

Survey says Australia a top choice among prospective international students

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Short on time? Here are the highlights:

- *A global IDP research survey has found that Australia is now the second-most preferred destination for international students after Canada*
- *Canada (27%) and Australia (25%) were the first and second choice for surveyed students, respectively*
- *The survey also explored the perspectives of current versus prospective students about studying in Australia*

New [IDP](#) research shows that Australia's popularity as a study destination is steadily improving. Australia still trails Canada in this regard, but it is closing the gap.

The Emerging Futures research was conducted with 11,000 prospective students, applicants, and current students in August 2022.

Canada remains the top choice for 27% of surveyed students, unchanged from March 2022, while Australia is the preferred destination for 25% of students – up from 20% in March.

The UK holds the #3 position at 20% – the same as in March – while the US is in fourth at 18%, down from 20% in the spring.

What is behind Australia's rise?

Australia returned to the consideration set of prospective international students when it re-opened its borders in late-2021, and many students have been attracted to the January 2022 announcement that [caps would be lifted on number of hours students could work while studying](#) (a policy that will remain in place till 30 June 2023).

Working while studying has become [a priority for a significant proportion of international students](#) in 2022. Global economic contraction and/or currency devaluations are affecting the finances of students and their families. The IDP research found notable concern among prospective students about whether they will have enough money while studying in Australia.

Of the leading English-speaking destinations, only Australia and, more recently, [Canada](#) have implemented policies allowing unlimited hours for international students to work while studying in 2022.

Also guiding the decisions of international students are concerns about safety, and in this regard, Australia now has a competitive advantage.

Almost two-thirds (62%) of surveyed students said that Australia's being "a safe country for international students" is a reason that Australia is their preferred destination. This is up from 50% of students who gave this reason in March 2022.

Where is Australia especially popular?

Among students from the two top senders of students to destinations abroad – China and India – Australia is less popular than other leading destinations, according to the IDP research. However, among students from Thailand, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Vietnam, Australia is very popular. These are increasingly important sending markets for all destinations, so Australia's attractiveness in these countries is good news for the country's educators – especially as they react to slowing Chinese outbound.

Comparing current versus prospective students

IDP segmented students according to whether they were currently enrolled or prospective, and not surprisingly, each segment was focused on different things when evaluating Australia as a study destination.

For prospective students, concerns are primarily around “balancing part-time work and study, not having enough money and adapting to a new culture and way of learning.”

Among current students, perceptions of Australia are mostly positive: 92% say that “the academic support they had received from their institution had met or exceeded their expectations,” and 87% were similarly impressed with the lifestyle for international students in Australia. However, a significant proportion of current students said that “their expectations for financial support had not been met.”

Work/study balance

Government decisions about how much international students can work while studying are tricky ones to make. On the one hand, it is important to allow students to make enough money to live comfortably; there were all too many stories (during the pandemic especially) of students having to go to food banks in Australia and Canada due to lack of money for groceries.

On the other hand, full course loads at university equate to a great deal of time both in class and after school in order to keep up and excel. Too many hours of paid work on top of academics can be exhausting and overwhelming and even jeopardise students’ marks. The IDP research “identified a correlation between poor mental health and students working either fewer than 10 hours per fortnight or more than 40 hours per fortnight, as well as those living alone or off campus.”

Matching students’ hopes with real life in Australia

Speaking to the research, IDP client director Andrew Wharton said:

“As we welcome students back, the opportunity for the Australian sector is to listen to what students want, which is clear career pathways and job opportunities during their studies, and to make sure their expectations are met when they arrive.”

Simon Emmett, CEO of IDP Connect, added that a key finding in the research is that current students often struggle with mental health and study/work balance. He said: “Notably, the findings highlight the pressures students face when juggling studies and part-time work, as well as feelings of isolation.”

More generally, Mr. Emmett commented on the competitive landscape in international education today, and to the effects of a turbulent global economy – effects that are often more acutely felt in the very emerging markets that are now at the top of the list for recruiters. He said,

“With open borders and attractive post-study work policies, destinations are going head-to-head to attract international students. However, at the same time, many countries are facing socioeconomic instability, and students are navigating new emerging challenges.”

Last month, Australia announced [a major extension of post-study work rights](#) for graduates of certain degrees linked to skills shortages in the Australian economy. The announcement will likely make Australia even more attractive to international students choosing to study in certain fields.