

STUDY ABROAD

Pursuing an undergraduate degree in Southeast and East Asian countries

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For aspirants looking to study abroad, there is the question of where you want to spend your undergraduate years. There are the usual suspects — the USA, Canada, UK, and Australia. However, the exponential rise in the competitiveness of university admissions in the West and the almost ludicrous price tag of education in these locations are pushing more and more students to look towards more affordable opportunities closer to home.

For Nazifa Tabassum, a graduate of the Bachelor's programme in International Business from INTI International University in Malaysia, the decision was simple. "I wanted to get an international standard of education while being near to my home," she says. Unlike the torturous and lengthy process involved in US admissions, the process of gaining a place in a Malaysian university is relatively straightforward and transparent. "I directly contacted my chosen institution's academic office and, not only were they responsive towards all my queries, but they also helped me connect with students and alumni to gain a better understanding of the requirements for my study abroad journey."

Another country gaining traction from international students in recent times is South Korea. Munim Hasan Wasi, a junior at Korea Advanced Institute of Science & Technology (KAIST) studying Computer Science with a minor in Economics, didn't consider South Korea initially. However, the rarity of receiving a full-ride scholarship in the West made him cast his net wider. Looking for a university with an English medium of instruction and a focus on an academically-intensive curriculum, he stumbled upon KAIST. He elaborates, "The application guide that can be found on the application website is pretty extensive and I was fortunate enough to talk to a Bangladeshi student already at KAIST through social media. Besides, the close resemblance of the Korean admission process to the US system— with SATs, IELTS, essays, and letters of recommendation being the main requirements—simplified it for me."

Munim adds, "Korea is one of the most peaceful and safe countries in the world. So, it is a very good place to start your journey as an independent adult. The abundant opportunities to participate in industry internships and university exchange programmes are cherries on top of the cake."

Hamid Ahmed*, a student pursuing an MBBS in Mainland China, settled on the country partly because he found their facilities and overall integration of technology in daily life to be quite ahead of most other countries that offer MBBS. "If you want to work hard and put in the extra effort, you'll learn a lot in a fraction of the cost you'd be paying elsewhere. Plus, the people are nice and the culture is great," he testifies.

Most international students in China go there on a full merit-based scholarship called the Chinese Government or CSC scholarship, with a lot of provincial and partial scholarships up for grabs, too.

Regarding the overall application process, Hamid says, "I searched online and did some fact-checking on reliable sites like CUCAS. Since the language barrier is pretty significant, I also had to go on forums and places like Quora and Reddit to get a direct perspective from people who have had the experience of living and studying in China. I went to the websites of the schools I was interested in and emailed their admissions department for any help."

Hong Kong is another excellent option as Riti Prama Saha, a student of Biomedical Engineering at Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU), says, "As my university is in Asia, it has a similar time zone as my country which helps me stay connected to my family without any time constraints. Moreover, my university provides me with an interdisciplinary education and I get to take courses from multiple fields."

For Bijoy Sen, another student at PolyU, the merit-based scholarships plus stipends he was awarded were too lucrative for him to refuse, particularly given the intensive education that he would be receiving.

Talking about the admission process, he says, "More or less all universities in Hong Kong have very comprehensive websites that explain the whole application process

which, by itself, is fairly smooth compared to other countries. There is plenty of support available online, and the Academic Registry of each university can be easily approached through emails." However, you should be aware of the high cost of living in Hong Kong, the difficulty in securing a dormitory following the first year of study, and the fact that universities only offer conditional letters for admissions based on predicted grades.

There are an immense number of educational opportunities available within our small part of the world. Why are we leaving these stones unturned?

**Name has been changed upon request.*

Adrita Zaima Islam is not studying in Southeast or East Asia.



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