



The first group of arriving travelers from overseas goes through immigration formalities at Shanghai Pudong International Airport. China lifted quarantine requirements as well as on-arrival PCR test for inbound travelers on January 8, ending almost three years of COVID-19 restrictions. — All photos by Jiang Xiaowei



# Shanghai greets first international arrivals, with no COVID restrictions

Travelers streamed into China by air, land and sea last Sunday, many eager for long-awaited reunions, as China opened borders that have been all but shut since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic nearly three years ago.

**Yang Jian and Lu Feiran**

**I**t's the first time in three years that Li Mingyu, a Chinese student studying in New Zealand, got to hug her father, who came all the way from Xuzhou of Jiangsu Province to pick her up at Shanghai Pudong International Airport.

The flight Li took, NZ289, a Boeing 787-9 that landed at Pudong at 6:31am, became the first international flight to Shanghai after China's relaxed COVID-19 measures for inbound travelers came into effect last Sunday.

"I wanted to buy a flower bouquet but it was too early, so I wrote a welcome sign on a piece of red paper to greet her," said Li's father.

Greeted by airport staff in normal uniforms, passengers from Auckland got off their plane and quickly passed immigration checkpoints.

Welcomed by long-missed family members or friends who came to pick them up, they left the airport terminal

buildings directly.

For the first time since April 2020, passengers from abroad no longer encounter quarantine staff in hazmat suits holding throat swabs on landing, or are transported to designated quarantine hotels.

Working in New Zealand, Zhang Meng from north China's Hebei Province said that she hadn't been back home for three years. On hearing that no central quarantine is needed for on-arrival passengers, she booked a flight home immediately.

"I felt so excited that I saved all my annual leave for the reunion with my family. And the entry procedure was very convenient as no on-arrival PCR test was required."

She did a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test before departure as required, and was wearing a mask throughout the journey. "It feels great that things are finally back to normal. It's easier — and will be cheaper — to book flights and I'll be able to see my families and

friends more regularly in the future."

Elsewhere, Melissa Hurst from New Zealand felt lucky as she and her family planned their trip to China long before the optimized measures were announced — in March.

They had been prepared for quarantines but breezed through with nearly all the restrictions dropped. Also they only waited for about two weeks for their visa, much faster than they expected.

"It's the first time we have returned to China after the pandemic broke out. We had to do the COVID test and waited one day (for the result) and nothing else."

As China downgraded the COVID-19 management from Category A to Category B, the limitations for international travel were abolished, bringing a dawn of hope for complete global economic recovery after the pandemic.

Inbound travelers are now only required to take a PCR test 48 hours before departure and can travel to China if the results are negative.