

INDIA PLANS VISA-ON-ARRIVAL TO BOOST TOURISM COMPETITIVENESS



India is set to loosen up its rules for foreign visitors as it looks to give its tourism sector a much-needed boost. According to a report by NITI Aayog, in partnership with the Ministry of Tourism, India is set to adopt a progressive approach to visas while also working on improving the existing e-Visa system.

The report, titled "Unlocking Growth in Tourism and Hospitality Sector", was released at a national-level workshop at the end of June. It states that visa and immigration procedures should be seen as enablers for tourism, alongside other key factors such as infrastructure, accommodation capacity, and service quality.

Introducing 90-day Tourist Visa-on-Arrival

The report suggests introducing a 90-day, multiple-entry Tourist Visa-on-Arrival scheme for eligible countries. **With this type of visa, travelers would be able to apply for permission to enter India at the airport or seaport of entry.** It would benefit both spontaneous and organized trips, as well as multi-destination and multi-entry visits.

The scheme would be rolled out progressively and only for selected countries. Eligibility criteria would include tourism-related potential, reciprocal facilities for Indians, migration risks, and regional partnerships.

Currently, India offers a limited Visa-on-Arrival facility to citizens of South Korea, Japan, and the UAE, who are required to hold an e-Visa or regular visa for entry into the country. According to the report, India should consider extending this option to more countries on a reciprocal basis.

Making the E-Visa Process More Efficient

The report also comments on the current state of India's e-Visa system. While the portal has been praised for its convenience, it has also received criticism for being complicated and at times not working correctly. The report suggests several changes to make the process more efficient and less error-prone.

For example, the report mentions that the current system requires applicants to enter the same information multiple times, which can be frustrating, especially for those applying from mobile devices. It also suggests that the e-Visa system should not ask for more information than necessary for a standard tourist visit.

Other suggested changes include smoother operations, such as fixing technical inconsistencies like time-outs and glitches, fixing issues with CAPTCHA, improving the display on mobile devices and browsers, and providing more payment options, including other international cards. The report also mentions that travelers should be able to track their applications and receive assistance if their application is delayed or rejected. Fake websites, which mislead travelers into providing personal information, should also be taken down.

The report states that several of the suggestions are already being worked on, such as improving the

user experience, introducing more payment options, and creating a unified online application form. Between August 2025 and February 2026, India has already taken steps to make e-Visa more accessible, including expanding the list of eligible countries to 175, introducing a new category of e-Visa, and launching new visa facilitation measures at more airports, seaports, and land checkpoints.

Looking at the Bigger Picture

The suggestions in the report are part of a larger effort to modernize and digitize India's visa and immigration system. In March 2026, the Indian Cabinet approved the continuation of the IVFRT (Immigration, Visa, Foreigners Registration & Tracking) program until 2031. The program is set to introduce more digitized, mobile-friendly visa systems, as well as self-service kiosks and improved infrastructure at checkpoints. It has already helped make most e-Visa applications processed within 72 hours and cut down on the time spent at immigration.

Other changes that fall under the digitization drive include multilingual tourist helpdesks and the reintroduction of an online health declaration system for international travelers.

Enhancing Connectivity and Accessibility

While visas are an important part of the equation, they are only one piece of the puzzle. India is also working on other ways to improve transportation and connectivity, including a new phase of the regional air connectivity scheme, UDAN. **It is set to revive around 100 abandoned runways, build infrastructure at 441 aerodromes, and construct 200 modern helipads, among other projects.** The projects will contribute to better air connectivity, particularly to remote and tourist destinations.

India's tourism sector has a lot of potential, and the government is making efforts to position the country as a preferred travel destination. However, the proposed visa-on-arrival and other changes, if implemented, will contribute to making it more attractive to international visitors. The next few months will show whether these suggestions will be realized.

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