

SA tourism industry outraged by sudden visa renewal changes

The latest directive from the Department of Home Affairs (DHA), instructing visitors without visa renewals by 23 February to promptly leave South Africa, has been criticized as "a thoughtless directive" by the Southern Africa Tourism Services Association (Satsa), the representative body for inbound tourism. The DHA introduced this directive during the festive season on 21 December 2023, overturning the previous agreement that granted visitors an additional 90-day extension while awaiting visa renewals. As disclosed in a recent [Daily Maverick](#) article, individuals who arrived in October/November and sought to extend their stay must now depart by the end of February, catching them off guard.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

"This irrational decree shows a complete disregard for the tourism industry and will be ruinous at a time when the country desperately needs visitors' foreign capital," says Oupa Pilane, Satsa chairman. "South Africa grants short-term visas on arrival to tourists from many countries. But due to astounding levels of ineptitude and incompetence, Home Affairs regularly fails to process the simple visa extensions in a reasonable time."

Economic impact of 'swallows'

The much-needed 'swallows' who visit for up to 180 days are a golden goose for South Africa's economy and indeed its tourism sector, which is the third-highest GDP earner for the country and enjoys a deep and vast supply chain creating job opportunities.

Pilane added that the Sun Chasers are a lucrative market segment for the country not only because of their lengthy stay, but also because of their contribution to the government's coffers through their retail spend and associated VAT.

"It is shameful that Home Affairs cannot execute its simple mandate in issuing visas on time, and then thinks nothing of imposing arbitrary edicts to eject visitors who planned six-month stays and, in many cases, own property here," Pilane continued.

"Tourism is trumpeted as a priority by government, yet this renegade department, and others like the Department of Transport, appear to be doing their utmost to shackle this critical sector, either with deliberate intent or through staggering ineptitude. It is disgraceful to penalise visitors for their inexcusable dysfunction."

Government's prioritisation of tourism

Citing the Department of Transport as another example, Pilane added that the department has failed to address the severe dysfunction at the NPTR and the long delays in issuing operating licenses to tourist transport operators, despite numerous offers of assistance and constructive attempts to engage with the department to broker solutions. "It's another example of the same malady," said Pilane.

"The severe delays and ongoing dysfunction at the Regulator are a disaster for our tourism fleet. Operators are hamstrung because they simply cannot obtain permits for their vehicles within a reasonable time. There are simple solutions on the table, but no willingness or urgency to implement them. We can do better, and we need to stop scoring own goals if we value our tourism industry."

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