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Calls for a new India visitor visa to boost UK tourism

A [new report published](#) by the Royal Commonwealth Society in partnership with leading aviation tourism and industry groups recommends that **India is added to the UK's latest £87 two-year visitor visa scheme**. The reform would help reverse the UK's falling market share of global Indian tourists, which has halved over the last decade. The estimated cost to the UK economy is almost £500m per year and over 8,000 jobs. France has now leapfrogged the UK as India's most visited European nation, attracting 500,000 visitors from the subcontinent in 2015.

Nigel Huddleston, the Member of Parliament for Mid Worcestershire said; "I believe that the changes advocated in this report would help re-establish the UK as the leading destination for Indian visitors by making a clear statement that we are open for business."

In October 2015, the Prime Minister, David Cameron, announced a pilot scheme for a two-year UK-China visitor visa costing £87. The report recommends that Indian nationals have the same opportunity. At present Indian visitors continue to pay a hefty £330 for a two-year visa, or £87 for six-months.

UK-Indian relations are strong. They share deep economic and cultural ties – most notably through the Indian diaspora of 1.4 million. Indian business visitors also spent £201m in 2015; almost three times the average spend on business trips to the UK. However with the number of Indian tourists growing 10% year-on-year the UK should be capitalising on its immense potential for attracting visitors.

Next year offers the most opportune time to introduce this change with 2017 designated the UK-India Year of Culture, marking 70 years of Indian Independence. Throughout 2017 both nations will see a strong collaboration in business, art, music, design and much more. Having a cheaper and extended UK visitor visa will help enhance these endeavours.

Furthermore, the UK's decision to leave the European Union will undoubtedly lead to a dramatic shift in the UK's relationship with the rest of the world. At a time when the UK is reviewing its global position, it is even more pressing that it deepens its Commonwealth ties and sends a message to the world that it welcomes visitors.

The report's author, **Tim Hewish, Director of Policy and Research at the Royal Commonwealth Society** said: "We hope that the government will consider the very clear benefits of our recommendation, enhancing the already close affinity between two great Commonwealth nations."



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NOTES TO EDITORS:

Download the full report '*A Passage from India - Improving UK visitor visas for Indian nationals*':

<https://www.thercs.org/assets/Research-/India-Visa-Report-online-copy.pdf>

Download the two-page infographic: <https://www.thercs.org/assets/Research-/RCS-IndianVisaInfographic-2pp-web.pdf>

During the Chinese Premier's visit to the UK in October 2015 David Cameron announced a reciprocal pilot visa lasting two years for £87, which began in January 2016. This equates to a four-fold saving when compared to buying four separate six-month visas to cover the two-year time frame. Importantly, this two-year extension also applies to the standard six-month £87 business-visitor visa version. This decision has created a favourable benefit to Chinese visitors over Indian or other Commonwealth nationals, who must pay £330 for a two-year visa. The six-month visa fees for 2016 have now increased to £87.

The Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS), founded in 1868, is a network of individuals and organisations committed to improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth citizens across the world. Through youth empowerment, education and advocacy, the RCS promotes the value and the values of the Commonwealth. www.thercs.org

Partners:

Airport Operators Association (AOA), Birmingham Airport, British Air Tourism Association (BATA), British Airways, Confederation of Indian Industry, Heathrow Airport, Emirates, Manchester Airport Group (MAG), Tourism Alliance, Virgin Atlantic.

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