

# To live or not to live on-campus

*“I share one kitchen and four bathrooms with 20 other students on the same floor.”*

**W**hen German exchange student Torben Daeneke arrived in Melbourne and checked into his university apartment, little did he know that he was sharing the flat with the love of his life.

Daeneke's application gave the option of living with either two girls or a male student.

“Of course I chose the flat with two girls!” Daeneke exclaims in his energetic German accent.

The match making worked well, because Daeneke and one of the housemates became very good friends and later partners.

While Daeneke's story is romantic and has a fairytale ending, the story did not end so pleasantly for the third housemate, who was feeling left out.

“What made it escalate was the fact that two people got along too well and these two people were not getting along with that third person. So she was a bit of a fifth wheel on a car,” Daeneke said.

Most international students face a dilemma on arrival in Australia over whether to opt for student residences or choose their own housemates.

Potential culture clashes and issues of cost and limited transportation often affect an international student more than their local counterparts.

International students often choose on-campus living for convenience and the opportunity to mix and



mingle with other students. French international student Julien Voraz says that being around people is very important to him, and he is happy to pay the price for it.

In Australia, on-campus living is generally more expensive than overseas universities. Students pay up to \$900 a month to rent a fully furnished apartment that usually includes bills. Some students also receive wireless internet that is available on campus.

But Voraz believes living on campus also saves money. “I don't pay for transport and there is more time to work and study,” he says. As an international student, Voraz says on-campus living allows him to interact with

other cultures and overcome language barriers.

Increasingly, international students are choosing on-campus living, but increasing numbers have not created decreasing cost. When asked whether students need to be wealthy to afford on campus living, Swinburne Student Residences manager Dinesh Balgovind says, “compared to the overall mix of students at university, they do.”

Balgovind says that over the last 10 years, on-campus housing has become a good source of income for universities. This has forecast changes in the way university residences are run. For example, “Privatisation is on the cards as Swinburne is looking into outsourcing the

management of residences,” Balgovind says.

International students are often shocked by the business-like nature of Australian universities.

German-born Daeneke says, “In Germany, student residences are not-for-profit and therefore low budget.”

But quality is not always paramount. “I share one kitchen and four bathrooms with 20 other students on the same floor.”

Some international students are turning away from on-campus housing because of high costs and lack of space.

Indian international student Mihir Sheth considered on-campus living, but found that off-campus

look for rental history from applicants and confirmation that tenants earn enough to keep up with rental payments. Douglas Rochlin is a landlord and only rents to students. His friendly character has given comfort to many students over the years. He does not demand previous housing experience from students as he fears otherwise they will not have a place to live. He encourages other renters to give international students a go as he feels they add diversity to the Australian culture.

Apart from friendly landlords, support is available through universities for international students trying to find off-campus housing.

Swinburne accommodation advisor Samdup Tsering, helps students by discussing their budget and living preferences. He urges students to inspect any place before getting into lease agreements as they have proven to be difficult to exit.

“It is not recommended to book off-campus housing from abroad unless they are arranging it with someone they know,” Tsering says.

Students like Voraz followed his advice by staying at a motel, taking time to compare living options before making a decision to live on-campus.

While living in a hotel might be a stressful way for international students to start their Australian education, Voraz speaks from experience when he says, “choose carefully as it can be stressful to live with someone you don't get along with. It is not just about the quality of housing but also ensuring that those housemates share similar values to you.”

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