

VISA APPLICATION PROCESS

AMERICAN EDITION



This document will guide you through what you should know as an American applying for your school invitation papers and your Z Visa. Because Teach English In China already has a detailed Application Guide (see link below), I will be highlighting the ways in which the Visa process will be different for an American.

Sometimes the changes will be minor and sometimes significantly different. You can also expect costs to change depending on where you live in the U.S., and how far you're willing to travel.

Teach English in China Application Guide: <http://teach-english-in-china.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Visa-Application-Guidance-1.pdf>

I. Documents needed to receive your Invitation Papers

MEDICAL EXAMINATION

The medical exam part of the process usually proves to be easier for Americans than for teachers applying from the UK. Some cities will require you to get an official stamp from a hospital and not a walk-in/medical clinic on your physical form. Because most hospitals don't administer physicals, they typically won't have a problem stamping a physical form filled out a clinic. This is especially true if you go to a hospital associated with your clinic (Mercy Clinic/Mercy Hospital, for example). Apparently, there is a lot more red-tape surrounding this process in the UK, so this is definitely a pro for applying from the States!

Because your physical isn't being used to diagnose a medical problem or disease, some insurances won't automatically cover it. However, some companies/policies will cover physicals for work-related purposes, so I would recommend checking with your insurance before you get the physical done. They may have you fill out paperwork in order to get the physical covered. If you don't feel like going through the hassle of more paperwork, physicals aren't usually very expensive. Expect to pay \$50-\$200 without insurance for a physical. With insurance, you will probably only have to pay your co-pay (\$20-\$50 depending on your insurance).

- Typhoid and Japanese Encephalitis Vaccinations: On that same note, it's a good idea to check with your insurance whether or not they will cover the Typhoid and Japanese Encephalitis vaccinations. Some may consider it a preventative treatment and cover it

under your wellness/preventative benefits. Or, they may have you fill out paperwork to claim it as a work-related procedure. (Most won't cover it if you tell them you're just traveling as a tourist.) Again, if you want to go ahead and get these vaccinations without dealing with your insurance, expect to pay ~\$100 for the typhoid vaccine and anywhere from \$330 to \$500 for the Encephalitis vaccine. With insurance, expect to pay your co-pay fee for typhoid, and ~\$50-\$100 for Encephalitis, since this vaccine will take two or three visits.

If you want to save ~\$20 on your uninsured typhoid vaccine (oral version only), you can also check out GoodRx.com for a coupon:

https://www.goodrx.com/vivotif?hide_online_pharmacies=true&show_pet_friendly_pharmacies=false

AUTHENTICATION

This part of the process can sometimes be more frustrating as an American, so you should be extra careful to complete the process correctly to save time and money. Depending on your city and the grade you'll be teaching, you may have to authenticate your degree, your TEFL certificate, and/or your background check.

STEP 1: Find out which of the Chinese consulates you will be working with. This is determined by your state residency (i.e. your residency is the state where your driver's license is registered in).

There are five consulates located in San Francisco, California; Los Angeles, California; Chicago, Illinois; New York, New York; and Houston, Texas and one embassy located in Washington, D.C. Follow the link to find out which one you will be working with:

<http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zmzljjs/t84229.htm>

I put this as Step One because each embassy has slightly different requirements, so it will be a good idea to read the authentication pages on your specific consulate/embassy's website to make sure you're doing everything according to how they want it.

STEP 2: Go to your local bank, FedEx/UPS store, or post office to get your document and a photocopy notarized. This will cost ~\$15.

NOTE: Have the notary notarize the actual document, NOT a photocopy of the document. Many consulates will NOT accept photocopies. I didn't really like having someone write directly on my degree, but you can have the notary do it on the back of the document where it's not as intrusive.

STEP 3: Mail in your document to your state's Secretary of State Office. Each Secretary of State has slightly different procedures for what type of paperwork you need to send to them, so make sure you check their website first. This will cost ~\$10-\$20.

Missouri's requirements, for example, can be found here:

<https://s1.sos.mo.gov/business/notary/notary/certify>. For Missouri, you would need to include a letter stating what country the documents will be sent to, a return address, and a contact phone number and e-mail address, as well as the actual documents you want authenticated.

If you're lucky enough to live near your state's capital city, you can also go to your Secretary of State's Office in person to get your document authenticated.

Things to remember:

A. Get your document authenticated, **NOT apostilled**.

B. You can only get your document authenticated in the **same state** that you got it notarized in. So if you got your document notarized at a FedEx in Texas, you would need to send your document to the Texas Secretary of State. If you graduate college and decide to move back home before your trip to China, you would need to keep the states in which you received the notarization and authentication consistent.

(STEP 3 ½): If you claim residency in one of these states: Washington DC, Delaware, Idaho, Kentucky, Maryland, Montana, Nebraska, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia or Wyoming, you will also need to get your document authenticated at the federal U.S. Department of State after you get it authenticated at your local Secretary of State. **All other states don't require this.**

Follow the link to find out more about the U.S. Department of State's requirements for authentication:

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal-considerations/judicial/authentication-of-documents/authentication-certificate-requirements.html#General>

Basically, you will need to fill out this PDF: <https://eforms.state.gov/Forms/ds4194.PDF> and send the PDF, \$8.00 per document, and your documents to this address:

Office of Authentications
U.S. Department of State
CA/PPT/S/TO/AUT
44132 Mercure CIR PO BOX 1206 Sterling, VA 20166 1206

STEP 4: The last step is getting your document authenticated by your state-specific Chinese Consulate or Embassy.

The New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Houston Consulates DO NOT allow applications by mail.

Only the San Francisco Consulate and the D.C. Embassy allow applications by mail.

If you are under the jurisdiction of the New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, or Houston consulates, that means you have three options:

- Drive/fly to your consulate

- Get a member of your family or a friend to deliver your documents to the consulate in your name
- Work with an agency

There are **pros and cons** to each option, of course: if you live close enough, you can drive to the consulate, submit the application yourself, and probably save yourself a lot of time and money. If you don't have all the correct documents, however, you will have to make a return trip, which is both inconvenient and more expensive.

Personally, I recommend working with an agency. Although it is on the expensive side, it's also the most convenient. The agency will make sure you have everything properly sorted out before submitting it to the consulate. Expect to pay ~\$140 to \$300 altogether, depending on how fast you need the authentication, which agency you use, and how many documents you need authenticated.

Reputable agencies that will help you get your documents to your Chinese Consulate include:

China Visa Service Center: <http://www.mychinavisa.com/>

VisaRite: <http://www.visarite.com/authentication.htm>

Visa Express: http://www.visaexpress.net/china/china_cert.htm

If you're applying straight to your consulate, remember to check their individual websites to see what additional paperwork you need to fill out. If you're applying with an agency, you will need to fill out the paperwork needed for the consulate (which the agency will provide) as well as the paperwork that the agency needs to process your application.

Note: Travel Agencies can also help you through Step 3 and Step 3 ½. While a more convenient option, it will also end up being more expensive.

Once you finish the final step of authentication, pat yourself on the back! Authentication is one of the most complicated processes for Americans getting a Z Visa. Everything else will be a little easier!

CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECK

The extent to how in-depth your background check must be will vary by school and city. I only had to sign a statement provided by my school that guaranteed I had no criminal record. Other schools may require an FBI check, which will take at least six weeks to complete. Be sure to check with your school representative as soon as possible, so you can start on what may be a semi-lengthy process.

The Law Dictionary provides a great guide for how to order a background check in the U.S.: <http://thelawdictionary.org/article/how-to-order-a-criminal-background-check-on-yourself/>

Some states will require you to go to your state Highway Patrol office to receive your background check or your state's Department of Justice building. It's a good idea to check around before arriving at the building or mailing off documents to make sure that you're working with the right place. Expect to pay \$20 or less for the background check.

- Signed Contract: No Changes

- Passport Copy: No Changes
- Completed TEFL: No Changes
- Copy of Degree Certificate/Final Year Statement: No changes
- Signed Reference: No changes

Once everything is processed correctly, your school representative will send you back your invitation papers, and you should be ready to start the Z visa process! Sending documents from China to the U.S. can sometimes take a long time, however, so expect to wait at least a few weeks before you receive them.

II. U.S. Process Needed to Receive a Z Visa

- **Same Documents, Different Process:** While the documents needed to get a Z Visa in the U.S. are pretty much the same as for someone in the U.K., the process will likely be vastly different for one main reason:

You CANNOT Apply for the Z Visa by mail.

No exceptions no matter what state you live in or which Consulate you apply to.

- **Applying in Person:** You do not need to make an appointment to submit your Z Visa documents to the consulate. You can walk in anytime during business hours, which is quite different from the U.K. process.

Submissions will take about 4-5 days to process normally, though you can pay extra for rush services (~\$20). Consulates will not mail back your Z visa once the processing is done, so you will have to come pick it up from the site.

Individual directions for each consulate can be found here:

D.C. Embassy: <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/hzqz/zgqz/t84245.htm>

Chicago: <http://www.chinaconsulatechicago.org/eng/ywzn/qzhz/qz/t1241441.htm>

San Francisco: <http://www.chinaconsulatesf.org/eng/lzsj/zgqz/>

Los Angeles: <http://losangeles.china-consulate.org/eng/visa/chinavisa/t1447943.htm>

Houston: <http://houston.china-consulate.org/eng/vp/zgqz/t1251843.htm>

It probably goes without saying that you will want to be absolutely positive you have all the necessary documentation with you in order to prevent return trips!

Expect to pay ~\$140 to \$170 in consular fees, depending on how fast you want it processed.

(This of course won't include your travel, food, and possible hotel fees, which can rack up fast. Depending on where you live, then, it might be easier and less expensive to go with option #2.)

- **Applying with an Agency:** Because most people won't live near enough to a consulate to afford a trip in person, you will need to use a travel agency to submit your documents in person.

While these services aren't exactly cheap, travel agencies are effective at their jobs and easy. They will make sure you have all the necessary documents and that everything is correct before they submit it to the consulate.

Depending on when you need your Z visa back, you can pay anywhere from ~\$250 to \$800 in agency fees, which includes the consulate's fee. (Note: The \$800 estimate comes from a 6-hour processing time fee—so most people won't need to spend nearly that much to receive a Z-visa!)

There are many, many travel agencies out there that offer these kinds of services, but three reputable ones include:

China Visa Service Center: <http://www.mychinavisa.com/>

VisaRite: <http://www.visarite.com/authentication.htm>

Visa Express: <http://www.visaexpress.net/china/china.cert.htm>

Apparently, there are rumors that some Chinese consulates are considering making Z visas applicants come to their offices to give fingerprints and submit documents. If that does come to be the new policy, agencies like CVSC provide services like the "application pre-check," for example, that would still help you with the process. For now, though, consulates continue to accept documents submitted by a family member, friend, or agency representative.