

Central Europe's firm growth

Next issue

In our July issue, **Special Report** finds out about the latest trends in the language for specific purposes sector, while **Market Report** reports on market trends in Malta last year. **Direction** looks at the provision of English language courses in independent schools in the UK and **Feedback** finds out what students studying in Spain think about their study abroad experience. **City Focus** uncovers Sydney's appeal for students and **Status** brings us market information about the UK.

The economies of Central Europe are growing and as a consequence, study abroad is becoming increasingly popular, reports online Czech magazine, *sucsess.com*. Individual agencies in the region confirm this trend, with some claiming a growth in their business last year of up to 75 per cent.

Jarmila Dratnalova, of Student Agency in the Czech Republic, told *Language Travel Magazine*, "Language courses abroad are becoming more and more popular and people have finally learnt about the possibilities of learning languages abroad." In Hungary, Eva Brodszky, of OTP Travel, agreed that language learning overseas was gaining in popularity. "Hungary is going to [join] the European Union (EU) soon," she said, "and there are many global companies here already, so everybody realises that English is inevitable, almost im-

perative, at the level of fluent and easy communication."

In terms of Central Europe's economic performance, GDP growth for 2001 stood at 3.8 per cent in Hungary, 3.6 per cent in the Czech Republic and 3.3 per cent in Slovakia, while in comparison, Germany's economy grew by just 0.6 per cent and the USA's by 1.2 per cent.

"The Central European countries should become full EU members in 2004 at the latest," reported *sucsess.com*, "[and] the need for language training is high. At the same time, there is a lack of university places and almost 40 per cent of applicants in the Czech Republic are turned down, which could result in more students seeking university courses abroad."

According to Ales Barta at Alfa Agency in the Czech Republic, 30 per cent of clients are currently interested in learning a language for further study over-

seas, and increasing numbers of clients are expected this year. In Slovakia, Lýdia Lamasová of Eurolingua agreed that the number of outbound students was rising, but cautioned, "The number of companies offering [language travel] services [in Slovakia] is growing too."

Agencies in the region say that English remains the most popular language choice – followed by German, because of geographic and historical reasons – but destination choices include Malta, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand as well as the more traditional choice of the UK.

Réka Lénárt, of Study Tours in Hungary, said Spanish was growing in popularity among Hungarian students. "There's a tendency to choose a Latin language as a second language now," she said, "while it used to be the third language that students chose to study." □

Agent questionnaire



Name of Agent: Wang Wei
Position: Executive Director
Age: 39
Name of Company: Beijing Wiseway Consulting Co., Ltd.
Location: Beijing, China
Other branches: Shanghai
Number of full-time student counsellors: 10
Average no. of student per year: 300

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?

Since 1999 when we established the company, which soon became approved and licensed by the Ministry of Education, China. [Our company] was established by a group of UK alumni.

2. Please tell us about your client profile.

Half of our clients are postgraduate students, who might need three months to one year of English language training before they start their academic programme. The other half are younger students, who would do A-level or university foundation programmes in the UK. They both need English language before their academic course.

3. How do your clients form an opinion about which country they want to study in?

This depends on the level of excellency in education programmes, and also the cost.

4. Which destinations are most popular among your

clientele and why?

The UK and Ireland, as we are specialised in these two countries.

5. What are the main problems that you encounter in the course of your work?

To get an offer letter from a good university quickly.

6. How do you overcome the negative image in the press of many study abroad agencies, and how do you believe this problem can be resolved?

To upgrade the level of our service [offered] to our clients, and start by establishing ourselves as reputable organisations.

7. How do you market your services and how have you adapted your marketing technique in the past few years?

Newspaper advertising is the main means of our promotion. We also have brochures in major commercial outlets [and] we also actively participate in exhibitions and other [events].

8. What percentage of Chinese, in your opinion, are interested in study abroad, and how will this change over time?

Almost all of them. However, the problem is that the UK embassy in China tends not to issue a visa to students whose main purpose is to study the English language. As soon as this can be improved, I am sure there will be a big increase.

9. How do you see your business developing in the future?

We want to strengthen our efforts as a professional organisation [with] enhanced staff training. We plan to vigorously develop the domestic market by building up a national network of recruitment in 10 cities and provinces across China. We plan to strengthen cooperation with current partners, and at the same time, build alliances with other reputable UK organisations, in order to meet the growing number of applications. [Finally, we plan] to introduce a series of related training programmes, such as an IELTS training programme, to cater for the needs of the local market.

Alto in 'new phase of development'

THE ASSOCIATION of Language Travel Organisations (Alto), which was set up three years ago, has "stepped into a new phase of development and expansion", according to a newsletter issued by the association.

Alto's new goals include becoming a major information resource for the language travel industry; developing important industry tools for members to better develop their programmes; and providing a platform for agent and school associations.

In order to go some way towards developing the association into an important information resource, Alto has set up the Alto Peer Group to advise the board of market developments around the world. "The Alto board felt that there is a great wealth of knowledge and experience among the

Alto members that should be integrated into the development of the association," said Michael Gerber, Alto's Chairperson. "Twenty-four members have volunteered to form an Alto Peer Group, in order to help the board carry out its work by giving advice and sharing opinions on market trends."

Alto has also pledged to increase the association's international profile and membership, and become a forum for associations throughout the world. According to Gerber, Alto is looking at building up "closer collaboration with Nafsa and Arels and other associations".

In its quest to increase membership value, Alto is planning to hold a number of seminars on "fundamental management topics for the industry" at its next Annual

General Meeting, which is to be held in Greece this September.

In its first three years, Alto has been successful in establishing best practice guidelines for the working relationship between agents and schools in what are often contentious areas such as Internet sales. More recently, Alto has set out recommendations on the remuneration to agents for accommodation sales.

"For [many] agents, the sale of accommodation has not been considered a 'commissionable' item," explained Gerber. "The question of costs for accommodation services needs to be addressed as a structural matter for all parties involved so that not only are agents properly compensated, but also cost and coverage of the school's own service is properly accounted for." □

On the move



Serge Courault became President of French agency association, Unosel,

earlier this year. He told *Language Travel Magazine* that his priorities were to mobilise awareness of the Afnor quality standard throughout France. "During my presidency, I am going to try to strengthen the quality of our [members'] services," he said, "and to bring together all of our fellow professionals throughout France."



Roberto Caldeira worked for EF in Brazil for seven years, three of which he spent

as Country Manager of the organisation. After a two-year break working in the retail industry, he has now returned to the language travel business as Director of Corporate Planning for STB – Student Travel Bureau, Brazil's largest language and student travel organisation.



The Twin Group in the UK has appointed Martyn Price as Managing Director

of Euro Academy, its outbound language study division. Mr Price is known in the industry through his previous position as Travel Manager for Endsleigh Insurance. "I intend to build on the Euro Academy brand, expanding our core markets in gap year, adult, school and youth language travel," said Mr Price.



Liz Cross (top) has become Principal of Aspect ILA, Perth in Australia. Originally from Queensland, Ms Cross has spent the last seven years in the industry. Most



recently, she was working in Boston, USA, implementing facility improvements for several east coast schools. Alice Woods has been appointed Marketing Manager for Aspect ILA Australia, where she has been working for over three years in the areas of marketing, tour groups and counselling. "In my new role, I look forward to visiting more countries and to meeting up with many more of our partners," said Ms Woods.

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?

Mark van Niekerk - Director.

Where do you work?

One World Language School (Owls), Cape Town, South Africa.

Why and how did you start in the industry?

During my travels abroad as a student, I worked at a number of small schools in Greece and Italy. On my return to South Africa, I completed a postgraduate teachers diploma and during this period, I was approached by International House to set up the infrastructure for a school in Cape Town.

Why should agents choose to represent your school?

[Firstly] we are one of the few [schools here] that is completely South African-owned. This means that we are very familiar with the local terrain and conditions. Also, our staff is permanent, so students have continuity of learning, and we are able to run relevant in-house training programmes for our teachers. Of course, Cape Town is a cheap destination with world-class service.

How does your school promote itself to agents?

We have a 100 per cent open-door policy with agents regarding our classes. [Also] website marketing, trade journals and visits to unusual destinations to meet agents have resulted in Owls [attracting] a wide spread of students worldwide.

What percentage of your annual student intake comes through agents?

60 per cent of students come via agents. The balance is students who return to us again, or are referred to us by previous students.

Talk to us

- Refunds – under what circumstances do you offer students a refund? Do you ever have problems obtaining refunds on behalf of your students from your partner-schools? How could schools improve their refund policies?

- Agency marketing – how do you market your agency? Have you used any different media in recent years that have proved particularly successful? Can you tell us about one of your particularly successful marketing campaigns?

- Expansion – what services do you provide for your student clients? How have you expanded your business in recent years and why?

If you would like to comment on any of the above issues or anything else relevant to the language travel industry, please send *Language Travel Magazine* your comments by email to mail@hothousemedia.com or fax on +44 207 440 4033

Clarification

In the April edition of *Language Travel Magazine*, there was an inaccurate entry in the course guide to home tuition courses in the UK. We would like to clarify that Churchill House School of English has 130 teaching centres in 80 locations and the minimum length of stay is two days, not two weeks as was printed.