



HIGH COMMISSIONER

AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION
PRETORIA

26 March 2020

LETTER TO AUSTRALIANS FROM THE AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER

Hello, my name is Gita Kamath and I am the Australian High Commissioner to South Africa, based in Pretoria. I also look after other countries in Southern Africa - Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho Mozambique and Namibia.

We understand that these are difficult and stressful times as we deal with the unprecedented effects of the COVID-19 virus. Many hundreds of thousands of Australians and people from other countries are still abroad, and we know that options to return home are becoming more difficult by the day.

As I'm sure you are now aware, the South African Government has announced that it is imposing a lockdown from midnight tonight 26 March for 21 days – so until after Easter to 16 April. Similar measures have been taken in Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique and Namibia. During this time we urge you to follow the advice of local authorities and abide by the local regulations and requirements which will be enforceable by the police and law enforcement authorities. We at the High Commission, our staff and families, will also be in lock-down at our homes but we will do what we can to continue to keep in touch with you and provide consular advice and services as best we can, particularly for Australians who may have chronic health conditions or who are particularly vulnerable in other ways.

There is no easy way to say this but with the airports in South Africa closing tonight, if you do not have a confirmed booking to depart South Africa today the window to do so will have closed. You urgently need to ensure you have secure accommodation, possibly to see you through until the end of the lockdown on 16 April. There are many hotel and other options available online and some suggestions are provided below. If you plan to go to the airport today/tonight to try to secure a seat on a flight please ensure that you have returned safely to your accommodation prior to lock down.

I acknowledge that for many people this will cause financial hardship. In the first instance speak with your airline to check whether they have provisions to accommodate passengers who held confirmed bookings on flights that have now been cancelled. I would also encourage you to contact your travel insurer in the event that assistance may be available. I know it is difficult but if you do not have sufficient funds available you may need to speak to your family and friends at home to help you through this.

I know that many of you have already given us details of your current location and contact numbers that have been entered onto our register. As we go into lockdown it is vital that we know where you all are located and are able to communicate with you as best we can to give you updates on local situations and to inform you quickly in the event other options to depart

become available. I stress here that at this time we cannot say that further flights will be available but we're working hard with the South African government and Qantas on this.

To help us with this, if you have not already done so could you please provide, by email to consular.pretoria@dfat.gov.au the following details:

- . Full names, dates of birth and passport numbers for yourself and all accompanying Australians;
- . Where you will be located during lockdown – if this is a hotel please provide the full hotel address, phone number and your room number;
- . The best way to contact you – email and phone please. We would like to be able to speak to you all individually, but please understand that we are a small office and that we too will be under lockdown restrictions. Email communication is most efficient from our end, but if this is not possible for you of course phone us on 012 423 6000. We will not have reception staff until the lockdown is over but we're doing the best we can to answer your calls.
- . Advice if you suffer from a chronic medical condition and you are concerned about access to medications or treatment.
- . Name and Australian contact information for a nominated family member that we are able to contact on your behalf in the event of an emergency. We are of course bound by the Australian Privacy Act so will not contact other persons about your situation unless it relates to a life-threatening emergency. It would be helpful though if you could confirm your consent for this in your email.

Medical: If you have a condition that you take regular medication for it's of course vital that you have ample supplies to see you through. Australian prescriptions cannot be filled in South Africa so if you do need to get additional medications it's important to start thinking about this.

Doctors and pharmacies will remain open during the lockdown. I recommend you visit a GP rather than going to a hospital at this time, unless of course you have an emergency. Your hotel should be able to give you advice on a GP nearby or may have a doctor on call that you can access. I suggest you have a chat with your hotel's concierge or reception about this, including what arrangements they have in place in the event you have some sort of medical emergency.

Visas: We've heard from several Australians concerned about the issue of overstaying their visas if they go into lockdown. South African authorities have advised that there will be no penalty for travellers whose visas expire as a result of the lockdown.

As you can understand, the situation is changing daily and we encourage you to continually monitor our social media platforms – Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn - for further updates over the coming days.

Please also continue to monitor advice on the government's Smartraveller website – there is a general COVID bulletin on the main page of the site, and individual Travel Advices for each country on the website www.smartraveller.gov.au.

Very importantly please follow the advice given by South African or other African government authorities, particularly in relation to lockdown procedures and restrictions in place.

Information for South Africa is available at www.gov.za

While movements will be heavily restricted during the lockdown it is still important to consider your personal safety and security.

- Information on security concerns can be found in the “Safety” section of our travel advice at www.smartraveller.gov.au – just type South Africa or the country you are in into the destination box and follow the prompts.

- It’s important to be vigilant about your safety even when in lock down – the basics are crucial: ensure your hotel room doors are locked and use the extra safety latch; if you do go out make sure you are back at your accommodation before it gets dark; make sure you watch your wallet, mobile phone and other valuables, and ensure your passport is secure. All those normal common sense precautions but it’s easy to be complacent. We want you to be safe.

You may be, or become separated, from families and friends and there remains a tremendous amount of uncertainty as to when life will return to normal and when you may be reunited with loved ones. For me, my husband and children are in Australia, so I know the feeling of being separated. And I am ensuring that I keep in touch with my family on a daily basis. I urge you to do the same with your families and loved ones.

I and my staff at the High Commission are committed to the safety of Australians overseas at this time. It is a challenging period for everyone so please take care and look after yourself and your family and friends.

I would be very grateful if you could pass this email on to other Australians that you are aware of currently in South Africa, Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia or Eswatini.

Warm regards
Gita

Gita Kamath
Australian High Commissioner

ACCOMMODATION SUGGESTIONS:

In addition to hotels you might want to consider booking accommodation via Air BnB www.airbnb.com, which is very popular in South Africa. Just keep security considerations in mind and remember you will not have access to things like room, laundry, ATM services etc. There are of course many other suggestions and options available through websites such as www.booking.com.

Johannesburg

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Cape Town

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