

## Soaking in the overseas experience

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UNIVERSITIES and polytechnics in Singapore say more students are going abroad for weeks or months for a range of activities, from work stints and exchange programmes to study and training trips.

Christabel Tan, for instance, spent two weeks last year attending classes in the Chinese city of Chengdu.

This year, the 20-year-old Nanyang Polytechnic student grabbed another opportunity to go on her first solo trip, to learn about entrepreneurship at Babson College in Boston, the United States.

Some polytechnics and universities here say at least half of their students go on overseas trips, and the numbers have more than doubled in recent years. Some, like Ngee Ann Polytechnic and Singapore Management University, have close to nine in 10 students going abroad.

More than 60 % of the Nanyang Technological University's (NTU) graduating cohort had overseas exposure last year, an increase from 48% five years ago.

Prof Er Meng Hwa, NTU's vice-president of international affairs, said the goal is to have eight in 10 undergraduates do so, as it "nurtures their multicultural skills".

It also "prepares them for the global workplace, where they are expected to work with people of diverse backgrounds", he said.

Some 2,500 Republic Polytechnic (RP) students went overseas last year, compared to 704 in 2009. At Temasek Polytechnic, 2,710 students went abroad in the latest academic year, up from 1,886 five years ago.

Sharonne Tan, assistant director of RP's office of student and graduate affairs, noted that students are making use of the variety of overseas programmes and funding schemes that have sprung up to help offset the cost of these programmes, which range in price from several hundred to thousands of dollars.

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These include the Ministry of Education's Opportunity Fund, which was made available to polytechnics last year.

There are also more types of trips on offer.

"In the past, it used to be only study trips. Now students can go overseas for friendly sports matches or training," she said.

"More companies, like engineering firms, airlines or hotels, are also giving Singaporean students the chance to work at their overseas locations."

Taking advantage of such opportunities, nearly 45% of Singapore Polytechnic's latest batch of graduates went overseas, up by more than 30 per cent compared to five years ago.

Similarly, more than seven in 10 National University of Singapore (NUS) students travel abroad now, compared to half five years ago.

NUS students who are eligible for financial aid can get funding for half the cost of the overseas programmes.

Those going on exchange programmes can also get a loan of up to S\$10,000 (RM25,900).

Ryan Tan did a six-month internship last year at a restaurant in Shangri-La Hotel in Beijing to understand the Chinese culture better.

"These overseas trips are a stepping stone as they help us establish connections before we start work," said the 20-year-old graduate of RP's restaurant and culinary operations diploma course.

Nanyang Polytechnic's Tan, a third-year food science and nutrition student, agreed.

"I don't travel much as my family is not well-off. When I entered poly, there were so many opportunities and bursaries that helped to cover the expenses."

"I love going overseas and seeing another land.

"We do many things in a certain way here in Singapore, but somewhere else, it could be done differently," she added. – Asia News Network