

feature

Studying in Singapore and Malaysia

Education institutions in Malaysia and Singapore say that both countries have many advantages for international students and numbers look set to grow in the future. **BETHAN NORRIS** finds out more.

While studying in the USA, Australia or the UK might be the ultimate goal for many Asian students, factors such as high tuition fees and travel costs, as well as cultural and safety concerns, have been prompting many to look for educational opportunities closer to home. Singapore and Malaysia have both undergone something of a transformation in their international student provision in recent years, with higher standards and increasing choice attracting greater numbers of students to their shores.

Khairul Faiz Morat, Manager of External Relations at Monash University - Malaysia Campus, says that the private higher education sector in Malaysia has gained momentum in recent years. "The country has successfully hosted four foreign university branch campuses and a number of local colleges have grown to become university colleges well en route to becoming universities in their own right," he says. "Despite some key challenges, the sector has grown tremendously and this bodes well for the future."

The growth of foreign university campuses in both Singapore and Malaysia has certainly boosted the profile of these two countries as a study destination for international students. Jeremy Yap from James Cook University Singapore (JCUS) says that, as well as gaining a well-respected qualification, students studying at their Singapore campus also have other advantages. "Students studying at JCUS go through a fast-tracked trimester year that allows them to finish their studies earlier than their counterparts in Australia – eight months of summer holidays are taken out to allow faster completion of the courses. This brings about savings to precious time and money while enjoying the rights and privileges that come with being a full-time student of JCU Australia," he says.

For many international students choosing to study in Malaysia or Singapore, cheaper tuition fees and reasonable living and travel costs are principal factors. Leecen Hoh from Taylor's University College & Taylor's College in Malaysia says that students come to study in Malaysia if they can't afford to study in a western country of their choice. However, cultural considerations can also play a role as Leecen relates. "Malaysia is viewed as a model Islamic country – with a good living environment, no discrimination, halal food, Islamic culture – by many other western countries," he says.

Scott Dooley from Lorna Whiston Schools, a secondary school in Singapore, agrees that Singapore can often be an attractive consideration for students and parents who may be influenced by negative views of the west. "It is not such a culture shock for [students] when they first arrive," he says. "Things here are still Asian, they are never made to feel like outsiders. I know a lot of parents like the fact they don't have to worry about drugs or encountering racism etc, things they often believe are prevalent in the west."

Yap lists a number of other reasons why students might choose to study in Singapore. "This city in Southeast Asia embodies the finest of both east and west," he says. "It is a safe, clean and green country with state-of-the-art infrastructure that presents itself as an ideal destination for studying overseas. A student [visa] is relatively easy to obtain compared to other destinations."

Institutions in Singapore and Malaysia also offer a full range of course options for students. Morat from Monash says that business courses are most in demand by both international and local students although other courses may increase in popularity shortly.



"The university has received significant interest in the engineering programmes," he says. "Some of the newer programmes, such as the Bachelor of Psychology & Business have lower student numbers as they are new programmes."

At JCUS, business programmes are also in demand from international students. "As we offer an MBA, some students who have finished our Bachelor in Business stay to finish their MBA courses as they can complete both in three years thanks to our fast-track system," says Yap. "We can accept students without work experience on to our MBA courses," he continues.

Due to the location of both countries, international student nationalities tend to be predominantly Asian and Leecen in Malaysia says that Indonesian, Chinese and Korean students are their largest nationalities. "Chinese numbers have decreased gradually over the years [due to] higher admissions requirements [and] competition from other Malaysian institutions, institutions in China and other countries such as Singapore and the West," he adds.

Dot Chen from HELP University College in Malaysia says that the college's top international student nationalities are Chinese, Indonesian, Maldivian and African. She adds, "[We have experienced] a drop in mainland Chinese students – as experienced worldwide – and an increase in numbers of African students. China is encouraging her students to study in China by boosting educational options in China [while] awareness of the education offered at HELP and in Malaysia has risen among students in Africa."

However, as awareness of the opportunities available in Southeast Asia grows, it is likely that new student markets will open up in the future. Dooley says, "For all areas of education in Singapore, one of the biggest obstacles has been people's awareness of Singapore as an education option. For instance, in Japan I was asked often, 'Do they speak English in Singapore?' However, places closer to Singapore have always had a higher understanding of what Singapore can offer." ■

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subject focus

UK high schools

Overseas students are an integral part of the UK boarding and high school sector and international programmes are evolving on a yearly basis.

The UK's international secondary school sector is a well-oiled machine, attracting thousands of students every year. UK high schools provide a spring-board for students wanting to enter higher education at an English-speaking university and students can choose to study on an academic secondary school programme that caters specifically for their long-term goals.

UK high schools have always been popular with international students due to their global reputation for high quality. As demand has grown, however, many schools report how courses specifically catering for international students have developed as a result. Valerie Simpson from the Cambridge Tutors College in Croydon, says that when the college first started accepting international students 25 years ago, "there was an increasing demand from international students for traditional A-level courses that would qualify them for entry to UK universities". More recently, however, Simpson notes, "Our fast-track one-year GCSE course is popular with international students who have not quite reached the standard academically, or do not have the language skills, to start an A-level course straight away."

Elsewhere, Sarah Bellotti at King's International Study Centre, attached to King's School in Cambridgeshire, says there is a strong focus on GCSEs at the centre. "WeI mostly prepare students for the exams on a one-year course," she says. "While there is a strong focus on English, the emphasis is on academic English and we have phased out the typical language exams of KET, PET and FCE," she says.

Obtaining academic qualifications that will help achieve future academic goals is clearly a priority for many international students at UK high schools. Hazel Ormrod at Padworth College in Berkshire says that they have opened an International Study Centre at the school to cater for international students "who wish to combine English language with academic study in preparation for GCSEs or A-level studies". She adds, "We also developed a university access

programme in business or law, which is a one-year course designed for students aged 17 years and over who have completed their high school education but who need to improve their English and their academic achievement in the subjects that they plan to study at university. The course is internally assessed and is recognised by an increasing number of British universities."

At St Clare's in Oxford, which offers international students an International Baccalaureate (IB) and pre-IB programme, Francisco Bustos says that ensuring students mix with different nationalities is an important part of the course. "We have over 40 nationalities at any one time in the college," says Bustos, who adds that the school's partnerships with US universities running university-level courses also ensures a ready supply of native English speakers at the school.

Integration into the cultural and academic way of life in the UK is vital for international students and many schools stress that this is an important part of the curriculum. Katja von Schweitzer at St Mary's Hall in Brighton, says that playing a full part in school life is a must for all international students and that their "buddy" system is a way to help students adapt to time away from home. "Every year we run our seagull programme which takes [students] to places of interest – e.g. London, Portsmouth, Lewes – [where we] give talks and activities to broaden their knowledge and understanding of British life," she adds.

With so many new courses on offer, international enrolments at many UK high schools remain healthy. Gwyn Phillips from King Edwards School in Surrey says that the school limits international enrolments to 25 per cent of the overall student body and adds, "Mainland China is the fastest growing group [and] Germany provides the largest single nationality group."

As schools develop and offer new programmes, the popularity of UK high schools shows no sign of waning, and Ormrod notes, "We have noticed an increase in enquiries from the Middle East and East European countries." ■

Name of school	Location	Types of programmes					Minimum age of international students	Minimum language proficiency	Do you offer language support?	Accommodation options	
		Year-long	Short-term	Summer	Exam prep.	Summer activities				Residential	Host family
Cambridge Tutors College	Croydon	✓			✓		14	req	✓		✓
King Edward's School	Surrey	✓	✓			✓	11	v	✓	✓	✓
King's School	Cambridgeshire	✓		✓	✓	✓	14	i	✓	✓	✓
Padworth College	Berkshire	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	13	n	✓	✓	✓
Queen Ethelburga's	London	✓					6	v	✓	✓	✓
Rydal Penrhos	Colwyn Bay	✓				✓	7	v	✓	✓	✓
St Clare's Oxford	Oxford	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	15	i	✓	✓	✓
St Mary's Hall	Brighton	✓	✓		✓		8	n	✓	✓	✓

v varies req info on request n none i intermediate

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