

Opting for a Year-Long Exchange

My decision to participate in an exchange programme for two semesters rather than one was pretty much of a no-brainer on my part. This was because I felt that just four months abroad was barely enough to settle down and properly immerse oneself in a foreign culture. As it was, the general consensus among the NUS students who joined me in the second semester was that time had flashed by too past, especially as they were enjoying themselves. In comparison, being abroad for ten months enabled me not only to experience life not as a foreign student, but also and localise myself. This was large due to the fact that as the sole Singaporean student on exchange in the first semester, I had to mix around and engage with other locals and international students, which led to rapid acculturation. I was also able to choose my own hall to stay in as opposed to being placed in one with a closed-door policy limited to mostly international students (PGP, anyone?) Most importantly, I was able to experience all four seasons of a temperate climate, and I must say Autumn is arguably the most enjoyable in terms of both the weather and the scenery.

Loughborough

The Geography Department's newly signed departmental-wide exchange with Loughborough University in the UK is a timely agreement, as Loughborough has recently attained the position of 6th best University in the UK in the 2007 Times Good University Ranking Guide. Located in the East Midlands (giving easy accessibility to the rest of UK), Loughborough is a market town, the largest in the county of Leicestershire.

SEP students to the UK often prefer the bright lights of London (only a mere 1.5 hours from Loughborough by train) and universities in more established towns, but I feel that Loughborough as a campus university is the perfect choice for Singaporean students who have not had the opportunity to experience life studying in a sprawling green campus with a small but self-sufficient town. We do have our own shopping malls, but shopaholic Singaporeans are only a fifteen minute train ride away from the larger cities of Leicester and Nottingham (my lecturer in the Economy, Society and Space module informed the class the latter city has branded itself 'Shoppingham').

Loughborough is best known as the UK's premier tertiary institution for sports (students hobbling around on crutches are a common sight during the Inter-Hall Games season), with its students making up 30% of England's representatives for the World University Games and the University being indentified as a major player in the 2012 Olympics. Such a sterling reputation ensures that the school has the most modern and spectacular sporting facilities available for its students, and I strongly encourage NUS Geography students who have a passion for sports to take up this opportunity. Students who prefer to watch from the sidelines are not any less disadvantaged as the games spectators have just as much fun cheering their teams on, with the added bonus of the buff physiques of the sportsmen and sportswomen, the gender ratio of which is firmly in the fairer sex's favour.

On the travel front, Lufbra (as the students term it) has a strongly established Singapore Society and International Students Association which organise fortnightly parties at the Student's Union (a building equivalent to our YIH which houses not one but five clubs) and weekly weekend trips to cities such as Warwick, York, Lincoln, Bath, Edinburgh etc. I found it a practical arrangement to

spend my first semester exploring the UK and the second traversing Europe when my other NUS friends came on their exchange.

Geography at Loughborough

Staff at Lufbra's geography department often go out of their way to help international students with matters, and some members of the faculty are well-known in their field. Students who are considering pursuing a degree in physical geography might like that there are interesting modules with the occasional field studies component to be taken. While the learning curve for these modules may be steep, the curriculum is pretty enjoyable and novel enough to sustain interest. This can also be said for the other modules in general, which are taught from a euro-centric viewpoint and so help to increase perspectival outlooks.

Survival Tips: Dos

Locals in Loughborough are lovely and very approachable, but some might find the students slightly more distanced. Do show them you're actually proficient in English by initiating a conversation over the dinner table or a cuppa (alcohol, not tea), and you'll find that they're actually rather unassuming and friendly.

I have it straight from the SEP co-ordinator (Dr. Pow) that "you're not going there to study", so do try to accept invitations for gatherings and parties and organise a lot of your own!

On a more serious note, a one-year exchange involves a lot of planning and administrative issues to settle (mostly with the NUS side). Do comb through all the clauses and requirements listed in the respective web pages as there are a lot of traps that may prevent credit transfer and even graduation.

Pictures



Me at the sign to the entrance of the University after a night out.



Campus grounds during spring and autumn.



View from my window in Towers hall, the only multi-storey building in the entire town.



The NUS SEP students at the Singapore booth during International Day, held at the Student's Union.



With friends at the Chinese New Year party organised by the International Students' Association.



With friends.



At various gatherings with friends.



Easter travels to Paris, Amsterdam and Brussels



On trips to Athens, Santorini, Edinburgh and Dublin



On travels to Prague, Dublin and Edinburgh