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Supporting tourism and agriculture through Visa Application Charge changes

The Morrison Government is ensuring Australia remains an attractive destination for tourists, and temporary visa holders who often fill critical skills shortages, by offering refunds or waivers of Visa Application Charges (VAC).

Tourists, working holiday makers, seasonal and pacific workers, prospective partners and temporary skilled workers whose travel has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic will be eligible.

Visitors

Visitor visa holders who are overseas and whose visas expired or will expire between March 2020 and December 2021 will be eligible for a waiver when they apply for a new visa.

This will help support the rebound of Australia's \$45 billion international tourism sector when international travel restrictions ease.

We know many of our tourism destinations and operators are doing it tough right now and these arrangements will help encourage people to travel to Australia when our international borders re-open and once again inject vital tourism dollars into our economy.

Working holiday makers

Backpackers on Working Holiday Maker visas who have been unable to come to Australia or who had to leave Australia early due to COVID-19 will also be eligible for a waiver, when they decide to return to Australia.

Those who are unable to return because they have passed the age limit for a Working Holiday Maker visa will be able to claim a refund.

Working Holiday Makers are a major contributor to Australia's tourism industry and also fill critical workforce shortages, particularly in regional and rural Australia. On average, they spend all their money in Australia, contributing more than \$3 billion a year to the economy and supporting local jobs.

These changes build on a number of measures announced by the Morrison Government to allow Working Holiday Makers to remain in Australia longer and support the critical sectors of health, aged care, disability care, childcare, agriculture and food processing.

Seasonal Worker Program and Pacific Labour Scheme workers

Seasonal Worker Program and Pacific Labour Scheme visa holders will also be eligible for a refund of the VAC if they were granted a visa before 20 March 2020 and have been unable to travel to Australia due to COVID-19

These programs restarted in August to help fill labour shortages in key industries, particularly the farming sector.

Visa conditions for these workers have also been temporarily relaxed and options are available for them to extend their stay in Australia for up to 12 months to support the agriculture sector.

Temporary skilled workers

Due to travel restrictions there are many Temporary Skill Shortage and Temporary Work (Skilled) visa holders who have not made their initial entry to Australia, or have returned home due to COVID-19 and may wish to apply again.

To support local businesses that seek to access critical skills not available in the local labour workforce, the Government will offer a waiver of the VAC for subsequent applications by affected temporary employer sponsored skilled migrants.

Subsequent skilled visa applications will still be subject to the strict labour market testing requirements to ensure Australians have first priority for jobs.

Prospective Marriage visa holders

The Prospective Marriage visa provides holders with nine months to travel to Australia to marry an Australian citizen or permanent resident.

VAC refunds will be available for Prospective Marriage visa holders who have been unable to enter Australia before their visa expired, due to COVID-19 related travel restrictions.

Refunds will ensure these visa holders are able to apply for another visa to travel to Australia and hold their wedding once travel restrictions are lifted. For those visas that have already expired, any new application will be prioritised.

Visa extensions will be available for Prospective Marriage visa holders whose visas are still valid.

Australia's success in managing the COVID-19 pandemic and our economy, will continue to make Australia an attractive destination for tourists and temporary workers. These measures will reinforce that when our borders open up, Australia will remain a nation that welcomes and values our international visitors.

Further details will soon be available on the Department of Home Affairs website.

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