

Introduction to Singapore Work Visa

As a culturally-diverse nation with a breathtaking cityscape, Singapore is one of the most coveted destinations for expats to relocate and settle down. Many expats who have come to Singapore are drawn to its holistic environment to study, live and work, and its excellent healthcare facilities, low rates of crime and attractive remuneration packages.

Nonetheless, with nearly 40% of the workforce being made up of non-residents, the government has stepped up measures to manage the influx of foreign workers. As such, professionals have to prepare ahead in order to comply with the employment requirements.



Moving to Singapore without first obtaining a work visa can be risky although there are some Singapore-registered companies who provide employment visas to successful applicants. There are different work visas that are available in Singapore that correspond to an expat's education credentials and work experience.

If an expat is the main applicant, then the following visas can be applied for:

- a) Personalized Employment Pass (PEP)
- b) Employment Pass (white-collar professionals)
- c) S Pass (mid-level staff)
- d) Global Investor Program (GIP)

If an expat is an accompanying family member, then the following visas can be applied for:

- a) Dependent Pass (DP)
- b) Long Term Visit Pass (LTVP)
- c) Student Visa

Which Pass is The Most Suitable Work Pass?

Personalized Employment Pass

Key Criteria

- If currently holding an Employment Pass: Earnings of a minimum salary of SGD\$12,000 per month
- If an expat is an overseas applicant: They must not have been unemployed for more than the previous 6 consecutive months and draw a fixed monthly salary of SGD\$18,000 (after conversion of their foreign salary to Singapore Dollars).

Key Characteristics of the pass

- An expat can work freely in any sector (subject to professional registration or certificates required to support their profession, i.e. medicine, dentistry, law, architecture, pharmacy)
- To change their job in Singapore, an expat will only need to notify the Ministry of Manpower. There is no need for an expat to re-apply for another employment pass
- An expat can remain in Singapore for a continuous period of 6 months without employment, thus allowing them to search for a new employment
- The pass is non-renewable.

Requirement of the Pass

- Not to be unemployed in Singapore for more than 6 months
- Earn a fixed salary of at least SGD\$144,000 per calendar year, regardless of the number of months an expat is not in employment.
- Notify the Ministry of Manpower of any change of employer, personal particulars, and annual fixed salary.

Employment Pass (EP)

EP is one of the most common work visas which a professional obtains upon accepting a job offer in Singapore. This visa is mainly for individuals who will hold an executive or managerial role and have exceptional skills and experience in their careers.

An EP is not applicable for business owners, entrepreneurs and investors. If one of these categories relates to an expat they may consider applying for the Global Investor Program (GIP).

Key Criteria

- a) An expat must be in a managerial or executive role and/ or in a specialised job
- b) An expat must possess relevant qualifications from a recognized reputable university, or have obtained necessary professional qualifications and skills with a proven track record
- c) An expat must be employed at a fixed monthly salary of a minimum SGD\$3,600

Upon accepting an employment offer from a Singapore based employer, the employer will then proceed to apply for an EP on an expat's behalf.

Key Characteristics of Employment Pass

- EP is issued for an approved period with a maximum validity of 2 years. It must be renewed upon the expiration date.
- If an expat does not have enough relevant working experience, for example, if they are a recent graduate from a reputable university, they still qualify to work in Singapore. On the other hand, if they do not hold a higher education degree for the job but have accumulated years of demonstrable working experience, they are still eligible to obtain an EP.

S Pass (SP)

The SP is designed for mid-level skilled foreign employees who are seeking employment in industries which Singapore needs to be filled, for example, the engineering, electronics, oil, chemical industries. This visa allows Singapore-registered companies to hire foreign employees at a salary of SGD\$2,200 per month. However, from January 2020, the minimum qualifying salary for the SP visa will increase to SGD\$2,400 per month.

Key Criteria

- a) An expat must at least have a diploma and/ or other educational qualifications that reflect the requirements for the specific industry they are applying to be employed in
- b) An expat must possess technical and specialist expertise and have relevant skills and experience for the industry they will be employed in
- c) An expat must be employed at a fixed monthly salary of a minimum SGD\$2,200

The obtaining of an SP involves three stages, being the submission of requirements, the assessment and then approval. A representative from an expat's employer or an approved third-party service provider facilitates the application process.

The final stage of applying for an SP requires an expat to visit MOM with the following documents:

- a) Foreign applicant's travel document/ passport
- b) Embarkation/ Disembarkation card
- c) Education certificates/ credentials
- d) Residential address in Singapore
- e) Completed Medical exam form
- f) IPA letter
- g) Declaration form
- h) An employer representative's contact details for card delivery
- i) Any other additional requirements requested by MOM

Key Characteristics of S-Pass

Unlike the EP, there is a quota/cap of employees with an S Pass that a company can employ. Additionally, the company has to pay a monthly levy. The cap is subject to a sub-dependency ceiling where the number of employees that are S Pass holders must only consist of 15% of the company's total labor force in the services sector and 20% in other sectors.

- SP can only be applied for by an eligible Singapore-registered employer or an authorized visa agency.
- Foreign employees can only arrive in the country after the visa approval.

Global Investor Program (GIP)

GIP is designed for investors who are interested in relocating to Singapore through investment in a new business entity or in Singapore-registered companies. If an expat has sufficient funds, they can consider obtaining their Singapore Permanent Residence status. Most importantly, they need to prove to the government that they are capable of making their proposed business a success based on their experience and skill.

Under GIP, there are two investment options at present:

- a) Option A: Invest at least SGD\$2.5 million in a new business entity or in the expansion of an existing business operation.
- b) Option B: Invest at least SGD\$2.5 million in a GIP fund that invests in Singapore-registered companies.

Besides their investment input, they will also need to provide proof of a good previous business track record and submit a credible business proposal or investment plan in order to earn their permanent resident status through this program.

Key Criteria

An expat is eligible to apply for PR under the GIP if they have:

- a) a substantial business track record; and
- b) a successful entrepreneurial background

Assessment criteria for GIP application

- a) An expat has at least 3 years of an established entrepreneurial track record together with an established business network and has submitted audited financial statements of their business for the last 3 years
- b) An expat's businesses turnover must be at least SGD \$50 million in the most recent year and at least SGD \$50 million annually on average over the last three years. An expat may consolidate their business turnover to meet the minimum turnover criteria.
- c) If an expat's business is a privately held company, they should own at least 30% of the shareholding. An expat's role in the company, as well as the growth and profitability of the company, will be taken into consideration.

Additional Assessment Criteria for Option A Applicants

- a) An applicant must submit a detailed 5-year business or investment plan with projected employment and annual financial projections.
- b) An applicant is required to fulfill the third-year milestones outlined in their business plan and fulfill their business plan within 5 years of Singapore Permanent Residence Final Approval
- c) If the business plan involves the investment into an existing Singapore-registered company, the additional third-year milestones that the company would be required to achieve are:
 - The hiring of at least 5 additional employees and
 - An additional annual total business expenditure of at least SGD \$1 million. For example, the company is required to achieve SGD \$X million

worth of total business expenditure as at the date of investment in its third year.

Permanent Residence for Family Members

An expat can apply for permanent residence for their family members if their spouse and children (21 years and under) are eligible to apply for PR under their GIP application. Male dependents who obtain PR will be required to enter National Service. If the children are over 21 years then they are not eligible to apply for PR under their GIP application. However, they can apply for a 5-year Long Term Visit Pass (LTVP) which is tied to the validity of their Re-Entry Permit (REP).

Validity and Renewal Re-Entry Permit (REP)

Upon the finalisation of an expat's PR, they will be issued a REP which will be valid for 5 years. The REP will enable an expat to retain their PR status while they are away from Singapore.

Requirements for GIP Option A applicants:

For a 3-year renewal:

- a) An expat has fulfilled investment conditions under Option A, and Either
 - b) The company an expat is investing in employs at least 5 employees in addition to their current manpower headcount at the third-year milestone; with at least 5 Singaporean citizens amongst such employees
 - c) The company an expat is investing in under GIP Option A has incurred at least SGD \$1million more than the annual total business expenditure at the third-year milestone.
- OR
- d) An expat or at least one of their dependents, a PR under your GIP application, has resided in Singapore for more than half of the time period.

For a 5-year renewal, an expat is required to fulfill all of the above requirements.

Requirements for GIP Option B applicants:

For a 3-year renewal:

- a) An expat has fulfilled investment conditions under Option B, and Either
- b) They have established a business in Singapore employing at least 5 Singapore citizens and have incurred a minimum of SGD \$1million in total business expenditure in Singapore.
- c) An expat or at least one of their dependents, a PR under their GIP application, has resided in Singapore for more than half of the time period.

For a 5-year renewal, an expat is required to fulfill all of the above requirements

Which Pass is Suitable for My Family Member(s)?

Family members may be eligible for a dependent pass or long-term visit pass. In order to apply for a family's long-term pass that is tied to an expat's main pass, an expat will need to:

- Earn at least a fixed monthly salary of S\$6,000 (an application for parents requires a minimum fixed monthly salary of S \$12,000)
- Hold a valid Employment or S-Pass
- Be sponsored by an established, Singapore registered company (usually their employer)

Family members who are eligible for a long-term pass application tied to an expat's main work pass are:

- a legally married spouse
- unmarried children under 21 years old, including legally adopted children
- a Common-Law Spouse
- unmarried handicapped children over 21 years of age
- unmarried step children below 21 years of age
- parents

A new requirement which came into effect in early 2019 requires all children under 12 years of age to provide proof of a mandatory vaccination schedule (diphtheria and measles vaccination) before any long-term pass application is granted. The mandatory vaccination applies for dependent pass renewals as well. It is advisable to start this process in advance as it will take up to 2 weeks for Singapore's National Health Board to provide the approval letter which is required to be submitted to the Ministry of Manpower when lodging a child's dependent or long-term visit pass application.

Frequently Asked Question

Q: I don't see any pass above where I may be eligible, does this mean that I would not be able to work in Singapore?

A: No, it doesn't necessary mean that you will not be able to work in Singapore. Do contact AIMS to allow us to assess your situation and we will be able to advise the most appropriate work pass where you may be eligible.

Q: I will be sent by my company to Singapore for only 4 weeks to assist with a client's site inspection, do I need to apply for a valid work pass?

A: Again, we will need to assess your activity in further detail. There may be a chance that your work activity qualifies for work pass exemption. With a valid work pass exemption, you will be able to work with your short-term visit pass (tourist/ business visa) after AIMS applies for your work pass exemption.

Q: I heard that S-Pass holders can't apply for dependent passes for their family members. Is this true?

A: You can apply for your eligible family member's dependent pass when holding an employment pass or s-pass. However, you as the main work pass holder, would need to draw a minimum monthly fixed salary of SGD\$6,000 and you must be sponsored by an established, Singapore-registered company (your employer). Nonetheless, the dependent pass application is still subjected to Ministry of Manpower's approval.

Q: Who are deemed as eligible family members of the main pass holder to qualify for dependent pass?

A: Your legally married spouse and/or your unmarried children under 21 years old, including legally adopted children.

Q: I do not qualify under either of the above, what is my other option?

A: You may consider applying for a long-term visit pass holder instead. You will be eligible if you are a common-law spouse and/or an unmarried handicapped child over 21 years of age and/or are an unmarried step-child under 21 years of age and/or are parents of an applicant (only if you, as the main applicant, are earning more than SGD\$12,000 fixed monthly salary).

Q: I would like my child who is above 21 years old to live in Singapore with my family, is this possible?

A: Your child would not be able to apply for any long-term visit pass tied to your employment in Singapore. Nonetheless, he or she can consider obtaining either full-time employment in Singapore or becoming a full-time student in Singapore. AIMS would be able to consult in more detail on this.

Q: As a dependent pass holder, am I able to work in Singapore without applying for an employment pass?

A: Yes, this is technically possible. However, there's an additional step where you would need to apply for a Letter of Consent before you start your employment.

Q: There's a new law stating that any child below 12 years old would need to ensure certain vaccination is done before the child can apply for a long-term pass in Singapore. Am I able to avoid this step as I do not believe in vaccination?

A: Unfortunately, it is a mandatory step to apply for a long-term pass and there is no exemption unless there is a valid medical reason which will need to be verified and the approved by a HPB doctor in Singapore.

For more information on Singapore immigration and to assess your qualifications, please contact AIMS Immigration Specialist at expatlandsg@aims.sg.

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