

## FREQUENTLY ASKED CORONAVIRUS QUESTIONS, ANSWERED FOR YOU AND YOUR CLIENTS

SATSA is monitoring this continually evolving situation and committed to bringing you the latest and most pertinent updates and advice. The health, safety and security of our members, employees and all travellers is our highest priority.

It should be emphasised that South Africa is at the beginning of the epidemiological curve. The situation is going to evolve every 24 hours.

### **Q: What travel restrictions are in place in South Africa at the moment?**

A: President Cyril Ramaphosa announced on 15 March 2020 that the government would impose the following travel restrictions:

- **A travel ban on foreign nationals from high-risk countries such as Italy, Iran, South Korea, Spain, Germany, France, Switzerland, the USA, the UK and China** from 18 March 2020.
- South African citizens are advised to refrain from all forms of travel to or through identified high-risk countries such as the EU, the USA, the UK, China, Iran and South Korea. Effective immediately.
- All non-essential domestic travel is discouraged, particularly by air, rail, taxis and bus.
- South African citizens returning from high-risk countries will be subjected to testing and self-isolation or quarantine on return to South Africa. The quarantine is compulsory and for 14 days.

It is important to note that the biggest denominator on implementing quarantine will be based on travel history, not nationality. Government has stated that this process deals with stigma issues that it is a time for solidarity, not stigmatisation. Since the travel ban announcements, some of the airlines have already started cancelling their scheduled flights and have notified affected passengers accordingly.

### **Q: What is the confirmed list of high-risk countries?**

A: It is important to note that while France was not on President Cyril Ramaphosa's list of high-risk countries, this was an oversight and it is certainly on the list that South Africa has included in its travel ban. The high-risk countries have been designated by the World Health Organization, not the South African Government.

The Swiss Confederation (Switzerland) was also added to the list of high-risk countries as of 17 March 2020, according to an announcement by the Department of International Relations & Cooperation.

### **Q: What are the visa restrictions?**

A: South Africa believes that the only mechanism to deny access to high-risk travellers is by imposing visa requirements, even for those nationalities which have not traditionally required visas to visit South Africa.

Further to requiring a visa, South Africa will also review the Advanced Passenger Process (APP) lists of passengers prior to the arrival of passengers by air and flag any potential cases. The flight will be flagged and retained in a special area for checking before passengers are allowed to disembark.

Of the countries mentioned as high-risk in the travel ban – South Korea, Italy, Iran, Switzerland, Spain, Germany, USA, UK, France and China – only Iran and China require visas to visit South Africa.

- South Africa has revoked the over 8,000 visas granted to Chinese nationals, issued in January and February, who have yet to travel to South Africa
- South Africa has revoked the 425 visas to Iranian nationals, issued in January and February, who have yet to travel to South Africa
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For the other nationalities who are listed as high-risk, according to the World Health Organization, there will be a requirement to apply for a visa. These will be evaluated on travel history and not necessarily on nationality alone, i.e. a national from one of the high-risk countries who has not travelled to one of the high-risk countries may well be granted a visa to visit South Africa.

For medium-risk countries – Hong Kong, Singapore and Portugal – South Africa will require nationals to apply for visas providing a certificate indicating that they have undergone a test and they were found to be coronavirus-free. They will then be granted a visa to visit.

The assessment to allow access to South Africa will be based on their travel history, not their nationality to ensure there is no discrimination.

Foreign nationals on South African student visas, work visas, or residency permits will not be affected.

The government will continue to regularly issue travel alerts referring to specific cities, countries or regions as the situation evolves based on the risk level.

**Q: Can foreign nationals renew their South African visas?**

A: South Africa will renew expired visas – long or short – for nationals specifically due to COVID-19 reasons for up to July 2020 after which this will be evaluated. In the spirit of international solidarity, if South Africa is asked by another country to safeguard its citizens – in the same way, South African citizens were retained in China – South Africa will not refuse them.

For those foreign nationals, who wish to extend their stay, not due to COVID-19, they will need to provide another good reason.

**Q: Will travellers from high-risk countries be allowed to transfer through South Africa's international airports, if they are only in-transit out of the country and do not enter through immigration?**

A: All entry, regardless of compliance with visa requirements, of foreign travellers with ordinary passports, travelling from or transiting through high-risk countries, is prohibited until further notice.

In a case where some of the passengers from high-risk countries arrive in South Africa, connecting or transiting to other neighbouring countries, the airport authorities, port health, together with the immigration team will conduct a robust assessment and do a thorough travel history check to implement quarantine where required.

We are seeking further clarity of the particulars of travellers in transit and will keep all members updated.

**Q: What happens if a traveller is unable to leave the country due to cancelled flights?**

A: For any queries regarding flights, cancellations, and refunds, the airline in question should be the first contact. The aviation industry is changing quickly as the situation unfolds, and airlines will have the most up-to-date, accurate information when it comes to their own policies.

It depends on the airline, but in most cases, the passenger should be given a full refund if the airline has cancelled the flight and suspended all service out of South Africa. The traveller should then try to rebook their flight with another airline.

Airlines that fly direct between South Africa and the high-risk countries will need to review these routes and make decisions about whether it is sustainable to continue.

Over the course of the next week, repatriation will occur on a large scale around the world, following which many airlines will no longer be able to fill seats and will likely cut their service, by up to 50% to 70% in some

cases. This means that what an airline is doing today, it might not be doing in a week's time. After most repatriation has occurred, most airlines will need to be rescued or consolidated.

**Q: How will the travel restrictions affect South Africans, or other foreign nationals, travelling out of the country?**

A: Government has advised against travel to or through high-risk countries. That said, as long as flights are going, travellers will not be prevented from leaving the country. On arrival in their destination, they will be subject to the local border control measures or restrictions in place.

Remember that travel restrictions are in constant flux as the infection spreads. Check the relevant consulate or embassy before any travel.

**Q: What is the procedure for travellers in South Africa to present themselves to be tested? By when and how do travellers present themselves to be tested?**

A: Government has stated that all travellers who have entered South Africa from high-risk countries since mid-February will be required to present themselves for testing. And travellers from medium-risk countries (Hong Kong, Singapore and Portugal) will be required to undergo high-intensity screening.

Travellers who must present themselves for testing should phone the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) toll-free hotline (080 002 9999), or a nearby healthcare facility to receive advice on what to do and where to go for testing.

Despite the directive to test all individuals from high-risk countries, health centres may have a different threshold for testing and will not test those who are asymptomatic or on the 'worried well'.

For instance, you may have to show symptoms such as a dry cough, fever and myalgia (fatigue) **AND** fall into one of the following categories, according to NICD:

- Been in contact with someone who has COVID-19;
- Have travelled to a country where you have a high risk of getting infected? (This will be based on the latest reports from WHO and NICD)
- Have worked in or been to a healthcare facility treating people with COVID-19;
- Have a severe case of pneumonia with an unknown cause

Testing is widely available – it costs around R1200 in the private sector ([Lancet Laboratories](#) announced a fee of R1400) and is free in the public sector. But know that due to the high number of specimens to test, there is a backlog at the moment in the public sector.

**Q: Is domestic travel in South Africa still allowed?**

A: There is no restriction on domestic travel. But, you are encouraged to limit unnecessary movement.

There will be further announcements coming each day. Government is recommending everyone to limit movement and social distance.

**Q: What ports of entry are affected?**

A: South Africa has 72 ports of entry – 53 of which are land ports of entry. Of these, 11 are airports and eight are sea ports. These were evaluated individually, and it was decided that:

- None of the 11 airports are going to be interfered with. These will run as normal, but with heightened activity and vigilance by port health authorities and immigration officials.

- Of the sea ports: six will be left as is, but also with heightened activity. Two – Saldanha Bay and Mossel Bay – will only allow cargo transactions. No passengers or crew embarkation or disembarkation will be allowed.
- Selection criteria for the 53 land ports of entry that will be closed was based on selecting those where there is no commercial activity or health facilities.
- Botswana has 17 ports of entry with South Africa. Five will remain operational
- Zimbabwe has one port of entry with South Africa which will remain open
- Mozambique has four ports of entry with South, of which only one will remain open.
- Lesotho has 14 ports of entry with South Africa, with only five remaining open
- eSwatini has 11 ports of entry with South Africa, with only five remaining open.
- Namibia has 6 points of entry with South Africa, of which only two will remain open.