

Chinese tour operators take South Africa off their lists

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CHINESE tour operators have taken South Africa off their brochures because of the visa requirements kicking in today, tourism sector representatives, Southern Africa Tourism Services Association (Satsa) and Association of Southern African Travel Agents (Asata), said on Friday in a last ditch effort against the new regulations.

Satsa chief executive David Frost said South Africa, which was gaining momentum with 150 000 a year bookings from China, had been replaced by Australia, which now gets up to

a million bookings, as tourists found it too onerous to apply for visas in person at South African embassies in China and have their biometric data captured.

Parents and guardians travelling with minors must do so in possession of an unabridged birth certificate showing both parents' details. This requirement applies to children 17 and under. If one parent is travelling with a minor, they are required to be in possession of an affidavit of consent from the absent parent.

On Friday the two organisations held a press briefing at which they addressed what

they termed the 10 myths in the state's understanding of the mechanics and impact on the new visa requirements. Asata was represented by its chief executive Otto de Vries

The myths include that the government has consulted widely with tourism stakeholders; that the backlog of 4 000 applications for unabridged birth certificates would be cleared by the implementation date; that the department of home affairs was ready to roll out new regulations; that all stakeholders had been trained and that 30 000 children were trafficked in South Africa

annually among others.

Another myth was that the tourism and travel industries had overreacted about the negative impact of the new requirements. The briefing was told that about 1.4 million people or 15 percent of South Africa inbound tourists would be affected.

"The spectre of this new requirement has decimated our tourism appeal in China," Frost said. The industry said it was seeing reduced demand from China because citizens required short-stay visas when visiting this country and the demand for in-person visa applications

had deterred them from travelling here.

"Chinese tour operators have responded by reducing the coverage of the SA tourism product in their brochures, which means the extent to which SA (South Africa) will be sold as a tourism destination in China will diminish and competitive destinations will be purchased instead," the industry said.

Dissipating demand

The industry said about 700 000 children under the age of 18 visited South Africa in 2014. A total of 9.55 million people vis-

ited the country as overnight tourists in the same period.

"Demand from all overseas markets steadily dissipated throughout the year, coming off highs of 8.6 percent in the first four months of the year to a decline of 1.2 percent in the last four months," the industry said, adding that assuming a 20 percent drop in demand from the family market, the economy would lose at least R10 billion annually and about 24 000 jobs.

They said from May to December 2014, about 66 000 tourists were lost to the visa requirements, that the total

direct, indirect and induced impact on the economy in 2014 was a negative R2.6bn and a potential loss of more than 5 800 jobs.

In the current year, the number of lost foreign tourists due to changes in the immigration regulations is likely to increase to 100 000 with a direct tourism spend of R1.4bn and the total net loss to the gross domestic product of around R4.1bn and a loss of 9 300 jobs.

The outbound industry is set to lose at least R8bn in revenue, "which will directly affect employment", the industry said.

