

Travelstart addresses non-refunding of visa costs

While the cost of visa applications varies widely, a travel visa for Europe will cost South African passport holder over R600, and more than R1 000 for the UK and USA. The most expensive visa for South Africans is the Nigerian visa with fees ranging from R3 000 to R6 000 for a single trip.

This year South African holidaymakers' top international holiday destinations have included London, Amsterdam, Paris and New York. With the average spend on an international trip rising, the added cost of travel visa applications and the risks associated with being denied a visa are increasingly becoming an area of concern, especially as many countries tighten entry controls. Application fees in most cases are non-refundable if the visa is denied, and traveling abroad has become a financial gamble for most South African passport holders.

Very few visa-free countries

The list of countries that are visa-free for South African passport holders is alarmingly short, with only a handful of countries in South America, Southern Africa and South East Asia readily accessible without visas. The US, Europe, Northern Africa and Central/Southern Asia remain difficult to obtain visas for, and the visa application process often requires pre-booked flights.

At its recent board meeting The World Travel Agents Associations Alliance (WTAAA) resolved to urge governments to streamline visa processes to encourage flow of travelers around the world. Around a third of travelers surveyed by Travelstart stated they try to avoid destinations requiring a travel visa and felt that South Africans were unfairly prejudiced against in the restrictions placed on their travel.

In an effort to encourage ease of travel for South African passport holders, Travelstart has released a unique travel product, the Visa Denied Service. The service covers travelers for the cost of their international flights booked through Travelstart in the event that their visa is denied.