

# The Current Environment for Business Travel to China: FAQs and Best Practices

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- *At the moment, travel authorizations are only being considered for the most senior executives and certain technical experts.*
- *Health authorization may be denied just hours before a traveler is due to board a flight.*
- *Providing supplemental documents and choosing a departure airport wisely can boost an executive's chance for successful travel to China.*

As new and more contagious strains of COVID-19 appear throughout the world, business executives are finding it more difficult to secure authorization for travel to China. Travel to China currently requires an executive to receive an invitation from the local foreign affairs office (“PU letter”) and a visa (unless the traveler already has a residency permit), as well as a green Health Declaration Code (HDC) from the Chinese embassy or consulate. But since January, the Chinese government has stopped issuing PU letters, a decision USCBC understands will be reevaluated this month. There have also been reports of executives receiving a red HDC at the last minute, preventing them from boarding their flight. The below frequently asked questions and answers detail USCBC’s most up-to-date information and best practices.

## **Is it possible to get a business visa right now?**

Yes. USCBC understands the Chinese embassy was issuing visas as recently as late January. However, the seniority of the executive applying for a visa matters. Conversations with the embassy suggest that only the most senior executives—such as China head or global executive—whose presence in China is essential to the company’s success and provides consequential contributions to the local or national economy are likely to have their travel approved. Technical staff urgently needed for time-sensitive projects might also have a chance in a narrow range of circumstances.

## **What are the health requirements to travel to China?**

Whether traveling on a business visa or returning home to China, all travelers must possess a green HDC. A green code indicates the traveler is cleared to board their flight, while a red code prevents the traveler from boarding the flight. The color of the code is determined by the Chinese embassy or consulate after the traveler submits documentation of a negative COVID-19 nucleic

acid test conducted [within 48 hours](#) of the planned flight. In recent weeks, submitting negative test results has not necessarily guaranteed that the traveler will receive a green HDC.

### **Am I guaranteed successful travel to China as long as I have all of my documents?**

No. In the past 3 weeks, USCBC understands embassy and consulate officials have been issuing red HDCs, often as late as 6 hours in advance of a flight to China, without providing a reason. USCBC sources indicate Beijing has directed the embassies and consulates to limit travel due to the deteriorating public health environment globally. USCBC also understands issuance of a red HDC to travelers is the baseline decision at this moment. Similar to visas, green HDCs are more likely to be issued to only the most senior executives or technical experts.

### **How can I increase my chances of receiving all necessary authorizations from the embassy and traveling to China successfully?**

Although this is not publicly requested by the Chinese government, USCBC recommends securing two “letters of necessity” to improve the chances of receiving travel authorizations. This applies both to those seeking a visa as well as those who already possess a visa or residency permit.

1. **Letter from the local foreign affairs office:** This document states the necessity (to the company and local economy) of the executive’s travel to China at this time and is sent directly from the local foreign affairs office to the embassy or consulate where the executive is applying for travel authorization.
2. **Letter from company headquarters:** USCBC conceptualized this document after many hours of conversations with the embassy about how to best position our member companies for travel approval. It includes vital information about the applicant and their travel plans while in China, the crucial role of the applicant within the company’s operations/projects to the local economy, and acknowledges compliance with local authorities’ quarantine requirements. It should be on company letterhead, signed by someone at headquarters, and addressed to the consular division where the visa application is submitted as well as to the Chinese embassy.

USCBC recommends submitting these letters both in English and Chinese. For more detailed information, contact [ggonzalezmicklin@uschina.org](mailto:ggonzalezmicklin@uschina.org). While USCBC has observed some cases of executives successfully traveling to China when these documents are submitted, there is no guarantee of approval.

USCBC also understands that executives planning to depart for China specifically from Dallas, TX (DFW airport), instead of other US airports, may have an easier time coordinating green travel code decisions, as the Chinese embassy has jurisdiction over this port of exit. All other airports with direct flights to China are under different consular jurisdictions, making it difficult for the embassy to intercede.

## What are the quarantine requirements upon arrival?

Travelers are now facing longer quarantine requirements upon arrival. This typically means 14 days of centralized quarantine followed by 7 days of home quarantine and 7 days of observation (“14+7+7”).

## Prospects for the future

USCBC will re-evaluate changing travel requirements and demands as China concludes its annual legislative gathering in Beijing this month, though early messages from the meeting [suggest](#) restrictions will not be reversed any time soon. On a positive note, this week, the Chinese government [launched](#) its international travel certificate mobile application through WeChat—China’s version of a digital vaccine passport. The application does not currently permit or expedite international travel for vaccinated individuals, but that is a likely next step to follow on a bilateral or multilateral basis.

