

## The road to our Passports (Aug'14)



Four new Australian Passports. It all seems so simple when you look at them. Just a passport really, what's the big deal? Well, the big deal is that these four little documents are the final result of nine years-worth of endless paperwork, red tape and bureaucracy ... up to the very last hurdle. Sure, we love our new country, but dear lord you need some thick skin and tons of patience to work the authorities. Let us explain.

**Step 1: Temporary Visa (2005 – 2007).** It all started in Europe. One can understand that in order to obtain a temporary independent working visa, some due diligence is justified. But Australian Immigrations had made the process very daunting. Lots of officially verified and translated papers (kilo's), birth certificates, identity declarations, language test, health test, police checks and so on. No sane person would start it without an experienced migration agent. Our agent took us through the Professional approval stage (the skills list), the Regional stage and then finally the federal Immigration approval stage. That last step took so long that we'd already sold our house, quit our jobs and bought the tickets to AUS, but still no visa. Then two weeks before departure the case officer in all their wisdom decided they needed more evidence on our relationship history (mind you, they had stacks of evidence right in front of them). A last minute rush of even more paperwork got us over the line just in time. We had a nice little sticker in our passport, and we were in!

### **Step 2: Permanent Visa (2009)**

Two Australian years and one daughter later we qualified for a permanent visa. It meant that we could stay indefinitely. The procedure required again almost all of the documents we had previously handed in (identity verification, birth certificates, police checks etc.) which again needed to be officially translated and verified by a Justice of Peace (JOP). The attachment list of our application contained no less than 38 verified documents, so we had to provide an index for Immigrations just to make sense of it. Only five months it took this time, but hey: we were in!

Small detail was when the visa grant letter arrived we were advised that no longer a visa passport sticker was required, since all visas were now electronically connected to our passport number.

### **Step 3: Citizenship (2012 - 2014)**

After another two years and another daughter born we could apply for Australian citizenship. First Mikaela and Nora (both Swedish) and later Jan (Dutch) applied. Ella didn't need one, since she was already a citizen by birth (born after we were granted permanency).

Now you guess what the procedure is to apply for citizenship?!? You got it: the same load of documents, birth certificates and identity declaration that we had already done twice. And again they needed fresh copies of everything certified by a JOP. And then of course the crucial citizenship test, of which all questions can be found online...

But the result was all worth it: a nice citizenship ceremony and a big shiny certificate. We thought we were finally there. Surely the passports couldn't be that hard to get .....

### **Step 4: Passports (2014)**

Well, guess what the application procedure is for your first Australian passport? Yep, another round of massive paperwork (the exact same ones that we already handed in three times), birth certificates, independent identity declarations, freshly verified documents by the JOP (they got to know us well) before we could lodge our application. Funny detail: the post office hands out leaflets with instructions on how to interpret the instructions on how to fill out the passport application! It is apparently so complex that less than 20% get it right. Experienced as we were by now we lodged all documents correctly in one go and even got a compliment from the officer: *"You guys are organised"*.

Surely this was the last hurdle we thought. But was it?

### **Step 5: Evidence of citizenship Ella (2014)**

The phone rang: foreign affairs.

*"We cannot approve Ella's application, because we don't see a permanent visa sticker in your old passport"*.

Ehhhh, no, that's because Immigration no longer requires that sticker, remember? That's why we sent you a JOP certified copy of our Visa Grant letter.

*"Yes I have that, but my instructions say that I need a sticker"*.

You gotta be joking? Can't you look-up the validity of the visa Grant Letter in the Immigrations files?

*"No, we are Foreign Affairs and we don't have access to Immigrations systems"*

Of course not (sigh...) so what do we do now?

*"You need to apply for Evidence of Citizenship for Ella through Immigrations, and forward it to us (JOP certified of course)"*

Now let me guess: this Evidence of Citizenship requires a whole stack of paperwork, birth certificates, independent identity declarations, and everything we handed in already four times?

*"Yes, and all certified by a JOP"*

Of course ... But do you realise that the centre piece of evidence for Ella's Evidence of

Citizenship is that exact same Visa Grant Letter that is already in front of you?

*“Ehhh, are you sure you don’t have a sticker?”*

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And so it happened that one last time we went through the whole shebang to obtain Evidence of Citizenship for Ella from Immigrations. And when that finally arrived the JOP smiled at us one last time, the passport officer at the post office shook his head one last time, and we lodged the final piece of evidence one last time.

So you can imagine that when these documents finally arrived today, it was a bit like finishing a marathon. We got through nine years of bureaucracy, and can now proudly show our Australian Passports.

Aussie Aussie Aussie, Oi oi oi !