

# Do Au Pairs receive Fair Pay?

## "What do you hope to achieve by being an Au Pair?".

The usual answer is "**I want to experience another culture, travel and improve my language skills**" however, this particular Austrian Au Pair went on to say: *Use the skills of being creative and energetic around children, to travel with the security-net of having people there that care for me. And the clincher - I want to be able to look back at my year of being age 20 and know that I did something different, and make lifelong friends and make the most of the opportunity of sharing another family, learning new ways, and meeting new friends, and to make sure that I am adaptable in my life and **not stuck behind my own visions of my upbringing**".*

This is what the Au Pair opportunity has in its pockets for you  
– **absolutely priceless!** –

The family shares their private and personal life with you – a huge opportunity to discover differences of life.

- The family invites **you - a total stranger** – as their Au Pair into their house, their home, where everyone should feel safe. If for any reason you can't fit in, the whole family will feel uncomfortable and especially little children don't cope very well. Choose well (see below), also for your own sake!
- Regardless of your qualification there will be a family who will give you the opportunity to join them as Au Pair and basically train you how to run a home and care for children. If you have a formal overseas qualification, unfortunately this isn't recognised in Australia for formal employment; however, families will honour those as much as your willingness to fit in.
- Please remember that your experience or qualifications from overseas
  - Might not be needed by all families, so again: choose well if this is important to you.
  - Even with experience and qualifications a foreign country has a lot more challenges and a lot of things will be done totally different from what you are used to.
  - The language barrier might lead to miscommunication/-understandings on both sides.
- The family might ask the following:
  - Have you any work experience in child care like a Kindergarten, regular babysitting?
  - Do you hold a 1st Aid certificate – does this include children?
  - Do you bring any other formal qualifications from your home country?
  - Can you provide a police check and a working with children check?

The trend has moved away from engaging agencies to find Au Pairs or families which has its pros and cons. For both sides it means saving the fees but au pairs miss out on being somewhat prepared and families might be unsure what to expect; it is not uncommon that an Au Pair has been mistaken with a professional nanny.

After more or less extensive correspondence and Skype interviews most families choose their Au Pairs rather by gut feeling than based on (professional) qualification, experience or references, as the best Au Pairs are usually those who find it easy to fit into the host family's dynamics. This is what you should look out for!

The whole experience is based on the concept that the Au Pair is being integrated into the host family. This also means that you, the Au Pair should want to make a real effort to fit in with the family and you are here merely for the experience. Trust me, families put in a massive effort to make you feel comfortable.

Help (!) them and ask questions how things work in Australia, in the host family, how they like you to care for the children. Based on this elementary starting point it is contra productive if families have to get out of their way (sometimes every 3 months) to accommodate a young adult from overseas:

- a) It would deprive the Au Pair of the cultural experience.
- b) It weighs out the benefit families get from the help of another pair of helping hands.

Do it their way as much as you possibly can to make the most of the opportunity of sharing another family, learning new ways. Don't worry, this will not change you as a person at all but will ensure that you learn to be adaptable in your life and will earn you the love and admiration of your host family.

## Choose wisely

It is up to you, the Au Pair, to do your research what family suits you best to fit in.

**As offers vary greatly** - Some points to consider:

- Location of the family (if you come from a big city, why not choose the real outback?)
  - Close to city (are you a nightlife person?)
  - Car available if remote or close to public transport
- Size of the family
  - How many children
  - Age of the children, e.g. babies to care for, nappies, school drives
  - One parent family
  - Children/parents with disabilities
- Hours required
  - Variations from 10 to 50 depending on family requirements
  - Weekends/Public holidays free or not? (e.g. shift work families)
  - When the hours are required, fixed or flexible, means can you plan for your free time?
  - How many hours are you in sole charge of how many of the children (age)?
- Length of stay: Up to 3 months, 6 months, 9 months or longer. The longer you stay, the easier it will be to spend a lot of quality time with your host family.  
 Don't forget that **the shorter your stay the more work for the family** to find and settle someone new in. This is lost quality time parents could spend with their children (and you) – *No matter how fantastic you are.*
- Extras the family provides, which should be seen as a privilege and not be expected are
  - Travels with the family
  - Car use for personal travel/enjoyment (don't expect petrol to be paid for, please).  
Ensure you know who pays for the excess in case of damage if the family lets you use a car.
  - Any other luxury you think is normal ... in this case you might consider whether Au Pair is really for you.
  - Your own granny flat/living area (although that might defeat the purpose of family integration and lessen your experience)
  - Does the family employ a cleaner? (less cleaning by Au Pair)
  - Any other extras a family provides also if it doesn't cost them anything, like a membership of [Au Pair Surfing Australia](#).

## Fair Pay in an unregulated industry

The Au Pair industry in Australia is unregulated therefore the agreements between Au Pairs and host families vary greatly based on the needs of families, their location, the size of the family, the family budget. Au Pairs might also want to consider that – opposed to working holiday travellers – they have a safe place to stay and also know how much they are earning right from the start.

But what is Fair Pay for Au Pairs? As this seems to be one of the biggest questions for both families and Au Pairs, here are some **thoughts for consideration**:

Although Au Pairs receive pocket money, paid mostly on a cash-in-hand basis, let's start with looking at Australia's [National minimum wages](#), regulated by the [Fair Work Ombudsman](#) in an Award

At 18 years of age	<b>At 19 years of age</b>	At 20 years of age	> 20 years of age	
\$11.52 per/hour	<b>\$13.92 per/hour</b>	\$16.48 per/hour	\$16.87 per/hour	(1 <sup>st</sup> July 2014)

Those wages compare to the child care industry in the first two years of employment as taxable income. And those hourly rates most probably would be paid in hospitality (plus a casual loading) to backpackers.

The price tag on **room and board** (three daily meals, adequately furnished room and access to laundry facilities) in a family home is \$260.00 to \$300+ per week as defined by the Australian Homestay Network, a national recognised body in Australia. Australian universities follow those guidelines for [home stay students](#). This is basically the same what families provide for their Au Pairs.

Based on the hourly rate and cost of living a simple tax calculation can be done for a 19 year old, which is about the average age of Au Pairs who come to Australia in their gap year after finishing school.

**\$13.92 /h x 38 h/week x 52 weeks/year = \$27,506.00 gross income**, which is considered a low income and reduces the tax payable to \$1,736.00 and **leaves \$25,770.00** to pay for living expenses.

Brisbane for **example** has a **homestay rate of \$280.00 week x 52 weeks/year = \$14,560.00**.

We now deduct this from the net income just calculated and the end result is \$11,210.00 per year, or **\$215.00 per week for 38 hours of work**.

Most of you would receive pocket money something along this line if you help out the odd 40 hours (a couple of hours will surely cover tasks you would consider as a normal contribution to the household you live in). If you get more, keep quiet about it and just be happy.

If you get less, you might think of re-negotiating, but before you do, here is more to consider:

## How generous is your family?

- Do they provide extras, like snacks or yummy treats?
- Internet use will usually be free (value approx. \$9.00/week)
- Is a mobile phone provided? (value approx. \$5.00-\$10.00/week)
- Car for personal use or contribution to public transport?
- Family dinners, vacation, excursions?
- Toiletries provided?
- Are they generous with their time to help you, eg. questions, drop-offs, or just a coffee chat?

You are also saving on both travel time and expense to and from work. Although your family might not care about it, it is worth mentioning that you probably are a non-resident for tax purposes in Australia (you can [test this](#) on ATO website) and would have tax obligations of 32.5% tax on every \$ earned in a regular job. Well, most au pair agreements work cash-in-hand as pocket money.

Although every Au Pair should understand that any personal activities during work hours are unacceptable (e.g. personal use of mobile phones, internet, skypeing, writing your diary etc.) you will find that families are actually phasing in **paid breaks** for you, for example if you prepare and have your own breakfast, lunch and/or dinner with the children. **No employer would pay you for either preparing or eating your meals.**

Then there are times when little children having a day time nap and you are only asked to keep an ear on them but can otherwise do whatever you like for most of the time. Some afternoon activities might give you a little time to relax or check your phone when the children are engaged otherwise.

Being an Au Pair is an experience, an opportunity and a challenge – more for an Au Pair than for the families. If you as an Au Pair are aware of it, **the families will love you to bits** and this is **something you can't put a price tag on.**

## So what is a fair amount of pocket money?

Most Au Pairs come on a Working Holiday Visa and as per the conditions you are supposed to have your own funds of \$5000.00, which is a fair amount to spend on travels, personal needs and entertainment.

The following assumption is made that both you and your family have a good understanding what can and can't be expected from an Au Pair and that some expectations might need to be adjusted according to the family situation, your skills, experience and personality.

It is generally understood that the cost for room, board and general expenses cover around 15 to 20 hours help from an Au Pair. Students actually are often found working those hours in a Demi Pair arrangement.

An Au Pair should have at least a weekly amount of pocket money of around \$80 - \$100 regardless of hours to be able to go on outings and explore the area. This does not mean that the host family needs to pay this if only up to 20 hours are required as long as the family plans the au pair schedule in a way that it is possible for the Au Pair to source her income elsewhere, eg. in hospitality, babysitting for other families, cleaning jobs or whatever else is possible. (Students, as above, have other commitments and value the savings on room and board and love the extra comfort and benefit living with the security of a host family).

A family who needs a lot of flexibility from the Au Pair or simply does not agree with the Au Pair working elsewhere should communicate this right from the start and pay the minimum pocket money.

So here is a breakdown of what is reasonable in Au Pair arrangements

Up to 20 hours	\$80 - \$100 (but can be earned with additional jobs)
up to 30 hours	\$100 - \$150 pocket money
up to 35 hours	\$150 - \$180 pocket money
up to 40 hours	\$180 - \$240 pocket money

What needs to be taken into account is the length of time you spend with children in sole charge and how much contribution to the household is expected. Do you have to be flexible with your hours, do you work weekends, are some hours more stand-by, means you might be needed on occasions, does the family accommodate your plans, eg. time off, change of arrangements so you can earn extra money somewhere else, can you take children on 'all paid for' excursions, is a completion bonus promised etc. etc? If you are unsure, please check with us.

### **Qualities that families love and look for in an Au Pair:**

- *Responsible*
  - *Common Sense*
    - *Ability to adapt*
      - *Honesty*
        - *Energy*
          - *Initiative*
            - *Creativity*
              - *Easy to live with*
                - *Cleanliness in the home*

**Acceptance:** Every family is different, every situation is different, every family will have its positive and negatives and that needs to be factored in when considering an Au Pair role. Consider carefully without judgement and remember that the responsibilities of a family differ greatly to that of a young person.

Accept what you have accepted. Don't be impressed by stories from your Au Pair friends because you will **never** get the whole story.

### ***Be receptive to feedback and alternative ways of doing things.***

With most families you can't do anything wrong – they just do it a different way.

*And who knows*

*... maybe*

*... your Au Pair children might become Au Pairs*

*... for your own children*

*... one day.*

*.... And friendships are made that will be cherished throughout your life.*