

# Upswing in Germany

Last year was a good year all round for German language schools, but nevertheless, visa problems are having a dampening effect on enrolment from certain destinations. AMY BAKER reports.

## Impact of fees for higher education

In 2005, a landmark court decision paved the way for all universities in Germany to start charging fees to students for higher education (see *Education Travel Magazine*, May 2005, page 45). A popular long-term study destination, Germany still remains a very affordable option, however, to date, seven of the 16 regional states have started charging fees.

Nevertheless, some industry members are concerned about the effect this might have on enrolment from students intending to learn German as a prelude to enrolling at a university. Chinese and Vietnamese students, for example, favour Germany for its very affordable university tuition fees.

Dorothee Robrecht from GLS Sprachenzentrum Berlin observes, "We prepare many students for language certificates that they need in order to attend a German university. In the past, German universities were attractive as students did not have to pay." And Ulrich Schmidt from Friedlaender Schule in Berlin says, "If universities will have fees, then I think there'll be fewer students, especially from developing countries."

However, Eva Matthäi, from Carl Duisberg Centren, is confident that there will be little impact on this market segment. "German universities charge a fee of around US\$500 per semester. Fees are still considerably lower than in other countries," she notes.

German language tuition providers are upbeat in their assessment of business last year after a couple of lacklustre years in terms of business growth, according to previous reports (see *Language Travel Magazine*, February 2006, page 21).

In what is a diversified market, lacking any central lobbying group or marketing association, reports are positive from all those German language teaching centres that contributed to this feature. Niels von Eisenhart Rothe of S&W Training in Meersburg am Bodensee points to an increase of 18 per cent in enrolments in 2006 compared with 2005. Florian Meierhofer of BWS Germanlingua paints an even rosier picture: "Business performance has been absolutely great for our schools in Munich and Berlin," he says. "We had an increase of 35 per cent on student weeks, so we are quite happy about that."

Meierhofer believes one reason for the upturn in business may be the effect of the football World Cup being held in Germany last year, and showcasing Germany as a "beautiful country with lots of sunshine!" Von Eisenhart Rothe also points to a growing proportion of US clients, while other schools underline that rising demand has also been noted from Russia, Brazil, Mexico and Japan.

At GLS Sprachenzentrum Berlin, Dorothee Robrecht – who underlines a steep incline in student numbers last year – offers a unique reason for the good upturn in business at this school: a new campus in a trendy area of Berlin with studio apartments on-site. "Obviously, this is something that students are looking for and find very attractive," she notes.

While demand seems to be growing from a number of markets, it is not a diversification of product types, pinpointed by some schools in our previous report, that has helped to win business; far from it. Most schools indicate that the standard intensive German language programme still accounts for the lion's share of bookings and it may be other services that win enrolments.

"What we observe is that the majority of students are booking our standard courses, any 'frills' attached don't seem to be very attractive," says Robrecht, while Meierhofer says that 95 per cent of his bookings are for the general German course. At did deutschinstitut Berlin, Axel Freudenfeld states that the 24-lesson intensive course is most popular, while the did school representatives in Frankfurt and Munich also point out that after intensive courses, TestDaf preparation classes – TestDaf is used for university entry – have risen in popularity in the last two years.

Europeans, such as British, Swiss and French, appear to make up the most significant share of nationalities at German language schools. Asian nationals, such as Japanese and Chinese, have also figured in the league table, but problems are being reported with visas from certain Asian countries, despite the overall market upturn. Ulrich Schmidt from Friedlaender Schule in Berlin says, "Students from non-European Union (EU) countries now have big problems to come here" and Meierhofer adds, "For certain countries, we encounter huge visa problems. For example, the big Chinese market is now almost completely dead."

He relates that since the German embassy took the decision to start conducting interviews with visa applicants in German, the



PHOTOGRAPH: WWW.GERMAN4TOURISM.DE

market has suffered. "This means that students are forced to learn the language in China before they can come to Germany to study at a German university." This may have more of an effect on the academic-oriented German market than newly introduced tuition fees at some universities (see box).

With visa challenges affecting the market, the question of whether schools might work together for the good of the sector is relevant. However, some schools point to their membership of international or European industry associations, such as Ialac or Equals, as filling the gap left in the national marketplace since the disbandment of IQ Deutsch some years ago.

Freudenfeld cites a lack of interest in the most recent attempt to set up a national association and further suggests that although the German government runs the chain of Goethe Institut schools, its efforts actually work against the interests of the country's private language teaching sector. Meierhofer adds, "Compared with the UK, the British Council is a partner of British language schools and the Goethe Institut is a competitor of German language schools."

If the sector managed to get the government to work more proactively with the entire German language teaching industry, the outlook for the future could be more positive. As it is, Meierhofer says, "We will be very happy if we will have the same numbers of students again in 2007." ●

The spectacular gardens at Château de Villandry



PHOTOGRAPH: T. EIGELAND - CRT CENTRE

# French polish

France is a heady mix of stunning landscapes, characterful cities and charming towns. And history, culture and, of course, gastronomy, each imbues the various regions with a distinctly different character. GILLIAN EVANS reports.

Attracting close to 80 million visitors a year, France is the world's most popular tourist destination, and there are plenty of reasons why. Paul Wheal at the Department of Languages at ESC in Saint Etienne, situated just north of Lyon, suggests: "The incredibly wide variety of activities France offers must be the main reason for such popularity, from skiing in the Alps to swimming in the Mediterranean; from eating out in great restaurants to dining in with food-obsessed friends; from bustling vibrant cities to remote traditional villages – the choice on offer in France is endless," he enthuses.

Damien Renaux at BLS, which has centres in Bordeaux and Biarritz, adds that it is the "French way of life, the arts, the rich history, the food, the wine, fashion, the cafés and, more generally, the social ambience they can find in our country" that draws people from all over the world.

France is a country made up of an assortment of individual regions each with its own character, and Bénédicte Le Marcis at the Aquitaine School of French in Bordeaux, which was launched in March 2006, believes that one of the greatest pleasures for visitors to France is "discovering the different regional peculiarities: nature, geography, cooking, art, architecture, craft and literature".

Looking at the region in which Bordeaux is situated, Aquitaine, there is certainly a vast range of landscapes as well as unique history and gastronomy. Le Marcis mentions the region's "diverse and exuberant nature", including the "Côte d'Argent Atlantic coast, the Bassin d'Arcachon (a bay on the Atlantic), the Pyrenees mountains, the Dordogne and Garonne rivers, and the Landes Forest, which is the largest pine forest in Europe". In addition, the area has prehistoric sites and medieval castles, and acres of vineyards.

Bordeaux itself is a historic university city with wonderfully preserved 18th-century architecture, set on the banks of the Garonne River. Renaux highlights the cultural side of the city. "Culture is very much sponsored by the local council/government giving access to museums, theatres and festivals at a very low price or for free." He also mentions the incredible variety of food in Bordeaux and the fact that there are "about 15,000 wine producers around the city".

Another historic university city is Chambéry, capital of the Savoie region, east of Lyon. With a population of 120,000, it is home to the University of Savoie. Karine Joly-Patrouillault at the university's Institut Savoisien d'Etudes Françaises pour Etrangers (ISEFE) says that the city, which is framed by the Alps, is en route to the most famous ski resorts in the country.

Just west of Chambéry is St Etienne. The city is surrounded by Le Pilat French National Park, which makes it an ideal base from which to take part in cross-country skiing in the winter, as well as mountain-biking, hiking and horse-riding all year round, as Wheal at ESC relates. ESC is a business school, where around 80



international students study on bachelor- or masters-level courses each year. Despite being 300 kilometres from the Mediterranean Sea, St Etienne has the largest inland pleasure port in France. "Here, it is possible to practice all sorts of water sports, or just to relax on the sandy beach in the summer months," says Wheal. The city also has a relatively low cost of living. "St Etienne has all the benefits of a medium-sized city in terms of amenities, culture, transport networks and entertainment, but at a fraction of the price of other more fashionable destinations," asserts Wheal.

The big tourist draw of France is undoubtedly Paris. "Paris is the capital for tourism, gastronomy and creation," asserts Sylvie Wormser at Ecole Suisse Internationale, which is located close to the Montmartre district. Another Parisian school, the Institut de Langue et de Culture Francaises (ILCF), welcomes over 2,500 international students each year. "ILCF is located in a beautiful university setting, in the heart of Paris, close to internationally well known areas like St-Sulpice, Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Montparnasse – some of the most famous artistic and historical areas of the city," relates Servane Gandais at ILCF. "Also [our] proximity to the central Jardin du Luxembourg makes the area very pleasant in the summer."

Yet while Paris's attractions are famous around the world, there are many other

cities that warrant a student's attention but may be relatively unknown internationally. Patricia Lejeune at CIEL de Strasbourg ventures, "Strasbourg is far enough away from the capital to be truly independent on a cultural level, with its own opera, France's only national theatre outside Paris, two international music festivals and Europe's only bi-national TV station, Arte." She continues, "The city's international student population of some 50,000 keeps the city vibrant and intellectually alive."

Lyon, France's second-largest city after Paris, is another option.

"Lyon has a very rich cultural heritage and is famous for its gastronomy and vineyards and, more recently, for its football team," states Frédérique Di Tullio, Director of Lyon Bleu International. "We don't have a lot of tourists – like Paris and Nice do for instance. It means that visitors can see a more authentic 'French way of life' and feel they are part of a city and not 'tourists' anymore."

Hélène Thoma at the Institut de Langue et de Culture Françaises at the Université Catholique de Lyon dubs the town the "capital of gastronomy" because of the diversity of its food specialities. And food is something that the people of Lyon take very seriously: Thoma says that those staying with host families are often surprised by "the length of the family meals".

Activities arranged by IS Aix-en-Provence, situated north of Marseille in the south, promise to serve up a good helping of this region's culinary specialities with patisserie and wine tasting classes as well as barbecues. Anna Diaz at IS Aix-en-Provence says that apart from enjoying these classes, students like "the friendliness of the inhabitants, the vibrant student life in Aix and the warm climate".



**La Petite France**  
The picturesque district of Strasbourg was once home to the town's millers, tanners and fishermen. Half-timbered houses and narrow streets are criss-crossed by canals in this World Heritage site

PHOTOGRAPH: CIEL DE STRASBOURG



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## Agent viewpoint



"The cultural images associated with large cities such as Paris and Nice definitely act as a travel incentive for our students. In my experience, there are no real consistencies in what surprises our students about studying and travelling in France. Some are surprised by the richness of the culture or the beauty of the architecture. My feeling is that it truly depends on the individual student and their particular experience. For the most part, students really enjoy visiting sites that they've read or heard about."

**Jesse Philippe, Languages Abroad International Education, Canada**



"Whilst Swiss students could easily study French in the French part of Switzerland, many of them prefer going to France for good reason; the cultural experience, the beaches, the charming villages and exciting cities, not to mention the lower cost of living. The most popular towns and cities we send our students to are Paris, Nice, Montpellier, Aix-en-Provence, Cannes, La Rochelle, Bordeaux and Biarritz. Students enjoy the French way of life, having fun and the multi-cultural school environment."

**Kurt Krummenacher, Boa Lingua, Switzerland**



"Czech students appreciate France as a whole as [their trip] is usually their first opportunity to experience the country on their own. It is only recently that more students are becoming interested in studying in France. They are interested in busy cities and the smaller, quieter places. They find French customs, habits and the way of living different to what they are used to."

**Jana Jikova, BCTT, Czech Republic**

In addition to the many varied inland experiences, France also offers a wide range of coastal adventures. The French Riviera, with its miles of beaches and chic resorts, such as Cannes, is a great draw for many international students. But there is more to this area, as Andreas Schweitzer at the Collège International de Cannes, is keen to point out. "[Cannes] is not only a tourist region with beaches and bars, but offers a rich cultural life, a very specific regional 'cuisine provençale' and a friendly population with a Mediterranean mentality," he says.



PHOTOGRAPH: VINCENT FORMICA - OFFICE DU TOURISME DE LYON

For a quieter experience of the French Riviera, there is the Centre Méditerranéen D'Etudes Française (CMEF) in Cap d'Ail, situated between Nice and Monaco. "The CMEF is located in a three-hectares park at the doorstep of Monaco, a few minutes walk from the seaside," elaborates Alessandra Zunino at the school, who adds that Cap d'Ail overlooks a quiet 3.6 kilometre-stretch of coastal walk, studded with exquisite Mediterranean flora and geological features.

In the southwest, the historic town of Béziers enjoys the same mild year-round climate but is off the tourist track. Jacqueline Hobson at Centre Hobson in Béziers lists "horse riding, canoeing, kayaking, hiking in the mountains, sailing and water sports" as some of the students' favourite pastimes. And on the Atlantic coast, Biarritz provides students with a spectacular coastal setting. Renaux claims it is "one of Europe's most beautiful seaside resorts" and students are attracted here by the surf and the beauty of the Basque country. BLS offers courses to enable students to make the most of their location, such as French and surf or French with Basque cooking lessons.

**Hôtel de Ville/Bartholdi fountain, Lyon**  
Built in the 17th Century, Lyon's Hôtel de Ville represents the heart of the public space. The Bartholdi fountain was sculpted in 1889 by the man responsible for the Statue of Liberty

"Our accountancy professor is an experienced mountaineer. Each year, he leads a group of students on various mountaineering excursions in peaks in the French and Italian Alps and they finish the year by climbing to the top of Mont Blanc. The character-building nature of such a task is very much appreciated by all those who take part in the group, which has been a successful school activity for the past decade."

**Paul Wheal, ESC, Saint Etienne**



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