

Regional Immigration Newsletter

December 2011

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In our final issue for 2011, we look at the recent immigration regulatory updates in the Asia Pacific region including: Singapore announced the increase in work pass administrative fees and witnessed a rise in the number of rejected Permanent Resident applications. India clarified the scope of the term “salary” for granting of Employment Visa. New Zealand implemented a range of new biometric security measures, made further enhancements to improve the immigration website and introduced fee changes for certain applications. Thailand extended the services available at a number of immigration offices due to the recent floods.

SINGAPORE

Increase in work pass administrative fee

In October 2011, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) announced the increase in work pass administrative and issuance fees.

The change came in line with the government’s financial principle for users of the service, rather than taxpayers, to bear the cost of the service. First introduced in 2005, the fees, which have not been revised since, were set below cost recovery.

Key details of the changes which have taken effect from 1 December 2011 are as follows:

- Increment of application fees for Employment Pass and S Pass from \$10 per application to \$20
- Increment of issuance fees for Employment Pass and S Pass to \$120 and \$70 respectively, charged per transaction instead of per year

The application and issuance fees for other passes (e.g. Training Employment Pass, Dependants’ Pass etc) have also been adjusted in accordance with the Employment Pass and S Pass.

Discontinuation of the Employment Pass Eligibility Certificate

The MOM announced the discontinuation of the Employment Pass Eligibility Certificate (EPEC) scheme from 1 December 2011. Applications or appeals are no longer accepted.

All EPECs which have already been issued would remain valid until their expiry. The EPEC holder would continue to be eligible to apply for a Long Term Visit Pass (LTVP) from the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority. A non-renewable 3-month LTVP would typically be issued.

The EPEC was introduced in 1992.

Moderation of inflow of foreign workers

In order to consistently achieve continued diversity and competitiveness of the economy, Singapore has to ensure that the inflow of foreign workers is managed with a balanced approach.

The Singapore government aims to keep the foreign share of the workforce at about one-third and have progressively been introducing measures, such as making changes to the Employment Pass framework, to moderate foreign manpower inflow to avoid over reliance on foreign workers.

While steps have to be taken to manage influx of foreign workers, Singapore has to remain focused on long term prospects, to continue to stay open, attract investments and talents from abroad for the growth of the economy.

Increase in rejection of PR applications

As a result of the tightened immigration policy since 2009, more foreigners have been failing in their bid to be Permanent Residents (PR) in Singapore.

68,143 PR applications were rejected in 2010, marking a 15% increase from 58,923 rejected applications in 2009. The figure for 2009, in turn, was doubled as compared to 2008’s.

The specific evaluation criteria for the grant of PR is privy to the authorities. Every application is assessed holistically on a set of criteria to ascertain the foreigner’s ability to contribute to the growth of Singapore, how well they assimilate into society and their commitment to Singapore for the longer term.

INDIA

Clarifications on the grant of Employment Visas

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has recently issued clarifications widening the scope of the term “salary” in relation to the grant of an Employment Visa (EV) to Foreign Nationals (FNs).

In 2010, the MHA announced that FNs must draw a salary of at least USD 25,000 per annum to be granted an EV. With the scope of “salary” being widened, prerequisites considered for calculating income tax can also be included when working out the threshold salary limit of USD 25,000 per annum. However, prerequisites which are not considered for computation of income tax would continue to be excluded while working out threshold salary limit. Examples of such prerequisites are reimbursement of telephone, employees’ contribution to a recognized provident fund (up to 12% of salary), contribution to an approved superannuation fund (up to INR 1,000,000 per annum), medical insurance premium to an approved scheme etc.

The MHA also further clarified that the Employment Contract should indicate clearly the salary and allowances being paid in cash; and the nature and amount of other prerequisites which would be taken into account for taxation purposes.

NEW ZEALAND

Biometrics boost NZ border security

Immigration New Zealand (INZ) has recently implemented a range of new Biometric Security measures and now has the ability to store photos of all non-New Zealanders and extend the powers to require fingerprints in some circumstances. Governments around the world are increasingly using biometrics to complement identity checks.

The changes will protect people from identity theft and prevent the misuse of passports or visas by fraudsters and criminals. A further benefit is that the new technology will speed up visa application processing, as customs are more readily able to confirm who they’re dealing with.

New Zealand is part of a Five Country Conference biometric programme involving the immigration agencies of New Zealand, Canada, the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom. This enables the various agencies to share biometric data to help confirm identities.

Revamp for Immigration NZ’s on-line presence

New improvements to the Immigration New Zealand website have provided a more streamlined and user-friendly service for customers.

The most significant improvements to the website include a new Visa Options tool and an Employer’s Hub.

In one simple step prospective migrants or visitors to New Zealand can see what visas are available to them. By responding to some simple questions, customers will be provided with a selection of visas that they may like to investigate further.

The new Employer’s Hub will provide a dedicated online service for employers, where they can access the immigration

information, service and assistance they need. Most importantly, the new Employer’s Hub will enable employers to search Skillfinder, INZ’s database of potential skilled candidates, by occupation and make contact (via INZ) with those candidates.

Fees changes for applications lodged outside New Zealand

The fees that INZ charges for immigration services changed on 29 August 2011. The changes only affect payments made outside New Zealand, not payments made in New Zealand dollars.

The fees changed because currency exchange rates have varied significantly in recent months, and the fees that were charged outside New Zealand are no longer aligned with the value of the New Zealand dollar.

THAILAND

Extension of services available at selected immigration offices due to floods

A number of extra immigration services typically not provided at some immigration offices, have been made available by the Immigration Bureau of Thailand due to the flooding of the government complex at Chaeng Wattana.

This arrangement, which began on 1 November 2011, would remain in place until the situation returns to normal.

How PwC's Global Visa Services can help you

The Global Visa Services (GVS) team of PwC's International Assignment Services is a dedicated team specialising in the provision of immigration advice and assistance with visa requirements and applications for employees. Our global network of immigration specialists based in over 95 countries globally forms one of the largest immigration service providers of its kind in the world.

Please visit our website at www.pwcias.com. Our immigration page features a series of country immigration guides which currently include Australia, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam.

The guide is intended as a brief overview only – please contact us for further information and advice.

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