

Protected Areas & Restricted Areas in India: Permit Requirements for Foreign Nationals including OCI cardholders

Overview

Certain parts of India are classified as **Protected Areas**, while a few specific territories of India are classified as **Restricted Areas**. Foreign nationals wishing to enter or stay in these areas must first obtain a **Protected Area Permit (PAP)** or **Restricted Area Permit (RAP)**, as applicable, from a competent authority. A foreigner is not normally permitted to visit such an area unless there are extraordinary reasons justifying the visit.

1. Protected Areas

Protected Areas in India have been declared under the **Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958**, as areas in India covering the belt between the Inner Line and the International Border in:

- Whole of **Arunachal Pradesh**
- Parts of **Himachal Pradesh**
- Parts of **Jammu & Kashmir**
- Whole of **Manipur**
- Whole of **Mizoram**
- Whole of **Nagaland**
- Parts of **Rajasthan**
- Whole of **Sikkim** (partly Protected, partly Restricted)
- Parts of **Uttarakhand**
- Parts of **Ladakh**

2. Restricted Areas

Following areas in India have been declared as Restricted Areas under the **Foreigners (Restricted Areas) Order, 1963**:

- **Andaman & Nicobar Islands** — entire Union Territory
- **Sikkim** — part of the state (the belt between the Sikkim–West Bengal border and the Inner Line, restricted since 20.2.1990)
- Tibetan Settlements, Monasteries, Institutions, Nunneries and other locations mentioned in the Fourth Schedule of Immigration and Foreigners Order, 2025 (https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/2025-09/4merged_16092025.pdf) are Restricted Areas.

3. General Permit Rules

- **Who needs it:** All foreign nationals, including OCI cardholders, intending to visit or stay in any restricted or protected areas are required to obtain the concerned permit before travelling to such places.
- **Purpose-based approval:**
 - Non-tourism visits (business, employment, studies, etc.) require **prior MHA permission**.
 - Tourist-visa holders visiting an area not yet opened for tourism also require prior MHA reference.
 - Non-tourist-visa holders wanting to visit only for tourism may be granted a Special Permit for areas open to tourism.
- **How to apply:**
 1. **Foreigners abroad:** Apply to the nearest Indian Embassy/High Commission/Consulate along with the visa application, or before travel to India, at least 30 days before the intended date of travel. OCI cardholders may apply for the same separately at the nearest Indian Embassy/High Commission/Consulate at least 30 days before the intended date of travel.
 1. **Foreigners already in India:** May apply to the concerned Foreigners Registration Office at least 15 days before intended date of visit to the restricted/protected area via <https://indianfro.gov.in/efro/home>.
 2. **Individual (non-group) tourist permits** generally require prior MHA clearance.

Conditions of Use

- Permit holders may visit **only** the designated places and only via the specified circuit/route and entry/exit points, for the authorized period. No area other than the ones indicated in the permit should be visited.
- **North-Eastern States:** A foreigner must enter/exit North-Eastern States only by air, primarily via **Guwahati (Dispur) Airport** (Aizawl, Imphal and Kohima airports may also be used if the foreigner holds a valid PAP/RAP for that area). Road travel within these states must stay mainly on National Highways to the extent possible.
- Tourist groups must report at the declared entry point, accompanied by a **Liaison Officer** appointed by the concerned State Government.

Obligations of Permit Holders

- Carry sufficient photocopies of the permit (a copy may need to be deposited at each entry/exit point).
- Do not overstay beyond permit expiry.

Obligations of Travel Agents / Tour Operators / Guest Houses

- Ensure sponsored groups hold valid permits and do not deviate from permitted places or overstay.
- Guest houses/hotels must accept only foreigners with valid permits and must report a foreigner's arrival/departure to local police within 24 hours.
- Non-compliance is actionable under the **Foreigners Act, 1946**.

4. State-wise Protected Area Permit (PAP) Details

Arunachal Pradesh

- Entire state is Protected; permit mandatory for all foreigners.
- Eligible visitors: organized groups (2+ persons) sponsored by a recognized travel agency with a pre-drawn itinerary; groups of two tourists even if unmarried; or a foreigner married to an Indian national belonging to Arunachal Pradesh, visiting the state on a tourist visa.
- Permit validity: up to **30 days**, for specified circuits (e.g., Along–Deporijo–Itanagar–Pasighat–Ziro; Bhalukpong–Bomdilla–Tawang; and several others).
- Issuing authorities: MHA, Indian Missions abroad, FRROs (Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Amritsar, Hyderabad, Bangalore), Home Commissioner/Secretary (Tourism) of Arunachal Pradesh, and the Resident Commissioner in Delhi.
- Deputy Resident Commissioners (Kolkata, Guwahati) may issue PAPs directly without a tour-operator sponsor; and also to single tourists for Tawang, West Kameng and Lower Subansiri districts (along with the RC, New Delhi).

Himachal Pradesh

- Applies to the belt between the Inner Line and International Border (parts of Kinnaur and Lahaul & Spiti districts). No foreigner can enter or stay in the protected area of the State without obtaining a permit from the competent authority.
- Eligible visitors: groups of 2+ sponsored by a recognized agency, pre-drawn itinerary; permit valid **30 days**.
- Conditions: military/security areas out of bounds (no photography); valid ID required; certain roads (toward Shipkila/Kaurik from NH-22) closed; stay duration decided case-by-case.
- Some areas (e.g., Kaza; the Kaza–Kibbar–Prangla Pass–Baralacha–Keylong–Manali trekking route) can be visited **without a PAP**.
- Issuing authorities include MHA, Indian Missions abroad, State Government, district DM/ADM/SDM offices, ITBP (DSP-level officer), Tourism Commissioner, Resident Commissioner (Delhi) and DGP Himachal Pradesh.

Jammu & Kashmir

- Applies to the belt between the Inner Line and International Border. No foreigner can enter or stay in the protected areas of the State without obtaining a permit from a competent authority.

- Eligible visitors: groups of 2+ with an authorized travel-agency representative and pre-drawn itinerary.
- Permit validity: **up to 7 days** per sub-division (covering circuits such as Nubra, Nyoma, Pangong Lake area, Chiktan/Batalik, Turtuk Valley, etc.).
- Leh–Manali Road open to foreigners **15 July–15 October**. Tours to be organized via recognized travel agents only, who will ensure that such groups do not split and are confined to the specified mode of conveyance viz. jeep, matador etc. by attaching their representatives to the groups.
- Issuing authorities: MHA, Government of J&K, and the District Magistrate concerned.
- Myanmar citizens require prior MHA approval.

Rajasthan

- Covers a roughly 40 km belt along the international border (west of NH-15, Sriganganagar to Sanchore), excluding city limits of major towns and certain listed tourist villages in Jaisalmer.
- Certain high-tourism-potential sites in Jaisalmer and Barmer districts (e.g., Kiradu, Juna Patrasar, Sam dunes area, Sudasari, Hadda-Deva-Mohangarh, Bhadresh power-project area) are **excluded from the PAP regime** for pre-drawn package tours; a 500m corridor along access roads also remains open.
- Where PAP is still required: valid for groups of 2+, up to **30 days**.
- Issuing authorities: MHA, Government of Rajasthan, and District Magistrates.

Sikkim

- A mixed regime: part Protected, part Restricted. No foreigner can enter or stay in the Restricted or Protected area without obtaining a Restricted/Protected area permit from the competent authority.
- **Protected-area Tourist Circuit Routes** (e.g., Gangtok–Rumtek–Phodong–Pemayangtse–Khechoperi–Tashiding; Zongri trekking; Tsangu/Chhangu Lake; Mangan–Lachung–Yumthang; and various East/North/South/West District routes, plus mountain-biking and white-water routes) — permits generally valid **30 days**, extendable by another 30; some circuits limited to 5 or 15 days; some allow individual tourists, others only organized groups.
- Green Lake Trekking permit duration: **15 days** (extended from 5), issued by Sikkim's Home Department in consultation with local army units.
- Issuing authorities (numerous): MHA, all FRROs, all Indian Missions abroad, immigration officers at major airports, and various Sikkim/West Bengal government officials.
- **Restricted-area places** (Gangtok, Rumtek, Phodong, Pemayangtse): individual tourists allowed up to **15 days**; the remaining Protected parts of Sikkim (beyond the Inner Line) are open only to organized groups on identified circuits.

Uttarakhand

- Applies to the belt between the Inner Line and International Border. No foreigner can enter or stay in the protected areas of the State without obtaining a permit from the competent authority.
- Eligible visitors: Foreign tourists in groups of **4 or more people**, sponsored by a recognized travel agency in India with a pre-drawn itinerary may be allowed to visit the following places after obtaining a Protected Area Permit: Nanda Devi Sanctuary (Chamoli & Uttar Kashi districts), Niti Ghati, Kalindi Khal, and areas adjoining the Milam Glacier.

5. Restricted Area Permit (RAP) Details

Andaman & Nicobar Islands

- Foreigners may visit a specified list of islands/locations after obtaining necessary permits (e.g., Port Blair municipal area, Havelock, Neil, Long, Middle & South Andaman, Baratang, Little Andaman, Ross Island, Interview Island, and several marine-park islands) provided **total stay does not exceed 45 days**.
- Certain remote islands (e.g., Jolly Buoy, South Cinque, Red Skin, Narcondam, Interview, Brother, Sister) allow **day visits only**; Barren Island may only be viewed from a vessel, with no landing.
- Myanmar citizens need prior MHA approval to visit Mayabunder and Diglipur.
- Visitors must comply with Ministry of Environment & Forest guidelines to protect marine/natural resources.
- Issuing authorities: MHA, Indian Missions/posts abroad, FRROs (Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai, Amritsar, Hyderabad, Bangalore), and the Immigration Officer, Port Blair.

Sikkim (Restricted portion)

- Places of tourist interest: **Gangtok, Rumtek, Phodong, Pemayangtse**.
- Individual tourists: up to **15 days**.
- Groups (for the remaining Protected areas toward the International Border): must be sponsored by a recognized agency with a pre-drawn itinerary, traveling on National Highways where possible.
- Issuing authorities: MHA, Indian Missions abroad, FRROs (multiple cities), immigration officers at major airports, and Sikkim/West Bengal government officials.
- Myanmar citizens require prior MHA approval.

6. Prohibited Areas

Separately, under the **Official Secrets Act, 1923**, no foreigner may visit or reside in any place declared "prohibited" without permission from the civil authority having jurisdiction over that place.