

US Visa Application Process and Experience

On Tuesday afternoon, on a whim, I decided I wanted to visit the United States. I started filling out forms and paying fees, and by Friday morning, I had passed the visa interview! With a passport in hand, I managed to get through the visa interview in just three days. Thinking about it now, I still feel a bit excited.

Let me share my journey. Influenced by friends on social media, seeing them go to the U.S. for studies, internships, and work, I also felt a bit tempted. I've read many articles about startups in Silicon Valley and have been quite fascinated. Not long ago, I read byvoid's travelogue. Byvoid, an undergraduate from Tsinghua University's class of 2010, traveled to 13 countries in 2013, mostly on a budget. He spent less than 10,000 yuan on a 13-day trip across Europe. He was the type who hadn't traveled much before but suddenly visited many countries. He said it felt surreal—things that once seemed difficult were now easily achievable. My former boss also studied in Silicon Valley, and a friend from Tsinghua interned at Google's headquarters last summer. He recently came over for a meal and shared his experiences from Silicon Valley. So, why can they all go to the U.S., and not me?

Here's the detailed journey. Six months ago, my previous company planned an overseas trip, so I went back to my hometown to get a passport, mainly because my household registration was there. After getting it, the passport just sat there.

This Tuesday afternoon, on a whim, I filled out the DS160 form online, scheduled an interview, and paid a little over 1000 yuan. On Friday, I went to the U.S. Embassy for the interview.

Before going, I read many posts on Zhihu about visa interviews, so I saw many stories of rejections, which made me quite nervous. This was my first time traveling abroad, and the rejection rate for first-time travelers to the U.S. seems high. It helps if you've been to developed countries like Japan to show you won't overstay in the U.S. Also, although I co-founded a startup, we haven't been able to pay salaries yet. After a few months, funds are running low. So, I borrowed 10,000 yuan from a friend and 15,000 yuan from my parents to temporarily boost my finances. I should mention that my relationship with my parents regarding money is like that of good friends. Not long ago, they needed some money to repay a debt, so I transferred funds to them. In the first six months after starting work, I even gave them 5,000 yuan each month. After gathering some funds, I went to the bank to print my transaction history, hoping it would look decent. Feeling that I'm not doing particularly well and my conditions are average, I practiced the interview dialogue at home and wrote down some answers on my computer.

My appointment was at 7:45 in the morning. Arriving at the embassy, I joined a long queue, went through several checkpoints, registered my appointment, gave my fingerprints, and then had the interview. The interviewer was a handsome American guy, around 25 years old. After handing over my passport, he asked in English:

"What is the purpose of your visit to the United States?"

"I want to visit Google. I'm currently a founder of a company, and there are many startups in Silicon Valley. I want to visit there and come back to improve my company. Many friends have gone to the U.S., and I also

want to see it for myself. I also have an older sister from my hometown who married there and I want to visit her."Because I had practiced, my English was quite fluent.

"What does your friend do in the U.S.?"he switched to Chinese.

"He works at Google."

He typed on his keyboard for a while and then asked if I owned any property.

"Yes, my parents own a house in Guangzhou."

"Your are approved, yours is ok."

"Thank you,"I smiled slightly, feeling a weight lifted off my shoulders.

None of the prepared documents were needed. It seems the visa officer wanted to see if I had strong ties in China and if my contacts in the U.S. had any negative history. They assume everyone has immigration tendencies and then look at your documents and ask questions to see if they can dispel that assumption.

Afterward, I asked the lady who watched over my phone and bag, and she felt the approval rate was around 90%.

Over these three days, I realized that many things seem scary and daunting simply because I haven't done them before. But in reality, as long as you try, you'll find that most things are quite easy. Life is full of possibilities. It's important to challenge yourself often.

Since phones aren't allowed inside, here's a photo in front of the U.S. Embassy.