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Erfahrungsbericht
zum Auslandssemester an der
James Cook University Singapore


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Introduction

After five years of studying Business Law in Bielefeld, I realized that I have to go abroad for a certain time in order to improve my qualifications and to broaden my horizon. Having passed all classes in my master course and having been close to graduation, it was the perfect time to gain experience in a foreign country before starting to work full-time. The main reason why I decided to go to Singapore was neither that I felt connected to Asia, nor was the JCU Singapore a partner university of the Fachhochschule Bielefeld. Singapore came to my attention as I searched for potential study abroad destinations on the websites of Gostralia!, which connects students from the German-speaking regions and Australian universities. Although I was interested in studying in Australia or the United States, I became very excited when I found out that James Cook University Australia has a branch in Singapore. The idea...
of living in a highly developed South-East Asian country with a westernized environment and multicultural society prompted me to apply for this great opportunity.

**Preparations**

The application process was uncomplicated. I could prove my level of English language proficiency by sending in my Abitur certificate. I applied with the help of the agent Gostralia! for the June 2015 intake about nine months in advance. There were a lot of things to consider. In my case the financing of the study term turned out to be the toughest issue because the tuition fees and costs for living in Singapore are quite high. Fortunately, I was eligible for Auslands-Bafög, which covered around two thirds of the total costs. My application for a DAAD-scholarship has been approved, too. However, I had to pay the tuition fees first, before I got the financial support. Therefore I applied for a student loan as I had not saved a lot of money. The other costs consisted of payments for the flight, accommodation, international health insurance and living expenses. If you want to explore Asia (Singapore has a very convenient location to do this), you need plenty of money for travelling as well. I would recommend to book a return flight several months in advance so that you can get a cheaper price.

International students have to apply for a student’s pass (visa-requirement) for their long-term stay. However, I entered Singapore with a tourist-visa which was valid for 90 days. The completion of the student’s pass was done together with the JCU in the university so I did not have to go to the immigration office in person.

**Accommodation**

In order to find a suitable accommodation, the JCU offers a pre-arrival system including accommodation requests and airport pick-up service for international students. I appreciated this opportunity as it made life very easy for me in the first days. Considering the high prices of renting, many students are forced to choose a twin-sharing room in an apartment which is often shared by four to seven people. While I had to pay 500 SGD (around 300 €) monthly for twin-sharing, one of my housemates had to pay more than 1000 SGD for a master room including his own bath-room. I was placed in the Ace-Suites, a hostel mainly occupied by students from JCU, and shared the apartment with people from India, Mauritius, Vietnam and China. In Germany I used to live in a twin-shared apartment, had a single room and paid less money. Sometimes I missed to have privacy and needed to get used to the new circumstances. In retrospect I can say that it was a very good and important experience to
live together with many students from different countries. As almost everything in Singapore is kept under surveillance, the hostel entrance and the rooftop also had a surveillance camera. This was supposed to discourage the tenants from making wild parties or bringing friends for staying overnight. Apart from hostels, there are a lot of other options to get a room but in most cases this is more expensive. I knew a lot of students e.g. from Denmark and Norway who rented condominiums which are more comfortable and have a pool in the inner courtyard.

**Life in JCU**

The campus is located in the east of Singapore. From my accommodation I could walk for 20 minutes or take a bus to reach the university. Every student was required to attend classes and to be on campus at least three hours per day, which was monitored by electronic fingerprint. This system seems to be very strict, but it was not a problem to leave Singapore for travelling when asking the JCU for permission. The study year is divided into three trimesters. Each trimester students usually attend four classes, so it becomes clear that you can graduate in a shorter time, compared to the German system based on two semesters per year. What I liked most about the JCU is the high number of international students coming from Europe, Australia, India, China and diverse countries of South-East Asia. Many of them told me they came to the JCU Singapore because you can complete a Master degree in just one year (three trimesters). In my opinion, the short time is also a downside of the programme and my biggest criticism of this system. During the lecturing period I had to do presentations and assignments for each subject, mostly at the same time. Furthermore I had to write final exams at the end of the term. That is why sometimes I felt stressed and could not enjoy my studies as I was just rushing from one assessment to the next one. Consequently the students do not have the time to go into depth and to learn more about the topics they are interested in, unless they want to give up their free-time.

As I already mentioned, the university consists of many students from different cultures, so I could improve my intercultural skills as I had to do a lot of group work. The lecturers put special emphasise that the students mixed the cultures when forming groups for presentation work. On the other hand I learned a lot about doing business in a multinational organization due to the subjects I chose:

- Managing Business in a Global Context
- Global Marketing
- People in Organizations
- Business Law
All of these subjects (except of Business Law) dealt inter alia with the complexities of global cultures and cultural theories and made me understand how business and management adapts to global culture environment.

Moreover the JCU encourages students to engage in clubs and campus activities which is also a great opportunity to make new friends and to develop and improve certain skills. I joined the JCU football team (Imagine to play a 90 minutes football match in the tropical heat, this was so exhausting) and helped younger students in English language matters as an English tutor. The Campus has a canteen with fresh food at affordable prices. I liked the wide offer of different food: You could choose between Economic Rice, Japanese, Chinese, Indian, Western and Muslim food. If you still did not find the right one or you just wanted to go out for having lunch, there was a foodcourt nearby the campus.

Life in Singapore

Singapore is unique and diverse. The population of around 5.5 million living in the small city-state consists of Buddhists, Christians, Muslims and Hindus. The majority of residents are of Chinese descent, some are either of Malay or of Indian descent and the rest of the population are expatriates and foreign domestic workers. This cultural diversity is also represented in the variety of food, dining is said to be the country’s national pastime. Indeed, I will miss the cuisine because the so called hawker centres (foodcourts) offer so much delicious food even at a small price. I could have lunch or dinner at any time I wanted to and
only paid 3-5 SGD (2-3 €). My favourite foodcourt was located near my accommodation and was a Chinese vegetarian, although I usually love to eat meat.

Indian and Malay food and a Chinese foodcourt

Actually I was very lucky to be in Singapore at this time because of several reasons. During the study term I had only contact to less than ten Germans so I spent most of the time with people from other countries. In my opinion this was very important for my time abroad, so you I could improve my intercultural competence and language skills quicker, instead of hanging around with Germans all the time. Furthermore Singapore celebrated their 50th national day on the 9th August. The celebrations culminated in an air show performed by the Singaporean air forces and in the end in a big firework. It has to be mentioned that on the previous weekends Singapore practised the National Day Parade, including the air show and the firework!! This amazed my fellow students and me, becoming witnesses of Singapore’s
greatness. Another highlight was the Formula 1 night race in September. For me it was the first time to watch a race and I had a very entertaining weekend because at the end of each race day famous artists gave a concert.

Air show at the National Day Parade

Grandstand Marina Bay at the Formula 1 race

Studying in Singapore means to have the chance to explore the rest of South-East Asia. There are convenient opportunities to travel from Changi Airport to the surrounding countries, e.g. with Tiger Airlines or Air Asia. I travelled to Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur and Melakka), and two times to Indonesia. At the end of the study term I was on vacation at Bali.
Studying in Singapore means also probably to be at the safest and cleanest place on earth, since the state has issued very strict rules concerning criminality and pollution, but this did not affect me in a negative way.

**Conclusion**

Reflecting my study abroad semester, I can say that it was the best time in my life. I have never regretted my decision to go to Singapore - quite the contrary - I experienced so many new things and it is true: I feel that I have become more mature and more self-confident after spending time in a foreign country. I can even imagine of working for a couple of years there, regarding the many German companies which settled in Singapore. There is a lot more to tell about this city but I think you should find it out yourself. However, I would definitely recommend you to study in Singapore.
Gerne verwirklichen wir auch deinen Traum von einem Studium in Australien, Neuseeland oder Asien!

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