

Look beyond the horizon

Ms Soon Jin Ning chose SMU's Lee Kong Chian Scholars Programme for its prestige and overseas exposure programmes

by grace ma

RIGHT from the start, Ms Soon Jin Ning, 23, knew that she wanted to pursue a career in banking and finance. She eventually chose finance and accountancy at Singapore Management University (SMU) as she felt that the university's interactive, seminar-style approach would sharpen her speaking and presentation skills.

During her first year, Ms Soon applied for and was awarded the Lee Kong Chian Scholarship, which covered all her tuition fees and provided her with opportunities to travel overseas for community projects, an overseas exchange programme with a partner university and a business study trip.

"The bond-free scholarship also played a huge factor in my decision as it would allow me to pursue my interests in the banking and finance industry upon graduation," she says.

The Lee Kong Chian Scholars Programme is open to both local and foreign undergraduates studying full-time at SMU, and scholars must complete two degrees in four years, one of which must be from the Lee Kong Chian School of Business.

Rich university life

For her business study trip, Ms Soon went to London, where students watched real-time operations and negotiations at the London Metal Exchange and Lloyds Bank headquarters, toured local museums and attended cultural workshops.

Her six-month exchange programme at Emory University in the United States was a "very meaningful" one too, says Ms Soon, as she sat in lectures by professors who were also business consultants to multinational companies.

Ms Soon also went on a one-week community service project in a mountain village in Lahu, Thailand, where the team travelled on mountain roads that hugged the edge of cliffs, and walked through muddy paths to reach the village. There, they helped the locals to draw up a tourism plan for their coffee and tea produce, and taught English to the village children.

On her own, Ms Soon volunteered as a camp facilitator for Children-At-Risk Empowerment, a welfare organisation dedicated to transforming the lives of wayward youth. She also signed up for a one-week trip to a Cambodian orphanage to teach the children handicraft and English.

She says: "Through all these community projects,



Ms Soon advises those considering scholarships to choose something that will allow them to pursue their passion.

PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

I learnt about different cultures and how not to take things for granted in Singapore. I also learnt empathy and leadership skills in leading and inspiring the children."

Sporty and outgoing, Ms Soon joined SMU's Ultimate Frisbee team and represented the university in local and overseas tournaments, as well as in an exchange programme with the frisbee team at the University of Western Australia in Perth.

The road less travelled

Her adventurous spirit spilled over to her academic life

too. While her peers graduated in May last year, Ms Soon extended her undergraduate studies by one semester to intern at Citibank Singapore in the area of global markets foreign exchange.

"I felt that it was better to expose myself to as many aspects of banking and finance before I graduated, than to graduate and realise I don't know which area to focus on," says Ms Soon, adding that the flexibility of SMU's academic structure in accommodating her extension was another attractive factor in her choice of school.

Since February, Ms Soon has been working as an analyst in DBS Bank's capital markets depart-

ment, where she helps companies, real estate investment trusts (REITs) and business trusts tap equity capital through initial public offerings (IPOs) and secondary market activities such as share placements, rights issues and other forms of equity offerings.

Ms Soon advises those considering scholarships to choose something that will allow them to pursue their passion.

"If you find yourself undecided or unwilling to commit prematurely, opt for scholarships without bonds instead. What you get out of your education depends on your individual goals."