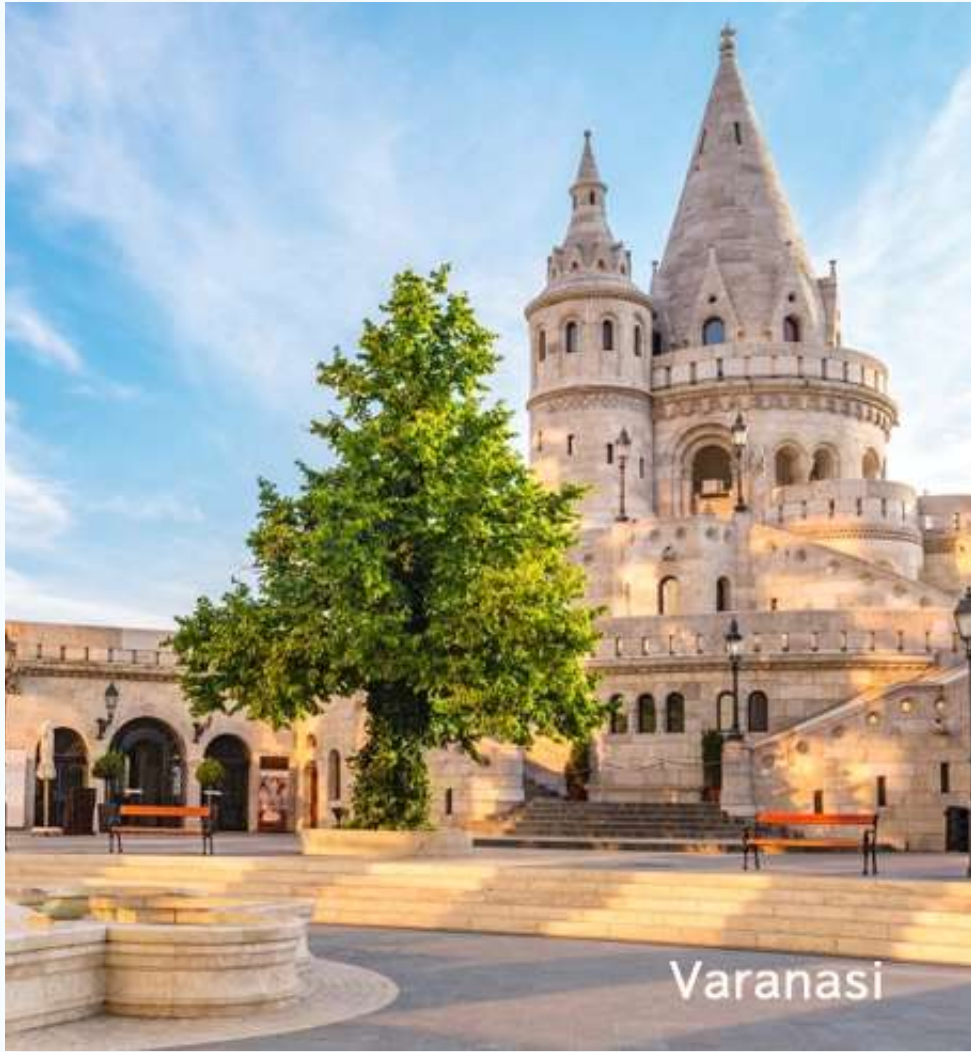


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Varanasi

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Indian tourists might soon enjoy visa-free travel to Russia

Indian tourists may soon be able to travel to Russia without a visa, but with a catch—only when traveling in groups. The Moscow City Tourism Committee is currently engaged in talks with India's External Affairs Ministry to establish a 'group-free visa regime.' This initiative aims to streamline travel for Indian tourists by allowing a certain number of travelers to enter Russia without requiring individual visas, provided they travel together. The Moscow City Tourism Committee Chairman, Evgeny Kozlov, affirmed that negotiations are still in progress to determine the exact number of participants for this exemption. According to Kozlov, who cited the Chinese protocol, these agreements typically involve groups of 10 to 20 individuals. The details will be decided after the two governments continue their negotiations. India has become a significant market for Russian tourism, ranking second only to China in terms of tourist arrivals. Kozlov emphasized that Indian tourists tend to spend generously while traveling, with an average expenditure of around USD 2,000 per person per trip. This has made India a priority market for Moscow's tourism efforts.

Israel launches e-visa system for Indian travelers

Ministry of Tourism (IMOT) has introduced a digital e-Visa system for Indian travelers, effective January 1, 2025. This new system aims to simplify the visa application process, eliminating physical paperwork. This marks a pivotal step in Israel's commitment to enhancing tourism accessibility and strengthening ties with India. The e-Visa platform allows Indian nationals to apply for visas entirely online, providing a faster, more efficient process. Applicants can complete the procedure from anywhere, at any time, through Israel's official government portal. The system also features reduced documentation requirements, making it particularly convenient for individual tourists. However, group visa applications will continue to be processed through traditional methods. India remains a key market for Israel's tourism sector. "In 2018, the country hosted 70,800 Indian visitors, marking a record. Although the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted global travel, Indian arrivals began recovering in 2022, reaching 30,900 despite minimal promotional campaigns. The momentum continued in 2023 with 41,800 Indian visitors. In 2024, 8,500 Indians travelled to Israel during the January-October period," Israel Ministry of Tourism (IMOT) India Director of Marketing, Amruta Bangera told PTI in December.



Travel between China and Thailand will soon be possible via Bullet Train

By 2030, Thailand will likely have its first high-speed rail network up and running, which will connect it to China via Laos. This game-changing initiative will strengthen bilateral trade and ties between the two countries. Officials are hopeful that this infrastructure will boost Southeast Asia's second-largest economy in the long run, despite the delays. Currently, the first phase of the rail line, which connects Bangkok to Nakhon Ratchasima province, is 36% complete. The design for the second phase, extending the line to Nong Khai in northeastern Thailand, has been finalized and is awaiting cabinet approval. When fully operational, the 609-kilometer (378-mile) rail network will cost an estimated 434 billion baht (\$12.9 billion) and include a bridge over the Mekong River to connect Thailand with Laos and China.



The Ultimate Mammoth Lakes Winter Holiday

Mammoth Lakes is a treasured winter destination offering numerous activities and experiences for the whole family. From festive Christmas events and dinners to off-mountain activities, here is a look at all the fun that is in store this holiday season in Mammoth Lakes. Ice Skating at the Community Recreation Center-Head to the LA Kings Ice at Mammoth Lakes for public skating throughout the holiday week. Rentals are available at the ice rink. Additionally, for families with kids, Santa makes a special appearance at the annual Skate with Santa Night. NYE Sunset Snowshoe Tours- On December 30 and 31, join a guided sunset snowshoe tour of the Mammoth Lakes Basin. Alternately, guided tours over moderate terrain to the lookout on Panorama Dome departing from the Tamarack Cross-Country Ski Center also offer a unique adventure. If you are here during the Christmas week or staying through the first week of the year, take in another unreal moment in time with a full moon guided snowshoe tour through the Mammoth Lakes Basin.



Chasing 'ghosts': How Indian travellers are warming up to paranormal tourism

As its name suggests, it's visiting a "haunted" or mysterious location to explore the unknown. It blends thrill, education, and cultural curiosity, and it involves guided tours to places believed to have a supernatural significance. These tours focus on removing superstitions and understanding paranormal activities scientifically. For instance, TravelChannel.com defines this as "the niche within the travel industry where tourists attend paranormal-themed conventions and festivals, investigate famously haunted locations, and join ghost tours or haunted pub crawls through cities". Others have referred to it as visiting places that embody belief systems beyond normal views. It is a well-established niche in countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, where there are provisions for proper guided tours, overnight stays, and events at these so-called "haunted" locations that cater to those intrigued by the supernatural.

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Planit Holidays - # +91 8287945614 | Email id : Sales@Planitholidays.co