

Expeditions Fund Report: Dissertation Research in Singapore

As part of my final year dissertation we are required to undertake an independent study on a research topic of our choice. This project involves conducting primary research in order to answer your own research questions and aims. My dissertation aims to look at how temporary migrant workers in Singapore organise under difficult conditions. This required going to Singapore to conduct in-depth interviews.

Once I had overcome the jetlag and vaguely became used to the heat I went to my first interview located in the centre of Singapore's bustling shopping district, Orchard Road. The interview was with a student from the National University of Singapore who had been involved with a project helping migrant workers in Singapore.

Over the next two weeks I went on to interview seven more individuals, all of whom provided incredibly vital and insightful opinions and ideas on migrant workers in Singapore. A majority of the people interviewed are part of various NGOs in Singapore, these included Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics (HOME), Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2), Migrant Workers Centre (MWC), and the UN Women (UNIFEM). All these NGOs operate with the aim to improve the lives of migrant workers in Singapore. As advocates for these migrant workers, who have been working in Singapore for many years, they had an in-depth and personal understanding of what migrant workers in Singapore go through. The thoughts and experiences of all these interviewees were thus invaluable to my project.

During the beginning of my trip, whilst frantically trying to arrange interviews, I was also hoping to find a way to volunteer with TWC2, a NGO that looks after migrant worker in Singapore. TWC2 runs a soup kitchen called the Cuff Road Food Program that offers meals to workers who have been injured or who have had a dispute with their employer. These workers tend to be in a difficult place because they not allowed to work and thus cannot afford to feed themselves, however are required to remain in Singapore until their case is resolved. This program takes on volunteers to help give advice to migrant workers on their rights and options to help pursue their cases.

The process of applying to be a volunteer for this program was incredibly long and indicated that it would take almost a month until you could become a regular volunteer. This posed a problem, as I would be able to volunteer for a maximum of two weeks. Fortunately however, I was able to secure an interview with Debbie Fordyce, who started up the Cuff Road program, and who is also a long-standing member of TWC2. After the interview, which lasted over an hour and a half, I mentioned my interest in volunteering with the program. I was very grateful that she invited me to attend a volunteer's introduction to the program for the following day and said I was welcome to attend the program.

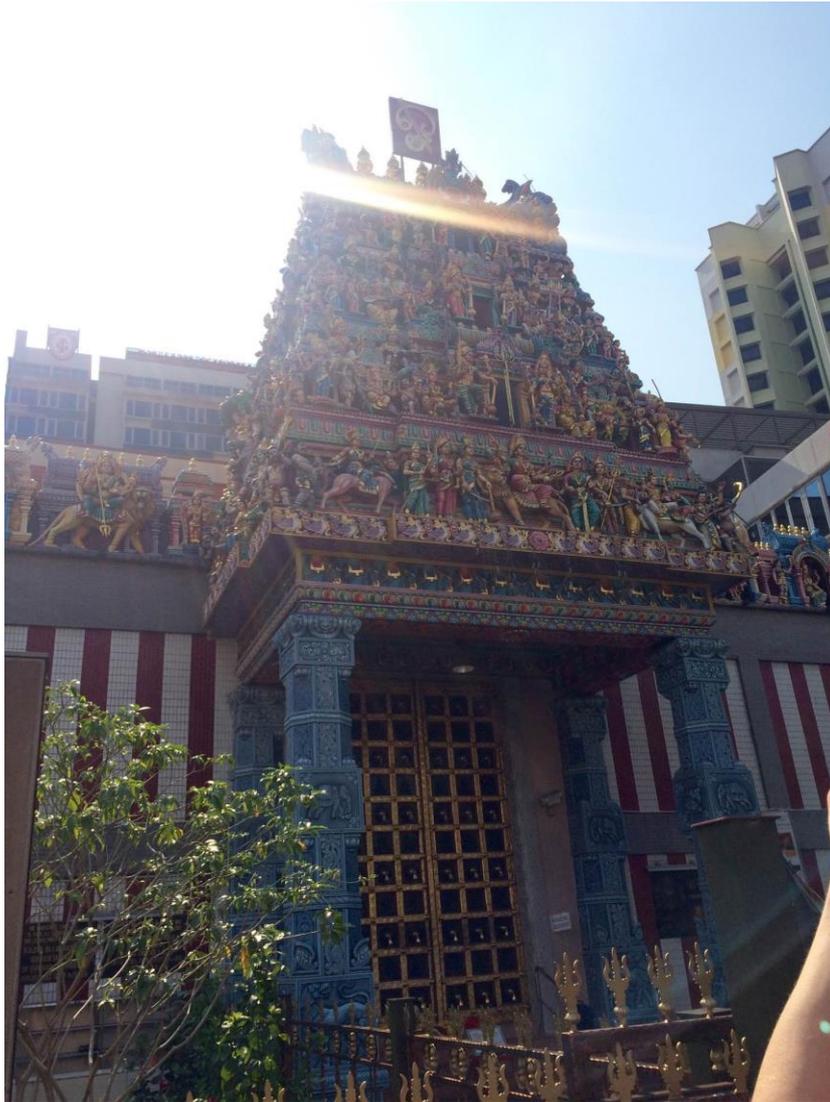
The introduction to the Cuff Road Food program gave us a brief explanation on how the program operates and the different types of advice we can give to the

men. It taught us how to use the online system to register men who are new to the program and how to check on their cases.

August the first, my first proper day at the Cuff Road Food program, was manic. The first day of the month involves the most amount of work because it is change over day for all the food cards given out. This meant that for every individual attending, his details have to be rechecked and written out. With over 200 men coming for food that evening, it is not difficult to imagine that the room above the restaurant where we sat was full of people. This was however one of my favourite days volunteering at the program as it gave me the greatest opportunity to speak to the workers and really understand their circumstances. It allowed me to discuss with them their problems and truly understand their emotions and feelings.



During my free time from research I was able to explore some of the many attractions that Singapore has to offer. I visited Little India, where many of the Bangladeshi and Indian migrant workers spend their time off work. Seeing many beautiful temples and dining at delicious restaurants.



I also visited Singapore's latest attraction, Gardens by the Bay, located next to Marina Bay Sands Hotel. The light show was an excellent end to a productive three weeks away.



Travelling to Singapore allowed me to research a topic that I was incredibly interested in. It gave me the opportunity to complete my desired research topic and helped me pursue my research to complete my dissertation. I gained invaluable knowledge, skills, and life lessons whilst pursuing my research.