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TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

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| INSIDE | <p>NEWS</p> <p>DOMESTIC AIRFARES</p> <p>VAT cut possible</p> <p>Page 2</p> | <p>FEATURE</p> <p>CONFERENCE VENUES</p> <p>All the top airport locations</p> <p>Page 11</p> | <p>FEATURE</p> <p>THE GULF</p> <p>Ensure clients stay within the law</p> <p>Page 15</p> |
|---------------|--|---|---|

Govt throws another spanner in the works

TARYN NIGHTINGALE

AS IF cutting overrides and commissions on government business wasn't enough, departments are now allowed to negotiate a "market-related" service fee with tenderers.

Effective April 1, government's new Preferential Procurement Regulations, 2017 (which govern procurement pending the promulgation of the Procurement Bill later this year) stipulate that the State may not award tenders to TMCs whose service fees are not market-related. If the tenderer scoring the highest points is not willing to negotiate a market-related fee, the State could cancel the tender.

Mariska South, owner of 9° South, works as a tender consultant and

specialises in submitting tenders for TMCs. She says the State has also introduced the idea of regulating TMCs' fees: "If a department has three TMCs who've tendered for a contract, the State can request that an average fee be charged."

Most agents think the decision is a fair one, but doubt whether its implementation will benefit the industry.

An agent who preferred to stay anonymous says the changes are possibly to combat Treasury's initial concerns about agents within the public sector. "TMCs weren't transparent and were deliberately low in their pricing to catch business," she says.

"The decision is a good one, provided the trade and Treasury understand the principles and joint objectives of putting

To page 2



TCAA hits the road, My Cousin!

The Tourism and Culture Authority Abu Dhabi (TCAA) will be hitting the road with Barry Hilton as MC of its upcoming roadshow from May 23-25. TCAA will kick off the show in Johannesburg at Summer Place, then move on to the Hilton Durban and end at the One&Only Cape Town. The event starts at 09h00 and ends at 12h30 daily. Pictured are (from left) **Johnathan Hollard**, trade and MICE executive, and **Jean Martins**, country manager for SA of TCAA. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Brazen fraudsters get smarter

CANDICE MAY

FRAUDSTERS are becoming bolder in their approach to scam TMCs by impersonating clients via telephone. A Pietermaritzburg-based agency recently fell victim to a scam that began with a client referral and ended with the agency losing R250 000.

This is not the first agency to be conned out of a large sum of money after following up on a referral. In 2014, a Johannesburg agency lost almost R2m in four days and in October last year, the same agency almost fell for a similar stunt.

The agent from the most recently

scammed agency, has asked to remain anonymous and says one of the agency's existing corporate clients contacted her saying he had referred the corporate client's UK-based office to the agency so that they could issue flight tickets. "The client provided us with the contact's name - 'Mr Richard Lawton'. Due to our relationship we trusted the referral," the agent says.

Later that afternoon, Mr Lawton emailed the details of the 11 travellers and said it was a highly urgent request.

The agent then issued the tickets for flights from Ghana that same day - six on Kenya Airways and five on Emirates

To page 2

Two-thirds of booking sites have dodgy prices

TESSA MARSH

A RECENT study conducted by the European Commission and EU consumer protection authorities, found that 235 of the 352 booking websites screened (two-thirds) had prices that were unreliable.

In just over 32% of the cases, the price first shown was not the same as the final price. Almost 21% of the sites had promotional offers that were not really available and on 30% of sites, the total price or the

way it was calculated, was not clear; 25% of the websites didn't specify that statements about scarcity (e.g. only two left) applied strictly to the website and not the supplier.

A similar screening doesn't appear to take place in South Africa and the Advertising Standards Authority only investigates when a complaint is lodged, leaving the SA market vulnerable to fraudulent offers. **Ramesh Jeenarain**, md of World Leisure Holidays, says the

To page 20



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VAT cut on domestic fares possible

TESSA MARSH

There is "triple tax dipping" when it comes to airfares, says Shadow Minister of Tourism and Member of Parliament, **James Vos**. He plans to present a policy to parliament within the year proposing the axing of VAT on domestic air tickets.

"There needs to be a reduction in aviation taxes to improve the competitiveness of South Africa as a value-for-money destination for local and international tourists." He says while several taxes are grouped together as airport taxes, only approximately 20% goes to the airport. "If we exempt air travel from VAT then an immediate cost saving of 14% will be realised by travellers. This step will not require new legislation but merely an amendment to existing legislation that will expedite implementation."

He says EU countries like Germany, France, Italy and Greece have implemented the zero-rated tax policy on flights, which was followed by a significant increase in travel.

Chris Zweigenthal, ceo of Aasa, says on domestic tickets, VAT is charged on the fare and on charges in the ticket tax boxes. He understands the concern over double or triple dipping but says it is practised in other sectors. He believes this would be a very hard sell given the other priorities in SA and pressure for VAT to be removed on basic commodities.

June Crawford, ceo of Barsa, says the VAT Act would need to be amended and domestic airline tickets zero rated. "I doubt that SARS would entertain this, as air travel is not an essential. Any reduction in costs on air travel goes towards stimulating demand

but I doubt this would be significant. Some airlines in this market offer well priced fares," she adds.

SA Airlink ceo, **Rodger Foster**, says: "If air tickets become VAT exempt, what about VAT on all the input costs? If the entire supply chain is VAT exempt, there would be a cost saving to the consumer."

Treasury says because VAT is mainly a revenue-raising instrument that flows into the national revenue fund and a final consumption tax, applied on top of all other charges that may include other excise taxes (air passenger departure taxes), it does not agree with the notion of triple dipping. Treasury says it does not support increasing the scope of current VAT exemptions or concessions as these have not proved to provide any assistance to poor or specific sectors. ■

Another spanner in the works

From page 1
this in place," says **Sailesh Parbhu**, md of XL Nexus Travel. He says these are fair play; price parity and transparency.

Rachel Penaluna, business manager of Sure Maritime Travel, agrees but says: "There's no clear standard in travel because the industry isn't regulated. Will government benchmark a market-related fee against the lowest price? Then we just have the same problem of agencies undercutting each other," she says.

Mariska also handles tenders on behalf of legal firms where tenderers don't hesitate to charge a fair fee and government doesn't question it, she says. But agents seem desperate for

government business. "I recently saw a tender where a TMC was quoting service fees equal to what was being charged in 2006."

Meanwhile, Treasury says it is tackling late payments by departments. "The Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation and National Treasury are continuously intervening in cases of non-compliance by encouraging government departments to comply, and also requests one-on-one meetings with responsible departments with their HODs," said a spokesperson.

Treasury was also looking at specifications for the use of lodge cards that departments could use when they tendered travel

services, the spokesperson added.

In terms of the National Travel Policy Framework (NTPF), which will be published before the end of April, departments have until September 30 to adopt and adapt it as their minimum standard to develop similar or more stringent policies, the spokesperson says.

"The NTPF is issued as an Instruction in terms of Section 76(4)(c) of the Public Finance Management Act. Departments that do not comply by October 1 will incur irregular expenditure and will be dealt with accordingly. TMCs who don't comply will be in breach of their contract and may face being put on the database of restricted suppliers." ■

Brazen fraudsters get smarter

From page 1
The next day, Mr Lawton requested tickets for more passengers. "This didn't sit right with us so we immediately requested the credit card details."

Mr Lawton then sent through copies of three credit cards – two from Westpac (Australia) and one from Chase Bank (US). The agent became suspicious, as she'd never received such clear copies of credit cards from a client before. "I contacted the relevant banks with a code 10 request, but they both said

they could not make contact with the cardholder. I then realised we'd been defrauded of R250 000."

When the agency contacted the existing client who made the referral, the client denied doing any such thing, which led to more unanswered questions. The agency has since contacted the airlines and requested a refund on the unused portion.

Christo Snyman, national director of forensic services of Mazars, says agents are becoming increasingly vulnerable to fraud that

exploits the trust they have with clients. He says scammers need only download spyware that allows them to hack into agents' emails and see correspondence between them and clients.

To avoid getting scammed, Christo says agents must be wary of emails that come from web-based email services like Yahoo and Gmail. He also suggests requesting a landline and cellphone number from every client – the more contact details the better. Foreign credit cards should also be verified before booking. ■




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BA gives Africa products a boost

BRITISH Airways plans to add capacity on African routes, introduce new lounges and enhance catering for African customers.

The airline will add 680 seats a week each way to its London-Johannesburg route by operating two A380 services in October.

The airline will again operate its expanded Cape Town schedule with three weekly flights from Gatwick over the 2017/2018 Southern hemisphere summer. Operations have now been moved to Gatwick's South Terminal, where a new premium check-in area has been created. The area features leather bench seating and ample power supplies.

BA has plans to revamp its lounges

at OR Tambo International and Terminal 5 in Heathrow and will also build a new lounge at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi, which will be shared with American Airlines.

In Heathrow's Terminal 5, BA has launched a new 'First Wing' check-in area with dedicated two-lane security, which will help speed up the journey.

Although a date has not yet been set, the airline will also be making changes to the catering on its Johannesburg route. As part of a £400m (R6,85bn) investment in its long-haul Club World business product, a new service style will be introduced in September. The new service includes display trolleys from which customers can select dishes from a choice of freshly prepared starters and desserts. ■



Agents make waves

Cruises International treated its top 20 agents of 2016 to a lavish luncheon at Medeo Restaurant in The Palazzo Hotel, Montecasino, on April 12 to celebrate their cruise-selling success. Agents indulged in a three-course lunch and were then awarded their certificates. Pictured (from left) are proud agents, **Quinten Barnard** and **Maria Pereira** of XL Sandown Cruise Corner, with **George Argyropoulos**, ceo, and **Nirosha Sidat**, senior sales and operations manager of Cruises International. Photo: Candice May

Fastjet ups frequency on Harare-Victoria Falls route

FASTJET increased the number of flights on its Harare-Victoria Falls service on April 7.

The airline previously operated three weekly flights on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays.

It has added a Friday flight in

response to strong passenger demand and to be able to offer a weekend away service.

Flight FN9001 departs Harare at 16h15 and lands in Victoria Falls at 17h25. The return flight FN9002 departs Victoria Falls

at 17h50 and arrives in Harare at 18h55.

Tickets for the additional flights are on sale, with fares starting from R570 one way (including taxes). Passengers are advised to book 21 days ahead of their intended

departure date to take advantage of the lowest fares.

Fastjet also offers double-daily flights every day between OR Tambo International Airport and Harare from R1 331 one way (including taxes). ■

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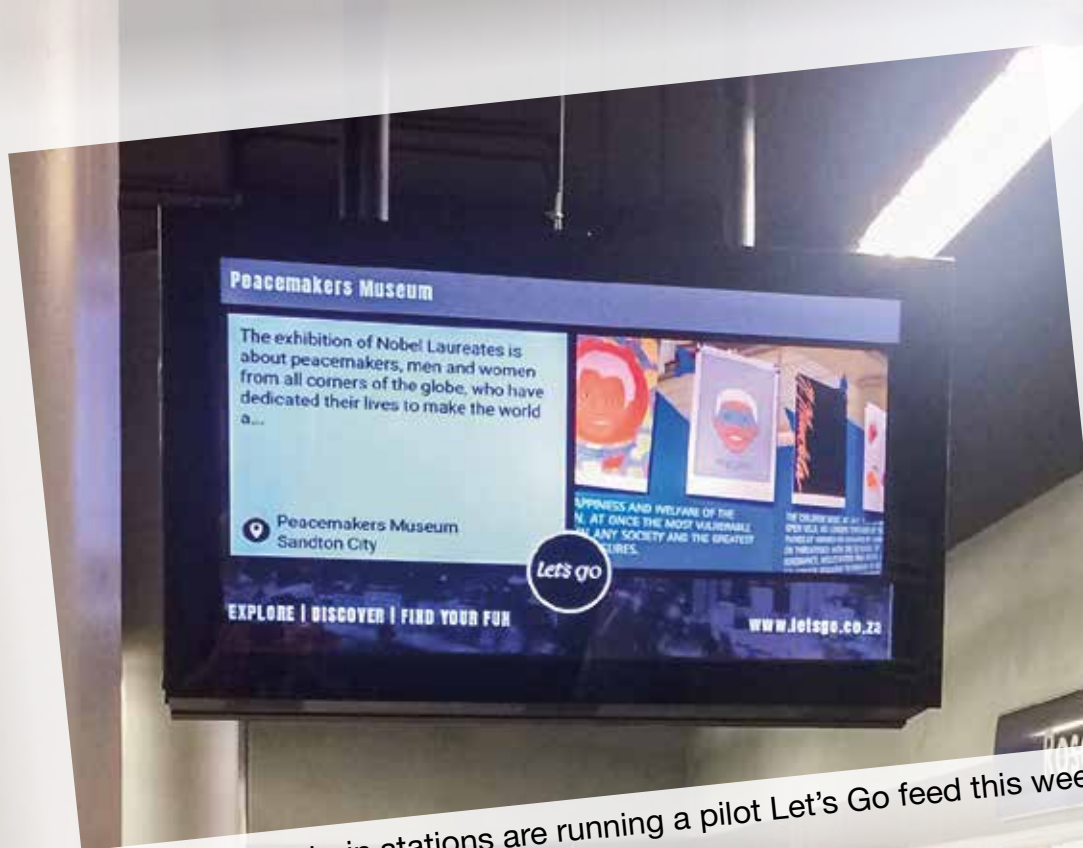
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NEWS

Crystal unveils more details on world cruise

CANDICE MAY

CRYSTAL Cruises has unveiled the full itinerary for its world cruise on the *Crystal Symphony*, which will depart Cape Town on January 7 and arrive in Fort Lauderdale on April 30.

In the October 26, 2016 issue, *TNW* reported that the cruise line had confirmed dates for the world cruise but could not provide a detailed itinerary at that time.

Spanning 114 days, the cruise will explore a new destination almost every day. Highlights include crossing the International Dateline and cruising the Pacific, South Pacific and Atlantic Oceans; the coasts of South America, Peru and Colombia; Pitcairn Island and the Caribbean.

The ship will dock overnight at several destinations, including Port

Louis; Perth; Sydney; Auckland; Papeete, Tahiti; Nuku Hiva, Marquesas Islands; Easter Island; Lima; Guayaquil, Ecuador; and St Barts, French West Indies.

The *Crystal Symphony's* accommodation includes penthouses, penthouse suites and deluxe staterooms with the option of a veranda and large picture window. On-board features include bars, restaurants, live entertainment, satellite TV, WiFi and a personal butler service.

George Argyropoulos, md of Cruises International, says this is very exciting for Crystal Cruises as it will be the first world cruise to depart from Cape Town. He adds that this once-in-a-lifetime trip is one that every travel bug should add to their bucket list.

Bookings are currently open. ■

Airlines flying from Zim still accept card payments

FIONA DAVIDS

DESPITE being advised to request travellers flying from Zimbabwe to pay for their tickets with hard cash, airlines are still allowing passengers to pay by credit or debit card.

According to media reports, airlines have advised passengers travelling from Zimbabwe to purchase their tickets with hard cash. But three airlines told *TNW* they were still accepting card payments.

Kenya Airways marketing manager for South Africa, **Tracey King**, said the airline still accepted card and cash payments when travellers purchased tickets to and from Zimbabwe.

Similarly, SAA accepts payments in US dollars, bond notes, Zimbabwean credit cards, EFT, mobile money transfers, debit cards and all international credit cards. SAA spokesperson, **Tlali Tlali**, said: "This is in compliance with the rules and regulations as determined by the Zimbabwean government."

British Airways Comair also confirmed that passengers travelling from South Africa to Zimbabwe could still pay with credit and debit cards, although the

situation in Zimbabwe is different.

Brian Kitchin, executive manager of sales for Comair explained: "In Zimbabwe, MasterCard and Visa cards need to be loaded with money, not bond notes, and then these cards can be used to make online or international payments."

An airline industry expert said if airlines did request customers to purchase tickets with hard cash, it was because government had put a cap on foreign currency, making it difficult for airlines to recover the money spent on the air ticket. "The Zimbabwean government used to pay airlines back in foreign currency but now, because of the ban, airlines are being reimbursed in bond notes – which they can't use," the expert said.

The expert added that airlines trading and selling tickets in Zimbabwe needed to cover their revenue. As a result of the lack of foreign currency, airlines were unable to recover that revenue, which allowed them to pay their bills, such as fuel and additional overheads.

An airline association is engaging with the Zimbabwean Government, Central Bank, Finance Minister and Treasury to provide airlines with foreign currency. ■

New hotel to open in Sandton CBD

LEGACY GROUP will open The Leonardo, its fifth development in the Sandton CBD, towards the end of 2018.

The 52-storey hotel will be the tallest building in Sandton by approximately 100m.

Features will include five-star accommodation (with self-catering and fully catered options), five floors of business facilities, including working spaces and

conference rooms, a pool area with a 28m-long pool, a variety of restaurants as well as crèche and childcare facilities.

"The Leonardo will be different to anything on the square and provide leisure and business travellers alike with high-end accommodation and facilities in a safe, secure environment," says **Gijs Foden**, director of Legacy Retail Management. ■

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'False' itineraries get the go-ahead for visas

CHANA BOUCHER

ACCORDING to a recent eTNW poll, the majority of travel agents will oblige if a traveller requests an itinerary for their visa application even though the client has not booked and paid for air or land arrangements. But some are concerned about the ethicality of this, even thinking of it as "fraud".

Debbie Nicholson, md of Visas & Passports Unlimited, says the itineraries serve to provide approximate travel dates for the correct validity of a visa request and proof

of a legitimate plan to travel. She says, some embassies will consider an application with an itinerary reflecting planned travel dates. "If an applicant is applying last minute for a visa, we would not recommend they confirm any flights until their visa is received, so using an itinerary is definitely a safer way to apply for your visa," she adds.

Debbie says the itineraries often state that they are just an estimation or quote and that they are not intended to mislead anyone. She says the only risk agents face when

issuing these itineraries is that the incorrect dates are processed on the visa, resulting in it expiring before the correct dates are ticketed or the visa not being valid for alternative dates due to, for instance, flights being full. "Visas can be issued according to travel dates, so it is vital that these itineraries be as accurate as possible," she advises.

According to Debbie, some countries discourage travellers from purchasing air tickets prior to receiving a visa. If a traveller purchases the ticket without allowing

sufficient time for the visa to be processed before the confirmed travel date, he will incur costs to have the flights changed.

Immigration New Zealand area manager, **Darren Calder**, says: "Immigration instructions deem acceptable evidence [for a visa application] to include travel arrangements to be confirmed subject to payment, provided the applicant has sufficient funds to confirm the arrangements." He says this minimises the risk to the applicant in the event that his application is declined

or not approved before the planned flight.

According to Darren, the travel itinerary assists with the assessment of the bona fides of the visitor, including whether or not the applicant genuinely intends to stay in New Zealand temporarily and legally, and helps the deciding immigration officer to select appropriate travel conditions in relation to the visa's duration.

With this in mind, the only concern an agent should have is whether or not it is worth their time, especially as most say they do not charge for the service. ■

Cathay Pacific, Cathay Dragon merge website

CATHAY Pacific and sister airline, Cathay Dragon, merged their websites on March 29.

Agents will now be able to book flights from all points across the airlines' combined network through

a single shared website where they will be able to manage bookings and check in online.

They will also have access to flight timetables, flight status and baggage information, and be able

to choose from a range of inflight entertainment options for both airlines, which will be available through the online booking platform.

Country manager for Cathay Pacific Southern

Africa and Indian Ocean, **Rakesh Raicar**, said:

"The website merger is the latest development in Cathay Dragon's rebranding process. Last year, Cathay Pacific rebranded Dragonair as Cathay

Dragon, merging the two brand names to capitalise on Cathay Pacific's international brand recognition and leverage on Cathay Dragon's unique connectivity into Mainland China." ■



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Conference Venues

There are many benefits from hosting a conference or event at or near an airport. Liesl Venter spoke to conference organisers to round up some of the options in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban.

MICE experts select their top airport venues OR Tambo International Airport

JOHANNESBURG offers a wide variety of airport conferencing, says **Harry Epskamp** of Dumela Conference Solutions.

The Birchwood Hotel and OR Tambo Conference Centre

With over 60 venues set in 52 hectares of beautiful gardens

and only 7km from the airport, this venue is a firm favourite, says Harry. Versatile and able to meet specific prerequisites, the range of venues can handle anything from two to 3 000 delegates.

The Premier Conference Centre

Situated on the retail level

in Terminal B at the airport, this venue is as close to the airport as one can get. Offering three meeting rooms that can seat 10, 12 and 14 delegates respectively, the venue also has seminar facilities that can handle groups of 25 or 50 and a conference venue for groups of 60 or 120. An assortment of catering options is also available.

Emperors Palace

This world-class convention and exhibition centre is located alongside ORTIA. Not only does the venue boast four award-winning hotels, ranging from five-star suites to three-star rooms, but it also houses the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa) Walkway, where delegates can breakaway. The Emperors Palace Convention Centre has 29 venues and provides touch-

panel user-interface technology, giving presenters control of presentations, volume and lighting at their fingertips.

Complimentary uncapped WiFi is also available to all guests and delegates through the entire entertainment complex. Free shuttle services to and from ORTIA are also available for delegates and the Gautrain Rhodesfield Station is nearby.



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AVANI

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Cape Town International Airport

Cape Town and Durban have fewer offerings than Johannesburg when it comes to airport venues, says **Megan McIlrath** of Event Affairs. But within 10km one can find a range of facilities to suit almost any need. She suggests the following conferencing venues around Cape Town International Airport.

Airport Conference Centre

Situated in the southern office block alongside the domestic terminal (Terminal 5) at the airport, the venue can handle anything from six to 80 delegates. Four rooms are available and vary from

an executive boardroom to a spacious conference area.

Grand West Casino

Possibly Cape Town's largest entertainment centre, Grand West is only 11km from the airport. Six fully equipped conference venues are available that can be configured in a variety of styles. The Good Hope suite can host up to 170 people, while the Grande Arena is a 2 250-sqm multi-purpose space that can hold 5 000 people seated or 7 000 standing. Sun Exhibits can accommodate 6 500 people, while the Market Hall caters for 900. Hanover Street is perfect

for networking events and holds 500 delegates, while the Roxy Revue Bar is ideal for presentations and office meetings with a twist. It can seat 160 delegates.

Hotel Verde

Known as one of Africa's greenest hotels, this venue is just 400 metres from the airport and boasts eight state-of-the-art conferencing and events venues. High-tech audio-visual equipment is built into each of the venues and is included in the rate, as well as free WiFi and parking. In line with its green practices, the venues offer carbon-neutral conferencing at no extra cost.



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CONFERENCE VENUES

King Shaka International Airport

Durban holds an allure of its own, says Megan. Whilst several of the venues require a short trip, they are well worth the journey, offering not only excellent facilities but also spectacular views. There are three great conference venues close to KSIA.

Latitude Conference Centre

This venue in Dube City is only three minutes from the arrivals terminal at the airport and caters for up to 300 delegates. With various seating configurations and rooms that can be used for both conferencing and breakaways, the venue is fitted with modern audio-visual equipment. Dube Square – an open-air space – is also available for events and can hold 1 000 delegates.

Fairmont Zimbali Resort

Situated only 16km from the airport, this luxury

resort offers world-class conference meeting facilities that include an executive boardroom and flexible ballroom with pre-conference and courtyard space. There is more than 5 000sqm of meeting space, fitted with state-of-the-art technology. An onsite conference team is on standby at all times to advise or assist in the planning of an event.

Kingfisher Conference Centre

Overlooking the waters of the Mount Edgecombe Country Club Estate, this conference centre is a mere 15 minutes' drive from the airport. The multi-functional centre has four dedicated and purpose-built conference rooms that can be configured in several different ways, with space for up to 160 delegates, dependent on the style. Each room is equipped with state-of-the-art technology and free WiFi while there is ample parking available on site.



25% off at Vic Falls resort

The 221-room AVANI Victoria Falls Resort in Zambia's Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park is offering a 25% discount for bookings of 25 rooms or more, valid until July 31. The resort's conference centre can be divided into separate areas and can accommodate up to 450 delegates. The resort also offers themed banquets in unusual venues, such as dinners aboard the Royal Livingstone Steam Express, or alfresco barbecues and candlelit ceremonies in the Boma.

Birchwood upgrades its facilities

THE Phomolong Restaurant, set within Birchwood's gardens, has been renovated to improve its facilities and update its appearance. During the process, Birchwood's head chef and top-tier management team created a new menu with a focus on providing a unique dining experience for both in-house guests and conference delegates. The

restaurant officially opens in May.

In other news, since launching in 2016, ValuStay @ Birchwood has been a popular choice for cost-conscious business travellers and groups on a budget. The 94 rooms provide guests with access to all Birchwood's facilities, including three restaurants, the Hi-Flyer Aviation Bar, pool,

Mangwanani Boutique Spa and gym, while also providing the in-room features such as DSTV, a desk and coffee-making facilities.

Birchwood has decided to undertake a complete renovation and refurbishment of the rooms, beginning in May, which will further enhance the offering while keeping the value-for-money concept. ■

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Skiing



Encouraging your clients to opt for all-inclusive ski packages may not always be the best way to keep costs down. Sue van Winsen reports.

Does all-inclusive always mean cost-effective?

THERE are so many elements that go into a ski package – from airfare through to accommodation, to ski passes, lessons and equipment hire – and that’s without delving into meals and drinks. Bringing all of these together into one package at a cost-effective price can be daunting, so there’s a temptation to just opt for the all-inclusive option, but this may not always be the most budget-friendly choice.

Greg Taylor, md of Pure Skiing, says with SA’s ever-changing exchange rate, there is definitely merit in looking at all-inclusive ski packages, as agents secure most items prior to travelling. “But, on the flipside, booking aspects separately can amount to less at the end of the day, should the exchange rate play along.”

What it ultimately comes down to, says Greg, is considering the needs of



“Much of your time outside skiing is spent in the same place, so the toss-up is that you don’t get to experience the village vibe, yet you have the convenience of everything under one roof.”
Greg Taylor

the traveller. “Pure Skiing has both all-inclusive and tailored experiences, so for us it’s about fitting what’s right for that individual client.” For example, agents should ask clients whether they prefer the club resort vibe, or if they prefer visiting different restaurants and venues, and this will guide their choice.

He says the ease of all-inclusive makes it ideal for families with young kids and first timers, as well as those who like to relax in the hotel. “Much of your time outside skiing is spent in the same place, so the toss-up is that you don’t get to experience the village vibe, yet you have the convenience of everything under one roof.”

Anthea Hay, managing member of Peak Adventures, agrees that there is a market for both all-inclusive and tailor-made packages. “It comes down to how many

of the inclusions you will really use within the hotel resort,” she says. “Taking meals into consideration, for example, I have bought an excellent three-course meal with a bottle of wine for €17 (R242) for two people in a top ski resort in France. So, what does an all-inclusive option cost for meals at the hotel, and are you paying for more than you use?”

Again, it comes down to the preferences of the traveller. “Some may enjoy the comfort of an apartment, having coffee and breakfast at leisure without having to get dressed and go down to a dining area with hundreds of others, while some may find it important to have unlimited drinks and entertainment on tap in an all-inclusive resort,” says Anthea.

All-inclusive packaging

Not to be confused with all-inclusive resorts, which include drinks, meals and activities, Anthea says the

all-inclusive packages are put together by specialist operators – who include flights, accommodation, ski hire and passes.

“Getting an operator to book and package together with discounts, the direct transfers, accommodation in the right area, the correct ski pass, ski lessons and ski rental with relevant insurance, can be cost-effective as well as add value,” she says.

“Operators are able to negotiate discounts and pass these on to the clients as well as having everything pre-paid, saving the traveller time and money,” Anthea adds. “Ski holidays are expensive compared with many other types of holidays. It is senseless for a client to book every aspect of a ski holiday himself not knowing what options are available and what it entails. It could be a totally different experience with value added if everything was booked by a reputable agent.”



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Destination choice is key

According to Greg, the skiing destination selected can have just as much of an impact on costs as the choice between all-inclusive vs tailored. “The prices for drinks in France and

Switzerland are much greater than Austria and Italy. A beer in France can easily be €8 (R114) whereas Austria can be between €4 and €5 (R57 and R71), if not cheaper in some resorts.

Did you know?

While most travel insurance policies cover leisure skiing, if travellers are participating in a professional event or competition, they will need to apply for an extension on the standard cover.

Three Austrian resorts for repeat skiers

Travellers who opt for a ski holiday year after year can be tricky to book for. **Greg Taylor** of Pure Skiing listed his top resorts that are sure to keep repeat skiers happy.

Saalbach

As one of Austria's largest interconnected ski resorts, there is plenty to keep skiers of all levels happy, says Greg. It also offers a great après-ski experience within the setting of a charming village. It has 270km of ski slopes spread across all levels, with 140km of blue, 112km of red and 18km of black slopes. For experienced skiers, there is also the option of freeriding, also known as skiing off-piste, with many freeride parks, routes with different levels of difficulty and information points.

St Anton

With 350km of lift-connected skiing, St Anton is a great resort, which Greg says has a great vibe. It receives particularly high levels of snowfall and, with 97 lifts, the resort runs efficiently despite the big numbers that visit during the ski season. The slopes are better suited to skiers with more experience rather than beginners. Intermediate skiers are spoiled for choice with a wide selection of challenging blue runs and tricky reds. There are also great opportunities for off-piste skiing.



Robinson Club Amadé.

Amadé ski region

Greg says Amadé's vast 700km ski area means the resort has something for everyone. "Our club resort, Robinson Club Amadé, has skiing from the doorstep

with all lessons, hire, meals and selected drinks included.

It's a great choice for new skiers and new to most South Africans," he adds. That

doesn't mean it isn't a great choice for those with some experience, with 270 ski lifts and 760 snow-guaranteed pistes, all available on one ski pass.

Lack of experience puts SA skiers at risk

WHILE a significant number of South Africans enjoy winter sports abroad, the experience they have in this environment tends to be low, so the risk of injury is high.

According to **Simmy Micheli**, sales and marketing manager of Travel Insurance Consultants (TIC), the most common ski claims received are knee injuries, followed by ankle and hand injuries and in some cases, there are more serious claims with damage to the skier's shoulder or back.

"An interesting and modern development is the selfie injury," says Simmy. "Several recent claims resulted from skiers being injured while trying to film or photograph themselves on the slopes."

Whatever the cause, any injury sustained while participating in snow sports can ruin a holiday, bringing it to



Any injury sustained while participating in snow sports can ruin a holiday.

an abrupt end.

"Additionally, it can leave travellers with exorbitant medical costs, particularly when visiting places like Europe and America, where the currency exchange is unfavourable for South Africans," says Simmy. "This is why it's so important to have a comprehensive insurance policy."

Some recently paid-out claims included R220 000 for a client who was admitted to hospital for a fractured clavicle after a snowboarding accident in Italy, as well as R306 000 for a client who suffered head and spine injuries in a skiing accident in Saalbach, Austria, and who returned to SA with a medical escort.

Case study: SA skier saved from hefty medical bill

A TIC policy holder, **Bernice Keuler**, injured herself while skiing in Austria in March 2016. She said: "On the last day of our holiday, I was skiing and on my last run down, I became distracted for a moment by another skier doing a jump. I wasn't

going fast at all, but I fell. I was in so much pain. Thankfully my husband was skiing behind and stopped immediately to help. A nearby ski instructor phoned the medics and I was taken to hospital.

"I was told that I had

fractured the fibula in my left leg, and my leg was put in a cast. I would most certainly recommend that travellers take out travel insurance when they go abroad," said Bernice, who was upgraded to a business-class seat when she flew home.

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Pure Skiing is offering a three-star, seven-night Christmas package with rates from R22 800pps. The rate includes seven nights' accommodation on a bed and breakfast basis at the Pension Panorama, six-day ski pass, six days' ski hire, 10-day travel insurance policy, five dinners at different venues and Christmas dinner. It excludes ski lessons, flights and meals not specified. Valid for travel from December 23-30.

Don't miss the French Mountains 2017 roadshow that will take place on the following dates:

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Club Med Beidahu opened in China last year. Photo: Club Med

Two new ski resorts for Club Med

CLUB Med will open a new resort in France, Club Med Samoëns in December this year. The family-friendly ski resort is centrally located in the heart of the French Alps and will be Club Med's new flagship all-inclusive resort in France, an hour from Geneva airport.

There will be 420 guest rooms, including family suites and interconnecting club rooms. Facilities will

include one main restaurant with four different areas, as well as a gourmet lounge with a menu designed by French chef, Edouard Loubet, and skiers can choose between two different ski domains. Le Grand Massif is well-suited to beginners who want to ski amidst the pine trees, while Flaine's high altitude is ideal for advanced alpine skiing.

Club Med also opened

Club Med Beidahu – Jilin, China in November last year. Located in Jilin Province, an hour-and-a-half's drive from Changchun Longjia International Airport, the resort offers 176 rooms, all with views of the ski slopes or Beidahu reservoir. There are 19 ski slopes with activities ranging from skiing and snowboarding to Nordic walking and hiking nature trails.

Overhaul of iconic French ski area kicks off

SINCE 1945, Val d'Isère has been one of the world's most popular ski resorts due to its huge ski area and traditional village feel. Now, the resort is undergoing a major overhaul, with government project giving the green light for the redevelopment of Le Coin de Val in the centre of Val d'Isère.

The redevelopment project kicked off last year and will continue until 2020. Currently, most of the work is focused on the extensive demolition of the resort, while construction will only start in 2018.

The new buildings will be constructed to recreate the traditional design of old alpine villages in order

to retain the aesthetic feel of the region. New shops and restaurants will be added along with two hotels and residential apartments.

The Tower of Val will be the central focus point of the development, inspired by the 14th Century Montmayeur medieval tower in Aime. According to the developers, the tower will "protect guests from the vicissitudes of the modern world during their stay at Val d'Isère".

With seven storeys, the tower will include a restaurant on the top floor.

Large car parks with underground access will allow for better traffic flow below street level, leaving the roads to be

pedestrianised. The charm of Val d'Isère's old village will be reinforced through the creation of narrow streets and the use of traditional stone, slate and wood.

According to media reports, Le Coin de Val will cost around R2,8bn and will see the addition of 900 beds to the resort, which will span 22 000sqm.

The new buildings will incorporate environmentally friendly systems designed to reduce energy consumption, while rainwater and melted snow will run the sanitation system and geothermal energy will heat the hotel rooms and apartments.

Did you know?

Air France's baggage policy allows Business and La Première passengers to check in skiing and other sport equipment provided it weighs no more than 23kg and that its total dimensions are 300cm or under. Passengers may need to get prior approval from the airline's customer service department at least 48 hours prior to travel, particularly when travelling as a group with 10 or more passengers. ■



The Gulf

Visitors to Gulf countries should be mindful of the region's deeply entrenched cultural and religious beliefs. Michelle Colman reports.

Make sure your clients stay on the right side of the law

THE recent arrest of a South African working in Dubai and his Ukrainian fiancée, who fell pregnant out of wedlock, was a reminder that visitors should familiarise themselves with the region's strictly enforced laws.

Indeed, tourist visits tend to be more fleeting and their situation does not compare with that of workers in the region, but the incident serves to focus on the fact that Gulf countries have a distinct value system that should be respected for a trouble-free stay. The area, says **Annemarie Lexow**, sales and marketing manager of Travel Vision, has very strong and old cultural beliefs, and visitors would do well not to offend laws and customs.

Perhaps one of the best-known taboos in the region exists around the consumption of alcohol. In Dubai, drinking is allowed in licensed restaurants, pubs and clubs, but not tolerated in non-licensed locations or public areas. Tourists must be over 21 to drink legally.

Culinary customs

The Abu Dhabi Culture and Tourism Authority, represented in South Africa by Development Promotions, suggests that if alcohol is not offered in an establishment, it is better not to ask for it. A third emirate, Sharjah, is almost completely dry and there are very few locations where alcohol is allowed.

There are constraints to bear in mind when it comes to eating too. It is widely known that Muslim tradition forbids the consumption of pork products, but here are some other points of good manners advised by Abu Dhabi Tourism:

- In a hosted situation, never refuse food or an additional helping as it is considered rude.
- When finished eating, leave your utensils facing upward in the middle of your plate.
- Eat with your right hand only.
- If you are eating in a local home, remove your shoes on entry.
- If the tourist is hosting the meal, he will be expected to tip 10% over and above the service charge.

During the fasting month of Ramadan, non-Muslims can eat and drink in many hotels and restaurants. To respect those who are fasting, these areas may be screened off. Alcohol can be purchased after sunset. An interesting event to witness over this time is the daily Iftar feast at sunset, breaking the daily fast.

Public behaviour

Locals may take offence at swearing, spitting and aggression, and public displays of affection will cause frowns. "Very interesting, and I know South Africans will find this very hard to abide by, is the law against jay walking," says Annemarie. "Be very careful and do not try it anywhere in the UAE; you will be fined if you do not cross roads at the designated areas."

She further warns: "If you need to carry medication with you whilst in the UAE, be sure to have a doctor's letter to support the medication, specifying the period of travel, your illness or condition, what the treatment is for and its description."

This applies to medicines that are named on the UAE Ministry of Health's restricted and controlled list, such as those containing codeine.

Along with the doctor's note or prescription, medicines should be carried in their original packing, and travellers should not take a larger quantity than they need for the duration of the trip.

Clothing etiquette

"Be mindful how you dress in public," cautions Annemarie. "Ladies do not have to cover their hair and face when walking in public, as long as their shoulders and chest are covered. You might have to wear a scarf when visiting a holy site or mosque."

Says **Thaybz Khan**,



Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque – visitors should respect dress codes. Photo: Mohammad Reza Domiri Ganji

contemporary brand manager at Cruises International: "A good rule of thumb is covering from knees to shoulders."

Non-revealing clothing stretches to wearing shoes with closed toes, says literature provided by the Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture

Authority. Hemlines must fall below the knee. Dubai Tourism says swimwear is appropriate at the poolside or on the beach, but not on the streets or in malls. For men packing a business suit, darker colours are considered more professional.

Business conduct

The Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority offers some guidance on acceptable business conduct.

In a meeting, acknowledge the most senior person first. Use the right hand when shaking hands and exchanging business cards. A woman greeting a man

should wait to see if he extends his hand first.

The first name is often used as a form of address, preceded by the honorific Mr, Mrs, Ms. Status is important and acknowledged by using the correct terms such as Sheikh or Sayed.

Initial meetings are usually about building relationships

and trust, and decision-making can be slow and bureaucratic. While Middle Easterners may arrive late, punctuality is expected of westerners. Refreshments should be accepted and complimented on. Note that it is disrespectful to show the bottom of your shoes in a meeting.



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Top stopover choices

•Dubai is increasingly known for its entertainment and the big stage names that perform in the city. This year has seen the likes of Guns 'N Roses and Bryan Adams in concert, and in May it's the turn of Justin Bieber. It is included in a three-night package from Emirates Holidays, with accommodation at the five-star W Dubai Al Habtoor City. Rates start from R15 985pps, including return airport transfers in Dubai by private car, regular Tier tickets for the concert and economy-class flights on Emirates with 20% bonus miles for Emirates Skywards members.

•Etihad Airways has introduced a '2-for-1 Stopover' where the second night comes free at a choice of 60 hotels. It starts at US\$44 (R587) per person and travellers can also take advantage of a range of '2-for-1' activities. Also available is the Premium Stopover, where business-class travellers get a free night in Abu Dhabi and first-

class passengers get two free nights. The Abu Dhabi Transit Stopover, for those with six to 12 hours between flights, offers passengers a round of golf, including club rental, for US\$40 (R534). Alternatively, travellers can spend the time at the Yas Links Golf Course swimming pool for the same fee. For those travelling for Hajj or Umrah, the Islamic City Stopover accommodates travellers in alcohol-free hotels in Abu Dhabi, with access to alcohol-free activities.

•Travel Vision's three-night Dubai City stopover sells from R17 440pps and clients stay at the four-star Vida Downtown Dubai, a boutique property 10 minutes' walk from Burj Khalifa. Breakfast is included, as well as a desert safari with barbecue, return airport transfers and a visa. The three-night Abu Dhabi stopover is priced from R16 925pp, inclusive of flights, half-board accommodation at the four-star Traders Hotel Qaryat Al Beri, return airport transfers, a half-day city tour and



Traders Hotel, Qaryat Al Beri, Abu Dhabi.

a visa. On the tour, passengers view the world's largest man-made port at Jebel Ali, the gigantic Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque and Union

Square, before driving down to the Corniche, an impressive 8km stretch of perfectly manicured waterfront. From there, it's on to Heritage

Village, designed to remind younger Emiratis of their rich and colourful past. Finally, the tour wraps up at Abu Dhabi Marina Mall.



An artist's impression of the four-star Vida Downtown Dubai.

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Celebrity Constellation cruise options

AT THE end of the year, the *Celebrity Constellation* undertakes a series of cruises that include a number of Gulf ports of call on its itineraries.

According to **Thaybz Khan**, contemporary brand manager of Cruises International, pricing starts from R22 300pps, including gratuities and taxes.

- 15 nights, departing November 12. Ports include Rome (Civitavecchia), Sicily (Messina) and Athens (Piraeus) before the ship sails through the Suez Canal. It then calls at Aqaba in Jordan, Muscat in

Oman and Abu Dhabi.

- 10 nights, departing November 27. Ports on this itinerary include Abu Dhabi, Muscat and Khasab in Oman, and Dubai.

- 12 nights, departing December 7. Ship calls at Abu Dhabi, followed by the Indian ports of New Mangalore, Goa (Mormugao) and Mumbai. It heads back to Abu Dhabi via Muscat and Dubai.

- 14 nights, departing December 19. Itinerary includes Abu Dhabi, Muscat, Cochin, New Mangalore, Goa, Mumbai and Dubai.

Did you know?

Abu Dhabi Tourism will be hitting the road in May. Agents are invited to a fun-filled morning with entertainment by Barry Hilton. The venue is Summer Place in Johannesburg on May 23, Hilton Durban on May 24 and the One&Only Cape Town on May 25.



Ferrari World on Yas Island.

Abu Dhabi's newest attraction gets pulses racing

ABU Dhabi's newest attraction, the Turbo Track, has opened at Ferrari World on Yas Island. Considered to be the most heart-pounding rollercoaster ride in the world, the Turbo Track shoots a car at 102kph along a 180-metre steel track, catapulting guests vertically up to 64m before plunging them back at zero gravity.

According to Abu Dhabi media reports, the ride aims to give guests a glimpse into the world of Ferrari test drivers. Major structural changes had to be made to the building to accommodate the rollercoaster – the third to be launched at Ferrari World Abu Dhabi in the last 12 months.

"Today, we are celebrating

the exceptional story of how a world-class rollercoaster came to be. We are extremely humbled by the passionate drive that continues to fuel the minds and hearts of our team at Ferrari World Abu Dhabi and those who diligently worked behind the scenes to bring this new ride to life," said **Jesse Vargas**, gm of Ferrari World Abu Dhabi.

The Gulf

AccorHotels plans mega-hotel for Dubai

ACCORHOTELS has announced a conversion and rebranding of a former Sheikh Zayed Road landmark into the 1 015-room Mercure Dubai Barsha Heights Hotel Suites and Apartments.

The property is currently undergoing the first of a two-phase comprehensive refurbishment and is expected to open on May 19.

The first phase includes the renovation of 120 hotel rooms to fit Mercure brand dimensions. The second-phase renovations will focus on enhancing additional guest rooms and facilities to elevate the hotel from a four-star ranking into a five-star property. The full project is scheduled

for completion by the end of 2018. Upon opening, the 1 015-room hotel will be the largest Mercure property in AccorHotels' global portfolio.

The hotel is close to major business and leisure attractions within the city, including Dubai Media City, Mall of Emirates, Emirates Golf Club, Knowledge Village and Dubai Internet City.

Facilities will include an all-day-dining restaurant with a shisha lounge, two speciality restaurants, lobby lounge, health club, spa and swimming pool. As part of the extensive refurbishments, a new speciality restaurant will be incorporated into the hotel's offerings, along with over 400sqm of meeting space. ■

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Australia

An unfavourable exchange rate has made Australia an expensive destination for South Africans – but destination experts have some tricks up their sleeves to make it more affordable. Sue van Winsen reports.

Tips to make the rand go further

WITH the exchange rate sitting at over R10 to the Australian dollar, travel 'Down Under' can be costly and agents are having to be creative and make the most of their destination expertise to sell the country to South Africans.

It's not just the exchange rate that makes Australia pricey – another factor is that many of the destinations people want to travel to are along the east coast. These areas, like Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, are popular with travellers from all over the world, making them very expensive, says **Annemarie Lexow**, sales and marketing manager of Travel Vision. She

adds that accommodation is particularly pricey in these cities.

Another factor that pushes up prices is that Australia is a year-round destination and therefore there are no opportunities to travel during low or shoulder periods, says Annemarie. "Also, as Australia is in the Southern hemisphere, it shares our seasons and their school holidays are similar, making it more difficult for a family with kids to travel out of season to Australia."

Cutting costs

Annemarie says many South Africans stay with family and friends to save on costs, but

still book excursions and activities while they are there – providing an opportunity for agents to upsell.

This is also the view of **Theresa Szejwallo**, md of Trafalgar and CostSaver, who says while Australia is not a huge seller, it is growing. "We believe this is due to the short city stays we offer. It seems our guests are taking these as an add-on extension to their family visits. With all the inclusions and experience Trafalgar provides, with the seamless orchestration in the way we package every aspect, there is just no comparison with the experience an independent traveller would have."



The Great Barrier Reef is on most visitors' bucket lists.

Bronwyn Strydom, marketing manager of Trafalgar and CostSaver, says Trafalgar's most popular 'mini-stay holidays' are Sydney and the Blue Mountains, Sydney's Food and Wine Discovery, Melbourne and the Great

Ocean Road, Cairns and the Great Barrier Reef and Tropical Reef and Rainforest. Another way to cut back is by exploring the country by coach, says Bronwyn. "All VIP sightseeing is included with extra free time and optional experiences."

Average costs...

Numbeo, which publishes the average cost of living in countries around the world, provides some

insight into what tourists should expect to pay for common items and services in Australia.

- McMeal at McDonalds: AU\$10 (R100)
- Cappuccino: AU\$4,19 (R42)
- Water (1,5l): AU\$2,49 (R25)
- Three-course mid-range restaurant meal for two: AU\$80 (R808)
- Mid-range bottle of wine at a supermarket: AU\$15 (R152)
- Domestic beer at a supermarket (0,5 litre): AU\$5,18 (R52)
- Gasoline (1 litre): AU\$1,27 (R13)
- One movie ticket: AU\$18 (R182)

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Take note!

The Australian government has implemented tighter screening procedures for passengers flying to Australia on Emirates, Etihad, Qatar and Qantas from Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha. This follows the implementation of the country's new requirements for enhanced explosives detection. The new directive does not apply to flights bound for the UAE out of Australian airports. The tightened security measures will include additional screening at the gate and it may include targeted screening of passengers' personal electronic devices. However, there is currently no restriction on carrying electronic devices on flights into Australia.

Did you know?

Air Mauritius offers flight options from Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban to Perth in Australia. From Perth, passengers can connect seamlessly with Virgin Australia to all the country's major cities. In addition, the airline offers economy-class passengers with a checked luggage allowance of two pieces weighing 23kg each, while business-class passengers can check in two pieces weighing 32kg each. On all non-connecting flights from Australia to South Africa, passengers are offered a free stopover in Mauritius at a four-star hotel, including meals and transfers. All-inclusive return airfares between SA and Perth start from R9 714 for economy and R24 414 for business class. ■

Births, deaths, marriages, promotions – we want to know! Please e-mail TNW's Taryn Nightingale, at tarynn@nowmedia.co.za.

Appointments

■ Fastjet has appointed **Hein Kaiser** as gm of Marketing and Communications to oversee the carrier's African markets.



Angelique Claassen has been appointed manager of Distribution and IT Systems for fastjet's core markets across Africa. Hein will be based in Johannesburg and will focus on the airline's overall marketing and communication strategy and serve as spokesperson and manage the regional marketing teams in fastjet's key markets of Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia and South Africa. Previously Hein was head of Communication and Corporate Affairs and acting head of Marketing at SAA subsidiary, Mango. "As fastjet continues to deliver on its vision to make air transportation affordable and accessible to everyone



on the African continent, the time is right to invest in specialist leadership for our key business areas," says **Nico Bezuidenhout**, ceo of fastjet. "Hein was integral in building the success of the Mango brand, and has been recognised for his strong strategic ability and lateral creativity." Angelique will be based at fastjet's headquarters in Johannesburg. She will also manage channel distribution for fastjet's key markets of Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia and South Africa. Angelique was previously the channel manager of SAA subsidiary, Mango. "We are confident that Angelique's appointment will support the growth of fastjet across key African markets, and strengthen our ability to deliver an efficient and pleasurable customer experience," says Nico.

■ **Uzair Desai**, better known as Oz, has been appointed as Corporate Traveller gm of Flight Centre Travel Group (FCTG).



Oz joined FCTG in 2010 where he worked in one of the group's stores as a retail travel consultant in Cape Town. Oz became a team leader in 2011 and he has also been part of the group's retail finance department as an accountant in 2012. In 2015, Oz moved to Johannesburg and was appointed an area leader.

■ Premier Hotels & Resorts has appointed **Deneys Swart** Group operations manager of Resorts and **Bruce McKay** has been appointed Group Food and Beverage manager. Deneys, a former business consultant, joins the Premier team with 35 years' experience in the hospitality industry and specialised in lodge development, team building, service excellence, and industrial relations. Bruce brings with him 30 years of experience as chef, food columnist, hotel school proprietor, and hotel manager.



Pick of the week

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Professional Career Services
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Senior In-Bound FIT Consultant – French – Johannesburg

Equity Connections cc
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Senior Corporate Consultant – Randburg

Wendy's Travel Personnel
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Business Development Executive – Cape Town

Club Travel
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APPLICATION FOR
GENERAL SALES AGENT
FOR THE TERRITORY OF BOTSWANA

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Tender documents and detailed information pack may be collected from the Manager, Air Mauritius office in Johannesburg or email wnel@airmauritius.com.

Tenders in sealed envelopes marked "APPLICATION FOR GENERAL SALES AGENT" should reach the following address not later than 16th May 2017:

The Manager,
Air Mauritius SA (PTY) Ltd,
Suite 1201, 12th Floor, Bedford Centre, Smith Road, Johannesburg
Or PO BOX 75001, Gardenview, 2047

Tenders received after specified date and time will not be considered.

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To the point

The Queen Victoria Hotel at the V&A Waterfront in Cape Town will open The Manor House in May. It will consist of four butler-serviced executive suites and offer a private dining room that can seat six guests. Guests have access to the hotel's restaurant, Dash, and a 24-hour gym.

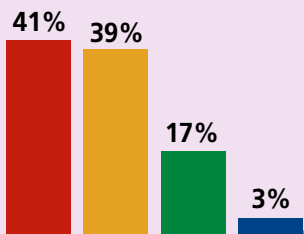
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Industry hotshot joins fastjet

FASTJET has appointed **Sylvain Bosc** as the airline's new chief commercial officer.

Sylvain's credentials include tenures as chief commercial officer at both SAA and French airline, Corsair.

He also worked as group strategic planner for the Air France KLM group and held several key commercial positions at Air France earlier in his career.

He joins ceo, **Nico Bezuidenhout's** team to rebuild, restructure and redevelop the business. Sylvain says he is looking forward to working for an airline that has adopted the

concept of a truly pan-African LCC, which plans to make air travel accessible to the second-most-populous continent after Asia, as it presents both a commercial and socio-economic opportunity.

"There has been a marked stimulation of tourism and trade growth in markets where fastjet operates. Typically, aviation fulfils a significant role in the development of these two



Sylvain Bosc

sectors and in empowering the public who have not had the opportunity to fly before," he says.

Nico is enthusiastic about the new team of top talents he is assembling and believes that it reflects the direction of the airline's business. He says Sylvain's appointment will go a long way to re-establish a solid and formidable commercial foundation for the airline. ■

Booking sites have dodgy prices

From page 1
company was made aware of a special on a site for a seven-night, all-inclusive stay at La Pirogue Resort and Spa in Mauritius for R9 900 per person, including flights and taxes. "Despite World Leisure Holidays having exclusive selling rights to La Pirogue in SA, if you remove the airport taxes alone, the price comes to R6 100," he says, adding that this would be a price 12 times cheaper than legitimate offers.

Ramesh says they approached the agency offering the deal and have since been on a wild goose chase. TNW is currently assisting in investigating this case and will report the outcome in a later issue.

He says sites like this can be damaging to the trade. "People think they're booking with a reputable supplier and only on travel dates do they realise they've been duped."


Irene Ferreira, corporate travel director at Reynolds Travel Centre, says they had to assist a client who used an online site to book a trip to Germany. On arrival, the client discovered the accommodation was not booked, confirmed or paid for.

Irene and Ramesh both agree that South Africans are less trusting of booking online than Europeans. "SA travellers prefer to use reputable booking sites or an agent. We have clients

who compare our quotes to online sites and, where possible, we try to match; 99% of the time we get the booking," says Irene.

"I only deal with websites I know to be authentic," says **Tony King**, senior travel adviser at GoTravel.co.za. Irene says she uses booking sites like Expedia or Booking.com for comparative reasons. "If more cost effective, we book on that site and then charge a service fee."



Asata ceo, **Otto de Vries**, says Asata is investigating the feasibility of self-regulation for the travel sector and this is an area that would be considered so the end customer is protected. ■



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