



# UK Visas & Immigration

## The UK Visa Service in China

### Did you know?

- **96% of Chinese customers** who apply for a visa get one<sup>i</sup>.
- The numbers of **UK visas issued to Chinese nationals continues to rise**. In 2013, UK Visas & Immigration (UKVI) issued almost 292,000 visas to Chinese visitors, just under 40% more than 2012<sup>ii</sup>.
- **Provisional figures from Visit Britain show 11% more Chinese** customers visiting the UK in 2013 than in 2012<sup>iii</sup>.
- **Average processing time** for a (non-settlement) visa in China was just over seven days in 2013 and we processed **98% within our 15 working day target**. We processed **Approved Destination Scheme (ADS)**<sup>iv</sup> visit visas in an average of just over five days.



## Delivering what our customers want

### *A quick and convenient application process....*

- We have **12 Visa Application Centres** across China, more than any other country. They are in Beijing, Chongqing, Chengdu, Fuzhou, Guangzhou, Hangzhou, Jinan, Nanjing, Shanghai, Shenyang and Shenzhen and Wuhan.
- We are investing in our network ahead of the summer peak and to accommodate for future growth in the market and will be **moving or expanding all 12 Visa Application Centres** in the coming months.
- Applicants can apply, pay and book a visa application centre appointment **online**.
- We employ additional short-term staff during the busy summer months to ensure that we meet increasing demand and continue to process visas within our service standards

### *Clear guidance and information...*

- **Guides on the visa application process are available in Chinese** for business visitors, independent travellers and ADS travellers.
- We provide **translated help-text in Chinese** on our online application forms, as well as a **Chinese language website** providing guidance on the application process and how to complete a visit visa application form.
- We provide a **telephone and email visa information enquiry service** in Mandarin, Cantonese and English, at the cost of a local call.

### *Added value services...*

- Optional **3-5 day priority visa service** for all tourists, business visitors, family visitors and skilled or temporary workers travelling to the UK is available in all of our visa application centres. In July 2013 alone, 11,000 customers used this service. From summer 2014 we will be offering a **24 hour visa service**.
- In 11 Visa Application Centres in China we offer a **Passport Pass Back** service for applicants who wish to retain their passport to travel or to apply for a visa to another country whilst their UK visa is being processed.
- We have introduced a **Prime Time service** in six of our Visa Application Centres, offering extending opening hours for those who need the convenience of an appointment outside of usual business hours.
- **Premium service lounges** are available in the **Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou** visa application centres, reducing waiting times for applicants and offering personalised assistance at every stage.
- We offer a **VIP Mobile Visa Service** for travellers who would like the convenience of us going directly to them to collect their biometric data.

### *Working with partners to develop our service...*

- We have a **dedicated team** based in the British Embassy in Beijing who support business, tourism and education sectors with their visa needs.

### *Tourism...*

- There are over **100 ADS agents** in China and we are expanding this further.
- For ADS travelers, there is a **shorter visa application form** and streamlined documentary requirements, including acceptance of photocopies.
- We have continued building **stronger partnerships** with travel agents and the travel sector through identifying the top 20 most important agents and developing a premium scheme with them.
- We continue to work closely with travel agents and tour operators to **remove duplication between the UK and Schengen visa application process**. In November we began testing a process allowing selected travel agents to make off-line applications for tour groups using the same form they use for a Schengen visa (plus a short two page addendum form).
- ADS agents now receive a **50% discount** on our 3-5 day service and Passport Pass Back.

### *Business...*

- We continue to expand membership of our '**Select**' **business scheme** to key businesses wanting to invest in the UK. We are arranging face to face meetings so we can ensure we meet the full range of their needs.
- Providing 'Select' members with a **single point of contact** and enabling them to provide reduced documentation for applications.
- Working with UKTI to identify high value businesses and individuals and create **bespoke visa solutions** for them, such as the Mobile Visa Service and long term visit visas.

### *Education...*

- We work closely with agents and the British council at road shows, training and tailored materials to provide students with accurate information about studying in the UK.
- Actively **identifying growing markets** for education such as Summer and Winter Schools and boarding schools and marketing bespoke visa solutions and activities towards these groups.
- We provide educational institutions with a **single point of contact** for visa and immigration queries.

## Some common misperceptions about Chinese tourism and visas

### **Most Chinese visas are refused.**

96% of those who apply get a visa.

### **It takes too long to get a UK visa.**

Our standard service is to provide a visa application centre appointment within five working days and to make a decision within 15 days. However, average processing time for a (non-settlement) visa in China was just over seven days in 2013. Our priority service processing time is three to five working days.

### **Chinese visitor numbers to the UK are declining.**

A record number of Chinese visitors came to the UK in 2012. Latest figures from Visit Britain show 11% more Chinese customers visited the UK in 2013 than 2012.<sup>v</sup>

### **France gets eight times more Chinese visitors than the UK.**

French figures claim that France received 1.4 million tourist arrivals<sup>vi</sup> from Chinese nationals in 2012. (Schengen visa figures for 2013 are yet to be published). Yet in 2012 France only issued 277,000<sup>vii</sup> Chinese visit visas, compared to the UK's 210,400. The entire Schengen area issued fewer than 1.2 million. The connection between the 1.4 million figure and any other source (not just visa data, but also Chinese official data on exits from China) is unclear.

### **The UK's visit visas are expensive.**

The cost of a UK visa is competitive. A UK visit visa costs £80 and is multiple entry and valid for six months. In China, a Schengen visit visa for France or Germany costs about £70<sup>viii</sup> for the standard single entry three month visa.

### **A UK visa application is too long and complicated.**

The UK application forms are straightforward and are completed online. Many of the questions require simple yes/ no answers and Chinese nationals now have the benefit of help-text in Chinese language to help them fill out the form. There is a shorter visa application form and streamlined documentary requirements for ADS travellers.

### **Having the application form in English deters Chinese applicants**

We provide translated help-text on our online application forms for all major visa categories. We also provide visa application guidance for customers in Chinese, available on our [website](#).

### **Having to provide biometric information (fingerscans and photographs) when they apply is unnecessary and puts the UK at a disadvantage.**

Biometric information is a key part of the UK's visa process and helps protect applicants and the UK public. The Schengen area is also due to introduce biometrics as part of its visa application process.

### **Frequent visitors have to apply each time they come to the UK, including resubmitting their biometrics.**

We offer multiple entry Long Term Visit visas, valid for up to 10 years, for frequent travellers to the UK, eliminating the need for them to keep re-applying for a visit visa.

### **Applicants have to provide lots of documents.**

We have already reduced the number of documents required to support applications and we are looking at how we can simplify it further in future, for example piloting a scheme with selected agents where we remove the requirement for translated documents.

### **The Home Office requires originals of all personal documents.**

We had feedback about the requirement to provide so many original documents. So we responded to this by now accepting copies of all key documents required to support an ADS application<sup>ix</sup>.

### **The Home Office keeps passports too long preventing travel or applications for another visa**

If applicants need their passport quickly they can opt for either our passport pass-back service, which allows them to keep their passport whilst their application is being processed, or our three to five day priority visa service.

*Last updated: March 2014.*

Source for all data is the Home Office published statistics, October to December 2013 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tables-for-immigration-statistics-october-to-december-2013> unless stated otherwise

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<sup>i</sup>Total visas issued against applications 01/01/13 – 31/12/13

<sup>ii</sup> Visitor visas issued 01/01/13 – 31/12/13 against 01/01/12 – 31/12/12

<sup>iii</sup> Percentage increases in nominal terms for 01/01/13-31/12/13. VisitBritain inbound visitor statistics, December 2013 <http://www.visitbritain.org/insightsandstatistics/inboundvisitorstatistics/latestdata/>

<sup>iv</sup> The Approved Destination Status (ADS) is an agreement between the British Government and the National Tourism Administration of China (CNTA) to facilitate the visit of Chinese tourist groups to the UK. The Approved Destination Scheme is unique to China and is the only route for group tourism from China to the UK. Approved Destination Scheme visas are valid for 30 days and require successful applicants to enter, leave and travel within the territory of the UK as a member of a tour group.

<sup>v</sup> . VisitBritain inbound visitor statistics, December 2013

<http://www.visitbritain.org/insightsandstatistics/inboundvisitorstatistics/latestdata/>

<sup>vi</sup> DGCIS: [http://www.dgcis.gouv.fr/files/files/directions\\_services/etudes-et-statistiques/etudes/tourisme/2013-07-4pages-28.pdf](http://www.dgcis.gouv.fr/files/files/directions_services/etudes-et-statistiques/etudes/tourisme/2013-07-4pages-28.pdf)

<sup>vii</sup> Schengen visa data: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/visa-policy/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/visa-policy/index_en.htm) (at bottom of page)

<sup>viii</sup> Correct using information and exchange rates at the time of writing in February 2014. In China a Schengen visa for Germany and France costs €60 plus a local €25 service fee.

<sup>ix</sup> See 6 above for definition of ADS