



Tips for Teachers

Finding an Overseas English Teaching Job

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Have you wanted to travel or live abroad? Are you intimidated by the process of finding a job or relocating to a country that you have not visited before? Fortunately, if you are a qualified ESL or EFL professional, you do not need to be intimidated. A growing number of ESL/EFL positions are available worldwide, but there are not enough English teachers to fill them. If you want to teach abroad, you are pushing at an open door.

The plan outlined below can make it possible for a qualified candidate to find an overseas teaching position. A qualified candidate is a native or near native English speaker who holds a TESL/TEFL certificate or degree from a recognized institution. The importance of obtaining formal training in TESL or TEFL cannot be emphasized strongly enough. It is becoming increasingly difficult to secure a decent teaching job in most countries without such training. The old assumption that if you can speak a language, you can also teach it, is now widely regarded as false. So, if you have the requisite English skills and TESL/TEFL training, you can find a teaching job abroad, often in ten days or less, by following these ten steps.

Step 1: Decide where you want to go.

Reasons for wanting to teach in a particular country, or countries, will be many and varied. It may be somewhere you have always wanted to visit or one that you know well and want to settle in for a while. It may be a place that presents a challenge or has personal significance for you. Whatever your chosen country, and whatever your reason for going there, you will find receptive pupils who are willing to learn and who will be grateful to you for teaching them English. It is no exaggeration to say that many will remember you for the rest of their lives.

Step 2: Book a flight and room.

The Internet and your local library have many sources of information about budget flights and cheap rooms. However, you may not always want to pick the cheapest option. Comfort and security are as important as the price. Book a room for one night. Once you are there, you can see other options and perhaps negotiate a good monthly rate. If your destination requires a visa, travel on a tourist visa. When you find a job, your employer should be able to arrange for your work permit (see Step 9).

Step 3: Prepare the materials you need to sell yourself.

Put together a professional résumé or curriculum vitae before leaving. Include copies of your TEFL certificate, college or university transcripts, any other relevant certificates or diplomas, and a summary list of the specific TESL/TEFL courses or workshops that you have taken. Many institutions will ask for a recent photo when you apply, so take a supply of 12 or more pictures with you.

Most employers will also ask for references. Arrange these before you leave. Former employers, teaching colleagues, and co-workers make the best references. Ask each to write a brief letter addressing your work as a teacher and to leave the letter undated so that you can use it into the future. Each letter should also include an address, phone number, and e-mail address where the writer can be contacted. If you do not have any relevant teaching experience, ask your TEFL trainer to write a reference about the skills you have learned in your course.

Take at least two paper copies of all these documents with you in a protective case. Where possible, save everything in your e-mail account, and keep a back up copy in your e-mail folder or on a memory stick.

Step 4: Pack nice clothes.

Unfortunately, some employers may be more concerned by your appearance at your interview than by your qualifications. Dress conservatively. For men, this generally means a shirt, tie, dark pressed trousers, and polished shoes. For women, a long dark skirt, white blouse, and covered shoulders are probably best. Avoid the temptation to wear clothing or jewelry that may be interpreted as setting a bad example for the students that you may be teaching.

Step 5: Arrive and hit the ground running.

If possible, ask your hotel to pick you up at the airport. Alternatively, book a taxi from the taxi desk inside the airport arrival hall. You might pay a bit more than bargaining on the street, but it is safer and less troublesome. On the first day in a new country, this can save you some anxiety. It is best not to search for a job on your first

day. Instead, take a stroll, locate an Internet café, and let your body and mind adjust to the new environment. Unpack your interview clothes, and if necessary, find a laundry service to have them ironed. Hang up your clothes, polish your shoes, and check your résumé. Finally, relax.

Step 6: Buy a mobile phone.

Prospective employers will want to call you. They will not be impressed by your professionalism if you ask them to leave a message at a hotel or guesthouse. It is best to get a mobile phone with a local number. In most places, mobile phones are cheap and easy to find. Before leaving the shop, ask the staff to switch your language options to your native language.

Step 7: Find your job.

Although these are not the only possibilities, the three most common means of locating a job are with an Internet search, through the local newspaper, and walking in.

Using the Internet

Visit www.eslcafe.com, the primary Internet site for teaching jobs around the world. Scan the job listings and copy any that sound promising. E-mail a cover letter and your résumé to each employer. It may be better to paste the résumé into the body of your e-mail message rather than attaching it as a file as many schools will not open attachments. Be sure to send individual e-mail messages to each potential employer. Employers do not respond well to applicants whose messages show that they are sending a blanket message to many recipients.

In your cover letter, tell the school that you are currently in the country and are interested in a position immediately. This will greatly increase your chances of a quick response. Keep it short, but ask the school to look at your résumé and to consider inviting you for an interview. End the letter with your phone number and e-mail address. Later, follow up your e-mail with a phone call to the school or program director. Check your e-mail messages often, and respond to inquiries right away.

Using local newspaper(s)

Go to a newsstand or coffee shop and look through English language or local newspapers. Sit down and scan the classifieds. These almost always contain help wanted ads for English teachers. Circle them and immediately call those that list phone numbers. Mention that you meet their requirements and that you are interested in a position. If possible, arrange an interview. E-mail any contacts that you could not reach by phone. Beware of unscrupulous agency ads, which are usually easy to spot by their vague offers.

Walking in.

This can often be the most effective way of finding a teaching job. Spend a day or two visiting local private language schools. Put on your best business clothes, and carry multiple copies of your résumé, transcript, reference letters, and photos. Compile a list of 4 to 6 schools and visit them. In my experience, this is the most effective way of job searching.

Walking into a school will help you grow more comfortable talking to employers if they call you back for an interview later. Greet the receptionist; ask to talk to someone about a teaching position, and hand him/her a copy of your résumé. Always smile and show enthusiasm. You may get an interview and a job offer on the spot. This happens more often than you would ever believe. However, do not be discouraged if nothing happens right away.

Step 8: Prepare for the interview.

If you have followed Steps 1-7 carefully, the invitations for interviews should begin rolling in. Make sure you get a good night's sleep so that you look rested and alert at your interview. Dress smartly, but conservatively, for an interview, even if you are applying for a temporary or casual post. In fact, dress like a sales executive. After all, you are selling yourself. In some settings, employers may be more concerned by your appearance, smile, and enthusiasm than they are by your qualifications or work experience.

Step 9: Consider your job offers.

Do not automatically accept the first job you are offered. Examine the contract carefully, and ask questions including these:

- a. How many hours a week will I be teaching? [Over 25 is too many.]
- b. Will you arrange for a work visa? [They should.]
- c. Will you help me find an apartment? [They should.]
- d. What will be my salary? [This varies greatly depending on the setting.]

You might also ask whether the school provides orientation or training with their teaching methods or can arrange for some peer observations. If possible, talk to other teachers at the school, and confirm that they are treated well and paid on time. Sign the contract when you are satisfied, but only when you are satisfied.

Step 10: Sign the contract.

Congratulations. Wherever you are, you will be teaching English to grateful pupils in a fascinating country as well as embarking on a fulfilling and life changing experience.

Some Caveats

The ten steps outlined above will enable you to find a teaching job anywhere in the world. With careful planning, a little organization, and a neat appearance, it is relatively easy to find a job within ten days of arriving in a new country. On the other hand, there are some pitfalls that you want to avoid.

1. Do not attempt to teach English without a TESL/TEFL certificate or degree.

Any assumption that you can teach a language based solely on the fact that you can speak it is a false one. The time and money that you spend earning your TESL/TEFL credentials will be well worth it later. If you do not possess the proper degree or have limited teaching experience, consider applying first for only part-time positions because the interview process is less rigorous. If you obtain the part-time position and are able to prove yourself to be competent or better, your employer will soon forget about your weak credentials.

2. Do not write to schools before leaving home.

Unsolicited written applications from afar are often a waste of time and lead to disappointment on the part of the school. In many parts of the world, the pool of teachers who are locally available is adequate. Similarly, sending your résumé or CV to every school in the local Internet directory will probably not yield positive results. For one thing, most ESL schools do not have the time or personnel to go through dozens of e-mail inquiries a day, knowing from experience that the teacher they select will probably accept a position elsewhere. Many ESL/EFL schools have lost count of the number of times they have read, "Due to some family/personal problems I will not be able to take up my position. . . ." This is why my advice is to get on a plane, fly to the country of your choice, and search once you get there.

3. Do not assume that all of your students are beginners.

One of the biggest mistakes novice language teachers make is treating all ESL students as beginners. Often, your students will have been studying English for several years. They will come with questions; you should have strategies for answering them. Learning how to teach grammar and handle difficult questions is part of a strong TESL/TEFL training program.

4. Do not let your students down.

Most foreign students are desperate to learn English, and their classes may be costing them a small fortune. It is important that you establish a reputation for integrity. Without it, you will have nothing of value as an outsider in their country. They are not fooled about their teachers' motivation. If a teacher is unenthusiastic or interested only in his/her paycheck, they will quickly spot it. But, they will be equally quick to recognize a good teacher who can make a difference to their education and their lives. The gratitude they will have for you and your hard work will likely exceed anything you could experience as a teacher at home.

5. Do not be timid.

Nervousness is normal. You will inevitably have some butterflies in your stomach as you set off, but if you are enthusiastic and genuinely care for your students, the world truly is your oyster. Once you are settled, you will quickly discover opportunities for further personal and professional development that you probably did not foresee.

About the Author

Jimmy Crangle has extensive experience teaching English as a foreign language throughout Asia. He now resides in Bangkok, Thailand, where he works as a marketing consultant for a number of TEFL schools around the world. Feel free to email him with any comments, suggestions, or questions at: jimmyc@thailandexperience.com