

Affordability ranks high for overseas study choices

By ZOU SHUO
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Chinese families are increasingly prioritizing cost-effectiveness when selecting overseas study destinations while continuing to seek high-quality education, according to a report released on Saturday by EIC Education, a Beijing-based education consultancy.

Educational quality remained the top consideration for the fifth consecutive year, the report said. However, the ranking of “study costs” rose to sixth place in 2025, up from eighth place in 2022 and 2023. At the same time, “economic strength” climbed to eighth place, reflecting heightened financial awareness in overseas education planning.

This growing emphasis on value for money is shifting attention toward destinations with stable policies and lower overall costs. European and Asian countries are gaining popularity as alternatives, the report said.

Germany and France were cited as notable examples, attracting Chinese students with reputable public universities — many offering tuition-free education or low registration fees — as well as a growing number of English-taught programs.

More than 38,000 Chinese students studied in Germany in the 2023-24 academic year, while more than 27,000 Chinese students were studying in France during the same period, indicating strong interest in both countries, the report said.

Malaysia has seen a sharp rise in demand, with the number of Chinese applicants increasing nearly four times from 2020 to 2024, reaching 33,216. The report attributed its appeal to branch campuses of top global universities, such as the University of Nottingham, where students can earn identical degrees at about one-third of the cost of studying in the home country.

The shift toward cost-conscious choices has coincided with a stronger focus on employment prospects. Data reveals a growing preference for science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields, as well as interdisciplinary studies aligned with future job markets.

EIC’s student service data from 2022 to 2025 showed applications for science and engineering disciplines rose steadily over the four-year period. Business and economics-related majors continued to account for the largest share of total applications, but their proportion declined year by year over the same period.

Returning to China after graduation

has also become the mainstream plan, driven by a favorable employment environment and supportive talent policies in major Chinese cities, the report said.

Feng Mingqiu, 25, completed a postgraduate program at the University of Malaya and graduated in July this year. She is now seeking employment in China.

She chose Malaysia primarily for its affordability. The total tuition for her program, including semester service fees, ranged from 60,000 to 70,000 yuan (\$8,504 to \$9,922), far lower than comparable programs in Hong Kong and the United Kingdom, she said.

With a less competitive undergraduate background but a strong grade-point average, Feng said she was not competitive enough for universities in Hong Kong and the UK. The University of Malaya, which has a high global ranking, allowed her to realize her goal of studying at a top-ranked institution.

The program was taught in English, and Malaysia has no time difference with China and is geographically close, making daily life and study easier to adapt to, she said.

Feng said her postgraduate degree had improved her employment prospects, noting that many positions explicitly require a master’s degree or higher. She has submitted job applications and is awaiting interview invitations.

Yuan Ye, a 24-year-old veteran currently studying at the University of Science and Technology Beijing, plans to pursue postgraduate studies in Singapore after graduating next year.

He cited several reasons for his choice.

Singapore’s postgraduate programs typically last one to one-and-a-half years, shorter than the three-year domestic programs. This allows him to graduate at age 26, close to the average graduation age for domestic postgraduate students.

He also pointed to the strong international reputations of the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University, as well as suitable advanced study directions in his field. In addition, Singapore’s large ethnic Chinese population, convenient communication, familiar food, minimal time difference with China and proximity to home make it easy to adapt to, he said.

Yuan ruled out the United States because of visa difficulties for veterans, safety concerns and high costs, noting that a two-year US master’s program would cost about 1 million yuan.



Snow soccer

Players compete in snow soccer matches at Qipan Mountain in Hunnan district, Shenyang, Liaoning province, on Sunday. The district hosted a series of snow soccer events as part of a winter city festival integrating sports, tourism, commerce, culture and community activities.

ZHANG WENKUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Chan: Hong Kong economy extends solid, steady growth

Promoting innovation, creating quality jobs key Budget consultation topics

By LI XIAOYUN in Hong Kong
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Hong Kong’s economy has posted solid, steady gains this year despite global uncertainties, with exports, tourism and corporate investment all recording varying degrees of improvement, the city’s Financial Secretary Paul Chan Mo-po said on Sunday.

Writing in his weekly blog, Chan said sustained efforts to promote innovation, technology and economic development are beginning to bear fruit, creating more favorable conditions for Hong Kong’s next stage of growth and bolstering its resilience against external challenges. The city’s economy expanded 3.3 percent in the first three quarters from a year earlier.

With public consultations on the 2026-27 Budget set to begin shortly, he said key topics will include widening the city’s economic horizons, accelerating the development and application of innovation and technology, speeding up industrial upgrading, and creating more quality jobs.

The latest figures show that Hong Kong’s goods exports have posted double-digit year-on-year growth so far this year, while services exports have also strengthened, supported by a buoyant financial market and a surge in visitor arrivals to the highest level since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The special administrative region recorded more than 45 million tourist arrivals in the first 11 months of 2025, surpassing last year’s total.

Visitor trips from outside the Chinese mainland reached almost 11 million, up 16 percent from a year earlier. Fresh data from market research firm Euromonitor International also ranks the SAR as the world’s second most-visited city by global travelers.

Hong Kong International Airport was named the world’s leading airport for customer experience at the 32nd World Travel Awards earlier this month — one of the industry’s most prestigious accolades.

With the Christmas and New Year holidays approaching, Chan said the city will roll out a wide range of events and promotions, and he hopes the festivities will draw more travelers and inject greater momentum into consumption and the broader economy.

Investor sentiment tells a similar story. In recent months, several financial institutions and major e-commerce firms have leased or purchased large floors of commercial

space and even entire buildings to expand their presence in Hong Kong and tap both mainland and global opportunities. These moves reflect a vote of confidence in Hong Kong’s longer-term prospects, Chan said.

The finance chief attended the opening ceremony of the 59th Hong Kong Brands and Products Expo on Saturday at Victoria Park, where 900 booths across a dozen themed zones attracted strong crowds of residents and visitors from other cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. He said many exhibitors are ramping up product innovation and incorporating more technology into their offerings.

Chan added he hopes local companies and manufacturers will seize technological trends to develop more innovative products, strengthen brand building and management, and leverage Hong Kong’s brand advantages to unlock greater business potential.

Free TCM services available for Tai Po fire victims

By WANG ZHAN in Hong Kong

Free traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) services will be provided to all residents affected by the devastating fire in Tai Po starting today, according to the Health Bureau.

The bureau said in a statement on Sunday that a variety of TCM services will be deployed to fully address the medical needs of all residents of the eight blocks at Wang Fuk Court, including foreign domestic helpers.

From Monday through Feb 28, 2026, eligible individuals will be able to access up to three complimentary TCM consultations, which include prescribed medications and related treatments based on clinical assessment.

The TCM services offered will provide holistic care for post-fire health concerns, addressing psychological effects like anxiety and insomnia, respiratory issues such as coughing and throat irritation, physical recovery from weakness and fatigue, digestive problems, and musculoskeletal pain or injuries.

Affected residents with medical needs can call a hotline or visit any District Health Centre or District Health Centre Express to access the services, regardless of their current place of residence.

Additionally, fire victims admitted to public hospitals under the Hospital Authority are eligible for a full fee waiver at the Chinese Medicine Hospital of Hong Kong (CMHHK) until Dec 31, 2026.

The waivers apply to all government-subsidized services at CMHHK, including general and specialized clinics, allied health services, day-patient care, and specified Western medicine diagnostic

procedures and medications.

Following the deadly fire on Nov 26, the Chinese Medicine Clinics cum Training and Research Centres (CMCTRs) under the Hospital Authority promptly enhanced TCM services and offered medicine re-dispensing support in the Sha Tin, Tai Po and North districts of Hong Kong.

Since Dec 2, CMCTRs across all 18 districts have been providing comprehensive support to fire victims, with full medical fee waivers available until Dec 31, 2026. These waivers cover government-subsidized TCM outpatient services, including general consultations, acupuncture, and bone-setting treatments.

As of Sunday, the Support Fund for Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po had received HK\$3.4 billion (\$148.26 million) in donations. With start-up capital of \$300 million from the

special administrative region government, the fund has now reached around HK\$3.7 billion.

Established by the SAR government, the fund will be used to assist residents in rebuilding their homes and providing long-term and sustained support.

Meanwhile, a total of 1,390 Wang Fuk Court residents had been accommodated in youth hostels, camps, or hotel rooms through the coordination of the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau as of Saturday morning.

Another 3,235 residents are currently living in transitional housing units provided by the Housing Bureau or the Hong Kong Housing Society.

The SAR government said the fire victims can remain in these transitional housing units for an extended period and need not worry about rental expenses.

Taste of Dong



A parade featuring locally preserved meat specialties is held during a folk culture event in Sanjiang Dong autonomous county, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, on Saturday. GONG PUKANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Jiangxi valley goes viral, wrongly tagged Japan

By ZHAO RUINAN in Nanchang
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Operators of a scenic valley in eastern China, whose mist-filled cliffs went viral in a TikTok video, have corrected its misidentification as Japan.

The clip garnered over 1.3 million likes and the account labeled the location as Tokyo and Hokkaido in Japan, however, officials in charge of Wangxian Valley, a tourist attraction in Shangrao, Jiangxi province, confirmed the video was filmed there.

Xiong Hui, a representative of the valley, said attention from the viral video came as a surprise.

“We noticed the video attracting significant interest on overseas social media on Wednesday morn-

ing,” she told China Daily. “Wangxian Valley is indeed located in Shangrao, Jiangxi. Its deep gorges and shifting mist make the landscape instantly recognizable. We’re glad viewers enjoyed the footage.”

“We hope friends from around the world can come and see the real beauty of Jiangxi’s mountains and rivers.”

Wangxian Valley, once a defunct mining zone, has since been redeveloped into a cultural resort town combining natural scenery, folk traditions and performance activities.

According to official data, the scenic area received 3.1 million visitors in 2024, including more than 150,000 from overseas, underscoring its growing international appeal.

The misidentification prompted

Yu Jing, spokeswoman for the Chinese embassy in India, to clarify on X on Dec 8 that the clip did not depict scenery from Japan, inviting users to “come and see the real China.”

“Chinese landscapes are being mislabeled as ‘Tokyo’ and ‘Hokkaido’ in this viral video that’s already hit 1.3M likes,” wrote Yu. “In reality, this is Wangxian Valley in Jiangxi province, China.”

Yu’s post drew a wave of comments. “I should find some time to go see it — it looks absolutely stunning,” wrote X user Kevin Bailey.

Another user, Pranay from India, said, “Mistakes happen on the internet, especially when videos go viral. Good to see the correct place being shared. Every country has beautiful landscapes — knowing

where they’re from matters.”

This is not the first time Chinese scenes have been mistaken for Japan.

Earlier this year, a widely shared video praised online for showing “Japanese subway discipline” was identified by Chinese users as having been filmed at Beijing’s Xi’erqi subway station. A similar mislabeling had circulated back in 2020.

A commentary on China.com said such episodes reflect a long-standing perceptual filter. It argued that parts of the Western media and popular culture have for years portrayed East Asia in narrow, one-dimensional terms, creating a simplified — and in some cases rigid — “image database.”

The fast-changing realities of



Wangxian Valley in Shangrao, Jiangxi province, bathes in enchanting lights on the evening of July 12. LIU JINHAI / XINHUA

contemporary China, from futuristic city skylines to scenic sites like Wangxian Valley that combine traditional aesthetics with modern

tourism design, often sit outside this dated frame, leading to misreadings and misplaced assumptions, it added.