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## Teaching English in Korea

### Land a foreign classroom post and see the world while banking a few bucks

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Like many people with a serious case of wanderlust, Kimberly Berls grew up itching to fill her passport with stamps.

"I always wanted to travel, but I come from a very meat-and-potatoes, middle-class family from central Ohio," said Berls, 28, now living in Chicago's Bucktown neighborhood. "I didn't necessarily have the means."

But she did have the ability to teach English abroad, and that allowed her to live and work in Japan, Greece and Mexico — while squeezing in plenty of sightseeing.

"I was able to work my way around the world instead of paying my way," said Berls, who has visited more than 30 countries.

Teaching English abroad is an ideal way to immerse yourself in another culture while making some cash to boot.

A slew of programs are out there, but one of the most lucrative comes courtesy of the South Korean Ministry of Education. Each year it hires some 1,100 college graduates to teach English to Korean students in primary and secondary public schools.

The Korean government recently brought aboard Greenheart Travel in Chicago to help with teacher recruitment, which started April 1. The River North-based not-for-profit has been facilitating many types of cultural exchanges for 25 years.

"This is a great opportunity to live overseas and support yourself while doing it," said Lauren Bauer, Greenheart's coordinator for the Korean program. "They pay for everything. You get a furnished apartment, a decent salary, health insurance. And once you finish a full contract, they give you another month salary as a bonus."

Teacher salaries generally range from \$1,600 to \$1,900 a month, depending on the person's qualifications and where they're working in Korea. (People with a master's degree, for example, make more money, as do teachers stationed in rural areas.)

Participants also get 1.3 million South Korean won (about \$1,150 U.S.) to help pay for a one-way airline ticket to Korea, and another 1.3 million won when it's time to leave.

The compensation package includes 18 paid vacation days plus 13-15 national holidays.

Teachers are expected to work 35-40 hours a week, with up to 22 of those hours spent giving instruction in the classroom.

Sounds great — but you don't speak a word of Korean, right?

Not a problem, Bauer said.

"They really want you to only speak English in the classrooms," she said, adding that participants are paired with Korean teachers who speak English.

Prospective candidates must fill out an application, provide a couple of letters of recommendation and do a phone interview with a Korean government official. Successful applicants are then referred to one of 14 Korean provinces, where local officials ultimately decide who gets hired.

Everyone accepted into the program will go to Korea in August for a 10-day training session

before heading out to their respective schools in September.

People can request where they'd like to teach. Some spots are in high demand, such as the picturesque city of Busan, the volcanic island of Jeju and the mountainous Gangwon province, known for its beaches and skiing. The capital city of Seoul is popular, too.

"The earlier people get their applications in, the better chance they have [of being assigned their top choice]," Bauer said.

The application deadline is June 15. Another round of recruiting will take place this fall for teachers whose contracts will start in February or March.

Berls, who now works for Greenheart's parent company, the Center for Cultural Interchange in Chicago, spent more than two years in Japan teaching English.

"Korea really is the new Japan," she said. "In Korea, there's a demand for English teachers that's comparable to when I was in Japan seven years ago."

Like Korea, Japan is one of the better-paying places for English teachers. But the cost of living is considerably higher in Japan than it is in Korea.

"I have [teaching] friends in Korea right now who are saving about \$1,000 a month," Berls said.

Jeff Corra, 33, of Naperville moved to Korea nearly three years ago to teach English. His younger brother Michael, 30, soon followed.

"They've really created a life for themselves there," said their mother, Jeanne, who's visited her sons twice. "The people are very good to them. It's been such an experience. They're not coming home anytime soon."

As for Berls, she said she loved living in Asia because it was so different from the United States — from the food to the people to the culture. But these differences can take some getting used to.

"It's a different way of life," she said. "You have to realize there are going to be challenges."

For many people in this current economic climate, just finding a job on U.S. soil can be a challenge. That makes programs like teaching English in Korea more appealing now than ever.

"If somebody's about to graduate or has been unemployed for a while, here's a chance to take a gap year. Maybe pay back some student loans," Berls said. "And travel the world."

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