

Teaching English overseas

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Working as an English teacher is a great way to earn money while you travel. You will be immersed into the culture of your host country as no tourist can be. Opportunities vary from teaching small groups of kids at private language schools, to teaching business English to adults, or working as a teacher's assistant in a government school.

i-to-i Australia assistant manager, Andrew Jack says it is "ridiculously easy" for a recent university graduate to find a teaching job.

"You just need to pick where you want to go and how long you want to go for."

i-to-i is a specialised travel company offering a range of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) courses, paid work and volunteer placements internationally.

Some teachers choose to work in Central or Eastern Europe, using a city such as Prague as a base for exploring the rest of the continent. A more popular choice is to head to one of the "big four" – Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong. These countries offer high salaries and great teaching conditions. Thailand and Vietnam also provide teaching opportunities to degree holders. Jack says there are also opportunities for non-degree holders in China, Latin America and Indonesia.

Whether you have your degree or not, it is highly recommended that you complete a TEFL course, which is internationally recognised.

As with any job, the more experience and qualifications you have, the better the salary and opportunities. You can earn anywhere from \$260 per month in Hungary to \$2500



in South Korea. According to Jack, the pay is enough to sustain a comfortable lifestyle and often you will earn enough to save some money. Other benefits such as accommodation, flights and health insurance can be negotiated as part of your contract.

Foreign countries also mean foreign languages and customs. In spite of the many wonderful teaching experiences, a smooth ride

is not guaranteed. To avoid having a bad experience, it is essential that you do your homework on both the country and the school itself.

"Try to make contact with the school as much as possible before you leave," Jack says.

"Get on the internet and speak to teachers that are out there. Find out what the issues are, people's stories and the problems that they've had."

In 2007, the largest English school in Japan, Nova, collapsed leaving many teachers stranded without work or accommodation. According to former Nova employee, Steven Broderick many of the affected teachers were still arriving even after current teachers had stopped being paid.

An internet search will uncover a wealth of websites and forums offering advice on how to find a reputable

school and what questions to ask. You can also find blacklists of disreputable schools.

And once you're there, don't be afraid to jump ship if you're not satisfied.

"If your English school is giving you the run around, just apply for other schools and improve your situation," Broderick says.

"English teaching jobs are a dime a dozen. If you're having a bad time, change

your situation and apply for something else. You have to be very wary and, as much as possible, educate yourself about the working laws and conditions."

One teacher who has worked in China, Australia and Switzerland, Chloe Groom says, "Get a qualification."

"This is a way of insuring yourself against really dodgy schools. I (also) think it's extremely important that teachers understand how their language works in order to answer the students' inevitable 'why?' questions as well as know how to get the concepts across effectively."

"Be very, very careful about the terms and conditions you have agreed to," Groom says.


"Being clear from the start about the maximum number of hours you are expected to teach is essential."

To minimise culture shock, read as much as you can about the country before you leave.

"In Fuzhou, there were very, very few foreigners and people would scream 'Foreigner!' at us in the street," Groom says.

"It really isn't intended to be rude, it's basically just an observation. But of course it can sound very aggressive and very intimidating if you don't understand why they are doing it, and especially if you don't understand Chinese."

"Basically (though) it's a pretty great job," she says.

"I tried three years as a lawyer in between my teaching stints, but now it's what I do and I have no plans to go back. And I know a lot of people who started it just for something to do for a year and are still hard at it eight years later." 

Andrea Rotondi and Daniel Bray