SMU turns heads in India

While it may not be goodbye US or UK yet, it certainly is Namaste Sinagpura when it comes to tertiary education for Indians, says NITHYA SUBRAMANIAN

Tertiary education in Singapore is becoming extremely popular among Indian students wishing to study abroad, and why not? New universities such as the Singapore Management University (SMU) have started making a mark in just a short span of seven years by offering international standard courses at affordable costs.

So while it may not be goodbye US or UK yet, it certainly is Namaste Singapore.

Today, SMU boasts of over 5,000 students and has six schools which include the Lee Kong Chian School of Business, School of Accountancy, and School of Information Systems - with whom the renowned Carnegie Mellon University is playing a strategic partnership role.

For expansion and strategic reasons, the School of Economics and Social Sciences was reconstructed in March 2007 into two separate ones, and the latest, School of Law, opened its doors to students this August.

Pupils from India seem to have found making a dent here for it and are currently the second largest group of international students. And these kids seem to be at home studying at SMU. Says a very happy Simran Sawhney who studies in the Lee Kong Chian School of Business, “First of all, with a large Indian community of 450 Indian students, one can never feel away from home. SMU offers various programmes to make its international student population more active and vibrant. There is an Indian Cultural Society that organises events, festivals, orientations and interactive sessions to spread the Indian spirit. And that’s not all - the food counts in the university too offer Indian food!”

Prajal Ghatak, who is in his senior year working towards a BSE (Information Systems Management), and BIM (Marketing) at the School of Information Systems and Lee Kong Chian School of Business, adds that the safety of the country and drug-free environment makes Singapore and SMU a preferred education destination.

“Each incoming international student is assigned a buddy during their first few days in Singapore. The Indian community is extremely well-connected and it is not difficult for a new student to fit in.”

Interactive, seminar-style learning, the opportunity to earn double degrees and the tuition grants are some of the additional attractions for prospective students.

The university has started new initiatives to attract overseas student talent. For India, it launched the International Student Ambassador Program (India Chapter) in September 2005. Through this programme, alumni from the University visit these areas and talk to prospective students about the institute.

Says Ghatak, who has been an ambassador: “Considering that all of us come back to India at least twice a year during our vacations it is not too much additional effort to go back to the leading schools in one respective cities and spread the message about SMU and what it has to offer to Grade 11 and Grade 12 students. Students have been extremely receptive and we have successfully been able to make them think seriously about Singapore.”

The general wisdom is that information shared by students is far more credible. Hence the combination of using students’ as well administrative staff works very well. Amazingly through this system the university was able to reach out to almost 20 schools and about 2000 students from top High Schools in India in the very first year. The first round of successful and comprehensive school visits were held in Bombay, Delhi, Chandigarh, Calcutta and Bangalore.

Another attraction is the student exchange programme held between foreign universities. Sawhney had a great time recently. Summarising her experience she says: “Out of my two years of university life, the most exciting phase has been my International Exchange in Copenhagen, Denmark. This provided me with a chance to not just travel around Europe and study in a new environment, but for the first time since I left home, I noticed a sea change in myself in terms of maturity, confidence and perspective. The opportunity for inter-cultural interactions with 600 students from all over the world gave me long-lasting friendships and relationships.”

Students normally reside with local families during such exchanges and this can be quite an enriching experience, she says.

With such exciting opportunities dangled before them, it is no surprise that universities like the SMU are attracting Indians here in hordes.

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