

Earth Times

Online visa system for Sri Lanka to start trials at end of January

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Colombo – An online visa system for visitors to [Sri Lanka](#) is to be put into operation on a trial basis at the end of January, an immigration official said Monday. It is to replace the existing system of free visas issued on arrival for residents of 78 countries including the United States, Britain, Germany, Japan, [Australia](#) and China.

The official said that after a three-month trial period they hope to introduce the scheme in which visitors would be able to apply for a visa and obtain a decision within a day.

On-arrival visas will still be given to Singaporean and Maldivian passport holders whose countries currently issue on-arrival visas for Sri Lankans.

The measure is aimed at raising revenue and improving the screening of visitors before they arrive in the country.

The online visa applications will be processed by officials including police and intelligence units. The new system has raised concerns in the [tourism industry](#) that it might slow visitor arrivals.

The president of the Tourist Hotels Association of Sri Lanka Anura Lokuhetti said that its members had urged the government to defer the decision until 2012 as the trade had just beginning to recover after the civil war.

"Sri Lanka was known to be a destination with easy access, but scrapping the on-arrival visa system will affect arrivals," he said.

Sri Lanka recorded 600,000 tourist arrivals last year and hopes to increase the figure to 700,000 by end of this year.

Tourist arrivals in Sri Lanka have been low due to the ethnic conflict but since the end of the civil [war](#) in May 2009 tourism has been picking up.