

Americans Outside China
Returning to China Wiki/FAQ
Rev 8, June 25th, 2020

General Disclaimer

This document is intended to be a living document to provide assistance to Americans attempting to return to China. Updates are based on the feedback and experiences of others to help those trying to return to their adopted home. As the situation is dynamic and unfolding, please use this as a guide only. Hope to see everyone back in China soon.

Background Notes

The issue at hand is that entry to China is temporarily suspended based on the announcement from March 26th:

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1761867.shtml

This document details the process that several people have followed to re-enter based on the following statements in the announcement:

Foreign nationals coming to China for necessary economic, trade, scientific or technological activities or out of emergency humanitarian needs may apply for visas at Chinese embassies or consulates. Entry by foreign nationals with visas issued after this announcement will not be affected.

Due to lack of defined terminology, this process is being called applying for the exemption visa or special process. As it's the exemption to the rule. Not to be confused with the R visa which is for highly qualified individuals and not part of this scope.

Recommended information that provides significantly more information

<https://www.china-briefing.com/news/chinas-travel-restrictions-due-to-covid-19-an-explainer/>

One of the better sources so far that would explain the process in more detail is from AmCham Shanghai

<https://www.amcham-shanghai.org/en/article/guide-returning-expatriates-and-their-families?from=groupmessage&isappinstalled=0>

Process

The process noted below is to assist with those applying to return to China based on the business exemptions noted: economic, trade, scientific or technological activities. Limited info on humanitarian purposes (info just listed in FAQ for now). This is also referred to as the normal channel procedure in articles which appear to be the common path for Americans returning. In order to obtain the visa, the critical step is to get an invitation letter (PU). Without this letter, it does not appear possible for a visa to be issued.

Based on feedback, to get the invite letter issued, you should be working at a company that has demonstratable economic impact in China (based on headcount, revenue, etc). Examples would include large multi-national companies, companies working on key initiatives in China, larger local companies etc.

One milestone for qualification has been reports of a minimum level of 1 million RMB in local taxes. This was based on feedback from Changning, Shanghai. It would be expected that the level varies based on province. Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen being higher than Central China.

The path, requirements and timeline are listed below.

Step 1: Application at District FAO (Foreign Affairs Office)

- **Overview:** Have to apply at the district FAO office where the company is registered, not necessarily the same district as where it is physically located. Example application form is attached in appendix.
 - o **Note:** If you are applying in Changning, Shanghai, you should check with street FAO before the district. Bypassing this step could result in the application being denied.
- **Requirements:** Application form along with justifying letter on why your presence is required within China. Feedback has been that this should detail projects showing your participation, rather than generic statements. Example of the application form is attached in the appendix
 - o **Note:** On the application and communication with FAO be sure to indicate where you are located. The invite letter (PU) states which Embassy/General Consulate to send your passport to. Ensure this is set to the correct location.
- **Approval Time Frame:**
 - o Estimated 2 – 3 business days (Based on feedback in May)
 - o Estimated as 5 business days (Based on feedback in June)

Step 2: Application at Province FAO

- **Overview:** Once approved by the district FAO, the next step is getting approval at the province FAO. For tier 1 cities, ie Shanghai, this would be the Shanghai FAO. This is the approving office that issues the invite letter required for the visa
- **Invite Letter:** Example invite letter shown in appendix
- **Requirements:** No additional submission
- **Approval Time Frame:**
 - o Estimated 5 business days (Based on feedback in May)
 - o Estimated 5 business days (Based on feedback in June)

Step 3: Application for Visa

- **Overview:** Once the invitation letter is issued, you can apply for the visa to get back into China. They are issuing M (Business) or F (non-trade) visas most commonly. It's a single entry, 60/90 day visa to get you back in the country

- **Requirements:** Submission requirements seems to depend on where you are applying (which is called out in your application form and also the PU). Details are provided in later section.
- **Approval Time Frame:** If expediting, it appears to be around 5 business days. Non expedite can take up to 10 days. Highly variable based on location.

Step 4: Flight to China

- **Overview:** With visa issued, you can schedule a flight to China.
- **Requirements:** Flight information must be provided to the province FAO before departure. It has been noted failure to provide this would result in being denied at the border.
- **Arrival:** Information on arrival and process is detailed in appendix.
- **Approval Time Frame:** Takes ~3 business days, so plan flights accordingly.

Visa application

Visa application requirements tend to differ based on location. This section is intended to capture the requirements to save people time in preparing the documentation and prevent multiple back and forth. Its better to be over-prepared as office hours appear limited in many locations, so delays can add up quickly.

Visa applications needs to be directed to the location called out on the PU (which you need to ensure is submitted correctly when applying for the visa). This needs to be set based on your current location / residence if within the US. If outside the US, the closest embassy.

USA locations

Information on the how the US is split between the 5 consulate generals (San Francisco, Houston, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York) or the embassy in Washington D.C, see the link or map below.

<http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zmzlgj/t84229.htm>

Los Angeles

For contact information, see the following link: <http://losangeles.china-consulate.org/eng/visa/Notice/t1760121.htm>

San Francisco

- Contact: visa.sf@gmail.com
- Information: <http://www.chinaconsulatesf.org/eng/>
- Requirements for submission
 - o Visa application form (available on the website)
 - o One picture per exact requirements on visa form
 - o Passport
 - o Invitation letter (PU) from MFA
 - o Invitation letter from employer/company
 - o Documentation showing the applicant resides within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Consulate.
 - o Copy of latest Chinese visa
 - o Documentation on flight to Shanghai
 - o Covid test (Varying reports, test within 3 / 5 days?)
 - o Applicate statement indicating reason for this special visa application

Houston

- Information: <http://www.chinaconsulatesf.org/eng/>
- Requirements for submission

- Visa application form (available on the website)
- One picture per exact requirements on visa form
- Passport
- Invitation letter (PU) from MFA
- Copy of drivers license
- Invitation letter from employer/company
- Letter of company profile and job description
- Form of job description
- Itinerary in China
- Copy of latest Chinese visa / residence permit / work permit
- No Covid test was listed as required based on initial submissions
- Applicate statement indicating reason for this special visa application

Washington, D.C

- Address: 2201 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W. Suite 110, Washington, D.C. 20007
- Telephone:
 - (202) 855-1555 (9:30-12:00 Monday to Friday)
 - (202) 790-8746 (14:00-16:30 Monday to Friday)
 - Fax: (202) 588-9760
- Email: visaoffice.dc@gmail.com

- Requirements for submission
 - Visa application form (available on the website)
 - One picture per exact requirements on visa form
 - Passport
 - Invitation letter (PU) from MFA
 - Copy of drivers license
 - Invitation letter from employer/company
 - Copy of latest Chinese visa / residence permit
 - Scan of work permit card (both sides)
 - Copy of first passport page
 - No Covid test was listed as required based on initial submissions
 - Health declaration form (attached in appendix)

New York:

Contact information: cnnnyconsulate@gmail.com

Wechat ID: chinaconsulate_ny

Chicago

Contact information: chinavisachicago@gmail.com

International Locations

Hong Kong

- Apply at: http://bio.visaforchina.org/HKG2_EN/index.shtml
- Requirements for submission:
 - o Visa application form (available on the website)
 - o One picture per exact requirements on visa form
 - o Photocopy of entry stamp into Hong Kong
 - o Passport
 - o Invitation letter (PU) from MFA
 - o Completion of two health forms about Covid (not available online). Have been attached in the appendix. Make sure to ask as this is not well documented. May vary depending on where visa is applied at
 - o Business invite letter (seems to be more the general checklist process for M visas, but was requested. Note: should just be addressed to Dear Sir/Madam. Don't call out anything else – HKG specific)
 - o Copy of business license
 - o Results of Covid nucleic test based on testing within past 3 days

Travel

Once the visa is obtained and travel can be booked, getting to China is another challenge. Rules regarding transfer vary from country to country. Will not be documented here as its constantly evolving. Suggested website:

- <https://www.iatatravelcentre.com/international-travel-document-news/1580226297.htm>

Unconfirmed/Unknown – There's mention of Covid testing again within 3 days of flying.

FAQs

- **Q: Are my existing visas / permits now invalid**
- A: They are still valid (assuming its not past the expiration date). If the visa was issued before March 26th, they cannot be used for entry under the temporary border restrictions. Once border restrictions are eased, they could be used.

- **Q: The announcement states I can apply for a new visa. Can I get a new tourist/business visa?**
- A: Essentially new visas are only being issued for what was described in the announcement on March 26th: *China for necessary economic, trade, scientific or technological activities or out of emergency humanitarian.*
- A: As of June 9th, 2020, no one has reported being able to get a normal visa issued outside of this special process detailed. Its been noted, visa agencies will accept your passport and apply for you, but the visa application is rejected.

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- **Q: What is the humanitarian exemption**
- A: Limited info is known. One report from an individual who was trying to return to China as their father was in the hospital. Feedback they received was that it had to life threatening emergency and a letter from the hospital had to be provided.

- **Q: Can I get a new visa issued without an invitation letter from FAO**
- A: It appears highly unlikely. No one has reported success with this path

- **Q: Can my spouse/family travel with me back to China if I'm approved**
- A: Yes, they need to be added onto the application for the invite letter. The invite letter will call out the names of family who are able to travel with you. Note: varying reports on success.
- A: Note, there appears to be varying success based on district applying at. While it could be based on the justification letter provided, will note feedback below. Based on info from June 16th :
 - o **Pudong**: Multiple people have been succesful with obtaining approval for spouse/kids
 - o **Changning**: Have denied approval for spouse on one application
 - o **Suzhou**: Success with bringing back family

- **Q: What if I am in China and my family is in USA. Can I apply for an invite letter for my family?**
- A: This appears to be noted as "family reunion" and follows a different set of rules. No information is known yet, but its assumed the process is the same. (To be updated). Unknown rates of success.

- **Q: Is my existing residence permit now cancelled or invalid when a new (M or F) visa is issued**
- A: Based on reports so far, the new visa (single entry) purpose is to allow you to get back into China. Existing residence permits were not cancelled

- **Q: Once issued an invite from Shanghai and completed the process, can I travel around China?**

A: Preliminary info. Initial feedback was that it is not possible to travel outside the province issuing the invite. More info needed to understand the rules.

- **Q: Upon arrival in Shanghai which district do I have to check in with**
- A: If you are arriving on a visa arranged by MFA, then you need to check-in with the district where you registered.