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BRAZIL EXPANDS VISA EXEMPTION FOR CHINESE SEAFARERS

CHANGE RESULTS FROM
THE EXPANSION OF THE
MARITIME TRANSPORT
AGREEMENT WITH CHINA

Brazil has implemented a significant change in the application of its Maritime Transport Agreement with China, extending visa exemption to Chinese seafarers. Previously, this exemption applied only to crew members of vessels registered in the People's Republic of China. Under the new directive, the exemption now also includes seafarers from special administrative regions such as Hong Kong and Macau, as well as autonomous regions like Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Xinjiang, and Tibet.

This change was formalized through a circular issued by the General Coordination of Immigration Police of the Federal Police, clarifying the expanded scope of the agreement. As a result, shipping companies transporting crew members from these jurisdictions, aboard vessels flying any of those flags, will no longer be subject to the issuance of Infraction Notices (AINs) by the authorities.

In cases still within the administrative defense or appeal period, the Immigration Division of the Federal Police in Rio de Janeiro has been instructed to accept contestations and appeals against previously applied penalties. This applies solely to fines that are still under administrative review.

Additionally, shipowners who have already paid fines for violations related to transporting Chinese crew members under the former criteria may now seek reimbursement through legal action. The new position of the Brazilian government provides a solid legal basis for recovering improperly paid amounts.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BRAZIL'S MARITIME SECTOR

With the expansion of the agreement, vessels transporting Chinese crew members benefit from immediate relief, as shipowners are no longer at risk of infractions. For cases still under administrative process, shipowners with pending appeals must act quickly to ensure their defenses are submitted within the required deadlines.

The new measure also presents a financial recovery opportunity, as companies that have already paid undue fines can now pursue reimbursement through judicial means, backed by the updated government stance. This expansion of visa exemption for Chinese seafarers reflects a joint effort to modernize logistics infrastructure, promote sustainability, and deepen economic ties between Brazil and China, strengthening a long-term strategic partnership.

NEW BRAZIL-CHINA SHIPPING ROUTE

In April, a new direct maritime route between Brazil and China began operations, linking the Port of Gaolan in Zhuhai with the Brazilian ports of Santana (Amapá) and Salvador (Bahia). This initiative marks a milestone in commercial relations between the two countries, with positive effects on logistics, the economy, and geopolitics—particularly for Brazil's North and Northeast regions. It also reinforces Brazil's role as a strategic partner for China.

The route results from bilateral agreements between the two governments and represents progress in economic and technological cooperation. Direct access to Asia expands opportunities in emerging markets across South America, while enhancing the position of Brazilian ports in global logistics. The ports of Santana and Salvador are now strategic hubs for exporting commodities such as soybeans, iron ore, beef, and pulp, as well as for importing industrial and technological supplies from Asia.

Brazil's Minister of Ports and Airports, Silvio Costa Filho, emphasized that the new international connection boosts the global presence of Brazilian ports and promotes a more modern, efficient, and sustainable logistics framework. The National Secretary of Ports, Alex Ávila, highlighted the environmentally responsible nature of the initiative: *"The new route strengthens Brazil's green logistics by reducing emissions and connecting the country to the world with greater efficiency and environmental responsibility."*



REGIONAL IMPACTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Between January and March 2025, Bahia exported approximately USD 1.2 billion worth of goods to China and imported USD 800 million in Chinese products. With the new direct shipping line, bilateral trade is expected to intensify, leading to job creation and attracting investments in strategic sectors such as renewable energy, logistics infrastructure, and technology.

According to Antonio Gobbo, CEO of the Bahia Port Authority (Codeba), the new route establishes a direct trade corridor with southern China and Hong Kong. *"This connection will reduce transit time, lower freight costs, and complement the existing Bahia-Asia shipping line, currently operated by 366-meter vessels. This is fully aligned with the guidelines of the Ministry of Ports and Airports,"* Gobbo said.

The Port of Salvador is equipped to receive vessels of up to 150,000 deadweight tons, offering highly efficient loading and unloading operations. On the Chinese side, the Port of Gaolan is the region's only deep-water port, with the capacity to handle up to 160 million tons per year.

Another Brazilian terminal positively impacted by the expanded shipping network with China is the Port of Pecém in Ceará. Integrated into the new route operated by the Santana Service (MSC/APM Terminals), the travel time from China to Ceará has been reduced to around 30 days. Cargo movement at the terminal is expected to grow by up to 10%, particularly in the trade of fruits, nuts, granite, and industrial equipment.