FREE REPORT FOR SINGAPOREAN PARENTS

3 Hidden Costs Singaporean Parents Don't See Coming When Their Child Studies in Melbourne

See how Singaporean families are planning ahead for university, migration and long-term accommodation in Australia, while avoiding costly mistakes that many only discover after arriving.

Disclaimer
This report has been prepared for general educational purposes only and does not constitute financial, legal, taxation or investment advice.
Any figures, examples, rental estimates, case studies and calculations included in this report are illustrative only and should not be relied upon as a guarantee of future outcomes.
Before making any property, financial or migration-related decisions, readers should seek independent professional advice that considers their individual circumstances.
Unify Partners Real Estate Pty Ltd
Licence No. 091610L

Unify Partners

Melbourne has become one of the world's most sought-after destinations for international students, and it's easy to see why.

Ranked the #1 student city in Australia and #5 globally, Melbourne is home to some of the country's leading universities, including the University of Melbourne, currently ranked #19 in the world. It is also recognised as the #4 most liveable city globally, attracting students, professionals and families from around the world.

For many Singaporean parents, these are exactly the opportunities they hope to provide for their children.

However, choosing a university is often the easiest part of the journey.

The bigger challenge is everything that comes after.

- **Where will your child live?**
- **How much will accommodation cost over the next three, five or even eight years?**
- **Should you simply rent?**
- **What happens if your child decides to stay in Australia after graduation?**
- **And how do you make confident decisions when you're planning from another country?**

These questions are becoming increasingly important as Melbourne continues to grow.

Victoria is now home to more than 259,000 international students, while the state's population is projected to exceed 10 million people by 2051. As more students, skilled migrants and families choose Melbourne, demand for accommodation continues to increase.

This is why many parents are beginning to think differently.

Rather than focusing solely on where their child will live during university, they are considering how today's decisions may influence their family's future opportunities, flexibility and long-term plans in Australia.

In the pages ahead, you'll discover three hidden costs many parents don't consider when planning for their child's education journey in Melbourne.

You'll also learn why some families are making decisions years before they become urgent, and the questions worth asking before committing to a rental, property purchase or long-term plan.

After all, some of the most important decisions are not made when your child arrives in Melbourne.

They're made long before the plane takes off.

Hidden Cost #1:

Underestimating The True Cost Of Accommodation

When parents calculate the cost of studying overseas, tuition fees are usually front of mind. Accommodation is often not.

Yet for many families, housing can become one of the largest expenses throughout a university journey, particularly in a city like Melbourne where demand for student accommodation remains strong.

Around Melbourne CBD and nearby university precinct, weekly rents commonly range from AUD $500 to $750 per week.

To put this into perspective:

Weekly Rent	3 Years	5 Years	8 Years
AUD $500	AUD $78,000	AUD $130,000	AUD $208,000
AUD $750	AUD $117,000	AUD $195,000	AUD $312,000

These figures do not include rent increases, utilities, internet, moving costs or the possibility of changing accommodation during your child's studies.

The challenge is not simply the cost.
It's the uncertainty.

Many students move multiple times during their university years due to lease expiries, rent increases, changing housemates or limited availability. Purpose-built student accommodation and university residences can also experience high demand during peak intake periods, with some providers operating waitlists before semester commencement.

This doesn't mean renting is the wrong decision.

For many students, renting remains the most practical option.

However, understanding the true cost of accommodation over an entire education journey allows you to evaluate your options with greater clarity and avoid making decisions based solely on short-term considerations.

The question is not whether accommodation will cost money.

The question is how much it may cost over the full duration of your child's time in Melbourne.

Hidden Cost #2:

Waiting Until Your Child Arrives To Start Planning

Many parents begin thinking seriously about accommodation only after their child's university offer has been confirmed.

Unfortunately, this is often when choices become more limited and decisions feel more rushed.

By then, families may need to compare suburbs, understand rental requirements, arrange inspections, organise documents and make decisions from overseas within a short timeframe.

This is why some families choose to start planning several years before their child arrives.

Not because they have all the answers.

But because planning ahead gives them more options.

For example, a family whose child plans to begin university in 2029 may start exploring accommodation, education pathways and long-term goals in 2026 or 2027.

This gives them time to understand the market, compare different strategies and make decisions without unnecessary pressure.

It also allows families to think through different scenarios before they become immediate concerns.

Your child may decide to pursue postgraduate studies.

They may receive a graduate employment opportunity.

They may choose to remain in Australia after graduation.

Or your family may eventually consider broader plans of your own. None of these outcomes are guaranteed.

However, they can be easier to navigate when you have already considered the possibilities early.

The families who feel most confident about major decisions are not necessarily those with the biggest budgets.

More often, they are the ones who give themselves enough time to understand their options.

When it comes to education planning, waiting until your child arrives in Melbourne can sometimes be the most expensive decision of all, not because of the money spent, but because of the options you may no longer have time to properly consider.

Hidden Cost #3:

Thinking Only About University Instead Of The Bigger Picture

For many parents, the initial goal is simple: provide their child with a quality education and a safe place to live while studying in Melbourne.

However, university is often just one chapter of a much longer journey.

Some students choose to pursue postgraduate qualifications.

Others secure graduate employment opportunities and remain in Australia after graduation.

In some cases, a child's education becomes the starting point for broader family conversations involving migration, lifestyle changes or future retirement considerations.

This is why some families ask a different set of questions from the beginning.

For example:

What if your child decides to remain in Melbourne after graduation?

What if your family wants greater flexibility to spend time in Australia in the future?

What if you eventually plan to retire or relocate?

What if you want to create a long-term asset that can benefit future generations?

There is no single right answer to these questions.

Some families decide that renting is the most suitable option for their circumstances. Others explore ownership opportunities as part of a broader family strategy.

The important point is that accommodation decisions do not exist in isolation.

They often intersect with education, migration, lifestyle and long-term financial planning.

The families who approach these decisions most confidently are often those who look beyond the next three or four years and consider where they would like to be in the next ten or twenty.

After all, while university may last only a few years, the decisions made during that period can create opportunities that extend far beyond graduation.

Freehold vs Leasehold: A Difference Many Singaporean Families Don't Realise

When exploring property options in Australia, one of the first differences many Singaporean families notice is the concept of freehold ownership.

In Singapore, approximately 80-85% of residential properties are leasehold, meaning ownership is granted for a fixed period before eventually reverting to the state. While leasehold properties remain popular and valuable, they operate differently from freehold ownership.

In Australia, many residential properties are sold on a freehold basis.

This means ownership is not limited by a lease term and can generally be passed on to future generations, sold, rented or retained indefinitely.

Singapore Typical	Australia Typical
Predominantly leasehold	Greater availability of freehold ownership
Fixed lease period	No lease expiry
Ownership eventually reverts to the state	Ownership can be retained indefinitely
Different long-term legacy considerations	Greater long-term ownership flexibility

For some families, this distinction may not be important.

However, for others, particularly those thinking beyond university accommodation, it can influence how they approach long-term planning.

A property initially purchased to support a child's education may later serve different purposes. It could become a future family residence, a source of rental income, a retirement option or an asset passed on to the next generation.

This doesn't mean freehold ownership is automatically better.

Rather, it highlights the importance of understanding the differences between ownership structures before making a decision.

Many families spend considerable time researching universities, courses and visas. Yet few spend the same amount of time understanding how property ownership works in different countries.

For those considering long-term plans in Australia, it is often a conversation worth having early.

Looking Beyond Singapore: ABSD, Diversification & Long-Term Planning

For some Singaporean families, the decision is not simply whether to rent or buy accommodation for their child.

It is also about where they want to build their future.

One consideration that frequently arises is Singapore's Additional Buyer's Stamp Duty, commonly known as ABSD.

For Singapore citizens purchasing a third residential property, the current ABSD rate is 30% of the property's purchase price.

For example, a family purchasing a SGD $2 million property as their third residential property could incur an additional SGD $600,000 in ABSD alone.

As a result, some families begin exploring opportunities outside Singapore. Their objective is not necessarily to replace their Singapore property holdings, but to diversify their assets, create additional options for their children and gain exposure to a different market.

For families already considering Australia for education, this can naturally lead to broader discussions around accommodation and long-term ownership opportunities.

Of course, every family's circumstances are different.

Factors such as taxation, financing, residency status and long-term objectives should always be considered carefully and discussed with appropriate professional advisers.

The key takeaway is not that one market is better than another. Rather, it is that the decision-making process often extends beyond accommodation alone.

For some families, the question evolves from:

"Where will my child live while studying?"

to:

"How can we use this period to create more flexibility and opportunities for our family in the future?"

The answer will look different for everyone.

However, understanding the options available is often the first step towards making a more informed decision.

Planning Pathways Some Families Explore

There is no single strategy that works for every family.

The right approach depends on your child's education plans, your family's financial circumstances and your long-term goals.

What is interesting, however, is that families with similar objectives often arrive at very different decisions.

Some choose to rent throughout their child's university journey because they value flexibility and do not want the responsibilities of property ownership.

Others explore purchasing a property several years before their child arrives, allowing them to secure accommodation while also considering future uses for the property.

There is no single strategy that works for every family.

The right approach depends on your child's education plans, your family's financial circumstances and your long-term goals.

What is interesting, however, is that families with similar objectives often arrive at very different decisions.

Some choose to rent throughout their child's university journey because they value flexibility and do not want the responsibilities of property ownership.

Others explore purchasing a property several years before their child arrives, allowing them to secure accommodation while also considering future uses for the property.

Some families may view a property primarily as a place to live.

Others may consider whether it could generate rental income, support a future move, or form part of a broader family wealth strategy.

The important thing is not which strategy you choose.

It is understanding the advantages and trade-offs of each option before making a decision.

Family Goal	Common Approach
Maximum Flexibility	Rent
Secure Long-Term Accommodation	Purchase Property
Future Migration Plans	Purchase & Hold
Retirement Planning	House & Land or Long-Term Ownership
Family Wealth Diversification	Explore Opportunities Beyond Singapore

For Australian citizens, permanent residents and some Australian expatriates working overseas, there may also be additional considerations such as negative gearing and other taxation benefits.

As these depend on individual circumstances and current legislation, professional advice should always be sought.

The goal is not simply to choose accommodation.

It is to choose the pathway that best supports your family's future plans.

Real Family Stories

The following case studies are based on real Singaporean families who explored different approaches to accommodation, education and long-term planning in Melbourne.

While every family's circumstances are unique, these examples may provide useful insights as you consider your own options.

CASE STUDY #1

Potential Rental Costs Of Up To AUD $312,000 Considered During Their Decision

Background

- Daughter planning to study medicine in Melbourne
- Estimated education journey of 5-8 years
- Rental accommodation near university estimated at approximately AUD $750 per week

Solution

- Purchased a 2-bedroom Melbourne apartment for approximately AUD $990,000
- Secured accommodation before studies commenced

Result

- Potential rental costs of up to AUD $312,000 factored into their decision
- Accommodation secured throughout the education journey
- Retained ownership of a Melbourne asset after graduation
- Potential future rental income of approximately AUD $850 per week

CASE STUDY #2

AUD $100,000 Estimated Increase In Value Before Their Son Even Arrived

Background

- Son expected to move to Melbourne in 2027
- Family wanted to plan several years ahead
- Concerned about future prices and accommodation availability

Solution

- Purchased a Southbank apartment in 2023 for approximately AUD $700,000
- Secured accommodation years before it was required

Result

- Property now valued at approximately AUD $800,000
- Approximately AUD $100,000 estimated increase in value over 3 years
- Accommodation secured before their son's arrival

Real Family Stories

The following case studies are based on real Singaporean families who explored different approaches to accommodation, education and long-term planning in Melbourne.

While every family's circumstances are unique, these examples may provide useful insights as you consider your own options.

CASE STUDY #3

AUD $1.25 Million Freehold Townhouse For A Daughter Studying At University

Background

- Daughter studying at the University of Melbourne
- Family wanted stable accommodation close to transport
- Seeking a better long-term use of capital than low-interest deposits

Solution

- Purchased a AUD $1.25 million freehold townhouse in Melbourne's eastern suburbs
- Walking distance to public transport

Result

- Daughter enjoyed stable accommodation throughout her studies
- No need to compete in the rental market
- Family retained ownership of a premium freehold Melbourne asset

CASE STUDY #4

Rental Income Helped Offset Holding Costs Before Relocation

Background

- Child expected to move to Melbourne in 2027
- Family considering future migration to Australia
- Wanted a property that could support itself before relocation

Solution

- Purchased a new Melbourne apartment for approximately AUD $1.1 million
- Contributed 50% cash and financed the balance
- Rented the property prior to relocation

Result

- Rental income of approximately AUD $950 per week
- Approximately AUD $50,000 annual rental income
- Mortgage repayments approximately AUD $3,900 per month
- Rental income helped offset the property's holding costs before relocation

Real Family Stories

The following case studies are based on real Singaporean families who explored different approaches to accommodation, education and long-term planning in Melbourne.

While every family's circumstances are unique, these examples may provide useful insights as you consider your own options.

CASE STUDY #5

Avoiding A 30% ABSD While Creating A Long-Term Family Asset

Background

- Family already owned multiple properties in Singapore
- Purchasing another Singapore property would attract 30% ABSD
- Children may study in Melbourne in the future

Solution

- Purchased a new Melbourne apartment for approximately AUD $950,000
- Contributed 30% cash deposit and financed the balance
- Diversified outside Singapore

Result

- Potential rental income of approximately AUD $900 per week
- Secured a freehold Melbourne property
- Created a long-term family asset outside Singapore

CASE STUDY #6

Building A Future Home In Melbourne For Retirement

Background

- Singapore-based buyer planning a future move to Melbourne
- Wanted more space and lifestyle flexibility
- Looking for a long-term retirement option

Solution

- Purchased a 4-bedroom, 3-bathroom house and land package for approximately AUD $630,000
- Fixed-price turnkey contract
- Located in Melbourne's northern growth corrido

Result

- Secured a future home for retirement or relocation
- Access to a 5% rental guarantee
- Achieved the space, lifestyle and flexibility difficult to replicate in Singapore

Meet Jeanette Lee

Jeanette Lee is a Melbourne-based real estate professional with more than 20 years of experience helping overseas families navigate property ownership, education planning and migration-related decisions in Australia.

Having migrated to Melbourne herself and guided her own children through their education journey, Jeanette understands firsthand how overwhelming it can feel to make major accommodation and financial decisions from overseas.

Known for her practical and education-first approach, Jeanette is passionate about helping families understand not just what opportunities exist, but how those opportunities align with their long-term goals.

As Founder & CEO of Unify Partners Real Estate, Jeanette has helped buyers across Singapore, Malaysia and the Asia-Pacific region purchase property in Australia with greater confidence and clarity.

Complimentary Strategy Session

No Pressure. No Obligation. Just A Conversation.

Every family's situation is different.

Your child's university plans, timeline, budget and long-term goals will influence which options may be most suitable for you.

If you'd like to discuss your circumstances, ask questions or better understand the opportunities available, you're invited to book a complimentary strategy session with Jeanette Lee.

During your conversation, you'll gain clarity on:

- Accommodation options based on your child's education plans
- Whether renting, buying or planning ahead may be worth exploring
- Migration, lifestyle and long-term planning considerations
- Common mistakes families make and how to avoid them

This is not a sales presentation.

It's an opportunity to ask questions, explore your options and gain greater confidence before making important decisions.

Book Your Complimentary Strategy Session Today

Level 19/180 Lonsdale St, Melbourne VIC 3000

+61 402 182 522

0402 182 522