SINGAPORE : 48 students from the Southeast Asian region have just become Singapore Scholars.

They will be doing their undergraduate studies under the Singapore Cooperation Programme, which was set up to bring the ASEAN member-states closer and boost understanding among the younger generation.

The Singapore Scholarship aims to help foster a sense of identity among the 10 ASEAN members.

It also seeks to encourage learning from one another.

18 year-old Thai Natapa Phruthisaranphong is one of the 48 recipients this year, and will be studying Business Management at the Singapore Management University.

She is no newcomer to Singapore, having visited the country twice before on holiday.

She said, "It's (a) safe and good place, my parents are not very worried about me even if I come home late. In Singapore, it's a mix of Asian cultures and so it feels more like home in Singapore, than being in Europe or America."

19 year-old Lay Seak Meng from Phnom Penh hopes to return to Cambodia and contribute to his home country as a civil servant in the future.

He will be doing Business Administration at the National University of Singapore.

He said, "I can tell other ASEAN scholars about my country...and others, I can listen to them as they tell about their countries. It is nice as we can grow our friendship among member countries....Singapore is also a cosmopolitan country...many nationalities here, so what a good place to improve my communication and leadership skills."

400 scholarships have been awarded to young men and women from the other 9 ASEAN countries since the initiative kicked off eight years ago. - CNA/ms