



**Legalify
Attorneys**

Nigeria's Visa Guide for Foreign Nationals

Understanding visa options, immigration compliance and lawful entry into Nigeria



1. Introduction

Nigeria remains one of Africa's most significant destinations for investment, commerce, education, humanitarian activities, religious engagement, and cultural exchange. As the continent's most populous nation and one of its largest economies, Nigeria attracts thousands of foreign nationals annually for a wide variety of purposes, ranging from tourism and business meetings to long-term employment, education, investment, and permanent settlement. To facilitate the lawful entry and stay of foreign nationals¹, Nigeria operates a structured visa regime designed to accommodate different categories of travelers according to the purpose and duration of their stay². While many prospective visitors and migrants may be familiar with specific visa classes, fewer understand the broader framework upon which Nigeria's immigration system is built.

At its core, Nigeria's visa³ regime is organized into three principal categories: the Short Visit Visa, the Temporary Residence Visa, and the Permanent Residence Visa. Each category serves a distinct purpose and provides varying rights, privileges, and durations of stay. Understanding these categories is essential for individuals and organizations seeking to enter, reside, work, study, invest, or establish long-term ties within Nigeria.

¹ Sections, 9, 10 of immigration Act 2015, and Immigration Regulation [L.N. 93 of 1963.]

² Section 33 Immigration Act

³ "visa" means an impress or endorsement by any means on a travel document, purporting to be signed and dated by an officer appointed for that purpose by or on behalf of the Government of Nigeria, and authorising entry into or transit across Nigeria subject to compliance with any special requirements prescribed by the immigration authorities at a port of entry, and valid for specified time and for the number of journeys stated therein.

a. The Short Visit Visa: For Temporary Visits and Short-Term Engagements

The Short Visit Visa category is designed for foreign nationals whose purpose of travel is temporary and does not involve long-term residence in Nigeria. These visas generally facilitate entry for tourism, business engagements, conferences, religious activities, humanitarian missions, sports participation, cultural exchanges, academic programmes, temporary work assignments, and other short-duration visits.

Broadly speaking, Short Visit Visas are divided into two major classes:

- i. the Short Visit Visa issued through Nigeria's e-Visa platform; and
- ii. the Short Visit Visa obtained through Nigerian Embassies and Consulates abroad.

i. Short Visit Visa (e-Visa)

Nigeria's e-Visa system has significantly streamlined the visa application process by allowing eligible travelers to obtain visas electronically before arrival. These visas are intended for short visits not exceeding ninety (90) days and are available for a wide range of travel purposes.

Foreign nationals visiting Nigeria for tourism, business meetings, contract negotiations, trade fairs, marketing activities, sales engagements, conferences, seminars, job interviews, sports competitions, entertainment events, study tours, academic exchange programmes, humanitarian services, emergency relief operations, and temporary work assignments may be eligible under various e-Visa classes. One important feature of the e-Visa category is that visas issued under this platform are generally non-extendable. Travelers are therefore expected to complete their intended activities within the authorized period of stay.

The e-Visa category includes numerous visa classes, including Transit Visa, Business Single Entry Visa, Business Frequently Travelled Visa, Business Executives Visa, Tourism Visa, Sports Visa, Creative Arts Visa, Study Tour Visa, Academic Exchange Programme Visa, International Cultural Exchange Visa, Emergency and Relief Work Visa, Visiting Visa

(Single Entry), Business Multiple Entry Visa, and visas for Nigerians by birth who hold foreign passports and seek temporary entry into the country.

ii. Short Visit Visa (Embassy)

Certain categories of travelers require visas that exceed the limitations of the e-Visa framework or involve circumstances requiring consular processing. Such visas are typically obtained through Nigerian Embassies or Consulates abroad. Unlike most e-Visas, Embassy-issued Short Visit Visas may accommodate visits extending beyond ninety days depending on the applicable visa class and immigration approval.

This category includes Diplomatic Visa (Non-Accredited), Transit Without Visa, Visiting Visa (Multiple Entry), Journalist Visa, Cleric Visa, Medical Tourism Visa, Religious Tourism Visa, Humanitarian Services Visa, Staff of International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO) Visa, and Staff of Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Visa.

These visa classes play an important role in facilitating diplomatic engagements, religious missions, media assignments, medical travel, humanitarian operations, and recurring business or personal visits to Nigeria. For foreign nationals whose intention is merely to visit Nigeria for a limited period without establishing residence, the Short Visit Visa category serves as the primary gateway into the country.

b. Temporary Residence Visas: For Employment, Education, and Long-Term Stay

While Short Visit Visas are designed for temporary visits, Temporary Residence Visas cater to individuals who intend to reside in Nigeria for an extended period. These visas permit eligible foreign nationals to remain in Nigeria for periods that may extend up to two years at a time, subject to renewal and compliance with applicable immigration requirements.

The Temporary Residence Visa category is particularly important for expatriate employees, foreign students, interns, diplomatic personnel,

religious workers, and family members accompanying lawful migrants residing in Nigeria. As Nigeria continues to attract foreign direct investment and international talent across multiple sectors, Temporary Residence Visas serve as the legal foundation for long-term foreign participation in the country's economy and institutions.

Types of Temporary Residence Visa

Employment-Based Residence: A significant portion of Temporary Residence Visas are designed for employment purposes. These visas facilitate the lawful entry and residence of expatriates engaged by Nigerian companies, multinational corporations, government institutions, free zone enterprises, international organizations, and religious bodies. Relevant categories include Employment (Expatriate) Visa, Employment (Expatriate Free Zone) Visa, Employment - Expatriate (Government Official) Visa, Employment (INGO) Visa, and Employment (Cleric) Visa. These visa classes enable foreign professionals and specialists to contribute their expertise to Nigeria's economic, developmental, humanitarian, and religious sectors while remaining compliant with immigration laws.

Temporary Work Permits: Nigeria also provides Temporary Work Permit (TWP) Visas for foreign nationals engaged in specific short-term professional assignments. These visas are available in both ninety-day and six-month variants and are frequently utilized by technical experts, consultants, engineers, installation specialists, maintenance personnel, and other professionals engaged for limited-duration projects. The Temporary Work Permit system enables Nigerian organizations to access specialized expertise when necessary while maintaining regulatory oversight over foreign labor participation.

Education and Academic Programmes: Nigeria's immigration framework also supports international education and academic exchange. Foreign students enrolled in Nigerian educational institutions may obtain Student Visas, while scholars, lecturers, researchers, and participants in institutional exchange programmes may qualify under the Academic Exchange Programme Visa category. Similarly, Internship Visas provide

pathways for foreign nationals undertaking practical training and professional development opportunities within Nigeria.

Diplomatic Residence: Accredited diplomatic personnel serving foreign governments and international missions in Nigeria may obtain Accredited Diplomat Visas, facilitating the performance of official diplomatic functions while residing within the country. Collectively, Temporary Residence Visas provide the legal mechanism through which foreign nationals can live, work, study, train, and contribute meaningfully to Nigerian society for extended periods.

c. Permanent Residence Visas: Building a Long-Term Future in Nigeria

For certain categories of foreign nationals whose connection to Nigeria transcends temporary residence, Nigerian immigration law provides pathways to permanent residence.

Permanent Residence Visas represent the highest category of immigration status available under Nigeria's visa framework. Unlike temporary visas, they are intended for individuals who seek to establish enduring ties with the country through family relationships, substantial investment, exceptional professional skills, or retirement. Permanent residence offers greater stability and long-term security for eligible applicants and reflects Nigeria's commitment to attracting investment, talent, and meaningful integration.

Types of Permanent Residence Visa

Family-Based Permanent Residence: One of the principal pathways to permanent residence is through family relationships. Foreign spouses of Nigerian citizens may qualify for permanent residence status under the Spouse of Nigerian Citizens Visa category. This pathway recognizes the importance of family unity and facilitates the long-term residence of foreign spouses within Nigeria. Similarly, Nigerians by birth who previously renounced Nigerian citizenship may obtain permanent residence through the Nigerian by Birth who Renounced Nigerian Citizenship Visa category. This provision reflects Nigeria's continuing

connection with members of its diaspora who wish to re-establish permanent ties with their country of origin.

Investor Residence Programmes: Nigeria also provides permanent residence opportunities for qualifying investors who contribute significantly to the country's economic development. Recognizing the importance of foreign direct investment, the immigration framework accommodates investors across various levels of enterprise development. Investor visa categories include Investors Visa (Small Enterprise), Investors Visa (Medium Enterprise), Investors Visa (Large Corporations), Investors Visa (Ultra Large Corporations), and Investors Visa (Oil, Gas and Power Sector). These pathways are intended to attract entrepreneurs, business owners, industrial investors, and strategic capital inflows capable of generating employment, innovation, infrastructure development, and economic growth.

Highly Skilled Immigrants: In an increasingly competitive global economy, nations compete not only for capital but also for talent. Nigeria's Highly Skilled Immigrant Visa category provides a pathway for individuals possessing exceptional expertise, specialized knowledge, or high-demand professional qualifications to establish permanent residence within the country. This category reflects a growing recognition that human capital remains one of the most valuable drivers of national development.

Retirement Residence: Permanent residence is also available to qualifying retirees. Retirement Visa categories accommodate both individuals retiring within Nigeria and retirees relocating from abroad. These pathways offer eligible retirees an opportunity to enjoy long-term residence while contributing to local communities and economic activity.

2. Choosing the Right Visa Category

One of the most common immigration mistakes made by foreign nationals is selecting a visa category that does not align with their intended purpose of travel or duration of stay. Even further, choosing the wrong Visa may sometimes lead to offence in Nigeria, for instance if you a foreigner is in

Nigeria for the purpose of Business, then it must be through the right Visa, and must not engage in any business, partnership, practice a profession or accept employment without consent of director of immigration or minister in appropriate cases.⁴

A visitor entering Nigeria for tourism, for example, should not rely on a visa category intended for employment. Similarly, an expatriate employee requiring long-term residence cannot lawfully operate under a short-term visitor visa. Investors seeking permanent establishment in Nigeria may require a fundamentally different immigration pathway than individuals attending a conference or trade fair.

Understanding the distinctions between Short Visit Visas, Temporary Residence Visas, and Permanent Residence Visas is therefore critical to maintaining immigration compliance and avoiding legal complications.

3. Conclusion

Nigeria's immigration system is structured to accommodate a diverse range of visitors, professionals, students, investors, diplomats, humanitarian workers, and permanent settlers. Whether the objective is a short business trip, a multi-year employment engagement, an academic programme, a strategic investment, or permanent settlement, there is a visa category designed to meet the specific needs of the applicant. The key to a successful immigration journey lies in identifying the appropriate visa category from the outset and ensuring compliance with all applicable immigration requirements and Laws.

As Nigeria continues to strengthen its position as a regional economic hub and destination for global talent and investment, a proper understanding of its visa framework remains indispensable for anyone seeking to enter, reside, work, study, invest, or build a future in the country.

⁴ Section 8 Immigration Act

Disclaimer

This article is for general information purposes only and does not constitute legal advice or professional guidance in relation to global mobility and immigration law or any related matter. It is not intended to create, and shall not be construed as creating, an attorney-client relationship between Legalify Attorneys (or any of its Lawyers and contributors) and any reader or recipient of this material.

Legalify Attorneys is available to provide tailored legal assistance, should you or your organisation require guidance on related legal matters or other legal matters.

All enquiries may be directed to your usual contact at the firm, or to:
info@legalifyattorneys.com

Legalify Attorneys

For more information contact:
info@legalifyattorneys.com

www.legalifyattorneys.com

