

Tourist destinations begin to reopen again in India

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Agrai: The Taj Mahal and other historical monuments in Agra, India, reopened to tourists on June 16, 2021, after having remained closed for more than 2 months due to a surge in COVID-19 cases during the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Taj Mahal was closed to tourists on April 4, when the second wave began to rise.

[The Archaeological Survey of India](#) (ASI) has decided to reopen the monuments under its supervision as the second wave recedes across the country.

The final decision has been left to the respective state governments and district magistrates under whose jurisdiction such monuments are located.

Agra District Magistrate Prabhu N Singh confirmed that he received the notification from the ASI and forwarded it to the state government, requesting guidelines for when the monument reopens. The revised guidelines are expected to arrive on Tuesday.

The Taj Mahal had remained closed to tourists for nearly 200 days in 2020-21 before reopening on April 4. The closure massively hit the local tourism and hospitality sectors.

Agra's prominent hoteliers told India Today TV that the hotel industry has been on its knees for the past 16-17 months. Hotel employees are barely scraping by without work. They complained that neither the Centre nor the state government took notice of their plight.

Domestic tourists may return to Agra if the Taj Mahal reopens on June 16. This is expected to revive the local economy in Agra, which is heavily dependent on Taj Mahal tourism.

Vishal Sharma, Secretary of the Agra Tourist Welfare Chamber, said the Agra tourism industry had been nearly destroyed in the past nearly two years. Many businessmen in the tourism industry have gone bankrupt, incurring huge debt.

Handicraft emporiums have been closed, and those involved in the production and sale of handicrafts have suffered huge losses since April 2020. A large number of handicraft salespeople are now selling fruits and vegetables.

He further said while the monuments would reopen on June 16, the tourism industry may actually pick up only when foreign tourists return to India. At present, foreign tourists are not allowed in India. Further, the prevalence of the Delta variant of coronavirus may continue to keep foreign tourists away from India even after rules are relaxed.

Approved Guides Association president Shamshuddin and former chairman of the Agra Tourist Guild Arun Dang shared similar views. They further sought financial assistance to the tourism sector to ensure its speedier revival.

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