

Will India Pay for Your Trip to a Trade Fair?

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Sometimes, and usually only in part. Indian export councils run hosted buyer programmes that cover hotel and part of the airfare, now funded through Market Access Support after the old MAI scheme ended on 31 March 2026. Each organiser sets its own package and conditions.

Key takeaways

- MAI ended on 31 March 2026. Buyer support now runs under Market Access Support in the Export Promotion Mission.
- Government pays 75% of an airfare ceiling, and many organisers tie airfare to orders or MoUs.
- You usually pay first and are reimbursed against tickets, boarding passes and passport stamps.
- Supported delegates must not be related to Indian entities, which can matter for diaspora-owned importers.
- The Indian mission in your country is usually the gate. Calls for nominations close months ahead.

Sometimes, and usually only part of it. Indian export councils and federations run hosted buyer programmes at some fairs and at reverse buyer-seller meets, covering your hotel and part of your airfare. Since the old Market Access Initiative (MAI) ended, the money comes from Market Access Support (MAS) under India's Export Promotion Mission, and the support comes with conditions you should read first.

Many AI answers and fair websites still talk about MAI, which is out of date. This post explains what changed, who actually qualifies, and the catches nobody puts in the headline. The caveat - MAS is running as a pilot, its guidelines were still headed "draft provisions" when we read them again on

13 October 2026, and each organiser sets its own package, so treat every offer as that organiser's promise.

SourcingFrom Intelligence

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- 01 **MAI's guidelines ran from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2026. DGFT launched Market Access Support on 31 December 2025 under the Export Promotion Mission.** *(MAI revised guidelines, Department of Commerce, 19 Jul 2021. [DGFT scheme guidelines](#), Trade Notice 19/2025-26, amended by [Trade Notice 08/2026-27](#) of 1 July 2026, read 13 Oct 2026)*
 - 02 **Under MAS, government pays 75% of an airfare ceiling of ₹1,25,000 for buyers from Africa, the Americas and Oceania (₹75,000 elsewhere), or of actual cost if lower, and support is "limited to buyer hospitality".** *(Same notice)*
 - 03 **Overseas delegates who want support "must not be related to Indian entities", and post-event feedback is mandatory for future support.** *(Same notice · Verified rule. Effect on diaspora-owned importers Indicative)*
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What we don't know yet

- The MAS hotel ceiling. The guidelines list "Hotel Stay for foreign buyers (ceiling to be notified)", and no ceiling had been notified when we checked on 13 October 2026.

1. What Changed When MAI Ended

For years, the Market Access Initiative paid for foreign buyers to visit Indian fairs and meets. Its 2021 guidelines ran to 31 March 2026. The Export Promotion Mission, approved by India's Cabinet with an outlay of ₹25,060 crore for FY2025–26 to FY2030–31, consolidates MAI and other export schemes (pmindia.gov.in). Its Market Access Support component now funds buyer hospitality.



Comparing the old and new rules, three things stand out (MAI 2021 guidelines against DGFT Trade Notice 19/2025–26) –

- **The airfare ceilings stayed the same in rupees**, but the government now pays 75% of the ceiling rather than hosting in full. Africa joined the top tier.
- **Some old buyer rules are no longer written down**, such as buyers being "of the level of Director/ Senior Executive/ Sourcing Agent" and no buyer being supported more than three times. Organisers may still apply them.
- **New rules arrived** – no related parties, mandatory feedback, and a minimum of 100 overseas participants for a supported meet.

	MAI (2021 guidelines)	MAS (Export Promotion Mission)
Airfare	Hosted within ceilings	75% of the same rupee ceilings
Top airfare tier	Americas and Oceania	Africa, the Americas and Oceania
Buyer seniority and three-visit limit	Written into the rules	No longer written down
Related parties	Not covered	Must not be related to Indian entities
Feedback after the event	Not covered	Mandatory for future support

What does that mean for you? Packages vary more between organisers than they used to. One fair may cover four hotel nights, another two, another nothing.

2. So Who Actually Pays For What?

The organiser does, using its share of MAS money plus its own budget. In practice the offers we read in September 2026 ranged from generous to nothing at all. The India Carpet Expo paid a fixed airfare sum, higher for Australia, New Zealand and the US than for the UK and EU, plus two hotel nights. IHGF offered transfers and discounted rooms, no free hotel. IJIS ran a lucky draw (organisers' published terms, Sep 2026).

The full fair-by-fair table, with dates, is on our [India trade fairs page](#). I won't repeat it here. What I'll add is how to read it.

3. The Catches Nobody Headlines

The airfare often depends on results. FIEO's 2026–27 buyer–seller meets reimbursed airfare up to a cap "based on business outcomes such as MoUs or confirmed orders" (call for nominations, posted by the Consulate General of India, Atlanta). At one 2026 meet, buyers got half the fare, or all of it in cash at the venue if they placed an order (Embassy of India, Doha). That's not a free trip. It's a nudge to buy.



You pay first, they reimburse later. Reimbursement usually comes against your ticket, boarding passes and passport stamps. EEPC's 2024 package asked for the "Visa and Immigration Stamp". Keep every scrap of paper.

You owe them your time. Hosted buyers sit through a meeting schedule. EEPC's package had "Compulsory B2B Meetings" on all three days, and one 2026 rice conference checked six hours a day at the venue by badge scan

(organisers' terms). That's a fair trade if the exporters are screened for your category.

Family links can rule you out. MAS says supported delegates "must not be related to Indian entities". If you're a UK or UAE importer whose cousin runs the export house, read that line twice. How organisers apply it to diaspora-owned importers isn't spelled out, so ask.

You have to prove you're a real importer. Some programmes set a bar, such as India SME Forum's meets asking for at least US\$50,000 of cumulative imports over the last two financial years. Others screen through the Indian embassy in your country. Expect to send a company record and your import history.

4. How Do You Get A Seat?

The gate is usually the Indian mission in your country. Organisers share buyer lists with missions for checks, and missions repost calls for nominations on their events pages. Calls close months ahead – FIEO's call for July to December 2026 meets closed on 30 May 2026 (CGI Atlanta).

So the useful step is one short email to the commercial wing of the Indian high commission, embassy or consulate covering you, naming your company, your category and your import record, and asking to be nominated for buyer-seller meets in your category. Don't expect help from your own government on this side of the trade. Austrade, NZTE and the US Commercial Service exist to promote exports, not imports (their own about pages).

5. What To Ask An Organiser Before You Accept

Here's my short list –

1. Which costs are covered, and are they paid upfront or reimbursed after?
2. Is any part tied to placing an order or signing an MoU?
3. What documents will you need for reimbursement?
4. How many meetings must I attend, and on which days?
5. Who's on the exhibitor or seller list, and are they screened for my category?
6. Does any related-party or previous-support rule apply to me?
7. Is there a fee to apply, and is it refunded if I'm not selected?

Get the answers in writing. A hosted programme with a strong meeting list is worth the strings. One with a vague list isn't, however nice the hotel.

6. Worth It?

For a first trip from Australia, New Zealand or the US, a hosted buyer meet in your category is often the best value going, because the higher airfare tier applies and the meetings are pre-set. Just go in knowing it's a sales event you're being helped to attend. If you'd like someone on the ground to check the units you meet before you commit, [SourcingSync](#) does that.

Before the trip, read [are Indian trade fair exhibitors manufacturers?](#) and [communicating with Indian factories](#). [India's factory cities](#) helps you plan factory visits around the fair.

And before you book, check the fair's own page for this year's terms. The old MAI wording you'll still find online is history.

Questions Buyers Ask

Is MAI still running?



No. Its guidelines ran to 31 March 2026. Buyer support now runs under Market Access Support within the Export Promotion Mission.

Will India pay my whole airfare?



I'm a small importer. Can I still be hosted?



Does the hosted trip commit me to buying?

