

India seeks to ease travel restrictions

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 26 October, 2020



Dhaka: India is easing its visa requirements for the first time since March, allowing foreign nationals to return to the country. The government is also restoring all previously issued visas except tourist ones.

The easing of restrictions means thousands of foreign residents, students, and business travelers can travel to India.

Visa relaxation

India moved quickly in early March to close its borders, suspending all visas until further notice. Not long after, India also suspended all international flights, effectively locking out anyone wishing to travel to India. By May, the only route to return to India was to be a citizen taking one of the few Vande Bharat flights at the time.

This week marks the first time the government has eased visa restrictions. The only relaxation previously had been that visa holders (non-tourist) and PIO/OCI cardholders (foreign nationals of Indian origin) could travel on travel bubble flights. Now, however, many more can return to India.

Under the new rules, all visas to India have been restored except tourist, medical, e-

Visas. All PIO/OCI holders can also return as long as it is not for tourism purposes. The new rules allow business travelers, foreign students, employees, etc. to return to India. Fresh visas will also be issued for anyone wishing to travel for any reason except tourism.

Quarantine rules still apply

While India may have relaxed visa rules, the quarantine requirement remains in place. This means everyone entering India must undergo a 14-day quarantine (seven days in a hotel and seven days at home). A negative RT-PCR test in the 96 hours before the flight allows passengers to complete the 14-day quarantine at home.

The quarantine rules will impact business travelers, with most unwilling to quarantine for so long on short trips. However, for many coming to India for a long time, the rules are in line with countries worldwide and shouldn't make a big difference.

Few flights available

While the visa relaxation is positive, international flights remain limited in India to just 18 countries under the travel bubble. These countries include the US, UK, France, Japan, UAE, Qatar, Nigeria, and more. This means that all travelers outside these countries will have to take long connecting flights.

For instance, India currently has no travel bubble with any East Asian country except Japan. This means all travelers from the region will have to take a longer route to fly to India. Similar issues will affect passengers in Latin America and parts of Africa as well, where travel agreements are few.