

Ialc reveals report findings at Rouen workshop

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Ialc, the International Association of Language Centres, held its 2015 workshop in the historic French city of Rouen in April, where the 'life cycle' of the language travel industry and how agents perceive independent chain schools were just two of the topics discussed during the opening seminars.



The panel debate at Ialc focussing on the future of the language travel industry

This year's host school was French in Normandy, with Director Eleri Maitland at the forefront of arrangements, who sought impressive buildings for the workshop, including the 15th century Hotel de Bourgtheroulde, where the seminars and fancy dress party took place, and the Musée des Beaux-Arts for the opening reception.

Before the main meetings took place, Ialc presented its first industry research report administered by StudentMarketing entitled, *Perception of independent and boutique chain schools in language travel*.

The report, which gathered information from 472 agencies representing 72 countries and 230,000 students, found that 64 per cent of agency customers choose to study at independent schools, while 36 per cent prefer chain schools. When it comes to quality, 56 per cent of agents think that independent chain schools are of higher quality than chain schools.

The factors that agents like most about independent chain schools are: easier access to senior management; a greater ability to adjust the offer; and the friendlier approach. The preferred method of contact for agents when meeting with their school partners is face-to-face at a workshop, with fam tours in second place.

Saudi Arabia and China were the top source countries for English language travel by number of student weeks (most recent data taken from 2013). Japan and Brazil also saw a steady rise from 2011 to 2013, while South Korea declined slightly.

The report showed that the US was the top sending destination for ELT by number of student weeks, overtaking the UK in 2012, which was highlighted in *StudyTravel Magazine's global market report of 2012* in the December 2013 issue.

Ireland's popularity continued to rise year-on-year from 2011 to 2013, with David O'Grady, CEO of MEI, commenting in *StudyTravel Magazine's market analysis on Ireland* that the strength of the US dollar and pound sterling may continue to give Irish schools the edge in 2015.

According to the report, the language travel industry is now in the consolidation stage with regulation from government supervision and industry bodies expected to occur in the future. This was discussed in the panel debate, *The state of the language travel industry: Growth or Maturity?*, moderated by Jean-Marc Alberola, President of Bridge, featuring Jose Carlos Hauer Santos Jr., President of STB Brazil, Jacqueline Kassteen, Director of ICEF Monitor, Lyn Scott, Academic Director at ELC Sydney, and David Brown, joint-CEO of Oxford International Education Group.

Brown commented that the industry has been through consolidation, but with so many individual language schools, the industry could be on the verge of decline. He stressed the importance of diversifying youth programmes, as students now see study abroad as an important experience – not only to learn a language. Although Brown said it takes away from uniqueness, Scott added that standardisation of courses can be good for the customer, while the school offers a more personalised experience.

Santos believes that independent chain schools don't know how to sell themselves, something which was noted in the research report as only 13 per cent of agents said their students knew the difference between an independent and chain schools. Santos added that although 60 per cent of STB Brazil's clients go to chain schools, independents have the personal touch and a warmer feeling towards students which they should capitalise on in their brochures.

Schools now have to compete in an increasingly technological world, commented Kassteen, another disruption for the language travel industry. As well as the rise of Moocs (Massive Open Online Course), independent schools now have to ensure they have mobile-friendly websites and mobile and interactive learning to stay competitive with chains. Scott added that schools should consider investing in their premises and online

presence to up their game.

Speaking about the destination of Rouen, Jan Capper, Director of IALC, said, "Rouen is in that smaller group of destinations, full of history, right in the heart of France. It's important for us and it's important for agents to have the chance to come to one of our destinations that are not capital cities and are not in famous places."

IALC members chose the US city of Boston to be the workshop destination in 2017, hosted by [ELC Boston](#). The 2016 workshop will be in Leeds and York, UK, from April 7 – 10, joint hosted by [CES Leeds](#) and [Melton College](#), York.

Read about IALC's future plans in *StudyTravel Magazine's* [Q&A with Jan Capper in the April 2015 issue](#)

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