

Friday, May 17, 2024

China welcomes foreign visitors with expanded visa-free policy for cruise travel

CHINA on Wednesday enforced a policy allowing visa-free entry of foreign tourist groups aboard cruise ships via all cruise ship ports along the country's coastline.

Tour groups each consisting of two foreigners or more, and organized or received by Chinese travel agencies, can enter China visa free on board cruise ships via the cruise ports in 13 Chinese cities, including Shanghai, Tianjin, Guangzhou and Sanya, according to the National Immigration Administration.

The tourists can stay for no longer than 15 days. While in China, they can visit coastal provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions as well as Beijing, an NIA statement noted.

The NIA also announced that seven cruise ports, namely Dalian, Lianyungang, Wenzhou, Zhoushan, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Beihai, have been designated as visa-free transit ports for nationals from 54 countries.

This move facilitates the transit and departure of foreign travelers from these ports via cruise ships under China's visa-free transit policy, the statement added.

To make cruise entry and



A cruise ship leaves the Shanghai Port International Cruise Terminal. — CFP

exit procedures more convenient, the NIA has introduced a range of measures focusing on facilitating clearance for foreign cruise passengers, crew landing, and cruise maintenance, among other services, according to Mao Xu, a senior NIA official.

The 15-day visa-free policy for international cruise tour groups comes after years of

successful trials.

The pilot trial of this policy began in Shanghai in October 2016, allowing foreign cruise travelers to explore Shanghai, Beijing, and other port cities, as well as their neighboring cities.

With more options in entry ports and expanded visit areas, foreign visitors will have a richer experience in China,

boosting the country's appeal to international tourists, said Zhu Jiali, an associate professor with Xiamen University.

With a coastline stretching 18,000 kilometers, China boasts steadily improving port infrastructure, abundant tourism resources, and rapid growth of the service industry, making it a major stop for international cruise liners.

Currently, China's inbound cruise tourism market is experiencing strong momentum. From February to April, over 14,000 tourists from at least 47 countries and regions visited China aboard cruise ships, according to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

Zhu highlighted the move's role in further bolstering the development of the cruise economy in coastal areas.

Data showed that since the inception of the pilot initiative, Shanghai has experienced an annual average growth of 10 percent in cruise tourist arrivals.

The expanded adoption of the policy will attract more foreign cruise ships to Chinese cruise ports, driving port development and domestic consumption, Zhu said.

Echoing Zhu's view, Fiona Ma from Singapore-based travel agency EU Holidays said the expanded policy is a huge opportunity for Singaporean outbound travel planners like her.

She is expecting more tourists from various countries to choose Singapore — a major hub for international cruise tours — as their starting point to explore China.

(Xinhua)

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