

Canada's mix

English language schools in Canada experienced mixed fortunes over the past 12 months. BETHAN NORRIS finds out about the strengthening Canadian dollar and increased work rights for international students.

Work permits for full-time students

One of the most significant events to occur in Canada's international education industry over the last 12 months was the introduction of a nationwide system allowing full-time international students studying for more than six months at tertiary institutions in Canada the chance to work off-campus for up to 20 hours a week (see *Education Travel Magazine*, March 2006, page 53).

This development puts Canada in line with many other popular study destinations, and although the rule is currently not applicable to language students, many in the industry believe the change will have a positive effect across all sectors.

"I think the off-campus work permit [rule] will continue to drive up enrolments in academic and career programmes," says Nadina Dodd from Vancouver Community College International in Vancouver, BC, who adds that some of their student applications for permits have already been successful. "These programmes also feed into our ESL programmes when students need to do a bit of English upgrading so we may also see a slight increase in ESL [enrolments]."

English language students with long-term study plans will also benefit. Mark Herringer from the international recruitment office at Malaspina University College in Nanaimo, BC, says, "It has positively affected our retention rates and will positively impact on our recruitment as word-of-mouth gets out that part-time jobs are plentiful in most locations in Canada."

After what was generally reported to be a good year in 2005, some language schools in Canada point out that the beginning of 2006 saw international enrolments increase with the opening up of new student markets. "Our student numbers are up this year for both adult and teen programmes," confirms Anthony Stille, Director of English School of Canada in Toronto, ONT. "We have had some successful marketing trips to Brazil, Mexico, Korea and Taiwan, and this seems to have had a significant impact on our overall numbers."

Ken Gardner from Vancouver English Centre in Vancouver, BC, also reports a positive 12 months. "Our numbers have increased by approximately 15 per cent over the previous year," he says, adding that they have recently increased their marketing budget and while some student markets, such as Korea, have declined, "they have been replaced by other students from Latin America and the Middle East".

Other schools, however, relate less positive experiences, with George Jasper at the Language Repair Shop in Vancouver, BC reporting that student numbers at the school are "down 10 per cent" on the previous year, largely due to "overseas competition". Gary Gervais from Heartland International English School in Winnipeg, MN, notes that while Mexico has been performing well recently, overall, "the strength of the Canadian dollar has had a negative impact on enrolments".

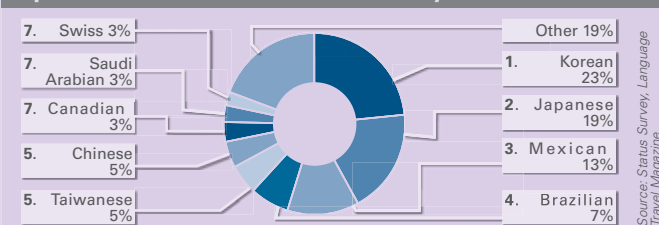
With such diverse factors influencing the market in Canada, it is difficult to highlight unilateral trends. However, Korea and Japan remain key student markets while most schools have noted increased interest from new markets – largely South America and the Middle East, which have been performing well in the last 12 months. "Brazil has exploded as have other markets such as Spain and Saudi Arabia," says Stille. "Canada as an educational destination has received increasing attention in Brazil and the problems with obtaining US visas have helped... Canada." He adds, "Saudi Arabians also seem to be shifting away from the USA towards Canada."

Increasing Canada's profile as a study destination is a priority for the marketing departments of individual schools, but, until recently, Canada's government has been slow to follow the lead of rival destinations such as Australia and the UK and develop an international student recruitment strategy. However, developments such as a welcome change to work rights for full-time international students (see left) and attention to quality standards herald an ongoing change in attitude towards this lucrative industry, and provincial governments have also been increasingly active in marketing their educational opportunities overseas.

"The Ontario government, specifically the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, is making a great commitment and effort in helping the recruitment efforts of post-secondary institutions," says Helen Chadwick from St Lawrence College in Kingston, ONT. "They have committed resources towards show attendance, website development and the creation of collateral materials."



Top student nationalities in Canada by student weeks, 05



In the absence of a national recruitment strategy, however, many private language schools are relying on their own marketing efforts, and keeping a continuing eye on developing new courses, to improve enrolment figures and tap into new markets. Janice Ferguson from Mount Royal College in Calgary, AB, says that the college is to start offering Business English certificate courses at the end of this year, while Barbara Yates from Queens University in Kingston, ONT, says that have also acknowledged an increased demand for work-related language courses through the development of their 13-week Business internship programme.

An increased interest among students for language courses that prepare them for further study in the tertiary sector is also a trend noted by Christine Brassard at College Platon in Montreal, QB, who notes, "With more students coming to do the Toefl exam we have incorporated some Toefl listening comprehension and vocabulary building into the higher [course] levels."

Brassard underlines that continued marketing efforts are important for ensuring stable student numbers. "I think that attending student fairs regularly and keeping in close contact with our agents helps to promote the school," she says. In Nova Scotia, Christine Wall from East Coast School of Languages (ECSL) in Halifax, NS, adds, "We hope to draw students from new markets like Europe as a follow-up to fairs ECSL participated in and will participate in." ●



Germany's gems

PHOTOGRAPH: WWW.DRESDEN.DE

Basteibrücke in the Saxony region (main picture)

Stunning mountain scenery, fairytale castles, perfectly preserved medieval towns, a welcoming population, plenty of culture and great beer – a winning recipe for language travellers going to Germany, says **GILLIAN EVANS**.

For first-time visitors, Germany is certainly a pleasant surprise, and for those who have already been to the country before, there is always plenty more to discover. Florian Meierhofer from BWS Germanlingua, which has schools in Munich and Berlin, sums up some of Germany's broad attractions. "Students are fascinated by the beautiful landscape here, by the rich culture, the historic city centres and the important museums."

Germany is a country of natural beauty, old towns and cities, and fairytale castles and palaces – and this year Germany had an added draw, as Eva Goebel at International House (IH) Freiburg points out: the World Cup football tournament. As the country played host to the event in June and July, major cities put up big outdoor screens for those unable to obtain tickets to the matches, and with beer flowing and the sun shining, there was an inescapable party atmosphere throughout the country. Many language schools joined in with the festivities, and some such as Sprachinstitut Treffpunkt in Bamberg even taught their students specialist football vocabulary in a lesson, that students put to good use playing table football at the school, relates Alexandra von Rohr.

Football aside, Bamberg has many attractive qualities, says von Rohr. Located in northern Bavaria, about equidistant from both Munich and Frankfurt, it is a well-preserved historic city. "The entire old part of town – the largest one in Germany that was not destroyed in World War II – was admitted into the World Heritage List in 1993," states von Rohr. The city is made up of a mix of architectural styles that stretch from the 11th to 18th centuries.

Bamberg is also an ideal spot for "culture vultures", with 13 museums, 10 art galleries and eight theatres as well as being home to the famous Bamberger Symphoniker classical orchestra. Another of Bamberg's many attractions is that it boasts the highest density of breweries in the world. "Formerly 60 breweries, [there are now] 10 family-run breweries left in Bamberg [but that is not including] the 300 which still exist around the city," says von Rohr.

Another city famous for its beer is Munich. It is also a place that knows how to enjoy itself, hosting many festivals throughout the year, including the Oktoberfest and Tollwood. But it also boasts world-class museums and art galleries while its location close to the Alps makes it an ideal base for hiking in the summer and snow sports in the winter. According to

"One of our Chinese students kept asking our accommodation officer when his roommate was going to arrive. He always got the same reply: 'He is next door'. He asked this question everyday until we realised that the student was expecting someone to share his room. He couldn't believe that this big room was just for himself."

Eva Goebel,
International House,
Freiburg

Little Venice, Bamberg
Bamberg in northern Bavaria boasts its own Little Venice region. The half-timbered houses, located along one side of the Regnitz river, originally housed the families of fishermen.



PHOTOGRAPH: GERMAN NATIONAL TOURIST BOARD

Meierhofer at BWS, it is easy to feel at home in Munich. "Despite being in a big city, you feel like you are in a village," he asserts.

BWS's other school is located in Germany's capital, Berlin, which Meierhofer says, is "a city with a great nightlife and art scene, important museums, a rich history and has political importance". He adds, "The people who live there are so open-minded and don't have problems with accepting people who look different, who are dressed in a specific fashion or who have crazy hobbies!"

Dorothee Robrecht, Marketing Director for GLS Sprachenzentrum in Berlin, continues the list of attributes: "the open and truly multicultural atmosphere; the unpretentious and very accessible art scene; and the diversity of its districts – each with its very own style, from funky Kreuzberg or trendy Prenzlauerberg to upper-class Zehlendorf". In addition, she notes that Berlin is a green city with lots of lakes, rivers, canals and parks in the city centre. And despite being Germany's capital city, the cost of living is relatively cheap. "Prices for food and accommodation [are low in Berlin] compared with other German cities or European capitals," asserts Robrecht.



Munich's Olympic stadium

The design for the Olympic Stadium in 1972 was inspired by dew-covered cobwebs. Visitors can get a view of the city and the Alps from the top of the Olympic Tower

Another of Germany's gems is Dresden. "Dresden is famous for its old baroque architecture and its cultural life," ventures Bernd Bichtemann, Director of Inlingua in the city. Situated on the

River Elbe, Dresden has wonderful old buildings, museums, theatres and over 700 restaurants serving up both German and international cuisine.

Bordering both Switzerland and France in the southwest of Germany, Freiburg offers students a taste of the Black Forest and more. "Freiburg is a beautiful university city with a history going back more than 900 years," comments Goebel at IH Freiburg. "It is also a lively city with more than 30,000 students living here, and its location close to the Black Forest, Switzerland and France makes it ideal for hiking, mountain biking, visiting tourist attractions and festivals."

For most language schools, it is important that students get to know not only the country but also its people. IH Freiburg achieves this through its links with the city's university. "Our students can use the facilities such as the university library, the university restaurant, etc. They easily get involved in student life," explains Goebel.



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Agent viewpoint



"Most students are surprised by how attractive and scenic Germany is. They do not realise that it is stunningly beautiful and has a varied geography. It really has it all! And Germany hosts well recognised events such as the Oktoberfest in Munich, the Love Parade in Berlin and most recently, the World Cup. Students are intrigued by the unique blend of history and modernity."

Lianne Hodgson, Languages Abroad, Canada



"During the last year, interest in knowing Germany and its culture has grown. Because of TV programmes, Mexican people have a wider vision of the country and its importance. Students over 18 years old prefer Berlin, others choose Stuttgart and Munich for long-term studies and the parents of younger children choose smaller towns for summer programmes. Students find German people very kind and friendly and they enjoy the museums. and social life."

Nelly Machiavelo, Redca Cursos y Sistemas, Mexico



"Many Korean students who study classical music aim to go to Germany for further study, and to enter a university of music. Big cities such as Berlin, Munich and Cologne are popular. Students get used to living in a big city like Seoul. They have fun living in a big city overseas, too. Many of our students mention the kindness and sincerity of people at the language

school and of their host family."
Christina Kim, Euro Arts, Korea



"Most of the students who choose to learn German are not beginners. They might have studied German at university or are going to study at university in Germany in the near future. The most popular cities are Berlin and Munich."
Daisuke Yamamoto, Ryugaku Times, Japan

"Moreover, they can stay in a student residence together with other German students."

At other schools, host families play a key role in introducing students to Germany. Andrea Weik at Carl Duisberg Centrum in Berlin notes, "Most of our students stay with host families, they talk German with the family members and learn a lot about Berlin and [our] way of life."

At GLS, not only is German taught to international students, but foreign languages are also taught to Germans, which as Robrecht points out, means that locals are constantly in the school. She adds,

"The GLS campus, with restaurant, cafeteria and lounge, is a great meeting point for both students and locals."

Most schools also organise extra-

curricular activities that involve mixing with locals. At Sprachinstitut Treffpunkt, an example is a weekly meeting at a bar or beer garden. This, according to von Rohr, attracts many past and present students. "A lot of German friends and former students from the school join as well as teachers, hosts and people interested in a colourful mix of people from all over the world."

Nearly all international students find Germans friendly and welcoming and only too willing to help. Bichtemann recounts a story of one of their Japanese students arriving at the wrong railway station for the school pick-up. When the student informed one of the officials at the station they personally drove her to the other station and helped her find her chauffeur!

Dresden street scene

The Münzgasse, one of the oldest lanes in this East German city, boasts many restaurants and locals are known to love eating well. All types of cuisine are on offer here



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