

Visa Applications and Waivers: What's New?

January 22, 2013

Two changes involving China and visas are worth noting. On January 1, 2013, China began allowing visitors from 45 countries to stop over in Beijing and Shanghai for up to 72 hours without a visa. And, this coming March, China will enhance its visa appointment procedures for Chinese citizens wishing to travel to the United States.

Change in Visa Appointment Process at US Posts in China

Beginning in mid-March 2013, the US Embassy and Consulates located in China will change their procedures for the scheduling visa appointments. The changes are part of the US State Department's Global Support Strategy (GSS) to increase efficiency and time for consular staff to adjudicate applications.

The new procedures will include appointment scheduling and fee collection services through a call center and website; information services through a call center and website; document delivery services; and greeter services at the US Embassy and Consulates.

Since the new procedures will include a change in how visa application fees are paid, any visa application fee receipts issued by CITIC Bank will not be valid after March 14, 2013. Visa applicants with CITIC Bank fee receipts are encouraged to complete their visa application and appointment process prior to March 14, 2013. Note that we do not expect visa application fees to increase with these changes.

The Embassy has not yet announced how the new visa application process will be implemented in China. Details about the new service are expected closer to the implementation date. We will provide updated information when the details are released.

New 72 Hour Visa Waiver for Beijing and Shanghai Transit Visitors

As of January 1, 2013, visitors from 45 countries, including the United States, are allowed to stop over and visit Beijing and Shanghai for up to 72 hours when passing through to another destination without a visa under recently issued regulations.

Five conditions must be satisfied for the visa waiver:

- The visitor must be a citizen of one of the qualifying countries.
- The visitor must hold a valid international travel certification (passport) proving his or her citizenship.
- The visitor must satisfy the applicable conditions for entering the ultimate destination country.
- The visitor must hold airline tickets or other travel documents detailing a destination other than the country of origin and a departure date from Beijing or Shanghai within 72 hours of arrival.
- The airline carrying the visitor must report to the border entry inspection authorities.

The visa waiver is for visiting Beijing or Shanghai only, and is available only to foreign travelers entering and departing Beijing through the Beijing Capital International Airport or Shanghai through the Shanghai Pudong Airport or the Hongqiao Airport. Visitors using the visa waiver are not allowed to travel outside Beijing or Shanghai during their 72-

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hour stay.

The new regulations leave open several issues relating to the waiver. For example

The regulations require a visitor to inform the airline of his or her intention to take advantage of the waiver--but provide no guidance as to when or how to contact the airline about the waiver.

The regulations do not specify whether notifying the airline is required prior to boarding or whether notification can be made on board or upon arrival.

The regulations also require the airline to report the visitor's entry--but do not specify what information is necessary, how or when the report is to be made, or how the visitor can be assured his or her entry into China will not be delayed at the immigration desk.

In order to avoid delays, travelers who intend to use the visa waiver program should contact their airline early to determine the airline's pre-boarding and other requirements.

The 45 countries qualifying for the visa waiver are:

European Schengen Visa Agreement countries (24) Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland

Other European Countries (7) Russia, United Kingdom, Ireland, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine

American countries (6) United States, Canada, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Chile

Oceania (2) Australia, New Zealand

Asian countries (6) South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Brunei, United Arab Emirates, Qatar

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