Shixin, a 3rd year Economics major, went on an exchange trip to Sweden for 5 months. ENSEMBLE (the free annual magazine of NUS Economics Society) sat down with him for a tête-à-tête to find out more about his experience a foreign land.

First things first, why Sweden?
Well, I chose Sweden for three reasons. I wanted to avoid seeing familiar faces around. Why go overseas just to mingle with Singaporeans? I also wanted to explore the Swedish culture. Being exposed to more popular culture like American, British, Japanese and Australian influence, I thought it would be interesting to see how the Swedish culture is like. Now I can tell you more about Swedish food besides their famous meatballs! Lastly, I felt that I would not have an opportunity to go to Sweden in future as it is not a place where I will likely go to for traveling or for work. If I didn’t go this time, I would probably never get to visit that country.

At one of Lund University’s numerous student dinner parties

What was your goal when you decided to go on an exchange trip and did you manage to accomplish it?
I strived to go for each and every lesson and achieve best scores possible. And of course, travel around! I skipped quite a number of lessons to travel but did manage to score well as schooling there is very slack! *laughs* I didn’t initially plan on going to UK and France but I ended up seeing the sights in five countries – UK, France, Norway, Denmark and Sweden. Could have gone for more though...

On a mountain top in Bergen, Norway

Did you face any problems over there?
Hmm… during the first few weeks, I had to orientate myself with the surroundings. For example, I had to figure out the way to the supermarket. Contrary to popular belief, language barrier was not a big deal as the younger generation was generally frequent in English. I can’t say the same for the older generation of Swedish though.

How about one Swedish thing that left a deep impression on you?
I thought they are so environmentalist! In my town, there is a centre for recollection of trash. The Swedes are willing to drive from their homes to the centre, with their trash already sorted out beforehand. They even have this recycling machine at the supermarket which allows one to recycle. A receipt will be issued, which can be used to buy things from the supermarket. Perhaps, we should do likewise in Singapore!

Swedish food or local food?
LOCAL!!! *without hesitation* The Swedish cuisine is somewhat boring. Not much variety
and not extremely tasty. Eating is not a very exciting thing over there...and it can be expensive too! But there is a big Middle Eastern community in Sweden and they tend to make really delicious kebabs and falafels!

In the Absolut Ice Bar, Stockholm, Sweden

**Any particular bad encounters while traveling?**
Sad to say, plenty, but none of them happened in Sweden. Most of the bad encounters happened in France. My group of travel mates was dining in a restaurant in Paris when suddenly a white mouse fell from the ceiling and ran across the restaurant. One of my mates, an outspoken (and rather aggressive!) Taiwanese girl demanded an explanation from the restaurant manager. To our dismay, the manager shrugged and said that it was not uncommon to find mice in restaurants. I felt that was quite a lousy excuse. Another disappointing thing was that Paris did not have a countdown on New Year’s Eve!!! *disgruntle*

We had decided to spend our last day of 2005 in Paris but to our dismay, we only had the company of policemen alerting Parisians that it was illegal to let out fireworks. Wet blankets...

**Ok, so how about good encounters?**
Geez, there are plenty of them too! How about my skiing trip with my Taiwanese and HK friends up in the Swedish mountains? We had so much fun – learning how to ski for the first time, falling down countless times, building a snowman, making snow angels, having a snowball fight and violently shaking a tree to make the snow fall on us! And when I was in UK, my friends studying there showed me around London, Oxford and Bath. In Oxford, they brought me to where Harry Potter the movie was shot! It was so good catching up with my friends after they left Singapore for their studies.

At Sacré Cœur, Paris, France

**Finally, how much dough did you spend on your trip?**
All in all, SG$12,700. From the moment I stepped onto the plane to when I got back home. Yes, plane ticket included!