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TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY



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## Agents left out of pocket by 'endorsed' operator

CHANA BOUCHER

**S**OUTH African travel agents operate in a market where the absence of guarantees and bonding make trust a key factor. They rely on tourism authorities for references when dealing with ground handlers and operators abroad. So when a tourism authority introduces agents to a foreign supplier, is this an endorsement that means they should then take responsibility in the event of that supplier defaulting, or are agents on their own?

Md of Club Travel, **Wally Gaynor**, has claimed such an incident happened in October last year when the Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM) organised a road show across South Africa, giving the travel trade the opportunity to meet and interact with delegates from Dubai, including the tour operator, Quality Tours. The operator ceased operations in December and six South African tour operators and travel agents were affected, three of which are associates of Club Travel.

"South African tour operators and agents would not have known about this operator and not trusted dealing with them but for the Dubai Tourism

Board connection," says Wally. "They were endorsed by Dubai Tourism and feature on their website.

"None of the agencies abdicated responsibility to their clients. Distant Travel & Tours lost R200 000, which she could not afford as a small operator but took the money from her bond to sort out her clients. If any of these affected entities had told their clients 'it's not my problem' we would have read about it in the *Sunday Times* and again our industry would have been tarnished like many times in the past," he said.

**"SA agents would not have trusted dealing with this operator but for the Dubai Tourism Board connection."**

Wally believes the DTCM has a "legal and definitely moral responsibility to do good by these people". He adds: "I am willing to facilitate our partners and those others affected to join together and do one class action against the Dubai Tourism Board."

The DTCM did not respond to *TNW's* specific questions about why Quality Tours was selected to participate in the

road show and whether or not it believes DTCM should be liable for the damages South African agencies and tour operators suffered. Instead, it issued a statement saying it had been made aware that certain tourism operators had been affected by the closure of Quality Tours.

It said: "The DTCM is mandated to license tourism establishments and travel agents in the Emirate of Dubai. Quality Tours, an independent limited liability company, holds a licence permitting it to provide inward travel services... Their current licence [expired] on March 24. The DTCM had no knowledge that Quality Tours intended to cease trading." DTCM adds that it has opened an investigation into the circumstances surrounding Quality Tours' closure.

While he is not consulting on the case, **Gareth Cremen** of Ramsay Webber, says in a situation like this, travel agents may have a leg to stand on. "Without seeing the documentation, it sounds as if Club Travel has a case." He says the tourism authority endorsed an operator that was not reputable and that the tour operators and travel agents would not have done business with the operator if it wasn't for this. ■



### Pirate of the Royal Caribbean

Cruises International is offering specials on Royal Caribbean cruises booked between April 1 and April 20 (excluding *Quantum of the Seas*). Savings start from US\$25pp (R270) for an interior cabin for five nights to the Bahamas, Bermuda, Caribbean, Canada, and Europe between June 1 and April 30, 2015. Searching for treasure is CI commercial manager, **Tracey Krog**. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

## HWT brand will live on in SA

NATASHA TIPPEL

THE Harvey World Travel brand will vanish in Australia, after a group of travel agents failed to buy the label from Helloworld in an attempt to keep the name alive. The brand will not only continue in South Africa, but there are big plans to grow it.

Last year, the Jetset travel

group took the decision to rebrand all its agencies under one name, Helloworld, combining its marketing budgets and initiatives to better compete with Flight Centre in Australia – a local condition that is unique to the Australian market and not relevant in South Africa, says **Allan Lunz**, md of BidTravel.

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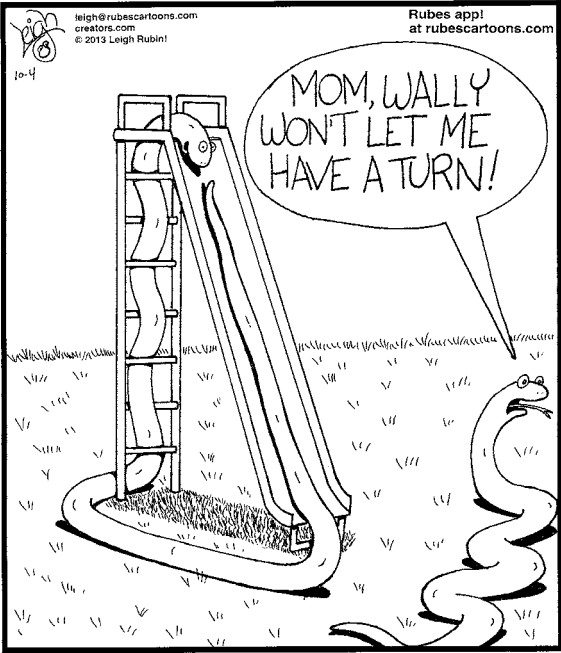
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# Consolidation is hurting preferred agreements

DORINE REINSTEIN

**N**EGOTIATING corporate preferred airline agreements has become a lot more difficult in an increasingly consolidated airline industry, according to recent Egencia study, Corporate Travel in the Consolidated Skies.

The study shows that the number of carriers has declined dramatically over the last 20 years as a result of airline consolidation. In this post-consolidation era, with fewer airlines and fewer empty seats, it is harder to find deep discounts and disturbingly easy to lose negotiated rates. If companies fail to deliver the load share that they promised, airlines are cancelling contracts, sometimes as early as 90 days after being signed.

And South African agents are feeling the pinch.

**Jim Weighell**, corporate manager of Sure Travel, says airlines are getting better at enforcing contractual terms, with a better handle on profit objectives and associated reporting. "I think airlines are looking to apply greater discipline in enforcing the terms of contract where airfare discounts are being negotiated. Improved management information allows carriers to monitor performance more closely. Historically corporations have wittingly or unwittingly provided 'inflated' traffic estimates, which significantly affect regional airline budgeting," he says.

Club Travel has also found that airlines have become more discerning in renewing agreements. **Collin Austin**, business development executive, says: "Airlines

definitely look at the figures from the previous agreement and, if those figures are not showing a return on investment, they sometimes decline to renew." Collin adds that in this market suppliers are still very interested in the corporate business simply because the yield from this sector is still higher than the average yield.

**Ben Langner**, md of Carlson Wagonlit Travel, agrees. He says although airlines have become increasingly selective about corporate agreements and stricter about support requirements, it is an opportunity for TMCs to assist corporate clients in negotiating airline agreements relevant to their business travel needs.

**"If companies fail to deliver the load share, airlines are cancelling contracts, sometimes 90 days after signing."**

**Mark Hollyhead**, Egencia's senior vp for the Americas, says the increased pressure for companies to deliver bums on the seats of preferred carriers has shifted the focus more to the TMCs to manage and sort air preferences and ensure business travellers choose the preferred carrier. "To maximise air contract discounts, it will be increasingly important for corporate travel managers to make travellers aware of their preferred carriers and to ensure these air partners appear at the top of their booking displays."

Mark says although the fundamentals of travel

management haven't changed, the ability to manage air preferences should. "A 21st century TMC should be able to attractively display clients' preferred choices within the booking tool, with integrated approvals and real-time reporting on compliance. The ability to control 'sort order display' should be in the hands of the travel manager to act quickly and adjust when necessary."

Jim argues, however, that companies meet targets where compliance is mandated and enforced within the company's HR policy from the top down. "Unless this discipline is in place, it is very difficult for the TMC to enforce policy," he says, adding that the key to cost saving is for the company internal protocols to set the parameters for acceptable booking behaviour. The TMC can, however, advise on the 'best-fit' policy relative to the company's objectives and culture, he says. "Self-booking tools are useful in this regard as they provide real-time reporting on bookings and behaviour with detailed reporting."

Collin agrees that a lot depends on the corporate's travel policy. "Very few corporates have really tight policies where we have to use a preferred supplier exclusively but a really good agreement will drive itself." He adds that the TMC can help companies set up solid corporate agreements. He says a TMC can arrange a cluster deal for SMEs, where they wouldn't be able to obtain corporate deals individually. By grouping several SMEs together, a corporate deal can often be achieved, he says. ■

## To the point



The maintenance work at Blantyre's Chileka Airport has been completed and the airport has been reopened ahead of schedule. Work was originally set for completion on March 31. Malawian Airlines and Kenya Airways have resumed flights to and from the airport.



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# New Travelport leadership team for Africa

NATASHA TIPPEL

TRAVELPORT has established a new leadership team for Africa to run three new sub-regions, including Southern Africa.

The region is headed by **George Harb**, previously md of Travelport China. George is responsible for overseeing Travelport's direct operation in Southern Africa as well as managing key third party relationships. **Robyn Christie**, Travelport gm South Africa, reports to George.

North Africa is now managed by **Stuart Laird-Smith**. Central, East and West Africa is led by **Peter Barry**.

The appointments were effective April 1. All of the above regional directors report into **Rabih Saab**, md of Africa, the Middle East

and South Asia.

Currently md of Travelport Africa, **Mark Meehan**, has been appointed new managing director for Asia Pacific. He will take up his new position, which will be based in Singapore, early this month.

Commenting on the appointments, **Jason Clarke**, Travelport's md of global sales, said: "The appointments are all designed to further accelerate the execution of Travelport's strategic plan in two of the world's fastest growing travel regions – Africa and Asia Pacific.

"Meanwhile, the new senior team we have appointed to replace Mark in Africa will provide a highly customer-centric approach to the very diverse needs of each of the sub-regions." ■



Celebrating the partnership that will bring the first Boeing 737 MAX 8 to Africa are (from left): **Cédric Goubet**, executive vp of CFM; Comair's **Erik Venter**; and **Van Rex Gallard**, vp for Africa, Latin America and Caribbean Sales of Boeing Commercial Airplanes. Photo: Debbie Badham

## Comair orders new hi-tech B737s

DEBBIE BADHAM

COMAIR has ordered eight Boeing 737 MAX 8s, making it the first airline in Africa to order the new technologically advanced aircraft.

The aircraft are scheduled for delivery between 2019 and 2021 and will support Comair's future fleet renewal. The airline currently operates an all-Boeing fleet of 25 Classic and Next-Generation B737s on its kulula.com and British Airways brands.

Scheduled for production

in 2017, the B737 MAX is the most technologically advanced 737 variation designed by Boeing to date. The aircraft builds on the efficiency, economics and reliability of the 737 range and, thanks to new aerodynamic improvements such as advanced technology winglets, has a fuel performance that is 14% more efficient than the most advanced single-aisle aircraft currently on the market. It can also carry 12 more passengers.

The aircraft's LEAP-1B engine, designed by CFM, ensures double-digit fuel efficiency and allows for eight percent lower operating costs.

"This R9 billion investment in Comair's fleet upgrade is fundamental to our business strategy. Our decision to make this investment was not taken lightly and is a critical component in managing our exposure to the volatile fuel price and thus minimising the impact of the fuel price on airfares," says Comair ceo, **Erik Venter**. ■

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### A snapshot of the week's airline news

#### EK launches new flights

EMIRATES is extending its network with the launch of several new services. The airline launched a non-stop daily service between Dubai and Boston on March 10 and from August 5 will operate a daily service between Dubai and O'Hare International Airport, Chicago. Both services will be operated by a Boeing 777-200LR. In addition, the airline will launch a daily non-stop service between Dubai and Oslo from September 2 operated by a B777-300ER.

#### Fastjet launches ancillary products in Africa

FASTJET is now offering low-cost car hire in Africa through its partnership with TravelJigsaw, parent company of Rentalcars.com as well as online parking services in South Africa through its partnership with Looking4Parking.com. The airline will also further investigate opportunities to launch secure parking at other African airports where fastjet operates

# Your clients' safety is your responsibility

CHANA BOUCHER

**T**RAVEL agents can be held liable for any damages if they fail to advise their clients of the risks when travelling to a country experiencing political unrest, security issues or whether it is prone to natural disasters.

This, says **Gareth Cremen** of Ramsay Webber, is in line the Consumer Protection Act. He says travel agents have a misconception that they can't be held liable as they are the intermediary but as the experts in travel they are expected to advise their clients on the degree of risk involved in travelling to the destination they are selling. "Travel agents don't understand the consequences of not complying," says Gareth. He believes this is due to the inefficiency of the Consumer Commission since its launch as well as the public not being aware of their rights. "The CPA is not being used to its full potential so travel agents are continuing with business as usual," he adds. But he believes this is changing and that South Africans are becoming more litigious.

He advises that disclaimers should be used if a client is visiting an area prone to cyclones, for example, at the time that they are travelling. An agent can state that they cannot vouch for the weather but they should make the client aware of the potential for adverse weather conditions.

In the case of an area that has experienced political unrest, such as the Ukraine or Thailand, an agent has an obligation to identify the risk and explain to their client that there have been incidents that affected tourists.

Travel agents will need to show that they took all reasonable steps to make their client aware of the risks if it went to court. He says while an agent cannot foresee everything, if something does happen before the client travels, it is the agent's obligation to contact the client and offer them the opportunity to cancel or delay their travel plans. Gareth adds that they should also encourage their client to take out travel insurance.

**"Travel agents have a misconception that they can't be held liable as they are the intermediary."**

**Simmy Micheli**, manager of sales and marketing at TIC, says it is not necessary to purchase additional insurance when travelling to a high-risk destination. "Insurance policies are pretty much standard, regardless of what is happening anywhere in the world," she says.

Simmy adds that the benefit that does change in the event of civil unrest, war



or a strike is the cancellation curtailment cover. "The heartbeat of this benefit is to cover your losses if you cannot travel or need to cut short your travel because of an unexpected medical condition." She adds that TIC covers five other perils that might lead to a trip cancellation or curtailment, including the theft of travel documents, retrenchment, a traumatic event before the traveller's departure, accidental loss to home of R100 000 or more due to a storm, fire or burglary and the cancellation of the flight ticket within 36 hours of departure by the airline due to strike, riot or civil commotion. This is provided that it was 'unforeseen', i.e. there was no public warning 14 days prior to the purchase of the policy.

"Prior to the drama in Egypt [for example] travellers had the above benefit as indicated but since then there is no cover for this specific benefit to travel to Egypt," explains Simmy. ■



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#### Travel updates

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# How to avoid ADMs

DORINE REINSTEIN

SAA recently hosted a workshop at its Durban offices to teach KZN travel agents how to avoid ADMs by preventing common mistakes.

**Lorraine King**, SAA's financial officer, said one of the most common ADMs was caused by incorrect exchanged tickets relating to name changes. When this happens, agents should submit a copy of the billed Fare Audit ADM and the relevant tickets to SAA. An Agent Credit Memo will then be issued to the agent minus the 15% audit fee plus VAT and an administration fee.

"Rather follow the correct procedures for name changes though," said Lorraine. For SAA to change a name on a ticket it needs: a copy of the

valid ticket reflecting the same dates/routes/name; a copy of the passport or RSA ID reflecting the valid name as per the new ticket issued; a copy of the billing reflecting both tickets; and Maestro Net reflecting that SAA received the funds and valid flight coupons for refund.

Lorraine warned that any rectification due to an agent error would automatically attract an administration fee or R250 plus VAT per ticket.

Pictured here are some of the attendees at the workshop (back from left): SAA's **Lorraine King**, **Kriba Govender** and **Madelein Vorster**. Front from left: **Jessica Kantola** (Pentra head office in Westville) and **Seema Sukhdeo** (One Stop Travel and Tours head office in Morningside). ■



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# WTM Africa unveils conference agenda

TESSA REED AND DEBBIE BADHAM

THEBE Reed has announced topics of discussion for the forums, conferences, seminars and lectures that will accompany the three co-located shows making up Africa Travel Week, including World Travel Market (WTM) Africa. Topics covered will include responsible tourism, sustainable business, tourism education and technology.

The event programme accompanying WTM Africa, WTM Vision, will include the Euromonitor Regional Trends Report, a keynote session delivered by the Digital Tourism Think Tank and a dedicated responsible tourism programme, which will form a key component of the education sessions and include speakers, **Wilfred Cheval** of Dyer Island Cruises and Marine Dynamics; **Anne-Kathrin Zschiegner** of the Zeitz Foundation; **Fabrice**

**Leclercq**, ceo TRIP Ghana, and **Anne van der Tuuk** of Abang Africa Travel.

The African Business Travel Association will also host sessions on the broad range of developments, challenges and opportunities impacting the African business travel industry. A dedicated panel headed by **Kamilla Swart**, associate professor of the Department of Tourism and Events Management at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, will discuss challenges faced by the tourism industry in education.

Meanwhile, Thebe Reed is calling on travel professionals to get behind WTM Africa.

"The World Bank has predicted that sub-Saharan Africa's economic growth should accelerate to more than five percent over the next three years, far outpacing the global average, with increased investment, high commodity prices and a pick-up in the

global economy driving this expected growth surge," says **Sugen Pillay**, business development director of Thebe Reed Exhibitions. There are business opportunities for both inbound and outbound trade in Africa, he adds.

Thebe Reed has found it challenging to convince the local travel industry that the event caters directly for its interests but Sugden says the aim of WTM Africa is to address the broad needs of the industry – for both inbound and outbound travel in Africa.

"WTM will provide a platform for industry professionals to interact with a large number of international exhibitors such as the Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, Atout France, Botswana Tourism, Hilton Worldwide, RezLive." He says travel professionals will also find value in the full event programme of informative and educational sessions. ■

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# TOUR OPERATORS

Max Marx looks into the process of quoting by wholesalers for retailers, and finds frustration all round.

## Quoting – poor practices spoil sales

**T**HE relationship between travel agent and tour operator is perhaps never more critical and inter-dependent than when it comes to requests for quotations. What transpires at this point can determine whether a sale is closed or not and, as such, can affect the bottom lines of both travel agencies and wholesalers.

Yet, it is at this juncture that travel agents and tour operators feel the most frustration – travel agents with tour operators because of slow response times for tailor-made quotations, and tour operators with travel agents because they don't quiz their clients sufficiently on their travel requirements. This often results in tour operators having to re-quote several times – by which time the agent's client has shopped around and the chances of closing a sale are vastly diminished.

**Lucinda Tyler**, Club Travel product manager, says the failure of agents to obtain comprehensive information from their clients is an



**Lucinda Tyler**

industry-wide problem. "Agents often just send client emails on to tour operators without actually consulting."

She adds that Club Travel solves the problem by providing its consultants with a template that prompts them to request specific information from clients. "Our consultants have to complete this template before requesting quotes from tour operators, which avoids a lot of backwards and forwards between agent and operator

and saves valuable time for all concerned," she says.

**Johann Strydom**, World Leisure Holidays md, says the better an agent translates client expectations to a tour operator, the more the operator can deliver it realistically.

**Ethienne Smit**, gm of Tourvest Leisure Travel Group, suggests that where travel agents don't provide tour operators with sufficient information, the wholesale consultant should refuse to assist the retail agent. "When wholesale consultants are working on complicated quotes and are spending a lot of time on them, they must have the information they require."

For agents, first prize is to receive the quote virtually immediately after the request has been made. But for tour operators this can prove problematic when there are many destinations in different time zones.

**Alet Steyn**, Wendy Wu Tours' business development manager,



**Johann Strydom**

understands the urgency and the need for same-day quoting but says this is not always possible.

"With destinations like Vietnam, Cambodia and China, which are five to six hours ahead of us, if a request for a tailor-made quote comes through after 11 am, it is just not possible to provide a same-day quote because of the time differences."

Ethienne says operators have very different standards when it comes to quoting. "Some operators

are able to quote while you're on the phone without keeping you waiting, while others insist on emailing you quotes without committing to specific turnaround times. This leaves our consultants having to follow up on a regular basis until they actually get the quotation they've requested."

He says this type of situation is untenable in the world of online booking. "In the online environment, taking even a day to get back to a client is too long. If we don't get back to our clients quickly, they start shopping around. And some wholesalers take between 24 and 72 hours to respond to a request when we've promised our clients same-day feedback."

**Linda Steenekamp**, gm of XL Rosebank Travel, says with the technology available today and with much travel bookable online, she does not understand why it takes 24 hours or longer for tour operators to provide quotes.



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## These operators are tops!

IN INTERVIEWS with leading travel consortiums, Beachcomber Tours and The Holiday Factory received high praise from travel agents when it came to requests for quotations.

**Lucinda Tyler** says Beachcomber and The Holiday Factory tick all the boxes. "Their quotes are easy to read, easy to use and they provide good turnaround times."

For **Ethienne Smit**, Beachcomber is tops: "They have an online booking tool that our consultants love using because it has everything they need. Their consultants are knowledgeable and friendly.

When you call through they send you the quote immediately. They also give you the options you want plus additional options. Their quote formats are also very good and easy to read and understand."

**Flora Fubbs**, The Holiday Factory's senior manager: contracting, marketing & operations, explains why travel agents like dealing with her company when it comes to quotations: "We have invested in a great reservations system that allows consultants to quote and book quickly. The biggest advantage of our system is speed and accuracy. Our investment

in technology and back office teams ensures our system is always correctly populated."

She says that when agents call The Holiday Factory's call centre and chat to consultants, a very high level of efficiency is achieved. "A quote is created and emailed to the agent during the phone call. We ensure we give agents exactly what they are looking for and also provide alternatives, which reduces the necessity for a lot of back and forth." Flora adds that The Holiday Factory is in the process of developing an online quotation system for the trade.

## Shopping around holds up the works

BEACHCOMBER gets a lot of duplicate quote requests because clients shop around, says **Joanne Visagle**, Beachcomber's sales and marketing manager.

"We sometimes have five or six agencies vying for the same booking. This becomes tricky as we quote from live flight availability. It can happen that one agent gets a better or worse rate purely because the flight availability has changed in the last few hours or they ask for slightly different dates or room types."

**Inge Dobihal**, owner of Austria Connection, says

that because agents request so many quotes and their clients shop around a lot, the quote-to-booking ratio is pretty poor industry wide.

**John Ridler**, Cullinan Outbound Tourism's media and pr manager, agrees. "We are doing the same quotes for a number of different travel agents and in the end only one of these will convert."

He adds that agents (or their clients) also seem to shy away from discussing budgets at the time of the inquiry. "This results in us having to re-quote multiple times before we come to the right package

it. It would therefore help everyone if a budget was determined upfront."

**Alet Steyn** says agents are often unfamiliar with a destination and don't want their clients to know, so they don't ask them exactly what they're looking for. "This is especially true when clients request Vietnam, Cambodia and China. We then put in a good quote but it is not what the client is after."

She adds that Wendy Wu offers agents destination training, but such training is often rejected by agencies that do not have Wendy Wu as a preferred supplier.

## Trafalgar's Costsaver: quality at a great price

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**Theresa Szejwallo**, Trafalgar's md, says the company has included all the essential ingredients that make up a great holiday.

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up to half the dinners included, Costsaver is designed to give travellers freedom and flexibility."

Theresa recommends Costsaver's three top-selling tours – Italian Dream, Imperial Highlights, and Britain and Ireland.



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# 'Best' is not the cheapest

**DEZY De Lima**, Holiday Tours brand custodian, says agents should not always think that price is the only determining factor in client decision making and should therefore give clients several options. "A four-star hotel that offers clients a far better experience than a three-star may only be R100-R200 more, so give your clients a choice, and don't just take it for granted that they're penny pinchers."

Price is a big contributing factor, says **Joanne Visagie**. "Agents should advise their clients not to settle for sub-standard accommodation just to save a few rands on their Mauritius holiday, as they will end up being disappointed."

When clients say they want the best deal, agents should not presume they mean the cheapest, says **Flora Fubbs**. "Often clients mean the best value-for-money holiday that meets all their requirements."

When clients are not forthcoming about their budget, agents can get around this by asking them the type of star rating they're looking for and the type of excursions they're keen on, says **Ethienne Smit**.

**Alet Steyn** says: "If a client

says they only have a R20 000 budget, they cannot go to Cambodia and Vietnam for two weeks. Also, one can't tour Cambodia and Vietnam in five days. Agents should know that these are impossible requests."

**"Advise your clients not to settle for sub-standard accommodation just to save a few rands on their Mauritius holiday, as they will end up being disappointed."**

To assist her agents in obtaining the correct information from clients before requesting quotes from tour operators, **Linda Steenekamp** has provided a recommended list of questions to ask.

Ethienne says Tourvest consultants are trained to get all the information they need from a client to quote adequately.

"They are focused on conversion, which is incentivised with performance measured on conversion and

quotation turnaround times. So getting all the information from the client at first point of contact is the ideal scenario."

**John Ridler** suggests that agents draw up a simple checklist for their clients so that pertinent information is provided first time round (see page 13).

**Inge Dobiha** would like agents to be more specific and not to request quotes for all possibilities. "Advise us about flight arrival and departure times as this impacts the itinerary for any tailor-made, self-drive tour with limited time available. It also impacts suggestions on duration of nights in a city.

"Agents should also find out a client's interests, how they want to travel between places, their preferred hotel category and room allocation when it's more than two people travelling.

"It's a heavy burden if requests come in for tailor-made itineraries and quotes such as 'please submit some suggested itineraries and quotes in three- and four-star hotels for a family of five for five to seven nights' with no other information," she says.



Tamassa Resort pool area. Photo: Tamassa

## Soft refurb at Tamassa

THE four-star Tamassa Resort on Mauritius's south coast at Bel Ombre has undergone a soft refurbishment.

The spa has a refreshing new look, and the Kids' Club has been refurbished and offers new games and new bicycles.

Tamassa's 214 rooms have all been refreshed and feature new soft furnishings and linens. The public areas, including the poolside and bar, have been spruced up and upgraded security installed. The restaurant now features a wider range of themed buffets including Tex Mex, Asian and Mediterranean.

Island Light Holidays is offering an all-inclusive seven-night package to the resort for R17 020pps (includes R3 846 taxes) ex-JNB, with fares ex-Durban from R17 755 and ex-Cape Town from R18 699. The package includes return flights on Air Mauritius, airport transfers, full board including local drinks; and most land and water sports, including waterskiing.

One child under 12 can fly, stay and eat free and only pays for taxes when sharing with two adults.

The package is valid for travel from June 1-July 20 and must have been booked and paid for by May 15.

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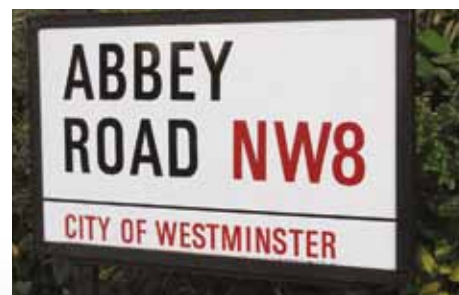


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## TOUR OPERATORS

# Thumbs up for Beachcomber

TRAVEL agents interviewed for this feature have named Beachcomber Tours one of the best wholesalers when it comes quotations. They have praised the tour operator's new online quoting system for its ease of use, functionality, speed, easily readable format, and the ability to quote for several passengers at once.

The quoting system can be found within Beachcomber online – Beachcomber's new agent-only online information and booking portal, which offers a collection of tools to help agents close every Beachcomber enquiry, with added marketing features

that can be customised, like flyers and eChats that highlight special offers.

The new quoting engine gives consultants access to live flight and accommodation availability and displays a choice of airline and route options.

Agents can choose the type of room they would like to include in the quote or just select the 'cheapest' option in the drop-down menu, which will select the cheapest available room for them.

They can also choose between quoting on a specific hotel or generating a quote for all hotels. All food and

beverage package options are listed on the results page.

If agents change their flight or accommodation selection, prices are automatically recalculated and displayed.

Another aspect is that once the quote has been completed it can be sent instantly to the agent's email address and can then be immediately forwarded to the client. The email with the quotation also includes a separate document that contains a breakdown of the commission earned by the agent.

Access to the quoting system is free to all agents registered with Beachcomber.

## Accuracy is critical!

**ETHIENNE Smit** says operators often fail to accurately take down the information provided by agents. "Very often our consultants will call, give the information, specify their exact needs and client requirements, and the tour operator will send a quote with a whole lot of incorrect variables, such as incorrect amount of adults, incorrect children's ages or incorrect room type.

Many also don't think to provide added value by making suggestions instead of just taking down the inquiry. "By adding value, they can help agents with the conversion of the inquiry," he says.

**Linda Steenekamp**, takes issue with tour operators that send quotes that include the commission she is earning on the quotation.

"My clients do not need to know the amount of commission I am earning. Why can't tour operators send me two quotes, one for my back-end that includes my commission, and one for the client without my commission reflected?"

She adds that she'd also like tour operators to provide a list of excursions and pricing with the quotations they provide, which will allow for more business and increased revenue.

## Earn extra comm with Trafalgar online

TRAVEL agents can earn an extra 1% commission by using the Trafalgar online quoting system.

The system provides real-time availability, is simple to use and enables agents to create as many quotes as they want. These can be emailed directly to their clients from Trafalgar's website and agents can copy themselves in.

The online quote also has return functionality (a simple button that links back to Trafalgar's site) enabling agents to proceed straight from quote to booking without having to start the process from the beginning.

"Booking can proceed from this click through and the system has built-in reminders when payment is due. Our online payment system makes

this a seamless transaction," says **Theresa Szejwallo**, Trafalgar's md.


She says agents who request a quote from Trafalgar should know the tour name and the proposed date of travel, as this makes the process that much smoother.



**Theresa Szejwallo**


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# Phone vs email vs online

MANY tour operators still take requests for quotations by phone or email. Developing an effective online quoting system, especially for operators that offer a wide range of products in many destinations, can be challenging.

Where the choices and selections are finite, or an operator offers set departure tours, then online quotation tools seem to be the way to go.

**Inge Dobiha** says the bulk of her business is tailor-made quotes for which it's difficult to set up an online quotation system to accommodate her wide product offering in seven countries.

**Dezy De Lima** says Holiday Tours has 19 dedicated agents who take requests for quotations by phone and email. They also do bookings and receive payment.

She says agents can utilise Holiday Tours' online booking and quotation tool for domestic, Mauritius, Thailand and selected point-to-point international travel. For more tailor-made itineraries and destinations or properties not featured on the website, agents can phone or email Holiday Tours for quotes and bookings.

Tourvest's leisure consultants always go the online route first, where



**Dezy De Lima**

tour operators offer online quotation tools, says **Ethienne Smit**. "Online tools work well for point-to-point but as soon as it becomes complicated you have to go through to the wholesaler consultant, because most tools don't cater for complex routings."

He adds that, because Tourvest's leisure consultants work in a call centre environment, it's not always possible for them to stay on hold waiting for a tour operator for long periods of time. "So if utilising an online booking tool is not an option, they prefer to email but if the quotation is urgent, they will still call through."

**Joanne Visagie** says, although email enquiries are high, Beachcomber gets far more calls from agents for

quotes and consultations. Quotes are sent as soon as the call is completed. She says agents are increasingly using Beachcomber's recently launched online quoting tool.

**Linda Steenekamp** says she would only trust online quotations for destinations like Mauritius, which comprise just one destination, a flight in, flight out, transfers and accommodation. "If you're going to destinations like Florence, Rome and various other cities in Italy, for example, then you need the expertise of a wholesale consultant to put it all together."

Club Travel's agents prefer to request quotes by phone because of competition, says **Lucinda Tyler**.

"We have clients who send quotation requests by email but have sent the same request to six other agencies too. So we use the phone because we know that if we only reply this afternoon, or tomorrow, we've already lost that client."

**Flora Fubbs** finds that, with email enquiries, travel consultants do not always send through all the detail required.

"We therefore prefer the opportunity to consult with the agent on the telephone to ensure we offer the correct quote for their client."

## Checklist: questions to ask your client

- Which destination(s) are you interested in visiting?
- Have you been there before?
- How much time do you have available?
- What time of year do you want to travel?
- What are your preferred dates?
- Are you flexible with departure dates?
- What type of holiday are you after (beach or cultural, for example)?
- What is your budget?
- What type of activities do you enjoy?
- How do you want to travel between places – train, self-drive, coach, fly?
- Are you travelling for a holiday or a special occasion?
- What are your expectations for this trip?
- What are some of your previous travel experiences?
- What star rating do you prefer for accommodation?
- Who are you travelling with?
- Where are you travelling from?
- How many adults are travelling together and what are their ages?
- How many children are travelling and what are their ages?
- Would you like to share a room with your children or do you want inter-leading rooms?

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The Ambre has undergone massive refurbishment. Photo: WLH

## Trendy Ambre appeals

WORLD Leisure Holidays' Ambre resort in Mauritius is a popular choice among South Africans seeking a trendy, upmarket Mauritian hotel that caters for the adult market.

"Since the hotel reopened in October 2012 following a massive refurbishment, the uptake from the South African market has been beyond expectations," says **Johann Strydom**.

Ambre, he says, represents a new concept for the South African market. "It's contemporary, romantic, trendy and only for guests who are 16 years and older. The

resort offers affordable, all-inclusive packages and with its evergreen seasons – meaning one doesn't have to wait for schools to break up to go – we often see double-income earners in the hotel."

While the average stay is seven nights, South Africans are also popping over for shorter mid-week and weekend breaks.

An all-inclusive seven-night package to Ambre starts at R17 400pps (including R3 400 taxes) and includes transfers. A R500 discount is on offer on certain set departures to all WLH hotels in Mauritius.

## A host of new tours from Wendy Wu

WENDY Wu Tours is offering great new tours in China, Vietnam and Cambodia.

The operator has created new fully inclusive Deluxe River Cruising & China Holidays packages from its most successful group tour itineraries. The tours have no more than 20 passengers and clients

stay in luxury properties and boutique resorts and sail on the luxurious Victoria Cruises and President Cruises ships along the Yangtze River.

Also on offer is an extensive range of cruising options in Indochina. The new three-day Halong Bay in Focus cruise in Vietnam

travels along Halong Bay to Hanoi aboard the luxury Au Co cruise boat. Also new is the Discover the Mekong overnight cruise on board a Bassac vessel in Vietnam, while in Myanmar, travellers can cruise the Irrawaddy River on Pandaw River Expeditions' luxurious ships.

## Thompsons Holidays highlights hotspots

NEW hotspots for the coming European season are Turkey, Greece, Italy and France, says **John Ridler**.

John recommends some of the must-see places in each destination:

- In Turkey, spend a few nights in Istanbul followed by a coach tour to ancient

sights like Cappadocia, Bodrum and Kusadasi.

- In Greece, take in the sights of Athens and then do some island hopping to Mykonos, Santorini and Crete. A Louis Cruises cruise, which takes in all these islands, is a great option.
- Italy is popular with couples

travelling by train or on escorted coach tours and there is growing demand for self-drive packages.

- In France, Paris is an old favourite matched with train journeys into the countryside as well as escorted tours and self-drive packages.

## Holiday Tours specials

- Holiday Tours is offering seven nights at the five-star Outrigger Mauritius Resort & Spa from R16 995pps, valid from June 27-July 21. A 30% discount on accommodation and an early-booking discount of

10% have been included in the price.

- In Thailand, Holiday Tours is offering a seven-night B&B Phuket and Phi Phi package from R12 188pps. It includes four nights at the Sea, Sun & Sand Resort

& Spa in Phuket and three nights at the Phi Phi Erawan Palms Resort, return flights, airport taxes of R813, return airport transfers and daily breakfast. The package is valid for travel from April 1 to October 31. ■

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Equity Connections cc Handle all aspects of creditors functions. Reconcile, process, pay all creditors. Must be computer literate and have strong numeracy skills. Email: [equitycon@mweb.co.za](mailto:equitycon@mweb.co.za)

**Team Leader - Leisure/Corporate - Sandton**

Equity Connections cc Take full responsibility for all aspects of teams' success and growth. Present weekly/monthly reports on productivity and team progress. Email: [equitycon@mweb.co.za](mailto:equitycon@mweb.co.za)

**Travel Sales Consultant - Cape Town**

Club Travel Opportunity to analyse the market, meet and exceed targets whilst identifying new agents, build relationships, provide training and handle branding for agents. Email: [careers@clubtravel.co.za](mailto:careers@clubtravel.co.za)

**Online Galileo Consultant - W.Cape**

Club Travel Contacting agents regularly, follow up, obtain feedback, assisting with queries, activation of non-transacting agents and coordinate, fix agents issues and advise sales executive. Email: [careers@clubtravel.co.za](mailto:careers@clubtravel.co.za)

## Account Executive – Travelinfo

This position would suit an intermediate travel candidate looking for a career change.

Use your good people skills and travel industry experience to establish and maintain relationships with travel clients and agents.

**Essential Requirements**  
Travel Diploma, 4-5 years travel industry experience, License and own car

Send CV to [careers@nowmedia.co.za](mailto:careers@nowmedia.co.za) (put position name in subject line)  
Please include your salary expectations when applying  
Only successful candidates will be contacted



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*Only successful candidates will be contacted. Should you not hear from us within 2 weeks of this advert, please consider your application unsuccessful.*



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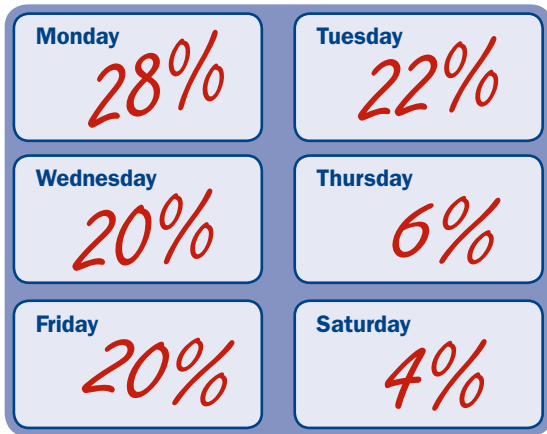
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# Asata conference: what's on the agenda

**R**EGISTRATION is now open for Asata's annual conference, which will be held from May 23-26 at the African Pride Arabella Hotel & Spa in Hermanus.

The theme for the weekend is: Back to the Future of Travel!

"If you've been in the travel industry longer than a decade or so, you'll remember when it was more important to make a customer than a sale," says ceo, **Otto de Vries**.

"We were not as obsessed with complex web-based systems. The emphasis was on knowledge, training and educationals, giving individuals a career, not a short-term travel fix.

"Airport taxes and fuel surcharges didn't outweigh airfares, there was more to

marketing than spamming and relationships were important to your business."

The conference programme will be finalised over the next few weeks. So far, delegates can expect workshops and seminars on:

- Business rescue
- The POPI Act and your business
- The new amended B-BBEE codes of good practice
- Grow your network, grow your business

There will also be industry development updates and talks on:

- The launch of Asata's Young Professionals in Travel (YPT)
  - The Asata Professional Programme
  - Asata's strategy for 2014/15
- Guest speaker on global

trends is **John Melchior**, a corporate travel analyst who focuses on corporate travel distribution trends in the European marketplace. He has worked with companies such as Radius, Birmingham European Airways and Maersk Travel. He is currently md of JME Enterprises and Consulting, a firm that works on strategic and business development for companies from all sectors of the travel industry, mainly in Europe and the United States.

Visit [www.satavelagents.co.za/conf2014/](http://www.satavelagents.co.za/conf2014/) for more information on the conference and to register. Asata has advised that the hotel capacity is limited and that the association will be taking registration on a first-come, first-served basis. ■

## Major upgrade for Vic Falls airport

TESSA REED

VICTORIA Falls International Airport in Zimbabwe is undergoing major expansion that includes a new terminal and runway, and work should be completed by April 2015.

Airport manager, **Ronnie Masawi**, says the new runway will cater for wide-body aircraft, while the new International

Terminal will be able to handle 1,2m passengers per annum.

The project will see the existing terminal building upgraded and become a domestic terminal, and the existing runway will be strengthened and used as a taxiway. A new landside and airside road network and new car parking will also be constructed. The project will

cost \$150m (R1,6bn).

The airport development has been welcomed by the industry. **Trish Mambinge**, gm of Shearwater Victoria Falls, expects to see an increase in tourism arrivals with the expansion of the airport.

She adds that some airlines have already shown interest in flying directly into Victoria Falls. ■

## HWT brand will live on in SA

From page 1

"We in South Africa have invested an enormous amount into the brand. We love the brand. We're committed to it. We are not changing the name of HWT in SA, there is no reason to.

"We have a new md – **Marco Cristofoli** – whose mandate is to aggressively grow the brand, and we plan to go from strength to strength in this market," he says.

BidTravel owns 50% of HWT in South Africa; the other 50%

is owned by the Australian group. "This may change," Allan says. But, regardless, the group is committed to keeping its yellow and blue identity. "HWT is alive and well in this market, and growing. Watch this space..." he says. ■

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