



Beautiful area outside Hualien, Taiwan

## **So You Want to Teach English Overseas?**

*A guide to teaching English in Asia*

*Foreword: This guide is written from the US perspective. A fair amount of this will also apply to potential English teachers from other English-speaking Western nations. I met several Canadians that taught English in Taiwan. I also met some guys from South Africa that did as well.*

*My time teaching English was in Taiwan, so this guide is written based on that experience. I'll chime in with what I know about other countries as well.*

So, you are interested in going abroad and teaching English in Asia? This guide is going to help you make that happen. Let's jump right into it and discuss the actual requirements.

## **Requirements in Taiwan:**

### **Education**

You'll need a college degree to teach English in Taiwan. A bachelor's degree from a University in any study will do. It doesn't need to be relevant to teaching English. Mine was Sociology.

### **Criminal Background Check**

Recent laws have been passed that require you to have a clean criminal background check in order to teach in Taiwan. I believe they want it run on the federal level. I've heard stories that some people have gotten around that, but I would consider it a requirement based on my understanding of the law. As always, check with your school of interest and specific country laws.

### **Visa Considerations**

It was helpful to get a tourist visa when I went to Taiwan which allowed me to be in the country for six months. After I was employed, they were able to convert the tourist visa to a working visa. If you are hired, your school can discuss your work visa plan. If you're looking to just visit Taiwan, US Citizens can visit visa free for up to 90 days. Having the tourist visa may make it easier to apply for your work visa.

### **Health Background Check**

In Taiwan, you'll need a health background check. This is likely a requirement for other countries. The health check consists of a blood screen where they are concerned about HIV and possibly other communicable diseases like tuberculosis and a chest x-ray. I always felt like we could do without the chest x-ray but it's a requirement.

### **Other countries:**

Most countries in Asia will also require you to have a bachelor's degree from a university. I've heard that there are some countries that will allow it without a degree although one is still preferred. I've heard this about China, Cambodia, and Laos.

Increasingly, countries are requiring criminal background checks in order to teach overseas. I've understood this to be true for Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, and possibly more. Thailand and Cambodia may not require this but always check with your school and the most current country requirements.

\*In Taiwan and most countries in Asia, it's not a requirement but you may want to consider picking up a TEFL certificate. There are different types of teaching certificates available and some countries require them but not Taiwan. I got certified at International TEFL Academy. It proved to not really be necessary per se, but it was still a fun experience and would help you to be more prepared heading to the classroom.

## Getting to Asia

Here's a hack that can be helpful for keeping cost low when traveling to Asia. It's often cheaper to fly to a low cost destination in Asia then travel onward to your desired local. Let me explain.

Recently, I was planning a trip to Taiwan. When I was looking at round trip ticket's I only was seeing tickets priced around \$1,100 for the dates I wanted to go. Rather than accept the price of \$1,100, another strategy is to seek out the cheapest fare to Asia and then see what you can do from there. A country that often has cheap fares is Hong Kong. If you search at the right time, you can get round trip tickets from Chicago to Hong Kong for under \$600. Then once you're in Hong Kong, see what kind of inter Asia tickets you can find to get you to the location you're looking at. Often, if nothing else, you can stay in another place like Hong Kong or Thailand and have short vacation for the cost of the difference in the flight.

### **Hotels in Asia. What to expect:**

Generally speaking, in a word, hotels in Asia are cheap. There's always variety and if you want to really operate on a lean budget, there's plenty of hostels for prices that actually can run as cheap as \$5 a day in some parts of southeast Asia. If you go with a more standardized hotel in east Asia, the cost might be closer to \$30 to \$60 or so. But with the standard hotels have rather impressive amenities to boast. If you are willing to drop a little cash and get into the \$100 range, the hotels can become immaculate.

The picture below is our room inside the Lotte hotel in Hanoi. The pic doesn't do it justice, but this hotel was amazing. If I recall correctly, the price was maybe under \$130. Great tub with an amazing view of the city.



Most hotels in Taiwan (and most of Asia) include free snacks like instant noodles, and free coffee and tea, as well as a kettle to heat water to cook your noodles and heat your tea. Hotels in Asia also typically include travel kit toiletries which include toothpaste and toothbrush, a shave kit, sewing kit, q-tips and some other toiletries.

There's another category of hotel you may come across in Asia called the "love motel". I won't get into too much detail here other than to say there's a whole genre of hotels set up for short term romantic encounters. The styles vary greatly in these themed boutiques. Protection is included as a courtesy. Sometimes a special type of chair designed for extracurricular activities is in the room.

These so-called love motels offer regular overnight stay and also offer a short stay option of a couple hours at a reduced cost. Most regular hotels in Asia have this short stay option as well. It's a different culture eh?

## Travel Tips

One site I highly recommend for travel to countries in Asia or anywhere in the world for that matter is [WikiTravel](#). There's actually two version of this site with some controversy around which is the "real" wiki version. The other one, now believed to be more true to open source origins is [WikiVoyage](#).

WikiTravel/WikiVoyage is a fantastic site that tells you most of what you need to know about getting into a destination, how to get around, sites to see, where to stay and what to do. I highly recommend it for travel to any destination.

## When You Only Speak English

Well here's a rather obvious concern we should address. If you only speak English or are at the beginning level of language at your destination country, how's that going to work out?

Surprisingly better than you might imagine. One of the great benefits of speaking English is it's generally understood to be the language of business. Airports around the world seem to always have English versions of any message or posted sign.

The English language abilities vary across Asia. I'll share anecdotally, what I've experienced as far as how challenging it is to get around speaking only English in some countries in Asia.

**Easy** - There's a pretty high level of English speaking going on in some Asian countries. Hong Kong, Singapore and the Philippines speak a great deal of English and you should have little problem communicating with most people, ordering food, or taking transportation.

**Medium**- Taiwan has a fairly high level of English spoken. It varies somewhat depending on the region and the person but most people under 30 or so seem to have had at least some English they've picked up from school. There will be options to eat without needing to order in Chinese, but some dishes may be out of your reach. As far as getting around, there are plenty of English signs on public transportation and most restaurants may have an English menu. Countries known for tourism like Thailand, also have a good deal of English spoken sufficient to do business with English speaking customers

**More Challenging**- These are just opinions based on short trips, but some countries make it less of a priority to speak English or their countries more English friendly. That's not to say English resources aren't available, but just that there were times I felt more challenged than in other Asian countries. I found it a bit more challenging getting around in Japan and Korea and sometimes had trouble with subways that had less English signs. That being said travel is still doable but if you have a bilingual travel partner, things will be easier.

One tool for getting around the language problem is to use Google Translate. The progress Google Translate has made is impressive. You can even look at foreign language on signs and get instant translation. This can be helpful looking at menus.

## Internet and Phone Service

Most countries in Asia will allow you to easily pick up a SIM card at the airport or local shops and buy prepaid minutes so you can power your phone with internet. I've found the cost of data in Asia to be generally cheaper than in the US.

Sometimes there can be a bit of complication getting your SIM. Taiwan requires a bit of paperwork to get a SIM card that can require your passport. It's worth it get internet data at a great rate.

Sometimes when you land at odd hours, the cell phone kiosks can be closed. This is one of the reasons I signed up for Google Fi. It's cellphone and data service that works globally in most countries. It's really quite a nice feeling to touch down from a flight and have internet access immediately. It can definitely make for a less stressful commute to your hotel or destination.

If you're interested in signing up, I have an affiliate link that if you click and sign up will give you a \$20 credit. I'll also receive a \$20 commission for any signups. Click the link [here](#) if you're interested in signing up with the credit.

## The Actual Work and Pay

The schedule of an English teacher in Taiwan is relatively lax compared to the 40 hour work week. The typical hours worked varies around 25 to 30 hours a week. Probably closer to 25, and sometimes a bit less. The typical pay in Taiwan is about \$600 to \$650 NT an hour which is around \$18/hour. This means your roughly pay might be somewhere around \$1,800 to \$2,000 a month. There are sometimes bonuses for good attendance and class retention.

If you've got a free place to stay at your school, your monthly budget may actually look something like this.

Food	\$200 USD
Cell Phone Service	\$30 USD
Entertainment	\$200 USD
Cleaning Fee & Electricity	\$40 USD
Transportation (scooter fuel or bus/train/MRT)	\$20 USD
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$490 USD</b>

If you make an effort, it's definitely doable to save \$1,000 US a month, presuming you don't need to pay off debt. Regardless, you should have about \$1,000 a month of cash flow at your disposal. This can be a great way to empower your financial independence journey.

## The Teaching Part

So how is teaching? Well generally speaking the kids are pretty well behaved in my experience. At times they were remarkable. At times they are quiet and a bit harder to inspire. In Taiwan, there was a slight element of the teacher sort of entertaining the students. After all, if you are teaching in a cram school they are a business rather than a public education facility. This means it's important that the parents are satisfied with the students experience. The customer is always right.

If you're teaching the younger kids that don't speak much English yet, you'll usually have a Chinese speaking co-teacher in the room to help assist or even lead the class and you play the role of demonstrating English

with a proper pronunciation. As the kids English progresses, you will likely eventually teach kids without the assistance of a co-teacher.

Cram schools or buxibans, operate in the afternoon to evening, typically around 4:00pm to 9:00pm. As far as schedules go, this leaves your day free to do as you please until at least around 4:00. It also means you won't need to wake to an alarm clock.

## Some Helpful Teaching English in Asia Tips

- Some countries offer travel reimbursement for your flight ticket. I generally haven't seen this in Taiwan but I believe it's common in Korea.
- Some schools have free room. My first school in Taiwan allowed free room for the first year teaching there. You only needed to pay for electric and a fee for the cleaning maid that came to around \$30 a month. The name of this school was called "Gloria English School" in Taoyuan. The city is about a 40-minute, roughly \$2 bus ride from the major international city of Taipei. Taoyuan is a charming town that holds a special place in my heart!
- One popular cultural thing in Asia is the idea of a "language exchange." The idea is that you learn some Chinese and your language exchange partner learns English and you help each other. It should be noted that language exchange also tends to be a bit of an excuse to set up the scene for romance. In Taiwan, a popular site that people meet and do language exchange is one called [tealit](#).
- When looking for jobs, a popular site for teaching in Asia is a site called [Dave's ESL café](#).

## Some Concerns

- One thing to keep in mind whenever you're outside your home country is to consider the laws and rules of the country your visiting. Often in Asia, there are harsh penalties for drug use. Dealers can be executed in some places. I'd strongly advise to avoid messing around with drugs when overseas. It's not worth it. That being said, there are some parts of Asia that treat it a bit more casually. Cambodia has "Happy Pizza" and I read that Thailand recently legalized medicinal marijuana.
- The legalities of teaching. Often school will have a high demand for teachers such that they might not be as concerned with breaking the law. You're required to have a work permit to teach in Taiwan. But sometimes schools will hire substitute teachers to work without a work visa. Beware...do this at your own risk of deportation.

To learn more about teaching English and traveling the world, check out some other posts on my site and follow the blog for ideas on earning and cutting dependency on office life. Here's some relevant posts:

[Teaching English Online for Supplement Income](#)

[The Life of a World Traveling English Teacher](#)