

SOUTH AFRICA TO RELAX VISA RULES AFTER MONTHS OF DECLINE



The South African government has announced that it will relax its visa rules after a significant drop in the number of tourists coming to the country. According to the South African tourism leaders, the current rules make it very hard for foreigners to visit the country, causing the sector to lose approximately \$540 million in revenues annually.

The relaxation of the rules comes after a committee appointed to look into the impact of the current visa rules submitted its recommendations to the country's cabinet.

The new visa rules in South Africa will be of great benefit to tourists entering the country with children. Under the current rules, tourists coming with children were required to carry with them an original birth certificate. While the government has defended this rule, claiming it was to prevent child trafficking, it has agreed to relax it, allowing parents to only present an original or certified copy of birth certificates at the visa application stage.

The visa rules will also be relaxed for tourists from China, India, and Russia. Chinese citizens were previously required to appear in person at a South African embassy or consulate to apply for a visa. The complicated application process saw a worrying drop in the number of tourists, forcing the government to relax the visa application rules.

The measures that will be taken to ease the process include offering long-term multiple entry visas to frequent travelers. Tourists from various countries might also receive visa-waiver or be provided with visas on arrival if they have valid visas from countries such as the USA, UK, Canada, and other countries that carry out stringent security checks.

The South African government has also adopted several short-term and long-term measures that will ease the process of applying for visas and entering the country. Some of the short-term measures include the implementation of biometrics capturing systems at entry points, offering long-term multiple entry visas, introducing tourism programs for visitors from certain countries, extending the validity of parental consent affidavits and accepting letters from school principals as confirmation of travel permits for children on academic tours. These measures will be implemented in the coming few months.

The government is also considering other measures, which will be implemented within a year. These include waiving visa, increasing visa facilitation centers, issuing of visas on arrivals to tourists with valid visas from certain countries, upgrading passenger processing systems and automating the visa application system.

The relaxation of the visa rules by the government has given foreign nationals with a prospect of visiting South Africa a huge relief. The new visa rules in South Africa will ease the process of entering the country, which is expected to bring about an increase in the number of tourists, and consequently, an increase in the revenue for the tourism industry.

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