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Editor's note

Who would have thought that the innocent, innocuous travel behaviour of buying bottled water could end up costing a company more than R6 million per year? Granted, this would only apply to a company with around 2 000 regularly travelling employees, but it's a staggering statistic nonetheless.

This was one of the points raised by ABTA founder, **Monique Hilton**, during an ABTA workshop focusing on traveller behaviour – and the very real costs that can end up blowing travel budgets. Hilton also polled her members for practical suggestions on how corporates can save by changing their travel behaviour. Some of the tips may be a bit too extreme for the average business traveller, including one suggestion that travellers boil water in the kettle provided in the hotel room and decant it into the plastic bottle provided to save on buying during the day.

In the same session, **Alan Reid**, procurement manager: Africa for Puma Energy, raised the important point that corporate travel takes people out of their comfort zone. He urged travel managers to look at things from a human perspective, and rather not “sweat

the small stuff”. For more on this interesting subject, be sure to read our Big Issue which explores the topic of traveller behaviour and whether you should be factoring it into your policy.

We're also venturing 'Into Africa' with a feature that takes a closer look at some of the trends that are shaping travel on the African continent, from the glut of hotels that are opening in Angola and Nigeria, and whether we can expect accommodation rates to come down as a result; to the progressive visa policies implemented in Ghana, and the impact these may have on corporate hubs in West Africa.

This month, we've profiled **Elaine Janssen**, who has the hectic but rewarding job of handling procurement for the diverse range of divisions that make up the Omnia Group. It's only in the last few years that travel has come under the spotlight, and with the introduction of online booking technology, the company has been able to realise significant savings.

Keep reading!

Sue van Winsen
(suev@nowmedia.co.za)

COVER

Elaine Janssen tells *Travel Buyer* how constant communication has resulted in widespread adoption of online technology in a company that was previously used to the traditional way of handling bookings. Cover photograph by **Shannon Van Zyl**.

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Govt to publish travel tender

NATIONAL Treasury will publish a tender (at the end of May), with the aim of selecting a panel of 10 TMCs that will be approved to deal with government travel.

In the bids they submit, TMCs will need to specify a set management fee for the work they will be conducting for government, instead of a 'per transaction service fee', a government official said, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Once Treasury has approved the panel of 10 TMCs, the various government departments will be able to hold 'closed tenders' to select their preferred TMC partner from the panel. The tender process will take some time and the panel of TMCs is only expected to be appointed by October this year, the official said.

Meanwhile, TMCs who currently provide travel services for government continue to liaise with Treasury in the hope of finding a resolution to the current service fee issue. The new 'standard remuneration model' has cut all rebates, overrides and volume-based incentives from suppliers to TMCs, without making a provision for increased service fees. For the past few weeks,

all rates offered to government have been nett and non-commissionable.

BA Comair has placed a code on all tickets issued for government passengers, which means the agent cannot claim an incentive for the sale. **Brian Kitchin**, Comair executive manager of sales, said government has negotiated a new deal with Comair that is non-commissionable. These private fares are accessed by inserting a specific deal number into the booking, which is linked to the negotiated nett rate.

"Both BA and SAA have received strict instruction from National Treasury that all government business is non-commissionable. I imagine any airline that wants government business will have to abide by the instructions of the Treasury."

SAA, however, has not been as quick to implement austerity measures. Spokesperson for SAA, **Tlali**

Tlali, said that at present, SAA had not changed the incentive agreements that the airline had in place for travel agents booking for government officials. "SAA will honour and maintain existing incentive agreements until these agreements reach their termination dates."

TMCs have highlighted the

“Each day that's passing without a resolution to this problem is hurting our business.”



Otto de Vries, ceo, Asata

issue with Treasury, submitting revised service fee proposals for services rendered until the end of October that will ensure the financial viability of continued operations. However, agents say that although Treasury promised to consider the proposals and respond in May, they have yet to hear back from government.

"We can't go on much longer like this. Each day that's passing without a resolution to this problem is hurting our business. If we don't get an answer this week (May 18), we'll have to escalate the matter," one travel agent told *Travel Buyer*.

Meanwhile, Asata continues to engage with the TMCs involved. The association has also engaged the Department of Tourism to assist on this matter. "Meetings continue to take place behind the scenes," says Asata ceo, **Otto de Vries**.

UK visa applications just got easier

THE UK has launched a new online application service in South Africa, "designed to provide a simple and intuitive customer experience".

The infamous time-consuming procedure is expected to be simplified through the launch of the 'Access UK' online service. This is an alternative to the current Visa4UK service.

Travellers applying for a standard visitor visa, a visitor (marriage and civil partnership) visa or a visitor (permitted paid engagement) visa are able to make use of the service, UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) said in a statement.

Benefits of the service include a shorter form with questions ordered based on customer feedback. "It is dynamic and asks relevant questions based on a customer's previous answers. What's more, the service is available on mobile devices, enabling application forms to be completed on smartphones or tablets." The service is accessed via the gov.uk website. Prospective clients should make sure they click on 'apply using the new service'.

Another airline launches flights to CPT

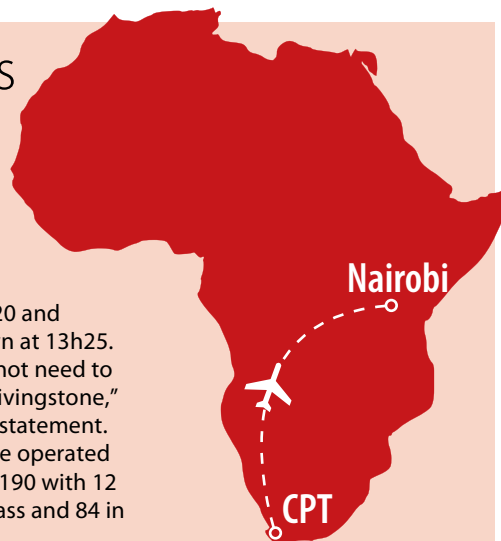
KENYA Airways will launch three flights a week from Cape Town to Nairobi, effective July.

Flights will operate on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays and will fly via Livingstone. Flight KQ 783 will depart Cape Town at 14h15 to arrive in Livingstone at 17h10. It departs for Nairobi at 18h00, arriving at 22h00. Return flight KQ 782 will

depart Nairobi at 07h20 to arrive in Livingstone at 09h30. It departs Livingstone at 10h20 and arrives in Cape Town at 13h25.

"Passengers will not need to change aircraft in Livingstone," the airline said in a statement.

The service will be operated using an Embraer E190 with 12 seats in business class and 84 in economy class.



Umhlanga hotel expands

PROTEA Hotel Umhlanga is launching a new 15-storey tower that will add 119 rooms, restaurant, lounge and bar to the property. It will launch in the third quarter of this year.

The property will offer 240 rooms in total, ranging from luxury to semi-self catering to suit corporate and leisure travellers.

The new conference rooms can host up to 150 delegates and there is also an eight-seater executive boardroom.

'You get what you pay for' – TMCs

TRAVEL Management Companies are finding themselves between a rock and a hard place, with corporate clients complaining that recent agency cut-backs and retrenchments mean they no longer receive dedicated service from consultants.

TMCs have hit back, saying it is no longer viable to offer value-added services when corporates are cutting back drastically on their travel spend.

In April, when government went ahead with plans to cut overrides and volume-based incentives to TMCs, they were given notice to restructure their business models and submit new service fee proposals to make up for any loss of income as a result of the move. However, the revised fees that industry submitted were rejected.

The root of the problem is that, in the past, TMCs offered many value-added services at no charge, such as a dedicated consultant to each account, says chairperson of the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) for Southern Africa, **Howard Stephens**. "But they can't do that anymore," he says, referring to the current economic climate.

What's happening in the marketplace is that corporates are paying less but still expecting the same services they used to get, says one TMC. "Ultimately, corporates will get what they pay for."

The issue is compounded by the fact that most corporate clients don't understand the cost involved in providing a dedicated service. In the past, the client may have delegated travel arrangements to their PA, and they can easily make the mistake of assuming there is little cost and effort involved, says Stephens.

His advice for agencies

battling this misperception is to play open-book with their clients. He suggests TMCs break down exactly how much it costs to run the different services they provide and then present this to their clients.

Total transparency is the answer to communicating added value to corporates, says another TMC, adding that his company is very clear about what the corporate is paying for, whether it be a certain amount for dedicated account management or a per-hour rate. He says, in the past where TMCs have offered these kind of services free, one element would have been cross-subsidising another. "They probably cross-subsidised it

out of supplier revenue and said 'well we are getting this revenue and that will cover us, therefore we don't need to charge for the service', thinking that's a clever

way of trying to win business. But there's no free ride, either they were making up the cost on tickets or recovering it some other way."

Monique Swart, founder of the African Business Travel Association (ABTA), agrees, saying that if corporates want a particular service, they need to pay the appropriate fees. She adds that part of the problem is that some agencies oversell themselves in terms of what they can actually deliver.

"It was common for account management to be given away free," says a TMC.

The TMC also needs to ensure that it is offering a true consultation service and not just a "booking service" to demonstrate real value, she adds. Service should be promoted to clients as an outsourced consultancy, she says. "Corporates need to see it as investment in their programme."

There's no free ride, either they were making up the cost on tickets or recovering it some other way.



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Emirates introduces new baggage policy

EMIRATES has introduced a new baggage policy, effective for all its return outbound African flights. Economy-class passengers are allowed two pieces weighing 23kg each; while business-class and first-class passengers may take two pieces weighing 32kg each.

The baggage allowance applies to all return Emirates flights commencing from Algeria, Angola, Ivory Coast, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Mauritius, Nigeria, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. "Irrespective of the point of sale, the piece concept will apply for the entire journey," the airline said in a statement.

Bid for business-class upgrades – Ethiopian

ETHIOPIAN Airlines has introduced a programme that gives passengers the option to bid for an upgrade from economy class to Cloud Nine (business class).

Using 'Upgrade to Cloud Nine', customers with a valid Ethiopian Airlines economy-class ticket can make an individual bid for an upgrade. If they are not successful in their bid, they will retain their economy-class ticket. The programme is now available on selected Ethiopian Airlines routes.

How does it work?

Eligible passengers who have booked an economy-class ticket will receive an email about seven days prior to their trip inviting them to submit an offer. Passengers can also submit an offer by going to 'Book' on Ethiopian Airlines' website and selecting 'Upgrade to Cloud



Nine'. If their flight qualifies for an upgrade, they will be directed to the 'Upgrade to Cloud Nine' page where a bid can be placed.

Bids can be edited and retracted up to 50 hours before the scheduled departure time. After that, the bid becomes binding.

Ethiopian Airlines will select the passengers who will be upgraded to Cloud Nine. Selection criteria will take into account the bid amount, original ticket price as well as other criteria, including the amount of seats available in Cloud

Nine and the number of bids that have been placed.

All passengers who have placed a bid will receive email notification within 24 hours prior to departure, informing them whether or not the bid has been accepted. If their bid is accepted, the credit card on file will be charged with the corresponding amount and they will also receive an updated e-ticket.

If the bid is not accepted, passengers will fly economy class as planned and will not incur any additional costs.



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Flyafrica Zimbabwe to rebrand, relaunch

FLYAFRICA Zimbabwe plans to relaunch flights under a slightly different name, flyafricazim, with the backing of new investors.

The airline terminated its franchise agreement with the Flyafrica group after the parent company was placed into liquidation earlier this year.

The 'new' airline owns the Flyafrica brand name in Zimbabwe and can therefore continue to operate under this name, says the company's principle investor, **Cassidy Mugwagwa**. Additional investors have been signed to the tune of US\$25m (R377m) to develop a pan-African operation, says Mugwagwa.

Flyafricazim plans to fly the Johannesburg-Harare route and establish operations between Johannesburg and Bulawayo as well as domestic routes within Zimbabwe.

After the termination of its franchise agreement with Flyafrica Ltd, Mugwagwa says flyafricazim needed to source new aircraft, reservation support, as well as web support and marketing. The company has done this through its purchase of Airconnect, which handled many of these functions for Flyafrica in the past.

"Aircraft have been sourced from Star Air Cargo and key staff, who originally worked for Flyafrica Ltd, have also been retained – so we are good to go."

The new airline's strategy is to operate in a number of different countries.

"Each country must be profitable, operate with a local partner and be able to sustain itself with minimal operating financial support from head office," she says.

The airline aims to launch subsidiary airlines in four countries over the next two years.

More airlift to India on the cards

AIR India is reportedly looking at reintroducing flights to South Africa.

Air India chairman and md, **Ashwanai Lohani**, was quoted in Indian newspaper, the *Business Standard*, saying the airline was looking at connecting to some points on the African continent, including South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania. He said the airline was currently in talks with

South African authorities for possible operations to Durban.

Air India responded to queries, saying: "We are expanding our international network.

"We will make an announcement once we have finalised the stations."

The airline is currently expanding its Boeing wide-body fleet to enable international expansion of its routes.

BidTravel shuts down OTA

BIDTRAVEL has shut down operations of its online travel agency, Webjet SA.

The technology will be repurposed and offered as a white label solution to companies with a high customer base looking to introduce a loyalty programme that allows customers to earn and redeem points for travel.

"For example, if a company was looking to introduce a loyalty scheme, we would provide and run the technology for them. Travel will be booked on the company's website, under the company name, but the booking process will be facilitated by BidTravel technology," explains **Allan Lunz**, BidTravel md.

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Air France launches new product on JNB route

AIR France launched its newly retrofitted Boeing 777-300 aircraft on the Johannesburg-Paris route. Its new long-haul travel cabins offer four La Première private suites, 58 business, 28 premium economy and 206 economy-class seats.

La Première private suites feature fully flat beds over two-metres long, 61cm HD touch-screen TVs, plus a range of latest technological and comfort features. Bedding on the futon mattress includes a duvet, sheet, large pillow, merino wool blanket, and cushion. On-demand entertainment is available in 12 languages.

Business-class seats convert to a two-metre long bed and feature a 41cm HD touch-screen TV. The curved seats, which offer direct access to the aisle, provide privacy and have built-in storage facilities, power sockets and USB ports. Premium economy has improved



Pictured here are (from left): Christian Halm (Air France KLM commercial director, Southern Africa and Angola); Kerstin Bersztel (Air France KLM regional station manager Southern Africa and Angola); and Domingo De Cola (Air France KLM Southern Africa gm).

comfort seat cushions and a multi-position footrest. Economy has fully revised seats with more leg-room and wider tray tables. Improvements across all classes

factored in results from a customer survey undertaken by Air France KLM to ensure that the airline continues to meet changing customer needs.

Iberia is back with bold plans for SA

IBERIA has set a launch date for its re-instated flights to South Africa from Madrid, starting August 2, with grand intentions to capture the South African market travelling on to Portugal.

Part of the airline's strategy is to target the underserved market, offering connecting flights (of only an hour) via its hub in Lisbon.

Edward Frost, regional country manager of British Airways and Iberia in South Africa, says the connection will service the large Portuguese community in South Africa as well as those in Angola and Mozambique.

"There are a lot of people very excited and supportive of this flight," he says.

Iberia's flights will also offer SA passengers good access to the rest of Europe – particularly the south of the continent – and Latin America, says Celia Muñoz Espín, head of sales for Europe, Africa and Asia. The airline offers

convenient connections to 20 destinations in South America, including Buenos Aires, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. In Europe, the airline flies to 35 destinations, including Porto, Milan, Rome, Berlin, Frankfurt, Geneva and Zurich.

Iberia will launch with three flights a week. Flight IB 6050 will depart Johannesburg at 20h15 on Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays to arrive in Madrid at 06h35 the next day. Return flight IB 6051 will depart Madrid at 23h45 on Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays to arrive in Johannesburg at 09h05 the next day. Flights are currently bookable on the GDS.

Iberia will fly the Johannesburg route using an A330-300, which features 242 seats in economy and 36 in business class. The upgrades to the business-class cabin include lie-flat seats, each with direct access to the aisle.

The airline plans to target a mix of business and leisure, with

Frost adding that there are a lot of interesting opportunities, particularly in the renewable energy and fishery sectors. The development of solar energy projects in the Northern Cape will allow the airline to facilitate the traffic of expertise and investment coming into South Africa.

International flights will be operated on a codeshare agreement with British Airways, offering passengers the ability to earn and burn points on loyalty programmes offered by both carriers.

Iberia will also leverage British Airways' relationships with the trade in the SA market, which will be served by a joint sales team.

Being part of the IAG group also means agents will be able to offer clients flying to Europe an alternative to flying on British Airways, with the added benefit that passengers will not need to apply for both a UK and Schengen visa.

Brussels Airport departures hall reopens

BRUSSELS Airport held a reopening ceremony for its departure hall on May 1, which was damaged in the terror attacks on March 22. Arnaud Feist, ceo of the Brussels Airport Company, said the airport is "returning to an almost normal situation".

Work continues in the Brussels Airport departures hall, with damage caused by the explosions not fully repaired. The airport operator plans for the facility to be fully operational by the start of Europe's summer holidays.

As of May 2, 111 check-in desks were open in the departures hall, in addition to the 36 desks in the temporary construction area. This means that 147 check-in desks and several self check-in kiosks in the departures hall and temporary construction area will be available to passengers.

Additional security measures are in place across the airport and passengers are urged to take note of the following:

- Arrive at the airport three hours ahead of scheduled departure time.
- Travel light: do not take more than necessary.
- Respect the liquids and gels restrictions.
- Check in online through the relevant airline's website.
- Bring a printed copy of reservation, ticket or boarding pass.
- Keep identity card and passport ready when arriving at the airport.
- Only passengers are permitted in the departures hall and temporary construction area. ■



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*Image depicts Club World cabin, available on long-haul flights to London and beyond.

Should you be addressing traveller behaviour in your policy?

The decisions corporates make during business trips can have a huge impact, not only on cost but also on duty of care. This was the topic under discussion at a recent ABTA workshop in Johannesburg. **Sue van Winsen** reports.

Companies are starting to recognise that traveller behaviour can have a huge impact on travel budgets. This goes far beyond travel policy compliance, but rather speaks to the simple decisions that business travellers make every day – from tipping, to where they eat and how they use technology at each stage of their journey.

At a recent ABTA workshop in Johannesburg, **Monique Hilton**, founder of ABTA pointed out that at US\$5 a bottle, a company with 100 travellers taking 10 trips a year and drinking four bottles of water per trip, could end up spending as much as R300 000 on bottled water alone. A company with 2 000 employees could easily end up spending around R6 000 000 a year - a compelling reason to start looking more closely at traveller behaviour.

However, **Otto de Vries**, ceo of Asata, said it's likely, that with so much else going on, addressing traveller behaviour was simply just not a priority for many corporates, but he added that companies could be losing out by not considering this aspect of travel management. He added that he expects this will shift in the coming years, with more local companies adopting traveller-centric solutions to appease a new generation of corporates.

There are many benefits in evaluating traveller behaviour, says de Vries, as happier travellers are likely to be more compliant. "You can also realise cost savings by identifying where habitual wastage occurs."

More personalisation

"Internationally, travellers are getting far more attention and traveller satisfaction is becoming more important. Travel personalisation is gaining momentum, especially as suppliers have more direct access to



Kim Parker, head of business development, Wings Travel Management

customers than ever before," said de Vries. He adds that as mobile apps gain traction, algorithms are being developed to predict behaviour and pair travellers with suitable specials and other personalised offerings.

According to the 21st Century Travel Agent Study, travellers expect to be seen as individuals and want to take control of their own itineraries and tailor their experiences, but without compromising on travel policy or costing the company any additional money.

"TMCs need to engage with travellers to provide contextual content," said de Vries, who pointed out that according to the study, 73% of travellers believe it is very important for the TMC to make personalised recommendations.

Procurement manager: Africa for Puma Energy, **Alan Reid**, says understanding traveller behaviour is all about people and not policy. He says travel impacts people's time and takes them away from their personal space, putting them into foreign environments. "To manage travel behaviour you have

to look at it from a human point of view and make it easy to comply. For example, don't make them eat in a restaurant alone – instead let them order room service," he adds.

Reid adds that it isn't worth "sweating the small stuff". For example, he says, don't come down hard on the person who doesn't have a slip for a taxi trip. "You've got to trust people. Within the bigger scheme of things, you need to understand the invasion that travel has into personal time when writing the policy, policing it and reporting." He suggests speaking to travellers and then taking a practical policy up to the board for approval. "If you don't take travellers into account, you will be up against the wall the whole time," he adds.

The role of the TMC

Kim Parker, head of business development for Wings Travel Management, says that once you have the policy and supplier programme sorted, it's important to look at other ways of enhancing the management of travel. "This is when travel behaviour can open up a whole new world of how you

can save money for the company," she says. This includes assessing booking behaviour as well as looking more closely at the cost of changes. "For example, when a traveller wants to go home on an earlier

flight because their last meeting was cancelled, you need to be aware of how much that change is going to cost."

She says she doesn't believe that traveller behaviour should be left to the corporate travel manager to manage. "You need to be in partnership with the TMC and all levels within the organisation," she adds.



ways to change traveller behaviour to realise savings

ABTA polled its members for suggestions on changes that may result in real savings:

During the trip

- Switch off data roaming and find the most cost-effective roaming options. Often buying local SIM cards is the cheapest option. Use free hotel WiFi where ever possible.
- Keep a currency exchange calculation note in your wallet in the plastic window so that you are fully aware of how much you are paying for various items while travelling, as well as tips.
- Make sure you have as many US\$1 bills as you will need for tips, or the local currency equivalent, so that you don't end up tipping more than you meant to.
- Spend a few minutes driving around the car hire parking lot to get to know the car to reduce risk of accidents or fines.

Policy changes

- Make use of corporate fares where possible, even though they are available on higher classes. Some of the benefits include free changes and discounts.
- Visual guilt: make use of the three options given to you by the travel agent. Sometimes an earlier time of 15 minutes can save as much as R600.
- When meetings finish earlier than expected, employees should use the spare time working at the airport lounge on their laptop rather than taking an earlier flight at an extra cost due to the ticket change. ■

Embracing change to enhance efficiency

As the procurement officer for Omnia Group, **Elaine Janssen** has seen the company adopt a fresh, high-tech approach to travel with the introduction of a self-booking tool. **Sue van Winsen** spoke to her to find out what lessons she's learnt along the way.

When it comes to implementing changes to processes and systems, there's nothing more important than communication. "Rather talk too much than risk leaving people out of the loop," says **Elaine Janssen**, who has held the position of procurement officer for Omnia Group for the past eight years.

Prior to joining Omnia Group, Janssen completed a number of courses that prepared her for her future career path over the years, including studying Advanced Procurement Management through Damelin, and various other strategic planning, negotiating

and sourcing courses.

She then went on to work at several companies, including BOSAL, where she was eventually tasked with consolidating spend, identifying generic spend within the group, as well as negotiating national agreements with suppliers that led to great savings. "My main passion is procurement," explains Janssen. "I like to focus on bringing savings to the table."

However, it was only when she joined Omnia Group that travel formed part of her procurement portfolio. "Different rules apply to travel when compared with other types of procurement," she says. This realisation led the procurement division to investigate new ways of

approaching travel, that would eventually result in major cost savings.

Omnia Holdings is the JSE-listed company, which comprises several different divisions, including mining (BME), fertilizer (Omnia Fertilizer) and chemicals (Protea Chemicals). This diverse range of industries, with a geographically widespread working force, means that the company's employees travel locally, all over Africa, as well as internationally. Most travellers are middle-management and sales staff.

My main passion is procurement. I like to focus on bringing savings to the table.

Introducing new innovations

Several years ago, Omnia adopted an online booking tool. "This was a big change, as employees were used to the traditional way of making bookings, using travel management consultants in each of the regions," says Janssen. Despite this, she says, procurement had to make a decision based on what was best for the business, and now that

staff have tested the system and realised that it works, we have earned their trust," she adds.

"We have had an adoption rate of 70-80% on the online tool," she says. Travellers

have enjoyed the independence, she says, as many of Omnia's employees are salespeople who do not frequent the office and therefore need a system or tool that they can access anywhere at any time.

Once Omnia had visibility of its spend, it was able to bundle it together and negotiate more effectively with suppliers. "We are also saving a lot in terms of fees, as we don't have to pay for a car, accommodation and flight separately. Instead, we can do them all in one booking and get a bundled price, paying just one fee," she adds.

While the online booking tool has proven to be very effective, the company still uses the services of a TMC for more complicated regional, international and multi-leg bookings.

One of the best features of the online tool is its enhanced accommodation bookings, with features like maps and GPS coordinates of the properties. She adds that this is available throughout the region, with travellers able to see the nearest accommodation vendor, along with their information, grading, what

facilities they have to offer and pictures.

Looking ahead

In the coming months, Janssen plans to focus on streamlining the online booking tools accommodation section. "We currently have in the region of 3 000 suppliers listed on the tool and we need to refine this," she adds.

She also plans to look more closely at the company's duty of care policy. "Our employees travel all over Africa – destinations like Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola, and we have to make sure that we're taking care of them and ensuring their safety," says Janssen.

Another area Janssen is already working on developing is virtual card technology. Currently, she says, Omnia staff just use credit cards, but then end up having to be out-of-pocket while they wait for expense claims to be paid out. With virtual cards, they will be able to travel and know that everything has already been taken care of. "This also means less administration work for the finance department, who have to process all the expense claims." While she says hotels are still in a "catch-up process" in terms of introducing virtual card facilities, especially in Africa, she expects this will be implemented more widely in the near future.

Never stop communicating

Janssen says there is no question that technology makes life much easier. "You will always have people that embrace change and you will have people who will not. It is up to you to gain their trust. Ensure that your policies are clear and concise. Communication plays a vital role – the more people know – the more they embrace. Information gives power," she concludes.



8 VENUES WITH countryside charm IN THE CITY

Exchanging the hustle and bustle of the city for some scenic serenity in the countryside is often just what conference delegates want, but logistically it is not always possible... Or is it?

Liesl Venter sets out to find some venues with countryside charm in the heart of the city.

1. Casa Lee Country Lodge, Pretoria

In Donkerhoek, Pretoria, Casa Lee offers a unique conference facility and training centre on the doorstep of the city. This venue aims to create an environment that encourages creative thinking without the intrusion of the big city. It is easily accessible from the highway, and facilities include a multi-purpose hall that can accommodate up to 220 delegates as well as a smaller facility for more intimate gatherings. Another fully equipped conference room can accommodate up to 70 delegates, along with a host of breakaway rooms. A boma, open deck, swimming pool, and BMX and mountain bike trails complete this charming venue. A total of 11 on-site rooms are available for accommodation.

2. Le Souvenir, Klerksdorp

Situated only 2km north of Klerksdorp in North West, Le Souvenir is inspired by the French countryside. Its earthy ambience offers real hospitality and the perfect atmosphere for a peaceful conference where it's possible to completely forget about the busy city nearby. A banqueting hall with majestic chandeliers can comfortably seat up to 400 guests but can be configured in a variety of styles. Several lounges with fireplaces offer cosy corners in winter for workshops, launches or can serve as breakaway rooms. The venue also offers an airstrip for those wanting to fly in.

3. Suikerbossie, Hout Bay

Considered one of Hout Bay's hidden jewels, the Suikerbossie conference venue boasts magnificent views overlooking the valley of Hout Bay with Chapman's Peak below. Flanked on the west by Llandudno beach and Table Mountain as a further backdrop, this is tranquillity in the heart of the city. The venue has a kosher kitchen and is also halaal friendly. Conference facilities can accommodate a large number of guests in a variety of seating styles while the venue includes data projector, screen, flip charts/paper/pens, conference pads, mints and iced lemon water for events. A fully licensed bar is also available on the premises.

4. Morrells, Johannesburg

Morrells is ideal for product launches and lavish gala dinners with several venues on offer, along with a piano room and cigar lounge with classic décor and landscaping reminiscent of Provence in France. The Upper Conference Room can accommodate up to 110 delegates, as can several of the other facilities. With its open rafters, crystal chandeliers and views over the estate, it's easy to feel that you have been transported out of the city. Dropdown screens and a ceiling-mounted projector, surround-sound system, complimentary WiFi as well as flipchart and pens are provided, and several breakaway rooms are available.

5. Lombardy Boutique Hotel, Pretoria

In Lynwood, Pretoria, this unique function centre can accommodate anything from 25 to 200 delegates depending on seating style. Nestled among tranquil gardens, water features and majestic trees, there are also 20 luxurious suites that offer accommodation.

6. Durban Country Club, Durban

Established in 1922, Durban Country Club not only has a proud history but is also home to a large variety of birdlife, mongooses and rare trees. Renowned for its classic Cape Dutch architecture and beautiful setting overlooking the Indian Ocean, the Club has been the venue of choice for many important celebrations and offers a variety of venues that can accommodate any number of delegates. The Athlone Room is a firm favourite with its neutral tones and can seat up to 100 people, while the Belvedere & Ball Room is the largest of the function rooms, accommodating up to 250 people.

7. Makaranga, Durban

This 12-hectare property in Kloof is renowned for its lush gardens, which offer peace and quiet only a stone's throw from Durban's city centre. Two boardrooms can host small conferences or meetings of up to 12 delegates, while two bigger venues, which can either be combined or used separately, are available for up to 160 delegates in total. The garden also lends itself to great events, making the ideal setting for teambuilding.

8. The Johannesburg Country Club

Situated across two locations in Johannesburg's suburbs of Auckland Park and Woodmead, the Johannesburg Country Club brings the luxury of the country to the City of Gold. Conferencing facilities are available at both premises and can be configured and grouped to suit events of any size.

The club's variety of facilities are elegant and classic in quiet and peaceful garden settings. Woodmead is close to Sandton and Auckland Park to the Johannesburg CBD.



Morrells Boutique Venue

PHOTO: MORRELLS BOUTIQUE VENUE

CASE STUDY:

An annual conference in the country

Catherine Larkin, CEO of CVLC Communication, talks to **Liesl Venter** about the ups and downs of conferencing in the countryside in relation to an event she organised in Limpopo.

The brief

The company was approached by the Professional Movers Association (PMA) to organise its annual conference at a resort in the Entabeni Game Reserve in the Waterberg. Tasked with delivering a conference for 130 people in a location outside the city, a venue was needed that was easily accessible, offered areas for people to network, had sufficient space for truck displays, a range of leisure activities to choose from, as well as different venues for the conference and each evening's events. Golf facilities were also a non-negotiable and the budget needed to be strictly adhered to.

The planning processes

Larkin and her team found the perfect venue in the Legend Golf and Safari Resort. "It really ticked all the boxes and was exactly what we were looking for," she explains. When heading out of the city, says Larkin, planning is a crucial element to successfully pull it all off. "Loads of pre-planning and

a sound understanding of the client's requirements are extremely important. For example, we knew from previous congresses that our delegates had a preference for certain drinks and we made sure that the venue pre-ordered extra, as the venue was hours away from any shops."

Challenges and successes

Larkin reveals one of the challenges was that they were not able to use several of their usual service providers, simply because they were too far from the venue and their transport costs would have come in too high. "We needed to source suppliers close to the venue, many of which we had never worked with before," she says. "What we did do, however, was ask some of our regular suppliers who they recommended. We also asked the venue for details of their recommended suppliers in an effort to make sure we were using reliable companies."

A number of site visits were conducted prior to the event, not only for the organising team but also sponsors, who needed to see



Catherine Larkin, CEO, CVLC Communication

the venue before the congress.

"With countryside venues, you often needed a Plan C and D, in addition to the Plan A and B," says Larkin. One of the biggest issues to deal with was that the venue did not have cellphone reception – so communicating with suppliers and the rest of the team on-site was intermittent and a huge challenge," she says.

There is no doubt that life in the countryside is slower than

that in the city, so often when conferencing in remote countryside locations, the sense of urgency is not what urban-based organisers are used to, Larkin adds.

Dealing with the logistics of being out of town and also the remoteness of the venue, meant that planning had to be done down to the minutest detail. "Also the different venues at the resort we were using were far apart and some were not accessible by car. So we had to be taken to the various venues by the venue team. This obviously also required good planning."

The result

Despite the challenges the conference proved to be extremely successful. And what was the key to pulling it all off? "Communication, communication and more communication," says Larkin. "Talking with everyone involved and making sure the venue, suppliers and the client were on board all the time allowed us not only to meet the objectives set out in the initial brief but, in some instances, exceed them."

Three new and refreshed countryside venues

1. Phantom Forest Eco Reserve, Knysna

This new venue is set to open early next year. Set in a forested glade behind the gatehouse areas, the area will be ideal for small weddings, events, or a high tea for up to 50 guests. Phantom Forest Eco Reserve accommodates 28 guests (no children under 13) and comprises six Classic Tree Suites, four Upper Tree Suites (with additional outdoor bath on deck), and four Moroccan Suites. The reserve also has two restaurants and the Boma Boma spa.

2. Premier Hotel Sani Pass, Drakensberg

Premier Hotel Sani Pass in the Mkomazana Valley is undergoing a full refurbishment, to be completed by December 1. The refurbishment will see the hotel change from three-star to four-star status, with renovations including air-conditioning installed in facilities and rooms, and WiFi throughout the hotel and garden rooms outside the main hotel building. The upgrade will include 24 new rooms. All rooms will have balconies and views of the Sani Pass and

southern Drakensberg. New facilities include a wellness centre and a conference centre accommodating up to 300 guests in cinema style.

3. Blue Rock Village, Somerset West

The Blue Rock Village, a car-free Green Village set to open later this year, will include a multi-functional Lifestyle Centre within the development that will be linked to a conference centre, hotel and spa. An array of medical centres, boutiques, schools, colleges, nurseries,

restaurants and cafés will also be included in the development. Architectural and project management firm, Swisatec, announced that it would upgrade the well-known Blue Rock Resort in Somerset West and create the mixed-use Blue Rock Village. The location of the village also allows for easy access to the N2 highway, Cape Town International Airport and Cape Town CBD. All parking in the village is underground to maximise green living and the visual effect. Fast Internet connection will also be available with a fibre optic system that includes WiFi.

Vic Falls: Innovative teambuilding ideas

Victoria Falls offers a number of experiences well-suited to teambuilding activities. **Liesl Venter** spoke to **Glen Byrom**, chief explorer at Twice, a Victoria Falls-based DMC, for his top picks.

1. The Elephant Café & River Meander

Cross the famous bridge from Zimbabwe into Zambia for a magical experience unlike any other, says Byrom, who adds that it can be custom-packaged to suit different groups from 20 to 50 people. The day kicks off with a 30-minute upriver jetboat trip exploring the Zambezi channels for wildlife. "After a scene-set by a noted modern-day solo explorer, a small herd of domesticated elephants suddenly appears and you will be able to enjoy time interacting with them," says Byrom. "Then it's a sumptuous gourmet lunch on the exquisite Elephant Café deck that juts into the Zambezi, while the elephants wander nearby." He says it is an ideal teambuilding activity thanks to the many creative adaptations that can be devised from it. It can also be lengthened or shortened depending on who is participating and what the goals are.

"Raft floats, travelling downstream, can also be used to reach the venue. While on the river, in rafts or jet boats, various scavenger-hunt elements can be included. For bigger budgets, the return transfer can be aboard a luxury vintage steam train," he says. "It's an extremely unique activity that combines several enticing and surprise elements offering all the great aspects of Vic Falls – elephants, the river, its channels, gourmet meals and an exclusive, remote five-star river-deck."

2. White water rafting

The Zambezi River is acclaimed for being one of the finest white water rafting

destinations in the world. "Corporates can choose between a half-day (12 rapids) or full-day (23 rapids) itinerary, depending on the amount of time they want to spend on the river," he says. And if ever a team needed to work together this would be the place, as white water rafting in this part of the world includes some Grade 5 rapids, he adds. "The names of some of the rapids give you an idea of what to expect – Oblivion and Stairway to Heaven to name just two," says Byrom. "Organisations may brand the rafts with their logos and set up challenges along the way."

3. Canoe and conference

"Give us something unique and wow" is often what corporates say when heading out of the office for teambuilding or a meeting. "More often than not, they just end up meeting in a traditional air-conditioned room with the usual flags and bunting flying their logo outside in a location that is not their office," says Byrom. "At Vic Falls we tend to do teambuilding and conferencing slightly differently." Setting out from a remote spot upriver on the Zambezi in either canoes or rafts, delegates can enjoy the tranquillity and beauty of this eco-wonderland, with guides pointing out the birds and wildlife along the way.

"They disembark on a small island and trudge through the jungle to a conference set-up, but there are no podiums, no whiteboards, no power-points or technology," he says. "This is an amazingly inspiring offer at Victoria Falls because it is one of a kind. To entice delegates further we surprise them with **Paul Connolly**, a modern-day David Livingstone and solo

explorer of the remotest rivers of Africa. He exudes charisma and passion and takes participants into this African wonderland. This canoeing excursion is further sweetened by the arrival of some elephants with which participants can interact.

4. Interactive drumming and bush dinner

Africa is the drum continent of the world and drumming is a fundamental group activity for celebrating success, preparing for battle, or relaxing, says Byrom. Drumming as a teambuilding exercise is a very popular offering at Victoria Falls.

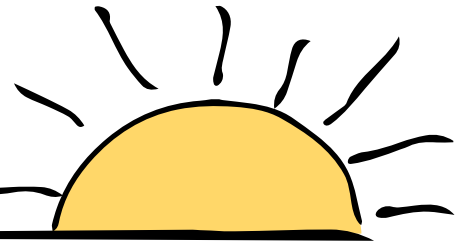
Groups are guided by facilitators who, with instructions, get the full group (each equipped with their own traditional African drum) beating. "This evolves to a point, eventually, where there are different drum patterns of beats for different sections of the group – and a tapestry of individual, yet complementary sounds, are woven."

This element, which literally creates group harmony, can be woven into other magic moments, says Byrom. "For example, the group might start at the elegant century-old Victoria Falls Hotel with High Tea and then stroll along a red carpet to the colonial-style station where the train awaits. Then steam on to the famous bridge for sunset cocktails. Steam back and pass the station to travel into the night where, suddenly, the train stops and a bush dinner has been set up under the stars. It is in such a situation that the interactive team drumming becomes more meaningful," he says.



PHOTO: WILD HORIZONS

Six things to do after sunset in Vic Falls



When the sun goes down there is no shortage of ways to fill your guests' time, from special dinners in scenic locations to adventurous outings. We round up some of the best options on both the Zambian and Zimbabwean side of the Victoria Falls.

1. Full-moon dinners

On Zimbabwe's side of the Falls, perched 120 metres above the rapids of the Batoka Gorge and just downriver of the Victoria Falls Bridge, is the newly opened Lookout Café. Operated by Wild Horizons, the Café is adjacent to its high-wire facility, where it offers adrenalin-fuelled activities such as the Gorge Swing, Flying Fox and the Vic Falls Canopy Tour. During full moon, the Café offers special dinners, where guests can enjoy views of the Falls and the bridge, lit by the light of the moon. It can accommodate groups of up to 60 guests and the list of Full Moon Dinner dates can be viewed on its website.

2. Dinner river cruises

Enjoying sundowners on the Zambezi is widely regarded as one of the 'must-do' activities when visiting the Victoria Falls. Guests are likely to see wildlife on the banks of the river, including elephant and various antelope, along with plentiful birdlife, as well as crocodile and hippo in the river itself. There are several operators, departing from both the Zambian and the Zimbabwe side of the Falls, with vessels that offer dinner cruises, providing guests with the opportunity to stay on the water after the sun has gone down. These vary in terms of capacity as well as luxury. Safari par Excellence,

based on the Zambian side, has two boats that offer dinner cruises – the *Makumbi*, with space for 100 guests and the smaller *Mambushi*, with space for 23 guests. Both serve freshly baked snacks, a light dinner and local beverages, spirits and wine. Based on the Zimbabwe side, the Zambezi Explorer Cruise Company also has two vessels that operate dinner cruises, *Zambezi Explorer* with capacity for 150 passengers across three decks (booked on an exclusive-basis for dinner cruises), and *Zambezi Reflections*, which has capacity for 34 passengers and serves gourmet-style meals.

3. Night game drives

The Victoria Falls is near a number of small reserves and national parks, including the Zambezi National Park and the Stanley and Livingstone Private Game Reserve, both in Zimbabwe. These parks have granted operators special night-time access, as both are normally off-limits to tourists outside daylight hours. Shearwater Adventures offers a rhino encounter game drive, including a night drive and bush dinner. The experience starts before the sun goes down so that guests can see the wildlife that gather at Nakavango Dam to drink, followed by a night drive through the park. The vehicle then returns to the reserve's reception area, where guests will enjoy dinner under the stars. Wild Horizons offers a 'Night Eyes' safari in Zambezi National Park, which enters the park in the late afternoon and continues into the night. Refreshments are served on the banks of the Zambezi.

5. Dinner at The Boma

The Boma, on the Zimbabwean side of the Falls, specialises in creating traditional Zimbabwean dishes. Guests are served a four-course meal comprising starters, soup (prepared on the campfire), and a barbecue buffet with a selection of salads, followed by a choice of desserts. The restaurant caters well for those with an adventurous palate, with its trademark dish being warthog fillet. Other delicacies include mopani worms, smoked crocodile tail, impala knuckle terrine and game stews. It also serves more traditional fare, including beef, pork, fish, chicken and a variety of vegetarian meals. Entertainment comes in the form of traditional dancing, story-telling, a fortune teller and an African drumming circle. The Boma can seat 300 people in the dry season (April to October) and 230 in the rainy season (November to March). It is recommended that you book in advance.

6. Live music at Mama Africa Eating House

Situated on the Zimbabwean side, Mama Africa Eating House offers a traditional 'township-style' restaurant environment, featuring brightly decorated rooms and food from across Africa. Mama's Hot Pots are the restaurant's signature dishes, and options include Umhlabha ledobi, an Ndebele-dish of dried meat and peanut butter sauce, and Hunter's Pot, a game stew. The menu also features a selection of grilled meat, including Zimbabwean rump steak, grilled Zambezi bream and Mozambique-style peri-peri chicken. Live music is played by a township jazz band. ■



4. Steam train dinner experience

The Royal Livingstone Express gives guests the opportunity to travel in an authentic, restored train. The Royal Livingstone Express comprises five air-conditioned carriages, two dining cars, a club and kitchen car, lounge car and observation car. The train is operated by Sun International's Royal Livingstone Hotel in Zambia and takes guests through the Zambezi Valley, providing them with an

opportunity to enjoy views of the Falls from the bridge and the scenery of Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park. For the dinner experience, guests are collected from the Royal Livingstone Hotel at 17h00 and transferred to the Bushtracks Private Station, where they board the first-class lounge carriage. The dining cars have seating capacity for 92 passengers, who are served a six-course gourmet-style meal.

What does the future of car rental look like?

Mobile apps and cutting-edge photographic technology are expected to play a big role in the car rental industry in the coming years. **Darise Foster** reports.

The car rental industry will have to adapt in order to cater to traveller demands by introducing relevant technology that will meet the needs of the customer.

This is the view of **Lance Smith**, executive of sales at Avis Budget, who says: "Customers are demanding to be able to interact with car rental companies via mobile and that is right from point of reservation, to point of payment and probably (even more importantly), whilst on rental. So even at the point of picking up cars, a lot of customers are asking, 'why do I have to stand in queues? Why can't I go straight to the car?', thus, one thing the car rental industry is starting to identify is that the mobile phone is unique to the user and can therefore be used to enable the user to pick the vehicle up directly from the car lot, without having to go to kiosks."

According to **Melissa Storey**, executive head of strategy, development and marketing at First Car Rental, 40% of its direct customers use smartphones to search, book their cars, contact the company, read newsletters and access mobile apps.

Consequently, First Car Rental has already introduced the First Car Rental Show&Go Mobile Checkout Programme. Designed for business travellers, this mobile



Lance Smith, executive of sales, Avis Budget

technology allows customers to go from airport arrivals straight to their rental car, bypassing the branch. Using a mobile device, the agent recognises the customer with photo identification associated with their loyalty card 2D snap, and checks the renter out in less than a minute.

The First Car Rental Show&Go facilities are currently available at OR Tambo, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, King Shaka George and East London International Airports.

The car rental industry will also investigate ways to enable customers involved in an accident to complete claim forms and record damage on their mobile phones, without having to go back to the station to pick up forms, says Smith.

Similarly, the toughest interaction between car

rental companies and their customers – the vehicle check – will also be transformed in the future. Says Smith: "I think the technology that a lot of car rental companies are looking at now is to build 360-degree photographic booths so that when customers pick up their vehicles, they can drive through an electronic booth which will record all damage and condition of the car, then when they bring the car back, they drive through a similar booth and those two pictures should be matched and the conditions of the car noted."

Smith also believes that "connected cars" will play a big role in the next five years. "On-board computers will be able to tell us all kinds of things about vehicles. For example, if you have an accident, we will immediately be alerted and can contact the driver to see whether they need assistance. If there's no response, then we would just send a helicopter."

He says that driverless cars could also feature in the car rental companies of the future. "Potentially, the customer would just drop their car at the airport, and the car would drive itself back to the yard, park by the fuel tank, before driving through the wash bays and parking itself in the bay ready for the next rental," he says. "This isn't a pipedream – we're already in the testing phase," he adds.

Payment methods set to change

According to **Lance Smith**, many customers have sought alternative ways to pay car rental companies.

"In developing countries particularly, the vast majority of the population do not have credit cards, thus they require us to provide means for people with debit cards to rent cars. And that is something that the industry is working towards," he says.

The big issue at present is risk, he says. "We would need to take large deposits and should nothing happen to the car, we would need to refund the money back to the customer," Smith says.

This would need to be done using dual-channel cards, says Smith. While some individuals already own dual-channel cards, the majority still use single-channel cards to complete payments, thus making it difficult for the car rental industry to introduce any major changes at present.

But he is aware that South African banks are moving toward introducing dual-channel payment cards. "As soon as the banks enable dual-channel cards, we will be able to refund money back onto debit cards. I see this happening in the next three years," he says.

Expect increases in rates

Due to tough trading conditions and vehicle pricing inflation, customers should expect to see greater than CPI rate increases going forward, reveals Bidvest Car Rental md, **Paulette McGhee**.

"Vehicle pricing inflation of 20% needs to be recovered via pricing to the customer as the current environment is not sustainable," says McGhee.

Melissa Storey agrees: "The rand/dollar exchange rate, the price increase of most vehicle brands (and the increase in the interest rate as a result), together with the economic downturn in South Africa hit every business and consumer hard recently – and the first avenue where spending is curbed is often travel."

To counter this demand, car rental companies will likely introduce products which allow customers the ability to rent a car for a few hours, rather than an entire day, says **Lance Smith**.



Paulette McGhee, md, Bidvest Car Rental

"Traditionally, car rental companies bill per day, but customers have asked for more convenience around renting cars – i.e. renting a car for an hour or two, and this initiative will be introduced by car rental companies in the South African market in the not-too-distant future," he says.

Dramatic slowdown in corporate rentals

The local car rental industry is made up of four major segments – corporate/government, foreign inbound, domestic leisure and insurance replacement. According to the Southern African Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association (Savralla), these segments account for 36%, 21%, 29% and 14% of the total car rental industry respectively.

An industry which generated R5bn in 2015 alone, the foreign inbound and domestic leisure segments of the car rental industry showed promising growth, increasing by 11% and 4.5% respectively. The challenge faced by the car rental industry however, is the fact that the corporate/government segment is showing negative growth.

Lance Smith, says that corporates are showing a much more significant decline than government and they are actually cutting back on their entire travel itineraries. "This trend is not exclusive to car rental."

Smith says when corporates do rent cars, the length of the rental period is much shorter and the cars are smaller, which he attributes to a huge drive around cost savings. "People are definitely cutting back and technology such as the Internet and video-conferencing is having an impact. Corporates are now assessing whether they actually need to travel, or whether they can simply pick up the telephone or organise a teleconference instead," he adds.

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Avis drives the water-efficiency movement

In the 2015 financial year, Avis saved more than 148 million litres of water by harvesting water in their wash bays at the Avis head office as well as at Cape Town International Airport, King Shaka International Airport and Port Elizabeth Airport.

This sees an increase of approximately 32 million litres of water saved year on year.

After examining its water usage at its car-washing facilities in 2007, Avis installed the latest water-recycling technology which reduced the amount of fresh water used per wash. While fresh, clean water is used

in the 'final rinse arch', recycled water is used during the 'pre-soak' and 'shampoo' stages.

As a result, the car rental company has saved 706 million litres of water since it implemented water conservation measures in 2007.

"Water conservation and management is something we take seriously at Avis," says Avis

for Southern Africa, **Rainer Gottschick**. "We urge businesses across South Africa to follow suit and save water where possible as rainwater harvesting is just one part of a holistic solution to saving one of South Africa's most essential commodities."

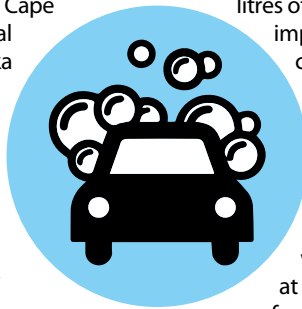


PHOTO: SHANNON VANZYL

Shaun Durieux, national travel sales manager for First Car Rental.

First Car Rental booking app expands to Android

First Car Rental now offers its clients access to its rent-on-the-go mobile apps with its latest Android booking app for smartphones and tablets. The car rental company launched an iOS app for iPhones and iPads in September last year. The First Car Rental apps for iPhones and smartphones allow customers to reserve, modify and cancel reservations

straight from their device. The app also allows renters to book a rental, view their fleet, send a message to customer services, call central reservations, find First Car Rental branches plus, for account holders, log in to their corporate weblink account. The app also shows branch opening times and contact details. A list of car groups available for hire at a chosen location can be viewed.

The 'Uber effect' causes car rental shake up

The rapidly growing popularity of Uber has had a huge impact on the car rental industry, but not in the negative way most people would imagine. **Lance Smith**, says the advent of Uber essentially just shorted the lead time car rental companies had to bring certain technologies to the market, particularly when it comes to their point-to-point business.

He says technology such as simple apps than enable travellers to locate a chauffeur

driver, track him on a map and contact him directly instead of via a call centre, are just a few examples of features that are now readily available from car rental companies. "Online booking for transfer services is also now freely available to customers," he adds.

Another increasingly popular request, says Smith, is for corporates to have direct links embedded within their own websites, instead of having to work through the car rental company's website. ■

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AVIS

Nigeria and Angola lead Africa's planned hotel development

Should the continent's plans for hotel development be realised, the sector will see large-scale expansion, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, writes **Michelle Colman**.

The note of confidence which has permeated recent pronouncements and predictions on travel and tourism growth in Africa, is again echoed in recent research on hotel development undertaken by the W Hospitality Group.

In its annual Hotel Chain Development Pipeline Survey, the group reveals that the number of planned hotel rooms in Africa has soared to 64 000 rooms in 365 properties, up almost 30% on the previous year. The increase, it says in a statement, is largely due to strong growth in sub-Saharan Africa, up 42.1% on 2015. Hotel development in North Africa, while also showing growth, comes in at a more modest 7.5% hike.

Trevor Ward, W Hospitality group managing director, comments: "The evidence from our survey is clear - investors remain confident about the future of the hospitality industry on the continent. Even when pummeled daily by low commodity prices, exchange rate problems, political challenges and poor infrastructure, Africa remains resilient."

Growth in West Africa

Nigeria and Angola, both oil-producing countries, account for almost a third of the planned development, with 17 782 rooms between them. Nigeria's room development is up 20% over 2015. Angola, never before listed among the top 10 countries, pushes Egypt out of second place, thanks to a deal signed by Accor Hotels to build 50 hotels with over 6 200 rooms between 2015 and 2017.

In both countries, the hospitality



PHOTO: DOLLAR PHOTO CLUB

sector has a reputation for being expensive. But, with the collapse of their oil economies, is it feasible that there may soon be a glut of hotel rooms in both destinations, and at lower rates too?

Shaun Lovett, head of business development at Wings Travel Management, a TMC heavily involved in the oil and gas industry, says while the oil price does have an effect on hotel capacity, the sector records a fairly low percentage of hotel spend when considering total travel spend. Typically, air travel makes up the major share of the sector's travel spend.

"This is mainly due to the fact that oil companies want their travellers offshore and onto the rig in the quickest possible time. There are planned logistics, together with the TMC, to ensure additional hotel nights are not added to the trip cost. Something to take into account, is that some of these contractors or specialist staff have high daily rates that need to be considered when delaying the individual getting offshore," he says.

Furthermore, oil and gas companies that move large volumes of rotating staff, often build their own staff housing or hotels to cater to these needs and save costs.

"Do I expect the rates to drop? Perhaps, but I believe that companies and TMCs from a business travel perspective will look to favorably negotiate rates down where they can guarantee volumes for a win/win on both sides," says Lovett.

More choice

Lovett observes that hotel rates have been dropping in the past three to four years as supply begins to meet demand, and says this is evidenced in minimal price increases or actual savings over a two- to three-year period.

"West and Central Africa, due to their immense wealth in natural resources, have over the past 30 years or so since independence been strife-torn, plagued by civil wars and corrupt practices, making

it very difficult to create proper infrastructure.

"Now that there is a relative amount of peace and stability in the region, coupled with a growing demand of foreign visitors due to growth in job opportunities as a result of foreign investment, conditions are such that more hotel developments are springing up."

Simultaneously, these countries are realising that diversification is needed in their economies as oil prices are at their lowest in many years, states Lovett. Consequently, other industries are receiving attention, such as agriculture and tourism.

"Hotel rates will not drop substantially in these countries as they remain, generally speaking, very expensive markets to operate in. Costs of goods and services are generally very high due to importations, hence although hotel prices are on the decline, don't expect any miracles in the short to medium term."

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Ghana eases up on visa regulations

Ghana's progressive approach to visas is unlikely to cause corporate hub relocation, say local travel managers. **Michelle Colman** reports.

Heeding an African Union Commission directive, Ghana has relaxed its visa requirements for African visitors and is in the process of introducing visas on arrival for travellers from member states.

"With effect from July this year, we will be allowing citizens of AU member states to enter our country and obtain visas on arrival with the option to stay for up to 30 days and experience what our country has to offer. This measure, with time, should stimulate air travel, trade, investment and tourism", stated Ghanaian President **John Dramani Mahama** in February during a State of the Nation address.

The announcement was welcomed by AU Chairperson, **Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma**,

who stated: "After Ghana, I am convinced that many other African countries will follow suit, in the interest of achieving an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa."

In light of South Africa's recent tightening of visa regulations, Ghana's move is bold and brave. *Travel Buyer* asked TMC, Wings Travel Management, if ease of access might encourage companies to move their West African hubs, traditionally located in Nigeria, to Ghana.

Head of business development, **Shaun Lovett**, said: "Shifting a business hub due to relaxed visa rules is not something that I see happening in the near future." He points out that relocating a hub involves economies of scale.

"Ghana has generally been



Ghanaian President, **John Dramani Mahama**



AU chairperson, **Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma**

viewed as 'Africa for beginners' and this is seen in the amount of foreign aid organisations that are headquartered in Accra," says Lovett. "Ghana is a peaceful country which has allowed foreigners to use it as an operating base for other more volatile countries in the region. In recent years, oil discoveries have also boosted the Ghanaian economy significantly and more and more foreigners are visiting, thus also paving the way for visas rules to be relaxed."

However, he believes the major players in the oil and gas sector will continue to operate at the source of discoveries, even though these may be very inhospitable environments. "The oil industry has been created on the back of adversity, mining for its oil in the most adverse conditions

and regions on the planet."

How much of a burden are Africa's generally restrictive visa regulations in the management of travel on the continent?

Says Lovett with reference to the oil and gas workers: "It just depends on the country and industry. Notably, the people coming into these countries have a particular skill set that is sought after and each day that is delayed due to visa procedures, is a delay and potential loss to the business."

"The point to note is that doing business in Africa is not easy, but the rewards can be extremely beneficial and this is something that is just part of the process. Funnily enough, the countries that have the most restrictive processes with visas in Africa can typically have the biggest reward from a business perspective."

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Hotels in strategic locations

Accor Hotels' commitment in Angola is to open 50 hotels in strategic locations over a two-year period. The locations include Luanda, the Angolan capital, and the capitals of 17 provinces.

The properties will span all categories from luxury to

economy - 27 hotels will be operated under the banner of the economic Ibis Styles brand, 22 under the midscale Mercure brand and one under the luxury Sofitel brand. The development is being undertaken in partnership with Angolan company AAA Activos LDA.



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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

Sub-Sahara strides ahead

The W Hospitality Group's Hotel Chain Development Pipeline Survey reveals a number of interesting facts that provide a fresh perspective on Africa's booming hospitality sector, particularly in the southern part of the continent:

- Other countries in the Top 10 of planned hotel development are Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Kenya, Ethiopia and Senegal, with South Africa holding ninth position.
- Hotel development across Africa spans 36 hotel chains and 86 brands with over 64 000 rooms in 365 hotels.
- By comparison, in the first such survey conducted in 2009, there were 19 international and regional hotel chains in Africa with a pipeline of 144 hotels and just under 30 000 rooms.
- In 2011, the number of

pipeline rooms in the five countries of North Africa was some 25% higher than in sub-Saharan Africa. Today it is less than half. Hotel development in the North is more subdued as the region's hospitality sector matures, and also because of political turmoil. Libya, for example, has seen a 40% drop in the development pipeline and Egypt is experiencing a significant drop in tourist numbers.

- Despite the promising 2016 survey findings, **Trevor Ward** cautioned on the number of hotel deals that have been signed but have so far not opened, for a variety of reasons but primarily lack of finance. "Between 2006 and 2013, 104 deals with 21 377 rooms, over 30% of the total, were signed and should now be open, or at least well under construction."

Travel within Africa is on the rise

According to data released by travel data provider ForwardKeys, current forward flight bookings within Africa are up by 6.2% from May to October compared with the same time last year.

The company, which monitors future travel patterns by analysing 14 million reservation transactions

each day, says that intra-African bookings comprise 10% of international flights made to Africa.

"The ForwardKeys data provides a valuable opportunity to look ahead and see how air travel to and within Africa is growing," says **Jonathan Worsley**, chairman, Bench Events.

Carrier ups flights to Zimbabwe

Air Zimbabwe has increased frequencies for its services from Johannesburg to Harare and Bulawayo.

Public relations manager, **Shingai Taruvinga**, said the airline has introduced a Sunday frequency to the Johannesburg-Bulawayo route, which it now services four times a week. Midday flights have also been added to the morning Johannesburg - Harare flights.

The airline was striving to integrate the region through air access and has recently embraced e-technology, she said.

"We want to assist businesses to tap into activities in these cities where we are resuming services," she said, adding that services had recently been resumed to Dar es Salaam. "By opening up more routes, more opportunities can be exploited."



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Swiss hotel group enters East Africa

Swiss International Hotels and Resorts has set its sights on expanding its business portfolio on the African continent through new hotel investments in Kenya and Rwanda.

The global hotel chain and Mount Kenya Holiday Homes plan to co-develop a resort on the foothills of Mount Kenya.

The announcement follows the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the two entities earlier this year and will see an investment of US\$70 million.

The resort, Swiss International Mount Kenya Resort, is expected to start operations next year and construction is under way.

The resort will offer 67 four-bedroom villas and 128 apartments, 86 townhouses and 75 hotel suites. Other facilities include a nine-hole – reversible to 18-hole – golf course, a golf clubhouse, two restaurants, and a spa.

Henri Kennedie, chairman and CEO of Swiss International

commented: “Swiss International is fully committed to hotel expansion in Africa.”

The developer, **Ronald Ndegwa**, said it was an achievement to have Swiss International on board as the group would help maintain high standards in the resort.

In Rwanda, Swiss International signed a management agreement with the owners of the Villa Portofino hotel in Kigali last month.

The 51-roomed upscale hotel is now known as Swiss International Villa Portofino Kigali.

The hotel has a Swiss Café, restaurant and lounge, a Ted & Co bar and lounge, a conference facility, a spa, a pool and gym.

Swiss International is already represented in Nigeria with two hotels, and one hotel in Sierra Leone. Currently, the group is associated with hotels in Switzerland, Germany, The Netherlands, Greater China, the Middle East and Africa.

Mombasa resort invests millions in renovation

Sarova Whitesands Beach Resort in Mombasa, Kenya, is set to undergo US\$3.6m (R53.6m) renovation in June, with completion expected by September. The resort will remain operational during this period.

The 335-room resort will have 135 rooms undergo refurbishment at a cost of US\$3m (R44.6m), while the renovation of its four conference rooms will cost US\$650 000 (R9.7m).

The large conference room has capacity for 400 delegates while the three others can accommodate 300, 250 and 120 delegates

respectively.

Sarova Whitesands Beach Resort gm, **Raj Jadhav** said: “The conference rooms will have new carpets, chairs, tables, audio and video equipment, air-conditioning and fresh wall paintings.”

Sarova Whitesands Beach Resort sits on a 23-acre plot with manicured gardens and a palm-fringed white-sand beach.

The hotel has four swimming pools for adults and one pool for children as well as a spa facility. It also has three bars and three restaurants, the largest of which has capacity for 600 people.

Visa "openness" indexed

In January this year, The African Development Bank (AFDB) Group, headquartered in the Ivory Coast, released its first Africa Visa Openness Report, which ranks countries on the ease of their visa regimes.

Says **Akinwumi Adesina**, AFDB president, in the report's foreword: "The index aims to be a tool for change, to inform and

inspire leaders and policymakers to make visa reforms, simplify visa processes and apply positive reciprocity."

He refers to the African Union's Agenda 2063, which calls for the introduction of an African passport applicable by all member states by 2063, along with the abolition of visa requirements for African travellers across the continent.

Other Findings:

- Africans need visas to travel to 55% of African countries.
- Africans can get visas on arrival in 25% of African countries.
- Africans don't need a visa to travel to 20% of African countries.
- Only 13 out of 55 countries offer liberal access (visa free or visa on arrival) to all Africans.

South Africa hold the 35th spot in the rankings of visa openness.

The *top 10* countries on the ranking of visa openness are:

- 1 Seychelles
- 2 Mali
- 3 Uganda
- 4 Cape Verde
- 5 Togo
- 6 Guinea-Bissau
- 7 Mauritania and Mozambique
- 9 Mauritius and Rwanda

The report points out that eight of the top 10 countries have an upward trajectory on travel and tourism figures on GDP, employment, visitor exports and investments. ■



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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. To get connected, e-mail lindav@nowmedia.co.za.

1. Gauteng

Courtyard Hotels. Rates from R1 050 per room per night for a one-bedroom suite. Offer includes one night's accommodation with breakfast. Two-bedroom suites available from R1 743 per night. Offer is valid for Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays only. Available for stay until July 31.

2. Namibia

Falcon Africa Safaris. Desert and Beach special from R7 650pp sharing. Offer includes return flights from Johannesburg, approximate taxes, three nights' accommodation in Swakopmund with breakfast daily. Valid for travel until July 31.

3. Mauritius

World Leisure Holidays. Sun Resorts special from R15 420pp sharing. Rates include return flights from Johannesburg on Air Mauritius, return coach transfers, seven nights' accommodation at the Ambre Resort (guests must be 16 years and older) with breakfast, lunch and dinner daily. Special excludes taxes, levies and surcharges of approximately R4 190pp. Airline surcharge applicable between June 25 and July 17. Book by June 30. Travel period until July 31.

4. Thailand

The Holiday Factory. Seven nights from R13 450pp sharing. Rate includes return flights from Johannesburg to Phuket, approximate taxes, return transfers, accommodation at the Patong Merlin Resort with breakfast daily, resort credit of THB1 200pp per stay (for a maximum of two guests) and 10% discount on food and beverages at the hotel's restaurants. Valid for travel until October 31.

5. Mozambique

Mozambique Tours. Inhambane weekend special from R5 922pp sharing. Rate includes return flights from Johannesburg, return transfers, three nights' accommodation with breakfast daily and WiFi. Offer excludes taxes

6. Brazil

Dream Kist Tours. Fortaleza from R5 219pp sharing. Offer includes return transfers, five nights' accommodation at the Beira Mar in a double room with breakfast daily and a city tour. Package excludes flights. Valid for travel until June 30.



of approximately R4 100pp. Available for SADC residents only. Valid for travel until December 23.

7. Réunion

Thompsons Holidays. Réunion combo from R17 508pp sharing. Offer includes return flights from Johannesburg on Air Austral, airline levy, personalised meet and greet, seven nights' accommodation with breakfast daily and seven-day group A car hire. Itinerary: St Dennis-St Pierre-St Gilles-St Dennis. Valid for travel until July 7.

8. Cape Town

Radisson Blu Le Vendome Hotel. Winter conference package from R1 850pp. Rate includes one night's accommodation with breakfast and dinner, WiFi and parking. Day conference packages available from R365pp. A minimum of 10 rooms bookable with a one-night minimum stay per group. Valid for travel until September 30.

9. United Kingdom

Edusport Travel. Golf packages from R14 820pp sharing. Rate includes three nights' accommodation with breakfast daily, general admission tickets for July 16 and 17 and shuttle transfers to Royal Troon Golf Club. Package excludes flights. Set travel dates July 15-18.

10. China

Dragon Holidays. Discover the Mighty Yangtze from U\$990pp sharing (approximately R14 351). Rate includes return transfers, eight nights' accommodation in a twin cabin with breakfast, lunch and dinner daily, entertainment, lectures and river guide. Itinerary: Shanghai to Changqing. Set departures September 9 and 23.

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