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# Living in Swaziland

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## Introduction

Eswatini, formerly known as Swaziland, is a land of surprising contrast and extraordinary warmth nestled in the heart of Southern Africa. Despite being one of the continent's smallest nations, it offers a remarkable fusion of natural splendor, deep-rooted tradition, and progressive openness to visitors. For expats seeking both adventure and a sense of belonging, Eswatini promises a lifestyle defined by tranquil rhythms and vibrant cultural experiences, against a backdrop of rolling hills, lush forests, and bustling markets.

Moving to a new country presents both exhilaration and uncertainty. For those considering life in Eswatini, there are practical considerations that shape the daily experience: from navigating visa and residency processes, understanding cost of living differences, to choosing a new home and accessing healthcare. The country's unique blend of modern influences and enduring traditions requires adaptability, cultural sensitivity, and an open mind—characteristics that will reward the newcomer with lasting connections and distinctive memories.

While Eswatini's modest size ensures a close-knit community feel, it can also pose certain challenges. Public infrastructure, healthcare systems, and professional opportunities differ from what many expats might expect in larger economies. Issues such as a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS and economic disparities are real, yet they exist alongside a remarkable spirit of resilience and communal support. For families, professionals, and retirees, understanding both the advantages and challenges of life here is essential for a successful transition.

At the same time, Eswatini offers exceptionally rich rewards, from its welcoming people—the emaSwati—who take pride in their heritage, to the country's spectacular array of festivals and cultural ceremonies. Vibrant markets, world-class wildlife reserves, and the ever-present beauty of the landscape punctuate daily life. Whether you are drawn to its investment-friendly environment, the promise of adventure, or the appeal of a gentler pace, Eswatini encourages you to explore your surroundings deeply and embrace the local way of life.

This book, *Living in Swaziland: A Guide for Expats*, is designed to provide a thorough and honest road map for anyone considering a move to Eswatini. It addresses the full spectrum of expat needs, from legal requirements and practical advice, to cultural insights and leisure opportunities. Whether you plan to stay for a year or a lifetime, the information within these chapters aims to empower you to make informed decisions and to lay the foundations for a rewarding time in your new home.

Above all, living in Eswatini is not simply about adapting to a new place—it is about growth, exchange, and respect. By approaching this transition with curiosity and humility, expats can find not just a place to live, but a new community to call home. Welcome to Eswatini: a kingdom of possibilities waiting to unfold.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: Visa and Residency: Navigating Entry and Permits**

Eswatini, a jewel in Southern Africa, beckons with its unique blend of culture and captivating landscapes. However, before you can immerse yourself in the kingdom's charm, you'll need to navigate the often-intricate world of visas and residency permits. This initial hurdle is perhaps the most crucial, as proper documentation lays the foundation for a smooth and legal stay. Understanding the requirements and application processes is paramount for any expat dreaming of a life in this vibrant nation.

For many prospective expats, the first question is always about entry. The good news is that citizens from a considerable number of countries enjoy visa-free entry for short visits. This typically includes most Commonwealth countries, the USA, Japan, and most European Union nations, allowing for tourist or business stays of up to 30 days. Should your initial wanderlust extend beyond a month, it is possible to apply for a 30-day extension through the Ministry of Home Affairs. However, if your intentions are to truly settle in, work, or study in Eswatini, a simple entry visa won't suffice; you'll need to look into temporary or permanent residence permits.

The Ministry of Home Affairs Headquarters in Mbabane is your primary point of contact for all matters relating to residency and permits. Alternatively, applications can be initiated at Eswatini's diplomatic missions abroad. While the thought of government bureaucracy might trigger a familiar sigh, approaching the process with diligence and patience will save you considerable headaches down the line. It's advisable to apply for your work permit from your country of residence and await approval before packing your bags and travelling to Eswatini.

### **Temporary Residence Permits: Your Ticket to a Longer Stay**

If your plans involve a stay exceeding 60 days, or if you intend to live and work in Eswatini, a temporary residence permit is your next step. This permit effectively grants you the right to reside in the country and, depending on its type, may also authorize you to work. The validity period for a temporary residence permit can be up to two years, often tied to the duration of your employment contract, and is renewable.

The application for a temporary residence permit requires a detailed collection of documents. You'll need a completed application form, naturally, along with two recent passport-sized photos. Your passport should be valid for at least six months beyond

your intended stay. Proof of accommodation in Eswatini is also a standard requirement, indicating where you plan to lay your head. Furthermore, you'll need to demonstrate financial self-sufficiency with bank statements or other proof of sufficient funds to support yourself during your time in the kingdom.

A crucial component for anyone over 18 years of age is a police clearance certificate from your country of origin, ensuring you're not bringing any unwelcome baggage from your past. A medical certificate is also mandatory, confirming your good health. It's vital to remember that all copies of your documents must be certified to be considered valid by the authorities. This meticulous approach to documentation is a common thread throughout the Eswatini immigration process.

## **Work Permits: Paving the Way for Your Career**

For expats eager to contribute their skills to Eswatini's economy, a work permit is indispensable. This permit is explicitly issued for the position outlined in your employment letter and becomes invalid should you receive a promotion or if your employment is terminated. Work permits are typically issued for up to two years, contingent on the length of your employment, and can be renewed.

The application process for a work permit is a personal endeavor, requiring you to apply in person at the Ministry of Home Affairs. A fundamental requirement is a formal job offer from an Eswatini-based employer. Beyond the general documents for a temporary residence permit, you'll also need to provide evidence of your qualifications and experience, proving your suitability for the role. The employer often plays a significant role in this process, providing a cover letter detailing the job offer and justifying the hiring of a foreign national. Companies sponsoring foreign nationals must also be registered with the Ministry of Labour.

The processing time for a work permit can range from seven to thirty working days, though it can extend to four to six weeks. It's important to remember that work permits are location-specific, and any changes in your job or relocation within Eswatini might necessitate re-approval from immigration authorities. This means your original permit may not be valid if you change roles or move to a different branch of your company.

## **Dependent Permits: Bringing Your Family Along**

If your move to Eswatini includes your nearest and dearest, they too will need to secure their own permits. Family members, defined as dependants, must apply for a temporary residence permit. A dependent permit is specifically issued to the spouse, parent, or guardian of a foreign national who has already been lawfully granted entry for work or other purposes. The validity of these permits is often directly linked to the main applicant's permit, ensuring that the family's stay aligns with the primary expat's

authorized period.

The requirements for dependent permits generally mirror those for individual temporary residence permits, with additional documentation to prove the relationship to the main work permit holder, such as marriage or birth certificates. It's worth noting that a dependent permit typically does not automatically grant the right to work. If a dependant intends to seek employment, they will need to apply for their own separate work authorization.

## **Student and Internship Permits: A Journey of Learning**

For those whose Eswatini adventure revolves around academia or professional development, a student or internship permit is the gateway. This permit is required for foreign nationals planning to pursue education, undertake an internship, or engage in academic research at an accredited institution in Eswatini. The validity of these permits is, understandably, tied to the duration of the studies or the internship period.

The application for a student permit involves a complete application form and passport-sized photos, much like other permit types. Additionally, you'll need a letter of acceptance from the school or institution where you intend to study, along with a support letter from the Ministry of Education. For those over 18, a police clearance from your country of origin and a medical certificate are also required, as is a copy of your passport. Demonstrating financial means to support yourself throughout your studies is also a key component of the application. It's important for international students to verify specific visa requirements with Eswatini diplomatic missions in their home countries, as these can vary by nationality. While some countries are exempt from entry visas for short tourist stays, it's generally not advisable to attempt an internship or study on a tourist visa.

Navigating the visa and residency landscape in Eswatini can feel like a labyrinth at times, but with careful preparation and attention to detail, it's a journey that can be successfully undertaken. The key is to gather all necessary documents, understand the specific requirements for your intended purpose of stay, and be prepared for the application process. Remember, the Ministry of Home Affairs is your central resource, and their guidelines, though sometimes extensive, are designed to ensure a well-regulated and secure environment for everyone in the kingdom. With your permits in hand, the real adventure of living in Eswatini can truly begin.

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