BIZCOMMUNITY

SA lost R886m due to new immigration regulations

South Africa's tourism industry's lost direct spend of up to R886m in 2014 due to the changed immigrations regulations.

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This is according to an impact assessment study on South Africa's the new immigration regulations on the travel and tourism industry. The study was conducted on behalf of the Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA) by Grant Thornton.

The changes relate to the requirement for tourists coming from countries whose citizens are required to have a visa, to now appear in person during the visa application process. The second concern area relates to the more contentious requirement for all minors travelling to and from South Africa to be in possession of an unabridged birth certificate in addition to their passport, where applicable.

Whilst it may be too early to provide a conclusive report on the impact of the regulation affecting travelling by minors, the outcomes of the study present clear evidence of the negative consequences these regulations are already having on the industry.

Other findings

- South African tourism markets that are directly impacted by the changed visa regulations have been negatively impacted. Significant downward trends were noted for Asian, Central and South American countries. China and India in particular have seen significant decline in demand.

- Thailand, Peru and the Philippines are some of the few countries which require or recommend children travelling alone, with one parent or with a third party to have a copy of the child's birth certificate in addition to a letter of consent from the absent parent(s). However, in the case of Peru and the Philippines, these requirements apply to citizens and residents of the country and not to tourists. In Thailand these regulations do not apply to children travelling with both parents.

- It would be more cost effective to implement the collection of biometric data on arrival at South African borders than to implement the same system in country at all consulates and processing centres;

Fears confirmed

"Essentially, what the report does is to confirm the fears we have expressed about the unintended consequences of the new regulations," says TBCSA CEO, Mmatšatši Ramawela. "Our first impact assessment report already gave us a glimpse of what to expect and sadly, we have not managed to successfully mitigate against some of the risks which were highlighted by the first report."

Ramawela reiterated that the industry was not against government's plans to address the issue of child trafficking or to enhance national security but rather that these objectives could be achieved without compromising the country's tourism and overall economic growth potential. "What we are saying is, allow us an opportunity to engage and present alternative solutions which will not have such a drastic impact on our industry."