

Campus Asia Field Study in Singapore



In February 2026, I participated in the Social Innovation Field Study in Singapore as part of the CAMPUS Asia Program. Over the course of five days, I perceived Singapore not only as a highly developed city, but as a carefully designed social system.

What made this experience especially meaningful was that I had actually lived in Singapore for more than 4 years as a child. Because of that, I thought I already knew much about this country. However, as a child, Singapore was simply just a place where I lived, and never questioned how the city was built, how different culture co-exist, and what historical events shaped the current society.

Returning in 2026 as a university student taking part of Campus Asia Field Study, this program provided new understanding to current Singapore through official visits to social enterprises, academic lectures at Nanyang Technological University, and independent exploration of multicultural districts as well as remnants of war. From these learning opportunities I began to understand how Singapore integrates social innovation, historical memory, and multicultural coexistence into its national identity.

Day 2:



By the time we landed at Changi Airport, it was already the second day of our program. My first impression was the airport's organization and cleanliness. Everything felt structured and efficient, which immediately reflected how carefully planned Singapore is as a city. As we traveled by bus toward the city center and visited Little India and Arab Street, I began thinking more consciously about cultural intelligence. Seeing how different cultural districts were located so close to one another made me reflect on how multiculturalism in Singapore is not accidental, but intentionally structured.

One comment from our tour guide stayed with me. He mentioned that the buildings in Chinatown, Arab Street, and Little India were provided by the government in all similar architectural structure, but diverged into distinctive designs. That detail made me realize that urban planning itself plays a role in shaping equality among culture. This governmental effort demonstrates how treating communities equally while still preserving their unique identities is possible. This helped me understand that multicultural coexistence in Singapore is supported not only socially, but institutionally.



The visit to Dignity Kitchen was one of the most impactful experiences of the program for me. The founder of Dignity Kitchen gave us a speech on what a social enterprise is and how they train individuals with disabilities, equipping them with practical skills and future employment opportunities. Rather than offering charity, it provides meaningful work, income, and dignity. What stood out to me was how naturally this social mission fits within the hawker center environment. By integrating inclusive employment into a food court, Dignity Kitchen shows that social innovation does not have to be separate from daily life, rather it can function within existing systems in a sustainable way. During our visit to the Dignity Kitchen, we had opportunities to learn Singaporean sign language, and actually interact with workers using what we learnt. This experience will forever be meaningful in my life as a social innovator, especially as it was my first ever interaction with a language I have never kept in touch with.



Later that evening, during our independent study time, I visited another hawker center on my own. Sitting among families, workers, and students from different ethnic backgrounds, I noticed how naturally people shared space, and enjoy cuisines from different countries. I began to see hawker centers as more than just places to eat, but rather a social function as social equalizers. I very enjoyed being a part of such place, and I look forwards in going back one day.

Day 3:

On the third day, we visited Nanyang Technological University.



Professor Yeow Hwee Chua's lecture provided an academic perspective on Singapore's economic development, while Dr. Gary Lit spoke about the untold stories of the Japanese Occupation in Malaysia and Singapore. Listening to the discussion about the Japanese Occupation as a Japanese student was a humbling experience. Many of the personal and local perspectives shared in the lecture were not something I had deeply encountered in Japanese education. This lecture required me to listen carefully without defensiveness and to recognize that history is remembered differently depending on national context. Furthermore, I reacknowledged the importance of understanding



history through different perspectives and the heritage of passing on true stories across generation and country.

That evening, after returning to the hotel, my friend and I explored Arab Street. A step inside the street completely changed the atmosphere, more colorful, lively, busy, and importantly, with the Sultan Mosque standing prominently. What made me surprised the most was, the Haji Lane. Rather than being dominated solely by Arabic culture, it reflected a mix of global influences, including Korean dessert shops and international brands, which reflected Singapore's layered identity.

Day 4:

On the fourth day, I explored Chinatown and later visited the Battlebox at Fort Canning. The Battlebox experience left a strong emotional impression on me. Through immersive audio explanations and the use of red and blue lenses to view contrasting British and Japanese perspectives, I became aware of how history can be framed differently depending on narrative position.



Standing in the underground bunker where the British surrender was decided, I felt a quiet sense of discomfort. It was not because of the dim lighting, but because the space had been preserved almost exactly as it was left. The walls, the narrow rooms, and the visible bullet marks and scratches made the history feel very real as it was directly conveying the tragic trace. As a Japanese student, I was confronted with the reality of Japan's aggression from another country's viewpoint. This precious experience showed that cultural intelligence involves acknowledging historical responsibility and understanding the emotional weight that history carries in other societies.



Throughout the program, I realized that Singapore's success lies not only in economic growth, but in systems design, including city and communities. Social innovation in Singapore was visible in enterprises like Dignity Kitchen, in urban planning showcased at the Singapore City Gallery, and in cultural districts that structure coexistence. Most importantly, I developed a deeper sense of cultural intelligence. Not simply appreciating the diversity, but rather the respect to each other, especially when confronted with historical complexity. Moreover, Singapore taught me that social innovation is not only about creative ideas, and it is about building systems that sustain dignity, harmony, opportunity, which leads to sustainable city development. By observing how Singapore integrates development, multiculturalism, and historical awareness, I began to reconsider how societies can intentionally design inclusion.