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Headline: SMU, NTU expand list of countries for study-work stints abroad

## SMU, NTU expand list of countries for study-work stints abroad



SMU and NTU have expanded their overseas entrepreneurship programmes over the past two years, sending students to a wider list of countries. PHOTOS: ST FILE

Singapore Management University (SMU) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) have expanded their overseas entrepreneurship programmes over the past two years, sending students to a wider list of countries.

The students spend time at the hottest start-up landscapes to kick-start their own entrepreneurial journey.

NTU's Overseas Entrepreneurship Programme (OEP) has opened applications to New York and Boston in 2018, and is solidifying partnerships in Haifa, Israel, as well as Berlin, Germany, by the same year. This is in addition to current locations London, Beijing, Shanghai and Silicon Valley in the United States.

All OEP trips are for six months or one year.

Similarly, SMU's Entrepreneurship Immersion Programme (EIP) has added Jakarta and New York to its list of start-up hot spots that students visited this year, an expansion from two countries in its inception in 2015.

Students can now sign up for immersion trips to Belgium, Denmark's Copenhagen, Switzerland, Jakarta or New York, spanning 10 to 12 weeks. SMU hopes to expand the EIP to China, Kuala Lumpur, and Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam.

In NTU, undergraduates sign up for the six month or year-long internships through tech start-ups under NTUitive, the university's enterprise and commercialisation arm.

In SMU, students go through the Institute of Innovation and Entrepreneurship (IIE).

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## PRICELESS EXPERIENCE

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MR HAU KOH FOO, director of SMU's Institute of Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Selected students from both universities study and work overseas through these heavily subsidised programmes. This means they can gain on-the-job experience without putting their education on hold.

Most students from NTU return home to realise start-ups of their own or add valuable insights to existing ones. For example, 25-year-old NTU student Sean Chua came back from Beijing, China, with invaluable insights. He shared this with people whom he co-founded online marketing app sqkii with back in 2014.

In SMU, all students are required to pitch and introduce original start-ups to the Singapore market.

SMU student Nicholas Han, 25, co-founded Schaffen Watches, which produces customised watches, upon his return from Rialto, Belgium.

Mr Chua and Mr Han were both in their third year of studies when they went overseas.

Both SMU and NTU's programmes follow the National University of Singapore's Overseas Colleges (NOC), which has been around for over a decade.

NOC applications are open to both undergraduates and post-graduates across Singapore, China, the US, Switzerland, Germany, Israel, and Stockholm in Sweden. Applications open twice each year.

Students from NOC developed successful tech start-ups Carousell and PlayMoolah.

For both SMU and NTU, the overseas trips bridge important gaps for entrepreneurially inclined students. Professor Tan Ooi Kiang, NTU Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education, said students work with "experienced entrepreneurs as their sounding boards". This mentorship, in turn, helps students realise how to quickly solve problems that arise in their own start-ups in Singapore.

Students in SMU get a feel of navigating an overseas market, said Mr Hau Koh Foo, director of SMU's IIE. "Many of them tell us that the experience of living and working independently in a different culture is priceless," he said.

In the future, SMU aims to take in 40 to 50 EIP students per year.

NTU hopes to send 70 students on the OEP next year, and progressively reach 150 to 200 students annually in future.

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## Access to e-commerce start-up in China



Mr Sean Chua, a final-year electrical and electronic engineering student at NTU, in Jing Shan Park, Beijing, last year during his year-long internship at Jumei, a successful start-up in China.  
PHOTO: COURTESY OF SEAN CHUA

When Mr Sean Chua heard about a potential one-year internship at China's successful start-up Jumei, the Bachelor of Engineering student at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) took a big leap of faith.

The then 24-year-old dropped his exchange programme to the Czech Republic to pioneer the school's first overseas entrepreneurship programme in Jumei last year.

The programme in Beijing meant Mr Chua worked at every department at the e-commerce platform for cosmetics for two months each, from marketing to data analytics to community development.

"I was very hungry to learn, and built good rapport with the departments," Mr Chua, now 25, told The Straits Times.

He would often ask for work outside of the department he was in, making sure he kept up with everyone and learnt as much as he could. This meant sometimes running on three to four hours of sleep, but the budding entrepreneur did not mind.

"It was good for me to move around. I really got to know how the CEO operated his whole company from all departments' viewpoints," Mr Chua said.

Eventually, he was trusted by chief executive officer Leo Chen - an NTU alumnus - to lead a data analytics project.

"I spent two months comparing our product prices with competitors' and went over 30,000 product pricing records in total. Then, I gave a presentation in Chinese at the end."

His findings led to better pricing strategies, potentially bumping up sales for Jumei.

"It was really fulfilling," he said.

Being in China showed Mr Chua just how tiny Singapore's market is, making it a "humbling experience" for him.

He added that programmes like NTU's Overseas Entrepreneurship Programme (OEP) can empower Singaporeans to take their ideas to a more global market, acting to bridge the gap to entrepreneurial success.



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Mr Chua had three start-ups under his belt before going for OEP.

At 17, he read through finance reports while his friends were engrossed with computer games.

His first and second start-ups did not do so well, Mr Chua admits, but they were important stepping stones to his third start-up, sqkii, the marketing company behind the \$50,000 mouse hunt, which he co-founded in 2014.

He returned from OEP and shared many things with the sqkii team, from his observations about data analytics to advertising strategies in China.

Mr Chua is now completing his final semester in NTU. His fourth start-up project, MeUAsk, is a paid question-and-answer platform set to launch by the end of the year.

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## Stint in Europe showed value of social capital



Mr Mervin Ho, a final-year economics major with a second major in finance from Singapore Management University's School of Economics, sightseeing in London. He interned at supply chain financing start-up, Tallysticks, for a month last year. PHOTO: COURTESY OF MERVIN HO

A 10-week internship in Switzerland was an opportunity that Singapore Management University (SMU) student Mervin Ho Keng Mun, 24, simply could not pass up.

The School of Economics student, who is majoring in economics as well as finance, felt he would get valuable contacts if he got right into the financial hub.

Under the programme, Mr Ho got to sit in on entrepreneurship lessons in one of Switzerland's universities - School of Management Fribourg - for about a week.

For one month, he also interned at Tallysticks, a London-based supply chain financing start-up. After that, he went back to Switzerland to continue his lessons while still working for Tallysticks via online meetings.

"I had no defined role; as an intern I helped out with everything," Mr Ho said.

The trip had other highlights - like working in a culturally diverse start-up.

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Mr Ho worked with interns from South Africa and Spain, as well as his colleagues from Europe.

"Work was so vibrant and culturally diverse. It was interesting to learn about their various backgrounds," Mr Ho said.

He felt that London opened a lot of doors for him and going there has reaffirmed that a wide and strong social capital is essential.

Mr Ho said that ideas can be powerful, but knowing the right people to validate them can take such ideas to new heights.

He now feels the crux of a successful business is the people in it. Having complementary skill sets and mutual trust in one another is essential. "If you're a strong person and your idea is weak, you can always improve things. If you have a great idea and you have a weak team, things will be difficult to solve," he added.

When Mr Ho returned, his own big idea was to co-found Haste, a mobile payment application for shoppers to skip queues in retail stores.

He thinks that Singapore's start-up scene is more visible than London's, but aspiring entrepreneurs here can catch up with London by linking themselves to international programmes like SMU's Entrepreneurship Immersion Programme.

Mr Ho is now completing his final year in SMU. Haste is in the process of launching with two potential clients.