



Media release

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Q and A on Swiss Visa Acceptance Centers, visa policies

The Embassy of Switzerland in China is opening nine new Visa Acceptance Centers (VACs) from June 15 to July 15, with the aim to expand its visa services and facilitate visa application for Switzerland-bound travelers and businessmen. With the opening of the new VACs, Chinese travelers to Switzerland can apply visas in 15 Chinese cities and enjoy faster and more convenient services.

Upon the opening of the VACs, Mr. Wyss Rudolf, Counsellor and Head of Operations at the Swiss Embassy in Beijing, talks about the new VACs, enhanced visa application services and future initiatives in further speeding up visa application process.

Q: The nine new Visa Acceptance Centers (VACs) are the second group of visa centers that are being opened in China this year following the launch of three VACs in January. What are the nine cities and when will these new VACs be opened?

Mr. Wyss: The nine cities in which we are going to open the new Visa Acceptance Centers are: Xi'an, Hangzhou, Nanjing, Shenzhen, Kunming, Changsha, Fuzhou, Jinan and Chongqing. The opening will take place gradually over this summer and is scheduled as follows: June 15th: Xi'an, Hangzhou; June 30th: Nanjing, Shenzhen, Kunming, Changsha; and July 15th: Fuzhou, Jinan and Chongqing.

In January this year, we already opened three new visa centers in Chengdu, Wuhan and Shenyang. By now, with the existing VACs in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, there are 15 VACs across China in addition to the visa sections at the Embassy in Beijing and Consulates General in Shanghai, Guangzhou and Hong Kong.

Q: Why does the Swiss Embassy open more and more visa acceptance centers?

Mr. Wyss: There has been a big increase in visa application to Switzerland in the past years, especially for tourist visa. In 2015, overnight stays from Chinese tourists in Switzerland came to a record number of over 1.6 million and China now is the fourth source of tourists to

Switzerland and the first from Asia. This is a very positive trend that the Embassy wants to encourage.

We have been dedicated to providing fast and convenient visa services to Chinese tourists and businessmen. With these new visa centers, we are aiming to offer faster, smoother and more convenient services to the increasing number of Chinese travelers to Switzerland. We would like Switzerland, which is already one of the first choices as tourist destination among many Chinese individual tourists and families, to be more accessible and closer to Chinese people.

Q: How do the new VACs work? What are the specific and enhanced services the new VACs will provide?

Mr. Wyss: The new VACs are managed by the Embassy's commercial partner TLScontact, which provides mostly administrative services on behalf of the Embassy. The VACs are authorized by the Swiss Embassy to accept applications for short stay individual visa (business, tourism, ADS Groups, family friends visit, medical treatment, culture and sport), and provide administrative support services, such as recording biometric data, the collection of visa applications and return of passports in sealed decision envelopes to applicants.

They have no role or influence over the outcome of an application. The decision to issue or refuse a visa or request additional documents is made solely by Swiss competent migration authorities, in accordance with Switzerland's immigration visa rules and guidelines.

The procedure to apply for a visa to Switzerland through a VAC is very simple. Applicants first make online appointments through TLScontact's website. They then will receive an appointment at the centers to submit required documents. Since January, 2015, on the occasion of the 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and China, the average processing time by the Embassy for short stay individual visa applications of Chinese nationals has been shortened to 48 hours as a further contribution to Sino-Swiss people to people relations.

Q: The Embassy introduced the Visa Information System (VIS) in October, 2015 and all applicants are required to provide their biometric data (10 fingerprints and a digital photograph) when applying for a Schengen visa. What changes are there with the introduction of the Schengen Visa with biometric data?

Mr. Wyss: The VIS was introduced in October last year and has been strictly implemented since then. All applicants applying for a visa to Switzerland and other Schengen Member States are required of a scan of their fingerprints. Exemptions are only applied to minors under the age of 12 years or for people who cannot physically provide finger scans.

The VIS is introduced to facilitate visa application procedures and checks at external border of the European Union, as well as enhance security. It offers better protection to visa applicants against identity theft and prevent false identifications, which in certain cases lead to a refusal of a visa or entry to a person who is entitled to enter.

The scanning of 10 fingerprints is a simple and discreet procedure which should take no more than five minutes and can be done at the VACs. The biometric data is stored in the VIS database for five years. Therefore, frequent travelers only need to complete the procedure once within this period for all Schengen countries as the fingerprints will be copied from the previous application file in the VIS.

Q: What are the future initiatives the Embassy will launch to further facilitate visa application process?

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Mr. Wyss: In addition to the new VACs, we have just started to offer the mobile biometry, an on-demand mobile biometrics service which applicants can order and have their biometric data taken at certain locations instead of visiting the VACs. This works especially for Approved Destination Status (ADS) groups going to Switzerland. We will continue to work together with TLS to improve our services even further.

For specific issues relate to visa applications, we advise you to visit the official website of the [Swiss Embassy](#), or [TLScontact](#), or call +8610 8532 8888 or send emails to: bei.visa@eda.admin.ch.

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