SINGAPORE: It is the return of students to the city -- some 14,000 of them are set to turn the Bras Basah area into a hip and lively student enclave.

Donne Marie Aeria gets nostalgic whenever she visits her old school premises at present-day Chijmes, which used to house CHIJ Secondary.

She studied here for some eight years and she enjoyed her days growing up in the city.

Said Ms Aeria, "You started exploring the hawker stores and the side lanes and the little book shops selling stationery -- it was a big thing for young students then. Now we realised we needed to bring students back as they are very creative and lively. They move fast with a natural buzz which they create with their youthful energy."

The city was home to many schools then, including Raffles Institution and Catholic High.

One former Catholic High student is now at the helm of the Singapore Management University.

Said Professor Tan Chin Tiong, provost of SMU, "What we had in the past in this area is nothing compared to what we are going to have in Bras Basah. Looking into the future, they will be operating, functioning from brand new cutting-edge infrastructure like SMU's campus, NAFA and La-Salle."

Students also give the thumbs up to city life.

"It feels quite cosmopolitan being in the heart of the city and it's probably more accessible for everyone across the island," one student said.

"When we come here, we pass through areas like Orchard, so we get used to the surroundings and soon they become part of our natural surroundings and habitat. The city will become an important part of us with time," another said.

"Around Bugis and Chijmes, you see a lot of SMU students. A lot of them bring certain youth vitality to the whole environment," said a third person.

With some 14,000 students set to make the city their second home, some have expressed concern that there may not be enough space for them.

But schools say there is room for expansion. The land where the former National Library used to stand has been set aside for the Singapore Management University's expansion down the road. - CNA/ct