

Comparative costs

While cost is an important consideration for most international students on long-term study programmes overseas, it can sometimes be outweighed by other decisive factors. Bethan Norris reports.

The first thing students consider [when deciding where to study abroad] is the cost," claims Mia Ando from Green Road agency in Japan. "It's natural because that's the easiest part they can compare by themselves. However, [we explain to] students why one school charges more – because of better facilities, for example – and students gradually understand the value of what they are paying for."

Making the decision to study overseas, especially on a long-term education course, can be a very expensive undertaking for students and their parents, with factors such as living costs, insurance and air fares to be considered, as well as potentially hefty tuition fees. Ando says, "I often advise students to look at the overall cost and compare, because some schools seem to be cheaper but the accommodation fee is much more expensive."

Agents emphasise that, while cost is a major consideration, there is a fine line between cost concerns and the benefits to be gained by the experience. Yuki Yamashita, from Global School Information Network in Japan, says, "Everyone wants to maximise the result with minimum investment."

Considerations, such as the perceived quality of education on offer, the prestige of the qualification gained and the potential future financial gains to be had from increased career opportunities, are also important to students and these can offset the enormity of the initial financial outlay. "[The] cost of the study programme plays a certain role but not a decisive one," confirms Tatyana Zarembo, from Greenwich Meridian Tours in Russia. "High standards, prestige and reputation also influence the decision."

It is for this reason that the long-term education market often shows more resilience in the face of world economic change than the short-stay language travel market, as students continue to undertake expensive education programmes in times of recession with a view to long-term benefits. Yamashita reports that the USA has suffered as a destination for Japanese students over the last five years, with many students preferring to enrol on cheaper programmes in Canada or Australia. However, he adds, "For those wanting to attend academic programmes, [students] still choose the USA as a destination."

The USA and the UK have traditionally been the most popular destinations with international students due to their reputation for quality education. However, these countries are also the most expensive, with high tuition fees and living costs

(see below), and economic uncertainty in many parts of the world means that many students have no option but to look elsewhere. Eduardo Heidemann, from AF Programas Culturais in Brazil, says that cost is now one of the most important considerations in Brazil. "The USA is becoming less popular each year due to costs and of course all the other issues such as visas and terrorist problems," he says. "New Zealand and Australia are the top choices for long-term students."

Increased international promotion of the educational opportunities available in Australia and New Zealand in recent years has also had the effect of changing students' perceptions of these destinations. Ando in Japan has seen the popularity of Australia and New Zealand rise at the expense of destinations such as the UK. She says, "[The UK] seems to be less popular because the cost of living is high and it can be a problem for students who stay for a long period."

Another important factor for students concerned with the issue of cost is the ability to work part-time on a student visa in certain destinations. Heidemann believes that this can have a considerable influence on the student's decision about where to study. "Countries like Australia and the UK, where students on a student visa can work legally for up to 20 hours per week become very popular," he says. "Many students choose these countries because they can work legally." ○



Average costs (in US\$) for students taking a Bachelor of Business course 2000/2001

	Australia	NZ	UK	Canada	US public	US private
Average yearly course fee	5,970	5,576	10,204	6,102	10,210	23,936
Number of universities surveyed	39	7	44	19	30	16
Cost of living per year	6,043	5,523	8,783	6,906	8,529	8,529
Average length of course in years	3	3	3	4	4	4
Average total cost	37,006	33,491	56,961	55,087	80,872	137,010

Source: Study by IDP Education Australia and Australian Education International