

Visa application by non-Chinese nationals

All participants who do not hold a passport issued by the (mainland) People's Republic of China will need a visa to enter the country. The following is a set of general guidelines for visa application by a Non-Chinese national. It does not cover residents of Hong Kong, Taiwan, or Macao. Please be reminded that the actual application process and the requirements may vary so that you should check with the nearest Chinese consulate (or embassy) for more accurate information. ("Chinese consulate in X" seems to be a good search phrase on the Internet.)

Where to apply?

- 1) The consulate visa office in your area
- 2) A designated visa service agent or
- 3) A (or any) travel agent

Some consulates allow you to do one of these three, others may offer more than one options. Again, check with the consulate near you.

When to apply and how long will it take?

You should apply about a month before the trip. In most of the countries the OC has checked, a week seems to be the norm of how long it takes to obtain a visa. However, you are strongly encouraged to do it early, preferably in the beginning of June to allow sufficient time for you to supply additional documentation should it be requested by the consulate. Besides, application through a travel agency typically takes longer than applying yourself in person.

What type of visa should I apply for?

Either the tourist visa (L) or the visiting visa (F). The L is easier—requiring one fewer document (See below) than the F. In the U.S., one can obtain an L simply by checking the "Tourism" box under "Purposes of the Visit" as one of the "purposes"—you can check as many boxes as applicable. (This means that you do not decide what visa you will get. The consulate does, based on the boxes you check under "Purposes of Your Visit.")

What documents are required?

For the L, you will need:

- 1) A passport valid six month from date of application
- 2) A completed visa application form, and

- 3) A 2X2 inch photo, white background, color or black-and-white to be attached to the visa form.

For the F, you will need, in addition to the above, a document from the agency/entity that invites you to visit it.

Currently, two visa forms are accepted: the old and the new. The old form is accepted till June 30, 2011. You might want to take advantage of the old form: It is two-page long as opposed to the four-page new form. Both forms are available from any Chinese consulate website.

The invitation document needed for the F can be a “notification to attend a meeting.” The email notification of your abstract that you received on February 15, 2011 should suffice. However, should you need a more “official-looking” document, send the OC a request email to iclc11@xisu.edn.cn.

How much does it cost?

It varies widely from country to country based on diplomatic reciprocity (Two given countries charging the same nominal amount of each other’s citizens for similar services). The highest seems to be \$140 (for U.S. citizens).

Currency

The RMB—the Chinese currency (CYN)—is the only currency used in China. Although credit cards are accepted in higher-end stores, China is still a “cash society” so that you ought to bring enough cash with you. You can convert your currency into the RMB in one or more of the following ways:

- Through your own bank
- Travelers’ checks
- Withdrawing from ATMs in China
- Exchanging in an airport

Exchanging through your own bank before you enter China is about the best alternative if your bank provides that service. Travelers’ checks are safe, with reasonable exchange rates and fees, but it is not always easy to locate an institution that cashes them in China. Withdrawing from an ATM is convenient, but the fee can be high. Converting in an airport is also convenient, but the exchange rate may be higher than what you would pay in a bank.

Check with your bank for possible affiliation with a Chinese bank that might benefit you. Bank of America, for instance, has business connections with the China Construction Bank in such a way that the clients of the Bank of America can use their debit card to withdraw cash from the ATMs of China Construction Bank (for up to \$300 a day) without any fee.

What to pack into your luggage

Light clothing. The weather in Xi'an in July can be hot and humid. The temperature ranges from 85 to 100 °F. So, light clothing is all you will need. You might also bring an umbrella for possible rains.

Toiletry. Although there are stores and shops that sell goods from all over the world in Xi'an, you may not have the time to locate the right store. So, bring enough toiletry for the trip. While in Xi'an, you are advised to take with you paper napkins and toilet paper, as these paper products are not available in all facilities.

Getting around

Taxi might be the major means of transportation for you to get around in Xi'an, as the other form of transportation—the public bus—may require more getting used to than you will have the time for.

The taxi service is very reasonable. The meter starts from 6 RMB (less than \$1) for the first one and half kilometers (KM) and runs at 1.5 RMB per KM thereafter. So, you could get from one end of the city to the other end for only a few USDs.

However, you should allow plenty of time to get a taxi, as the service is in high demand. The worst time is the peak hours—7:00 am-9:00am and 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm. You should also be mindful of the period between 3:00 and 4:00 pm: the drivers change shifts at 4:00 pm so that they begin to head for their stations from 3:30 pm.

The taxi service is quite well-regulated and the service is by and large professional: You hop on one and tell the driver where you are going. The driver starts the meter and will charge you accordingly.

At the Xianyang (Xi'an) airport or the railway station, you might also see occasional private vehicle drivers attempting to offer you service. The best way to make sure that you are taking the intended vehicle is to see to it that you are charged according to the meter.

Personal safety

Xi'an is a relatively safe place and the rate of violent crimes is low. If you come out of your hotel at night, you may see a woman walking by herself on the street without signs of worry. Still, we ask that you be mindful about the following.

Traffic safety: Like all major metropolitan cities in China, the Xi'an streets can be crowded and the road behavior of motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians may not be what you are used to. You might notice, for instance, that a vehicle passes you by within inches of your body, a bicycle is riding right into you, only to swerve aside at the last moment, and a fellow pedestrian is literally on your heels, with a tad too much closeness. Although these things are normal and the "offenders" have no intention to offend, we ask that you be vigilant on the street.

Pickpockets: There still are occasional small crimes such as pickpocketing, most notably in crowded places such as the train station or a public bus. So, if you do go to such places, keep your valuables as invisible to a stranger as possible.