

It may be time to rethink how we relate to foreigners

One in four Singapore residents is a foreigner. How are Singaporeans grappling with new stereotypes? Youthinkers weigh in.

Can't tar all with same brush

IN THE hostel where I stay at Nanyang Technological University (NTU), female students share a toilet, and I have spent two of the past three years cleaning up after the Chinese nationals I shared mine with.

The sight of dirt-streaked floors and stained toilet bowls smeared my image of students from China.

But I was forced to reassess my opinion of them after going to Shanghai on a six-month exchange programme last year.

I was impressed by how gentlemanly some of the university boys could be. On group dates, the guys would stand up when the women arrived and they would insist on paying the bill.

Their respectful behaviour made me realise that there is more to them than their hygiene habits, and how wrong it is to tar everyone with the same brush, just because of bad experiences with one or two.

Lee Khai Yan, 22, is a fourth-year student at the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, NTU.

Some choose to be aloof

I USED to think foreign students came to Singapore to experience a new learning environment and make friends.

Yet, those in my hostel seem to be doing anything but that.

Four months have passed, and they have skipped most of the hall activities that were planned to help them integrate themselves.

They isolate themselves, or leave halfway through mandatory hall events and orientation programmes. Not even free block suppers can get them to open their room doors.

It seems they are here just because they enjoy guaranteed student accommodation for the first two years of their study programmes here.

Such anti-social behaviour only serves to reinforce the existing stereotypes that others have of them.

This is why Singaporeans cannot always be blamed for keeping their distance from foreigners - it takes two hands to clap.

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