

Benefits of having a green card

On a day to day basis, having a green card changes very little. It won't affect your daily life in any noticeable way – at least, it doesn't for me. When it comes to long-term planning – i.e. employment and remaining in China – this is where it has its benefits:

1. It's an excellent safety net. If you lose your job or decide to quit, or for whatever reason become unemployed, you don't need to leave the country, as your right to work is not connected to your right to stay.
2. It makes it easy to do freelance work. You can pick up additional work by simply signing an agreement with a company and with no need to obtain a work visa. You can take on as much work as you like (or not).
3. It makes you more employable. You become more attractive to companies because they don't need to apply for a visa for you or go through any annoying paperwork. They can employ you with the same ease as if you were a Chinese citizen. That means that you will probably be preferred over a non-GC-holder, assuming all other things are equal.
4. You can sign long-term contracts (i.e. rolling contracts) with employers. You aren't limited to the 5 years max applicable to those with work permits.
5. You can use it to buy train tickets, plane tickets, and check in at hotels. Note that the first two are usually hassle free, but when it comes to using it at hotels I have run into problems on several occasions. Many hotels still don't accept the green card (though they should, by law) and still ask for my passport. On the other hand, if I give them my passport they get confused when they can't find a visa and I then need to present the green card to them. Hopefully things will improve as the card gets more recognised.
6. It's easier to buy property in China. I don't know much about this, because I've never once considered buying property here, so this is of no interest to me.

There are various other minor advantages, but these are the main ones that stand out to me.

Applying for a green card

There are several routes available, including employment, marriage, making a significant investment in China or being considered a “talent”. Most people apply based on either marriage or employment.

To go through the marriage route, you need to have been married to a Chinese citizen for over 5 years. For the employment route, there are a couple of options available. One is to be in an “essential position”, which basically means a company executive or tenured professor, or some other high ranking position. Another option is based on income. This is the type of application that I, and several colleagues, made. In order to apply based on income you must prove earnings of at least 500k RMB each year (pre-tax) and have paid over 100k RMB in tax each year, for each of the prior 4 years.

Other options include being a recognised “international talent”. Celebrities, sports stars, public figures, Elon Musk, etc.

My experience applying for the card

Applying is quite laborious and time consuming, and needs you to pay for various things along the way (see costs below).

When I applied, there were 11 items required. These ranged from the very simple (for example 2 passport photos) to the more complicated (for example overseas Criminal Record Check and Medical Report).

For most people, the Criminal Record Check will probably take the most effort, because it requires you to request a criminal record check in each country you have ever lived in for two or more years. For me, this was only the UK and China, so it wasn't too much of a big deal. However, the complications come because it needs to be authenticated at the Chinese Embassy in the country where it was applied for and also professionally notarised.

In order to do this, I went through a law / notary firm who did the whole thing for me for a fee. The other option was to ask a family member to do it, but I really didn't want to put my parents through the hassle of running around getting documents signed and stamped on my behalf, so a notary was by far the best choice.

Other documents required are the Enterprise Registration Certificate for the company you work for, along with a Recommendation Letter. These weren't too hard to get for me, but it really depends on the type of company you work for and your relationship with them. I can see this being a stumbling block in some cases.

In addition, all foreign issued documents need to be translated into Chinese by a professional translation company. You also need to provide the certificate of the translation company to show that it's all legit.

Finally, when you have all the documents together, you'll have a stack of paper at least an inch thick. You then need to take them to the local PSB (take a coffee and snacks with you because you will be there for a while) and sit down with an officer who goes through them with a fine toothcomb.

In my case, I needed to visit the PSB 3 times because either something was missing or something hadn't been completed satisfactorily. On the third time, just before I was about to leave for my annual holiday, they accepted it.

Once submitted, there was a waiting time of around 6 months before the card was ready. Other people have reported longer and shorter times, but 6 months seems to be the average.

Costs

The cost of applying for the card was 1500 RMB when I applied, but this has now risen to 1800 RMB. There is an additional fee of 300 RMB when you go to collect the card.

Other costs I had to pay included the police check in the UK (around £50 I think), the notary service (£300), the medical check fee, and the translation fees.

When everything was factored in, I seem to remember it cost the equivalent of just over 10K RMB. That's from the starting point of the application to actually receiving the card.

Should you get a green card?

The first question should be "are you eligible to get a green card?". If you aren't married and don't meet the income requirements, you probably can't get one, unless you can show off some amazing super-slick basketball or football skills that leave every province in China wanting to recruit you.

If you are eligible, then ultimately it's down to how much you think the card will benefit you. If you're planning on staying in China for the long haul, it's worth getting because it will benefit you in the long term, and as the above-mentioned "safety net" it's excellent.

You also have to weigh up the hassle, cost, and time involved in applying and be prepared to grit your teeth and go through the whole process.

Useful links

<https://www.expatden.com/china/china-permanent-residence>

<https://www.beijingesc.com/china-green-card.html>

<https://www.beijingesc.com/faq-on-chinese-visa-and-visa-in-beijing/144-whats-the-procedure-of-getting-china-green-card.html>