

## Press release

### France continues to be a more popular destination for Indian visitors than the UK – with the latest research showing the gap is widening

Research by The Royal Commonwealth Society shows that despite the UK's historic cultural and economic links with India, France attracted 185,000 more Indian business visitors and tourists in 2016.

Overall the number of visits to the UK by Indian nationals fell by 1.73% in 2016, while in France it grew by 5.3%.

Commenting on the research, **Director of The Royal Commonwealth Society, Michael Lake**, said: *“Given the strong historic ties between the UK and India in areas such as trade, culture and business, the fact that France continues to attract more Indian visitors than the UK is not only hugely surprising, but also enormously concerning. It’s clear that more needs to be done to build stronger links between such important Commonwealth partners.”*

In response to these statistics, MPs, The Royal Commonwealth Society and representatives from the travel and tourism sector are today in Parliament reiterating their calls for a **UK-Indian bilateral visa agreement** to stop this decline and kick-start growth in the number of Indian visitors to the UK. The call comes ahead of the Commonwealth Summit, being held in London next month, which Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to attend.

Given that the competitiveness of the UK visa offering globally has plummeted from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 108<sup>th</sup> in international rankings, a UK-India bilateral visa agreement would be an ideal initial step in making the UK a more attractive destination for Indian visitors. The agreement would be similar to the one recently put in place with China.

**Virendra Sharma MP**, who is supporting the campaign, said: *“A new UK-India bilateral visa agreement will enhance trade and tourism, as well as strengthen important business and cultural ties, enabling both the UK and India to capitalise on future global opportunities.”*

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#### Notes to Editors:

1. The Royal Commonwealth Society, 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 Royal Commonwealth Society promotes the value and the values of the modern Commonwealth. We champion human rights, democracy and sustainable development through our international networks and across the 53 member states which are intrinsically linked through their common history and shared values.



2. A factsheet entitled 'Britain and India - building a new visa partnership' will be launched in Parliament on 7<sup>th</sup> March. The factsheet was produced by The Royal Commonwealth Society and supported by Airlines UK, Airport Operators Association, Confederation of Indian Industry, Edwardian Hotels, Tourism Alliance and UKinbound.
3. The new UK-India Visa Agreement being proposed would reduce the cost of a two year visa from £388 to just £89 and allow travellers to make repeat visits within two years. This would mirror the reduced cost two-year multiple entry visa that was launched in January 2016 for visitors travelling both ways between the UK and China.

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