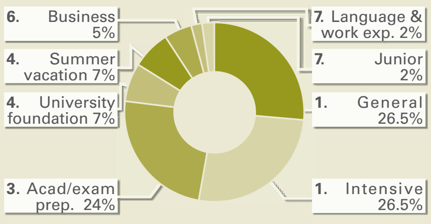
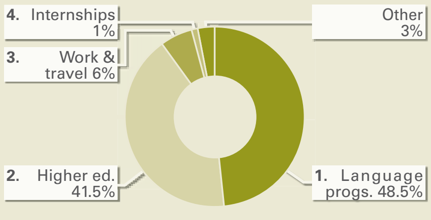
Thailand persistent

Political uncertainty and an unstable economy have affected the outgoing student market in Thailand negatively. The majority of agents in our Agency survey on Thailand reported a drop in demand for overseas programmes while China is gaining stature as a study destination.

Most popular courses



Average percentage agency business



Economic overview

• In the first quarter of 2008, the Thai economy grew by six per cent year-on-year, which was higher than the annual average for 2007 of 4.8 per cent. Heightened political uncertainty and a deteriorating consumer and business confidence had a negative effect on the economy in May and June.

• Inflation rose significantly in the second quarter of 2008 to 2.8 per cent due to higher domestic retail oil prices on the back of continued increases in world oil prices.

• Exports have continued to expand by more than expected since the global economy has not slowed down by as much as the Monetary Policy Committee previously projected.

Source: The Bank of Thailand

Market growth

Business among the nine agencies that took part in this year's Agency Survey on Thailand actually decreased this year by just over one per cent. Three agencies recorded negative growth in their business over the last 12 months, while two recorded an increase and one said that business had remained the same. One agency declined to give us a figure. The unstable economy was blamed by one agent for their decline in business, a factor that was cited in last year's survey to explain the meagre four per cent growth in business at that time (see LTM, November 2007, page 14).

Language and destination trends

Australia is a firm favourite among Thai students as a destination for overseas education and this country remained in top position this year. The trend for studying in China, meanwhile, increased dramatically, with 20 per cent of overall students choosing to study there, compared with one per cent previously. This change from last year can, however, largely be attributed to the inclusion of an agency who only sent students to China or Korea. As such, Chinese was the second most popular language requested by students wanting to study overseas and this shows the importance of this language and destination in Asian student markets.

Student and course trends

The average length of stay for Thai students decreased slightly this year to 15 weeks – down from 17 weeks previously. This slight decline may be attributed to the fact that fewer students (17.5 per cent) were learning a language for future studies overseas – in direct contrast with the results of last year's survey when 71 per cent of Thai students were intending to pursue their studies overseas. Instead, either future or current work provided the motivation for the majority of language learning trips abroad, with each of these indicated by 37.5 per cent of students. It is possible that in the face of continued economic uncertainty, Thai students are instead opting for shorter, less expensive courses as they cannot afford to embark on a three- or four-year degree programme.

Key points

• The total number of students placed by the **nine** agencies in our survey was **1,080**

• Individual agencies placed between **35** and **310** students on courses each year

• Average business growth was **-1** per cent

• The average length of stay for Thai students was **15 weeks**

• Overall, **54 per cent** of Thai students stayed with host families when studying overseas

• Higher education was a significant sector, accounting for **41.5 per cent** of agencies' business

• In the last 12 months, agencies worked with an average of **26** different providers

Agency business

Despite the decline in students seeking to learn a language for further study opportunities overseas, outside of this sector, 41.5 per cent of overall agency business was spent dealing with higher education programmes, a similar percentage to last year. Language programmes were the most popular with Thai students while volunteer programmes notably declined in popularity – agencies did not deal with this sector of the market at all, despite it making up seven per cent of business last year. A greater percentage of schools were found through fairs and expos this year, while the Internet was less popular as a means to find new business partners, falling from 25 per cent last year to 19 per cent this year.

Looking ahead

Few of the agencies in our survey had anything positive to say about the immediate future of the study abroad industry in Thailand with common reasons for a potential decline cited as the declining economy, increased competition among agents in Thailand and an unstable political situation. However, some agencies were upbeat with one saying that they had opened more offices in Thailand recently and were expecting an increase in business as a result.

Top destinations

32.5%
1. Australia
25%
2. UK

3. China 20%
4. USA 17%
5. New Zealand 3%
6. Canada 2%
7. Ireland 0.5%

Top languages

80%
1. English
18%
2. Chinese

3. French 0.5%
3. Japanese 0.5%
5. Spanish 0.2%
5. German 0.2%

How do agencies find new schools to represent?

27%
1. Workshops
26%
2. Fairs and expos

3. Internet 19%
4. LTM/ETM 6%
5. Other press 4%
Other 18%

How do agencies recruit students?

47%
1. Word-of-mouth
27%
2. Website

3. Advertising in press 11%
4. Seminars to students 6%
5. Mail shots 2%
6. TV/radio 1%
Other 6%

Percentage of agents who recognised each of the following organisations

Australia	
Acpet	43%
EA	71%
Canada	
Capls	0%
CLC	29%
Languages Canada	14%
France	
Souffle	0%
FLE	0%
L'Office	0%
Unosel	0%
Ireland	
MEI~Relsa	43%
Italy	
Asils	0%
Italian in Italy	0%
Malta	
Feltom	0%
New Zealand	
Ed. NZ	14%
English NZ	43%
Portugal	
Aeple	0%
South Africa	
Eltasa	0%
English SA	0%
Spain	
Fedele	0%
UK	
ABLS	0%
English UK	71%
British Council	86%
Europe	
Eaquals	0%
USA	
AAIEP	57%
Accet	43%
CEA	29%
UCIEP	29%
International	
Ialc	14%
QE	14%
Tandem	0%

Thai agents named a range of programmes they work with, including, in Australia: Archer College, Adelaide, SA; Australian College of English, Sydney, NSW; Australian School of Business and Technology, Sydney, NSW; English Language School in Sydney, NSW; Geos, Sydney, NSW; Global Village, Brisbane, QLD; Holmes College, Sydney, NSW; International House, various; Perth International College of English, Perth, WA; Sydney College of English, NSW; The Education Group, Sydney, NSW. **In China:** Dongbei University of Finance and Economics, Dalian. **In New Zealand:** Languages International, Auckland and Christchurch; Seafield School of English, Christchurch; Southern Lakes English College, Queenstown. **In the UK:** Golders Green College, London; Language Specialists International, Portsmouth; Newcastle College, Newcastle upon Tyne; Oxford House College, Oxford. **In the USA:** Geos, Boston, MA. **International:** ELS, Kaplan Aspect, Study Group.

Thank you to the following agencies for taking part in this survey: Aimhigh Centre, Centory Co, Dominic and Chang Corporation Co., Learn More International Education, NZ Study Thailand, Professional InterEducation Co, S7K International Education Co., Trendsetter Education, Union Plus Co.