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Moving to Taipei

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Introduction

Welcome to 'Moving to Taipei: A Comprehensive Guide To Moving To The Taipei Area,' where we'll take you on a humorous and engaging journey through the nooks and crannies of this dynamic city. If you're reading this, you're probably contemplating a move to Taipei, a bustling hub where ancient traditions meet futuristic innovations. Rest assured, you're in for an adventure resembling a rollercoaster ride through a night market—exciting, slightly bewildering, but oh so worth it.

While this guide doesn't delve into moving universalities (we assume you've dealt with bubble wrap and sticky tape before), it does dive headfirst into the specifics of relocating to Taipei. From maneuvering through labyrinthine visa policies to deciphering how to pay your electricity bill at a 7-Eleven, we've got you covered. Remember, laws and regulations are like Taipei weather—they can change rapidly. It's wise to refresh your knowledge with reliable government sources to ensure you're up to date.

Taipei is not just a geographical location; it's an experience waiting to unfold. Bursting with culture, it offers tantalizing street food, towering skyscrapers draped in digital art, and hidden temples whispering tales of yore. As you embark on this journey, prepare for a transformation—not just of addresses, but of perspectives. With its blend of hospitality and hustle, Taipei ensures every newcomer feels less like a tourist and more like a houseguest invited for a perpetual stay.

Moving overseas can feel as daunting as navigating a crowded metro station during rush hour, but fear not! We're here to make sure you don't end up heading the wrong way. This guide will hold your hand (figuratively, of course), as we navigate Taipei's vibrant streets, showing you the ropes so you can settle in with ease. Whether it's little-known shortcuts or the most happening expat meetups, you'll be in the know with insider tips sprinkled throughout these pages.

And let's not forget the people of Taipei—a community as diverse as the cuisine on offer. The city's vibrant blend of locals and expats creates a melting pot of culture and camaraderie that promises enriching interactions and friendships waiting around every street corner. As you familiarize yourself with the sounds, flavors, and rhythms of your new home, not only will you grow accustomed to Taipei, but Taipei will become accustomed to you.

So tighten your seatbelt, open your mind, pack an umbrella (seriously, it rains a lot), and step confidently into your new life in Taipei. We're here to ensure that your move is as smooth as a well-brewed cup of oolong tea at a local teahouse—satisfyingly

deep, unexpectedly refreshing, and leaving you with a smile. Welcome to Taipei; it's going to be quite the adventure!

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CHAPTER ONE: Visas and Residency

Alright, let's talk about the first dragon you need to charm before you can even think about arguing with your landlord over faulty air conditioning in Taipei: visas and residency. Getting the right paperwork is your golden ticket, the key that unlocks the door to your Taipei adventure. Mess this up, and your dream of slurping beef noodle soup under the shadow of Taipei 101 might just remain a dream, possibly enjoyed only during a brief, frantic tourist trip. Think of this chapter as your essential Waze navigation through the sometimes bewildering, often frustrating, but ultimately conquerable highway of Taiwanese immigration bureaucracy.

Before we dive deeper than a scuba diver exploring Kenting's reefs, remember that vital mantra from the introduction: **check official sources**. Seriously. Taiwan's visa rules can change faster than the specials board at your local Taiwanese breakfast joint. The Bureau of Consular Affairs (BOCA) and the National Immigration Agency (NIA) websites should become your new best friends, or at least respected acquaintances you consult regularly. Think of this guide as your savvy friend who gives great advice, but your government contacts are the ones who issue the actual permission slip. Don't rely solely on anecdotes from that guy Dave you met online; get the facts straight from the horse's mouth, or in this case, the official government unicorn.

First up, let's discuss the easiest way to scope out Taipei if you're just testing the waters or visiting Auntie Mei: **Visa-Exempt Entry**. Citizens of many countries can swan into Taiwan for up to 90 days (sometimes less, check BOCA!) without needing to apply for a visa beforehand. It sounds delightfully simple, and for tourism or short business meetings, it is. You rock up, get a stamp, and boom, you're free to explore night markets and get hopelessly lost in the MRT system. It's perfect for that initial reconnaissance mission to see if you can handle the humidity and the sheer, unadulterated joy of finding pineapple cakes that actually contain pineapple.

However, and this is a big 'however' underscored with flashing neon lights, visa-exempt entry is **not** your gateway to moving here long-term. You absolutely cannot legally work on this status. Think of it like dating: it's great for getting to know the place, but it doesn't give you the right to move in and start redecorating. Critically, in almost all cases, you cannot convert from visa-exempt status to a resident visa *while you are inside Taiwan*. You'll typically need to leave the country (a classic "visa run" to Hong Kong, Okinawa, or somewhere nearby) and apply for the appropriate resident visa from a Taiwanese overseas mission. Don't try to game the system; overstaying your visa-exempt welcome leads to fines, deportation, and a potential ban from re-entry, which definitely puts a damper on your moving plans.

So, what if your passport doesn't grant you visa-exempt privileges, or you need just a bit longer than 90 days for your initial look-see, but you're not ready to commit to residency yet? That's where the **Visitor Visa** comes in. This needs to be applied for *before* you travel, usually at a Taipei Economic and Cultural Office (TECO) or representative office in your home country or region. It serves similar short-term purposes as visa-exempt entry – tourism, visiting family, short-term study (perhaps at a language school for a single term), attending conferences – but involves an actual application process with supporting documents and a fee.

Visitor Visas typically come with specific validity periods and allowed durations of stay per entry. Sometimes, extensions might be possible from within Taiwan at an NIA office, but don't count on it as a guaranteed strategy for prolonging your stay indefinitely. These visas are still fundamentally for temporary stays. Applying for a job or planning to settle down? The Visitor Visa is not your vehicle. Trying to use it as a sneaky backdoor to residency is like trying to pay for a fancy dinner with Monopoly money – it won't end well.

Now, for the main course, the visa type that signals you're serious about this Taipei move: the **Resident Visa**. This is the visa category you'll need if you plan to stay in Taiwan for longer than six months for purposes like working, studying full-time in a degree program, joining family members who are residents or citizens, or starting a business. Unlike its short-term cousins, the Resident Visa is specifically designed for those intending to establish residency. Getting this visa is the crucial *first step* towards obtaining your Alien Resident Certificate (ARC) after you arrive, which is the actual ID card that proves your legal residency status.

Crucially, like finding a taxi during a typhoon, securing a Resident Visa almost always requires applying from *outside* Taiwan before you make your move. You present your case (job contract, university acceptance letter, marriage certificate, etc.) to the relevant TECO overseas, they deliberate, and if approved, they slap that precious visa sticker into your passport. This sticker is essentially your entry permit, allowing you to enter Taiwan with the specific purpose of applying for your ARC within a designated timeframe (usually 15 days – don't miss this deadline!). Think of the Resident Visa as the invitation to the party, and the ARC is your official party membership card.

The most common pathway for foreigners moving to Taipei is via a **Work-Based Resident Visa**. This means you've successfully landed a job with a Taiwanese company that is willing and able to sponsor your work permit. First, your employer applies for a work permit from the Ministry of Labor (MoL). Once that permit is approved (which can take several weeks), you use the approval letter and other required documents (like your employment contract, diplomas, and potentially professional certificates) to apply for your Resident Visa at the TECO. It's a two-step process involving two different government departments, so patience is key.

Finding that sponsoring employer can sometimes feel like a classic chicken-and-egg scenario. Many employers understandably prefer candidates who are already in Taiwan (perhaps visiting on a visa-exempt stay or visitor visa for interviews), but you can't legally work without the work permit and Resident Visa/ARC. This often requires some nimble job searching, networking (which we'll touch on later), and perhaps a specific strategy discussed with potential employers. Some people secure jobs remotely before arrival, while others come first to job hunt, fully prepared to leave and apply for the visa once an offer and work permit are secured.

Another popular route, especially for younger folks or those looking to immerse themselves in the language and culture, is the **Student Resident Visa**. This requires official acceptance into a degree program at an accredited Taiwanese university or college, or enrollment in a government-recognized Mandarin language center program (usually requiring a certain number of hours per week and a minimum enrollment period, often three months or more). You'll need your acceptance letter, proof of funds, and potentially a study plan to apply for this visa at the TECO. The visa duration is often tied to your program length, and you'll need to maintain your student status to keep your subsequent ARC valid.

Be aware that very short language courses (e.g., less than 3 months) might only qualify you for a Visitor Visa, not a Resident Visa. The distinction usually lies in the intensity and duration of the program and whether the language center is specifically approved for issuing the documents needed for a Resident Visa application. If your goal is long-term residency through study, ensure your chosen program meets the requirements for the Student Resident Visa category. Working rights on a student visa are also typically restricted, usually allowing limited part-time work after a certain period of study and with an additional work permit application.

For those with existing ties to Taiwan, the **Joining Family or Dependent Resident Visa** is the relevant category. This generally applies to foreign spouses and minor children (usually under 20) of Taiwanese nationals or of foreign residents who already hold a valid ARC. The main requirement is proving the relationship, typically through authenticated marriage certificates or birth certificates. Often, the sponsoring spouse or parent needs to have their own residency status sorted first. This visa allows you to live in Taiwan with your family, and depending on the specific circumstances (e.g., spouse of a Taiwanese national vs. dependent of a foreign worker), it may or may not grant open work rights automatically – always verify the specific conditions.

Authentication of documents like marriage and birth certificates can be a process in itself. It often involves getting them certified by relevant authorities in your home country and then authenticated by the TECO in your jurisdiction. This bureaucratic *cha-cha* can take time, so start gathering and authenticating these vital records well in advance if you plan to use the family route. Don't just show up with a photocopy from

your home printer; they need official stamps and seals that prove legitimacy across international borders.

Then there's the **Entrepreneur Visa**, designed for ambitious individuals looking to start their own business venture in Taiwan. This isn't just for anyone with a bright idea scribbled on a napkin. It typically requires a substantial business plan, proof of sufficient investment capital, and often meeting specific criteria related to innovation or economic contribution. The application process is generally more involved than a standard work visa, requiring detailed proposals and financial documentation reviewed by relevant investment commissions or ministries. It's a pathway for serious business founders, not a casual alternative to finding traditional employment.

Beyond these main categories, Taiwan offers Resident Visas for other specific purposes, such as religious work (for ordained clergy or missionaries sponsored by a religious organization in Taiwan), volunteering (with registered non-profit organizations under specific programs), or participation in certain cultural or artistic activities. These niche visas have their own specific requirements and application processes. If your reason for moving doesn't neatly fit the work, study, or family boxes, delve into the BOCA website or contact your nearest TECO to explore these less common but potentially relevant options.

A particularly shiny object in the Taiwanese visa landscape, introduced to attract high-caliber professionals, is the **Employment Gold Card**. Think of it as the VIP pass for skilled talent. It cleverly combines a work permit, Resident Visa, ARC, and multi-entry permit into a single card, valid for one to three years. The major perk is flexibility: unlike a standard work visa tied to one specific employer, Gold Card holders in many fields can work for multiple employers, work for themselves, or even seek employment *after* arriving in Taiwan, without needing separate work permit applications for each gig (within certain regulations).

Who qualifies for this golden ticket? Eligibility generally falls into specific fields like Science & Technology, Economy, Education, Culture & Arts, Finance, Law, and Architecture. Within these fields, applicants usually need to meet certain criteria, such as holding a high salary (often well above the average Taiwanese income threshold), winning prestigious awards, holding senior executive positions in major companies, or possessing specific high-demand skills. The application process is distinct and handled primarily online through a dedicated portal, though TECOs are still involved for passport inspection. If you think you might qualify, the Gold Card website is your primary resource. It offers significantly more freedom than traditional routes, making it highly attractive for experienced professionals.

Regardless of which Resident Visa type you're pursuing, the general application dance performed at your local TECO remains fairly consistent, albeit with variations in the supporting documents. You'll need to locate the specific TECO responsible for your

geographic area – they operate like consulates but have different names due to Taiwan's unique diplomatic status. Check the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) website for a directory. You'll then need to meticulously complete the official visa application form (usually available online), provide recent passport-sized photos adhering to specific requirements (white background, no smiling – look serious, you're dealing with bureaucracy!), and pay the application fee (which varies by nationality and visa type).

Of course, the core of your application will be the supporting documents proving your eligibility for the specific visa category: that work permit approval, the university admission letter, the authenticated marriage certificate, or the Gold Card qualification evidence. Your passport needs to be valid for at least six months beyond your intended stay and have blank pages for the visa sticker. Accuracy and completeness are paramount. A single missing document or incorrect piece of information can lead to delays or rejection, sending you back to square one, which is considerably less fun than exploring Taipei's back alleys for hidden culinary gems.

One common hurdle that often trips up Resident Visa applicants is the **Health Check**. For most Resident Visa applications, you'll need to undergo a medical examination shortly before you apply. This isn't just a quick cough-and-check; it typically involves a physical exam, blood tests (screening for things like HIV and syphilis), and a chest X-ray (primarily checking for tuberculosis). The examination usually needs to be conducted at a hospital designated or approved by the Taiwanese authorities in your country. Some TECOs maintain lists of approved local hospitals, while others might allow any licensed physician but require the report form to be authenticated.

Alternatively, under certain circumstances, you might be able to get the health check done *after* arriving in Taiwan at a designated local hospital *before* applying for your ARC, but this often requires specific permission or applies only in certain visa conversion scenarios. For the initial Resident Visa application overseas, plan on getting the health check arranged in your home country. Ensure the specific Taiwanese government health certificate form is used, filled out correctly by the physician, and submitted along with your visa application within its validity period (usually three months). Failing the health check for specific conditions can unfortunately lead to visa denial.

Once you've navigated the forms, gathered the documents, passed the health check, paid the fee, and survived the waiting period (which can range from a few days to several weeks, depending on the TECO and the complexity of your case), you might finally receive the good news: your Resident Visa has been approved! They will affix a visa sticker into your passport. Examine this sticker carefully. It will state the visa type, the number of allowed entries (usually single entry for the purpose of obtaining the ARC), and, crucially, its validity period for *entry* into Taiwan.

Most importantly, the Resident Visa sticker will usually include a note stating that you must apply for your Alien Resident Certificate (ARC) and Re-entry Permit (if needed) at a local NIA service center within 15 days (or sometimes 30 days, *read the visa carefully!*) of arriving in Taiwan. Missing this deadline can cause significant problems, potentially invalidating your visa and requiring you to leave Taiwan. So, celebrate getting the visa, but remember it's the key to the next stage, not the final destination. It gets you *in* the country legally with the right status to *apply* for residency. The ARC application process itself is a separate adventure we'll tackle once you've landed (see Chapter 8 and beyond).

Let's quickly troubleshoot some **common pitfalls** to avoid sinking your moving ship before it even leaves port. The most frequent mistake is applying for the wrong visa type - trying to use a Visitor Visa for work, or assuming visa-exempt entry allows for long-term stays. Always match your purpose and duration of stay to the correct visa category. Another classic blunder is underestimating processing times, both for the work permit (if needed) and the visa itself. Start early! Don't book non-refundable flights assuming your visa will magically appear overnight.

Incomplete or inaccurate documentation is another major cause of delays and frustration. Double-check every requirement listed by the TECO. Get documents authenticated properly if required. Ensure your passport photos meet the specific criteria. And never, ever attempt to work illegally on a tourist or visa-exempt status. Taiwanese authorities take immigration rules seriously, and the consequences are unpleasant, potentially barring you from returning for years. Lastly, assume that switching visa types *within* Taiwan is difficult or impossible. While some limited conversions exist (e.g., sometimes from a student visa to a work visa if you find a job after graduation), the general rule is that you need to apply for the correct Resident Visa from outside Taiwan before you arrive for your intended long-term purpose.

Navigating the visa labyrinth is undoubtedly the least glamorous part of moving to Taipei. It requires diligence, patience, and a perhaps surprising amount of paperwork wrangling. But getting it right is fundamental. It's the foundation upon which your entire life in Taiwan will be built. So take a deep breath, organize your documents like a pro, consult those official websites religiously, and approach the TECO with politeness and preparedness. Think of it as your first initiation rite into the wonderful, occasionally perplexing world of Taiwan. Once you have that Resident Visa sticker gleaming in your passport, you're one giant leap closer to calling Taipei home. The bureaucratic beast may seem daunting, but it's definitely tamable with the right information and a healthy dose of persistence.

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