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Indian visa service in Canada shut down: what happens now?

Canadian citizens can no longer get a visa to travel to India. But what about those with OCI cards? How long will this situation last?

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Long queue outside the Canada Visa application centre in Ahmedabad on Thursday. (Express photo: Nirmal Harindran)

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As diplomatic tensions with Canada continued to rise, India on Thursday (September 21) **suspended visa services in that country.**

The announcement was made on the visa facility website of the Indian High Commission in Canada.

A day earlier, on Wednesday, New Delhi had advised all Indian nationals in Canada, as well as those who were planning to visit that country, to “exercise utmost caution”, given the “growing anti-India activities and politically-condoned hate crimes and criminal violence in Canada”.

Exactly who in Canada is impacted by the suspension of visa services?

Canadian nationals who intend to visit India, but who do not have an Indian visa yet, will be impacted. This group would include mainly Canadian tourists, business travellers, and students, as well as family members of Indian citizens travelling to visit relatives and friends.

Tour operators in India had been expecting a large number of tourists from Canada to visit this winter. Foreign tourist arrivals have been impacted from the 2019-20 season onward as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath, and it is widely anticipated that the coming season will be busy. Some operators were already bracing for cancellations from Canada on Thursday.

Will Indian-origin Canadians with OCI cards also be impacted?

No, Indian-origin Canadians who have a valid Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card, or a valid long-term visa for India, will not be impacted by the suspension of visa services.

OCI cards allow holders lifetime entry into India, and to live and work in the country indefinitely.

What happens to Canadians who already have a valid Indian visa, and may be planning to visit India at this point?

Canadians with a valid Indian visa will not be impacted by the Indian government's latest decision. As of now, their visa stands. They have not been cancelled yet.

For how long is this situation going to last?

As of now, visa services have been temporarily suspended. Where the situation goes here onward will depend on the way political and diplomatic relations between the two countries evolve.

The current crisis began on Monday (Canada time) after Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau alleged a "potential link" between "agents of the Government of India" and the killing of Khalistani separatist, Hardeep Singh Nijjar, in Canada in June. Canada expelled a senior Indian diplomat, and India retaliated on Tuesday by expelling a senior Canadian diplomat. There has been no thaw yet.

Could Canada reciprocate with its own curbs on Indians seeking Canadian visas?

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Canada has so far said that their visa services remain open. But that can change, if they decide to take reciprocal measures. Again, what happens will depend on the way the political and diplomatic situation unfolds hereafter.

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