

## H-2B visa crunch impacts Provincetown

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For years, H-2B visa workers have been coming to the Cape for the summer (and into the fall) to take jobs as housekeepers, servers, dishwashers and other temporary, non-agricultural positions. The government caps the number of H-2B visas it hands out annually at 66,000. That number is divided into two parts of the year, so 33,000 visas are handed out bi-yearly.

That seems like a relatively small number considering how many workers there are on H-2Bs on the Cape alone, but that's because up until now, there was a returning worker exemption in the law that allowed, well, returning workers to not be counted in the visa cap.

This year however, Congress failed to renew the exemption and are unable to come up with a way to allow these workers in for the season, leaving some wringing their hands.

In Provincetown, there are mixed reactions to the news. At the Provincetown House of Pizza, business owner Angelo Lambrou says his business is slightly impacted because they lost one long-term employee due to the new restrictions.

However, Lambrou isn't too worried because his business didn't rely heavily on H-2B employees.

Bill at the Bradford Carver House says he "doesn't know from personal experience" but has heard talk about the lack of help around town.

Dave Wallace, a manager at the Gifford House says there's one lady from Jamaica who has been coming for years. She was real dependable and so it's a loss. The problems, he says though, will be more internal with training new people and finding good, dependable workers who can stay through November, a big downfall with college kids.

Gui Yingling, owner of Spiritus Pizza, says that a lot of businesses relied on these workers who'd been coming for 10-plus years. He says he hired more H-2B workers at Bubala's than at Spiritus and so was experiencing the problem more at that restaurant.

He explains he'd had a lot of his friends come down from western Massachusetts to work for him as a favor. Yingling thinks he'll have to work more this summer to save from cutting back on hours or services.

Megan Temple, a friend of Yingling, adds about the workers "they're part of the community...they've been here for decades."

At the Anchor Inn, manager Mark Lucisano is more laid back because all the staff is there and there are no major problems. "We're OK" he adds.

At the White Wind Inn nearby, employee Derick Weaver repeats the sentiment, saying that the restrictions haven't affected them really since the staff is mostly local.

Kris Bottiggi, who works guest services at Prince Albert and serves at Patio restaurant feels differently. Especially at the restaurant, he's seeing a lot of Europeans who can't return. He feels that workers will have to either work more hours or the restaurant will be forced to hire anyone, potentially lowering the quality of service.

Michael Sullivan, owner of Big Daddy's Burrito feels it's "almost too early to tell, but it's been OK." He feels that mostly bigger establishments, especially those that house employees are going to be the one's impacted. He himself uses mostly J1 visa workers (mostly students and professors--visitor visas).

Sullivan has had great luck with the Europeans, many of whom send their friends to him from overseas. "It's good karma," he says.

Jeri Boccil and Liz DeBella, owners of Way Down Town, think that the restrictions have "gravely affected the flow of business this year." They feel that they lost not only employees with this, but friends.

However, they have a bright side, since they see lots of locals stepping up. For them "the hardest part is training people" for positions that their former H-2B employees had own.



Gui Yingling, owner of Spiritus Pizza, says that a lot of businesses relied on these H2-B workers. (Source: Sam Baltrusis)

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Boccil says that their staff this year is "a lot of locals, mostly all Americans for the first time in years."

They feel that employees this summer may end up working more hours due to fewer staff. The two women also feel that the government ends up hurting itself with this because the fewer workers lead to fewer businesses which leads to fewer taxes for them.

A solution by Boccil and DeBella was to shorten their menu and lower their prices to attract more customers and make work easier for their smaller staff.

At the Ranch, one of the managers has a different reaction to the restrictions. He feels workers on H-2B visas come and work, but don't spend any of the money, so "they really f\*\*k us over."

He feels they "rape the economy" and sees local hiring as better. He feels local business owners like hiring H-2B workers because you don't have to pay them as much as kids and locals. He also feels that the Jamaicans he's met have an anti-gay sentiment and is slightly relieved to not have them coming back.

While some business owners feel the crunch, others feel relief, and still others are driven to innovative ways of looking at their business.

Although no one can see into the future to tell how the new visa restrictions will affect the summer season in P-town, many have hope that it will be just as good as previous ones, if only a little overworked.