

THE HINDU

Maori land beckons

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The Hindu The Future: At the New Zealand Education Fair, in Chennai.

Universities in New Zealand have established themselves as centres of research excellence.

"The major reason why Indian students prefer to pursue their higher learning in New Zealand is because the country has strong quality assurance systems which ensure consistent, high quality education across all levels, both public and private," says Ziena Jalil, Regional Director - South Asia for Education New Zealand (ENZ). Ms. Jalil who was in Chennai recently to participate in the New Zealand Education Fair, organised by ENZ, says, "Universities in New Zealand are important not just for teaching but also for research and the development of society and economy as a whole. As centres of research excellence they play an important role in economic transformation and development."

New Zealand is the ideal choice for anyone who wants to equip himself/herself with internationally competitive skills and qualifications. It offers a huge range of options, from short-course trade certificates to high-powered research-based doctoral studies.

Academic culture

"Our education system is world class and qualifications at all levels are recognised around the world," says Ms. Jalil. "Education in New Zealand is student-centred, focused on enabling students to problem-solve, process information, work with others, create and innovate. Each student is able to develop his/her potential along a number of possible pathways, academic or vocational. The nation also fosters innovation, creativity and critical thinking that's essential to succeed in today's changing world." And according to the recent Global Innovation Index, New Zealand is ranked 13 of the 141 countries listed.

There are eight universities in New Zealand, and each is a public institution, partly funded by the government. There are no privately-owned universities. Besides, there are 18 Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs). The ITPs have a specialist role to deliver technical, vocational and professional education to meet the needs of industry and business. They provide professional and vocational education and training on a wide range of subjects from introductory studies to degree programmes. There are Private Training Establishments (PTEs) that offer specific vocational niches at certificate and diploma level for occupations — travel and tourism, design, computer training in certificate, diploma programmes, English language learning, and more.

Leisure

Once the school work is done, there's plenty to keep young people in New Zealand stimulated, entertained and in touch with what's going around them. Cinema is very popular. Around a million New Zealanders go to the movies every four weeks.

"International students can experience 'Māori Performing Arts' including singing, Poi dances and the famous Haka of our indigenous Māori people during the 'Kapa Haka' cultural performances around the country," she says.

Commenting about the safety of international students, Ms. Jalil says that New Zealand has the world's first official Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students. This Code advises education providers on the standards of care they must provide to international students living and studying in New Zealand. All education providers who enrol international students must be signatories to the Code, and their compliance is closely monitored by the government. The Code also has a specific standard around ensuring that international students are in safe accommodation. The option of home stays is provided to students, wherein they can experience local culture by staying with a host family. Younger India students opt for the home stay experience, while many students studying at the graduate-level choose on-campus or private accommodation options.

Course relevance

Ms. Jalil says that courses offered by institutions are constantly and consistently reviewed to ensure their relevance to local, national, business and global needs to produce leaders and citizens equipped for the 21st Century. Among the subjects Indian students choose to study, management and commerce top the list, followed by

Information Technology, food, hospitality and personal services, and engineering and related fields.

Most students are able to work part-time (up to 20 hours per week) while they study. Once studies are successfully completed, eligible students have the option to stay back for an additional year under the Graduate Job-search visa scheme.

"There are no scholarships awarded for the bachelor's and master's programmes but in New Zealand, students who get admission to Ph.D pay only the domestic fee and are eligible for additional benefits for partners and dependents. This makes New Zealand universities an attractive destination for research-based study," she says. The country is also gearing up to offer Massive Open Online Courses, in order to offer high quality and specialised distance learning courses programmes.

Have a clear plan

Robert Dillinger, director of Dilinger Consultants, who specialises in education and immigration guidance, says students aspiring to study in New Zealand must diligently prepare for it and begin early. "Indian students seem to concentrate only on admission and not much on visa requirements," says Mr. Dillinger. "Admission is only 10 per cent of your work, but the remaining 90 per cent is about the visa." The student and his/her family have to work together in procuring the required financial documents, academic verifications, police clearance, medical and x-ray examinations. The IELTS score is mandatory for a visa. In some cases there may be a telephonic visa interview. So be prepared!

"In my experience, I find that those students, who have a clear future plan, fare well and succeed in getting a Permanent Residence status in New Zealand. For example, students must understand the post-study work visa and plan accordingly," says Mr. Dilinger. A student who completes one year of study can stay in New Zealand for one year (if two years study then two years post-study work visa) and gain work experience. But it is important to know that one must find a job in their line as this will provide you skilled occupation status. The spouse of the student can work full time and this is unique to New Zealand. Gaining experience in skilled occupation can fetch you the PR status. Those who study for two years can work for two years post-study and those who complete Ph.D can stay for three to four years.

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