

India extends visa-on-arrival facility to 180 countries

[Himanshi Dhawan](#), TNN | Feb 6, 2014, 02.07 AM IST

NEW DELHI: In a significant step towards liberalization of the visa regime, the government on Wednesday cleared two initiatives: visa on arrival and electronic travel authorization for all countries barring eight "prior reference" countries including Pakistan, Iran, Sri Lanka and China.

ETA will allow foreign travelers to apply for a visa from home and receive an online confirmation in five working days.

"We have decided to extend visa-on-arrival to tourists from 180 nations. It will take 5-6 months to put the infrastructure in place. We hope to implement this from the next tourist session beginning October," planning minister Rajiv Shukla said.

Visa-on-arrival at 9 airports initially

The extension of visa-on-arrival and electronic travel authorization to citizens of 180 countries will be implemented initially at nine airports including Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Cochin, Hyderabad, Goa and Trivandrum. Both facilities are likely to be implemented by the end of the year.

India currently offers visa-on-arrival to tourists from 11 countries like Finland, the Philippines, Singapore and Japan. The decision was taken in a meeting convened by the Planning Commission that included representatives from the PMO, ministries of home affairs, external affairs and tourism.

ETA will be available for a 30-day period from the date of the tourist's arrival in India while VoA will also be for the same period for a single entry.

The move, aimed at boosting the tourism sector, would not need the Cabinet's nod, Shukla said, adding that the home ministry would notify the same at an appropriate time.

"The facility will provide a major boost to the country's tourism sector. This is historic," Shukla said.

A separate website would be set up for extending the facility to foreigners intending to visit India as tourists.

To get a visa, they would need to apply on the designated website along with the required fees. They would be granted an electronic version of the visa within three days.

This newspaper has consistently argued that providing a visa on arrival should be the norm rather

than the exception. For reasons of geography, history and culture, India is well-placed to become one of the world's most favoured tourist destinations. Its potential has, however, been tapped only very slightly. Given the tourism sector's positive spin-offs on employment and earnings, we can ill-afford to let such a situation continue. Anything that can attract tourists to India is worth pursuing. Visa on arrival is one such thing, but far from being the only one. The government must also work to improve the tourism infrastructure and provide a greater sense of security to tourists, particularly women, among other things.

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