

The New Swiss Schengen Visa

SwissCham Breakfast Seminar, Hilton Hotel, Beijing (9 December 2008)

On 15 December 2008, Switzerland issued the first Schengen visa. The new Swiss Schengen visa will facilitate travel in Europe for Chinese passport holders as it will not only allow travel in Switzerland but also in the whole Schengen area.

Conversely, Chinese passport holders with a valid Schengen visa issued by other Schengen states will also be able to enter Switzerland without an additional Swiss visa.

As a non-European Union (EU) member situated in the heart of Europe and completely surrounded by Schengen member-states, Switzerland's integration into the Schengen area represents a natural development and a further step in its cooperation with the EU.

On this occasion, the Swiss Chamber of Commerce in Beijing organized a breakfast seminar on the new Swiss Schengen visa at the Hilton Hotel on 9 December 2008.

Members and non-members of the Chamber from diverse Swiss, Chinese and foreign companies came to listen to the Head of the Visa Section from the Embassy of Switzerland in Beijing, Mr. Hervé Findeisen.

Among the 21 companies and organizations represented at the seminar, Nestlé, Credit Suisse, Zurich Kantonal Bank, Huawei Technologies, the Swiss Business Hub and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Liaison Office in China to name but a few represented Swiss, Chinese and international companies as well as organizations.

The keynote speaker, Hervé Findeisen, gave a thorough presentation on the Schengen visa procedures and regulations. Mr. Findeisen is the Head of the Visa Section from the Embassy of Switzerland in Beijing since July 2008. The Beijing Visa Section is the second biggest abroad. It occupies 14 staff who issue as much as 90'000 visas per year.

The Embassy and its Consulates in Shanghai and Guangzhou issue around 120'000 visas every year. Although Switzerland is not a member of the EU, it is member of the Schengen Agreement. In contrast, Ireland and the U.K. are EU members but do not issue any Schengen visas.

Main Updates

New application form

Downloadable on the Chamber's website:

<http://www.swisscham.org/bei/services/swissvisa.php>

Schengen visa sticker

There will be a photo on the new visa

General requirements

Strict photo quality regulations as required under Schengen

Two photos per person

Travel health insurance compulsory (with minimum coverage of 30'000 Euros or 50'000 CHF)

Visa fees

All visa fees are at the same rate of 60 Euros

Period of stay and validity of the visa

The validity of the visa is indicated with the exact date of allowed entry and of obligatory leave

Schengen visa categories

- Airport transit visa (A)
- Transit visa (B)
- Short stay travel visa (C)
- Longer stay visa (D)
- Residence and travel visa (D+C)
- Limited territory visa (LTV)

Territorial responsibility

Where to apply for the visa? The traveler must apply at the consulate of his country of main destination. The "main destination" is defined by weighing the following factors in the following order of relevance:

- the main purpose of journey
- the longest length of stay
- the state of entry in the Schengen Area

The visa authorities retain full discretion in determining the main destination. In case of doubt, the consulates of the countries concerned will consult each other.

Mr. Findeisen gave three examples of travels in Europe:

- 1) Business and tourism: Switzerland for business; France and Italy for tourism
- 2) Tourism: 3 days in Switzerland; 2 days in France and 2 days in Italy
- 3) Tourism: 2 days in Switzerland; 2 days in France and 2 days in Italy

For example 1) the main destination is Switzerland because the purpose of the travel is business.

For example 2) it will also be Switzerland because the length of the stay is longer than for the two other countries.

For example 3) as the scheduled time is of two days for all three countries, the main destination will be the country where one lands first.

Application Process

The normal time to get one visa is five days, but it is possible to go through the "fast track" which takes only 48 hours. Swiss companies can apply for being listed as eligible for the fast track procedure, so that their employees can receive their visa faster.

Questions and Answers

Q: *We are doing business with many high ranked Chinese people in diverse companies. We have gone several times through a very unpleasant experience: after having applied for the Schengen visa, bought the plane ticket for the Chinese visitors and booked the hotel, out of ten applications three were refused by the Embassy at the last minute. This is not only a loss of face for us, but also a waste of money and it gives a bad image of Switzerland. What is your view on it?*

A: I totally agree on the fact that it is unpleasant. We are working on it; we want to develop a good relationship with people doing business with Switzerland. But you have to know that in such cases you shouldn't hesitate to directly contact the Embassy and discuss the problem.

Q: *When going to Switzerland from China, there are no direct flights. Is it possible in that case to stay a few days on a holiday in the first country we land in and then go to Switzerland for business, even if the visa has been issued from Switzerland?*

A: Yes, no problem.

Q: *If a Chinese has had his or her passport issued in the south of China for example, but that this person lives now in Beijing and works in Beijing, is it necessary to apply for a Schengen visa in southern China or can it be done in Beijing?*

A: As long as you can prove that you live and work in Beijing, then it can be issued in Beijing. You should show your residence permit when applying.

Q: *If I want to go to Switzerland and then to the U.K., as the U.K. don't issue any Schengen visas, what should I do?*

A: If your first destination is Switzerland you apply for one visa for Switzerland, and then for another one for the U.K.

Q: *If a Chinese person has a visa of 90 days to do business in Switzerland and then finds another business opportunity in Germany, is it possible for that person to go to Germany without applying for a new visa?*

A: If the person has worked for example one month and wants to go to Germany for less than two months, then it is possible. But if the person wants to work for longer, then the person needs to apply for a new Schengen visa but this time in Germany.

Q: *Is it possible to send someone to do the Schengen visa on behalf of someone else?*

A: Normally the applicant has to come in person to the visa section to apply for a visa. We only make exceptions for people in the diplomatic field, people working in international organizations and employees from Swiss companies listed for the Fast Track Procedure.

Q: *If a Chinese person has had his visa application refused, are there any chances to have it accepted another time?*

A: First, when an application is refused, the visa section will put a stamp on it. But this only means that the application has been refused. The visa section that puts the stamp has to inform the visa sections of other countries about the reasons of the refusal. If the purposes are not coherent with the regulations, then we can re-examine the file as a normal file.

Q: *Once the Schengen visa takes effect, what impact do you think this will have on the development of the Swiss tourism?*

A: I think there will be more and more Chinese people coming to Switzerland and that the people who used to travel to the European countries including Switzerland will increasingly spend their whole vacation in our country.

Q: *Will there be any cooperation between the European travel agencies and the Swiss travel agencies in the future?*

A: Switzerland will accept all the travel agencies registered on the Chinese National Tourism List.

Q: *When applying for a language exchange or visiting a relative, what changes will there be once the Schengen visa takes effect?*

A: If you want to stay longer than 90 days in Switzerland the procedures are the same than before, otherwise you can apply for a Schengen visa.

- Q:** *If one wants to apply for a visa for medical care, what is the procedure to follow?*
- A:** Apart from filling the registration form, you also have to prove that you have already paid the fees for the medical care, and that you have an invitation letter from the hospital where you want stay.

Comprehensive information on the Schengen visa is available on the **Schengen Area page** of the Chamber's website:

http://www.swisscham.org/bei/services/swissvisa/schengen_agreement.php

The Chamber also offers a **Swiss Visa Application Support Service**:

<http://www.swisscham.org/bei/services/swissvisa.php>

The **Visa Section of the Embassy of Switzerland** in Beijing can be reached at:

Tel.	+86 10 8532 8755
Fax	+86 10 6532 6210
E-mail	bei.visa@eda.admin.ch

Disclaimer

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