Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Relocating to Singapore

This guide is designed to answer the most common questions families have when considering a move to Singapore for their children's education. It is structured thematically to guide you through your decision-making journey.

Part 1: The Singapore Education Landscape

These foundational questions cover the structure and nature of the educational environment in Singapore.

Q: What is the real difference between a "traditional international school" and a "local international" school?

A: This is a crucial distinction in Singapore's education landscape.

Traditional International Schools (e.g., UWCSEA, Tanglin Trust, Dulwich College) primarily serve the expatriate community. They follow a Northern Hemisphere calendar (Aug-Jun), boast a highly diverse international student body, and generally have higher fees. They offer a comprehensive global education experience.

"Local International" Schools (e.g., ACS (Independent), SJI, Hwa Chong International) are part of the Singaporean education system, licensed to admit both local and international students, often in a 50/50 ratio. They typically follow a January-December calendar, offer deeper immersion into Singaporean culture, and have a more accessible fee structure. They are an excellent choice for families seeking world-class academics combined with an authentic local experience.

Q: How competitive are top schools and what is the application timeline?

A: It is very competitive. The most sought-after schools have long waitlists, so we strongly recommend starting the process 12 to 18 months in advance. A typical timeline is:

18-24 Months Out: Begin research and create a shortlist of 3-5 schools.

12-15 Months Out: Contact admissions offices and prepare documents.

10-12 Months Out: Submit applications (most deadlines are Sep-Jan for an Aug start).

6-9 Months Out: Entrance exams and interviews take place.

4-6 Months Out: Offers of admission are sent out.

3 Months Out: Accept an offer and begin the Student's Pass application process.

Part 2: The School Selection Journey

This section addresses the key factors in choosing the right school for your child.

Q: How can we find a school that fits our budget while still offering the best academic "value for money?"

A: This is a key concern for many families, especially those from India, Malaysia, and Thailand. Our approach is to find the "sweet spot" of value. For the highest return on investment (top IB scores vs. lower fees), the "local international" schools like ACS (Independent) and St. Joseph's Institution are unmatched. For families seeking a more moderate price point within the traditional international school system, we go beyond the famous "brand name" schools to identify hidden gems like Nexus International School or Dover Court International School, which offer strong results and excellent care without the highest fees. We provide a detailed financial breakdown of all options to help you make a fully informed decision.

Q: Our child's first language is not English. How can we ensure they will thrive academically and socially?

A: This is the most critical question for families from ASEAN countries and many parts of China. Our first step is a thorough assessment of your child's current English level. Based on this, we shortlist schools with the most robust and nurturing EAL (English as an Additional Language) programs. Schools like UWCSEA and Stamford American International School are known for their excellent, well-resourced EAL departments. We prioritize schools that integrate EAL students into mainstream classes like art and sports from day one, which is vital for building confidence and making friends.

Q: How can we find a school that supports our child's mother tongue and cultural identity?

A: This is a priority for many Chinese and ASEAN families. We identify schools with strong, dedicated language programs. For native Mandarin speakers, schools like Dulwich College (Singapore) and NLCS Singapore have specific "Mandarin A" streams that focus on high-level literary analysis. For a deeply bicultural environment, Hwa Chong International is an excellent choice. For other languages, we help you connect with community groups and after-school programs to ensure your child stays connected to their heritage.

Q: As an American family, how does the IB Diploma compare to the AP system for US university applications?

A: Top US universities hold the IB Diploma in very high regard. They value its emphasis on critical thinking, research skills (via the Extended Essay), and breadth of knowledge. While APs are excellent, the IBDP is often seen as a more comprehensive and rigorous pre-university curriculum. An IB Diploma can also translate into significant college credit, potentially allowing your child to skip introductory-level courses. We can provide a detailed comparison to show how the IBDP aligns with the admissions criteria of your target US universities.

Q: We are a British family concerned about pastoral care. How can we assess which schools are genuinely nurturing?

A: We look beyond the marketing brochures. We assess pastoral care by looking at the student-to-teacher ratio, the structure of the house or homeroom system, the qualifications of the emotional guidance counselors, and the school's overall ethos. Schools like Tanglin Trust and NLCS Singapore have robust pastoral systems modeled on the best British independent schools, ensuring every child is known and supported. We can arrange meetings with the heads of pastoral care during school visits.

Part 3: Visas & Logistics

This section covers the practical aspects of your family's move.

Q: What are our family's visa options, depending on our situation (employee, business owner, or non-working parent)?

A: Your visa strategy is key. Here are the main routes:

For Employees: The most direct route is for one parent to secure an Employment Pass (EP). The rest of the family can then typically get Dependant's Passes (DP).

For Business Owners: The most common and flexible route is to incorporate a Singaporean company that sponsors an Employment Pass (EP) for you as a director. This is generally more straightforward than the EntrePass, which is for a very specific type of venture-backed innovator.

For "Education-First" Movers: If your child is granted a Student's Pass (STP), one parent can apply for a Long-Term Visit Pass (LTVP) to accompany them. Approval is not automatic, and we help you prepare a strong application.

Q: My company provides a relocation package. How do you work with that?

A: We integrate seamlessly with corporate relocation packages. We provide clear, itemized invoices for our services ("School Search and Placement," "Visa Application Services," "Home Finding") that you can submit for reimbursement. We can also liaise directly with your company's HR or relocation agent to ensure a smooth, efficient process, allowing you to focus on your new role.

General Questions

**Q: We are on a tight timeline for a mid-year transfer. Can you still find a school place?**

**A:** While challenging, it is often possible. Our deep relationships with admissions departments across various schools give us real-time insights into occasional mid-year openings due to family relocations. We can move quickly to identify these opportunities and expedite the application process for you. Flexibility on school choice is key in these situations.

**Q: I am a non-working parent planning to move with my child. What are my visa options?**

**A:** This is a common and important concern. If your child is admitted to a school and granted a Student's Pass, you (one parent) can apply for a Long-Term Visit Pass (LTVP) to accompany them. The approval is at the discretion of the ICA and is not automatic. Factors they may consider include your home country and financial standing. We can help you prepare a strong application to maximize your chances of approval.

**Q: How can I be sure my child gets a top-tier education but doesn't lose their Chinese language and culture?**

**A:** This is our specialty. We prioritize schools with strong, dedicated Mandarin programs for native speakers. Schools like **Dulwich College (Singapore)** and **NLCS Singapore** have specific "Mandarin A" or "Native Mandarin" streams that focus on high-level literary analysis, not just language maintenance. We also recommend schools with a significant bicultural community, like **Hwa Chong International**, where Mandarin is part of the school's DNA. This ensures your child is academically challenged in both languages.