

Why seeking a visa to Europe is ‘humiliating’

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Here's the bald truth. If you are planning to visit the US as a tourist, getting a visa is a far simpler process — minus the long wait for an interview for a B1/B2 visa — than getting a visa to go to a European country in the Schengen zone. The paperwork for a US visa is a lot less because Uncle Sam makes heavy use of tech to run background checks on applicants. You fill up a form online, go for an interview to the US embassy or consulates, and if approved, you get a 10-year multiple-entry visa (renewals are even simpler).

The endless list of documents required

for a Schengen visa includes leave letter from employer or educational institution for students!

While European Union's new rules starting this February allow frequent travellers to get longer validity visas ranging from one to five years, it is linked to the validity of applicants' passports. Which means even if you are eligible for, say, a three- or five-year visa, you will still get only a short-term visa if your passport is valid only for one year. The US, on the other hand, does not link the two.

And, remember, having a US visa makes your life much easier as an international traveller. Many countries recognise the rigorous vetting process before the US grants a visa and are less inclined to refuse you a visa.



DOCUMENTS...

😊 Not needed 😞 Needed

	US	SCHENGEN
Confirmed return flight	😊	😞
Hotel booking	😊	😞
Travel insurance	😊	😞
Bank statement	😊	😞 For past 3 months, stamped and signed by bank
Salary slip	😊	😞 For salaried employees only, past 3 months
Letter of leave of absence	😊	😞
Income Tax Returns	😊	😞 Past 2 assessment years
Visa duration (tourist)	10 years	Period of stay, at times a little longer. Discretionary*
Renewal	Dropbox (appointment waiver) option	No dropbox option
Passport expiry	Visa duration not dependent on passport date	Visa expires six months before passport expiry

US SCORES ON VISA FEES TOO

A US tourist visa will set you back by ₹13,499 while a short-term Schengen visa costs about ₹7,199. Yes, Schengen is cheaper, but this is only for a short-term visa. So, if you visit Europe 10 times in 10 years, you will have to fork out over ₹70,000 (assuming visa fees don't increase). Whereas for the ₹13,499 you pay for a US visa, you can visit the US any number of times in 10 years.

OTHER SCHENGEN PECULIARITIES

➤ Citizens of **non-Schengen countries need to apply for visa at least 15 days before the date of the intended travel**, and not more than six months in advance. The short-term Schengen visa allows the holder to travel to and within any Schengen country for up to 90 days, within a 180-day period.

➤ The same country's consulates in **different cities often have different rules**. For example, the consulate of a EU country in Mumbai gives priority to those who have travelled to Europe in the past two-three years while granting visas, but the same rule does not apply in Delhi.

➤ In case of travel to multiple Schengen countries, the visa application has to be made at the consulate of the country where the visitor is planning to stay the longest. But often, that consulate has **no free appointment slots to allot**, while the consulate of another Schengen country may have a shorter visa wait period.

➤ Schengen visas are issued basis hotel reservations provided. Despite this, at the time of entry, **people are sometimes asked to show the hotel reservations**.

US B1/B2 visa-seekers may be asked to produce a few of these documents during visa interview

'Economist' Makes A Case For Indian Tourists

In a recent article, 'Indians are conquering the world', the influential magazine had this to say. Excerpts:

International departures from India more than doubled, to 27m, in the decade to 2019. Overseas spending by Indian travellers tripled between 2010 and 2023, to \$33bn.... The number of valid Indian passports grew from 52m a decade ago to 93m this year. Indians are thirsty to see the world. Unlike the Chinese at a similar stage, however, they are not rushing to Europe. It is countries closer to home that are reaping the rewards. The countries that welcome Indians will enjoy both the economic benefits and the cultural soft power that tourism affords. Rich Western countries, however, make Indians feel unwanted.... Britain's visa fees are extortionate. Getting a visa for Europe's border-free Schengen zone... requires stacks of paperwork, evidence of financial health and proof of intent to return. Many travellers find it humiliating. Some refuse to go.... The consequences of turning away visitors from a huge rising power go beyond economics. Tourism shapes global culture; it helps determine which places are seen as important and which are overlooked.... The countries that invest in attracting Indians will shape the mental geography and implicit alliances of the future.

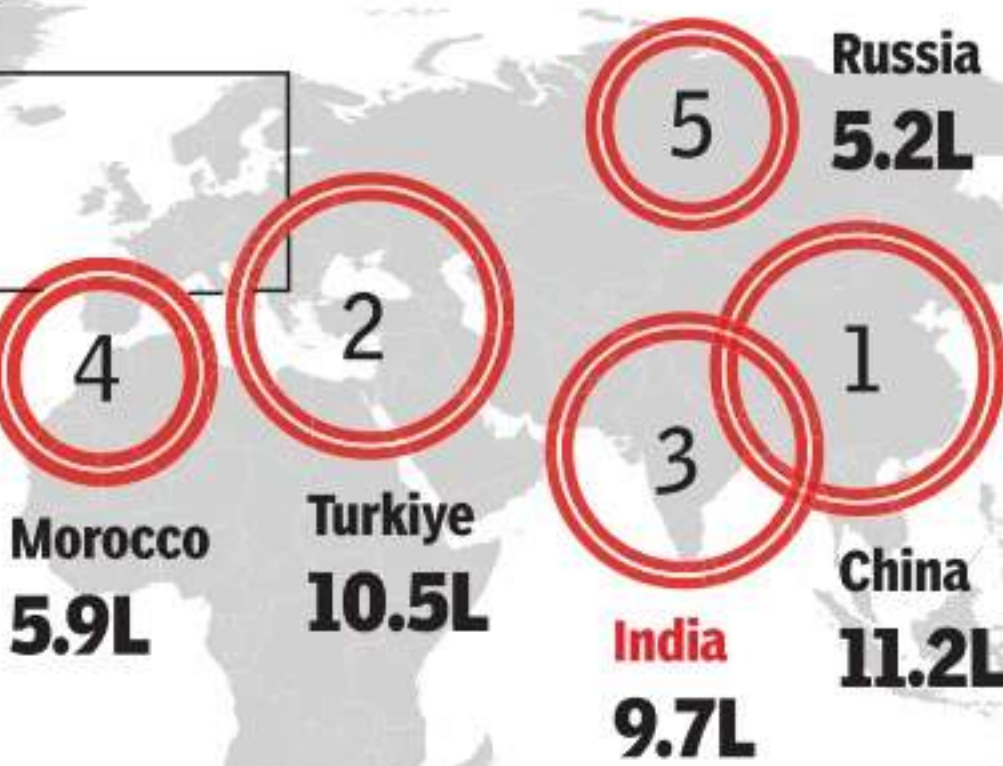
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countries allow entry with the Schengen visa

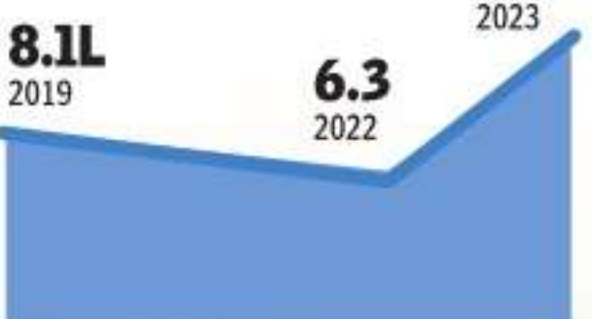
The United Kingdom and Ireland are not part of the scheme



India had the third most applicants for Schengen visa in 2023



More US tourist visas for India



2020 and 2021 were Covid years of restricted travel

14L US visa applications (tourist and non-tourist) were processed in India last year, the highest ever

1 in 10 US visa applicants was from India

11% of US visitor visa applications from India got rejected in 2023

How Does UK Compare With US, Schengen?

UK requires applicants to provide documents to support that the visitor is coming for a permitted activity; will leave the UK at the end of the visit and will be able to support self and any dependents for the duration of the trip. Applicants also need documents to prove that they will be able to pay for return or onward journey and any other costs linked to the visit.

But their visa fees are very high

6 months	₹13,308
2 years	₹49,992
5 years	₹89,222
10 years	₹1,11,440

Additional GBP 500 fees for priority service to get a decision within 5 working days.

The UK is developing a digital immigration system that will allow travellers to use an eVisa to travel to the country without carrying a physical document (except for passport). It will offer additional security and convenience to travellers. Timeline for its introduction isn't yet known.



Image: AI

Source: European Commission, US State Dept, US Embassy