

## India agrees to expand air agreements with Vietnam, Uzbekistan

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New Delhi: India has agreed to liberalize its air treaties with Vietnam and Uzbekistan, increasing flight quotas for both countries.

This move demonstrates India's commitment to boosting international trade and tourism while supporting the competitiveness of its own airlines.

Under the new agreements, Vietnamese carriers will see their weekly flight quota rise from 28 to 42, while Uzbekistan's quota doubles from 14 to 28 weekly flights. This will provide a major boost to airlines like Vietnam Airlines and VietJet, who have faced capacity constraints on high-demand routes between India and Vietnam. Similarly, Uzbekistan Airways and IndiGo will now be able to increase the frequency of flights, thereby catering to the rising demand for travel between the two countries. These revisions are part of a broader strategy to liberalise air

rights, but they are also notable for their rarity. The Narendra Modi-led government has historically resisted expanding bilateral aviation agreements, citing concerns over protecting Indian carriers from being overwhelmed by larger global competitors. However, in recent months, India has been opening up more air routes, recognising the need to adapt to the increasing global demand for connectivity.

The new arrangements will particularly benefit travellers and businesses. For example, Vietnamese carriers will now be able to offer direct flights from Indian metros like Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata to major Vietnamese cities like Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, which were previously underserved. Additionally, under the India-ASEAN aviation agreement, Vietnam Airlines and VietJet will be able to explore new routes from cities like Hyderabad and Bengaluru, which were previously not accessible due to limited capacity. The tourism sector stands to gain immensely from these increased flight frequencies, as Southeast Asia, especially Vietnam, has become an increasingly popular destination for Indian travellers. According to the Indian Ministry of Tourism, inbound tourist traffic from Vietnam to India has grown by 22% in the last year alone. Similarly, the easing of visa requirements by Vietnam has played a pivotal role in encouraging Indian travellers to explore this vibrant country.

From a sustainability perspective, this expansion in air travel could have mixed consequences. On one hand, it opens up economic opportunities and enhances people-to-people ties, contributing positively to the region's tourism and trade sectors. However, the environmental impact of increased flights, with aviation contributing significantly to carbon emissions, cannot be ignored. The government and airlines must look to mitigate these effects by adopting more fuel-efficient aircraft, promoting sustainable tourism practices, and working towards a greener aviation industry. For passengers, this move will bring tangible benefits. Increased competition is expected to lower ticket prices, offering more affordable travel options. With better connectivity, business travellers will also find it easier to navigate international markets, while families and students will enjoy the convenience of more frequent flights.