

ACCOMMODATION: HOME AWAY FROM HOME

SPECIAL REPORT

For each international student embarking on their new overseas adventure, student accommodation plays a crucial part in creating a new home. This year, providers tell us more about how to create the perfect environment. Delilah Kealy-Roberts finds out more.

ASSOCIATED

Like 2022, 2023 wasn't without its challenges for accommodation providers. Particularly, the soaring demand post-pandemic continues to outstrip supply. Archit Singh, PR Manager at student accommodation booking platform Amberstudent <https://amberstudent.com/> elaborates, "In 2023, the student accommodation sector faced challenges such as adapting to fluctuating international student numbers post-pandemic and managing the balance between supply and demand for quality housing."

According to Chris Milne, Sales Director at UK-based student residency provider London Nest <https://www.londonnest.com/>, this tension between supply and demand has also resulted in higher costs for students. He notes, "Rising development and operational costs and an unbalanced supply and demand continue to result in soaring rates. It is noted cost of living is now becoming a leading factor in choosing a study destination. The growth in international student numbers is expected to continue. This will include a significant increase of students from price-sensitive markets."

The supply issue has been particularly pertinent in countries

such as Ireland, which are seeing a surge of interest from overseas students. Eduardo Gonzaga, Director of Dublin-based Leevin Ireland <https://leevinireland.com/> also notes that supply has struggled to keep up with demand: "Unfortunately, the rental market in Ireland has been low in properties due to its high demand, and we know that more students are coming to study here."

"The supply of affordable high-quality student housing is paramount to the international education sector"

The answer, according to providers, will come in the form of accelerated growth in new accommodation offerings and collaboration with PBSA companies and education providers. Chris explains, "The supply of affordable high-quality student housing is paramount to the international education sector. Whilst there is an anticipated acceleration of growth in Purpose-Built Student Accommodation, the impact is not expected to be felt until 2026 in major student cities."

Head of Business Development and Partnership at Londonist [https://](https://londonist.co.uk)



londonist.co.uk, Dinara Suleimanova agrees. She says, "Partnerships between universities and private PBSA operators are becoming crucial in the light of the current challenges faced by the sector."

Another challenge faced by those working in the student accommodation sector is creating a home for international students, where they can feel included, integrated, and equipped to achieve a balanced lifestyle.

Carla Mendes, City Marketing & Residence Experience Manager at Granada-based LIV Student <https://livstudent.es/> highlights the difficulties of student integration when it comes to a generation that has grown up during the isolation of the pandemic and is more reliant on technology. She says, "We're talking about a generation that was born and raised in a world of rapid technological expansion, but which brings with it a series of annoyances and issues often linked to a lack of face-to-face sociability, a low tolerance for frustration and an excessive dependence on technology."

To tackle this, many providers are thinking creatively about how to create a home away from home for students, allowing them to feel

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comfortable and included, wherever they are in the world.

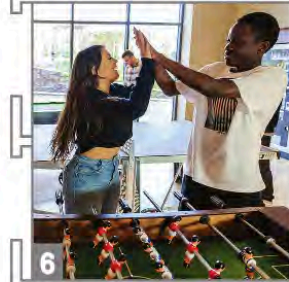
At Resa <https://resa.es/en/>, which offers student accommodation across Spain, the key to this is creating spaces where students can find common ground despite cultural differences. Eleonora Guardini, Resa's Sales and Marketing Manager elaborates, "Even before [students] arrive at our residences, they already begin to form part of a diverse community. Our aim is to create a home away from home, where all residents, regardless of their origin, feel welcomed and appreciated. We strive to promote an inclusive environment where linguistic and cultural barriers fade away, giving way to the building of strong friendships that transcend borders. To this end, we not only design common spaces where you can share good times, whether it's studying or watching a movie, we also design the StudentLife programme which facilitates the integration of students, both national and international."

Also focusing on student wellbeing and inclusivity, Dinara adds that, at Londonist, "It is paramount that overseas students staying in our student residences feel welcomed, supported, and become integrated

with domestic students and their local community. Our Student Portal gives access to students to manage their reservations for accommodation, transportation, London's best-known attractions and special offers."

She adds, "With a crucial focus on wellbeing and an experience-led strategy, we launched a 'Move with Londonist' campaign to expose students to novel experiences. We provided students complimentary tickets to leading attractions tailored to their interests and a chance to meet and interact with other students from Londonist residences."

One area where integration is at the very heart of the accommodation offering is the homestay sector. Harsha Shivdasani, Operations Director at Hosts International <https://www.hosts-international.com/> says, "Offering host family accommodation as a core product, this is what we do! We offer international students the opportunity to integrate into our community and our hosts are excellent at supporting inclusivity and wellbeing which is the base of homestay accommodation. What needs to happen equally, is for international students to understand inclusivity through the diversity the UK offers and to



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Photos: Londonist (1 & 2), Britannia Student Services (3), Resa (4), Leevin (5), LIV Students (6), Australian Homestay Network (7)



➔ be open-minded to integrating into our multicultural society.”

Continuing on this positive note, Harsha says that the future looks bright for homestay accommodation after a difficult few years – especially with students looking for a fully integrated study abroad experience. She explains, “Like a fashion trend, homestays are back and looks like 2024 will match pre-pandemic levels.”

The Australian Homestay Network (AHN) www.homestaynetwork.org confirms the increasing demand for student-hosted accommodation. David Bycroft, Founder & Director says, “The Australian Homestay Network (AHN) will place 15,000 international students into hosted accommodation in 2024. These students come from most countries and Australia is already a multicultural population. We communicate and train both hosts and students to ensure cultural integration.”

Like in other areas of student accommodation, the biggest issue facing many homestay providers is the struggle of supply to keep up with demand. David adds, “The main challenge is the student accommodation sector is going through an unprecedented lack of

supply whilst demand for international education is at its highest point ever.”

As well as the importance of finding a sense of community, there are many other factors that play a large part in the decision-making process when international students are selecting accommodation – from sustainability to leisure facilities.

“Technology is significantly shaping the future of student accommodation”

Michele Da Silva, Managing Director, Britannia Student Services <https://britanniastudents.com> elaborates, “One of the trends in student accommodation starts even before the accommodation has been built. There is now an emphasis on sustainability and eco-friendly design and the features it can bring to student accommodation. This covers energy efficiency in the building and renewable sources of providing that energy. We also believe that there is a trend to increase the variety of facilities on offer by providers of new student halls of residence. For example, private dining rooms and even swimming pools and saunas!” delilah@studytravel.network

LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY

While technology dependence can raise challenges when it comes to integration, many accommodation providers are leveraging new technology to allow them to continuously improve their offerings.

Archit from Amber Students champions the evolving use of technology in the accommodation industry, saying “Technology is significantly shaping the future of student accommodation. Digital solutions like virtual tours, online booking platforms, and AI-driven personalisation are improving the search and selection process for international students.”

According to Carla from Liv Student, the demand for smart technology to be integrated into student accommodation is increasing, and housing providers are using tech to help with security, sustainability, and comfort. She notes, “The integration of smart building solutions for security, energy efficiency and convenience has probably continued to grow, improving the overall student living experience. In addition, the use of digital platforms for reservations, communication and community engagement may have become more sophisticated, simplifying administrative processes and connecting residents.”

Eleonora from Resa also emphasises the importance of utilising technology to meet the digital generation of students halfway: “We have set to work to increase the virtual tours of rooms for all those students who cannot make a face-to-face visit to our residences.”

“Our aim is to continue increasing the experiences to remain at the forefront in a sector whose target public has been born and has grown in the era of digitalisation.” ■