

Distance no object if course fits the bill

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Andrew Baxter finds that, despite the extra costs, travel still broadens the mind

Six months before even receiving his admission offer from Lancaster University Management School, Sanjay Goel began ensuring his daughter Dhvani, now nine, and son Armaan, five, would be mentally prepared for him being away from home for the best part of a year.

In September, Mr Goel, a 39-year-old engineer from Delhi, joined a cohort of 77 on the UK school's one-year MBA programme. He is looking forward to returning home for two weeks in December, to see his wife Pixie and their children, but says he is "very comfortable" with his decision to travel so far to achieve his ambitions.

The hassles of international travel and absences from home do not seem to deter potential business school students if they feel that the experience adds value for them – indeed visiting foreign countries is one of the big attractions for some participants.

Attilio Giaquinto, a 35-year-old architect with his own Turin-based company, is on the 18-month EMBA programme at ESCP-EAP European School of Management. Already, he has had spells of up to a week in Paris, in Brussels for a thematic seminar on the European Union, and Shanghai for a module on emerging markets. Coming up next year are spells in Austin, Texas, to study themes around the new economy, and the school's Madrid campus.

"I really like to see these places, and it's a very good opportunity to share free time with the people you are doing your EMBA with," says Mr Giaquinto.

Both he and Mr Goel could have attended schools in their home countries, but had reasons for preferring to go abroad.

Indian business schools did not work out for Mr Goel, either because international experience was a major requirement – he has spent almost all his working life at Bajaj Auto, the big Indian

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motorcycle manufacturer – or because only very few candidates aged above 35 were accepted.

As for overseas options, the US was discounted because most of its MBA courses last two years. At 39, Mr Goel felt that both the actual and opportunity costs

would be too high. "I really wanted a one-year course," he says.

He looked at two schools in Singapore, but both were specialised rather than focusing on general management, which is what he felt he needed to enable him to move on to bigger things.

"I had tried approaching other companies in India, but the problem was that I didn't have an MBA. I was an engineer," he says. Eventually his choice narrowed down to two schools in the UK.

Mr Giaquinto appreciates the diversity of his cohort, in which 29 nationalities are represented. "As an architect it is very important for me to get to know people with different lifestyles and from different cultures," he says.

The connections he has formed with classmates from India and Ghana have helped him locate potential new business there, he says. He is even doing a project for one of his classmates.

While travel was a prerequisite of the programme for Mr Giaquinto, for Mr Goel it was more a case of getting him to a school whose programme suited him well. "To go further, into managerial positions, I needed a lot of 'soft skills', and the Lancaster MBA has a focus on personal development – the 'mindful manager' model runs through the course, emphasising personal skills and team working," he says. Three hands-on projects, including a consultancy assignment for a small local company, were an added attraction.

Both men feel their investment has been money well spent. Mr Giaquinto is using about €45,000-€50,000 of his own money, with travel accounting for up to €15,000 and the rest going on the MBA programme and a year-long General Management Programme that preceded it, undertaken at ESCP-EAP's London campus.

"It's good value, and with the job I am doing [for the class-



Attilio Giaquinto (left) and Sanjay Goel

mate), I am already repaying the cost," he says. "By the end of the 18 months, I will have repaid the full cost, if everything goes in the direction it is going now."

Mr Goel's all-in cost, including two return flights between India and the UK, is about £24,000. He is using his own savings and borrowing from friends and family – "I did not want to mortgage the house to do this," he says.

Although less than three

months into the course, he says it is giving him all he hoped for and even pointing the way to new options for the future, such as starting his own business.

He is relieved, too, that it was always his plan to return to India to develop his career further. Half the class are from India, he says, but with the economic downturn, "things are very bad for those who wanted to seek jobs in the UK".