

 **ESL Job Exchange**

# Best Places To Teach English and Make Money

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ESL Job Exchange  
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## INTRODUCTION

Each year, the team at ESL Job Exchange reviews and ranks the best places to teach English, earn decent income, and save a ton of money – often more than what you could save in a regular old nine to five job in your home country.

Our goal is to shatter the rather unfortunate myth that English teachers are people who work for pennies and have few career prospects. There's much inaccuracy in this notion. People who teach English can and do make good money – depending on where they choose to work. ESL Teachers do acquire desirable skills that are marketable for future job prospects. Many ESL teachers go on to become:

- Recruiters
- Sales and Marketing Executives
- Human Resources Managers
- IT Professionals
- Consultants
- International School Teachers
- Local Celebrities
- Entrepreneurs

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT LOCATION TO TEACH ENGLISH

There are so many places where you can teach English and live well. For example, you could hop on a plane to Thailand, land a teaching job quickly, and live a comfortable lifestyle in the countryside. You could currently do this all within USD 1,200 a month or less with careful money management. In our experience though, if you were extremely frugal with your spending, you would realistically save between USD 200 – 400 per month.

You might be OK with this if your goal is to explore Thailand and its wonderful culture for a year. Even if that's your goal, you may in fact be better off teaching English online, which would give you much more flexible work hours, and allow you to earn the same amount of money working 3 – 4 hours per day each week. For this reason, Thailand doesn't fit the criteria to enter our list of best places to teach English.

Another example is Japan. English teacher salaries in Japan are comparable to those in South Korea and major cities in Mainland China. Yet, the cost of living in Japan is higher and your potential to save is thus lower. With a typical ESL teaching position in Japan today, one could reasonably expect to save USD 500 – 800 per month with careful money management. However, it is currently possible to save this much or more in China and South Korea with less effort while living comfortably. Thus, Japan, doesn't make our list for 2021.

## OUR CRITERIA FOR SELECTING THE BEST PLACES TO TEACH ENGLISH

How do we determine what makes our list of best destinations to teach English? We examine both monetary and non-monetary aspects of typical job opportunities. In other words, these are not extraordinary jobs in the locations we've selected. As long as you meet the minimum qualifications and experience to legally work in these locations, your chances of getting hired are good.

In most cases, if you have a university degree, 120-hour TEFL certificate and a clean criminal record, you're qualified for most ESL teacher jobs. Some locations on our list demand ESL teachers have higher qualifications and experience than others. These markets may be more competitive, but they also pay proportionately better salaries and benefits.

Below are monetary and non-monetary incentives often offered by ESL employers in top destinations:

- High salary relative to the average local salary and cost of living
- Low or no income tax
- Health insurance coverage paid by employer
- Return airfare from home country to work destination paid/reimbursed by employer
- Private furnished housing paid by employer
- Utilities paid or partially paid by employer
- Transportation between residence and workplace provided by employer if the distance is great
- Meals on work days provided by employer
- Annual and end of contract bonuses

- Visa and work permit expenses paid for by employer, including visa expenses for dependents
- Free or subsidized tuition for children
- 1 – 4 months paid holidays if working in a public school or university

You might be thinking – *Why would an employer be willing to provide all of these incentives just to have someone teach English?*

There are several reasons, depending on each location or type of employer where you are employed. Let's look at a few examples:

**Universities:** Universities usually have residences and other facilities on site for teachers, so it costs them very little to offer these incentives to teachers.

**Low or No Income Tax:** In some locations, salaries are tax-free or taxed at a low rate. Even if the cost of living is high in these locations, the ability to earn a high income with low or zero taxes means teachers can save more of their income, especially when other benefits such as free housing are provided.

**Lucrative Industries:** Employers operating in lucrative industries where salaries are already well-paid, as is the case with the oil and gas industry, have the means to hire on teachers and provide extensive benefits in addition to high salaries. Employers are typically very large companies with significant budgets for staffing and training and development. They also have residential compounds where their expatriate staff are provided free housing.

**Regulatory Requirements:** Some destinations have laws in place requiring employers to fully or partially provide specific benefits, such as health care coverage or pension contributions, which can be claimed by teachers. In some countries, employers are required to pay end of contract gratuities or severances when employees dutifully complete their contracts, amounting to 1 – 2 months of monthly salary, or more, depending on the years of service.

**Government Programs:** Some countries have implemented specific government programs for improving the overall level of English language proficiency, and have allocated funding and resources to attract ESL teachers who possess the qualifications and experience they desire to accomplish their goals.

**Low Cost of Living:** A relatively high salary in a proportionately low cost of living can amount to higher savings potential for ESL teachers, so be careful not to dismiss what might seem to be a low salary compared to what you could earn at home. It is possible

to save as much as 40 – 50% of your salary in some of these countries because expenses are low. Compare this with the average household savings in US, which according to one study, was less than 10% in 2016.

For the average person living in a *Western* country, income tax and housing are likely to be the biggest expenses. When you remove these two expenses, the potential to save is huge. Let's see how this works, by looking at the average American household:

According to a USA Today article published on May 8, 2018, the average American household's pre-tax income in 2016 was nearly USD 75,000. As you can see, housing and taxes combined add up to 48% of all spending:

<i>Annual Income and Expenses</i>	USD	%
<b><i>Income</i></b>	<b>74,664</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b><i>Expenses</i></b>	<b>68,161</b>	<b>91%</b>
<i>Food (eating in and out)</i>	7,203	10%
<i>Alcoholic Beverages</i>	484	1%
<b><i>Housing (rent, taxes, utilities)</i></b>	<b>18,886</b>	<b>25%</b>
<i>Apparel and Services</i>	1,803	2%
<i>Transportation</i>	9,409	13%
<i>Health Care</i>	4,612	6%
<i>Entertainment</i>	2,913	4%
<i>Personal Care Products and Services</i>	707	1%
<i>Reading</i>	118	0.2%
<i>Education</i>	1,329	2%
<i>Tobacco Products and Supplies</i>	337	0.5%
<i>Miscellaneous</i>	959	1%
<i>Cash Contributions (e.g., Charity)</i>	2,081	3%
<b><i>Insurance and Pensions (including Social Security Payroll Tax)</i></b>	<b>6,831</b>	<b>9%</b>
<b><i>Personal Taxes</i></b>	<b>10,489</b>	<b>14%</b>

Source: [US Today](#)

From the above data, the average household in the US saved about USD 6,500 (about USD 540 per month) in 2016. Now, let's compare this average with the savings potential of an ESL teacher in a major or mid-sized city in Mainland China.

ESL Teachers in larger cities in China can typically earn between 10,000 – 20,000 RMB per month in 2021 depending on location and type of employer. This converts to about USD 1,500 – 3,000 per month, or USD 18,000 – 36,000 per year. There are ESL teachers in China earning more than this, but let's focus on the typical scenario.

Because the typical ESL employer in China provides housing, covers some or all utilities expenses, and provides or reimburses return airfare, the living costs for a typical teacher is low. Income tax is also low for this level of income. Therefore, a typical ESL teacher based in China can save USD 800 – 1,000 per month, or USD 9,600 – 12,000 per year. If you are married or have a partner who is also qualified to teach English in China, both of you can teach – possibly even with the same employer – and potentially double your income and savings while sharing the remaining living expenses.

Many ESL teachers working in China are earning and saving a substantial amount of their income. That said, you need to assess your own situation and see if a move abroad to teach English is going to be financially worthwhile. Every person has a unique situation, and results vary from one individual to another. What we are presenting to you is the potential to earn and save based on what is achievable for a typical teacher who manages their money affairs responsibly.

On that note, it's time to look at our pick of the best destinations to teach English in 2021!

## UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE)

### OVERVIEW



[UAE](#) is a wealthy oil-producing country on the Arabian Peninsula, well-known internationally for its extravagant skyscrapers and luxury hotels – a spectacular scene in the desert. The country regularly employs highly qualified ESL teachers and offers some of the best salaries and benefits in the industry. This not only makes it a very attractive option to earn and save a lot of money, it also makes it the most competitive ESL market in terms of people who apply to work in UAE as ESL teachers.

The country, comprised of seven Emirates – the largest and most well-known among them being Abu Dhabi and Dubai – has a population of 9.4 million. Just under one million of these are students.

While UAE is home to several expats from around the world and residents enjoy a comfortable lifestyle, it is important to remember that UAE adheres to Sharia Law, and thus has strict laws and harsh penalties for violation of these laws, some of which may contradict the norms in your country. Unmarried couples will not be allowed to cohabit, and premarital sex is effectively illegal; pregnancy between an unmarried couple will be reported by doctors to the local authorities, resulting in prosecution of both partners. Alcohol is available for sale, though with several restrictions. However, Dubai, and Abu Dhabi to a lesser extent, have many entertainment options, and there's plenty of things to do and see in UAE.

Both public and private schools in UAE have a strong preference for hiring well-qualified teachers who hold a teaching certification, a bachelor's degree or higher, and an in-person ESL certification (CELTA or 120-hour TEFL certificate). If you meet these qualifications, and have experience to add, you'll likely be in demand for top ESL jobs in UAE.

### SALARY AND BENEFITS

Salaries for ESL teachers in UAE currently range between USD 3,000 – 6,000, based on teaching qualifications and experience, as well as what can be negotiated by the teacher.

The majority of ESL teaching jobs in UAE are within the public and private school sectors. Both are known to provide attractive benefits. Here are some typical benefits teachers can expect in UAE:

- Tax-free salary
- Furnished housing for a single teacher or family (usually up to five family members)
- Visa expenses covered for teachers and their dependents
- Paid return airfare between UAE and the teacher's home country, plus one holiday flight per year
- Health insurance coverage for teachers and their dependents
- School tuition paid or subsidized for teachers with children
- Annual bonus of 1 – 2 months' salary
- 1 – 2 months paid holidays (usually during school holidays)
- [End of Service Gratuity as required by UAE labor law](#)

UAE based ESL teachers can save a lot of their pay with the kind of benefits on offer. With this, they also get to live in an ultra-modern *oasis*, and are centrally located with easy access to neighboring countries in the Middle East, as well as to Africa, Asia and Europe aboard some of the world's finest airlines. What's not to like about it?

## TYPES OF EMPLOYERS

### Private International Schools

Private schools in UAE cater mainly to the country's elite as well as children of expats. Private schools are more prevalent in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Because English is the primary language in many of these schools, both nationals of countries considered to be *native English speaking* who have ESL or other subject qualifications are in high demand. Teachers at private international schools may earn less than their counterparts working in public schools. Nonetheless, private international schools are a great option for teachers who want to break into the Middle East ESL market.

### Language Centers

Language centers in UAE are not as popular as they are in Asia, but plenty of language center jobs do exist. Language centers cater to residents who need to further their English language skills. Presently, the most popular language centers cater largely to adult expats who are improving their English language skills mainly for work or business. Children tend to make up less of this segment, probably due to many schools in UAE using English as the main language.

## Public Schools

Public schools in UAE are considered to be the *crème de la crème* of all ESL job opportunities worldwide. They offer, hands down, among the best compensation packages in the industry. Due to the excellent remuneration on offer, competition for is high, with many highly qualified teachers applying to these positions. Thus, UAE government can afford to be selective about hiring among the most qualified candidates.

UAE public school system recently went through a major overhaul with the aim of raising the standard of education. This project was completed in 2016 and involved hiring a significant number of foreign teachers.

Teachers who are hired to work in UAE public schools will not find out their position and placement until after they are in the country, so flexibility and open-mindedness when applying is important. Public school systems in UAE are open to all children of UAE residents, although non-Emirati students are required to pay annual fees.

### GETTING HIRED

UAE is arguably the most lucrative ESL job market in the world today. This also makes it the most competitive market as UAE employers want well qualified teachers and those who have these qualifications want to maximize their opportunities by getting hired in UAE. No other country pays as well as UAE as a general rule. It's as simple as that.

If you have an online degree or certificate, this will likely affect your chances to get hired. UAE (and other countries in the Gulf) generally disregards online degrees and certificates. It has a strong preference for teachers with practical training and actual teaching experience in a physical classroom. If you have yet to obtain a TEFL certificate, we recommend you opt for a [120-hour TEFL certificate with an in-person practical learning component](#). This means at the very least, you should select a blended learning course, or ideally complete an in-person TEFL certification course.

## KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

### OVERVIEW



[Saudi Arabia](#) is the largest oil-producing nation in the world and the largest country on the Arab peninsula. It is categorized as a high-income nation by the World Bank. In 2021, we rank Saudi Arabia second only to UAE for well-paid ESL job opportunities.

It is the fifth most populous country in the Middle East, with a population of just under 34 million people. An estimated 32% of the population is below the age of 14, thus creating a strong demand for expat teachers for the foreseeable future.

Due to the highly conservative nature of the country, alcohol as well as many other forms of entertainment are prohibited. With a conservative Islamic government and culture, Saudi Arabia adheres to a very strict gender segregation policy. Female teachers are employed to educate female students at all-female schools, and male teachers for male students at all-male schools. Expats working in Saudi Arabia are expected to abide by local laws and customs. Failure to do so can lead to serious consequences.

Despite the restrictive conditions that exist, the country has been a draw to teachers who seek *professional* ESL job opportunities with decent remuneration. Deciding to work in Saudi Arabia requires a high degree of open-mindedness to cope with the cultural differences any expat will experience while living and working there. Usually, expats are provided residences within housing compounds where they are somewhat isolated from the local populace. Within these compounds, there are fewer restrictions imposed than when out and about in public, where for example, women must wear *abaya* –head to toe dresses completely covering their bodies.

In our experience, both men and women who have decided to work as ESL teachers in Saudi Arabia do very well financially. However, due to the harsher restrictions on women, we have found that employment in Saudi Arabia as an expat is better suited to single men and families than to single women. Unmarried couples are forbidden to cohabit. Homosexuality and transgenderism are strictly forbidden, and thus we do not recommend Saudi Arabia as a suitable destination for LGBTs.

Employers in Saudi Arabia seek qualified and experienced teachers, albeit on a lower scale than what is typically required to teach in UAE. Whereas UAE employers usually

require licensed teachers for most ESL teaching positions, Saudi Arabia employers generally place importance on the combination of solid ESL qualifications (university degree + CELTA or TEFL) and several years of highly relevant ESL experience.

## SALARY AND BENEFITS

ESL teacher salaries in Saudi Arabia generally range between USD 3,200 – 4,000, although it is certainly possible to earn more if you are employed in a university, where salaries typically start at USD 4,000. The amount you make will depend on your experience and level of qualifications, as well as what you negotiate with your employer.

Saudi Arabia employers typically provide the following benefits to their teaching staff:

- Tax-free salary
- Furnished housing or housing allowance
- Health insurance coverage
- Visa expenses
- Paid or reimbursed return airfare
- Some schools may offer yearly and end of contract bonuses
- Some employers offer annual bonuses
- [End of Service Benefits](#) for those who complete a minimum of two years' service

Teachers working in Saudi Arabia can save a substantial amount of their income because of the cost savings these benefits provide, as well as the fact there is little in the way of entertainment to spend money on. In fact, many expats working in Saudi Arabia discover that their vast savings enable them to take frequent trips abroad and still save well. Asia, Africa and Europe are within close proximity, and neighboring countries UAE and Oman are popular for short weekend escapes.

## TYPES OF EMPLOYERS

### Language Schools

Language schools in Saudi Arabia are very similar to their counterparts in the rest of the world in that they provide extra learning opportunities for students to study English. These schools have received a huge boost due to government-sponsored initiatives to encourage Saudis to study English. Schools are both public and private, and teachers are employed both in large cities such as Riyadh or Jeddah, as well as in smaller rural areas. In addition to teaching lessons, teachers at language schools will be expected to help with developing curriculum and course structure. Although knowledge of Arabic is

not required, it is a desired skill among employers, so teachers who are able to communicate in Arabic will have a strong advantage.

## Universities

Universities in Saudi Arabia typically pay the highest salaries for ESL teachers, and are thus coveted by the most qualified and experienced teachers applying to university positions. University students are required to take an English proficiency exam, and many of them plan to study abroad in an English-speaking country, so they will likely be taking additional English lessons. Consequently, experienced ESL teachers are in high demand at the university level. University teachers are required to develop course materials.

## GETTING HIRED

Employers in Saudi Arabia typically hire qualified ESL teachers with at least 2 – 5 years of experience, so teachers with less than two years of experience will find it difficult to get hired, especially by public schools and universities.

Candidates who possess a teaching certificate in addition to ESL qualifications and experience will have a distinct advantage. Saudi Arabia employers don't have a favorable view of online qualifications, so having an in-person or blended learning [120-hour TEFL certification with a practical component](#) will be a necessary part of your application.

When applying to jobs in Saudi Arabia, you should prepare your presentation with professionalism and care. Be sure to include the following:

- Résumé or curriculum vitae clearly highlighting your ESL experience and qualifications
- Reference letters from past employers that detail your work record and ethos
- Publications or special assignments relevant to ESL or other relevant academic concentrations such as linguistics

Most employers in Saudi Arabia expect teachers to present themselves in professional attire. If you are serious about teaching English in Saudi Arabia, dress to impress for the interview – in-person or online. A suit and tie for men is ideal, a business suit, blouse and long skirt or dress is appropriate; avoid skirts and other apparel that reveal skin.

## THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

## OVERVIEW



[China](#) is not only the most populous country in the world; it is the fourth largest country in the world by total land area, and has emerged to become the world's second largest economy in terms of GDP due to its rapid economic expansion over the past two decades. China's stratospheric growth has made it the world's largest ESL market by a wide margin. No other country at present provides as many employment opportunities for ESL

teachers as China does.

Although China is an emerging economy, it has very good infrastructure in major cities. China's high speed railway network is a thing of marvel, making travel within China not only fast but also inexpensive.

With a population of nearly 1.4 billion people, China has an enormous appetite for learning English. Over 3 million students currently study in public and private schools, and it is mandatory for all students to study English in order to pass the national higher education exam before entering university. This has created a tremendous need to employ ESL teachers throughout the country.

In order to improve the quality of English language education, the Chinese government has been steadily raising the criteria for employing ESL teachers in the Mainland. To be employed in China, you will need both a university degree as well as a 120-hour TEFL certification. Many employers also expect teachers to have at least two years of teaching experience, though this expectation often must take a back seat given the overwhelming – and often urgent – demand for teachers.

## SALARY AND BENEFITS

Due to China's vast size and population, salaries vary immensely depending where you teach and what type of employer you work for. In large urban centers such as Beijing and Shanghai, salaries typically range between USD 1,500 – 2,800 per month. Salaries in midsized urban centers such as Chengdu and Tianjin ranges between USD 1,200 – 2,300 per month, while in smaller urban and rural areas, it is common for salaries to range between USD 700 – 1,500 per month. It is indeed possible to earn more than the figures stated above. Salaries of USD 3,500 per month, though not typical, are not unheard of.

While salaries are primarily based on qualifications and experience, it is also possible to negotiate your salary with prospective employers. You will have much more bargaining leverage if the position you are considering requires a teacher urgently. Due to China's more stringent requirements for employing foreign staff, jobs are often difficult to fill within the desired timeframe, causing some employers to be more flexible when negotiating salaries in order to avoid being left without the teachers they need. However, it is also important to exercise due diligence to make sure the job you are considering is legitimate and the employer makes good on agreed upon conditions. Make sure you ask every prospective employer permission to communicate with a currently employed foreign teacher who you can ask questions about the employer and the job.

On the surface, it is apparent that typical teaching salaries in China are lower than those offered in UAE and Saudi Arabia. However, what's important to keep in mind is that the cost of living in China is proportionately lower than both UAE and Saudi Arabia. As well, getting hired in China is much easier than in UAE or Saudi Arabia; there's a good chance you will have multiple offers if you possess the necessary qualifications and present yourself professionally. China does value both qualifications and experience, but the fact is there simply aren't enough experienced teachers to fill the demand China has for ESL teachers nationwide. So, if you're still early in your career as an ESL teacher, China is an excellent springboard for gaining relevant experience. With just a university degree and a 120-hour TEFL certificate, you could be aboard a plane to China – job in hand – within a mere few months.

Chinese employers typically offer the following benefits to ESL teachers:

- Furnished or semi-furnished apartment, or housing allowance if you wish to rent
- Reimbursed return airfare to home country
- Visa and residence permit fees incurred in China (you may have to incur the cost of obtaining the Z Visa before arriving in China)
- Basic health insurance (we recommend purchasing your own insurance with emergency evacuation coverage in case of serious injury or illness)
- Paid annual vacation

In addition to these typical benefits, some employers also include:

- Annual bonus or end of contract bonuses
- Fully or partially paid utilities
- Some or all meals provided on work days

- Annual stipend for travel within China
- Winter and summer holidays of 2 – 4 months if working within the public school or university system
- Free Chinese language lessons

The benefits typically offered to ESL teachers significantly reduce their cost of living in China, such that the biggest living expenses teachers typically have are food, clothing and entertainment. Higher salaries don't always equate to higher savings in China. For example, a salary of 25,000 RMB (USD 3700) per month in Shanghai would be a basic *getting by* income, whereas a salary of 17,000 RMB (USD 2500) per month in a mid-sized city like Tianjin can actually go a lot further, with the potential to save half of that amount.

## TYPES OF EMPLOYERS

### Private Language Schools

More commonly referred to as enrichment schools or training centers in China, private language schools offer a variety of English language classes and enroll students of all ages, though the majority of students enrolled in almost any language center will be under 18, as Chinese families view English education for their children as a priority. As a teacher in a private language school, you could may indeed teach students of all ages and walks of life – from young children to business people – depending on the school you work at and their specific needs. The curriculum is usually provided for you and in almost all cases there will be a Chinese teaching assistant there to help you, which sometimes means you won't have as much autonomy over your teaching methods as you may want.

Private language schools usually provide 1 – 2 weeks of paid vacation per year to teachers, and some also offer end of contract bonuses.

Always thoroughly vet private language schools you are considering to work for. Check for both quality and legitimacy before accepting a job, and remember that it is illegal to work in China without the proper visa and work permit. There are many jobs listed online suggesting you can arrive in China on a business visa and work legitimately. This is untrue. Your employer will need to arrange and provide you with the relevant employment documents in order for you to obtain a Z visa from outside China (usually from your country of citizenship). Once you arrive in China on the Z visa, your employer can then start the process of arranging your residence visa and permit. Be suspicious of

anyone suggesting otherwise, and always check with the correct sources for the latest visa and employment rules.

## **Public Schools**

Teachers who work in public schools are essentially employed by the Chinese government. Because of this, teachers can be sure their employment conditions and arrangements are legitimate. Public school teaching positions also provide greater teachers with a greater deal of stability. There will typically be a set number of teaching hours per week assigned to each teacher, and usually, though not always, some office hours. It's common for public school teachers to work up to 20 teaching hours and 10 office hours per week. A contract hour is usually 45 minutes in public schools. Classes in public schools can have as many as 40 students, and normally foreign teachers are accompanied by a Chinese teacher during each lesson.

Public schools close for the Chinese winter break, which occurs each year between mid to late January until the end of February, and summer break, which occurs in mid to late July until the end of August. This adds up to between 2 – 3 months off per year for teachers working at public schools. Some schools sign 10 or 11 month contracts with teachers, but many do pay the full 12 months. Some schools regard the It is important to negotiate the terms with your employer before signing a contract.

## **Universities**

China has both public and private universities, and both offer a similar experience and pay to teachers. University teachers have a greater deal of autonomy over their lessons and instruction than teachers at private language schools and public schools. Class sizes vary greatly, but will typically be between 15 – 30 students, though some classes can have more than 100 students.

Teachers at universities typically work a maximum of 20 teaching hours per week, with minimal or no office hours. Many universities require as little as 10 – 12 teaching hours per week, and can work with the teacher to frontload all or most of these hours so that the teacher is effectively working only 3 – 4 days per week. This light workload is offset by lower salaries than teachers working elsewhere typically earn, though some universities pay very well, particularly if the teaching assignments are to students enrolled in specialized fields. University positions are ideal for people who want to have time to concentrate on personal projects such as pursuing a graduate degree, traveling around China or publishing a book, for example. Universities provide a stable work environment, and like public schools, enjoy long winter and summer breaks. University teachers thus have between 3 – 4 months off each year.

## International Schools

International schools in China will vary greatly from the other types of schools listed here as they primarily cater to students of expats or Chinese parents who plan to send their children abroad for university. Because of this, all classes are taught in English and teachers are employed to teach various subjects aside from English, such as Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, Literature, Physical Education, etc. Teachers may also be hired to teach all subjects to an entire grade.

International Schools offer generous salaries and benefits, and while there is certainly a preference to hire licensed teachers, it is not impossible to be hired by an international school with strong educational qualifications, experience and a 120-hour TEFL certificate. Teachers working at international schools will often receive about 1.5 months of paid vacation during the winter and summer breaks.

### GETTING HIRED

As already mentioned, employers in China are often keen to hire teachers with experience, but because of the high demand for teachers in China, they can't always be as selective as they would like to. This means ESL teaching experience is an asset when applying for jobs, especially for public school and university positions, but is not a deal breaker if you're just starting your teaching career.

However, you will need to have both a university degree and a [120-hour TEFL certificate](#) to be legally employed. We recommend completing a 120-hour TEFL certificate with a 20-hour practical component to be on the safe side, as some employers in China will expect this, and it is a wiser long-term decision for your teaching career. Employers will have their own requirements based on their specific hiring needs, organizational policies, and any specific requirements set by the provincial authorities. If you are successfully hired, a staff member should provide you with a list of required documents in order to proceed with signing a contract and arranging your visa.

Most employers in China conduct video interviews online. It's important to make a good first impression. For men, we recommend appearing in a shirt and tie. For women, a blouse should be adequate. If you have reference letters from previous teaching jobs, these can be helpful to securing a job.

### REPUBLIC OF KOREA (SOUTH KOREA)



Republic of [Korea](#), more commonly known as *South Korea*, comprises the southern half of the Korean

peninsula and is bordered to the north by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (*North Korea*). In the past few decades, the country has become an economic powerhouse and as such, the demand for English teachers is still quite high.

Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, South Korea rapidly became one of the most popular destinations to teach English due to the very attractive salaries and benefits offered, as well as specific programs and benefits provided by the South Korea government. By the mid-2000s, South Korea had replaced Japan as Asia's go-to destination for teaching English. More recently though, interest in teaching in South Korea has somewhat dissipated as a result of the emergence of China as an economic powerhouse and destination for teaching English. Still, teachers continue to be relatively well-paid in South Korea, and there are plenty of opportunities to earn and save substantially while living in a modern, developed country with outstanding infrastructure.

To teach English in South Korea legally, you must be a citizen of one of the following countries:

- US
- UK
- Ireland
- Canada
- Australia
- New Zealand
- South Africa

South Korea is relatively strict and teachers will need to meet the E2 visa requirements in order to teach English.

A university degree is required to obtain a work visa and teach legally in South Korea. A TEFL certificate may also be required, especially for positions in public schools and universities. We recommend completing either an online or in-person 120-hour TEFL certificate, and ideally one with a 20-hour practical component, to open the doors to more lucrative opportunities not only in South Korea but elsewhere.

## SALARY AND BENEFITS

Salaries for ESL teachers in South Korea typically range between USD 1,800 – 3,200, and can be even higher, particularly for university positions. A TEFL qualification and

experience will be valued in South Korea, but are not always necessary. Therefore, South Korea is considered to be a solid option for anyone looking to start an ESL teaching career and earn a decent wage in a developed country. Experienced teachers may be able to secure higher paying positions, and salaries can often be negotiated with employers prior to signing a contract.

Teachers employed in South Korea can expect to receive the following benefits typically offered by employers:

- Paid and furnished apartment
- Paid or reimbursed return airfare
- Paid visa expenses
- Health insurance
- 1 – 2 weeks paid vacation for private school teachers
- 4 weeks paid vacation for public school teachers
- Overtime pay for working above 120 teaching hours per month
- Contract completion bonus of 1 month's salary offered by most schools
- Pension plan refund for American and Canadian teachers

The cost of living in South Korea is relatively low compared to the cost of living in western countries. Medicare is excellent and also relatively inexpensive. Korean schools are legally required to cover 50% of their foreign staff's medical plan, while the remaining half (between 1.5 – 2.5%) is deducted from the teacher's monthly salary. With the benefits provided to teachers and the moderate cost of living in South Korea, many teachers are able to save USD 800 – 1,000 per month on typical salaries, and more with higher paying positions.

## TYPES OF EMPLOYERS

### **Private Language Schools (Hagwons)**

Also known as Hagwons, these private language schools serve as a place for students to receive extra instruction outside of their normal education. Private language schools are very popular in Korea, much like in other countries in East Asia. Like their counterparts in Japan (Eikaiwa schools), and China (enrichment schools), Hagwons can be great places for new teachers to find employment because they are a private business and may have fewer barriers to entry than at public government-run schools and universities.

The curriculum is typically formulated by the schools, and classes are well structured. Because these schools cater mainly to elementary and secondary school students,

work hours are usually during evenings and weekends. At first, this may feel unusual to anyone who is used to the typical 9 to 5 job, but many teachers in South Korea have come to appreciate having the day to explore the local area or focus on personal hobbies and projects.

Many teachers have had amazing experiences teaching at Hagwons while others have had terrible experiences. As with any private school, it is important to carefully check out the school's reputation and stability. Request to speak to a teacher currently working at the school to get a sense of his or her experiences. Also ensure any promises pertaining to salary or benefits are clearly documented in the contract.

## **Public Schools**

The public school system in South Korea has been ranked one of the best in the world. Foreign English teachers hired to work in public schools are expected to be highly qualified and have experience teaching the relevant grade levels. Foreign English teachers in South Korea are hired under one of four programs:

- English Program in Korea (EPIK)
- Gyeonggi English Program in Korea (GEPIK)
- Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education (SMOE)
- Teach and Learn in Korea (TaLK)

Teachers will be expected to come up with their own lesson plans and manage their classrooms. The hiring process is quite a bit more stringent than at the Hagwon schools and the level of competition is much greater as salaries and job security can be higher.

## **Universities**

Just as in many other countries in Asia and around the world, university jobs in South Korea are the most coveted and thus also the most competitive. This is because of the generous vacation time, higher salaries, and low teaching hours. The majority of universities in South Korea are outside of the main city of Seoul so competition for positions at universities in the capital is going to be much greater. Teachers will need to come up with their own lesson plans which are appropriate to the level of speakers in your class. Most jobs will be for freshman and sophomore level students with the primary focus being on conversational skills and writing, debate, and presentations being ancillary.

GETTING HIRED

Many employers in South Korea prefer teachers with relevant teaching experience. Private language schools are more open to applicants with minimal experience, whereas public schools and universities are more selective in their hiring.

Obtaining a reputable blended learning or in-person [120-hour TEFL certificate](#) with a practical component will open up more opportunities and equip you with the skills to excel as an English teacher.

South Korea remains a fairly conservative society in many respects, so keeping a professional appearance is important. Men should wear a shirt and tie to the interview, regardless of whether the interview is conducted in-person or via videoconference. Carefully craft your résumé to highlight your relevant qualifications, skills and experience, and if you have teaching experience, always keep copies of reference letters ready to submit with your applications.

## VIETNAM



[Vietnam](#) is a coastal country in Southeast Asia bordered by Cambodia and Lao to the west and China to the north. With a population of nearly 95 million, Vietnam currently is a popular destination for people who want to work abroad, gain teaching experience and save money while exploring and enjoying this country's beautiful and diverse landscape. The country has experienced significant economic growth and development. The

combination of economic growth and the government's initiatives and investments in education has created a good market for teachers with TEFL qualifications who want to gain experience.

Vietnam is a young country, with nearly 40% of its population under 40. Additionally, around 23.5 million Vietnamese are enrolled in an educational institute.

The demand for native English speakers is quite high as the government has made it a priority to increase the level of English fluency across the country. [According to BBC](#), nearly 21% of all government spending in 2010 was directed towards education, and unlike many other countries throughout Asia, where rote learning is typical, Vietnam has developed a curriculum which challenges students to apply critical thinking skills both in and out of the classroom environment. Both the government and students themselves have embraced opportunities to study and improve English.

Although salaries in Vietnam are somewhat lower than destinations like China and South Korea, the cost of living is low and the opportunities to teach English are vast. A university degree and TEFL certificate are required to be legally employed as a teacher in Vietnam, and teachers can typically save in the range of USD 600 per month.

## SALARY AND BENEFITS

Salaries for teachers in Vietnam generally begin at USD 800 in rural areas and increase towards USD 2,000 or higher in higher paying schools and urban areas. The actual amount you can make will depend on the type of employer you work with, your experience and level of qualifications. Salaries can be negotiated to some extent, prior to signing a contract.

Schools in Vietnam do not typically provide the same level of benefits that many other countries popular with ESL teachers provide.

Some of the better quality employers provide these benefits:

- Paid apartment
- Health insurance
- Paid visa expenses

The lack of benefits offered in Vietnam compared to other popular ESL destinations often deters more qualified teachers from considering it. However, Vietnam has a very low cost of living, especially in the more rural areas, meaning teachers can still save well and enjoy a more balanced life with breathtaking beaches and landscapes within grasp. Teachers in Vietnam often take on private lessons or work online outside of their regular work hours, enabling them to earn and save more while benefiting from low living costs.

## TYPES OF EMPLOYERS

### **International Schools**

International schools are the ideal employer for teachers considering Vietnam, due to the higher salaries and benefits offered. The majority of international schools are located in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, though they can be found in other cities as well. Students are usually the children of expat and local upper-income families.

These schools only hire once a year during the summer months, so if you are considering a position in an international school, timing your application is very important. Positions may still open up during the year due to teachers leaving, so be on the lookout for these opportunities as well. Most of the hiring process will take place between June and August to have teachers on board for the start of the school term in September.

### **Language Schools**

The majority of English teachers living in Vietnam work at private language schools, as they offer the easiest opportunities to get hired. Students at these schools are enrolled in additional English language classes outside of their regular school hours. This means most teachers work during evenings and weekends. Language schools operate throughout Vietnam, though there are many more schools and thus opportunities for teachers in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. Most students are elementary and secondary school students. Some private language schools cater more to adults who want to improve their conversation skills or business English skills. When applying to jobs at a

private school, make sure to vet the reputation of the schools as employers. One of the best ways to do so is to request to speak to a teacher currently-employed at the school. Avoid any school that asks teachers to work without a visa and work permit, as this puts you in a vulnerable situation where you are working illegally and which schools may renege on commitments made, including refusing to pay you or provide you benefits initially agreed upon.

## GETTING HIRED

Higher quality employers, and more specifically international schools, public schools and universities, want to hire teachers with qualifications and experience. This is not an absolute, as more qualified and experienced teachers have opportunities in destinations where better pay and benefits are on offer. Still, Vietnam, with its low cost of living makes it a fairly attractive place to earn and save, especially for teachers who moonlight such as those working online, or for those who have other passion projects on the go. Having a university degree and a TEFL certificate is almost always going to be a requirement for any legitimate job opportunity, and we highly recommend completing a 120-hour TEFL certificate with a 20-hour practical component as a minimum TEFL qualification. This puts you in a position to get hired by better employers, gain experience and prepare yourself for better job horizons as you develop your ESL teaching career.

Vietnam is not as formal as many of its neighbors. Still, it's prudent for men to appear in a shirt and tie and for women to appear in a blouse and skirt or dress appropriate for business attire, whether interviewing in-person or online.

Prepare a well-crafted résumé that highlights your qualifications, skills and experience. Also keep copies of reference letters handy to submit with your application as these can help significantly with getting you shortlisted for jobs with higher quality employers.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

There are many more destinations where one can teach English than the five we've recommended in this guide, and it is definitely possible to make a decent income in any of these countries with the right qualifications, experience and attitude. For example, there are teachers living in Thailand earning USD 2,500 per month or more, and receive benefits like housing and return airfare. However, they are more the exception than the norm.

What we've aimed to do with this guide is to provide you with the best places to earn and save money in 2021 under typical circumstances as teachers qualified to teach in these places.

UAE and Saudi Arabia typically offer the best salaries and benefits packages for ESL teachers, but will usually require teachers have a combination of higher qualifications and experience. China and South Korea, on the other hand, offer lower but decent salaries and benefits, enabling teachers who meet the minimum requirements to work, save money and gain valuable experience before moving on to the next stage of their lives. Vietnam is a decent entry point for teachers starting their careers, allowing them to experience life in a beautiful, exotic, country that is on the rise, teach English, gain experience and save some money.

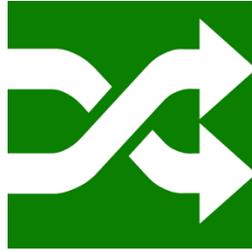
People who contemplate a career as an ESL teacher do so for different reasons. While we've concentrated mainly on the monetary aspects of teaching abroad in this guide, there are certainly many who enter this field for different reasons. Some are adventurous *escape artists* who want to explore a country while financing their getaway, while others are traveling and working during a gap year before pursuing a master's degree. And of course, there are those who are purely passionate about teaching English. We know ESL is a world of diversity and no two people are the same, nor do they have the same reasons for embarking on an ESL teaching career.

For this reason, we established ESL Job Exchange, where anyone beginning or furthering their careers can search and find quality ESL jobs around the world.

[www.esljobexchange.com](http://www.esljobexchange.com)

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