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New Immigration rules to cost South Africa R6.8b in lost tourism

Effective 01 July 2014 children under the age of 18 will be required to produce an unabridged birth certificate in addition to a passport when entering, departing or transiting South Africa. This unique requirement will be introduced regardless of the nationality of the child and regardless of whether the child is traveling with parents, with other adults or unaccompanied. South Africa will be the only country in the world mandating this for travelers by air and, as a result, will cause mass confusion and disruption to tourists and air travelers globally. From 01 July, airlines will be forced to refuse travel to families not in possession of these documents and the disruption to travel plans, financial impact on service providers and reputational damage for South Africa is inevitable. The policy timing could not be worse as South Africa prepares to welcome tourists over the peak European school holiday travel season.

"Air travelers and travel bookers in South Africa and overseas just don't know about this requirement and, why would they? A passport is the globally recognized travel document" commented June Crawford, CEO of the Board of Airline Representatives SA (BARSAA).

The purpose of the unabridged birth certificate requirement is to create an additional verification to deter child trafficking and whilst the goal is well-meaning, the unintended consequences of the resulting confusion is significant. A child denied boarding by an airline ultimately means a family can't travel and, by industry estimates, until traveler awareness is 100%, tourist arrivals to South Africa could be negatively impacted by up to 20%. Based on 2013 numbers, 536,000 foreign visitors could be denied travel and, conservatively, the lost income to South Africa from these high value visitors could be over R6.8b annually inevitably leading to job losses in the South African tourism sector. Additionally, no airline can afford a 20% drop in passenger numbers on routes that already operate with razor thin margins so this policy will likely lead to suspension or complete loss of air service to South Africa.

Unabridged birth certificates are required to obtain visas but not, for example, when South African travelers arrive in the United Kingdom.

"The global airline industry is working collectively with the International Air Transport Association (IATA) on global measures to counter child trafficking by air and, in our opinion, a consistent approach internationally is the only way to address this issue" further commented

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June. "If all airlines and airports worldwide adopt the same measures simultaneously, the traveling public and travel service providers will be quickly educated to the new requirements. As it stands, South Africa will just appear isolationist, 'anti-children', tourism demand will go elsewhere and it will take years for South Africa to overcome the reputational damage".

The airline industry in South Africa met with the Department of Home Affairs on 03 June to request a 12 month delay to the policy implementation to allow for full and proper consultation and collaboration. To date there has been no confirmation that the proposal has been accepted so all stakeholders have to prepare for the requirements to be implemented as planned on 01 July.

End

Editors Notes

Data Sources:

- South Africa 2013 Arrival statistics excluding mainland Africa (SouthAfrica.net)
- 2013 Average spend of a British tourist excluding pre-paid services was R12600 per person (SA Tourism)

About BARSA

The Board of Airline Representatives South Africa is the association of international airlines that operate to and from South Africa. The purpose of the association is to represent the interests of the airlines and their customers via collaborative engagement with government and other stakeholders to ensure a safe, efficient and sustainable aviation industry in South Africa.

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