

Indian students make a beeline for Canadian universities

Description

By Kanika Tandon, Education Writer

Indian students looking to study abroad are finding Canada an increasingly desirable destination. "Indian students have rediscovered Canada in the last few years," says Simon Cridland, Head of the Advocacy Programme at the High Commission of Canada in India. The High Commission has witnessed a considerable increase in student visas issued over the past two years. In 2008, the total number of Indian candidates applying for Canadian student visas was a relatively small, but decent 3,000. However, 2010 statistics reveal that the figure has soared to 12,000. Embassy officials are reportedly confident that the numbers will double again over the next two years.

Enrolment figures at the University of Toronto (ranked 29th in QS World University Rankings® 2010), which has seen a massive increase in Indian student enrolment, corroborate this. Richard Levin, Executive Director of Enrolment Services at the University, informs us that between 2006 and 2010, the university recorded a 27 per cent increase in applications and a 52 per cent increase in Indian students registering for undergraduate programs.

The steady growth in the country's popularity as a higher education destination among Indians can be ascribed to several factors, including the consistent efforts of the Canadian and Indian governments to cement their bilateral ties. With 3 of its universities in the Top 50 of QS World University Rankings® 2010, Canada offers higher education which is internationally recognized and globally respected for its quality – it also helps that tuition is relatively low! "Canada generally is a safe, peaceful, affordable and attractive destination for international students, with an excellent education system," says Levin.

Compared to the US, the UK and Australia, Canada has friendlier immigration rules, of which Indian students are taking advantage. The fairly relaxed visa rules of the country also allow students to work and repay their student loans. Students can work on the campus and are permitted to work off campus for 20 hours per week. Post graduation, they are allowed to work for 3 years in Canada, and have the option of becoming a Permanent Resident of the country under the Canadian Experience Class policy, if they choose to.

In addition to this, the Canadian government has taken steps and introduced programs and policies specifically aimed at attracting Indian students to the country. The Student Partners Program (SPP), implemented in partnership with Canadian visa offices in India and the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC), was launched in April 2009 and is open exclusively to Indian students. "SPP was introduced to streamline the application process for Indian students who want to study in community colleges. Through it, we get high quality students applying for our skills-based community college education," says Cridland. He adds that the job-related qualifications which these colleges offer are particularly successful in attracting Indian students, who have come to appreciate their value in recent years, and that of the Canadian institutions that provide them.

Another scheme designed with Indian students in mind is MITACS Globalink, introduced in 2008. Under it, 150 bright and successful Indian undergraduate students are invited to Canada each year to do an internship of 3-4 months. It offers a stipend which covers all expenses including airfare, accommodation, and meals.

As a consequence of this increased traffic, Canada holds a special attraction for Indian students because they can now seek safety in numbers in a society that was already solidly multicultural. "One million Canadians can trace their roots back to India," confirms Cridland. Levin seconds that and comments, "The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is home to more than 500,000 Indo-Canadians. Here you'll find the third largest South Asian marketplace in North America as well as numerous Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan and Bangladeshi restaurants, cafés and shops. South Asian culture and Indian cinema are also prevalent in the GTA." He proudly informs us how in June this year, Toronto hosted the International Indian Film Academy Awards (IIFA awards) becoming the first North American city to host this prestigious event.

Several efforts are being made to boost the socio-cultural and educational ties between the two countries, which held their first Education Summit at Carleton University, Ottawa, this year. It was aimed to strengthen the higher education and research ties of the two countries. A Canada-India Centre of Excellence in Science, Technology, Trade and Policy was also opened at Carleton University in 2010, with the goal of perpetuating multicultural understanding. Numerous student fairs, seminars and online activities are being undertaken by the Canadian High Commission in India to promote Canada as a higher education destination. In addition to all this, the Indian government has declared 2011 as the year of India in Canada a year of events aimed to familiarise Canadians with all things Indian.

Slowly but surely, Canada is emerging as a leading education destination for Indian students. "International students come back and spread the word about their experience. As the word gets around, Canadian education is beginning to gain popularity," says Cridland. And looking at the figures, we'd certainly be inclined to agree!