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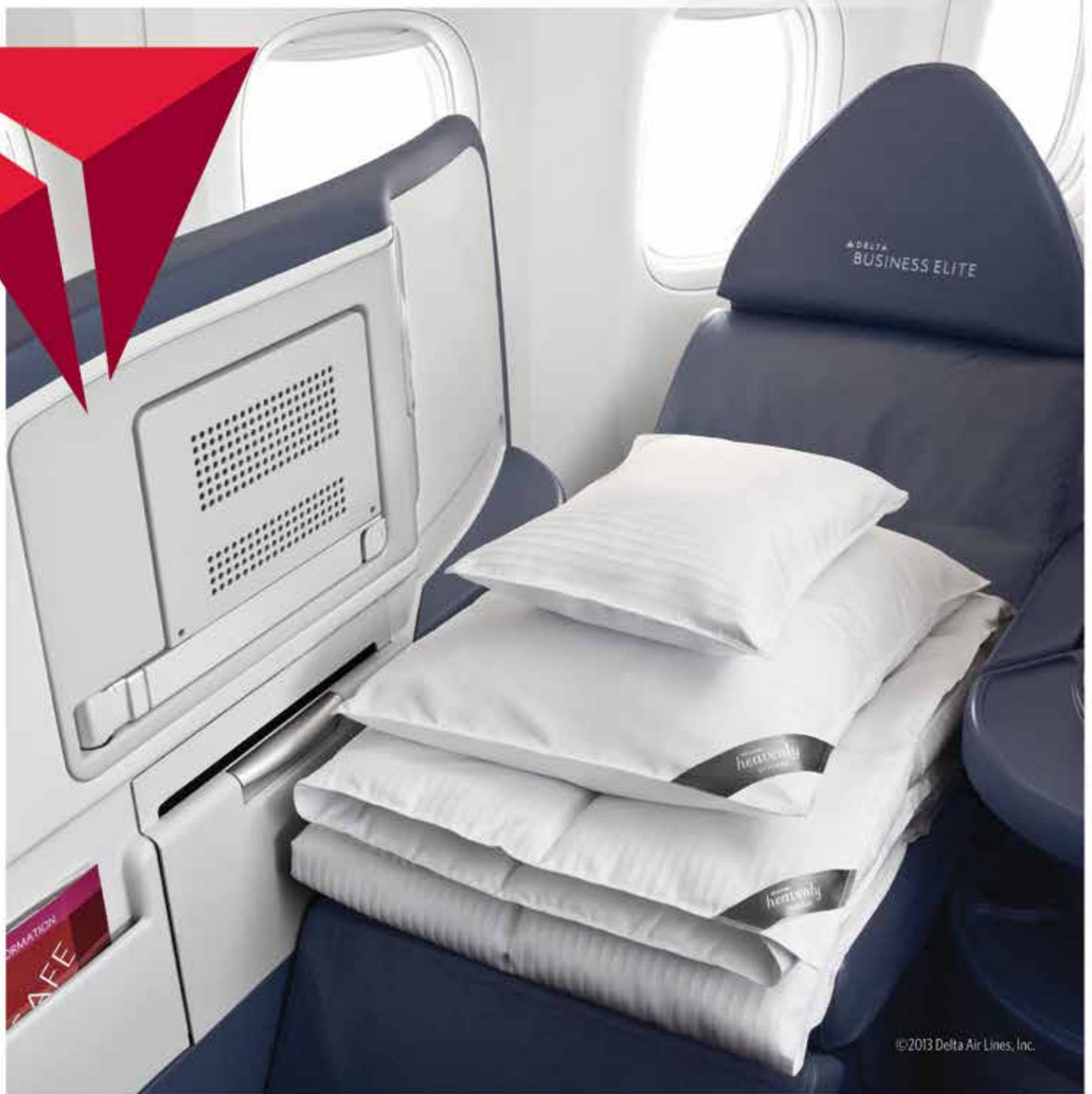
Getting crews on site is a 24/7 task for eNCA's Gill Scholtz

- *3 ways to beat the billback*
- *Prepare for rising car-rental costs*
- *How to avoid audio mistakes at your next event*
- *Africa: a continent of untapped MICE opportunities*

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COMMENT:

The business of association

THE recent announcement of a partnership pact between the Association of Southern African Travel Agents (Asata) and the African Business Travel Association (Abta) is interesting.

The understanding sees Asata educating Abta members on the importance of engaging with Asata members while also providing greater access for buyers to Asata's member TMCs. In turn, Abta will be providing insights to Asata members about the challenges buyers currently experience, particularly regarding travel in Africa, says Abta founder **Monique Swart**.

I have not heard much about similar partnerships promoted in other markets and part of the reason could be that as critics of the development will contend, the question of independence could come into play. Another suggestion is that the term 'association' is too loosely applied, according to an industry player in the UK. "Like all these things, partnerships are successful if working toward a common, mutually beneficial goal and both parties work hard to achieve them. In the not-for-profit association sector, the added complexity of volunteer boards and participants makes the goals much easier to set than achieve."

A South African travel buyer who travels extensively in Africa, contends that Abta and Asata should have a partnership, or at

least an association, as they have some of the same 'customers' when looking at South African TMCs. "But they should not have an association when Abta talks to the buyers, suppliers and others who are not part of Asata's membership. I think if the association is around common subjects, lobbying for the common good, training etc., then it is a good thing, as too much effort is often wasted by different groups trying to reach the same objective by working differently."

Swart emphasises that a TMC's Asata membership (or lack thereof) will not affect their Abta membership and that her reasons for the agreement are to elevate the TMC sector and help other African travel agents associations who are struggling to be effective. "A well-developed, educated and well-represented TMC sector is a vital element of a healthy business travel industry."

With 'Africa' such a major focus in our sector, I wonder if we'll ever be ready for a Johannesburg, Cape Town or Durban Business Travel Association, as is the case in the US for example, where local chapters or affiliates such as the Chicago Business Travel Association, which formed in 1970 already, drill down even further into local challenges.

All the best!

KIM COCHRANE
(kimcochrane@telkomsa.net)

COVER

Travel procurement is a 24/7 task at news channel eNCA. *Travel Buyer* investigates what being at the heart of news entails for travel procurer **Gill Scholtz**. Cover photograph by **Shannon Van Zyl**.

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New SA carrier – is there room?

COMPETITION in SA's domestic and regional airlines is heating up.

EX-SAA ceo, **Siza Mzimela**, plans to launch a new airline, Fly Blue Crane, that will operate domestic and regional routes. Fly Blue Crane is a subsidiary of Mzimela's consultancy business, Blue Crane Aviation, which she runs with **Theunis Potgieter** and **Jerome Simelane**, also both ex-SAA.

The airline is remaining tight-lipped, not offering many details about its plans. **Rich Mkhondo**, executive: chief marketing and communications of Fly Blue Crane, would only confirm that the airline had applied for an Air Services Licence "for potential future prospects of launching a regional airline".

According to Fly Blue Crane's application with the DoT, Mzimela, who owns 70% of the airline, will be the ceo. Potgieter, with 20% of the shares, will be coo; while Simelane, with the remaining 10%, will take the position of chief commercial operator.

The application also states that Fly Blue Crane will use Bombardier Canadian Regional Jet (CRJ) 900 Series aircraft, not



HEADING up Blue Crane Aviation are **Siza Mzimela** (right) and **Theunis Potgieter**.

currently operated by any other airline in South Africa, and that the plan is to launch services by January 2015. One of the regional

routes in which it has expressed interest is Cape Town-Windhoek.

The carrier has also applied for a domestic licence.

SA MICE industry faces stiff competition from Africa

THE South African conference industry needs to stay abreast of burgeoning competition from the rest of Africa, which is increasingly becoming a focal point for international PCOs.

This was the message from **Zelda Coetzee**, national chairperson of the Southern African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI), at a panel discussion at the Incentives, Business Travel & Meetings (IBTM) Africa expo held in Cape Town as part of Africa Travel Week. She called on the local industry to reinvent itself and "think out of the box" to keep up with competition

from the rest of the continent, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa.

According to information presented to the panel discussion by various delegates at the event, growth in Africa is showcased by Lagos, which plans a new convention centre and expects an increase of 23 000 hotel rooms by 2017, while Addis Ababa last year recorded a 24% growth in tourism and this year expects a 30%-plus increase.

Gerard Hounkponou, officer in charge of the 1000-delegate United Nations Conference Centre in Addis Ababa, said Ethiopia's economy was growing

at 11%. He said Addis Ababa would have eight five-star hotels by the end of May 2015. It already has 24 four-star hotels with 10 000 rooms. Meanwhile, East Africa is boosting its convention facilities. The Arusha International Conference Centre in Tanzania has expanded to accommodate more than 1 300 delegates. Upgrades are planned for the Kenyatta International Conference Centre in Nairobi. Coetzee said SAACI planned to establish branches in Lusaka and Windhoek soon, which would assist the professionalising of the industry there.

■ See more on this topic on page 14.

Airfares in Africa 50% HIGHER

AIRFARES in Africa are 50% higher than anywhere else in the world, and this needs to change. This is according to SA tourism minister, **Marthinus van Schalkwyk**, who spoke at the dialogue of African ministers at the Tourism Indaba, which took place from May 10-12 in Durban.

According to the minister, African countries need to increase transparency when it comes to airfares, taxes and fuel surcharges. As African countries democratise, it is much more difficult for governments to continue with untransparent systems."

Bidvest launches travel insurance

THERE'S a new player in the travel insurance sector that promises to make the process of selling travel insurance easier for travel agents, while offering competitive prices and products.

Bidvest Insurance has launched a range of travel insurance products, which it believes complements its growing range of life, motor and household insurance offerings.

Eugene Roden, md of Bidvest Financial Services, says: "Competitively priced travel insurance products found a natural fit with the foreign exchange and related products offered by its sister company, Bidvest Bank, while the travel firms within the Bidvest Group's Travel and Aviation division created a further distribution channel. The Bidvest Travel Insurance range will also be available through the wider travel industry."

Turnaround expected for SAA's Beijing route

SAA is confident that the recently announced improvements on its Beijing route will be able to turn the profitability of the route around. Currently, Beijing is SAA's worst-performing route, with losses of up to R309m a year.

Flights now depart four hours earlier from Johannesburg and arrive earlier in Beijing.

Kendy Phohleli, SAA gm of commercial (acting), says improved arrival and departure times and better codeshare

relations with Air China will make it easier for customers to catch connecting flights to other destinations within China. The partnership also offers frequent flyer programme benefits.

The route is currently unprofitable because the original timeslots didn't allow travellers to connect to other areas in China, says **Rod Rutter**, coo of XL Travel. This led business travellers to opt for alternative flights into China through Hong Kong. The new schedule, he says, will

make a huge difference to the popularity of the route.

Allan Lunz, md of Bidtravel, is less optimistic. He says although the improvements are good news, Beijing is simply the wrong gateway. "The route to Beijing is based on political considerations, not commercial. It is not the correct destination." Lunz adds that Shanghai would be a better gateway, as there are tremendous business opportunities in Shanghai for South African corporates.

Asata & Abta sign MoU

THE Association of Southern African Travel Agents (Asata) and the African Business Travel Association (Abta) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which will see the two organisations working more closely together.

The MOU allows Asata to educate Abta members on the importance of engaging with Asata members when they procure travel. Similarly, Abta will also educate Asata members on the challenges travel buyers currently face.

Abta founder **Monique Swart** explains that although the two organisations will not be sharing databases, the fact that Asata is represented at Abta events and vice versa will hopefully improve and encourage the engagement between respective members.

Says **Otto de Vries**, Asata ceo: "Essentially this MOU gives Asata an opportunity to communicate to travel buyers that they should be partnering with our members for their corporate travel procurement requirements."

Four Seasons Westcliff opens for reservations

THE Four Seasons Westcliff, Johannesburg, will open its doors on December 1, with reservations already open. This follows refurbishments to the hotel, formerly known as The Westcliff, after it was acquired by Four Seasons last year.

Refurbishments include five new restaurants, which include the Flame, offering grilled cuisine; the Cellar Door, offering a variety of South African wines with food; and the Westcliff Deli, offering light meals and snacks.

Other facilities include two swimming pools, an in-room media centre, a private bar, a fitness centre and a 24-hour business centre. Its spa facility



PIC: FOUR SEASONS WESTCLIFF

features saunas and steam rooms, as well as an outdoor lounge. The property also has a divisible 1 457 sqm event space

that can accommodate up to 200 guests.

The 117-room hotel is the brand's first hotel in South Africa.

WTM Africa to return to Cape Town

ORGANISERS of WTM Africa are calling the event, which was part of Africa Travel Week, a success and have confirmed that a three-year contract has been concluded with Cape Town.

WTM Africa saw more than 350 travel companies exhibiting, catering for both inbound and outbound markets.

"Being able to network with suppliers from other countries was fantastic," says Sure Maritime Travel's **Rachael Penaluna**.

"Pre-booking appointments with representatives from countries

we wanted to know more about was key. We went directly to the suppliers, countries and operators that we knew would be useful to our consultants, which included representatives from Nigeria, Madagascar, Turkey, Dubai, Thailand, Ghana and Kenya."

The overall sentiment at the event was that travel in Sub-Saharan Africa would continue to grow and that the industry should expect a good year. Focus was placed on the importance of online tools for travel companies, particularly in the mobile and social media spaces.

Carol Weaving, md of Thebe Reed Exhibitions Groups, the organisers of Africa Travel Week, said more than 10 500 appointments took place during the International Luxury Travel Market, Incentives, Business Travel & Meetings and WTM Africa combined.

She said Thebe Reed planned to grow the number of exhibitors and buyers for next year's show, which will take place between April 13 and 17. She added that the group would stick to its formula of back-to-back, one-on-one meetings for ILTM and IBTM.

News flash...

Tourvest acquires Three Cities

■ **TOURVEST Holdings** has bought Three Cities Management in a move that will see its African Hotels and Adventures (AHA) business, a division of Tourvest, become one of the largest tourism hotel and lodge management companies in South Africa.

In terms of the deal, which is subject to various conditions including Competition Commission approval, Tourvest will acquire the existing sales, marketing and management contracts for 23 hotels and lodges across the country. ■

Besting the billback

Debbie Badham speaks to leading professionals who attended a recent GBTA SA event about payment solutions to find out more about how billbacks can be more effectively managed.



Travel and procurement specialist for SAMSA, **Nomfundo Mji**



EMEA F&S procurement lead for Accenture, **Linda Basson**



Chief financial officer at Tourvest Travel Services, **Lidia Folli**

BILLBACKS remain a headache for travel buyers across the country. Not only is the processing of billbacks a highly labour-intensive process, therefore making them expensive to process, but there are additional complications around billbacks not being received in the same month in which the service they are billing for was rendered.

Sometimes invoices are sent as much as five to six months late. This can then have a negative impact on an organisation's travel reporting, as it distorts when the travel spend actually took place. What's more, it can by this late stage be difficult to verify whether the traveller ever made use of the services for which the supplier is billing. In some instances, the traveller may no longer work for the same organisation and in other instances they might not even be in the country.

Another significant challenge when it comes to billbacks is that the initial quote received by the company is hardly ever the same as the final invoice issued by the supplier. This then has a negative impact on the organisation's general procurement and payment processes.

Why in this era of advanced technology are billbacks still such a challenge?

Billbacks are admin intensive. As travel and procurement specialist for SAMSA, **Nomfundo Mji**, points out, the sheer volume of properties that any given organisation will deal with as part of its travel programme creates a massive administration burden. "This makes it impossible to streamline the process and there simply is no one solution at this point," she comments.

EMEA F&S procurement lead for Accenture in SA, **Linda Basson**, agrees the manual processing of



so many invoices is a significant challenge for most corporates. "The nature of travel spend in South Africa is changing. It's no longer restricted to a small travel base of travellers; we have far greater numbers of individuals travelling." She believes that the industry at large has simply not harnessed technology effectively enough to present a viable solution to the situation.

Chief financial officer at Tourvest Travel Services, **Lidia Folli**, notes that the industry needs to develop technology that caters specifically to the South African market of third-world travellers. "A significant percentage of our traveller base does not have credit cards, or they have limits on their cards that won't support a month's business outside the country. We simply haven't put enough effort into finding the technology to solve this problem."

Current attempts to find solutions to problems presented by billbacks are fragmented. Mji notes that

corporates and TMCs are all going it on their own in an attempt to resolve the issue. "We need a collective solution to this problem, not an individual solution from a particular corporate or TMC. Hotels should also assist in seeking out a viable solution."

Invoices can be presented as much as three years after the fact. How does this impact the bottom line?

Because South Africa's prescription legislation is old, suppliers have up to three years to present invoices to corporates. While it is highly unlikely that suppliers would wait this long to send through an invoice because they need to get paid, invoices are sometimes sent through as much as five to six months late. "I had one case in which an invoice was sent through 12 months later. The

cost then had to be taken off the wrong financial year as it was billed late," says Mji.

To this Basson adds that depending on how a corporate's financial year is structured, late invoices in less extreme time periods may also encroach on the next year's budget.

Corporates utilise too many suppliers to have contracts with each and every one which stipulate that invoices must be sent within a specific period of time. "When you are utilising three or four hundred different guest houses, you can't write up a contract with every single one of them saying that you won't accept an invoice that is more than six months old," explains Basson. Even if this were possible, companies can't contract outside of legislation.

How can the challenge of late invoices be streamlined?

Folli notes that in general there's been an improvement taking place as far as the issuing of late invoices is concerned. "It's in the supplier's interest for invoices to get paid as quickly as possible," she comments. "On average invoices should come through within 60 days at the latest." This she explains should be made possible by TMCs actively chasing up invoices that have not yet been presented.

What's more, she maintains that TMCs should be providing clients with lists of vouchers detailing transactions that have not yet been settled. "If this is not happening, clients should request an accrual's listing from their TMC so that they are able to provide for expenses whether they have been invoiced for or not," Folli advises.

Do meeting and conference billbacks present similar challenges?

Billbacks tend to be far simpler to process when it comes to meetings and conferences. Basson explains that the company should typically end up with one bill per supplier. "We would have one overall agreement with the venue and then a couple of different invoices from different service providers."

With just one person within the organisation responsible for collecting and processing invoices, the entire process is far more efficient. What's more, a significant percentage of the venue hire cost is settled prior to the event. "Conferencing is also generally contracted directly between the

client and supplier so billback challenges should be minimal," adds Folli.

Says Mji: "We tend to book our larger conferences directly with the hotels and in my experience we get our final tax invoices in less than five days in these instances. I believe this is also because the communication is centralised on our side."

How can billbacks be managed more effectively?

Since company credit cards are not a viable option for a significant percentage of South African travellers, it would seem that there is no real way to do away with billbacks altogether. Basson points out that the issuance of vouchers is cumbersome, as someone within the company would have to issue a voucher each and every time it became necessary.

There are, however, ways in which the billback process can be more effectively managed. "Organisations can establish cultures of high control," says Basson. "They can reduce their number of billbacks by using only a list of preferred suppliers and only allowing travellers to stay in specific establishments when they travel."

Folli adds that corporates should be moving away from having full billbacks, thereby restricting what travellers can purchase. She notes that part of what makes the billback process so cumbersome is the need to have invoices broken down to a very detailed level. "Instead of checking every single invoice in this way, companies could implement spot checks, saving time and money. By storing suppliers' details on an electronic repository it would also be quicker and easier to facilitate these spot checks."

Folli points out that there is a perception amongst many TMC clients that legislation demands they collect an invoice from both the supplier and the TMC. She explains that corporates only actually require an invoice from the service provider that they are settling with – a fact that would make the handling of billbacks less challenging for travel buyers.

The implementation of digital invoices also goes a long way to speeding up the billback process. "Suppliers who allow us to access invoices online allow the billback system to work more efficiently," maintains Mji. "TMCs are then able to access the invoices more quickly so that we are invoiced on time. This will save time and allow the chance of billing in the correct time period." ■

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Travel procurement is a 24/7 task at news channel eNCA. Travel arrangements are required as often as news breaks, and that may be multiple times a day, without advance warning. **Michelle Colman** investigates what being at the heart of news entails for eNCA's travel procurers.

WHETHER it is 15 000 crocodiles escaping from a Limpopo farm, or the State President addressing a pre-election rally, broadcaster eNews Channel Africa (eNCA) needs to get its news crews on site, often at a moment's notice. Advance planning is a luxury that rarely factors into the process.

Gill Scholtz, the channel's Johannesburg office manager, oversees the process for the Dunkeld-based head office, as well as its bureaus in Durban, Bloemfontein and Port Elizabeth. It's a heavy load, shared by administrative assistant, **Renchia Maasdorp**, who works on the

company's travel procurement full time.

At the time of our interview, South Africa was gripped by the **Oscar Pistorius** trial. For Scholtz and Maasdorp, that meant accommodating an average of nine staffers a week in Pretoria, close enough to the capital's High Court to facilitate a daily 04h00 start. At the same time they were preparing for 14 teams to cover the May national election, some travelling to locations as remote as Ulundi and the much-publicised Nkandla.

Rural destinations feature high on Scholtz's list of challenges, and thereby B&B and guesthouse facilities. Many

of these far-flung areas present numerous difficulties. The nearest accommodation facilities are often some distance from the news site, and few offer shuttle services. If there is a major event occurring, they are heavily booked and tend to inflate their rates excessively.

Scholtz illustrates with the example of Madiba's passing. "In anticipation of the event, we began sending news teams down to the Eastern Cape about a year ahead. We came to an agreement with a B&B in Qunu, which gave us their normal nightly rate of R1 000 because of our good relationship with them; we were booking eight

rooms, on a monthly basis. Other establishments in the same area were hiking their costs to as high as R3 000 per night per person, when their normal rate was about R530. For the actual burial we had to supplement accommodation by renting additional houses and even a campervan."

A barter deal with Tsogo Sun takes care of most of eNCA's accommodation requirements in larger cities, and Wings Travel Management has handled the eNCA account for the past four years, in accordance with a contract that is reviewed annually. But when it comes to accommodation in smaller locations, Scholtz is a strong

advocate of doing her own research into properties and negotiating rates. "Save, save, save is our policy," she states, "and to do so we believe we need to do our own investigation and secure our own bookings. We then pass the details on to Wings Travel Management to manage payments."

As a result, Scholtz has built up an extensive inventory of suitable properties countrywide, as well as good relationships with owners and managers. The broadcaster favours three-star facilities for news staff, but will upgrade to four-star when this category is unavailable.

“In anticipation of Madiba’s passing, we began sending news teams down to the Eastern Cape about a year ahead.”

In the sphere of air travel, eNCA’s policy is that news crews fly on low-cost carriers where possible, while management is booked on mainline airlines. There is flexibility, however, when frequencies are few and haste is at stake.

An aspect that strains budgets, however, is the large bills the channel has to contend with for excess luggage,

incurred by cameras and heavy equipment essential for news coverage. On local trips the cost of excess baggage averages at R1 500 per trip, while on a regional or international assignment it hits the R10 000 mark. "We tend to use airlines that offer extended excess baggage allowances."

Frustrations in Africa

eNCA teams do a fair amount of travelling in Africa, which often comes with considerable frustrations. Scholtz says there’s a lack of mid-range accommodation in much of the continent, leaving very poor or very costly options. Further, communication is problematic, as are payments. An eNCA crew was once 'held hostage' by an Ethiopian hotel that would not let the South African guests check-out until payment was received. Although it had been remitted by the travel agent, it took longer than anticipated to filter through to the property. Extra expenses incurred through

flight changes and an extended stay of three days was generously borne by the travel agency.

Some African hotels want cash payments only, says Scholtz, while others demand credit cards, even when payment has been made. "We don't issue company credit cards to our news teams, and discourage them from spending their own funds as they have to wait for refunds," points out Maasdorp.

On occasion, news crews undertake road journeys. Often, an element of road travel is the massive Satellite Navigation Vehicle, used for outside broadcasts. Parking availability and parking costs come into play here, often at odds with hotels that have high parking rates and first-come-first-serve policies.

With so many trips taking place at short notice, both women are on call at all hours, on weekends and public holidays. "I've made bookings at 23h00 at night in the past," laughs Scholtz. Much use is made of the SOS after-hours service built in to eNCA's agreement with Wings Travel Management. The pressure is less intense when it comes to business trips for management and staff members who take up the opportunity of fellowships abroad. These can be planned at a more leisurely pace.

Hailing from the Eastern Cape with a background in insurance broking and bookmaking, Scholtz was well entrenched at e.SAT TV (Pty) Ltd before it launched eNews Channel in 2008. The Johannesburg office now accommodates a staff of 300. Along with her post as office manager, she acts as personal assistant to the channel's head of news, **Patrick Conroy**.

Describing herself as a the mothering type, Scholtz's prime motivation is ensuring eNCA travellers are comfortable; she is not averse to pulling them out of an establishment if they encounter problems with hygiene or safety, or striking the venue off her list of future selections.



Administrative assistant **Renchia Maasdorp** assists **Gill Scholtz** with travel.



eNCA news teams at work.

Gill Scholtz's tips for travel buyers

- Get involved in negotiations with accommodation suppliers, especially when working with the B&B and guesthouse sectors.
- Foster good relationships with your suppliers.
- Keep a detailed inventory of accommodation establishments that work for your travellers, incorporating notes on locations and facilities.
- When travellers return, get them to rate properties and record their feedback.
- Where possible, undertake site inspections. ■

CASE STUDY: The 'Vietnam' of all events

Ricky Da Costa, manager: marketing for the Tshwane Events Centre, recalls one of the most challenging conferences the company has ever pulled off. He discusses what he calls the "Vietnam" of all events, detailing some of the challenges and solutions involved.



PICS: TSHWANE EVENTS

The brief

TSHWANE Events Centre was approached by the City of Tshwane to plan and execute its annual Tshwane International Trade Investment Conference – an initiative to promote the city and market it as a business destination of choice.

What made this conference so challenging? **Ricky Da Costa** of the Tshwane Events Centre says not only did Tshwane Events Centre have to manage and raise sponsorship for a conference that required breakaways, gala dinners, tours around the city, networking events, an exhibition and a golf day, but it also had to do it in just six weeks.

When he took a closer look at exactly what was required for the conference, programme content needed to be developed from scratch and international speakers, moderators and panellists had to be sourced. Invitations were sent to around 5 000 delegates, with a target of 1 000 attendees, which needed to be pursued.

Exhibitors had to be secured for the exhibition element and tour guides sourced for

various tours – not forgetting the programmes, catering and entertainment for each networking function, as well as the catering and décor required for the gala dinner.

The planning process

The company's management team was called into action to subdivide the conference's various elements and create individual project teams. Well-established service providers were then brought in to carry out a wide range of functions. Detailed planning and logistics played a vital role in the ultimate success of the event.

Challenges and successes

Da Costa reveals that one of the conference's greatest challenges was the fact that the client insisted on bringing in specific BEE service providers to help bring the conference together. This created difficulties because some of these service providers simply weren't experienced enough to handle an event of

that magnitude. While Tshwane Events Centre managed to successfully guide them through the processes and elements involved, this consumed significant resources and increased challenges brought about by time pressure.

Naturally, the sheer number of facets involved in the conference was a massive challenge in itself. The coordination of breakaways and network functions, many of which didn't take place at the venue, created a logistical nightmare. Da Costa explains that there were many details that needed to be factored in, and consequently there was a great deal of room for things to go wrong, for example bus drivers taking delegates to tour destinations getting lost.

The key to pulling off the conference lay in the company's strict adherence to timelines. While this may seem like a simple concept, Da Costa points out that there is often pressure from clients to work according to impossible timelines. He advises conference planners to know their own boundaries and not to be swayed by the temptation to meet ridiculous time requirements.

In fact, it has become the trend for clients to request that conferences be pulled off in shorter and shorter timeframes

and the problem with this is that even though it is still possible to pull these conferences off in the given time period, it becomes very costly. Da Costa reveals that the cost can be three or four times greater in cases such as these and meeting planners need to be sure they have the budget to cater for this or they will land in hot water.

"I call my team miracle workers, but miracles cost you," Da Costa comments.

Tshwane Events Centre believes that it managed to perform a miracle for the City of Tshwane, a feat Da Costa attributes to the company's well-versed project management skills, which leave little margin for error.

The results

Despite the incredibly tight time frame, the conference attracted the number of delegates required and, according to Da Costa, showcased the city in a positive light. He notes that a number of business deals were able to be concluded off the back of the event. "Thankfully the delegates were unable to see the madness taking place behind the scenes and saw only a well-put-together and seamless event," Da Costa concludes.



► *Meet continues on p10*

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How to **AVOID** audio mistakes



Jakobus de Wit

Jakobus de Wit, operations manager: Audio for Gearhouse SA, offers his top tips for outsourcing conference and event sound.

BEFORE planning conference or event sound, it is important the organiser determines the type of event to be hosted. The type of event and size will dictate the questions they need to ask, but the following list of guideline questions will help planners meet their requirements:

- What gear is available at the venue?
- Who is the preferred supplier of technical gear for the venue?
- What type of access to the venue is available (e.g. goods lifts, staircases)?
- What storage space is available for unused equipment and empty cases?
- What power is available?

- Are there rigging points and access machines available?
- What are the health and safety requirements?

Common mistakes

When outsourcing sound services, one of the most common mistakes planners make is not visualising the equipment in the room. This often leads to realising much later that the sound equipment is located in the wrong areas. Often conference and event organisers underestimate the importance of sound and don't set aside enough budget. There are also hidden costs they may not have considered and so end up not having enough budget

for consumables such as tape and batteries.

Before the event

How much notice your sound supplier will need depends on their capabilities. Some items can be really easy to source but others can be much more challenging. The best advice is to contact your supplier as soon as you have an idea of your requirements. Most suppliers will offer advice, so it's a good idea to make them part of your planning, site visits and meetings.

Another consideration, depending on the size of the event, is that pre-show build-up may be required and can last a few days. It's always a good idea

to book the venue for a few days ahead of the event if possible but this may not always be feasible, depending on finances. Once again, the sound supplier will be able to provide advice on a case-by-case basis in this regard.

During the event

Some events can become very stressful with last-minute changes and unexpected equipment failures. For this reason, it is always recommended to have a technician on site for the opening of the event. Some events need crew to be on site all the time to operate the sound gear.

Themed dinners *in the Sky*



PIC: TSOGO SUN

The newly refurbished Sky venue in the Maharani Towers is now offering Vegas and Carnival-themed suppers.

THE Southern Sun Elangeni & Maharani complex in Durban has opened a new venue on the 31st floor, called Sky. The venue used to be in operation in the 1980s, explains **John Aritho**, gm of the Maharani Tower. "It was called Raffles and used to be the hottest nightclub in town but when we started to conceptualise the venue we knew we wanted to offer something different and versatile," he says. "Based on that we decided to start themed supper nights."

The themes currently on

offer include 'Vegas' and 'Brazil Carnival'. The events take place during the last weekend of the month but the venue can be hired on an exclusive-use basis during the rest of the month.

A big focus is placed on the cuisine and the Southern Sun Elangeni & Maharani complex executive chef, **Shaun Munro**, incorporates the themes into the menu. "We have a dedicated and creative team of chefs who have travelled the world and been exposed to various styles of food," says Aritho.

What are the benefits?

The benefits of taking a table at one of the themed evenings is that the food and entertainment are taken care of by the team at the Maharani Towers. This can provide a 'no-stress' solution for entertaining clients or staff. Aritho says so far the themed supper clubs have been almost sold out every time.

How can you incorporate it into your event?

Aritho says many conference clients choose to include a themed dinner in place of a traditional gala dinner after meetings held on site earlier in the day.

Clients also have the option of booking the venue on an exclusive-use basis. "There is a huge stage that allows clients to include a performance to supplement the theme, as well as full sound and projection which is included in the rate."

UPGRADE commences for Protea Hotel Fire & Ice



PIC: PROTEA HOTELS

PROTEA Hotel Fire & Ice in Cape Town has scheduled a three-month refurbishment commencing on June 1, which will be completed in September. The redesign includes the refurbishment of all public areas on the ground floor, including the reception, bar, restaurant, the decks and the lift lobby. The unisex public restrooms will also undergo renovation. The hotel will remain open for business during this time and construction noise will be limited to weekday working hours.

▶ Meet continues on p12

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Bring **OUT** the best by bringing **IN** the best

If you are planning a multi-faceted conference, the chances are that you'll be working with a number of different service providers who will all need to be managed effectively to ensure the event is a success. **Debbie Badham** speaks to leading PCOs for tips on how typical coordination and communication mishaps can be avoided.

THE biggest challenge when working with many different external service providers is the issue of access and loading.



Zolewa Molapisi, ceo and creative executive producer of By Design Africa, explains

that when you are dealing with numerous large trucks entering the venue to off-load their equipment and supplies, the loading process must be managed very carefully.

How big is your loading dock and how many contractors can it accommodate at any given time? What needs to be set up first and what can wait? These are all challenges Molapisi believes can easily be avoided through stringent time management and a well-coordinated plan.



Keith Burton, md of African Agenda, confirms that access is one of the trickier challenges

meeting planners face when working with external service providers. "It's important to remember when booking the venue that service providers will need time to off-load and set-up," he comments. "What's more, should your service provider

require access to the venue at 04h00, then yours is the number that will be on speed dial when they are battling to gain access so early in the morning – make sure you have prepared beforehand for them to access the venue."

Preferred suppliers



Also topping the list of common frustrations is the venue's list of preferred suppliers. **Gill**

Slaughter, operations director for Turner Conferences, points out that venues sometimes insist on using preferred service providers, meaning that should the PCO choose to bring in its own suppliers, then venues will no longer provide standard conference package equipment.

Slaughter believes the best way to deal with this challenge is to read the venue hire contract carefully. "Ensure that all your correspondence is conducted in writing and never take anything for granted," she cautions.

While other venues may not insist on a list of preferred suppliers they may insist that any outside service providers used are accredited. Even if the venue does not insist on seeing the suppliers' credentials, this is something that meeting planners should automatically vet for their own peace of mind.



Avoid clashes



Research, marketing and sales manager for the Conference Company, **Natalie Kensley**,

maintains that clashes between external service providers and the in-house service provider can be a challenge if suppliers are not carefully selected. "Meet with the external service providers beforehand," she urges. "Don't just select one. Interview a few and make your choice based on the service provider that you feel will be the best fit with the rest of your team."

This of course will help eliminate issues with poor service and supplies that sometimes have the tendency to rear their heads – particularly in more rural, outlying areas.

Where possible, use service providers with whom you've established a strong relationship.

Bridget von Holdt, executive director of Glasshouse Communications Management, notes that this will help to reduce communication gaps. It should,



however, not be taken for granted that external people brought in must be well briefed on exactly what

is required of them. "Try and bring your service providers into the equation as early as possible and have them meet with one another so that everybody is on the same page."

Molapisi adds that meeting planners should ensure there is always one central point of communication to which all parties involved must report back. "This will help ensure that everyone understands exactly what is required of them and secure the seamless integration of all your conference's various elements into one successful event," she concludes.



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Is this *Africa's greenest* meeting venue?

Meet enlisted the help of a meetings expert to inspect the facilities at Hotel Verde, which claims to be Africa's most eco-friendly hotel. After a detailed walkthrough and interviews with key staff, she provided us with her assessment.



Annette Ashley is the founder of African Inspirational Marketing, which has been in operation for ten years. She started the company after working at Cape Town's Victoria & Alfred Waterfront and Canal Walk Shopping Centre. During this time she also served on the Cape Town Tourism board, as well as the SAACI board and still is a member of SKAL International.



DCP rates from R360pp

PICS: SHANNON VAN ZYL



What Annette Ashley found

I WAS unable to attend a recent industry function held at the Hotel Verde so I was therefore delighted to have been invited to visit the hotel to write a review. I had heard much about the hotel and its owners **Mario** and **Annemarie Delicio**, who were inspired by a vision of creating a hotel that would deliver an experience where guests would be able to work and play in an environment that had been researched and designed to offer conferencing in a 100% carbon-neutral venue.

It was therefore with great excitement that I arrived at the hotel, despite not being able to find Michigan Street on the GPS, to receive a warm welcome from the moment I entered the gates to be greeted by security who ushered me to secure underground parking with access directly into the hotel foyer.

The décor is modern and eclectic. Guests are met at each turn by something different and special. It is like going on an adventure of discovery to find a well-oiled approach to reducing carbon footprints, which will not only benefit the environment but also aid companies in achieving CSR targets. It is amazing to see an establishment taking a dedicated holistic approach to a global crisis.

On our tour we discovered 145 rooms, four different room types, all with the desired

comforts, including contemporary décor and room service. The local art that adorns every corner of the hotel depicts the South African culture.

The restaurant serves breakfast from 04h30 each morning as well as lunch and dinner. The menus are designed around seasonality and local produce. The kitchen gets its ingredients from the on-site garden where an eco-approach sees herbs grown by aquaponics, a self-sustainable food production system. Guests are spoilt with a 24-hour deli and bar.

It was a pleasure to see how the conference facilities were planned and how flexibly they were designed, from the VIP lounge to the combined rooms that accommodate up to 120 delegates, as well as a fully equipped business centre. The seven venues are all named after well-known artists. It goes without saying that the facilities have free Wi-Fi.

What an ideal location! Only 400m from Cape Town International in a restored wetland. It is ideal for delegates travelling from various destinations to meet at a central point before travelling to their next port of call. No traffic to fight, even at peak times, and the shuttle service to the airport leaves every 30 minutes. On top of all this the hotel is sound proof so guests are protected from air-traffic noise. ■



PICS: PROTEA HOTELS

A continent of *untapped* MICE opportunities

An increasing number of companies are shifting their focus from the traditional long-haul destinations for their meetings, incentives, conferences and events towards more local and regional destinations. Unsurprisingly, the African continent has been highlighted as a promising MICE destination with substantial growth potential, writes **Dorine Reinstein**.

AFRICA has become a hot destination for incentives but training and service levels still lag behind, believes **Zelda Coetzee**, national chairperson of the Southern African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI), who was speaking during a panel discussion at the recent Incentives, Business Travel & Meetings (IBTM) Africa expo in Cape Town. She indicated that Africa was in dire need of supply chain services to professional conference organisers (PCOs) in Africa and for more professionalism.

Nicola Varkevisser, marketing manager for Tourvest Destination Management, agrees there is a lack of local PCOs on the ground in numerous African countries. "Specialist eventing suppliers (décor, AV, entertainment etc.) are limited in these regions, resulting in organisers needing to take suppliers with them to the areas."

According to Varkevisser, however, there has definitely

been an improvement in the availability of conference facilities in the region over the past few years. "Venues in any region are realising that in order to attract corporate business, conference facilities are a necessity, as corporates adopt a '2 for 1' deal in the sense of conferencing for a day or two and then by incorporating the incentive portion of the event as well. New developments are always popping up in these regions, thereby attracting a larger audience."

The current lack of conference and function facilities in popular African MICE centres such as Lagos, Addis Ababa, Dakar, Maputo and Swakopmund has resulted in the existing facilities being overpriced. This is according to Stephanie Moss, director **Stephanie Moss Solutions**, who says: "The hotels are currently able to charge what the market will bear." She adds that although technology and infrastructure are not as developed as in other countries, international hotel chains that

have invested in these countries have spent money on internal infrastructure to make 'things work'.

“Building a hotel in Africa without conference space at this stage of the continent’s development would be sheer insanity.”
- Danny Bryer

Danny Bryer, director of sales, marketing and revenue for Protea Hotels, explains that international hotel groups such as Protea Hotels and Marriott International have indeed invested heavily in their facilities on the African continent to provide standards and service levels that are comparable to anywhere else on the planet. He admits that one of the biggest infrastructural weaknesses in

Africa tends to be uninterrupted power supplies but where this is known to be a problem, the company builds generators as part of the base construction of a hotel.

Untapped potential

Wayne Troughton, ceo of hospitality and property consulting firm, HTI Consulting, explains the MICE market is still largely untapped on the continent. He says undeveloped hotel markets, where conferencing room nights represent less than 10% of the market, include Luanda and Kinshasa. Partly developed markets where room nights represent between 10% and 15% of demand include Maputo, Lusaka, Lagos, Kampala and Dar es Salaam.

Bryer agrees there are indeed a lot of opportunities to be explored. He says Africa is set to grow substantially as a MICE destination in the years to come. "We can't keep up with the demand for conference

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space in South Africa, Zambia, Namibia, Uganda and Nigeria, and building a hotel in Africa without conference space at this stage of the continent's development would be sheer insanity."

Themba Mthombeni, ceo of Duma Travel, agrees that the markets are expanding as more SA companies are moving into Africa. "Lots of new hotels are being build and infrastructures are continuously improved."

Opportunities will continue on the African continent for years to come, continues **Kathy Nel**, national manager for incentive and event management at Limex. "I definitively expect to see more MICE business in Africa. From an incentive perspective, clients

are staying regional, as it is more cost effective than longhaul destinations. From a conference perspective, there is more business being done in Africa and this has to pull through into conferences."

Air access an obstacle

To capitalise on the opportunities and to grow the meetings and conferences sector, Troughton argues that air access is crucial. He says the development in South Africa around OR Tambo International Airport illustrates this point. The conference facilities around OR Tambo act as hubs, he says. "People come in from the rest of Africa, meet here, and then disperse again." He adds that Maputo has recently



PICS: PROTEA HOTELS

International hotel groups such as Protea Hotels and Marriott International have invested heavily in their facilities on the African continent to provide world-class standards and service. Pictured: Protea Hotel Mbweni Ruins Zanzibar.

developed a new airport, which places the city in a good position to tap into the market. "They are trying to develop the sector in Mozambique and the sector has significant potential."

Bryer continues: "We definitely don't have enough air access and it needs to be a continental development focus going forward."

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Improved air access would open up a number of potential destinations to the MICE sector, agrees Varkevisser. She says Swakopmund as well as Swaziland would benefit from improved air access. "Swaziland offers great accommodation and conferencing opportunities but due to the size of the aircraft used for scheduled flights and the popularity of the destination, larger groups need to be split over various scheduled flights,

thus resulting in staggered arrival times."

The routes, says Moss, are limited and the flights are overpriced compared to what they used to be on older routes and just astronomical on some of the newer routes. She elaborates that it is sometimes even quicker and less stressful for corporates to fly via Europe than with connecting flights in and around Africa.

In response, **Richard Bodin**,

fastjet's chief commercial officer, has seen a steady increase in the amount of business traffic on fastjet flights between South Africa and Tanzania. "The easier and more cost effective it is to reach a destination, the more appealing that destination will become to MICE organisers."

The greatest challenges to providing air access to Africa's remarkable MICE destinations, according to Bodin, are burdensome bureaucracy,

overbearing regulation and monopoly operators. "Together, these factors make it too difficult and costly for passengers to get to destinations that would otherwise be perfect for MICE. The more expensive it is to get to a relatively immature MICE destination, like Tanzania, the harder it is for them to gain traction. To put it even more bluntly – if visitors can't get to Tanzanian-operated MICE destinations, those destinations will fail."

TANZANIA – a perfect MICE destination

TANZANIA is a well-hidden gem when it comes to MICE opportunities. *The New York Times* recently highlighted Dar es Salaam on its list of top-52 places to visit in 2014, citing the city's positioning as a point of access to Kilimanjaro and the Serengeti – not to forget its vibrant night life, cuisine and surrounding natural splendour.

Richard Bodin, fastjet's chief commercial officer, explains a Tanzanian MICE destination may offer a much better experience in far superior facilities than a location in Mauritius, Durban or Cape



PIC: PHOTOPRESS

Town but monopoly prices on flights make it prohibitive for South Africans.

He says: "There are many wonderful destinations, but our dream is that Tanzania grows in popularity as a MICE destination. We are committed to providing low-cost airfares

between Johannesburg and our growing network of routes, for which Dar es Salaam is the hub. Our entry level one-way fare on our route between Dar es Salaam and Johannesburg is just R1 600 all including taxes – and that's pretty special!"

News flash

■ **AUSTRALIA'S StayWell Hospitality Group** has teamed up with Mantis Collection to front the growth of its hotel brands throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. Under the joint venture agreement, StayWell will establish its Park Regis and Leisure Inn brands in some of Sub-Saharan Africa's key cities, at prime properties to be procured by Mantis. The deal follows StayWell's recent hotel entry into China and its expansion in India. Earlier this year, StayWell opened its first Indonesian property, Bali's new Park Regis Kuta, and it will soon open its first UK hotel, Park Regis Birmingham.

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How to evaluate non-scheduled and charter airlines



THE fatal crash at Lanseria International Airport earlier this year involving a Beechcraft King Air BE90 twin-engine aircraft once again highlighted the need for companies to scrutinise the safety records of non-scheduled and charter airlines.

Felicity Meyer, travel manager Massmart, explains it is important for companies to make sure they are letting their travellers fly with professional pilots and charter companies who have the necessary safety track record. She adds the fact that a charter company has all

the legalities in place is often not enough to ensure that it is also a safe company. According to Meyer, often charter companies will contract outside freelance pilots to contain costs, but these pilots might not have satisfactory experience.

The Global Business Travel Association has compiled a comprehensive questionnaire that companies should present to charter companies. The questionnaire covers the following points, amongst others:

- Pilots – how many hours of flying experience does the chosen pilot have in general as well as on the specific aircraft that has been selected?
- Insurance – what kind of insurance does the charter company have in place? Does it cover passenger liability?
- Approval/certificates – what kind of certificates does the

company have? When were they issued? When will they expire?

- Safety management system and safety performance – when was the safety management system formalised? When was the safety policy established? How often are the safety meetings?
- Training – what kind of training has the pilot followed? Induction? Recurrent training? Simulator training? Emergency training? Technical training and refresher?

Meyer explains it is of the utmost importance for companies to ask these questions and to make sure their questions are answered. If a charter company answers all the questions of the GBTA questionnaire, this is already a good indication it is a reputable airline.

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14 new hotels for Marriott in UAE and Africa



PIC: PROTEA HOTELS

MARRIOTT International has strengthened its position in the Middle East and Africa by signing 14 new properties under its brand.

It recently signed six properties in the UAE and Saudi Arabia and a further eight in Africa under the Protea Hotels brand, which has recently been taken over by Marriott.

In Africa, five will open within the first quarter of 2015 and include properties in South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana and Rwanda.

Marriott will open a new 312-room Renaissance Dubai Downtown Hotel in 2015, as well

as opening the Dubai Marriott Hotel Citywalk and Marriott Executive Apartments Dubai City Walk in 2016.

Marriott currently operates 12 properties, spanning five brands in the Middle East.

In Saudi Arabia there are plans to open three hotels within the next two years – the Courtyard Hotel by Marriott Al Khobar; Residence Inn by Marriott Al Khobar; and the Residence Inn by Marriott Jazan, which is set to open by the fourth quarter of this year.

Currently, Marriott has 161 properties across 18 countries with a total of 23 701 rooms across eight brands. ■

Prepare for rising car-rental costs

Travel buyers can expect to pay more for car-rental services in the near future, as car-rental companies report that challenges such as e-tolls, a weak rand and a still-sluggish economy are heavily impacting on costs, writes **Dorine Reinstein**.

THE downward spiral in which the rand seems to have been trapped for the past few months is having grave repercussions for both the cost of vehicle parts and the fluctuation of fuel costs, explains **Fiona Angelico**, national sales and marketing manager for Thrifty.

Avis has also recognised that cost increases driving up the price of car rental are among the main challenges facing the car-rental industry for the next 12 months.

Keith Rankin, chief executive at Avis, elaborates that the significant devaluation of the rand, the change in the interest cycle and the upward pressure on CPI are all contributing factors to the rising costs.

Melissa Storey, executive head: Strategy, Development and Marketing at First Car Rental agrees: "Interest and fuel-price hikes as well as new car prices will be a major challenge for our industry. We have already experienced an interest rate hike of half a percentage point this year, and every increase affects us significantly on a fleet of 6 000 cars."

Fuel prices

According to Storey, the ever-increasing fuel price has a dramatic impact on a logistic-sensitive industry such as car rental. "We will have no choice but to be vigilant with our variable costs and when price increases become a necessity it is important to remain competitive."

Gaynor Von Loggenburg, sales and marketing director for Budget Car Rental, adds that since 2010, industry average car-rental rates have remained low, only increasing marginally over this period by 5% (cumulatively). "This is not

sustainable nor responsible and customers can expect to see higher than inflationary increases – driven by external factors such as vehicle price increases, interest rates, fuel and shareholder expectations."

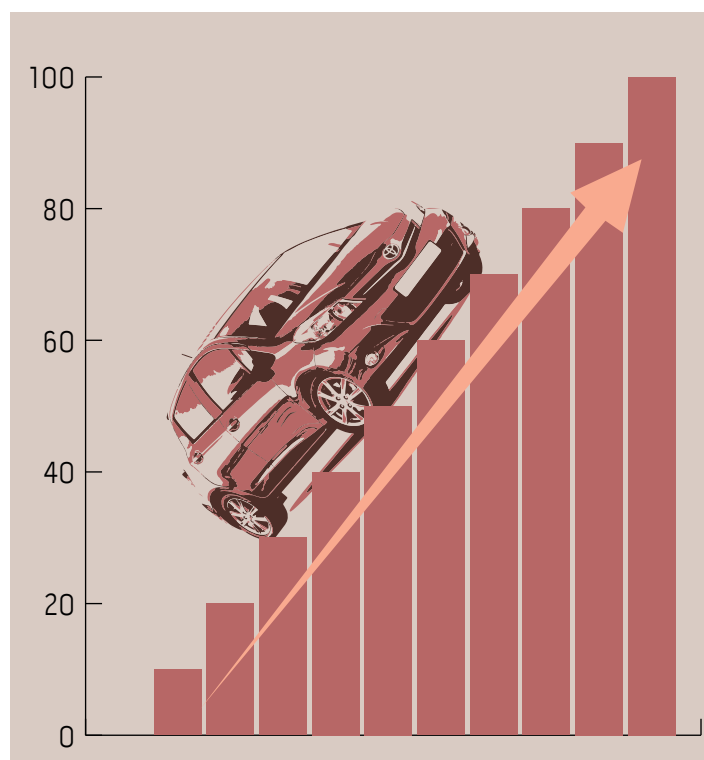
E-tolls complicate matters

Yanna Dickens, systems and technology manager for Hertz, explains the introduction of e-tolls has led to significant challenges. She says the cost of systems' development to capture the thousands of toll transactions via a daily file has put significant pressure on the industry. Dealing with tolls that are received late are another major obstacle. "We need to bankroll these until payment is received from the renter. We have seven days to pay the tolls and we may only receive payment from customers up to 90 days after the event."

Storey echoes Dickens' sentiment, saying that although the systems and hardware that First Car Rental has 'invested' in have been reliable, it doesn't change the fact that the company has had to spend millions on this. "And we continue to utilise resources for exceptions and customer queries related to e-tolls, which could have been utilised in efforts to enhance our actual core business instead."

Significant pressure to reduce budgets

The threat of rising car-rental costs comes at a time when the corporate market is already under significant pressure to reduce travel budgets. According to the recently released Avis Travel Index, car-rental bookings made by travel agents through the GDS have been on a slow



GRAPHIC: MICHAEL RORKE

decline between December 2012 and December 2013.

According to Avis, there are a number of influencing factors that could have contributed to this, such as a slowdown in the economy, corporate companies cutting back on travel or alternatively planning shorter trips, sharing vehicles whilst embarking on trips and using videoconferencing to connect faster.

Rankin explains the current trend is likely to continue throughout 2014, as there will be no change in the prevailing economic conditions.

According to Angelico, GDS bookings could also be down because of the fact that an increasing number of corporates are looking to reduce costs by booking directly with suppliers or by using the provider's booking channels.

"GDS cost per booking parameters are such that external booking mediums have been

Did you know?

■ **FIRST** Car Rental's Show&Go Mobile Checkout Facility is now considered a standard in corporate car hire amongst First Car Rental's frequent flyer customer base, says spokesperson Melissa Storey. Accessible at OR Tambo, Cape Town and King Shaka International Airports, Show&Go Mobile Checkout allows frequent travellers to bypass branches, queues and paperwork.

effective, as these can reduce the cost parameters to the end user. Websites have also become a new trend as specials are offered through this medium during low season. This provides the corporate traveller with flexibility if they have a corporate credit card."

► feature continues on p20



PIC: ERNST & YOUNG

“I’m against e-tolls; I don’t have to pay”

Reality...

By Dorine Reinstein

CAR-RENTAL companies explain that this sentiment is without a doubt a myth. No matter how vehemently opposed customers are to e-tolls, when they rent a car, they will be liable to pay for the tolls.

Says **Melissa Storey**, executive head: Strategy, Development and Marketing at First Car Rental: “We have a few anti e-tolls customers, to such an extent that they remove the tag whilst renting our vehicles. I’m sure it seems almost logical to some renters but unfortunately for them it really makes no difference to our system, as it is highlighted as an exception on our daily activity, alerting us that the tag is faulty or was removed. Since the registration number belongs to

us, and we know who is driving the car on which date and when, irrespective of whether the tag was in the vehicle at the time when they passed through the gantry, we still auto-bill the applicable contract.”

Avis has also met with e-toll rebels who remove e-tags from the windcreens in a bid to avoid paying for the tolls.

Keith Rankin, chief executive at Avis, says customers should understand that tolls are not an additional way for car-rental companies to make money. “Clients believe that Avis is profiting from e-tolls and that we support this method of infrastructure funding. To the contrary, Avis is seeking to cover its e-tolling costs and we

would have much preferred a mechanism such as the fuel levy that has none of the administrative burden that we are currently having to develop and manage.”

The fact that the bill for the e-tolls arrives late is also no excuse not to pay the tolls unfortunately.

Gaynor Von Loggenburg, sales and marketing director for Budget Car Rental, adds: “The late submission of files from SANRAL has resulted in late invoicing to the customer, which the customer does not always understand. We have made the customer aware, however, that we are totally dependent on SANRAL for all information.”

► feature continues on p22



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P2P – a flourishing service

DESPITE shrinking corporate travel budgets, which has led to a decline in traditional car-rental bookings, point-to-point (P2P) transfers have seen an unprecedented boost over the past few years.

The popularity of the service has prompted Thrifty to launch a new point-to-point service for its customers.

Says Thrifty's **Fiona Angelico**: "Car-rental companies have set the platform to offer a full menu of service to their customers. Thrifty is a young and dynamic company. For us to compete directly with the mature brands, we needed to introduce a transfer and chauffeur drive as one of our service offerings."

According to Angelico, the popularity of this service can be witnessed at the arrival terminals. "There are more and more personalised services being offered to customers

on arrivals. Transfer services are also very popular with our female customers. They enjoy using this service as the feel safe when traveling in unfamiliar areas." Angelico adds that Thrifty is currently in the process of establishing this service in the Western Cape and Gauteng.

Budget Car Rental's **Gaynor Von Loggenburg** adds: "Our Door2Door has increased in popularity month on month. Corporates state that the main reasons for use are safety and security of staff plus a timesaving factor due to traffic. The cost of airport parking has made it more cost effective to use as opposed to travellers leaving personal vehicles at the airport." According to Von Loggenburg, Budget has considerably increased its Door2Door fleet to accommodate demand.

Europcar has also seen an increase in consumer demand for tailored transport solutions that



PIC: ANIS

address conferencing and event requirements.

Europcar's SA commercial officer, **Martin Lydall**, says Europcar has an experienced specialist team. "Our solutions range from a traditional chauffeur service, to transfers to a flexi-drive service and allow for maximum flexibility."

According to Lydall, Europcar chauffeur services are a cost- and time-effective alternative to traditional self-drive, with options ranging from economic to luxury and including off-peak rates. "Savvy business travellers away from their hometowns

enjoy chauffeur services because they don't have to find their own way around challenging road diversions or worry about parking. And while travelling, they can safely attend to calls and messages or go through the next meeting's papers."

Hertz has also seen an increase in demand for this service and the company has made some substantial changes to the point-to-point fleet to include higher specs that are more comfortable and offer better value for money, says **Peter Le Grange**, national chauffeur drive and Gauteng manager for Hertz.

Our South African Service Awards achievements over 3 years:

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Most Consistent Performer over 3 Years - overall

2013 - 1st Place;

Travel and Related Service - Car Hire Division

2012 - 1st Place:

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Europcar launches SMME product

EUROPCAR recently unveiled its new Business Connect tool, which gives SMMEs more control over costs and logistics.

Business Connect is designed to make booking and paying for car rental easier and safer for both SMME owners and staff. The new tool offers clients streamlined online booking and three key fast-track advantages for the collection process. Clients don't have to queue or waste time signing paperwork. They are also able to collect the car using only a valid driver's licence.

"Another pay-off for the SMME owner is better business practice, with Business Connect becoming an all-in-one time-management and payment solution," says Europcar SA coo, **Martin Lydall**. "We believe SMMEs deserve a service traditionally reserved in SA only for corporates, larger businesses and government departments. That includes enjoying all our usual products – plus a lower, preferential business rate and electronic invoices and statements."

Did you know...

■ **THRIFTY** recently introduced the *Blue Club Service* for loyal corporate customers. The service includes separate counters for all Blue Club members at all Thrifty's international airport locations.

Customers go directly to the *Blue Club Counters*, where they show their driver's licence and sign and go. Their vehicles are allocated to special bays, closest to the branch.



The future of car rental: car-sharing

GLOBALLY car-rental companies are increasingly purchasing or developing car-sharing businesses. This could be poised to be the car-rental model for the future. One example of car sharing is the Avis Budget Group's ZIPCAR.

Keith Rankin, chief executive at Avis, explains:

"Car sharing is a model of car rental where people rent cars for short periods of time, often by the hour. They are attractive to customers who make only occasional use of a vehicle, as well as others who would like occasional access to a vehicle of a different type than they use day to day."

Car-rental companies improve technological offerings

CUSTOMERS can expect the continued e-enabling of car rental into the mobile app space, believes **Keith Rankin**, chief executive at Avis. "This will not be just for making bookings but it is evolving

to incorporate picking up and returning vehicles, the recording of an accident at the accident scene, to the logging of customer service issues."

Rankin adds customers can also expect more telematics in car-rental vehicles. ■

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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. NAIROBI

South African Airways. Business-class return fare ex-Johannesburg to Nairobi reduced to R10 600. Stay must include a Saturday night. Taxes and surcharges excluded.

2. USA

Holiday Tours. Disney's All Star Resorts. Land-only rates are from R8 799. Offer includes: return airport transfers, seven nights' accommodation, complimentary use of Disney's transport system, seven-day Magic Your Way base ticket plus Orlando Eat and Play Card. Offer is valid from June 22 to July 21.

3. CROATIA

Inspiration Travel & Tours. 'Scenic Croatia' packages are from R13 540 pp sharing. Land-only package: eight-night escorted coach tour including

accommodation with daily breakfast and dinner. Visit: Zagreb, Plitvice, Trilj, Dubrovnik, Split, Trogir and Zadar. Valid for travel on selected dates in July, August and September. Also available are four- and seven-night packages.

4. SOUTH AFRICA

Car Hire Brokers. Domestic special – rates are from R279 per day. Special includes Group T Hyundai or similar, super collision damage and theft waivers, unlimited mileage, contract fee and airport surcharges. Minimum three-day rental required. Available for rentals until August 31.

5. GREECE

United Europe. 'Best Of Greece' packages. Athens and Santorini packages are from R5 580 in October. Offer includes: two nights in Athens, four

nights in Santorini, three-star accommodation, breakfast daily, return transfers in Athens and Santorini and economy ferry between Athens and Santorini.

6. DAR ES SALAAM

Fastjet. Johannesburg and Dar es Salaam special. Fares are from R1 600 one-way inclusive of all airport charges and taxes.

7. GAUTENG or KWAZULU-NATAL

Peermont. Weekend 'Fun Stay' rates are from R535 at Metcourt Emperors Palace and from R595 at Mondazur San Lameer. Rates are pp sharing and include breakfast. Offer expires December 31.

8. SINGAPORE or ITALY

F1 Grand Prix Tours. F1 Singapore (September 21) from R16 380 and F1 Italy (September 7) from

9. MOZAMBIQUE

Mozambique GSA. Vilanculos Beach Lodge – SA residents special. Rates are from R8 900 pp sharing. Offer includes return airfares ex-Johannesburg, airport taxes, return air transfer to resort, five nights in a luxury chalet, all meals and non-motorised water sports. Special expires October 31.

R17 700 pp sharing. Package includes return flights ex-Johannesburg, airport taxes, airport transfers, three nights' accommodation with breakfast and two days' circuit transfers. Excludes race tickets.

10. LIMPOPO

Zebula Golf Estate and Spa. Midweek special at Zebula Bush Lodge – book any three nights from Sunday to Thursday and pay R4 000 per room per stay on a room-only basis. Child 12 years and under stays free when sharing a room with adults. Free use of tennis and squash courts, putt-putt and 200 free-range balls per day to use on driving range plus free Wi-Fi. Offer expires July 17. ■

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



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