



Singapore Immigration Newsletter

October 2008

A publication by PwC International Assignment Services

Welcome to our latest edition of the Immigration Newsletter brought to you quarterly by the PwC International Assignment Services' specialist Global Visa Services team in the Asia Pacific region. In this edition, we look at a number of initiatives announced in Singapore to improve security and enhance the efficiency of its application processes, some relief for travellers to China following the Olympics, the UK's points based system and other updates from the US and Taiwan.

SINGAPORE

Long Term Pass Card

The Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) and Ministry of Manpower (MoM) jointly announced that a new Long Term Pass (LTP) card will be issued to foreigners holding an Employment Pass, Dependant's Pass, Long Term Visit pass or Student's Pass. Our Immigration Alert issued in July 2008, provided an overview of this initiative. In summary, its key features are:

- It will replace the current dual system of a stamp endorsement in travel documents and paper-laminated Green FIN cards.
- Biometric features including photograph and fingerprint of all cardholders aged 15 and above, to reduce forgery or fraudulent use of passes.
- The card is intended to facilitate expedited and automated immigration clearance at major checkpoints in Singapore through faster verification of personal particulars.

The LTP card will be introduced in phases, commencing with the ICA-issued Long Term Visit Passes and Student's Passes later in 2008. The MoM plans to open a new Employment Pass Services Centre in the second quarter of 2009 to register and issue LTP cards for relevant MoM passes. Further details relating to the issuance of the LTP card are expected to be released by the authorities in the next few months.

Electronic Issuance of S Pass

An employer can now submit a request for the electronic issuance of a notification letter which enables an individual to commence employment pending collection of his or her S Pass. Previously, attendance at the MoM counter to facilitate the pass collection process was required on three separate occasions.

The launch of this new e-Service will significantly help to streamline the process. Following receipt of the In-Principle Approval letter, a medical examination must be completed - the results of which are entered online, and an e-notification letter is then issued. Personal attendance at the Work Pass Services Centre is then only required once for the collection of the S Pass.

Electronic Appointment System and e-Visa

The ICA has expanded its e-Appointment facility, enabling individuals to pre-book appointment times, as part of an initiative to significantly reduce the waiting time on arrival to the ICA building. Appointments for services including the collection of Identity Cards and passports for Singapore Citizens, Student's Pass and Long Term Visit Pass for foreigners, and the completion of Singapore Permanent Residence formalities can now be booked in advance online. The ICA intends to further expand this service later this year.

The e-Visa is a new visa facilitative measure, which enables eligible foreign nationals or appointed third parties to print the approved entry visa electronically without making a trip to the ICA to physically collect the visa.

CHINA

Post Olympics Immigration Measures

Following the Beijing Olympic Games, the immigration authorities in China have announced certain measures which will provide some relief for travellers to China.

- The visa-free privilege for Singaporean citizens has been reinstated with effect from 19 September 2008.
- The requirement to provide proof of a confirmed round-trip air ticket and hotel confirmations corresponding to the visit locations for all visa applications has been lifted with effect from 19 September 2008.

- Applicants from the USA who apply for a tourist visa are required to provide an original employment verification letter from the applicant's employer. In addition, the applicant's passport must have a validity period of a minimum of one year from the date of application.

It is also anticipated that the visa restrictions on foreigners traveling to China via Hong Kong may be lifted shortly, however, this has yet to be confirmed.

UK

Launch of the Points Based System

The next phase of the Points Based System will come into effect in November 2008, and represents the largest shake up of immigration rules in the UK for 30 years.

Under the scheme, employers are required to sponsor non-EU workers. To be a sponsor, the employer must first register and make an application for a Sponsorship Licence to the UK Border Agency. Employers that have not obtained a sponsorship licence before the scheme goes live in November may face difficulties in recruiting talent from outside the EU and will not be able to extend existing work permits for such individuals.

In order to maintain a sponsorship licence, in addition to a number of reporting obligations, employers will need to comply with illegal working requirements which, since February 2008, are now more stringent.

USA

Pre Travel Authorisation

A new online application system has been established as part of the US Visa Waiver Program (VWP). The Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (ESTA)

will be used to determine the eligibility of visitors to the USA from the 27 countries participating in the VWP, by requiring the individual to apply for advance authorisation prior to travel.

The ESTA can be applied for at any time, even where the individual has no specific travel plans in place, but no less than 72 hours prior to intended departure. Following submission of this application, the traveller should receive a status notification within moments. Once approved, the ESTA is valid for multiple entries for two years, or until the expiry of the travel document, whichever is earlier. As future visits are planned, or if travel details change after authorisation, these can be updated online.

Available from 1st August 2008, the ESTA will be mandatory for all visa waiver eligible travellers from 12th January 2009.

TAIWAN

Employment Visitor Visa

The Taiwanese Bureau of Consulate Affairs has eased the conditions relating to when a foreigner may be present in Taiwan while their work permit application is in progress.

If the term of a foreign employee's assignment is six months or more, the individual can apply for a 30-day employment visitor visa at a Taiwan Consulate abroad while their work permit application is being processed. Previously, the individual may have had to remain abroad while the work permit was in progress, or enter Taiwan with an alternative visa which could have resulted in their having to depart and return to Taiwan prior to completion of formalities. Technically, the recent measures could enable the foreign employee to enter Taiwan two to three weeks earlier, while the work permit is being processed.

How PwC's Global Visa Services can help you

The Global Visa Services (GVS) team of PwC's International Assignment Services is a dedicated team specialising in the provision of immigration advice and assistance with visa requirements and applications for employees. Our global network of approximately 300 immigration specialists based in over 95 countries globally forms one of the largest immigration service providers of its kind in the world. Please visit our website at www.pwcias.com or contact us for further information and advice.

Caroline Wicks

+65 6236 4089

caroline.wicks@sg.pwc.com

Ruth Shaw

+65 6236 3867

ruth.r.shaw@sg.pwc.com

© 2008 PricewaterhouseCoopers International Assignment Services (Singapore) Pte Ltd. All rights reserved.

Disclaimer: This publication is intended to provide only general information and it does not amount to professional, legal or tax advice. Readers should therefore not rely on the contents of this publication as a basis of specific action, without seeking professional advice.

"PricewaterhouseCoopers" refers to the network of member firms of PricewaterhouseCoopers International Limited, each of which is a separate and independent legal entity.

Co. Reg. No.: 199903085C