

## **Teo Zhi Xiong**

The three top challenges that I face while preparing for my time in England would be being independent, understanding the culture and maintaining the well-being of my health.

Firstly, I am preparing to be self-sufficient in handling all my own needs when abroad. This exchange programme is going to be the first time in my life being away from my home for a significant period. Despite having experienced two years of National Service in Singapore, in which I have grown more independent, through experiences such as being deployed for an overseas exercise for three weeks, it was merely a stepping stone in the development of my independence. This exchange programme would definitely challenge me to push the boundaries of my comfort zone even further than before.

One of the needs that I currently struggle to be independent with is cooking my own food. Since I was young, my family would cook most of the meals. Consequently, I have not really learnt to cook. As meals in England are relatively more expensive, it is not sustainable to dine in restaurants for every meal. Therefore, I have started learning how to cook spaghetti from my family members, as it is fairly simple to cook. Hopefully I will be able to master it soon and learn to cook a wider variety of meals.

Secondly, I am preparing myself to be more aware and sensitive to the culture in England. It is going to be my first time travelling out of Asia, to a Western country. My knowledge of the British culture is quite lacking, only from the movies, books and media platforms that I follow. I think it is essential to be familiarised with the British culture before going as it helps me to adapt and ease into the new environment and to prevent myself from being overwhelmed or confused by certain practices. It also improves my communication with the locals as I will be more sensitive to the differences.

Fortunately, I have a friend who is currently an undergraduate at the same university that I will be attached to, the University of Leeds. Other than reading up on the British culture, I plan to seek him for advice on the important practices to take note of. With his first-hand experiences and knowledge on Leeds and England, I am sure his input would be extremely helpful.

Lastly, due to the persistent widespread and danger of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is a challenge to preserve the well-being of my health both here in Singapore and when I am abroad. I have been playing my part in coping with this pandemic, such as following the safe management measures the government has implemented and being fully vaccinated against the virus. Hopefully, the pandemic situation both in Singapore and the UK would continue to improve and my exchange programme would be made possible. I plan to observe similar safe management measures when I am abroad, such as wearing masks and maintaining hygiene.