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Editor's note

The recent terrorist attack on French satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, in Paris had an immediate and substantial impact on international travel worldwide. Travel warnings were issued. Airports – particularly those in Europe and the United States – stepped up security measures. Demand for travel insurance was boosted.

At times like these, everyone looks to the travel buyer to advise on duty of care: is it safe to travel? Are travellers being tracked? Are they covered adequately by insurance? Will there be delays at the airport? The list of questions is endless and providing the right answers is critical.

Travel buyers – often undervalued in organisations – carry huge burdens. They are responsible for many things and, most importantly, many people. Their role is a complex one without clear definition that is continuously evolving. So how do you pin it down? In our Power Panel on page 12, we explore what it means to be a travel buyer: a manager caught in the middle between serving the best interests of the employer as well as their travellers.

Talking about travellers and their comfort, the Economy Class feature looks at how airlines are working to improve the passenger's experience in the back of the plane. More companies are shifting their policies to include economy class and reduce costs but they still want flexibility and choice when it comes to products, and airlines want to deliver.

In our Meet pages, we explore how idyllic and intimate locations can bring out the best in conference-goers. Conferences are generally more productive when delegates find themselves in an environment where they feel comfortable.

That might be the reason business travel to Mauritius is booming. No longer considered only a leisure destination, there is a growing presence of South African-linked businesses in the country, which indicates the increasing significance of bilateral trade. The Seychelles, too, is jumping on the bandwagon (see page 14).

Keep reading!

Natasha Schmidt
(natashas@nowmedia.co.za)

COVER

Travel Buyer speaks to GBTA regional director of the EMEA, **Catherine McGavock**, about current global best practice in the corporate travel arena. Cover photograph by **Shannon Van Zyl**.

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Air China to fly to SA

AIR China will commence direct flights to South Africa from March, part of the strengthening of its codeshare agreement with SAA, an inside source has told Travel Buyer. The airline will operate direct flights to Johannesburg from Beijing with a 45-minute layover before continuing on to Cape Town. "The final detail is happening this month for operations in March," the source confirmed.

DoT deputy director: licensing and permits, **Andries Ntjane**, confirmed that Air China had made a request for

designation to operate on the route to South Africa. He said since Air China was a licensed operator there shouldn't be any major hurdles. "It's just a formality."

At the time of going to print, there was strong speculation to suggest that SAA would drop its Beijing route – its worst performing route, accumulating losses of R309m per year – as early as March.

In December last year, SAA announced that it would strengthen its bilateral co-operation with Air China. It said in a statement that the key

element in the strengthened relationship would be some network reconfiguration for both airlines to provide better passenger and cargo services between South Africa and China and countries adjacent to both.

SAA acting ceo, **Nico Bezuidenhout**, said in a media briefing in early December that the airline would terminate certain unprofitable routes in the next three months as part of its 90-Day Action Plan. The plan aimed to effect R1,3 billion in annual savings in the 90 days, including R507 million savings on Asian routes, he said.

Bigger Bidvest lounge at CPT airport

BIDVEST has opened its new International Premier Lounge at Cape Town International Airport.

The new lounge is larger than the previous one and is conveniently located just after passport control in the international departures terminal.

The lounge caters for more than 90 000 people annually and **Gavin Bell**, md of Bidvest Premier Lounges, said customer feedback had been sought and considered during the upgrade of the facility and it was clear a bigger space was required.

The facility, which represents the new look and feel of Bidvest's Premier Lounges countrywide, has unisex toilet facilities, showers, free WiFi, complimentary hot and cold snacks, a range of beverages, and a smoking facility. Each armchair has been fitted with its own USB port and power point. The lounge is also wheelchair friendly.

Next up for renovations is the Premier Lounge at OR Tambo International Airport's domestic terminal and the new lounge awarded to Bidvest at Bloemfontein Airport.

The Cape Town lounge is open Mondays to Sundays from 05h00-23h00.



Tabassum Qadir (left), co-chairperson of Skywise Airlines, at the December launch with Allan Lunz, md of Bidtravel.

Skywise bookings open

THE long-anticipated entry into South African skies of low-cost carrier, Skywise, was announced at a grand launch event at Melrose Arch on December 13.

Bookings for the airline's new route between Johannesburg and Cape Town will open on February 11, with flights commencing in March.

The reason Skywise opted to launch during South Africa's lowest travel season is to mark the anniversary of Nelson Mandela's release from prison, says **Tabassum A. Qadir**, co-chairperson of Skywise. "This day is significant as Nelson Mandela was freed from prison after 27 years and we want to mark 'Freedom of Skies' on February 11."

Club Travel expands into Africa

CLUB Travel will look at expanding into other African markets through the adoption of ProTAS Mid and Back Office. The company will extend its offering on a franchise basis, offering its online products to travel agencies in those territories.

The fact that each African market is different and has its own currency creates challenges for existing payment systems. One of the greatest advantages of the ProTAS Mid and Back Office is that it easily handles multiple currencies. The flexibility of ProTAS also makes it simple to roll out in other markets without needing to have the full infrastructure in place. Club Travel has adapted the way in which the system is configured to make the most of functions such as automated fees.

New Moz airport to boost travel

NACALA Airport in Mozambique, which officially opened its doors in December, will boost travel to northern parts of the country.

LAM is the first airline to offer services to the new airport, with a thrice-weekly service from Maputo. The flight is operated with an Embraer 145 carrying 50 passengers. The flight departs Maputo at 06h30 arriving in Nacala at 08h35. The return flight departs Nacala at 09h05, arriving in Maputo at 11h10, allowing a smooth connection to Johannesburg.

Mozambique's President, **Armando Guebuza**, said "the development of Nacala is unstoppable". He added that the airport would allow the region to create a free trade zone in Nacala that could potentially attract major investment in the region.

Flyafrika unveils plans for 2015

FLYAFRICA.com has revealed more details of its plans for a tourist route from Cape Town to Victoria Falls and on to Kilimanjaro, which it plans to have up and running before the end of the year.

Once discussions with Tanzanian authorities are complete, flyafrika will be able to launch the route, says **Adrian Hamilton-Manns**, ceo of the flyafrika group. "It is something we are very committed to."

Flyafrika Zimbabwe already flies from Harare to Johannesburg daily and Harare-Victoria Falls and Victoria Falls-Johannesburg, both four times a week. VFA-JNB flights

will increase to daily on June 1. This is just one of the many developments the airline group will see this year, Hamilton-Manns told *Travel Buyer*.

Sales opened in October for the group's second airline, flyafrika Namibia, which offers daily flights from Windhoek to both Johannesburg and Cape Town. From March it will also launch flights from Johannesburg to Lusaka using fifth freedom rights.

"Johannesburg to Lusaka will be the first of many routes where flyafrika does not have an Air Operator Certificate in the country but will use fifth freedom rights, which we can now exercise," said Hamilton-Manns. The rights will also

allow flyafrika to build its hub operation out of Harare with flights to Lusaka, Mozambique and into neighbouring countries such as Malawi.

The launch of two more airlines is planned in the first half of this year. With four airlines, the group's operations will increase to 16 routes. In the second half of the year and early 2016, flyafrika plans to launch three more airlines, bringing the total number in the group to seven.

Plans to launch a South African operation are on the cards but due to opposition from established South African carriers, Hamilton-Manns can't provide a set date but expects it to be by the end of the year.



Acsa cracks down on hand luggage allowance

ACSA and airlines will roll out a campaign from February 2 at all SA airports to enforce hand luggage regulations.

The lead will be taken by the airlines in this regard, the airports company told *Travel Buyer*. "The need for the hand baggage restriction campaign was identified by the domestic carriers to implement uniform controls on hand baggage, in line with all flights departing from Acsa airports. An agreement has also been reached with international airlines that a uniform policy across all flights would be in the interest of consistent application of legislation for all passengers."

- The allowance is as follows:
- Economy-class passengers are allowed one bag plus one slimline laptop bag. Business/first-class passengers are allowed two bags plus one slimline laptop bag. Handbags are considered part of a female's wardrobe and not as hand luggage.
 - Slimline laptop bags must be of a size and thickness specifically designed to carry a laptop and charger. Bags capable of carrying other items such as documents and clothes are not permitted.
 - No bag should exceed 56cm x 36cm x 23cm (total dimensions of 115cm) or weigh more than 7kg per bag. Bag weight may vary according to airline specifications.
 - If hand baggage does not comply, the passenger will be referred back to the check in counters to check in the baggage as hold baggage. Extra fees may apply, as per each airline's guidelines.

Flight Centre appoints new MD

FLIGHT Centre South Africa has appointed **Andrew Stark** as its managing director, which will see him take over the overall running of the business with immediate effect.

Stark, who is currently Retail general manager, will take over the role from **Janine Salame**, with whom he will work closely over the next five months.

Salame has occupied the role of md from the age of 29, and in the past six years has seen Flight Centre South Africa double its turnover and treble its profits, the company said in a statement. "She was fundamental in building a culture at Flight Centre South Africa that has seen the group win continuous 'best employer awards'."

Stark has held various roles within the company, both locally and in New Zealand, since his initial appointment in 2000. These include new business development manager, gm of Product,



and head of Flight Centre's corporate travel brands (Corporate Traveller and FCM Travel Solutions).

He will be supported by a leadership team that includes: **Michael Snyman** (cfo), **Sue Garret** (gm: Marketing and Product), **Sam Van Gool** (Peopleworks), **Marieke Tucker** (Retail Leader), **Robyn Van Staden** (gm: Corporate Traveller), and **Melanie Walljee** (md: FCM).

Terrorist attacks boost travel insurance

RECENT terrorist attacks – the latest in Paris, which saw the killing of 12 people at the French satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, followed by a shootout involving hostages at a supermarket in Porte de Vincennes – have led to a surge in demand for travel insurance.

Wybrandt Lubbe, travel manager Bidvest Insurance, says the increased risk of terrorism has made more travellers interested particularly in the 'Cancel for any Reason' benefit.

Lubbe adds, however, that it is important to warn clients that if they want to cancel their trip to a city as a result of a terrorist incident, the same city must not have experienced a terrorist incident within 90 days prior to the terrorist incident that is the cause of the client's claim.

Simmy Micheli, TIC manager of sales and marketing, says: "We find that many of the queries we receive will specifically be about recent events and what cover is on offer." Most travel insurance companies cover medical expenses incurred or Accidental Death and Permanent Disability cover for unforeseen terrorism attacks, she says.

Etihad pax pre-cleared for travel to US

TRAVELLERS on all Etihad Airways flights to the United States will have a smoother journey to their end destination, having pre-cleared US Customs and Border Protection at Abu Dhabi Airport.

On January 15, US pre-clearance opened for the early-morning EY103 to New York JFK and EY183

to San Francisco.

The new early-morning operation complements the mid-morning pre-clearance that opened in January last year, which caters for Etihad passengers to Chicago, Dallas-Fort Worth, Los Angeles, New York JFK, and Washington, DC.

The process allows passengers

to pass through all required checks, including US customs, immigration and security in Abu Dhabi before they board their flight to the US, enabling them to avoid queues on arrival. Another benefit is that air travellers who connect on to a US domestic flight have their baggage checked through from Abu Dhabi to their final destination.



PHOTO: FAST JET

Fastjet Zambia one step closer to take-off

FASTJET Africa has announced that fastjet Zambia has received confirmation from the Zambian Civil Aviation Authority that it has successfully completed Phase 1 of its application for an Air Operating Certificate.

In the next stage of the process, which is currently

under way, authorities will evaluate fastjet Zambia's planned company structure, examine its Airbus aircraft and approve its operational plan.

Ed Winter, Interim Chairman and ceo of fastjet, said: "The process to obtain permission to operate in Zambia is proceeding extremely well. We have an

excellent team in Zambia, who are working positively with the local authorities to complete the approval process as efficiently as possible."

Zambia will be fastjet's second base, from which it plans to operate low-cost flights to various destinations in East and Southern Africa.

Marriott opens first hotel in SA

MARRIOTT International will open its first Protea Hotel branded property in South Africa since its acquisition of the Protea Group in April last year. Protea is one of 18 brands under the Marriott International umbrella.

The Cape Dutch-style Protea Hotel Mowbray in Cape Town's southern suburbs will open on February 1.

The hotel comprises 46 standard studio rooms (20 with twin beds and the remaining 26 with king size beds), 12 one-bedroom suites with lounges and the option of king size or twin beds, six two-bedroom suites with lounges and the option of king size or twin beds and six luxury lofts with lounges on the ground level and queen size beds on the mezzanine.

Hilton digital check-in goes live worldwide

HILTON Worldwide has announced that its digital check-in and room selection technology is now live across more than 4 100 hotels spanning 11 brands worldwide. This includes 53 hotels in Middle East & Africa region.

Through their Hilton HHonors accounts, guests will be able to check in and choose their exact room from digital floor plans or lists, on desktop, tablet and mobile devices. They will also be able to further customise their stay by requesting upgrades or making special requests with the simple click of a button.

Geraldine Calpin, global head of digital at Hilton Worldwide, said: "Digital check-in and room selection puts our guests in the driving seat and gives them unprecedented choice and control across their entire stay."

SkyTeam rolls out fast-track service

SkyTeam has completed the roll-out of SkyPriority across its global network, offering dedicated check-in desks, priority boarding and baggage collection, and priority at transfer and ticket desks to Elite Plus, first- and business-class customers at

more than 1 000 airports.

The alliance has also announced the launch of fast-track lanes at security and immigration for top-customers. The security fast track service is available in 39 airports and immigration fast track has been rolled out in 21 airports.

"SkyPriority is the first alliance-branded service to be successfully implemented globally. We have had a significant increase in our customer satisfaction ratings that directly corresponds with the service roll-out across our network," said **Michael Wisbrun**, SkyTeam md.



Qatar to introduce new business-class seats

QATAR Airways will introduce new premium seats in its business-class cabins next year.

The new seating arrangement will feature double beds and match rival carriers' costlier first-class products, Qatar Airways ceo, **Akbar Al Baker**, revealed in Doha.

The product will be offered

across the Qatar Airways fleet, and is in response to Etihad's 'Residence' cabin, which features a bedroom, shower, sitting area and butler service on its 10 A380s.

"This will be a product that will be unrivalled in our history," said Al Baker. "When you introduce that, I really don't think you need a first class."

Hyatt to offer free WiFi for all guests

HYATT hotels will offer free Internet to all guests from next month.

The deal will extend to an unlimited number of devices such as laptops, tablets and

smartphones and is valid for all Hyatt properties worldwide (regardless of booking method or loyalty programme participation), in public zones such as the lobby through to individual rooms.

Netherlands to outsource visa applications

FROM February 1, The Netherlands Honorary Consulate in Durban will close the desk for the application of Dutch passports and Schengen visas. All visa

applications will be processed by VFS Global.

Cape Town applications will also be processed by VFS. Gauteng residents should still apply via the Netherlands Embassy in Pretoria.

for the RECORD

In the January issue of *Travel Buyer*, in the sponsored brand update 'A look at the Blue Train's plans for 2015', it was reported that "The Blue Train's Durban route will be dropped in favour of a new route to the Kruger National Park". Blue Train spokesperson,

Themba Masheula, has since advised: "The good news is that The Blue Train will be available for chartering to not just Durban but also to the Kruger National Park, and in 2016 this [Kruger] route will be incorporated into The Blue Train's normal schedule." ■

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How to stay ahead of the game

Corporate travel is evolving at a rapid pace, increasing the need for forward-thinking travel buyers to remain one step ahead of the game.

Debbie Badham speaks to GBTA regional director of the EMEA, **Catherine McGavock**, about current global best practice.

AS THE regional director of Europe, the Middle East and Africa, for the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA), **Catherine McGavock** is considered an authority on international best practice for corporate travel.

Interestingly, her career began in marketing and events, where she specialised in membership programmes – hence the link to her involvement in associations. McGavock's prior involvement in the travel industry included time spent working for Capita plc – a large UK-based outsourcing plc – where she was involved with the corporation's entry into the travel market when they purchased a TMC and then Evolvi, a rail booking tool. McGavock managed the division's marketing needs. "I loved the travel industry and was delighted to become involved in the sector again when the opportunity to join the GBTA arose," she says.

During her time with the GBTA, McGavock has developed a wealth of knowledge around travel management, sharing valuable insight on a variety of topical issues.

Person-specific policies


When it comes to best practice around developing a single, coherent policy that includes booking and reconciliation procedures, McGavock says travel buyers should not focus on developing a single policy at all. "While in the past focus has been on a single policy, the current trend is to acknowledge that one size doesn't fit all."

In order to encourage greater compliance, McGavock says it's particularly important for the travel manager to take local and regional variances into account when creating a global travel programme. "There has been a definite move away from global consolidation to region-specific solutions that take cultural variances and infrastructure, such as GDS capabilities and content availability, into account.

What's more, advances in technology now enable organisations to implement person-specific policies with variations that take individual traveller and business unit needs into account. "It's about developing a policy that works for your company, with buy-in at all levels and the systems in place to make compliance easy and reporting effective."

She says that to do this, the travel manager must understand the needs of both the business and its travellers as well as the content available for the environment in which they are working. "To be adopted, the travel policy must be sensible and appropriate for the organisation in question. It also needs to be communicated well so that people know what's expected from them."

Focusing specifically on compliance, McGavock notes that performance should be tracked and, more than this, travel buyers should recognise compliant behaviour and address non-compliance. "The GBTA foundation recently conducted some valuable research into the levels of and reasons for non-



compliance in a number of key markets globally – information like this can give travel managers valuable insights into what levels of compliance are realistic and alert them to possible issues to address.”

Informed benchmarking

Not surprisingly, McGavock highlights the need for a greater understanding of the travel programme as vital to success. She says travel buyers should first understand their own programmes and then benchmark them against other effective programmes to develop a clearer idea of policies they should be implementing and achieve a greater sense of what success looks like. “Whatever the chosen model, it’s important to note that traveller safety and duty of care are paramount,” she advises, adding that when implementing new initiatives, travel buyers should tackle those projects that will make the greatest impact first.

Optimal outsourcing

A greater understanding of the travel programme and the organisation as a whole will assist the travel buyer with decisions around outsourcing. McGavock believes that there are many ways in which outsourcing can bring value to a travel programme whether this involves outsourcing the entire function or specific elements of it – this might include demand management, support, technology, the booking process or data capture and analytics. “What works is highly dependent on the organisation’s need and the expertise of the outsourced provider,” she maintains. “The key to success is to develop a good understanding of the organisation’s current

requirements and what it is likely to need in the future.”

Thereafter, travel buyers should embark on a rigorous process to select the right partners and ensure that the contract, with its service level agreements (SLAs), penalties and incentives, is designed to drive the exact service needed.

The false economy

McGavock warns that travel managers need to be extremely careful about placing too great an emphasis on transaction costs – particularly when working with a TMC. “It is wiser to focus on achieving savings in terms of the overall spend because if you squeeze your transaction fee so much that the TMC can no longer afford to serve you, it’s a false economy,” she says. In other words, while you might save the company money in the short-term, over the long run, you stand to waste and even lose money by missing out on more significant savings. However, McGavock says that it is possible to incentivise the TMC to reduce overall costs in different ways – for example through demand management (looking at why business trips are taken and their return on investment); through influencing booker and traveller behaviour; or through more efficient sourcing.

Competitive environments

One way to drive down costs, according to McGavock, is to maximise price competition among suppliers. She says that to do this, travel buyers first need to understand and leverage competitive environments. “They need to develop a good understanding of what’s available in the marketplace and make use of these insights as part of their



Catherine McGavock with Sabre's Adrian Marklew at the GBTA Southern Africa conference in October 2014.

negotiations.” What’s more, it’s important that buyers know when, and are prepared to walk away from a negotiation when they find themselves unable to get the deal they need.

Accurate data

When it comes to data collection and analysis, accuracy is of paramount importance. McGavock’s advice for travel buyers is to be specific in what they are measuring, to make sure they know what they are looking for and to be vigilant in ensuring information is consistently collected. “Ultimately the key to capturing data is to make sure that your booking channel works and that it offers appropriate content,” she says. “Otherwise your travellers will be tempted to book elsewhere – which will result in leakage, and will then render data incomplete.”

To avoid this, McGavock recommends that travel buyers create feedback systems for travellers so that they have an easily accessible platform from which they can keep the travel manager informed that the necessary content is there and that the systems work.

Game changers

There are a number of major trends influencing travel at the

moment, says McGavock. These include:

- Big data – suppliers have a far greater understanding of travellers and how to monetise that knowledge.
- Distribution – a far greater number of ways in which travellers can now book travel.
- Technology – the increasing prevalence of video conferencing and explosion of mobile technology.
- Demographics – the rise in Gen Y travellers.

She maintains that these factors are all serving to make traditional travel management far more difficult. “Travel managers can either choose to embrace or at least accommodate these changes; or resist them – although that would seem rather like King Canute trying to stop the tide.”

Collaboration amongst the organisation’s different departments can help to address challenges brought about by change. “There seems to be an emergence of collaborative environments whereby the travel manager is linking in with other departments in the organisation, for example HR, finance, IT and security, as well as with external service providers such as the TMC, to help with the management of the travel programme,” McGavock says. ■

Inside one of Cape Town's most iconic hotels

We asked meetings expert, **Janine Abrahams**, to inspect the facilities of the Southern Sun Cape Sun.



PHOTOS: SHANNON VAN ZYL



WHEN I think about the Southern Sun Cape Sun it evokes fond memories of the city itself. It's one of the most iconic and oldest hotels in Cape Town. In my view, it's a truly well looked after hotel, which seems to improve with age. I find that the hotel possesses a rather distinctive character, with employees who are known for providing great service – this will definitely elevate your experience when you are on conference. Worth noting is its location, which is central and easily accessible from all major highways.

Facilities

In terms of the hotel's conferencing facilities, there are seven individual venues that can accommodate 12 to 650 delegates. The rooms are fully equipped and air-conditioned, suitable for plenary sessions, breakaways, cocktail functions and gala events. A dedicated banqueting team is on site to ensure that everything goes as planned. Themed functions and special menus can be tailored to suit the event in question.

On the accommodation side, the hotel has 368 rooms with great views of Table Mountain, the V&A Waterfront and the city. All rooms have a private bathroom with shower and bath combination, tea- and coffee-making facilities, a safe, hairdryer, modem points,

satellite television and individually controlled air-conditioning units. A stocked mini bar is also available in certain room types on request.

The hotel is equipped to cater for every need with a fitness centre, fully equipped business centre, 24-hour valet, parking and concierge, an indoor swimming pool and Camelot Spa. Guests can also enjoy a Cape culinary experience at the hotel restaurant with its traditional ambience. Meals are served with flair and confidence from the staff.

Although the hotel does not offer free WiFi for day conference delegates, it can be purchased as part of the conference package. Guests staying over in the hotel receive free daily WiFi. There is also a lack of electronic signage for branding purposes; however the hotel does have sufficient glass mirrored stands, which prove very versatile when it comes to personalised branding.

I was pleased to hear that the Southern Sun Cape Sun is currently building its own parking area directly under the hotel that will be able to accommodate approximately 100 vehicles. For many years the hotel has made use of the Picbel Parkade parking area located across the road. While the hotel will continue to use this space, it will only be for overflow vehicles. Having its own parking area will certainly be a great advantage.

Overall, I would recommend this hotel.

Business development manager for Event Dynamics, Janine Abrahams, has an eight-year track record of successful conference and event management, characterised by methodical, thorough and diligent work.

How to draw the most from delegates

Meet's **Liesl Venter** speaks to **Theo Joubert**, deputy general manager of the Drakensberg Sun Resort, about how idyllic and intimate locations bring out the best in conference-goers.

PRODUCTIVITY is not just about the amount of work generated but also about the quality of work produced. "Getting the most out of delegates is paramount to a successful conference, whether the goal is learning, listening, launching, creating, deciding or presenting," comments **Theo Joubert**.

This is made a great deal easier when delegates find themselves in an environment where they feel comfortable. As Joubert points out: "Without the distractions of their day-to-day hustle and bustle, delegates have the opportunity to engage on a different level."

There is no denying the

benefits of off-site meetings. The demand will always be there for companies to take their delegates out of their normal surroundings and transport them somewhere scenic, comfortable and thought provoking.

These are exactly the characteristics that make the Drakensberg a strategic choice for conferencing. Tucked away in the scenic destination are some outstanding venues that offer guests the opportunity

to relax, unwind and enjoy the good things in life, including more intimate and focused conferencing.

"There is nothing better than waking up to the iconic views of the Drakensberg mountains before choosing from a host of things to see, do and experience," says Joubert. "The Drakensberg offers a very real opportunity for

conference organisers to put together an event that is not simply focused on work."

The region's ability to meet just about any need is a true advantage when it comes to keeping delegates engaged. "The Drakensberg is ideal for hardcore work, play, and teambuilding or simply relaxing," says Joubert. It works well for small intimate groups but can just as easily handle larger crowds of people. The region is known for hosting groups as small as four to those of 1000 delegates – all without losing the intimacy, luxury, comfort and enjoyment it offers."

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7 CENTRAL AIRPORT VENUES

Looking to hold an upcoming event at an airport venue and seeking out the 'best-fit' for your particular needs? We round up some of the most convenient options for South Africa's three international airports.

» OR Tambo International Airport



PHOTO: TSOGO SUN

1. InterContinental Johannesburg

Situated just 70 meters from OR Tambo, the country's only luxury airport hotel boasts 138 beautifully furnished en-suite rooms, each with a writing desk, complimentary WiFi, coffee machine, mini-bar, television with DSTv and DVD player and an electronic safe. The hotel is home to the Camelot Spa, where a range of pampering treatments is on offer, as well as an indoor heated swimming pool. It features an upmarket and fully serviced conference and meeting facility that consists of seven boardrooms and two conference rooms that can cater for between 10 and 100 delegates. All rooms are equipped with the necessary amenities, including free WiFi, data projectors and AV equipment. The conference centre is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

2. Southern Sun OR Tambo International Airport

Stylish and comfortable, this hotel is a favourite business venue in Gauteng. Situated 500 metres from the country's busiest airport, it has 366 en-suite rooms with television, complimentary WiFi, tea- and coffee-making facilities, hairdryer, electronic safe and mini bar. It also has an outdoor pool, an on-site gym and fully equipped business centre. A day spa for pampering is part of the offering as is a popular onsite restaurant that serves breakfast and dinner. A complimentary airport shuttle service is also available.

The hotel has eight conference venues with various layouts available depending on requirements. It can cater for anything from ten to 300 people. All venue options are equipped with a host of supplies, facilities and items, from projectors to monitors and PA systems all the way to small touches such as whiteboards and flipcharts.



PHOTO: TSOGO SUN

3. Garden Court OR Tambo

Located a few minutes' drive from the airport this hotel offers 53 en-suite rooms all equipped with the necessary amenities such as tea- and coffee-making facilities, air-conditioning, an electronic safe and complimentary WiFi. Rooms are fitted with writing desks and chairs, affording business executives a more comfortable stay.

Conference facilities are available to suit a range of requirements and include nine venues that all provide a variety of layouts. Capacity for as few as ten guests to as many as 80 can be handled with ease. Equipment includes projectors, monitors and other audiovisual items as well as whiteboards and flipcharts.



PHOTO: TSOGO SUN

» Cape Town International Airport

1. Hotel Verde

A modern venue with contemporary design, this four-star hotel is situated a mere 400 metres from the airport. Having recently won Best City Hotel 2014 at the World Responsible Tourism Awards, it has been carefully designed to offer luxury with minimal environmental impact, providing guests with a unique, eco-friendly accommodation experience. The hotel has 145 rooms that are all comfortable and tastefully decorated while also meeting sustainable energy needs. It is the first hotel in Africa to offer 100% carbon-neutral accommodation to guests at no extra cost.

The bedrooms are spacious, with private bathrooms and tea- and coffee-making facilities. Some rooms have a kitchenette and all feature a flat-screen TV and mini bar. Guests can enjoy a chic bar area, a 24-hour deli or sit-down meals in the restaurant. A complimentary airport shuttle is available. Additional features include an on-site gym and outdoor jogging trail. Seven conferencing venues are available including four boardrooms that cater for up to 12 people and three for 40 and more delegates. The venue can also host banquets for more than 100 attendees. All rooms are equipped with state-of-the-art AV equipment.



PHOTO: HOTEL VERDE



2. Protea Tyger Valley

Only 15 minutes' drive from the airport, this three-star hotel has great views of majestic Table Mountain. One hundred neatly decorated and well-furnished guest rooms, each of which has a modern private bathroom, are available with in-room facilities including air-conditioning, tea- and coffee-making facilities and satellite TV. Parking for guests is also available. The hotel has its own on-site restaurant that serves breakfast and dinner. A bar and lounge are part of the allure as are the outdoor swimming pool and sundeck. The hotel has a new multi-purpose conference facility that can be used as two spaces or combined to create one large venue. It can handle up to 120 delegates.

» King Shaka International Airport

1. Oyster Box

This five-star hotel has, just 15 minutes from King Shaka, become an iconic landmark and is renowned across the world. It boasts 69 rooms, 15 luxury suites and one presidential suite all tastefully decorated and offering a variety of amenities including tea- and coffee-making facilities, WiFi, television and beach gear. A spa, outdoor pool and bar are all part of the offerings, as are a variety of restaurants where guests can relax. There are five conference and event venues, ranging in size and capacity, that can be configured to meet the requirements of any planner. State-of-the-art audiovisual equipment is available.



PHOTO: RED CARNATION HOTELS



PHOTO: FAIRMONT ZIMBALI RESORTS

2. Fairmont Zimbali Resort

A tranquil and private retreat only 16km from King Shaka International Airport, this hotel has 154 guest rooms and suites, including a Penthouse and Presidential suite, as well as 18 Fairmont Heritage Place villas. Rooms are stylishly decorated offering coffee facilities, high-speed Internet access, television, in-room safes and custom-filled mini-bars. With five outdoor swimming pools, a spa and several unique dining options there is more than enough to keep delegates occupied. The hotel boasts state-of-the-art conference facilities that include two boardrooms as well as a 240sqm ballroom, a courtyard and pre-function space. State-of-the-art technology is available. ■

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Who is the travel buyer?

One role, many faces – the travel buyer is a negotiator, analyst, communicator, consultant... *Travel Buyer's* **Debbie Badham** engages industry professionals in a debate around the evolving role of the travel buyer.



Felicity Meyer, travel manager, Massmart



Andrew Shaw, online business solution manager, Amadeus

THE role of the travel buyer is a complex one and is often undervalued within organisations. Travel managers are tasked with a broad range of duties, managing processes, people and relationships without a clear job spec that is dependent on companies' requirements and their evolving travel needs. Why is the role of the travel buyer so difficult to pin down?

A business consultant specialising in organisational effectiveness, **Iain Johnson**, who spoke at the GBTA 2014 conference, provides an outside perspective on the situation.

"Perhaps uncertainty exists because too many travel managers are still assuming a more traditional role and focusing too much on the management of travel itself," he says, adding that perhaps travel buyers are boxing themselves in when they have a far more complex and valuable role to play.

The confusion, says online business solution manager for Amadeus, **Andrew Shaw**, has arisen because everyone in the industry has a different take on the role. He explains the shift in travel management dynamics by saying that travel buyers were previously primarily concerned with suppliers and deals. "Now travel buyers are moving more into procurement and handling everything from the travel policy to all communication around the travel policy. This also means they are now dealing with far more processes and more formal guidelines," he says. "One could say they've entered a completely new playing field."

Sandra Engelbrecht, head of accounts management and

sales for BCD Travel agrees that the evolution from the traditional role of the travel buyer to what it has become today constitutes a shift from supplier or vendor management to more strategic management of travel and the traveller. "The travel industry is cognisant of the evolving role of the travel manager, but the question is: is the industry gearing up for the future accordingly?"

Travel manager for Massmart and chairperson of the GBTA, **Felicity Meyer**, believes that travel buyers do have a firm grip on their role within the

corporate travel space. She says the primary confusion lies within the corporations themselves. "There are surprisingly few

companies that have instituted managed travel programmes. For this reason the local industry is still developing in terms of its professionalism."

Meyer's take on the situation is that travel buyers are hemmed in by the perceptions of those around them. She says business travellers are generally only interested in travel processes when something goes wrong. "This essentially means that a travel buyer who is highly competent in their role is invisible to the rest of the company."

The 'invisible' buyer

Meyer provides a more in-depth look at the highly competent and invisible buyer whose travel programme is so seamless that no one even notices they are there. She says effective travel management is about really good reporting. "Travel buyers also need to be able to support their programmes with

relevant data and then use that data intelligently to highlight inefficiencies and rein in rogue travellers," she says.

What's more, Meyer believes that forward-thinking travel managers should make themselves highly accessible. "It's about developing yourself into a thought leader, such that you become the person people go to when they need travel-related answers."

The jack of all trades

The travel process in its entirety begins and ends in-house – part of the reason why it cannot simply be outsourced. "A travel buyer is necessary to facilitate all aspects of that process from start to finish," says Meyer.

In light of this, the travel manager's day-to-day undertakings touch every department of the company they work for. This means that an effective buyer should possess great organisational knowledge and a wide range of skills. "This job is about good business acumen – understanding the corporate and the process – finance is a significant element but so are other facets such as IT and HR," Meyer comments.

Travel managers need to be familiar with the finance department and procurement and then be able to apply these methodologies into travel management, agrees Engelbrecht. "One could definitely argue that travel has unique features when compared with other spend categories, so the travel manager should have a good knowledge of both to continue adding value."

Perhaps it is the very nature of travel management, requiring travel buyers to involve themselves in so many different aspects of the company that makes it difficult to define exactly where and

There are surprisingly few companies that have instituted managed travel programmes.



Iain Johnston, Iain Johnston Consulting



Sandra Engelbrecht, head of account management and sales, BCD Travel

how they add value. "Travel managers are constantly being pulled across many different areas of business, which can make their role quite undervalued as it is difficult to meaningfully measure the initiatives they are involved in," says Engelbrecht.

Although, Johnston points out, as travel spend is one of the greatest expenses within most corporations, travel buyers have a significant opportunity to demonstrate their value by managing spend effectively.

The mediator

As important as it is for travel buyers to familiarise themselves with a wide range of different processes, they also risk becoming too process orientated. "Some buyers can become too focused on the policy and the procedure," comments Shaw. "However, they also have a really important role to play as facilitator and mediator."

In order to facilitate an efficient and effective travel programme, travel buyers need to ensure that each stakeholder involved in the travel process understands their responsibility and then facilitate the resulting interactions seamlessly, says Shaw. He explains that, without the travel buyer there to balance the needs of the company, the traveller and the suppliers – the TMC included – there is room for the various parties involved to take advantage of the situation. For example: suppliers are always trying to reach the traveller

directly and to cut out company involvement. This in turn encourages travellers to book outside of policy.

Johnston explains the optimal role of the mediator in this way: "Organisational effectiveness is built around three things, namely operational performance, exceptional service and effectively addressing the needs of the company's employees." He maintains that buyers are uniquely positioned to balance the requirements of each of these pillars as far as they are influenced by travel. His term to describe the travel buyer's role in understanding and managing the needs of the various stakeholders involved is that of "the fixer".

"Travel managers are 'fixers' by default," says Meyer. "We are firefighters in a sense, however it should only be necessary to fight fires if there is something wrong with the process. When travel buyers find themselves fighting fires they need to go back to the process and see where the problem lies."

The perfect partner

Much of the confusion that exists around the role of the travel buyer relates to the industry's vague understanding of the role of the TMC. Where exactly does the role of the travel manager end and the role of the TMC begin, and what does a truly successful collaboration look like?

Meyer maintains that success is based on mutual respect between the travel

manager, the TMC and the suppliers. "When the travel buyer possesses an in-depth understanding of the way in which their partners work, they will know when travellers are making unrealistic demands," she adds.

Detailed communication is vital, says Shaw. "The TMC's role should be extremely well defined, based on an agreement that the travel buyer oversees."

Engelbrecht agrees: "The travel programme should have set goals or KPIs – the TMC's role is to ensure that these are being met and to help find opportunities to enhance the travel programme." She notes that because the travel manager has greater influence with the internal stakeholders, including the travellers, they should rather place greater emphasis on the development of relationships and helping travellers to understand the programme's goals.

"We are definitely moving away from managing travel to managing travellers and their behaviour," says Meyer. "If the travel buyer gets nothing else right, this is the one thing they can absolutely not afford to get wrong. Travel after all, is all about psychology."

Johnston points out that in order to achieve this, the travel manager must have a good understanding of the travellers' needs. "After all, we can't manage people according to our own needs, which is why, when it comes to any aspect of business including travel management, the greatest source of efficiency is working relationships," he maintains. ■

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Kathy Basson – Mauritius Incentive Connection



Eden – where business and pleasure meet

With significant development taking place on Eden Island, the Seychelles is gearing up to attract a greater number of South African conference-goers. **Debbie Badham** attended the launch of the Eden Bleu Hotel as a guest of the establishment to find out more.

IT IS becoming more common for corporates to combine conferences with incentive trips – a trend that has increased the popularity of destinations such as Mauritius, which not only offers SA corporates a paradise getaway on their doorstep, but is also well equipped to meet conference requirements.

While the Seychelles has traditionally been perceived primarily as a leisure destination, the recent launch of the Eden Bleu Hotel, along with the development of Eden Island as a whole, will likely go a long way to altering this perception. **Craig Heeger**, executive chairman of Eden Island Development Company, says the island has received a great deal of attention from South African companies demonstrating interest in holding their conferences in the Seychelles.

Eden Island is the result of a huge amount of time and investment according to Heeger. Thirteen years ago the residential and commercial marina was nothing more than a white patch of coral. Heeger was approached

in 2003 by Seychelles Tourism to invest in the island, the result of which is a bustling development 100 metres off the coast of Mahé.

Aside from the picturesque marina and Eden Bleu Hotel, Eden Island is also home to Eden Plaza, the only purpose-built retail centre in the Seychelles, which houses shops, boutiques, restaurants and bars, banking and medical facilities, a spa, and diving and boating charters.

The hotel, which is situated close to the international airport and the capital Victoria, features the most high-tech conference facilities on the archipelago.

Its conference centre can accommodate 340 guests theatre-style and 240 guests banquet-style while leaving space for a dance floor. The venue is also sub-divisible and soundproof so that two different events can take place simultaneously.

“With our conference and meeting facilities and exceptional digital technology, the Eden Bleu Hotel is seamlessly able to combine business and pleasure,” comments **Peter Smith**, marketing director, Eden Island Development Company.

Eden Bleu itself offers 74 deluxe rooms, 12 luxury suites and a presidential suite. However, a

rental pool of apartments, maisons and villas provides conference organisers with greater capacity to work with as well as a wider variety of accommodation options. The hotel’s banqueting

team can produce menus to suit the event or conference in question and provides alternative dining options in the form of its Marlin Bleu Restaurant, which is complemented by the adjacent Bourgeois Bar that offers views out on to the marina.

The island has received a great deal of attention from South African companies demonstrating interest in holding their conferences in the Seychelles.

Eden Plaza’s variety of dining options offer delegates the opportunity to kick back and relax island-style on the marina’s boardwalk. The plaza provides a highly atmospheric setting with its live music and proximity to the open water.

The concept behind the commercial development as a whole was to create a hub from which visitors can explore the island and all that it has to offer, unlike other conference and incentive destinations that are designed to keep people in one place.

The destination serves as an ideal base for island hopping, further promoting its selling point which is based on putting together unique conference and incentive packages. The overall aim is to market the Seychelles as a destination that has something for everyone, offering excursions ranging from historical trips to Victoria to cultural, culinary and beach experiences.

Mauritius has long been the hotspot for South African corporates looking to combine conferences with incentive

experiences. However the Eden Island Development Company believes that the Seychelles will be able to compete effectively with other island getaways such as Mauritius as the Eden Bleu Hotel is quite aggressively priced according to the market in which it operates. In fact, the team believe they have managed to develop a five-star product that offers four-star pricing. What's more, Seychelles is easily accessible from Johannesburg, with flights less than five hours.

State-of-the-art technology

The Eden Bleu Hotel is well equipped to handle large conferences with the most demanding technological requirements. Its conference centre is equipped with three high-definition LED screens to which presentations, HD videos and a variety of other content, from a Twitter feed to a live video conference, can be broadcast wirelessly.

The biggest of these LED screens is close to six metres wide – the largest of its kind in Africa. What's more, the projectors are not sensitive to light, enabling delegates to enjoy the venue's natural light. Power points are located throughout the conference centre's floor space, making it easy for delegates to charge laptops and mobile phones.

A business centre is available with work stations and four

meeting rooms, and forms part of a large public area well suited to displays and cocktail events. The hotel also has a small boardroom that seats eight, two slightly bigger venues that can accommodate 14 people each and a large boardroom that accommodates 18. Technology across the boardrooms is also state-of-the-art and features a touch-panel smart board able to be wirelessly interfaced with a laptop or other electronic devices. This means that notes can be taken from the smart board and e-mailed directly from the screen.

Each of the hotel's meeting rooms is designed with large, sliding doors that open on to the terrace at the front of the hotel, offering delegates views of the marina.

"This is not just technology for technology's sake," maintains Smith. "Every innovation is designed to give our guests the best possible experience by allowing them to access the information, services or facilities they need in the most efficient way possible."

One such innovation is an interface that guests can download on to their mobile device before their booking is even made, enabling them to access in-room facilities, menus, hotel services, island activities and more.

Every business travel requirement has been taken into consideration and addressed. For example guests without roaming on their mobile phones can make



VISITORS can take a catamaran out to the middle of the harbour.

use of the hotel's customised iPhone 5s kitted out with a local number and airtime.

Cultural excursions

The range of activities that conference and incentive planners can organise on a trip to the Seychelles is perhaps more diverse than one might imagine.

For a more historical and cultural experience, delegates can participate in a tour of Mahé. Giant tortoises and nine-year-old Coco de Mer fruit are some of the unique discoveries visitors will make when calling on the island's botanical gardens. Following on from this, guests will explore Victoria, which also happens to be the smallest

capital in the world, where they can experience local markets, learn more about the history of the Seychelles and develop a greater understanding of the islands' unique and vibrant culture.

The tour includes a visit to Mahé's Mission lodge ruins, which tell a sad tale of the island's history, which was intertwined with slavery. At the same time they will visit the appropriately named La Misère viewpoint which provides unrivalled views of the island with some truly breathtaking scenery.

In between visits, a stop-off at Takamaka Bay for lunch on the beach is a great way to further appreciate the island's beauty. The tour ends with the exploration of the restored colonial plantation, Jardin du Roi, which is rich in Creole history.

The Eden Bleu Hotel's location on the marina makes it highly convenient for guests to board a catamaran for a trip out to the middle of the harbour. From here they can take part in several different activities such as boarding a semi-submersible vessel to take a closer look at the underwater marine life, stopping to feed the fish and snorkelling through crystal-clear coral reefs. A visit to Moyenne Island enables travellers to spend some time exploring and relaxing, whether they prefer to go for a swim or spend some time sunbathing on the beach. ■



TRAVELLERS can pay a visit to Victoria where they will experience the town's colourful markets.



PHOTO: LUFTHANSA

Finding comfort in 'cattle' class

As corporate travel continues its shift towards economy class, airlines are working to improve the low-cost travel experience.

Dorine Reinstein investigates.

INDUSTRY experts agree there has been a shift in business travel trends as companies increasingly seek to reduce travel costs.

Says **Matthew Pancaldi**, global client management director at HRG: "While policy changes are still broadly driven by hours flown and destination, it is indisputable that there has been an overall move from business to economy class, and within both classes, a shift towards lower cost and less flexible fares, as

companies look for actionable ways to reduce their corporate spend."

As **Wouter Nel**, sales and marketing manager at Air Mauritius, points out, travel is no longer seen as a luxury for corporate travellers. "Most companies are assessing their budgets, and one of the easiest ways to save costs to the company is to reduce travel spend."

Improvements to the economy-class offering are making it an increasingly viable option for

business travellers. **Richard Bodin**, fastjet's chief commercial officer, says customers have been getting a better deal in economy class over the past few years with better quality seats, improved leg-room, and better ergonomics. He says the fact that automation and in-flight entertainment (IFE) has moved from business class to premium economy down to economy has also played a big role in making the class more attractive for corporate travellers.

Hi-tech advancements

Technological advancements remain at the forefront of re-inventions to economy class. Nel says corporate travellers attach great importance to in-seat power, digital IFE, on-board WiFi and the ability to make calls on their mobile phones while in the air.

Says Nel: "We are going to start seeing an economy seat that is more connected than ever before, with features such as on-board WiFi, in-seat power and USB ports. In the modern economy class, you will be connected to the world from the sky."

Axel Simon, director Southern Africa at Lufthansa, says carriers are increasingly investing in new IFE platforms. "Lufthansa recently unveiled its Wireless IFE system for short- and medium-haul flights, which affords passengers the ability to connect their electronic devices to a closed wireless infotainment system offering

movies, TV shows, CDs, audio books and e-journals."

He adds that Lufthansa is also continuing to install its FLYNET, wireless Internet system on wide-body aircraft. "For just under €20 (R279), passengers can connect to broadband Internet via network operator, T-Mobile. A similar system is being evaluated for the narrow-body fleet."

Digital technology is giving customers greater control over every aspect of their economy-class journey says **Edward Frost**, British Airways commercial manager for South and East Africa. "Not only can you check in using your mobile device, but you can also have your boarding pass sent directly to it. Effectively this means you can get your bag tagged at a fast-bag drop, skip the check-in queues and go straight to security."

According to Frost, BA has several

developments in the pipeline to streamline the online process even more. These include electronic bag tags, which are being trialled at the moment. "When passengers check in they will be able to store all relevant information on the tag. Then at the airport they will simply place their bag on an automated baggage machine, which reads the tag and delivers it to the aircraft."

Technology has generally made the economy-class experience more comfortable, according to Frost. "Boeing's 787 Dreamliner's carbon fibre composite construction means that it can be pressurised more than conventional metal-bodied aircraft so that the cabin air isn't as dry. These environmental factors help reduce the symptoms of long-haul hangover, such as a dry nose and throat, parched skin and tiredness."

'Extreme economy'

Although airlines are trying to emphasize the upside of the sleeker and lighter economy-class seats, there seems to be a fine line between enhancements designed under the guise of increasing comfort and enhancements designed to squeeze as many people in as possible.

Airbus recently filed a patent for 'saddle seats', which feature bicycle-like saddles with small back and arm rests that will pivot out. The aircraft manufacturer said the saddle-style seat had been developed to reduce the distance needed to accommodate the legs of passengers between two rows of seating. Airbus did admit that the folding saddles were not as comfortable as conventional airline seats, but that "this reduced comfort remains tolerable for the passengers in as much as the flight lasts only one or a few hours".

Reduced comfort remains tolerable for the passengers in as much as the flight lasts only one or a few hours.

Fortunately, South African carriers don't seem in a hurry to adopt 'saddle seats'. When questioned about the new design, **Hein Kaiser**, spokesperson for Mango, said: "This, I must say, is a first. I cannot imagine that it is comfortable!" He added that Mango would not be looking into the design at this time, as the carrier recently installed ergonomically efficient and comfortable seats with substantial leg-room.

Air Namibia has no plans to 'densify' its economy-class product either. On the contrary, **Michell Fourie**, manager of sales and marketing for commercial services in South Africa, says: "Air Namibia is proud to have one of the most generous seat pitches in economy class and seat width in Africa, allowing our clients to travel in comfort. It is not in our plans to detract from this service. As demand increases we have increased capacity without compromising our product."

New and improved seats

Sleeker and more streamlined seats are another feature common to the more enhanced economy class. Nel says the economy seat on most carriers has evolved to become thinner and lighter. "Airlines are exploring new seat options that are slimmer in design while still offering the same level of comfort and adding to leg-room, alleviating bulky design and aiding fuel economy," he comments.

Increased interest in economy-class travel has prompted Emirates to invest in what it considers to be maximum comfort and choice for economy passengers. **Fouad Caunhye**, regional manager, Southern Africa, says: "Emirates' investment in its new fleet stands out in that it enriches passengers' experience and ensures performance meets expectations – from

the properly reclining seats in economy and new and updated personal screens to the ample leg room." He adds that, with load factors of over 80%, Emirates' economy class is without a doubt a favoured option for travellers from South Africa.

Air France is another airline that has invested heavily in its economy-class seats over the past year. A spokesperson for the airline told Travel Buyer that when Air France designed its new economy seat, it consulted its customers in order to offer a product that met their needs. "This new long-haul economy seat is concrete proof of Air France's move upmarket for all its customers. Close to 10 000 seats have and will be installed on 44 long-haul aircraft between June 2014 and July 2016."



PHOTO: MANGO

More legroom with Mango

MANGO has upped the ante considerably on its domestic routes with its new seat rollout affording enhanced legroom.

"The new seats will increase leg room by up to 6.55 centimetres, depending on where you are seated" says ceo **Nico Bezuidenhout**. "There is no reduction in our seat density either with a 186 guest load remaining consistent throughout our fleet. The difference is the level of added comfort Mango is able to offer."

Ergonomically designed with the latest in

aviation technology, the new seats are slimmer with efficient use of available space. "The seats are also more light weight, and will produce a saving in excess of 1.7 million tonnes in carbon emissions annually due to less fuel burn," says Bezuidenhout. "The savings in fuel allows Mango to lower its cost base even further, making it possible to contain fare affordability even more."

The first two aircraft in Mango's fleet to feature the new seats will be in service from the end of August.



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High demand for FlySafair

JUST over two months after its inaugural flight, low-cost airline, FlySafair, celebrated its 100 000th passenger.

"We're thrilled to have reached this milestone in such a short time," says FlySafair ceo, **Dave Andrew**. "Many of these passengers are corporate flyers and we have been delighted by the degree of support from businesses across South Africa."

Andrew adds that the immediate demand for FlySafair flights has exceeded expectations so significantly that he anticipates that growth will take place faster than first envisaged. Additional routes will be announced in the first quarter of this year.

FlySafair currently flies to Cape Town, Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth and George.

The rise of premium economy

AXEL Simon explains that although corporates are increasingly shifting towards economy class, business travellers are still looking for more perks, which is where premium economy comes in. He predicts that the industry will see more carriers introducing premium economy on their aircraft in the future. In March 2014, Lufthansa unveiled its new premium economy cabin, which will constitute 10% of the seats in every wide-body aircraft. "The new premium economy definitely answers the needs of corporates that are not able to opt for economy, as the fares are closer to economy-class fares."

Airlines that have no premium economy offering often experience demand for the sale of ancillaries from their corporate customers. **Wouter Nel** says Air Mauritius offers last-minute upgrades at the airport as well as the opportunity to purchase emergency exit seats. The

possibility to pre-seat is another popular choice for corporate customers.

LCCs extend their reach

According to **Richard Bodin**, a lot more passengers will gradually start opting for LCCs, especially when travelling into Africa, as business-class prices into Africa have shot up. He says, whereas before companies would only opt for LCCs for short-haul trips, the envelope has now been pushed further such that medium-haul trips are now considered.

Bodin says to attract the medium-haul corporate traveller, fastjet has introduced a new product, Smart Class, which offers travellers a certain degree of flexibility to their itinerary. He adds that Smart Class offers travellers the possibility to sit in the front of the plane, which means they get off the aircraft first and beat the queues at immigration. "We are getting a lot of requests for this product from corporate travellers, who absolutely want to travel with us but who also want a certain degree of flexibility. With this product, we are meeting the corporate half-way."

Michell Fourie says the emergence of LCCs in the African market has resulted in clients who opt for legacy carriers seeking out service and unique selling points, such as seat comfort, including seat pitch and width, inflight entertainment and technology offers, more options in the beverages offered and top-quality selections in meals.

Not outclassed just yet

Although an increasing number of corporate clients are shifting towards the back of the plane, business class will not cease to exist any time soon. Bodin says people will always want to have a choice of class of travel, especially when it comes to the longer nine- and 12-hour flights. "They'll always opt for business class on long flights when corporates are expected to work immediately after they get off the aircraft."

Numerous airlines have started to discount business-class fares in an attempt to entice corporate customers to opt for upgrades. According to Nel, last-minute bidding on upgrades and the introduction of 'pay economy, fly business' fares has been popular over the past year. "Air Mauritius offers a last-minute upgrade at the airport. This is hugely popular with corporates, as they are booked in economy but can fly business class at a nominal upgrade fee. Air Mauritius is very competitive in terms of business-class fares; we want to make business class accessible for all," he says.

Air Namibia has started offering innovative business-class deals. Fourie explains: "Some corporate companies have a standard policy for staff travelling on any regional flights under two hours that requires them to travel in economy class. However with cost-effective and flexible Air Namibia business-class rates, corporate clients can benefit through corporate agreements and allow staff the opportunity to travel in business class on our short-haul business-class sectors."

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AIR Namibia's economy-class product offers one of the widest seat pitches (91cm) in air travel, providing passengers with additional leg-room. In addition, all economy-class seats on the airline's international route from Windhoek to Frankfurt now

feature monitors with updated, modern on-board entertainment systems. In terms of its regional routes, the airline recently increased capacity on routes to Lusaka and Harare and now operates an Airbus A319 with 96 economy class seats and 16 business class seats. ■

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Mauritius - growing trade boosts travel

Trading partners South Africa and Mauritius are becoming increasingly important to one another. Accordingly, business travel is on the rise, seeing more briefcases among the beach bags headed for the Indian Ocean paradise. By **Michelle Colman**.

MUCH IS known about Mauritius as a leisure spot for South Africans but less as a business destination. There's a growing presence of South African-linked businesses in the country, and the establishment of a South African Chamber of Commerce in 2013, with some 270 members, indicates the increasing significance of bilateral trade.

Richard Robinson, president of the chamber, told Travel Buyer that although multinational company shareholding information was not publically available in Mauritius, there were many businesses of South African origin trading with the island. Retail brands such as Woolworths, Nando's and Engen are very popular; Standard Bank and Investec have been operating successfully for a number of years, while Metropolitan Health recently launched in the Mauritian medical insurance market. Aspen Pharmaceutical's head office is located on the island, and specialist service providers such as Arup Sigma (civil engineering) and Rehm Grinaker

(construction) are contributing expertise in the country. The chamber's membership includes financial management services, banks, professionals and manufacturing, travel and property services.

"Many companies with origins in South Africa have successfully integrated into the Mauritian economy either via franchise or local shareholding structures," he says. "Furthermore, according to the Mauritius Financial Services Commission, there are more than 140 registered GBC1 companies having South African shareholding." (A GBC1 is a body corporate registered in Mauritius, holding a Category 1 Global Business Licence to conduct business outside Mauritius. It may be locally incorporated or registered as a branch of a foreign company.)

Full diplomatic relations between the two countries were only established in 1994, but today South Africa is one of Mauritius's leading trading partners. 2013, however, brought a downturn as exports from Mauritius to South Africa fell close on 10% and imports from

South Africa reduced by some 3%. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from South Africa dropped by almost 72% between 2012 and 2013, from Rs5,3 billion to Rs1,49 billion (R1,89bn-R531m). Direct investment from Mauritius to South Africa decreased too, by 52%, from Rs77 million to Rs37 million (R27m-R13m). Additionally, uncertainty accompanied the announcement of new terms to the Double Tax Avoidance Treaty.

Robinson points out that FDI from South Africa to Mauritius spiked in 2012, almost entirely due to investment by South Africans in the first Integrated Resort Schemes (IRS), which came online that year and facilitated the acquisition by non-citizens of resort and residential property on the island. "We have therefore simply seen a return to normal FDI levels," he remarks. Furthermore, the fall-off in trade between 2013 and 2012 included most of the country's traditional trading partners, with the exception of a few such as China and India.

Signs of a comeback were seen

in data for the third quarter of 2014, with imports from South Africa to Mauritius increasing by 22% and exports from Mauritius to South Africa up by 25%.

A top trading partner

Robinson points out that South Africa remains the largest trading partner with Mauritius on the African continent. "Boosting trade between the two countries is a priority, for which the SA Chamber and the South African High Commission, as well as the Board of Investment, are strong advocates. The South African Department of Trade and Industry are also regular visitors to the island, so this is a task that is high on the agenda for all parties."

Statistics Mauritius reveals that South Africans account for the top slot in business travel arrivals by quite a wide margin. In 2013, 6 497 South African travellers listed business as the purpose for their trip to the island. Between January and September of 2014, 5 018 South African business arrivals were recorded.

South African tour operators

have noticed a general hike in business travel to the island. **Charmaine Banks**, head of Groups and Incentives – South Africa & Africa for Lux* Resorts & Hotels, says: “There is certainly an increase in requests for corporate negotiation on rates from companies that hold offices or trade on the island in various industries.”

New tax treaties

The renegotiated Double Tax Avoidance Treaty, however, remains an ambiguous bugbear. It states that the tax residency status of companies that have both Mauritian and South African residency must be determined by both the Mauritius and South African revenue authorities on a case-by-case basis. The current treaty holds that a company with dual residence is taxed in the country where its management is situated.

Robinson says closure on the matter will go a long way to restoring business confidence. “Mauritius ranks highly as an investor-friendly but compliant country with a low tax regime. Furthermore, many of the existing Double Taxation

Avoidance Agreements with other African states positively contribute to the country’s attractiveness as a destination for dual listings and a ‘gateway’ for companies investing in Africa,” he says.

Mauritius’ professional service standards also serve the country well for conferencing. Comments Robinson:

“Mauritius is a very popular conferencing destination for South Africans, with both independent conferencing facilities and those attached to hotels. Many South African corporates, such as Investec, choose Mauritius to host their annual in-house conferences, the Airlines Association of Southern Africa held their AGM here in November 2014 and of course, FIFA hosted their annual congress in May 2013.”

Michelle Hunter, general manager for Groups and Incentives at World Leisure Holidays, has observed a definite increase in demand for conferencing in Mauritius for 2015, particularly for resorts that provide a comprehensive offering that does not necessitate delegates having to leave the property.



Avoid the ‘sea of sameness’

WHILE Mauritian resorts offer corporate groups high levels of service and experience, there’s often a repetitive formula to their offerings.

Lux* Resorts and Hotels has struck out from what it calls ‘swimming in the sea of sameness’. Some of the special touches it offers corporate groups include:

- Screen on the beach: a large screen, fastened between two palms trees on the beach, showing a blockbuster movie or company motivational film. The audience is seated on bean bags, with feet in the sand and underneath the

stars, snacking on popcorn and slushies.

- Message in a bottle: a treasure hunt-style race to encourage team fun around the resort, ending with a surprise for the winning team.
- Starry, starry night: an evening of star gazing hosted by an astrologer equipped with a telescope.
- Cake Boss: team building built around the art of cake decorating.
- A day on the private island of Ile des Deux Cocos: the island can be booked on an exclusive basis and transformed in a ‘ship wreck’ island.

Specialised corporate facilities

THE Indigo Group specialises in hotels for business travellers in Mauritius and has four hotels in the four- and five-star categories in Port Louis, Ébène Cyber City and Port Chambly.

Managing director, **Rolph Schmid**, says business travellers represent a market that has grown considerably for the island over the past decade.

“Our two properties on the waterfront in Port Louis, namely the Labourdonnais

Waterfront Hotel and Le Suffren Hotel & Marina, are positioned in a strategic area close to government offices, embassies, banks, the Board of Investment, and telecommunications. Based at these two properties, business travellers can enjoy the advantage of being in the city and at the same time benefit from all the leisure aspects of the waterfront, which provides, retail outlets, a bar, restaurant and casino.”

A third property, the

Hennessy Park Hotel, is situated in the heart of Ébène Cyber City where many corporate offices are now established. It is 10 minutes’ drive from the capital, Port Louis, and easily accessible by highway from all parts of the island.

The Address Boutique Hotel is north of Port Louis and is suitable for guests who need to do business in the capital as well as in the northern part of the island.

Says Schmid: “Since the

biggest corporate market for Air Mauritius is South Africa, Indigo Hotels and Air Mauritius have decided to enter into a partnership offering travellers residing in our hotels the opportunity to earn miles from their hotel bill on their Kestrelflyer programme. This programme also applies to conferences and group bookings. Kestrelflyer card holders also enjoy various benefits in our hotels, depending on the grade of card they hold.”



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A blend of business

BUSINESS travellers hail from a mix of professions, with a strong accent on SMMEs. "Large corporates use their local offices to make all arrangements, whereas we can offer the SMMEs a great deal for a once-off request," says **Flora Fubbs**, The Holiday Factory's senior manager of contracting, marketing and operations.

Carla da Silva, former regional manager for Air Mauritius in Southern Africa and Latin America, says banking, law firms, advertising agencies and the film industry account for business travellers, with most electing to stay near to the business district of Port Louis and the IT hub of Ébène Cyber City.

John Ridler, media and public relations manager for Thompsons Holidays, says the tour operator offers hotels in both destinations for this very purpose.

Grand Baie, just 30-40 minutes' drive from Port Louis, is also a convenient location. "However," says Banks, "as the road infrastructure has been upgraded over the last year, traffic has lessened and we see corporates opting for resorts across all areas, extending their stays for some R&R and travelling in to the various business locations. It's more about the resort offering as opposed to location only."

Ridler concurred: "A new trend is for business people to stay at resort hotels rather than in Port Louis and take their spouses along with them for a short holiday."

For multiple reasons, one

aspect of business travel that is particularly strong is incentive travel. Da Silva says meetings, incentives, conferencing and events revenue has increased by over 100% for Air Mauritius.

This, she says, can be

A new trend is for business people to stay at resort hotels rather than in Port Louis and take their spouses along with them for a short holiday.

attributed to the island's proximity to South Africa, which is only four hours from Johannesburg, five hours from Cape Town and just under four from Durban. The island has no malaria and there are no visa requirements

for South African passport holders. There is also a variety of hotels catering for all group sizes, all well-versed in the art of handling MICE groups, particularly incentive travel.

Beachcomber Tours' sales

manager, **Joanne Visagie**, says: "MICE is huge for us – we had a massive year last year and are looking good for this year." She attributes a sophisticated infrastructure and the highest standards of service and efficiency as reasons for a strong repeat rate among corporate incentive travel groups. She points out that a good time for groups to obtain the benefit of better rates and complimentary services is between mid-May and end-July.

According to Ridler, Thompsons' MICE enquiries and bookings for Mauritius are up by as much as 10%, as competing destinations grow more expensive with increasingly onerous entry requirements. A typical four-star MICE package to Mauritius starts from a reasonable R15 000 per person and includes flights, transfers, accommodation and is inclusive of all meals and drinks, he says. ■

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UK visas – your questions answered

Applying for and obtaining a UK visa as a South African passport holder can be challenging. *Travel Buyer* spoke to **Isabel Potgieter**, spokesperson for the British High Commission, and **Henry Nedambale**, Teleperformance Contact regional manager: South Africa, putting common complaints to them. This was their response...



Applicants feel extremely aggrieved that they have to pay £1,37 (R24,26) a minute to get information on the UK visa. They're sometimes kept on hold by call centre agents and say the information provided is not always accurate. Who operates the call centre?

The telephone information service is not provided by Teleperformance, says Potgieter. "From April 1, 2014, UK Visas & Immigration introduced a single international enquiry service for its overseas customers, provided by our commercial partner, Hinduja Global Solutions. This offers an improved service to visa customers in 20 languages and introduced a standard charge for all, regardless of country of residence. Advisers have been trained to provide our customers with a quick, accurate and professional service with help available to them throughout the application process."

Is there any other way applicants can get information on UK visas without having to pay for it?

Customers who don't want to pay for the telephone information service, says Potgieter, can use the improved www.gov.uk website to access all relevant information about the visa process. "If they need to contact us they can use the international enquiry service via email, which is free."

The visa application form is time-consuming to fill in and often bombs out, meaning applicants lose all info they've inputted and have to start over again.

Upgrades were made to the online application form and process in

November 2013, with new features enabling customers to make and access applications more quickly and easily. The Visa4UK website experienced unprecedented activity in March last year, resulting in restrictions being placed on the number of concurrent users. These restrictions were subsequently lifted following a significant increase in service capacity. The www.gov.uk website is now also far more user-friendly for those seeking immigration information.

Why does it take 15 working days for Teleperformance to return a visa?

Turnaround of visa applications is driven by demand and UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) capacity rather than influenced by Teleperformance, says Potgieter. "Our published customer service standard globally is to resolve all short-term visa applications within 15 working days of submission at the Visa Application Centre. During less busy periods, processing times in South Africa are often significantly less than this."

Applicants complain about the Teleperformance visa tracking system. They say it's impossible to find out where in the process their visas are and that they are not notified when the visa is ready.

Nedambale acknowledges significant teething problems in the first two months of Teleperformance's operations in South Africa. "The tracking system wasn't working and clients were unable to receive emails. Those teething problems have been sorted out and the system is

now working 100%. Clients are able to track their applications on the Teleperformance Contact website (www.ge2za.tpcontact.co.uk), receive emails notifying them that their application has been forwarded to the British High Commission, and when their documents are available for collection.

Staff in Teleperformance's application centres are rude and not customer-service orientated.

"We welcome feedback from our clients on Teleperformance's service so that we can continually improve our offering. Feedback from a recent Teleperformance customer survey at all five of our UK visa application centres in South Africa indicated that almost 97% of respondents were satisfied with the attitude of and support from our staff. We will continue to work to exceed our customers' expectations," maintains Potgieter.

"If anyone has an issue or complaint or wants to correspond with us, they can reach us through the www.get2za.tpcontact.co.uk website, where there is an email form under the Feedback and Complaints tab. If applicants wish to speak to a call centre agent they can dial +27 (0)21 300 3758 or 00 44 124321 8173 (this is a pay service)."

How long does an expedited visa take to process?

"Our priority visa service for fast tracking the application generally sees the application returned within five working days. This processing time is, however, not guaranteed," says Potgieter.

Clients say the UK visa is expensive and want to know why there's a cost differential between a six-month (R1 536) and 10-year (R13 635) visa.

"We recognise the importance of the visitor route to the UK economy. That is why our government has sought to bear down the fee for short-term visit visas. The current fee for a six-month multiple-entry visitor visa is significantly below the cost to the Home Office of processing the application, and remains competitive. Applicants for a long-term visa benefit from the convenience of not having to make multiple visa applications each time they want to come to the UK. Long-term visas also allow regular travellers to the UK to hedge against possible future visa fee increases or changes to eligibility," notes Potgieter.

Why is it necessary to also apply for a UK visa if you're a transiting passenger?

"South African nationals are able to journey via the UK without first obtaining a transit visa where they are travelling on to the US, Canada, Australia or New Zealand and hold a valid visa for the respective country, and where they will transit out of the UK within 24 hours of arrival. The 2014 visa fee review saw a reduction of almost 30% in the price of a direct airside transit visa, along with a freezing of the landside transit fee. We believe this will help to enhance the UK's position as a hub for transiting passengers." ■

Top 10 specials

Linda van der Pol, Travelinfo's editor, is our Deal Detective, bringing you great specials from *Travelinfo*, the online travel information system in daily use by travel agents all over SA. Just book through your TMC and tell the consultant it's a Travelinfo special. To get connected, e-mail lindav@nowmedia.co.za.

1. Mauritius

SAA Economy-class day- and flight-specific fare from Johannesburg to Mauritius is from R1 980 return. Offer excludes taxes and is valid for travel in February only.

2. Phuket

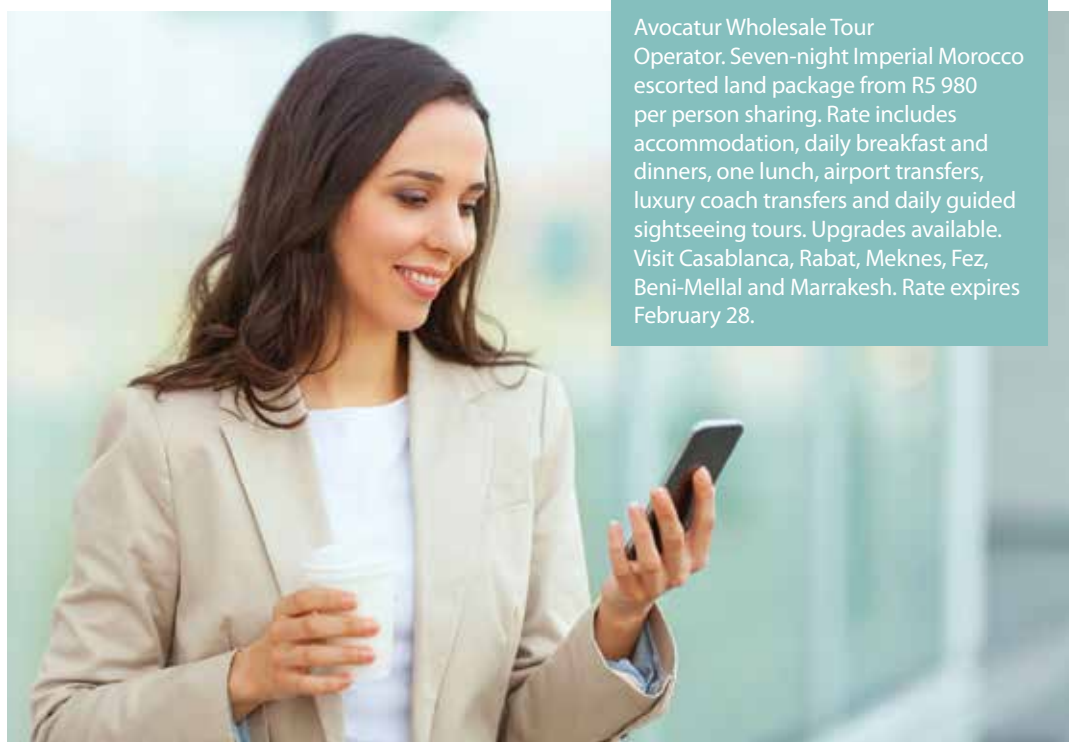
Azure Travel. Seven-night packages are from R7 227 per person sharing. Offer includes return flights from Johannesburg, accommodation in a twin-sharing room with daily breakfast, and road and boat transfers where applicable. Excludes airline taxes of R3 770 per person. Valid for travel from May 1 to June 20.

3. France

Club Med. Easter holiday ski deals from R28 750 per person sharing. Package includes airfares, taxes, return airport transfers, seven nights' accommodation on a full-board basis (breakfast, lunch, and dinner, including wine, beer, soft drinks, open bar and snacking), five-day ski school, six-day ski pass, activities, entertainment and travel insurance. Offer is valid for travel until April 30 (best travelling date April 4).

4. Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia

Curious Traveller. Singapore and Sapphire Princess Cruise (Thailand and Malaysia). Packages are from R14 375 per person sharing in an inside cabin. Offer includes airport/hotel/harbour/airport transfers,



three-night stay in Singapore (four-star accommodation), Singapore Garden Bay tour, five-day cruise, all on-board meals and port charges. Offer excludes airfares and is saleable until February 20. Cruise departs February 23.

5. Zimbali

Fairmont Zimbali Resort. 'Wish you were here' special. Rates are from R1 200 per person sharing, including breakfast. Minimum two nights' stay required. Offer expires March 31.

6. Pretoria

Court Classique Pretoria. Loftus Versfeld supporter fan special (rugby, soccer, events and concerts). Rate per room is R720. Maximum two people per

room. Children stay free when sharing in a one-bedroom suite, weekends only. Rate expires February 28.

7. Franschhoek

African Hotels & Adventures. Summer conference packages at Le Franschhoek Hotel & Spa. Rates are from R415 (half day), R435 (full day) and R2 295 (stay and conference). Rates include conference venue, equipment and meals as per package. Rates expire March 31.

8. Israel

El Al Israel Airlines. Superstar Holiday packages from R10 370 per person sharing. Offer includes return economy-class ticket from Johannesburg, two nights' accommodation including breakfast. Rate is

9. Morocco

Avocatur Wholesale Tour Operator. Seven-night Imperial Morocco escorted land package from R5 980 per person sharing. Rate includes accommodation, daily breakfast and dinners, one lunch, airport transfers, luxury coach transfers and daily guided sightseeing tours. Upgrades available. Visit Casablanca, Rabat, Meknes, Fez, Beni-Mellal and Marrakesh. Rate expires February 28.

based on two people sharing. Fare includes fuel levy but excludes taxes. Offer is valid until February 28.

10. Cape Town

Legacy Hotels & Resorts. Portsworld Hotel special offer – rates are from R1 530 per person sharing. Special includes accommodation with breakfast, a ferry trip from the V&A Waterfront, a tour around Robben Island and a Cape Malay dinner feast at the Quarterdeck Restaurant. Valid until September 30. ■

DISCLAIMER: All specials are subject to availability, currency fluctuations and seasonal surcharges.

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