

With a view to stimulating economic growth, increasing earnings from the export of services like tourism, medical value travel, travel on account of business thereby making India an attractive destination for foreign direct and portfolio investment, Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, at its meeting held on November 30, 2016, had approved various measures for liberalization, simplification and rationalization of the visa regime in India. These are now ready for implementation from tomorrow. These include liberalization of the e-Visa scheme, Tourist, Business, Medical and Employment visas. New categories of visas such as Intern Visa and Film Visa have been introduced.

With effect from tomorrow i.e. April 1, 2017, e-Visa has further been sub-divided into 3 categories i.e. e-tourist visa, e-Business visa and e-Medical visa. E-visa facility has been extended to the nationals of 161 countries for entry through 24 airports (E-visa service was earlier granted through 16 airports) and 3 Indian Ports i.e. Cochin, Goa and Mangalore to tap the potential of cruise tourism from different countries. This service will also be provided from Mumbai and Chennai seaports shortly. The window for application under e-visa scheme has been increased from 30 days to 120 days and duration of stay on e-visa has been increased from 30 days to 60 days with double entry on e-Tourist and e-Business visa and triple entry on e-Medical visa. Separate immigration counters and facilitation desks to assist medical tourist have been provided at Indian airports namely, Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengluru and Hyderabad.

The Multiple entry Tourist and Business visas for a period of 5 years will now be available to nationals of most of the countries. Upon urgent requests, business visa and medical visa will be granted within 48 hours of application. 94 Missions having bio-metric enrolment facilities have started giving 5 year long term Tourist and Business Visa w.e.f. 1st March, 2017. The remaining Missions will be providing this facility in due course.

A new category of visa titled Intern (I) Visa has been rolled out with effect from 1st March, 2017 to a foreigner intending to pursue internship in Indian companies, educational institutions and NGOs, subject to certain checks and conditions. The period of visa is restricted to the duration of internship programme or one year, whichever is less. The intern visa will be granted immediately after completion of graduation/post graduation. Intern Visa however, will be issued with prior clearance from Ministry of Home Affairs in case of Internship in NGOs or internship involving visit to protected and

restricted areas.

Another new category of Visa, titled Film (F) Visa has also been introduced with maximum duration of one year with multiple entry facility.

The minimum salary limit of for grant of Employment Visa, which is presently US dollars 25,000 per annum, has also been modified. This will facilitate foreign nationals engaged as teaching faculty by the Central Higher Educational Institutions.

The liberalization of the visa regime will considerably facilitate entry of foreigners into India for tourism, business and medical purposes. Consequently, the arrival of foreigners in India is expected to go up substantially in the coming years. This will in turn give a boost to the tourism, medical and business sectors resulting in substantial increase in direct and indirect employment in these sectors.