

## **Visa norms get easier for tourists from 18 countries**

New Delhi: Foreign tourists keen on visiting incredible India may no longer have to do umpteen rounds of the local Indian embassy to get their tourist visas. The government is considering a proposal to provide visa on arrivals to tourists coming from 18 countries, which already get five-year multiple entry visas.

These 18 countries include Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Finland , France, Germany, Iceland, Japan, Luxemburg, Mexico, Netherlands , New Zealand, Norway, Spain, South Korea, Switzerland and Vietnam. Besides this, tourists from the United Kingdom also get a five-year visa while those from the United States of America get a 10-year visa.

The proposal for visa on arrival was floated by the ministry of tourism and culture and has been given the go-ahead by the ministry of external affairs. The government is now waiting for final clearance from the ministry for home affairs.

"We are discussing the issue with the ministry for home affairs as it would give a big boost to Indian tourism," a tourism ministry official said. The home ministry, however, wants the advanced passenger information system in place before granting such visas.

The advanced passenger information system provides all data on the travellers as soon as they board flights from their country of origin. While the erstwhile Air India (now a part of the National Aviation Company Ltd) has already put the system in place, many other international airlines and Indian airports still have to introduce it.

Regular discussions are however being with the home affairs ministry on the issue and the tourism ministry is hopeful that visas on arrival may be introduced sometime in 2009, the official added.

The move is likely to give a big boost to tourism in India . In 2007, about 5 million foreign tourists visited India . While travellers from the UK and the US form the biggest chunk of those coming to India, those from Canada, Australia, Japan, China and parts of east Europe also visit the country in significant numbers. The government hopes to increase the number of foreign tourist arrivals into India to 10 million by 2010 when the country will host the Commonwealth Games.

Source: The Financial Express, April 28, 2008