

Some good news for South African passport holders



South Africa is now the only African nation whose citizens can apply for a Japanese tourist visa through Japan's electronic visa (eVisa) system.

The change simplifies the visa application process for South Africans planning on travelling to Japan, one of Asia's largest developed economies.

This development also comes as travel and business ties between the two countries continue to strengthen.

In a statement, Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the online visa system is now available to applicants from a select group of countries, including South Africa.

"Foreign nationals/people who wish to travel to Japan for tourism for a short-term period can apply for a visa online and receive an electronic visa (eVisa) through the Japan eVisa system."

The ministry said that South Africa joined Australia, Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, the United Kingdom and the United States as countries whose residents can use the platform.

It added that the eVisa is available for travellers arriving in Japan by air or sea, limited to scheduled international passenger ferry services between Japan and Busan or Shanghai.

The visa is valid for a single-entry stay of up to 90 days for tourism purposes. "Electronic visas will be issued to those who applied through the Japan eVisa website," the ministry said.

According to the South African Embassy in Tokyo, 2025 marked the 115th anniversary of the establishment of official diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Trade between South Africa and Japan reached R155.7 billion, while 273 Japanese companies currently operate in South Africa.

The embassy noted that this extensive business relationship has supported stronger airline partnerships through Middle Eastern and East African hubs.

This makes travel between the two countries increasingly accessible for both business and leisure travellers. Japan has also become one of the world's fastest-growing tourism destinations.

According to the Japan National Tourism Organisation (JNTO), the country welcomed a record 42.7 million international visitors in 2025, surpassing the previous year's total by 5.8 million.

The bad news



At the same time, travel between South Africa and Japan has been increasing in both directions.

Statistics South Africa reported that arrivals from Japan to South Africa increased by 31.8%, highlighting growing tourism and stronger people-to-people connections between the two countries.

While Japan has made travel easier for South Africans, the picture is less positive when it comes to parts of Europe.

Spain recently expanded its visa-free access programme for several African countries, allowing eligible visitors to stay for up to 90 days without applying for a visa. However, South Africa was not included.

Instead, the visa-free list covers Rwanda, Mauritius, Botswana, Eswatini, Seychelles, Lesotho, Cape Verde and Namibia.

Citizens of those countries can travel to Spain for short visits without completing the traditional visa application process, which generally requires paperwork, appointment bookings, application fees and approval waiting periods.

South African passport holders, by contrast, must still apply for a standard Schengen visa before travelling to Spain.

Spain's visa policy reflects broader immigration, diplomatic and security considerations that governments typically weigh when deciding whether to relax entry requirements.

Although South Africa's inclusion in Japan's eVisa programme is a welcome development that makes travel to one of the world's most popular destinations easier, South Africans continue to face more restrictive visa requirements for several other destinations, including Spain and the wider Schengen area.