



# **THE ENGLISH TEACHER'S GUIDE TO KOREA**

**Living, Working, and Thriving in Korea Sparkling**

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**Chapter 3**

ATEK Press

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## CHAPTER 3: OBTAINING EMPLOYMENT AND MOVING TO KOREA

There are several steps in the process of getting a job in Korea, which involve a number of factors. These steps are covered in this chapter in-depth.

### VISAS IN KOREA

#### *VISA TYPES*

There are a number of different visas that foreign English teachers come to Korea to work on. They are listed and described below:

Visa	Length of Stay	Description
C-4	90 days	Short-term employment. This visa is used for English camp jobs. It is used not only for English teachers, but short-term workers in many fields.
E-1	1 year	Visiting professor. This visa is for those teaching at universities.
E-2	1 year	Foreign language instructor. This is the most common visa issued to foreign English teachers.
F-2	1-2 years	Residency. For those married to Korean citizens.
F-4	2 years	Overseas Korean. This visa is for individuals of Korean heritage who are citizens of Canada or the USA.
F-5	Indefinite	Permanent Residency.
H-1	1 year	Working holiday. This visa is available to citizens of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand only.

#### *WHO CAN WORK IN KOREA?*

Under the laws of the Republic of Korea as of this book's printing, citizens of Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America are permitted to obtain C-4, E-1, E-2, F-2, and F-5 visas if they meet the other requirements for the visa.

To work in Korea as an English teacher on a C-4 (camp job) or E-2 (foreign language instructor) visa, one must possess a four-year bachelor's degree, in any field of study, and be from one of the following countries: Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom, or the United States of America. To obtain an E-1 (visiting professor) visa, one must possess a graduate degree (masters or doctoral) in either the field one plans to teach, or in education. Obtaining F series visas can be a complicated process, and are beyond the scope of this book. Contact the Korean Immigration Service for more information.

## *HOW TO GET A VISA*

Different visa types require different types of documentation. This documentation changes from time to time. One should obtain the most up-to-date information from your prospective employer, who should be able to tell you exactly what documentation you need to gather. The basic process is the same for C-4, E-1, and E-2 visas (although the required documentation is different):

Accept a job. Your new employer will either mail or email you copies of your contract. Sign them and mail them along with all required documentation back to your new employer. Your employer will take the documentation to immigration, who will process the visa request and issue a "visa issuance number," which your new employer will send to you. Take that number to your nearest Korean consulate and fill out an application. You will leave your passport with the consulate. When you pick it up, it will have your visa affixed to it.

What is widely different between C-4, E-1, and E-2 visas is the amount of paperwork required. At the time of this writing, C-4 visas require only a copy of your degree, a copy of your transcript, and a criminal background check. E-1 visas require degree and transcript originals (or copies with an apostille), plus a letter from a previous university or similar institution you taught at describing your duties (if you taught university for-credit classes, that should be mentioned in the letter), and a letter of transfer if you are currently working at a Korean university. E-2 visas require degree and transcript originals (or copies with an apostille), a criminal background check with an apostille, and after one arrives in Korea, a drug test and medical

checkup. For specifics of what the E-2 documentation should look like, ask your employer.

## FINDING THE RIGHT JOB

Finding the right job is not dissimilar to finding the best orange in the produce section at your supermarket. At first glance they all appear similar. When looking more closely, you can see that some are larger and some are smaller. Some have obvious blemishes and some have blemishes you only see when you pick them up. Some are different shades of orange. How do you know which one is the best?

The answer is: you can't know for sure until you arrive and start working, just like you can't know about an orange for sure until you peel one and eat it. However, you can approach looking for a job with a critical eye, and that will reduce your chances of ending up in a bad situation. Let's start with some basics about different job types.

### *JOB TYPES*

#### UNIVERSITY JOBS

Universities typically offer low hours per week and long vacations; twelve hours per week for 2.2 million won monthly with four months paid vacation is considered by many to be a decent offer. Some universities may offer more money for those hours. This is for a departmental job (teaching in an English department, for example), not a university language institute job. Many universities have language institutes attached to them (dubbed “unigwan” by the foreign teaching community) where they teach English to students and/or to non-students. Often these university institutes require higher hours per week and give substantially less paid vacation than university departments.

The benefit of a university job besides the low hours and long vacation is that the job is very stable: there is little likelihood that a university will suddenly go out of business! Pay is on-time, proper deductions are usually made, and many universities are on a private pension system that is superior to the national pension scheme, especially for people staying more than a single year (although some university pension schemes take several years to “vest,” before you

are entitled to the money in them; check with each institution about its policies).

Competition is high for many university jobs, with successful applicants often having a graduate degree and several years experience teaching in Korea. Many universities prefer to hire someone already in Korea, so if you are applying from outside the country, you may be at a disadvantage.

## **PUBLIC SCHOOL JOBS**

Public school jobs typically require 22 teaching hours per week, and usually require you to be at the job site 40 hours per week, from 8:30 to 4:30 Monday through Friday. Public schools usually offer between ten and thirty days of vacation each year, and often have specific dates that you are allowed to take vacation time, which revolve around the school calendar (you will be asked to take vacation when students are on breaks). The job is stable and pay is on-time. You will usually be co-teaching with a Korean (see the section on co-teaching), though some schools prefer that you teach on your own. Though salary levels vary by province, a new teacher may receive about 1.9 million, while someone with documented experience and a TESOL certificate may receive 2.3 million or more. Jobs in rural areas pay slightly higher.

## **PRIVATE ACADEMY (HAKWON) JOBS**

Hakwon positions are by far the most common type of job in Korea. They vary widely in size, customer base, management style, pay, and many other factors. Fairly common among hakwons are 10 to 15 days paid vacation a year, and about 2.1 million won a month for someone with no experience. Some hakwons are large chains, and many others are small businesses. Some of the large chains are actually franchises, so they too are run like small businesses; good or bad reports from one franchised hakwon have no meaning for another, run by a different owner. Teachers' experiences at hakwons are very different; some have good experiences and form close relationships with their bosses or the owner, while others have terrible experiences. There is little government regulation of labor practices, so complaints from English teachers are more common with hakwons than with public schools or universities.



## **CAMP JOBS**

Summer and winter English camps are common in Korea. Camps usually employ teachers for about a month. They may front the money for you to fly to Korea, and then deduct it from your pay, or they may ask that you pay for your own flight. Salary is usually around 2 million for a month for someone with no experience, although some camps pay more. Expect to work long days (you may have duties in the evenings) and take at least some of your meals with the campers. Housing is often shared with another teacher. Camp jobs are an excellent introduction to Korea for those unsure about committing to a year.

## ***RESUMES AND INTERVIEWS***

When you answer a job listing, the employer or recruiter will ask for a resume and photo. While submitting a photo may be unusual in your home country, it is standard practice in Korea. If the employer is interested in hiring you, you will be contacted for an interview. Most phone interviews are very different from Western-style interviews; they are short and will often not include many probing questions, such as “What do you see as your greatest strength?” The prospective employer wants to hear your English: is it clear, or heavily accented? They may ask why you are interested in teaching English in Korea. They will likely invite you to ask questions as well. Be prepared for a job offer on the spot at the end of the interview: hakwon managers/owners often interview foreign English teachers after already deciding they want to hire them. You do not have to accept on the spot. Remember that English teachers are in great demand, and that you can negotiate salary, ask to see the contract, or make other stipulations. They will either meet them, or they'll tell you why they can't. If you get a bad vibe, just say no, as there are lots of other employers all over Korea.

## **AVOIDING A POTENTIALLY BAD SITUATION**

Ninety-eight percent of those taking a first job teaching English in Korea will not have the ability to inspect their new workplace or apartment before taking the job. This means that they are relying on what their employers are telling them about the job, apartment, pay,

benefits, et cetera. If you cannot come and look around, then you must gather as much information as you can (from as many sources as you can) to make the best possible decision. Start by asking your prospective employer some questions.

### **QUESTIONS TO ASK A PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYER**

These questions will help you get a sense of what kind of employer you may be working for. Also, they will show the employer that you are an “informed” employee. If you are not extended a job offer after asking all these questions, that may be an indicator that the employer isn't doing everything legally and thinks you might make trouble. In that case, passing on your application is doing you a favor.

#### *WORKING HOURS*

What are the working hours?

When do teachers prepare for classes?

How long do they prepare for classes?

How long are the rest periods?

How many classes will you teach per day?

How much time will you spend teaching per class?

What hours will you work during school breaks?

Will you work Saturday and/or Sunday? If so, what hours?

#### *JOB DUTIES*

Are there other job duties that are not written in your contract?

If so, how often will you perform these duties?

#### *WAGES & OVERTIME*

Does your employer always pay overtime wages?

Did your employer pay your wages in cash or deposit your wages into your Korean bank account?

Are you able to set up an account anywhere, or is a particular bank required?

How does your employer calculate overtime wages?

#### *PAY RECEIPT*

Does your employer provide pay receipts that clearly stated the date of pay, pay period dates, overtime wages earned, monthly salary

including deductions from your monthly salary for ( 1 ) pension, ( 2 ) income tax and ( 3 ) health insurance?

### *HEALTH INSURANCE*

When will your employer provide you with a health insurance card?

### *LIVING CONDITIONS*

How big is the apartment?

What is it furnished with?

### *PAID ANNUAL LEAVE*

When and how may you use your paid annual leave?

### *DISCIPLINE*

What should you do if you have a problem with an uncontrollable student in the classroom?

### *PAID SICK LEAVE*

How do teachers use a paid sick leave day? Does your employer require them to work another day to make up for the hours missed?

### *WORK ATTIRE*

What are the work attire expectations?

### *PERFORMANCE EVALUATION*

How are teachers evaluated?

How does the school handle it when a parent or student complains about the teacher or teaching method?

### *CURRICULUM*

Is there a curriculum, or will you be expected to set the curriculum?

If you are expected to set the curriculum, are there materials available (books, etc.) to work with?

### *REFERENCE (VERY IMPORTANT)*

How many foreigners have worked at this school before me? Are there any current or former employees I can talk to? *If the answer to the former question is any number greater than zero, and the answer to the latter question is "no," for any reason, proceed with extreme caution.*

Getting information about a job from only your prospective employer is not dissimilar to asking a lion whether or not it is okay to come into the lion's den. It will be important for you to get information from at least one other source. A good source is often a current or former English teacher at that school. Try to schedule an appointment to speak to them over the phone, when they are not at work. If they are at work, you may not get honest answers, as the teacher is probably within earshot of their boss or coworkers. Don't just listen to the content of the teacher's answers to your questions. Is there stress in their voice when they answer some questions? Which ones don't they answer right away? Do they sound evasive or guarded? What is the general feeling you get from the conversation? Here are the questions. Note that some are the same as the questions I suggested you ask your employer: the answers should be the same too.

## **QUESTIONS TO ASK A CURRENT OR FORMER TEACHER**

### *WORKING HOURS*

What were your working hours?

When did you prepare for your classes?

How long did you prepare for your classes?

How long were your rest periods?

Did your employer allow you to use your rest period freely?

How many classes did you teach per day?

How much time do you spend teaching per class?

What hours do you work during school breaks?

Do you work Saturday and/or Sunday? If so, what hours?

### *JOB DUTIES*

What job duties did you perform that were not written in your contract?

How often did you perform these duties?

### *WAGES & OVERTIME*

Did your employer always pay overtime wages?

Did your employer pay your wages in cash or deposit your wages into your Korean bank account?

Were you able to set up an account anywhere, or did your employer

require you to use a particular bank?

How did your employer calculate overtime wages?

### *PAY RECEIPT*

Did your employer provide pay receipts that clearly stated the date of pay, pay period dates, overtime wages earned, monthly salary including deductions from your monthly salary for ( 1 ) pension, ( 2 ) income tax and ( 3 ) health insurance?

### *HEALTH INSURANCE*

When did your employer provide you with a health insurance card?

Did your employer pay contributions for both parties to the National Health Insurance Corporation?

Did your employer respect your right to medical privacy?

### *TAXES/PENSION/SEVERANCE PAY*

Did your employer always deduct the correct amount for income taxes from your monthly salary?

Did your employer pay deductions from your monthly salary for income taxes to the tax office?

Did your employer pay into the Korean Pension Plan?

Did your employer always pay severance pay upon completion of your contract?

### *LIVING CONDITIONS*

Was your apartment clean upon arrival?

Were you provided with all the furnishings as stated in your contract?

Were all the furnishings/appliances in working order when you moved into your apartment?

Were the bills in your name or your employer's name?

If the bills were in your employer's name, did your employer deduct the correct amount from your monthly salary for utilities?

Did your employer respect your right to privacy?

### *PAID ANNUAL LEAVE*

When and how do you use your paid annual leave?

### *PROBLEMS*

Has the employer ever been abusive towards students?

Has the employer ever been abusive towards teachers?

Has the employer ever done anything that made you feel uneasy, concerned, or afraid?

### *PAID SICK LEAVE*

Did you use a paid sick leave day? If so, how did your employer react?

If teachers used a day of paid sick leave, did your employer require them to work another day to make up for the hours missed?

### *TURNOVER*

How long do teachers usually stay?

How many teachers have left since you came? Why did they go?

Why is the teacher I will be replacing leaving?

### *PERFORMANCE EVALUATION*

How are teachers evaluated?

How does the school handle it when a parent or student complains about the teacher or teaching method?

In addition to questioning your potential employer and current or former employees, it is probably a good idea to post a request for information on one or more websites serving English teachers in Korea. Ask if anyone has any information good or bad about a particular school. Mention the school by name and the boss by name as well (sometimes schools change names if their reputations come under fire, and sometimes bad bosses move to new schools).