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TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

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'I'd like to book a holiday, on loan please'

CHANA BOUCHER

SOUTH African consumers will soon be able to take a loan to book their next vacation.

Travelfin – a new point-of-sale financing option for travellers to book their holiday and pay it off over a period of 12 to 24 months – promises to open new markets for those selling travel, and assist agents in securing more prepaid bookings. Finance will be advanced through Capitec Bank.

The product's founders, **Frikkie Reynders** (of inbound tour operator Highline Tours) and **Andre Fourie** (of FinYou), say it will be a tool that agents can offer their clients and assist them in making the sale "there and then".

Frikkie says the biggest advantage of Travelfin is that the transaction can happen well in advance of the travel date even if the client doesn't have the cash available, which fixes the exchange rate and prevents the cost from escalating due to rate fluctuation or additional flight costs. "For example, the client might get a bonus in December and

want to travel then, but now they can book it in February already to take advantage of early-bird discounts and avoid the last-minute rush. Travelfin is an extra tool to plan holidays better and fix the price," he says.

"Agents can offer their clients and assist them in making the sale 'there and then'."

Clients will have three options to apply for finance: filling in an application while at the travel agency; applying through the travel agency's website; or applying online through Travelfin's website. If their application is approved, they will receive a notification and the amount for their trip will be settled directly with the travel agency within a few days.

Frikkie says Travelfin is aware of the financial pressure consumers put on themselves and will not overexpose them to debt. "If they cannot afford to travel, we won't sell it to them. They must be able to afford the

monthly payments."

He believes there are three target markets in particular that will find this product useful: clients who want to travel for a special occasion, such as newly or soon-to-be weds who don't have the cash to pay for a honeymoon because of wedding costs; the emerging market who have secure jobs but perhaps not the savings to let them travel; and those who need to travel for an emergency and don't have the adequate credit on their cards or the time to save up.

According to Frikkie, the finance charges are reasonable. Andre adds that there is no registration or monthly fees and that for merchants there are no bank charges, making it cheaper than credit card transactions. He says that, like a credit card transaction, Travelfin will receive the payment from a financial institution and settle the outstanding amount with the merchant.

Currently Capitec is advancing the loans, although Andre says there are plans to get other big financial institutions on

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Switched on!



Passengers flying with Lufthansa will soon be able to use their smartphones, tablets and electronic devices uninterrupted on all Airbus aircraft. Electronic devices were previously only able to be used during in-flight mode on Lufthansa's B747-8s and had to be switched off during take-off and landing. The airline is currently seeking LBA approval for electronic devices to be allowed on its other aircraft as soon as possible. Tech-savvy **Evelyn Kidder Ralphs** (LH sales manager) gets down to work. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

New partner for UK visa applications

DEBBIE BADHAM

NEW commercial partner for UK Visa Services, Teleperformance, will take over the operation of UK visa application centres in South Africa this month.

Visa application centres

will change location as follows:

- From March 24, the Johannesburg centre will move to the 3rd floor, 24 Central, 6 Gwen Lane, at the corner of Fredman Drive, Sandton.

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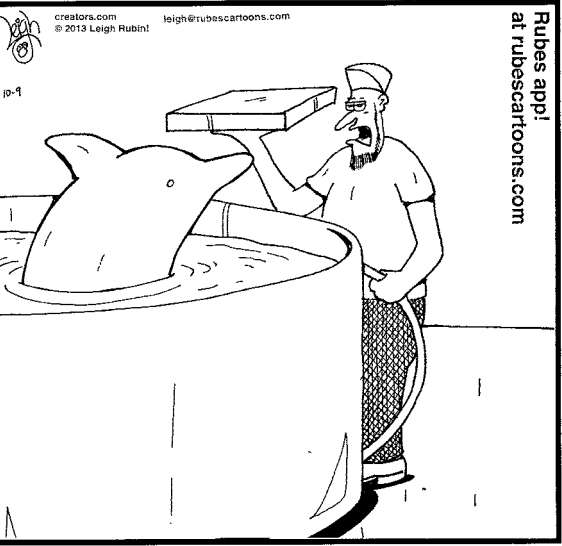
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Is local still lekker?

CHANA BOUCHER

LOCALS planning to get away for a quick break over the Easter holidays will have a tough time finding affordable airfares and accommodation, particularly for travel to Cape Town, but this doesn't seem to be putting them off.

Michelle Jolley, marketing manager of Flight Centre, says even although prices rise over peak season in Cape Town, there is still a significant increase in demand for travel to the city over this period.

"It is a popular destination and as the rand is quite volatile at the moment people are opting for more local travel options. It can be an expensive holiday but remains reasonable when compared with destinations where the rand is weaker." Michelle adds that Cape Town as a destination remains a top seller.

Amadea Sunney, product manager domestic for Holiday Tours, says flights make up around 70% of the package price and that the availability and price of flights might play a part in whether travellers fly or drive.

A search for flights between Johannesburg and Cape Town for the long weekend, during which the Two Oceans marathon also takes place, reveals that many flights are already sold out and fares for those that aren't are between R2 000 and R4 000 one way.

South African travellers are still waiting for new airline entrants to launch in the market, bringing with them

cheaper fares. According to the SA Civil Aviation Authority, Skywise still has many requirements it has not met before an Air Operator Certificate can be issued and the airline can launch flights. But ceo, **Rodney James**, says he is hopeful that Skywise will begin operating in the first half of this year. "Competition will certainly bring airfares down by providing the much-needed extra capacity and choice for the flying consumer," he adds. FlySafair has yet to re-apply for an air service licence and refused to comment on its progress in launching domestic flights.

"A search for flights between Johannesburg and Cape Town for the long weekend reveals that many flights are sold out and those that aren't are from R2 000-R4 000, one way."

Room rates in Cape Town have also increased over the past few months.

Cape Town Tourism ceo, **Ever Duminy**, told TNW there had been a 4,7% increase in the average room rate in 2013 compared with the previous year. "This is below the consumer price index, showing that the industry is absorbing the costs and understanding the impact that changes in price will have on the industry."

Clifford Ross, ce of City Lodge, says the economic downturn and oversupply of rooms in Cape Town resulted

in hotels discounting rates to get business and stagnant prices since the end of 2008. "I don't believe the rates being charged are excessive but hotels are starting to claw back some rate lost during the economic downturn."

Cape Town is an expensive destination for South Africans, particularly when compared with all-inclusive holiday packages to Mauritius. "In Mauritius one would spend most, if not all, of your time at the resort, eliminating additional travel costs such as car rental, taxis and sightseeing costs," says **Tammy Hunt**, operations director of eTravel.

Jonathan Gerber, director of TAG, agrees: "There are not a lot of all-inclusive-type deals in Cape Town and, once you've worked out what you need to spend on a family, it is substantial. We could sell Mauritius a whole lot cheaper than Cape Town but then again, they are two completely different destinations."

He believes Cape Town is catering more towards the overseas tourist. "We as locals need to travel during winter and when specials are in full force." Michelle agrees, saying savvy travellers should take advantage of off-season specials that are very affordable.

Those wanting to visit Cape Town during the holidays need to book way in advance, advises **Wally Gaynor**, ceo of Club Travel. "The closer you get to the time of travel, the less choice there is and the more expensive it becomes." ■

'I'd like to book a holiday, on loan please'

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board in the near future. Travelfin will use the FinYou platform, which is already used by large brands such as Bidvest and Minolta in other industries and has been tweaked to suit the travel industry, says Andre. In-store training is to be provided by Axis Marketing.

Kosie Nagel, land and air contractor for Flight Centre, says Travelfin provides

another payment solution, similar to using a credit card, for those who can afford to take on the debt, but just in a new form. "It speaks to a certain market and offers another way for them to explore the world."

Kosie says he is already putting selected packages together under the Student Flights brand and will advertise the possibility of travelling now and paying

it off over 24 months. Once the product has been tested, he expects to roll it out to the rest of the group.

For now, Frikkie says the product is in "alpha phase" as it needs to be tested to ensure that it is a seamless operation and that there is sufficient demand in the market. At the time of going to print, the launch of the Travelfin website was imminent. ■



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Europcar launches SME product

DEBBIE BADHAM

EUROPCAR has unveiled its new Business Connect tool, which gives SMEs more control over the costs and logistics involved in car rental.

Business Connect is designed to make booking and paying for car rental easier and safer for both SME owners and staff. The new tool offers clients streamlined online booking and three key fast-track advantages for the collection process. Clients don't have to queue or waste time signing paperwork. They can also collect the

car using only a valid driver's licence.

"Another pay-off for the SME owner is better business practice, with Business Connect becoming an all-in-one time-management and payment solution," says Europcar SA coo, **Martin Lydall**. "We believe SMEs deserve a service traditionally reserved in SA only for corporates, larger businesses and government departments. That includes enjoying all our usual products – plus a lower, preferential business rate and electronic invoices and statements to meet businesses' need for financial control and management." ■

KQ launches flights to Abuja

KENYA Airways will begin operating direct flights between Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, Nairobi, and Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja, Nigeria, from June 3.

The flights will operate four times a week on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

"This latest development is in line

with our long-term growth strategy. We aim to fly to every African capital by 2016," says group md and ceo, **Dr Titus Naikuni**.

KQ536 will depart Nairobi at 07h50 and arrive in Abuja at 10h35. KQ537 will depart Abuja at 11h35 and arrive in Nairobi at 18h20. ■

DXB runway closures to affect EK schedules

DEBBIE BADHAM

DUBAI International Airport will implement runway closures from May 1 to complete a phased refurbishment, which will affect Emirates' flights out of SA.

The southern runway will be closed from May 1-31 and the northern runway from May 31-July 20. Scheduled passenger flights have been reduced to accommodate the closures but other than planned changes, the construction will have

no further effect on the airport's traffic.

"There will be some changes to the flight schedule to South Africa. Emirates will continue to serve each of its three destinations, Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg with daily flights but with one flight less to Cape Town and Johannesburg respectively. Emirates looks forward to resuming its full schedule to South Africa once the runway upgrade has been completed," the airline said. ■

Protea Nelspruit opens new conference venue

PROTEA Hotel Nelspruit in Mpumalanga has launched a new conference venue, doubling the hotel's conference capacity.

The Valencia Room is situated in a landscaped garden and can accommodate between 30 and 70

delegates. The new facility is equipped and is suitable for meetings, seminars, cocktail functions, product launches and banquets.

The hotel can now accommodate meetings, seminars and banquets for 60 to 120 delegates. ■

To the point



A new logo, new name and new corporate identity have been revealed as Discover the World Marketing rebrands as Discover the World. Ceo, **Jenny Adams**, says: "We are now called Discover the World because that is truly our mission for our clients."

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Protecting your clients' personal info: what you need to know

The Protection of Personal Information (POPI) Act, can potentially have far-reaching consequences for travel agents. Dorine Reinstein reports.

THE POPI Act, which was officially signed into law at the end of last year but isn't effective yet, could see travel agents who accidentally or purposely leak information about their clients facing fines of up to R10m and jail sentences of up to 10 years.

What is it?

POPI regulates the manner in which personal information may be processed and provides rights and remedies to protect personal information.

The Act applies to every business that processes (collects, disseminates or merges) personal information (passport numbers,

names, phone numbers, race, gender, etc.) and special personal information of the 'data subject' (client) 'entered into a record' (such as e-mails and hard copies) by or for a responsible person (the travel agent) who determines the purpose and means of such processing (to book flights, hotels, car rental).

There will be a 'mean' regulator

The Act will have its very own regulator in the near future. The regulator will deal with consumer complaints and with appeals concerning breaches of the law.

Gareth Cremen, partner at Ramsay Webber attorneys, says the regulator

will be a "mean machine", as the fines imposed for non-compliance can be anything up to R10m. In the worst-case scenario, travel agents, tour operators, hotels and/or airlines could even find themselves behind bars for up to 10 years for disseminating their clients' information.

The powers of regulators will be far-reaching. They can demand access to a travel agent's premises for the purpose of conducting an investigation. They may also approach a court of competent jurisdiction and obtain a warrant to conduct an investigation. This may include searching the premises,

inspecting, examining, operating and testing equipment used to process information, and inspecting and seizing any record, material or equipment found there that may serve as evidence. They can also stop a travel agent from processing information, which will effectively mean that the travel agent will have to close its doors. The powers of the regulator are very broad.

The basic rule

You need the consent of the consumer in order to process their personal information!

The following tips will help travel agents be compliant...

1 Adjust your terms and conditions

Insert clauses into your current terms and conditions that stipulate that your agency will be collecting personal information as well as special personal information as defined by the POPI Act. Don't forget to mention the reason why you need to collect information: to secure bookings with third

party service providers.

Agreements must be concluded with all suppliers surrounding information being provided to them and ask for them to indemnify you in the event that there is a breach.

2 Install cookie pop-ups

If you are dealing with online bookings from customers be sure to have a cookie policy and also ensure that your online terms and conditions have been updated. Install pop-ups that warn your customers that you are collecting their personal information. Include a disclaimer that outlines that, by logging on to the site, the client consents to sharing his information but, remember, consent is needed where information is collected and sent outside the Republic of South Africa.



3 Invest in security software

Travel consultants tend to move around a lot in the industry, from one job to the next. This trend carries an inherent risk that the consultant takes along client information to the competitor and it is up to the owner or manager to limit the risk of clients' information being leaked.

That is why travel agencies should have the necessary software in place that will alert them when someone tries to pull information from the server. It is imperative that travel agencies stop all client information at the doorstep.

Once a breach has occurred, the travel agent has an obligation to report the breach to the regulator as well as to the client.

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4 Adjust corporate agreements

Travel agents are not allowed, under the POPI Act, to reveal any personal and/or special personal information to third parties. What happens if a jealous wife wants to know where the husband is vacationing with his mistress? What do you do when the ceo of a big corporate client phones asking where his employee is and what he is using the company's credit card for? Every company and person in the agency – anyone handling client information –

should study the definition of 'personal information' and 'special personal information' as defined in the POPI Act. Therefore, for example, agents cannot divulge information to their client's wife unless the husband has signed an agreement that all information can be passed on.

It is advisable to have agreements in place with corporate clients whereby the company gives you the permission to do all future bookings for the

company and their employees. Companies must ensure that they have the requisite permission and/or consent from their employees in order to hand over information on all bookings made by the company, irrespective of who the employee is. What happens if the company makes a booking for a third party outside their employ? These are all issues that need to be dealt with in the agreements and terms and conditions.

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5 Get it in writing

Travel agents need to officially notify clients about the type of information they collect about them and why. If problems arise, the onus will be on the travel agent to prove that the client gave his consent to store the information.

This notification can be a simple booking form. Outline on your booking form the information you need and include a notice reading: "Please refer to our privacy policy and terms and conditions, which deal with the manner in which your personal information is stored. The purpose of collecting, disseminating and merging is contained therein." Gareth says the fact that the agency has a privacy policy in place will not be enough to protect you.

Problems arise when clients phone the travel agent requesting an

urgent flight ticket, as a telephonic conversation won't be sufficient proof of consent. Gareth advises agents to do the booking and send the client an email, preferably with a delivery receipt recording the transaction and stating in the email: "As per our conversation, you confirm (i) having understood and agreed to our privacy policy and standard terms and conditions; and (ii) that we may proceed with your booking/reservations on your behalf in accordance with our privacy policy and standard terms and conditions. We informed you during the telephone call that we do collect information in line with the POPI Act and by doing so you hereby consent to us utilising same for the purpose as set out in our privacy policy and standard terms and conditions etc."

6 Appoint an information officer

It is imperative that travel agencies appoint a dedicated person within their company as the information officer, Gareth says. This person will be responsible for enforcing the POPI Act and implementing the privacy policy within the company.

The information officer will keep all the client information on file and record it in a safe vault to ensure it can't be leaked. The information should be encrypted to prevent usage by other individuals.

Internal policies and procedures will need to be implemented, especially with regard to safeguarding any credit card information. Ideally the information officer should be the only person to access and process payments on behalf of clients.

Always ask the appointed information officer and employees processing information to indemnify you in case there is a breach of the information that only they have access to.

7 Destroy information

The Companies Act states that travel agents need to keep documents on file for five years. However, there is a conflict as, according to the POPI Act, travel agents can't keep documents for longer than is necessary to render services. The solution to this is to notify the consumer in writing that his/her information will be filed away for five years, after which it will be destroyed. During that period,

nobody else will have access to that information.

If the client requests to be removed from the database, comply with this request. Remove his/her file from the computer database and get his/her file offsite with companies such as Metrofile or, if you prefer electronic vaults, one such as Safe4. All electronic data should be encrypted to prevent unauthorised usage by third parties.

8 Foresee risks

According to the POPI Act, companies need to be able to foresee both internal and external risks to the clients' information. What are the risks involved in your business? How do you stop employees selling off credit card information and personal information to third parties? What firewalls have been established by your IT department? What happens if your laptop/employee's laptop has been stolen? These are real issues that need to be carefully

considered and catered for.

If there is a breach of info and the regulator asks you to prove the steps you've taken to prevent the offence, you will need to show all possible measures taken by you to identify and prevent the offence from occurring. The mere fact that you did not know or that it was the employee's fault is not sufficient to protect the company and its directors from criminal prosecution and/or a fine in terms of POPI.

9 In case of a breach

If a breach of information took place and a client's information was compromised, both the client and the regulator need to be alerted immediately.



10 Seek legal advice

Travel agencies will be held liable for non-compliance with the POPI Act, regardless of whether or not there was an intention to leak information or whether it was negligence. To ensure that you are 100% compliant with the POPI Act and that the

weaknesses within your company are addressed, it is advisable to seek legal advice.

It is also suggested that companies train all relevant employees on the POPI Act and the procedures implemented by the company.

11 The golden rule

Put the necessary policies and procedures in place and don't deviate from the rules.

When will the law come into effect?

South African president, **Jacob Zuma**, signed into law the POPI Act at the end of last year but the commencement date still needs to be set. Once this is set everyone will have a year within which to comply.

It is good practice and far better to start the process now rather than waiting until the 11th hour. ■



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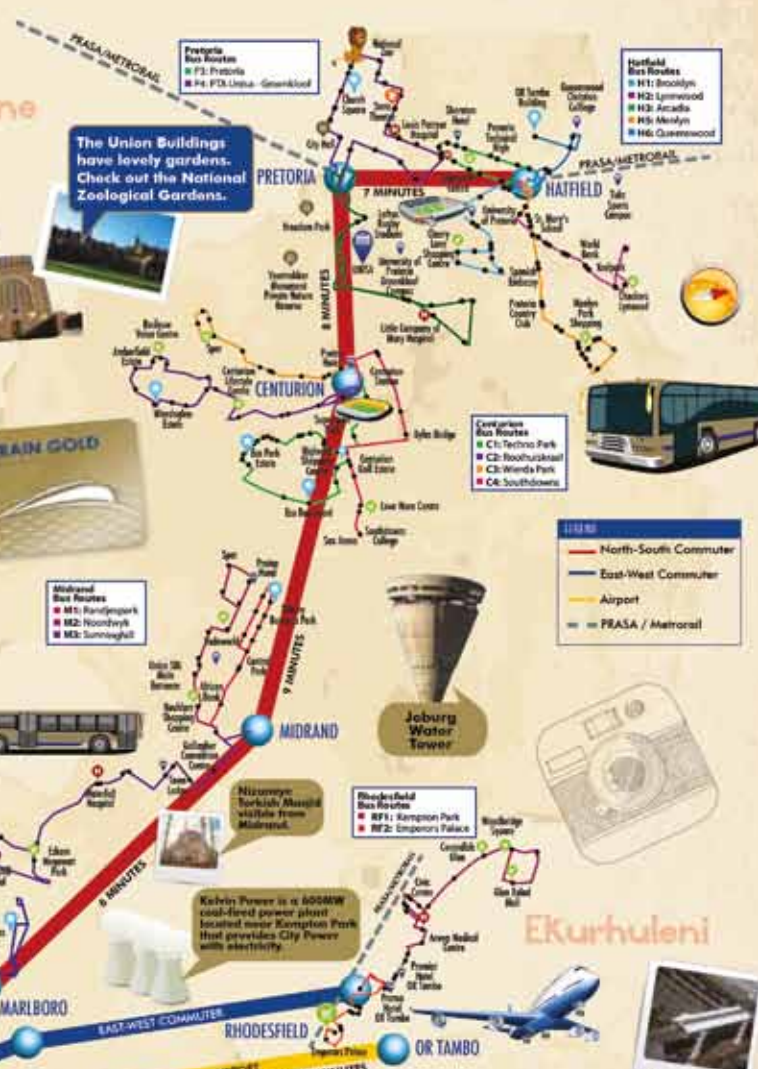
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Makeover for Southern Sun Maputo

TSOGO Sun is to close the Southern Sun Maputo from April 1 to August 1 for the hotel to undergo a full makeover that will include the addition of facilities as well as a total rejuvenation of existing services. The business and leisure hotel will have an additional 110 guestrooms and new conferencing rooms once the makeover is complete. The existing 158 guestrooms and public areas will undergo a full refurbishment at the same time.

Protea Midrand completes refurbishment

PROTEA Hotel Midrand has completed a refurbishment of its 177 guest rooms. The 20-year-old hotel is popular with business travellers and conference organisers. Rooms have been transformed into elegant and calm spaces and new cupboards, desks, pedestals and headboards have been installed as well as additional plug points and improved lighting.

Profitability in sight for African aviation

CHANA BOUCHER

AFRICAN airlines are expected to report a profit of US\$100m (R1,07bn) by the end of 2014, up from a loss of \$100m last year, according to IATA's latest financial forecast.

The association says the key factors driving the better performance of African airlines include the improving economic performance in the region, which makes it easier for airlines to generate cash in a high-cost environment, and improvements in efficiency in airline operations.

Tony Tyler, IATA dg and ceo, however, added that challenges

still facing the region included poor infrastructure, high taxes and restricted market access policies for intra-African connectivity. "This is on top of the intensifying competition that the region's airlines face on long-haul routes," he said.

While he said there was overall growth in passenger numbers, this was now being led by the developed rather than emerging markets. He added that the tightening of South Africa's monetary policy to protect exchange rates was slowing economic growth.

Globally, IATA's outlook for the year was reduced from a previously projected net profit of \$19,7bn (R210,7bn)

to \$18,7bn (R200bn), accounting for a fuel bill that was \$3bn (R32bn) higher than was predicted in December last year. Tony said the total number of passengers expected to travel by air this year was 3,3bn, which equates to 6 000 people boarding a flight every minute. "Even though this is a forecast downgrade, the overall story for the industry is positive."

Some of the other challenges facing the airline industry are the rising price of oil as a result of the instability in the Ukraine and the need to align regulations surrounding passenger rights on a global scale. ■

Etihad creates new group

DORINE REINSTEIN

ETIHAD has consolidated its business ventures beyond its core airline business, with the establishment of the Etihad Aviation Group, which will comprise Etihad Airways, the Hala Group, Etihad Airport Services and other group support functions.

The newly formed Hala Group will bring these different businesses together to drive commercial value for Etihad Airways, for Abu Dhabi and for the airline's equity alliance partners. It combines Hala Travel Management and the

destination management services of Hala Abu Dhabi, Etihad Holidays, and other major start-up initiatives such as a new global loyalty company. Hala Abu Dhabi is Etihad's in-house DMC and professional conference organiser. It offers leisure arrangements for Abu Dhabi and the UAE for local and international visitors, including hotels, tours or tickets to events such as concerts and the Formula 1 Etihad Airways Abu Dhabi Grand Prix.

"Ten years ago we started life as a small regional carrier but with global ambitions.

Since then we have grown to become one of the world's leading passenger and cargo airlines and have expanded and diversified our operations outside the core airline business, laying the foundations to become one of the leading aviation and travel groups in the world.

"The new Etihad Aviation Group structure reflects this diversification and is a natural development to deliver continued and sustainable success for Etihad Airways and its partners," said **James Hogan**, Etihad president and ceo. ■

To the point



Kulula has announced an important change to its GDS fare structure. The airline has increased its Q surcharge on kulula (MN/161) fares from R30 to R50 (excl VAT) per sector as a result of the depreciating rand. The increase is applicable to all service providers.



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SELL MORE ... THAILAND

The Naked Agent



Every month our team of mystery shoppers hit the streets, take to the phones or surf the web to find *TNW's* Naked Agent of the month. Using the same holiday request, they look for the agent who really gets to know the customer's needs in full and who is able to nail the sale through genuine interest, enthusiasm and excitement about the customer's enquiry. We call it consultative-partnership selling.

Thailand for the girls

THIS month, our mystery shopper contacted four agents in the Gauteng area for a girls' holiday to Thailand. The four ladies haven't been

to Thailand before and are looking for a nice relaxing beach resort, preferably half-board accommodation and a stopover for shopping along the way.

Our selling-orientated criteria:

10%	Engage the customer by making an excellent first impression – be interested, excited and enthusiastic.
20%	Profile the customer, getting to know their needs in full, their likes, dislikes and prior travels. Use consultative sales techniques, not transactional questions only, and provide advice about the destination.
10%	Hook the customer, preventing their further shopping around, by sounding like an expert.
10%	Match the enquiry to the quote, providing two or three options, ideally within the same day of enquiry.
20%	Sell the holiday ideas and bring them to life. Don't just attach a quote.
5%	Close the sale when you spot buying signals.
15%	Convert the sale by creating a sense of urgency and asking for the booking.
10%	Persist if customers provide a reason why they can't book – attempt to overcome objections.
100%	TOTAL

Agents are scored up to the maximum of the weighted percentages above.

WINNER

**Pentravel Cresta
Randburg**

70%

Lee-Ann Habib-allah, the winning consultant, was very friendly, interested and engaging throughout the call, getting to know our needs in full and asking the million-dollar question, 'What is most important to you about this holiday?'. She was excited by our first trip to Thailand and drew on her experience of the East and suggested a few options, explaining in detail what each would provide. When I confirmed that we liked to shop, Lee-Ann said two nights in Bangkok should suffice and suggested hotels that were close to shopping areas. For a beach experience, she suggested Phuket's Karon Beach because I had said that we would prefer something that wasn't too busy. She asked about the basics – when, where, how long and passports – after she had created excitement about our holiday and then recapped to make sure she had everything covered. Within a

couple of hours I received a further call from Lee-Ann, advising me that she had created a couple of quotes best matching my needs and wanted to tell me about them. She explained why she had selected the particular properties, always linking it back to what my needs were and also drew on personal experience, having stayed at one of the properties. She outlined why it was better to take the direct flight, which fitted my price range because I was only going to be in Thailand for a short time. Lee-Ann recommended both the properties she'd selected and the airline, and then concluded by saying she would be on duty and available if I'd like to chat about the quote over the next couple of days. The mystery shopper was highly impressed by Pentravel Cresta and would only encourage Lee-Ann in future to recognise buying signals, create a sense of urgency and ask for the booking.

**Sure Penzance Travel
Alberton**

30%

This agent had a lovely warm personality, opening the conversation with: "Shoot! What do you want to do and what do you need?" I told her that we wanted to go to Bangkok as we liked shopping but I was not sure what else as we had never been there before. She queried whether we also wanted to go to the islands, somewhere like Phuket or Phi Phi, and then asked about the duration and date of our trip. After a quick recap, she asked for my contact details, our budget and what star rating we would prefer for our hotel, asking if a four-star establishment was OK, which I opted for if it fitted

our budget. The agent promised to get back to me with a few options. While she was mainly transactional in her questions and provided little in the way of expert advice and assistance, she was excited about my needs and so created a level of engagement, thus hooking me. Unfortunately, the engagement ended there. While I received two options within a 24-hour period they were just attached to separate emails with no attempt to sell whatsoever. A disappointing end to a promising start.



Photo: TAT

XL Michelle's Travel

Boksburg

While the travel agent sounded friendly, the when, where, how long, interrogation lasted all of two minutes. She asked me about the style of accommodation and when I said I wasn't sure and needed help, she replied: "OK, I will make it four-star." I was surprised that my

request for guidance had been overlooked. There was no attempt to understand any of my needs, likes or dislikes and, surprisingly, not even my budget. The agent's last remark before ending the conversation was: "OK, I will request this and will action it as soon as I hear something." After two

12%

working days, two quotes were received by email with no attempt to sell the holidays recommended. I was left to review the email attachments and hope that they would meet my needs.

Lara Travels

Oakdene, Johannesburg

What a disappointing start. Very little friendliness in the tone of voice. She asked me where I was looking to go to and for how long, how many people would be travelling and whether we minded sharing rooms, followed by: "Are you only looking at Phuket?" I said friends had recommended including Bangkok because

it was good for shopping. I expected her to be excited about this and agree but she didn't. I then prompted her saying: "Well, is it good for shopping?" She simply laughed, said yes and recommended two nights in Bangkok and seven days in Phuket. She advised me that she would put together some options and mail

7%

them to me. There was no excitement, no interest and no enthusiasm at all. The whole experience was transactional and didn't differ in any way from what a customer could achieve if they went online. After six days no quotes had been received.

Sales tip

Sound like an expert and hook the client

The mystery shopper was completely blown away by the service from Pentravel Cresta. The agent almost got it right and got a fabulous score. This is the example that all agents should be following and learning from. The top scorer took the time to get to know the customer's likes and what was most important

to them about the holiday. She used her personal experience to create a further wow and hooked the customer because she cared about finding the right holiday.

Expertise isn't just about destination and product knowledge, it's also about competence, efficiency, engagement and trust. The winning agent had it all.

Get sales fit

The mystery shopper could soon be in your area. Sign up for Travelinfo Plus's sales training workshop, 'Get Sales Fit', and make sure that you are delivering a service that the travelling customer deserves, keeping our industry alive and thriving. ■

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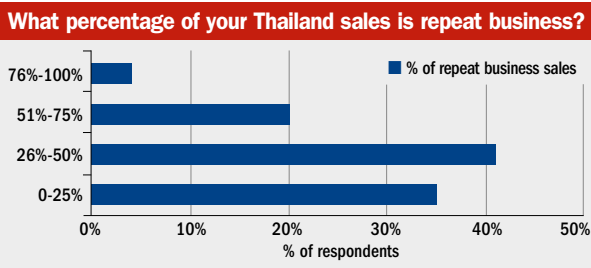
The land of many happy returns

A SNAP survey on selling Thailand among retail travel agents and wholesale tour operators, revealed that respondents had a high number of repeat business requests, and its attraction

from a price point of view. The survey, posted on eTNW for a day, aimed to elicit some idea of holiday patterns to Thailand and to highlight gaps – 265 readers responded. Here are some of the points.

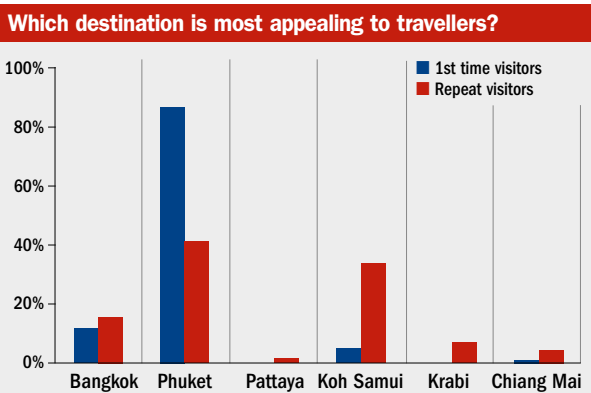
High percentage of repeaters

Thailand's ability to keep visitors coming back is seen in the graph at right. Approximately 40% of respondents indicated that a quarter to half of their sales was repeat business. This highlights Thailand's variety and diversity and the fact that the country can be repackaged and resold several times.



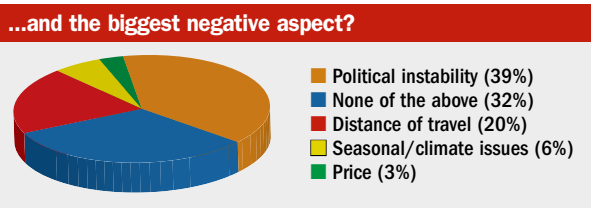
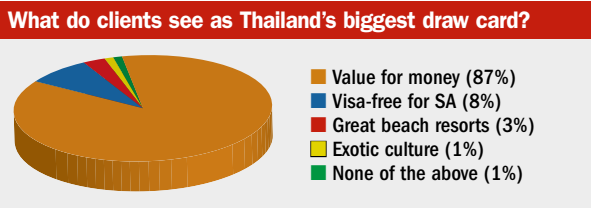
Potential beyond the obvious

Repeat visitors appear to look for different experiences on subsequent visits. Not surprisingly, Phuket is sold to a high percentage of first-time travellers. However, repeat visitors are more interested in venturing off the beaten track and are more likely to visit other destinations on a return trip. The graph at right indicates that there is a strong opportunity to sell options that fall outside the stock standard packages that dominate the market.



Price, price, price

The fact that value for money emerges as the biggest draw card of travelling to Thailand comes as no surprise, considering the current weak state of the rand. Being visa-free is a further attraction. Political instability and distance of travel emerge as the biggest negative aspects, however, the percentages are relatively low. The relatively high percentage for 'None of the above' begs the question as to what the other negatives are.



Top tips

Travel agent and tour operator respondents offered these tips in eTNW's recent Snap Thailand Survey.

- 1** Bargain with the locals to get the lowest price possible. Some of the sightseeing and Phi Phi transfers are also cheaper if booked when in Thailand.
Nadine Norman (Pentavel – Port Elizabeth)
- 2** Take an empty suitcase and lots of spending money. Do day tours and take days at leisure where you can browse and explore. Spend at least two weeks in Thailand as there is so much to see and do!
Nadia Horn (Selena Travel – Cape Town)
- 3** Be brave enough to explore off the beaten track. Thailand isn't hard to navigate and the people are very friendly. It's well worth looking for an authentic experience by venturing further than the brochures suggest. Speak to local hotel managers about things to do in the region.
Jennifer Moller (Travel Counsellors – Durban)
- 4** Visit the islands – they are absolutely beautiful. Don't always go back to the same island and resort. Thailand has so much more to offer. Take a Thai cooking course in Kancharaburi.
Leigh McLaren (Thompsons Travel – Cape Town)
- 5** Be respectful of the religion. Be modest. Be ready to take your shoes off to go into temples. Avoid making jokes about the Thai Royal Family.
Nicolette Bosch (Club Travel – Algoa Bay)
- 6** The colourful Bor Sang Umbrella Festival celebrates traditional craftsmanship each January. Thailand celebrates New Year in April at Songkran. Floating candles and hot air balloons make Loy Krathong the most romantic day in November.
Nooline van der Merwe (Global Travel Alliance – Cape Town)
- 7** If you are going to learn at least one phrase, learn 'mai pen rai', which means 'never mind' or 'it's nothing'. This is a philosophy for Thai people and keeps them calm and at ease. Exude positivity and it will be reflected back to you – this is the Thai way of life.
Melissa Heisnah Seretse (AT&T Travel – Botswana)
- 8** Experiencing two beach destinations in one holiday is a must. I would recommend hiring a jeep or scooter, however make sure you have an international drivers' licence to avoid issues with Thai police.
Tracey Visscher – Flightsite (Cape Town)
- 9** Travel agents should try to sell the northern areas of Thailand and other areas that are less commercial and well-known. Sell Thailand combined with other Asian countries, especially those that are just opening up (eg. Myanmar).
Jan Jenkins – Umvuselelo Tours & Travel (Centurion)
- 10** Don't be scared to give western restaurants a skip and eat where the locals eat – the food is fantastic, cheap and also gives you such a beautiful understanding of the people.
Rob Ferreira (Flight Specials – Secunda)

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3* SUNSET BEACH RESORT, PHUKET (10 NTS)
BONUS: Breakfast daily + One set menu dinner
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from **R11 825pp**
(Add airline levy from **R943**)

Peak season surcharges & block out dates may apply. Valid for SA Residents. All prices are subject to change due to currency fluctuations, rate increases, airfare increases and availability. For standard terms and conditions refer to www.thompsons.co.za E30E



Quick Reference Guide

Tourism Authority of Thailand's destination guide

EACH tourism region within Thailand offers the traveller something different.

Bangkok:

- Once in Bangkok, transportation options are endless: tuk-tuks, motorcycle taxis, the underground MRT train, BTS Sky train or boat rides on the Chao Phraya River all connect to popular tourist sites.
- An often-chaotic mixture of old and new. Ancient temples stand across from giant mega malls, and deluxe condos tower over canal shanty towns.
- Shopping of all types, from markets to slick shopping centres filled with world-class designer labels.
- The heart of Thai cuisine, where delicacies from every part of the country can be found.
- Offers a wide menu of family-style attractions such as the Dusit Zoo, snake and crocodile farms, theme parks and traditional puppet shows.

Phuket:

- An island ringed by beaches, each with its own atmosphere. Some are great family spots, others draw a sophisticated crowd, others attract adventurers.
- Boasts incredible water-based excursions such as the Phi Phi islands or Phang Nga Bay, a marine park where canoeing is possible.
- Inland, Phuket Town, Patong and numerous markets along the coastline make for good shopping. Patong is the centre of nightlife.
- Muslim fishing villages, elephant trekking in tropical forests, Chinese architecture and Buddhist temples fill the island with interesting things to see and do.

Chiang Mai:

- Chiang Mai is not only the capital and cultural core of the Lanna

kingdom, it is also the centre of Buddhism in northern Thailand. The most important temple in town is Wat Prathat Doi Suthep, high on a hilltop.

- The city is famous for its handicrafts – silk, jade, paper, wood and lacquer-ware products are just some of those available. To the east of the centre are numerous factories where craft-making demonstrations are offered.
- Popular activities include elephant riding and river rafting. From Chiang Mai, trekking can be arranged into the mountainous countryside, where nights are spent in hill tribe villages.

Krabi:

- On the mainland, this coastal resort is maturing as a tourist destination and is increasingly sophisticated.
- It's estimated that there are around 200 islands around the Krabi coastline, making for great island hopping. Good snorkelling and kayaking spots abound.
- Just south of Ao Nang Beach, around a rocky headland and accessible only by boat, Railay presents a tranquil and extraordinary world.
- Wat Tham Sua, or Tiger Cave Temple, is a warren of natural caves formed within a lush jungle and home to monks who worship in this environment.

Koh Samui:

- A charming and quaint island with interests for all ages and facilities for all budget categories.
- Perfectly suited to leisurely exploration with all its oddities – such as the mummified monk at Wat Khunaran, the markets and villages.
- Offers a vibrant nightlife, especially alongside its main beaches of Chaweng and Lamai.

Emirates:

- With seven daily flights on its Dubai-Thailand route, Emirates offers the largest number of seats into Thailand compared with any other international carrier.
- Bangkok is served twice daily by Emirates' A380s.
- Emirates flies daily from Dubai to Phuket, giving South Africans direct access to the island.
- Emirates Holidays offers a selection of packages to suit different requirements and budgets.

Holiday Tours:

- Holiday Tours maintains a live inventory on point-to-point Thailand packages on its website.
- Point-to-point travel can be quoted, booked and paid for online.
- Rates are competitive.

Singapore Airlines:

- Singapore Airlines offers a daily service from Johannesburg and four weekly flights from Cape Town via Johannesburg to Singapore, where there are the following options to travel to Thailand:
 - 35 weekly flights to Bangkok
 - Five weekly flights to Chiang Mai on SilkAir.
- 35 weekly flights on SilkAir to Phuket
- Seven weekly flights on SilkAir to Koh Samui
- Passengers from South Africa are entitled to S\$40 (R360) worth of Changi Dollar Vouchers for shopping and dining or exclusive access to the Ambassador Transit Lounge.

Thai Airways:

- The only airline operating direct flights from Johannesburg to Bangkok, with short transit times on most of its connecting flights.
- Competitively priced fares for onward destinations in Thailand and neighbouring destinations.
- Thai Airways' Royal Orchid Holidays offers special discounted prices on selected Thai accommodation. Agents can customise packages to meet clients' needs with ease.

Thompsons Holidays:

- Thompsons has extensive, long-time experience in packaging Thailand holidays.
- Staff have in-depth knowledge of beach and inland locations and a wide variety of special interests.
- Attractive specials are constantly compiled and publicised to the travel trade.

Trafalgar Tours:

- Trafalgar's new Secrets of Thailand itinerary is based on its 'At Leisure' style of travel offering longer stays, later starts and more free time.
- Insider Experiences range from Tai Chi exercise sessions to a Thai massage in the grounds of the Wat Pho temple.
- Trafalgar takes small groups with a maximum capacity of 26. Departures for as few as 10 guaranteed passengers are definite.
- Various extensions and combinations meld the itineraries together for a wider Indochine experience beyond Thailand.



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Aerial view of Lumpini Park in Bangkok. Photo: Wikimedia

Uncovering Thailand's secrets

TRAFALGAR'S Secrets of Thailand tour is priced from R28 475 per person twin share.

The itinerary includes a visit to the world's highest alfresco restaurant to experience night views, learning Tai Chi at Lumpini Park and a short trip by

local tuk-tuk to the oldest temple in Bangkok, Wat Pho. In Kanchanaburi, travellers board a local train for a ride across wooden viaducts, which offer fantastic scenery along the Kwai River. They then fly to Chiang Rai and experience a long-tailed boat ride along the Mekong River

in the Golden Triangle, where the borders of Thailand, Myanmar and Laos converge. There's also a visit to the Ban Mae Kampong homestay for a Be My Guest lunch. The trip ends with a traditional Kantoke presentation of northern dances and a highlight dinner.

Free ticket for group bookings

CHANGI Airport Group is providing a free ticket for MICE groups of 15 or more passengers travelling on Singapore Airlines and SilkAir to Singapore and beyond. The offer is

available for bookings made before October 31 for travel until March 31, 2015.

For non-MICE groups, Singapore Airlines offers one free ticket for groups of more than 20.

Bustling city meets beach

THOMPSONS Holidays is offering a Bangkok and Phuket combo package from R12 423 per person. The package includes flights from Johannesburg to

Bangkok and Phuket with taxes, transfers, two nights in Bangkok and five nights in Phuket with breakfast daily. The offer is valid until June 30.

Thai promo fares on offer

THAI Airways is running two promotional fares for flights departing from Johannesburg to Bangkok and beyond.

The Thailand and Network promo, which is valid for sales and travel from now until March 31, includes all-inclusive fares from R8 600 for Thailand

and R9 900 for selected destinations in Asia.

The Winter Special promo offers all-inclusive fares from R8 800 for Thailand and R10 000 for selected Asian destinations. It is valid for sales until June 30 and travel from April 1-June 30. ■



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Kenya

Photo: Photopress

Kenya offers experiences that range from wildlife viewing to sipping cocktails on the beach and remains a popular choice for travellers, reports Chana Boucher.

Confidence is building

DESPITE the setbacks that Kenya has suffered recently, interest from SA travellers seems to be picking up, say industry stakeholders.

According to **Rosemary Mugambi**, sales and marketing director East Africa for Serena Hotels, Lodges and Resorts, bookings from SA travellers, especially business travellers, are up. "As at December 2013, Serena hotels in Kenya had a 6.6% increase from the SA market [compared with the previous year]," she says.

Last year saw some challenging times for the destination that included a fire at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport as well as the violent hostage situation at the popular Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi. But Rosemary says it wasn't long before visitors returned.

"Business travel did recover quite quickly but leisure travel has taken a few months. I would say confidence in the destination is building up and while at present business is relatively slow, the indications for the second half of the

year are positive."

John Ridler, media and PR manager for Thompsons Holidays, says the Kenyan authorities handled the fire situation well and the airport was quickly up and running again using temporary facilities.

Although authorities expected the new Terminal 4 and the temporary arrivals terminal to open earlier this year, it was announced that a delay in equipment delivery would see the soft opening of these facilities postponed to around August. The temporary facility will have capacity for 2.5 million passengers and is expected to significantly ease pressure on the airport.

According to Rosemary, SA travellers favour popular regions like the Masai Mara, particularly for the wildlife migration. She says Kenya is able to compete against neighbouring popular tourism destinations such as Zanzibar, as it takes the lead in tourism infrastructure and human resources.

John says, after a lull,

interest in the Mombasa beach resorts has picked up again. "Mombasa stands up well against Zanzibar as a desirable destination," he comments.

Spokesperson for Kenya Tourism Board, **Carolyn Riddick**, agrees that Mombasa is popular. She says movie star, Brad Pitt, enjoys visiting Lamu, which is 340km north-east of Mombasa and a Unesco World Heritage Site. She adds that Lamu, Malindi and Diani Beach are popular options and that Kenya competes as a holiday destination because it combines beach and safari.

Rosemary says Kenya offers product diversity that caters for various levels of the market, from upmarket clientele to the budget conscious.



Spa reception area at Mara Serena Safari Lodge. Photo: Serena Hotels

Mara Serena special

SERENA Hotels, Lodges and Resorts is running a special offer on its Mara Serena flying package, which includes two nights full-board accommodation at the recently refurbished Mara Serena Safari Lodge.

The lodge now features a new reception, bar lounge, arrival lobby area, gift shop, buffet counters

in the restaurant, dining area, and health club and spa with steam room, sauna and gym.

The package also includes flights from Nairobi, game drives and a hippo pool breakfast.

It is available until June 30 from US\$720 (R7 724) per person sharing.



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Photo: Courtesy of the Kenya Tourism Board

TNW5434SD



Park fee hikes – not all bad

WHEN entrance fees to Kenya's national parks were increased in January after the imposition of VAT, there was an outcry from many players in the industry who believed it would make the destination less competitive. Others, however, believe it will not affect the number of visitors to the parks and that it was a necessary move.

In accordance with the country's VAT Act 2013, a number of previously exempt tourism services, including game drives and conservancy and park fees, are now subject to a 16% VAT charge.

Rosemary Mugambi says the higher fees could make Kenya a more expensive destination for travellers from South Africa. **John Gakinya**, md Trails of Africa Tours and Safaris, expects the increased fees to definitely affect tourism because they raise the average spend per day for tourists visiting the parks. "Bearing in mind that tourism is a global industry



Carolyn Riddick

with destinations competing between themselves, if the countries around us do not charge VAT on park fees, then we will look more expensive in the market." However, he adds that the long-term effect of the charges will depend on what industry receives in return for the increment.

"If the funds are used to improve the product then, in the long run, the industry players benefit," he says.

John Ridler says the game destinations are already expensive, so the tax is not really a factor.

Carolyn Riddick says the fees are important for conservation and justified by the way that wildlife is taken care of by the Kenya Wildlife Services. "Entry fees are charged at all our national parks and reserves, where revenues are kept to support visitor services and facilities. Every time you visit a park or site you are investing in its future."

In September last year, Kenya Association of Tour Operators ce, **Fred Kaigua**, said Kenya was now one of the few countries in Africa taxing conservation. "Conservation is very expensive and, in most cases, does not even manage to pay for itself. To further tax it is adding insult to injury and will most certainly have a very adverse impact."

• See article in TNW February 26, 2014.



Photo: Sarova Whitesands Beach Resort & Spa

Combine bush and beach

THOMPSONS Holidays is offering a five-night bush and beach combo to Kenya from R17 194. The package includes flights from Johannesburg (with taxes), three nights at the Sarova Whitesands Beach Resort &

Spa including breakfast and dinner, transfers, one night at the Ashnil Aruba Lodge in Tsavo East and one night at the Kilaguni Lodge in Tsavo West, including all meals. The special is valid from April 1 to June 30.

Kenya Airways to take delivery of Dreamliners

KENYA Airways has ordered six Boeing 787 Dreamliners and expects delivery this year, with the first arriving on April 14. It will also take delivery of a second B777-300ER in May.

The fleet expansion is part of the airline's Project Mawingu route expansion plan and growth strategy.

"Long-haul routes to Paris, Amsterdam and Beijing are among the destinations earmarked for direct flights, as we explore new markets that will help us achieve our objective, to contribute towards the sustainable development of Africa," says ceo and md, **Dr Titus Naikuni**. ■

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

Appointments

■ Protea Hotels has announced the appointment of three new general managers. **Tania Malan** has been appointed gm of African Pride Melrose Arch Hotel in Johannesburg. **Jacques Jordaan** joins the group as gm of the Protea Hotel in Midrand and **Garrick Grabe** has been appointed gm of the Protea Hotel in Nelspruit.



■ **Keaton Quarmby** joins the Westin Cape Town as director of marketing. She was previously the marketing manager for New Balance SA, where she worked for 10 years.



■ City Sightseeing Johannesburg and Soweto has appointed gm, **Christine Tworeck**. Christine was previously branch and operations manager for City Sightseeing Cape Town. She will be responsible for managing operations, sales, strategic planning and roll-out, and for spearheading future growth.

■ **Andrew Molyneux** has joined Tshukudu Game Lodge in Hoedspruit as gm. Andrew has a strong commercial and business background, bringing valuable knowledge and skills to the well-established facility.



■ **Vanessa Dee** was recently appointed manager for Twice DMC in Livingstone, Zambia. Vanessa has managed two international lodges in Malawi and Mozambique and worked as a travel consultant in Johannesburg.



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Pick of the week

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New aircraft for SAA Africa routes

DEBBIE BADHAM

SAA has taken delivery of two new A320 aircraft – with more to come – which will be deployed on SAA's domestic and intra-African routes.

The aircraft arrived earlier this month. Another is expected in June, followed by two in the third quarter and one towards the end of the year. The A320s are configured with 24 seats in business class and 114 in economy.

SAA would not specify which routes the aircraft would be deployed on.

Spokesperson for Airbus, **Linden Birns**, says A320s are designed for routes with three- to four-hour flight time, making them ideal for domestic routes and services to African destinations such as Kenya.

“Business-class seating offers a 10% improvement

on pitch compared with our current business-class offering on narrow-body aircraft, giving our competitors in the domestic market a run for their money,” says **Myriam Bracke**, SAA product manager.

The fuel-efficient aircraft feature a back compartment on all business-class seats, with the exception of the first two rows, where passengers are able to store a PC tablet and make use of a USB power point to keep the tablet charged during the flight, as well as a PC power console for additional laptop computer power.

Further innovations are also in the pipeline, including Samsung tablets with in-flight entertainment already loaded – a service that will be offered to business-class travellers on longer African flights. ■



40 years of adventure!

To celebrate turning 40, Exodus is offering a R400 discount on bookings paid in full before August 31. The company was launched in 1974, when **David Burlinson** and **John Gillies** journeyed overland from London to Cape Town. The trip took 16 weeks. The operator now offers adventure tours across all seven continents. Pictured here are (from left): **Sarah Whiteside** (Travel Vision sales and marketing manager) with **Dharmesh Koooverjee** (ceo) and **Natalie van Wyk** (worldwide reservations and Exodus specialist consultant). Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Q9 inventory removed from Amadeus

DORINE REINSTEIN

ARIK Air's inventory has been removed from the Amadeus GDS platform. Unconfirmed bookings have been marked as cancelled (HX) and future fare searches for Arik Air don't show options.

Amadeus declined to comment on the matter, citing confidentiality restrictions. A spokesperson for Amadeus told TNW, however, that all existing bookings made in the Amadeus System would still be honoured.

Rodger Whittle, Arik's vp for South Africa, says: “We regret sincerely the inconvenience faced by our agents and

customers. We have enjoyed a long relationship with Amadeus and are in close dialogue with them on resolving the present issue at the earliest opportunity.”

Rodger added that all bookings and tickets remain fully valid and are contained in the airline's central reservations system. Agents requiring assistance with existing or future bookings can contact the airline by phoning 011 666 7470 or by email: zacustomerservices@arikairint.com.

The current problems with Amadeus are in no way an indication that Arik Air plans to halt operations, Rodger

adds. “Johannesburg has steadily and consistently grown this key destination in our network and the South African market continues to be very supportive of the route for Arik. The introduction of the Airbus A330-200 on the route late last year has seen our business grow even more.”

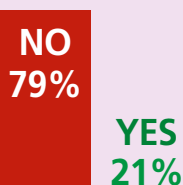
June Crawford, ceo of Barsa, says she is unaware of any problems relating to the airline. “Their load factors to and from South Africa are good and their equipment is modern.” She adds that Arik is a member of Barsa in good standing with all membership fees up to date. ■

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Flights to BLZ cancelled

DEBBIE BADHAM

FLIGHTS to Blantyre's Chileka International Airport have been cancelled until March 31 while the runway is repaired.

SAA, Malawian Airlines and Kenya Airways have suspended their flights and will resume

operations on March 31. “SAA passengers will be accommodated on our Lilongwe flights,” says SAA spokesperson, **Tlali Tlali**. “We will offer a full refund and waive penalties to SAA-ticketed passengers wishing to cancel their travel arrangements due to flight cancellations

occasioned by the airport closure.”

Kassim Geresu, ceo of Malawian Airlines, advises travellers flying into the country to make use of Lilongwe International Airport during this time. KQ clients flying to Blantyre will be rerouted through Lilongwe. ■

New partner for UK visa applications

From page 1

- From March 31, the Pretoria centre will move to the 1st floor, Menlyn Corner, Frikkie de Beer Street, corner of Lois Avenue and Atterbury Road, Menlyn.
- The Cape Town centre has moved to the Media Quarter Building, corner of Somerset Road and De Smidt Street,

- De Waterkant.
- The Durban centre has moved to the 3rd floor, Office Tower, The Atrium Overport City, 430 Peter Mokaba Road.
- The Port Elizabeth centre has moved to the ground floor, Building 66, Fairview Office Park, Greenacres. Visa applicants must continue to complete applications and pay

for their visas online at Visa4UK before selecting an appointment at their application centre. Appointments to submit an application at visa application centres must also be booked online.

The VFS helpline and e-mail ID will remain active until March 31.

For more on UK visas, see Travelinfo. ■