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144-Hour Visa-Exemption Transit Policy Takes Effect on January 30 at Ports of Entry in Shanghai

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To accelerate the strategy of "Development Driven by Innovation", sanctioned by the State Council, as of January 30, various ports of entry in Shanghai, airports in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province and Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province are to implement a 144-hour visa-exemption transit policy, which is aimed at the integration of various visa-exemption transit policies adopted by different ports of entry in the Yangtze River Delta area.

After the 144-hour visa-exemption policy takes effect, citizens from 51 countries can transfer in China via any of the following ports of entry including Shanghai Pudong International Airport, Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport, Shanghai Port International Cruise Terminal, Shanghai Wusongkou International Cruise Terminal, Shanghai Railway Station, Nanjing Lukou International Airport, or Hangzhou Xiaoshan International Airport without Chinese visas by producing their own valid international travel documents and onward air / vessel / train tickets to a third country (region) with confirmed date and seat within 144 hours upon arrival, and can stay within the administrative precincts of Shanghai municipality, Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province for 144 hours. In a comparison with its previous incarnation, the 72-hour visa-exemption transit policy which came into effect on January 1, 2013, this latest 144-hour visa-exemption transit policy represents breakthroughs in many areas and boasts many eye-catching aspects. First and foremost, the length of time for visa-exemption stay is extended considerably. With the previous 72 hours doubled, foreign passengers would have ample time to conduct short-term activities such as businesses, sightseeing, visits and exhibitions while in Shanghai. It would also give leeway to domestic travel agencies in the development of in-depth tour products, invigorate the tourism market and spur the development of the hotel and catering industries. The second difference lies in that the new policy covers all types of ports of entry for visa-exemption transit. Originally, foreign passengers who qualify for 72-hour visa-exemption transit in Shanghai can only transfer to a third country (region) from Shanghai Pudong International Airport and Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport, but not from sea ports or rail ports in Shanghai. With the new policy in place, the available ports for transit will not only include airports, sea ports and rail ports in Shanghai, but cover Nanjing Lukou International Airport, and Hangzhou Xiaoshan International Airport as well. Foreign passengers are entitled to 144-hour visa-exemption transit while transiting through any of these ports of entry to a third country (region). This integration of air, sea and land ports brings great convenience for transit passengers and will substantially benefit the construction of Shanghai Navigation Center and Shanghai Aviation Hub. The third improvement is the expansion of temporary stay areas for visa-exemption transit passengers. Formerly, foreign passengers eligible for 72-hour visa-exemption who transit through Shanghai, Nanjing and Hangzhou are restricted to staying within their respective administrative precinct. Given the highly integrated economy, intertwining high-speed rail and highway networks and frequent talent flows in the Yangtze River Delta area, such restrictions are evidently un conducive to the healthy flow of talents, the development of logistics and exchange of information, and can hardly satisfy the practical need of certain transit passengers any more. That the latest 144-hour visa-exemption transit policy expands the scope of temporary stay for foreign passengers to cover Shanghai Municipality, Zhejiang Province and Jiangsu Province, which are collectively known as the Yangtze River Delta area, not only meets the need of transit passengers, but also benefits the flow of the people in the area, which will surely supply large number of talents for industries such as science and innovation, commerce and trade, tourism, conference exhibition, etc., and stimulate the integrated economic development of Yangtze River Delta area.

The General Station of Shanghai Immigration Inspection (GSSII) and its affiliated immigration inspection stations are the main authority to implement the 144-hour visa-exemption transit policy. In an effort to ensure its smooth implementation, GSSII formulated concrete work plans whereby it has finished updating and renovating its exit and entry inspection system and the selection of highly capable inspectors with fine foreign language and communication skills to carry out the inspection tasks. Currently, all frontline inspectors from various immigration inspection stations have completed trainings aimed to enable each and every inspector to master relevant regulations stipulated in the 144-hour visa-exemption transit policy. In addition, within the immigration inspection areas of Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport, Shanghai Port International Cruise Terminal, Shanghai Wusongkou International Cruise Terminal, Shanghai Railway Station, GSSII has set up dedicated inspection lanes for 144-hour visa-exemption transit passengers, updated the contents of billboards and electronic screens and erected new signposts, so that transit passengers can receive immigration inspection with ease. At present, the preparations for the enactment of the policy has been completed, and GSSII will avail of the opportunity to constantly improve its service standard and border control capabilities and endeavor to create a convenient port clearance environment for the construction of Shanghai Science and Technology Innovation Hub and make contributions to the socio-economic development of Shanghai.