

New 10-Year Chinese Visas Reflect Expanding Opportunities for Canada

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A reciprocal agreement between China and Canada on long-term multiple entry visas of up to 10 years took effect on March 9. This is a welcome change for Canadians who in the past had to deal with a cumbersome and lengthy visa application process for visits to China.

The new 10-year visas are another sign of the continued strengthening of the two countries' relationship. The new visas are valid for up to 10 years subject to the visa holder's passport expiration date and allows for stays of up to 180 days per year in the visiting country.

Canadian proponents of the new 10-year visas tout that applicants will benefit from reduced costs, red tape, and time spent on visa applications. They will also benefit Canadian businesses sending employees to China as well as the flow of tourists to the country. Chinese-born Canadians, numbering 1.5 million, and Chinese foreign students, numbering 100,000, will also benefit from greater mobility between their homeland and Canada.

Prior to the new visa, Canadians visiting China had to apply for one-year single- or multiple-entry visas. The process was often lengthy and cumbersome, especially for those living in cities where there was no Chinese consulate.

Since 2013, the Chinese government has also granted visa-free entry to Canadians upon landing for stays of up to 72 hours in the main Chinese travel hubs. Some of the requirements include not leaving the province or city of entry and providing evidence of a departure flight from the same Chinese city to a destination in a third country (a country other than the country of origin or China). For example, the 72-hour visa exemption couldn't apply to a short stay in China for a passenger coming from and returning to Canada.

All told, the new 10-year multiple-entry visa and the 72-hour visa-free entry are testaments to the continued growth in personal and business connections between the two countries. The

easier flow of people in conjunction with the ongoing negotiation of trade agreements will continue to reduce the number of barriers between the two countries.

Trade agreements between both countries are also facilitating the flow of investment between Canada and China. On October 1, 2014, the Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement between Canada and China came into force, establishing investment rules between the two countries. Key aspects of the agreement include non-discriminatory government treatment for investments made by Canadian investors in China and vice versa; a defined dispute resolution mechanism; and protection measures for damages suffered by investors in each respective market. Government officials in both countries tout the agreement as providing certainty and predictability for investors in each country.

Negotiations also continue on the 12-member Trans-Pacific Partnership that could eventually include China. And as the shift towards Asian economies continues to grow, think-tanks and businesses are asking for a bilateral free-trade agreement between Canada and China in order to remain competitive with our peers. Australia recently concluded negotiations with China on a free-trade agreement that the countries are now preparing to sign.

The visa reforms and trade agreements reflect a much more visible shift in focus by policy-makers. The federal government recently opened additional trade offices in China, bringing the total number to 15 with 100 trade commissioners. Air traffic is also increasing with additional flights and a long-awaited new flight between Montreal and Beijing announced for the first half of 2015.

All of these changes demonstrate the ongoing shift in focus by policy-makers and the growing opportunities for Canadians who expand their networks to China.