New environment, amazing race & host family

For me, the first impression of Singapore to me is a very modern and high density country. Even if I arrived to this place at night; I could still feel that atmosphere is full of energy. However, as a foreigner, I still need some time to immerse myself in to this new environment no matter for language or the culture. Fortunately, due to the completely plan from SMU, exchange students like us get good care from different society and receive many fantastic event news from school. Later, I will explain the detail of two most impressive events-amazing race and host family program.

First, amazing race is an interesting city tour to know Singapore famous spots more. This event comes from a SMU CCA group, Caretaylst. They take care of our scholars since they represent SMU to take the responsibility to welcome and educate us. In this special event, they show our scholars around in a form of competition, a trip full of exciting memory and delicious traditional Singaporean food. Caretaylst bring us to little India, Clarke harbor, China town and so on. During the time, we know the culture and history of those places. Of course, we also take many pictures with those special statures such as Merlion and traditional food like Fujian Mee. Besides, it helps us know the other scholars more and build up our relationship. I do really appreciate that SMU find such a great CCA group to help us.

In addition to amazing race, the host family program also helps us a lot. In my previous experience, in my home university, they don’t provide this kind of service since they will arrange those exchange students to dormitory. However, SMU still does that. In this program, I was assigned to a SMU professor, Mok as my host family. From that, I know how normal Singaporean spends their time. Besides, he also taught how to soak up in these new surroundings. Besides, he also encouraged me to travel to near countries to explore more. Due to his suggestion, I was not so worried about the life here and feel more comfortable with socializing with new people.

All in all, since SMU set up the greatest plan for our scholars, all of us get the good care and fall in love this new place.
Every school has its own feature and uniqueness and SMU is not an exception. However, the culture of SMU is much different from my home university so that I spend much time to understand and accept that. As the dean of OIR said, exchange students will encounter several phases. After the first phase – honey moon period was gone, I started struggle for my school life.

The first and biggest problem is instant speaking. In SMU, I must face to every professor and interact with them. We must show the name card first and always be well-prepared for answering the any unexpected questions from professors. For me, the reason why it is a big problem is language. In my home university, almost every course is instructed in Mandarin. In the beginning, I didn’t catch professors often and not dare to ask any question for not understanding. Then, the result is that when I was asked question from professors, I did not know how to reply and feel embarrassed for that. Therefore, I just tried to talked to other exchange student friends and discuss how to conquer this problem. After that we start to practice English more and use free time to talk exchange experience here. In the end, we start to go back to the track and feel little better in the SMU instant speaking culture.

In addition to instant speaking, the meeting sea culture is very special for me. In Taiwan, when we take 7-8 courses in one semester, generally, we will not have more that 2-3 group project so we are familiar with self-working. Compared to my home university, every module here is packaged with at least one project and those projects take students lots of time to discuss, argue and debate. Just like the previous problem, I still can’t follow my team mates. Thus, I turned to the teaching assistant for help and asked her advice. She told me that I should try to interrupt the other people when I could not follow them. She said that it’s everyone’s responsibility to not to leave anyone behind. After that, I tried to ask question when I did not understand what are they discussing and the feedback is quite pleasant. They always answer me in a positive way.

Although I start to face more and more challenge here, I am still happy for them. After all, being able to step out of comfortable zone and cooperate with different countries people is very important for me.
Community Service & Communication

During the time, some scholars and I finished our community service project, Revatilize. In this event, we help those old people to paint their house. During the process, I learn how to contribute to the older community and learn the importance of communication. It’s a very impressive and happy experience.

In the morning, each group is taught to finish first meeting by noon. I was paired with another Japanese boy together because the old woman could not speak English and I can act as bridge between them. Thus, being a translator is not as easy job for me and we also communicate with each other when things are difficult to be explained in English. During the time, the old woman discussed the education issues in Singapore with me. For, example, we compared the history of education system between Singapore and Taiwan. It is really a happy experience for me since it let me know Singapore better. At the same time, while I paint for the house, I also chat with Japanese boy to talk about their painting tradition such as painting timing and colors. Successfully, we finish our first time before noon. After the landlord feel quite pleasant about our work, Japanese boy and I got the temporary break and went out for food.

However, when we just came back after lunch, we found that landlord was not so happy. The reason is that landlord mistook that we would go out and not came back for residue work. Although Japanese boy and I felt innocent about this thing since we already told that we would be back before left the house, we did not argue for that. The reason is simple because Caretaylst already taught us that we should not argue for some things like the old people are easy to forget what they have heard. Therefore, we just luckily meet this thing. After explaining the whole story to the landlord and calm her, we continue our work. After the second time painting, she was really happy the result and treat us with fruits.

In the whole community service, I learnt how to communicate different age, country, and gender people. At the same time, we understand the meaning of serving better. After all, to make the people being served happy is the most important thing.
Bali trip

All works and no play makes Jack a dull boy. After experience the stressful learning life in SMU, the words from my host family, Mok pop up again, try to take the free time to travel to near countries. For that, I plan to my life first time oversea travel with other scholars. No matter for planning or traveling are unforgettable memories for us.

Good plan brings a good trip experience and all of our group member agree with this sentence. Therefore, four of us take different responsibility in a group. Someone deal with air ticket, and some tackle handle card-rental and route planning and the other people try to consult more people’s traveling experience in the internet to make sure the quality of travel. Due to the cooperation, I become more familiar with them and back up each other because some of them start to take exam at that time. Finally, we took the same plane from Singapore to Bali.

In this trip, lots of exciting and interesting thing happened to us. For example, someone was a rookie traveler and almost forget to bring his passport to the Airport. Then, this thing made him check in custom in last 3 minutes and let everyone very nervous. Besides, we also tried to explore many good restaurants in Bali suburban. While we tasted it, we also introduced our traditional food in our home town to each other. While we were on way from location A to location B, we also took the chance to learn each others’ mother language for fun.

After the trip, we became very good friends. We even gathered together for studying the midterm exam. Furthermore, we also made agreement that we would go to each other’s countries for travel and local people there need to act as tour guide. For us, the trip really bright our exchange life and build up the so called cross culture friendship.
After half term pass, the midterm presentation is coming. Before that, it is inevitable that we have lots of meeting and preparation for that. Fortunately, I can cooperate with local students and European students within one team here. This relationship brings about the culture conflicts since different countries people have their own approach. Later, I will mainly focus on punctuality and multitasking issue.

Basically, the punctuality issue often causes serious conflicts no matter in which group. In my observation, it is very high possibility that Singaporean team mates will be late. Generally, an about fifty percentage will be late for 15 minutes. However, there is higher than 20 percentages will be late for 1 hour. Those things cannot be accepted by European students. For them, punctuality is very important for personal reputation. When such things happen again and again, those Europeans start to lose their trust on Singaporean. It results in conflicts in the future meetings. Even if the quality from Singaporean is not bad, those European still does not regard it as acceptable. Then they will start to fight for that. Then, they just waste a lot of time and low productivity. That behavior also destroy team atmosphere and embarrass other team members.

In addition to punctuality, multitasking is also nightmare for us. Due to the training of high competitive society, most of Singaporeans are good at multitasking. However, when this habit comes across European, it becomes a nightmare. For example, when our team just rehearsed for the midterm presentation, while Europeans speak, Singaporean still watched their screen for the other things. Without the eye-contact and lack of trust, those European thought Singaporean do not care about this rehearsal but the trust is that Singaporean just pay attention their by ear not eyes. In the end, they just got fighting again and the situation become chaos.

For me, those may not be so happy but I think such difference is my key take-away. That is what I can’t learn in Taiwan. In one word, I still appreciate that I can face this kind of thing when I am young.