

LIBERALIZATION OF VISA REGIME OF INDIA DURING THE LAST ONE YEAR

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Ministry of Home Affairs

Liberalization of visa regime of India during the last one year

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India has a robust visa regime to facilitate smooth entry, stay and movement of foreigners in India for legitimate purposes while ensuring the security of the country. During the last one year, the MHA has taken a series of steps to liberalize the visa process in India. Some of the major steps are described below:

The Electronic Visa Facility now covers practically all the countries of the world. Foreign nationals of 166 countries can now enjoy this facility at 26 airports and 05 seaports. The foreigner does not have to interact with any Indian official till his arrival at the immigration counter. The Bureau of Immigration (BoI) generally decides within 24-48 hours whether or not to grant an e-visa to a foreigner. The popularity of e-visa is sky rocketing. The number of foreigners who visited India on e-visa has gone up from 4.47 lakhs in 2015 to 17.00 lakhs in 2017. The figure for 2018 is 18.78 lakhs upto 30th October, 2018.

Two new categories of e-visa i.e. e-Conference & e-Medical Attendant visa have been introduced recently. E-visa is now available for five categories i.e. (i) Tourist, (ii) Business (iii) Medical (iv) Conference and (v) medical attendant.

The local FRRO has been empowered now to extend duration of electronic visas beyond 60 days upto 90 days. Moreover, these e-visas can now be availed three times in one year against twice in a year earlier.

For foreigners who are already in India and who require any consular/visa services like extension of visa, conversion of visa, exit permission or any of the total 27 visa-related services, an online e-FRRO facility has now been launched throughout the country. The foreigners do not have to physically visit the offices of FRROs/FROs. They can apply as well as receive consular/visa services online after making online payment.

To promote cruise tourism immigration facilities have been provided at five major seaports where e-Landing Permits are granted to passengers for their onshore site-seeing. The condition of biometric enrollment for such tourists arriving at the ports of Mumbai, Cochin, Mormugao, Chennai & New Mangalore has also been suspended till December, 2020 to ensure faster immigration clearance so that cruise tourists can spend maximum time on shore.

Foreign nationals who fall sick during their stay in India can now avail medical treatment without converting their visa into Medical Visa. This would take care of sudden medical emergencies.

Allowing conversion of any category of visa of a foreign national who is married to an

Indian citizen/Person of Indian Origin/OCI Cardholder into an Entry Visa at any point of time by the FRRO himself

Facilities such as extension of employment and business visas for a period up to ten years within India as against five years at present; extension of visa of foreigners who are staying in India upto 15 years continuously and for 5 years at a time; permitting a foreign national who is already in India on Long Term Visa to attend international conferences/seminars/workshops without any specific permission from the FRRO concerned have also been extended.

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Foreigners require Restricted Area Permit/Protected Area Permit besides a proper visa to visit areas which have been declared as "Restricted" or "Protected" areas. In many cases such permits are granted only after a Prior Reference is made by the concerned State/UT Govt. to the MHA. This takes time and creates another entry barrier for a foreigner. The MHA has now rationalized issuance of such permits. Prior Clearance of the MHA for grant of Protected Area Permit (PAP) and Restricted Area Permit (RAP) to foreigners in the following three major areas has been dispensed with :

Foreigners intending to visit a place covered under the PAP/RAP regime for activities other than tourism on a visa other than Tourist Visa;

Foreigners visiting a place for tourism purpose which is not opened for tourism;

Individual foreign tourists.

Accordingly, the State Government concerned or the FRROs can now take decision locally and grant PAP or RAP to such foreigners immediately.

Earlier, foreigners visiting Andaman & Nicobar Islands required a visa as well as an RAP. With a view to promote flow of tourism and investment, 30 islands of Andaman & Nicobar have been excluded from the RAP regime notified under the Foreigners (Restricted Areas) Order, 1963. Foreigners will also be allowed to visit 11 uninhabited islands, to be notified by Andaman & Nicobar Islands Admn., only for day trips without any RAP. Requirement of registration by foreigners visiting these islands has also been dispensed with.

Provisions relating to grant of intern visa have been liberalized with a view to attract more foreigners for internship in India which will be beneficial to Indian organizations. Intern Visa is now available at any time during the course of study. Further, minimum remuneration requirement for grant of intern visa for internship in a company has been reduced from Rs.7.80 lakhs to Rs.3.60 lakhs per annum.

With a view to enhance transparency and speed in processing of grant of event clearance for international conferences/seminars/workshops, an e-Event Clearance Module has been rolled out in April, 2018. Faster conference clearance would result into faster visa issuance for the foreigners intending to attend such conference.

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