

SHANGHAI NOW

Friday, March 17, 2023

China resumes issuing all types of visas for foreigners

China once again started issuing a range of visas to foreigners from Wednesday in a major easing of travel restrictions in place since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The move marks the latest step towards reopening China to the outside world, as Beijing breaks with the strict COVID restriction.

In addition to new visas being reviewed and approved, those issued before March 28, 2020, that remain valid, once again allow entry to China, said a notice posted on Tuesday on a social media account affiliated with the foreign ministry's consular affairs bureau.

Similar notices appeared on the websites of several overseas Chinese missions, including its embassies in the United States and France.

The updated policy also allow for the resumption of visa-free travel for those arriving on cruise ships to Shanghai as well as for certain tourist groups from Hong Kong, Macau and countries within the ASEAN regional grouping, the notice said.

The move would "further facilitate the exchange of Chinese and foreign personnel," it added.

China received 65.7 million international visitors in 2019, according to data from the United Nations World Tourism Organization.

China began emerging from its strict COVID-19 containment strategy in late 2022. Beijing announced in late December that inbound travelers to the country would no longer need to quarantine from January 8, but kept in place visa restrictions on foreigners. At the



Travelers queue up to go through immigration formalities at the Pudong International Airport in Shanghai on Sunday. — IC

time, Beijing said it would "continue to adjust its visa policy for foreigners visiting China in a scientific and dynamic manner in accordance with ... the epidemic situation."

It also then resumed issuing Chinese passports for "tourism" or "overseas visits of friends."

With cases surging in China around the New Year, several countries — notably Japan and South Korea — reimposed restrictions on Chinese visitors.

The US in early January joined other countries in taking new measures after Beijing's decision to lift its COVID-19 policies. As cases waned in China, both sides subsequently eased those restrictions.

The US announced the lifting of COVID-19 test requirements for travelers from China in early March. Australia's health minister later said the country will drop the requirement for travelers arriving from China to test

for COVID-19 before departure from March 11.

South Korea also dropped a requirement for pre-departure COVID-19 test for travelers from China starting from the same day, in its latest step to ease border controls.

Meanwhile, Japan dropped a requirement that everyone take a test for the coronavirus upon arrival from China on March 1.

(Agencies)

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