Comprehensive ETA Q&A

Will my clients from visa-exempt countries be affected?
Not immediately. Clients from visa-exempt countries (UK, Germany, USA, etc.) continue entering with just a valid passport. The Minister mentioned they're exploring optional biometric capture for these travellers in future to enable the same seamless airport experience, but emphasized it would never be an obstacle.

Which clients will need to use the ETA?
Only tourists from countries that currently require visas. Starting with China, India, Indonesia and Mexico, then expanding to all visa-requiring countries.

When can my clients start using it?
- **Phase 1 (End Sept-Nov 2025):** G20 delegates only from the four pilot countries (no fees)
- **Phase 2 (Late November 2025):** All tourists from China, India, Indonesia and Mexico (fees introduced)
- **Phase 3 (TBA):** All other visa-requiring countries

How fast will approvals be?
The system can technically approve visas in seconds, but the Minister said they'll build in security delays of "maybe an hour or two" initially, possibly up to 24 hours for thorough security checks.

Will there be express processing?
The Minister hinted at premium processing, saying those who "cannot wait 24 hours and who might be willing to give us a small fee" could get faster service.

How does the technology actually work?
Clients scan their passport with their phone, take a selfie, and the system:
- Runs 40 fraud checks on the passport
- Matches their selfie to their passport photo
- Auto-populates the application form
- Processes through machine learning algorithms
- Issues approval in real-time if all checks pass

What happens at the airport?
There will be dedicated ETA lanes with facial recognition cameras. If your face matches the system records, you walk through. No stamps, no forms. The Minister said: *"This is how you arrive in world class destinations... you don't go and stand and stamp and forms, you walk through."*

How much will it cost?
Phase 1 (G20 delegates): Free
Phase 2 onwards: "People already pay for a visa so there will be nothing new about that" - specific amounts not yet announced.

Which airports will support ETA arrivals?
Initially OR Tambo and Cape Town International. The Minister was clear about expansion:
"We want this system at our land borders... we want it to go to all of our ports of entry over time."

What about visa renewals?
The system will allow visa extensions from 90 to 180 days online through the same platform.

Do clients still need supporting documents?
The Minister indicated they're reviewing what documents are actually necessary, saying: "If it's a matter of asking for a document that gets put in a file somewhere no one ever looks at again, we won't do it."

What if a client's application is rejected?
They get instant notification with reasons.

How will this affect group bookings?
No more coordinating embassy visits or couriering passports. Groups can all apply online simultaneously and get real-time results.

How do travellers receive and present the ETA?
The ETA will be issued electronically. Travellers can store it in their phone's digital wallet (next to their flight ticket) or download/print a copy if needed. At immigration, they simply show the digital version for biometric matching; no physical visa or stamp required.

What are the security implications?
The system will track entry and exit biometrically, automatically flagging visa overstays. The Minister emphasized this eliminates human corruption: *"You can't bribe a computer."*

Should I wait to book clients from visa-requiring countries?
No. Continue with current processes until ETA is officially available for your specific markets.

How can I help promote this?
The Minister specifically asked the tourism industry to help spread the word in visa-requiring countries once the system launches, emphasizing: *"It's never been easier and better to come to South Africa than it is now."*

What's SATSA doing?
We're staying closely engaged with Home Affairs throughout the rollout to ensure tour operator needs are considered and you're kept informed of all developments.