Although the only negative note is that NUS often switches deadline dates to what it says on the given course outline. I found myself one day surprised that I had a term report due 2 weeks before the initial hand in date stated on the course outline – and me ending up shifting workload emphasis just to complete it in time. So take note of changing due dates!

What would you recommend as an appropriate course load for other VUW students visiting your partner university? What specific courses would you recommend to visiting VUW students? Why?

Three modules is enough – just enough to cover core courses needed to transfer back at home, always plan out what courses to have on certain days so you can spend more time exploring and travelling if you choose to.

What advice would you give VUW students about succeeding academically at your host university?

Get in contact with professors and even RA's or exchange students who are in a similar field. Academic success not only comes off from hard work but also with the connections you have, that may even benefit you outside, after your exchange is finished.

What was your impression of the computer facilities, library, and internet access at your host university?

Lots of resources available, easily accessible libraries within the central library and architecture resource center. Although computers and their availability is somewhat limited compared to VUW, it is due to students having own laptops to do work on. Otherwise the education centers are highly accessible, fully furnished and a great place to do work and plus side, is air-conditioned!

If you went to a country where English is not the native language, how did you prepare for this? Were there any intensive language courses provided by the host university?

Although English is the main language in Singapore, learning all the slang and slight Chinese and Malaysian words were relatively easy. Friends and locals are a great way to learn.

## **E: Accommodation**

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

On campus student dorms, in a place called uTown. It's predominantly where all the exchange students find residence. Lots of resources available, gym, pool, food courts, marts, and MRT stations are within reach. Also great place to meet new friends, since everyone is pretty much on the same boat as you.

What were the pros and cons of this form of accommodation?

Literally all pros. No cons. everything you need in one place. Not too far from downtown, the MRT station and there's also a free bus service to and from the university campus. Gyms, pool, basketball courts among others are easily in walking distance. Great place to live. Also inter-house competitions along with its fully refurbished and new buildings. Two food courts to choose from that gives student discounts on food.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

uTown hands down. Easy and affordable if you compare the price you pay for a flat in Wellington. If you don't get placed into uTown, email ASAP and they will place you in, as NUS has a tendency to prioritize exchange students rather than locals.

How early can you move into accommodation?

A Week or two before the semester starts, so you can settle in.

What options were available for meal plans or cooking facilities? How satisfied were you with the food?

No meal plans for uTown, but neighboring dorms like Tembusu and Cinnamon have meal plans. Food court is cheap and often the go to as you can't cook in the flat. Cheap filling meals with a huge range of food. Mix Vege Rice and the Indian Place is the go to.

If you lived in off-campus housing, how easy was it to find? What should future VUW exchange students know about living off-campus?

Do you have any tips of advice for future students when applying for accommodation?

If you initially don't get placed in your choice of accommodation, don't sweat. Just email the faculty ASAP and they will be more than accommodating and switch you over. They do have to prioritize exchange students over local students.

## **F: Personal & Cultural Connections**

What was it like making friends? How successful were you at making friends with local (i.e., not international) students?

Easy making friends, both local and exchange. It all just kind of happened all at once with me I was surprised. Also I had my godmothers family living in Singapore so local contact and meeting people my age was relatively easy. Also locals and students are more than accommodating to let you join them for a game of basketball etc. Within NUS, all architecture students were relatively open and a couple had just come back from their exchange themselves so there's common ground to relate and talk about.

What was it like to adjust to the culture of your exchange country/university?

Personally I think it's just coping with the activeness of Singapore as a whole due to the amount of people within a city. More lively. Also adjustments to how many people have faith to those around them, including strangers, due to Singapore being such a safe place to live in. Adjusting was relatively hard at first due to that initial culture shock and the sheer largeness of the place. Also learning about halal and non-halal foods was different, but easy to cope with, its mainly to do with the respect of religion among others.

What, if any, cultural differences did you find particularly challenging? How would you recommend students to prepare for these differences?

Not a lot of cultural differences, just the amount of people and their slang really. Also coping with the diverse groups and ethnicities of people. Some tend to be ruder and less inclined to wear deodorant – for some reason – I guess it's just the culture and what people eat, maybe?

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

Singaporean culture is very, very modern. Not a lot of historical and cultural centers in town, but South East Asia as a whole is very cultural I found. And I had a lot of opportunities to visit, pretty much all of South East Asia. Loved every part of it. From the modernity to the more cultural aspects. Along with the great food that is unique from each place.

How were you treated by local people? By university staff and faculty? By students?

Locals were mostly friendly although the push and shove of the people and population, some tend to be a bit more rude than others. University staff directly in the architecture faculty were very friendly and accommodating with exchange students, and understand the position and nature of exchange students who also tend to travel on the side of study. Students were helpful also, although some tend to be more reserved than others. Still treating academics as a competition for grades.

As far as you could tell, how easy would it be for students with disabilities to study at your partner university? For students who are visible minorities in your host country? For students who are gay, lesbian,

bisexual or transgendered?

Everything is widely accepted in Singapore, although I didn't see any teacher aids etc at NUS, but I'm sure resources and help is easily acceptable.

Did you face any issues regarding discrimination in your host country? What were they, and what advice would you give to future students?

No not a lot of discrimination, although Singaporeans still prefer and give bias to local students.

### **G: Extra-curricular/Social Activities**

What organized activities (clubs, sports, etc.) were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

A lot of extracurricular activities, sports competitions, and inter house sports and clubs are a plus. Great way to meet friends and get exercise too, if the gym isn't really your thing. Also a lot of exchange parties and gatherings to meet new people and let loose a bit if you need to!

What do you recommend other visiting students see or do on their weekends or holidays?

Oooh, a lot in all honesty. Always travel during the Chinese New Year break, and Spring Break to neighboring countries for sure! CNY break is usually time for locals to spend time with family, so spending time with your exchange family is a plus too. But during the odd weekend when you're not out of the country. A trip to Sentosa, Pulau Ubin and just downtown to Marina Bay is a must. What I did with my exchange family [my group of friends that I met over in SG] is we travelled to Malaysia first then slowly travelled further and further from Singapore. Great place to start and to ease yourself in. But despite all the travelling don't forget to just explore Singapore first, everything is accessible and easy to get from place to place. Although getting lost is also part of the experience!

What opportunities were there for students to work on-campus? Off-campus?

No. Not a lot of opportunities, exchange students on a student pass isn't eligible for work.

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

Volunteer opportunities were open if you're in a club, although internships are very different.

### **5 things to take to your host country or region**

1	Camera/ GoPro, whatever may it be. Just something to record everything you see, do and eat even. If not a journal to keep all tickets, photos, and even notes on what was done on every single day.
2	Something from New Zealand, whether its treats, chocolate, or even some spare cash to trade with other exchange friends for them to keep as a memorabilia.
3	Appropriate clothing for sure. Singapore is warm all year around, and so are its neighboring countries.
4	Spare suitcase and bag for each individual trips you take, and space for souvenirs just in case you have excess on the way home
5	As little as possible! Things are cheap and everything you need is accessible and affordable.

### 5 pieces of useful advice would tell a VUW student going to your host university

1	Travel with an open mind and meet a balance of local and exchange friends on your trip, and go outside of your comfort zone.
2	Try all the food! Hands down best, affordable and diverse cuisine you'll ever see.
3	Don't wait to travel. Start close and make your way out further and further from Singapore.
4	Buy a journal/ diary to note things and experiences that you've done on certain days. It's fun and nostalgic to re-read once the exchange is finished.
5	Take time to also explore Singapore itself. It's a great place to get lost in.

### Top 5 Things to do

*What are your 'Top 5 Things To Do' future VUW students at your host university or city/country?*

1	Travel! You're in the heart of South East Asia and everything is within reach!
2	Get out of your comfort zone and try something new, or maybe even tick off something on your bucket list. – I did and I got my open water PADI license!
3	Eat. Eat as much as you can I can't stress this enough food is cheap and delicious too. If you're conscious about weight, don't sweat it, travelling around from place to place keeps you active. Also try street food, doesn't have to be in Singapore, but other places too. – I tried roasted crickets (surprisingly crunchy)
4	Meet local students along with new exchange friends too. Exploring with exchange students is fun but, locals know the in's and out's of their hometown.
5	Sentosa Island, Universal Studios and especially Marina Bay!

### H: Personal Experience

Please write one paragraph about your exchange experience. Plus, don't forget to submit some photos to

the exchange office!!

Hands down the best decision I've made during my academic life so far! Applying for exchange has definitely had an overall impact on my life. It's not every day that you can study and travel abroad at the same time. I think during my time in Singapore I've grown as a person and gotten out of my comfort zone, and do things that I could have never imagined me doing. Being born Filipino, gave me the chance to fully explore South East Asia and its rich and diverse cultures. Before the exchange I guess I had underestimated myself and did things that I had never thought of even doing. I thoroughly enjoyed my time and I will never forget all the experiences and friends that I know have, who are scattered all over the world themselves – giving me a chance to possibly visit them in the near future too. I will most definitely be returning to Singapore for a visit as it's safe to say that Singapore is now my 3<sup>rd</sup> home.



How did you find the support with....

- your host university?

Supportive of the exchange students, often having a very strong student body exchange council/ representative.

- the host lecturers?

Wise and very experienced professors, varying from different backgrounds. My professor was from MIT.

- the International Office at the host university?

Accommodating with issues if were any. Although hard to communicate with at times, especially during times of registration – for classes.

- the Victoria Abroad office?

Very good and smooth process in terms of registration etc. Great support.

- The VUW faculty assistance?

Excellent, had a few talks with March Aurel Schnabel and recommended me with connections and how to get in touch with practicing professors from that side of the world.