

The coronavirus is impacting outbound travel from South Africa

There has been a rising concern among South African travellers about travelling internationally due to increasing reports about the spread of Coronavirus, which has impacted travel bookings. Some holidaymakers are choosing alternative destinations to Asia, deferring their travel or cancelling their travel plans, as the situation evolves.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

Members of the Association of Southern African Travel Agents (ASATA) confirm that, in particular, leisure travel has been affected. "Travel suppliers such as cruise lines, airlines and tour operators have implemented proactive measures, such as rerouting itineraries, cancelling flights to affected areas, increasing their health precautions and enforcing travel restrictions to mitigate the risk of contracting the virus," says Otto de Vries, ASATA CEO.

"In some cases, cruise lines and airlines are waiving their cancellation and change penalties outright to accommodate passengers who choose to cancel or defer their travel plans. There is no question that there will be an impact to the outbound travel sector as the wider public gets to grips with how and where the virus is spreading."



UNWTO addresses travel industry on coronavirus

Juergen T Steinmetz 3 Feb 2020



However, South Africa's outbound travel sector has been equipping travellers, who are choosing to travel, with information on what precautions to take, based on those outlined by the National Institute of Communicable Diseases.

The NICD has also advised the industry that, while travellers should think twice about travelling to China, travel to other destinations should be fine provided the necessary precautions are taken.

Taking necessary precautions

"As a travel association, it is incumbent on us to ensure that our members, which represent over 90% of South Africa's retail travel sector, are informed proactively by reputable sources what the situation is on the ground, not what is

necessarily being disseminated online. This is so that in turn they can advise their customers, who can then make an informed decision on whether or not to travel, or where they will travel to," adds de Vries.

"We have seen in the last week alone, media reports and social media posts highlighting that South Africa has its first Coronavirus cases, only to be informed directly by the NICD that this is fake news. It is our responsibility as the travel industry to ensure we are advising our customers proactively and accurately, to the best of our ability, about what the actual situation is on the ground."

ASATA members are also advising travellers, who do choose to travel, to ensure they have the right travel insurance and to know what their policy includes so that if they need to cancel or defer their travel, they are covered appropriately.

South African travellers, who are returning from their holiday or business trips, can be assured that currently there are no travel or trade restrictions to South Africa, and that any passenger found to be ill or exhibiting fever symptoms on arrival will be reviewed at airport clinics.

ASATA members confirm that, although China is a major trading partner of South Africa, corporate travel has been less affected than leisure travel. Some business travellers and groups are however choosing to cancel or defer their travels to certain Asian destinations until more clarity can be obtained.

"We urge any leisure or corporate traveller to speak to their travel expert and ascertain what their options are. We will continue to advise our members proactively on the situation on the ground, so that travellers can be informed responsibly about the spread of Coronavirus and the precautions they need to take when travelling," concludes de Vries.

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