

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 in Architecture (Prof)
Major(s)	Architecture
Exchange Institution	National University of Singapore
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	100 (mostly materials for my degree), no text books needed.
Accommodation	2000 at Utown Residence (one off payment)
Return Airfare	2000
Local Transportation	500-600 (Ubers + MRT EZ-Link cards were used for bus and subway)
Meals	Cheap at food courts on campus, like 3-6 dollars a meal, or 20+ at restaurants
Visa	Around 200 all up, with application fees and issuance fees etc
Health & Insurance	1Cover, one off payment of \$361.65 (student + online discount applied) for 6 months
Personal Spending	5000
Communications (phone, etc.)	M1 SIM card, 30 a month
Other fees (specify)	Flights to neighbouring countries (own leisure trips were 600 all up – budget airlines)
What unexpected costs did you encounter? What items were more or less than expected?	I seem to have spent so much on food. Its best to carry cash as food courts don't often take card – only at established restaurants they do, but these are usually very expensive. I would usually have to get cash out at an ATM every few weeks (or less, depending on what purchases I made).

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

I feel I had just enough! I also got living-cost weekly payments from StudyLink which helped a lot. I feel I could have been struggling if it were not for those. I did however spend more money than some due to the trips I made to other countries (flights + accommodation + activities etc.)

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

I got myself a Cash Passport Mastercard which I would load money onto into Singapore Dollars. This was super handy as I would get charged less at ATMS when withdrawing cash. It also comes with an APP so you can check your balances and you can do all the transfers from your NZ bank to the Cash Passport account and the money would be in there after 3 business days (this was a little annoying, though). I did also bring my NZ debit cards to use if I desperately needed money from an ATM and there was not enough in my Cash

Passport card.

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

Cash Passports are super handy! They're easy to use and cheap to set up. You can load your card with multiple currencies so its really good for travelling around.

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

Coke = 2 Coffee = 1.20 at food courts (beware this is not what we are used to in NZ), or Barista coffee = 5-6 dollars.

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?

NUS set you up with your VISA applications and its pretty straight forward for most of it. Just remember to always check your emails and its all done online and follow all instructions correctly by their due dates. It was a little tedious at times but not too difficult to complete.

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

As above 😊

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 health insurance we had to pay as NUS students and it was under 100 NZD all up if I remember correctly.

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

1Cover. It was about 360 for the entire time I was away and covered me for all of South East Asia. I didn't end up needing to use it but it was very easy to purchase online. There was a student discount too.

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/cr edits value	Rating (1-5)	Comments
VUW Trimester 1/YEAR					
AR4102 – Design 8	English	ARCI411 –Design	30	4	Such an interesting course! My tutor was amazing and is probably one of the best I've

					had at university. The course taught me so much about how different Singapore's approach to architecture is versus NZ.
SSD2213 – Singapore Urban History and Architecture	English	Elective	15	3	Really interesting also. Learnt about how Singapore came to be as a country and its various schemes to get it to where it is now. Also learnt about iconic buildings and areas.
DEP5102 – Urban Planning History and Theory	English	ARCI 251 - Architecture History & Theory	15	4	The tutor for this course made it really fun, even though it was difficult at times. Learnt more about the history of Urban Architecture in different areas of the world.

Course Registration/Enrolment

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

It was all online and pretty straight forward. Any problems I encountered I could email in and get a response pretty quickly after.

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?

I had minor issues at the start as some classes were not available to enroll online for exchange students so I had to email the professor himself who took the course and see if I could join, in which he said yes. This was for DEP5102. My advice would be to always make sure your emails as enrolment due dates are always sent to you. Also make sure you are not late trying to enroll and everything should go smoothly.

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

Just make sure you do it before the deadline!

Academic Experience

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

It was different but not a massive change. All the students were very hard-working from the first day of term which threw me off a little. They're also competitive due to how their marks are graded with a bell-curve system. It was really interesting and most local students love exchangers!

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 difficulty was about the same in my eyes, but for me there were smaller tutorial groups compared to what I am used to at Vic. This meant the tutor could spend more time with individual students and was really beneficial to my learning. Workload was similar also. Group work is more common at NUS though.

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?

Other than finding the courses that you need to cross-credit to the compulsory papers needed at Vic, maybe try for an elective that you would not be able to study back at home. For me learning about Singapore's Urban History was really interesting. Try to make the most of studying away from home and doing something different!

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

Persevere! Don't be intimidated by the competitive local students. Also making sure you introduce yourself to your professors really help. All of mine were really nice and were happy to help when I was stuck.

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

Singapore has free wifi everywhere so you will never not be connected for long! Internet was fast and reliable, computers were the same standard as the architecture labs back at Vic.

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?

English is widely spoken in Singapore however there is an accent that I was unfamiliar with. At first I would have difficulty understanding everything, especially when they would integrate Singlish words into their sentences but I got used to it pretty quickly.

E: Accommodation

What form of accommodation did you stay in?

Utown Residence 4 bedroom flat apartment with fan only (no air-con)

- 3 other flat mates

- shared kitchenette, lounge, toilet and shower

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

PROS – my flatmates were the nicest people ever!! They were all exchange students like me so we became fast friends. Two were from the USA and the third was Canadian.

- It was so convenient living right on Campus. There was a free shuttle bus that you could catch to your Faculty and also to the nearest MRT station (Kent Ridge). There were also nearby bus stops that you could take further around the city.

- Utown is such a good place to live! Almost all residents were international exchangers, so you meet so many people. There are two food courts (cheap meals), a pharmacy, bookstore, mini supermarket, a 24 hr

convenient store, multiple ATMS, a Pizza Hutt, plenty of restaurants and is home to Singapore's largest Starbucks Coffee shop. There is also plenty of study areas, a gym, swimming pool etc. Everything was literally a minutes' walk from my room.

CONS – the only negative thing really is that I was put in a room with no air-conditioning. It would get so unbearably hot in my tiny room sometimes that it would be hard to focus if you were doing school work. Most mornings I'd wake up in a sweat but it was something I did eventually get used to funnily enough. You can purchase a standing fan at your own expense to help with this though. The fan does help with the heat but on the highest setting it was quite loud so this was something I had to get used to as well.

What accommodation would you recommend to future students?

Definitely a 4bedroom apartment in Utown Residence if possible. It is very in high demand though, so make sure you fill your application on time! There are also rooms with air conditioning which would make the humidity and heat more bearable in your bedrooms.

How early can you move into accommodation?

They send an email but it is approximately a week before the Semester's classes begin. If you want to check-in earlier you have to email to let them know (and maybe pay extra fees?).

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

In my apartment we had our own kitchen so it was self-catered. The kitchen included a microwave and fridge. I bought the flat a kettle also. But since there are no stoves or oven I barely cooked a single meal over there. They don't allow portable cookers or toasters etc due to safety reasons. I bought most of my meals from the food courts in Utown.

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

N/A

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

Apply before the deadline! Also I HIGHLY RECOMMEND staying at Utown Residence if possible, or any of the other Halls located in Utown. Living in Utown is what made my experience so enjoyable. Although I submitted my applications on time which my three choices of accommodation I was allocated a room that I did not even choose on my list. I decided I wasn't happy with that so I decided to email the Office of Housing Services right away to put me on the waiting list for a room in Utown. Within two weeks I received an email saying I was going to be transferred to live in Utown. I was so happy!

F: Personal & Cultural Connections

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

I actually found making international friends the easiest thing ever! Everyone is so lovely in the first week

and you are bound to make friends during orientation activities. These friends I made were from all over the world and we actually ended up travelling around South East Asia together. I still keep in touch with them to this day! I found making local friends a little bit harder. Although the local students were nice, they were a lot more into their studies which is understandable.

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

Quite easy to my surprise. Singapore is quite Westernised in many ways which made it easy to adapt. It was a nice place to come 'home' to when I went on weekend trips to countries such as Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam etc.

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

Not too much. Just keep an open-mind! The mannerisms of the Singaporeans are not what I am used to in NZ as we are more laid back and openly friendly. Singapore can be very fast paced at times.

What parts of the culture did you most appreciate?

The clean streets and clean public toilets – amazing.

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

People were respectful of other people's personal space which I appreciated. University staff were for the most part lovely (my professors) and very welcoming and understanding. The local students were also welcoming too. I never felt scared to ask anyone for help which was really nice.

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?

I feel like it would be absolutely fine! Everyone was very accepting of everyone.

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

Not at all!

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?

There were plenty of clubs available, especially targeted toward exchange students. These were for example; sports teams such as volleyball, basketball, ultimate Frisbee... etc. Also dance clubs, cheerleading were very common. I personally did not join any due to my study timetable.

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

Explore all of Singapore as much you can while you're studying and need to be in the country. However on freer weekends and holidays, explore surrounding countries. There is so much to see in SE Asia! It's all so diverse and beautiful. There are cheap flight deals all the time on airlines such as Tiger Air, JetStar, Scoot, Air Asia etc.

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

N/A

What volunteer or internship opportunities were there for students?

N/A

5 things to take to your host country or region

1	Camera
2	Raincoat + umbrella (it randomly downpours quite often)
3	A jumper for when you are at uni – they blast the A/C in there and you can get cold wearing just summer clothing
4	Photos of family and friends to keep in your room when you are homesick
5	Not a lot of luggage because YOU WILL GO HOME WITH THREE TIMES AS MUCH STUFF

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

1	Keep an open mind!
2	Put yourself out there and you won't regret it
3	Try new foods you would never think of trying
4	Buy an Ezy-Link MRT card for the subway, buses and you need these to print at NUS printers too
5	Make sure you have all your forms, photographs, photocopies etc ready before arriving

Top 5 Things to do

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

1	Marina Bay Sands Hotel – get a group of friends stay a night if you can and visit the infinity pool
2	Universal Studios
3	Eat Chilli Crab at Jumbo Restaurant in Clarke Quay
4	Travel to nearby countries when you are free
5	Haji Lane at night time

H: Personal Experience

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

This exchange was the best thing I have done for myself. I honestly can't express how proud I am of myself for going on this trip. I am so naturally shy and introverted and the past six months have helped me tremendously in terms of my self confidence. I've made some of the best friends ever, who I plan to continue to keep in touch with and eventually travel with again in the future. I stepped out of my comfort zone so many times and I'm so grateful that I did. I visited about 7 different countries during my time away, ate some amazing food, took a million photos and made so many amazing memories. I also learnt so much in my classes that I am able to take away and use this new knowledge in my future studies. I did feel homesick at times but that was completely normal and faded after a while. Although I was sad to leave my life in Singapore, it made me so much more excited to come home and appreciate everything New Zealand has to offer. I 100% recommend studying abroad to anyone!



