

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR FOREIGNERS WHEN TRAVELING TO INDIA

Entry/exit requirements

Foreign citizens require a passport and visa to enter and exit India for any purpose. Visitors, including those on official government business, must obtain visas at an Indian Embassy or Consulate abroad prior to entering the country, as there are no provisions for visas upon arrival unlike several other countries, for instance, Iran - which issues one week's tourist visa upon arrival at few Airports; Vietnam, China etc. In India, those arriving without a visa are subject to immediate deportation.

There are several kinds of visas as issued by Indian authorities depending on the nature and purpose of travel, for instance, tourist visa, transit visa, entry visa, student visa, conference visa, employment visa, journalist visa etc. Fees of such visas are fixed on the basis of reciprocal/special arrangements between governments and may differ for citizens of different countries.

Travelers visiting India are responsible for requesting the correct type of visa from the Indian Embassy or Consulate, as there generally are no provisions for changing one's immigration category (e.g., from tourist to work visa) once admitted.

Foreign citizens who visit India to study, do research, work or act as missionaries, as well as all travelers planning to stay more than 180 days are required to register, generally within 14 days of arrival, with the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) closest to where they will be staying. The FRRO maintains offices in New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai (known as the "Chennai Immigration Office"), Calcutta, and Amritsar. In smaller cities and towns, the local police headquarters will normally perform this function (referred to as the Foreigner's Registration Office or FRO). Missionaries whose primary purpose of travel is to participate in religious activities should obtain a "missionary visa" rather than a tourist visa. It has been seen in the past that Indian immigration authorities have deported foreign citizens who entered India with a tourist visa and conducted religious activities.

If a foreign traveler overstays his or her Indian visa, or otherwise violates Indian visa regulations, the traveler may require a clearance from the Ministry of Home Affairs in order to leave the country. Such travelers generally must pay a fine, and in some cases, may be jailed until their deportation can be arranged.

Visitors are advised to carry photocopies of the bio-data page of the traveler's passport and the page containing the Indian visa in order to facilitate obtaining an exit visa from the Indian government in the event of theft or loss of the passport.

Loss /theft of passport

The loss or theft abroad of a passport should be reported immediately to the local police and the nearest country-specific Embassy or Consulate.

A victim of a crime while overseas, in addition to reporting to local police, should contact the nearest country-specific Embassy or Consulate for assistance.

The investigation and prosecution of the crime is solely the responsibility of local authorities, consular officers can help you to understand the local criminal justice process and to find an attorney if needed.

Victims of a crime in India, including loss or theft of a passport, should obtain a copy of the police report i.e., "FIR" or "First Information Report" from local police at the time of reporting the incident. A copy of this report is helpful for insurance purposes in replacing lost valuables, and is required by

the Indian Government in order to obtain an exit visa to leave India in the event of a lost or stolen passport.

Certain Legal issues:

While in a foreign country, a foreign citizen is subject to that country's laws and regulations, which sometimes differ significantly from those in the native country and may not afford the protections available to the individual under the domestic law. Persons violating Indian laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested or imprisoned.

Indian customs authorities enforce strict regulations concerning temporary importation into or export from India of items such as firearms, antiquities, electronic equipment, currency, ivory, gold objects, and other prohibited materials. Even transit passengers require permission from the Government of India to bring in such items. Those not complying risk arrest and/or fine and confiscation of these items. The Government of India requires the registration of antique items with the local police along with a photograph of the item.

Indian customs authorities encourage the use of an ATA (Admission Temporaire/Temporary Admission) Carnet for the temporary admission of professional equipment, commercial samples, and/or goods for exhibitions and fair purposes

Foreign visitors planning to engage in religious proselytizing are required by the 1956 Foreigners Act to have a "missionary" visa. A 1995 Central Government order defines "inappropriate" religious activity to include speaking at religious meetings to which the general public is invited. Foreigners with tourist visas who engage in missionary activity are subject to deportation and possible criminal prosecution. The states of Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Arunachal Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh have additional legislation regulating conversion from one religious faith to another.

A number of foreign citizen men who have come to India to marry Indian nationals have also been arrested and charged with crimes related to dowry extraction. Many of the charges stem from the foreigner's inability to provide an immigrant visa for his prospective spouse to travel immediately to the native country.

WRITER'S PROFILE

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