



HIGH COMMISSIONER

AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION
PRETORIA

5 April 2020

LETTER TO AUSTRALIANS FROM THE AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER

Hello everyone

Day 10 of lockdown and I know many of you are keen to hear news of possible flight options to return home. As you may know on 3 April Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack MP and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Marise Payne announced that a network of flights operated by Qantas and Virgin to key international hubs – London, Los Angeles, Hong Kong and Auckland are being established to help Australians get home.

We're receiving questions from many of you asking how this arrangement can help our Australian community in southern Africa to get home when commercial flights from most of the region are not operating and most of us are in total lockdown.

I don't have easy answers on this right now but ask that you continue to be patient as we here at the High Commission together with our colleagues in Canberra continue efforts to find a solution in cooperation with airlines and South African authorities.

Several people have asked for advice on flights arranged by other governments, and whether Australians can access these flights. We are in close consultation with many Embassies in southern Africa about their charter/repatriation flight plans and will let you know if there are viable options in this regard. Such flights may be restricted to citizens of the countries concerned and may be at considerable expense that would need to be borne by the traveller. Passengers would also need to have confirmed onward bookings to Australia from the charter destination. Isolation/quarantine restrictions in the destination countries would also need to be observed should entry to those countries (rather than transit) be required.

Another frequent question we're receiving is in relation to travelling across provincial borders in South Africa in the event there is a flight from, say, Johannesburg. This is a question we are currently discussing with South African authorities. While we will need to confirm the precise process and paperwork requirement (there will of course be paperwork!), at least in most situations we expect provincial border crossings during the lockdown will be permitted provided the traveller is in possession of a letter from the Embassy confirming that the purpose of their travel is to enable them to depart South Africa. We hope to have more on this soon.

For our Australians in Namibia, Mozambique, Angola, Botswana, Lesotho and Eswatini the situation and your circumstances will be different. The latest information we have on lockdowns, border and airport closures is provided below. As we will be doing here, I encourage you all to keep your ear to the ground about departure options and let us know if

there is an opportunity that you believe may work for you. We will do what we can to support you to depart should the opportunity become available.

We've received many inspiring emails demonstrating the strong resilience within our southern Africa community, and that "hang in there and make the best of it" Aussie attitude. That being said we do know that some of you are in very difficult situations. Please be assured that we are doing our utmost and will be back in touch with you as soon as we have further news.

A couple of heart-warming links for you all below, for a little dose of home, be that Australia or South Africa.

<https://twitter.com/Australia/status/1245974384554082304>
<https://twitter.com/GoToSouthAfrica/status/1243269376670928902>

And for lovers of our awesome African wildlife, Kruger National Park are conducting two game drives a day that can be viewed here on YouTube – safari from the comfort of your couch!

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCV6HJBZD_hZcIX9JVJ3dCXQ/videos

You might have noticed that I'm regularly posting on Facebook and Twitter (*Twitter @AuHCSouthAfrica* and *Facebook @AuHCSouthAfrica*). I imagine you're all finding creative ways to stay healthy and occupied during lockdown and if you would like me to post a photo of you and your family making the best of the situation at the moment I'd be happy to do that (the appropriate ones of course!). You can send us your photo by email (small file sizes please), or tag us on your Twitter or Facebook account and I'll repost/retweet.

I'll just repeat that we are receiving an enormous number of emails from Australians in the region and while we will reply individually to those with particular personal concerns or vulnerabilities, I will try to address the general issues raised in my letters. Information may be repeated and updated where appropriate in each letter as new Australians continue to join our register and we don't want them to miss what's been given to others in previous letters.

Information common to all countries

Safety and Security: Whether in lockdown or not it is 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.

Keep in touch: As we continue efforts to ensure we know of all Australians in the region and their location, please let us know if your circumstances change, i.e. if you move address or contact number, or if you return safely home to Australia.

Summary of country provisions

Country	Lockdown	Dates of Lockdown	International departures possible	All borders closed	Further information
Angola	Yes	27 March to 11 April	No	Yes	Government website: http://www.minsa.gov.ao/TodasNoticias.aspx
Botswana	Yes	2-30 April	No	Yes	Government website: https://www.gov.bw/
Eswatini	Partial	27 March to 17 April	No	Yes	Government website: http://www.gov.sz/
Lesotho	Yes	29 March to 21 April	No	Yes	Government website: https://www.gov.ls/
Mozambique	Partial	1-30 April	TBC	*No	Government website: http://www.misau.gov.mz/ *Note entry is not possible from South Africa or Eswatini as the borders are closed.
Namibia	Partial	27 March to 16 April	No	Yes	Office of the President: http://www.op.gov.na/ Namibia Ministry of Health: http://www.mhss.gov.na/
South Africa	Yes	27 March to 16 April	No	Yes	Government website: https://www.gov.za/Coronavirus http://www.nicd.ac.za/ https://www.sanews.gov.za/ http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/

Angola

A state of emergency has been declared from 27 March to 11 April and a lockdown implemented during this period. People will be required to stay at home and only leave their premises for the purpose of health care and to acquire basic services. All flights in and out of Angola are suspended, land border crossings are closed and passenger ships are banned. Angola has confirmed cases of the COVID-19 virus.

Botswana

Botswana declared a State of Emergency on 31 March 2020, following the confirmation of COVID-19 cases in Botswana. President Masisi announced that more extreme social distancing measures will take effect from midnight on 2 April for a period of 28 days. Movement outside of the home is restricted to accessing or performing essential services only. Currently, there are no scheduled flights in or out of Botswana and all land and air borders have been closed to

foreign nationals. Doctors, pharmacies and supermarkets currently remain open to the public yet restricted to a maximum of 50 individuals at a time. There is a total suspension of public gatherings of more than 100 people. Please also look at the Botswana Facebook page: Covid-19_Mohw and ring this Toll free no. 0800 600 740 for further information.

Eswatini

Eswatini announced a 20 day partial lockdown which includes a closure of borders for the movement of people for 20 days from 27 March 2020. There are no international flights during this period. The partial lockdown measures include the suspension of all unnecessary travel between cities, towns and communities, except for instances of providing or acquiring essential services such as healthcare, food, or banking services. All gatherings of more than 20 people are prohibited. Eswatini has confirmed cases of the COVID-19 virus.

Lesotho

Lesotho is currently in a full lockdown until 21 April. The borders with South Africa are closed, however essential goods and cargo will be allowed. All persons are expected to remain at their places of residence, except to seek medical attention and purchase essential items. All essential services such as supermarket, grocers, essential banking services, post offices, government service departments, hospitals, clinics, doctor's practices and pharmacies will remain open. All gatherings are prohibited. The Lesotho Defence Force and police service have been operationalised to ensure compliance with lockdown measures. Lesotho is one of the few countries yet to have confirmed cases of COVID-19 but you should nonetheless take care to minimise your risk of exposure to COVID-19. For further information, see this link <https://www.gov.ls/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Lockdown-Gazette-Lesotho.pdf>.

Mozambique

Mozambique has not announced a full lockdown but has confirmed cases of the COVID-19 virus. President Nyusi declared a state of emergency on 31 March, applying from 1-30 April. Additional measures have been put in place to mitigate the risk of contagion. Airlines are reducing capacity on flights to Mozambique although some flights are continuing. Mozambique currently requires all travellers arriving to self-isolate for 14 days. Mozambique has banned public events with 50 or more people. Most supermarkets, grocery stores, pharmacies and other essential services remain open.

Namibia

Namibia has announced a state of emergency. A 21-day partial lockdown is effective from 27 March to 16 April which includes a 30-day international travel ban and border closures. Khomas (Windhoek) and Erongo (Swakopmund, Walvis Bay) regions are in full lockdown with restrictions on people movement. People are not allowed to leave their homes during the lockdown period, unless for essential services to pharmacies, food supply stores, courts, banks and for medical reasons. Gatherings may not exceed more than 10 persons and there are restrictions on domestic transportation. Namibia has confirmed cases of the COVID-19 virus.

For further information ring the Namibian Toll-Free Number 0800-100-100 or the website <https://convid19esswebsite.firebaseio.com/home>.

South Africa

Lockdown

A 21-day lockdown commenced at midnight 26 March and will be in effect until after Easter, to 16 April. It is very important to follow the advice given by South African government authorities, particularly in relation to lockdown procedures and restrictions in place.

Information is available at www.gov.za. Lockdown regulations are enforceable by the police and other law enforcement authorities. Violations will be dealt with seriously and may result in legal action and imprisonment.

We, and our families, at the High Commission are also in lock-down at our homes but will do what we can to continue to keep in touch with you and provide consular advice as best we can, particularly for Australians who may have chronic health conditions or who are particularly vulnerable in other ways.

Transport options while under lockdown: While of course movements will be heavily restricted during lockdown if you do need to travel, for a medical appointment for example, there are options. The South African Minister of Transport announced on 25 March that e-hailing services such as Uber are authorised to operate but with restricted hours and conditions.

I received a message from Uber on 27 March advising that they are authorised to operate daily for all riders but under restricted hours from 5am to 9am and 4pm to 8pm for permitted travel purposes only. The Uber app will only be available during the restricted operating hours and travelling is restricted to obtaining an essential good or service (e.g. grocery shopping and medical appointments) or rendering an essential service. For UberX, UberGO, UberBLACK, Uber ASSIST, UberVIP there is a maximum of one passenger; for UberXL a maximum of 2 passengers and for UberVan a maximum of 3 passengers. Passengers are requested to sit in the back seat of the vehicle. It is illegal to transport any alcoholic beverages in any vehicle during the lockdown.

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: South African authorities have advised that there will be no penalty for travellers whose visas expire as a result of the lockdown.

Keep monitoring our social media platforms – Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn - for updates:

Twitter @AuHCSouthAfrica

Facebook @AuHCSouthAfrica

LinkedIn [australian-high-commission-south-africa](https://www.linkedin.com/company/australian-high-commission-south-africa)

and continue to monitor the government's Smartraveller website – both the general COVID-19 bulletin on the main page of the site, and individual Travel Advices for each country, on the website www.smartraveller.gov.au.

As I will say each letter - I and my staff at the High Commission are committed to your safety at this time. It is a challenging period for everyone so please take care and look after yourself and your family and friends.

Warm regards

Gita

Gita Kamath
Australian High Commissioner
