

# Singapore: Nanyang Technological University (NTU)

## Getting to Know Singapore:

Singapore is a small country located on an island at the tip of the Malay peninsula with a population of 5.5 million people. Singapore has a tropical climate and temperatures range from 70-90. It's very humid and rains just about every other day, so always have an umbrella with you!

Singapore is a very modern and diverse city. It is a former British colony so English is an official language and is widely spoken. However, the local dialect may be difficult to understand and "Singlish" is commonly used, which mostly consists of adding 'lah' to the end of words. The majority of citizens are of Chinese heritage, but there are sizable Indian and Malay populations as well- these cultures, religions, languages and holidays are all celebrated in Singapore society. It is also a very safe city. Singapore has strict laws on paper which can be enforced, so don't take risks. These laws include not littering, eating/drinking on public transportation, doing graffiti, or even chewing gum!

## Culture:

Women are generally shy while men are outgoing. Americans are viewed mostly positively and you should encounter very little if any negative reactions.

Singaporeans dress to impress. You may need to dress up when you go out, depending on your destination. In these cases you cannot wear shorts and must have closed-toe shoes. NTU has a dress code posted to their website, though it is typically enforced only during exams. Flip flops are popular though. Generally, men can wear shorts every day but need to have dressy clothes for going out. It is typically too hot to wear jeans and they are not acceptable attire for going out.

Although a modern city, things happen at a slower pace, with the exception of public transportation which runs on schedule!

The currency is the Singapore Dollar. You can check the exchange rate online at [oanda.com](http://oanda.com) or [xe.com](http://xe.com).

Tipping is not normal or expected. Singapore is very cash-based society, so it is recommend that you have cash on you at all times- credit cards are not widely accepted. Bargaining is common at markets, but not in shopping malls. Singapore is more expensive than neighboring countries.

## Pre-Departure

*NTU will provide information about this process, but here is some general information you need to know:*

- You will need to submit documents to NTU for your SOLAR pass. Please make sure to submit all required documents by deadlines!
- Have hard copies of your student pass information with you upon departure from the US.
- You will need a passport that has at least six months validity AFTER the end of your planned date of departure from Singapore.
- If you are a citizen of another (non-US) country, you will need to determine whether or not you are required to obtain a visa prior to your arrival in Singapore.

## Resources:

- Singapore's page in the CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sn.html>
- Travel Guides:
  - Lonely Planet: <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/singapore>
  - Fodor's: <http://www.fodors.com/world/asia/singapore>
  - Trip Advisor: [https://www.tripadvisor.com/Travel\\_Guide-g294265-Singapore.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Travel_Guide-g294265-Singapore.html)
  - Nomadic Matt: <http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-guides/singapore-travel-tips/>
- The US embassy's Singapore page: <https://sg.usembassy.gov/>
- The US State Department's page on Singapore: <https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/singapore.html>
- The *New York Times*' Singapore travel guide: <http://www.nytimes.com/travel/guides/asia/singapore/overview.html>

## First Days in Singapore

### *Arriving:*

Most flights from the US arrive between midnight and 3am. Some students have simply spent the rest of the night at the airport (ranked #1 in the world for several years!) and taken public transportation in the morning when it opens for the day. Others have made arrangements with their buddies to pick them up (see below). You could also stay at a local/airport hotel, though they are expensive.

There are many activities the week before orientation week, so arrive in time to participate! NTU will give you information regarding the first date that the dorms are available so unless you want to stay in a hotel/hostal, pay close attention to this information. Sign up for the buddy program through the International Office. The office will give your buddy your room key so that you can make arrangements to get into your room even if you have a late arrival. Contact any groups or organizations that you are interested in before the semester so that you can start participating as soon as you arrive.

From the airport, you can take the green MRT line to NTU. It takes around an hour and a half. You can also take a taxi, but they are expensive—around \$50 Singaporean dollars. If you do take a taxi, you may want to take one from the street outside the airport as it will be cheaper. Take a blue or red taxi as those are cheaper than limos or black taxis. It's about a 45-minute drive to campus.

## Academics and Campus Life

### *The School*

- NTU is home to around 27,000 students. Around 8,000 of these students are international and 500 of them are exchange students.
- Dorms are on one side of the campus
- There is a week-long break for fall and spring break.
- There are two sides to the campus and buses transit throughout campus
- The campus is located on the western side of the island and is one hour from the city center by train. The airport is 1.5 hours away by train.
- Libraries are closed on Sundays and generally close earlier than we would expect

- Make sure to get a map of campus to navigate—it's a huge campus!
- There is a clinic on campus
- Workout facilities are available on campus for \$60/semester. There's an Olympic-sized swimming pool outside.

### ***Classes:***

NTU pre-enrolls you in the courses from the list you submit with your application. You get the confirmed list 1-2 months before you arrive. However, most students do not get all of the courses that they want. It can often be difficult to get a schedule that works and get into classes—be persistent (and polite)! If you want to change you can do so upon arrival, it's easy to do so in the online portal.

Classes are pretty similar to UW-Madison—most are in a lecture format but some are discussion-based. The typical class size is 50 students. Classes run from 60 minutes to three hours. Classes generally have a lot less homework than UW-Madison and there's an emphasis on final exams which determine a large portion of your grade. There are lots of groups projects, and classes are recorded. Lab coats (for purchase) are required for courses that have a lab.

Room locations use an alpha-numerical code. Each one starts with an 'N' or 'S' to indicate whether it is in the "north" or "south" spine, followed by the building number and then room number. For example, N4137 would be in the north spine, building 4, room 137.

### **Exams:**

Finals represent the vast majority of your grade—sometimes as much as 75%! The rest of the grade typically consists of a midterm. The final exam schedule is available when you enroll in courses so make sure to check this as well. Exams are taken very seriously and are monitored by a proctor. You will be in a large room with students from several different classes and are assigned a desk number. Exams are usually two hours long. The exam period is two weeks long and you have a week break before exams. Ask about access to old exams, as they may be available for some courses. You must get your calculator approved before you are able to use it in an exam.

### **Housing**

You should plan to live on campus in the dorms as finding an apartment off-campus is difficult and **very** expensive. There are 18 dorms to choose from and most of them are located together in a group. The nicer and newer dorms are farther away. Most exchange students live in doubles, which are the most common type of room. Please respect the rules in the dorms. You will be asked to pay a large sum of money upfront to cover the housing for the semester—around \$700 USD, so prepare for this.

### **Applying for on-campus housing:**

Make sure to apply by their deadline (Singapore time!), if not earlier- housing is in high demand and if you miss the housing application deadline, you may not be able to live on campus. Roommates are assigned randomly.

Dorms typically come with the following amenities:

- Washing machines are free, but you have to pay for the dryer. It is also possible to hang your clothes.
- Not all dorms have air conditioning. However if it's available, you have to pay extra for it.

## **Daily Life**

### ***Transportation:***

Singapore has a fantastic subway system known as the MRT, which extends throughout the country. You will need to get an "Easylink" card for the MRT. You can travel to downtown in 40-60 minutes. The MRT opens at 5:00am and closes at 11pm or midnight.

There is no eating or drinking on public transportation- there is a huge fine for doing so. Two buses circle campus though most buildings are also connected by covered walkways.

### ***Food:***

The water is safe to drink in Singapore but not (necessarily) other countries in the region.

The food in Singapore is delicious and diverse—there are many kinds of cuisine which represent the varied cultures.

There are canteens on campus which are good options for meals since food on campus is subsidized so prices are generally lower than what you'll find elsewhere. There is also a McDonald's and Subway in case you need a taste of home—but be warned that they are expensive compared to Singaporean food. The menus tend to be in Chinese, with some English.

Eating out (off campus) is fairly expensive, with the exception of hawker centers, which are areas with many food vendors/stalls.

### ***Money:***

Cash: Many places won't exchange damaged US bills. The Boonlay MRT station often has the best exchange rates. It is not recommended to open up a bank account- it is more hassle than it is worth. MasterCard has typically been more widely accepted than Visa. Make sure you take some new, crisp US dollar bills- you may need these for departure taxes, visa fees in the region, etc.

### ***Technology:***

Laptop: It is recommended to bring a laptop with you to Singapore as computer access on campus is limited. It is not recommended to buy a laptop in Singapore.

Internet: Internet is available in the dorms and access is included in your dorm fee. Wi-fi is available only in the common areas. You can get free Ethernet cables from the dorm desk if you ask. Websites that stream cannot be accessed overseas.

Cell phones/communication: It is recommended to purchase a pay-as-you-go plan. Do not get an extended plan (like most people have in the US) as these are expensive and hard to get out of. You also need to have an unlocked phone to use a plan. SIM cards are cheap, around \$10 a month and you will need your passport to buy a SIM card. Singtel and Starhub are the two main cell phone providers in Singapore. It is possible to get free international minutes on your cell phone. Look for the 'super hot

deal' when recharging your phone. You can get a Skype phone plan for about \$3/month for unlimited calls. Viber is a great app for calling as well.

Adapters can be purchased at NTU for less than \$3.

### **Leisure/Things to do in Singapore:**

#### **Resources:**

- Tour Singapore: This is a free tour offered during orientation
- There is a Facebook group that organizes events each semester. There are good events to attend; they are fun and a good way to meet people.

#### ***Points of Interest/recommended activities:***

- The canteen is a major place for exchange students to socialize.
- Pulau Ubin is a small island off of Singapore that is great for hiking and biking.
- Sentosa: an area with man-made beaches, amusement parks, and beach volleyball. Beaches are not so good in Singapore, but are great in neighboring countries. Universal Studios is also located in Sentosa.
- Jurong Park – bird zoo
- The zoo. It is one of the best in the world and even has a night safari which is recommended.
- Horse races
- DNA helix bridge
- Chinatown

### **Traveling Outside of Singapore**

Singapore is a hub for many airlines including budget airlines, making traveling in the region cheap and easy. Tiger Airways, Jet Star, and Air Asia are all regional airlines with cheap rates. Scoot Airlines has many deals, especially on Tuesday mornings.

**You will need to stay in Singapore until you receive your student pass, which takes about one month.**

Past students have recommended staying after the semester has ended and traveling.

Travel agencies for travel packages are not recommended. It's easy to make your own arrangements!

During the Chinese New Year (in the spring term), you may want to visit a non-Chinese country since everything closes.

Visas: A number of countries require visas—make sure to research and apply in advance of travel! In particular, Vietnam, Myanmar, Indonesia, and China (not Hong Kong) all require visas. Vietnam has an option for visa-on-arrival, but you must still complete some paperwork in advance.

#### **Popular destinations:**

- Indonesia: Indonesia has an airport departure tax of \$20USD. Make sure that you budget for this when you leave the country. Indonesia requires a visa.
- Malaysia: You can take a bus or train to Malaysia.

- Philippines: The Philippines are beautiful and is easy to travel around since they speak English. However, parts of the country are dangerous and should be avoided. It is recommended to stay north of Cebu. Check the State Department website for travel warnings.
- Laos: Extremely beautiful. You can obtain a visa-on-arrival.
- Thailand: Very accessible/touristy. Lots of beautiful beaches. No visa required.
- Myanmar: A visa is required. Make sure to plan in advance and do research.

**Helpful websites:**

[Travelfish.org](http://Travelfish.org): a travel website dedicated specifically on Southeast Asia. This is a great resource for planning trips!

***Accommodations:***

- [Agoda.com](http://Agoda.com): This site has many listings for countries in Southeast Asia
- [Hostelworld.com](http://Hostelworld.com): A great site for finding cheap accommodation worldwide