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Thuli Mahonga keeps Nedbank's delegates excited about events

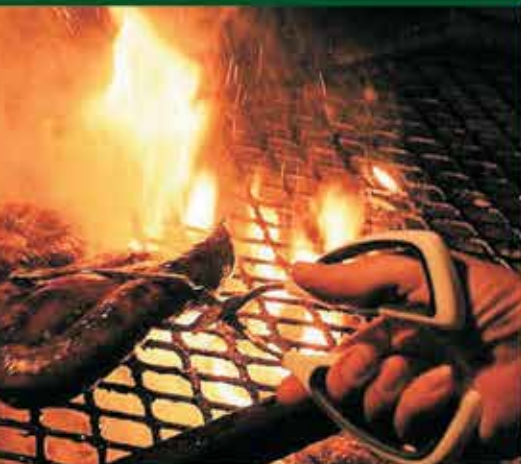


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Editor's note

New entrants in the domestic market, a plummeting rand and rising operating costs will create an unstable environment for airfares in the coming few months, industry experts predict.

Increased competition in the domestic aviation space has already led to all-time low fares, according to a recent study by online travel agency, Travelstart.co.za. Hopping on a plane to Cape Town from Johannesburg is now cheaper than it was in 2012.

Comair has been the first casualty, citing "unsustainably low" airfares as the reason for a 17% drop in profits for the year ending June 30, 2015. "New competitors [entered] the market with very aggressive but more than likely unsustainable pricing. Comair was, out of necessity, drawn into the fray in order to retain its slice of a market that had still not recovered to 2008 volumes," the airline said in a statement.

But the cheap tickets aren't expected to last and forward outlooks predict the economic downward trend will continue. The car-rental market has slowed down over the past 18 months, largely as a result of corporates tightening their belts. The market

is down by double digits, Avis' executive director of sales, **Lance Smith**, told *Travel Buyer*. Corporate travellers, who need to justify all expenditure, have become more demanding and expect greater value – turning to their TMC to come up with relevant solutions.

In our bumper TMC feature we delve into the challenges facing the corporate – TMC relationship and how expectations are changing, with trust being a critical factor.

With the Rugby World Cup in full swing, we put the spotlight on sports incentives. Major sporting events are a once-in-a-lifetime experience, making it an ideal reward for staff and clients – even those who aren't fanatics.

For the culture vultures, we look at the Cape Winelands and what you need to know when hosting an event in this beautiful part of the world. Looking to go international? Our features on Singapore and Zanzibar will give you insight as to where to stay and what to do when visiting these destinations.

Keep reading!

Natasha Schmidt
(natashas@nowmedia.co.za)

COVER

For the Nedbank events team, dedicated focus on the tiniest of details is critical to success. *Travel Buyer* speaks to senior events manager, **Thuli Mahonga**. Cover photograph by **Shannon Van Zyl**.

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Fly Blue Crane spreads its wings

FLY Blue Crane officially launched flights on September 1, operating to 'underserved' routes in South Africa from Johannesburg.

The airline, which is headed up by ex-SAA executives, **Siza Mzimela**, **Theunis Potgieter** and **Jerome Simelane**, first announced plans to launch flights in May last year.

It aims to provide a high frequency 'hybrid' service geared at the business market.

"We're not an LCC or a full-service carrier," says chief operating officer, Theunis Potgieter, "we are a hybrid airline that will offer quality products but at a more competitive price."

Initially, three domestic routes will be on offer. Based in Johannesburg, the airline will fly to Bloemfontein, Kimberley and Nelspruit. Plans are to expand quickly, adding new domestic routes as well as focusing on regional routes, says Potgieter.



Showcasing Fly Blue Crane's new offering at an information-sharing session for the travel trade are gm of Commercial, **Jerome Simelane** (second from left); **Siza Mzimela** (third from left); and **Theunis Potgieter** (second from right); flanked by the airline's lovely air stewardesses showing off their new uniforms.

New flights from Lanseria

FLYAFRICA now operates to Windhoek out of Lanseria International Airport. Flight N6 302 departs Lanseria at 08h30 and arrives in Windhoek at 10h25. Flight N6 307 departs Windhoek at 10h55 to arrive back in Lanseria at 12h50.

African airline ceases operations

KORONGO Airlines, national airline of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has ceased flights after only three years of operations.

The airline's Boeing 737 was severely damaged due to a problem on the runway in Mbuji-Mayi. "Operating conditions in the region remain extremely difficult for an airline, partly because of poor infrastructure in smaller airports. Given these circumstances, the decision was taken to cease the activities of the airline," the airline said in a statement.

"The company has unfortunately not been able to reach profitability due to a lack of critical mass operations based on a fleet of only one aircraft, which doesn't offer sufficient possibilities to amortise the fixed costs of an airline operation respecting all international safety standards."

What is the industry talking about?

A NUMBER of critical talking points were raised at the GBTA workshop on August 20, which drew a large crowd of delegates eager to share in the topics of discussion. Fraud and reconciliation were identified as two considerable challenges in the payment landscape, as was the need to integrate new payment technology more effectively into existing payment systems.

An interesting discussion around how demographics are changing highlighted the need for a paradigm shift and greater sensitivity to the needs of women when travelling. Particular areas that require greater awareness

include travel early in the morning and the safety issues that surround this. Shuttle or chauffeur-driven services were discussed as possible solutions. Known hotel brands should be given preference over bed and breakfasts, and access to WiFi to remain connected is also a priority.

The topic of data was again raised, relooking at the need for corporates to use data to identify trends within their travel policies. In order to do this, corporates need to ask themselves what they need from the data and what data would be meaningful. Ultimately, how the data is extracted will determine future efficiencies.

Proflight launches Lusaka-Durban flights

PROFLIGHT Zambia has launched direct flights from Lusaka to Durban.

The latest route was part of its strategy to expand across Southern Africa, the airline said.

Flights operate three times a week, using a 50-seat CRJ-100 aircraft. If demand proves strong, the airline will add a fourth weekly flight.

Fares start from US\$210pp

(R2 800) one-way, excluding taxes. Children are half price.

Flights depart Lusaka at 11h00 on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, arriving in Durban at 13h30. Return flights depart Durban at 14h10 the same day, arriving in Lusaka at 16h40.

The Durban service would provide connections with Proflight's services between Lusaka and Ndola, Kitwe, Solwezi and Mfuwe, the airline said.

New hotel to open in Houghton

CONSTRUCTION has started on The Houghton Hotel, which will form the cornerstone of an existing residential development and is set to open at the beginning of 2018.

The Houghton Hotel, which has been invited to join the Leading Hotels of the World portfolio, will overlook the Jack Nicklaus signature golf course and offer 55 hotel rooms of 50 sqm as well as six hotel suites ranging from 90 sqm to 120 sqm. The conference centre measures approximately 600 sqm and caters for up to 550 guests, standing.

The hotel has a contemporary delicatessen, a 90-seat fine-dining restaurant with three private dining rooms, and the Sky Bar, offering breath-taking views over the golf course's third hole. There is also a business centre offering boardrooms with the latest technology and a guest service offering.

Other facilities include a hair and nail bar, spa, dry cleaner and gym. For those keen on outdoor activities there are jogging paths traversing the hotel's 7,2km parkland surrounds as well as the golf course.

Flyafrika establishes West African hub

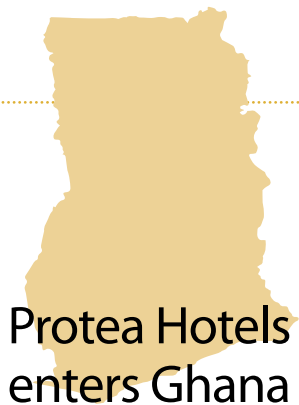
FLYAFRICA.COM is on track to establish a hub in West Africa with the launch of Gabon flyafrika in November.

President of the Gabonese Republic, **H.E. Ali Bongo Ondimba**, announced the strategic partnership during the New York Forum in Libreville on August 29.

Adrian Hamilton-Manns, Flyafrika ceo, told *Travel Buyer*: "Gabon has been one of our primary projects because it opens up all of French West Africa.

"We will be introducing a new product called 'Connect' – a domestic product – when we open up flights for sale," he said. In April, the airline will launch international flights to multiple destinations in

West Africa from Gabon, using a Boeing 737-800. Gabon flyafrika's West African ambitions will be further strengthened by the introduction of flights to Europe and Saudi Arabia later in the year. "We are going to fly from Libreville to France for as low as US\$150 (R1 993)," Hamilton-Manns said. Flyafrika plans to add 10 countries in the next 12 months.



Protea Hotels enters Ghana

PROTEA Hotels has opened the Protea Hotel Select Takoradi, its first property in Ghana.

The new hotel, located in Takoradi – an oil-rich area of the country – boasts 132 rooms, including 12 two-bedroomed apartments. The hotel features a large restaurant, bar and lounge, terrace and an entertainment and pool area as well as a gym. Conference facilities for a maximum of 150 delegates and WiFi connectivity are also available. ■

Etihad introduces new 'Fare Choices'

ETIHAD Airways has implemented a new fare structure to "provide more choice and clarity when booking flights".

All bookings ticketed from September 14 have been split into distinct fare choices. The structure for economy class includes Economy Breaking Deals, Economy Saver, Economy Value and Economy Freedom. Business

class includes Business Breaking Deals, Business Saver and Business Freedom, while in first class there will only be one fare – Freedom.

"A total of eight new 'Fare Choices' have been introduced, allowing travellers to tailor their bookings to their individual needs. The 'Fare Choices' are transparent and differ in baggage allowance, flexibility and included benefits that otherwise need to be

purchased separately," says **Peter Baumgartner**, chief commercial officer of Etihad Airways.

"Ultimately, this is about providing choice. When it comes to booking a flight, not everyone's needs are the same. Some guests want to travel light and on a budget, while others want to be able to make last-minute travel decisions, carry extra baggage or earn more miles."

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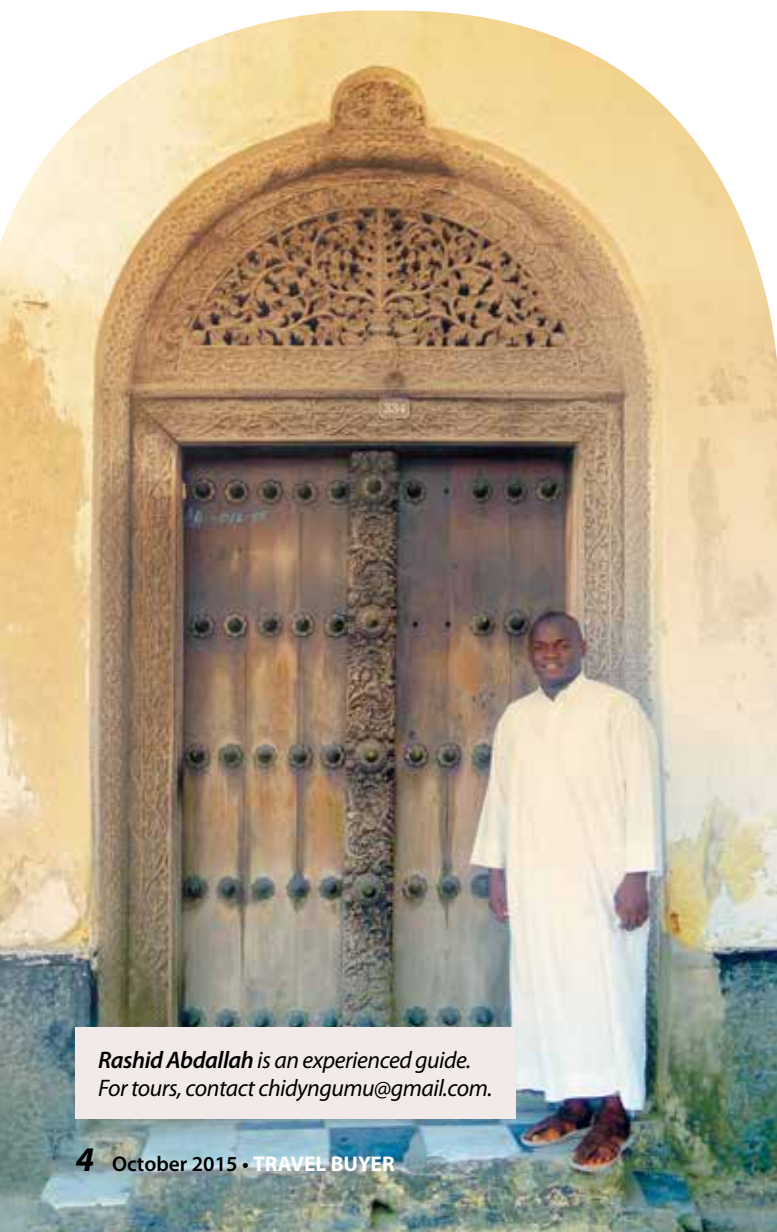
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Inside Stone Town's newest offering

The first Park Hyatt in Zanzibar has officially opened its doors. *Travel Buyer's* **Kate Nathan** experienced the property's new offering first-hand as a guest of the hotel.



*Rashid Abdallah is an experienced guide.
For tours, contact chidyngumu@gmail.com.*

PARK Hyatt Zanzibar, although the newest hotel in Stone Town, is imbued with the history of Zanzibar and Stone Town, and the spirit of the island and the town are successfully reflected in the hotel's clever and beautifully-executed design attributes.

The property comprises two linked buildings, one of them the old Arab mansion, known as Mambo Msiige (meaning "cannot be imitated" in Swahili), built around 1850 by a wealthy Omani family, with its beautiful Arabian architecture, heavily-carved doors and cool, shaded courtyards. The other, new, purpose-built building, known as the Zamani Residences, is modern, but carefully designed, carrying through many echoes and nuances of the old building, creating a seamless unity between the two.

An extra dimension is added through the location of the property. It is situated above a small public beach, next door to the fishing boat moorings and the small commercial port of Zanzibar. It is an unusual location for a five-star super-luxury hotel, but one which adds a great deal to the experience and makes the visitor feel a part of the local life.

The Park Hyatt Zanzibar's 67 rooms (including 11 suites), are cool and generously proportioned, with all the features and amenities of a superior five-star establishment, including an in-room coffee machine. Contemporary styling effortlessly blends with Swahili accents. The Oceanfront rooms embrace spectacular views, looking down onto the exceptionally clean beach and the clear, glassy, dazzling turquoise sea. Watching the fishermen preparing their hand-carved wooden Dhows and the ships coming and going, interspersed with a couple of lively beach soccer games, provided this writer with hours of entertainment. For those who prefer fresh water, a pool deck contains a rimflow pool with an excellent view over the beach, but is separated from the beach with a glass wall.

The land-facing rooms have a charm of their own, looking out over old Stone Town, a Unesco Heritage site. One of the most enjoyable aspects of the hotel is that you can easily walk out and immediately find yourself among the town's labyrinthine streets and alleys (some of them so narrow that the only vehicles they allow are handcarts, donkeys and scooters).

Guests are advised to take



PHOTOS: KATE NATHAN

GREAT group deals

THOMPSONS Holidays is offering three-night Zanzibar packages for conferences starting from R7 850 in a twin room and R10 500 in a single room. The rate includes accommodation, transfers and full conferencing facilities with refreshments and a three-course lunch daily, but excludes flights. **John Ridler**, PR manager of Thompsons Holidays says: The five-star hotel offers top class accommodation and dining and has excellent meeting and banqueting facilities for groups of 12 through to 120, along with its unusual location in ancient Stone Town.

a guided walking tour, for purposes of navigation rather than security, as it is quite easy to get lost. Stone Town embodies and preserves Swahili culture, a blend of indigenous, Arab, Persian, Indian and Portuguese influences, unique to the African East Coast. Not much has changed in the past couple of centuries, and an easy short walk from the hotel will grant tourists access to several of the famous carved Zanzibar doors, plenty of picturesque shops, a history of slavery sites, the Persian hammam, the People's Palace (the residence of the last Sultan of Zanzibar), and the House of Wonders (presently undergoing renovation) - in its time, the largest and highest building in Zanzibar, and the first to install electricity plus an elevator!

In terms of its conference offering, the property has fully-equipped conference facilities of varying sizes, which can accommodate up to 120 delegates, all of whom could be accommodated in the hotel on a sharing basis.

An Anantara Spa at the hotel contains a hair salon plus three suites where body treatments and massages are conducted in beautiful, fragrant surroundings.

► Did you know?

Passengers on certain Mango aircraft which service the direct Johannesburg-Zanzibar route will find they are able to surf the net at 30 000 feet. G-Connect In-Flight WiFi is available on six of Mango's fleet of eight aircraft, making the carrier the first SA airline to offer wireless internet onboard. Passengers may purchase G-Connect vouchers while booking on the website and top up onboard the flight.

Top activities for groups

PARK Hyatt Zanzibar prides itself on offering guests a full concierge service, catering to individual requests by guests, operators or agents. Some of the standard offerings the hotel can arrange are:

- Kite surfing
- Scuba diving
- Sunset Dhow cruises
- Fishing trips (the chef will prepare guests' catch for dinner)
- Day cruises around the island
- Safari Blue (a full-day excursion exploring the conservation area of Menai Bay)

Popular land arrangements, other than Stone Town walking

tours, are:

- Stone Town at Dawn (photography tour)
- Discover Zanzibar Craftsmanship
- Discover the Spice Island (culinary tour)
- Authentic cultural experiences
- Antique treasures
- Golfing
- The Rock Experience, an iconic restaurant perched on a rock just off Zanzibar's east coast
- Luxury Short Safaris packages - short safaris from Zanzibar by private aircraft to the Serengeti for a short (two night) stay, combining this with the Park Hyatt Zanzibar stay. Preferred tour operator will arrange this. ■



The Park Hyatt Zanzibar's infinity pool.

How healthy are your events?

Healthy living has become the modern day mantra. **Liesl Venter** investigates what impact the rise of healthy eating has had on the conference and events sector.

ACROSS the world more and more people are embracing healthier eating options, with consumers actively engaging in discussions around food ingredients, the impact of genetically modified food, the need for more organic produce and fewer processed foods.

Reuben Rossouw, head chef at the Protea Hotel Durbanville, says while health-conscious customers are on the rise, they still represent a relatively small percentage of overall guest numbers. "No doubt, people are looking more closely at what they eat. But it is still only about 10% of the total group, if not less, who want the more healthy options."

Craig Swart, general manager of Bon Hotel Riviera on Vaal, agrees, saying the demand for health options has slightly increased but it can hardly be considered major at this stage.

"What is interesting, though, is the increased awareness of unhealthy food and fats that we are starting to pick up," he says. It is no longer uncommon to see a plate come back with the fat cut off a steak or plain olive oil being used on salads rather than the creamy house sauce.

While the demand for health food has been slow to catch on, it is constant, says Rossouw. "Guests are also far more aware of the nutritional value of ingredients for health risk reasons such as diabetes, strokes and heart attacks."

Health comes at a cost

Conferencing and events have not experienced as significant a shift towards healthy foods as would be expected. Some attribute this to the increased cost this would add to the budget and others, the fear of ending up with boring cuisine.

"Any diet will cost a little more but definitely doesn't make life boring," says Rossouw. "In fact, we find most guests love to see what the chefs can come up with at conferencing

or cocktail functions."

According to Swart delivering health-conscious menus can be expensive. "Because it is still not mainstream it can be expensive, especially when it comes to gluten-free flours and baked goods. However it does not have to be more expensive with some creative thinking."

Buffets provide choice

Buffets remain a contemporary favourite for conferences. "For bigger groups, buffets are simpler because they allow delegates to pick what they would like to eat. They offer variety and there is usually something for everyone," says Rossouw.

Guests with special dietary requirements are catered for in singular fashion. "So we will serve a frutata instead of a quiche for the gluten-free guest," he explains. "There is a wide range of health options available to choose from. By incorporating one or two within the buffet you are offering guests choice, while at the same time catering for a variety of tastes."

Rossouw says while the delivery of healthy food has not become the norm at local events, chefs are working hard to use more natural ingredients and to deliver healthier options. "We use proper stock reductions or jus for gravy instead of instant gravies, which generally have a thickening agent that is not gluten free," he says.

"Salads have also become standard on most menus. You can toss nearly anything together with light vinaigrette, which then becomes a delightful meal on its own and provides that healthy option for delegates. We have also started to incorporate do-it-yourself salads in the buffet for this reason."

Something for everyone

Making sure there is something for everyone on the menu is important, comments Rossouw. "We have started to find ways of delivering exactly that and are constantly working on healthier options – so while we still deliver

the traditional pizza, we now also provide a healthy version of it."

"While menus are not necessarily all about healthy options yet, delivering the health option for that person who

wants it is a must," agrees Swart. "People with different dietary requirements are no longer being sidelined."

He says it is important for chefs to show they have gone to the trouble of catering for specific needs and that these dishes are equivalent to the mainstream options.

"Gone are the days when vegetarians had to eat the steamed vegetables and rice offered with the meat main course – almost like second-rate citizens. Now they want to see that the chef has taken time to prepare a speciality dish that caters for their needs," he says.

Ultimately, he says, it is about keeping guests satisfied. "The food has to be filling, it has to be attractive and it has to offer value for money. These are still the requirements that delegates demand – more than a healthy meal."

The food has to be filling, it has to be attractive and it has to offer value for money.



5 sizzling hot FOOD TRENDS

Event dining is becoming increasingly strategic – new and innovative concepts are a must. **Liesl Venter** investigates the latest and greatest new trends.

THERE are several buzzwords trending throughout the food industry at the moment, says founder and creative director of experience design agency, Studio H, **Hannerie Visser**. A foodie with style, she also happens to be the food

curator for the Design Indaba Expo this year. As such it's not surprising that very little of what she does can ever be described as ordinary.

According to Visser, dining has become about an experience. "However, sometimes it is easy to get swept up in a concept and

presentation, but the actual food and how it tastes should always be the priority," she maintains. "Everything you prepare should have a purpose. Don't just create something because you think it will look cute or cool."

Health, sustainability and ethical practice are fast

becoming non-negotiable, Visser says. "People want to know the story behind the food that they eat – where it was grown, by whom and how." These are the things that matter in the culinary experience, she says, and for gala events it is no different.



Go casual

Long gone are the days of the formal sit-down gala dinner with waiters in black and white bow-tie outfits courteously serving a beautiful plate of food. "Casual dining is in," says Visser. "In fact, street food is

very popular at the moment. Lots of organisers are getting food trucks to serve at events – from the truck. It's a casual affair and provides guests with more options as to what they want to eat."

Bigger portions are back

The trend towards bite-size meals might not have completely passed but there is a definite move away from small titbit portions.

"Family-style dining featuring food served in bigger bowls or large platters from which guests can dish for themselves is fast becoming a trend," says Visser.

Promoting a more convivial atmosphere, family-style dining adds to the relaxed, casual atmosphere that is currently being sought after rather than the formal gala dining experience.



Food is art

Conceptual dining, brought on by international food designers like Bompas and Parr and Marije Vogelzang is an exciting new trend that is taking the current food environment by storm. "We are seeing very exciting food experiences emerge," says Visser. "And there are many options to choose from. For example, glow-in-the-dark jellies and breaking food baked in clay with hammers are becoming very popular."

Intertwining food and art creates a real experience for guests unlike anything they have ever encountered before.

A full sensory experience

The importance of how food looks is nothing new and over the past few years major efforts have been made to create visually pleasing dishes.

The influence of sound on the taste of food, however, is fast becoming just as important, says Visser. "There is definitely increased focus on the entire sensory experience rather than just the food itself, as all the senses impact on your eating experience."



Delicacies of a different kind

According to Visser, there has been a move away from the tried and tested produce that everyone knows and is used to. Not only are chefs experimenting more but the introduction of produce that is not usually expected has become very trendy.

"I am seeing things like goat meat and insects being used more often on menus," she says. Anything from grasshoppers to crickets to mealworms is becoming a culinary trend.

When to conference in the Winelands

The Winelands, with its unrivalled scenery, is an idyllic setting for all kinds of events. **Carina Borralho** reports.

WHEN planning an event or conference in the Winelands, meeting planners and organisers need to factor in the weather, their client's budget and how prices vary at different times of the year, transport to and from the Winelands, and accommodation, says **Natalie Kensley**, research, marketing and sales manager at The Conference Company, adding that no event would be complete without a wine tasting.

Kensley says any kind of corporate event is well suited to the Winelands, as the region offers a spectacular array of venues and estates to choose from, each with a unique venue, service and setting. "I believe that corporate clients need to explore a few venues to understand if the venue and setting will match the corporate event planned as well as the culture of the company," she says.

There is hardly an event that would not be well suited to a Winelands setting, agrees **Ligia de Coito**, ceo and founder of Wine Desk, who notes that the Winelands can cater for small and intimate events as well as large capacity ones, while offering beautiful natural surroundings.

"From team building to seminars and board meetings, the Winelands provides event organisers and planners with a wide range of options," she says.

Any type of corporate event is welcome at Stellenbosch Wine Routes. From conferencing to team building, think tanks, AGMs, year-end functions, incentive

trips and more. "We are an innovative wine and gourmet region of South Africa and look forward to welcoming visitors to our beautiful region," says **Annareth Bolton**, Stellenbosch American Express Wine Routes ceo.

However, Kensley says, in her opinion, the Winelands setting best serves strategic planning meetings, team building, exclusive alfresco corporate family days and exclusive incentive meetings.

According to **Frieda Lloyd**, vice chair at Hermanus Tourism, the Winelands is best suited to events that aim to educate and entertain corporates, and can cater specifically to personalised or themed corporate events.

When to book

Although the region can be visited at any time of the year, as it is "an absolute gem when it comes to seasons", according to Kensley, it does depend on the type of event being held as well as the budget of the client.

De Coito recommends that meetings planners book events during the winter months. "The Cape Winelands region is at its greenest in winter and, although there are rainy, windy days, there are also beautiful days with warm, pleasant weather." She adds that availability for venues is also better during winter periods.

Bolton says, although winter is a good time for special rates at local accommodations and venues, the

Winelands is a destination for all

seasons. She notes, however, that a good time to visit is during harvest time, which runs between February and April each year. "This period allows corporates to make their own wine, pick their own grapes, and do grape stomping," she comments.

Lloyd says it is best to take advantage of the quiet seasons, when winemakers are not busy with their harvest and can take time to welcome corporate travellers and educate them on various wine selections.

A wide range of add-ons

When it comes to event add-ons and teambuilding, the Winelands has much to offer.

"Creation Wines has a variety of options for corporates. From blending your own wine, to vineyard safaris, meeting planners will find something that appeals to them," says Lloyd. She adds that SA Forest Adventures allows delegates to ride quad bikes through the Southern Right vineyards and explore the natural beauty of the surrounds. "There is also Panthera Africa, which is a wild cat sanctuary. A visit to this sanctuary could be paired with a wine tasting at one of the Stanford producers."

Many venues offer guests the chance to work alongside wine farmers and experience farm life, as well as to explore methods of sustainability. When planning teambuilding events, this is something worthwhile to include in a package, says Kensley.

Wine Desk offers a wide range of conference add-ons, which are tailor-made for each event. "We take

into consideration the delegates – where they are from and what their group interests may be, as well as the conference schedule (half days or full days) or any other requests from the client," says de Coito. Wine Desk offers food and wine pairings, physical activities such as cycling routes with wine tasting, horse-back riding with wine tasting, walking culinary tours through the towns and more.

When it comes to tailor-making conferencing or events, Bolton says Stellenbosch Wine Routes prides itself on creating bespoke itineraries for any sized group. "We do all the work for corporates, and customise the programme according to the events' needs."

Some of the fun activities at Stellenbosch Wine Routes include:

- Blend your own wine
- A treasure hunt through town
- Hikes and guided mountain bike tours
- A Land Rover 4x4 experience at Simonsig Wine Estate
- Cooking demos
- Walking and food tours
- Dine with a local

Don't miss this event!

The annual Hemel-en-Aarde Pinot Noir Celebration, which "sells out in three days", is a popular event that meeting planners could use to add to the attraction of their event or to plan trips around, says Lloyd. The event allows guests to taste the unique flavours produced by Hemel-en-Aarde winegrowers, and to attend a gala dinner hosted by a list of local and international speakers who discuss wine-making philosophies. ■

Every event is an occasion

For the Nedbank events team, dedicated focus on the tiniest of details is critical to success.

Debbie Badham speaks to senior events manager, **Thuli Mahonga**, to find out more.

FOR senior events manager for Nedbank Retail and Business Banking, **Thuli Mahonga**, bringing the imaginings of others to life is all in a day's work. Having been part of the events industry for more than ten years, Mahonga is well versed in the complex logistics and hard work involved in pulling off successful events for a range of different stakeholders.

Born and raised in Soweto, she began her career with a diploma in hospitality, going on to complete an internship at the Cape Sun in 1995. Thereafter, Mahonga went to work for the Don Group where she worked her way up from a receptionist position, becoming a general manager at a young age.

Although she worked in hospitality, Mahonga had little to do with banqueting until she joined an events and communication company where she became very involved in eventing. At the time, the company handled events for the department of education which meant that one

of Mahonga's very first events was the massive launch of the FET programme.

She describes working with the Department as an eye-opening experience as she was exposed to reams of strict event protocol and large conferences that needed to cater for the needs of varying groups of people, each with their own agenda. "The last project we did was a Commonwealth conference for over 3 000 people," Mahonga says.

Years later she made the decision to join Nedbank. "The challenges around running an up-and-coming business were significant and I needed to make sure I was taking care of myself," she says, adding that she has now been with Nedbank for seven years.

At Nedbank Retail and Business banking, Mahonga heads up a team of four event managers and also liaises with the co-ordinators who work across the bank's various regions.

Keeping delegates engaged

While Nedbank's travel desk handles agreements with the bank's various venue suppliers for accommodation, conferencing is handled by the events team. Mahonga points out that there is a very specific reason for this. "I don't like to use the same venues all the time because it's important to keep delegates engaged. As such, I always look for places that have a bit of an edge."

To sustain this, she conducts a significant number of site inspections to find venues with unusual

offerings. "For example, I recently needed to organise an incentive event and ended up deciding on the African Pride Crystal Towers Hotel & Spa because of its quirky features. A tubular shower that sits in the middle of the bathroom changes colour and the television electronically ascends and descends from the foot of the bed," Mahonga elaborates. She adds that another hotel she recently visited was the Protea Hotel Fire & Ice in Pretoria where she appreciated the venue's amazing trademark of milkshakes and memorable hotel scents.

► *Article continues on p10*



PHOTO: SHANNON VAN ZYL

► *Article continues from p9*

Each event is negotiated with the supplier on its own merit. "Most venues are fairly flexible – they generally want your business and are willing to negotiate accordingly. They also seem to understand that we always want more value for money," says Mahonga.

As there is a limited database of standard venues to choose from, Mahonga is vigilant about acquiring the details she needs about each property from her team. "It's about asking the right questions to ensure that you get the results you want. Also, if you understand the objective of the event, it makes it much easier to execute in a precise fashion." She explains that part of her process when organising an event is to walk through the entire process from beginning to end, going through the finer details step by step. "For example, as delegates walk in and register, is the registration digital or manual? If it's digital, what kind of machine will be used and is there an electrical outlet at the place of registration to accommodate this?"

Streamlining venues

Mahonga explains that the assistance of a PCO often proves invaluable when the company is organising larger events. "When I'm particularly busy, it helps to be able to ask one of the PCOs we work with to look at venues. In this way they are able to streamline venues for us – they understand what kind of venues we like – and I then end up only having to see four different options as opposed to twenty."

She says that the conference organisers that the bank has relationships with are also really helpful in keeping the Nedbank team abreast of all the latest industry information and trends.

Brand integrity is critical

Each and every event that Nedbank organises has its own brief and character. There is a wide variety of people throughout the organisation and for this reason, each event, must be considered on its own merit.



Thuli Mahonga seeks out venues with unique offerings such as the trademark milkshakes and lobby scents offered by the Protea Hotel Fire & Ice! Menlyn.

Mahonga notes, however, that the one thing which remains consistent throughout the bank's events is its brand positioning. "We have to ensure that the brand is always positioned in the right manner and that our values are reflected throughout," she explains. "In everything we do, the common thread of respect remains."

Managing people and perception

As in most lines of work, managing people is one of the greatest challenges in event planning, according to Mahonga. "People are dynamic and up and down. They also perceive things completely differently to the way in which you perceive them, and it can be a challenge to try and align those perspectives and expectations," she maintains.

What's more, corporate event planners have a number of different stakeholders who are directly affected by the events they organise. This includes staff whose delivery needs to be managed, as well as vendors from whom Mahonga must ensure she gets what she requires and, finally, the internal stakeholders whose expectations need to be met.

"As you can imagine, all of this involves a significant amount of back and forth," she comments,

"As such, I firmly believe that great people skills are the best way to forge the way forward in the business of events." She adds that over the years, Nedbank has developed good relationships with its vendors.

Innovations around budget

Budgets are an ongoing challenge, says Mahonga who adds that, to deal with this, she will always push for more for less. "We're really feeling the cost pressure now and, as such, have to take into account the cost of absolutely everything we do. Where certain functions are outsourced, we have to

ask ourselves whether we can rather handle those internally. For example, when large volumes of delegates' bags need to be packed, we'll opt to handle this in-house."

She says, to get the job done, the team will

draw staff members in to come and assist with the task at hand by making it fun.

Understanding what events mean to people

Mahonga says there have been a number of events during the course of her career that have been challenging, including the Commonwealth event because of its sheer magnitude and logistics,

and the Nedbank Golf Challenge, which she says was a real eye-opener the first time she became involved. However, she adds that because of the nature of the incentive events that Nedbank often organises, it's important to treat each and every one as a stand-out occasion.

"The key is to be extremely sensitive as to how people are treated and remember that this is their moment. Each and every person at that event must leave being made to feel truly special – and this must carry through to all the finer details of the event, even including the way in which you speak to them," Mahonga maintains.

Adapting to constant change

The events industry is constantly changing, and as such Mahonga believes one of the most vital skills an events manager can possess is the ability to remain abreast of the latest trends. In line with this, she believes that the next trend to take the industry by storm will be the rise in bespoke event apps. "Each event will have its own special app," she comments.

Mahonga explains that the advantages of apps are endless. "Delegates will be able to start networking before the event has even begun. Speakers will be able to load their papers on to the app so that delegates can see what they'll be discussing beforehand and raise more engaging questions during the course of the session. Registration will also be able to take place through the app," she elaborates.

In the business of dreams

While the events industry is often perceived as glamorous, Mahonga is quick to point out that the opposite is true, and that hours of hard work go into successful events. However, the upside is a satisfied client at the end of the day. "I have the rare opportunity to capture people's dreams and bring them to life – and the more complex they are, the more I enjoy it," she says. "At the end of the day, events are really all about serving people."

Do you trust your TMC?

The tripartite relationship between the TMC, the supplier and the travel buyer has been a contentious subject for some time, with TMCs stuck between a rock and a hard place. **Dorine Reinstein** reports.



Monique Swart, founder, African Business Travel Association

THERE are a number of issues in the travel industry that require further scrutiny. “One of these issues is overrides, transparency and who the TMC works for,” says **Monique Swart**, founder of the African Business Travel Association.

According to Monique, customers are often not comfortable with the idea of overrides, as they are concerned that the TMC is not working in their best interests if they are being “paid” by a supplier. “As a customer, how do I know that my TMC is not ‘leading’ me to book with a supplier, not because they have the best service, products or price, but because they are getting bigger overrides from that supplier?”

The main fear of the travel buyer, agrees **Howard Stephens**, retired cpo of Nedbank, is that the TMC could be driven by supplier targets rather than customer requirements. “The prices given to us by some suppliers may include a provision for overrides payable to the TMCs. The business could take advantage of these lower prices.”

Nolan Burris, founder of Future Proof Travel Solutions, says there have been numerous surveys and studies over the years showing that indeed, many corporates view commission in any form as a conflict of interest to some degree. “After all, by definition, commission, and by extension, override commissions, are designed not only to shift market share but to reward selling higher prices over lower ones.”

However, Burris believes that most TMCs have the integrity to represent their customers first and foremost. “To do otherwise would be putting at risk one of the most significant reasons for corporates to use a TMC over other options available.”

Swart notes that most TMCs also feel they are entitled to volume-based rewards, as is common in many other industries. “If I was a builder buying a thousand kilos of cement from one cement supplier, he would give me a discount,

which means I can then make more money on the different construction jobs I am working on. If my clients are happy with the quote I have given them to build their house and they think it’s a good price, why should my cement discount matter to the client?”

Volume-based incentives will always be part of the retail sector, says **Claude Vankeirsbilck**, chief sales & marketing officer for Tourvest Travel Services. He adds that only in the travel industry has this issue come under the spotlight. “Nobody will ask the supermarket why they are putting forward one brand and not the other. Customers will not ask the cashier what their overrides and incentives are for promoting one brand over the other.”

“By definition, commission, and by extension, override commissions, are designed not only to shift market share but to reward selling higher prices over lower ones.”

Swart points out, however, that travel pricing is not “fixed” as is the case with products in other industries. “We know that travel is not a commodity with set pricing like others but that there are still benchmarks that should be more clearly understood and actively investigated.”

She maintains that TMCs should not assume that clients know what a good price is. “I think there are many clients out there who are in the dark as to what a good and fair price is for a specific ticket on a specific route, or a specific room in a specific hotel. And so, because the clients are not always doing enough due diligence on what good pricing is, they rely heavily on the TMC to decide for them,” Swart

says, adding that it can be difficult for clients to “trust” that their TMC, who is also earning overrides, is focused on getting the lowest prices.

Are buyers forcing TMCs to earn their fees elsewhere?

TMCs are currently struggling to remain profitable and this is an issue that needs to be addressed. “If the TMCs need overrides to keep the lights on and the buyers are not happy about this, what is the solution?” questions Swart.

She adds that buyers are often not realistic in their expectations. “Clients need to adjust their expectations – you cannot pay peanuts and expect anything other than monkeys. If buyers are not paying the TMC professional fees to provide them with a professional service, TMCs will have to look elsewhere for their income. Bottom line.”

Stephens argues that while most businesses would be prepared to pay more for value-added services, they would then also question the efficiencies required for day-to-day processing. He adds that most businesses would like to understand nett costs and profit margins and have an insight into whether the TMC’s business model is viable. “If the TMC would do away with overrides, most companies would be happy to pay the TMC for the actual work done, including a profit margin,” says Stephens.

“Hefty consultancy fees would need to be supported by a clearer value-add,” comments **Kele Mohatle**, travel manager for Liberty Group South Africa. She adds that a price tag is determined by the value-add that comes with it. “All TMCs offer the same core service and the pricing is usually within the same brackets, however to cost more than that, the TMC needs to provide a value-add that they believe the client needs and is willing to pay for.”

► [Article continues on p12](#)



Howard Stephens, retired cpo, Nedbank



Nolan Burris, founder, Future Proof Travel Solutions



Claude Vankeirsbilck, chief of sales, Tourvest Travel Services



Kele Mohatle, travel manager, Liberty Group South Africa

► *Article continues from p11*

"TMCs need to be a lot more selective in how they get their clients, stop undercutting of fees, stop over-promising and under-delivering, and stop dealing with clients who are going to damage their bottom line," adds Monique.

It is possible for TMCs to thrive primarily, or even exclusively, on professional fees, according to Burris. "I know leisure, corporate and fully specialised TMCs today that are earning more total revenue from fees than from commission," he says, adding that, when 100% of the revenue comes directly from the customer, everything changes. "Loyalties shift, roles are changed and even supplier relationships become about something else – usually something focused entirely on the customer."

How transparent is too transparent?

The truth, according to Stephens is that in any business dealing, any conflict of interest between the parties should be disclosed. "If there is a financial incentive to doing business a certain way, then independence can't be guaranteed."

In the world of business travel, most corporates already know about overrides anyway, adds Burris. He maintains that the larger companies are often intimately familiar with how it all works and overrides are definitely not a secret. "These days, avoiding transparency about it is likely to create a cloud of suspicion."

Mohatle agrees that override

commissions are a common and acceptable practice in the industry, which can even benefit the client. That is why TMCs should have no reason not to disclose them to the client as a form of transparency. "The finer details between the TMC and their supplier can remain confidential, however there is no need not to disclose the existence of this type of relationship to the client. If the reason for promoting a preferred supplier is clear to the client, then the client can't question the motive."

However, according to Vankeirsbilck, the travel industry has gone overboard when it comes to transparency, taking it further than any other industry has. He says since the move from commission to professional fees, a lot of travel agents, who felt they would lose clients, have simply become too transparent when it comes to the details of their financials.

The discussion should be a lot less about transparency and more about service delivery. "The TMC fee often amounts to 5% or 6% of the total cost of travel. That should not be the focus for the corporate," maintains Vankeirsbilck.

The level of transparency requested by clients can sometimes be a bit "ridiculous", agrees Swart. But she also warns that the constant demand for transparency smacks of a deeper issue – a lack of trust.

TMCs need to ask themselves some hard questions about where this lack of trust is coming from and what they can do to address it, says Swart. "They need to have some in-

depth discussions with their clients about the options: either the client is happy to pay the TMC enough to make servicing them worthwhile and profitable, or they need to be OK with the TMC getting additional income elsewhere."

The way forward

The TMC and the travel buyer seem to be stuck in a Catch 22 situation, with clients saying they would pay more for better and more trustworthy service, and the TMCs saying they struggle for the resources to better service their clients, says Swart.

Is there an answer to this impasse? Industry players believe there is.

"There needs to be a lot more conversation between clients and their TMCs around what good business looks like for both parties," says Swart.

Although globally most TMCs still rely heavily on overrides, the time has come to move away from this business model, maintains Burris. "There are TMCs operating successfully and profitably on fees alone. They operate a very different kind of business with very different priorities. It's a much more sustainable model that is not so vulnerable to the actions of others."

Looking ahead, Burris predicts there will always be a combination of fees and commissions or other forms of supplier remuneration. However, he predicts supplier remunerations will start representing less and less of the overall TMC revenue. "Wouldn't it be wonderful to finally take control of your own business's future?" he asks.



Warning signs that your TMC might not have your best interest at heart!

ALTHOUGH overrides should have no impact on the relationship between the TMC and the client, **Claude Vankeirsbilck** says there will always be some rogue travel agents, which is why it is important for companies to look

out for the warning signs.

He explains that if the TMC is trying to push one supplier, even though the client feels this supplier is not suitable for their company, alarm bells should go off and they should investigate.

Other warning signs are when

service fees are simply too cheap. "If you feel the travel agent can't possibly make money from the fee he is charging, it means he is getting his money elsewhere – either by abusing overrides or by adding on to fares," Vankeirsbilck says.



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Corporate travel agents - the pressure is on

The corporate travel landscape in South Africa is headed for significant change. **Dorine Reinstein** speaks to TMCs to see how they are adjusting to meet the changing demands of the corporate traveller.

ALTHOUGH corporate travel is growing globally, organisations in South Africa continue to be cautious with their travel spend. As a result, corporate travellers, who need to justify all expenditure, have become more demanding and expect greater value. They turn to the TMC to come up with relevant solutions.

Consequently, while TMCs will remain important for the facilitation of bookings, this will no longer be their only distinguishing feature. Efficiencies, the ability to consult and provide unique solutions, and special offerings will become increasingly important, says **Frank Palapies**, coo – Africa & Middle East at Wings Travel Management.

Corporates now expect that the TMC should provide increasingly specialised services and information, agrees **Themba Mthombeni**, ceo of Duma Travel. Corporate travellers have become a lot more demanding because their understanding of travel as a commodity has greatly increased over the past few years, he adds.

Today's corporate traveller requires more control, information, flexibility, mobility and value for money than ever before, confirms **Ben Langner**, md of Carlson Wagonlit Travel in South Africa.

Well-trained consultants

As corporate travellers head to lesser known destinations in Africa, they look to the TMC for education with regard to cultural norms and standard practices in these destinations. "Education and training of consultants have therefore become critically important, as has the set-up of structures and networks to deal with new destinations in Africa," says Mthombeni.

Cost savings

The most important shift in travel management, says **Claude Vankeirsbilck**, chief sales and marketing officer at Tourvest Travel, is the demand for corporates to be in complete control of their expenditure. He says this is especially true in South Africa, where the corporate is faced with soaring travel costs as a result of a plummeting rate of exchange.

"Cost reduction has become the driving force of travel management,"

says Vankeirsbilck. He explains that the TMC's role in the supply chain has become much more elevated, as the corporate customer turns to the TMC to help achieve important cost-cutting objectives. "There is now a lot more reliance on the TMC to come up with solutions. What is your negotiating power? What is the technology you can bring to the table?"

There is now a lot more reliance on the TMC to come up with solutions. What is your negotiating power? What is the technology you can bring to the table?

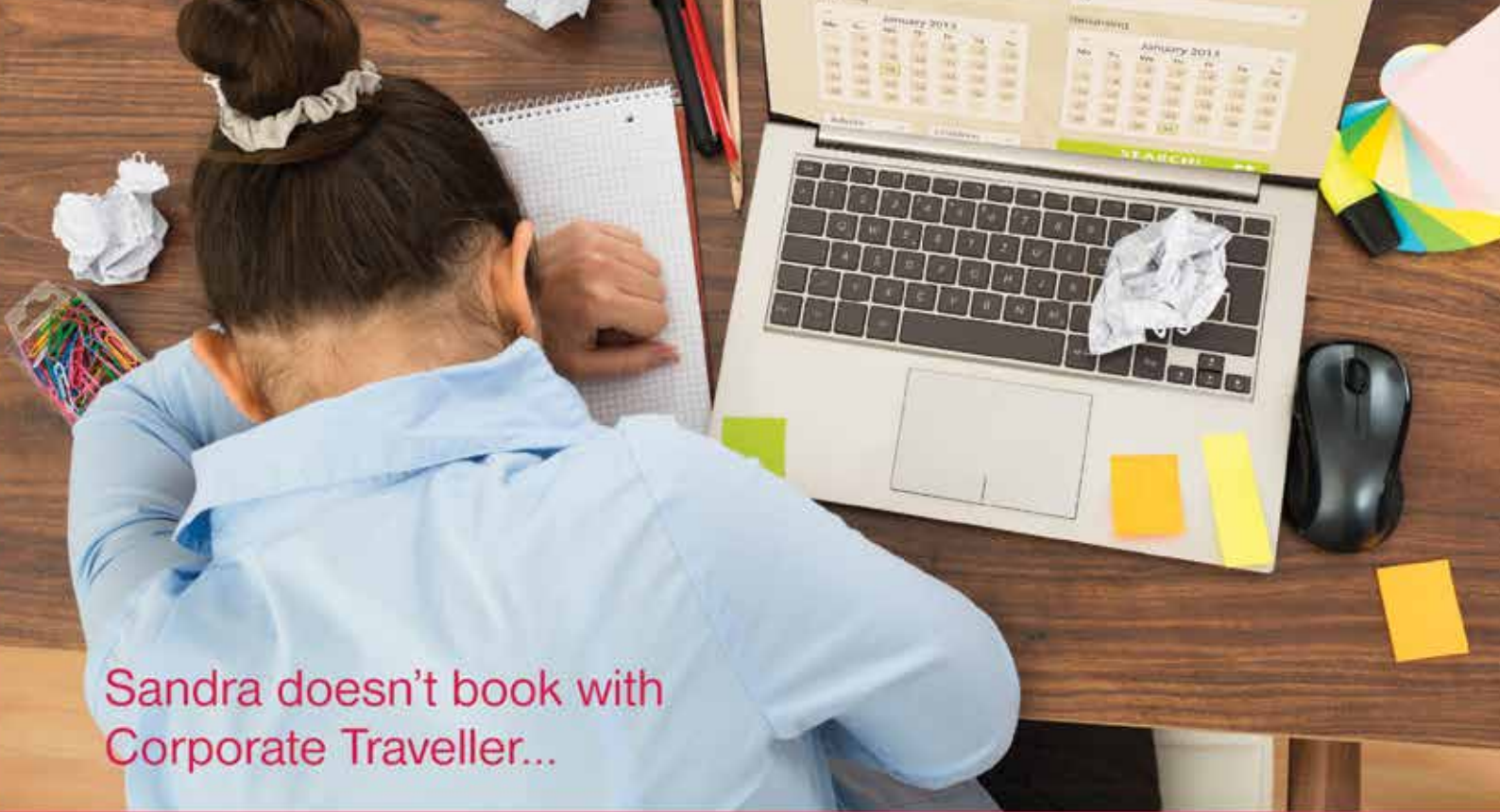
Ongoing, successful initiatives to bring down the cost of the travel programme are more important today than ever before, agrees Langner. "Corporates have to optimise all opportunities to get more for their buck in a generally tough trading environment."

Michelle Jolley, marketing manager for Corporate Traveller, says the corporate is indeed relying increasingly on the TMC to streamline its travel policies and implement practices such as supplier consolidation and advance purchase to assist with cost savings.

Innovative technology

TMCs can assist corporates to achieve greater control over costs through the use of technology, says Vankeirsbilck.

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He says corporate travellers want an end-to-end solution where they have complete visibility of their expenditure. The solution the TMC offers needs to handle everything from requisitioning to managing corporate deals and expenses as well as approval workflows.

"Customers are looking for greater automation, especially when it comes to approval systems," confirms Jolley.

Palapies agrees that automated systems, offering end-to-end value propositions, will become a necessity for the TMC. However, he warns that,

in this regard, South Africa is still lagging behind.

"If you compare Scandinavia to South Africa, there are considerably fewer people involved in completing the same number of transactions. It would be unfair

to say that this is only due to the inefficiencies of the people involved. There is also obviously inefficiency in the level of automation on the side of both the TMC and its clients," he says.

The main reason why South African TMCs are lagging behind is because of supplier remuneration, maintains Palapies. "Currently, because TMCs are remunerated, they can afford to employ the people who capture the transactions manually. However, if remuneration were to be cut, all of a sudden, a percentage of the TMC's income would be gone. This would force them to become more efficient and embrace automation and efficient processes."

According to Vankeirsbilck, about 30% of Tourvest's corporate customers are currently operating off an online travel management solution. "We foresee that moving to 75% by the end of 2016," he says, adding that often corporates don't know how to bring technology into their organisation. "There is a slow uptake because of the vulnerability brought about

by travellers doing their own bookings."

Aside from automated systems, Langner also believes that TMCs need to adapt their management of travel programmes. This includes a focus on maintaining accurate traveller profiles and the provision of mobility solutions. "Advances in technology are what enable TMCs and their clients to cope with an increasingly complex environment, while, at the same, satisfying travellers' expectations of an individualised travel experience," says Langner.

While Jolley agrees with

Vankeirsbilck and Langner that companies want to be able to retain control over their travel spend without having to accumulate a long paper trail in the process, she notes that, when it comes to travel management,

customers, in the majority, want to deal with a real person who can use their experience and expertise to add value to their travel programme and manage the process from start to finish.

Customers are looking for greater automation, especially when it comes to approval systems.

Better deals

The TMC's relationship with suppliers will remain important, says Palapies. He says in an increasingly competitive market, the TMC that can consistently offer better deals to a client will come out on top. This means they need to foster good relationships with suppliers.

"For example, we would communicate with our customers by telling them that they currently have a number of nights booked at a particular hotel but, if they change to the hotel next door, they could save 30% on costs. The customer would appreciate it because you are communicating well and saving them money, and the supplier will be satisfied because your technological and communications expertise is proven, which will mean that the TMC will be given the promotion again in the future."

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6 trends impacting managed travel

Dorine Reinstein speaks to TMCs about their views on how shifting corporate demands are affecting various areas of managed travel and how this is impacting on the services provided by TMCs.



Less traditional lodging on the increase

CORPORATE clients are increasingly more willing to consider non-traditional accommodation options, such as bed-and-breakfast establishments and, more recently, offerings from the shared economy, such as Airbnb, says **Ben Langner**. He says the reason for this is the corporate's constant quest for an optimal balance between cost and convenience.

The major factors limiting a potentially stronger drift to less traditional accommodation options, says Langner, are safety, security and obligations in terms of duty of care.

Monica Horn, product manager for Harvey World Travel Franchise Support Team, points out that, although travellers like to book guesthouses to contain costs, they are more focused on deriving additional value from establishments for less or the same spend as before.

"A lot of corporates talked about moving to B&Bs and guesthouses but I haven't seen any big hotel chains closing as a result of this," says **Claude Vankeirsbilck**. He maintains that although there is definitely

a big focus on rates, value-adds have become especially important when it comes to accommodation. Hotels have therefore started offering a lot of value-adds to compete with non-traditional establishments, such as access to WiFi and business centres.

Langner says, when it comes to traditional accommodation options, corporate travellers are almost non-negotiable in their demands for free WiFi.

"Interestingly, free parking, a breakfast included in the rate and gym facilities also feature strongly in the expectations of many corporate travellers."

When travelling into Africa, corporate customers will still request four-star plus

accommodation, specifically because of the importance placed on amenities such as free WiFi, location and safety, notes **Michelle Jolley**.

Declining car hire

Although car hire is still an important part of travel, HWT has seen a decline in demand for rental cars over the last financial year, reveals Horn. She says consultants attribute this decline to the Gautrain and female

business travellers preferring to make use of chauffeur drives, especially to catch early-morning flights.

There has also been a stronger demand for lower categories of cars and shorter rental periods, says Langner. "Because of the rather constrained economy within which our corporate clients have to operate, the cost of business trips is under scrutiny more than ever before," he adds.

Vankeirsbilck notes that transport services are becoming increasingly commoditised. "At the end of the day, the corporate needs to make sure that its cars are being delivered on time, that they are clean, that they work well and that they have ABS. Even the lower group cars today are providing safety like never before," he says.

Enhanced expense management solutions

Clients will start to expect the TMC to do expense management on their behalf, says **Frank Palapies**. "In this context, the TMC shifts from a pure fulfilment centre to a consulting service that can identify inefficiencies in the clients' processes and offer solutions to improve on them. These solutions include integrating your booking tool with the rest of your software and integrating a tracking tool in the client's workflow."

Online travel management systems greatly assist the corporate when it comes to

expense management and cost control, points out Vankeirsbilck, explaining that an automated system such as the one Tourvest offers can create savings upwards of 25%.

Vankeirsbilck says online systems help create a clearer view of what the corporate is buying and transparency of the direct line approval. "You can see exactly what your travellers are buying and you are approving what they are choosing," he says. "That means travellers are not choosing anything that is out of policy or that is more expensive than what they should be buying. Back in the days, if the traveller didn't take a particular quotation, the approver didn't even know what had been quoted in the first place. Now this technology is identifying to the approver that the traveller has booked one option, although he could have taken another option that was R10 000 cheaper. That's direct control of the expenditure."

Online expense management also assists with facilitation of reporting. "If the corporate goes to dinner with a customer for example, they take a photo of the receipt, upload it to the system and that gets included into their expense management system."

Jolley agrees and says customers want to be able to easily manage and reconcile their expenses. "Online reporting is becoming more important, as is the ability to access invoice copies and statements at the touch of a button, and we can see this through the uptake of

In this context, the TMC shifts from a pure fulfilment centre to a consulting service that can identify inefficiencies in the clients' processes and offer solutions to improve on them.



our online reporting tool," she explains.

The rise of the sharing economy

Although the sharing economy is a reality around the world and there is definitely a growing interest in these options among corporates, this trend has not really taken off in South Africa yet. "Customers prefer to have all their travel expenses consolidated with Corporate Traveller so that it can be better managed and reported on," says Jolley.

Langner agrees that, at this stage, it would be an overstatement to describe the sharing economy as having taken off in the corporate travel market. "However, because of cost considerations, the desire for more choice, control and flexibility, offerings of the sharing economy resonate with modern business travellers and I definitely foresee a growing migration to these options."

Themba Mthombeni agrees that although the sharing trend has not yet particularly picked up with clients, it is "only a matter of time".

Loyalty still important

Loyalty remains an important part of corporate travel as travellers still very much want to take advantage of the perks that come with frequent travel, says Jolley. They also want their

travel manager to be able to assist with the management of their loyalty points in terms of upgrades and advice, she adds. Loyalty is important for companies too, according to Jolley as it allows them to maximise their value for money by using programmes, as they can often get free flights.

Langner agrees that loyalty is still an important consideration but he warns that this is only the case when the service provider's offering is consistent with the needs of the corporate travel market. "As cost containment is extremely high up on the list of travel programme management mandates, any significant pricing discrepancies across services quickly kill loyalty."

Vankeirsbilck further notes that, although loyalty remains important, it's no longer tolerable at the expense of cost. "Loyalty is important but it's not the decision-making factor it was a couple of years ago."

Increased focus on duty of care

Corporates are paying more and more attention to duty of care, according to Mthombeni. "Unlike in the past where there was a lot of lip service, nowadays corporates are backing their beliefs with creative and enforceable policies," he says.

Effective management of duty of care has become a non-negotiable aspect of travel management for many corporate

clients, agrees Langner. This has also led to the standard mandating of accurate profile management, comprehensive safety and security measures and strict requirements for adherence to policy – to enable greater control of travel programmes, which, in turn, enables TMCs and their corporate clients to respond

more quickly and effectively in the event of travellers landing in situations of distress.

However, according to Vankeirsbilck, without any specific duty of care legislation in South Africa, it's still not as important as it is in Europe and the US, where duty of care is legislated.

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ITCs – a better definition is needed

ASATA recently put together a Member Advisory Forum (MAF) to discuss the measures that need to be taken in order to deliver a definition and framework for the ITC model in the South African market.

The MAF will look into defining the models that are currently termed ITC but do not meet the true ITC business model. The forum will also review the roles and responsibilities across the entire value chain of business models operated by Asata to support and encourage a strong business practice and ethic that protects the travelling consumer and delivers a professional offering.

What do you want from a TMC?

TRANSPARENCY features high on the agenda of qualities that corporate travellers and travel buyers are looking for when choosing a TMC.

During a customer panel discussion at the Association of South African Travel Agents Conference earlier this year, **Kele Mohatle**, travel manager of Liberty; **Merril Isherwood**, specialist travel manager of SARS; **Howard Stephens**, retired travel manager of Nedbank; and **Richard Whitfield** of T-Systems South Africa, agreed that a corporate travel procurement manager would not hesitate to pay the price for the TMC's services as long as the TMC could demonstrate its value. "The corporate will pay as long as they understand what value they receive in return,"

Mohatle said. She added that it was important that TMCs be transparent about costs. "If your client finds out you've been lying about overrides or commissions, he'll start wondering what else he's not being told," she said.

True value comes in many different forms, depending on who the client is, Whitfield said. As a travel professional, the TMC should be able to interpret the data it obtains and advise the corporate accordingly. "We rely on you as the travel industry experts to advise us. If you see we are spending too much money on the wrong booking methods, come and advise us. Tell us how we can save money and bring down our travel spend. That is where we'll start to see value in the TMC," he said.

Stephens added that TMCs

should engage with their clients on a strategic level. They should look at their clients' expansion and advise them on the best way forward for their travel policies and decisions. "Build relationships with your clients. Don't do everything by email; sit down and talk to your clients."

Clients can and will use technology to do the simpler things faster and more efficiently, for example booking a domestic ticket. However, they still needed the TMC's expertise when they were faced with lost baggage, visas and destination management, said Isherwood. "Spend time on those issues. Clients want you to align yourself with them on a strategic level and understand what is required to enable them to reach their goals and objectives."

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The 'easiest place' in the world to do business

Doing business in Singapore is easy, with all the benefits of a mature, industrialised and technologically advanced society. **Michelle Colman** looks at what business travellers need to know.

AS A business destination, Singapore boasts numerous accolades. The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report for 2014/15 (which measures productivity and prosperity) ranks the city-state as Asia's most competitive country, and the second most competitive country in the world. The World Bank recently positioned the city as the 'world's easiest place to do business' for the ninth time (Doing Business 2015 Report), and The Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Singapore as having the best Business Environment in Asia Pacific (EIU Country Forecast Report 2013).

One of the original Asian Tigers, the city has a strong reputation for business-friendliness – relatively free of constraints and corruption, with high rankings from all the credit rating agencies such as Fitch, Moody's and Standard & Poor's. Its infrastructure is developed, its population skilled and its network readiness is ranked second in the world by the World Economic Forum.

Singapore is one of the world's leading financial centres as well as a major oil-refining centre and logistics hub. The economy is also dependent on exports. The country's Economic Development Board lists 19 leading industries – among

them are aerospace engineering; chemicals; energy; electronics; healthcare; marine and offshore engineering; pharmaceuticals and biotechnology and precision engineering. Emerging sectors include the automotive industry; lifestyle products and services; safety and security and space.

Mohamed Firhan Abdul Salam, area director, Middle East & Africa for the Singapore Tourism Board based in Dubai,

points out that there are in excess of 7 000 multinational companies operating in Singapore, 4 000 of which have located their regional headquarters on the island. Co-investment

and seed funding programmes foster an environment in which ideas can be turned into businesses easily and profitably and government offers a number of incentives to qualifying businesses to set up in the city.

Integrity, productivity and rule of law are strong factors in the business environment. Salam says Singapore has developed a strong domestic regulatory framework to protect intellectual property (IP) rights. It is currently rated the best place in Asia and ninth in the world for IP rights protection (IMD World Competitiveness Report 2011). Similarly, the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report 2013-2014 ranks the

island as having the best IP protection in Asia and the second best in the world.

Gateway to the east

Tourism, too, is significant to the Singaporean economy and in 2013 the city drew 15.6 million international visitors. Business travel and MICE visitors were estimated to have accounted for 3.5 million of these arrivals. Total South African arrivals in 2013 were recorded at 36 372, down slightly from 2012's 36 972.

Advantages for the South African business executive are the regular airlift between local cities and Singapore, coupled with excellent air connections to the rest of Asia and worldwide (Changi Airport is used by over 100 airlines flying to 300 cities). The fact that English is the language of business and entry visas are not required increases convenience. **Sally George**, market development manager for Singapore Airlines in South Africa, says South African business people who work with Singaporeans are also attracted to their positive work ethic and proactivity.

Tour operators, however, indicate that accommodation and costs of staying in the city are a bit on the pricey side.

Salam says South African representation at trade shows is generally low, put down to distance from the market, but the Singapore Tourism Board is keen to engage business travellers to take part more often in these events.

The city, however, being a major gateway to south-east Asia, does feature on the itineraries of incentive groups, usually in combination with other countries in the neighbourhood. For South Africans, Singapore Airlines offers one of the few direct services into the region, bolstering Singapore's stopover and short-stay status.

Says **Elmari Oberholzer** of Wow Incentives and Events in Johannesburg: "We use Singapore as a stopover destination – usually two nights – for incentive groups due to the good connections offered by Singapore Airlines to other destinations such as Bali, Vietnam and Borneo. Singapore is also a popular choice for trip extensions for individual delegates who wish to stay on for a few extra days."

Gill Dewar, md of GCD Consulting, agrees that the city is not a standalone destination and also suffers the perception of not having enough in the way of attractions and activities to warrant a full incentive on its own.

"I am not quoting much at the moment for Singapore but we have had a few corporate bookings in the past – I cannot remember ever doing a straight incentive [in Singapore only] although I personally believe there is a lot to do there. All the new facilities on the island and at Sentosa have certainly opened up the destination. It is a good alternative to consider due to direct flights, no visas, a favourable exchange rate and the variety of hotels and products on offer."

Singapore is also a popular choice for trip extensions for individual delegates who wish to stay on for a few extra days.

Daily access

SINGAPORE Airlines offers daily flights between South Africa and Singapore, four of them commencing in Cape Town and routed via Johannesburg, and the balance starting in Johannesburg. The daily service offers passengers flexibility and convenience. In business class, the airline features a fully flat bed, facilitating a good night's sleep before arrival.

Diarise these dates!

THE following are key trade shows in Singapore for 2016:

- **February 16-21:** Singapore Air Show, Changi Exhibition Centre;
- **March 10-13:** International Furniture Fair Singapore, Singapore Expo Convention and Exhibition Centre;
- **April 12-15:** Food and Hotel Asia, Singapore Expo Convention and Exhibition Centre;
- **May 31-June 3:** BroadcastAsia and CommuniAsia, Marina Bay Sands.

How to get AROUND

COMPACT Singapore – with an area size smaller than New York City – is easy to get around. The fastest transport system is the MRT rail network. A Singapore Tourist Pass will allow unlimited travel for one day at S\$10 (R96), two days at S\$16 (R154) or three days at S\$20 (R192). The pass can also be used on the city's bus system. Metered taxis can be hailed at the roadside or at taxi stands but it's advisable to check on surcharges before getting in.

Room for investment

ACCORDING to International Enterprise Singapore and the Economic Development Board, South Africans are doing business in Singapore in diversified sectors such as services, trading and food and beverage.

Some of the more notable South African companies with a presence in Singapore include Dimension Data, Sasol and Nando's. South African business travellers visiting the

city are involved in the fields of finance, chemicals, petroleum, iron and steel, vegetables and fruit. They also attend conferences in the city state, with medical gatherings being popular.

Last year, workforce management group, Adcorp, announced its intention to set up a south-east Asian hub in Singapore. The Financial Mail quoted ce, **Richard Pike**, as saying the company had a two- to three-year window to

establish a recruitment business in a region that would hold half the global workforce in the next 30 years but in which the world's biggest players had yet to gain a firm foothold.

The choice of Singapore was based on the plethora of multinational head offices in Singapore, each with staffing needs, as well as the city-state being largely English-speaking and holding the world's third-deepest capital market.



PHOTO: WILLIAM CHO

Top tips for doing business

IT IS helpful for business travellers to bear in mind that Singapore has a multi-ethnic population, made up of Chinese, Indians and Malays. You could be greeted with a handshake, a bow or a Namaste with hands pressed together in prayer mode.

Singapore's multicultural traditions may require some negotiating. Take names, for example – the Chinese use the surname first, followed by one or two first names. It is generally best to refer to Chinese colleagues by the honorific (Mr, Mrs, Ms) followed by the surname. Malays will use their first name followed by the Arabic 'bin' or 'bint', meaning son or daughter of, followed by the father's name. It is generally

acceptable to use the honorific followed by the first name in addressing business people of Malaysian descent.

Caution governs the Singaporean style of doing business and this may come across as indecision to the uninitiated. Reading between the lines and attention to non-verbal communication are often required. Politeness and calm should be observed at all times. Visiting business executives are advised to show respect for chains of command.

Appointments should be made well in advance, steering clear of the Chinese New Year (falling at the end of January into mid-February) when many businesses close. Business cards must be exchanged, after

initial introductions, using both hands. On accepting a business card, it should be read before being put away. If hosted for a meal, a guest should let the host order and delay eating until the host begins.

Dress for year-round hot and humid tropical weather and daily rain showers, which can be heavy but are usually brief. Casual business attire is generally acceptable on account of the weather.

Research business etiquette ahead of your meetings as this could make the difference in concluding a deal. For after-hours eating, shopping and entertainment, download the pocket guide 'Enriching Your Singapore Business Experience' for tips in 10 city precincts. ■



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HOW TO

increase the value of your incentive

Major sporting events are a once-in-a-lifetime experience, increasing the perceived value of sports travel as an incentive. **Darise Foster** finds out more.

THE VIEWERSHIP numbers attracted by major sporting events are among the highest in the world. For instance, Nielsen's 2013 Year in Sports Media Report revealed that nearly 109 million viewers watched the annual Super Bowl half-time show that year, 71% of UK homes watched the 2013 Wimbledon final and over 21,6m German viewers watched the 2013 UEFA Champions League Final. Arguably, even those who are not avid-sports fans enjoy major sporting events.

An escape

While bringing people together, these events also provide an escape from daily routine – as attendees are captivated by the game and general aura of the social event. According to **Jean Martins**, country manager for the Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority, the once-in-a-lifetime aspect of these major sports events generates increased enthusiasm in employees and is therefore a greater incentive. "Any travel incentive in a competitive sales environment is a great motivator for teams, but a once-

in-a-lifetime experience such as the 2015 Formula One Etihad Airways Abu Dhabi Grand Prix provides that extra bit of motivation," she says.

Pure Sport gm, **Greg Taylor**, echoes her sentiments. "In this day and age, travellers are more mature and sophisticated and many of them are already well travelled. A sporting event provides an anchor – something different to the norm, which I believe drives staff to greater performance."

Sporting trips are not exclusively for male-dominated sales teams, as is typically assumed, adds Taylor. He also points out that the event is just an addition and the destination should be the main attraction. "As such, corporates do not need to be afraid of looking at an option like this for the not-so-stereotypical sports lover," he maintains.

F1 Grand Prix Tours ceo, **Johan van Veelen**, agrees, saying that although F1 incentive groups tend to be more male-orientated, they offer corporate management a hugely different and significant value-for-money incentive option for a diverse workforce. He notes that the Formula 1 series attracted a television

audience of 425m viewers in 2014 – making it the world's most-watched annual sports series.

While sports-related incentives are a sought-after and motivational prize for employees, they are also an attractive option to package for management, says Van Veelen, adding that they are helpful in maintaining relatively low costs, achieving incentive objectives and require less time spent away from the workplace.

Making it personal

Incentive organisers are also able to enhance sporting experiences through different add-ons. Taylor notes that these are particularly useful when looking to personalise an incentive. "Most events will offer add-ons for those looking for a more personal experience," he adds.

"Experiences such as Formula 1 after parties with driver presence, local restaurants, nightclub visits, self-drive experiences in super cars and even race viewing from yachts, can support the main event and offer great value-adds," agrees Van Veelen.

To satisfy everyone on the



Johan van Veelen, ceo, F1 Grand Prix Tours

trips – sports fans or not – it's also extremely important to add sightseeing excursions and other points of interest to ensure the incentive applies to everyone, says Taylor.

The Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, for example, could be packaged to include sightseeing tours such as a trip to Yas Waterworld, Ferrari World or the Zayed Mosque, notes Martins.

Incentive planners should take care when organising sports travel programmes, the experts warn. While these incentives might be easy to package, there are certain

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factors that can slip through the cracks during the planning stage. As Martins points out, events such as the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix are very popular, therefore planners must ensure their travel incentive programme is planned and booked well before the event.

"As with any event, it is imperative that visitors secure official tickets to the event prior to visiting the destination," says Martins. These can be purchased through the official organisers or designated tour operators. "In South Africa, there are several sports specialists who package sports experiences," she says.

"I would say choosing the right experience for the right group is the most challenging part," Taylor comments. "With so many different corporate cultures around, planners need to ensure they have tailored each trip to the specific needs of particular clients."

Van Veelen agrees, adding that incentive groups are made up of diverse people from different back grounds, cultures, religions and with different expectations. "Packaging an incentive that satisfies different needs can be very challenging at certain events. However, sports travel incentives remain an attractive option because they are flexible in terms of budget, time and entertainment levels," he maintains.

Make the most of major sports experiences

FOR years the corporate market has incentivised clients and top-performing staff through unique travel experiences. What could be more unique than a major gathering on the global sports calendar? *Travel Buyer* spoke to **Yvette Snowball**, gm coastal for Tourvest Destination Management: business and sports events, to gain further insight into how corporates should go about planning an incentive centred around a major sporting event such as the 2015 Rugby World Cup, taking place this month in London.

"A sports gathering has a unique appeal and lends a different edge to any travel experience, whether it is attending the Rugby World Cup, a Sevens Rugby Tournament, F1, UEFA Champions League, Super Cup or Wimbledon," Snowball says. "It therefore made complete sense for our clients to incorporate the 2015 Rugby World Cup into their incentive destination choices for 2015."



Yvette Snowball, gm, Tourvest Destination Management

Selecting the right option

When assisting clients with choosing the right incentive destination, Tourvest Destination Management pitches, on average, four to six destinations for their clients to choose from.

As such, the first step in incorporating the RWC into the incentive proposal process was to include London on the list of

destination choices. "This was done as far back as two years ago," Snowball explains. "The RWC 2015 was a particularly appealing choice because London as a destination has an appeal to the corporate market," says Snowball.

"Some clients have offices in London and they will combine the RWC with their business trips," she says. The city is also very accessible, with many different airlines and routings available, allowing for flexibility. London is also perceived as an "easy" incentive destination in terms of navigating oneself in and around, she adds. "The excellent public transport system and the fact that there is no language barrier were other deciding factors when choosing this destination," notes Snowball.

She says it is important for corporates to choose a TMC that is familiar with both the sporting event as well as the destination where the event is being held, so that the group gets the most out of the trip.

▶ *Article continues on p26*



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▶ Article continues from p25

Tourvest Destination Management, for instance, possessed a unique advantage in pitching the Rugby World Cup in that it has first-hand knowledge of the product and packages. SA Rugby Travel, which is part of Tourvest Destination Management, created a joint-venture enterprise with the South African Rugby Union (SARU), which has been awarded 'exclusive' rights by the International Rugby Board to sell World Cup tickets in South Africa, explains Snowball.

Keeping guests entertained

Incentive planners should consider adding a breakaway city into their itinerary, as guests enjoy a two-city experience, recommends Snowball. "In this case, we combined London with secondary destinations such as Scotland, Ireland, Amsterdam and Paris." She

adds that these destinations are generally either visited before or after the tournament's pool games. "Otherwise, if guests are attending the quarter or semi-finals, they would serve as breakaways in between games," she says.

"Then of course between game days, we had to keep guests entertained." This is easier in London, Snowball says, as there are a number of exciting activities, apart from the usual tourist attractions for guests to experience. "Fun things that we included in our incentive were activities like clay pigeon shooting from a barge on the Thames, '007-style' driving experiences on and off road, golf and even adrenaline days on high-speed boats." She adds that, in terms of London cuisine, there are many options available and it is important to find a balance between providing guests with traditional pub lunches and letting them experience some of the high-end restaurants.

Top tips for success

Incentive programmes need to be well-balanced, in line with budget and, most importantly, they need to make each guest feel special and rewarded, maintains Snowball. "Apart from the obvious, there are the smaller things in the tick box that need to be considered," she says, explaining that factors such as lounge access at airports, allowances to provide for leisure days when there are no activities planned, memorabilia and insurance must all be taken into account when planning a trip of this nature.

Other considerations should include add-on flights from respective regions, social media platforms to engage in during the trip, teaser campaigns and gifting, among others.

"In order to achieve all of this, it is vitally important that planners partner with the correct operators, which are both reputable, financially sound

and are available 24 hours a day," says Snowball. These operators should also be willing to negotiate to ensure planners provide their guests with the best product and at the best price, she adds.

"No project is complete without its challenges of course," she says, adding that there are numerous potential setbacks when organising the RWC as a travel incentive. These include the high exchange rate to London, expensive visas and the fact that many clients cannot travel during September and October as these months do not fall within their leave cycle.

"But at the end of the day, I have to ask: who would not want to say they have attended a Rugby World Cup, a Champions League Final or the Olympics? Incentives are powerful and so is taking your top performing staff to a global sports gathering. Sports travel is results driven in the end, so consider it for your next incentive," she adds.

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Sevens action in CT

SA Rugby Travel is offering packages to the Cape Town Sevens tournament (Valid: December 12-13).

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includes: match ticket, economy-class return flights and airport taxes.

Accommodation and match ticket – from R2 290pps the package includes: match ticket; two nights in three-star accommodation, breakfast, a round of beer before the stadium transfers and a snack pack.

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PHOTO: MARTIN SERAS LIMA

New Sevens World Series

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The race is on!

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1. Bali

Thompsons Holidays. Stay at Asana Agung Putra Bali from R11 975pp sharing. Package includes return flights from Johannesburg, airline levies, return airport-hotel transfers, seven nights' accommodation with daily breakfast, two full-day tours, one half-day tour and a welcome drink on arrival. Special is valid for travel until December 14.

2. Namibia

Just Holidays. Spend 10 days enjoying Namibia's incredible landscape from R12 399pp sharing. Rate includes visits to Sossusvlei, the Fish River Canyon and Swakopmund, 10 days' car rental with unlimited mileage, post-tour accommodation in Windhoek and breakfast daily. Valid for travel until October 31.

3. Russia

Visit Russia. Two-for-one sale on 2016 Russian river cruises from R18 450pp sharing. Cruise Moscow to St Petersburg and vice versa. Deal includes seven nights' accommodation on board the five-star Rostropovich. Special is valid for travel between May 7 and October 1, 2016.

4. Spain

Holland America Line. Book a seven-night 'Gems of Spain', Barcelona round-trip cruise from R15 005pp sharing. Offer includes

5. Sweden

Inspirations Travel & Tours. Visit Stockholm and Jukkasjarvi with a Lapland adventure package from R15 500pp sharing. Offer includes transfers, three nights in Stockholm, one night at the Ice Hotel and one night in Jukkasjarvi. Special is valid for travel between December 12 and 22.

accommodation on board MS Eurodam, meals, entertainment, a free signature beverage package and Pinnacle dinner for two. Reduced cruise fares for third and fourth guests and a 50% reduced deposit apply. Cruise departs October 21.

6. Tanzania

Falcon Africa Safaris. Experience the Serengeti wildebeest migration from R26 500pp sharing. Package includes return flights from Johannesburg, internal flights, three nights' accommodation in the Serengeti with all meals, transfers, park fees and game viewing, and one night in Arusha with breakfast and dinner. Special excludes airport taxes of approximately R3 500 and drinks. Special is valid for travel between November 1 and December 1.

7. China

ICAN Holidays. Eight-day family trips are available from R18 450pp sharing. Special includes three nights in Beijing, two nights in Xi'an, two nights in Shanghai, high-speed trains and domestic flights, sightseeing, transfers and some meals. Valid for travel until February 28, 2016.

8. Turkey

Azure Travel. Five-day 'Taste of Turkey' packages are available from R9 255pp sharing. Price includes accommodation, tours and transportation. International flights are not included. Tour visits Istanbul and Cappadocia. Special is valid for travel until November 9.

9. Madagascar

Travel with Options. Seven-night packages are available from R16 664pp sharing. Offer includes return flights on Air Madagascar from Johannesburg, airport taxes, return airport-hotel transfers, one night prior or post tour in Antananarivo at the Louvre Hotel, six nights in Nosy Be at Sakota Lodge, and breakfast and dinner daily. Special is valid for travel until November 30.

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will also be opportunities that will help you connect with other dedicated professionals, propel your career forward, and build crucial skills.

The conference programme includes key industry speakers, educational forums covering relevant topics, as well as a **Travel Expo**, providing practical tools, cost savings and exposure to resources that

delegates can apply to their corporate travel programme.

The **"GBTA SA Business Travel Innovator Award"** in partnership with Travel and Meetings publication will be presented at conference.

Register for conference and get R1000 off your 2015/2016 membership, and stand to win a 2 night stay for 2 at Protea Hotel Fire and Ice, Menlyn.

Who should attend?

- Managers/ Buyers responsible for travel within any size company
- Procurement Managers responsible for travel
- Travel Management Company staff (TMC's)
- Technology providers in the travel industry
- Suppliers in the travel industry

JOIN OUR EXPERTS AT THE ANNUAL GBTA SA CONFERENCE



Erik Venter, ceo, Comair Ltd

Travel distribution in Africa

Hear Erik Venter discuss Travel distribution of the future and how this is changing globally and in South Africa. Erik joined Comair in 1996 as Financial Manager, and has held various positions within the company including Commercial Manager; Commercial Director and Financial Director. In July of 2006 Erik was appointed as Joint CEO of Comair and served in this position until December 2011 when he assumed the sole responsibility for the company as Chief Executive Officer. He remains in this position to date.



Dion Chang, Founder, Flux Trends

Business Disruption

Keynote speaker Dion Chang, is an innovator, creative thinker and walking ideas bank. He is one of South Africa's most respected trend analysts and takes the unique view of "trends as business strategy". While his feet remain firmly planted on African soil, he uses a global perspective to gauge the zeitgeist, source ahead-of-the-curve concepts and identify shifting business templates.



Dr Roderick Ross, CEO, Ross Consulting

Conference MC, moderator & presenter

After completing his PhD in Chemical Engineering at the University of Cape Town where he was awarded Best PhD in the Faculty of Engineering, he went on to complete his Post-doctorate at Imperial College, London. Rod spent 7 years in the United States and United Kingdom in numerous senior technology roles. His employers included the Centre for Process Systems Engineering Imperial College London, Process Systems Enterprise, United Technologies Research Centre and ParosTech. Rod returned to South Africa in 2005 to pursue opportunities in the technology space and would eventually be appointed CEO of TravelLinck International. Rod has subsequently set up Ross Consulting in Mauritius to offer outsourced consulting and software development solutions.



Andreas Hansson, CEO and Co-founder, Cabforce Finland

The future of ground transportation

Andreas Hansson is the co-founder and CEO of Finnish technology and services company Cabforce, which was acquired by CarTrawler in April 2015. Cabforce was founded in 2009, has grown to become the leading online provider of taxi and private transfer booking solutions. As Cabforce CEO, Andreas is responsible for the continued growth and success of the company in the travel tech industry. Prior to founding Cabforce, Andreas worked in the mobile telecom industry for more than 15 years. He has extensive experience in concept innovation and definition, consumer insight, change management and management consultancy. Andreas holds an M.Sc. Eng. in Computer Science and Industrial Management from Helsinki University of Technology.

Travel Buyer Award

The GBTA SA, in conjunction with Travel Buyer & Meet, has officially opened up nominations for its corporate Travel Buyer of the Year Award, go to www.tam.co.za. Nominations will run until 7 October, and the winner will be announced at the annual GBTA conference in October.

**To register email Nicky du Plessis Nduplessis@gbta.org
+27(0)82 577 7104**

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