

Ethiopia begins issuing online visas for tourists

Ethiopia has started issuing visa online for tourists and other visitors across the world effective 1 June. In a [tweet](#), the Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister, Fitsum Arega said: "A relaxed visa regime will enhance both #Ethiopia's openness and will allow the country to harness the significant stopover transit traffic of @flyethiopian."



©John Wollwerth via [123RF](#) - Addis Ababa Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

The online visa is seen as one of the most innovative services implemented in the area of freedom of movement but not many African countries have embraced electronic visa service. An online visa application service is regarded as an essential component of a modern, integrated visa management system, which enhances both security and convenience.

The Ethiopian Tourist eVisa was launched by the Main Department for Immigration and Nationality Affairs in Ethiopia in June 2017 but the service has only been open to a few countries (37 countries). The eVisa for Ethiopia now authorises tourists from across the world to apply for a tourist eVisa online. Once issued, the Ethiopian eVisa is valid for 30 or 90 days depending on the applicant's selection, according to the [e-Visa Ethiopia website](#).

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed last month revealed that the country will "very soon" follow Rwanda's example allowing all Africans to travel to the country without visas. Ethiopia's move to relax its visa regime will open up the east African country to African visitors, and it will undoubtedly ease the free movement of African nationals and boost tourism.



Ethiopia to allow all Africans to visit without visas "very soon" - PM Abiy Ahmed says

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Prime Minister Ahmed's plan was revealed during a state banquet which he hosted for Rwandan President Paul Kagame who was in Ethiopia last month on a three-day official visit. The two leaders held bilateral talks in Addis Ababa and made a commitment to strengthen relationships in key sectors.

While Prime Minister Abiy did not give specific details of the plan to allow all Africans to travel to Ethiopia without visas, the proposal was warmly welcomed, seen by many observers as a laudable step to open Africa's borders. The policy will undoubtedly open up the east African country to African visitors, and it will ease the free movement of African nationals and boost trade and tourism.

Towards a more open Africa

The announcements by Prime Minister Abiy and his Chief of Staff Fitsum Arega are indeed laudable and demonstrates that African countries are beginning to act on the implementation of the African Union's (AU) 2063 Agenda for "a continent with seamless borders" to help facilitate the free movement of African citizens.

A number of African countries have in the past year started implementing the 30-day visa-on-arrival policy recommended by the AU, and these include Kenya, Ghana and Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe offers visas on arrival for SADC members and several international countries). However, other countries have been slow in implementing the 30-day visa-on-arrival policy recommended by the AU. The visa policies of most African states remain restrictive, and the countries are inaccessible to African visitors.

The AU has appealed to countries to review their visa policies to "implement mechanisms allowing for the issuing of visas on arrival for citizens of Member States, with the possibility of a 30-day stay."

The Africa Visa Openness Index, a guide by the African Development Bank (AfDB) reveals how Africa countries remain largely closed off to African citizens. According to AfDB, "on average Africans need visas to travel to 55% of other African countries, can get visas on arrival in only 25% of other countries and don't need a visa to travel to just 20% of other countries on the continent."

AfDB recommends that African countries should promote more visa-free regional blocs, push for greater reciprocity, and introduce more visa on arrival policies for Africans. The AU has urged member states to champion the visa on arrival initiative, identified as "critical to facilitating and encourage intra-African trade and investments, as well as tourism. With a growing middle class, we must encourage intra-Africa tourism."

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