

SO YOU WANNA TEACH ENGLISH ABROAD?

You don't have a job, nor do you have any unique skills that could get you one.

You don't have roots. No spouse. No dog. No nothing.

No one will care if you leave the country for at least a year.

You need to get away from those "persistent men" who keep sending you threatening messages about a union between your kneecaps and a crowbar.

If your mother asks you one more time when you're going to get married, you'll go postal.

These are all fantastic reasons to leave the country. And lucky for you, you possess a very important skill that is in high demand abroad. What do you have that the rest of the world wants? The answer is: your ability to read this article. Yes, you speaker of English you, that language of yours will take you far... as long as you're willing to teach your talent to others. You don't even have to know the language of the country you're traveling to.

But just because you're a native speaker doesn't mean that you'll be an effective English teacher. So before you go and devote - minimum - a year of your life to teaching English, you better read this article and learn exactly what it involves.

1. KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GETTING YOURSELF INTO

There are thousands of reasons that people have for wanting to teach English; knowing yours will help you decide where you'll end up. But we're going to make a disclaimer first: almost everything will depend on the program you participate in. Salary, location, benefits, time commitment, requirements - it'll all depend on the organization that ships your carcass to wherever you're teaching. So with that in mind, here are some general items to think about:

SALARY. If you are working for the money, then you better find a new job - the salary ranges from \$0 (for you kind volunteers) to as high as \$50,000 per year. There are exceptions, of course; if you're ready to sign up for 2 years in Saudi Arabia, the rumor mill places the highest paying jobs at around \$75,000 per year. However, you'll live in an American village, separated from the native population. Without alcohol. Or any nightlife. But hey, they've got great fitness centers. The point is, this is not a way to make oodles of cash. However, you might get side benefits, such as scholarships to help pay for your college tuition (the Peace Corps offers this).

LOCATION. Again, it depends. But consider that in most of the world, big cities are much more expensive to live in than small towns, so if you're trying to save some money, you might be better off staying away from teeming metropolises. Also keep in mind that the really poor villages of this earth won't be able to pay you high salaries, so if you need to save up, then you may be better off trying to teach English in an elite private school.

BENEFITS. This is a recording: it depends on the program. Some places will offer you health care, which would be a great addition. But there are cultural benefits, such as learning a new language and culture, and getting the chance to travel.

TIME COMMITMENT. Most programs require at least a one-year commitment (what, you gonna skip out on the kiddies before they even learn to say "hello"?), so be prepared for it.

REQUIREMENTS. Do you need to be a certified teacher? We won't say

that it's required per se - most programs require them, some don't. However, if you are certified to teach, it's much easier to nab a job (and a higher paying one, at that). Also realize that if you speak the native tongue of the country in which you teach, then more doors will open up to you.

2. FIGURE OUT WHERE YOU WANT TO TEACH

Unfortunately, the world isn't quite your oyster - there are limits to where you are needed, wanted, and able to go. If you are an American, the greatest demand for you is in Asia and Latin America - places with close ties to the US either geographically or economically. If you are British, your best bet is in Europe or Africa, for similar reasons. While it's possible to work outside your "assigned" area, it is especially hard for Americans to find work in any European Union country. (There are plenty of Brits and Irish who can work in the EU without needing any visas, permits, or proof of unique skill - that's a hard nut to crack.) However, there are plenty of opportunities available for all in Russia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, or any other former Eastern Bloc nation.

With these minor restrictions aside, the number of locations a person can be placed is enormous. From Portugal to Japan, Ghana to Oman, Germany to Cambodia, if it's a country, chances are they're looking for people to teach English. Since you can go pretty much anywhere, there is no one way to choose your location. Perhaps you love surfing; then go to Indonesia or some other spot in the South Pacific. If you want a central location that will allow you to visit other countries, then stick yourself in Prague, near the middle of Eurasia. Want to salve old political wounds? Go to Vietnam, where Americans are welcomed with open arms these days (you Brits, go to India). Like mountains? Try Nepal. Like Buddhism? Try Tibet.

In short, there's a plethora of choices for the English-speaking globetrotter. Even if you only have selfless reasons for teaching abroad, there are plenty of chances for selfish reasons to come into play when choosing your locale... just as they should.

3. SECURE A JOB

While there are thousands of jobs, there are also thousands of applicants. Every day more and more people are jumping on this bandwagon, and while it's still a good market for teachers, it's much more competitive than it was even 5 years ago. There are two vantage points from which to approach the job search: if you're certified, or if you're not certified.

I'm certified! (or I want to be)

As we mentioned, a virtual prerequisite these days is a certificate in ELT/TEFL/EFL or any of the other dozens of interchangeable letters that mean you've taken a 100-120 hour course in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. Yes, it's possible to get a job without this teaching degree, but they tend to pay less and are at iffy schools - the sort of places that might send a letter to your house offering you a position, and then no longer exist

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once you've made it out to Egypt. Not so good.

Courses come in a dizzying array of options; in England, the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate and Trinity College London both offer prestigious ones. The course is usually given in one-month intensive chunks and then you're certified; also, courses are offered part-time over several months (they'll set you back anywhere from \$1000 - \$4000). There are currently also courses available here in the U.S.; for a good, comprehensive list of certificate courses, see the book *Teaching English Abroad* by Susan Griffith, or follow some of the links further along in this article.

Certificate courses are nice in fringe benefits as well as training. Most courses have some sort of system set up which will pair you with a school upon graduation, or at the very least, you'll get connected to a head-hunter firm (that's a good thing, ominous as it sounds). There are courses that don't offer any sort of help in finding work; these programs are usually cheaper, but might end up costing more money in the long run. If one course offers free set-up assistance (some offer this assistance for life), and another offers nothing, well, you might end up having to pay a head-hunter anywhere from \$50-\$250 to match you with a school. Plus, some programs include round-trip airfare to the teaching location, while with others you're on your own. The cost of a ticket can easily exceed \$1000, so make sure you investigate your course of choice thoroughly before registering. Differences in prices usually can be accounted for by differences in services.

Once you get a certificate, you have the choice of finding work before you get to a country, or heading over first and then locating a job. In general, it's more secure to have your job in advance, but this is balanced by the increase in pay that often accompanies teaching positions that hire on site. In addition, teaching jobs obtained in advance can't be thoroughly investigated, whereas with work gotten while in the country, you can go around and kick the tires of your school (and they can do the same with you, hence the higher pay).

If you choose to find a school before leaving your home country, the best way is usually through head-hunting firms; a good list of places to start can again be found in *Teaching English Abroad*, as well as a list of reputable schools that accept applications and résumés from foreign locales. If you choose to go first, then go. Get a place, talk to Americans teaching in the area, look for notices, apply to many places, and cross your fingers.

I'm not certified!

There are many ways to teach abroad without a certificate:

Some schools often hire uncertified teachers when certified ones aren't available. It is much more difficult to get placed this way, but it is possible. Just don't count on it.

There is still the aforementioned Peace Corps, as well as missionary-style or volunteer programs. These programs realize that you probably just graduated from college, so they have few technical requirements, if any. They're just looking for cheap labor.

Still another option is a program specific to a school or government. If you went to college, chances are your university has at least one sister school in another country. There are often systems in place to get English speakers teaching abroad using these close ties, either at the sister school itself, or a nearby junior or high school.

Government programs, some feel, are the best option available. Usually, no certification is necessary, and pay is good. For instance: the Japanese government sponsors the Japanese Exchange and Teaching program (JET, 800-INFOJET), which offers positions as Assistant Language Teachers. These jobs entail helping a homeroom teacher with English lessons for junior and high school students. The pay is 3,600,000 yen (around \$28,000), which doesn't go as far as you would think in Japan. But it IS Japan - the competition for acceptance into this program is perhaps the fiercest anywhere at the moment, and has a difficult admission process.

JET is a very distinguished example, but there are many more like it; you need to investigate your chosen countries to find out what's available.

You don't necessarily need to work at a school to teach English; many business people want to be tutored in English, both privately and en masse. These jobs tend to be less consistent, but they also pay much better per hour compared with traditional work. There are also many night schools for adults that look for teachers.

The possibilities are nearly endless for an enterprising soul, which you are. Otherwise you wouldn't be working abroad, eh?

Here are those links that we promised you. These are but a small sample, but they'll definitely set you on the right direction.

Dave Sperling's ESL Café (<http://www.eslcafe.com/>)

IATEFL (<http://www.iatefl.org/>)

TESOL (http://www.tesol.org/s_tesol/index.asp)

4. BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO LIVING ABROAD

OK, so we hope you now have a general idea of the procedure you'll go through when finding a "teaching English abroad" job. Now comes the most important part: actually doing your job and enjoying your life abroad. The most important thing to remember is to have the utmost respect for the native culture, customs, and beliefs. Need we say more on this point?

Where you'll go

You may have a say in where you end up inside any given country, but sometimes it's the luck of the draw (if you join the Peace Corps, you'll have no choice!). You might end up in a small fishing village, or you might be in a big metropolis. Since you probably won't know for sure until right before you leave or right after you arrive, you should mentally prepare yourself for any circumstance. If that's a problem, rethink your path-flexibility is key, so this lifestyle might not be right for you.

Where you'll live

Your actual living space will probably be provided by the school you work for, although you might have to pay a relatively cheap rent (relative to your neighborhood, not your current standards-which means a dwelling in Japan or Taiwan could still give you dry heaves). Accommodations tend to be bare-bones, but if you luck out, they can be surprisingly luxurious (especially in wealthy nations). Regardless, you're not seeking comfort; you've come as a cultural imperialist! Just learn how to say in the local language, "Blame McDonalds, don't blame me," and you'll be set.

In a relatively short amount of time, you're likely to learn the native language of your adopted country (if you don't know it already). You're also likely to run into one problem or another. Remember, this is not a vacation; this is a job, and you may be spending your time teaching kids who don't want to learn. (The kids will probably talk behind your back right to your face until you master their language!) Our point is, if you know exactly where you want to go, you should immediately start taking lessons to learn that language - even if you're leaving in a month, something is better than nothing.

All these fears are small concerns, though, if you're already intrepid enough to pack up for another continent; a lucky twist of fate has given you perfect understanding of a demanded commodity (though you should brush up on your grammar, since your students may know more of the rules - or at least the names for them - than you do). You are in a rare position of blessed effortless power through knowledge, so go out there and use it for fuel.