

## A thumbs up to FM Arun Jaitley's Budget from tourism sector.

NEW DELHI: The government's move to extend visas on arrival facility to 150 countries and make world heritage sites more tourist friendly has been welcomed by the industry. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, in his first full-year Budget tabled in Parliament today, said he proposed to "extend the visas on arrival facility to 150 countries, in stages, after the success of the same issued to travelers of 43 countries."

Reacting to the announcement, Cox & Kings Director Peter Kerkar said: "The extension of Electronic Travel authorisation (Evisas) to 150 more countries is a positive step for tourism as this sector contributes seven per cent of India's GDP and helped create more than 40 million jobs last year."

Expressing similar views, Thomas Cook BSE 1.09 % (India) Managing Director Madhavan Menon said: "The Government's pro-tourism strategic vision sees continuum and we applaud the vision and long term initiatives of Budget 2015-2016 including expanding the VoA scheme to 150 countries in a phased approach..."

KPMG's India Head of Tourism and Hospitality sector Jaideep Ghosh said: "The proposed increase in the number of countries under the Visa on Arrival scheme, we expect, should catapult the inbound foreign visits to exceed 8 million in the current calendar year."



*In Budget speech, Jaitley pointed out that facilities at India's 25 Cultural World Heritage Sites were deficient and called for development of the locations.*

In a similar vein, MakeMyTrip.com Co-Founder and CEO India Rajesh Magow said: "The announcement of visa on arrival to 150 countries from the current 43 countries is a positive and progressive step. This will definitely boost tourism for the country and will give competitive advantage to India against other destinations in South Asia and Middle East."

In his Budget speech, Jaitley pointed out that facilities at India's 25 Cultural World Heritage Sites were deficient and called for development of the locations.

"Facilities like landscaping restoration, signage and interpretation centres, parking, access for differently abled, amenities for visitors including securities and toilets, illumination and plans for benefiting communities around them would be restored," Jaitley said.

Welcoming the move, Menon said focus on developing World Heritage Sites is of huge value given that many are in a bad shape and have received scant attention in the past.

Expressing similar sentiments, Kerkar said the plan to make World Heritage Sites more tourist friendly was long overdue as these sites attract a large number of tourists.

Jaitley has proposed to provide resources to start work for the following heritage sites -- Churches & Convents of Old Goa, Hampi in Karnataka, Kumbalgarh and other Hill Forts of Rajasthan, Rani ki Vav in Patan in Gujarat, Leh Palace in Ladakh in J&K, Varanasi Temple town in UP, Jalianwala bagh Amritsar in Punjab and Qutub Shahi Tombs Hyderabad in Telangana.