



AS IT IS

Australia Invites Students, Travelers to Help with Shortage of Workers

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Australia's government has invited backpackers and students to seek work in the country. "Backpackers" are mostly younger people who travel in a simple way and do not spend very much money.

The move is an effort to fill critical workforce shortages as Australia faces an outbreak of the Omicron **variant** of COVID-19.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison on Wednesday said his government would not require backpackers or students arriving in the next several weeks to pay the usual \$453 **visa** cost. He also urged such visitors to seek work as they travel around the country.

"Come on down now because you wanted to come to Australia," Morrison said during a televised press conference.

He added that the backpackers and students could seek work in agriculture, **hospitality** and "so many other parts of the economy" that lack enough workers.

The announcement comes as Morrison faces criticism at the beginning of an election year. Critics say he has not done well in dealing with the Omicron outbreak.

Australia is experiencing record numbers of new infections and deaths. Officials in Australia reported 67 new deaths and nearly 80,000 new cases on Wednesday. Chief Health Officer Paul Kelly said Australians should expect the pandemic's total death numbers to rise.

Australian businesses are struggling with the growing number of workers who are sick or ordered to **isolate**. The labor shortage has led to supply shortages. Major food stores have put in place purchase limits on some goods.

Rising hospitalizations have put pressure on the health system. Nearly 1.3 million cases of the country's total of 1.6 million cases have been reported in the past two weeks.

Morrison is also facing criticism over the shortage of at-home **rapid** tests. On Wednesday, he urged state leaders to drop any requirements for workers in most industries to take daily rapid tests. The federal government also promised to buy 52 million tests this month from Asia and the United States.

As the country faces a shortage of tests, police on Wednesday said 42,000 tests worth about \$500,000 were stolen from a **freight** station in Sydney.

I'm Ashley Thompson.

The Associated Press reported this story. Ashley Thompson adapted the story for Learning English.

Words in This Story

variant - n. something that is different in some way from others of the same kind

visa - n. an official mark or stamp on a passport that allows someone to enter or leave a country usually for a particular reason

hospitality - n. the activity of providing food, drinks, etc. for people who are the guests or customers of an organization — often used before another noun

isolate - v. to put or keep (someone or something) in a place or situation that is separate from others

rapid - adj. happening in a short amount of time : happening quickly

freight - n. goods that are carried by ships, trains, trucks, or airplanes
