

**Publication:** The Economic Times

**Date:** 16/02/2018

**Heading:**

**Link:** <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/travel/tourism-industry-bets-big-on-expansion-in-outbound-travel/articleshow/62941525.cms>

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

## Tourism industry bets big on expansion in outbound travel

By Anumeha Chaturvedi, ET Bureau | Updated: Feb 16, 2018, 02:10 PM IST



Japan announced several changes that relax the visa requirements for Indian and Ukrainian nationals in November 2017.

NEW DELHI: Tour operators and travel service providers in India are betting big on an expansion in outbound travel, although New Delhi still trails other Asian hotspots in tourist arrivals.

Besides the metros, visa and other travel services providers like VFS Global, BLS International and Cox & Kings Global Services are expanding their reach to other cities across the country. It also helps that many countries have simplified the visa processes for Indian travelers over the past few years.

"Globally, the year 2017 saw us add eight new client governments to our portfolio, of which three (Georgia, Algeria and Ukraine) signed on for services in India as well. In India, we processed over 4.5 million visa applications and opened centres in cities like Pune, Kochi, Jalandhar, Ahmedabad, Chandigarh, Jaipur and Puducherry," said Vinay Malhotra, COO, middle East and South Asia at VFS Global.

Karan Anand, head of relationships at Cox & Kings, said globally different countries are looking toward Indian travelers to drive growth of their tourism markets and are simplifying

their visa processes. The easing of travel requirements and better air connectivity have led to more Indians going overseas.

Japan announced several changes that relax the visa requirements for Indian and Ukrainian nationals in November 2017. It includes a simplified visa application for multiple-entry visas requiring only three documents: a passport, a visa application form (with photo), and a document proving financial sufficiency. Indian nationals who have travelled to Japan two or more times in the previous year are eligible for multiple-entry visas that are valid for five years, and up to 90 days per visit.

In August 2017, Qatar introduced a free of charge visa waiver scheme, while the relaxed visa norms for Israel involve less documentation for Indians who have availed visas of Schengen countries, US, Canada, Australia or Israel and have completed their travel to these countries. In the same month (December 2017), Russia announced free e-visa programme for all Far East airports.

BLS International, which provides outsourcing of visa, passport, consular, attestation and citizen services and handles visa processing for countries like Spain, launched the visa application centre for Spain in Chennai last year. It has 10 visa centres for Spain in cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Kolkata and Chandigarh with plans to set up more centres in South India. Shikhar Aggarwal, joint MD, BLS International, said the opening of new centers in India will strengthen ties in the South market for both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and BLS International.

"We are looking for further expansion of business this year with newer projects for visa outsourcing as well as e-governance / citizen services in domestic and international markets," he said.

Morocco is the latest addition to the portfolio of Cox & Kings Global Services (CKGS), which is associated with various diplomatic missions as an outsourced service delivery partner. It renders services related to visa, passport and other consular services. Besides the metros, the Morocco visa application centres will be opened in Ahmedabad, Pune, Goa, Indore, Bengaluru, Chandigarh and Jaipur.

"Transactions in excess of 10 million are processed every year and the number will only increase," said Venku Murthi, COO, Cox & Kings Global Services.