FREQUENTLY ASKED CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK TRAVEL QUESTIONS, ANSWERED FOR YOU AND YOUR CLIENTS

There is a lot of uncertainty at the moment with regards to the COVID-19 outbreak – no more so than when it comes to travel plans.

Based on information from expert sources (including WHO, South African Government, NICD, and Travel Insurance Consultants), SATSA has compiled FAQs to help you answer some of the most pressing questions you might receive from clients or have yourself.

Questions cover rights as travellers, cancellations and postponements, travel insurance, and measures in place for managing the infection across South Africa, at its borders, and specifically within the travel and tourism sector.

As the continuously evolves, 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.

President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a 'national state of disaster' on 15 March 2020 to enable the government to introduce measures to combat the spread of Covid-19 within South Africa.

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, the USA, the UK and China as 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.

Increased screening will be implemented for the following:
- All travellers who have entered South Africa from high-risk countries since mid-February will be required to present themselves for testing.
- Travellers from medium-risk countries will be required to undergo high-intensity screening. This includes Portugal, Hong Kong and Singapore.

Visa restrictions are as follows:
- Cancelled visas to visitors from those countries from 15 March 2020 and previously granted visas are hereby revoked.
- Any foreign national who has visited high-risk countries in the past 20 days will be denied a visa.

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: What border measures are in place?

A: The government has strengthened surveillance, screening and testing measures at OR Tambo, Cape Town and King Shaka International Airports.

As of 16 March 2020, 35 of the country's 53 land ports will be shut down; and 2 of the 8 seaports will be closed for passengers and crew changes.

Health Minister Dr Zweli Mkhize confirmed that all South African ports of entry are screening arrivals, as well as on some domestic flights. Measures may include a combination of fever screenings using infrared thermometers, in-flight inspections, and questionnaires, amongst other methods. Travellers are advised to cooperate fully with port and health authorities.

The Department of Health and National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) in South Africa are monitoring the situation closely, should measures need to be adapted or increased.

Q: What if I am currently travelling in South Africa?

A: If you are currently travelling in South Africa, from one of the listed high-risk countries, it is advisable for you to make arrangements to depart the country. If you were granted a visa to travel in South Africa, it will be revoked at this time. You will not be faced with border measures on departure from South Africa, but are, of course, subject to the boarder measures of the country into which you are arriving.

If you are not from a country on the current list of high-risk countries, you are allowed to remain in South Africa, but know that all domestic travel around South Africa at the moment is discouraged. Some countries are enforcing a 14-day period of quarantine or self-isolation on returning citizens or visitors. As the global situation changes daily, be sure to follow the latest developments and announcements in South Africa and your home country to know what to expect.

If you have entered South Africa from a high-risk country since mid-February, you are required to present yourself for testing.

You should contact both your insurance and travel providers (i.e. airline, tour operator, agent, etc.) to discuss your best course of action. Depending on your travel insurance, the costs of ending your trip early and returning home may be covered.

Q: Can I cancel a trip that I've booked out of fear of the coronavirus?

A: If you cancel your trip to South Africa, whether or not you will receive a full or partial refund depends on if you purchased a refundable flight ticket, the agreed cancellation fees of your product or package, and your specific insurance policy.

If you are from a high-risk country and have no choice but to cancel your trip to South Africa, you will need to contact your insurance and travel providers (i.e. airline, tour operator, agent, etc.) to explain the situation and find out whether you can cancel for a full refund or postpone your travel at no additional cost. You are likely to experience leniency in most cases, considering the official restrictions announced by the South African government.

Refundable airline tickets are more expensive than non-refundable ones but are a good idea if you're unsure or apprehensive about your travel plans. Some airlines will still charge a cancellation or change fee and/or there may be a strict cancellation policy meaning that there is a window of time within which you

need to cancel your flight to receive a refund. The particulars depend on the airline and chances are that if you're a frequent flyer with a lot of accrued miles, you will receive more leniency. Most flights are fully refundable if you cancel within 24 hours of the initial booking.

If you have basic travel insurance, you will likely be covered for any medical expenses relating to COVID-19 while you are on your journey, irrespective of when you purchased your policy.

However, regular travel insurance may not cover cancellation, non-medical costs or loss related to the coronavirus outbreak because it is now considered a known and foreseeable event. However, some insurance providers are making exceptions. Be sure to enquire with your provider about the extent of your coverage during this time.

Member Note:
On 2 March 2020 SATSA published the following:

SATSA has facilitated a discussion between leading DMCs and the Sales Thought Leadership Forum, comprising 19 leading hotel and lodge operators in South Africa.

These industry stakeholders have proposed a recommended position for incremental bookings from 1 March 2020. It is critically important that South Africa be perceived as a business-friendly destination with regards policies and trading terms and not halt the forward book, which we may do with unfriendly booking policies. In light of this, we urge the broader membership to adopt this position moving forward.

Cancellations:
- From unaffected areas, no change to your existing booking policy
- From affected areas: review on a case by case basis. No refund but booking can be deferred for 15 months

Penalties (Deposits):
- No penalty/deposit required from time of booking until the cancellation period of the particular supplier kicks in

For example:
- Groups: No penalties until 90 days prior to arrival
- Individual bookings: No penalties until 45 days prior to arrival

Usual deposits will be required at time of booking to make a booking, but these will be 100% refundable up until the cancellation period as mentioned above applies.

The Sales Forum will revisit this position in one month's time unless SA becomes an affected area.

Q: How do I pick a travel insurance policy?

A: Travel insurance policies will differ based on factors such as your age, the length of your trip, and what you want to be covered. A standard insurance policy may cover cancellation for events such as the sudden bankruptcy of a travel company, unexpected illness, or a natural disaster or unrest in the destination. However, once an event has unfolded, such as the current coronavirus outbreak, it is considered a known or foreseeable event and is no longer covered by most travel insurance policies.

Some travel insurance providers consider the current coronavirus outbreak to be a known event as of 21 January 2020. In this case, if you purchased travel insurance before this date, you will be covered for disruptions resulting from the outbreak; you may not be covered if you bought insurance after this date.

The exception is 'cancel for any reason' (CFAR) insurance. This is usually available as an optional upgrade to a standard travel insurance plan and may cost up to 50% more than a standard plan. It typically needs to be purchased within one to three weeks from the time you booked your trip or made the initial deposit, and you must cancel your travel 48 hours prior to departure. Often available in two tiers, CFAR insurance can cover you for 50-75% of your total travel costs.

Know that there is no-size-fits-all travel insurance plan and whichever you choose, be sure to read the full insurance contract before buying to check whether it applies to "worst-case scenarios," such as illness or flight disruptions.

Q: What if I booked a flight and want to reschedule it?

A: Leniency in rescheduling your flight will depend on the airline, route, and travel dates. Most airlines have been relaxing change and cancellation terms. However, each airline's policy is different – ranging from widespread fee-waiver policies to the more measured approach of fee waivers only for those flights to heavily affected areas (e.g. China, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Italy) or to countries with travel restrictions, depending on the dates of their original flight. Applicable dates may vary for each region.

Depending on the airline and circumstances, you may be entitled to a full refund or voucher in the full amount of your airfare, or be able to postpone your travel at no additional charge.

You need to check with your specific airline carrier for their current terms. If your purchase falls outside of this, you should still enquire, explain your situation, and ask for an exception. There's no guarantee, but many airlines are trying to be understanding and work with customers during this time.

Q: Is international travel riskier than domestic travel?

A: International travel does not necessarily pose a greater risk than domestic travel at the moment. It depends on the country and the individual traveller.

However, it does come with greater uncertainty as countries around the world continue to announce travel restrictions and/or quarantine directives for arrivals. Many international flights are also being cancelled, and you are advised to contact your airline to discuss your options. As the global situation changes daily, be sure to follow the latest developments and announcements in South Africa and your home country to know what to expect.

As from 18 March 2020, South Africa has imposed a travel ban on foreign nationals from high-risk countries such as Italy, Iran, South Korea, Spain, Germany, the USA, the UK and China; advised its own citizens from travelling to or through the EU and other identified high-risk countries; and discouraged all non-essential domestic travel.

If you must travel, the [World Health Organisation recommends](#) that "it is prudent for travellers who are sick to delay or avoid travel to affected areas, in particular for elderly travellers and people with chronic diseases or underlying health conditions."

Equip yourself with accurate information from reputable sources – including World Health Organization (WHO), Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, and local health and travel authorities in the destination. In South Africa, reliable sources of information include the South African Government, National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD), Association of Southern African Travel Agents (ASATA) and of course our SATSA coronavirus page.

Q: Are aeroplane passengers more susceptible to infection transmission?

A: It is important to know that the new coronavirus, COVID-19, is not airborne, and thus, not likely to be spread by breathing in recirculated air on a flight. Furthermore, most aeroplanes are fitted with HEPA air filters that are very effective at purifying the cabin air.

COVID-19 is transmitted through small droplets from the nose or mouth that are spread when a person with the virus coughs, sneezes, or exhales. It is possible to inhale these droplets if you are in close proximity with someone who is sick, or if you touch surfaces where these droplets have landed and then touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.

On a flight, you should be vigilant about precautions such as washing your hands frequently, with an alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water, coughing into your elbow and trying not to touch your eyes, nose, and mouth.

While it is not certain how long the virus that causes COVID-19 survives on surfaces, WHO recommends cleaning surfaces around you using a simple disinfectant – alcohol-based wipes may work best on a flight for disinfecting your tray table or seat belt buckle. The United States' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggest using a hand sanitiser with at least 60% alcohol content.

Many airlines are also enhancing their cleaning and disinfection procedures in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Emirates, for example, is conducting a comprehensive wipe down of all surfaces with an approved, eco-friendly chemical proven to not only kill viruses and bacteria but also provide a long-lasting protective coating against new contamination.

Most importantly, if you experience fever, cough or difficulty breathing, you are advised not to travel, stay at home, seek medical attention and call in advance. Follow the directions of your local health authority.

Q: What measures does South Africa have in place to deal with the spread of COVID-19?

A: South Africa's government is currently implementing a formal, inter-sectoral plan to ensure the country's readiness, optimisation of resources and capability in dealing with COVID-19. This includes a countrywide network of health facilities, the National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS) which can perform diagnostic testing, and the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) with its highly qualified staff, extensive sophisticated laboratory systems and emergency operations centre. (SATSA)

If a suspected case is identified, procedures are in place for case isolation and management as well as rapid specimen collection and transport so that a diagnosis can quickly be made. Suspected cases will be managed at designated hospitals with isolation facilities. Protocols are in place for the follow-up of case contacts to ensure that the virus does not spread. (NICD)

Professor Cheryl Cole, Head For Respiratory Diseases and Meningitis at NICD, confirms that guidelines outlining all procedures and protocols have been released and widely distributed to healthcare workers in

both the private and public sector, as well as to staff at all ports of entry where strengthened screening measures are in place.

Other measures announced on Sunday 15 March 2020, include:
- Gatherings of more than 100 people are prohibited.
- Mass celebrations of upcoming national days such as Human Rights Day and other large government events will be cancelled.
- Where small gatherings are unavoidable, organisers will need to put in place stringent measures of prevention and control.
- Schools will be closed from Wednesday, 18 March, and will remain closed until after the Easter Weekend.
- Government is working closely with colleges, universities and other public facilities such as Parliament, prisons, police stations and military installations to intensify hygiene control.

A robust health system for the control of infectious diseases and greater awareness, combined with coordination, collaboration, and additional time to prepare, will be advantageous for South Africa to manage the spread of COVID-19.

Q: Does South Africa have facilities to deal with the virus that causes COVID-19?

A: Healthcare facilities and workers in South Africa are prepared to deal with the virus that causes COVID-19. The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) has released and widely distributed guidelines to healthcare workers in both the private and public sectors. These guidelines outline all procedures and protocols, including how to rapidly identify a possible case, isolate a patient, take the correct samples, and transport the samples to the NICD for confirmation of the diagnosis. There is a set of technical resources available on the NICD's website that healthcare facilities and workers can easily access.

South Africa has designated facilities for the management of COVID-19 that are best equipped for aseptic and isolation chain or care. Across South Africa, there are currently ten designated facilities prepared to treat coronavirus patients:

- Western Cape: Tygerberg Hospital
- Gauteng: Charlotte Maxeke Hospital and Steve Biko Hospital
- Limpopo: Polokwane Hospital
- Mpumalanga: Rob Ferreira Hospital
- KwaZulu-Natal: Grey's Hospital
- North West: Klerksdorp Hospital
- Free State: Pelonomi Hospital
- Northern Cape: Kimberley Hospital
- Eastern Cape: Livingston Hospital

All personnel at these facilities are correctly trained and capable of implementing infection control procedures. In addition to these designated facilities, testing is being rolled out at health centres across South Africa.

The NICD urges people who experience symptoms, to not go directly to a health facility. To avoid spreading the disease, call **your nearest health centre or the NICD hotline number 080 002 9999**. They will advise you on what to do and how you can get the required assistance.

Q: Are we likely to encounter people from countries affected by coronavirus during our trip to South Africa?

A: Due to travel restrictions on both sides – in high-risk countries and now in South Africa – encountering a traveller from a high-risk country will become increasingly uncommon.

Know that South Africa has strengthened measures to test all visitors from high-risk countries or those who have travelled in these countries anytime since mid-February. All ports of entry are closely monitored with increased surveillance, screening and testing measures in order to identify and appropriately manage any arrivals who may have the virus.

Q: Where can I find the most up-to-date, accurate information about the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19?

A: Keep updated by following reputable national and global authorities – including World Health Organization (WHO) and Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center. In South Africa, reliable sources of information include the South African Government, National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD), Association of Southern African Travel Agents (ASATA) and SATSA.

More than ever, it is important to remain calm and not give credence to fake news, unverified information or social media stories that may lead to unnecessary panic. WHO has a page on its website dedicated to dispelling common myths concerning COVID-19.

Q: What guidelines should tourism establishments be following in terms of precautionary measures and equipment?

A: Tourism establishments should ensure that:
- Staff are aware of the WHO and NICD recommended advice on preventing infection (as below)
- Clean water and soap or sanitisers are provided
- Provide and insist that employees in vulnerable roles wear face masks
- Frequently touched surfaces in the workplace are cleaned regularly and kept hygienic
- Employees who are sick stay at home

Tourism establishments and their staff should follow and promote amongst guests the precautionary measures recommended by WHO and NCID, including:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick – a 2-meter distance is recommended
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a flexed elbow or a tissue, then throw the tissue in the bin
- Avoid contact with farm or wild animals (alive or dead), animal markets, and products that come from animals (such as uncooked meat)

Travel and tourism staff should receive training on how to identify the symptoms of COVID-19, what to do if there is a suspected case on the property and what daily measures to employ to prevent the spread of viruses in general.

If possible, establishments should consider deploying alcohol-based antibacterial hand sanitisers, tissues and closed bins for all guests on-site. They should prepare their on-call medical practitioners, provide

signage to educate all staff and guests, and increase cleaning and disinfecting of frequently touched surfaces.

Q: What products are recommended to sanitise the interior of vehicles?

A: While it is not certain how long the new coronavirus survives on surfaces, WHO reports that using a simple disinfectant to clean the surfaces around you will kill the virus that causes COVID-19. Alcohol-based wipes will also sanitise surfaces in vehicles or on a flight and are easy to keep on-hand. The United States' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggest using a sanitiser with at least 60% alcohol content.

Q: As an employee of a travel or tourism business, do I have the right to question guests about their health, and deny entry if I suspect they are infected with coronavirus?

A: All employers have an obligation, under the Occupational Health & Safety Act to keep their workplaces safe. This would include preventing the transfer of a virus to their employees and other guests. Accordingly, it follows that the person in control of such a workplace would be entitled to question anyone who intends entering the premises for the specific purpose of meeting their obligations under the Act.

Should they feel that they have no option but to grant a guest access, then they may be entitled to do so under strict terms, such as requiring the guessed to self-isolate themselves.

Further, most properties would constitute private property. As such, under the common law, the person in control of such property is entitled to set the parameters for allowing access to the property. It is unlikely that a court will find that denying a person access, whom it is feared is carrying the virus, would constitute a form of discrimination. If it is discrimination, it is entirely justifiable and based on the reasons set out above.

Q: How can I educate my staff to be coronavirus savvy?

A: It is important to note that this is a difficult time for both staff and guests.

Educate your staff using only the most up-to-date and verified information from reputable sources – including World Health Organization (WHO), Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD), Association of Southern African Travel Agents (ASATA), and SATSA.

Ensure that they follow and promote amongst guests the precautionary measures recommended by WHO and NCID (as above).

Of course, guest-facing staff should be cautious, but the aim should as always be to treat guests with the utmost respect. If worrying symptoms are present, staff should ask the guest to speak privately and enquire whether they are experiencing respiratory symptoms (coughing, sneezing, shortness of breath, breathing difficulties), have a fever or are concerned that they might have had contact with anyone who could have been infected.

If the answers to any of the above is yes or if there is uncertainty, staff should immediately phone the nearest health centre or **NICD hotline number 080 002 9999** to receive advice on what to do and how to seek the best support.