

Nigeria ranks behind Togo, Mali, others on free-visa access to countries

Africa's largest economy, Nigeria, has become the first on the continent to completely embrace digitised visa acquisition procedures with e-visas. The announcement made last week raised the hope that the development will likely increase the number of business tourists and other visitors to the country.

On the heel of this milestone recorded by the country, Henley & Partners, a global air travel ranking institution analysed the visa regulations of African countries and created an index that details the travel freedom citizens of indigenous countries enjoy.

However, according to the report, Nigeria ranks low on this scale behind Burkina Faso and Zambia as a middle level country with access to only 48 out of the 126 nations in the world.

Explaining the rationale for the survey, Andrew Taylor Vice President of Henley & Partners, the Global Leaders in residence and citizenship planning, stated, "In today's globalised world, visa restrictions play an important role in controlling the movement of foreign nationals across borders. Africa is one of the regions in the world with the highest visa requirements. Visa restrictions imply missed economic opportunities for intra-regional trade and for the local service economy such as tourism, cross-country medical services or education."

While countries like Cameroun and Rwanda trade spots with Nigeria, passports from South Africa, the Seychelles or Mauritius are placed among the best to own on the continent. This invariably means that citizens of these nations can travel to more countries visa-free than of the holders of any of the other 52 passports available on the continent.

In spite of the strong global stand South Africa possesses, there is a row over new immigration regulations which among other things stipulate that those wanting to change the status of their visas can henceforth only do so at the country's missions outside the shores of its homeland.

The southern country known for its xenophobic tendencies is also engaged in a brawl with Kenya over a decision causing the latter's citizens pay for its visas.

As nations on the continent continue to place restrictions on each other preventing the free flow of people, goods and services, the survey also reveals that expatriates from North America and Europe have a higher degree of freedom during travels within the region than their African and Asian counterparts.

Addressing the impact this will have on mass travel, Taylor says, "Experienced travellers who traverse Sub-Saharan Africa's Emerging Markets for business will know that it is best to get all their visas before they leave home."

With the wide variance in visa prices new rules guiding its acquisition have begun to emerge. For example, if you are a Ghanaian travelling to Kenya for instance, you do not require a visa if you are only staying for a maximum of three months.

However the Kenyan visa rules insist that all visitors must hold return tickets and all documents required for next destination and sufficient funds for maintenance of at least US\$500. In like manner, British and Australian citizens don't need advance visas for some southern African countries; French citizens do not need them in much of West Africa and Americans need them nearly everywhere.