

# Centre proposes restricting entry of visitors to Taj Mahal to preserve structure

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Myanmar President U HtinKyaw and his wife Daw Su SuLwin during a visit to Taj Mahal in Agra on Sunday | pti

NEW DELHI: Visiting the world's seventh wonder and monument of love, Taj Mahal, may not be easy anymore as the Centre is considering a proposal to restrict the flow of visitors as a part of the plan to protect and preserve the structure.

A comprehensive crowd management plan is being drawn up including plans to cut the existing visiting hours. Officials in the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) said a decision on limiting visits to Taj Mahal complex would be taken based on the study being carried out by Nagpur-based National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI).

The ASI had commissioned the Nagpur-based institute to conduct the study to assess the impact of tourist activities on the monument on a long-term basis as also the environmental effects on it.

The NEERI study will also submit a report on the optimum footfall at the Taj Mahal. Once the report is received, the ASI will analyse it and take a call on the number of people who will be allowed to visit the monument per day, officials said.

NEERI, in its draft report has suggested several permutations and combinations on crowd management, among other matters.

In 2012, the ASI had commissioned the study following a Supreme Court order to gauge the Taj Mahal's carrying capacity.

According to the Ministry of Culture, 7.43 lakh foreign tourists visited the Taj in 2012. The number fell to 6.95 lakh in 2013 and slumped to 6.48 lakh in 2014. The entry fee for domestic visitors to Taj Mahal is Rs 40 and for foreigners it is Rs 1,000.