



NAMIBIA
TRAVEL & TOURISM FORUM
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NTTF denounces the decision to put Namibia back on the red list/variant risk

Following the announcement from South African authorities on 25th Nov 2021, of the discovery of a new variant of COVID-19 (B1.1.529), which had been detected already in Botswana, Hong Kong and South Africa, it was extremely disappointing to see a number of countries including UK, Singapore, Israel, Italy, Austria, Czech Republic, Netherlands hastily put Namibia, along with South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, and Eswatini back on the Red list with immediate effect. Many other countries and EU are considering implementing the same decision. This impulsive response was made within 24hrs of announcement of a new variant, is extremely harmful and delivers a massive blow to the tourism industry that has only just started getting back on its feet.

There have been no cases in Namibia of this new variant and since 1st Nov 2021 the nation has had less than 20 new cases a day; 8 of those days there were less than 10 daily new cases reported. Currently the weekly incident rate stands at just 3! On what basis do the countries decide to stop travel, in turn impacting the livelihood of thousands of families who depend on tourism for their daily meals? How can such a decision be justified when Germany stands at 76,000 new cases yesterday?

As Southern African Tourism Services Association (SATSA) noted in their statement that the Infectious disease expert Professor **Marc Mendelson** says there is nothing to indicate at this stage that the protection COVID-19 vaccines offer will change in the face of the latest variant. "COVID-19 vaccines have proven themselves extremely robust against all SARS-CoV-2 variants to date." "We need to come to accept that breakthrough infections will remain with the 1st-generation vaccines. The sooner we come to accept it, the quicker we can recalibrate how to move forward," says Professor **Shabir Madhi**, Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences and Professor of Vaccinology.

Namibia has finally had booking numbers rise slowly and next week would be the first time in 20 months that a cruise ship would dock at the harbor bringing in much needed visitors and relief for the locals before the holiday season. There are total of 7 cruise liners scheduled to dock until 31st of December, bringing in over 10,000 tourists. All of those trips are now in jeopardy because of a knee-jerk reaction. Apart from that, thousands of additional travellers risk having to cancel their holidays at the last minute, which directly impacts the 100,000 Namibians who depend on the tourism industry's revival. There are also numerous tourists from the UK and elsewhere in Europe who are currently travelling in southern Africa and whose travel plans will be impacted by the sudden change in regulations.

The EU and UK are the main source markets for the Namibian tourism industry, and they appeal to the decision makers and authorities to look at the numbers and the reality on the ground. The ripple effect of this decision will be felt far and wide, with other possibly deciding to follow this impulsive lead and restrict travel to the region. We hope that the decision will be reconsidered with the broader implications in mind, and the countries can work together to find better travel solutions to benefit the global tourism industry and its revival

Yours faithfully,

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