

THE PRACTICAL 2026 EDITION

CHINA ENTRY & LONG-STAY PLAYBOOK

Legal routes. Arrival. Daily life.

A source-linked guide for international visitors and future residents.

XINGJIA DIGITAL

Read this first

This book is a practical orientation tool, not legal, immigration, tax, employment or medical advice. Rules, eligibility lists, local processes and document requirements change. Verify your individual situation with the relevant Chinese embassy or consulate, Chinese Visa Application Service Center, National Immigration Administration, local exit-entry administration, employer, school or qualified professional.

Verification date

Policy-sensitive sections were reviewed against the official sources listed in the final section on 31 July 2026. Check those sources again immediately before acting.

How to use the playbook

First complete the Route Finder. Then read the chapter matching your purpose. Use the arrival chapters for execution and the worksheets as your travel file. A colored warning box means pause and verify; it is not a shortcut.

A note on language

Official translations can use terms differently across agencies and locations. Where a visa category is named, the purpose matters more than memorizing the letter. Keep your explanation truthful and consistent.

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WORKSHEETS Route finder, preparation, arrival, long-stay and renewal trackers

SOURCES Official links and verification notes

CHAPTER 01

Start with purpose, not visa names

The one-question rule

Before comparing visas, state your real purpose in one sentence: tourism, transit, business meetings, paid employment, study, or joining family. Chinese immigration categories are purpose-based. A document that permits entry for one purpose does not silently authorize another.

Three facts that decide your route

Your passport nationality, intended activity, and planned length of stay are the minimum facts. Add your arrival port, where you will travel inside China, and whether you will leave for a third country or region. Never choose a route only because it looks faster.

What this book can and cannot do

This guide turns official information into decisions and checklists. It cannot determine an individual outcome, replace the competent Chinese embassy or local exit-entry authority, or guarantee approval. Local implementation and requested documents can differ.

STOP AND VERIFY

If your actual activity changes, re-check the route before acting.

FIELD NOTES

CHAPTER 02

Visa-free entry, explained carefully

Visa-free is not rule-free

Eligible ordinary-passport holders may enter for approved short-stay purposes within the published limit. Eligibility, permitted purpose, stay length, and policy end dates can change. Verify the official list immediately before booking and again before departure.

Count the permitted stay

Do not confuse a policy period with your personal permitted stay. Record the date of entry and calculate your departure deadline conservatively. Keep proof of accommodation and onward travel available.

Activities outside the policy

A visa-free visit for tourism, exchange, family visits, business meetings, or transit does not authorize activities that require prior approval, such as employment, formal long-term study, or news reporting.

FIELD NOTES

CHAPTER 03

The 240-hour transit route

Transit means onward movement

The transit policy is designed for eligible travelers passing through China to a third country or region. A round trip that returns directly to the place of departure may not satisfy this structure. Keep a confirmed onward ticket and verify the eligible port and permitted travel area.

Geography matters

The route is tied to designated entry and exit ports and approved provincial-level areas. Do not assume that being admitted at one eligible port allows unrestricted travel throughout China.

A practical transit file

Carry passport, onward reservation, accommodation details, a simple itinerary, contact details, and evidence that the next destination will admit you. Airline staff may check eligibility before boarding.

FIELD NOTES

CHAPTER 04

Tourist, business and exchange visits

L, M and F are different tools

L is associated with tourism; M with commercial and trade activities; F with exchanges, visits, study tours and other non-commercial activities. An invitation or meeting schedule should match the actual purpose.

Business activity versus employment

Negotiating, attending a fair, visiting a supplier, and taking local employment are not the same. If a China-based entity will employ and pay you for work performed as an employee, examine the work route rather than trying to stretch a business visit.

Build a coherent application

Dates, invitation letters, company information, hotel bookings and transport should tell one consistent story. Inconsistencies create avoidable questions.

FIELD NOTES

CHAPTER 05

The legal work route

The normal sequence

A common pathway is employer sponsorship and a foreigner's work permit process, followed by the appropriate entry visa when required and then a work-type residence permit after arrival. The employer and location are material parts of the authorization.

Do not start early

Do not begin work merely because a contract is signed or an application is pending. Confirm that the required permit and residence status are effective. Paid trial periods and informal arrangements can still create risk.

Changes during employment

A change of employer, work location, passport, role or contract may trigger notification or a new application. Coordinate before the change, not after. Keep copies of cancellations and transfer documents.

STOP AND VERIFY

A tourist, business, family or student status is not a substitute for work authorization.

FIELD NOTES

CHAPTER 06

Study and student residence

X1 and the residence step

Long-term students commonly enter with the appropriate study documentation and then complete a study-type residence process after arrival. The school should provide the current document list and deadlines.

Internships and part-time work

Student status does not automatically authorize employment. Where an internship or part-time arrangement is permitted, it generally requires school consent and a specific remark or authorization from the exit-entry authority.

Protect your timeline

Track enrollment, tuition, insurance, medical examination when applicable, address registration, residence expiry and passport validity in one calendar.

STOP AND VERIFY

Do not accept paid work or an internship until the required authorization is confirmed.

FIELD NOTES

CHAPTER 07

Family reunion and private affairs

Choose by relationship and duration

Q categories generally concern family members of Chinese citizens or foreigners with permanent residence; S categories concern family members of foreigners staying in China for work, study or other qualifying purposes. Duration and relationship affect the route.

Evidence is the application

Marriage, birth and kinship documents may require legalization, apostille treatment where applicable, translation, or local verification. Follow the mission-specific checklist rather than assuming one universal format.

Residence is not employment

A family-based residence status does not by itself settle the right to work. Examine employment authorization separately before accepting paid work.

STOP AND VERIFY

Family residence and employment permission are separate questions.

FIELD NOTES
