

HONG KONG

EDUCATION

CANADA NOW THE SECOND MOST POPULAR CHOICE

Interest shot up among Hongkongers heading overseas for higher education after Ottawa announced a new immigration pathway

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Canada has leapfrogged over Australia and the United States to become the second most popular destination after Britain for Hongkongers going overseas for higher education.

Britain was long the most popular choice, followed by Australia, the United States and Canada in that order.

But after Canada announced its new immigration pathways for the city's residents last year, 6,365 Hongkongers were granted student visas there, just behind the 6,511 issued by Britain.

Canada used to be the least popular of the four countries for Hongkongers heading abroad to study. Only about 2,500 were granted Canadian student visas each year from 2018 to 2020, making up a fifth of the total student visas issued by the four places.

The landscape was reshaped after Britain, Canada and Australia announced easier immigration pathways for Hong Kong residents following Beijing's imposition of the national security law in June 2020, banning acts of secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces.

Both Canada and Australia have said those who study there

may stay on and apply for permanent residence and, later, citizenship. Their dependants would also be allowed to apply for visas leading to permanent residence.

Canada's terms were easier, as Hongkongers only needed to complete a two-year diploma course at designated postsecondary learning institutes before

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JEANNIE TSE, EF EDUCATION FIRST

applying for permanent residence. Australia required Hongkongers to remain there for three to four years after graduating before applying for permanent residence.

The number of student visas issued by Australia rose after Canberra announced details of its migration scheme last November.

Australia issued around 11 per cent more student visas from January to March this year, compared to the same period in 2019, months before the outbreak of social unrest in Hong Kong.

Britain eased its migration rules for Hongkongers with its British National (Overseas) Visa scheme, which does not require applicants to study there.

Of the four top destinations for Hong Kong students, only the US did not offer a new migration scheme. The number of student visas there shrank last year.

In 2018, the year before the city's social unrest, about 14,800 Hongkongers applied for student visas from the four countries. The number rose to 14,950 in 2019, but fell to 12,067 in 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic struck.

Last year, about 17,900 Hongkongers obtained student visas to the four countries.

Meanwhile, more students have been leaving the city after sitting their university entrance exam over the past two years.

The Secondary 6 Students' Pathway Survey conducted by the Education Bureau showed about 14 per cent of those who sat the exam in 2020 and last year chose to continue their studies outside the city. It found 305 students polled went to Canada last year, a 126 per cent increase from 2019.

Jeannie Tse, country manager in Hong Kong and Macau for EF Education First, said the education consultancy noticed demand to study in Canada skyrocketed after the country unveiled its immigration scheme last year.

"We did not hold any seminars on Canadian education before 2020, but since last year, we've been holding at least one seminar every month," she said.

CONSERVATION

Database outlines spiders discovered for first time in city

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Hong Kong is home to over 100 species of spiders, according to a naturalist group that has compiled an online database on the creatures and which claims several discoveries on the local presence of several types of arthropods.

Outdoor Wildlife Learning Hong Kong yesterday said an 18-month research project by more than 800 volunteers had allowed the group to catalogue 100 spider species but many more could be added after a study of the data by taxonomists worldwide.

"Our biggest hope is to address people's misconception and fear of spiders because they are sometimes portrayed in documentaries or films as antagonists," said Ken So Ying-kin, the group's education and research manager.

"Through this scheme, we would also like to help enrich people's understanding of Hong Kong's biodiversity, not only about some popular creatures, such as birds and dragonflies, but also about animals as marginal as spiders."

The group did a habitat survey between December 2020 and May this year, covering mountain trails throughout Hong Kong.

According to the group, more than 800 trained residents, including students from primary and secondary schools, collected 4,783 valid spider records, comprising 33 families and 135 genera, a main taxonomic category that ranks above species and below family.

"Although the participants had no prior knowledge of ecolog-

ical studies, the quality of their work was comparable to academic research," So said. "They explored different nooks and crannies, and the rich data has offered important references for Hong Kong's ecological value."

The database includes visual records about the species' size, characteristics and distribution, as well as their web-building, mating and mimicking behaviours.

According to So, the database attempts to give researchers baseline information and fill gaps in local academic research. The previous leading literature about spiders in Hong Kong was published in 1998.

The survey discovered two spider families, the ghost and trachelid, neither of which had been logged as living in the city, and a new genus of fishing spider believed to have never been recorded locally, the group said.

Although the study did not identify any protected species, the group found the world's first species that disguises itself as a caterpillar. The group's analysis also found spider species were as diverse on the edges of country parks as they were inside them.

"Spiders are very important in terms of ecology," said Timothy Yip Ho-yin, a spider specialist at Tunghai University's department of life science in Taiwan. "Their presence reflects the diversity of the local ecology because of their high requirements on the number and variety of their prey and the environment in which they live."

If spiders found a place too difficult to adapt to, they would migrate to another habitat, Yip explained.



(Above) The Bottle-brush Iridescent Jumper or *Siler Semiglaucus* and (below) Painted Orange Jumper or *Epicilla Calcarata*. Photo: PK Eddie

