

# A NEW VISA SCHEME IS SET TO BENEFIT THE INDIAN TOURISM INDUSTRY



In 2012, up to 7 million foreign visitors came to India, a figure that the Indian tourism industry wants to increase this year by opening up the country to global visitors via a new visa scheme. Visitors from a large number of selected countries will be able to get their visa on arrival and almost everyone is welcome. This initially makes it sound like India has started a massive overhaul and adopted a friendlier approach in the face of its current security crisis but it is important to note the word “almost” and see true benefits of welcoming these selected tourists with open arms.

## **The other, self-serving side to this new policy and the possible Western bias.**

On the surface, this looks like a very simple scheme to open up the country to more tourists but there is arguably a lot more going on behind this decision and some interesting details to the policy. These visas may be portrayed as a way of encouraging millions more tourists, especially with the focus on a global reach; however, it can also be seen a fantastic publicity stunt and a way of patching over the damage to the country's reputation. Recently, many Western nations have put out travel warnings about India, re-establishing the common perception that it is not safe for young, vulnerable white women to travel alone in the country because of the recent spate of gang rapes. Businesses in India that are providing these instant visas say that the majority of their customers are from the UK and US and it seems that not only is this new policy a sign that India is perhaps now friendlier, it also suggests that the country is now much more accessible to young British and American student travellers, the sort that would have been put off by the old, complicated system of applications through Indian embassies. Interestingly, while it is now far easier for these tourists to enter the country, visitors from countries like Pakistan, Iraq and Afghanistan are still bound by the same old red tape.

## **Is this new visa scheme a win-win situation?**

In the end, this is a scheme that has the potential to benefit both sides substantially: tourists will not have as much stress to deal with if they want to visit the country - which is just as important for families and businessmen on last minute business trips as it is for the single Western woman - and the Indian tourism industry gets a potential boost and a face-lift after far too many damaging reports.

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