

ROZANA SANI
 rsani@nst.com.my

GOING to university marks a host of changes — the transition from being a kid to a young adult and not least, the first real opportunity, for many, to live away from home.

And, as students spread their wings, and slowly test their independence and develop a sense of responsibility and maturity, they will definitely need a place to stay.

While most universities provide hostels or apartments, many allow students to live off-campus.

For Sunway University, students and their parents or guardians are free to make their own choices on accommodation.

"We will try to accommodate all freshmen requests for on-campus accommodation. It is, however, not mandatory as many of our students come from the Klang Valley and may prefer to stay at home.

"We will give preference to new international students and those who come from out of town if we are short of on-campus accommodation. Otherwise, we are happy to accommodate all requests," says Sunway Education Group senior executive director Dr Elizabeth Lee.

Should there be a shortage of on-campus accommodation, the university will recommend off-campus accommodation that is suitable. A senior officer is assigned to look at alternative units.

"Alas, we cannot monitor standards of accommodation which students choose for themselves that we don't know of," Lee says.

"But, we have a counselling and wellness section under our Student LIFE department that looks into the welfare of our students regardless of where they stay. Students are welcome to seek help and our doors are always open to them."

On whether living on-campus and off-campus would be better for students, Lee says she feels that on-campus accommodation allows students to experience a more complete and wholesome university life. They get to live and work with other students from all over the world and from different backgrounds and fields of study.

"There is so much to gain from the enriching and vibrant community which they will belong to after classes. We have good amenities, including on-campus sport facilities, and within the Sunway City, entertainment and leisure. Those staying on-campus can concentrate more on their studies, do research or work in the library or participate in extra-curricular activities without having to rush home.

"Students also don't have to risk getting stuck in unpredictable traffic conditions, especially during examinations where they can't afford to be late. We strive to provide a safe environment to study and live — we have 24/7 on-campus security with CCTV surveillance."

The disadvantage of living on-campus, Lee says, will be the "curfew" system because the university believes in maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

"If they wish to stay out beyond the stipulated time, students are to provide a written request to the hostel masters who should be kept informed in case of emergencies." Many students opt to stay at home and this, too, is feasible as the transport system is efficient.

"It depends on the students, their lifestyles and personalities. Both options allow students to learn to be independent, exercise responsibility and grow. After all, these are the years when students learn to become adults, who will live their own lives in years to come," Lee says.

Choosing housing options for university life



On campus accommodation allows students to live and work together.



Dr Elizabeth Lee



When deciding on the type of accommodation, students need to look at costs, convenience and safety."

TAN SENG SENG,
 Tunku Abdul Rahman
 University College
 Department of Student
 Affairs director

BEING INDEPENDENT

Dean of Universiti Tun Abdul Razak's (UNIRAZAK) Centre for Student Affairs & Student Involvement (CSASI) Datin Nor Hafizah Ismail has the view that students who are from out of town and do not have relatives in Kuala Lumpur should stay on-campus.

"The location is closer to UNIRAZAK, the fee is reasonable, transportation is provided and there are planned activities. However, students need to abide by the rules and no outsiders are allowed to stay overnight."

While staying in rented rooms or houses may provide more freedom and independence, students have to resolve any issues on their own unless they request for CSASI's assistance.

They need to spend more on transportation as UNIRAZAK is right in the heart of Kuala Lumpur and as renting is quite expensive in the city, they will have to share space with more students to cut cost.

"CSASI has no formal checks on the welfare of off-campus students. However, CSASI keeps track of the welfare of all students. Should they require any assistance, we are available 24/7."

When deciding on the type of accommodation, students need to look at costs, convenience and safety, says Tunku Abdul Rahman University College Department of Student Affairs director Tan Seng Seng.

"For on-campus accommodation, the pros are the affordable rental, safety, the convenient location, food and amenities within hostel com-

ound and students need to clean their rooms only. But, there is no attached bathroom, cooking is not allowed and there is no freedom in choosing rooms or roommates."

For off-campus living, students can have a variety of food depending on where they live and their budget, and can make their

own choices in many aspects and learn to be more independent.

"The cons would be the safety aspect, distance from lecture halls and travel costs. Also, students must consider the tenancy contract they sign with landlords."

SELECTING WHAT'S BEST

Nur Izzah Sheikh Azmir, 20, from Kuala Lumpur, is a law student at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam.

She stays off-campus in a rented three-bedroom apartment with friends as she couldn't get on-campus accommodation for her second year.

The apartment is fully furnished and there are two to each room. Generally, we cook, but that depends on our schedule. We also go shopping for groceries and household items, and we split the bill equally.

"The complex has a gym and swimming pool. For transport, we either carpool or share Grab or Uber rides. I spend about RM400 monthly."



Jagadiswaran Rajandran

While cost is higher than staying on-campus, there is no curfew off-campus, so it is easier for students who plan on pulling all-nighters or go for late supper.

"All individuals are created differently, what might work for others may not work for you, and that's okay. The important thing is you have to

know what's best for you. Choose an environment where you know you are comfortable to study in and have fun."

"If you feel that living on-campus helps you to concentrate, then do whatever it takes to get a dormitory, and if you were to choose to live off-campus, my only advice is: choose your housemates or roommate wisely. Choose not only those you can have a good time with, but also with people who push you to strive academically."

Ummu Kalsum Azizan, 22, a third-year medical student at International Islamic University Malaysia in Kuantan, stays in university accommodation in a room shared with three other students.

"For us, it is compulsory to stay on-campus, but I like it. I can get news regarding my studies easily and I feel that I can be more focused. It is also easier to have group discussions or study sessions."

"As we are not allowed to cook, we buy our meals. We either take the bus to class or car-



Gladys Nathania Kunardi

pool. For extra-curricular activities, I play sports in the evening and sometimes join activities organised by the university. I spend about RM300 a month," the girl from Segamat, Johor, says.

Ummu Kalsum thinks undergraduate students should live on-campus because of the facilities available.

"Also, being here makes it easier for us to settle our work."

Irfan Ramlee, a 19 year old who hails from Kemaman, Terengganu, is in the fourth semester of a Diploma in English programme at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris in Tanjung Malim, Perak. He stays off-campus because of the close distance to lecture halls compared with staying in university accommodation.

"I stay in a five-bedroom double-storey terrace. There are 12 tenants and I am sharing a room with two other students. I mostly cook, but sometimes we would eat out as Tanjung Malim offer meals at an affordable price. For lectures, I mainly ride my bicycle, but for extra-curricular activities — I'm a member of the university taekwondo team — I take the shuttle bus for practice sessions." Irfan says he spends quite a bit as he travels a lot for tournaments and other extra-curricular activities.

"I spend at least RM650 a month. I work part time as a barber and also did some administration work at the university's office for a few months."

He says students who are active in extra-curricular activities should stay on-campus provided

PROS AND CONS OF LIVING ON-CAMPUS AND OFF-CAMPUS

| On campus | |
|--|---|
| Pros | Cons |
| Convenient to get to class | Restricted with curfews and strict room rules |
| Have more friends because you are often placed in a dormitory with other students from other faculties | Standard-to-slow Wi-Fi |
| Might be cheaper than off-campus residences | Cooking not allowed |
| Washing machine and dryer provided | Sharing bathroom |
| Off campus | |
| Pros | Cons |
| A nicer space, more modern and usually with own bathroom | Excluded if most of your friends live on-campus |
| Manage your own budget | A little bit more expensive |
| Cooking allowed | |
| No restrictions and no curfews | |
| Can get to know people from other universities | |

they are consistently active so that they can get a spot.
 "But if you are like me, work part-time for extra allowance, it is easier to live off-campus."

LEARNING TO ADJUST

Indonesian Gladys Nathania Kunardi, 19, experienced living alone for the first time when she enrolled in the Arts & Social Sciences degree programme at Monash University Malaysia.

She chose to stay in Sunway Monash Residence, an on-campus hostel, and is still doing so in her second year.

"I would rather stay in a place that is managed by the university. I am in a single room, but I am sharing the unit with 10 other people. We are not allowed to cook in our rooms, so I just buy food. The campus is near. It takes like five to 10 minutes maximum to walk from my room to the university. There is a launderette, Internet access, gym, study rooms and a 24/7 convenience store at the hostel."

She spends about RM1,500 a month — RM2,400 including rental.

The advantage of living on-campus is the convenience, says Gladys.

"I can wake up half an hour before class and still make it on time. However, it might be a bit of a challenge to go anywhere else as it is further away from the mall and other stores. I feel like the pros of living off-campus is that it will be easier to go elsewhere, but if I stay off-campus I might be a bit lazy to go to class."

She advises students to first stay on-campus as it will allow them to be closer to the university while they are still settling in, making it easier for them to manage their time.

"Being in a hostel is also quite helpful for finding new friends as everyone in that building is basically students of the same university. Stay off-campus only after you have settled in and you feel confident enough living alone."

Muaz Haazim Taj Rijal, 20, a second-year student at University Kuala Lumpur, learned to cope with the realities of independent living when he couldn't get on-campus accommodation.

He now stays in a double-storey house where there are five rooms and three toilets — he is sharing the master bedroom room with three

friends. He has 12 housemates.

The young man, who hails from Tanjung Malim, Perak, says he cooks mostly only for dinner.

Muaz goes to class mostly by LRT using the student card that offers 50 per cent discount on rides. Sometimes, he would hitch a ride on his friend's motorcycle.

"We don't have a gym nearby, but we do have things like dumbbells and a pull-up bar at home. Otherwise, our campus has a gym and we can go there anytime."

He spends between RM500 to RM600 a month.

"The best thing about living outside is that I can do projects and assignments easier — photo shoots, for example. We can turn one of the rooms into a studio and set a green screen and flashes. And, we can go in and out whenever we like. But, it's more expensive and we have to be responsible for ourselves."

"My advice is if you have a choice, stay on-campus because it is cheaper and has good services. Hostels usually have their own restaurants or cafes that are cheaper. Hostel has management that will make sure you live in comfort and there is added security."

Tunku Abdul Rahman University College student Jagadiswaran Rajandran, 21, stays outside to experience life off-campus.

"I did stay on-campus for a year while doing my foundation. Living off-campus is definitely a plus as I get a bedroom of my own whereas living on-campus you don't even get to choose your roommate. Besides that, there are more food options. We even have a microwave oven at home — I couldn't have one on-campus. Besides, we have a washing machine, water heaters and other facilities which I didn't have when I was staying on-campus," said the second-year Food Science student who hails from Johor Baru.

But, Jagadiswaran says, it is cheaper to live on-campus. So, students should consider their budget and whether they are willing to be adventurous.

"For me, living off-campus is a new experience where I get to learn to be more independent and learn to manage my finances well."



Irfan Ramlee



Muaz Haazim Taj Rijal