

Your eight-point checklist for choosing student digs

Upon acceptance into a university far from home, one of the top items on that to-do list is finding accommodation. The universities and FET colleges simply do not have enough accommodation on campus for all their students. Therefore, the onus falls on the students and their parents to find a suitable place for them to live and study for the duration of their tertiary education.



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“The student lifestyle is multi-faceted, and accommodation should offer all the facilities that students need in what is, for many, their first experience of living away from home,” says Craig McMurray, CEO of [Respublica](https://www.respublica.co.uk).

“A student’s living environment plays an equally large role in the success of their tertiary education as their learning environment does. This is where they learn to take responsibility for themselves by learning to manage their time, their relationships, and their commitment to their studies without the supervision of their parents.”

Choosing accommodation is about so much more than finding the cheapest possible spot within striking distance of the student’s lectures. Respublica offers some tips to make it easier to identify the best location.

1. **All above board:** Even though universities and FET colleges don’t own enough accommodation for all their students, they do recommend independent residence operators who offer suitable accommodation to supplement campus residences. If you are engaging with a student accommodation landlord, check that they are recommended by the institution you’re engaging with. This way you can be sure that rentals are fair, the accommodation is suitable, and that you are dealing with a reputable landlord.

2. **Safety and security:** Students should feel as safe when they're in their accommodation as they do when they're at home – so check that the facility that you're considering has suitable security, both to protect the student's belongings, and to protect their person too.
3. **Pricing vs value:** Shop around for the best deal to make sure you have considered all the potential costs involved. There are often hidden expenses not included in the basic fee (electricity, water, wifi, laundry, gym, residence life activities etc.) that cause costs to escalate. Fully fitted accommodation means that parents and students don't need to invest in appliances, desks, cupboards or beds. When investing in tertiary education, a top priority should be investing in an environment that is safe, private, and provides the necessary amenities at an all-inclusive rate.
4. **Keep it close:** Accommodation located close to campus should be first prize, or at the very least, it should be close to public transportation that offers easy access to classes. Research the city, as there are increasingly greater options to choose from – for example in Johannesburg, students can travel by taxi, the Rea Vaya bus system, or the Metro Bus system, as well as the Gautrain or metered taxi services.
5. **Creature comforts:** It's the creature comforts that make it easier to stay in and study, and the accommodation you choose should include the basics such as beds, built in cupboards, lockers for valuables, fridges, and a desk, all of which should be in good repair. Look for accommodation that offers serviced apartments with fully fitted rooms and kitchens that are also cleaned weekly.
6. **Living the lifestyle:** Being a student is about so much more than just studying – it's about building relationships and enjoying a balanced social life. Make sure that your chosen facility has common areas where students can relax and socialise in a safe environment. Investigate the comprehensive residence life programs on offer. These provide students with a strong sense of community and support through social, sport, co-curricular and residence education programs and activities designed to enhance their experience at university.
7. **Healthy body, healthy mind:** Choose a facility that offers a gym or other exercise options too.
8. **Top technology:** Gone are the days where students could complete assignments by spending hours in the library. The internet age has made more information more accessible, and students should have constant access to the online world. Does your chosen facility offer free uncapped wifi access? A 'yes' answer to this question is no longer a nice-to-have, but rather an essential, allowing students to seamlessly transition from working on campus, to working in their off-campus residence.

"Keeping this checklist close while you're shopping around for accommodation will mean that your child will be living in a safe, secure and nurturing environment that will make it easier for them to achieve the most out of student life," says McMurray.