A Singapore evangelist

Swiss student Sabrina Risch tells KELVIN SAM there are lots of things she loves about Singapore

"LOVE Singapore. So says final-year business management student Sabrina Risch, who spent four years studying here. Sabrina is currently studying in Saint Gallen University, spends her vacations in Singapore, and even had the chance to meet up with Singaporean students from the Saint Gallen-Singapore Management University (SMU) programme.

Although Sabrina is currently studying in picturesque Switzerland, she hesitates little in waxing lyrical about Singapore’s selling points: namely, Singapore’s courtesy and efficiency.

"Singapore is one of the easiest countries for a European to live in. Everybody speaks English, everyone is just so polite and the supporting infrastructure is amazingly reliable. Everyone is always willing to help me whenever I’m lost," says Sabrina. "Buses here come on time, the trains are accurate right down to the last minute, and there’s just so little bureaucracy!"

The Swiss student goes on to relate her amusing experience with Singapore’s efficient competencies.

"This snake crawled into the garden of our bungalow. Naturally, my mum and I were terrified and we didn’t really know what to do about the snake. Fortunately, our Chinese neighbours knew the telephone numbers for Pest Control and called them for us. They arrived within ten minutes and took away the snake without any fuss. I never felt more impressed with the way things work in Singapore!"

Pest control issue aside, Sabrina was also impressed with the academic rigour displayed by the Singaporean students and the melting pot of cultures evident in the local universities here.

"The students in Singapore seem to be working really hard. Every time I talk to my friends here in Singapore, they are either working on their projects or preparing for examinations," she says. "And it’s nice to see students of so many different races studying together. It’s rare to experience so many different cultural holidays without seeing any racial conflicts."

Although Sabrina has never worked on projects with Singaporeans before, her friends were all too ready to tell her stories about the differences in working styles. According to Sabrina, European students tend to be more open to criticism and will speak their minds during project meetings. In contrast, Singaporean students tend to be on the diplomatic side and would strive to avoid potentially awkward encounters by preparing an entirely different proposal instead and suggesting that they use it.

"It’s pretty funny, really. My Swiss friends would leave their first project meeting feeling they had deeply insulted their Singaporean counterparts and ending up feeling really guilty. But that’s the challenge of working with different people. You always end up learning new perspectives," she says.

No xenophobic loner, Sabrina also enjoys hanging out with her Singaporean peers. She recalls nostalgically her Friday nights spent playing sports, watching movies with her local friends and having late suppers at Newton Circus hawker centre.

"I can’t eat seafood, so I would always order chicken rice. I love the fragrant smell of freshly cooked chicken," she says.

Sabrina is currently on an exchange programme with Bocconi University and will be graduating next October.

She says she is working towards a consulting career in Singapore, after graduation. And freshly cooked chicken rice probably won’t be her only motivation."