

## **SINGAPORE SEES 13% ON-YEAR INCREASE IN NUMBER OF FOREIGN STUDENTS**

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By Angela Yeo

A total of 97,000 students from 120 countries came to Singapore for their studies last year, a 13% increase over the 86,000 figure seen the year before.

The economic crisis has provided a new opportunity for the Singapore education sector. Parents and students from around the world may abandon plans to study at traditionally popular destinations such as Britain and America to study in Singapore in order to save costs.

John Conceicao, Education Services Director at the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), said when interviewed that local living expenses are lower than that of countries such as Britain and America. International students can obtain high quality education at world-class institutions in Singapore at an affordable cost.

He said that students coming to Singapore are mainly from China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, South Korea and Vietnam. Other than these markets, Singapore has also been attracting students from Thailand and the Philippines in recent years. STB has also been in contact with students in North America and Europe in efforts to attract them to participate in student exchange programmes and study abroad programmes.

STB held its third Singapore Education Awards ceremony last evening. Minister of State for Trade and Industry Lee Yi Shyan said in the opening address and in response to questions from journalists that raising educational standards is more important than increasing the number of students. He said that the recent announcement by MOE on stricter regulations on private schools will help protect the excellent brand image of "Singapore Education".

### **Lee Yi Shyan: Even more important than quantitative growth, is qualitative growth**

In response to a question from the media over whether Singapore's goal of becoming a "Global Schoolhouse" might be affected if some schools are forced to shut down due to their inability to meet the standards set under the new regulations, Lee Yi Shyan said: "Even more important than quantitative growth, is qualitative growth." He said that Singapore hopes that international students here will receive high quality education that they can be proud of when they return to their home countries. As for the poor performers within the private school sector, he feels that they should take this opportunity to raise their quality, such as investing more in curriculum planning so as to provide a more complete learning experience for international students.

Singapore started aggressively developing itself as an international education hub in 2003. It had 61,000 international students then. This figure has risen more than 50% in the ensuing five years.

Lee Yi Shyan also said in his speech that government agencies such as STB, SPRING Singapore and IE Singapore provide support to education providers such as staff training, international collaboration and student exchange programmes. STB will also strengthen its support for the Association of Private Schools and Colleges (APSC) and work with the association to make Singapore a preferred destination for foreign students looking for high quality education.

The Singapore Education Awards were set up by STB for the purpose of promoting Singapore's education brand and recognising the contributions of individuals and organisations to Singapore's education sector thereby encouraging education providers to raise their quality and standard of service.

There are ten categories under the Singapore Education Awards. Prizes were awarded to 18 individuals and organisations. Among them, SIM Global Education topped the category for Best International Marketing Effort by a Private Educational Institution for the second time.

### **Warmly hosting international students: Anthony Ng nominated for Friend of International Students category**

Another category - Friend of International Students - lauds individuals who help international students integrate into Singapore.

**Anthony Ng Kwee Siong**, 36, the boss of a local repair business, who graduated from local private school **TMC Education Group**. He has helped host international students studying at his alma mater for the past five years.

Anthony is a Singaporean. He graduated from a Monash University part-time degree programme at TMC Education five years ago.

When interviewed, he said that his experience at the school was a positive one. When the school started recruiting more international students, he did not mind returning to help host these students even though he had already graduated.

He goes to the airport once every quarter, picking up international students arriving in Singapore for the first time and sending them to their hostel or other lodging locations. He picks up up to 40 students each quarter. In addition, he is also renting out two rooms in his home to international students.

He said that these international students all have his mobile phone number. They seek his help when they fall sick, need to buy a phone card or a computer. "They

are young and on their own away from their homes. They need to adapt to a new environment. It is unavoidable that they feel some trepidation." Even though bringing them to see a doctor is not a difficult task, it is very important to these students as this allows them to feel that someone cares."

Other than organising excursions to allow international students to understand Singapore better, Anthony also introduces them to their fellow nationals who are studying in Singapore so that they can watch out for each other.

Some of the students he hosted have continued to keep in touch with him after they graduated and returned to their own countries. "Seeing them study and grow up happily in Singapore brings me a great sense of satisfaction."