



Malaysia This Week in Asia / Economics

As Chinese students pick Malaysia, their parents buy second homes

Anwar could negotiate for more cooperation on education with Xi to capitalise on the momentum, industry insiders say

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A surge in demand for Malaysian real estate from wealthy Chinese families drawn to the country's international schools and universities may gain further momentum with this week's visit by Chinese President [Xi Jinping](#).

With a sizeable Chinese community, Mandarin-friendly programmes, and a multicultural environment, [Malaysia](#) offers a sense of continuity and comfort for [students from China](#), property agents say.

"Education is a key driver," real estate market intelligence group Juwai IQI Group CEO Kashif Ansari said. "Families often purchase property near universities or international schools, especially in Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru, and Penang, where the education infrastructure appeals to overseas Chinese."

The Malaysian government's education diplomacy – including streamlined student visas, reciprocal university links and partnerships with institutions like Xiamen University – has also cemented Malaysia's role as a soft-power bridge.

Juwai IQI reported a notable shift in 2024 among ultra-wealthy Chinese buyers, who are purchasing fewer homes in the United States and turning their focus instead to Southeast Asia and Australia.

Malaysia jumped from outside the top 10 to become the fourth most-inquired destination among high-net worth Chinese property seekers in 2024, behind Thailand, Australia and Canada, and just ahead of the UK.

Official statistics showed student enrolment from East Asia into Malaysian universities rose by more than 24 per cent between 2023 and 2024, surpassing 36,000 students.



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A view of Penang. More Chinese families are looking at homes in Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru, and Penang, where the education infrastructure appeals to them. Photo: Shutterstock

According to the Times Higher Education group, Chinese students remained the largest group, with over 33,000 applications, far ahead of the next biggest cohort, Bangladeshis, at just under 7,000.

The group's 2025 World University Rankings saw Malaysian universities make significant strides up the global rankings with Universiti Teknologi Petronas (UTP) listed among the top 250 universities in the world, rising from the previous band of 301-350.

Universiti Malaya, the country's oldest and most prestigious institution, was ranked in the 251-300 band. In 2023, Prime Minister [Anwar Ibrahim](#) invited Tsinghua University to set up a branch campus in Malaysia as the second Chinese university after Xiamen University.

Beyond education, Ansari said Malaysia delivered a high-end lifestyle at greater value for Chinese families, now squeezed by economic concerns back home.

Prime properties in Kuala Lumpur and coastal locations cost up to 87 per cent less than similar homes in Bangkok or Singapore, while offering comparable space, amenities, and prestige.

Damien Duhamel, managing partner at strategy firm Eurogroup Consulting, said Anwar could negotiate for more cooperation on education with Xi to capitalise on the momentum.



Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim may discuss with Chinese President Xi Jinping about education partnership opportunities, an analyst says. Photo: Xinhua

"Prime Minister Anwar can offer streamlined student visa plans, increased Mandarin-medium programmes, and reciprocal university links to enrol more Chinese students – especially those deterred by US visa barriers," Duhamel told This Week in Asia, adding the education industry brought a major boon to Malaysia.

visas – comprising 45 per cent of the scheme's 5,080 participants.



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Hadi Azmi is the Post's Malaysia Correspondent. Based in Kuala Lumpur, he covers Malaysian politics and current affairs. He has written for Bloomberg, The New York Times, and CNN.

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