

## **25 lakh tourists visited India in 2018 availing e-Visa**

India had issued over 25 lakh e-Visa last year, a five-fold jump from 2015. The number of e-Visas issued by the Bureau of Immigration, under the Home Ministry, has risen from 5.29 lakh in 2015 to 25.15 lakh last year, the official said. On the other hand, the number of regular or paper visas issued by Indian missions abroad has come down from 45 lakh to around 35 lakh in the same period. The number of main categories of visa has been reduced from 26 to 21 by clubbing some categories. The e-Visa facility now covers 166 countries and foreigners can obtain online visa within 72 hours for travel related to tourism, business, health, medical attendant and conference purposes.

The scope of tourist visa has been expanded by including activities like short-term, unstructured courses (up to six months duration) on local languages, music, dance, arts and crafts, cooking, medicine. Voluntary work up to one month has also now been allowed under tourist visa. Provisions of Internship Visa have been liberalised. Earlier, it was given only after graduation or completion of study. Now, a foreigner can come for internship in India at any time during his studies.

Visa for internship in Indian companies can now be given for a lower salary minimum of Rs 3.6 lakh per annum instead of the earlier minimum limit of Rs.7.8 lakh. This would facilitate grant of more Internship Visas to foreigners. India's visa regime has been overhauled during the last two years by making it simpler to understand and administer. It has become more liberal in terms of length of stay, number of visits allowed and flexibility in undertaking various activities.

The simplified visa regime will promote tourism, business and people-to-people contact, another official said. The duration of e-Tourist and e-Business visas increased from 60 days to one year. Restrictions on two entries in one year have been removed. Now multiple entries are allowed on these e-Business and e-Tourist visas. "

A foreigner can apply online for e-Business and e-Tourist visas any time. Restriction of maximum 120 days of advance application prior to expected date of arrival in India dispensed with, the official said.