

Where

## TO STUDY

*Benefit from a new economic environment, different ecosystems and diverse cultures when relocating*

by MATT SYMONDS

The modern business student has never been more global. They may have been raised in a suburb of Bangalore, completed an undergraduate programme in Boston, graduated from an MBA in the hustle and bustle of Hong Kong, then settled into work between Paris and London: air miles and expat packages are no longer the preserve of diplomats and the military.

The US continues to attract the most MBA applications from around the world, according to the latest statistics from the Graduate Management Admission Council (Gmac), followed by the UK, Canada, France and India. There are popular options across six continents, so does it really matter where you study an MBA?

Professor Pablo Martin de Holan, Dean of the MBA programme at Emylon business school in France, thinks it does.

"Location still matters for an MBA student. This new millennium and its technol-

ogies are reducing some of the burdens of location, but being close to the action still matters, particularly for young professionals who chose the MBA to accelerate their careers or change them."

Martin de Holan says that students choose France because it has the fifth largest economy in the world, with a huge number of multinational companies operating in a variety of sectors, from healthcare to hospitality, automobile design and manufacturing, mass transportation and defence.

"The connections Emylon has to these and other industries located in the vicinity of the school allows students who wish to pursue a career in these fields to immerse themselves in the realities of that industry, and to prepare themselves from the early days of their MBA.

"For some, location is important because they would like to work and perhaps



remain in a country that's not where they were born," he says. "For others, it is about taking advantage of a location's economic environment and its different ecosystems, like the strength of the luxury industry in France."

For this reason, Maryanne Maina chose an MBA with a focus on luxury strategies at HEC Paris, heading to the French capital famed for the likes of Chanel, Dior and Jean-Paul Gaultier.

"But it isn't all about fashion," Maina says. "It's about finance, management, business and branding, specific to the luxury industry – and where better than France?"

Maina, who grew up in Kenya, thought that Paris was beautiful and dreamy, a different experience from her youth in the vibrant city of Nairobi. While the Kenyan

capital remains her home, she says that Paris has a place in her soul.

"You have to go to a French school to study luxury. It means that I studied alongside remarkable people from countries around the world."

*"I studied alongside remarkable people from around the world"*

Using the knowledge and experience she gained from her MBA at HEC Paris – where 90 per cent of the student body is made up of international students – Maina is working as a consultant on the luxury market in Africa. She says that she matched her career aspirations to the best MBA for her, and location was an important consideration.

Maina is one of many African citizens who choose to study an MBA outside of the continent. According to the latest Gmac report, women now comprise a slightly higher percentage of Graduate ➔



Management Admission Tests (Gmat) taken by African citizens.

Martin de Holan advises MBA candidates to evaluate the qualities of the location of their chosen MBA, and see if they match with their own objectives, keeping in mind that the best MBA is not necessarily the highest ranked, but the one that matches the needs of the candidate.

Lidia Budaeva found that her needs were best catered for across the border in Germany, at the European School of Management and Technology (ESMT) in Berlin where the MBA class consists of 63 students from 34 countries.

Having worked in investment banking in Moscow, Budaeva wanted to leave Russia for an MBA in mainland Europe. She chose Germany, to learn about business in one of the strongest economies on the continent.

*“Tolerance and teamwork are key factors for success in business and life”*

“I visited ESMT and knew this was the school for me,” she says. “In the heart of Berlin, the most green capital in Europe, the buses run on time and everything is in order. It’s not like Russia where you can be surprised at any moment.”

Budaeva finds that living in Berlin is comfortable and costs are much more reasonable than in the Russian capital. Going back to Russia is now her last option, as she fears new sanctions in the country will destroy the investment banking sector in Moscow. Instead, she’d like to stay in Germany. She enjoys living in a city where she knows what’s going to happen, and can enjoy the parks and youthful atmosphere.

But a city campus in a start-up breeding ground isn’t what every MBA candidate looks for. Yasmeen Smadi is a student on the MBA programme at Nyenrode Business

Universiteit in the Netherlands where the school’s campus features a 13th century castle on the bank of the river Vecht.

“The moment I entered through the gate, I was amazed by the beauty of the campus and that was where the story began,” says Smadi.

The only private university in the Netherlands, the school is located on a park-like estate with a moat that surrounds the castle where the students have lectures. Smadi, who is from Jordan, says that it’s an atmosphere that promotes the socially tolerant, liberal and culturally diverse nature of the Netherlands that is also reflected in her MBA class at Nyenrode.

“Not only is the Netherlands a safe country, with both a high quality of living and excellent standards of education, its economy is one of the best in Europe. The possibility of finding a job here is quite high compared to other countries.”

At Nyenrode, 83 per cent of graduates find a job or start their own company within six months after graduation. Smadi highlights that the diversity of the class helps empower the students to succeed.

“Having different nationalities in the class teaches us to accept our differences and embrace them,” she says. “We learn that it takes a village of leaders to be successful and that collaboration, tolerance and teamwork are key factors for success in business and life.”

Yolanda Habets, head of the full-time MBA programme at Vlerick Business School in Belgium, agrees that the cultural, linguistic and economics factors make a big difference when choosing an MBA. She says that business schools have a responsibility to leverage their physical location to boost the overall MBA experience. ➔

AMANDA KOCHSCHICK



**The Rotterdam School of Management**

I applied for an MBA because I wanted to move into the corporate sector and thought the programme would be a great stepping stone to a more international career,” says Amanda Koch Schick, who worked for five years as a finance manager in the arts and charity sectors in London before moving to the Netherlands to study at the Rotterdam School of Management.

“For me, the most important factors to consider were location, the programme, the school’s academic reputation and the diversity of the student body. As most one-year programmes are based in Europe, I knew that was where I wanted to be. Also, as European schools tend to have a very international outlook in their curriculum I knew I’d be exposed to a competitive and challenging environment. RSM had everything that I was looking for.

“Location is such an important aspect of choosing where to study, especially when it comes to job hunting, and applicants should position themselves where they want to work and where the business is. Living in the Netherlands has been great so far. Dutch people are incredibly friendly, and almost everyone speaks English! Rotterdam is a very lively, buzzing city, but it’s also an international business hub.

“RSM introduced the career development aspect right at the beginning, ensuring your goals remain in focus and are aligned to what you learn in class. I have already received advice on my CV, LinkedIn profile and job-hunting strategies,” she says.

"All top business schools offer MBA programmes that are global in their approach, but their physical location does have an effect on the student experience, the delivery and access provided to the corporate network."

Habets says that studying in Belgium, for example, gives MBA students a real European experience. From multinational-als, including the world's biggest consultancies and consumer brands, to innovative start-ups in areas like pharma and biotech, Belgium provides access to opportunities across many industries. Habets highlights the great cities that the country is home to, from Antwerp, one of the world's biggest ports, and Brussels, where the cost of living is far lower than many other European capitals.

"Brussels has a unique status as the capital of Europe with some of the most critical governmental and non-governmental organisations in the world," she says.

"It's a strategically important city for large international companies and has a rich culinary tradition, as well as great beer and chocolate. And with a location at the heart of Europe, it is less than two hours by train to Paris, London, Amsterdam and Cologne, and within easy travel distance to everything else that Europe has to offer."

But with Africa and Asia recording the strong economic growth of recent years, schools in these regions are seeing increased interest from international students.

In 2009, Thomas Pedrick was working in the production department of a London publishing house, negotiating print runs in China, organising the shipment of books to the US and generally gaining an under-

standing of how a business works – particularly at an international level. He was working at a time when the company was beginning to focus on emerging markets, making acquisitions and inroads. The realisation that how the business operated was what he found most interesting ignited the idea of pursuing an MBA.

*"Belgium provides access to opportunities across many industries"*

"Having decided to study for an MBA, the first place I looked was the University of Cape Town. I'd been fortunate enough to visit South Africa a few times and so studying here – actually in an emerging market – felt like the ideal location and opportunity," he says.

"I compared it with the various MBA formats on offer in Europe and the US as well as in Asia, and reached out to current students and alumni. In every instance I received a response with well-balanced views on the strengths and weaknesses of the school.

Applying to a business school outside the traditional geographical areas for an MBA, it was reassuring for Pedrick to know that the Cape Town GSB was accredited. Its presence in the *FT* MBA ranking reinforced the peer comparison with other schools at a global level. His experience proved to be very positive.

"Most learning came from undertaking my studies as an international student and in particular undertaking them in South Africa. Doing an MBA outside my home country offered me a completely different perspective on how I approached and thought about business.

"Additionally, the complex context of South Africa, included in each subject but also very much a part of everyday life, ➔

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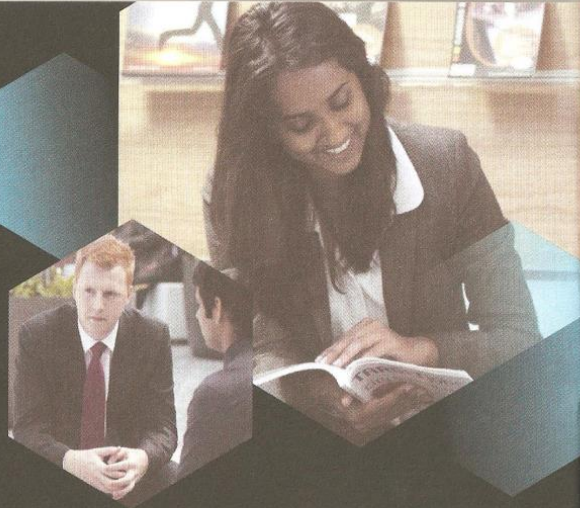
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provided a learning opportunity not available solely in the classroom."

It is the wide range of courses to help run your own business that proved so valuable to Fruzsina Hughes during her MBA at the Schulich School of Business in Toronto. With a First-class Honours degree in drama from the University of Bristol, she completed the Graduate Scheme at Lloyds Banking Group to gain business experience, but ultimately aimed to run her own business.

"I was looking to apply myself to something that would satisfy my need to be imaginative, but also required strong project managements skills," she says. "My choice was to be a luxury wedding planner, so I was looking for a business school that would really embrace my need to be creative and not try to pigeonhole me into the typical graduate path of a consultant, or a banker," says Hughes.

"Schulich has not only the diversity of people, but also the kind of mind-blowing number of courses you need to equip you to run your own unique enterprise."

The MBA as a gateway to international experience and personal and professional discovery is a trend that is likely to continue. Taking long-haul flights to reach study destinations will feel as natural as studying online, or networking across time zones from the back of a rickshaw.

Martin de Holan reminds potential students that an MBA is a personal choice. He says that a student interested in certain areas considered world class, in particular countries, should also pay close attention to the local strengths of a programme.

"The chance of entering a professional network is higher if a school is close to it."

Even in this global academic playground, local influence still counts. ●

HOPE  
FLAVIANO



Vlerick Business  
School in Ghent, Belgium

After years working in corporate auditing I came to realise I wanted to be sitting on the other side of the table. I knew an MBA would place a stamp of approval on my abilities, while building the skills I lacked," says globetrotter Hope Flaviano, who is originally from the Philippines and has lived in the UAE and Hong Kong before applying for an MBA at Vlerick Business School in Belgium.

"I'd been bitten by the travel bug. I knew I wanted to study in a country where English wasn't a first language, and Europe was my preferred continent. After experiencing Belgium I knew it was the friendliest country in Europe by far," she adds.

"But I had other factors to consider. Coming from a third world country, 'value for money' was important to me. I compared courses, looking at costs and quality of course content. Vlerick ranks highly for both, making it the obvious choice. After living around the world, moving to another new country was no big deal. I'm experiencing more change through my very diverse classmates!"

Hope advises applicants to consider what they want – and where they want it – before applying. "I liken my MBA experience to photography. You want a picture of a beautiful landscape, but perhaps the image is a little fuzzy or the right filter isn't in place. It takes adjustments to set up the perfect shot – something you'll look at afterwards and be proud of. That's what I've done with my MBA. I've set all my variables and now I'm getting the results I want."