

Moscow Pre-ICPC Workshop

NUS sponsored our participation in the Moscow Pre-ICPC Workshop held in Moscow, Russia from 9 to 17 March. The workshop consisted of six contests (of very difficult problems) following ICPC rules. After each contest, the solutions were explained briefly.

The highlights of this workshop were the contests. These contests contain high-quality questions that are more difficult than the ICPC World Finals. By using very difficult contests, it challenged us to think about these difficult problems and practice our problem solving skills. Furthermore, as the contests were sufficiently difficult that we could usually only solve around 3-4 questions per contest, we spent a lot of time thinking about the more difficult problems.

Most teams that participated in this workshop were also participating in the ICPC World Finals. This allowed us to see our relative performance with respect to the other teams. We often compared ourselves against the other teams, and use them as a benchmark for the number of problems that we expect to solve. This inspired us to train harder in the days leading up to the ICPC World Finals.

The Moscow Pre-ICPC Workshop concluded with the Moscode Festival, which is a programming competition based on ICPC. As the setting and design of this competition was made very similar to the real ICPC competition, Moscode gave us an opportunity to do a “simulated” practice for the ICPC World Finals.

ICPC World Finals 2019

NUS sponsored our participation in the 2019 ICPC World Finals held in Porto, Portugal, from 31 Mar to 5 Apr. The ICPC World Finals saw more than 130 teams from around the world participate. These teams are the strongest in their respective regions, having placed in the top few for ICPC Regional Contests, so competition was extremely tough. In particular, there were powerhouses like Moscow State University and St. Petersburg State University, along with top schools such as MIT, Harvard and Carnegie Mellon.

Before the actual contest, there was a practice contest for us to familiarise ourselves with the programming environment (i.e. keyboard, editor, judge etc.) and resolve any technical issues, especially with particular problem types like interactive problems appearing for the first time in ICPC World Finals 2019.

During the actual contest, there were bugs in two pieces of our code. Unfortunately, we had not seen these bugs before, leading us to spend almost half the time in the contest debugging (instead of problem solving and coding), resulting in our eventual joint rank of 62th. Although disappointed (we had aimed for top 30), the entire ICPC journey has been an incredible learning journey for us, both in terms of technical knowledge learnt, and the oft under-emphasised point to effective communication within a team under stressful conditions.

We are grateful for Porto's hospitality during the trip, and would also like to thank NUS and our sponsors for their support, and our coaches Steven and Suhendry for their kind guidance.