



## July 2011

Those avid followers of American talk show host Oprah Winfrey will tell you that she loves to trot out the line, "the thing I know for sure" or something to that effect. Well, I'm not trying to emulate the 'Queen of American Talk', but there is one thing I know for sure. That is, if you are a South African passport holder and you are a frequent traveller, then you

are a pretty resilient person.

Not only do you have to endure an extended time in an aircraft seat, but in many cases, you are required to get permission from the country you wish to visit, in the form of a visa. I am not about to undermine any country that imposes a visa regime on South Africans, but I have come across some fascinating television programmes about 'Border Control' and I am amazed at the amount of offenders who do penetrate the system, in spite of the extent of the information requested on a visa application. No matter how deserving you feel you are of being issued with this essential document, never take it for granted, as you could be in for a big disappointment.

This is, therefore, a gentle reminder that before an air ticket is purchased and before you have committed to any engagements, please ensure that your visa has been approved by the relevant consulate. Quite frankly, it is not a difficult process, but it can end up as one, if you fail to follow their instructions. Further to that, unfortunately, there is also

not a 'one-size-fits-all' approach - each country has very particular requirements and the best advice possible is for you to ensure that you provide all the information requested and, most importantly, in the format that is requested.

If you don't like that, well, I'm afraid I have some more bad news for you. It won't be long before we will all be required to present ourselves in person to the issuing office, so that we can be finger printed and a photograph of the iris of our eye can be kept on record to prove our absolute authenticity. In fact, this biometric identification is a reality scheduled for implementation by the end of 2012.

There is a price to pay for this type of integrity and for passengers who live out of town, that price is going to be in the additional time it will take you to visit the authority.

As representatives of the travel industry, we at ASATA endeavour to meet regularly with our colleagues at these government departments, particularly in preparation of any forthcoming events where we know South Africans will be visiting specific countries. It is always very evident that the individuals working for these government departments are just following procedure that will ultimately reduce any risk to their country. They are not there to promote tourism to their country and if your application form is incomplete, your submission "challenges" the process and unnecessary delays are caused.

Each applicant is entirely responsible for the completion and submission of all visa documentation, but your ASATA Member travel agent is always in a position to assist you, should you require that.

**Robyn Christie**



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