

The Visa on Arrival Scheme in Nigeria – Recent Developments

Introduction

About two years ago, the Nigerian government introduced the 'Visa on Arrival' (VOA) scheme. The VOA is a short term-visa to be issued at the port of entry to frequent business travelers, with a maximum validity of 30 days stay in Nigeria. The scheme was introduced as an incentive to attract foreign direct investment into the country and boost tourism¹.

Recent Developments

The Federal Government, in the last couple of months, has embarked on several public enlightenment programmes to sensitize the public on the existence of the VOA scheme, among other initiatives to create an enabling environment and ease the process of doing business in Nigeria.

The Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), which is the agency responsible for managing movement of expatriates in the country, has put measures in place to simplify the process of accessing the VOA facility. The present leadership of NIS has been passionate about making the VOA scheme easily accessible to citizens of non-ECOWAS countries. Part of the measures recently put in place by the NIS is the upgrade of its website to a more user friendly platform. The website of the NIS - www.immigration.gov.ng, has been updated with detailed information on the application processes and procedures, eligibility and timeline for obtaining the VOA facility. However, any foreigner, who wants to take advantage of the scheme, will still need to manually apply through a Nigerian company and obtain an approval before traveling. After obtaining the approval, the visitor can travel and make the relevant payment in cash at the port of entry.

In addition, the restriction of the VOA to certain group of people has been lifted. The VOA facility is now open to all category of business visitors, who are on short visits to Nigeria.

Expectations

The recent efforts by the NIS towards achieving a seamless and efficient

administration of the VOA scheme is commendable. However, in order to achieve the desired world-class standard, the application process for the VOA should be automated. Automation will enable applicants submit applications online, obtain approval and make the relevant payment.

In the meantime, for efficiency and faster completion of the process at the port of entry, the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) can partner with some banks to install dedicated kiosks where foreigners can make payment through the Point of Sale (POS) machines. This should address the current payment challenges faced by visitors who utilize the scheme.

With the commitment exhibited by the government and the NIS, the expectation is for the VOA to ultimately translate to an E-Visa. This will facilitate a one stop-shop for VOA application, payment and issuance of the visa electronically, to potential travelers to Nigeria for business.

Conclusion

The VOA scheme has so far proved to be an efficient means of eradicating the bottlenecks associated with obtaining business visas at Nigeria Missions abroad.

The flexibility of the VOA scheme could lead to huge investments, employment opportunities and a robust economy. The expectation, therefore, is that government would continue to put in place measures to improve the process of administration and issuance of the VOA to further enhance the flow of foreign direct investment and ease the process of doing business in Nigeria.

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¹ Please see our Newsletter on The Visa –On-Arrival Scheme of November 2015.

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