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verge of a travel
APOCALYPSE?

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keeps her eye on the ball



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Editor's note

Honesty, transparency and communication are words that regularly feature in a travel buyer's vocabulary when discussing what they value most in terms of their relationship with their TMC. While meaningful reporting, data consolidation and technology are all important services TMCs can bring to the table, none of them mean much if clients are suspicious of their TMC's motivations.

This has played out very clearly in government's controversial decision to axe TMC overrides. Whether government has taken the right approach in tackling this topical issue is highly debatable, but it does point to a widespread concern that TMCs are not acting in the best interests of their clients. It is also clear, as **Howard Stephens** points out in this month's Big Issue, that there are TMCs that have adapted to the times and moved to a service fee model that allows them to put their client's needs front and centre, without having to rely on commissions, rebates and overrides to turn a profit.

This month's profile is **Veronica Lebona**, the Travel Manager for the South African Football Association

(SAFA). When she joined SAFA, it took the decision to end its contract with its TMC and instead just use an agency for ticketing, handling everything else in-house. This has presented challenges, with Lebona having to be available 24/7 to handle travel emergencies, but has also resulted in significant savings.

We are also putting the spotlight on hotel brands. There's been a huge amount of flux in the hospitality industry in recent years, with a number of acquisitions and mergers shaking up the market. While on the surface this may seem a bit intimidating, according to experts, it could be great news for corporates, giving them higher volumes to negotiate with and a wider range of loyalty benefits.

Finally, our Cruise Incentives feature will focus on some of the innovative, and cost-effective solutions cruise companies provide for corporate clients – both on-board and ashore, from themed dinners to Ferrari drives on the Amalfi Coast.

Keep reading!

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

COVER

Veronica Lebona tells *Travel Buyer* how she manages the unique challenges that arise when organising travel for the national football teams. Cover photograph by **Shannon Van Zyl**.

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Brought to you by Now Media, *Travel Buyer + Meet* is a professional travel publication aimed at South African travel procurement decision-makers in travel-buying companies. This publication aims to reflect an unbiased perspective of the corporate travel industry offering insight and tools encouraging readers to manage their travel spend better. *Travel Buyer* is the media partner of ABTA, ACTE and the GBTA



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How is the rise in terror affecting corporate policies?

BOMBS in Brussels, yellow fever in Africa: corporate travel is all about risk management. Corporate travel remained steady in the face of danger as companies still required key staff to visit head offices and branches and meet face-to-face, said **Bev Henderson**, corporate travel manager at XL Sandown Travel.

"We work with some very large corporates that are governed by companies in the UK and US. We are alerted immediately from international head office if there are incidents in hotels and cities, and which areas have become

no-go zones," she added.

Risk is assessed and both the travellers and security officers will decide if travel is safe. In some cases, security officers will travel ahead of travellers and provide feedback on situations on the ground.

"Companies take security very seriously and will go as far as banning airlines," she noted.

Henderson understands her clients' travel policies and security protocol and can help assess risk. In some cases, instead of travelling to a destination considered a hotspot, the client will prefer to fly delegates out to meet in South Africa.

As a result of the risk factor

of international travel, as well as the expense, time differences and travel time, video conferencing was growing between different countries," said Henderson.

Vanessa Krook, manager marketing, communications and supplier relations at BCD Travel, said: "Our travellers are still going to Europe and the terror attacks are not much of a deterrent, but our global clients are definitely using their risk management plans to track and inform travellers of terrorist hotspots and our consultants are assisting with added information."

"Journeys that were once labelled as low risk, such as

a business trip to Brussels or Paris, now must be considered high risk," reported **Martin Weisskirchen**, vp of BCD Travel Global Crisis Management.

He added: "A company needs to know who will be in charge in a crisis, and someone - but not always the same person - needs to be on call 24/7 and have the authority to put the established travel risk management plan into action."

In addition, corporate travellers need to understand their risk management responsibility and check in at regular intervals. In summary, a proactive plan understood by all results in a better, faster and more flexible reaction.

UK hikes premium visa rates

TRAVELLERS looking to get a priority visa to visit the UK will now pay substantially more for the service.

The Priority Visa Service, which allows travellers to have their application processed ahead of others, now costs £150 (R3 106) instead of £120 (R2 485). The Super Priority Visa service, which allows eligible customers to apply for a visa in Johannesburg in Pretoria and receive a decision within 24 hours, now costs £750 (R15 531) instead of £600 (R12 426).

"These changes ensure that the Home Office can achieve a self-funding system, while continuing to provide a competitive level of service and a fee structure that remains attractive to businesses, migrants and visitors," the UK government said in a statement.

BA to launch Cape Town – Gatwick flights



BRITISH Airways will launch three weekly direct flights between Gatwick and Cape Town, starting on November 24, the airline has announced.

The flights will depart Gatwick at 18h00 on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays and arrive in Cape Town at 07h50 the following morning.

Mega tour operator sets up shop in SA

THE resort division of TUI, the world's largest travel and tourism company, has set its sights on the SA market with the appointment of PureTours to market Robinson Club as part of an exclusive GSA agreement in Southern Africa.

The operator's global network of four- and five-star resorts will be available for the first time in South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique from this month.

The product is comparable with competitor, Club Med, offering an all-inclusive experience at resorts around the world. **Claus Martin**, director of PureTours, is quick to point out that Robinson has unique selling points in the form of its superior locations around Europe, its sports offering and focus on food. He says as Robinson Club's resorts are all English speaking, it is a significant advantage for South Africans.

Robinson Club has also proved popular in traditional markets for its meetings, incentives, conferencing and events offering. Martin expects the product will appeal to the local corporate market, especially from a budget perspective as there are "no nasty surprises" in the form of hidden costs, he says. As such, PureTours will roll out the brand to the corporate market during a road show, which will take place next month.

Direct flights to Brazil for R8k

LATAM Airlines Group is set to open bookings this month for flights between Johannesburg and São Paulo in Brazil, with fares costing "no more than R8 000 including taxes", says **Martin Modarelli**, LATAM's commercial director for the UK, Nordic countries and Africa.

Services will begin on October 2, with three weekly flights departing Johannesburg on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The airline will use a B767-300, carrying 221 passengers in a two-class configuration with 30 seats in business class and 191 seats in economy class.

"Africa and South America have massive potential in business and leisure travel,"

Modarelli said, adding that only 5 000 South Africans currently travel to South America annually, mainly visiting Brazil and Chile for business purposes. He said the new service would open up 115 new destinations in seven countries in South America, with good connections to the US, the Caribbean, Oceania and Europe. LATAM has more than 50% share of the São Paulo-Rio de Janeiro route with 31 flights daily.

Johannesburg-based Border Air will represent LATAM in South Africa. Modarelli said LATAM was talking to Comair for a feeder service within South Africa and Southern Africa.

LATAM is the amalgamation of LAN Airlines of Chile and TAM Airlines of Brazil.

Saaci discontinues PCO accreditation

THE Southern African Association for the Conference Industry (Saaci) has amended its accreditation of professional conference organisers in its current format, no longer awarding the organisation itself but rather individuals within the company.

With regard to travel management companies, PCO accreditation previously looked at whether the TMC ran association conferences in general. "It wasn't a necessity, it was just a stamp of approval recognised by Saaci and Grant Thornton that stated that TMCs that offered a service specifically looking after conferencing businesses had the resources and experience to host a regional or international association conference," says Saaci ceo, **Adriaan Liebetrau**.

Now, the accreditation will introduce designations into the conferencing sector. "So, within the TMC, there will be a certified events co-ordinator or a professional events manager," says Liebetrau.

PCOs and TMCs that are currently accredited as a Saaci Accredited



Adriaan Liebetrau, ceo, Saaci

Conference Organiser (SACO level 1), Saaci Accredited Professional Conference Organiser (SAPCO level 2) or a Saaci Accredited International Professional Conference Organiser (SAIPCO level 3) have the right to maintain their status as such until their accreditation expires.

"PCOs and TMCs that are currently not accredited will have an opportunity to join one of the new individual certification programmes this coming year," Liebetrau says.

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Govt moves on state-owned airlines merger

GOVERNMENT has taken the first steps to implement plans to merge state-owned airlines.

In February, during his budget speech, Minister **Pravin Gordhan**, said that government would look into a possible merger of SAA and SA Express under a strengthened board. Public Enterprises Minister, **Lynne Brown**, said in a briefing to the Portfolio Committee on Public Enterprises in April that she was in favour of a merger between SAA and SA Express, with a possibility of a 25% private equity partner.

The Portfolio Committee briefing is seen as the first step towards implementing the recommendations of the Presidential Review Committee on state-owned enterprises.

Spokesperson for the minister, **Colin Cruywagen**, said the



Pravin Gordhan, Minister of Finance

Department of Public Enterprises was considering whether to merge SAA and SA Express or create a holding company that kept three airlines – SAA, SA Express and Mango.

Although SA Airlink is privately

owned, ceo and md, **Rodger Foster**, said it made “infinite sense” for Airlink to be included in any corporate restructuring plans involving SAA and other state-owned enterprise airline businesses, as Airlink’s network airline system brought enormous value to SAA with regard to interlining, and vice versa.

Foster said Airlink was a privately owned business with 3% of its stock held by SAA. “It is a network airline and its network is a component of a larger composite network system together with SAA. It operates as a franchisee of SAA, such that seat inventory within the franchise environment and, by extension, throughout SAA’s global alliances, is available for multi-sector, multi-carrier itinerary for single contract seamless travel available for sale in the GDS.”

MHG eyes corporate market in SA

MINOR Hotel Group (MHG) is keen to establish a presence in South Africa through business hotels in Johannesburg and Cape Town, building on the deal it struck with Sun International (SI) in 2014 for a stake in eight SI properties.

This forms part of the group’s expansion plans, with 50 new hotels on the cards for Africa within the next five years. The multi-billion-rand plan will treble its current footprint. “At the moment we have 25 hotels in Africa and we want to grow by 50, adding 10 a year for the next five years,” said Sir **Richard Hawkins**, MHG’s regional operations director for Africa, operating out of its Johannesburg offices.

The plan is to negotiate management deals with hotels of about 150 bedrooms, with the possibility of taking equity in them later. No fixed budget has been allocated, but with each management deal likely to cost about R225m, it is a potential investment of more than R1,1bn in the next five years in Africa alone.



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Aloft launches world’s first emoji room service

ALOFT Hotels, a Starwood brand designed for the hyper-connected traveller, has launched Aloft TiGi (Text it. Get it) Emoji Room Service, the world’s only emoji-only room service menu. Guests at the newly opened Aloft Manhattan Downtown in New York can text an emoji to the hotel’s front desk and a delivery will be made within minutes.

The room service menu has launched with six speciality

kits with essentials that can easily be conveyed by emoji, including ‘The Sightseer’ with a MetroCard, city map and drinks; ‘The Re-Fresh’ with toothpaste, toothbrush, razor, shaving cream and deodorant, and ‘The Hangover’ with two bottles of Vitamin Water, Advil and two bananas.

“At Aloft we’re always looking for ways to shake up the hotel stay,” says **Brian McGuinness**, global brand leader, Starwood’s Speciality Brands. “We look to

consumer behaviour and think about how to integrate these trends into the Aloft experience. The rise of emoji was a logical next step, the perfect new wave of guest communications.”

Aloft has also introduced a number of other innovations, including using a robot for back- and front-of-house duties and keyless entry systems. It is currently working on mobile-controlled lighting and wake up preferences, as well as virtual reality experiences.

Ghana to relax visa requirements

GHANA is looking to relax its visa application processes for African citizens by making it possible for travellers to apply for visas on arrival. The Ghana High Commission confirmed that the government was expected to initiate the visa-on-arrival process in the beginning of July. Currently South Africans need to apply for a visa online, ensuring they have the correct documentation before travelling.

Centara expands into five new destinations

CENTARA Hotels and Resorts will develop new properties in Doha, Muscat, Dubai, Cuba and Turkey as well as expand its presence in the Maldives.

The group will open properties in Doha and Muscat by the end of this year – becoming Centara's first properties in the Middle East. In Doha, the Centara Grand West Bay hotel will have 261 rooms and suites plus 96 apartments that vary from one- to three-bedroom units. In Muscat, the 152-room Centara Muscat Hotel will offer a fitness centre, ample meeting and event space along with a premium lounge and roof deck.

There will be further expansion in Doha with two additional properties. Centara West Bay Residence and Suites will open in the second quarter of 2017,

in the West Bay area close to the Centara Grand.

Further along the pipeline, in 2018, a third luxury property will also open in the West Bay area that will have 514 rooms.

Cuba will welcome its first Centara property in late 2017. The Centara Grand Beach Resort Cayo Guillermo will have about 250 rooms and will be the first "truly five-star" product in the region, Centara said in a statement.

Additionally, the group will launch its first property in Turkey when the Centara Grand Lykia World Resort and Spa opens on the coastline of the River Koprucay. The resort will have 449 rooms, 10 restaurants and 10 bars and will offer an all-inclusive concept, allowing guests to experience a cash-free stay. Lastly the group will develop four new properties in the Maldives.



Airlink launches new service

AIRLINK has commenced a direct service between Cape Town and Maun. The flight operates five times a week on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Airlink intends to add more days as the destination moves into its peak season from August.

The route is operated by an Embraer ERJ 135 regional jet aircraft with flights departing Cape Town at 10h35 and arriving in Maun at 13h05. The return flight departs Maun at 13h35 and arrives in Cape Town at 16h10.

Airlink also operates daily services from OR Tambo to Maun and Kasane.

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PHOTO: THE MAIL ROOM

Sun Park to boost MICE business

SUN City's R1bn refurbishment includes the building of Sun Park, a new product aimed at the MICE market. It includes an indoor events venue and outdoor space, and will be launched across a number of Sun International properties. Sun Park will have a maximum capacity of 2 000 people cinema style or 1 000 schoolroom style.

Existing conference facilities in the Entertainment Centre, currently closed for refurbishment, will benefit from overhauled back- and front-of-house areas. The lower level will accommodate all food and beverage, retail and entertainment areas, with the upper level identified as convention space with limited food and beverage facilities. The

revamp includes the replacement of lifts and escalators and new units where required. The kitchen facilities on both levels will receive a full upgrade to provide for the increased space and required services. The Entertainment Centre will reopen in November, with normal conference business currently accommodated at the specially created Sun Sky Village.

iPrefer programme gets an upgrade

PREFERRED Hotels and Resorts has revised and enriched its iPrefer programme. The simplified structure now features two tiers – Insider and Elite – and members earn 10 points per US\$1 spent on eligible bookings, which can be exchanged for cash-value reward certificates redeemable towards free nights and other on-property experiences, as well as other benefits like early check in or late check out and complimentary Internet access.

New benefits include an upgrade for members at every tier, subject to availability, and 50% bonus points earning for Elite members with every eligible booking.

iPrefer has also launched a special promotion that gives all iPrefer members 12 500 bonus points for every stay booked via its website until May 31.



PHOTO: PEERMONT

PeerMont expands hotels across the region

PEERMONT has begun construction of a 100-room extension to the PeerMont Metcourt hotel at Emperors Palace, bringing the hotel total to 348 rooms, and 757 rooms in the total complex.

When completed in December this year, the PeerMont Metcourt at Emperors Palace will offer family rooms with extra-long king-size beds and two

extra-long single beds to comfortably accommodate a family of four, with each bathroom having a separate shower and bath.

PeerMont are also adding 20 rooms to the PeerMont Metcourt at Khoroni in Thoyoyandou, which will bring the total to 107 rooms; while PeerMont's hotel and conference resort in Lilongwe, Malawi is now fully operational.

OR Tambo hotel gets new look and management

HOLIDAY Inn Johannesburg Airport has refurbished its guest rooms, restaurant, public areas and lounges as well as the gym.

This is part of a R30m revamp and rebranding exercise. The 151-room hotel was previously called the Airport Grand Hotel, part of the Legacy Group.

A date for the conference centre upgrade has not yet been finalised. It will be closed during the work and management confirms that disruption will be kept to a minimum.

The property is a 10-minute drive from OR Tambo International Airport and has easy access to the Gautrain.

Renovated rooms feature separate shower and bath, hairdryer, flat-screen television with DSTV, digital safe, iron and ironing board.

SAA resumes Douala flights

SAA has resumed flights to Douala in Cameroon following the reopening of the airport. This follows the re-routing of Douala operations to Yaoundé in February and March, after Douala airport was temporarily closed for runway and parking area repairs.

SAA's four weekly flights from Johannesburg to Libreville (Gabon) and onwards to Douala will operate as per the normal schedule – flight SA086 departs Johannesburg at 14h50 on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, to arrive in Libreville at 18h40. It then departs Libreville at 19h25 to arrive in Douala at 20h20.

Return flight SA087 departs Douala at 21h20 on the same days, to arrive in Libreville at 22h15. It then departs Libreville at 23h20 to arrive in Johannesburg at 05h00 the following morning.

eTravel records unprecedented growth

ETRAVEL has recorded unprecedented growth over the last three months, posting R97,5m turnover in February, rapidly closing the gap towards its elusive R1bn target. The group showed 16% growth in December 2015, 19% in January 2016, and 20% in February compared with the previous year, despite a weak economy.

This feat is attributed to the strength of the "true" ITC model, which is making a comeback, says **ceo, Garth Wolff**.

While the emergence of straightforward ticketing business models initially hampered growth, Wolff says the appeal of original ITC models is drawing agents' interest. He says agents have become disillusioned with the ticketing model because it does not grant



Garth Wolff, ceo, eTravel

them access to the full suite of services they need

For example, more agents have taken an interest in the VAT invoicing side of eTravel's offering. "Very few people

actually know how to manage cash. It's important for agents to be free to stick to what they know."

eTravel launched its own ticketing solution, 'Just the Ticket' in February 2014 to cater for emerging demand at the time; however, the group has not seen much uptake, with members preferring to sign up for eTravel's full suite option instead, says Wolff. The result is that, to date, of eTravel's 187 independent agents, only eight are on the Just the Ticket option.

eTravel's success has to do with the company sticking to what it specialises in and doing that well, says Wolff. "eTravel is solid, we've been around for 17 years and we've kept our promise to pay more commissions to ITCs each year and will continue to do so."

GBTA SA announces new board

THE Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) has announced its new board for South Africa. Nedbank Medical Aid chairman and consultant to procurement, **Howard Stephens**, has been appointed chairman of the board.

Nicole Swart (Woolworths), **Thabani Ndlovu** (Hilton Worldwide), **Andrew Shaw** (Amadeus), **Marco dos Santos** (Massmart), **Elsa Silva** (FNB), **Roderick Ross** (Ross Consulting), **Tshipi Alexander** (American Express Cards), **Sue Ann Tredoux** (Sanlam), **Fikile Nkala** (Supergroup), **Kovilan Naidoo** (Cummins), and **Warren Tanner Ellis** (Diners Club International) make up the rest of the board members. ■

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Are we on the verge of a travel

APOCALYPSE?

On April 1, government implemented a standard remuneration model that axed TMC overrides. Should we expect the private sector to follow suit?

In an effort to save R25bn a year through stricter management of its procurement policies, government entered into direct talks with travel suppliers to renegotiate rates and save on commissions that go to travel agents.

"National and provincial government spend approximately R10bn annually on travel and subsistence. Of this, R4,5bn is spent on domestic air, land travel and accommodation services. Travel management companies are receiving approximately R1bn a year in commissions, rebates, and overrides and other volume-driven remuneration from suppliers – discounts that are not passed on to government," said **Phumza Macacanda**, spokesperson for chief procurement officer, **Kenneth Brown**.

"In order to overcome the fragmentation, duplication of effort and differing pricing models, the Office of the Chief Procurement Officer (OCPO) will be issuing a national travel policy that will govern public sector travel behaviour; enter into corporate agreements directly with airlines, hotel and accommodation establishments, car-rental companies and many more on strictly nett and non-commissionable prices." All rebates, overrides or volume-based remuneration by government departments and suppliers to TMCs have been discontinued for government business as of April.

Engaging directly with suppliers

Government has already contacted suppliers to ensure complete transparency, says **Clifford Ross**, ceo of City Lodge Hotel

Group. "We have had to provide government rates to the Treasury, which excludes all commissions, overrides and rebates."

According to Ross, this is a positive development for the travel industry as rates will now be transparent for all government departments – national, provincial and local – on a centralised database. "The rate package you see is the rate package you pay," he says.

"It should make it simpler and allow for fewer middlemen to pollute the waters," says **Michael Farr**, Sun International group general manager: corporate brand and communications, adding that the process will be a lot more efficient and allow hotels to reduce wasted margins as well as provide the rooms at efficient rates.

Government has also already negotiated discounts for flights on SAA and British Airways, as well as discounted accommodation with Premier Group, Protea Hotels and Tsogo Sun.

Fees not all bad

The problem with the initiatives government is putting in place is that they create a perception that all commissions and fees are bad, says former Satsa ceo, **Michael Tatalias**. "Travel agents work hard for their fees. Cut the channel out, whether travel agent or tour operator, and you get a less efficient industry."

This is exactly the issue that has already presented itself. TMCs doing government business 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 government's move to scrap overrides. However, the revised fees that industry submitted were rejected.



Clifford Ross, ceo, City Lodge Hotel Group

Howard Stephens, chairman of the Global Business Travel Association for Southern Africa (GBTA SA), says government can't have it both ways. While he says he understands its frustration with hidden fees and overrides, government does need to pay for the services they use.

Will corporates follow suit?

Overrides have been a contentious issue for quite some time, both for government and the private sector, as in many cases the process is not transparent. Stephens says it is vitally important that TMCs make decisions based on what is best for the corporate, and not what is beneficial for themselves.

"Companies fear that overrides could potentially influence the TMC's decision to choose one supplier over another, based on override agreements and not the company's best interests. The private sector would like to move to nett fares and do away with hidden commissions, but companies are well aware that they will need to pay more in



Howard Stephens, chairman, GBTA Southern Africa

service fees. Companies are more than happy to pay TMCs what they're worth," he says, "especially if nothing is hidden and the TMC is able to show value in terms of what they have saved the client through the decisions they have made."

Some TMCs are already operating this way – but others have stuck to the old way of doing things, says Stephens. "TMCs have got to change and differentiate so that travel can become more modern. Many corporates are quite happy to book themselves, but it is nice to have somebody behind them and that's a service worth paying for," he adds, especially in light of recent events, such as the Brussels bombs and Zika virus.

Stephens would like to see a tiered approach to TMC service fees – with different rates applying for junior, intermediate and senior services. "A junior would be able to handle the day-to-day simple bookings, but when it comes to an intermediate level, they should be able to show some added value. At the senior level they would be able to deal with regional travel into Africa. Corporates should pay for what they get," he says. ■

KEEPING AN EYE ON THE BALL

As the travel manager for the South African Football Association (SAFA), **Veronica Lebona** has had to use her determination and ability to stay focused to address the challenges that have come her way. **Sue van Winsen** spoke to her to get her tips on managing travel.

Not many travel managers can say that they are not only accountable to their company but to the whole country, but this is position **Veronica Lebona** is in, organising travel for SAFA and the national football teams of South Africa, including Bafana Bafana and Banyana Banyana. While at times it may be a high-pressure role, it's one that she relishes and takes enormous satisfaction from, knowing that she has played an important part in ensuring the nation's biggest tournaments go off without a hitch.

After studying travel and tourism at UNISA, Lebona joined the Connex Travel team as an intern. Through the years, she worked her way up the ranks, from a junior consultant, to an intermediate consultant at HRG, and eventually a senior consultant at BCD Travel. It was here that she was given the opportunity to take on one of the best jobs of her life – a VIP consultant for the 2010 FIFA World Cup. "It was such an exciting time. Being part of the organising committee was simply amazing and it was an honour to be one of the people that made things happen," she says.

Cost savings by cutting out the middleman

As the mother body for the organising committee, Lebona was based at the SAFA headquarters, and it was during this time that the SAFA team got to know her. The result was that once the 2010 FIFA

World Cup was over, they asked her to join the company on a permanent basis in 2011, to assist with their travel requirements. She says that SAFA's travel spend was higher than it should have been, mostly because of their reliance on their TMC, which meant they were incurring a substantial amount of fees. By employing Lebona, SAFA was able to bring travel management in-house and by cutting out the middleman, realised significant savings.

"I sleep with my phone next to my bed and will answer it, even at 01h00 because I understand travel and that even one minute can potentially cost a billion-rand deal."

She explains that now SAFA uses SA Travel Centre to do its ticketing, but everything else is handled in-house. Additionally, Tsogo Sun and SAA are both sponsors, so agreements are in place to pay these suppliers directly.

Another benefit of bringing travel management in-house, is that when SAFA employees have questions, they can simply knock on her door and get an answer. "With a TMC it can be difficult to reach them on the phone or email, but if you can just go next door for help, things can get sorted out quickly and efficiently," says Lebona. "It's far better that we are in control of our own travel through our centralised system, because if something goes wrong, it's easy for me to quickly work out exactly what the problem is and fix it." She has also been able to change the mindset to become more cost-conscious, no longer booking full fares, and teaching them about the importance of being more mindful when it comes to expenses.

However, bringing travel in-house does mean that she needs to be available 24/7

– something that Lebona takes very seriously. "I sleep with my phone next to my bed and will answer it, even at 01h00 because I understand travel and that even one minute can potentially cost a billion-rand deal."

Peaks and dips

Lebona says football is unique in terms of its travel requirements – particularly as her workload ranges dramatically, from frantic during tournaments to relatively quiet once the games are over.

She explains that while travel happens in waves, this pattern can be beneficial, as the quieter periods give her the opportunity to reflect on lessons learned from the busy season. "We are able to review our travel policy, analyse our budget and brainstorm improvements," she says.

While studying further through UNISA, Lebona is also focused on

reviewing SAFA's travel policy to realise further savings. "This is a process, but I have identified some aspects that need to be changed," she says. This includes reworking the policy to promote a company culture that travels responsibly, by not missing flights or overspending on food. "While changing mindsets is a challenge, it's very important to ensure everyone understands that it's not about 'punishing' them but rather just the right thing to do."

Reflecting on her highlights so far, she says the opportunity to not only meet, but also assist high-profile dignitaries from all over the world has been a privilege. "I love knowing that these people rely on me – it makes me stay humble and I will never take that for granted," she concludes. ■



PHOTO: SHANNON VAN ZYL



Delivering travel solutions, bringing value to the public sector

Current challenges facing the public sector

Current conditions under which the public sector operates are characterised by the country's low economic growth, falling revenues and a rising budget deficit.

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says Silas Phoshoko, National Business Development Manager at American Express® Card.

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Vendor negotiations are improved



It provides monthly/weekly views of transactions
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It helps identify irregular spend

It provides a view of all spend by category
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It enables management of travel policy

Reduce cost to serve

Unique business model
Improve compliance with Public Finance Management Act controls

Create insight, develop best practice

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Lack of institutional rates	✓	Can help identify key categories for negotiation
Reconciliation	✓	Card can streamline reconciliation of all travel expenses
Unauthorised expenditure	✓	Card can help government departments to have transparency of their spend
Irregular expenditure	✓	Card can help ensure that only travel-related expenses occur
Not paying in 30 days	✓	All suppliers are paid within 30 days

Through its strategic partnership with various public sector companies and government departments, American Express has helped them to keep track of their travel expenses. Not only does the American Express BTA keep track of expenses, highlighting wasteful and fraudulent spend,

but it will also save costs by streamlining the reconciliation process. The enhanced management information enables the company or department to negotiate discounted rates from suppliers.

At American Express we aim to deliver solutions and add value to the public sector.



About the team



The team's main responsibility is driving business development across different spheres of government and state-owned enterprises. The team helps government departments manage their travel-related expenses efficiently, while identifying and understanding challenges within the public sector and finding solutions that fit the need.

Silas Phoshoko has over 12 years' experience in the financial services industry. His card career includes significant experience in card issuing and he has specific expertise in leveraging the benefits of card programmes, government payment solutions and payment solutions for travel, entertainment and procurement in corporate markets.

For more information please contact Silas Phoshoko on +27(0) 11 294 9629 or at Silasp@nedbank.co.za.

NINE *fresh* ADD-ON ACTIVITIES IN CAPE TOWN

Ever-evolving, Cape Town always has a fresh new selection of activities and eateries to choose from. **Sue van Winsen** rounds up some of the top new options for corporate and MICE travel in 2016.

New eateries



ON19 Restaurant

1. Full Moon Dinners at The Westin

The Westin's ON19 Restaurant, situated on the 19th floor of the hotel, is the location for a series of Full Moon Dinners. As guests arrive, the event host and astrologer, **Dianne Garven**, gives a short explanation of the symbolic meaning behind the full moon for that month, before dinner is served. The menu has been crafted to the theme of 'farm to table', with dishes like glazed salmon trout, charred beef fillet and vegetarian tortellini, complemented by Avondale's La Luna wines. Patrons will each receive a personalised birth chart.

2. The Village Idiot!

Situated on Loop Street in Central Cape Town, The Village Idiot! describes itself as "a true inner-city neighbourhood restaurant and bar". Opened by the owners of Aces & Spades, the restaurant offers live music, pool table, local food and a wide selection of beers. The menu features proudly South African cuisine served across starters, braai boards and Tata Ma sides. Dishes include Taxi Wings, West Coast Mussel Potjie, Mrs Ball's Boerewors Burgers, Seafood Sosaties, Grilled Mielies and Chakalaka, to name a few.

3. Sunday Lunch at African Pride 15 on Orange Hotel

African Pride 15 on Orange Hotel, situated in Cape Town's city centre, has introduced special Sunday lunches. The menu includes beef carpaccio, oysters, a range of salmon dishes, fresh tuna, mussels, prawns and venison, along with an endless supply of bottomless bubbly – Graham Beck MCC – at no additional charge. The Sunday lunch is served on the first Sunday of every month

at a cost of R495pp. For those that prefer privacy, there is a private dining room available.

4. Jason Bakery

Located on Bree Street, this artisanal bakery also serves up fresh meals, and has an ever-changing blackboard menu. Also known for its coffee, Jason Bakery is a popular breakfast spot, with egg and chorizo tartlets and bacon croissants on the menu. At lunch, the restaurant serves a range of sandwiches and is famous for its burgers and cheesecake.

5. The Culture Club Cheese Shop

Newly opened just last year, Culture Club Cheese is an artisanal cheese and fermented food store, run by a cheesemaker from the UK who relocated to Cape Town. The shop sells more than 50 types of cheese, along with bread, coffee, charcuterie and condiments, and also includes an on-site restaurant. Most of the menu items feature cheese as the main ingredient, from soufflés to toasted sandwiches.

New activities

6. Bree Street and First Thursdays

Over the course of the past year, Bree Street in Cape Town's CBD has undergone a revival with a wave of trendy, artisanal food shops, bars and restaurants opening for business. The street is also the centre of a new initiative, called First Thursdays, where on the first Thursday of every month, the city's art galleries and cultural attractions stay open late and offer special night-time experiences. The event is completely free, with no structured tour, and no schedule to follow. Organisers provide a map and highlights of what is on show and from there it is up to you.

7. Table Mountain night rides

AWOL Tours has begun offering mountain biking on Table Mountain at night. Rides start at 19h00 with the option of transfers from hotels prior to departure. Guests are kitted out with an AL129 Momsem mountain bike with front suspension, hydraulic disc brakes and 29-inch wheels, along with a helmet and front handlebar light of 980 lumens. Routes are typically between 12km and



First Thursdays

18km long, and last about two hours, with some hill climbing depending on the group's fitness levels. Tours depart on Tuesdays and Thursdays with a minimum group size of four cyclists.

8. HintHunt

Situated in The Old Biscuit Mill in Woodstock, HintHunt is a new activity where small groups (between three and five participants) are given one hour to solve a series of puzzles and mysteries in order to escape from a locked room.

9. Jump Around

This trampoline park is situated in Paarden Eiland. **Jackie Pollok**, of Capex Exclusive Tours, recommends that groups complete the indemnity form online prior to arrival, and check the website for the time slots allocated to younger participants. "A series of well-placed trampolines on the floors and walls provide over an hour of energetic fun, accompanied by pumping music."



5 eco-friendly Cape Town venues

Environmentally sustainable strategies are no longer a nice to have, but a must have.

Liesl Venter rounds up some of Cape Town's green conference facilities.

1. Hotel Verde

As the first hotel on the African continent to offer carbon-neutral accommodation and conferencing facilities, this venue is not only a leader in Cape Town but across South Africa.

Having achieved the highest possible certification, joining only six other hotels in the world to be certified with Platinum LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) for New Construction, the hotel is also certified with Heritage Platinum, in which the hotel achieved a high score of 95% for its Environmental Management System, says **Chrisna van Dyk**, the hotel's conference and events manager and acting gm.

"Hotel Verde was built to be as sustainable as possible from below the ground up. In conceiving and developing the hotel, the focus was on minimising the impact on surrounding



eco-systems and water resources whilst maximising the use of open spaces," she says. "The green elements at the hotel range from cutting-edge innovations and technologies to responsible building practices, trend-setting sustainable operating practices and exceptional energy and water efficiency."

This hotel – while offering all the comforts expected from a four-star venue – features eight conference and event venues,

which can cater for up to 120 delegates. "In addition, our lively and artistically decorated basement is a versatile space with the ability to cater for up to 300 attendees for special events," says Van Dyk. "Simply by choosing to conference with us, you are doing your bit for the environment. We have a certified carbon-neutral programme. Among other things, we make use of re-usable boards and provide eco-friendly pencils and notepads to all delegates."

2. The Westin

Having adopted a green policy, environmental stewardship is embraced at The Westin where a committed team works to actively reduce the environmental impact of its business activities. Conserving natural resources, minimising waste and pollution, enhancing indoor environmental quality, establishing and reporting on key environmental performance indicators and raising environmental awareness across stakeholders are part and parcel of its offering. The hotel offers guests staying for more than two nights the opportunity to take part in a greening programme.

The Westin offers 19 meetings rooms that can accommodate from 12 to 1 335 people.



5. The Vineyard Hotel & Spa

This hotel and conference centre made a commitment to 'living green', including a water conservation programme. At least 95% of the water used is borehole water.

Water efficiency showerheads have been installed across the venue, reducing consumption of 18 litres per minute to between 7,5 and nine litres per head.

Energy sustainability is just as

important for the hotel, says the spokesman.

"A total of 20 kilowatts worth of solar panels have been installed on the property, which generate on average approximately 2 400 kWh per month," said the spokesman.

The conference centre can accommodate up to 200 delegates depending on what style seating is used.

3 & 4. BON Hotels – Andros Boutique Hotel and Homestead Villas

BON Hotels has several establishments across the country, including Andros Boutique Hotel and Homestead Villas in Cape Town, and going green means managing operating costs while improving client satisfaction and engagement, says **Riaan Raubenheimer**, group asset manager at BON Hotels.

"Identifying energy- and cost-saving opportunities, reducing carbon footprints, decreasing energy and water usage are all standard practice." A major focus has also become the use of more natural light, he says. "Utilising indirect sunlight for lighting, especially for corridors, lobby and other general areas, is a must, while skylights are incorporated for natural lighting on top floors," says Raubenheimer. "Thermal insulation is also important. Double-glazed windows, tinted or toned glass that acts like sunglasses to reduce the amount of heat and light entering the building make a difference." The use of reflective glass that has a coating that reflects heat and light away from the window is also increasingly used in hotels.

Energy-efficient heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems are key to hotels, says Raubenheimer. "As hospitality leaders and professionals, we need to drive and change the behaviour of our guests to such a degree that it becomes the norm and, without realising it, our guests will take a small initiative back home with them," he says.



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8 REASONS

why your next incentive should be in

ZANZIBAR

With its white sandy beaches and crystal-clear waters, the 'spice island' of Zanzibar continues to grow in popularity. **Liesl Venter** spoke to **Tes Proos** of Crystal Events and Incentives to find out why this tropical paradise, with its unique Arabic twist, is a great incentive destination for South Africans.

1. Easy access

It could not be easier to get to Zanzibar, thanks to the wide variety of flight options available. There are direct flights from South Africa, and several airlines also fly daily to Dar es Salaam from where it's really nothing more than a hop to the island, says **Tes Proos** of Crystal Events and Incentives. From Dar es Salaam it is only a 20-minute flight to the island, while those brave enough to take on the hustle and bustle can opt for the hour-long ferry crossing.

2. Affordability

With the instability of the rand, Zanzibar is one of the few destinations where South Africans can still find value. There is also a wide variety of hotels and resorts that cater for an all-inclusive experience, while value-add discounts are often available.

At the same time, says Proos, while there are many entertainment options available, the beach offering is such that travellers can have a good time without having to spend exorbitant amounts of money.

3. Accommodation variety

There really is something to suit just about everyone in Zanzibar, says Proos. "This ranges from basic two-star facilities to top-notch five-star properties. There is a solid selection of accommodation available to suit anyone's budget and taste." She says it is not necessary to have a massive budget

as there are plenty of three-star hotels that offer good value for money and where visitors can have a great time.

4. Unspoilt natural charm

Unlike many other islands, Zanzibar still has unspoilt rural charm, says Proos. "There is something about the simplicity of the island that draws one in. It is a charming destination where one can really relax and recuperate in a pristine environment." The island has over 30 beaches, some of which are isolated and untouched. "It is the perfect getaway from the bustling city," says Proos.

5. No complicated requirements

South African passport holders do not need a visa to visit Tanzania or Zanzibar if they intend staying for 90 days or less. "South Africans do not have to apply for costly visas or follow any complicated procedures. They can simply book and arrive."

6. Do nothing or something

When it comes to beach activities, there are a variety of options available. "The snorkelling is out of this world, thanks to the vast range of coral and tropical fish," says Proos. "There is also the option of swimming with bottlenose and humpback dolphins that are found in the waters around the island. It's a real beach

safari." Kitesurfing has also become very popular on the island while there are a variety of spas where one can be pampered in style. Or, says Proos, there is the option of doing absolutely nothing but enjoying the beach.

7. History and spice

Proos says a visit to the historic capital of Stone Town is a must. "Stone Town has been declared a Unesco World Heritage Site. Several tours are available where one learns about the interesting history of the island." And it's enough to keep one enthralled for hours, for Zanzibar has a history filled with stories of sultans and princesses, slaves and spices. It is, of course, also the birth place of Queen icon, Freddie Mercury, and the home in which he used to live is still there for visitors to see. "The spice history of the island is just as fascinating and a trip is not complete without a tour of one of the traditional spice farms. It is one of the world's largest exporters of cloves."

8. Safe and friendly

Zanzibar is considered to be a safe destination. The friendly island people are a further boon. "The island has no real industry to speak of, other than tourism, and it is their main focus. Visitors are the centre of their attention and the island people work hard towards ensuring a pleasurable visit," says Proos.



Is East Africa a safe destination for MICE?

Between 2013 and 2014 there was a 20% increase in the number of African countries affected by terrorist-related violence. As safety and security across the continent increasingly come under scrutiny, **Liesl Venter** takes a closer look at Kenya and Tanzania.

Kenya and Tanzania tend to conjure up images of mountains, galloping zebra and fishing dhow rather than bomb blasts and terrorist attacks. But recent incidents have resulted in some concern over the safety and security situation in East Africa.

Tanzania

Mustafa Hassanali, md of conferencing and events agency, 361 Degrees Tanzania, says the country remains one of the safest in Africa, both socially and politically. "There are no big safety or security challenges for visitors to the country," he says. "Much like other foreign countries, it is important to be safety conscious."

Paul O'Brien, security director South and East Africa for International SOS and Control Risks, agrees, saying Tanzania has been a beacon of relative peace and stability within a troubled region. Pockets of attacks in Zanzibar and in the northern region of Arusha have raised fears somewhat that the peace in Tanzania is in danger of being disrupted, but there is no clear proof that international terror groups were involved in these attacks, he says.

According to Hassanali, safety and security of conference and meeting goers in Tanzania has not been an issue. "It's important, though, that one keeps up to date with what is happening in the country

and the region. My simple advice is to do due diligence on the vendors being used in the country. Find people who are passionate about the service they provide but are also problem solvers," he says. "At the same time make sure you are using the services of organisations with proven track records. Hire a consultant who will advise you on the level of safety and the reality on the ground."

O'Brien says, crime, incidents of social unrest and religious tensions in Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar have risen in the past few years. "Mugging and petty crime are among the most commonly reported crimes. Crime has similarly increased in the northern city of Arusha and rural districts bordering Kenya, but rarely affects tourists."

Kenya

Kenya, on the other hand has increasingly become a concern as terrorist attacks have increased. "The greatest risks to travellers in Kenya are from road safety, crime and terrorism," says O'Brien. "Violent and petty crimes pose the most significant security risks to travellers in urban centres, especially the capital, Nairobi."

He says the risk of unrest tends to be heightened during national political events, including elections and referendums. "Potential security threats stem from spontaneous



Mustafa Hassanali, md, 361 Degrees Tanzania

or orchestrated protests and rioting, heavy-handed security crackdowns, vigilante roadblocks and a possible increase in opportunistic crime on the back of political unrest. While business travellers are unlikely to be deliberately targeted, they risk incidental exposure to violence," he says.

Mitigating risk

Travelling in Africa can be challenging regardless of where one is heading on the continent. "One key way to mitigate the risk associated with a changing environment is to have access to continual information flows and brief travellers on current issues at their destinations. Preparation

is an essential element of any risk mitigation plan," says O'Brien.

"Travellers to remote areas should have sound and robust travel management plans in place in line with the threat level for that specific area. Non-essential travel should be avoided to higher risk areas such as Garissa and areas in proximity to the Somali border," says O'Brien.

Whilst there are no significant restrictions on travel to Tanzania, experts maintain that security measures are necessary for both countries. "We advise restrictions on travel to parts of Kenya, mainly the counties bordering Somalia – Mandera, Wajir, Garissa and Lamu," he says.

Whilst conferences and meetings continue to take place in the two countries, visitors are advised to ensure they are selecting suitable, safe and secure accommodation as well as reliable transport. A sound knowledge of security conditions on the ground in both these countries form part of mitigating any risk.

"The key to any successful trip lays in solid preparation," says O'Brien. "Recent events in Paris and Ankara have shown that even traditionally lower-risk areas can be affected by terrorism. Having access to professional security information and assistance services goes a long way towards managing both expected and unexpected threats." ■

Why hotel mergers are great for corporates

Hotel industry consolidation is on the rise, with some of the biggest brands in the hospitality business joining forces. This could be a very positive trend for travel management professionals. **Sue van Winsen** investigates.

With the ink just drying on Marriott's highly publicised acquisition of Starwood, making it the largest hotel company in the world, hotel mergers continue to dominate the headlines. Even local hotel groups have been part of the merging and acquisition frenzy, with aha buying Three Cities and Marriott acquiring the Protea Hospitality Group.

The rationale behind these mergers, says **Vanessa Butler**, spokesperson for Corporate Traveller, is that hotel groups want to strengthen their position in a market, or even establish themselves in a market segment where they currently have little market share. "Due to financial reasons, a group may seek a merger with another group to keep it afloat, even if it means sacrificing shareholding."

Eliminating duplication and oversupply are also key reasons for the recent spate of hotel mergers, says **Mike Gray**, ceo of Uniglobe Travel SA.

Wilma Van Vuuren, head of yield management for Wings Travel Management, agrees and says, one of the primary drivers has been the necessity to be represented in as many locations around the world as possible. "Both business travel managers and travellers require preferred hotels to be represented

in the countries in which they are operating to ensure a consistent service level, compliance with internal travel policies, cost controls, safety and security guarantees, reporting and maximising return through the preferred group's loyalty rewards programme."

Many believe that we should expect to see more mergers in the coming months. Van Vuuren says this will be fuelled by the need to increase efficiencies, increase representation, and broaden the service offering to travellers, particularly in the area of providing accommodation products for travellers on all budget scales.

Market dominance

One of the concerns raised in light of the recent mergers, is that they have the potential to shift too much power to the supplier as a result of market dominance. In this context, they could be in a powerful position to dictate pricing.

This is a possibility, says Van Vuuren, as stock concentration in a smaller amount of suppliers can lead to less competition. "However, clients have the advantage of the purchasing power of travel logistics businesses that manage the relationship with the accommodation suppliers. Through travel logistics partners, clients are able to access better rates because

they have a better negotiating position owing to consolidated buying power." Simply put, mergers actually have the potential to save businesses more, because consolidation in stock means that the power of the travel logistics company is amplified.

Butler says consolidating spend through a TMC and compliance with travel policy become more important than ever in light of the potential for increased bargaining power to negotiate larger discounts and better rates as a result of higher volume and economies of scale.

Impact on pricing

Gray says he expects that pricing may fluctuate wildly as the merged brands try to find their pricing levels. Butler says while some groups will immediately bring pricing in line with their strategy, she expects that most will opt to leave their pricing as it was at the time of the merger, only initiating pricing changes once they have gauged market reaction.

"There are a lot of positive outcomes from mergers. They include, but are not limited to, pricing alignment, uplift and maintenance of properties to align the product, ease of contracting, and realisation of global standards and global brand recognition," concludes Butler.

Impact on loyalty programmes

Butler believes that most groups will not run the risk of client alienation by not allowing loyalty points to be absorbed into its programme, as they want to retain as much of the market share as possible during the merger process.

Van Vuuren says usually the terms and conditions of the loyalty programmes would remain in force until such time as the programme is reviewed and the change is officially communicated to members. As the merger trend continues, she says there are two things that are likely to happen. "Firstly, the travel loyalty programmes between the two merging businesses will be reviewed and consolidated into a single travel rewards programme, probably resulting in new rewards structures, benefits and terms and conditions. Secondly, from a traveller's perspective, the opportunity to earn more rewards and reduce overall travel costs will become more important, hence travel reward programmes will become a greater focus for travellers, travel managers and travel logistic businesses. Travel policies will probably be revised to ensure that travel reward programmes are optimised to ensure a greater return on travel investments."



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Millennial mayhem

– are hotels caught up in the hype?

Much hype has surrounded the emergence of the millennial generation – but should hotels adapt their offering to meet the demands of this market, or should they take a more generalised approach? **Sue van Winsen** spoke to members of the hotel industry to find out.

From room service delivered by robots to unstaffed hotels – it is difficult to recall a time when as many revolutionary changes have been brought in to meet the demands of a specific generation of travellers. Millennials, or those born between the early 1980s and early 2000s, are a segment that have piqued the interest of the hotel industry – especially as they begin to enter junior and middle management and travel more for business.

Tom Thrussell, vp of brand and marketing for Centara Hotels and Resorts, says the extent to which hotels should adapt their offering to cater for the millennial market depends on their particular segment. “But given that millennials currently represent one-third of all travellers and that within five years more than half of the money spent in the travel sector will come from millennials, if you’re not looking at how to attract them now, you’d better start quickly!”

Starwood believes we have entered what it refers to as “the age of great change”, where a new generation is reshaping global travel patterns, forcing the hotel industry to rethink the way it has operated since time immemorial. **Anjali Mehra**, regional director of

communications: Africa and Indian Ocean for Starwood, says things are changing at a faster pace than we could ever have imagined.

“A new generation of travellers, rising wealth and accelerating technological change continue to reshape global travel patterns. This is generating the increased demand for our mid-market brands targeting at the younger, tech-savvy traveller. What is also rapidly changing is the way people book and interact with the brand.

What do millennials really want?

Indeed, **Caroline Daniel**, regional director of Africa for Preferred Hotels & Resorts, says before even considering product enhancements and innovations, hotels have had to re-examine their approach to marketing. “The vast majority of millennials will judge a hotel and its offering at the dreaming or research stage of travel, long before they are ready to make a reservation. If the website, social media or marketing activity around a hotel or collection of hotels are not memorable or don’t resonate, the hotel might not get the opportunity to showcase



Caroline Daniel, regional director of Africa, Preferred Hotels & Resorts

that its facilities and amenities are in line with their lodging preferences.”

Some of the most common themes that emerge in terms of the desires of millennial travellers are convenience, efficiency and, above all else, connectivity. Mehra says: “Exploration, interaction and experience have become the major focus. They are willing to pay more for a richer experience. For example, today we are seeing lobbies evolve into social spaces with food and beverage experiences integrated to create an atmosphere that combines work and play.”

Thrussell says: “Predominantly, they want to be able to do all the things they do in their everyday lives with the same ease they would in their own home or other natural environment.” He says while they are not necessarily in need of high-tech or complicated gimmicks, they do want high-speed Internet and the ability to plug in and connect their own devices.

Mark Jakins, chief marketing and regional operations executive for Peermont, echoes Thrussell’s sentiments and says, aside from convenient connectivity, they also want irons and ironing boards in the rooms to quickly press their own clothes, as well as a wide range of television channels offering news, sport and lifestyle programmes. “Online reservations and check-in, self-service takeaway coffee stations to be able to drink on the run, and public areas in the hotels to offer gathering places with bars that have a vibe for social interaction are also important.

Loyalty programmes have also been overhauled. Daniel points out that millennials tend to value “soft” benefits over points, seeking “on the spot” rewards that offer instant benefits for every interaction.

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What about the rest?

But do hotels risk alienating other generations by adapting their offering to millennial travellers? Thrussell says that while some hotels cater purely for specific segments, such as millennials, other hotels transcend generations and a fine balance must be achieved. "We are in the midst of a generational transition that is more pronounced in its differences than ever before. It can be a challenge to address the diverse service styles, offerings and technologies required for the differing audiences from a training, service and cost perspective but, provided we stay true to our core values, offering and identity, it is possible not to alienate guest segments."

Daniel also believes it may not be wise for every hotel to overhaul its offering or image if it could damage the rapport it has established with a loyal client base. "However, certain services or facilities can be incorporated into a hotel's existing offering to better reach millennials and inspire loyalty for years to come."

What hotels are doing to attract millennials

Centara

The group has taken steps to ensure strong complimentary WiFi connectivity throughout its hotels. It has also upgraded its website experience, made enhancements to its booking engine and ramped up its social media activity to provide a seamless user experience. From a product perspective, it has introduced a new beach club and bistro concept called COAST, which is offered at four of its beachfront locations and offers the laid-back socialising experience that millennials crave. Centara is also adding a new brand to its portfolio – COSI – with the first property opening in Chaweng, Koh Samui, Thailand. COSI Hotels will be an affordable lifestyle brand aimed at modern,

tech-savvy travellers, offering experiences differentiated by their location and cultural influences.

Peermont

The group has begun upgrading its WiFi connectivity speeds, dependent on available bandwidth and regulations in some of the countries, such as Botswana and Malawi. Peermont has also improved the reservations process on its website to offer more customisation, while rolling out bigger televisions in all the hotel categories, with USB and HDMI support, so guests can plug their phone into the television to work on email or watch movies saved on their devices, including laptops, tablets and phones.

Starwood

Starwood's tech-savvy brand, Aloft, was created to meet the needs of the always-on, evolving millennial global traveller. It includes modular furniture, open spaces, industrial design elements, loft-like guest rooms and a commitment to adaptive reuse. Each Aloft hotel receives a seasonal refresh to update the design experience. Aloft was the first brand to pilot Starwood's keyless entry system, where guests use their smartphone as their room key, as well as Botlr, the industry's first robotic butler. The group has also focused on hiring more millennials, and has introduced reverse-mentoring, where millennials educate older staff on their world. ■



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Cruise lines

a one-stop shop for incentive organisers

The effort of introducing a wow-factor to an incentive trip is simplified with the choice of a cruise as the travel prize, writes **Michelle Colman**.

The concepts of incentive travel and cruising are a match made in heaven. Travel incentives demand experiences not normally available to travellers, and today's ships, with their high-tech attractions and 'bigger is better' features, have the ability to deliver and go beyond.

Even without the incentive group bells and whistles, cruising offers the average passenger a whole lot more than the average holiday resort. Ships nowadays stage Broadway shows, offer extreme sports and adventures, visit the most exotic ports and feature cuisine from every corner of the globe. For the travel buyer and TMC, cruise lines are, for the most part, a one-stop shop, and provided you know your client well enough to create a good brief, much of the organisational drudgery is taken off your hands.

Customised incentive services

In a brochure listing the top 10 reasons for a cruising incentive, Royal Caribbean International provides a comprehensive and compelling set of motivations. Just some of the customised services and events travel buyers can expect for incentives groups are:

- Award ceremonies
- Team-building events such as beach Olympics and scavenger hunts
- Dedicated restaurant venues
- Customised group shore excursions
- Customised menu covers and other corporate identity touches, such as desserts decorated with company logos
- Theatres, lounges and other venues for group events
- Upgraded suite amenities
- Beverage packages

- Services of an on-board group co-ordinator

If the size and budget of a group warrant it, even full ship charter is possible. Filling the Queen Mary 2, with her 2 500 passenger cabins, may be a bit ambitious but mid-size and smaller liners are worth investigation. Oceania Cruises, for example, has vessels to accommodate 680 to 1 250 passengers, while the Windstar yachts will take more intimate groups of 148 to 310. Full charters allow full customisation of the trip – every meal, activity and the design of each day.

A case study

Travel Buyer asked **Dalene Oroni**, groups and incentives manager at Cruises International, to describe the type of experience that can be built into incentive group itineraries. Her example was arranged for a cellphone service provider that invited clients and suppliers on a seven-night Mediterranean cruise. Each evening a different supplier hosted

a dinner themed on one of the countries on the cruise itinerary. Cuisine followed the theme and guests were invited to wear the appropriate national dress. "It took a lot of organising, but we pulled it off and it was a huge success," she says.

Keeping costs low

An ever-present concern for the South African travel buyer and incentive organiser is keeping costs realistic. Oroni suggests considering travel in off-season periods, booking interior cabins, setting shorter durations and utilising once-off cruise departures.

A considerable cost advantage to cruising is its all-inclusive nature, leaving the corporate client with fewer hidden costs. Many of the items the client would pay for in a resort do not incur additional rental charges, such as meeting room and venue hire, audio visual equipment and room service. On some lines, all drinks are inclusive, or purchasable as packages.



Dalene Oroni, groups and incentives manager, Cruises International

Incentive organisers watching pennies can opt for on-board beverage packages that cover soft drinks only, leaving alcoholic beverages for the traveller's own account. Alternatively, companies can agree to give delegates an amount of on-board credit, which they can use towards beverages, shore excursions or spa treatments, as they wish.

Tailor extra-special port excursions

With the trend towards experiential travel, incentive organisers are providing extraordinary experiences on land as well as on board their ships. Says Oroni: "Some incentive houses can, for example, incorporate a Ferrari dive drive on the Amalfi coast, or a special lunch in a Medieval restaurant in Eze [on the French Riviera] or a catamaran buy-out in the Caribbean."

While cruise lines do have shore excursion teams to assist with these special land-based experiences, Oroni finds that most

incentive houses choose to deal with their own DMCs.

Gill Dewar, md of GCD Consulting, a marketing and representation company with a portfolio of international DMCs, is involved in this sphere. "If a group docks in Mykonos for the day, instead of taking the standard shore excursion, we are able to tailor-make and 'incentivise' the experience and make it extra special. So when guests disembark, they will be picked up in private vehicles and treated to an extra-special experience that perfectly suits the client and/or

company that has booked the cruise."

Aldworth believes port excursions are where unique notes can be added to the incentive. "I always tailor them specifically to the clients' needs and budgets. Sometimes the prices of the ships' excursions are very high compared with doing them separately – it depends what is included and what your clients need. Adding in extra special touches is important and knowing the ports and what you can do there will specifically appeal to clients.

The TMC's view: Do the homework

Janet Aldworth, md of Sure Voyager Travel in Durban, has organised several incentive cruise trips for companies that reward both staff and customers.

A popular itinerary choice, she says, is the four-night cruise out of Singapore to Phuket and Port Klang, Malaysia. Here she has experience of both the Royal Caribbean and Princess Cruise products. She has also made use of Mediterranean cruises for incentives, starting in Barcelona and ending in Rome, and once did an upmarket Azamara Journey cruise from Monaco to Barcelona. In the Gulf she has booked a seven-night Dubai cruise for an incentive group, which she found to be relaxed and economical for lower budget incentives.

While there are cruises to suit a wide range of budgets,

she cautions that organisers must take care to select the product that will best suit the type of incentive group participant. "You need to know your clients' profile and that of the prospective winners. Who you are going to attract and incentivise is very important – you must choose the right quality cruise and cruise itinerary, otherwise you won't get anyone to buy into the cruise as an incentive," she advises.

Doing the homework and understanding client and cruise line, stresses Aldworth, is key to cruise incentives, as there is only so much a cruise company can do. "Certain cruise lines are prepared to go the extra

mile and treat passengers as winners who have worked hard to achieve their prize. Some of them are inventive and helpful. Others, normally the cheaper cruise lines, will only offer minimum assistance on board."

Her top tip for travel buyers is to locate a good travel consultant, familiar with the cruise lines and their varying appeal. "Take time to brief the agent fully on what sort of group

it is likely to be – likes and dislikes, background. Review the itinerary – don't choose a very basic cruise if the clients are likely to have travelled a lot... they won't work hard for a prize they can afford themselves."

You need to know your clients' profile and that of the prospective winners. Who you are going to attract and incentivise is very important.

What excites meeting planners most

In a survey conducted by Celebrity Cruises among meeting planners, the following points emerged as having excited them the most:

- Even though their winners had visited high-end hotel and resort properties in the past, a cruise was much newer and more exciting.
- The overall cost savings when compared with a land destination, ranged from 30% to 50%.
- Dining and entertainment, usually the biggest organisational challenges in terms of time and cost, were taken care of.
- Of great value was the all-inclusive, 'pay all in advance' nature of a cruise, allowing for complete budgetary control.
- A ship's self-contained environment meant fewer outside distractions and a more focused delegate group.
- Destination variety was a plus.



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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. Réunion

LAT Travel. Island diving package from R18 900pp sharing. Offer includes return flights and taxes from Johannesburg, return transfers, seven nights' accommodation with breakfast daily and five dives. Excludes tourist tax of €0.77pp per night (R13). Valid for travel until June 30.

2. Gauteng

SA Rugby Travel. South Africa vs Australia from R3 390pp sharing. Rate includes two nights' accommodation with breakfast daily and Category A match tickets at Loftus Stadium. Match date October 2. Travel dates September 30-October 3. Match tickets also available for South Africa vs Argentina.

3. Europe and Morocco

Costa Cruises. Europe and Morocco cruise from R9 600pp sharing. Offer includes 11 nights' accommodation on board with breakfast, lunch and dinner daily, as well as on-board entertainment. Savona-Marseilles-Tangier-Casablanca-Cadiz-Lisbon-Alicante-Civitavecchia-Savona. Offer excludes flights and port taxes of approximately US\$200pp (R2 966). Set departures May 23 and June 3.

4. KZN

Selborne Golf Estate, Hotel and Spa. Deluxe mini-spa breakaway from R3 940 per couple. Special includes two nights' accommodation



with breakfast daily and a pampering one-hour aromatherapy full-body massage for two. Offer valid until June 22.

5. Mozambique

Mozambique Tourism. Five-night special from R8 820pp sharing. Package includes return flights from Johannesburg to Inhambane, return transfers, accommodation at Pomene Lodge in a water bungalow with breakfast and dinner daily. Package excludes airport taxes of approximately R4 100pp sharing. Special valid for travel until December 17.

6. Zanzibar

AfricaStay. Four-night package from R7 540pp sharing. Offer includes return flights from Johannesburg to Zanzibar on Mango, including taxes; return transfers; accommodation at the Reef and Beach hotel with breakfast, lunch and dinner daily. High-season supplements may apply (school holidays). Seven-night package available from R9 215pp sharing. Valid for travel until June 30.

7. Western Cape

Bon Hotel Shelly Point. Rates from R499pp sharing. Offer includes one night's accommodation with breakfast, 15% off selected spa treatments, and 15% off a round of golf. Children under 12 eat and stay free. Valid for stays until October 31.

8. Mauritius

Indian Ocean Island Holidays. Seven-night special from R16 916pp sharing. Offer includes return flights from Johannesburg on Air Mauritius including taxes, return transfers, accommodation at the Radisson Blu Poste Lafayette Resort and Spa with breakfast and dinner daily. Valid for travel until September 30.

9. Thailand

Kulula holidays. Mega Thailand Special from R11 351pp sharing. Offer includes return flights from Johannesburg to Phuket on Qatar Airways, approximate taxes and fuel levies, seven nights' accommodation at Nipa resort with breakfast daily. Weekend supplements may apply for departures on Fridays and Saturdays and an airline surcharge of R1 700pp will apply from June 18 to July 15. Valid for travel until October 31.

10. London

TravelVision. Three-night packages from R18 834pp sharing. Rate includes return flights from Johannesburg and approximate taxes, accommodation in a centrally located hotel with breakfast daily, three-day London Sightseeing Pass with transport and a London hop-on hop-off tour. Valid for travel until June 20.

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



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