

Welcome to the March newsletter! Here are this month's topics:

New Topics:

- Spring Greetings from the U.S. Consulate Shanghai
- Upcoming Holidays and Other Closures
- Tax Seminar: March 28, 2008
- Driving Safety
- China Travel Alert Update
- Economic Stimulus Payments Information
- Local News: Taxi Gang Busted For Fleecing Foreigners
- Remain in Country During a Pandemic

Continuing Topics of Interest:

- New Parental Signature Requirements for U.S. Minors
- Tips For A Smooth Consular Visit
- Increases to U.S. Passport Fees
- Check Your Passport's Validity
- Register With The Local Police Within 24 Hours of Arrival
- Links to Overseas American Groups

Spring Greetings from the U.S. Consulate Shanghai

Dear Fellow Americans,

Happy Spring! We hope you find this newsletter helpful. Please spread the word to your American friends and colleagues to register with the Consulate. We frequently send important messages and want everyone to be informed.

Don't forget to vote!

This year's Presidential election is right around the corner, and we are privileged to have the opportunity to vote overseas. We encourage you to fill out an absentee ballot registration form next time you come into our office. We can help mail the registration request for you.

Volunteer Opportunity: Become an American Citizen Warden

We are currently looking for volunteers to serve as an American Citizen Warden in your area.

What do wardens do?

Wardens help transmit messages to Americans, and help assist the Consulate in emergency situations. This position is voluntary and unofficial. There is no compensation other than the sincere appreciation of the U.S. government, and hopefully, the appreciation of any American in distress who receives assistance.

What are the qualifications to be a warden?

- You must be an American citizen
- You must be at least 18 years of age
- You must be legally resident in the Shanghai Consular District (Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Anhui), preferably for at least another year
- You must be registered with the Consular Section

We greatly appreciate the service of our wardens, and invite you to participate. If you are interested please email us at: shanghaiacs@state.gov

Yours truly,
American Citizen Services
U.S. Consulate Shanghai

Upcoming Holidays and Other Closures

The American Citizen Services Unit will be closed all day on the following days:

April 4, Friday
Tomb Sweeping Day

May 1-2, Thur. & Fri.
International Labor Day

May 26, Monday
Memorial Day

New Parental Signature Requirements for U.S. Minors

Effective February 1, 2008, passport applicants who are U.S. citizen minors *under the age of 16* must appear personally with their parents to establish identity, proof of citizenship and proof of relationship.

For parental application permission, both parents must appear together and sign, or one parent may appear to sign and submit the other parent's notarized statement, or one parent may appear, sign, and submit primary evidence of sole authority.

Minors age 16 and 17 may apply in person with their own identification, but for security reasons, parental consent may be required. If your child does not have identification of their own, a parent will be required to accompany the child and present identification.

Tips For A Smooth Consular Visit

Come early. Our busiest time is 10:30 to 11:30 AM, and 2:30 to 3:30 PM. Lines are long and we recommend you come early since all customers are served on a first-come first-served basis.

For passport applicants: Complete (but don't sign) passport applications and bring copies in addition to the originals (such as passports, children's birth certificates) ahead of time – this considerably shortens your visit. Pay special attention to passport photographs. We will ask you to get other photos if they don't meet State Department's requirements.

For passport and more visa page applicants: Please remember to fill in your social security number. This is required by law.

For minor (below age 16) passport applicants: Parents - please remember to bring your child's original birth certificate when applying for a new or replacement passport.

For notary clients: Please make sure you have read your document(s) to be notarized and know the contents. Do not sign your document, but make sure that all other blanks are filled in before coming to the Consulate. If your signature must be notarized and witnessed, you must bring witnesses and their IDs with you.

Tax Seminar: March 28, 2008

An IRS representative will present a tax seminar at the U.S. Consulate General in Shanghai on March 28 to answer your tax questions.

The tax seminar is on a walk-in basis and please bring your passport for admission.

Time: Friday, March 28

2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Venue: U.S. Consulate Public Affairs Program Room,
Shanghai Center, East Tower, Suite 540,
1376 Nanjing West Road, Shanghai.

Driving Safety

This Warden Message is to advise Americans of a carjacking incident that occurred near an expat housing area in Beijing on Sunday afternoon, January 27. The incident occurred when a Chinese national exited her car after being struck from behind. Three assailants forced her back into the vehicle, which they commandeered and drove off. The woman was later released without having suffered serious physical injury. We take this opportunity to remind the American community to review their safety and security procedures when driving.

Americans are advised to

- * Keep a cell phone and charger in your car at all times.
- * In the event of an accident call the Police at 110.
- * Keep your car in good repair; the gas tank should be at least 1/2 full at all times.
- * Use gas stations that are well lit and busy.
- * Use well-traveled, well-lit roads whenever possible.
- * Keep your doors locked while driving.
- * At traffic lights, leave yourself room to maneuver.
- * Keep your car in gear when you stop at a traffic signal.
- * Park on well-lit streets with plenty of pedestrian traffic.
- * Whenever possible, do not park at a location where you have to surrender your keys. Never surrender the keys to your residence to attendants or valets; keep vehicle and residence keys on separate chains.
- * Place valuables or removable items in your trunk.
- * When planning vacations, travel or making large purchases don't discuss how much cash you have or how long you will be gone.

China Travel Alert Update

March 21, 2008

This Travel Alert is being issued to update U.S. citizens to safety and security concerns in China's Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) as well as the neighboring provinces of Yunnan, Sichuan, Gansu and Qinghai. American citizens in Tibet, especially in Lhasa, are advised to avoid areas where demonstrations are taking place. American citizens should defer travel to Tibet at this time. This supersedes the Travel Alert for China dated March 15, 2008 and expires on April 21, 2008.

On March 14, violence erupted following peaceful demonstrations in the city of Lhasa. Scattered violence continues in Lhasa and protests, some of them resulting in violence, have been reported in parts of Sichuan, Gansu, Qinghai, and Yunnan provinces. Currently, there is a significant increased security presence in many Tibetan areas of China, including Tibetan communities outside of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). Chinese authorities have restricted tourist and other travel to Tibet and other affected areas.

American consular personnel have not yet been granted access to the TAR or other affected areas, and therefore assistance to American citizens in those areas may be limited.

For the latest security information, Americans living and traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs Internet web site at <http://travel.state.gov>, where the current Worldwide Caution, Travel Alerts, and Travel Warnings can be found. Up-to-date information on security can also be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll free in the U.S. or Canada, or, for callers outside the U.S. and Canada, a regular toll line at 1-202-501-4444. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays).

The U.S. Embassy in Beijing can be reached 24 hours per day at 86-10-6532-3431. The addresses and telephone contact information for the U.S. Embassy and Consulates are at the bottom of this announcement.

U.S. citizens residing or traveling in China are reminded to register with the U.S. Embassy or closest U.S. Consulate by entering your travel itinerary and contact information at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/home.asp>. In case of difficulties registering online, please contact the closest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

U.S. Embassy Beijing: tel. 86-10-6532-3431

U.S. Consulate General Chengdu : tel. 86-28-8558-3992

U.S. Consulate General Guangzhou : tel. 86-20-8518-7605

U.S. Consulate General Shanghai: tel. 86-21-3217-4650

U.S. Consulate General Shenyang : tel. 86-24-2322-1198

Economic Stimulus Payments Information

President Bush signed an economic stimulus bill on February 13th which will result in stimulus payments to over 130 million individuals starting in May 2008. The following is the text of an IRS fact sheet which provides more details and eligibility information regarding the stimulus payments.

Some low-income workers and recipients of Social Security, certain veterans' benefits and certain Railroad Retirement benefits may qualify for economic stimulus payments this year from the federal government. In most cases, payments will range from \$300 to \$600 for individuals and \$600 to \$1200 for joint filers. Taxpayers may receive \$300 for each qualifying child. Most taxpayers do not need to take any extra steps to receive the payment beginning in early May. But there are some exceptions. Individuals who might not otherwise be required to file a 2007 tax return will need to file a return this year to receive the stimulus payment. However, some people may need to amend a previously filed tax return to include benefits to reach the \$3,000 qualifying income level. Adding these benefits on an amended tax return will not increase an individual's tax liability but will establish eligibility for the stimulus payment.

Individuals who need to file a return this year to receive a stimulus payment may be able to take advantage of thousands of free tax preparation sites all over the United States or low-income and elderly taxpayers. The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program provides help to low- and moderate-income taxpayers. Call 1-800-906-9887 to locate the nearest VITA site. The Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) Program provides free tax help to people age 60 and older. As part of the IRS-sponsored TCE Program, AARP offers the Tax-Aide counseling program at more than 7,000 sites nationwide during the filing season. To find an AARP Tax Aide site call 1-888-227-7669 or visit the AARP Web site. For the full text of this notice and additional information regarding this and other IRS issues, please go to the following web site: www.irs.gov/newsroom/index.html

Local News: Taxi Gang Busted For Fleecing Foreigners

Shanghai: Police in China's biggest commercial hub have detained eight members of a taxi gang for allegedly ripping off foreign passengers.

A total of 10 suspects are accused of blackmailing 13 passengers in less than two months and stealing 50,000 yuan in cash or goods, according to the traffic law-enforcement team under the Shanghai Municipal Communication Bureau. Zhan Jian, an official with the team, told China Daily that the taxi drivers are suspected of charging passengers extremely high prices and robbing them when they refused to pay.

"They worked right off Longyang Road Maglev train station and targeted expatriates who arrive at Pudong International Airport and get off the station after the train ride," he said. The current Maglev line runs from Longyang Road to Pudong International Airport.

Zhan said many complaints had been made since 2006 by passengers who had been duped after taking a taxi from that location. At the end of last year, a passenger was coerced into paying as much as \$1,000 for a ride that should have cost about 50 yuan. Tracing several clues, the team launched an investigation in the middle of January.

They have since found that some taxi drivers are cheating by issuing fake invoices, applying tricks on meters and threatening to use force when passengers refuse to pay. Zhan said that the eight men being detained at Pudong district department of Shanghai municipal public security Bureau would most probably face prosecution.

"We encourage appealing on taxi-drivers ripping off," he said. The hotline is 6546-6671.

Increases to U.S. Passport Fees

On February 1, 2008, the U.S. Government increased its fees for certain U.S. citizen passport services. For adult applicants renewing a passport, the total fee increased to \$75. For first-time applicants age 16 and over, the total fee increased to \$100. The fee for minors under 16 years of age would be \$85.

Please refer to the Department of State's website at www.travel.state.gov for complete information on all new requirements, including downloadable revised forms that must be used as of February 1, and the U.S. Consulate website at http://shanghai.usembassy.gov/general_information_acs.html

Check Your Passport's Validity

Please carefully review the validity of your current U.S. passport. Many governments require US travelers to have at least 6 months validity left in their passports for entry into their countries.

Regular passports are received within 10 business days after the US Consulate receives the application. The processing time is already quite fast so we cannot expedite your application.

We may issue limited validity passports locally for Americans who have emergency travel needs and who have proof of their immediate travel plans. However, your need to renew a passport in order to apply for a visa does not constitute an emergency.

Individuals who have lost more than one passport cannot be issued an emergency passport.

Register With The Local Police Within 24 Hours of Arrival

All foreigners (tourists, visitors, and long-term residents), including returning Chinese holding foreign passports, must register their place of residence with the local Public Security Bureau within 24 hours of arrival.

If you are in a hotel, registration is usually done as part of the check-in process. Those staying with family or friends in a private home must also observe this requirement. Failure to do so can result in fines and/or detention. Please consult with your nearest police office for more details.

Remain in Country During a Pandemic

The U.S. Government recently updated guidance to Americans living, working and/or traveling overseas about how to prepare for a pandemic. Should a pandemic alert occur, it is important to remain in country and not travel until conditions improve, which could possibly be several months. This information is available online at, http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/health/health_3096.html

American citizens living in or traveling to countries with human or animal cases of highly pathogenic avian influenza should consider the potential risks and plan accordingly. Please remember that U.S. embassies, consulates and military facilities lack the legal authority, capability and resources to dispense medications, vaccines, or medical care to private

American citizens overseas. Keep current with the latest medical guidance and practical information. Visit www.travel.state.gov to review the Country-Specific Information Sheets, Travel Warnings and Alerts for up-to-date assessments of conditions in specific countries and to obtain additional information on pandemic influenza.

Links of Interest to Overseas Citizens

If you have difficulty accessing the official Federal Voting Assistance Program website, you may also try the following links to get voting information.

Association of Americans Resident Overseas (AARO)

<http://aaro.org/>

Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas

<http://www.fawco.org/>

Expatriate Exchange

www.expatechange.com/

American Citizens Abroad (ACA)

<http://www.aca.ch/>

Overseas Vote Foundation

www.overseasvotefoundation.org

Democrats Abroad

Tel (202) 863-8177

Fax (202) 863-8063

www.democratsabroad.org

info@democratsabroad.org

Republicans Abroad

Tel: (202) 608-1423

Fax: (202) 608-1431

www.republicansabroad.org

chairman@republicansabroad.org

The appearance of external hyperlinks does not constitute endorsement by the United States Federal Government, United States Department of Defense or the Federal Voting Assistance Program of the linked web sites, or the information, products or services contained therein. The Federal Voting Assistance Program does not exercise any editorial control over the information you may find at these locations.

This newsletter is published by the American Citizens Services Unit, U.S. Consulate General, Shanghai, tel: (86-21) 3217-4650 ext. 2114; fax: (86-21) 6217-2071; e-mail: ShanghaiACS@state.gov; website: <http://shanghai.usembassy.gov/>.