

# TNW

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## lata issues – is there light at the end of the tunnel?

DORINE REINSTEIN

THE challenges South African travel agents face when dealing with lata's Amman hub may soon be resolved with the appointment of a new lata country manager "within weeks".

SA travel agents, who have struggled in dealing with lata's Amman hub to resolve technical defaults and amendments to bank guarantees, have grown increasingly frustrated with the situation. Many reached out to TNW late last year (see TNW December 4).

Asata ceo, **Otto de Vries**, said at the association's

regional meeting in Johannesburg that headway had been made in talks with lata. "Part of the way forward will be the first of regular teleconferences to take

**"Issues regarding the Amman hub will now be raised at the next PAPGJC meeting to be held in Geneva at the end of March."**

place between Asata and the Amman hub. It has also been agreed that issues regarding the Amman hub will now be raised at the next PAPGJC

meeting to be held in Geneva at the end of March."

Spokesperson for lata, **Chris Goater**, told TNW that lata's regional vp for Africa and the Middle East, **Hussein Dabbas**, would be travelling to Johannesburg in early March to meet with Asata and introduce the new vp for Africa, **Raphael Kuuchi**.

He added that the appointment of a new country manager for South Africa was also on the cards in the coming weeks. Chris warned, however: "The process is still ongoing. I know that the aim is to appoint someone soon but not at the expense of getting the right person in." ■

## Embattled SAA mulls stake in floundering airline

TESSA REED

SAA is considering buying a stake in Senegal Airlines, SAA spokesperson, **Tlali Tlali**, has confirmed.

"We have been approached by the Senegalese authorities and an offer was presented to us. The matter is currently under consideration and no decision has been made," he said.

While Tlali said he could not discuss any details at this stage, *Bloomberg* reported that Senegal had received bids for the purchase of at least 30% of its national carrier.

Reporting the airline's financial results last week, SAA Group ceo, **Monwabisi Kalawe**, said the airline was looking

to establish a West African hub. According to Tlali, Nigeria, Senegal and Ghana are the countries under consideration.

Transport economist, **Joachim Vermooten**, suggested that SAA should focus on its own restructuring for the time being.

Joachim said while it was difficult to assess the investment, given that its size and prospects had not been disclosed, from a commercial perspective the conditions in Senegal did not match those in SA. "SAA does not have a model it can export to Senegal that would not require considerable investment." Joachim added that consideration should

To page 2

**Ready to pose with a rose?**

Inside this issue of *TNW* you will find an Avis Club Red loose insert. Follow the directions, build your red rose, take your 'selfie' and send it in and you could be the winner of Avis Club Red roses to the value of R5 000. Pictured here (from left) showing you how it's done are Avis's **Kathy Venner** (key accounts manager: travel sales); **Nathalie Pretorius** (travel sales co-ordinator); and **Cynthia Dicks** (key account manager: travel sales). Photos: Shannon Van Zyl

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To the point



Kulula.com has created a dedicated agents' website, which is geared to keep agents up to date on the important information they need every day. The site includes handy links to pages such as FAQs and an overview of the new ADM policy that has just come into effect. The site also has links to kulula's Twitter and Facebook pages.

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Happy Chinese New Year!

Wendy Wu Tours is kicking off the Year of the Horse with three 11- or 15-day group departure tours priced from R29 255 to R39 070pps visiting Shanghai, Guilin, Yangshuo, Wuzhen, Xian and Beijing. Toasting the new year are Wendy Wu Tours' Alet Steyn (business development manager) and sales executive, Zian Vermeulen. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

LCC needs agents!

DORINE REINSTEIN

**R**YANAIR has done a U-turn by announcing it is in active negotiations with GDS suppliers and will be making its fares available on the GDS from mid-2014. In July the airline stated that, although it would like to develop its relationship to work more closely with agents, it would not consider operating on the GDS system.

Ceo, **Michael O'Leary**, was quoted in the media as saying: "In the old days a travel agent used to charge us about 10% commission, the GDS would take another 10%. Twenty percent of our revenue was gone for some notion of distribution service. The Internet now provides that for nothing."

Michael said negotiations with the GDS suppliers came

as a direct result of the airline's attempt to attract the flourishing market of group and business travel with the airline's new Groups and Corporate Travel service. He said the business travel sector could help Ryanair achieve passenger growth of over 110 million passengers by 2019. However, without the help of travel agents, this market could prove to be too hard to penetrate.

South African travel agents have welcomed the announcement saying it will offer more choices to their clients. **Kim Kral**, operations manager of FlightSite, says: "We'd certainly offer Ryanair as an option. I think it is a positive step for Ryanair to be on the GDS as it makes bookings easier for us to manage as far as schedule changes, etcetera, go."

UK travel agents, though, are sceptical. The Guild of Travel Management Companies (GTMC) in the UK was quoted in local newspapers as saying Ryanair still had more work to do. GTMC's ceo, **Paul Wait**, said: "Ryanair's biggest job is convincing the GTMC's members that it is more than losses that are forcing it to address the business travel sector. We need to see and feel that they want to be a strong partner to the community, are engaged in our needs and understand our concerns. Based on the announcements made to date, Ryanair is making headway in the right direction but we will remain unconvinced until it commits to investing in the products and services required by both travel managers and the business travellers themselves." ■

SAA resumes direct flights to New York

SAA will resume daily direct flights between Johannesburg and New York on March 9, three weeks ahead of the original planned schedule. The JFK-JNB sector has been operating as a direct

service but the JNB-JFK sector currently stops in Dakar, Senegal for refuelling. The non-stop flight is timed to land in New York in the early morning, allowing for easy connections to points in

North America: JNB-JFK: SA203 departs at 20h25 and arrives at 06h40 next day; JFK-JNB: SA204 departs at 11h15 and arrives at 08h00 next day. ■

Embattled SAA

From page 1

be given to whether South African taxpayers should be involved in such an investment and whether there would be benefits to them.

Joachim pointed out that with a 30% stake, SAA would not have management control

of the airline. "As a minority shareholder in any business, you are under the control of the majority shareholder," he said, adding that the minority shareholder would need to be comfortable with its business plan and its viability. Senegal Airlines has a fleet

of four aircraft – three Airbus A320s and an ATR 72-200. It offers flights to 15 cities in West African countries including Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Niger, Mali, Benin and Gambia, with flights to Belgium through a codeshare with Brussels Airlines. ■





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# It's business as usual for Qantas in SA

MAX MARX

THERE are no indications that Qantas's South African route will be affected come February 27, when the airline announces its half-year financial results and provides further details of its cost-cutting measures and structural review.

Qantas announced on December 5 that it expected to report a pre-tax half-year loss of between A\$250m (R2,38bn) and A\$300mn (R2,85bn) for the six months ending December 31, following deteriorating trading conditions. At the time, Qantas ceo, **Alan Joyce**, announced that the airline would accelerate its cost reduction strategy across all areas of business with the aim of achieving A\$2bn (R19bn) in cost savings over a three-year period.

Qantas regional manager for Africa, **Michi Messner**, said she did not foresee any changes on the airline's South Africa route – either in terms of frequencies or seat capacity. "It is an important route for Qantas from a VFR, corporate and leisure point of view."

She added that Qantas foresaw moderate growth on the route to the end of the 2013/2014 financial year although key challenges that remained were the sluggish economy, the high rate of exchange and the perception among the South African market that Australia was an expensive destination. Sales and load factors in the six months to December 31 were pretty much on a par with those of July-December 2012 and, in some instances, slightly higher.

A quick survey among South African travel agents has revealed that Qantas's financial woes and challenges have had no impact on their businesses.

**Sean Hough**, ceo of Pentravel, says: "Our relationship is stronger than ever. We're getting all the same support from the airline that we always have and we're selling the Qantas product furiously."

**Claude Vankeirsbilck**, Tourvest Travel Services chief sales and marketing officer, agrees: "There have been no issues at this stage, although generally when things like this happen there can be an impact down the line. If Qantas decides through these cost-cutting measures to withdraw the South African route or change its operational structure in South Africa in a way that it wouldn't be able to service the trade, then we would feel the impact."

As part of Qantas's cost-cutting measures, the partial sale of key assets is being put on the table. The Australian press and analysts speculate that this asset sale could include a partial or full sale of the Qantas Frequent Flyer programme, which has nearly 10 million members and is a good income generator for the airline. It is believed that the sale of Qantas Frequent Flyer could generate between A\$1,5bn (R14,29bn) and A\$2,5bn (R23,8bn) for Qantas and would be the easiest way for the airline to stem its financial woes. However, some argue that it would be a bad move for Qantas to sell off the programme because of the profits it generates. ■

## Preseat on LH and OS through Amadeus

TRAVEL agents using Amadeus are now able to book advance seat reservations in Lufthansa and Austrian Airlines economy class for travellers on domestic and European routes. The airlines have signed an agreement with Amadeus that enables agents to make use of Amadeus Airline Ancillary Services.

Agents will also be able to purchase extra-leg-room and emergency-exit seats for passengers on both continental and intercontinental routes. This will incur a fee, which is dependent on the seat booked. Passengers not choosing to pre-book seats will only be able to select their seat at check-in. ■

## Westin to debut in Mauritius

STARWOOD Hotels & Resorts Worldwide will open the Westin Turtle Bay Resort & Spa in Mauritius in time for spring.

The resort, which will fall under its Westin Hotels & Resorts brand, will be situated in Turtle Bay, on the north-west coast of Mauritius. The resort will comprise 190 guest rooms, including 38 suites, five dining venues, a pool

restaurant and bar, as well as a lobby lounge. A spa will offer treatments dedicated to well-being and two swimming pools and an equipped gym, steam rooms, saunas and Jacuzzis will be at guests' disposal.

Starwood currently operates two resorts in Mauritius – The St. Regis Mauritius and Le Méridien Ile Maurice. ■



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## SI restructuring – jobs on the line

SUN International has announced that about 1 700 positions in its South African operations might be affected by a possible restructuring of the business.

This is based on an initial assessment, which is still subject to a consultation process. The company has commenced the process, in line with the Labour Relations Act, with organised labour and other relevant stakeholders.

"In the current environment

we have no choice but to propose the restructuring of the business," said Sun International ceo, **Graeme Stephens**. "Retrenchments, if applicable, would be a last resort for us and certainly not a decision that would be taken lightly." The announcement follows an extensive review of its operations in South Africa, which focused on increasing efficiency and productivity and also improving revenues and profitability.

The company said it was experiencing increasing pressure on revenues along with growing operating costs. Over the past six years, revenue from the group's SA operations has increased by 17% while EBITDA declined by 2%. The company attributed this to escalating costs, pointing out that over the same period, employee costs had risen by approximately 39%, while the minimum wage had increased 47%. ■

## PEAK Adventure appoints new GSA

TRAVEL Vision has been appointed gsa for the PEAK Adventure Travel Group, the largest adventure travel company in the world. Travel Vision has been the gsa for Exodus for a number of years and has now expanded to include Trek America and Grand American Adventures, the other two brands in the PEAK group. Adventure travel is one of the fastest growing travel sectors worldwide.

"We are confident this trend

will take on here soon," says **Sarah Whiteside**, Travel Vision sales and marketing manager. "Travellers worldwide are becoming more sophisticated and adventure travel fulfils their needs by providing unique experiences, easy access to less developed tourism markets, cultural immersion and wildlife encounters in a sustainable and responsible manner. Health-conscious travellers can now also book trips that involve activities

such as walking, cycling, kayaking, cross-country skiing, dog-sledding and ice-climbing."

Trek America offers 50 unique itineraries for the 18-38 age group. Tours are three to eight days in length in the US, Canada, Alaska and Central America. Grand American Adventures' 60 itineraries offer clients spectacular natural sights, challenging and rewarding activities and cultural and wildlife encounters. ■

### DoubleTree by Hilton opens in Saudi Arabia

HILTON Worldwide has opened the first DoubleTree by Hilton hotel in Saudi Arabia. The 153-room DoubleTree by Hilton Dhahran is situated in Al Khobar in Eastern Province. The hotel has a free 24-hour business centre and caters for both business and leisure travellers. It is located in the heart of the business and commercial district of the city, close to Al Khobar Corniche, shopping malls and a new hi-tech petrol museum. Dhahran is one of the older Saudi port cities on the coast of the Arabian Gulf and is home to most of Saudi Arabia's vast oil reserves.

### New child policy at Lake Elmenteita Serena

SERENA Hotels has advised that Lake Elmenteita Serena Camp in Kenya will no longer accept guests younger than six years old. "The camp is a perfect choice for couples and newlyweds and is one of the few camps that offer night-time safari drives," says **Karin Sieberhagen**, sales and marketing manager of Serena Hotels in Johannesburg. Featuring 24 large custom-made canvas tents, the camp is an intimate and exclusive resort.

### African Insignia expands portfolio

TWO Durban properties have joined the African Insignia Hotels portfolio – the Benjamin Hotel in Florida Road and The Concierge Boutique Bungalows in St Mary's Avenue, Morningside. The Concierge Boutique Bungalows are built on the site of eight heritage-listed buildings and retain the 1920s façade of the original buildings. The interiors have a distinctive quirky style that is echoed in the gardens. The property was recently awarded the TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence. The Benjamin Hotel is also located in one of Durban's historic buildings. The hotel retains the charm of yesteryear and facilities include a small conference room.



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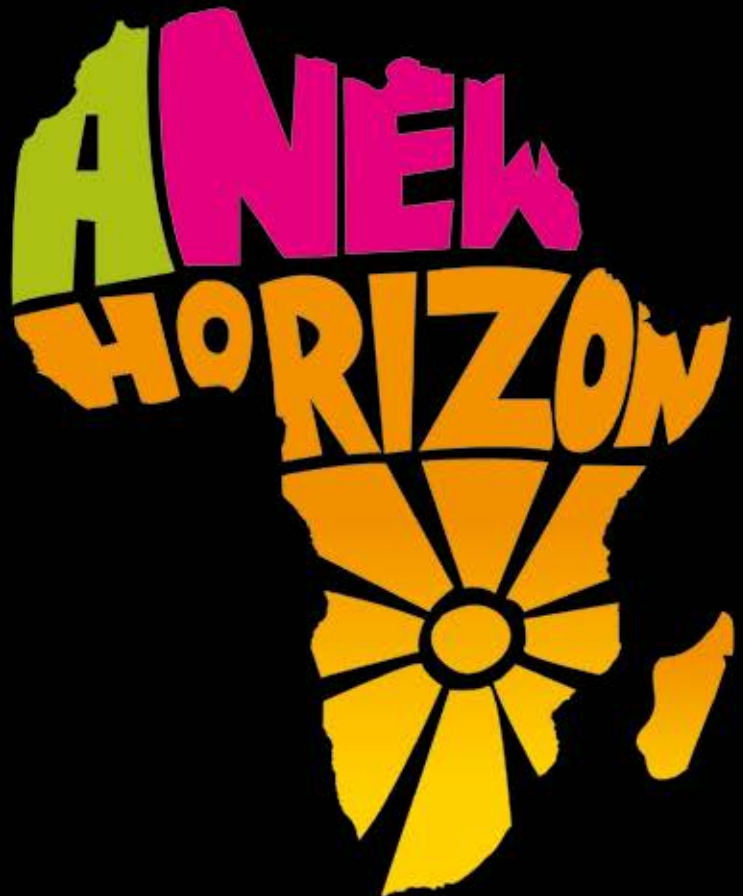
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# Weak rand hits QM2 bookings

HILKA BIRNS

**W**HITESTAR Cruise & Travel's sales of this year's RMS *Queen Mary 2* cruises from Cape Town to Sydney have taken a more than 40% knock due to the rand's decline against the British pound and the impact on the market of new competitor, Imagine Cruising.

The Cunard flagship called at Cape Town on January 27/28 as part of its annual world voyage, marking the end of an 18-night sector between Southampton and Cape Town and the start of the 22-night sector to Sydney, calling at Durban, Mauritius, Perth and

Melbourne. Whitestar's cruises on the SA/Australia leg are priced between R20 625 and R28 065pps.

Whitestar Cruise & Travel partner, **Paul Clarke**, says about 700 of the 1 000 passengers who embarked at Cape Town were SA clients. However, Whitestar this year managed to sell only about 400 cruises compared with 700 last year. He blames this mainly on the currency fall.

However, the entrance into the local market in December 2012 of UK's Imagine Cruising clearly has had an impact as well. While the company declines to go on record regarding passenger numbers,

md, **Robin Deller**, says: "We have had huge success with Cunard in 2013 by finding additional routes to market and providing the consumer with a fully packaged cruise offering priced in local currency to establish the value that cruising has over a land-based holiday. All packages are tailored to suit the individual needs to encompass air, land and sea to provide them with their own unique experience."

Meanwhile, Whitestar owner, **Carol McCarthy**, advises that discounted fares for cruise sectors in regional waters can be negotiated and advises agents to contact her in this regard. ■

# Qatar Airways launches online visa system

DORINE REINSTEIN

**QATAR** Airways has introduced a new online system that allows passengers of the airline, including South Africans, to apply online for tourist visas to Qatar.

The process takes about 10 days and the cost is US\$55 (R613) per person. The option to fast track the application is available at a cost of US\$120 (R1 336) per person and takes approximately seven days to process.

Only one-month single-entry tourist visas are available and the visa must be used within 60 days of the date of issue. The validity and the visa period cannot be extended.

The service can be accessed from the airline's website. ■

# AirHeads



A snapshot of the week's airline news

## SAX increases services to PLZ and ELS

**SA EXPRESS** has increased flights between Johannesburg and East London from nine to 20 a week, and on the Johannesburg-Port Elizabeth route from 13 to 18 flights a week. The airline has also made the following changes to its schedule. SA1403 now departs JNB at 08h30 and arrives in ELS at 10h00 from Monday to Friday. SA1404 now departs East London at 10h30, arriving in Johannesburg at 12h10 on the same days.

## EK – baggage allowance changes

**EMIRATES** will include golf clubs in passengers' free baggage allowance from March 1 and has also increased excess baggage charges on routes where the weight concept is applied. The increase applies to all sales and travel with immediate effect. Excess baggage purchased prior to January 15 will be honoured at the pre-purchased level. For passengers carrying golf clubs and who have tickets issued on or after March 1, the weight of the golf clubs will be included in the free baggage allowance and excess baggage charges will be incurred if it is overweight. For tickets issued prior to March 1, passengers can carry a set of golf clubs and a pair of golf shoes, free of charge.

## Ethiad Regional launches in Switzerland

**ETHIAD** Regional, the Swiss-based regional airline, has launched, providing improved regional and international connections to an expanded network of 34 destinations in Europe. Established in partnership with Etihad, the airline is operated by Switzerland's Darwin Airline, which is headquartered in Lugano with a major hub in Geneva. The full story appeared in *eTNW* on November 19.

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# Customise

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Verb

past tense: **customised**; past participle: **customised**

1. modify (something) to suit a particular individual or task.  
“training can be customized to the developing needs of your consultants”
2. make to specifications; “I had this training custom-made for me”
3. make according to requirements; “training provided when I needed it”



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# Singapore

Photo: CAG

While Singapore plays a key role as a hub for Asia, it is also seeing an increase in interest as a destination from South African travellers. By Chana Boucher

## Changi 'partners' with airlines

**F**OR a significant number of travellers to Asia, a visit to the continent starts in Singapore, either in transit at Changi Airport or for a night or two as a stopover.

Central to driving air traffic into and out of Singapore is the airport, which many would say is unlike any other in the world. While other airports continue to clash with airlines over high prices, Changi has a unique approach in that it 'partners' with the airlines operating flights into and out of Singapore, offering incentives to further the growth of all parties.

According to a Changi Airport Group (CAG) spokesperson, the airport values this partnership with all airlines as they are the enablers of the air hub. "Our goal is to work closely with our airline partners to bring about win-win growth for both the airlines and Changi Airport. CAG adopts a customised approach

in our partnership with airlines. Incentive programmes and joint collaborations with airline partners are tailored according to the individual airline's business model and needs," she says.

An example is the Changi Airport Growth Initiative, an incentive package that encourages airlines to start new routes or increase flight frequencies to existing destinations.

In 2013, the airport, which is among the five busiest international airports in the world, handled 53,7m passengers and 343 800 landings and take-offs. As of January 1, 2014, Changi handles more than 6 900 weekly scheduled flights with more than 100 airlines connecting it to 280 cities in some 60 countries.

According to the spokesperson, South Africa is an important market for the airport and is expected

to increase in size. "Point-to-point traffic between South Africa and south-east Asia has grown steadily over the past five years. Almost 300 000 passengers travelled between these two regions in the 12 months ending November 2013, an increase of about 34% since 2009," she says.

**Alvin Seah**, Singapore Airlines gm, Central and Southern Africa, says: "Working with the Changi Airport Group to provide a good transit and stopover service is key to enabling us to promote Singapore as a hub for travel to Asia Pacific destinations." He says the airline caters for passengers travelling to Singapore as well as those travelling into Asia and Australia or New Zealand.

Although currently only about 40% of the airline's passengers are bound for Singapore, Alvin says Singapore is a growing destination for both corporate



**Alet Steyn**

and leisure travel. "The city state is continuously re-inventing itself to provide new experiences for both the corporate and leisure traveller."

**Alet Steyn**, business development manager at Wendy Wu Tours, says Singapore is mainly offered as a stopover destination en route to Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar or China. "We make use of Singapore Airlines, so most clients

see this as an opportunity to add Singapore on at the beginning or end of a tour as a stopover destination, thus adding another country to their holiday," she explains.

Wendy Wu offers various short stopovers that include visits to Merlion Park, the National Orchid Garden, Little India, Singapore Flyer and Gardens by the Bay. There is also a tour to Sentosa Island, which houses south-east Asia's first Universal Studios Theme Park and the world's largest marine life park.

Alvin says South Africa's outbound market has a lot of potential as travellers keep discovering more off-the-beaten-path destinations in Asia. The increasing size of the middle class is also an indicator of future growth. "Despite the short-term challenge of a depreciating rand, the market has high potential in the medium and long term," he says.



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## Putting MICE on the SMAP

CHANGI Airport Group, along with Singapore Airlines and the Singapore Exhibition & Convention Bureau, recently launched a programme specifically targeting the meetings, incentives, conference and exhibitions (MICE) industry.

Called the Singapore MICE Advantage Programme (SMAP), it aims to enhance the overall experience for overseas MICE visitors. The three stakeholders developed SMAP to provide a seamless Singapore meeting experience.

**Peh Ke-Wei**, Changi Airport Group's vice president, passenger development, says: "Many MICE visitors have such a packed itinerary



**Changi Airport**

during their short stay that the only time they have to buy gifts and souvenirs is at the airport. This is why we have chosen to provide Changi Dollar Vouchers as part of the SMAP

programme." The voucher is redeemable at selected retail, food and service outlets at the airport.

**Alvin Seah** says the SMAP programme is an example of the airline and Changi collaborating to ensure they remain competitive and tap into high potential segments. "SMAP basically targets the MICE segments by offering a comprehensive package of benefits that will position Singapore and Singapore Airlines as preferred destination and carrier for MICE organisers. Benefits include special airfares, baggage allowance, free tickets, facilitation in event organisation and discounted hotel rates," he says.





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# Singapore



Hocj Keng Buddhist-Taoist temple.

## Family favourites from Wendy Wu

WENDY Wu Tours has a new four-day 'family favourites' short-stay tour for 2014. From R8 918 per person it includes visits to Merlion Park, Thian

Hocj Keng (one of Singapore's oldest Buddhist-Taoist temples), the National Orchid Garden, Little India, Singapore Flyer and the Singapore Zoo.

## Learn and win!

TRAVEL consultants stand a chance to win one of 10 Woolworths shopping vouchers to the value of R1 000 by completing

the Singapore Airlines and Changi Airport Group Travelinfo online workshop. The workshop runs until March 9.

## 'Click and pick' with Changi website

CHANGI Airport Group recently launched iShopChangi, an online shopping portal offering a range of popular duty-free products from the airport's retail stores.

iShopChangi provides travellers with the convenience of browsing at their own pace before they've even packed their luggage. **Ivy Wong**, Changi Airport Group's senior vice president, airside concessions, says: "With iShopChangi, we are integrating Changi Airport's strong proposition of tax and duty-free shopping with the advantages of online retail, offering our passengers greater convenience, comfort and value."

iShopChangi offers some 1 800 items across five



iShopChangi website.

categories including beauty, wine and spirits, chocolates and delicatessen, IT and electronics as well as timepieces.

Passengers simply need to 'click and pick' – click to purchase the items they are interested in via the portal and then pick them up at the

departure terminal on their way to the flight gate at the iShopChangi Collection Centre.

Members of Changi Rewards, the airport's loyalty programme, earn reward points for every dollar spent on iShopChangi and have access to exclusive discounts and promotions.

## Amazing stopover deal from SQ

SINGAPORE Airlines is offering a special one-night Singapore Stopover Holiday deal from just R517 (SG\$59). The package

includes accommodation, return airport transfers and admission into major attractions (worth up to R2 600). The price is

applicable for bookings made until September 30, valid for stopovers until March 31, 2015. Further information on Travelinfo.

### Did you know ?

- Singapore is approximately a one-hour drive from Changi International Airport;
- Singapore plays host to the annual Formula 1 Singtel Singapore Grand Prix each September;
- SA passport holders don't require a visa for leisure visits to Singapore for stays of up to 30 days. ■



Experience Singapore from ZAR490\* for hotel accommodation. The package also includes return airport transfers, unlimited rides on the SIA Hop-on Bus, admission to attractions and other benefits worth up to ZAR2,600. What's more, you can enjoy additional Boarding Pass Privileges when you present your boarding pass within one month of your travel date at participating hotels, tourist attractions, restaurants and more. Book at [singaporeair.com](http://singaporeair.com) or contact the Singapore Airlines office in Johannesburg at (011) 880 8560 or Cape Town at (021) 674 0601.

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\*Price excludes airfare and surcharges. Bookings must be made from 1 October 2013 to 29 March 2014. Valid for travel from 1 October 2013 to 31 March 2014. Terms and conditions apply.







The number of South Africans visiting Réunion is soaring, lured by its myriad offerings, reports Chana Boucher.

## Arrivals spike after visa requirement changes

IT MAY not be as popular or well-known as other destinations in the region, such as Mauritius or the Seychelles, but the recent move to scrap the visa requirement for SA passport holders has spiked tourist interest in Réunion, and those familiar with selling and marketing the destination expect this momentum to keep growing.

**Hélène Bezuidenhout**, manager of the tourism agency Atout France, says the move has seen a tremendous boost for the destination, with tourist numbers from South Africa on a definite increase.

**John Ridler**, media and

public relations manager for Cullinan Outbound Tourism, agrees that there has been a distinct spike since the visa requirement was dropped. "We have

**"Bookings are up 54% year-on-year. We plan to grow that as Réunion becomes better known and South Africans look for more exciting destinations."**

experienced a 70% increase in bookings."

According to **Lenél Vining**, Air Austral manager South Africa, Réunion's profile

as a holiday destination is now on a par with the other Indian Ocean islands and the absence of visa formalities means passengers can decide today to go there and travel tomorrow.

Hélène says: "We receive daily requests for information. I believe Réunion is not a difficult destination to sell, it just needs to be better known, and now we see that not only the general public but the tourism trade are keen to know more about the destination and to travel there."

Overall, Lenél says bookings are up 54% year-on-year. "We plan to grow

that as Réunion becomes better known and South Africans continue to look for fresh and more exciting destinations."

John says the charming island is "almost on our doorstep and offers thrilling adventure activities, awesome landscapes and superb beaches with aquamarine waters".

To boost visitor numbers even further, Hélène says Atout France will strengthen the marketing campaign embarked on last year. "Réunion must be top of travellers' minds so we will be present in all the media. We are maintaining our training programmes with travel agents and

encouraging them to take up the opportunity of a discovery trip special with Air Austral for a flight and hotel combo."

• The Air Austral flight and hotel combo special comprises one free ticket for bona fide travel agents (airport taxes of approximately R2 250 at own cost), and one ticket at 50% off the lowest fare (MSX1 from R1 435 plus airport taxes) on selected travel dates. Some 20 hotels are offering South African travel agents incredible rates for maximum stays of three nights at any one hotel. See Travelinfo for full details.



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Cirque de Salazie is a volcanic crater at the centre of the island, situated in a natural amphitheatre.

## Best time to travel

**LENÉL Vining** says: "Being a 90% leisure destination, seasonality has always been a factor and loads are traditionally very much in line with school holidays, especially those in Réunion. The Easter period is a very popular holiday time for South Africans yet not for Réunionese – this is the perfect time to visit Réunion with good availability and great weather."

The island's climate, says **Hélène Bezuidenhout**, is pleasant all year and the seasons are not too different from each other. "The tropical heat is moderate (24°C-33°C) all year round. Hiking enthusiasts prefer the Southern hemisphere winter or the period between the two main seasons (April-May and September-October), which doesn't stop them from making the most of the Indian

Ocean. Beach lovers are more likely to opt for the Southern hemisphere summer and make the most of the mountains to cool down."

Lenél says the leisure market generally fly economy but some travellers enjoy Air Austral's premium economy class, taking advantage of inclusive packages with preferential airfares. "Most stay for one week, although 10-day stays are also popular as there is enough to see and do on the island."

Air Austral recently cancelled a number of flights in February, May and June due to aircraft maintenance. According to Hélène, the flight cancellations were well thought through so that they don't affect visitor numbers. They come "just after the very high December/January season and before the March/April rush".

### Did you know?

At the beginning of June every year, the Sakifo Festival takes place over three days at Saint Pierre. The international music festival is a celebration of the musical cultural landscape of the island, showcasing the many strengths of the island. Last year the festival included names like Oxmo Puccino and Manu Chao. Visit [www.safiko.com](http://www.safiko.com) for more information.

## What Réunion has to offer...

**Hélène Bezuidenhout** highlights Réunion's key selling points:

- Only a four-hour flight from Johannesburg, it is a French island in the Indian Ocean – French with a touch of exotic;
- It is an island full of flavours: mixed people, mixed cultures, mixed food. It offers an array of colours, tastes and textures;
- It is a paradise of biodiversity. Lush tropical vegetation (with a rain forest), impressive volcanic landscape (with an active volcano), a lagoon with 550 species of fish and 150 species of stony coral;
- Up to 42% of the island is classified as a Unesco World Heritage Site;
- Great weather all year round;
- Friendly, welcoming and helpful people;
- Breathtaking scenery, from the highest summit in the Indian Ocean to lush green calderas and beautiful waterfalls, beaches and vegetation;
- Endless adventure with an activity for everyone, from extreme sports to leisurely paced walks or just lying on the beach.



Local cuisine offers an array of flavours.



Snorkelling with whales on the lagoon. Photo: Studio Lumiere

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# Self-drive is a great option

THOSE familiar with Réunion say that, with all its sights and experiences the best way to take it all in is from the seat of a hired car. This explains why self-drive packages are becoming more and more popular.

**John Ridler** says Réunion offers a number of exciting outdoor activities, from parasailing and canyoning to hiking and quad cycling (a unique form of pedal quad bike). In between all the activity, John says “tourists are urged to join a day tour or rent a car and drive into the mountains with expansive views and quaint villages that are stuck in an earlier age”.

**Hélène Bezuidenhout**, agrees: “Réunion Island is an ideal self-drive destination.”

She advises, however, that South Africans do need an international driver's licence and will have to adapt to driving on the right.

She suggests making car-hire reservations in advance, at the time of booking the rest of trip, to ensure that the vehicle is waiting on arrival at the airport.

“Réunion is not a place where you want to stay in one spot, so it makes sense to



**The Temple Tamoul is one of the many sights to visit while self driving.** Photo: Wikipedia

be mobile. Visitors will want to explore and perhaps not stay in the same hotel for the whole trip.

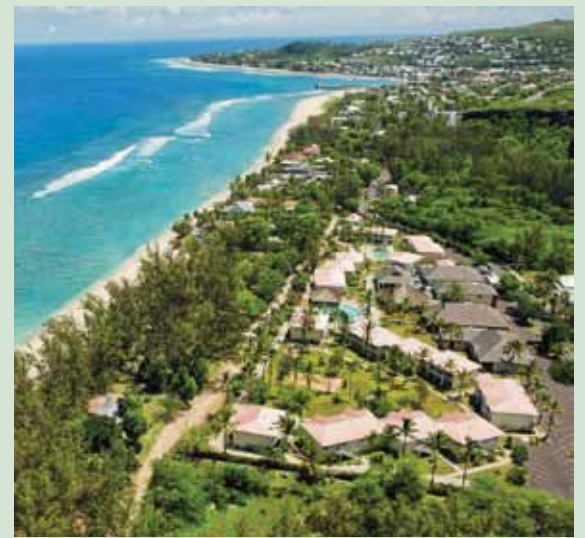
“Self-driving allows them to explore the island at their own pace, stopping when and where they want. But don't be in a rush to get there,” cautions Hélène.

She says that while the coastal roads are in good condition and almost as wide as a highway, the roads inland follow the bends of the hills and mountains. “For example, the road from Saint Louis to Cilaos is called the ‘road of 420 bends’.”

While driving in a foreign country might be daunting for some, Hélène says, “if you are with someone else who can assist you with directions and make sure you don't divert from the right side, or you have a GPS, it is well worth it”.

**Lenél Vining** says Réunion has excellent infrastructure and medical care, making it a very safe destination, especially for families with children.

“It is a unique destination for the client who wants more than an average beach holiday.”



**Hotel Le Recif, overlooking the Hermitage Lagoon in Saint-Gilles.** Photo: Hotel Le Recif

## Pick a package...

- Thompsons Holidays is offering a package for a self-drive tour around Réunion. From R21 200 it includes flights from Johannesburg with taxes, car rental, seven nights' accommodation around the island with breakfast daily. It also includes a kayak excursion and paragliding over the coral reef.
- Island Light Holidays is offering a seven-night stay at the Hotel Le Recif, overlooking the Hermitage Lagoon in Saint-Gilles, from R14 534 per person sharing. The package includes flights from Johannesburg, taxes, transfers and accommodation with breakfast daily. ■



W: [www.reunion.fr/en](http://www.reunion.fr/en) E: [reunionisland.za@atout-france.fr](mailto:reunionisland.za@atout-france.fr)



## Rich history and scenery

AUSTRIA Connection is recommending a combination of Croatia and Slovenia for travellers to Eastern Europe this year. Both destinations have depth of history and exquisite scenery.

Two products worth consideration are a

nine-day coach tour from Dubrovnik to Split, the Plitvice Lakes, the Postojna Cave, Bled, Ljubljana and Zagreb, and a 10-day self-drive programme that can be done either from Dubrovnik via Slovenia to Zagreb or the other way around.



Photo: Austria Connection

# EASTERN EUROPE

New destinations in Eastern Europe are emerging into the spotlight. *TNW* looks at the region.

## Unique cultures attract visitors

**D**ESPITE the increasing number of Eastern European countries joining the European Union, each continues to retain its unique essence.

**Inge Dobihal**, owner of Austria Connection, an expert on Eastern European travel, says visitors need not fear a dilution of identity in the individual countries of the region. The union,

she points out, is first and foremost an economic and political alliance, and has not affected the diverse cultures and lifestyles of Eastern Europeans.

Concerns that affiliation to the EU makes Eastern European member countries more difficult to access from a visa point of view, are also unfounded, says Inge. Romania, Bulgaria and

Croatia, for example, have all joined the EU but are not signatories to the Schengen Agreement and have their own visa application processes. Furthermore, Europe-bound travellers who are including any of the three countries in their itineraries and have a Schengen visa in place, can gain entry without a second, country-specific visa application (see box).

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## If your clients have a Schengen visa...

For travellers with a valid, multiple-entry Schengen visa:

- Croatia can be visited for any length of time, provided the Schengen visa covers the full period of the Croatian stay.

- Visitors can spend five days in Romania and Bulgaria without a separate visa. Romania can, in fact, be visited for five days without any visa.
- Bosnia can be visited for seven days, provided

the traveller is entering Bosnia from an EU country. This is of particular interest to pilgrimage travellers wanting to visit Medjugorje in Bosnia, easily accessible from Croatia.

## Top spots for 2014

### Poland

"Poland is picking up nicely and is, in my opinion, underrated," says Inge. She describes the country's cities as magnificent. "At their heart there is always a huge market square surrounded by buildings of the 15th and 16th centuries. With Poland being a very modern society with a vibrant Western lifestyle, nowadays these ancient structures house jazz clubs and pubs," she says.

### Slovenia

Inge names Slovenia as the country to watch in 2014. The size of Swaziland, it luxuriates in stunning

countryside with Alpine vistas and Mediterranean towns all thrown into the mix. Geographic features such as the Postojna Caves and Lake Bled have captured the attention of world travellers.

The caves are a vast network of tunnels, accessed by a train, followed by guided walks. The lake, some 35km from the capital, Ljubljana surrounds Bled Island. The country is also the home of the village of Lipica where the famous Lipizzaner horses are bred.

### Croatia

Still topping many tourists' wish list is Croatia, a popular

sailing destination in the European summer, when spectacular coastal scenery, a crystal-clear sea and affordability combine to make excellent cruising. It also has inland attractions and Inge highlights the Plitvice Lakes – a series of 16 lakes linked by innumerable waterfalls. Set in a national park, they attract over a million visitors annually, filling up three hotels in the reserve.

While Eastern Europe is no longer the bargain it once was, its countries remain less expensive than Western Europe and research will yield great value-for-money products.

## St Petersburg – a cruise highlight

REGENT Seven Seas Cruises, represented in South Africa by Encore Cruises, includes a number of Eastern European ports on its Northern Europe and Baltic Cruise itineraries.

St Petersburg, capital of the Russian Empire for 200 years, is a major highlight of many of these programmes.

Cathedrals, palaces and fortresses are on the touring menu there, along with a night of traditional Russian dance or ballet. Sochi, venue for the upcoming Olympic Games, Murmansk, Sevastopol, Yalta and Odessa are other Russian ports featured.

The medieval town of Tallin,

gateway to Estonia, often gets passengers' vote for charm. Walking through the Old Town, a Unesco World Heritage Site, where ancient buildings now house trendy restaurants and boutiques, is an atmospheric experience. Other stops in the Baltic states include Klaipeda, Memel or Riga in Lithuania. ■



Births, deaths, marriages, promotions – we want to know! Please fax or e-mail TNW's Mandy Watson, at mandyw@nowmedia.co.za or (011) 327 4094.



## Changes at Cruises International

Cruises International has announced changes to its team. Tracey Krog has been promoted to commercial manager and will have the overall responsibility for marketing, sales, operations and reservations. She joined the company six years ago. Carol-Lynn Kovacs has transferred from operations to join the marketing team. She will be the custodian for Oceania Cruises, Seabourn and Windstar Cruises. Nirosha Sidat moves from the client services contact centre to replace Carol-Lynn as operations team-leader. She has also been with the company for six years. Hannah Maury has joined the company in the position of national sales manager. Hannah worked for Air France for 16 years in corporate sales. Pictured (from left) are Nirosha, Hannah, Carol-Lynn and Tracey. Photo: Cruises International

## Bert van der Linden joins Holiday Aviation

**BERT van der Linden** has joined the Aviation Consulting Services division of Holiday Aviation as director, development and commercial.

Bert previously spent 45 years at Comair where he was a director before retiring in 2013. **Gavin Simpson**, ceo of Holiday Holdings, says, "Bert is one of the best known and most respected

professionals in the local aviation industry. There are few people in our market with his credentials and vast knowledge of the airline business. Not only did he serve his former company



**Bert van der Linden**

loyally for more than four decades but he also served the local aviation industry with distinction as chairman of the Airlines Association of Southern Africa from 2003 to 2006."

## Appointments

■ **Lara May** has been appointed national sales manager for The Travel Corporation.



■ **Jacky Maulgue** has started a new recruitment company, Sales Recruiter. Jacky has worked in sales in the travel industry



for more than 20 years and brings that experience to recruiting personnel.

■ **Carlos Luis**

has been appointed senior air contractor for Flight Centre Travel Group SA. He has been with Flight Centre for 10 years during which he worked in a number of areas in the finance team including retail accountant and financial controller. Carlos was cfo before taking on the role of gm for procurement.



■ **Paul van Blerk** has joined Visas and Passports Unlimited as sales and marketing manager. He has previously worked for Rennies Travel, Seekers Travel, BCD Travel, Travel with Flair, Wings Corporate Travel and SAA.

**Did you know** that Zambia's name comes from the Zambezi River. Zambezi is from a local word "Yambezi" meaning "Heart of All".

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March madness!



Pure Skiing is offering a selection of seven-night ski specials to Austria and Italy throughout March. Packages start at R14 280pps and R8 589 per child under 12 sharing with parents. These specials generally include return resort transfers, breakfast daily, resort guide, travel insurance, six-day ski pass and ski hire. The package excludes return flights and taxes, meals and drinks not specified, ski school and entertainment. See Travelinfo for more. Tobogganing down the slopes is Pure Skiing's director, Neal McAlpine. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

# 'Airlines won't come down' – Comair

DORINE REINSTEIN

DOMESTIC travellers aren't likely to see airfares come down, even if new carriers should enter the market. This is the word from Erik Venter, ceo of Comair, who says a drop in airfares would not be sustainable.

Comair is expecting its profits to double when it announces its financial results this week. The airline indicated last week that earnings per share and headline earnings per share for the six months ended December 31, 2013 were expected to be between 32 and 35 cents per share. Comair's EPS for the same period in the previous year was 16,4 cents, when the company generated R262 million.

Fastjet has vowed to bring down domestic fares if the airline succeeds in entering the South African market. Ceo, Ed Winter, says the current duopoly created by SAA and Comair is keeping airfares at an all-time high. "Prices went up by 35% after 1time fell. Fares are higher than they need to be and, in peak season, capacity is not there. For the South African consumer, a third airline would be a huge benefit."

However, Erik strongly disagrees: "Of course every start-up airline makes a lot of fuss about how it will sell cheaper tickets but the reality is that it is just not possible."

He says there is an 8% excess capacity in the market, partly created by the fact that domestic travel

has shrunk by 5%. "There is already strong competition for passengers between kulula and Mango, keeping prices as low as they can realistically be. The only way to get prices lower is to go bankrupt."

Erik says that in the last financial year, Comair made a profit of R46 per passenger. "Talk of reducing fares by 20% with the entrance of a new airline is nonsense. On an average fare of around R750, this would mean a reduction of R150 or, put differently, a loss of R104 per passenger."

*"The only way to get prices lower is to go bankrupt."*

"Mango was profitable during the period in review (year to March 2013), recording just under R40 million profit. However, Mango and its competitors' successes are not dependent on the demise of another airline. In fact, Mango has been profitable for five out of its six full fiscals. Actual traveller gains off the demise of 1time are estimated at only 4% of our actual volume," says Mango spokesperson, Hein Kaiser.

Although the local travel industry has seen the crippling effect of high fares on the domestic travel market, industry players are also doubtful that a significant drop in airfares would be feasible. They are wary of yet another fare war that might result in bankrupt

airlines and stranded passengers.

Avis ce, Keith Rankin, agrees that lowering airfares is not feasible for domestic carriers, especially when one takes into consideration the weak rate of exchange and increasing fuel costs. "The airline industry is under pressure. More competition is great but airlines still need to make money. Another player in the domestic airspace would undoubtedly benefit the consumer but is it viable in the long run?"

Chris Zweigenthal, ceo of Aasa, says the ROE is indeed the main culprit for the soaring airfares. He says South Africa has seen a deterioration of about 15% of its currency. This has affected jet fuel, maintenance and distribution costs. Chris says a new entrant in the market would undoubtedly create a competitive market and bring fares down in the short term. Keeping fares down would, however, not be sustainable in the long run.

Meanwhile, the domestic travel market is under tremendous financial pressure, which has resulted in a drop in domestic bookings, especially to destinations such as George and Port Elizabeth, says Keith. Even Cape Town has seen a drop in domestic car-rental bookings, he says. A long weekend to Cape Town from Johannesburg for a family of four will easily set travellers back R20 000. "How many people in South Africa can afford that?" he asks. ■

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eTNW and TRAVELINFO

**TNW**

### Mobile demand is static

Is there more demand from your clients to use mobile for booking and payment?



No 76%

Yes 24%

## Asata conference: what's on the cards?

NATASHA TIPPEL

YOU tell us.

Asata is appealing to its travel agency members to "write the programme" for this year's annual conference, which will be held at the Arabella Hotel & Spa in Hermanus from May 23-26.

"We have had plenty of feedback from members on last year's conference and we will incorporate this into the development of the conference schedule for 2014," says ceo of Asata, Otto de Vries.

Members are calling for more networking opportunities at conference

as well as workshops, discussion panels and guest speakers addressing key industry issues and global best practice and trends.

What topics of interest would you like to see on the line-up of this year's Asata conference? Write to natashat@nowmedia.co.za and let us know. ■

### For the record

#### SAA blames weak rand for losses

In the February 5 issue of TNW, we incorrectly reported that Treasury had extended SAA's R5 million loan. The loan is for R5 billion. TNW apologises for the error.

