

JANUARY 2015

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FOR SA CORPORATE

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CASH

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'TOTAL' TRANSITION

Ntombi Ngcobo's crossover from consultant to co-ordinator

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Editor's note

It's a new year, and – some would say – a fresh start. Nowhere is this more evident than with our national carrier. At the time of going to print, there was significant buzz around the airline's turnaround strategy and speculation was building in the industry that SAA was considering Etihad Airways as an equity partner.

In November, at the re-launch event of SAA's Voyager loyalty programme, acting ceo, **Nico Bezuidenhout**, said SAA had embarked on a 90-day action plan that would help return the financially ailing airline to commercial sustainability. Bezuidenhout was vague about the six-step plan, saying only that the first step was to look at the "solvency and liquidity of the business", second its "operational interventions", third "compliance", fourth "governance structures", fifth "reorganising assets", and sixth "communicating these changes".

Etihad and SAA announced in December their intention to "expand the strategic partnership between the two airlines".

If this were to happen, it would be a game changer in the travel industry. There is no doubt that the South African travel trade would like to see the national carrier succeed and a tie-up with a strong airline such as Etihad could be the answer.

In general, though, the industry faces many of the same challenges

it had last year. Experts predict that pressure on costs and margins, shrinking budgets and a weak rand will continue to challenge travel buyers.

A continuing focus for buyers in 2015 is curbing traveller non-compliance, gaining access to current and reliable data, improving the communication of this to all stakeholders, and better collaboration with suppliers and partners. Total's **Ntombi Ngcobo** shares some of her tips in this regard in this month's profile.

The results of long-awaited White Paper, 'Neema – understanding business travel in Sub Saharan Africa' were revealed during ABTA's conference late last year. The findings are not surprising but very interesting, touching on many of these issues.

Of course cost cutting is top of mind and this month we bring you tips on how to convert travel costs to cash through VAT retrieval.

With well-intentioned resolutions occupying our minds, January is a good time to relook at your travel policy and procedures. It's a dynamic industry we work in and let's hope this year brings with it some exciting changes and interesting stories.

Keep reading!

Natasha Schmidt
(natashas@nowmedia.co.za)

COVER

Two years ago **Ntombi Ngcobo** crossed over from consultant in a travel agency to the other side as travel co-ordinator for Total South Africa. *Travel Buyer* speaks to her about making the transition. Cover photograph by **Shannon Van Zyl**.

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SAA reinvents Voyager programme

SAA frequent flyers will, from early 2015, be rewarded for the amount of money they spend with the airline rather than the number of miles they have travelled.

This is just one of numerous changes SAA has made to its Voyager loyalty programme in an effort to attract, retain and reward customers fairly, said **Suretha Cruse**, SAA's executive Customer Loyalty, at the launch of the 'Re5 campaign' on Friday (November 28).

There are five key changes to the FFP, most of which will come into effect on February 1:

1) All members will receive 1 mile per R1,60 spent and the

accumulation of miles under this earning structure will count towards tier status.

2) The redemption of miles under the new structure will be applicable to the base fare and fuel levy of a member's requested SAA flights. Government and airport taxes are excluded.

3) Voyager has introduced 'Dynamic Award', which is related to the actual cost of the desired flight and is applicable to all revenue booking classes. During the initial phase Voyager members will be able to use their miles as full payment. During the course of 2015, part payment of miles and part cash will be introduced.

4) Based on the new SAA

exclusive earning and spending structure, SAA Voyager members' loyalty will be rewarded with 5% return on their SAA spend. For example, if a Voyager member has spent R5 000 on an SAA flight, a value of R250 in loyalty miles as a currency (cash) will be available to spend towards flight rewards.

5) Voyager has reviewed and improved the benefits of members based on their tier status, ensuring loyalty over time is rewarded, which means more benefits for Elite members.

Future expansion plans for SAA Voyager include more third party redemption partnerships, the launch of a new SAA Voyager credit card mid-2015, and an SAA Voyager online shop.

Lanseria offers free WiFi

LANSERIA International Airport has launched an MWeb WiFi zone offering for passengers moving through the airport.

"We are happy to launch the MWeb WiFi service for our passengers as we know that staying connected is important to travellers," said **Gavin Sayce**, ceo for Lanseria International Airport.

For a limited period, passengers at Lanseria International Airport can enjoy free high-speed uncapped WiFi Internet.



PHOTO: DEBBIE BATHAM

For the discerning business traveller

The Birchwood Hotel and OR Tambo Conference Centre offered a sneak preview of its latest offering, Silverbirch, at a special event on November 22. Designed to cater specifically to the more "discerning" business traveller, Silverbirch draws on a new "hotel within a hotel" concept. Silverbirch at Birchwood is situated in a quiet and separate area on the Birchwood property with separate controlled access away from the hustle and bustle of the

conferencing area. It also offers a dedicated check in area within the hotel's main reception. 153 dedicated rooms have been set aside with the goal of creating a peaceful and comfortable night's rest apart from the main hotel. Silverbirch is expected to officially open its doors towards the end of January 2015. Pictured at the preview (from left) are Birchwood's **Kevin Clarence** (chairman), **Lindiwe Sangweni-Siddo** (ceo) and **Lloyd Marshall** (gm).

Global event management brand arrives in SA

FLIGHT Centre Travel Group has launched a global corporate event management brand, called cievents, in South Africa. Cievents is a full-service meeting and event management agency offering highly specialised solutions for developing and managing its clients' MICE requirements.

The agency was established in 1986 and has offices in Australia, New Zealand, the

UK, USA, Hong Kong and now South Africa. It consists of multidisciplinary teams, including event management; event production; incentives, rewards and recognition; and digital and design.

As cievents draws on international experience and technology, the company believes it will be able to bring a new level of event management to South African corporates.

UK to launch pricey 24-hour visa service in SA

UK PRIME Minister **David Cameron** has unveiled plans to roll out its 24-hour visa service in a number of countries, including South Africa, by April 2015. He made this announcement at the G20 Summit in Australia last week.

The Super Priority Visa Service is currently already available in China and India and ensures a decision on a visa application within 24 hours.

The service fee costs a hefty £600 (R10 592) over and above

normal visa fee charges. The 24-hour service does not in any way guarantee a visa application will be successful and applicants will still need to meet the strict requirements of the UK immigration rules.

The Minister explained the aim of the priority service is to remove lengthy bureaucratic hurdles, which could currently be putting off business travellers, investors and rich tourists, pushing them towards countries with a simpler service.

Fastjet Zambia one step closer to take off

FASTJET Zambia has received its Air Service Permit (ASP), marking a major step towards launching operations in the country.

The carrier is now focused on continuing the submission of the necessary documents and manuals to complete the application process for an Air Operator Certificate (AOC),

which will then allow the commencement of domestic and international operations.

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

In addition, the airline has received permission from the Uganda Civil Aviation Authority to operate flights from Uganda

to Johannesburg, Juba, Nairobi, and Kigali under Fifth Freedom rights using Tanzanian-based aircraft. Once the authorities in the relevant countries provide their approvals, fastjet Tanzania will be able to offer flights linking Entebbe with these destinations.

Fastjet commenced operations from Dar es Salaam to Entebbe on September 16 and added additional flights in October.

New Ebola app launched

INTERNATIONAL SOS has launched a new, free Ebola app for mobile devices. It is designed to share the group's medical and travel information on Ebola and is maintained and reviewed 24/7 by medical and security professionals.

The app is now available for download on iOS and Android devices and will provide instant online access to key sections of International SOS's dedicated Ebola website.

Airlink changes fleet, ups capacity

AIRLINK is to retire its last seven remaining Jetstream 41s, which will gradually be replaced by Embraer ERJ-135s, resulting in an increase in capacity and shorter flying time to several destinations.

The turboprops are used to operate flights connecting OR Tambo, Phalaborwa, Polokwane, Richards Bay, Maputo, Durban's King Shaka, Nelspruit, Bloemfontein, East London, and Port Elizabeth on behalf of SAA.

Airlink ceo, **Rodger Foster**, said: "The intent would be to replace operational aircraft on a one-for-one basis with ERJ135 aircraft. The nett result will be an increase in capacity of 28% on flights where the J41 is replaced by the ERJ135."

Special car-rental rates for Mango pax

MANGO and Avis Rent a Car have forged a commercial partnership, giving customers preferential car-rental rates when booking Mango flights.

"The relationship adds more choice for our guests," says Mango spokesperson, **Hein Kaiser**.

Since the partnership's launch in November, Mango passengers have responded positively, with substantial bookings via the airline's website confirmed.

Iata to offer 'rescue fares' for stranded pax

IATA has announced a new arrangement to help passengers impacted by airline bankruptcy. A voluntary agreement on behalf of its members flying to, from and within Europe will cover the repatriation of passengers unable to return home due to an airline ceasing operations as

a result of financial failure. "Under the agreement, in the event of an airline bankruptcy, Iata member airlines flying to and from the EU will make their best efforts to offer repatriation to passengers stranded away from home," an Iata statement said. These passengers will be provided access to discounted

transport to return home, subject to available capacity. The 'rescue fares' of a nominal amount will be available for purchase up to a maximum of two weeks after the event to anyone flying to, from or within Europe who does not already possess insurance covering this eventuality.



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More benefits for SAA, Virgin Australia pax

SAA and Virgin Australia have announced a reciprocal frequent flyer agreement giving Velocity Frequent Flyer and Voyager members the ability to earn and redeem points as well as enjoy certain benefits across both airlines' networks.

From early next year, Velocity members will be eligible to earn Velocity Points and Status Credits on all SAA-operated services, including Airlink and

SA Express, while Voyager members will be able to earn miles on all Virgin Australia-operated services – domestic, short-haul and long-haul international routes.

Velocity members will be able to use their points to purchase reward seats on SAA flights in economy or business class, while Voyager members can do the same across Virgin Australia's network in economy, premium economy and business class.

Executive Apartments and Hotels rebrands

EAH Executive Apartments and Hotels has rebranded to The Capital.

The hospitality group is poised for significant expansion, set to grow its number of properties from six to 17. While its current portfolio consists of six properties in Sandton, future properties will be located in capital cities in and around South Africa and the sub-Saharan market.

The Capital's ambition

is to have 17 properties by 2018. Managing director, **Marc Wachsberger**, says: "We're working towards that goal and the rebrand is one further step in that direction. We need a really strong foundation as a business so that when we add hotels, we're able to plug them into a foundation that has a strong brand that the market recognises in locations like Cape Town, Pretoria, Gaborone, Windhoek and Namibia," Wachsberger concludes.

Avis introduces no-show fee

Avis is to introduce a no-show fee for renters who don't honour bookings from the second quarter of 2015.

Lance Smith, executive of sales, says the company first waited to see how the US and Europe reacted to the launch of the fee. He reports that the fee has been implemented with no problems or major challenges.

He says the fee will be charged to the client's credit card or account in the event of a no-show.

Smith says Avis is seeing on average 10% no shows and on some peak days, the no shows can be in excess of 25%.

SAA ups flights in Africa

SOUTH African Airways has upped frequencies on some of its key African routes.

A statement by the airline said the additional capacity was in response to positive market growth.

As of December 1, SAA increased frequencies between Johannesburg and Maputo from 17 to 21 a week and between JNB and Harare from 18 to 19 flights a week. As of December 4, flights between JNB and Kinshasa increased from six to seven a week, and from JNB to Mauritius from nine to 10 a week.

New platform planned for Meetings Africa 2015

MEETINGS Africa 2015 will feature a new business-to-business platform where exhibitors will hold table top one-on-one meetings with visitors, including corporate travel buyers, business travel agencies, and meeting and event planners.

Amanda Kotze-Nhlapo, chief convention bureau officer of South Africa National Convention Bureau, told *Travel Buyer* the new platform follows a partnership with the Unique Speakers Bureau, which hosted its annual showcase at Meetings Africa this year and will do so again next year. She said hosting the showcase attracts 500 corporates to the show. "We started off with the

partnership and it was really a success," says Kotze-Nhlapo, adding that the only challenge was to get the corporates to meet the exhibitors and walk the floor. "We decided that as a value-add for our exhibitors, we will host a half-day business-to-business event," she says. For this, the Convention Bureau has selected 50 corporate buyers, while the platform will be open to 50 exhibitors.

Meetings Africa 2015 will take place from February 23-25 at the Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg. The business-to-business platform will take place on Tuesday, February 24.

To register, or for more information, visit www.meetingsafrica.co.za.

Legend launches new clubhouse, unveils extreme offering

LEGEND Golf & Safari Resort unveiled its new clubhouse offering while putting on a four-day display of all that the resort has to offer during its Legend Extreme Showcase at the end of November.

Ceo, **Peet Cilliers**, believes that the new clubhouse is a completely unique offering, saying that it has no equivalent anywhere else in the South African bush. The facility houses a Sky View Bar, Renaissance Restaurant, Golf Pro-Shop, Clubhouse Boma, Members' Lounge with viewpoint, changing rooms, a gym as well as a children's play facility and splash pool.

With its 18-hole signature golf course (each hole has been designed by a different golfing legend) and Extreme 19 hole that is only accessible by helicopter, the resort has developed its reputation as a 'bucket-list' golfing destination.

International sales and marketing manager, **Mariki Theron**, says the clubhouse's

new facilities will further enhance this offering. In particular, the executive members' area, which provides businessmen and women with an exclusive lounge ideal for closing deals. For a lump sum of between R70 000 and R75 000, guests can acquire hospitality packages that include access to the lounge, as well as unlimited access to the golf courses. The Golf Pro-Shop also adds to the resort's positioning as a 'golf-hub' of sorts.

However, golf is not all that the resort has to offer. In fact, the Legend Extreme showcase completely dispels ideas that the resort only has golfing and safari experiences to offer. Two whole days of the showcase were dedicated to showcasing activities that are completely unrelated to golf or safaris.

While the Doorndraai Dam provides a range of watersport activities, the resort's natural landscape also enables a variety of adventure activities such as abseiling, clay pigeon shooting and helicopter rides. ■

Africa travel – corporates lack data

The results of long-awaited white paper, 'Neema – understanding business travel in Sub Saharan Africa' were revealed during the African Business Travel Association's conference in November.

THE biggest challenge in the African corporate travel sphere is a lack of reliable data.

This is according to 'Project Neema', a White Paper produced by Severnside Consulting in conjunction with ABTA, which was a major talking point at ABTA's 2014 conference, held at the Sheraton Pretoria Hotel from November 2-4.

The paper is the result of 12 months of research, comprising 170 different engagements (including interviews, feedback sessions and focus groups) with industry stakeholders based across Africa (Angola, Côte D'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa) and outside Africa (Germany, The Netherlands, UAE, UK and the US). In total 72 buyers and 94 suppliers were consulted.

"When large organisations laud the performance of their global travel programmes, they are not always delivering excellence for travellers to, from and within Africa," says **Chris Pouney**, Severnside's director of business travel.

Local offices are either left in isolation to deal with managing the corporate travel policy with minimal input from global teams or, conversely, they are instructed to mandate a global policy locally by a head office that has little understanding about the region, says ABTA founder, **Monique Swart**.

TMC support

The need for current, concise data has never been greater. Buyers said travel reported on by TMCs was of a substandard quality. Of those TMCs that generate multi-national data, 83% of buyers said they were concerned about the quality and integrity of the information, while 33% were



Helping facilitate a topical debate are (from left): **Kele Mohatle** (travel manager, Liberty Group) and **Monique Swart** (founder of ABTA).



Pictured (from left): **Grace Shiyabola** (travel manager, British American Tobacco in Nigeria) and **Aderoju Omololu** (principal consultant at Aptegy Consulting in Nigeria) provide a different perspective on travel in Africa.

disappointed by the timeliness of the delivery.

"Buyers complain TMCs are not always capable of delivering the joined up service promised across the region," Pouney says. "TMCs, especially in markets still paying airline commission, are not aligned

to add value to buyers and in many developing countries still refer to themselves as travel agents."

The report found that many companies had a desire to consolidate their TMCs to deliver more consistent service and standardise data – i.e.

work with global TMC brands. Of those corporates that have a locally selected TMC (55%), 30% are investigating options to achieve benefits of consolidation.

In a nutshell

Governance and policies: A big problem is that travel buyers don't travel. Research shows that 76% of travel managers rarely travel within Africa.

Technology: There is an appetite for technology solutions but take-up is poor. Mobile Internet usage is developing fast in Africa, yet buyers often only consider self-booking tools.

Payment systems: A single form of payment is unrealistic when travelling in Africa and buyers need to strategically select a range of different payment options taking into account costs and risks, efficient reimbursement of employees and suppliers as well as the availability of relevant data.

Airlines: Buyers are frustrated by a lack of capacity and direct flights within Africa. High fares and taxation as well as safety and service remain concerns.

Hotels: Economic growth and long lead times in hotel development have resulted in capacity issues and high rates in certain African markets, particularly Angola and Nigeria.

Safety and Security: Duty of care is a constant concern but travel buyers need to pay more attention to 'mundane' issues such as road accidents and illness. There are too many gaps in the briefing and tracking of travellers.

The Neema research paper is available to travel industry professionals across the globe. For further information, contact Monique Swart at Monique@abta.co.za or Chris Pouney at Chris.Pouney@severnsideconsulting.com. ■

A 'Total' transition – from consultant to co-ordinator

Two years ago **Ntombi Ngcobo** crossed over from consultant in a travel agency to the other side as travel co-ordinator for Total South Africa. *Travel Buyer's Debbie Badham* speaks to her about making the transition.

NTOMBI Ngcobo was no stranger to travel when she first joined Total South Africa in May 2012. Having been in the industry for almost 17 years, she has worked her way up from junior to senior travel consultant all the way through to management. Eventually, her curiosity around how things worked on the 'other side' of the corporate travel fence prompted her to take up her current position as travel co-ordinator for Total.

"The cross-over has been a positive one," she says, adding that she believes the experience she gained working as a travel consultant provided her with the right set of skills to add significant value in her role as a corporate travel co-ordinator.

Her greatest challenge in making the transition was learning to compile and present management reports, based on Total's Goods and Services purchasing process, which governs the in-house purchasing and payment process for the travel commodity.

However, she notes that the company's comprehensive support system assisted her in meeting this challenge head-on. "My line manager, **Jabu Khumalo**, was a great help in assisting me with management reporting, providing guidance and leadership on numerous issues as well as with understanding the purchasing process."

Ngcobo says at Total travel bookings are currently decentralised. Employees are able to book their own travel via the company's online booking system. This is then approved by the travelling employee's line manager, and then sent on for approval to the travel co-ordinator – a process that Ngcobo believes is helpful in eliminating a great deal of unnecessary admin. "My primary role is to manage our travel booking system and act as the 'super approver' for all bookings."

The company partners with Travel with Flair (TWF) for all its travel procurement needs. The TMC was responsible for developing Total's travel booking system. Ngcobo says she works closely with TWF on the system, providing them with a comprehensive understanding of Total's unique needs. "I also did IT training in order to be able to manage the system most effectively." She adds that Total has developed a very strong relationship with TWF over the years.

Curbing non-compliance

Another big challenge Ngcobo faced when taking up the position of travel co-ordinator for Total South Africa two years ago was traveller non-compliance – up to 85%. But she's managed to reduce this by 30%.

She says this particular area of travel has been tricky for her to manage but not impossible. "When I first arrived at Total, I was responsible for managing travellers who had been at the company for a very long time. Many of them did not understand why they should suddenly have to change the way they conducted their travel arrangements to comply with travel policies."

Her solution was to focus her time and energy on constantly educating travellers about the company's travel programme and the reason for its policies and procedures. To achieve this, Ngcobo makes use of the company's departmental meetings where she highlights different aspects of the company's travel management policy and explains why each procedure is important. "I mostly address issues around cost-saving through booking in advance," she says.

Online management

As all Total's bookings are made through an online system, travellers are unable to book outside of the travel management policy when it comes to the suppliers they select. "We are very cost-savings driven, so only our preferred suppliers are available on the system. Travellers are guided by what I've placed on the system. For example, our programme allows for C-class car hire and if one of our travellers wants to book a bigger vehicle they would need to log a very specific reason for having made that choice on the system."

For Ngcobo, the issue of non-compliance relates primarily to situations in which travel is not booked in advance. While many travel programmes stipulate that travel should be booked at least seven days in advance, Total found that this time frame was not working effectively for the company. As such, for the majority of business travel the travel management policy stipulates a longer time period between date of booking and travel. As a result of enforcing this change in behaviour and adherence to policy, there has been improved planning on the





With the assistance of her line manager, **Jabu Khumalo**, **Ntombi Ngcobo** has made a seamless transition from consultant to co-ordinator.

part of the traveller and substantial savings have been made.

In order to encourage advance bookings, Ngcobo closely monitors the company's travel KPIs and highlights areas where bookings have been made outside of policy. In these cases, she addresses the booking with the traveller's line manager – what she calls her “name and shame” policy, which is about taking accountability. The line manager needs to explain to Ngcobo why that particular booking was made outside of policy.

Having significantly increased compliance to the travel management policy, Ngcobo believes that this approach is highly effective. “When I first arrived at Total, 85% of bookings were being made after the stipulated period of travel. Now compliance has greatly improved to between 48% and 55%,” she says. But Ngcobo acknowledges that more work lies ahead in improving compliance and plans to approach this with vigour.

Communication is critical

Ngcobo says, ultimately, it is the development of strong relationships between the various stakeholders that form part of Total's travel programme that enables operations to run smoothly.

As a people's person, she believes communication is essential and tries to give Total's travellers a comprehensive understanding of the bigger picture around the business and how the travel programme fits with the company's objectives.

“I make an effort to explain the finer details of travel to our travellers,” she says. “This may involve conversations around the intricate details of how airline classes and strategies work and which hotels are cost effective but still comfortable.” She adds that travellers don't always understand costs as a result of unnecessary booking changes and how these build up and become quite significant.

Key to great travel management, as far as Ngcobo is concerned, is the ability to put oneself in the traveller's shoes. “There's simply no point in implementing policies that travellers are unable to follow or to which they are oblivious,” she says. This is made easier by Total's travel management policy, which doesn't distinguish between employees and their level within the company. For example, all employees fly business class on any flight longer than three hours, regardless of seniority.

Ngcobo's commitment to developing good relationships with the company's travellers has paid off. Not only has it influenced a change in traveller behaviour but has also produced trust among Total's employees; so much so that when travellers do find it necessary to book outside of policy they now seek out Ngcobo and check that they are cleared to do so.

On the supplier side, Ngcobo is well placed to hold suppliers accountable. As a former travel consultant she understands the

New company initiatives

Total South Africa recently formed a partnership with SAA Voyager. Through this partnership, SAA Voyager members earn one SAA Voyager mile for every one litre of fuel purchased through Total. The goal behind this was to offer Total customers a value-added lifestyle experience beyond the day-to-day necessity of filling up with fuel.

ins and outs of the industry and knows when she is being provided with good service and when she is not.

Extending the travel programme

The volume of travel for which Ngcobo is responsible is set to increase significantly in the near future. Total's international head office has identified the South African office as the company's innovation hub for countries within sub-Saharan Africa.

As a result, Total South Africa can expect an increase in the amount of travel into Africa on the part of the company's local employees as well as see Total employees from other destinations around the world travelling more frequently to South Africa.

Ngcobo says she looks forward to the new challenge, expecting enough of a boost to the company's travel programme to warrant bringing on board new members to her travel team. ■

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TRAVEL BUYER
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Convenient conferencing in Cape Town

We enlisted the help of meetings expert, **Liesel Short**, to inspect the facilities of the Harbour Bridge Hotel & Suites.



PHOTOS: SHANNON VAN ZYL

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MY FIRST port of call after being approached to inspect the Harbour Bridge Hotel was TripAdvisor. Any hotel worth its salt will feature here with reviews from visitors. The hotel is ranked number 69 of 104 properties in Cape Town with an overall ranking of 'Very Good' – a pleasant surprise.

Replies from the gm to reviews show a hands-on approach with personal attendance to feedback.

In my opinion, the hotel's main selling point is its location. In Cape Town where location is key, this hotel is perfectly placed. Easy access to both the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC) and the V&A Waterfront via a canal boat is a unique selling point. Due to its proximity to the CTICC the hotel lends itself to business travellers.

Graded as four-star accommodation, the Harbour Bridge Hotel offers 40 well-appointed rooms and 18 luxury suites. All rooms and suites have en-suite bathrooms and the suites have an additional lounge area and fully equipped kitchenette. Accommodation is designed to provide optimum comfort and guests can take advantage of a variety of services that aim to ensure complete relaxation at any time of the day.

All room facilities include:

- Satellite TV
- Hairdryer

- Telephone
- Private digital safe
- Air-conditioning
- WiFi (but only up to 50MB per day)
- Mini bar/fridge (stocked on request)
- Tea-/coffee-making facilities
- Room service

The Executive Cape Town conferencing venue can accommodate up to 16 delegates and offers standard equipment that includes:

- Flip chart
- White board
- Phone
- Internet access
- LCD screen

Business services are available at a nominal service fee and include:

- Internet
- Faxing
- Printing
- Photocopying

Great, friendly service from the staff, decently rated meals and value for money all make this a hotel worth staying at.

*Having earned her stripes (literally) as a Captain in the South African National Defence Force, **Liesel Short** has channelled her natural ability for creating order and harmony into her role at Red Hot Events. As a trained combat logistician and having managed hospitality during her time in the armed forces, Short developed her personality as a punctual perfectionist. She joined the Red Hot Events team in 2007 and, with an unorthodox eye for original combinations that create lasting impressions, brings a touch of magic to events.*

3 THINGS THAT SPELL *Luxury*



The dictionary defines luxury as “a state of great comfort or elegance, especially when involving great expense” but is this applicable in the world of conferences and meetings?

Liesl Venter sets out to define luxury conferencing.

Planned to perfection

COMFORTABLE chairs, the latest audiovisual equipment, water on the tables and peppermints to boot. Luxury? Maybe not.

Luxury is not necessarily what you see but rather that which you don't see.

“Great planning spells true luxury to me,” says **Beatrix Lourens**, owner and founder of Beatrix Events. She elaborates saying that true luxury refers to the amount of investment in planning. “The differentiation is in the time spent putting together a plan,” she says. “This provides the time to think of everything and anything and ultimately allows for a conference where extra attention has been given to every last detail.”

Enid Maulin, groups and incentives sales executive for Beachcomber, agrees saying luxury is all about delivering a top-drawer experience and service. “It's no longer a matter

of saving money but rather about ensuring a well-organised event that runs smoothly. That is what an investment in luxury affords you.”

What's more, a well-planned event that runs smoothly might very well be more affordable in the long run than simply weighing up the rands and cents of a stock-standard conference and a luxury one.

Lourens maintains that any company that is willing to spend budget on the execution of their event has luxury and a stress-free experience in mind.

Star-rating and style

While luxury, more often than not, is synonymous with high cost, this is not necessarily so when it comes to conferences. “An expensive conference doesn't necessarily equal a better conference,” says Lourens.

However, the star rating of an establishment is important, says Maulin. “It determines the level of service you are going to get at the venue and

will impact on how much of a luxury experience delegates will receive.” She maintains that “great service should always be high on the agenda for anyone planning a luxury conference”.

“Luxury is for the brand, the company and the client that don't want to be mundane, but set themselves apart from the rest.”

The obvious aspects that come into play, says Lourens, are the chairs, audiovisual equipment, and décor. “A well thought-out plan in terms of a theme with creative flair provides an edge to an event – it simply oozes luxury. Event styling is not for the run-of-the-mill conference,” she maintains. “The same concept applies to the décor and the audiovisual

equipment, which come in at a price. Clients that are willing to spend on these components are usually able to convey their message through media other than their presentation alone.”

Location

Maulin also points out: “Location is important as is the setting and the view that is on offer.”

It's important to determine the objective of a conference before deciding how luxurious it needs to be, says Lourens. “Luxury does cost more and before spending that budget it is important to understand what will be taken away from the experience it affords.” Spending money to create an extraordinary experience with added detail and comforts for delegates should be done for a specific reason.

“Luxury is for the brand, the company and the client that don't want to be mundane, but set themselves apart from the rest,” comments Lourens. ■

A look at *The Blue Train's* plans for 2015

Luxury train operator The Blue Train is hoping to make the most of the weakening rand, and will scrap its Durban route in favour of a new route to the Kruger. Dorine Reinstein looks at these and other developments the operator has planned for next year.



Themba Masheula, Spokesperson for The Blue Train, is confident that 2015 will bring numerous opportunities. He says the weakening of the rand compared with other major foreign currencies will definitely be an advantage for the industry in South Africa.

Despite 2014 having been a tough year for The Blue Train, which has felt the ripple effects of the Ebola outbreak and has, as a result, seen cancellations by the overseas markets, Masheula says 2015 promises to be an exciting year, as the luxury operator is planning to entirely review its destination offering.

New destinations

The decision has been taken to scrap the Durban route for 2015 in favour of a new route to the Kruger National Park. "The Durban route, which we have been running bi-annually for the last couple of years, has proved less popular with the industry. As such, the Durban trips of November 14-16, 2014, were our last trips on our normal schedule."

According to Masheula, the main reason Durban proved to be less popular as a destination on The Blue Train schedule is because travellers tend to compare it with Cape Town. "Almost everything available in Durban is also available in Cape Town...and Cape Town has more: Robben Island, V&A, Waterfront and of course Table Mountain. Cape Town is also known throughout the world because it features one of the 7 Wonders of the World. Lastly, I think Cape Town is also perceived to be much safer than Durban."

Demand for the Kruger on the other hand has

flourished, says Masheula. He says the Blue Train has already organised numerous charters to Hoedspruit, where guests not only wanted to visit the Kruger but also wanted to extend their holiday by staying at one of the luxury lodges in the area. "The Kruger is in the top three destinations that visitors want to see. It is synonymous with South Africa and is mentioned in the same breath as the late Madiba, The Blue Train and Sun City...to name but a few," he says, adding that travellers will now be able to tick off two bucket list points in one trip.

Masheula reveals that the route to the Kruger will make use of the Pretoria-Hazyview-Hoedspruit railway line. At Hoedspruit Station, which is situated along the Kruger fence, guests will disembark and be transferred by game vehicles to the Kruger gate. Although the final details will only be revealed at a later stage, it is expected that agents and operators would be able to book clients at the lodge of their choice.

Existing destinations

The 27-hour one-way overnight journey to and from Cape Town route continues to be the most popular journey for Blue Train passengers, says Masheula.

Southbound (Pretoria-Cape Town), the value-add off-the-train excursion includes a stop at Kimberley with a visit to the Diamond Mine Museum and to the edge of The Big Hole.

Northbound (Cape Town-Pretoria), the off-the-train excursion is at Matjiesfontein in the Little Karoo. The entire village has been declared a National Museum and the tour includes a drink at the historic Lord Milner Hotel.



THREE TRENDS AFFECTING LUXURY TRAVEL

1. Ebola: Hanlie Kotze, Blue Train Executive Manager says the Ebola outbreak has had an impact on Blue Train's business. However, she says that while it resulted in travellers hanging on to their money, last-minute bookings are now coming though.
2. Groups are back: "Groups are back on track, so we are seeing more group business on the trains, which is very good for our business," she says.
3. Education pays off: "The ongoing education of the travel trade has really paid off for us," says Kotze. She adds that for a while, the operator has been looking at how best it can get the international trade to sell luxury train travel. "The realisation is there now: there is definitely value add to book luxury trains." She emphasises that train travel allows people to see parts of the country they would otherwise miss.



Charter operations

Charter routes will continue to be an important part of the Blue Train offering in 2015, according to Masheula. He says in 2015 it will especially focus on the charters that are organised in conjunction with annual calendar events such as the Nedbank Golf Challenge at Sun City; the Macufe Festival in Bloemfontein and the Durban July.

Corporate market and MICE

The corporate and MICE markets will remain important focus points in 2015. Masheula says the Blue Train will tailor-make the experience for its corporate clients according to their budget and needs – from the duration of their trip, to meals and even the kind of gifting they want to give out during the event. A golfing or safari charter can be arranged, for example, whereby the train will stop at or near golf courses or game lodges that are situated along a rail route.

The train can be chartered for strategic meetings, product launches, VIP cocktail parties, lunches, dinners and even wedding receptions, with a variety of different routes as an option. The Conference Car, which is found in one of the two train sets, accommodates up to 22 delegates and is fully equipped with audio-visual and technical equipment for a high-level business meeting or a small conference.

Honeymoons

The honeymoon market continues to be lucrative. Masheula says: "For honeymooners, we try and make their journey memorable by offering a free Blue Train leather photo frame so that they can capture their memories and experience on board."



More access, more India



PHOTO: PIXABAY

As trade between South Africa and India continues to flourish, airlines are increasingly offering more seamless connections between the two countries. **Dorine Reinstein** reports.

EMIRATES and SAA are two airlines in particular that have taken note of the opportunities that the India-South Africa route can bring. **Sailesh Parbhu**, md XL Nexus Travel, says airlines that wish to increase their revenue on routes to India have, in most cases, improved their connecting times and increased their baggage allowances. SAA is a prime example. Says Parbhu: "SAA currently has six flights to Mumbai with excellent connectivity to the main internal cities," he says.

Last year, SAA and Jet Airways signed a codeshare agreement that enabled seamless connectivity to several business centres in India, including Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai and Thiruvananthapuram. In July this year, SAA's connectivity into India received another boost when Air India joined Star Alliance. Air India's network comprises 50 destinations in India, including

the industrial hubs of Aurangabad and Vadodra; Indore, which is home to many pharmaceutical producers; Coimbatore and Jamnagar, India's 'Oil City'.

Emirates is a popular airline for corporate travellers flying to India. The airline has greatly improved its connections between South Africa and the country. Parbhu adds that Emirates offers a stopover in Dubai, which is a draw card for businessmen who would like to conduct more than one meeting using the same air ticket.

Fouad Caunhye, Emirates regional manager for Southern Africa, says the prominent software hubs in India, such as Bangalore, Hyderabad and Chennai, have proved popular with South African travellers. "Emirates is committed to

improving business connectivity between South Africa and India to promote economic growth. Emirates' 185 flights a week to 10 destinations in India from the Dubai hub has translated into more trade and tourism opportunities by greatly reducing connection times when flying from South Africa."

In particular, Emirates has recognised the need for better connections from Durban to India and, as a result,

has improved its connections from King Shaka International Airport (KSIA). Caunhye says: "This flight has been a prime enabler of connectivity between Durban and the rest of the world?" and has had a profound impact on the local economic growth trickling down to and shaping the fortunes of communities within KZN."

TMCs say they have definitely witnessed an increased demand for travel to India. **Jose Cruz**, HRG Rennies Travel national executive client services manager, says the routes to India via the Middle East are flourishing with demand from corporates from the IT, banking and accounting sectors in South Africa. "I am surprised that other Middle East airlines have not taken advantage of this route," he says.

Dinesh Naidoo, group operation director of Serendipity Worldwide Group, agrees: "The new Indian Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** is pro-business and is creating a platform to make business in India easier."

According to the South African Department of Trade and Industry, South Africa's trade with India has doubled over the last five years, with minerals such as gold, diamonds and platinum, base metals, chemical products and machinery making up the bulk of exports.

I am surprised that other Middle East airlines have not taken advantage of this route.

The land of festivals

FEW countries offer year-round festivals with the same flair and colour that India does. "One might well describe India as a land of festivals," says **Manas Ranjan Pattanaik**, director of India Tourism.

He says travel managers will find that these festivities serve as a convenient added incentive for travellers bound for India. What's more, the country is known for its

impressive trade fairs.

One festival of particular interest to corporate travellers is the India International Trade Fair, which is held between November 14 and 27 in New Delhi each year. The fare is a massive event that showcases a wide range of products, including automobiles, pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, telecommunication products and much more. It

commemorates the birth of the first Indian Prime Minister.

For those looking to experience the unique and colourful elements of India's culture, Pattanaik offers a few recommendations:

- **Republic Day (January)** features a vibrant parade involving India's six regiments as well as floats presented by each individual state.
- **Surajkund Crafts Mela (February)** is hosted by a

different state each year and markets an incredible range of local crafts.

- **The Holi Festival (March)** has caught the imagination of the rest of the world with its tradition of throwing powder in the air to produce colourful explosions.
- **Goa Carnival (February)** covers the entire state of Goa with colourful floats and masked dancers performing to lively music. ■



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HOW TO

convert travel costs to cash through VAT retrieval

VAT reclamation can bolster a company's travel budget. The process can be confusing but a specialist can relieve corporations of all the hassle, writes **Michelle Colman**.

VAT recovery on travel expenses can be valuable to corporate companies, particularly when many rank business travel among their top three operational costs. With VAT now nudging past the 20% level in Europe and the rand floundering, getting back what you can makes considerable sense when it comes to corporate travel budgets.

The procedure is complex – a time-consuming dance of back and forth with regulations that differ from country to country. Utilising the services of specialists in the field can be enormously beneficial for both the travel buyer and the corporate.

The VAT-IT group is one such specialist, having developed its expertise in the field of outsourced VAT refunds and tax reclamation. Founded in South Africa 15 years ago, it is now headquartered in Luxembourg, has 26 international sales offices and 11 500 clients worldwide. Through extensive experience, it has fine-tuned

reclamation processes for 15 European countries as well as Australia, New Zealand, Japan and Canada. It further offers its clients the benefits of tax law experts keeping pace with legislation, conducting widespread research and who have developed good relationships with international tax offices.

How does a company become eligible?

Managing director of VAT-IT, **Christine Flöck**, explains that VAT and tax refunds are initiated by governments to encourage foreign companies to do business with them. However, the privileges of refunds and reclamation are extended according to the laws of reciprocity. Member states of the European Economic Community refer to this as the 13th VAT Directive and, broadly speaking, its basic condition for reclamation by a South African corporation is registration for business purposes, and as a VAT

vendor, in the company's home country.

What travel expenses qualify?

In principle, a number of travel expenses qualify for refund and include hotel accommodation, meals and entertainment, petrol, car rental and other forms of public transportation. Participation at trade shows and exhibitions, in conferences and training courses can also be claimed, as well as research expenses, professional fees, rental and storage charges.

Of particular interest to the engineering and manufacturing sectors is that there are instances where refunds can be claimed on import VAT. Specific to the oil and gas sector, mineral oil tax (MOT) on the purchase of jet fuel is often refundable. Flöck points out, however, that gifts and items bought by travellers in a personal capacity must be claimed individually at dedicated desks in airports.

What are the processes involved?

VAT-IT client services executives (CSEs) work closely with the company's clients, operating to deadlines set by international tax offices. They will visit clients annually, bi-annually or quarterly, dependent on the amount of travel conducted by the client's staff, to undertake on-site retrieval of relevant documentation. "The CSEs will go through the client's foreign payment files, gauging which invoices qualify for reclamation. Our head office team will then prepare the claim in the required format and language, and respond to questions from the relevant authorities. Often tax offices request information on the nature of the applicant's business and we submit the necessary letters of explanation accordingly," says Flöck.

CSEs will also take on much of the grind of preparing the claim, such as obtaining missing or original supplier invoices, matching account

Country	Car Rental	Conference/Trade Show	Hotels	Restaurants	Taxis
Australia	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%
France	-	20%	7%	7%	-
Netherlands	21%	21%	6%	-	21%/6%*
New Zealand	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%
United Kingdom	20%	20%	20%	20%	-

Examples of VAT levels on a variety of reclaimable travel-related expenses

*Depends on registration type of taxi service



and credit card statements to invoices, checking that VAT was charged correctly in the first instance and obtaining credits if necessary.

Clients are kept up to date on the progress of the claims, which tend to average six to eight months from submission to refund. Although the time period differs depending on the country, refund applications must generally be submitted within a year of incurring the expense.

When it comes to MICE events, the process is particularly smooth. Companies that have sent groups to attend conferences or incentive events abroad are usually able to submit one consolidated invoice from a destination management company (DMC) with a substantial VAT amount. The same is true of sports institutions, unless they are fully or partially government funded. Flöck cautions that government entities, due to their state sponsorship, are not viewed

favourably for full VAT refunds and generally receive partial reimbursement. A tourism organisation, which operates a number of European offices and participates in numerous European trade shows, encountered this resistance. VAT-IT fought the battle – all the way to the Upper Tribunal, Tax and Chancery Chamber in the United Kingdom – and managed to secure a far greater refund for the client than initially granted.

When is it worthwhile?

There's no hard and fast rule on when it becomes worthwhile to pursue VAT refunds – a small company would see value in R20 000 cash back resulting from just one annual trip, while VAT-IT recently found £300 000 (R5 million) in eligible VAT refunds for a local mining house. VAT-IT charges a success-based commission; if no refund is made, there is no fee due to VAT-IT.

How to prepare for a VAT claim

- 1) Familiarise yourself with travel expenses that qualify for refund in the countries visited by company staff.
- 2) Retain original invoices and keep them on file according to country. This will entail liaison with colleagues responsible for:
 - employee travel and corporate card expenses
 - foreign supplier payments

shipments of goods to/from foreign countries (an internal logistics department or an outsourced company)

- managing engineering or industrial installations
- organising MICE events

3) Consult a VAT refund specialist for an assessment (some specialists will do an evaluation at no cost). ■



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How to choose the right trip for your budget

Finding the right tour for your budget is critical to an incentive trip's overall success. We take a look at a variety of options available for budgets big and small.

Looking for a bargain?

ALL-inclusive is the ideal option for small-budget incentives. Cruising also tends to work very well for smaller budgets as it offers all-inclusive costing while on board. Cruises International's groups and incentives manager, **Dalene Oroni**, says the best option for low-budget groups is generally the Far East and a few options in the Mediterranean. "Flight costs have gone up tremendously in the last year, which makes it more difficult to fall within budget. In these cases we normally focus on shorter cruises with reasonable flight rates and one visa cost or none."

In terms of regional trips, **Johan Venter**, executive head of incentive travel for Uwin Iwin, says Mauritius remains hugely popular with clients in terms of value offering versus spend. He adds that Zanzibar and Zambia are also popular destinations close to home. "We find that Egypt is starting to make a comeback and rates are still very competitive as they try and recover from the recent downturn they experienced due to the political situation."

Zanzibar offers very good value for money for group travellers on a tight budget says **Mary Shilleto**, ceo of Thompsons Travel. "The destination's hotels generally offer all-inclusive packages, including meals and drinks, so the group or individual traveller knows

upfront what they are likely to spend on their trip. In addition, the destination offers pristine beaches and year-round fabulous weather."

If you thought that sporting events were impossible to put together on a tight budget, think again. **Greg Taylor**, gm of Pure Skiing, says the Malaysian Moto Grand Prix is a great option for a smaller budget. "The destination works out significantly more cost effective across the board, offering cheaper tickets and accommodation," he says.

Marketing manager of Duma Travel, **Karishma Singh**, says it's possible to tailor a trip to suit the client's budget, and for smaller budgets the company tries to focus on creating a memorable experience of the destination, cutting out more extravagant items. For example, a lunch or dinner on the beach in Mauritius really showcases all that the destination has to offer.

A little extra cash to spare?

For those with a bit more spend, the Far East is also a great option for incentive organisers who want to spoil their travellers but not break the bank. "There are multiple flight options to destinations such as Thailand and Vietnam, ensuring this part of the world is easily accessible, as well as the range of

high-quality, affordable hotels, delicious food and superb service," says Shilleto. "Travellers are spoiled by the unlimited range of activities on offer, sightseeing options and spectacular scenery."

When it comes to cruising, medium budget options tend to be seven-night cruises in the Mediterranean, Caribbean, northern Europe or Alaska. "In these cases, Royal Caribbean, Celebrity and Windstar fit well into the budget," says Oroni. "We also find that travellers do not want to spend more than 10 to 12 hours flying to the destination of their choice."

While ski holidays are often perceived as an expensive option, Taylor says with help from a professional tour operator, it would be easy to put together five- and four-star options from as little as R20 500 per person (land only), including ski charges and transfers.

Going big?

For corporates looking at the higher end of the spectrum (R50 000 per person, upwards) specialised sporting events are a good option, says Venter. The Rugby World Cup, which is being hosted in the UK in 2015, traditionally is very popular with corporate clients for their incentive trips, he says.

Other popular sporting events for large budgets include the F1 Grand Prix, says Venter. This tends to fall in the upper-spend bracket

due to the cost of corporate hospitality and the more expensive destinations such as Monte Carlo.

Venter adds there has been a comeback in the upper spend bracket (R65 000-R100 000 per person) over the last two years, where options such as exclusive yachts and ships are popular, combined with exclusive once-off experiences such as going night clubbing in a Cold War bunker in Moscow. "Hotels tend to be five-star deluxe and smaller; more intimate properties are preferred."

Shilleto says former "uncharted" parts of the world have become a huge hit with adventure travellers. "Exclusive cruises to Antarctica, polar bear viewing in Churchill, Canada, and tiger trekking in the Sundarbans of India are all offered by a large selection of reputable operators." She adds that sports and adventure travel is best suited to those with larger budgets to spend.

Cruising can also be a great incentive on a big budget. "Your high-end group would normally have R45 000-R60 000 per person to spend, which needs to include air travel. They want six-star, small intimate ships with unique destinations and itineraries. Again the Mediterranean is a very popular destination followed by northern Europe and Alaska," Oroni says. She adds that these groups tend to opt for 'out of the box' experiences where money is not an issue.

Top destinations to visit in 2015

Iceland

NO ONE wakes up in the morning and says 'let's go to Iceland', quips **Mary Shilleto**. She says this gives the destination an off-the-beaten-track appeal. Iceland is

vast and rugged and the activities available for incentive groups are absolutely endless, from bathing in geothermal pools and snowmobiling to ice trucking.



PHOTO: PIXABAY

USA

New York and Las Vegas still top the list of popular destinations, especially with more generous budgets being provided by clients, says **Johan Venter**. Shilleto agrees, saying that Vegas is on the up and up. "The city will be getting a new airport to cope with an influx of international tourism and there's a vast array of accommodation

from which to choose that will suit any budget." She adds that, while the gaming side of Vegas has been stagnant for about two years now, the city has seen growth in day-time parties. "The big stage productions are what bring travellers to Vegas, and a day outing to the Grand Canyon is on many travellers' bucket lists."



PHOTO: PIXABAY

Mauritius

Venter says Mauritius is still on most people's radar, and **Karishma Singh** agrees saying the island is still an attractive option,

largely because of its all-inclusive packages, which it make an extremely convenient choice for travellers.

Cuba

Thompsons Travel recommends Cuba as an up-and-coming destination that can offer groups an authentic experience. "Professional ground handlers ensure that there's support if there are any hiccups. For

example, in the past, if your bus broke down you would have been stranded. These days a driver can simply call for support and has enough cash to buy beverages and snacks as passengers wait for assistance," says Shilleto.

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PHOTO: EUGENE KASPERSKY

Dubai

Singh believes Dubai will prove to be a hotspot in 2015 largely because of its diverse range of tourist attractions.

"This destination places a great deal of focus on tourism, particularly events tourism, and

has a range of hotel options from which to choose and to suit any budget – any deal is highly negotiable. "Dubai also offers nightlife, glitz, glam, culture and great beaches, not to mention the shopping," says Shilleto.

The Med

Mediterranean cruises have always been popular for cruising, says **Dalene Oroni**. "This is largely because of flight times and the various options available to guests in these areas.

An incentive group also needs to keep within a maximum of seven to eight days as companies generally don't want their staff out of the office any longer than that."



PHOTO: PIXARBY

Poland

Shilleto says that while Poland is not nearly as celebrated as the Czech Republic, it is equally beautiful. "Krakow in particular is a treasure trove of culture and entertainment, not to mention its great value for money."

Upcoming sporting events

England is set to take centre stage during this year's Rugby World Cup in September and October. Venter reveals that there has been a lot of interest in the sporting event as far as incentives are concerned. "It's an expensive option though, which generally only appeals to clients in the upper-spend bracket."

Australia and New Zealand will also be top priorities on the corporate radar, playing hosts to the Cricket World Cup in February and March. **Greg Taylor** says both the Rugby World Cup and Cricket World Cup have always been popular events for South African corporates, making 2015 a great year for bucket-list incentives.

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7 tips for compiling a GREAT INCENTIVE

GROUP incentive travel comes with numerous challenges, ranging from budget constraints to unrealistic expectations and availability issues.

Industry professionals point out some things travel buyers need to keep in mind when organising incentive travel for large groups and offer tips on how to overcome them.

1. Start with the strategy

Start with the strategy behind the trip. "Incentive programmes are put in place to achieve particular business objectives and the design of the incentive project must tie in with this strategy," says **Stephanie Moss**, director Stephanie Moss Solutions.

2. Get creative with budget

Budgets play a big role when organising incentives so it's important to find ways of working around them. "We advise clients to be creative with their budgets," says **Joanne Visagie**, marketing manager for Beachcomber. "For example, we suggest dinners that are possible within the half-board package but are still private, or suggest activities at the hotel that are not charged as a supplement, such as a mini Olympics."

Moss believes the way to overcome the budget is to plan properly and do detailed research and, of course, to be knowledgeable about destinations and the facilities, services and possibilities for add-ons available. She says it's always crucial to select an appropriate destination for the budget. "The world

offers fantastic business combined with leisure options. It requires knowledge of key destinations and a keen eye for costs to make the correct choice to recommend to a client," she says.

Visagie says all-inclusive deals can be an attractive option when working within a restrained budget. "Fully inclusive packages work extremely well, especially for the South African market. The packages are easier for the client to budget on as it leaves very little to settle at the hotel direct."

3. Offer something unique

Porsche Dumagude, sales and marketing manager of the Emerald Collection in Zanzibar, says travellers are increasingly looking for something truly unique and it is important that the incentive organiser and product supplier offer this.

"I believe the process of creating an 'experience' deserves the most attention. Hand in hand with that you have to take into account the budget, logistically feasible programme delivery and attention to detail," agrees **Anton van den Heever**, founder of Delivering the Dream Incentive Management Services

4. Consider the group size

Devising a sound incentive plan depends greatly on the size of the group. Moss says destination selection can be a challenge for large groups, as certain destinations might not have capacity. "The popular tourist cities all have large hotels, and options such as cruising work for large groups but the off-the-beaten-track, more

exotic destinations cannot accept large numbers."

According to Visagie, flight availability can be a problem with large groups. "We try and work with the airlines and accommodate the groups on dates that they have larger aircraft. This is obviously only possible if the client is flexible with dates."

5. Arrange activities for varying interests

Incentive organisers might have to deal with a diverse group with varying interests. Moss comments: "Planning a trip for a diverse group can be difficult. Many large companies have many levels of employees and also employ people of different

backgrounds and cultures. This can be challenging but can be managed with proper engagement at the development stage of the incentive project."

6. Stick to achievable logistics

Michelle Hunter, gm of groups and incentives for World Leisure Holidays, says logistics should always be kept realistic. Incentive organisers need to make sure they keep a suitable ratio of time to get to the destination to time on land and distance, keeping a balance between leisure time and group activity time.

John Ridler, media and pr executive of Cullinan

Outbound Tourism, says it can be very challenging to organise logistics for a large group. He cites an example where the incentive trip departed from Johannesburg but delegates had to join from across the country. It was a challenge to co-ordinate all domestic flights to arrive in time to connect with the international flight.

7. Stay open to compromise

Moss explains that last-minute changes tend to happen when organising large incentive trips. She says managing travellers' expectations about making changes close to departure date is a knack group organisers need to learn.

Negotiate best rates

AIR Mauritius takes a flexible approach when it comes to group and MICE bookings. According to regional manager for Southern Africa and Latin America, **Carla da Silva**, all requests are embraced, especially in the case of repeat business, when the airline goes the extra mile.

Group organisers and their corporate clients can expect a large helping hand from Air Mauritius, which includes display of corporate banners at check-in, branded headrest covers and personalised check-in.

Da Silva's tips for securing the best rates are to give the airline notice of the dates and travel in off-peak times. She also cautions, to avoid costly passenger name changes, ensure the correct details are forwarded ahead of ticketing.



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Incentive solutions for 'Africa'

UWIN Iwin and Walthers DMC have entered into a new business tourism partnership to form Destination Business Solutions – Africa, offering PCO, DMC and event services across the African continent. The company has offices in Nairobi covering East Africa, Lagos for West Africa and Cairo for North Africa. Southern Africa will be serviced in Johannesburg by the independently owned Walthers DMC.

DBS chairman, **David Sand**, said: "Africa is fast becoming a focus of global investment. We believe our customers are looking for a one-stop solution for their client needs in Africa and DBS Africa will be a big part of their future success. Our mission is to be the go-to team in Africa to create solutions together and deliver great quality service."

Meanwhile Uwin Iwin's international team is growing at a significant rate. The organisation currently operates in 10 different countries including South Africa, Brazil,

India, Mauritius, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.

It opened its Egypt offices in October 2014 and has now set its sights

on the Asia Pacific and China with the launch of its first Asian office this month. "Our plan is to expand into this territory very quickly, followed shortly by Europe also in 2015," says coo, **Huw Tuckett**, adding that the company is also busy opening doors in North America.

He attributes Uwin Iwin's rapid expansion to demand from clients. "Most Blue Chip companies are multi-national. Our clients require global scale efficiencies with local relevance – and we are perfectly positioned to provide them with that service. The increase in our clients' sales performance across a number of territories has caught the attention of other territories needing the exact same solution."

Cruises International – new site sets sail

Cruises International is launching a Groups and Incentives website in January, where all

information, including any special offers, will be uploaded for all cruise lines in Cruises International's portfolio.

► Did you know?

Pure Skiing is in the process of launching brand-new five-star catered chalets. Situated in the towns of Courchevel 1850,

Verbier and St Anton, the chalets will be hosted with private chefs and chauffeurs, providing a truly enhanced five-star experience.



How to be 'smart' about incentives

At only US\$120 per person, per day, cruising offers the most value for money when it comes to groups and incentive travel, particularly on board Royal Caribbean's newest and most impressive, ship – the *Quantum of the Seas*. **Natasha Schmidt** was on board during the pre-inaugural sailing, courtesy of Cruises International.

GROUPS and incentives makes up 40% of Cruises International's business – which is not surprising when you see what options they have to offer. Royal Caribbean's 'smartest' ship takes cruising to another level.

Quantum of the Seas, which set sail in November last year, introduces a wave of unprecedented first-at-sea features and amenities, most of which are included in the price. Superfast wireless connectivity, the world's first robotic bartenders, a skydiving simulator, bumper cars, futuristic entertainment, and partnerships with celebrated chefs, **Jamie Oliver**, **Michael Schwartz** and **Devin Alexander**, are just a small sample of what the modern age of cruising looks like on-board *Quantum of the Seas*.

Tech firsts

Quantum of the Seas has more bandwidth than all other cruise ships in the world combined, so guests can check email, Skype, download streaming content –

basically, stay connected 24/7.

A downloadable app, Royal iQ, empowers guests to manage every detail of their vacation during the cruise. It allows them to call and text with other app users on board, reserve dining and entertainment options, build a personalised daily calendar, track luggage, and more.

The ship is also a 'cashless society'. Guests are given an RFID WOWband – a wristband – that not only lets them navigate the ship and enter their stateroom with tap-and-go technology but also allows them to pay for any extras. These bands are linked to a credit card, which can be for one or several accounts.

Creative spaces

Cruise ship dining has also been modernised on *Quantum of the Seas* with 'Dynamic Dining', where guests can choose from a landscape of 18 restaurants. There are five complimentary, full-service restaurants, which replace the traditional, common main dining room; several casual dining options; and a variety of speciality

restaurants (with a surcharge).

Most of these venues, which range from intimate to large, are available to groups to book out for functions at no extra cost.

Transformative entertainment venues also lend themselves to groups. Two70 is a multi-level great room with capacity for 540 guests, named for its 270-degree panoramic sea views through vast, floor-to-ceiling glass walls spanning almost three decks. SeaPlex – the largest indoor active space at sea – offers more first experiences for Royal Caribbean guests, such as bumper cars and a circus school with flying trapeze and roller skating. The Music Hall is a live music venue and the Royal Theater is where Broadway performances such as *Mamma Mia!* take place.

Want to combine an incentive with a conference? The ship also features conference facilities, with audio-visual equipment, coffee-breaks, etc. included.

Personalised service

Conference and incentive organisers can arrange for personalised amenities, such as giveaways, a dedicated TV channel for delegates, meals and menus, shore excursions, private transport, branding, and more.

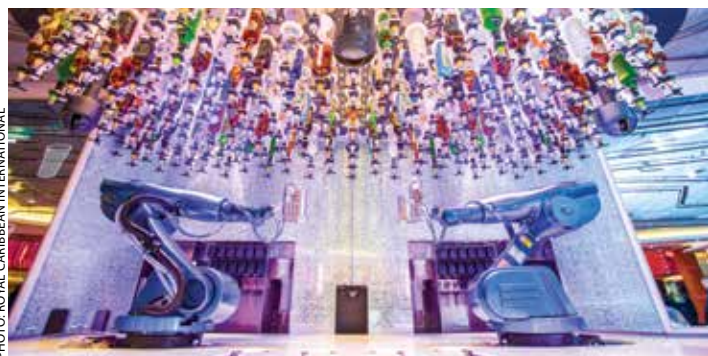
Cruises International, which has a dedicated groups and incentives department, will meet with the incentive buyer to qualify and personalise – based on the budget and the demographics of the group – the product best suited to their needs, taking the stress away from the organiser, says md, **George Argyropoulos**. "We

represent nine products, so there is an option for everyone. Royal Caribbean is the most popular because of the value-for-money, particularly when you compare it with land-based options." Cruises International can also assist with airline bookings.



Fast facts

- There are 16 family connected staterooms, 34 wheelchair-accessible staterooms, 1 571 balcony staterooms, 148 ocean-view staterooms and 375 staterooms with virtual balconies.
- The ship also features a Vitality spa and fitness centre, four pools, four whirlpools, a sports court, a rock-climbing wall, a flowRider surf simulator, a jogging track, an outdoor movie screen, a video arcade, a casino, an art and photo gallery, and a medical centre.
- For every three guests there is one staff member, making service fast and seamless.
- The North Star gives guests the opportunity to go 92 metres above sea level in a glass capsule, offering 360-degree views of the ocean. ■



Bionic bar - the first bar with robot bartenders.

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

Beachcomber Tours. Five-night packages at Le Mauricia (four stars) are from R11 410 per person sharing. Package includes return airfares ex-Johannesburg, return airport-hotel transfers, accommodation with daily breakfast and dinner, plus free land and non-motorised water sports. Offer is valid for travel from February 1 to March 20.

2. Netherlands

Thompsons Holidays. Amsterdam cruise from R14 437 per person sharing. Offer includes seven nights on board *Le Boat Countess*, all meals, soft drinks, on-board entertainment and port charges. Offer expires July 6. Book and pay by April 19. Excludes flights. Price is based on four people sharing.

3. Windhoek

Air Namibia. Companion special: Johannesburg-Windhoek. Return fares are from R3 223 for the first passenger and R2 823 for the second passenger, including taxes. All travel to be completed by March 31.

4. Phuket

Holiday Tours. Seven-night packages are from R10 444 per person sharing. Rate includes return flights from Johannesburg, all pre-payable airport taxes/levies, airport-

hotel-airport transfers, accommodation at the four-star Sea Sun Sand Resort & Spa plus full-day Phi Phi-Maya-Bamboo Island by speedboat, including lunch. Value-add: free shuttle service to the shopping mall and free WiFi access. Offer is valid from January 16 to April 15.

5. Australia

Travel Vision. Sydney and Melbourne City Stays – pay for three, stay four nights. Rates are from R2 851 per person in Sydney and valid until January 31. Rates in Melbourne are from R2 978 per person and expire on March 12 (block-out dates apply).

6. Croatia

Sirius Travel. Seven-night special: rates are from €720 (R9 986) for a standard cabin and €980 (R13 592) for a main deck cabin. Rates include accommodation on board the *M/S Kleopatra* with breakfast and lunch daily, welcome dinner, free WiFi plus city tours of Dubrovnik, Korcula, Hvar and Split. Rates are per person sharing and valid for May departures from Split. Bookings must be made by January 31.

7. Cuba

Rufaro Travel. Seven-night/eight-day 'Pearl of the Caribbean' package from £865 (R15 028) per person sharing. Package includes accommodation, three meals daily, selected tours and airport transfers. Offer is valid until April 30.

8. Western Mediterranean

Cruisemasters. Seven-night Western Med cruise with Costa Cruises on board the *Costa Fascinosa*. Rates are from US\$324 (R3 600) per person sharing. Departs Savona on February 8, 15 and 22 and March 1, 8 and 15. Offer includes seven nights' accommodation in an inside cabin, all meals and on-board entertainment. Excludes port charges of R165 per person. Kids cruise free (only pay port charges) with child-friendly ship amenities, kids' menus and beverage cards (to purchase).

9. Portuguese Islands

MSC Cruises. Maputo and Portuguese Island cruise – rates are from R3 650 for an inside cabin plus R860 mandatory charges. Offer includes four nights on board *MSC Opera*, all meals and on-board charges. Rate is based on two people sharing. Departure date March 2.

10. Gauteng

Crowne Plaza Johannesburg – The Rosebank. 'Romance packages' are from R2 500 per couple. Rate includes accommodation with romantic turn down, champagne breakfast, dinner at Butchers Block Restaurant, plus Armani Spa neck, back and shoulder massage. Offer is valid until January 31. ■

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

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