



RETURNEE OF THE MONTH

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2020

RENAE MEANA

Program: UVA Exchange: Yale-NUS and
NUS, Spring 2019

Major: 4th year, Global Development
Studies and Economics

Affiliations: Facilitator of Asian Pacific
American Leadership Training Institute
(APALTI) through multicultural student
services; ESL 6th grade tutor with Madison
House, former VISAS language consultant
and chair of Asian Student Union



WHY DID YOU GO ON THIS PROGRAM?

In my Global Studies classes, we discuss a wide range of theories when it comes to the economic, cultural, political, and social development of communities and countries all over the world. I wanted to immerse myself in a completely new environment and see theory in practice. After five semesters in Charlottesville and developing a comfortable routine, I wanted to push myself and develop a new "normal". The program at Yale-NUS was a perfect antithesis of UVA as a small school in an urban environment. Also, by being in Southeast Asia, there was a wide variety of classes to choose from when it came to topics specific to the region that I wouldn't have the opportunity to take at UVA.



RENAE MEANA

YALE-NUS & NUS
SPRING 2019

HOW WAS STUDYING ABROAD DIFFERENT THAN ANTICIPATED?

It truly felt like first year all over. It was surreal that I was on the other side of the world for school. Knowing that it was more permanent than a trip, was both nerve-wracking and empowering. Like first year, it took some time adjusting to how things run on campus like signing up for classes, where classrooms are, having new roommates, making new friends, and all that comes with being a new student. It felt like building up a whole new foundation. It was harder than expected figuring out how to strike a balance in all the different aspects of study abroad. There's a lot of give and take when it comes to doing classes, getting involved in campus activities and organizations, and travelling and exploring. It's easy to put pressure on yourself to get everything that you think you want to do done within the five months you are there. You can even get FOMO while abroad. Don't stress it and enjoy whatever you choose to do in the moment, you don't necessarily need to know what your next move is. Sometimes the best memories come from spur of the moment decisions.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO LIVE IN YOUR CITY?

I miss Singaporean public transportation so much. It was so convenient, affordable, and efficient, getting me anywhere I could possibly want to go. In the city, there are always events to experience, museums to explore, food to try, the options are limitless. It was especially easy to do things on a budget or for free as a student. One of the first weekends, a bunch of us went to Singapore Art Week which was a bunch of art installations and music and it was completely free. My roommate and I went to a free outdoor yoga session at night in the middle of the city during the light festival. For food or bubble tea, it isn't uncommon to find a meal under \$3 or \$4. There was always an opportunity to explore places off campus and the ease of taking a quick study break in the city on the weekends.

WHAT WAS YOUR MOST MEANINGFUL INTERACTION?

Over our recess week me and my roommate went to Hanoi, Vietnam. We went on a guided city tour with a local university student, just the three of us. It was such an incredible experience getting to see the city from the perspective of a local student our age. She told us that she had been giving tours as a way to practice English. We had such a casual conversation throughout the day, I talked about living in the United States and my roommate about France while our tour guide compared her own experiences. She taught us so much, from how to most effectively cross the road with all the motorbikes, to what to say in Vietnamese when you want to bargain, and where to get the best egg coffee. At the end of the tour she gave us hugs and we added each other on Facebook!



UNIVERSITY
of VIRGINIA

EDUCATION
ABROAD

RENAE MEANA

YALE-NUS & NUS
SPRING 2019

WHAT WAS YOUR MOST INTERESTING CLASS?

I was able to take such interesting classes, and many were applicable to my majors or interests! It was surreal being in a learning environment where I can see firsthand what was discussed. I took an Urban Studies class called Youth Urbanism which focused on how the youth interact with and impact the space of cities globally. Being in Singapore, one of the most urbanized places in the world, we discussed topics such as political voice and activism, mobility and migration, and precarity in the urban environment. The seminar had such engaging conversations as half of the class was international and the other half local Singaporeans. For the final project, my group did a research project on the underground music scene of Singapore. Through that project I was able to interview the owner of a hip-hop record café as well as an up and coming young Singaporean R&B singer who had won a national Youth Music Award. Another class I took was called Industrializing Southeast Asia. Each week we discussed the economic development and industrialization of a different East Asian or Southeast Asian countries. During my semester I was privileged enough to travel to Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines after learning about their histories and economic development.

HOW DID YOUR EXPERIENCE CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR GROWTH?

My confidence in my independent problem solving skills has increased tremendously. I find myself no longer feeling limited in what I can do on my own. Something that I really enjoyed while in Singapore were the independent explorations of the city that I would do every now and then. I would take days to myself and get lost on the MRT and see where I'd end up and go from there. I did a lot of stumbling upon shopping centers and food courts. One day I'd find myself in the middle of a chaotic flea market, and then another day searching for an Indonesian donut I was really craving.



UNIVERSITY
of VIRGINIA

EDUCATION
ABROAD

RENAE MEANA

YALE-NUS & NUS
SPRING 2019

DID YOU BRING ANY TRADITIONS OR HABITS BACK WITH YOU?

I have always enjoyed eating and the experience of sharing a meal with others. While abroad, I was surrounded by quite a few foodies. Singapore takes pride in its quality and variety of food. They really appreciate the social gathering of eating and the effort put behind the food no matter how simple. Sometimes the most memorable moments are at the table eating really good food. Regardless of what true foodies think of McDonalds, McDonalds abroad is always great. Singapore specifically has a sandwich called McSpicy and pandan soft serve. It was late at night when all of a sudden me and a couple of other students were craving some fast food. Over McSpicys we talked about our own cultural identities and how our experiences of Singapore and Asia had varied. It was such a simple meal, but the discussion all of a sudden got super deep. I always make sure to make the most out of the meals I share with others.

WHAT WOULD YOU TELL A STUDENT WHO'S CONSIDERING STUDYING ABROAD?

If you have the opportunity to study abroad, do it! You will not regret it. It allows for tremendous self-growth. It is incredibly easy to be hyper-focused on what you're experiencing at UVA. As students, one can get so caught up with classes and extracurriculars that it's easy to forget that there is so much going on in the world beyond the classroom and Grounds. My study abroad experience allowed for a lot of self-reflection, kept me grounded, and made more evident to me the numerous lives people lead globally. Study abroad really broadened what I see possible for myself in the future. Make the most of every moment you have. Each experience can be a learning experience if you allow it to be.



UNIVERSITY
of VIRGINIA

EDUCATION
ABROAD