



THE ROLE OF ELECTRONIC TRAVEL AUTHORIZATIONS

Transforming your visa operations is the first step towards **seamless, digital journeys** that generates **growth in travel and tourism**



In this paper, we examine the role and value of electronic travel authorization systems – particularly **Electronic Visas (eVisas)** and **Electronic Travel Authorizations (ETAs)** – and how, with a modern approach, these capabilities **strengthen border security, enhance the travel experience and boost economic growth** in travel and tourism.

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ELECTRONIC VISAS (eVisas) & ELECTRONIC TRAVEL AUTHORIZATIONS (ETAs)

As the world recovers from the effects of a global pandemic – a public health crisis which closed borders, grounded aircraft, confined ships to port, and left billions of passengers unable to travel for work or leisure – now is the time to re-think old ways of working and adopt new working practices to drive growth in travel and tourism; and ensure borders are secure and capable of identifying risk at the earliest opportunity.

As the rise of electronic visa and travel authorization issuance continues against a sharp decline in issuing traditional visas – and, more broadly, the transformation to fully digital processes gathers pace – there is a risk of late adopters being left behind. Travelers have a choice of destinations, particularly for leisure travel. And choosing to travel to a particular country is determined, in part, by how easy it is to get there. If one country requires a visa applicant to send their passport to the embassy, arrange an interview and be issued with a paper-based visa label several weeks later, they run the risk of that traveler choosing instead to travel to a neighbouring country where they can apply and be issued with an eVisa or ETA, online or directly to their mobile phone, in a matter of minutes. Indeed, these countries and those which allow travelers to check-in, cross borders and board aircraft and cruise ships using just their digital identity, should expect to see strong growth in their travel and tourism economies as a result.



Globally, our systems process more than two billion passengers per year – that’s more than 50% of all annual border crossings. And through our work with our government customers, we have developed a portfolio of mission-critical solutions to help governments implement electronic travel authorizations; issue electronic visas; process API, iAPI and PNR data; verify biometric identities; perform risk assessments; protect public health; and accelerate border crossing transactions for all passengers arriving and departing from their country by land, sea or air.

For the aviation sector alone, the global airline body, the International Air Transport Association (IATA), forecasts that passenger volumes will surpass pre-pandemic levels as early as 2024 when traveller numbers are expected to reach 4.0 billion¹. Managing that growth will be challenging for government control authorities responsible for visa and border operations.

The time to transform from paper to digital, from old to new ways of working, is now.



¹ Source: International Air Transport Association (IATA) <https://www.iata.org/en/pressroom/2022-releases/2022-03-01-01/>

GLOBAL TRAVEL LANDSCAPE: DIGITIZING THE RIGHT TO TRAVEL

While the challenges, constraints and threat environments of our 70+ government customers are truly unique, there are universal truths which unite them in their individual approaches to border management.

Firstly, all recognize the need to identify and manage risk as early and as far from the border as possible. Secondly, all apply near-identical categorizations of passengers seeking to cross their borders: (1) citizens / permanent residents; (2) visa nationals (i.e. passengers who require a visa to enter or transit through their territory); and (3) visa-exempt nationals (i.e. passengers who do not require a visa to enter or transit through their territory).

For many decades, governments all around the world have developed visa programs to issue a 'right to travel' for passengers seeking to gain entry to their country, whether for a short or long stay, for work or for leisure. Indeed, at the time, the only reliable way to manage risk away from the border, was to require nationals of certain countries (i.e. visa nationals) to apply for a visa at an embassy or consulate, have the authenticity of their document confirmed, provide answers to questions regarding the purpose of their travel, and ensure that passenger did not pose a risk to national security. This well-established method served us well. But the world – and certainly technology – has moved on. The future of travel is digital. And all travel and tourism business processes are slowly but surely transforming to leverage technology – mobile devices and biometrics in particular – and embrace new, modern digital ways of working. Both visa issuance and border control operations are already moving in this direction.

Traditional visa issuance



eVisa issuance





The past 20 years has seen Automated Border Control systems, which rely on verifying passenger's identities using biometrics, deployed on every continent with ever-increasing volumes of passengers now able to use them each and every time they cross the border.

In 2018, the United Nations global body for tourism, the UN World Tourism Organization (UN-WTO), reported that 10% of all visas issued were now electronic, up from just 2% six years before. In 2008, traditional paper-based visas accounted for 77% of visas issued globally. A decade later in 2018, they only accounted for 53% - with electronic visas and 'visas upon arrival' implemented in their place. The increase in electronic visa issuance, coupled with a decrease in traditional visa issuance, will only continue; and

the pace of adoption will only accelerate. And for electronic travel authorizations, at least another 26 countries will implement these once the European Union's ETIAS² scheme is operationalized across the continent in 2023.

In short, the old, traditional way of issuing paper-based label visas via embassies and consulates is on the decline. And the new way of issuing electronic travel authorizations and visas is on the rise. More and more countries are now purposefully moving towards fully digital processes that not only improve the visa issuance process, but also play a vital role in strengthening border security and driving growth in the country's travel and tourism economy.

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² Source: European Commission – Migration & Home Affairs: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen-borders-and-visa/smart-borders/european-travel-information-authorisation-system_en

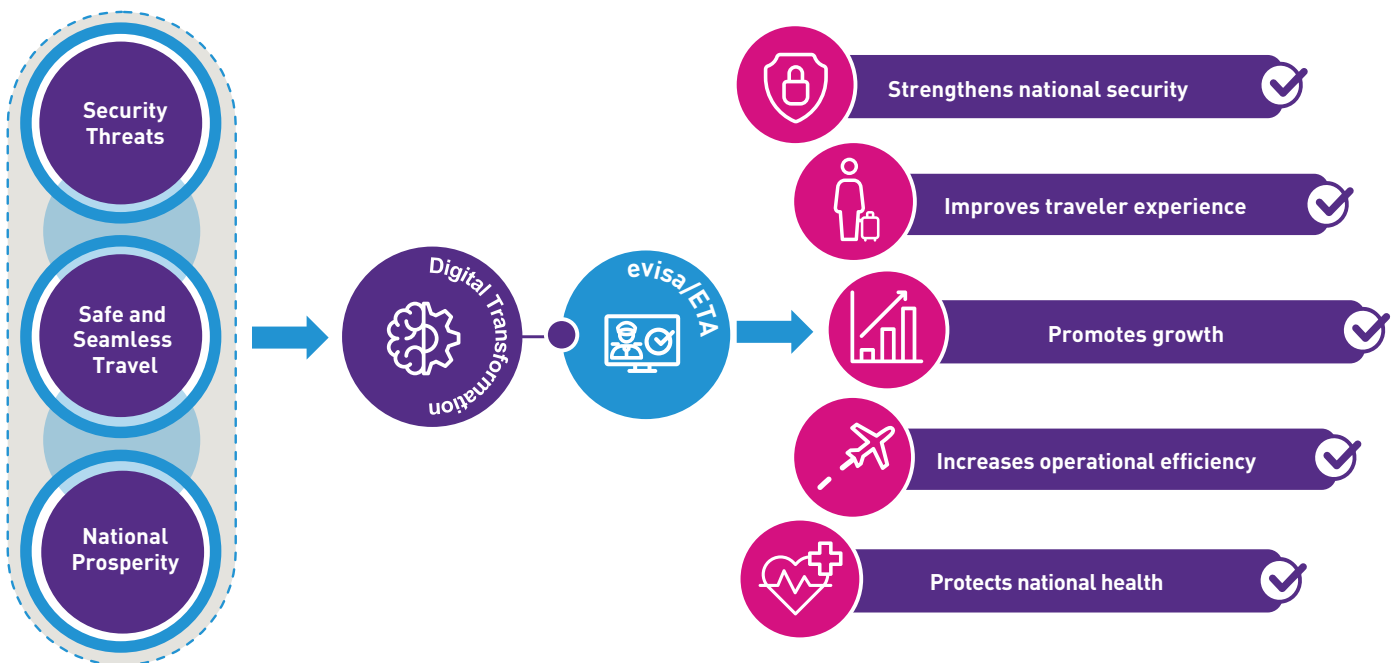
WHY TRANSFORM? WHY NOW?

So, why should governments transform their visa operations; and why should they do it now?

Quite simply because transforming from old to new – from paper to digital processes – delivers a range of benefits to the country, including a significant boost to the country's economy – something for which many governments are desperate after the pandemic brought whole sectors of their economy, travel and tourism in particular, to a standstill for the better part of two years. On the positive side, the sector's recovery is already underway. But perhaps as early as 2024, governments will need to issue visas and travel authorizations, and manage the border crossings, of an even greater number of passengers as compared to pre-pandemic levels.

Returning to the key findings³ of the UN World Tourism Organization (UN-WTO), together with the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), their analysis found visa facilitation programs increased international tourist arrivals from 5-25% per year; and the introduction of new types of visas resulted in an average increase of 8.1%. Both organizations found India's travel and tourism economy had grown by >20% following the country's launch of its e-visa application process. Equally importantly, the issuance of electronic visas and travel authorizations enables governments to capture biometrics and leverage mobile technologies, allowing passengers to travel safely, securely and seamlessly across the border.

These findings highlight how the implementation of electronic visa and travel authorization programs can deliver a significant boost to a country's travel and tourism economy; and create an opportunity to capture vital electronic data on visa-exempt nationals to strengthen national security.



³ Source: World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) – Visa Facilitation (August 2019) - <https://wttc.org/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/2019/Security%20and%20Travel%20Facilitation-Visa%20Facilitation-Aug%202019.pdf?ver=2021-02-25-182749-077>



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As compelling as these arguments are, what really makes the case for change for government control authorities is the recommendation by the United Nations agency responsible for passport and visa standards, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), which has proposed changes to Annex 9 (Facilitation⁴) of the Chicago Convention and encouraged its 193 Member States to adopt Electronic Travel Systems⁵. And with the European Union's implementation of its Electronic Travel Information & Authorization System (ETIAS)⁶, scheduled for 2023, it will soon be the case that the majority of countries worldwide will be issuing electronic visas and travel authorizations as the primary route for all passengers, both visa nationals and visa-exempt nationals, to enter and/or transit through their country.



Extract from ICAO Annex 9 - Facilitation, Chapter 9

C. Electronic Travel Systems (ETS)* 9.17 Recommended Practice.—

Contracting States seeking to establish an Electronic Travel System should integrate the pre-travel verification system with an **interactive Advance Passenger Information** system.

Note.— This will allow States to integrate with the airline departure control systems using data messaging standards in accordance with international guidelines in order to provide a real-time response to the airline to verify the authenticity of a passenger's authorization during check-in.

4 Source: ICAO – <https://www.icao.int/Security/FAL/Pages/Annex9.aspx>

5 Source: ICAO Annex 9 (Facilitation), Part C – Electronic Travel Systems, Paragraph 9.17

6 Source: European Commission https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/schengen-borders-and-visa/smart-borders/european-travel-information-authorisation-system_en

LEVERAGING MOBILE DEVICES TO INCREASE SECURITY, DECREASE FRAUD, AND IMPROVE TRAVELER EXPERIENCE

Importantly, the global drivers for adoption of electronic travel authorization systems need to be seen in the context of the vast majority (92%) of travelers' preference to use their own technology to organize their trip.

Earlier this year, SITA published its 2022 Passenger IT Insights Report⁷ which highlighted how a growing proportion of travelers are now opting for mobile apps.

In 2019 and early 2020, only 8% of travelers used mobile apps to perform key process steps in their journey (e.g. booking, check-in, bag-drop). By early 2022, that number had already risen to 20%. Today, with so many travelers carrying at least one mobile device on their journey – coupled with recent technological advances such as the integration of Near Field Communication (NFC) into mobile operating systems, iOS® and Android® in particular – the need for all stakeholders to provide mobile solutions will increase significantly. Indeed, within the next three to five years, we predict the majority of travelers will rely on digital mobile solutions to organize all aspects of their journey by land, sea or air, including visa applications and border crossings.

For their part, governments will further drive the adoption of digital mobile solutions as, by doing so, they will create new capabilities to enrol passengers, perform document authentication, conduct strong biometric identity verification, cross reference the ICAO Public Key Directory (PKD) and integrate new standards, such as the ICAO Visible Digital Seal (VDS) and/or the ICAO Digital Travel Credential (DTC).

And for carriers, ports and other travel and tourism providers, the ability to digitally verify an electronic visa or travel authorization as *'genuine'* and *'valid'*, not only significantly increases security but also significantly decreases opportunities for fraud, meaning fewer passengers are deemed inadmissible or improperly documented upon arrival requiring them to be returned home at the carrier's expense.

Finally, for travelers, every piece of research we have conducted over the past decade has highlighted their increasing willingness to use their own technology, mobile devices in particular, at key steps throughout their journey. Offering digital mobile solutions to travelers puts them in control of their journey and allows them to consent to their data being securely shared along the way.

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⁷ Source: SITA 2022 Passenger IT Insights Report – <https://www.sita.aero/resources/surveys-reports/passenger-it-insights-2022/>

MAKING TECHNOLOGY WORK FOR YOU

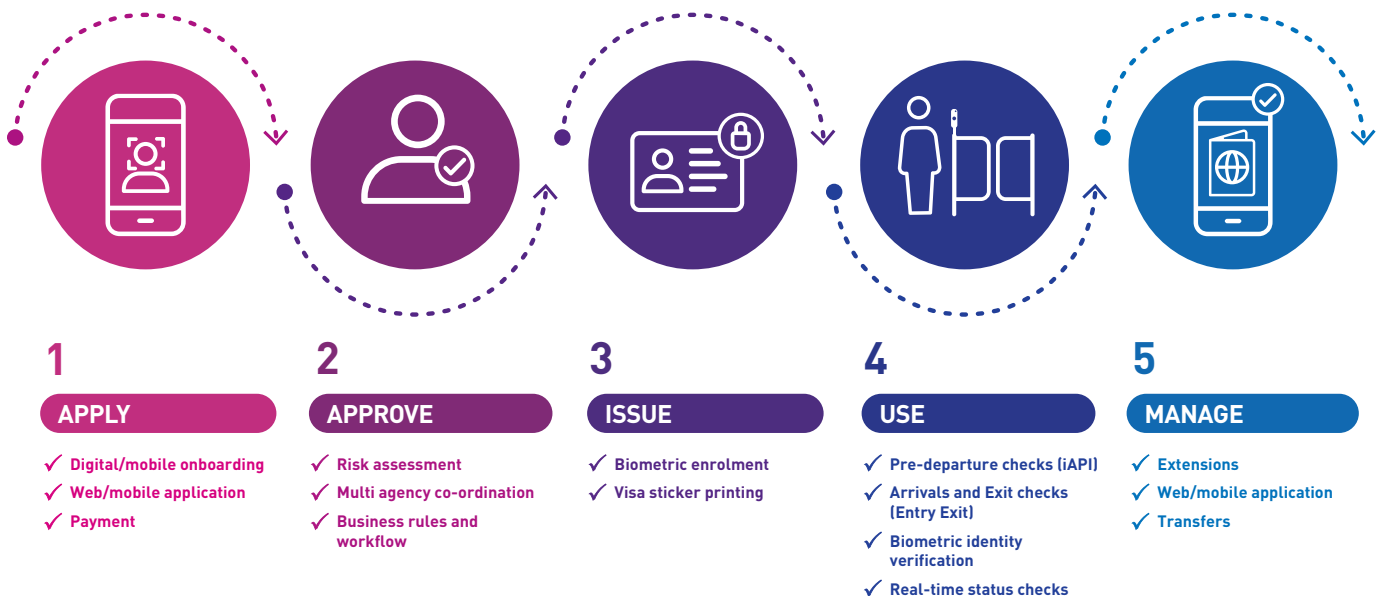
As a company that has specialized in developing mission critical systems for 75 years, we understand that technology on its own will never deliver all of your requirements.

Technology needs to work for you, not the other way around. And that demands changes to ways of working, the creation of new processes and procedures, and, invariably, changes to the work your people do on the frontline of visa issuance and border operations.

To achieve that, an effective, modern eVisa / ETA solution needs to mirror the five critical process steps governments follow throughout the lifecycle of a visa or travel authorization: (1) application; (2) approval; (3) issuance; (4) usage; and (5) management.

Equally, it is vitally important eVisa / ETA solutions incorporate the latest advances in travel document verification, particularly the ICAO Visible Digital Seal (VDS)⁸, which is also gaining international acceptance as an effective, affordable solution to the critical global challenge of providing verifiable proof of vaccination status and test results (e.g. COVID-19). Additionally, to ensure investments are protected and solutions future proof, electronic travel authorization systems must be capable of working with the ICAO Digital Travel Credential (DTC)⁹ – a verifiable digital representation of a traveler’s passport – to enable passengers to travel, apply for visas and cross borders using just their digital identity.

FIVE STAGE TRAVEL AUTHORIZATION SOLUTION FOR eVISAS AND ETAs



⁸ Source: International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) - <https://bit.ly/3vyQrhc>

⁹ Source: International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) - <https://bit.ly/3vwQmdG>

Crucially, to ensure government investments deliver affordable outcomes, both now and in the near future, electronic travel authorization systems must be designed to enable government authorities to fully leverage mobile technologies and biometrically verify passenger identities. As standards evolve and new technologies come online – such as an ICAO Visible Digital Seal (VDS) and/or an ICAO

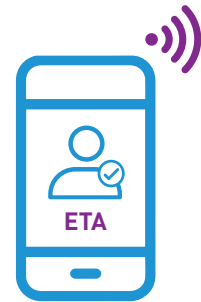
Digital Travel Credential (DTC), or indeed incorporating real-time identity verification and/or real-time denial of boarding for ineligible or high-risk travelers – electronic travel authorization systems should be readily configurable to activate new functionalities and requirements as and when needed.



SITA helps
customers process

5 MILLION

electronic visas and
travel authorizations a year



HOW CAN SITA HELP?

SITA occupies a rare position in the travel and tourism sector: we operate across government and industry, providing support to government visa issuance and border control authorities, as well as carriers and ports across all modes of transport, airlines and airports in particular. Indeed, more than 660 airlines are already configured on the SITA Gateway which connects governments around the world to the global air transport industry.

For the past 25 years, SITA has helped governments develop mission critical systems to manage their borders. Today, more than 70 countries rely on our systems to process passengers, issue visas, perform risk assessments and confirm passenger identities at the border. We can also help by sharing insights regarding the many eVisa and ETA systems we have deployed where, based on the policies in place, 99% of authorizations can be issued in less than 12 hours.

SITA has deployed systems where

99%

of electronic travel authorizations are issued in...



**LESS THAN
12 HOURS**

USE CASES

ASIA PACIFIC

In partnership with SITA, a major economy in the Asia Pacific region pioneered travel authorization with the introduction of the Electronic Travel Authority System (ETAS) in 1996.

Passengers apply for an authorization online or through their airline or travel agent at the time of making their travel reservation, receiving an immediate confirmation. By providing advance notice of intent to travel, ETAS creates the opportunity for the government to pre-screen travelers against known wanted persons and risk profiles, improving overall security. Today, SITA's solution processes more than 2.5 million ETAS transactions a year and 3.5 million ETAS queries.

This country further enhanced its innovative approach to border operations with the implementation of interactive Advance Passenger Information (iAPI) – often referred to as 'Advance Passenger Processing' or 'APP' – which integrates travel authorizations into the airline check-in process, allowing them to perform additional pre-screening shortly before flight departure, with the ability to authorize or deny the boarding of each traveler in real-time.

The use of iAPI is mandatory and has been implemented by all airlines operating flights to/from the country, with 99.8% of iAPI transactions taking less than 2.5 seconds – a remarkable achievement given flights to the country originate from all over the globe.

AFRICA

To prepare for a large influx of foreign nationals for a major international sporting event, this African nation needed to overhaul its border control operation. The government wanted to improve border security, create a more secure environment and reduce the administrative burden of security. At the same time, it wished to accelerate passenger processing at its airports – ultimately enhancing the traveler experience.

Implemented in just nine months, the SITA solution effectively exported the country's borders to the point of departure. It enabled both airlines and governments to transfer passport data in an interactive and real-time manner as passengers checked in for their flights.

In June and July 2010 alone, the country processed more than 1.5 million passengers using the SITA solution. Approximately 350 people were subjected to extra examination, while more than 60 were prevented from entering the country because their names appeared on either the national Visa and Entry Stop List, or watch lists provided by Interpol and the sport's international governing body.

In addition, more than 80% of airlines who used the system on flights to the country were also able to reduce their administrative and turnaround costs, while eliminating fines associated with transporting incorrectly documented or otherwise inadmissible travelers.

MIDDLE EAST

Sitting at the crossroads between East and West, the Middle East has always been a strategic area for air travel, trade, tourism, business, and investments. Growth has been significant and is set to continue driven by visionary leadership and the ongoing investment in infrastructure.

However, the Middle East's attractiveness is not limited to legitimate travelers, because its strategic location makes it a target for terrorism. As international air travel increases, the authorities need to maintain and enhance the current high level of security and public safety, in order to maintain attractiveness for locals, foreign residents, and visitors alike.

The challenge for governments is to deal with the ever-increasing numbers of travelers entering and leaving. Improved facilitation – the faster processing of passengers – is vital to support economic growth. But this must be combined with enhanced security to guard against trans-national crime, illegal immigration, smuggling, drug trafficking and terrorism.

Collecting and screening traveller data in advance of travel is a powerful and proven technique to do both. It increases security and makes border clearance both simpler and faster for the great majority of passengers. Although many countries around the world have implemented border management systems of limited scope – often in a piece-meal fashion – SITA has helped many countries in the Middle East by deploying fully integrated border management systems, allowing them to become world leaders in transportation security and the facilitation of goods and people across borders.

WHAT NEXT?

It all starts with a conversation. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss your ideas, needs and challenges relative to electronic travel authorization systems.

Our subject matter experts are available to explore how and where these capabilities can strengthen border security, enhance the travel experience and boost economic growth in travel and tourism in your country.

Organize an eVisa / ETA Exploration Session

Simply contact your SITA Account Manager or send an e-mail to borders.enquiry@sita.aero

We will take care of making the arrangements and making sure the right people are available to you to explore what electronic travel authorization systems can do for you.

Get in touch

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SITA AT A GLANCE

Easy and safe travel every step of the way.

- Through information and communications technology, we help to make the end-to-end journey easier and safer for passengers – from pre-travel, check-in and baggage processing, to boarding, border control and inflight connectivity.
- We work with over 400 air transport industry members and 2,500 customers in over 200 countries and territories. Almost every airline and airport in the world does business with SITA, and nearly every passenger trip relies on SITA technology.
- Our customers include airlines, airports, ground handlers, aircraft, air navigation service providers, and governments.
- Our solutions drive operational efficiencies at more than 1,000 airports, while delivering the promise of the connected aircraft to customers of 18,000 aircraft globally.
- We help more than 70 governments to strike the balance between secure borders and seamless travel.
- Created and owned 100% by air transport, SITA is the community's dedicated partner for IT and communications, uniquely able to respond to community needs and issues.
- We innovate and develop collaboratively with our air transport customers, industry bodies and partners. Our portfolio and strategic direction are driven by the community, through the SITA Board and Council, comprising air transport industry members the world over.
- We provide services over the world's most extensive communications network. It's the vital asset that keeps the global air transport industry connected in every corner of the globe and bridging 60% of the air transport community's data exchange.
- With a customer service team of over 1,700 people around the world, we invest significantly in achieving best-in-class customer service, providing 24/7 integrated local and global support for our services.
- Our annual Air Transport and Passenger IT Insights reports for airlines, airports and passengers are industry-renowned, as is our Baggage IT Insights report.
- We are a certified CarbonNeutral® company, reducing greenhouse gas emissions for all our operations through our UN recognized Planet+ program. In 2022, we committed to setting science-based emission reduction targets aligned to the Science Based Target initiative Net-Zero Standard.
- We also develop solutions to help the aviation industry meet its carbon reduction objectives, including reduced fuel burn and greater operational efficiencies.



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