

From [www.expatica.com](http://www.expatica.com) Living in The Netherlands Page

22 January 2002

## **The Working Holiday Scheme: a nightmare and opportunity in one**

**By Aaron Gray-Block**

**The Working Holiday Scheme gives young Canadians, Australians and New Zealanders the chance to live and work in Holland for a year. Though a great opportunity, the programme is not without critics.**

Some expats speak of a bureaucracy nightmare upon their arrival in the Netherlands on a Working Holiday Scheme (WHS), but also of the great opportunity the plan presents.

The scheme, which enables people between the ages of 18 and 30 from Canada, Australia and New Zealand to work in the Netherlands for up to one year, has been to some extent streamlined since its inception in Australia on 1 January 1981.

Key amendments to the Australian scheme such as the elimination of the need for participants to obtain a separate work permit and the raising of the age limit from 25 to 30 have made a WHS more accessible — yet problems remain.

### **Navigating the bureaucracy**

The Australian embassy in The Hague says work permits are now included with residence permits issued to expats after their arrival. In theory this should ease the WHS process, but some expats claim the difficulty is in actually obtaining their necessary residence permit.

WHS participants must first secure an MVV — a passport stamp issued by Dutch consulates in Canada, New Zealand or Australia — and they must obtain their residence permit by reporting to the foreign police within three days of their arrival in Holland.

But Ansuya Singaram, 29, of Sydney, says Dutch immigration counters had even shown a lack of knowledge of the WHS scheme upon entering and re-entering the country.

She also says dealing with the residence permit bureaucracy is a "bit of a nightmare".

Before WHS participants can obtain a sofi number (a tax file number) they need a place to live and then prove to the local town hall that they live at the address by obtaining a letter from a landlord or entering into a lease agreement, says Singaram.

"However, logically you need a job in order to enter or commit to a lease or start paying deposit, rent, etc," she says.

"It was quite a frustrating process to get the residence permit and there were different regulations and procedures depending on where you wanted to live in the Netherlands."

## **The pay-off**

Despite these problems though, Singaram says the scheme allows expats to meet the Dutch, learn a new language and improve work skills while having a lot of fun. And she would recommend it to others.

Another participant, Meline van Horrik, who's father is Dutch born-and-bred, says that although she had a great time in the Netherlands she was very pleased to have had the help of her relatives.

She notes that she "was shocked at how hard it was to get things sorted out" once she had arrived.

"The paperwork is unbelievable, especially when I compare it with the UK," she says.

"I was going around in circles for a while with the foreign police and with getting my sofi number. Then finding an employer who would fill in the papers for me was a nightmare as well".

Tom Ryan, 20, formerly of Melbourne, says he has had no troubles with his work permit or in transferring it to different employers.

However he says he needed to be persistent when obtaining a tax file number, applying for a residence card and in registering his Dutch address.

Ryan says he "had a nightmare of a time" because some authorities were openly dismissive. He warns persistence is highly necessary.

## **A streamlined future?**

The Southern Cross Group (SCG), a Brussels-based lobby group for Australian expats, quotes a source from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs in Canberra confirming that the requirement to register with Dutch police — specific to the Australia-Netherlands WHS — has acted as a hindrance.

In addition, a spokesperson for the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs says the department has "spoken with the Australian embassy in The Hague and we are not aware of untoward problems encountered by young Australians who have obtained working holiday visas in Australia, a practise encouraged by the Netherlands' authorities".

"Our advice to any young Australian who runs into problems is to contact the Australian embassy, which will only be too happy to assist," she says.

Despite this though, SCG co-founder Anne MacGregor says "any administrative burdens which young people face when they arrive in the host country ... should be minimised and streamlined".

According to Roel Bouwman, a Dutch consulate spokesperson, all working holiday visas are issued from Sydney, except those given to Australians living in the Australian Capital Territory, who are served by the embassy in Canberra.

Bouwman says 386 visas were distributed from the Sydney consulate in 2001 and about five or 10 would have been issued from Canberra.

He says about 50 percent of the Australians who participate in the scheme have Dutch heritage and perhaps even some Dutch language skills.

Australia gave 5,111 Dutch people a WHS visa in the 2000/1 year, according to the Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.

The Australian Department of Immigration says 27,000 young Australians used the WHS with 12 different participating countries in the same period.

The Dutch Justice Ministry says Australian and New Zealand expats in the Netherlands can work for an employer for an unlimited amount of time, but the Australian Department of Immigration says WHS participants can only work with the same employer in Australia for three months.

Australia presently has no quota on the number of Dutch nationals that can use the scheme to come to Australia per year, but the number can be capped at the discretion of the Australian Minister for Immigration.

The Netherlands has no limit on the number of Australians it will accept.

### **WHS requirements**

To qualify for the Working Holiday Scheme you must:

- Be aged 18 to 30 years inclusive;
- Possess a return air ticket or have funds to finance the return fare, and;
- Possess and show proof of adequate means of self-support (EUR 1, 170 minimum) while in the Netherlands in case of insufficient income from employment.
- Also, once an applicant is successful, they will be issued with a visa (MVV) free of charge by the Dutch authorities in the country of their origin.
- Upon arrival in the Netherlands the participant should report to the local police within three days and apply for a temporary residence permit for which a fee might be charged.
- The WHS participant should register at the local town hall when staying in the Netherlands for more than three months and an original birth certificate from the country of origin is needed for this registration. This certificate must be authenticated by the Department of Foreign Affairs (an Apostille Stamp). Registration at the town hall will enable the participant to obtain a tax file number — the so-called sofi number — at the Dutch tax office. (Note: New Zealand participants are strongly advised to have their birth certificate authenticated from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and stamped by the Dutch Embassy in Wellington before they leave New Zealand.)
- Participants should take out or retain medical and hospitalisation insurance cover during their absence.
- WHS participants will also will need to show a police clearance certificate upon registration with the foreign police in the Netherlands.
- Participants can only obtain one WHS visa and it is valid for 12 months only. It starts upon entry to the country.

### **For more information**

Further information on the Australian and New Zealand scheme is on the Southern Cross Group website at [www.southern-cross-group.org/sys-tmpl/workingholidays](http://www.southern-cross-group.org/sys-tmpl/workingholidays)

Information from Dutch consulate in Sydney website: [www.netherlandsconsulate.org.au](http://www.netherlandsconsulate.org.au)

Information from Dutch embassy in Wellington website: <http://www.netherlandsembassy.co.nz>

Information from the Dutch embassy in Ottawa website: <http://www.netherlandsembassy.ca>