China visa & entry: your checklist

Everything to check, prepare and do, from booking to leaving on time.



1 Before you book

- [ ] **Check which rule your passport gets: 30 days visa-free, the 240-hour transit, or a visa.** CHECK BEFORE YOU GO
  UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and 25 EU states get 30 days; the US, Czechia and Lithuania don't.
- [ ] **On the 30-day list? Check the end date before you book.** CHECK BEFORE YOU GO
  For most countries it runs until 31 Dec 2026. No 2027 extension was announced when we checked.
- [ ] **Using the transit? Book a ticket out to a different country or region, inside 10 days.** CHECK BEFORE YOU GO
  London → Shanghai → Hong Kong works; London → Shanghai → London doesn't. Separate tickets are fine.
- [ ] **Plan your route inside the permitted areas.**
  Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Beijing and others are covered whole; Sichuan and Yunnan only in named cities.
- [ ] **Need a visa? Start on your country's Chinese embassy website.**
  Online form first, then hand in your passport (6+ months valid, 2 blank pages). Give yourself a few weeks.

2 Before you fly

- [ ] **Fill in the free arrival card, on official channels only.** CHECK BEFORE YOU GO
  s.nia.gov.cn, the NIA 12367 app, or the WeChat or Alipay mini-programs. Sites that ask for a fee are fakes.
- [ ] **Save your hotel's full address on your phone.**
  The arrival card asks for your real address, and you'll need it at the desk and for the taxi.
- [ ] **Have your onward ticket on your phone, or better, printed.**
  On the transit rule, the officer at the desk makes the final decision.

3 At the airport

- [ ] **Immigration: show your passport and visa, or say you're on the transit and show your ticket out.**
  Ages 14–70 give fingerprints; a photo may be taken. It's routine.
- [ ] **Customs: carrying lots of cash? Use the red channel and declare it.**
  The limits (page 2) apply when you leave too. Most visitors pay by phone and use the green channel.

4 During your stay

- [ ] **Carry your passport, every day.**
  Foreigners aged 16+ are expected to have it on them, not in the room.
- [ ] **Make sure your stay is registered, on day one.**
  Hotels do it at check-in. With friends, you or your host register within 24 hours, online in some provinces.
- [ ] **Leave on time, with a day of margin.**
  Count from 00:00 the day after you land. Extending a visa: ask 7+ days before expiry. Transit: emergencies only.

The numbers that matter

30 days, no visa CHECK BEFORE YOU GO

30 days

50 countries, ordinary passports. Tourism, business, visiting friends or family, transit; not work, study or journalism. Counted from 00:00 the day after entry. Until 31 Dec 2026 for most countries (Russia: 31 Dec 2027; Brunei: no end date).

NIA list (as of 17 Feb 2026) · MFA (15 Feb 2026) · Shanghai gov (26 Aug 2026)

240-hour transit CHECK BEFORE YOU GO

10 days

57 countries, incl. the US, UK, Canada, Australia and all EU. Onward ticket to a third country or region (Hong Kong counts). 65 ports in 24 provinces. Passport valid 3+ months. Leave from any eligible port.

NIA (20 Aug 2026) · Beijing gov FAQ · Shanghai gov FAQ

Cash at customs

RMB 20,000 · US$5,000

At or above RMB 20,000 in cash, or foreign cash worth US$5,000, go through the red channel and declare it. Same on departure; 20,000 yuan is the RMB limit in or out.

China Customs guide (via Hunan gov, 26 Dec 2024) · Global Affairs Canada

Registering & overstaying

24 hours

Non-hotel stays must be registered within 24 hours (a warning or a fine up to RMB 2,000 if not). Overstaying: a warning, fines of RMB 500 a day (up to 10,000) or 5–15 days' detention.

Exit and Entry Administration Law Art. 39, 76, 78 · NIA (20 Mar 2026)

Sources (checked 13 Nov 2026)

1. **30-day list:** NIA en.nia.gov.cn/n147418/n147463/c183390/content.html
2. **End dates:** Shanghai gov english.shanghai.gov.cn/en-Individuals-ImmigrationandVisas-Visa-freepolicies/20260709/469e8c5656534926a04b31a1084351f0.html · MFA mfa.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/202602/t20260215_11860467.html · Chinese Consulate-General Adelaide adelaide.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/gg_1_1/202511/t20251104_11746678.htm
3. **240-hour transit:** NIA en.nia.gov.cn/n147418/n147463/c183412/content.html · Beijing gov english.beijing.gov.cn/contactus/faqs/list/202502/t20250226_4019778.html · Shanghai gov english.shanghai.gov.cn/en-Visafreetransit/index.html and english.shanghai.gov.cn/en-Visa2/20251020/b6d40e72778f4ea1a83a20f4664341d4.html
4. **Applying for a visa:** Chinese Embassy in the US us.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/lsfw/zj/notice/202509/t20250920_11712385.htm · online form consular.mfa.gov.cn/VISA/
5. **Arrival card:** NIA en.nia.gov.cn/n147418/n147463/c191530/content.html · official form s.nia.gov.cn/ArrivalCardFillingPC/
6. **Fingerprints, documents:** NIA "Welcome to China" nia.gov.cn/2022en/files/basic-html/page10.html
7. **Carrying your passport, registration, overstay:** Exit and Entry Administration Law us.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zytz/201307/t20130702_4899883.htm · NIA online registration en.nia.gov.cn/n147413/c196926/content.html
8. **Customs:** enghunan.gov.cn/hneng/Services/EntryExit/IAQ/202412/t20241226_33537676.html
9. **Cross-checks:** UK FCDO gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/china/entry-requirements · Global Affairs Canada travel.gc.ca/destinations/china

Mobile data in China
Our First Time Asia eSIM store: **shops.yonosim.com/firsttimeasia**
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Watch the video: F1 Visa & entry, **youtu.be/Ym0a8zWf5uA** · **@firsttimeasia**

Rules change. We checked everything on 13 Nov 2026; confirm the items marked "check before you go" on the official pages. Free to share, not for resale.



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