

MAY 2015

TRAVEL BUYER

+Me

BATTLE OF THE BRANDS

The rise of lifestyle hotels

HOW TO

access Europe with ease

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ULTIMATE
Vic Falls experiences

Why more corporates are

cruising

PRECISION IN TRAVEL

AXIM's Olive Makhafola on seamless outsourcing

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KEEP CLIMBING



Editor's note

The discerning corporate traveller is changing the way suppliers are positioning their brands – airlines are selling more ancillaries, car-rental companies are offering more technology and hotel groups are diversifying their offering.

On April 16, in true 'Virgin' style, **Richard Branson** officially opened the group's first Virgin Hotel in Chicago by recreating the iconic 'Danke Schoen' scene from the movie *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*.

The new four-star lifestyle brand features rooms called 'Chambers', with a patent-pending lounge bed and privacy screens that can be used to break single rooms into sleeping quarters and dressing areas. Some rooms are pet-friendly and are equipped with dog beds.

The hotel also offers free unlimited WiFi, minibars stocked with items at supermarket prices and hour-long nightly mingling sessions for guests where free cocktails are served.

Guests are also encouraged to sign up for 'The Know', a forum on which they can submit requests to the hotel. This replaces the traditional hotel loyalty programme, by giving guests preferential treatment according to their requests rather than a set list of options.

The company plans to open 25

hotels in the next seven years, with New York and Nashville properties scheduled to open in 2016.

Maybe not as extreme, but more hotels are introducing multiple-brand strategies with distinct products for different types of customers. We take a closer look at this phenomenon in our 'Battle of the brands' feature this month.

Talking about clashes, **Jim Weighell**, director of operations for the Global Business Travel Association Southern Africa, provides some in-depth context on US carriers' attempts to restrict Gulf carriers' operations and why this may have negative consequences for travellers. Gulf carriers say protectionism will restrict competition while US carriers argue that Gulf carriers, which receive government subsidies, are creating an uncompetitive environment.

This month we also look at travel in Europe and how to get around with ease; we investigate why more corporates are turning to cruising as a great incentive option; and in our dedicated meetings section we put the spotlight on Vic Falls, where investment is growing.

Keep reading!

Natasha Schmidt
(natashas@nowmedia.co.za)

COVER

Managing travel across four different provinces and multiple subsidiaries on behalf of travellers who often have almost immediate travel requirements, travel co-ordinator for AXIM, **Olive Makhafola** speaks about developing seamless routine and processes around outsourcing. Cover photograph by **Shannon Van Zyl**.

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UK implements visa 'health surcharge'

TRAVELLERS staying in the UK for longer than six months are required to pay a 'health surcharge' when they make their visa application. The surcharge must be paid online before attending the Visa Application Centre. They will then be able to use the National Health Service but will still have to pay

for certain types of services, including prescriptions, dental treatment and eye tests.



Biometric residence permits should also be presented when accessing healthcare in the UK. Travellers on a visitor visa do not have to pay the healthcare surcharge and will instead pay for any healthcare received through the NHS.

Air Botswana drops route

AIR Botswana will no longer operate direct flights between Maun and Cape Town from May 4. The service will be routed through Gaborone. Consequently, from May 4, flight frequency between Gaborone and Cape Town will increase from twice a week to four times a week on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays.

SAA

Bid for business upgrades!

SAA has introduced Step-Up, an online bidding system that gives customers the opportunity to upgrade their seat for an upcoming trip from economy to business class, where business-class inventory is available. The programme has been launched on selected routes and will be extended to more routes in the near future.

How it works:

Customers will get an email seven days before their scheduled departure informing them of the possibility of available seats in business class. The email contains a link to the Step-Up tool, where the customer will be able to place their bid. The minimum and maximum bid range is dependent on the original ticket purchased and where the passenger is flying. All bids stop 72 hours before departure, and customers have the ability to view, modify and cancel their bid before this cut-off. Nothing is confirmed immediately, as the system creates a prioritised list of all the bids. Customers are then notified 24 hours before departure of the outcome of their bid.

Birchwood launches premium product

THE Birchwood Hotel and OR Tambo Conference Centre has officially opened bookings for its new product, Silverbirch@Birchwood, which is designed to cater for the 'more discerning' business traveller.

The R25m investment sees the launch of Birchwood's 'hotel within a hotel' concept – 153 rooms situated on the property in a separate area, with separate controlled access, away from the hustle and bustle of the main hotel and conferencing area.

Other extras include larger workstations, unlimited and uninterrupted high-speed WiFi access and a business centre, and a dedicated check-in area within the hotel's main reception. Silverbirch also offers clients a complimentary



PHOTO: DANISE FOSTER

Birchwood's Bradley Partridge (corporate sales) and Jacqueline Engelbrecht (events manager) celebrate the launch of the brand's new offering at a special event held last month.

airport shuttle service and a dedicated porter facility. Fine dining away from the crowds is available at the Grill At One Twenty.

The new product would cater for clients who were looking for a more premium service, said Birchwood events manager, **Jacqueline Engelbrecht**.

Marriott drops eight Protea hotels

MARRIOTT International has ceased to manage eight Protea branded hotels in Western Africa, including Protea Hotel Abuja, Protea Hotel Apo Apartments, Protea Hotel Asokoro, Protea Hotel Delta, Protea Hotel Leadway, Protea Hotel Ikoyi Westwood, Protea Hotel Ikeja and Protea Hotel Victoria Island.

Commenting on the development, **Mark Satterfield**, ceo of Marriott International Middle East and Africa said that after completing the acquisition of Protea in April 2014, Marriott conducted a post-closing review of hotel operations. "Following this analysis, the owners of several hotels in Nigeria along with Marriott decided that these properties will operate independent of Marriott."

Air China – 'unlimited' connections

AIR China will launch its inaugural flight from Beijing to Johannesburg on August 30. The flight will depart Beijing at 23h15 to arrive the following day in Johannesburg at 07h35. The airline will operate flights from Johannesburg on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, departing at 11h40 to arrive in Beijing the next day at 07h10. The return flight from Beijing operates on Tuesdays,

Thursdays and Sundays. **Bradley Brouwer**, SA Tourism president of Asia Pacific, told *Travel Buyer* that the allocated time slots were optimal, offering unlimited connection opportunities within China. Spokesperson for Air China, **Xingyu Zhao**, says compared with the previous SAA flight, the proposed Air China flight schedule will offer more convenient connection times. Zhao says the recent state visit

to China by President **Jacob Zuma** has led to enhanced co-operation between the two nations in the aviation sector. "Air China and SAA announced a further strengthening of their bilateral co-operation within the Star Alliance. The key element in this relationship will be some network reconfiguration for both airlines to provide better passenger and cargo services between South Africa and China and countries adjacent to both."

All aboard for incentives!

CRUISES International pushed out the boat with a Royal Caribbean International breakfast for meetings and incentives planners at the Inanda Club on March 24. **Clem Galindo**, RCI's manager of international corporate, incentive and charter sales showed guests how RCI offers the largest conference spaces at sea; state-of-the-art equipment; endless customisation and branding opportunities; gourmet cuisine, all at a virtually all-inclusive cost. Galindo (centre) gave guests a taste of what participants in a cruise conference or incentive will receive. He is pictured here with (left) **Lizaan Schnettler**, Cruises International's groups accounts manager and (right) **Dalene Oroni**, Cruises International's groups and incentives manager. RCI is currently offering corporates a Mice incentive in which passengers get a discounted Premium Beverage



PHOTO: KATE NATHAN

Package for USD31,86 (R384) per person per day, plus internet access at USD2,50 (R30) per person per day on certain ships and USD5 (R60) on others. The Premium Beverage Package (usually USD57 (R685) per person per day), includes premium cocktails (up to USD12 (R144)

in value), frozen cocktails, beer, premium wines by the glass, non-alcoholic cocktails, bottled water, soda fountain drinks and a 20% discount on bottled wine, plus a one-hour cocktail reception. This must be booked when booking a meeting or incentive programme on an RCI ship.

New route for SA Express

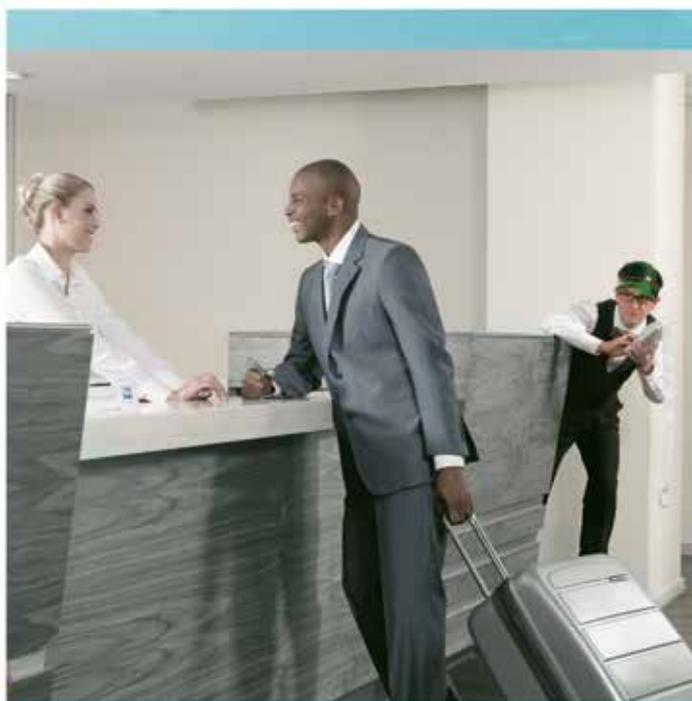
SA EXPRESS has introduced three weekly flights between OR Tambo International Airport and Pilanesberg International Airport. It has also introduced two flights a week between Pilanesberg and Cape Town International Airport. The CRJ 200, a 50-seat passenger jet, has been deployed for the service.

Flight SA1261 departs Johannesburg at 09h30 and arrives in the Pilanesberg at 10h20 on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Flight SA1264 departs Pilanesberg at 10h55 and arrives in Johannesburg at 11h45 on Wednesdays, while SA1268 departs at 16h20 to arrive in Johannesburg at 17h20 on Mondays and Fridays.

SA1255 departs Cape Town at 13h50, arriving in Pilanesberg at 16h00. Flight SA1254 departs Pilanesberg at 11h00, arriving in Cape Town at 13h20.



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Sandton braces for month-long shutdown

STREETS across Sandton will be closed for the entire month of October, while the City of Johannesburg hosts the world's second ever 'EcoMobility World Festival and Exhibition' – a month-long car-free district event.

The lanes that will be closed will, instead, be used for public transport, walking, cycling and other forms of eco-mobility during the Transport Month, executive Mayor of the City of Johannesburg, Cllr **Parks Tau** announced.

Maude Street, West Street, Rivonia Road, Fredman Drive, Alice Lane and Gwen Lane will all be affected, but

delegates at the recent Mayoral Breakfast were assured that a traffic impact assessment had indicated that these plans were doable and would not lead to 'chaos' in Sandton.

The City of Johannesburg said major changes to transport patterns were envisaged for Sandton in the long term, and that the Festival would serve as a glimpse of a future where public transport took precedence and there was infrastructure in place to encourage walking and cycling. "We want to show residents and visitors that an eco-mobile future is

possible and that public transport, walking and cycling can be accessible, safe, attractive and cool!" explained Mayor Tau.

Sandton has seen the number of incoming commuters increase by 3,4% per annum – a number likely to increase at 3% per annum at the current rate. An estimated 85 797 vehicles travel in and out of the district every morning between 06h00 and 10h00, while 89 217 travel in and out during the 15h00-19h00 peak period. The fear is that there is not enough road space if the growth continues in the same way, with the high level of private cars.

By 2017, the district will roll out Rea Vaya Bus Rapid Transit lanes and services, cycle lanes, public transport lanes, wider sidewalks, park and ride facilities, bike share schemes, corporate travel plans as well as Metrobus restructuring and recapitalisation, in an effort to promote the use of public transport and to accommodate a high level of accessibility for people entering the business hub.

The Mayor said the City would provide alternative transport in and out of Sandton for the month-long duration of the festival.

Tackling current issues

*THE most recent GBTA buyers' circle saw travel managers tackle a number of important issues, including the emergence of new players within the LCC market, as well as complications and pitfalls around the implementation of new BEE codes. Joining in the discussion are (from left) **Joey Kganyago** (senior travel consultant, IDC); **Liesl Burnett** (manager procurement, KPMG); and **Lesley-Anne Jacobs** (administrator, KPMG).*



PHOTO: DEBBIE BASHAM

FlyAfrica ups flights to Harare

FLYAFRICA.COM has introduced a second daily flight between Harare and Johannesburg.

Fares start from US\$39 (R483) one way. It will depart Johannesburg at 16h00 daily, arriving in Harare at 17h35. The return flight departs Harare daily at 18h05 and arrives in Johannesburg at 19h40.

"Our low-fare business model now allows people to make a business trip between Harare and Johannesburg, return the same day, save on hotel accommodation and spend US\$78 (R965) return to do it," says Professor **Chakanyuka Karase**, ceo of Zimbabwe flyAfrica.

Temporary schedule change at Air Namibia

SCHEDULE changes have been introduced for Air Namibia flights departing Windhoek from Cape Town on Mondays and Fridays. Until October 24, flights will depart at 08h40 (09h40 in summer), to arrive at 11h40. The flight number will also change to SW701 from

SW703, which currently departs at 06h55 (07h55 in summer) and arrives at 09h55. All passengers will be re-protected on SW flights only, and are to be rebooked at no fee. Full refunds for unused tickets will be granted regardless of terms and conditions of the fare (even non-refundable tickets).

Kenya Airways adjusts JNB flights

KENYA Airways has adjusted its South African flight schedule. The new schedule for Johannesburg is as follows: KQ765 departs Johannesburg at 01h50 to arrive in Nairobi at 06h55. KQ761 departs Johannesburg at 12h35 to arrive in Nairobi at 17h40. KQ763 departs Johannesburg

at 16h20 to arrive in Nairobi at 21h25. KQ760 departs Nairobi at 08h35 to arrive in Johannesburg at 11h45. KQ762 departs Nairobi at 12h05 to arrive in Johannesburg at 15h15. KQ764 departs Nairobi at 21h50 to arrive in Johannesburg at 01h00. All flights operate daily.

DHA opens visa facility for corporates

THE Department of Home Affairs will open a new facility for corporate account clients at the Gauteng Investment Centre in Sandton, which will serve as a one-stop shop for visa and permit renewals and put in place a shorter, more efficient process for visa applications for foreign nationals employed by corporate companies.

This will be done through the Department's Directorate of Corporate Accounts' partnership with the Gauteng Growth and Development Agency, the Gauteng Investment Centre and VFS Global, which renders visa facilitation services. The facility

will also benefit customers by offering immigration advice for applicants and enhanced management of stakeholder relations.

Home Affairs minister, **Malusi Gigaba**, said the department was also reviewing its corporate client desk to improve its services, and would be embarking on a national road show for different clients in the country to talk to them directly about their challenges and recommendations. Home Affairs deputy director, **Jackson McKay**, added that the department was looking at increasing staff to deal with appeals following the rejection of a visa.

Senegal scraps tourist visas and air taxes

IN AN attempt to revive Senegal's tourism industry, **President Macky Sall** announced last week that the country would waive all tourist visas for international travellers from May 1. The President

said he would also halve taxes on airfares to lower the price of air tickets and make travel to Senegal more affordable. He said he was in talks with various airlines to examine the possibility of also reducing the fuel surcharge.

St Helena is open for business

COMAIR has been appointed the official provider of air services to St Helena, with the Island's first airport opening in 2016. St Helena is a tropical island of volcanic origin in the South Atlantic Ocean.

Comair will operate a scheduled service between Johannesburg (OR Tambo International Airport) and St Helena Airport. The weekly Saturday service will be operated using a new B737-800 aircraft in a two-class configuration (business and economy class). The flight time from Johannesburg to St Helena is approximately five hours.

Bookings will open for sale later this year, subject to the conclusion of regulatory approvals.

Mantis has been selected as the preferred operator to manage the 32-room hotel to be created at 123 Main Street from three historic buildings in St Helena's capital, Jamestown. Construction is due to start in July and the hotel is expected to open during the first half of 2016.

"For a new and developing international tourism and investment destination, quality and trust are paramount. That St Helena is entering into partnership with two of the most respected and trusted brands in their respective fields – Comair and Mantis – sends out a very strong message. St Helena is open for business," says Enterprise St Helena's chief, **Niall O'Keeffe**. ■



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PRECISION IN TRAVEL

Managing travel across four different provinces and multiple subsidiaries on behalf of travellers who often have almost immediate travel requirements, travel co-ordinator for AXIM, **Olive Makhafola**, draws on a close working relationship with the company's TMC. She speaks to **Debbie Badham** about establishing seamless routines and processes.

HANDLING requests for travel to remote destinations that must take place on the day on which they are received is daily routine for **Olive Makhafola**. As the travel co-ordinator for Africa X-Ray Industrial & Medical (AXIM), Makhafola is responsible for travellers who are on call to assist with technical emergencies. They need to be able to get to a wide range of places both inside and outside South Africa's borders as quickly and seamlessly as possible.

To manage this effectively, Makhafola draws on her considerable background in travel to leverage her relationship with the company's TMC, Travel Dynamics.

Having always known that she wanted to develop a career in travel, after school Makhafola elected to study International Travel at Varsity College. After completing the two-year diploma, she began her career in leisure travel with a small company called Agape Travel, where, as part of a two-person team she was given significant responsibility.

She gained exposure to larger corporate accounts when she moved to work for Travel Leaders in Rivonia, at the same time handling a broader range of travel requirements in the form of car hire and accommodation. Thereafter she moved to a company named Panoptic where she was promoted to senior consultant.

Makhafola first heard of AXIM through a recruitment agent

and was hired by the company in October 2013 to handle all the organisation's travel booking requirements. Her travel team of one works closely together with their TMC to manage AXIM's travel across Johannesburg, Durban, Port Elizabeth and Bloemfontein, as well as for the organisation's other group companies. Makhafola reports directly to the executive PA to the company's directors.

Centralised bookings

The company's travel is split largely into those elements that are booked through the GDS and those that aren't. Essentially, Travel Dynamics handles GDS bookings, including flights and car rental, while Makhafola handles everything else. "All travel technology that we use sits with the TMC," she explains.

Booking is completely

centralised both in terms of international and domestic bookings. Makhafola takes in order forms from the travellers and then, depending on the travel requirements, she either

passes this on to the TMC or handles the booking herself.

She notes that it has proved to be extremely practical for the company to outsource the bulk of its travel because of the sheer volume of travellers for whom it is responsible. Given the nature of AXIM's business, travel also needs to be processed immediately. "Probably the most challenging aspect of our day-to-day operations is

when travellers are required to head through to the middle of nowhere that very day," she comments.

Luckily, international bookings are more controlled. Makhafola reveals that around 90% of international bookings are issued months in advance. This helps a great deal with timing around visas and other travel document requirements.

Comprehensive databases

As AXIM sends travellers all over the country, including very remote areas, the company makes use of a large number of bed and breakfasts. This can prove tricky when it comes to ensuring accommodation is up to standard. However, Makhafola reveals that, over time, AXIM has built a significant database of appropriate suppliers. "In cases where travellers have encountered sub-standard offerings we simply remove that supplier from the list, leaving us with a comprehensive database of options," she says.

Consistent communication

Despite its wide range of destinations, duty of care is a fairly hassle-free process for Makhafola. She explains that Travel Dynamics is vigilant in its communication around travel-related issues with the potential to impact safety and security. "Our travel agent sends through day-to-day updates. We then pass on the applicable notification to the entire company by email," she says, adding that it is then up to the traveller to take notice of the

communication if it should apply to their particular situation.

Savvy negotiations

AXIM takes a strict and straightforward approach to budgeting. There is a Travel Standard Operating Procedure in place regarding accommodation cost, class of flight and car hire that are able to be booked. "This applies to everyone throughout the company. Everyone is treated the same," says Makhafola.

Having worked on the supplier side of the industry, she finds negotiations with suppliers to be relatively simple. Key, says Makhafola, is to consider future increases when negotiating rates. "With these increases in mind, I determine whether the current rate is acceptable or whether we will require that supplier to drop their rate by a certain percentage," she explains. "Our budgets are very strict so equally important is to know when to move on from a particular supplier when they are unable to provide the rate required."

Controlled expenses

When it comes to reconciliation processes, this is made easier by tightly controlled expenses. Accommodation is pre-paid and travellers are provided with forex for the other everyday expenses. "They then come back with receipts, which are sent through to and reconciled by the accounts department," she says.

Limited changes

The greatest change in shifting from booking leisure travel to corporate travel is the number

The most challenging aspect of our day-to-day operations is when travellers are required to head through to the middle of nowhere that very day.

of changes involved, says Makhafola. "When you deal with corporate bookings, the dates of the trip might change, but generally the destination remains the same. Leisure bookings are completely different – I often think of corporate travel as controlled chaos," she quips.

Changes are not implemented lightly. According to Makhafola, travellers must produce a valid reason for requesting a change. She notes that this more often happens with domestic bookings rather than international ones. "When it comes to change fares, changes are implemented in relation to what is most effective."

Performance under pressure

She says that perhaps her greatest achievement since joining AXIM has been discovering her ability to perform under pressure. "When I first joined the company, there was a gap in the organisation in terms of the person whom I report to. I had to be really hands-on and deal with things myself, but I think that I handled that pressure really well."

In terms of future operations, the company will continue with its current systems and procedures. "Things have been working well so far, so for now we will stick with what works." ■

PHOTO: SHANNON VAN ZYL



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Top Challenges that Face Effective Procurement Spend Management in Corporations

E - Procurement Travel & Expense management has become an absolute necessity in today's business environment – especially when you consider just how many companies are sending employees to far corners of the earth. In the following piece we'll take a look at a few of the challenges which Procurement and finance officials face, when it comes to effective Travel & Expense Management.

Trying to manage your procurement spend without dedicated software

Investing in procurement spend management software can give your company much greater control over how much it needs to spend

on costs associated with business travel. TraveluXion's software has been purpose built to allow Corporations the ownership of licences that will allow them complete control & visibilities over there spend, as well as ownership of data which is integral for an effective solution. Our software is designed to give your business the foresight regarding any potential costs that will be incurred before & during trips.



Fighting against fraud

There will always be someone looking to take advantage of business travel and in South Africa, we're accustomed to seeing high ranking government officials abusing this privilege beyond belief. This reckless spending, however, is not exclusive to the public sector. There are thousands of employees in the private sector who take advantage of slack spend management to enjoy themselves in foreign lands at the company's expense. Effective procurement software can stamp out this sort of behaviour.

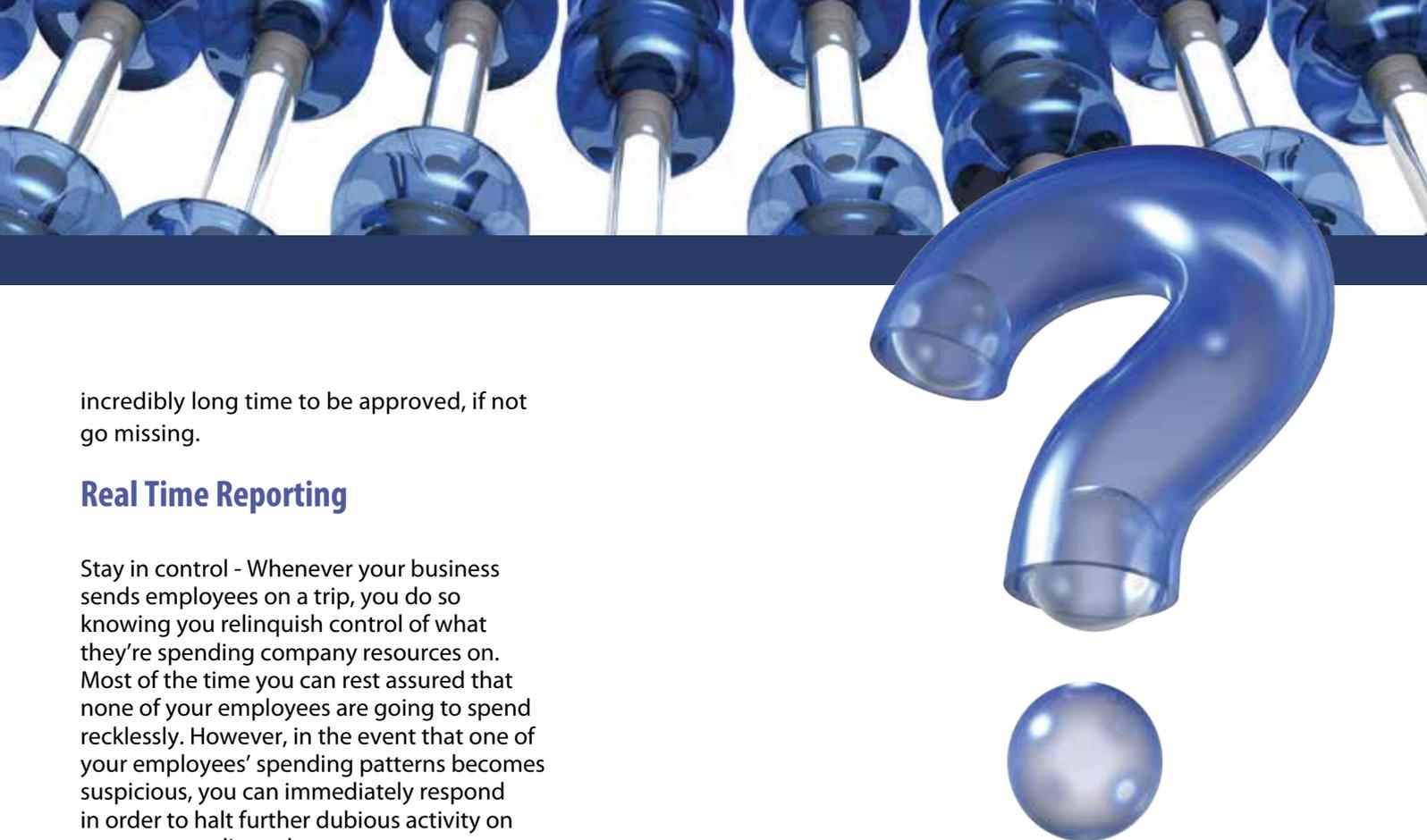
Inability to track and measure negotiated deals

A key component of Procurement is negotiations and contract management with suppliers. It is virtually impossible to effectively track & measure spend in the T&E space without software that is owned by the Corporation themselves. Reliance on third party information is high and is sent after the costs have been incurred, this does not allow for effective control over expenses before they are incurred.

Get rid of the paper requisition system

Travel procurement and approval often includes so many members of your organisation, from travelling employees and the accounts department to line and risk managers. All of these departments and employees require information in order to execute their jobs effectively – this information is usually contained on a single piece of paper.

This paper requisition floats between departments and can often take an



incredibly long time to be approved, if not go missing.

Real Time Reporting

Stay in control - Whenever your business sends employees on a trip, you do so knowing you relinquish control of what they're spending company resources on. Most of the time you can rest assured that none of your employees are going to spend recklessly. However, in the event that one of your employees' spending patterns becomes suspicious, you can immediately respond in order to halt further dubious activity on company credit cards.

Real time updates ensure your employees are sticking to their itinerary and budget

Your expense management process will give you an intimate understanding of where your employees are, as well as what they're spending company resources on. This gives insight into how well your employees are doing in terms of their budgeting and whether or not they're sticking to their pre-determined itinerary.

Concerned About the Rising Costs of your Business Travel Programme – Suffice to say by the time you have noticed a sharp increase in your Business Travel Spend, it is too late to change that, but it is not too late to seek advice on best practice and how to monitor and track spend behaviour and patterns.

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How to access Europe with ease



In spite of the growth of LCCs, South Africans prefer to travel Europe by rail. *Travel Buyer* investigates why rail travel is such a convenient option for corporate travellers conducting business in Europe.

THE LCC market in Europe has grown considerably over the past few years, creating affordable and broad airline access throughout the continent. This comes after Europe's big full-service airlines, such as Air France KLM and Lufthansa, started to extend their networks by introducing hybrid or low-cost carriers for their short-haul flights. However, the emergence of more LCCs and lower fares has not encouraged South Africans to explore the continent further by air. Tour operators report that SA travellers largely prefer high-speed trains when travelling on the continent.

Ian McPartlan, managing



Megan D'Arcy, product manager, Holiday Tours

consultant at Advito, says Lufthansa has gradually transferred all its domestic and regional European services that do not operate from Frankfurt or Munich to its low-cost carrier Germanwings. Meanwhile Air France has combined three of its regional subsidiary airlines to form Hop!, which will operate 30% of Air France's domestic and regional services. And at International Airlines Group (IAG), British Airways and Iberia have completed the full acquisition of Vueling, their low-cost carrier based in Barcelona.

Megan D'Arcy, product manager at Holiday Tours, says Europe has always been very accessible through the various modes of public transport, with South African travellers usually able to combine with ease countries within the EU. "The addition of various LCCs has definitely upped capacity, however it has had no direct major impact on our figures."

According to D'Arcy, rail travel, whether the high-speed trains or regular services, remains a firm favourite with South African travellers.

Corporate travellers in particular are starting to catch on to the benefits of travelling in Europe by train, says **Terri-Ann Wright**, manager of World Travel. She says that World Travel has experienced

significant growth during the first part of 2015 across both corporate and leisure bookings. "When the traveller considers the time spent travelling to and from crowded airports, dealing with the hassle of queues and tedious check-in procedures, rail travel is more efficient and seamless," she comments. "Rail is also often chosen because of its high-schedule frequency and ability to take travellers from major airports directly to the city centre and beyond."

According to Wright, travellers can arrive at the station up to ten minutes before departure, with the exception of Eurostar where check-in closes 30 minutes prior to departure (10 minutes for business premier class). "Travellers also benefit from excellent connections with other public transportation such as the underground trains, taxis and buses," she adds.

What's more, rail offers travellers an enhanced travel experience. Comments D'Arcy: "Rail travel is a fantastic way to travel as it allows passengers to enjoy views of the countryside between cities. Passengers can generally walk or take a short cab ride to their hotel in the city centre, making rail travel an easy, no-fuss way of travelling. Provided that a rail journey makes sense logistically

and fits within the time and budget framework as advised by clients, our consultants try to offer rail tickets where possible."

John Ridler, spokesperson for Cullinan Outbound Tourism, confirms that rail passes are very popular with SA travellers. "Not only are they affordable but it is a great way to see Europe. City-to-city travel by rail is hugely time saving and takes away the aggravation of crowded airports. Rail passes also offer flexibility, which is seldom available on LCCs, which penalise any changes to your route or dates flown."

As Wright points out, rail is also considered to be reliable because it is less affected by adverse weather conditions and other environmental factors. On-board features such as meeting rooms, WiFi, power sockets and business-class lounges optimise the travel experience on most trains that are popular with corporate travellers, she says.

Upgrades to technology are increasingly adding value to the rail experience. World Travel recently launched a mobile app called My Train Companion, enabling travellers to retrieve train schedules, locate stations on a city map, connect with public transport and retrieve their tickets through a booking reference.

Tips for exploring the East

Eastern Europe is an up-and-coming destination for South Africans. Here are a few top tips for business travellers looking to add a little leisure time on to their trip.

EASTERN Europe is very different from Central Europe, so agents advise clients to travel with an open mind, says Trafalgar md, **Theresa Szejwallo**.

"Culturally, these countries are not as cosmopolitan as, for example, Italy and France, and there may be a language barrier as not everyone speaks English." It makes things easier to have a travel guide who speaks both English and the local language, she says.

Pentravel Tyger Valley's **Landi Groenwald** agrees, recommending organised tours in places like

Prague and Budapest because of the language barrier. "The benefit of taking a tour is that the tour operator arranges access to attractions and there's no queuing, all transport needs are taken care of, there are a lot more inclusions and it's more cost effective."

She also advises careful checks on visa requirements for Eastern European countries. "Some visas can only be applied

for in person in Johannesburg, which can present a challenge for those living outside Gauteng. In some instances, clients visiting two countries in a region may have to apply for two different visas, so they

need to be applied for timeously."

Marelize van Zyl from Pentravel Tyger Valley says travellers should be aware that in some places in Croatia, only the local currency, the kuna, is accepted and not euros.

Inge Dobihal, owner of Austria Connection advises travellers in Prague to be aware of taxi drivers who invariably like to take the long route to the destination. "Travellers should have some basic knowledge of how far their destination is and ask the driver upfront what the approximate fare would be."

In Poland, says Dobihal, there are often many unlicensed taxis without meters lined up in front of hotels and airports. "Travellers should never take just any taxi outside a hotel. They should always ask the hotel reception to order a taxi for them, and at the airport look for the official taxi rank."

“It makes things easier to have a travel guide who speaks both English and the local language.”



Theresa Szejwallo, md, Trafalgar

"Lastly, in Romania, 'prost' means 'dumb head', not 'cheers' as it does in German!" says Dobihal. ■

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Vic Falls – investment is growing

Luring tourists to the mighty Victoria Falls has been high on the agenda of both Zimbabwe and Zambia, and both have taken a progressive approach in opening up the destination. But what impact has this had on the MICE sector? **Liesl Venter** finds out more.

HISTORICALLY, tourism has always been one of the fastest growing sectors of the Zimbabwean economy, reaching its highest growth rate in 1995 when the country hosted the All Africa Games. Tourist arrivals increased by a whopping 35% that year, but, sadly, it was short-lived as figures started to plunge soon after as visitors dwindled.

The world-famous Victoria Falls suffered the same fate, despite efforts by the Zambians to grow the market. Political instability in Zimbabwe took its toll.

"1995 was indeed a good year," says **Glen Byrom**, founder of Green Route, which, in the early nineties, pioneered specialist destination management for the MICE market into all of southern Africa, focusing on Victoria Falls twinned with Chobe in Botswana. "Victoria Falls had proved itself to be one of the most powerful and desired incentive destinations on the planet, peaking in 1995 welcoming a flurry of blue-chip international groups, including a group of 120 people from IBM USA that had won Africa's first global SITE Crystal Award, considered to be one of the highest forms of recognition in incentive travel," says Byrom.

But between 2000 and 2008 very little consideration was given to Victoria Falls as a tourist – or even MICE – destination.

However, times are changing again.

Victoria Falls, on both sides

of the river, is now gearing up for a resurgence of those heady days," maintains Byrom. "There have been several serious impediments over the past several years – first the global financial crisis has continued to throw key market economies into turmoil; then there has been the latest torpedo in the form of Ebola, which has scared away markets on a large scale. Victoria Falls and Zimbabwe and Zambia have remained Ebola-free and far from the epicenter." But he says just the mention of Africa, sends out a frightening message when such threats emerge. Many major European cities are closer to the Ebola centre than Victoria Falls but perception is hard to conquer."

According to Byrom, however, the obstacles are all fast disappearing – economies are improving, Ebola fears are subsiding and locals are seeing the green shoots of a MICE revival. "Long-haul groups are returning slowly, even though they are on more price-sensitive budgets, and many positives are in place and worth emphasising," says Byrom.

Game Changers

Robin Brown, managing director of DMC Cansaf/Blue Arrow, agrees, saying there

have been a number of positive developments in the tourism sector, including the new world-class Livingstone airport, which is already operational, the new Vic Falls airport, which becomes operational later this year, and a whole host of investment in the area.

"In the last 24 months, Africa Albida Tourism has invested over US\$4 million in a new luxury wing at Victoria Falls Safari lodge as well as a complete refurbishment of its current stock of rooms.

The same company has also made public its intention to build a wildlife- and history-based theme park on a property adjacent to the lodge," he says.

There is also the new conference venue at the

David Livingstone Safari Lodge and Spa in Zambia, which has an internal space of 250 sqm and offers WiFi as well as AV equipment. Up to 280 guests can be accommodated in cinema-style seating while a new boardroom for smaller and intimate meetings has also been established.

"We have seen Ilala Lodge break ground in the building of a new wing to its hotel – this will see a further 24 rooms added to its stock. It will also be investing in two new small cruise boats. African Sun has

upgraded 25 rooms at the Kingdom Hotel and Econet has, in the last 24 months, entered the tourism game and invested in three strategic businesses – the Victoria Falls Steam Train and Tram company; Batoka Safaris (a ground-handling company with transport options in the Victoria Falls old Tourism Services Zimbabwe brand); and Imvelo Safaris, which owns three lodges in Hwange and two properties in the Victoria Falls area.

These companies are all injecting substantial capital and cash flow into these businesses and the capital investment infrastructure.

"All of these are game changers," says Brown, "and the MICE business will be the mainstay of Victoria Falls business if we can get it right."

But, he says, a change is needed to move from simply being a good venue to being a world-class one with modern systems and furnishings. "Zimbabweans have proved time and again that they can provide world-class service but we have not yet hit our potential in this sector. Some investment is needed in a modern, large (1000-seat) conference venue and there is serious talk of this," says Brown.

Both Byrom and Brown say it is slow going still but the outlook is positive. "It's a no brainer," says Brown. "Everyone wants to visit the Victoria Falls at some stage, so tying it into a business trip is an obvious solution."

“Everyone wants to visit the Victoria Falls at some stage, so tying it into a business trip is an obvious solution.”



5 ultimate Vic Falls experiences

Darise Foster asks Robin Brown, managing and operations director at Cansaf and John Ridler, media and public relations manager at Thompsons Holidays, for top add-on recommendations.

Sunset cruising

THERE are few sights as breathtaking as sunset on the Zambezi River. Not surprisingly, both Brown and Ridler agree that a two-and-a-half-hour cruise on the Zambezi, be it by sunset or during dinnertime, is a top add-on for meetings in Vic Falls. Unforgettable African sunsets and numerous animal and bird-sighting opportunities combine to form a highly memorable African river experience.

Historical tours

Conference-goers can join a

professional tour guide on a two-hour tour of the Falls, delving into the history and geography of the region, exploring the best viewpoints and geographic sites. Alternatively, they can take a village tour to the nearby Monde area, where they can meet with the village headman in person.

Dine with elephants

Just a 20-minute drive from the Victoria Falls is the magical Elephant Wallow. Here delegates can meet Africa's gentle giants and enjoy a



PHOTO: MARK ABEL

professionally administered elephant interaction before sitting down to lunch or dinner in a traditional lapa-style setting on the edge of the Masuie River.

Take the plunge

Bucket-list experiences serve as the ultimate kind of incentive. Adrenalin-driven delegates would not want to miss the opportunity to take the legendary plunge off of the Victoria Falls Bridge on the border of Zambia and Zimbabwe. They can also bridge swing above the

Zambezi River or bridge slide from the Zambian bank of the gorge to the Zimbabwean side of the bridge. As delegates slide from the gorge towards the bridge they are treated to an incredible view of the Falls.

Into the wild

Just a one-hour drive from Victoria Falls, the Chobe National Park is renowned for its amazing wildlife. "The day visit includes a game drive a game cruise and a full lunch at one of the plush Chobe Safari lodges," says Brown.

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Clash of the carriers – bad news for travellers?

US carriers are attempting to restrict Gulf carriers' operations. **Jim Weighell**, director of operations for the Global Business Travel Association Southern Africa, provides some in-depth thought and context on the situation and why it could have negative consequences for travellers.

AN INTERESTING situation has developed in the aviation sector over the past month with the US's three largest airlines and a handful of airline trade organisations petitioning the Obama administration to open a review of the Open Skies agreements with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

The three carriers in question, along with a handful of unions, have announced a new coalition, the 'Partnership for Open and Fair Skies', which has publicised evidence of 'unfair' trade on the part of the Gulf carriers in hope of persuading the US government to take action – seemingly toward making the Open Skies Policy for Qatar and the UAE less 'open' than it is now.

Speaking at a press conference, the US carriers said the magnitude of subsidies that Gulf States paid to their local carriers violated Open Skies policies by creating a "government distortion of the market".

However, the point they seem to miss is this; the US carriers and labour organisations want to determine the definition of 'fair' based on their own circumstances, asking the US Government to adjust aviation policy accordingly. Surely this would also be deemed 'government distortion of the market'.

The real crux of the matter lies in the Partnership for Open and Fair Skies' claims that "the subsidies are fuelling a massive expansion in the Gulf carriers' fleets and seriously distorting the commercial marketplace to the detriment of US and third-country airlines".

The Gulf carriers are expanding their capacity into emerging markets where US carriers have been scarce historically. These emerging markets have been serviced by 'old world' legacy carriers, whose networks were built during

– let's face it – the colonial era. The US carriers have, in the past, linked their services into 'safe' markets such as Europe, making use of those old colonial legacy feeder networks.

Emerging market economies usually could not afford to develop viable carriers of their own without massive and punitive state funding and were dependent on those few global carriers, which were, of course, state-owned and subsidised until relatively recently. So historical government distortion doesn't count either it would seem.

But what about the global air traveller?

Even more to the point: does today's air traveller really care if great fares are the result of a government subsidy? As a passenger I would be watching this manoeuvre by the US carriers with some alarm because it certainly looks like an attempt at price regulation to me. At no point does the Partnership identify any benefit to the customer out of their action; this is all about US airlines and unions, which is an unusual coalition in itself.

The Gulf States are fast-tracking the development of their economies, not just their airlines, and a by-product of these emerging markets is the threat they pose to the global status quo.

But the other, and most important, development is the range of benefits it brings to the global traveller in terms of choice, customer service quality and price. This is especially true of emerging markets, including South Africa, where the Gulf carriers have had an undeniable effect on our market. They haven't forced anybody to use their services; travellers have been using the wide range of distribution channels to make their own choices and the Gulf airlines certainly seem to be doing well, having taken the risk of adding significant capacity into many markets.

While the Middle Eastern carriers in question have been investing in their on-board products, US carriers have been introducing tighter seating areas, adding surcharges for baggage and, in some cases, even charging passengers not to sit in a middle seat.

So why focus on the Gulf carriers?

The Middle Eastern carriers are now looking to use the Open Skies policy to increase their direct service between Europe and the United States, which places them in direct competition with the US carriers and their European partners. This additional competition was never going to be well received by the current incumbents.

Rapid growth on the part of Middle Eastern carriers is also an issue for the US Partnership.

Statistically, Emirates Airline was ranked 30th in the world by available international seat miles in 1998. It now ranks at number one in 2015. Qatar Airways has jumped from

90th to 10th.

Aircraft orders by the three main Gulf carriers will increase their available international seat miles – which are currently equal to the three US carriers – to about 46% greater than the US carriers' international seat miles by 2020, according to the Partnership. The Partnership report states that "the massive subsidies have enabled Qatar, Etihad and Emirates to rapidly expand their fleets and international routes, distorting the commercial aviation marketplace and diverting global traffic to their hubs".

What would the South African market look like without the Gulf carriers?

Less capacity, higher prices, fewer route and service quality options.

These carriers have added a significant new dimension to air travel from South Africa and have certainly changed the status quo. As long as they continue to offer safe, secure, comfortable and convenient flight options at competitive prices, we will continue to buy their products.

The bottom line...

The counter lobby has already commenced with US Travel Association president and ceo, Roger Dow, saying that limiting Gulf carrier expansion into the US would "fly in the face of competition and consumer choice and ultimately harm demand for travel to the US".

The US carriers had their opportunities to expand their global networks over the last 20 years but didn't grasp them. Whether or not there are subsidies involved, the Gulf carriers have invested in building market share by operating into countries across the globe, in developing and developed regions. Travellers enjoy competitive prices, high levels of service and a much wider range of options. Long may it continue. ■



Jim Weighell

Why more corporates are *cruising*

Global research shows that cruise incentives are on the rise. The statistics indicate that corporates are catching on to the convenience of cruising. **Dorine Reinstein** investigates.

AROUND 73% of meetings industry professionals expect to use a cruise line for a client's incentive group within the next three years. This is according to a recent Site Index study, Focus on Cruises for Incentive Travel, which surveyed 735 meeting industry professionals in the US and Europe.

The study also found that 53% of respondents said they were likely to organise a meeting or conference on board a ship over the same period. Only 5% of respondents completely dismissed the idea of holding a meeting or conference on a cruise ship.

Looking at the local market, cruise operators report that in South Africa cruising is flourishing. **Dalene Oroni**, Groups and Incentives manager for Cruises International, says cruise incentives have grown year-on-year. "I have a lot of repeat business and find that once clients have got a taste of cruising, they tend to come back time and time again."

"More and more groups are travelling; it's trending for sure," agrees **Claire Swanepoel**, product manager Cruising for Flight Centre and Cruiseabout.

While incentive trends in South Africa are generally the same as in the US, according to **Peter Shanks**, Development director at Imagine Cruising, the general awareness of cruising and what it can offer incentive groups is not as high in South Africa. "This creates an opportunity for those travel companies that focus on providing incentive groups," he says.

Keeping costs down

The increasing affordability and value-for-money proposition of cruise holidays are important factors in swaying incentive organisers to opt for a cruise. Meals, meeting space, use of audio-visual equipment, recreational activities and evening entertainment are all included, meaning better budget control and less out-of-pocket expense for attendees.

Depending on the cruise line, fares can include everything from full-board accommodation and daily entertainment to flights, transfers and tips, making it much

easier to budget. A few cruise lines even offer all-inclusive drinks or on-board spending as extra incentives.

Stephanie Moss, md of Solutions Group, says cruising offers exceptional value if one divides the overall cost of the cruise by the number of days. She says the cost of 24 hours on a ship with all drinks, meals, snacks, entertainment and other value-adds included is equivalent to a land-based hotel room of a similar standing on a bed and breakfast basis.

Meeting spaces are often included in the price, which can also make a considerable difference to a company's expense budget. "When it comes to cruises organised by Cruises International, there are several conference rooms available with all AV equipment included at no additional charge, so corporates can have a meeting at sea with their team and it will not cost them a cent," says Oroni.

The risk of a fluctuating exchange rate is eradicated when organising a cruise incentive. Oroni says the volatility of the rand is a major problem for

most corporates, making cruising a great option. "Corporates pay in rands upfront for everything and don't need to worry about fluctuating currencies. This is such a huge burden off anyone's shoulders."

Captive audience

A ship is a self-contained environment, fostering relationship building and encouraging greater meeting attendance and participation. There are fewer outside distractions on a ship, so attendees can focus more on the programme agenda, according to US cruise event specialist, Landry & Kling.



PHOTO: RSS



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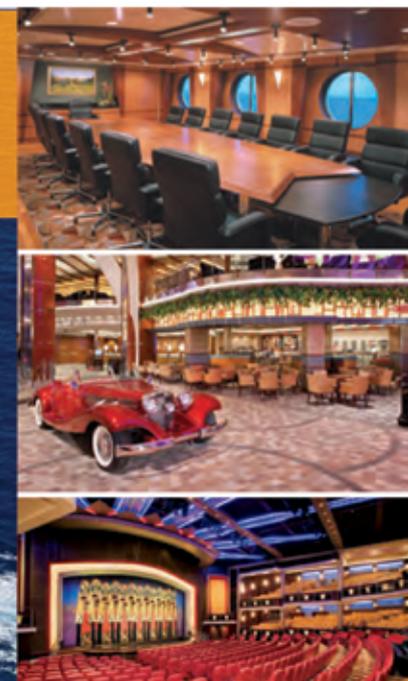
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CRUISE VS. LAND COMPARISON

Here is a summary of what's included on a Royal Caribbean cruise compared to a land-based resort

	Royal Caribbean cruise	Land-Based Resort
Dining Options and Amenities		
• Catered refreshment breaks*	Yes	No
• Casual and fine dining	Yes	No
• Pizza parlor, ice-cream bar and café	Yes	No
Entertainment & Activities		
• Nightly live music, comedy shows and musical stage productions	Yes	Sometimes
• Rock-climbing, mini golf, chef demos	Yes	No
• Full Casino	Yes	No
• Shipboard Activities	Yes	No
• Photography and Videography Services*	Yes	Sometimes
Fitness Facilities		
• Stationary bikes, treadmills, free weights, ellipticals	Yes	Sometimes
• Sauna, steamroom & whirlpools	Yes	Sometimes
• Jogging track and sports deck	Yes	No
Stateroom amenities		
• Complimentary room service**	Yes	No
Meeting and Incentive Services		
• Complimentary conference and meeting space	Yes	No
• Complimentary state-of-the-art AV equipment	Yes	No
• Dedicated Corporate Meeting & Incentive Sales Team	Yes	Yes
• Onboard Group Coordinator/Convention Services Manager	Yes	Yes

*Service fee applies **Service fee applies to orders between from 12 midnight to 5 a.m.

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PHOTO:RSS

Dedicated groups co-ordinators

All the major cruise lines are well versed in looking after groups, whether it is a small and intimate group of 20 or a mega event with 3 000 attendees.

Oroni says organising an incentive on a ship is very easy for organisers. "The most difficult part is choosing the ship and the itinerary. Once that is done, the incentive organiser can leave the rest up to the dedicated groups co-ordinator. They will make sure that all events on board are taken care of, from cocktail events to awards dinners, and can arrange anything from adding a logo to the menus to having the company's logo carved out of an ice block."

Ingrid Roding-Tudor, spokesperson for MSC Cruises, agrees. "Both locally and internationally, MSC has a dedicated events

team to facilitate a complete customised solution for meetings and incentives." She says organisers can book and pre-pay drinks packages for welcome cocktail parties or awards evenings, ship-board credits for on-board spending or even spa packages.

Latest technology

Theatres and lounges feature state-of-the-art sound, light and projection systems and built-in décor, saving corporates considerable time and money. Companies won't need to budget for AV equipment rentals, so they can reallocate their budget to provide extra amenities or customised events in ports of call, or just drop the savings to the bottom line.

Shanks says some of the bigger ships have theatres that can sit up to 1 000 people, as well

as a host of smaller meeting rooms and cocktail/dining venues. He adds that modern ships have WiFi available throughout the ship. "Businesses may fear they will be 'out of touch' at sea but that is just not the case."

One-stop shop

A cruising incentive is a one-stop-shop option for the incentive organiser. Oroni explains: "Groups fly in, we arrange a transfer for them, they embark and then get to see four or five different ports of call without having to go through the hassles of airports and passport controls and sitting in an aircraft seat for hours on end. They simply enjoy all there is to offer on board while being transported from one port to the next."

All event and group activities are contained in one location, which means it's not necessary to arrange group transport to and from other locations, says Roding-Tudor.

Team-building activities can also be organised on board a ship, even for meeting planners stuck within the confines of tight budgets. Cruise ships often offer planners unique team-building options, both on board and ashore, at no cost or for a minimal fee. From culinary events to rock-climbing and golf tournaments at sea, there are many ways to create memorable experiences that simply can't be duplicated at a land-based hotel.

How to choose the right cruise

FOR those meeting planners who do not have detailed knowledge of the cruise industry, the range of ships and possible itineraries available can be daunting.

Vessels range from Royal Caribbean's giant Oasis-class ships, such as *Allure of the Seas*, which can carry up to 5 400 passengers, to luxury yacht-style ships operated by companies such as Ponant, whose smallest vessel caters for a maximum of 64 guests.

Peter Shanks suggests American cruise lines, such as Royal Caribbean, Princess, Carnival and Celebrity, as the best options for corporate and incentive groups. "Both Costa and MSC ships also have good facilities – and a more international flavour for corporate or incentive groups that have a diverse range of international guests."

Dalene Oroni agrees that Royal Caribbean and Celebrity are still the most popular and most affordable cruise liners for South Africans but she says the smaller, more 'intimate' ships are also starting to make their way into the market, thanks to the exclusivity they offer.

Jackie Adami, md of Development Promotions, has seen the same trend towards holding incentives on smaller ships. She says, depending on group size, smaller vessels are often more suited to the incentive cruising market. Most of the smaller ships can be chartered, offering the group total exclusivity.



Jackie Adami, md, Development Promotions

"Ponant's luxury boutique ships are perfect for this purpose. The largest ship has only 132 staterooms (220-264 passengers), while the smallest takes only 64 passengers. The river cruise ships of AmaWaterways, with passenger capacity averaging around 150, are also ideally suited for group charters as are the luxury hotel barges of European Waterways, which take 12-20 passengers, accommodating small get-togethers," says Adami.

Spend less time out the office

THE fear of spending too much time out of the office is one of the biggest deterrents for corporate travellers when it comes to cruising. However, a cruising incentive doesn't necessarily need to be a long trip.

Dalene Oroni reveals that the fear of spending 'too much time out of the office' has definitely been a problem in South Africa. "The corporate client does not want employees to be out of the office for longer than seven days. It takes, on average, two days of flying to get anywhere from South Africa, which leaves you with four to five days of cruising."

She admits that most cruises are seven days or longer. However, she says it is possible to make an overseas cruise work when clients fly out over the weekend. "The Far East offers a lot of shorter cruises, and we are now going to offer seven-day cruises in Dubai, which is a quick flight over and back."

Peter Shanks adds that there are a number of short cruising opportunities out of Cape Town and Durban with MSC. "These can be short three- to five-day cruises, departing from local ports." He agrees that Dubai has become a convenient cruising destination for the corporate incentive market. ■



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07 Dec	4	Durban, Maputo & Portuguese Island	R 5 270	R 5 950	R 7 200
11 Dec	3	Durban, Portuguese Island	R 5 040	R 5 670	R 7 910
14 Dec	4	Durban, Inhaca & Portuguese Islands	R 6 890	R 7 740	R 8 840
18 Dec	3	Durban, Portuguese Island	R 5 760	R 6 480	R 7 440
21 Dec	7	Durban, Fort Dauphin, Inhaca & Portuguese Islands	R 13 080	R 14 000	R 17 300
28 Dec	11	Durban, Reunion & Mauritius	R 17 660	R 19 360	R 27 500
08 Jan	3	Durban to Cape Town	R 3 150	R 4 060	R 5 000
22 Jan	3	Cape Town to Durban	R 2 640	R 2 960	R 3 870
25 Jan	4	Durban, Maputo & Portuguese Island	R 4 340	R 4 900	R 5 600
29 Jan	2	Durban, No Where	R 2 450	R 2 770	R 2 980
31 Jan	5	Durban, Maputo, Inhaca & Portuguese Island	R 5 110	R 5 740	R 6 580
05 Feb	3	Durban, Portuguese Island	R 4 200	R 4 760	R 5 850
08 Feb	7	Durban, Fort Dauphin, Inhaca & Portuguese Islands	R 7 140	R 7 630	R 10 160
15 Feb	4	Durban, Inhaca & Portuguese Island	R 4 340	R 4 900	R 5 600
19 Feb	3	Durban, Portuguese Island	R 3 600	R 4 760	R 5 460
22 Feb	4	Durban, Maputo & Portuguese Island	R 4 340	R 4 900	R 5 600
26 Feb	3	Durban, Portuguese Island	R 4 200	R 4 760	R 7 800
29 Feb	4	Durban, Inhaca & Portuguese Islands	R 4 340	R 4 900	R 5 600
07 Mar	4	Durban, Maputo & Portuguese Island	R 4 340	R 4 900	R 5 600

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Battle of the brands

– standing out from the crowd

The global hospitality scene now offers an increasing number of lifestyle brands that will need to find new ways to differentiate themselves if they want to stand out from the crowd. But then again, some hotel groups think less is more. What do travellers actually want? **Michelle Colman** investigates.

WITH the goal of increasing their market segmentation, hotel groups are introducing multiple branding strategies with distinct products for different types of customers – Hilton Worldwide encompasses 12 brands, Starwood Hotels and Resorts has nine, Hyatt has nine and Marriott, owner of the Protea chain, has a considerable 18.

Multiple brands are the hospitality industry's response to a growing need for customised travel experiences, says **Jan van der Putten**. This, complicated by varying income brackets, has led to hyper segmentation.

Brands were initially based on price – luxury to budget. However, more recently lifestyle has become the central focus as hotels strive to attract different demographic groups such as baby boomers, millennials and multi-generational families, among others. Lifestyle brands have exploded into the market and, according to Van der Putten, these brands will continue to boom with the growth of millennial travelling. In fact, Hilton launched a new

lifestyle brand just last year, Canopy by Hilton.

But are these brands all too similar? Protea Hotels, now owned by Marriott (and slotted under Marriott's Modern Essentials group of brands), was one of the first local chains to establish a lifestyle brand, namely Protea Hotel Fire & Ice! Says group marketing manager, **Nicholas Barenblatt**: "Millennial travellers, as well as the new emerging market, are looking for a hotel experience that is extraordinary in the sense that it goes beyond the standard hotel experience in terms of design, food and beverage concepts, entertainment line-up and service culture. At the end of the day, the lifestyle brands that will succeed in this category are the ones that ensure they differentiate on service as opposed to merely the physical style of their hotels."

While acknowledging that younger generations are more inclined to aspire to lifestyle brands with their philosophy of 'I

work to travel', **Peter Schoeman**, divisional director of Sales and Marketing at the City Lodge Hotel Group, says the market will dictate whether more lifestyle brands will be needed. City Lodge's four brands, based on grading (Road Lodge – one star; Town Lodge – two star; City Lodge Hotel – three star; and Courtyard Hotel – four star), were recently "refreshed" for clearer differentiation. The group plans to evolve these rather than introduce new ones.

Some hotel groups, however,

reject the strategy around multiple identities, adopting a 'keep it simple' approach. The

Preferred Hotel Group, a global provider of sales, marketing and distribution services to 650 independent luxury hotels, recently announced its move away from a multi-branded business model to one master brand, Preferred Hotels and Resorts. **Lindsey Ueberroth**, president and ceo, says: "In a time when seemingly every hotel company is introducing

new brands that target specific demographics, we are doing the opposite by transitioning from a house of brands to a branded house." The group has, however, grouped its properties into five collections, "defining its hotels based on experiences rather than brands or stars".

This concept of differentiation through experience resonates with **Wayne Hill**, general manager – Hotel and Resort Operations for Peermont's Emperors Palace: "As every consumer of the future will be able to customise just about everything from their personal Avatars to the fabric on their car seats and what they watch on TV when they want to watch it, I suspect that differentiation will not come from lifestyle brands but from our ability to deliver on our promises consistently, with the 'experience' in mind."

While lifestyle aspirations may influence the traveller's choice, their brand support is generally quite fickle and easily swayed – first and foremost by price and value for money. Ease of reservation and other processes, loyalty and rewards programmes and consistency of product

“Lifestyle brands have exploded into the market.”



and service are additional factors that influence travellers across the board. According to Barenblatt, emotion and perception come into play and, if positioned correctly, brands will attract support. "However, that doesn't negate that the brand needs to deliver on basic services and not just meet, but exceed, guests' expectations in order to maintain loyalty."

Consistency is key

Consistency is all important in the management of brands, and extends from physical appearance of the property to every level of service and product. Delivering on brand promises and keeping brands relevant is a considerable challenge for hotel groups.

Says **Janine Pienaar**, South Africa representative for Centara Hotels and Resorts: "With hotels across various destinations, one of the challenges is to keep the same level of service and to ensure a 'Centara experience' across the hotels, while still ensuring that the guests have a destination-specific experience." "I would say ensuring

consistency in service delivery – and not only to the standards of the brand but more so to the personality and culture of the brand – continues to be most brands' biggest challenge due to the human element," agrees Barenblatt.

The task mentality that prevails in hospitality service must be replaced with an experience mentality, maintains Hill. In line with this, employees must be trained for success, retained, and engaged with the higher purpose of the organisation. Schoeman concurs that consistency demands staff training and commitment to service excellence.

"Our brands are entrenched in a timeless ethos that has weathered many a change in both business and consumer landscapes," says Van der Putten. "At the centre of all we do, is our guest. All products and services we offer are to better the guest's experience and for that reason, even though across our portfolio different properties boast unique elements, the fundamental brand ethos that is lived across all hotels keeps us consistent."

New markets, more brands?

WILL emerging travel markets, such as China, India and parts of Africa, all with specific tastes and requirements, give rise to even more hyper segmentation?

Peermont's **Wayne Hill** responds that these markets are often highly regulated and susceptible to the needs of itinerary-based travel. "This leaves hotels and resorts very little opportunity to sell their facilities to visitors as they are always on a 'time budget'." Hill says if he had to select a suitable brand for emerging travellers, it would be a three-star select-services product

– "in other words, a three-star room with four-star amenities and food, accompanied by beverage facilities."

While Hilton hasn't gone the brand route for emerging travellers, it has introduced a programme called Hilton Huanying that caters for the Chinese consumer. It is now offered at over 100 properties and introduces aspects of Chinese culture like language, food options, tea and other amenities. In Africa and the Indian Ocean, the programme is to be instituted at Hilton Sandton, Hilton Seychelles Labriz Resort & Spa and Hilton Mauritius Resort & Spa.



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What travellers want

TECHNOLOGY has dominated consumer demand in the hospitality field in the recent past and is expected to shape demand in the immediate future.

Technology rears its head in just about every sphere of guest interaction, from the reservation process where there is growing emphasis on last-minute availability and rate parity, to efficiency of service delivery before, during and after the guests' hotel stay, to demand for speedy WiFi and connectivity across multiple devices.

Aside from new technologies, leading hotel groups have noticed a number of prominent trends in traveller demands and behaviour:

- Design increasingly features as a requirement. **Nicholas Barenblatt** at Protea Hotels claims this is created through clever design of bedrooms and

public spaces, to create a social atmosphere and vibe.

- "Reduced customer effort. Guests don't want to queue, wait or be put on hold," says Peermont's **Wayne Hill**. Further, they want only one point of contact for conflict resolution with managers who follow through with problems until a resolution is found.
- Short reservation lead times, shortened stays, ease of booking and increasing price consciousness are observed by the City Lodge Hotels Group, according to **Peter Schoeman**.
- An increased demand for inclusive offerings has been noticed by the Centara group with its strong presence in popular leisure destinations. "We also find that interest for family holidays to long-haul destinations such as Thailand has increased," says **Janine Pienaar**.
- A range of MICE offerings,

such as dedicated business lounges and meeting space, has become essential for business travellers, comments

Hilton's **Jan van der Putten**.

What trends can we expect to emerge in the next five years or so? Hotel representatives made the following predictions:

- Increased use of mobile devices to access hotel services, mobile check-ins and mobile payment.
- All selling to take place on apps.
- More savvy guests who conduct extensive research online.
- A growing influence of peer-on-peer recommendations.
- No queuing. Loyalty programmes will include



priority pass systems, hotels will have to ensure sufficient data to facilitate faster check-ins and install 'honesty systems' for check-out.

- The increasing prevalence of facilities and amenities geared towards independent female business travel.
- More demand for healthy food and dining options in line with health trends at the time.
- A requirement for an exceptional standard of cleanliness and hygiene.
- Increased demand for sustainable product and hotels that reduce their carbon footprint.

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Sun International ups its gaming proposition

SUN International has acquired 100% of the Peermont Group. The acquisition, which is expected to reach conclusion over the next year, will bolster Sun International's strategy to increase its gaming revenue and diversify its portfolio.

Group general manager for Corporate Brand and Communications, **Michael Farr**, says the decision to purchase Peermont is one of three key transactions that have taken place recently, the other two being the group's deal with Dreams in Latin America and the other the proposed deal with Minor International (MINT) to part with a portion of its African assets. "All three deals are in line with our strategy to optimise capital allocation and resources," he comments.

The acquisition of Peermont will enable Sun International to increase its gaming revenue in

Gauteng specifically. "Gauteng is the province with the highest gambling spend in South Africa," notes Farr. "As a result of the proposed transaction with Peermont, our portfolio of South African assets will be further diversified and effectively reduce the Group's reliance on our GrandWest property in the Western Cape, which currently represents 27% of the Group's EBITDA."

Farr reveals that while the Peermont portfolio of assets will initially increase the proportion of the Group's combined business conducted in South Africa, it also opens the possibility of further restructuring its local assets over the medium term, to create a portfolio of fewer, larger, quality assets. "We are busy with the start of a strategic review of the Peermont portfolio before this deal progresses," he says.

Meanwhile, in February this

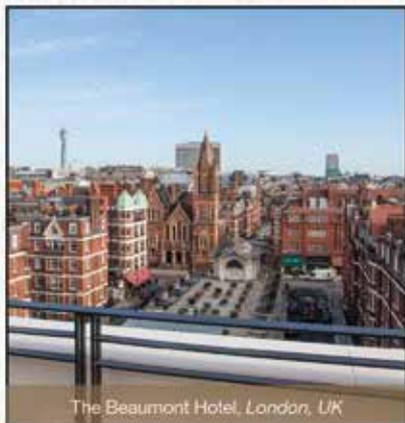
year, Sun International reached an agreement with Chilean company, Dreams S.A, to merge its hotel and casino operations in Latin America. "The merger will result in the creation of Latin America's largest gaming group, which will have the scale and capability to grow further on the continent," comments Farr. "We are committed to our strategy of diversifying our portfolio to increase exposure to offshore opportunities, in particular Latin America."

The Group has also entered into a deal with MINT. "As part of the proposed deal, Sun International has disposed of a significant portion of our African portfolio to MINT. We will continue to manage the casino operations situated at each of these African assets and MINT will assume day-to-day management responsibility for the hotel operations," explains Farr. ■

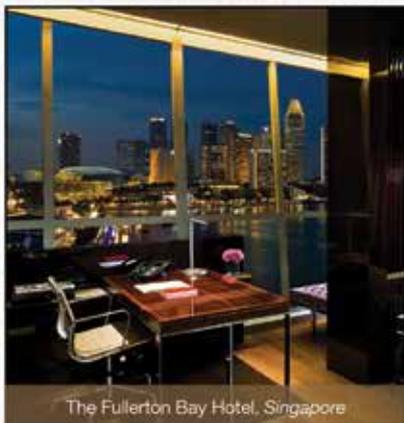
Centara to introduce new brand

CENTARA Hotels & Resorts offers five brands and, according to **Janine Pienaar**, is in the process of developing a sixth. Named COSI Hotels, it will be an affordable lifestyle brand for travellers who predominantly make bookings via the Internet and want comfort and convenience at affordable prices. The first COSI-branded property will open in 2016.

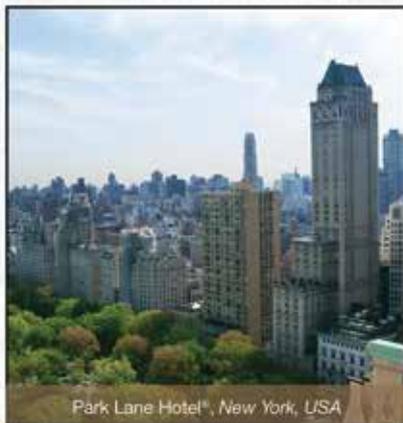
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Top 10 specials

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. Mauritius

World Leisure Holidays. Pay for five nights, stay for seven nights. Rates are from R10 180 per person sharing ex-Johannesburg and R10 830 ex-Cape Town. Special includes return airfares, return airport-hotel transfers, three-star accommodation with breakfast and dinner, land and non-motorised water sports and daily entertainment. Offer is valid for set departures in July. Rates exclude airport taxes. Four- and five-star packages are also available.

2. Thailand

The Holiday Factory. Twelve-night packages from R16 360 per person sharing. Three nights in Krabi, three nights in Phi Phi, four nights in Phuket and two nights in Bangkok. Rate includes return flights departing Johannesburg, approximate airport taxes, airport/hotel transfers, accommodation and breakfast daily. Offer is valid until October 31.

3. Mozambique

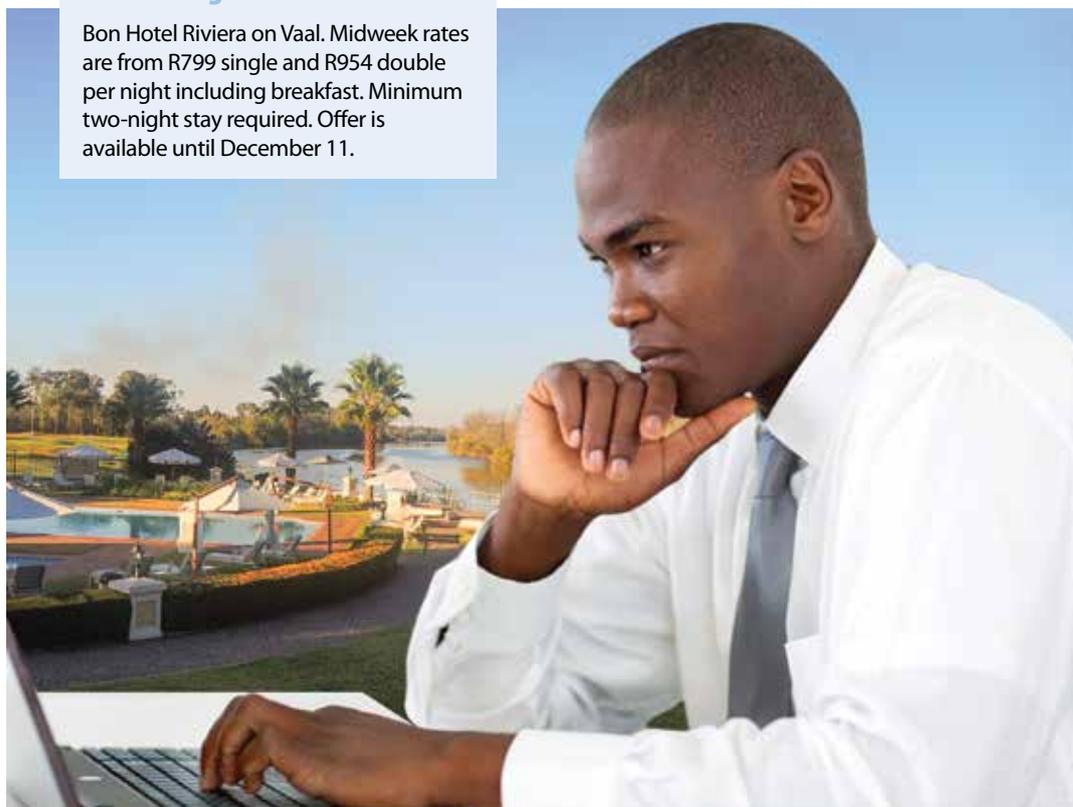
Mozambique Tours. Barra Lodge. Four-night packages from R5 300 per person sharing. Rate includes return flights ex-Johannesburg, airport-lodge transfers, daily breakfast and dinner. Excludes taxes. Offer is valid from May 4 to June 15.

4. Zimbali

Fairmont Zimbali Lodge. Family offer. 50% off kids rooms including breakfast. Rates start from R1 110 per person sharing for the first room or suite. The second room will be charged at 50% of the value of the first room. Rate expires September 30. Golfing and

5. Gauteng

Bon Hotel Riviera on Vaal. Midweek rates are from R799 single and R954 double per night including breakfast. Minimum two-night stay required. Offer is available until December 11.



spa packages are also available.

6. Zambia

Dreams. Zambezi Sun packages are from R9 525 per person. Offer includes return flights from Johannesburg, return airport-hotel transfers, three nights' accommodation with daily breakfast and dinner, travel insurance, free and unlimited access to the Victoria Falls and park fees. Offer is available for SA passport holders, until June 30.

7. Mauritius

Club Med. Rates are from R16 200 per person sharing and include airfare ex-Johannesburg, taxes, airport/hotel transfers, five nights'

accommodation on a full-board basis including wine, beer and soft drinks; open bar day and night with snacking, range of motorised sports and leisure activities, children's facilities, entertainment and comprehensive insurance cover. Rate is valid for travel from May to October.

8. Mozambique

Diamonds Resorts (Planhotel). New luxury beach resort south of Pemba in Mozambique opening on June 1. Book before the end of May and receive a 20% discount as well as a free upgrade to the superior Diamonds all-inclusive basis. Promotion is valid for travel until December 22.

9. Gauteng

Crowne Plaza Johannesburg – The Rosebank. Stay for three nights, pay for two nights offer. Pay R3 000 for a three-night stay, available for single or double occupancy. Offer is valid from December 14 until January 14.

10. Gaborone

Phakalane Golf Estate Resort Hotel. Weekend special. R750 per room per night. Offer ends May 30.

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

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