



TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

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INSIDE	NEWS CRUISES INTERNATIONAL BidTravel buys niche business Page 2	REPORT TC CONFERENCE 2017 Celebrating 10 years Page 10	FEATURE <i>WEDDINGS & HONEYMOONS</i> Memorable occasions on a shoestring Page 11
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Revolution in product training

STAR-RATINGS are up for grabs for agents who participate in continuous training on TI's revolutionary product training tool launching this month.

Travelinfo Workshops will be completely revamped into a 24-hour, 365-day product training classroom on demand.

By keeping up to date on travel products they sell, consultants will now accumulate points toward stars and their managers will be made aware of their efforts.

"We will make it mandatory for our consultants to participate."

By year end, Travelinfo expects to have basic training on 50 different products for new entrants as well as short update courses for people with experience who need to know what the recent changes are.

All training will be available all year.

When consultants complete a course, they will be awarded between 100 and 200 points. Extra points will be awarded where the consultant's travel agency has a preferred agreement with a supplier.

A certain number of points will translate into a star-rating. The more points an agent accumulates, the more stars they get and the higher their rating, says TI's divisional head, **Linda van der Pol**.

The number of stars an agent has is

a reflection of how much training the agent completed in the 365 days prior.

Agents who have been active on the TI Workshop system will be credited with the points they've accumulated (in the last 12 months) from the date the new training launches.

The training results will be updated monthly and sent to agency and consortium management so that it can be included in key performance area management.

Morné du Preez, ceo of Tourvest Travel Services, enthusiastically welcomed the development. Boardroom training was not working well, he said, and Tourvest would ask its preferred suppliers to put their product training up on Travelinfo Workshops. "We will make it mandatory for our consultants to participate."

Anton Marsh, md of Travelinfo, said that in the last year, 2 927 consultants completed on average, five Travelinfo workshops. "It is all about consultants being able to book travel products with confidence, so we now expect to see most leading suppliers participating and the course completion rate is set to soar."

The service, including the monthly management reports, is free to travel agents.

Travelinfo will explore the possibility of working with Asata on its professional education programme, but for the moment they are separate.

For details on how the points and star system will work, contact Anton at antonm@nowmedia.co.za. ■



Thrilling Thirsty's!

These smiling ladies spent a terrific Thursday at *TNW's Thirsty's* in the Cape. A beautiful venue, delicious food, good wine and great conversation made for a memorable evening. Pictured (from left) are **Nosipho Smayile**, **Ziyanda Mthethwa**, **Keabetsoe Mdleleni**, **Busiswa Ndlebe** and **Olwethu Ngalwana** of Travel With Flair. For more on *Thirsty's*, see page 6. Photo: Taryn Nightingale

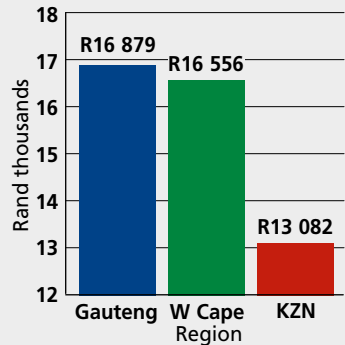
Series lifts the lid on working in travel

A REVEALING insight into the employment conditions in the travel trade starts with the first in a series of reports in this week's issue of *TNW*.

The reports are based on the widest industry survey of consultants ever undertaken and was conducted by *TNW* in March. There were 772 people who work in travel agencies among the 981 travel trade professionals who participated.

The first two reports: This week's, on basic pay, and next

Non-commission-earning agents' pay



To page 2

www.agentconnect.biz

source:flightstats.com

Number in on-time performance

- SAA appoints new CFO
- XL Travel and Travelport launch exciting new app
- Travel trade talks transformation
- South Africans among biggest cruise spenders
- Aussie visa price hike announced



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TNW6004SD

Rubes® By Leigh Rubin

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BidTravel has just completed a major acquisition by purchasing Cruises International. Pictured (from left) are George Argyropoulos, ceo of Cruises International; with Allan Lunn, deputy chairman and Lidia Folli, ceo of BidTravel. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Cruises International – sold!

TARYN NIGHTINGALE

BIDTRAVEL'S purchase of profitable, cruising niche business, Cruises International, was finalised earlier this month.

"The purpose of building a successful business is that you'd eventually be able to sell it," says ceo of Cruises International, **George Argyropoulos**. He says the sale came at the perfect time, not only is it the company's 25th birthday this year, but Cruises has reached a point where its growth needs to be accelerated. "As one person, you can only take it so far."

The sale is expected to benefit Cruises as a company, travel agents and clients alike.

A larger customer base, expansion into more African countries and the possibility of bringing a cruise line on either a limited or extended season around Africa are all on the cards. George says by tapping into BidTravel's

network of clients and products, Cruises has more clout when negotiating with big cruise brands.

The three global brands that BidTravel owns – HRG Rennies, BCD and CWT – all have businesses and clientele that extend into Africa, says **Lidia Folli**, ceo of BidTravel. "There is great opportunity in the availability of these partner networks."

As part of the BidTravel group, Cruises will potentially offer clients greater availability to additional services, says George, such as easier access to forex, insurance products and meet-and-greet services.

"Our core mission is still to assist a distribution chain [of cruise products] to travel agents, wholesalers and incentive and MICE operators to build a sustainable cruise business," says George. He adds that this means there won't be any favouritism towards BidTravel clients

at the expense of Cruises' existing client base.

Although George says he has no plans to retire just yet, the deal also gives him more freedom to plan an appropriate succession plan. "There's now a proper support system that allows the business to remain successful if I want to explore the possibility of spending more time with my family," he says.

Negotiations surrounding the deal, described by **Allan Lunn**, deputy chairman of BidTravel as "the longest courtship in travel history", began five years ago when BidTravel was looking to expand its leisure division.

"Cruising also suits the type of market we cater for," he says, "particularly MICE, as it's all-inclusive. You only unpack once and there is the opportunity of visiting bucket-list destinations that are often popular with corporate clients." ■

Series lifts the lid on working in travel

From page 1

week's, on commission, were sponsored by Amadeus.

The far-reaching survey also looked at issues such as educationals, compensation for after-hours duty and what consultants would like to see changed and what they like

most about their agencies. Filters were applied to see how conditions change for levels of experience and location.

The first report (see page 5) shows how consultants who do not fulfil a management role, can earn significantly

more, depending on their location.

Are commission-earning agents better off? Next week, TNW reports on the difference between agents who earn commission and those who don't; and reveals some surprises. ■



TNW

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Helen Johnston selects the top specials from Travelinfo

- **Thompsons Holidays.** Four-star Namibia offer from R6 361pp sharing. Offer includes return flights from Johannesburg to Walvis Bay, airline levy, return transfers and three nights' accommodation at the Hotel Zum Kaiser with breakfast daily. Valid until June 30.
- **AfricaStay.** Visit Zanzibar from R13 685pp sharing. Rate includes return flights and approximate taxes, seven nights' accommodation at the Double Tree by Hilton with breakfast, lunch and dinner daily. Valid for travel until May 31.
- **Airlink.** Fly to CPT from PZB from R3 000 return, including approximate taxes.
- **Club Mykonos.** Warm up in Langebaan from R1 010 per unit per night. Available midweek only. Valid until August 6.
- **Vic 1906 Hotel.** (Montagu, Western Cape) Stay from R795 per couple per night. Special includes one night's accommodation, breakfast and entry to the Montagu hot springs. Valid for stays until December 7.





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XL Travel and Travelport launch new app

KRISTIAN MEIJER

XL TRAVEL and Travelport have teamed up to create a brand-new app that offers agents and clients a convenient communication tool that will give travellers all the information they need before, during and after a trip.

XLGO will assist XL Travel clients across South Africa, with flexible itinerary management, duty of care, and travel assistance with real-time communications and flight updates.

"The provision of sophisticated mobile services in travel is no longer an option; it has become a necessity," says **Marco Ciocchetti**, ceo of the XL Travel Group.

"With this in mind, the launch of the XLGO app is the first step in our new mobile strategy, with additional mobile features and functionality to be regularly rolled out," adds Marco.

Aadil Esack, product and marketing manager of XL Travel, says the app is the first in the South African market that utilises Trip Assist, Travelport's mobile

technology that pulls client information directly from the PNR.

The app is then populated with the client's information as it is on the PNR, says Aadil.

XLGO was designed by the Travelport and XL teams and is engineered to be light on battery and data use and will not spam its users. It will only update with information that is relevant to the traveller.

"Apps like Uber have put people into taxis, who might have never otherwise considered it," says

Douglas Jewson, md of Travelport Africa. He adds that apps like XLGO will take away some of the fears associated with travelling, and as a result, will get more people travelling than before.

The app also utilises Travelport Engage, a flexible mobile messaging tool that delivers relevant and personalised travel content and information to each traveller. Other features include automatic itinerary updates, organised trip segments and real-time assistance either telephonically or through a chat



Be where it's app!

XL Travel and Travelport unveiled their brand-new app, XLGO, on Wednesday, May 10 at The Venue at Melrose Arch. The app aims to take the stress out of travelling. Here (from left) **Douglas Jewson**, md of Travelport Africa; **Robyn Christie**, gm of Travelport Southern Africa; and **Marco Ciocchetti**, ceo of the XL Travel Group, show off the XLGO app. Photo: Kristian Meijer

system (which will be introduced at a later date).

Robyn Christie, gm of Travelport Southern Africa, said: "In an increasingly smartphone-led communications world, we are committed to improving

customers' travel experiences with sophisticated mobile solutions that exploit the expertise and experience of Travelport Digital."

XLGO is available to download free from both the iOS App Store and Google Play store for Android. ■



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Location determines remuneration

Anton Marsh's first report on the *TNW* survey that explores agents' work conditions. From pay to educationals, from after-hours duty to what agents love and what they hate - it's all in the survey.

IT TAKES over 20 years for the average travel agent in South Africa to earn a basic salary over R20 000.

This is according to *TNW*'s Employment Conditions Survey, conducted in March this year.

The number of respondents who worked as consultants in travel agencies made up 772 of the 981 travel trade professionals who participated.

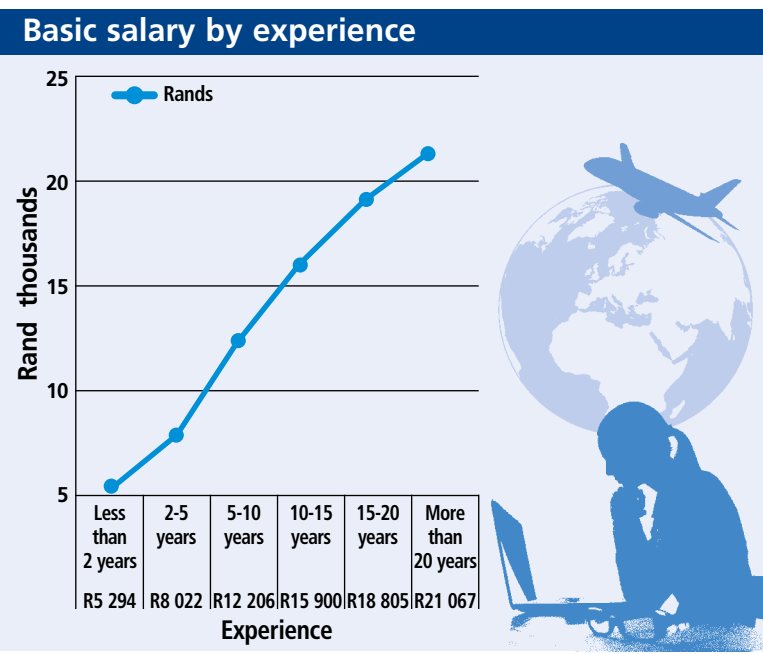
Of the 538 travel consultants who responded but did not hold a management position, 338 (63%) said they did not earn commission.

The average basic pay across the country for non-commission-earning agents with over 20 years' experience is R21 067.

The analysis shows, however, that remuneration in Gauteng and the Western Cape is far higher than the average.

Countrywide, travel agents with less than two years' experience are earning R5 294, rising to R8 022 for two to five years' experience.

The chart (right) represents how pay for travel agents who do not earn commission increases with experience.



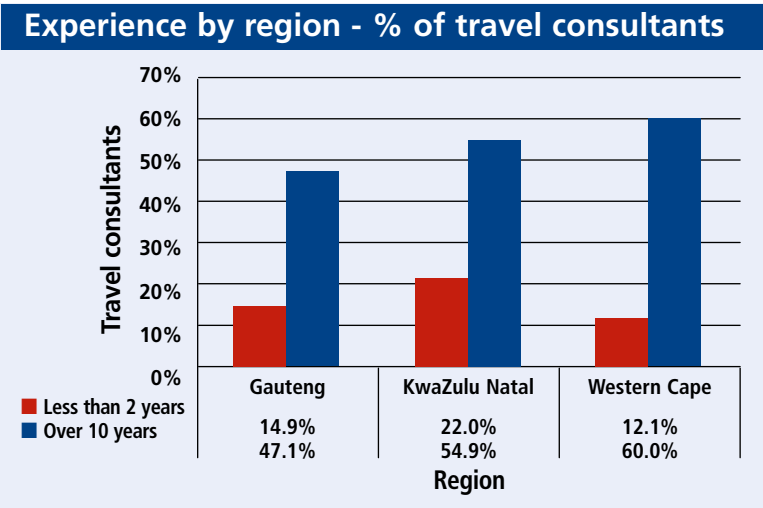
Lack of new entrants

Consultants in the Western Cape are by far the most experienced of the three busiest provinces, but the province also suffers from the most critical shortage of new entrants.

Non-commission-earning agents in Gauteng, with considerably less

experience than the Cape, earn a similar, slightly higher, basic salary.

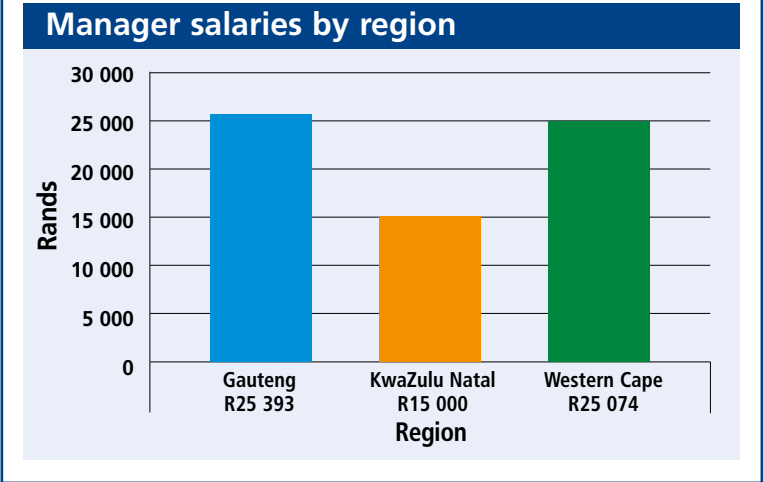
Only KZN has a healthy intake of new travel agents. 22% of KZN agents have less than two years experience. That percentage is 81% higher than Western Cape's 12,1%.



Consulting managers earn best in Gauteng

Consultants who also fulfil a managerial role earn two-thirds more in Gauteng and the Cape than their colleagues in KZN.

While managers in Gauteng and the Cape earn an average of R25 000, managers in KZN reported earnings of R15 000.



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TNW's Thirsty's

THIS month's Thirsty's was a blast! Cape Town agents flocked to the Southern Sun The Cullinan at the Foreshore on May 11. Guests mingled, laughed and generally just

had a good time. If you missed this one – don't despair, just make sure you join us at the next one in June in Johannesburg. For more information, email tnwthirstys@nowmedia.co.za. ■



Here's to a great night! Pictured (from left) are **Sharon Schierhout**, **Lucinda Tyler**, **Luanna Visagie** and **Tamsyn De Carvalho** of Club Travel.



Club Travel agents, back row, **Eric Yakaba** (left) and **Patrick Thene**; front, **Amanda Bakana** (left) and **Jodie Greyer** keep it playful.

Can you say selfie?
Pictured are
Wally Gaynor (left) and
Marcos Brandao of
Club Travel with **TNW's**
Taryn Nightingale.



Megan van Stade and **Zita Africa** of Travel With Flair give us a smile.



(From left) **Allistair Snyders** of Travelstart, **Bianca Jones** of Travel Counsellors and **Onai Sandi** of Travelstart get cosy.



Lovely ladies, **Vanesse Machill** of Stage and Screen Travel Services and **Prineta Hufkie** of Togo Sun pose for the camera.



Cheers! From left: **Edwardine Adams** and **Karen Darvel** of Travel With Flair and **Jaya Ranchod** of eTravel enjoy a drink.



Shelley Daniels (left) of Beachcomber Tours, **Natasha Schmidt** of **TNW** and **Claire Butterfield** of WorkTripper make a pretty picture. Photos: Taryn Nightingale

Bidvest and Hollard now on Amadeus

AGENTS can now issue Bidvest and Hollard travel insurance while booking in the Amadeus Selling Platform and Sell Connect. Because insurance is now an integral part of the Amadeus Selling Platform, agents are able to add an insurance policy as a result of Amadeus's partnership with global insurance aggregator, Hepstar. Insurance policies can be added to a flight booking without having to leave the booking flow. What's more, traveller and trip details are automatically pre-populated and insurance bookings are fully integrated into the PNR and back office system. This helps save time and effort and also allows for easy reporting and after-sales service.

"Ancillary sales like insurance present a terrific opportunity for agents to generate additional revenue, while simultaneously responding to their clients' needs by offering them the product they need at the time they need it," says **Jannine Adams**, senior marketing manager of Amadeus Southern Africa.

Claudia Snyman, chief operating officer of Hepstar, adds that the partnership ensures all its insurance providers gain exposure to a huge network of travel agents throughout the continent. ■

Travel heavyweights bag Pure Sport and Pure Skiing

TOURVEST Destination Management (TDM) formally acquired Pure Sport and Pure Skiing on May 8.

Pure Sport and Pure Skiing is an outbound business that provides sporting and skiing enthusiasts with travel services, both locally and internationally.

Tourvest Destination Management is a Destination Marketing Company that handles accommodation. Gm of Pure Sport/ Pure Skiing, **Greg Taylor**, commenting on the acquisition said: "In an ever-changing travel environment this acquisition will add tremendous value in providing the best possible product at the best possible price to the traveller and we look forward to exciting times ahead."

Bryan Coetzee, director of TDM sports travel division, which includes Team Sports Travel and SA Rugby Travel, said there were no changes to staff or products, thus enabling a seamless transition.

"The acquisition brings together a solid and reputable sports travel business built over 20 years, together with the resources and infrastructure that TDM offers. We look forward to growing the brand, product range and remaining relevant to our customers' ever-changing requirements."

"This new business brings diversity to the TDM sports travel division in its ski operations, FIT clientele and a Johannesburg footprint, which is key to the growth strategy of TDM sports travel," said TDM ceo, **Martin Wiest**. ■

Joburg-Tehran route still a long way off

KRISTIAN MEIJER

DESPITE already applying for a Foreign Operator's Permit (FOP) (see *TNW* August 31, 2016), Iranian-based airline, Mahan Air, says it has no plans to serve the Tehran-Johannesburg route any time soon, according to the airline's director of Global Marketing, **Hossein Hosseini**.

Department of Transport spokesperson, **Motlatsi Lebea**, says Mahan Air's FOP enquiry has been finalised

by the department, and the application has been handed over to the Department of Home Affairs.

"What is outstanding, though, is the airline's compliance with the Advance Passenger Processing Certificate (APPC), which is being addressed by the DHA," says Motlatsi. "The FOP will be approved as soon as Mahan Air is in compliance with the APPC."

Though Motlatsi says Mahan Air will be allowed to operate as soon as it receives the FOP, Hossein says the airline won't fly between OR Tambo and Tehran's Imam Khomeini International Airport for at least the next three years. ■

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SA cruisers beat other markets on spend

TARYN NIGHTINGALE

SOUTH Africans on average spend more on cruising per day than other markets.

This is according to **Natalya Bentas**, regional sales manager IRs-Europe, Middle East, Africa for Royal Caribbean International, Celebrity Cruises and Azamara Club Cruises. Natalya was visiting South Africa to meet agents associated with Cruises International to see where the growth opportunities are for the SA market.

“There is massive growth potential for the SA and African markets.”

“There is massive growth potential for the SA and African markets,” says Natalya. Not only do South Africans spend more per day than the other 15 markets (including the US) that we sell the Royal Caribbean International, Celebrity Cruises and Azamara Club Cruises brands to, but they also tend to book higher cabin categories, she says.

The SA market is ranked second

for overall revenue generated for the three brands for 2017 so far, says Natalya.

“It’s quite surprising, as you wouldn’t expect this, especially with our exchange rate,” says **Thaybz Khan**, contemporary brand manager of Cruises International.

The positive figures are also an indication of how well Cruises International is performing, says Natalya. It has shown a 30% year-on-year growth for the three brands. “The current number of forward bookings is 50% more than the same time last year,” says Thaybz.

“This is largely because SA is not a last-minute booking market,” says Natalya. This is beneficial to the consumer, travel agent and cruise brands. Travel agents then have the opportunity to properly educate their clients on the brand, thus making it more likely that the traveller will get the type of holiday they want. For the cruise company it means more business booked sooner. “Booking earlier also gives the client the opportunity to get excited about their holiday,” she says. ■

Aussie visa price hike in the pipeline

THE prices of all Australian visas are set to increase from July 1.

Australia’s Treasurer, **Scott Morrison**, announced in his budget speech that, in future, all visa fees would be indexed in line with inflation.

Student visa primary applicants will now pay AU\$560 (R5 472) instead of AU\$550 (R5 375). A partner visa (for non-Australians who are married to an Australian citizen) will jump from AU\$6 865 (R67 090) to AU\$7 000 (R68 407). Adult dependant

applicants will now pay AU\$420 (R4 104), up from AU\$410 (R4 007).

“Visa fees will be indexed in line with inflation.”

Visitor visas for tourists to Australia are set to increase from AU\$340 (R3 322) to AU\$345 (R3 371), while visas for frequent travellers and fast-track business visitors are set to increase from AU\$1 000 (R9 772) to AU\$1 020 (R9 966). ■

To the point



Victoria Falls River Lodge in Zimbabwe will launch the Exclusive Island Lodge on August 1. The lodge will offer three treehouse suites on the private Kandahar Island and each will consist of a bedroom, bathroom, an open-plan lounge, dining area and panoramic river views. Each suite has a private plunge pool. Bathrooms have a free-standing bath and an indoor and outdoor shower. The suites are on raised wooden decks where elevated walkways connect the suites and main areas. The lodge offers sunrise and sunset cruises as well as morning and evening game drives. As optional extras guests can enjoy spa treatments, canoe or fishing safaris and guided walks with qualified guides in the Zambezi National Park. The island is accessed by boat.



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SA Travel Counsellors and other industry players gathered for the annual Travel Counsellors conference at the Belmond Mount Nelson Hotel in Cape Town from May 5-7. Candice May reports.

Leisure agents take charge of packaging

LEISURE travel agents are relying less on tour operators and designing their own packages to significantly increase their margins.

Steve Byrne, group md of Travel Counsellors, explains that, whereas agents traditionally acted as the intermediary in the booking chain in the past, they now realise they can function as tour operators by putting in a bit more time and effort. He says agents can increase their margins and strengthen their customer relationships because they have more control of ensuring the best product at a good price. Steve adds that close customer relationships are the key to long-term success.

Travel Counsellor **Roshnee Govender**, who won the award for best margins of 2016 at the conference, achieved a profit margin

of 14,5% in 2016 by designing packages for her leisure clients.

She says it takes less time than going through a tour operator. "Sometimes you spend so much time on the phone to a tour operator holding for quotes. Instead, you could be looking for quotes for flights, accommodation and car rentals yourself."

Mladen Lukic, gm of Travel Counsellors South Africa, believes relationships between agents and tour operators will continue to evolve for as long as agents focus on giving their clients the best package options. "While relationships with certain tour operators will strengthen, others will weaken," he says. That said, Mladen predicts that tour operators will not be completely cut out of the chain in the future.



Leaders of the pack

TC business leaders from the headquarters in Manchester joined the South African team at the conference. Pictured (from left) are **Steve Byrne**, group md; **Mladen Lukic**, gm of TC South Africa; **Waseem Haq**, digital strategy and innovation director; and **Jim Eastwood**, global sales director.

Tech-savvy TMCs in demand

SUPPLIERS are more interested in partnering with TMCs – including ITCs – that invest in the relevant technology to stay on top of growing trends.

Waseem Haq, digital strategy and innovation director of Travel Counsellors, says suppliers such as airlines, hotels and car-rental companies have all become more tech savvy by offering their own direct booking channels. Therefore, suppliers are able to engage better and maintain stronger relationships with TMCs that are as up to date with technology. In order to keep up with trends, Travel Counsellors has

injected R12m into its myTC mobile app.

The app is used by clients and agents to make and manage bookings and includes features such as an enquiries section to request and view quotes.

While this may seem like a large sum of money to invest in an app, **Steve Byrne**, of Travel Counsellors, says it shows suppliers that the company is dedicated to matching their technological strategy.

He adds that investing in technology has the knock-on effect of strengthening relationships between agents and clients. ■

Birthday bash!



Travel Counsellors South Africa celebrated its tenth birthday at Gold Restaurant where guests were treated to traditional African cuisine and exciting live acts. Pictured next to the birthday cake are (from left) **Michelle Bullmore**, marketing and recruitment manager of Travel Counsellors South Africa, and **Karen Morris**, operations director of Travel Counsellors.

Bleisure travel on the rise

APPROXIMATELY five in every 10 corporate clients (50%) are incorporating leisure into their business trips, which is making agents extra money, TCs report. Agents agree the figure is an increase in bleisure bookings compared with past years.

Steve Byrne of Travel Counsellors feels the primary reason for the increase in requests for bleisure travel is because more agents are promoting the idea. He adds that, while a client may not buy into it for the first two or three trips, if the agent keeps reminding them, they eventually will – and then they won't stop.

Siobhan Nel, winner of the Best Travel Counsellor 2016 award, says bleisure does not only turn inconvenient trips into pleasurable stays – it can also benefit a company financially if the traveller

is willing to compromise. She uses the example of a trip to Paris: "If the traveller is willing, they can fly premium economy for R25 000 and spend two extra nights in a hotel for R4 000 to experience the city, which is more exciting and cheaper than flying business class for R40 000 solely for the business trip. Whether this is allowed will depend on the company's travel policy."

Another way agents have boosted their bleisure clientele is by suggesting they visit popular bucket-list cities in the same country as their business trip. **Siobhan** recently suggested to a client who flew to Chicago via JFK that he spend two nights in New York before the business trip "He was the only one at his meeting who didn't have a long flight and just one night to acclimatise. He loved the idea!"



And the winner is...

Several prestigious awards were handed out to the best Travel Counsellors of 2016 after the gala dinner in The Ballroom at the Belmond Mount Nelson Hotel. Pictured with **Siobhan Nel**, winner of the Best Travel Counsellor 2016 award, are **Ian Keane** (left), operations manager and **Jim Eastwood**, global sales director. Photos: Candice May

Weddings Honeymoons

Often honeymoon clients' expectations aren't aligned with their budget. Linda Thompson finds out how agents can manage expectations and deliver memorable honeymoons on a shoestring.



Small budgets, big dreams

COUPLES spend ages planning their once-in-a-lifetime wedding, with the lion's share of the budget going to the big day. But the budget for the average couple's honeymoon, the time when they can relax and spend quality time together, ranges from just R5 000 to R15 000, according to a survey of 436 visitors at the recent Wedding Expo in Johannesburg.

Finding solutions to deliver on these seemingly impossibly tight budgets to make their dream honeymoon a

reality can be a challenge for agents.

Regardless of the destination selected, **Kyle Nel**, travel consultant, Flight Centre Killarney Mall, requests that clients book a honeymoon as soon as possible after confirming their wedding date as one way of stretching a budget.

"We are able to take bookings almost a year in advance, which is beneficial for clients, as our exchange rate is likely to be affected by downgrades and currency fluctuations, which can

dramatically increase prices."

Edwina Fletcher, owner of Just Honeymoons, says honest and open communication with clients is key in finding a solution. "I advise that we may have difficulty finding something suitable in a four-star category, but ask whether we could look at three-star or reduce the number of nights from seven to five. If the budget can be alleviated through an off-season booking, I often suggest doing a quick two- or three-night local getaway straight after the wedding

and then look at booking the proper honeymoon out of season."

The innovative solution of a honeymoon registry, which is offered by some travel agencies and tour operators, can also assist with making that dream honeymoon a reality, suggests Edwina.

Some travel agencies and tour operators offer a registry service where they collect, track, and apply contributions from the wedding guests toward the honeymoon expenses.

Destination choice impacts price

Despite having tight budgets, South African couples have their hearts set on international destinations, with island honeymoons remaining a firm favourite, particularly Mauritius and Zanzibar. European cities are also preferred out-of-country locations, according to the survey.

It is possible to meet the dream of a tropical island holiday in destinations other than the usual choices. Flight Centre Killarney Mall's **Kyle Nel** says he helps couples to understand the potential price points

of Mauritius before suggesting other options. For example, Bali can be more cost effective than Mauritius and better suited to an adventurous couple seeking activities such as surfing, water tubing, rock climbing and volcano trekking. Senior leisure manager at Thompsons Holidays, **Wendy Schulze**, also suggests Zanzibar, Thailand and the Far East as great value-for-money island experiences, depending on what the couple want from their honeymoon.

Cruises are also growing in

popularity as they offer value for money in an all-inclusive 'resort-style' honeymoon. Development Promotions marketing executive, **Christine Lucas**, says: "A cruise compares to an island resort as, not only do you experience different islands every day, depending on your selected itinerary, but you also have the ease of unpacking just once and are exposed to fine dining at its best on board. There is a cruise line to suit every couple's, style and budget."

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TNW8148SD

Insider tips for destination weddings

MAURITIUS is a popular choice with South Africans for their wedding and, in some cases, it's left to the agent to arrange all the details to make sure the big day goes off without a hitch.

Warren Grisselle, future business leader for the Flight Centre Travel Group in South Africa, has booked at least two destination weddings in the past four years. His colleague, **Zethu Thwala**, travel expert at Flight Centre Sandton, has booked four weddings in five years for adventurous couples who were striving to create a different celebration. Recently, Zethu booked a December destination wedding for 15 guests at Sugar Beach followed by a honeymoon at La Pirogue.

Warren says an advantage of an out-of-country destination wedding is the opportunity to have all the guests together for more than just one day, prolonging the festivities and quality time. Destination weddings also have the added convenience of being able to combine the wedding and honeymoon into one. The couple usually have a resort in mind, but sometimes booking a destination wedding requires consultants to

have a clear understanding of the couple's vision to be able to present them with appropriate suggestions.

Two years ago, Warren received a request for a 100-guest wedding in Mauritius. It was a learning opportunity as it was his first destination wedding, and was made even more complicated because he received the request just three weeks ahead of the wedding. He had to arrange separate flights and airport transfers for the guests due to limited flight and accommodation availability. Transfers for the guests had to be arranged to Le Touessrok, the resort hosting the wedding, as well as return shuttles to their hotels following the event. Subsequent destination wedding bookings for Warren have been smaller with all the arrangements wrapped up within three days.

Both Zethu and Warren said that while these weddings were fun to book, there was still an element of risk as the agent could not be there on the day to ensure things went smoothly. There are also many factors beyond their control, such as the weather, which can be a problem



Destination weddings can be combined with the honeymoon.

Photo: Beachcomber Hotels

as these weddings typically take place outdoors.

Zethu recommends working with a reputable tour operator who has offices in South Africa to be able to follow up immediately should

any problems arise, particularly when there is a time difference. Another advantage of having a local tour operator is that there are no communication problems caused by a language barrier.

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Weddings & Honeymoons



Special honeymoon deals

Airlines and hotels in honeymoon destinations like Mauritius and Seychelles offer great extras for couples who have recently tied the knot.

ALEXIS Bekker, LUX* Resorts and Hotels head of sales and marketing for Africa, recommends that agents take advantage of out-of-season rates when possible. "We offer a fantastic discount of 70% on the land portion of the package for the bride, along with exclusive offerings to the couple, including free upgrades (subject to availability), sparkling wine, a romantic dinner for two on the beach, a five-course meal and special memorabilia."

Air Mauritius also offers special deals for travel outside of peak season through its Travelsmart solution. This includes 20% off the bride's flights, free allowance for golf bags, discounted tickets,

business-class lounge access in South Africa and the option of a last-minute upgrade to business class at a cost of R2 500pp on the A340 and R1 850pp on the A319 aircraft.

Joanne Visagie, sales and marketing manager of Beachcomber, confirms the financial benefits of flexibility of dates and booking in advance, which gives an early-booking honeymoon saving of 20%. "Honeymoons are a big market for us. It is one of the most memorable holidays of a lifetime, with honeymooners looking forward to an array of Beachcomber special privileges, including a 30% discount, daily lunch, welcome fruit and sparkling wine, amongst other items."

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AIR MAURITIUS

Thailand promotes wedding offering

THAILAND aims to become the hub for wedding and romantic travel in the ASEAN region and has launched several initiatives to target this lucrative segment.

Thailand's Minister of Tourism and Sports, **Kobkarn Wattanavarangkul**, said the wedding and honeymoon segment was one of the top generators of tourism revenue. In line with Thailand's plans to lure couples to tie the knot, more than 450 wedding planners from around the world participated in the fourth Annual Destination Wedding Planners (DWP) Congress 2017, hosted by the Tourism Authority of Thailand in Phuket earlier in the month.

The Minister added that the DWP Congress presented an opportunity to show



Thailand has plenty to offer for romantic weddings.

that Thailand had plenty to offer in terms of weddings and romance. "Our Thai hospitality and services can make any dream wedding even more memorable while our 'Amazing Thai Taste' is one of our strengths for a

wedding reception. We can offer various styles of food, from international cuisine to authentic Thai dishes. Also, there are many honeymoon packages designed to match the once-in-a-lifetime experience in Thailand."

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Weddings & Honeymoons

The Naked Agent

SCENARIO: A couple are planning their local honeymoon in September. The focus is on a relaxing and value-for-money

holiday, with plenty of options for fun activities. They enjoy bush and beach destinations and their budget is R20 000.

Strive for a personal connection

Bushscapes

Bushscapes' uncluttered website with its own thumbs-up/thumbs-down ratings for each lodge created a positive first impression, with a dedicated section for romantic getaways and honeymoons. I called the number given and spoke to **Liza-Marie Gordon**, who immediately put me at ease with her obvious interest in my request and her specific questions.

She listened to my scenario then asked more about us as a couple, our interests, budget, preferred dates, from where we would be travelling and if we had any particular properties in mind. She mentioned a few potential lodges that she would investigate. This included Thonga Beach Lodge, Kosi Forest Lodge as beach options and Leopard Mountain, Nambiti and Welgevonden. She said on the first call that she would get back to me within a timeframe of two days, which was helpful to manage my



Liza-Marie Gordon

expectations.

The regular communication from Liza-Marie was reassuring and included an email the morning after my call to update me that suggestions would be received by midday along with her availability over the approaching public holidays and short weeks in April. This helped me feel like a priority and was a timeframe that she delivered on with three, clearly laid out bush and beach options aligned to my request.

Her approach of only sending me the outlines of three options in the body of the email instead of as attachments was helpful and let me skip over unnecessary information if the lodge was not of interest.

She followed up to check that I had received the email and conveyed that other options were available should we be interested in lodges closer to Johannesburg.



WINNER

Romantic Retreats

The telephone numbers from the website went to voicemail and I left a message, with the agent returning my call within 10 minutes. She spent a good length of time on the phone with me discussing options and giving personal feedback from her own experience of going to the West Coast and made various suggestions. The personal feel continued when she outlined how packages could be tailored for me, with what was listed on the website simply a starting point. I appreciated that she had asked my

fiancé's name and also addressed him on the emails, which was a personal touch. She responded promptly with three options sent as attachments. The proposed itinerary was for Kalk Bay, outside Cape Town, the West Coast and Hermanus. While I could not fault the service, my only criticism was that what had been proposed was not the typical 'bush and beach' holiday someone embarking on a local honeymoon may expect.



Just Honeymoons

I contacted Just Honeymoons by calling the number on its website. I was quickly connected to one of their consultants who sounded warm and friendly and asked for my budget, dates and specific interests. Within a 24-hour turnaround time, I received an email with a six-night package for Springbok Lodge in the Nambiti Private Game Reserve and Protea Hotel Umhlanga. There wasn't a follow-up to check

whether I had received it or to ask if I needed additional options. The consultant did deliver on my request of a 'bush and beach' honeymoon that was only slightly over budget. Although only one option was provided, it felt comparatively slim and 'run of the mill' lacking the personal touch of the other agencies.

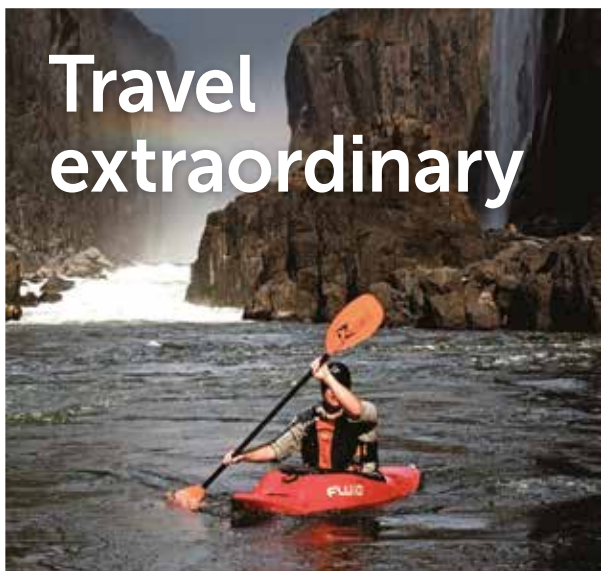


Liza-Marie's top tips for selling honeymoons

- Generally, for a local honeymoon, couples aim to get to their destination quickly to relax and unwind and do not want to spend a long time on the road. Ascertaining from where the couple will be travelling and how far they are willing to travel for their honeymoon are important.
- Give personal recommendations and know your product. Couples can feel overwhelmed with the large number of lodges available within South Africa.
- Provide fewer but more personalised options. People don't have time to read text-heavy quotes. Rather provide them with fewer choices that are more aligned to their needs than bombard them initially with too much info. A priority when booking honeymoons is to make the process as smooth as possible, as wedding planning is already an exciting and potentially stressful project.

Take note!

The purpose of the Naked Agent is to assess the experience from only a sales skills perspective and not the effectiveness of the travel agency. *TNW* believes that sales skills are increasingly important to travel agents and, in many cases, improvement in selling skills is the easiest way to increase the prosperity of the agency and its consultants. ■



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Turkish goes bowling

Turkish Airlines hosted its Cape Town bowling tournament on April 26, with 180 participants from different agencies competing for a range of gifts and the chance to take part in the grand final on May 13 in Istanbul. The winners of the Cape Town leg, the Travelstart team, flew to Turkey to compete, though they weren't the overall winners. Turkish Airlines says the aim of the tournament is to bring agencies together and help them build relationships. From left: Kenan Ince, director of Turkish Airlines Cape Town; Handre Oosthuizen, Nazmie Ismail and Arashaad Haron of Travelstart; and Renee Azel, regional marketing executive of Turkish Airlines Cape Town.

Totalstay sends lucky winner to Brazil

TOTALSTAY celebrated its first anniversary since replacing Exclusively Hotels as the only hotel booking website just for travel agents with a competition for a trip to Brazil. Agents had to find 'lucky luggage' hidden on the Totalstay website. **Nadine van Zyl** (right) of Pentravel was the lucky winner. "I couldn't believe it when I got the call to say I had won the trip. We've just returned and it



was amazing. We saw all the sights, Christ the Redeemer, Copacabana Beach, Iguazu Falls. It sounds like a cliché but it literally was the trip of a lifetime," Nadine says.



Fedhasa fundraiser

Fedhasa held its Cape annual golf day, a highlight on the association's calendar, at the Devonvale Golf and Wine Estate in Stellenbosch on March 30. More than 100 golfers attended and, besides the main sponsorship, 15 holes were privately sponsored. The money will be used to fund deserving hospitality students and trainees from Fedhasa Cape member establishment. With the R50 000 raised at the auction and the money raised through sponsorships, the Fedhasa Cape bursary fund now stands at R100 000. The winning team on the day was from Lagoon Beach Hotel. From left: **Jeff Rosenberg** (Fedhasa Cape acting chairman); the team from Lagoon Beach Hotel; and **Rema Wiese** (Fedhasa Cape executive officer).

UK company buys Disa

DISA Travel & Tours has sold its operations to UK-based travel retailer, Imagine Cruising, which will take over Disa's premises in Constantia Village in Cape Town from June 1. **Henry Sudwats**, md of Disa Travel & Tours, says the decision to sell was made after they had received an excellent offer for the store, and that it felt like the right time to move on. The agency said in a statement that all existing bookings would be attended to by an existing staff member.

Appointment

Julian Edmunds has been appointed chair of the African Travel and Tourism Association board from May 1. Julian succeeds **Ross Kennedy**. Julian is md of Coastal Aviation in Tanzania and has served on the Atta board for two years as Aviation and East African Director. He has experience in tour operating, marketing and managing in the UK, Zimbabwe, South Africa and for the last 10 years Tanzania. "I would like to thank **Ross Kennedy**, and vice chair, **Anita Powell**, for their many years of valuable service to the Atta board," said Julian.



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Big changes at BidTravel

TARYN NIGHTINGALE

SEVERAL major changes are happening at BidTravel: the consortium has a new ceo, it is moving house and has just completed a significant acquisition.

Effective April 1, Lidia Folli, coo of BidTravel and former cfo of Tourvest Travel Services, was appointed ceo of BidTravel. Previous ceo of almost 12 years, Allan Lunz, is now the deputy chairman of the consortium. Before that, Allan was md of CWT.

"Lidia's appointment will enable me to have a more strategic focus," says Allan, adding that his priorities will include greater attention to acquisitions, like the most recent Cruises International purchase. (For more on the Cruises story – see page 2.)

Currently, there are another two to three acquisitions on the horizon, he says.

Allan says, when choosing the right person to take the helm, it was integral to find someone who understood how to keep a business profitable. "It's one thing to understand that one plus one equals two, but for me, it was important that we had someone who knew how to make one and one equal three."

He says the "game has changed" and that he looks forward to how Lidia will make use of the technological opportunities that present themselves in today's industry, particularly her strategies around disruptors such as Uber and Airbnb.

"Coming into BidTravel as someone new with a fresh set of eyes has allowed us to view the business

differently," says Lidia. As ceo, she will take over the day-to-day responsibilities of managing BidTravel, including the mammoth task of moving the entire consortium to one building.

Each brand will have its own floor. Individual mds will still be responsible for each brand's identity and company goals, says Lidia. "We'll be moving 300 people within the next ten days." HRG Rennies and Harvey World head office will be the first of BidTravel's brands to move to 26 Girtton Road, Parktown. CWT is expected to complete its move by June 26 and BCD by July 22.

BidTravel will be running a competition for staff to name the building. The building's name is expected to be announced at the official opening in September. ■



TNW8146SD

SAA looks to expand in Africa

SAA wants to expand its African network by increasing its fifth-freedom flights. The airline currently has fifth-freedom rights to operate from Accra in Ghana to Washington.

In March, TNW reported that SAA's Ghana-US route could face the axe. At the time SAA spokesperson, Tlali Tlali, said SAA had not been notified of any changes.

But since then, Aaron Munetsi, SAA acting gm, commercial, was quoted in African Aerospace, saying SAA was in talks with Zimbabwe about Harare-London flights, with Zambia about Lusaka-London and with Uganda about Entebbe-London.

Aaron told TNW the Yamoussoukro Decision enabled any African airline to explore fifth freedom

opportunities on the continent as long as the other countries had also ratified the Decision.

The African Union's Vision 2063 also focuses on developing a Single African Sky where African airlines will have unlimited access to African aviation markets. Says Aaron: "Progress has been made, with 17 African countries signing up for the unlimited access programme. SAA is actively involved in discussions with African airlines to ensure they activate the agreements that will enable them to access these markets."

When and if new fifth-freedom routes will be launched is unclear. Says Aaron: "It is a work in progress and is guided by the progress made at government level."

In Parliament earlier this

month, SAA outlined plans to increase frequency and capacity into Africa.

Europe will also be a major focus for SAA in 2018, as well as China and the US. The plan will be to reduce the frequency or cancel loss-making routes, such as Brazil. A new or enhanced relationship with a European airline has also been identified as a possibility.

A possible merger between SAA, SAX and Mango remains on the cards. Finance Minister Malusi Gigaba was recently quoted as saying bids in response to the merger tender have been received and the government is now reviewing them with a view to SAA's long-term turnaround.

Treasury could not be reached for comment at the time of going to print. ■

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