

Checklist for choosing student accommodation

With matric exams now under way, the next major step for many learners will be leaving home to attend college or university – and finding somewhere to live while they complete their studies.

“And for the majority, this will probably not be a room on campus in an official residence, as SA tertiary institutions are woefully short of accommodation, says Andrew Schaefer, MD of leading national property management company Trafalgar.

Indeed, the latest available statistics from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHT) show that there is only enough on-campus accommodation for one out of every five tertiary students, he says, and in spite of sizeable private sector investment in off-campus student accommodation in the past few years, the actual backlog of student beds at universities around the country is estimated at well over 500 000.

“In practical terms, this means that tens of thousands of students are forced to look beyond purpose-built students units every year, and rent flats or rooms from private landlords. And unfortunately, there are no set standards yet for this type of accommodation as regards safety, facilities, noise or good management, so students and parents need to have their own checklist of things to consider when making their choice.”

The items on this list, Schaefer says, should include:

Distance from campus and access to reliable public transport.

Students often try to stretch their budgets by renting accommodation further from campus, but unless they have access to a regular shuttle service like the “Jammie” buses in Cape Town, or quick and cheap access to campus via public transport like the Gautrain or the new Bus Rapid Transport services, they can easily end up spending more on transport than they are saving on rent – and spending too much time commuting instead of studying.

Security.

In an unfamiliar town or city it is especially important for students to check that the area they are considering is safe, clean and relatively quiet so that they will be able to sleep and study comfortably. Shops and entertainment venues should be close but not too close, and the house or block of flats they are looking at should also have good security measures and procedures in place to ensure their personal safety and protect their possessions. Many students return home late at night which makes this even more important.

Building management.

There is no doubt that student accommodation works best in blocks of flats or houses that have been built or specifically converted to meet student needs - and where there is strong property management enhanced by the presence of an experienced on-site caretaker or “house mother” to constantly address maintenance, safety and counselling issues. Good landlords who target student tenants will also be familiar with 10-month leases and schedule major building maintenance for the “empty” months of December and January. Many will also provide low-cost/ free storage for students’ belongings during these months.

Single or shared rooms?

Some students like sharing dormitory-style rooms and bathrooms with their fellow students, others like sharing a flat or a house in which they have their own room, and yet others prefer to have a space that is entirely their own, even if it’s tiny. Their choice may also be influenced by cost, with shared accommodation generally being cheaper – and providing company. But whatever they choose, they should make sure that there is a quiet place in their house or block where they can go to study.

What furniture is provided?

Ideally, student rooms should be semi-furnished, with beds, desks, built-in cupboards and lockers for valuables all provided, and students only having to bring their own linen, kitchen utensils and perhaps a small fridge. In a shared house or apartment, the study area, dining area and lounge should also be furnished, and there should be a working stove and fridge in the kitchen. On-site laundry facilities are also most useful and a fast Internet connection is essential these days, preferably Wi-Fi.

Boarding or self-catering?

Students are notoriously bad at feeding themselves because they find meal preparation too time-consuming or because they just forget to budget for food, and many studies have linked poor academic performance to poor nutrition. So many parents prefer communes and student apartment blocks where the rent includes at least one good meal a day prepared by trained staff. But even if they choose this semi-boarding option instead of self-catering, students should always check the state of the kitchen and the equipment provided before deciding to rent.

Issued by the Trafalgar Property Group

For more information contact

Andrew Schaefer on 011 214 5228

Or andrews@trafalgar.co.za

Or visit www.trafalgar.co.za