



Guideline on visa and residence permit application in China

Chinese ordinary visas are divided into the following 8 categories: **business (F visa)**, **work (Z visa)**, tourist and family visit (L visa), student (X visa), transit (G visa), crew (C visa), journalist (J visa) and permanent residence (D visa).

A business visa is issued to a foreign citizen who is invited to China for business, research, exchanges in the fields of science, technology, education, culture and sports, or attending various kinds of trade fairs or exhibitions. To legally work in China, the foreign citizen will need a Z-visa to enter the country and to begin the process of obtaining a residence permit.

However, getting an F-visa or a Z-visa, as well as a residence permit in China, can be a difficult and seemingly ever-changing procedure. This document provides you with updated information on application procedures for visas and residence permits in China. Furthermore this document clarifies the difference between an F Visa and Z Visa so that SMEs can distinguish which kind of visa their employees need in different cases.

I. Business visa (F visa)

A business visa is used by foreign citizens who come to China on business but are not employed by a company incorporated in China, for instance for the purpose of a business visit, research, exchanges in the fields of technology, or attending trade fairs or exhibitions.

In order to receive an F visa, the foreign citizen must be invited by a Chinese resident company (either domestic or foreign-invested). **Please note:** the Chinese embassies in some EU member states accept only official invitation letters issued by a duly authorised unit in China, normally the local commercial authorities in China (namely the Commission of Commerce, or Foreign Trade and Economic Relations Commission, etc.). In recent days the authorities have strengthened the requirements on the application of such invitation letters, for instance the inviting Chinese companies have to submit certain documents proving an existing business relationship with the invited foreign companies. In this context it is advisable to contact the embassy or consulate in your home country in advance to clarify the applicable requirement.

There are several variations of F visas: single-entry, double-entry or multiple-entry. As a rule, double-entry and multiple-entry visas are issued to foreign citizens who have travelled frequently to China with F visas. For instance, according to the requirement of the Beijing Commission of Commerce, invitation letters for a multiple-entry visa valid for six months can only be issued to foreign individuals who have obtained at least three single-entry visas in the previous half of the year; and invitation letters for a multiple-entry visa valid for one year can only be issued to foreign individuals having travelled to China for at least 6 times in the previous year, or having obtained two multiple-entry visas valid for six months.

The maximum period of an F visa for one visit is limited to between 30 and 90 days. In practice the authorities are normally unwilling to issue F visas for longer than one month. An F visa can be renewed on site. However there is always the risk that the authorities may refuse the application,

especially in the case whereby the foreigner has stayed in China for a relatively long period of time, since the foreigner may be deemed as working in China.

Summarised below, F visas are convenient for foreigners who will:

- Not be employed by a resident company in China;
- Spend a relatively short period in China;
- Be frequently flying in and out of China.

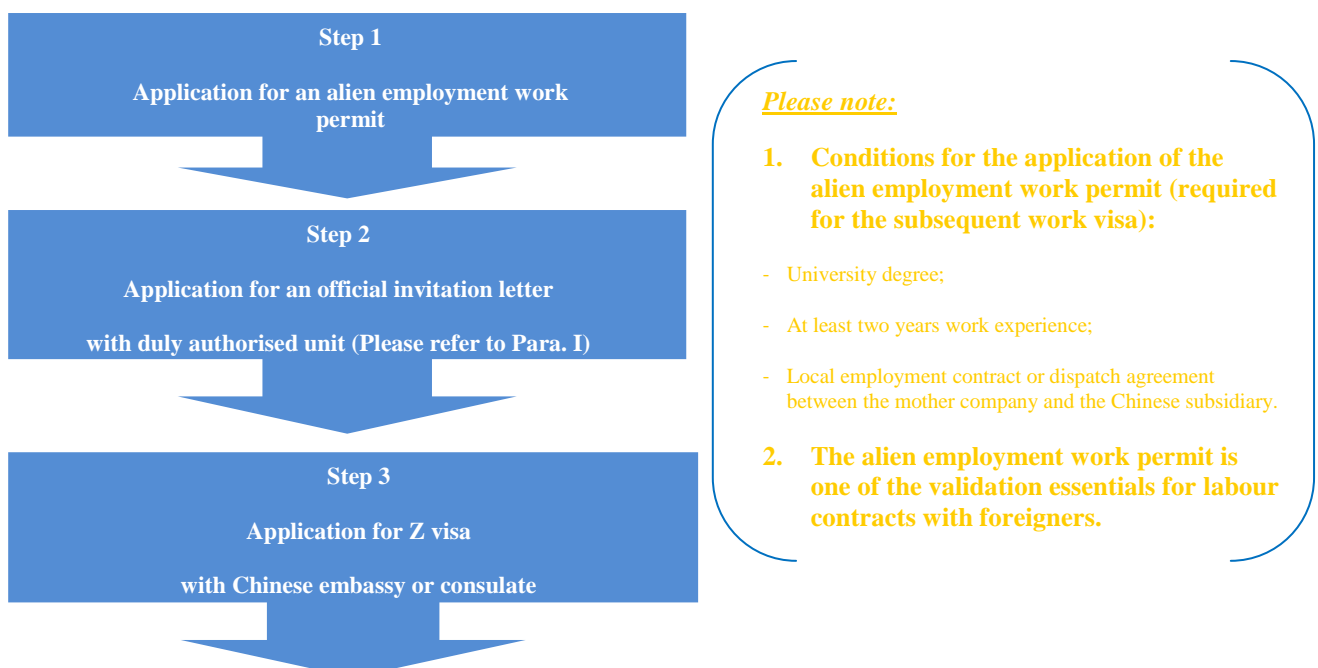
II. Work visa (Z visa) and residence permit

A Z visa is issued to foreigners employed by resident enterprises in China. According to Chinese law, a foreigner must hold a work visa if he or she will reside more than **three months** in China for business purposes.

Foreign employees possessing a Z visa have to subsequently apply for a residence permit at the local Public Security Bureau (PSB) within 30 days after entering China. The residence permit is normally valid for one year and allows foreigners an unlimited number of trips in and out of China during this period.

The dependents of foreign residents, normally spouse and children under 18 years of age, can also apply for a residence permit together with the residence permit holder.

The Z visa grants foreign employees more flexibility and reduces the need to have to extend the visa so frequently. On the other hand the application procedure is more complicated and more time-consuming compared to applying for an F visa. The following section details the normal application procedure for a work visa and residence permit. Please note that processes in different locations in China may be slightly different.



Travel to China

Step 4
Application for an alien employment certificate
with labour authority

Step 5
Application for residence permit
with local public security bureau



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The Centre's range of free services cover:

- Business Development – provision of market information, business and marketing advice
- Legal – legal information, 'ask the expert' initial consultations and practical manuals
- Standards – standards and conformity requirements when exporting to China
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Date: August, 2011



The EU SME Centre is a project funded by the European Union.