

Ningbo to Unlock New Opportunities: Visa-Free Entry Extends to 4 More European Countries

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On October 15, China launched a pilot visa-free policy for ordinary passport holders from Portugal, Greece, Cyprus, and Slovenia. It allows citizens from these countries to enter China without a visa for up to 15 days for purposes such as business, tourism, family visits, or transit, effective immediately until December 31, 2025. This initiative is expected to further deepen the relationship between Greece, Slovenia, and Ningbo in eastern China, as these nations are long-standing “old friends” from Central and Eastern Europe.



Santorini, Greece. (Photo: Lan Yue)

“Emails never beat a face-to-face meeting!”

“This is excellent news! We can seize this opportunity to invite Greek winery executives to Ningbo and allow them to explore the Chinese market,” exclaimed Lan Yue, General Manager of Ningbo Lantu Trading Company, upon learning of the new policy. She promptly shared the news with her social media contacts. Lan’s company specializes in Greek imports, introducing products like olive oil and wine to Chinese consumers’ kitchens and dining rooms.

In recent years, Chinese consumers—according to Lan—have shown a growing interest in healthy foods and a willingness to explore niche wines, creating new opportunities for promoting Greek products. Ningbo has been actively hosting trade and business exchange events with Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC). “With the visa-free policy now in effect, business representatives from Greece and Slovenia can more easily visit Ningbo to participate in matchmaking events and forge new partnerships,” Lan added.

Many in Ningbo’s foreign trade sector believe that the introduction of visa-free entry will encourage more frequent business travel to China by foreign companies.

“When the visa-free policy for Italy was introduced last December, our Italian clients quickly responded by traveling to China and even attended this year’s Canton Fair. If they still had to deal with the hassle of obtaining a visa, they probably would have thought twice about the trip,” recounted Wei Guowen, General Manager of Paulinda, a Ningbo-based toy manufacturer. “For those of us in foreign trade, emails never beat a face-to-face meeting. Visa-free entry allows us to meet with clients more often, which truly strengthens friendships and creates business opportunities.”



A European client poses with Paulinda’s original IP, “Xiao Yi”.

Collaboration boosts industrial growth

In addition to international trade, the visa-free policy brings benefits to Ningbo in areas including the industrial economy and cultural education.

Among the new batch of countries, Slovenia has developed a strong partnership with Ningbo Menova Pharmaceutical Co., Ltd, a listed company in Ningbo.

In 2017, Menova partnered with Slovenia’s largest pharmaceutical manufacturer KRKA to invest 500 million yuan in establishing Ningbo Krka Menova Pharmaceutical Co., Ltd. The collaboration leverages KRKA’s robust research and development capabilities to introduce high-quality generic drugs that have either been launched or are set to launch in Europe into the Chinese market. The partnership also aims to accelerate Menova’s integration of active pharmaceutical ingredient production and formulation development.

“Slovenia is a developed country with a per capita GDP surpassing \$30,000. It not only has strengths in the pharmaceutical and health sectors but also enjoys a global reputation for its advanced automotive technology, which aligns perfectly with Ningbo’s strategy to build a hub for new energy vehicles,” said Zhang Mingming, General Manager of the Ningbo CEEC Innovation Center. “We can also take the chance to attract more high-quality projects from Slovenia to Ningbo.”

Mutual understanding is the key

In terms of education, Ningbo has also engaged in significant exchanges with Greece and Slovenia.

In 2022, the China-CEEC Alliance of TVET Institutions for Industry-Education Collaboration was launched in Ningbo. As a key member, Zhejiang Fashion Institute of Technology has established communication channels with several universities across Central and Eastern Europe to promote educational exchanges, academic visits, and joint research. The institute is currently developing a study program in collaboration with the Ionian University in Greece.

“The visa-free policy will significantly enhance university exchanges,” stated Hu Yu, Vice President of Zhejiang Fashion Institute of Technology. “Previously, representatives from some Central and Eastern European countries were eager to visit China but found the visa process cumbersome. Now, with visa-free entry for countries like Serbia, Hungary, Poland, Greece, and Slovenia, we have a significant opportunity to boost industry-education cooperation between Ningbo and the CEEC region.”

Mutual understanding among people plays a vital role in fostering international cooperation. As increasing numbers of international students, researchers, and business representatives visit Ningbo and acquaint themselves with the city, Ningbo is set to benefit from accelerated project implementation and more frequent cultural exchanges. This will enable its stories to resonate in hearts and minds worldwide.