

## Sri Lanka approves free tourist visas for 35 countries

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Colombo : Sri Lanka's cabinet approved issuing free tourist visas to visitors from 35 countries including China, India and Russia, said reports citing a top official on August 22.

The move is aimed at boosting tourism and helping the revival of the country's economy.

Tourists will be given 30-day visas under a six-month pilot programme starting from October 1, said reports citing Cabinet spokesman and Transport Minister Bandula Gunawardana.

"The aim of the government is to transform Sri Lanka into a free visa country, much like Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam to tap into the benefits of a rapidly growing tourism industry," Gunawardana informed the local media at a weekly cabinet briefing.

The extensive list includes India, China, the UK, Germany, Netherlands,

Belgium, Spain, Australia, Denmark, Poland, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Nepal, Indonesia, Russia, Thailand, Malaysia, Japan and France. The island is expecting to close 2024 at 2.3 million arrivals.

Sri Lanka earned USD 1.5 billion from tourism in the first six months of 2024, up from USD 875 million dollars during the same period in 2023, according to the central bank.