SINGAPORE: The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) honoured 17 individuals and organisations on Tuesday for their contributions to the education services industry.

The winners were also recognised for ensuring that international students successfully assimilate into local culture.

STB said this is key in Singapore's effort as a global schoolhouse.

Community Development, Youth and Sports Minister, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, was the Guest of Honour at the 2008 Singapore Education Awards ceremony, which was held at Raffles Hotel on Tuesday evening.

The Singapore Education Awards was launched in March 2007. STB said the awards are an integral part of its efforts to rally the Singapore education industry to enhance industry collaboration and exchange best practices and ideas.

It is also meant to encourage members to strive for higher levels of professionalism to promote Singapore Education to overseas students.

The Singapore Management University (SMU) has received 3,600 applications from international students so far this year – three times of what it got in 2006.

SMU has made a name for itself in a short period of time, earning the university the title of "Best International Marketing Effort by a Public Educational Institution".

Instead of competing against other local universities for talent, SMU wants to work with them.

Alan Goh See Bin, Director of Undergraduate Admissions, SMU, said: "Now, imagine the firepower we have if we pool together as one. What are we talking about here? We're talking about bringing the very best foreign talent, foreign students to come to our universities and we're talking about talent on a global scale. There's enough to be had for all three universities."

And since it could be a different ball game for foreign students when they come to Singapore, making sure they adjust well with the bigger group is a priority for a team from the National University of Singapore (NUS).

NUS' Head of International Student Services Reza Shah and his colleagues, with some help from about 1,000 student volunteers, look after the welfare of close to 9,000 international students from 89 countries in the campus.

So it is no surprise that NUS won the title of "Best Host for International Students Studying in Singapore Schools".
One programme that has worked well is matching foreign students with host families to give them a taste of the local culture.

Reza said Singapore's multi-racial society is especially attractive to international students.

“"There are no borders; you're living in an almost borderless world and we're promoting a no-walls culture. So we believe with this diversity in the university community, it enriches the experience of the students. It's no longer about a Singaporean perspective, it's about international perspectives," he said.

That bodes well for Singapore which aims to host 150,000 international, full-fee students by 2015.

- CNA/so