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Lively cities, thrilling countryside, friendly people, great food... the West Country is a treasure trove of experiences for international language students, as AMY BAKER discovers.

Schools in the West Country of England seem united in agreement when asked why language students would want to study in this corner of the UK: the countryside, relaxed pace of life, fantastic walking opportunities and easy access to the coast are all selling points here.

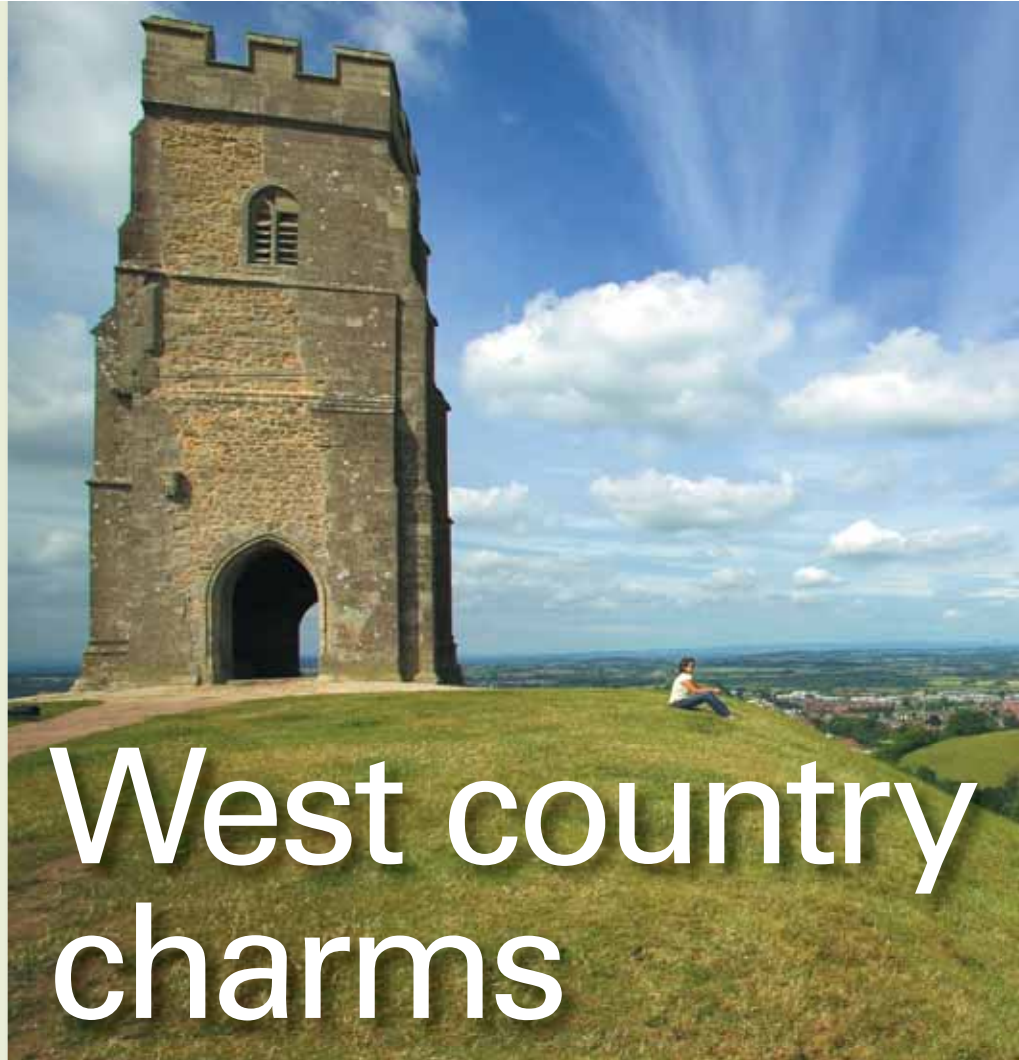
Helen Lami at Taunton International Study Centre says, "We believe that the West Country is an area of outstanding natural beauty where students can feel safe and lead a healthy, outdoors kind of life. Taunton is well placed between the north and south coastline and so trips to the beach feature prominently in the summer."

She adds, "There is wonderful walking in the Quantock and Blackdown hills and nearby Exmoor [national park]. The area's economy is based on tourism, agriculture and fishing which all bear testament to the area's beauty and mild climate." According to Andy Bungay at Exeter Academy in Exeter, "Devon and Cornwall are at the heart of Britain's surfing and beach scene" and he also mentions that cycling holidays are popular in the region, along the South West Coast Path.

Aside from the unspoilt countryside, however, there are pretty villages, market towns and lively yet compact cities throughout the region. In Bath, Principal of International House Bath, Mark Appleton, calls the city "the jewel in the crown" of the region – and it is one of the most visited cities in the country. "World renowned for its beautiful Georgian architecture, parks and gardens, and a shoppers paradise, Bath is a favourite destination for UK and international students," he says.

Nearby Bristol is the designated capital of the West Country, although relatively undiscovered by international students. John Duncan, Principal at the English Language Centre Bristol, observes that this is an advantage for the students that do opt to study in the city. "Those that come can blend in [to city life] and have more of a chance to integrate with the local community," he observes.

Seonaid Birkett, Director of the Bristol Language Centre, agrees. "Bristol has all the attractions of other UK cities but as a

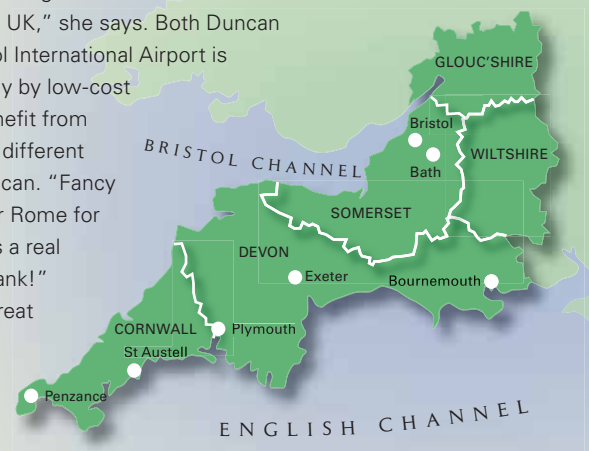


less touristic destination, students can get a real feel for what it is like to live, work and study in the UK," she says. Both Duncan and Birkett note the fact that Bristol International Airport is increasingly well served, particularly by low-cost carrier, EasyJet. "Students can benefit from cheap daily flights to more than 20 different European destinations," notes Duncan. "Fancy going to Edinburgh, Dublin, Paris or Rome for the weekend? With EasyJet, this is a real possibility and it won't break the bank!"

The city of Bristol itself, with great open spaces, stylish architecture and a renovated harbourfront area, is home to two universities, so there is a vibrant student scene. As Birkett puts it, "Bristol is a cosmopolitan student city with regular international student events, and from the Georgian suburb of Clifton to the historic and hip harbourside, there are [also] plenty of clubs, bars and restaurants."

Many learning establishments in the West Country are based in smaller towns too. The prestigious Millfield School has an established summer programme for international students and it also runs a preparatory (prep) school for younger students under 13 years old. The main school is based in a small town called Street, "surrounded by famous Somerset apple orchards and farmlands with fields of grazing cattle", says Karen Page at the school. The prep school is situated "at the foot of the national trust site of Glastonbury Tor" [a famous hill and reputed birthplace of King Arthur].

Another interesting study option for pre-A level and pre-GCSE students is Etherton Education, based in Wellington in Somerset. Karen Jones at the school, which provides academic summer courses, says of Wellington, "It is a small, friendly town and students can walk from the school to the town centre in three minutes."





Glastonbury Tor in Somerset presents an imposing landmark

She adds that students “love the green countryside and the clean, unpolluted air”.

Jones details many activities that students at Etherton Education can get up to in their free time, such as visiting Stonehenge, Bath “with its historic Roman baths”, the Jane Austen Museum, “mythical” Glastonbury, the interactive science museum, @ Bristol, and the Eden Project in Cornwall. She also recounts that the school organises a unique activity to ensure its clients learn about local life and customs. “Students spend time outside of the academic timetable at Marlands, a country house set in 17 acres of woods, streams and gardens,” she says. “Many students take full advantage of the opportunities offered, playing croquet on the lawn, gardening, picking summer fruit and then learning to cook traditional recipes.”

Another West Country-based educational establishment is SUL Language School, based in the village of Tywardreath in Cornwall in the corner of the country. Christopher Retallack, Director of the school, says that the village was made famous by author, Daphne du Maurier, in her book *The House on the Strand*. “Our full-time year round central education facility is limited to one-to-one teaching either in our office location or in nearby specialist host families,” he explains.

Retallack notes that there is a wide range of activities available in Cornwall – partly because it is a popular holiday destination for UK residents too. “Our towns and surrounding countryside are very well equipped with leisure and cultural attractions for visitors, including indoor sports centres, specialist



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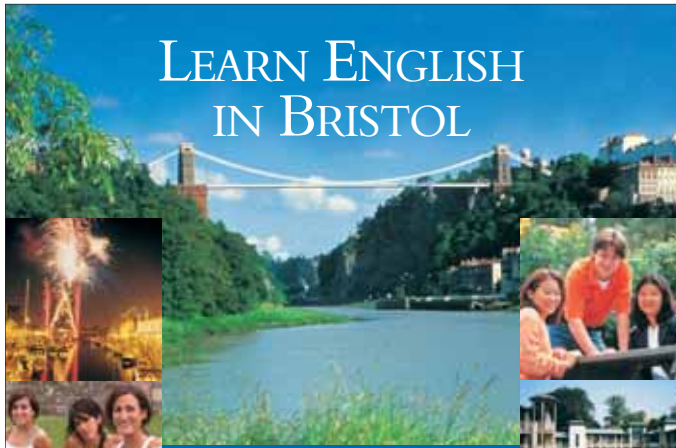
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## Agent viewpoint

"We have been sending students to the UK for the last 15 years and cities such as Torquay and Bath are the most sought after destinations. Brazilians seem to enjoy the West of England for several reasons: They say the accent found in this spot of the country is the most charming, they love the architecture, safety, the modus vivendi in these places and of course, the high standard of English courses. Lately I have added other destinations, but I must confess that the West of England is still my favourite."

**Fernando Boeira, Cultura Inglesa Porto Alegre, Brazil**

"Whilst the West Country does have its share of large cities (Bristol, Bath, Plymouth), I think what draws students are the historical sites, the beautiful scenery, and the small villages where traditional country life carries on unchanged. The weather is, of course, also warmer in the south of England. Students can visit a rich variety of historical sites such as Plymouth Hoe, the Roman Baths at Bath and Salisbury Cathedral. They can sample traditional English tea with scones and jam in small country villages with thatched cottages."

**Tim Greenwood, UKEAS Tainan, Taiwan**

"There are interesting towns and cities in the West Country such as Bath, Exeter, Torquay – these areas are not overcrowded with language schools, providing an ideal "real English" environment. In their free time, students like to visit the many places of historical and cultural interest and enjoy the peaceful atmosphere of rural Britain."

**Peter Rupp, Biku Languages, Switzerland**

tennis and superb golf courses, horse riding, as well as many minority interests such as falconry." He also mentions the well-known artistic community that exists in Cornwall, with many art galleries, including the famous Tate Gallery in St Ives.

"Cuisine specialities [from the region] range from the humble Cornish pastie and clotted cream to world-renowned restaurants such as the Seafood Restaurant owned by Rick Stein in Padstow," he adds. "There will soon be Jamie Oliver's new restaurant in Watergate Bay near Newquay."

Lami in Taunton mentions other regional food specialities that hail from the West Country, such as cider and Cheddar cheese and starry gazey pie [an unusual fish pie], which comes from Cornwall.

In Devon too, Bungay at Exeter Academy is keen to point out that there is a festival of Southwest food and drink each year and great restaurants such as Gidleigh Park, which is the only

restaurant outside of London with two Michelin stars.

Exeter itself, says Bungay, was voted Britain's number-one city for quality of life some years ago in a survey. "Many companies are relocating here which confirms Exeter's attraction as a perfect place to work, live and therefore study," he says. Bungay adds that the school itself offers attractive study surroundings, in a Victorian villa with a large garden and extensive views across the city, and the Exe estuary, to Exmouth.



### Tate St Ives, Cornwall

St Ives has been an attractive destination for artists since the 19th century due to the area's pure light and charm. Tate St Ives opened in 1993 and complements the area's artistic traditions

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Bristol is fast becoming a recognised centre for English language learning. The expansion of Bristol International Airport, the desire of students to find alternative locations in the UK, the convenient location of the city, and the fact that Bristol has two world class universities, all contribute to Bristol being a top destination for students.

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