

What's the deal with China crew visas?

OPSGROUP Team

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The process for obtaining a crew visa for China can be very confusing. We definitely recommend using an agent to assist with this, and with the permits for your aircraft. G3Visas are a good one – they really know their stuff. But if you are determined to go it alone then here is what we know.

What's the deal?

Crew need a C-type visa. These are usually valid for 7 days.

Simple so far.

However, crew can actually enter China on different visas at certain locations, if pre-arranged. And if you rock up with the wrong sort, you are probably going to get a fine or be asked to go home again.

In fact, for **crew entering as a passenger on a commercial flight** (heading in to ferry out an aircraft for example) **you cannot enter on the Crew C-Type visa.** This means you are going to need a **business or a tourist visa.**

In 2013, they added in a **new immigration policy for transit passengers.** If you are from one of the 45 countries on their approved list, and you transit in via **ZSPD/Shanghai Pudong, ZSSS/Hongqiao or ZBBB/Beijing** to a third country, then there is a **72 hours without a visa regulation.** The US is included on this list and we are mentioning it because of the above point about crew entering (as a tourist) to ferry an aircraft out.

You can also obtain **multi-entry visas** depending on your operations, but you are going to need a schedule showing the multi-operation and some sort of official company letterhead proof of why you want multiple entries. We definitely recommend having an agent assist with this because the paperwork can be daunting.

What are the Visa types (that you need to know about)?

- **C** - The standard crew visa
- **L** - Tourist visa generally valid for single, double or multiple entry. US and Canadian citizens may be eligible for a 10 year L-Visa
- **M** - Business visa useful for folk visiting regularly or work reasons (and who aren't employed by a Chinese company)
- **Z** - Work visa (if employed by a Chinese company)
- **G** - Transit visa. It is basically the same price as an L visa so probably better to just go for that one if you need one



Good old entry stamps. Your passport validity (and space in it) is also important

The Bilateral Agreement

China and the US have a bilateral visa agreement and it can be a little tenuous.

Back in December 2020, the US put in new rules to try and “curtail” travel by member of the Chinese Communist Party and their immediate family members. It limited them to one travel visa a month. Prior to this a 10 year visa could be obtained.

All very political.

This didn't impact crew visas. However, we have heard recently that:

“Due to unilateral change of the visa application arrangements by the US side, a large number of crew visa applicants from Chinese airlines are unable to obtain US visas through the previous channel. In response, we are compelled to take necessary reciprocal countermeasures for crew visa applications from the US side.”

We have not been able to verify this, but it comes from G3 Visas who are a bit of an authority on Chinese visa getting. So get in touch with the agent you are using to help you organize your visas, and leave a little more time in case of delays. So far, there has been no further update on what the deal is at the moment.

Are there other options?

Some operators who are ferrying aircraft out report that they have flown in via Seoul or somewhere else close and not part of China (**so not Taiwan or Hong Kong**), and then simply hopped from one aircraft to the other and flown it out again. This circumvents the requirement for the visa since you are not really entering the country...

We are not recommending or advising against it. We will say that a fair few operators have reportedly done this, and it has worked fine. But you might want to think about **what will happen if you have to divert** and go into a Chinese airport because then you are going to visa-less and this could get messy.

Customs and Immigration

Don't have any mistakes on your Gen Dec. It will cause BIG delays.

Also, be aware that certain nationalities are going to be asked a few more questions. This includes crew.

Turkey

For reasons unknown, if you have been to Turkey and have a visa or entry stamp in your passport, then you are going to have to explain yourself. Actually, it might have something to do with the Turkic Uyghurs in Xinjiang / the Uyghurs diaspora living in Turkey...

Uyghurs

If a crew member is from the Xinjiang region, expect them to be taken aside for additional checks. Nothing to be alarmed about, but good to know in advance that it will happen.



Tensions between China and the predominantly Muslim Uyghurs community are high

Chinese Citizens working outside of China

They can be a little “funny” with Chinese citizens who work for a foreign airline. Again, it tends to lead to additional immigration “chats” so be prepared for a brief delay.

What about permits?

Getting a permit is **notoriously intimidating**. They require use of AFTN/SITA, have specific routings and are only valid for exact timings given. If you want to land then you need a sponsor letter written in Mandarin by the receiving party...

Basically, use an agent. The authorities are not always the most patient or helpful. You'll be paying around \$75 for a one way overfly, \$100 for a round trip landing and some extra depending on handling.

Mainland Ground Express are a helpful bunch and you can get hold of them on **+86 20 8111 7474** or via email at operations@groundexpress.aero

Useful links for more info

- The US government travel resources site has some handy info on general visa and travel stuff.
- G3visa is a really handy agent for helping obtain any type of visa.
- Universal Weather maintain some pretty up-to-date info on the situation as well.
- **The OPSGROUP member Forum and Slack channels.** Yeah, we're going to throw this one out to our members and say ask on there because the rules and procedures seem to change a lot and often the **best info comes from someone who has just been there.**

And finally...

If you have been to China recently, experienced issues (or good things) with the visa or permit getting process, or have any tips for other operators then please let us know! Your up to date experience would be very handy to pass on to everyone!