

India Film Shoot Checklist for International Advertising Filmmakers

This document provides a comprehensive checklist for international advertising filmmakers planning shoots in India. It complements ad film production articles by focusing on practical, step-by-step activities. The checklist covers pre-arrival preparations, on-site execution, and post-shoot wrap-up. Activities include embassy applications, script submissions to the Film Facilitation Office (FFO) or Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), timelines, equipment lists for customs exemptions, visa types, and related tasks. Based on 2025 guidelines, it draws from official sources like the India Cine Hub (ICH), Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB), MEA, and Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC). Always verify with official portals for updates, as rules can change.

Ad films (commercials under 30 minutes) may not qualify for full incentives but require permissions for legal filming. Hire a local line producer early to assist. Expect total preparation time of 2-4 months. Budget for fees: USD 225 (approx. INR 20,000) for FFO national permits; visa fees USD 100-200; customs handling minimal with ATA Carnet.

1. Pre-Production Planning (2-3 Months Before Arrival)

Prepare foundational documents and research. This phase ensures compliance and avoids delays.

- **Research Locations and Local Partners** Identify shoot sites (e.g., Mumbai for urban ads, Rajasthan for heritage). Contact state tourism boards for initial advice. Hire an Indian line producer or production services company. They handle local coordination. Required documents: Signed contract with scope, budget, and responsibilities. Time taken: 1-2 weeks. Tip: Use FFO's location database on indiacinehub.gov.in for ideas.
- **Budget and Incentive Eligibility Check** Estimate Qualifying Production Expenditure (QPE): Minimum INR 10 million for post-production; ads often exclude full rebates but check partial state incentives (e.g., Uttar Pradesh up to 50%). Apply for co-production status if partnering with Indian entities under bilateral treaties (e.g., US-India). Submit to MIB via ICH. Documents: Project budget breakdown, fund origin declaration. Time taken: 20 working days for interim review. Note: Ad films may qualify if over 30 minutes total (e.g., series of commercials); otherwise, focus on permissions only.
- **Script or Concept Preparation** Draft script, storyboard, or treatment. Ensure no objectionable content (e.g., avoid politics, religion). For ads, include product details and cultural sensitivity notes. Prepare for evaluation by Script Evaluation Officer (SEO) via FFO. Documents: English script, synopsis, shooting schedule. Time taken: Include in FFO submission (45 days total).

2. Script Submission and Permission Application (45-60 Days Before Shoot)

Submit to FFO for national permits; MEA for documentary-style ads. This is mandatory for foreign crews.

- **Register on FFO/ICH Portal** Visit indiacinehub.gov.in. Register as "International Production." Create account with email and details. Time taken: 1 day. Required: Company registration proof.
- **Fill and Submit Application Form** Complete online form for national filming permit. Upload script/treatment. Describe ad concept, locations, crew list (with passport copies), and schedule. For ads resembling documentaries (e.g., real-life stories), route through MEA at Indian embassy. Submit signed undertaking. Pay fee: USD 225 via bank transfer. Time taken: 45 days for FFO processing; MEA adds 2-4 weeks if involved. Track status online. Documents: Script in English (notarized if foreign), crew bios, location list, intent letter. If

changes, resubmit. Outcome: Interim approval certificate (valid 12 months; extend to 24 for high QPE).

- **State-Level Permissions** After national approval, apply for local nods (e.g., ASI for monuments, forest departments for wildlife). Use FFO's single-window system. Time taken: 5-10 days per state. Documents: FFO certificate copy, local schedule. Fees vary (INR 50,000-200,000 per location). Tip: For Mumbai/Delhi, expect crowd control permits from police.
- **Handle Rejections or Revisions** If denied (e.g., sensitive content), revise script and resubmit within 15 days. SEO may require NOC from Indian mission abroad.

3. Visa Application Process (4-6 Weeks Before Travel)

Apply after FFO/MEA permission. Tourist visas prohibit filming; use specialized types.

- **Determine Visa Type** Film Visa (F Visa): For feature-style ads, TV commercials. Valid up to 1 year, multiple entries. Journalist Visa (J Visa): For short ad shoots (up to 3 months), photographers, or AV crews. Note: All crew/cast need valid visas; children require guardian consent.
- **Apply at Indian Embassy/Consulate** Use indianvisaonline.gov.in. Fill form, upload FFO permission letter. Time taken: 4-6 weeks; expedited for urgent shoots. Fees: USD 100-200 (bank draft). Documents: Passport (valid 6 months), 2 photos, bio page copy, FFO/MEA approval, shoot itinerary, proof of funds/hotels, health certificates (e.g., yellow fever if from endemic areas). For extensions: Apply at FRRO in India within 14 days of arrival if over 180 days.
- **Crew and Cast Visas** Submit group application if large team. Include roles (e.g., director, cameraman). Tip: Avoid mixing with business visas; penalties for misuse.

4. Equipment Preparation and Customs Exemption (1-2 Months Before Import)

Use ATA Carnet for duty-free temporary import. India accepts it for filming gear.

- **Prepare Equipment List** Create detailed inventory: Categories (cameras, lenses, drones, lights, sound). Include make, model, serial numbers, values (in USD/INR). Separate drones (need DGCA approval). Limit to essentials; excess may incur duties. Documents: List in Excel/PDF, notarized.
- **Apply for ATA Carnet** Obtain from issuing chamber in home country (e.g., USCIB in US). Valid 6 months in India (2 months for professional equipment). Time taken: 1-2 weeks to issue. Fees: Based on value (0.5-1% guarantee). No duties if re-exported. Process: Present at Indian customs on arrival. Officials stamp and inspect.
- **Customs Clearance on Arrival** Declare at airport (e.g., Mumbai/Delhi). Show FFO permission, Carnet. Time taken: 1-2 hours if prepared. Documents: Carnet booklet, equipment list, invoice copies. Hire broker for speed (INR 5,000-10,000). Note: Re-export within validity; pay 35% duties otherwise. Insure gear separately.
- **Drone and Special Equipment** Register drones with DGCA online. Permit required for flights. Documents: UAS details, operator ID.

5. On-Arrival and On-Site Activities (Day 1-Shoot Duration)

Execute upon landing. Register if long stay.

- **Immigration and FRRO Registration** Present visa, FFO letter at immigration. Register at FRRO if stay >180 days (online within 14 days). Documents: Address proof (hotel), passport copy.
- **Customs Inspection for Equipment** Match list to gear. Get entry stamp on Carnet.

- **Local Setup** Meet line producer. Obtain SIM cards, transport. Brief crew on safety (e.g., COVID protocols if active). Secure insurance: Cover crew, equipment, liability (mandatory for incentives).
- **Shoot Execution** Follow schedule. Obtain daily local permits if needed. Respect environment (no harm declaration for incentives). Track expenses: Keep GST invoices for rebates.

6. Post-Shoot Wrap-Up (Within 90 Days After Completion)

Close out legally. Apply for rebates if eligible.

- **Equipment Re-Export** Present at customs exit. Get stamp confirming no duties owed. Time taken: 1 day.
- **Incentive/Rebate Application (If Eligible)** Submit via ICH for up to 40% QPE rebate (cap INR 300 million; 30% base + bonuses). Ads may qualify if co-produced. Time taken: 60 days for final approval; 90% disbursed immediately, 10% after release proof. Documents: Audited statements, invoices, bank proofs, feedback form, 'Filmed in India' credits affidavit.
- **Report Submission** Send completion report to FFO/MEA. Include footage details if requested.
- **Exit Formalities** Overstay visas? Apply for exit permit at FRRO.

Common Pitfalls and Tips

- Pitfalls: Incomplete scripts delay approvals; wrong visa leads to deportation.
- Tips: Start 3 months early. Use English for all docs. Budget 10% extra for fees/delays. Engage locals for cultural navigation. For 2025, note enhanced rebates (up to 40%) but ad exclusions in some schemes.

References for Further Reading

- India Cine Hub Guidelines: indiacinehub.gov.in (internal link to incentives PDF).
- MEA Documentary Filming: mea.gov.in.
- Visa Portal: indianvisaonline.gov.in.
- CBIC ATA Carnet: cbic.gov.in.
- Examples: Nike India ads used FFO for quick urban permits; Pepsi Rajasthan shoots leveraged state rebates.