

# US visa fee moves hit agents

## Next issue

In our September issue, **Special Report** examines the different ways agents promote their businesses while **Market Report** finds out about market trends in the USA last year.

**Feedback** finds out what students studying English in Canada think about their study abroad experience and **City Focus** visits Florence. **Direction** looks at the question of refund agreements between agents and schools in the event of an agency's client not completing their course.

The price of a non-immigrant visa for entry into the USA has increased by over 40 per cent in Korea, from US\$45 to US\$65. The price hike came into effect on 1 June and the US Embassy in Korea told the *Korea Times* that the increase was needed, "to recover the actual cost of the [visa] service, including the machine-readable visa and processing through our sophisticated name-check technology."

Agents in the country said they had not been informed of the price increase by the embassy, and Joe Chang, of New Ivy Overseas Education Centre, said, "This is a sudden rise without any reason or explanation." He noted that as soon as the announcement was made, there was a long queue outside the embassy of students keen to obtain their visa before 1 June. "But the rise may not affect visa applications [in the long-term]," he added, "considering that the

[student] visa application fee for Australia is equal to US\$160."

However, Kim Ji Suk, Senior Manager at Geonet Study Abroad Agency, said he felt the price increase might affect the short-term language study market. "We believe that Canada could be a first choice for the student," he said, adding that students interested in long-term study in the USA would tolerate the fee but consider it unreasonable.

Meanwhile, the cost of a multiple-entry visa for Russian or American students studying in each other's countries has been significantly lowered, as a result of a meeting between Presidents Putin and Bush earlier this year. The move was ushered in to facilitate more convenient student exchange between the two countries, according to a report in the USA's *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Since 1 June, the fee has dropped from US\$450 to US\$65.

In Russia, Regional Manager of Study Group, George Goss, said that this would have minimal impact on the outbound language studies market, as single entry visas were generally granted for language courses overseas, which cost US\$65. Goss said, "In the Russian market, the most important factor is the preparedness of visa officers to grant student visas to genuine individuals."

Nevertheless, increasing cooperation between the countries could help smooth the visa issuing process. James Warlick, Consul General at the US Embassy in Moscow, said that he had been working on easing the US-Russia visa channel. He claimed that previously, students from both the USA and Russia had been known to experience "unnecessary difficulties". Russia has also agreed to reduce the processing time for US applications from several weeks to 10 days. □

## Agent questionnaire



Name of Agent: Ewelina Matysik  
 Position: Director  
 Age: 25  
 Name of Company: Language Investment  
 Location: Sopot, Poland  
 Other branches: no  
 No. of full-time staff: three  
 Average no. of students per year: 60 since Jan 2002

Would you like to participate in our Agent questionnaire? If so, please send us your responses to these questions, accompanied by your photograph. Please contact us if you have any further questions.

### 1. When and how did you become a language travel agent?

Language Investment came into being in January this year, so my company is quite new in the Polish market. Thanks to my experience in previous companies, I knew the Polish market well and I knew that language courses abroad are becoming very popular in Poland year on year. This is the main reason I wanted to become an agent. In addition to this, I am [also pleased] to offer language courses abroad to my clients – I know this is the best way to learn foreign languages. I love meeting people, I love working with my clients and I love travelling. All these points [led to me choosing] my present job.

### 2. Was it difficult to set up a new company?

There are not many problems with setting up a new company [and becoming] an agent of language schools abroad. The one difficulty is Polish law. Activities connected with selling language courses abroad are still relatively new and some settlements connected with agency activities are not [very] clear.

### 3. Please tell us about your client profile.

First of all, the main requests are for English language courses [in] the UK. Almost 80 per cent of my clients learn English in the UK. Second place [in terms of popularity] is Malta, then the USA, Canada, Ireland and other countries. The average age of my clients is 18 years old. In the summer time, there are more teenagers, and after the high season, [we have] adults who would like to spend their holidays studying. When I meet the clients and ask about their requirements, I notice that they often ask about teacher qualifications, the number of lessons per week and what the lessons are like, and they specify that they would like to be accommodated near the school. The most popular [type of course] is the general course – average 20 lessons per week – followed by intensive and then examination courses.

### 4. How many institutions do you represent and in how many countries?

It is hard to say. I never tell my clients that I do not have the courses or places that they [request]. When I receive an uncommon request, I

always try to find such a programme [for the client]. Of course, it takes two or three more days [than usual] to prepare a suitable proposition connected with a language placement for this client and I do my best to sell it. I have to check a suitable school, ask [business colleagues] for their opinion and I try to contact the school and get to know their products as best I can. To answer the question, I can say I cooperate with 30 schools abroad in over 25 countries. Their programmes are in my brochure, which I send or give to clients.

### 5. How do you find new institutions to represent?

I have found and find new institutions in Language Travel Magazine, through the Internet and at international and national fairs.

### 6. What sort of service do you expect from a good school?

I expect good school equipment, high quality lessons, a full description of what a language course offers, skilled teachers, nice and helpful staff, and an interesting extra-curricular cultural programme.

## Belta holds independent study fairs

BRAZILIAN agency association, Belta, held two fairs earlier this year to promote study abroad and succeeded in drawing a significant student audience to the events, held in Belo Horizonte and Sao Paulo. Celso Luiz Garcia at the association, said, "We have achieved an excellent result that, certainly, will grant us courage and motivation to promote a fair even larger and more complete next year to meet the consuming public interest."

It was the first time that ExpoBelta had been organised as a stand-alone fair. Last year, ExpoBelta was part of a large fair in which general tourism companies exhibited their services. Over five thousand students attended this year's Sao Paulo fair, while close to 1,000 visited Belo Horizonte. There were 64 and 40



PHOTOGRAPH: BELTA

*ExpoBelta received high praise from exhibitors, according to Belta*

exhibitors respectively at each fair, representing language teaching institutions, tourism agencies and Belta agency members.

"We could not have had a better result, as we have achieved 100 per cent satisfaction, according to the exhibitors' evaluations," said Belta President, Alfredo

Spinola. "We are quite sure that Belta scored many points with the international exhibitors as well as the visiting public." Belta used several marketing channels to advertise ExpoBelta, such as specialised press and newspaper advertising, invitations distributed to universities and high schools and features on youth-oriented radio programmes.

Exhibitors and organisers this year registered a high demand for language courses and high school programmes during the fair, as well as undergraduate and Master's degrees, said Spinola. Based on such evaluations, Belta expects a 10 per cent growth in business this year.

"In 2001, the Real devaluation in face of the US dollar and the September 11 events reduced the number of Brazilians that Belta members sent to study abroad to an estimated 65,000," he said, pointing out that in 2000, 70,000 Brazilian students travelled abroad to take some kind of course. He added, "Since September 11, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the UK and Ireland are favoured and Belta estimates that the USA has suffered a retraction of about 50 per cent." □

### Clarification

In the June issue of *Language Travel Magazine*, Richard Young was wrongly credited in our City Focus feature as the Director of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. His correct title is Marketing Director of UAB Barcelona. We apologise for any inconvenience caused.



Sarah Spencer (top) has joined agency Cactus Language in the UK as Product Executive for Latin America and Worldwide Language Courses. Ms Spencer has a passion for travel



and has worked for two years in a busy student and youth travel agency. Suzanne Furstner (below) is the new Product Executive for English and UK foreign language courses. Ms Furstner is Dutch and a graduate of Latin American Culture & Language Studies.



Margaret Eaglestone is the new Marketing Manager at the Centre for International Education (CIE) in Oxford, UK. CIE has recently relocated to larger premises in the centre of Oxford. Ms Eaglestone hopes to raise the profile of CIE, attract more students and maintain the friendly and welcoming nature of the school.



Linda Chung recently took on the position of Korean Marketing Manager at the International Language School of Canada, one of the largest English and French language providers in Canada. With her own international student experience, one of her aspirations for her job is to provide a meaningful, enjoyable and rewarding educational experience for her language students.



The Banff Education Center (BEC) in the Canadian Rockies has a new Assistant Manager, Jannine Rossi. Ms Rossi has been teaching with BEC for two years and held the position of Head Instructor for the past year. Her new role will include introducing dynamic new language programmes.



Mary Brooks, Director of the English Language Institute at Eastern Washington University in the USA, is the new President of University and College Intensive English Programs (UCIEP). "As UCIEP President, my mission for the coming year is for our organisation to offer convincing information to show how international education is vital to national security," she says.



### Face to face

Each month, we profile the people from language schools who deal directly with agents, in order to give you the chance to get to know some of the people you work with.

#### Who are you?

Chris Hayes, Teacher and Administrator.

#### Where do you work?

Sherkin Island English Language Centre, off the southwest coast of Ireland.

#### Why and how did you start in the industry?

I started work in London nearly 30 years ago and when I moved to Sherkin Island [in Ireland] I met a number of women who shared my interest in teaching English as a foreign language. We decided to form a cooperative and open our own school here on the island.

#### Why should agents choose to represent your school?

Our school is very unusual. Being on a quiet and beautiful small island makes it a perfect place to come and study. Also, we have formed partnerships with local sailing and diving organisations so we can offer exciting courses.

#### How does your school promote itself to agents?

This is only our third year of operation, so we are in the early stages of working with agents. We have a small number of agents in France, Germany, Spain and Japan and we are very keen to attract others. We use advertising in trade journals and web marketing to introduce ourselves to agencies.

#### What percentage of your annual student intake comes through agents?

At present, this is a small percentage, but we anticipate a rise in this figure.

#### How do you believe your institution will develop in the future?

We expect a steady increase in numbers over the next year or two. However, we intend to remain a small school, continuing to offer personal and friendly professional attention to each student.