

South Africa's gain

Comparatively easy visa procedures, combined with an increasing worldwide interest in South Africa as a study destination means that, overall, South African language schools are reporting another good year. AMY BAKER reports.

Association action in South Africa

The English Language Teaching Association of South Africa (Eltasa) has been joined by a rival association in the marketplace, called English South Africa (English SA). Launched earlier this year, English SA has the same high quality ideals as Eltasa (see page 7), and, according to one of its members, there is room for two associations in the marketplace.

"I think there is a place for both [associations]," comments Manya Bredell of Cape Town School of English. While Eltasa had the vision of being the national association of quality language schools, English SA says its objectives are similar: to set standards within the industry and jointly promote South Africa. "English SA will always remain open to new members who share the same objectives," says founder member, Jens von Wichtingen of Cape Studies.

Meanwhile, at Eltasa, the group is working on establishing relations with universities and tertiary institutions in the country and setting up joint marketing initiatives with any interested parties. "Successful negotiations have been held with such bodies as the Home Affairs department, educational institutions and flight companies," says Gavin Eyre, representing Eltasa.

We have very easy visa procedures. According to our agents, this is a major selling point now," relates Jens von Wichtingen of Cape Studies, highlighting one of the reasons cited by some South African schools for a rise in student numbers over the past year.

Gavin Eyre of Cape Communication Centre, a member of the LAL network, adds, "The South African visa regulations are very good and give clear and precise procedures to be followed. South African embassies are very efficient and process required visas in a short period of time."

With the tightening of visa regulations in a number of other markets around the world, such as the USA and latterly Malta, according to some schools there (see *Language Travel Magazine*, December 2004, page 17), South Africa is capitalising on its "easy-visa" status. Luanne McCallum, Manger of Interlink School

of Languages in Cape Town, which experienced a 30 per cent rise in enrolments in 2004, says that visa issuance is "important for agents in countries where it is now difficult for their students to get visas to the UK or USA, therefore they recommend us". McCallum points to Saudi Arabians as the best performing nationality at the school this year, because of the easy visas, good prices, and "strong interest in South Africa".

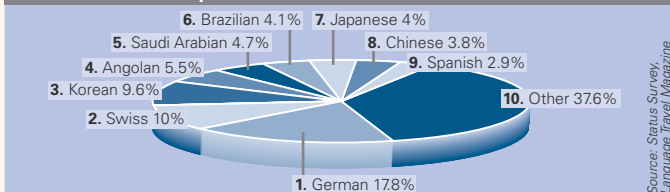
The other main student provider countries mentioned by schools in South Africa include the perennial good performers, Germany and Switzerland, and Eastern European countries such as Hungary, Poland, Russia and the Czech Republic. Von Wichtingen says "better value for money and more flight connections" have influenced more Eastern Europeans to study in South Africa. "We had an increase of about 10 per cent [in numbers] compared with the previous year, mainly from Eastern Europe, while the German and Swiss market remained the same," he adds.

In *Language Travel Magazine's* most recent South Africa Status survey, which analysed the 2003 performance of 10 South African schools, German and Swiss were top in the league table of nationalities, while Korean, Angolan and Saudi Arabian students followed. Angolan nationals moved up one place from the previous Status survey in 2002 to fourth place. Confirming the trend towards more African students studying in South Africa, Manya Bredell of the Cape Town School of English reports that despite a slight decrease in overall numbers at her school, African enrolments increased in 2004.

Looking ahead to next year, South American countries are expected to perform well, according to a range of schools, as well as Germany and Japan. "We have a slight increase in Japanese students



Top ten student nationalities in South Africa by student weeks, 2003



Source: Status Survey, *Language Travel Magazine*

as we have just started working with an agent there," relates Meryl van der Merwe of Inlingua in Cape Town. Von Wichtingen adds that he will be targeting "Eastern Europe, Japan and Brazil" next year.

As van der Merwe underlines, agent relations remain very important in South Africa. Bredell agrees, "Agents play a very important role and we will continue working with agents and even working with new agents," she says. Eyre adds, "Agents play a significant role for us here in Cape Town and the demand for agent-based business is growing at a steady rate."

To keep agents and students happy, language schools in the country are trying to ensure that their language learning products are as relevant as possible for students. While general and intensive English courses remain popular, two schools note that there has been increasing demand for business English programmes recently.

Following the market trends seen in other countries, schools are also developing links with tertiary institutions to offer streamlined language-to-university pathways via one of the language school associations, Eltasa (see box left).