

Starting your career in **Singapore** Country Guide for International Students



You chose to study in the United Kingdom. You are beginning to think about what your options are after graduation. Building on an excellent international education you are returning to your home country, Singapore. You stand at the beginning of an exciting career, but what are the steps you need to take in order to find a suitable job, and where do you find the information you need?

This careers profile provides you with practical advice about returning to work in Singapore to help you make a successful start in your career in the Singapore labour market. Included are key facts about current trends and jobs in Singapore industry, advice about seeking employment in Singapore, hints and tips for making a successful application, and helpful information sources.

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Country profile

Singapore has in recent decades become one of the most prosperous countries in the world. Its port is one of the busiest; its GDP per capita equals countries in Western Europe and it has strong international trading links. Singapore's real GDP growth was nearly 7% before the financial crisis hit in 2008, which lowered the GDP growth significantly. However, overall Singapore has a steady economy compared to other South East Asian countries, attracting investments with strong exports in pharmaceuticals, technology information and medical technology.

In early 2009, the Singaporean government already had plans to recover from the financial crisis and re-establish Singapore's position as South East Asia's financial and service hub, and it has done very well in regaining market strength, mostly through tourism and manufacturing. There was a 16% increase in GDP in comparison between the first quarter 2009 and first quarter 2010.

KEY FACTS: The Singaporean economy

GDP real growth 2009:	3.1%
GDP per capita 2009:	US\$53,200
Labour force 2009:	3.01 million
Unemployment rate:	2.1%
Major sectors of occupation:	Services, including Tourism (79.2%), Industry, including Manufacturing (20%)
Main trading partners:	Malaysia, Indonesia, China, USA, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea.

KEY FACTS: The Singaporean graduate labour market

Average age at graduation:	23 years
Average graduate starting salaries 2009:	US\$20,135 annually
Average working week:	Monday to Friday, maximum 44 hours (full-time)
Holiday entitlement:	Annual leave depends on years of service plus 11 days of national holidays

Benefits

Benefits of a UK qualification

Possibly the largest benefit which all international students receive when studying at one of the over 100 universities in the UK, is the fact that UK universities have some of the most renowned and prestigious histories of higher education in the world. Even if a graduate does not study at one of the more famous institutions, the graduate can return to their home country safe in the knowledge that no matter where they look for work, their qualifications will be highly respected. This is also useful in job interview situations, in which your study in the UK can come into conversation as a point of interest and as an example of experience in situations of teamwork, cultural awareness, when possibly you were outside of your comfort zone.

Furthermore, your experiences in writing and reading English are extremely valuable in the job market. As an added benefit, you will no doubt have been exposed to a variety of accents and dialects during your study stay, making you more open to the English language than you may have realised.

Case study:

When I got to my place I would be living for a year, it was a bit of a culture shock and took several months to get used to. But I think it is the same with most things, the more you put in, the more you get out. I threw myself into everything I could, making new friends and contacts along the way. On my return home I found that I had a new sense of confidence in dealing with people, one which was in my attitude at my job interviews, and with my good diploma I think certain helped a great deal in finding a place on a graduate scheme in the banking sector

Benefits

Graduating: Searching for work

Not long ago, student life and job finding was a far simpler procedure. Graduates would simply leave university, either looking for work through friends and family, a large company or a local business, and often step into a full-time job after an interview. These days, a wider variety of options exist which match the wider variety of jobs and the ease of travel which is available to the worldly student. As the number of students increases, so does the quality of the competition. It's tough out there. Many graduates having just left university know this, whilst others are soon to find out. Since so many new university leavers have a career path in mind which they may have had for many years, the competition is fierce in many of the desirable graduate schemes. This is more the case in the UK than almost anywhere else. However, one benefit which you as an international student have is that you have a home country to which you can return.

The lack of vacancies in the UK has led to many British students leaving for work further afield, often with little experience of the language in that country outside of the native English speaking countries. For example, in China whilst there are some international companies which accept English-only students, the vast majority will prefer a candidate with some basic Chinese.

It can be difficult to come across vacancies in graduate jobs, full-time occupation is hard to find without experience and most find that internships can involve heavy competition. All is not lost however! Most graduates find that the main issue is simply knowing where to look, and this guide hopes to point you in the right direction.

Check out the '**More Information**' section to see handy links with tips and advice in the search for work.

Main routes to employment

Getting started

As a graduate looking for work in Singapore, you should use a variety of strategies to stay updated with the newest jobs.

Online recruitment and vacancy websites:

- Best Jobs: www.bestjobs.com.sg/
- Career Compass: <http://app.careercompass.gov.sg/front/home.aspx>
- JobsDB: www.jobsdb.com.sg/Singapore
- Jobstreet: www.jobstreet.com/
- Monster: www.monster.com.sg/
- SingaporeJobsonline: www.singaporejobsonline.com/
- Singapore Job Search: www.sgjobsearch.com/

Social networking

Social networking has become an increasingly common and important part of seeking work, especially with the social media generation. Sites such as Facebook.com and LinkedIn.com have flourished into everyday use for graduates and employers alike, in order to find the right person for the job. Graduates looking for work in their home nation may already be aware of the value of such sites, and may be aware of specific sites which are specialised in their own country. Graduates can place details of themselves including their job experience, education level, home/current university as well as a photo if preferred. On some of these sites they can also search for jobs according to their specific interest or area of study. What is clear is that graduates should certainly take the time to discover the potential job opportunities which these sites offer, both socially and at a socio-professional level. The following list of examples is not exhaustive, and contains websites with varying emphasis on professionalism and social networking.

Main routes to employment

Sites worth checking out (global):

- www.cmypitch.com
- www.ecademy.com
- www.efactor.com
- www.facebook.com
- www.Linkedin.com
- www.myspace.com
- www.plaxo.com
- www.spoke.com
- www.ryze.com
- www.ziggs.com

Newspapers can also be a helpful source when it comes to job-hunting. The weekend editions often have a special recruitment section and are filled with vacancies.

Key newspapers to look for:

- Berita Harian
- Lianhe Zhaobao
- The Business Times
- The Strait Times

Many vacancies are not actually advertised in newspapers or magazines. Therefore, the use of alternative sources, persistency and well developed detection skills will help you to discover the hidden jobs.

Main routes to employment

Graduate jobs/Careers Fairs

An interesting way of finding work or further education is through graduate fairs. With varying focuses in each event, graduates can find themselves coming face to face with companies of interest, and may even find interest in something which was not previously considered.

Graduate fairs are also a good opportunity to find out about graduate schemes being offered by companies and what these entail.

Many fairs offer other facilities such as CV workshops, letter writing tuition and a chance to network with individuals representing companies of differing sizes and reputations, thus they can offer a good learning opportunity even if you struggle to find a company suited to you.

Many universities in the UK hold their own fairs near the end of the spring/summer term and throughout the summer, so it is well worth getting involved and putting yourself out there.

There may also be fairs in your home country, whether a national event or a university which is local to you, so keep your eyes and ears open.

You may find the following websites useful for locating fairs:

- www.careerseries.com.sg Career & Education 2010/2011
- www.ntu.edu.sg Nanyang Technological University of Singapore
- www.nus.edu.sg Singapore National University
- www.singaporejobfair.com A site with affiliation to many Singaporean fairs
- www.smu.edu.sg Singapore Management University

The main source for vacancies, information and tips concerning job applications in Singapore is the Internet. When searching the Internet for job offers and vacancies, it is advisable to bookmark web pages and re-visit them regularly. Make use of email alert services offered by online resources to stay updated with the newest jobs.

Alternative sources of information on jobs and companies:

- Singapore Business Directory: www.12zsingapore.com
- Times Business: www.timesbusinessdirectory.com
- The Yellow Pages: www.yellowpage.com.sg is both online and in print and offers business information

Main routes to employment

When looking for a job, it is important to extend your network of contacts in Singapore. Let your relatives, friends, former professors and teachers, neighbours and other acquaintances know that you are searching for a job and tell them what kind of job or position you are looking for. Try to attend careers fairs, and join professional networks connected both with your university (such as alumni networks) as well as online professional networking sites, to help you get in touch with valuable contacts.

It is advisable to register with any employment agency up to one year before the date of your return to Singapore. Applications for a specific role, however, should be sent no sooner than one month before your scheduled arrival back in the Singapore.

The right skills and competencies

The multicultural society in Singapore encourages employers to look for open minded employees. Your educational background and communication skills are important for getting a job. Having studied in the UK is a significant additional strength, so draw attention to your international study experience. And remember, the 'Time is Money' attitude adopted by many in the Singaporean business world is extremely important, so an efficient working style and appropriate core skills should be highlighted.

Most wanted:

- A positive attitude is very much desired.
- Strong communication and negotiation skills.
- Being open, honest and respectful.
- Leadership qualities as well as the ability to work in a team.
- Time management and organisational skills.
- Employers generally evaluate also a candidate's personal fit with the prospective organisation.

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Main routes to employment

The application letter

A letter of application should evoke the recruiter's attention. It should make the potential employer want to look at your application in more detail, to read your résumé and hopefully invite you for an interview. Precision, straightforwardness and honesty are critical when writing your application letter in Singapore. Your letter should explain your motivation for applying and whilst portraying the competencies and skills you have gained during your studies, through previous work experience or elsewhere.

Usually an application letter is divided into three sections. First, mention the vacancy you are applying for and where you found the vacancy, as well as your highest qualification or academic achievement. In the second section, give concrete examples of your education and experiences; show enthusiasm but avoid empty phrases. In the last paragraph, mention your résumé and the other supporting documents you are including with your application, such as:

- A recent photo
- Copies of educational qualification certificates
- Testimonials
- A record of your extracurricular activities (could also be included in the résumé itself)
- Copy of your passport/birth certificate

Do not forget to thank the reader for his/her attention and try to ensure your respect for the reader is apparent throughout.

The résumé

The résumé is a tool which you can use to secure an interview with the employer; it is a way of marketing yourself. It should not be more than three pages long, and should usually be in reverse chronological order, so that your most recent experiences and education/ employment are at the beginning. Your résumé should list your personal details, education and employment history, relevant skills, qualifications, and extracurricular activities.

With regard to personal information, name, date of birth, gender, marital status and number of children (if any) can be provided as well as contact details such as telephone, email and mobile phone details. This information is not all necessary but may be used and is usually placed at the top of the first page. The subject of referees is usually kept until the end of the document, stating that referees are available on request. A passport-sized photo may also be attached, but is usually not necessary.

Main routes to employment

Digital applications

Digital application forms have become more common in recent years in Singapore. The Internet is considered a fast medium of communication but completing an application form online requires the utmost attention – always check your submission before pressing send. If you are making your application via email, write a concise application email with your résumé attached. Applicants should always remember to use formal language when submitting an online application or applying via email.

The job interview

During the application procedure it is essential to make a good impression; make sure you are open and truthful throughout your application. Singaporean employers like to talk about your hobbies and extracurricular activities as it will help them to form a better idea of you as a person and thus as a prospective candidate. See it as a chance to improve your chances, not as a risk of losing credibility.

As cultural sensitivity is highly valued, highlight your international study experience. Remember, Singaporean employers appreciate openness, honesty and respect; highlighting your international experience is a good thing, but bragging about it is not recommended.

Preparing for the interview:

- Think in advance about questions that might be asked.
- Find out the objectives of the position and the skills required.
- Research the organisation's background.
- Be clear about your skills, abilities, personal qualities and experience.
- Prepare your own questions to ask the employer.
- Make sure you will arrive on time for the interview. If you are unfamiliar with the location it might be worthwhile making sure in advance.

Entrance tests in Singapore are not common; however, make sure you prepare yourself if they are announced during the process. These tests are usually related to general abilities, aptitudes and interests related to the job in question.

At times, employers might conduct group interviews, although one to one interviews are more common. It is advisable to enquire about the structure and process of the interview in advance.

Where will your career take you?

Research from the i-graduate International Student Barometer study tells us the following about the main career drivers for Singaporean graduates:

Major career drivers for Singaporean graduates:

1. I want to develop myself.
2. I like to be recognized for my achievements.
3. Future job security is important to me.

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Top 3 future plans of Singaporean students about to graduate from UK HE Institutions:

1. Employment in Singapore.
2. Undecided.
3. Further study at another institution in another country.

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The Singaporean government not only encourages the growth of the private sector, but also has a special project to keep the economy stable. Private entrepreneurship tends to be less popular among young people because of the prejudice towards failure in the Singaporean culture.

Steady jobs are the most sought after, which does leave opportunities for the more brave and entrepreneurial types among job seekers to do well or have the opportunity to 'go it alone'.

Current career prospects

Singapore has concentrated its economic efforts into the development of service and high-tech industries. Due to the fact Singapore is an island-state with almost no natural resources compared to its neighbouring countries, the focus on industry and service instead of agriculture has made the country a distributor and innovation hub in the region.

Where are the opportunities?

Accounting and finance

Highly developed and growing industries make Singapore a major South East Asia financial centre. Accountancy work is generally understood as a good way to enter the finance sector. Current work opportunities are available mainly in the fields of investment banking, payment systems, retail banking, private equity and venture capital, insurance and funds management. Despite falling upon hard times during the worldwide financial crisis, Singapore has rebounded well.

Advanced manufacturing

More than 1000 highly skilled researchers and around 45 companies are involved in advanced manufacturing in Singapore. Large investments from both the private sector and government have encouraged prospects for the sector throughout the economic crisis, particularly in the field of nanotechnology, intelligent systems, precision engineering and alternative energy.

Architecture, planning and construction

Construction was one of Singapore's leading industries in terms of growth in 2009. Big construction projects such Marina Bay Circuit, new Changi Terminal III, Resort Worlds at Sentosa Island and the Sports Hub have created many job opportunities in this sector in the past. However, this sector did suffer at the hands of the global financial crisis, and is still far from fully recovered.

Pharmaceuticals and biotechnology

Singapore has built seven research institutes and five research consortia to accelerate drug discovery research. Most of the international pharmaceuticals and biotechnology organisations have their Asia-Pacific headquarter in Singapore, and thus it is an important country for this field.

Current career prospects

Health and medical care

In 2006, health and medical care drew more than 400,000 foreign visitors to Singapore. Singaporean employers usually guarantee medical treatment for employees through schemes such as Medisave, Medifund, Medishield and Eldersshield, making the healthcare sector a large employer. It seeks to employ only the most skilled and promising staff, and will match this considerable desire with considerable payment for suitable employees.

ICT and e-commerce

Intelligence Nation 2015 is the ten year programme to maximize the potential of the information and communication technology in Singapore. Starting in 2005, the aim is for every individual in Singapore to have access to intellectual technology by 2015. With this vision, Singapore wants to become a leader in digital businesses and information technology through improving their grass-roots level communication technology skills. The government has also set robust intellectual property protection to encourage research and innovation in the information technology industry.

Logistic and supply chain management

Singapore has one of the best seaports and airports for cargo in South East Asia. The port of Singapore is the second largest port in the world after Shanghai. 21 of 25 top level third party logistic companies have their regional headquarters in Singapore. Work opportunities lie particularly in the field of sea and air freight, supply chain management, material management and logistical management.

Mining and energy

Singapore is the third largest refining centre in the world with a total production of approximately 1.4 million barrels per day. Work opportunities lie particularly in the fields of mechanical engineering, chemical engineering and piping works.

Tourism and travel

Singapore's shopping district, well-developed infrastructure, warm and consistent climate, safe atmosphere and major sporting events combined with the English speaking population make it highly attractive for foreign visitors. Job opportunities particularly lie in the field of hospitality management, marketing, as well as hospitality in general terms.

Where to find more information

General information

www.edb.gov.sg EDB Singapore, 250 North Bridge Road #28-00 Raffles City Tower Singapore 179101

www.gov.sg Access to Singaporean Government information and services

www.mom.gov.sg Ministry of Manpower Singapore, 18 Havelock Road, Singapore 059764
Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, 100 High Street #09-01 the Treasury Singapore 179434, Tel: (+65) 6225-9911

Advice and tips on Careers Fairs, CVs and general job seeking

www.articlealley.com/article_1547972_36.html - An article for those in the nursing profession.

www.collegegrad.com/articles/dont-give-up.shtml - An article on staying positive throughout the work search process

www.employmentblawg.com/2010/job-seeking-tips-for-college-graduates - Further tips in the competitive field of employment seeking graduates

www.fpef.org/Education/Tips.htm - Some good tips on networking

www.thegraduate.co.uk/static_generic.cgi?a=tmq_jobboards – Link with good information for those still considering staying in the UK after study

www.graduateopportunities.com/career_advice/graduates_with_disability - A link providing useful tips and stats for graduates with a disability

www.londongradfair.co.uk/autumn - The Guardian's annual job fair for graduates. It is located in London.

www.marketoracle.co.uk/Article1277.html - Tips on how to work out your finances post-study.

www.online-graduate.co.uk/tipsforgrads.html - Further tips for graduates seeking work experience.

http://www.prospects.ac.uk/international_students.htm - Information for international students

Where to find more information

Books and Articles

Finding work in Singapore; XpatXperience; www.xpatxperience.com

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Disclaimer

Whilst all efforts have been made to ensure the information in this Country Guide is correct at the time of writing, readers are advised that procedures and information sources may change regularly.

Appendix 1 : Sample CV

Soo Yin Kim

23 Victoria Street

Singapore 0718

☎+65 331 22 44

@ sykim@freemail.com

Nationality: Singaporean

Date of birth: 12-2-1965

Gender: female

EDUCATION AND QUALIFICATIONS

- | | |
|------|--|
| 1998 | University of California
M.B.A. |
| 1990 | National University of Singapore
Bachelor's degree in Business Administration |

WORK EXPERIENCE

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 1998 - present | Financial / Business Consultant
Jones & Associates, Singapore
▽ Clients include companies in video production, public storage, software sales, property management/development.
▽ Provide expertise in setting up business operations, computerised and accounting systems, creation of marketing and business strategies. |
| 1994-1998 | Financial Consultant
Comway Group Consulting, Los Angeles, California, USA
▽ Provide expertise in setting up business operations. |

Appendix 1 : Sample CV

∇ Set-up administrative, accounting systems and business start-up advertising.

1990-1994

Financial Officer

First Security Group, Singapore

SKILLS AND TRAINING

Computer skills: Knowledge of Microsoft Word, Excel, Power Point and HTML

Languages Spoken: Malay, Chinese and English

Languages Written: Malay, Chinese, English and French

ACTIVITIES AND HOBBIES

Board member of EWI Singapore.

Avid horsewoman