

Teaching English abroad for South Africans in 2021: Is this still possible?

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As Covid-19 continues to send parts of the world into various states of lockdown, many prospective EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers eager to teach abroad seem to be asking themselves the same question: "Is teaching English abroad still possible in 2021?"



Unfortunately, the answer to this question is no longer “yes” or “no”, but more of a “let’s wait and see what happens”. While infection rates worldwide appear to be decreasing, many popular EFL destinations, such as China, are still wary and anxious about allowing foreign nationals across their borders. This leaves many prospective EFL teachers eager to start their English teaching journey in a bit of a sticky situation, particularly teachers from countries that continue to experience high numbers of new cases. However, 2021 does hold a glimmer of hope for those wanting to teach abroad - you’ll need to be prepared to jump through a few hoops though.

International travel at the tail end of 2020 and early 2021 remains only a fraction of what it was before Covid-19 hit. Unsurprisingly, travel restrictions have had a dramatic impact on the recruitment of in-classroom teachers throughout 2020 and early 2021. However, as the vaccine and risk-based safety measures continue to roll out, several nations and regions appear to be easing travel restrictions slowly and reopening physical schools. As a result, recruiting and hiring for in-person teaching positions remain slow, but some countries have started to quicken the pace.

In Asia, countries such as South Korea and Taiwan seem to be going back to ‘normal’ and are currently ramping up their recruitment efforts. South Korea has started recruiting and hiring for Fall 2021 (applications opened on 1 February 2021), which can be done through the government’s Epik (English Programme in Korea) programme or a private language school (*hagwon*). Destinations such as Japan remain closed to foreign nationals living outside of Japan, while Thailand and Vietnam have very slowly started recruiting. Unfortunately, these countries are not currently accepting nationals from the UK or South Africa*.

Due to strict safety protocols, new teachers need to undergo Covid-19 testing and quarantine upon arrival (approximately 14 days) before they can start working and interacting with students. The 14-day quarantine period is funded by the teacher, so provisions should be made for these costs.

The borders and schools in Europe and the Middle East have slowly begun to reopen, and recruitment for in-classroom teachers is slowly starting to pick up. However, many popular destinations within Europe, such as Spain, remain closed to

teachers who do not currently reside within the respective country.

**Unfortunately, while schools and institutes may be hiring South Africans, many nations have implemented a travel ban on South Africans due to the new Covid-19 variant. This has caused a complete shutdown in visa processing, with many South African teachers already hired for a particular position but unable to enter the country of their choice.*

An alternative to teaching abroad

Despite travel restrictions placed on South Africans, the online EFL industry is a viable option for EFL teachers looking to earn an extra income while waiting for restrictions to be lifted. The online EFL market has grown exponentially since the start of 2020 despite a global pandemic. This is unlikely to change as the demand for online English teachers continues to increase as parents turn to online platforms as a way to help their kids learn while staying safe. Many online schools do require their teachers to be TEFL-certified, but it's an excellent option for new teachers looking to gain experience and get comfortable with teaching before heading abroad. Find your perfect online teaching job [here](#).



While the international demand for English education will only continue to grow and recruitment efforts increase, travel restrictions still present a significant obstacle for South Africans. Unfortunately, this trend is likely to persist for at least the first half of 2021 or until the virus is brought under control.

A South African's experience applying to teach abroad in 2021



We wanted to hear firsthand how the global pandemic has affected South African EFL teachers looking to teach abroad in 2021. We spoke to (experienced) EFL teacher Jemima, a Cape Town resident looking to teach in South Korea this year.

Here's what she had to say:

You're planning on teaching in South Korea. Will you be going through the Epik program or a private language school?

I tried going through Epik in 2019 but the amount of paperwork honestly put me off so I decided to go the hagwon (private academy) route, which everyone warned me against but I had an overall positive experience teaching at one. (Check out these [teaching jobs in South Korea](#).)

You've taught in South Korea before, so how does the process compare from the first time you went to now with Covid being a factor?

The process is longer now as documents take longer to be processed, however, I managed to get all my Dirco (Department of International Relations and Cooperation) documents apostilled within four months (last time it took two).

How has the new Covid variant affected your travels to South Korea?

Unfortunately, the visa application process has been delayed as a result of the temporary visa ban South Korea has placed on SA. This will be looked at again on 7 February apparently, so there is hope. Visa documents have an expiry date, so it is a bit stressful.

How are you feeling?

I am trying to stay positive and spend as much time with family and friends. They are the reason I came home in the first place, so I'm patient, regardless of when I go back.

As someone who is currently going through the process, do you have any words of wisdom for prospective teachers who are looking to teach English abroad in 2021?

I would advise that they research and choose the country they go to very carefully. Make sure you know all the bad as well as all the good (making a fellow foreign friend online who lives in that country is great too). Try and learn as many helpful phrases as possible in the native language and always try and remain open-minded. Don't think that teaching will be a breeze, and try and give it your best even if sometimes it feels as if the job is futile.

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