

The Complete NRI Guide to Investing in Indian Mutual Funds, Stocks, Bonds, AIFs & PMS

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Dated: 5th Jan, 2026



India remains one of the most compelling long-term investment destinations for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs). Structural economic growth, improving corporate governance, deepening capital markets, and demographic tailwinds continue to support wealth creation opportunities across asset classes. However, investing in India as an NRI is fundamentally different from resident investing and requires a clear understanding of account structures, regulatory pathways, taxation, and repatriation rules.

This guide provides a comprehensive, evergreen framework for NRIs looking to invest in Indian mutual funds, equities, fixed income, AIFs, and portfolio management services in a compliant and efficient manner.

1. The NRI Investment Framework: Getting the Foundation Right

Before selecting any investment product, NRIs must establish the correct banking and account architecture. This determines how money flows into investments, how income is taxed, and how proceeds can be repatriated.

NRE vs NRO Accounts

NRE (Non-Resident External) Account

1. Fully repatriable (principal + returns)
2. Ideal for investments funded through overseas income
3. Interest is tax-free in India

NRO (Non-Resident Ordinary) Account

1. Used for income earned in India
2. Repatriation typically capped (e.g., USD 1 million per financial year)
3. Interest is taxable in India

Choosing the wrong account can lock capital unnecessarily or reduce post-tax returns by 2–5% annually over long holding periods.

2. Mutual Funds: The Core Building Block for NRIs

For most NRIs, mutual funds form the core 40–70% of the India allocation due to diversification, transparency, and regulatory oversight.

Why Mutual Funds Work Well for NRIs

1. Professional management
2. NAV-based daily valuation
3. Easy diversification across 50–200 securities
4. Automated tax deduction (TDS), reducing compliance risk

NRIs can invest in:

1. Equity funds (large-cap, mid-cap, flexi-cap)
2. Debt funds (short duration, corporate bond, gilt)
3. Hybrid funds (balanced, dynamic asset allocation)
4. Passive funds (index funds, ETFs)

A typical long-term NRI equity allocation might target:

1. 60% equity mutual funds
2. 25% debt mutual funds
3. 15% international or alternative exposure

Over a 10–15 year horizon, disciplined equity mutual fund investing has historically helped investors compound wealth meaningfully, even through market cycles.

3. Direct Stocks: Control with Responsibility

Direct equity investing allows NRIs to build customized portfolios, but it requires deeper involvement.

Accessing Indian Stocks

NRIs can invest via:

1. PIS-linked demat accounts

2. Non-PIS routes (where permitted)

While mutual funds diversify risk automatically, a direct equity portfolio of 15–25 stocks is generally considered the minimum for reasonable diversification.

Who Should Consider Direct Stocks

1. NRIs with financial background or advisory support
2. Investors allocating more than ₹50–75 lakh to equities
3. Those comfortable with volatility and governance risks

Direct equities can enhance returns but also increase behavioral and concentration risk if not managed carefully.

4. Bonds & Fixed Income: Stability and Predictability

Fixed-income instruments play a crucial role for NRIs seeking income stability, capital preservation, or reduced volatility.

Common options include:

1. Government securities
2. PSU and corporate bonds
3. Fixed maturity products
4. Debt mutual funds

For many NRIs, 25–40% of the India portfolio is allocated to fixed income, especially when nearing financial goals such as retirement or education funding. Interest income is taxable and therefore yields must always be evaluated on a post-tax basis, not headline rates.

5. AIFs & PMS: Advanced Tools for Sophisticated NRIs

Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs) and Portfolio Management Services (PMS) cater to NRIs with higher investible surplus.

Typical Characteristics

1. Minimum investment: ₹50 lakh (often higher)
2. Lower liquidity
3. Concentrated or thematic strategies
4. Higher return variability

A prudent allocation is typically 10–20% of total investible assets, used to complement—not replace—core mutual fund holdings.

6. Why Advisory Matters for NRIs

Cross-border investing introduces complexity that goes beyond returns:

1. Taxation across jurisdictions
2. Currency exposure
3. Regulatory documentation
4. Estate and succession planning

A structured advisory approach helps NRIs avoid fragmented portfolios, compliance errors, and inefficient capital allocation — often improving long-term outcomes by 1–2% annually through better structure and discipline alone.