



## Teaching English Abroad: The Greatest Opportunity You've Ever Rejected

When a masterclass in personal development meets adventure and discovery

By Chris Broad

I often recommend the idea of teaching English abroad to people as a way of seeing the world, making a genuine difference and getting paid in the process.

Most burst into laughter.

“No thanks. Not for me,” they chuckle, disregarding the idea instantly. Seconds after I’ve face-palmed myself in frustration, I recall that a few years ago that I was one of those people. If someone had said to me 5 years ago “What about teaching English abroad?” I would have been sick in disgust.

*“The salary is awful, I despise humans younger than 18, there’s no job progression and it’s all just a waste of time. Now get out of my kitchen.”*

Yet having done the job for 3 years, I can admit that teaching English abroad is the greatest invention since sliced employment.

The experiences vary, but rarely do I hear people regret doing it, even for just 1 year. Everyday life becomes far more unpredictable, rewarding and interesting than any job you could have back home (unless you’re a pirate, an astronaut or a prominent magician).

I remember once, in the space of just one week, I beat-boxed in front of a Japanese politician, cycled 100km across a stunning archipelago in Japan’s inland sea, explored a derelict chemical weapons facility and gave a 10 minute speech to 1,400 teachers and students in a language I didn’t start learning until 36 months ago.

- And I’m a complete idiot.

Think what you can do.

A few years ago, a friend told me of their relative (who we’ll call Ben), who was in his early 30’s and had spent over 10 years travelling Asia teaching English.

“Ben’s so poor, he hasn’t got any savings or a house or anything. He just teaches and travels around Asia. He’s an idiot. He can barely afford to fly back to the UK”  
Ben, the idiot, hadn’t even got a mortgage.

He’d spent 10 years of his poor existence in Vietnam, South Korea, Thailand and Japan, picking up almost half a dozen languages, absorbing Asian culture, befriending hundreds of people, overcoming awkward, often bizarre, challenging situations and helping hundreds more learn to communicate in English.

And rather than use most of his salary to pay off a mortgage, he’d had to waste all his hard-earned money eating out most nights, at street stands and restaurants enjoying delicacies that couldn’t even be found back in Europe, all the while socialising with locals in the towns and cities where he worked and travelled.

Yet, in reality, Ben had lived far more than his family and friends back home. He’d been living in the present, embracing a lifestyle of continuous learning for the past 10 years. Each day was an adventure in itself.

Having taught for three years, I can say that if you don’t fall in love with the concept of teaching English abroad, you’ll at least return home with greater employability prospects. In fact, that’s what led me to Japan to teach in the first place. I originally came to Japan as a way of improving my prospects of joining a graduate scheme, entering a big company with a good salary and spending all day negotiating profit margins on pretzels and shampoo.

And whilst those dreams were torn up through my time living in Japan, if I was to go for an interview for such a job now, I would have a staggering wealth of experience to draw on. I could talk about how standing in front of and managing 40 teenagers four times every day, has made me more confident in public speaking and how being dragged into classes at the last minute has made me better at thinking creatively and rationally under pressure.

Living in a country where initially I didn’t understand the language, taught me how to communicate my points of view across effectively through a nightmare language barrier. Perhaps best of all, I can use chopsticks effectively to eat things.

Often to the point of being arrogant in the use of chopsticks.

Every day brings new challenges and situations I would only have been able to see on tv or read about on Wikipedia back home. If you ask most English teachers overseas, they’ll tell you the same thing.

Teaching opens up a lot of opportunities and it’s an excellent way of starting a new life in a foreign country where you might not initially speak the language. In Japan, many teachers then go into work in other professions outside of teaching.

If you’re living a life where you’re often sitting somewhere on a Tuesday wondering “what the hell am I doing,” then now is the time. It’s not too late.

Take the first step and do a TEFL course online. These days it costs very little and it’s better viewed as an investment — as opposed to a cost. The barriers to becoming a teacher are pretty damn low.

If you're interested in Japan specifically, enrol on the JET programme (Japanese Exchange & Teaching) or INTERAC. If you fancy South Korea's go for EPIK. But don't be naive as I was. Don't reject the idea straight away.



Think it through.

Romanticise the notion.

Daydream of all the awesome stuff you'll see and do, the people you'll meet, the romances you'll have, the food you'll try and the stunning environments and places you'll find yourself in.

Whether you spend the next decade travelling the world and having the time of your life, or bail after just 12 months, I can promise, you'll come out of it with a head stuffed full of adventures, a CV smothered in job prospects and if you're lucky, a sense of direction and purpose in life.

And literally no money.