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TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

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A turnaround for Schengen visas

DORINE REINSTEIN

APPLYING for and obtaining the dreaded Schengen visa is set to become a lot easier, with shorter visa processes, online applications, visas on arrival, and – most importantly – the introduction of multiple-entry visas for travellers.

The European Union says it plans to drastically simplify and shorten visa procedures for South African travellers from as early as 2015.

The EU aims to reduce the deadline for processing visas from 15 to 10 days as well as make it possible to lodge visa applications at other EU countries' consulates if the member state is not present in the country. Application forms will also be simplified and allow for online applications. In some countries, travellers will be able to apply for a visa-on-arrival for up to 15 days.

On the cards is the introduction of a new type of visa – the touring visa. This allows visitors to travel in the Schengen area, throughout various countries, for up to one year, without staying in one member state for more than 90 days in any 180-day period.

However, the most exciting announcement is probably the facilitation for regular travellers, which includes mandatory issuing of multiple-entry visas valid for three years.

A simplified visa system would undoubtedly boost travel to Europe from South Africa, industry stakeholders say.

Dinesh Naidoo, group operations director of SWG, says the process for

obtaining a European visa is currently a tedious and costly procedure. "If the process for European visas were relaxed you would find a growth for travel into Europe," he says.

Sarah Whiteside, sales and marketing manager of Travel Vision, adds that the current visa system is a deterrent for travellers based in outlying areas. She says clients from Port Elizabeth, for example, who want to obtain an Italian visa, need to travel to Cape Town. "The client has to add the cost of the visa, which is over R1 000, a return flight to Cape Town, accommodation, and car hire to the cost of his/her trip to Italy. Furthermore, applications for Italian visas can only be submitted between one month and 15 days before travel. The client therefore has to take the risk of paying for his trip in full, with the risk of hefty cancellation penalties hanging over him should his visa be declined."

Sean Hough, ceo of Pentravel, agrees, saying it would make Europe more appealing for families, who now tend to opt for other destinations when faced with the cost, administration and hassle of personal interviews at embassies.

All eyes are now on the UK to see whether the country will follow suit with a relaxation of visa rules. UK tourism companies have expressed concern that the improvements to Schengen visas could drive more business to competitor countries in Europe. **David Scowsill**, president and ceo of the World Travel & Tourism Council, called on the UK government earlier this

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It's no secret – South Africans love Thailand but there are many wonders still to be discovered. Trafalgar is offering a 'Secrets of Thailand' special package for 11 nights from R28 475pp. Travellers will visit the oldest temple in Bangkok, have the opportunity to learn Tai Chi at Lumpini Park, and experience a home-stay lunch at Ban Mae Kampong. Prices include flights and taxes. The tour departs on October 4 and 18, and November 1 and 15. Trafalgar md, Theresa Szejwallo, invites travellers to uncover secrets from the East. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

KQ, MN sign codeshare

KENYA Airways and kulula.com have announced a bilateral codeshare agreement to connect the carriers' networks via OR Tambo International Airport.

Kulula.com will place its code (MN) on the multiple daily Kenya Airways

services between Johannesburg and Nairobi. KQ will place its code on all South African domestic routes currently serviced by kulula, including Cape Town, Durban, George and East London.

Bookings are available for sale, effective April 10. ■

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Drop-offs a danger zone for OTAs

DEBBIE BADHAM

THE overwhelming majority of users who log on to online travel agencies are there to gather as much information as they can and then leave – without booking.

This is according to US remarketing specialist, SaleCycle, which analysed 100 global travel brands in 2014 and found travel booking abandonment to be as high as 81%. What's more, booking abandonment proved highest among online travel agents (OTAs) at 89,1%. Remarketing is a feature that lets a company reach people

who have previously visited their site.

Head of search and conversion for Travelstart, **Priya Unger**, says the statistics are an accurate reflection of the booking abandonment challenges faced by OTAs in South Africa. "This is a significant issue for OTAs in general. Consumers are highly connected, which means they compare prices a great deal more than they've ever done before, especially when dealing with high-value items such as flights."

FlightSite also experiences considerable drop-off rates but says its highest drop-

off rate is typically between the search page and its results page, rather than between the check-out and confirmation pages, where the most useful booking information is found.

"Tracking the booking funnel process is key to understanding online analytics," says FlightSite md, **Rian Bornman**. He adds that monitoring online behaviour is a major challenge in itself. "The only certainty with online behaviour is change, which means that alleviating the travel booking abandonment problem is an iterative process." ■

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'We're not going anywhere' – Skywise

CHANA BOUCHER

SKYWISE, the low-cost carrier that has been struggling to launch operations for over a year now, says, despite a recent major setback, it is still set on launching domestic services.

The Air Services Licensing Council cancelled Skywise's air service licence – which was issued in March last year – because it is only valid for a year and the airline had failed to begin operating within the required time.

Andries Ntjane, ASLC deputy director: licensing and permits, said Skywise

applied for an extension, but the Air Services Licensing Council declined this.

Rodney James, ceo of Skywise, said: "It's obviously a big blow to Skywise but we are looking at our options. We're not going to roll over and go away, not just yet."

He said the ASLC cancelled Skywise's licence despite its "very reasonable request for a short extension".

Skywise is still in the process of obtaining an Air Operator Certificate (AOC) from the South African Civil Aviation Authority. **Phindiwe Gwebu**, spokesperson for SACAA, said Skywise still had a number of requirements

to meet for the five-phase process of obtaining an AOC.

"Unfortunately I can't comment on our next move as we're waiting for a legal opinion and we're considering a plan B, which we've been working on for a couple of months," Rodney says.

Andries told TNW Skywise would have to start from scratch and reapply for the licence, which also meant there was once again an opportunity for competitors to object to their plans of launching a new service. When it initially applied for a licence in October 2012, the Council received objections from ex-1time employees. ■



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E-mail: twn@nowmedia.co.za

Web: www.nowmedia.co.za

Address: Now Media Centre,
32 Fricker Road, Illovo Boulevard,
Illovo, Johannesburg,
PO Box 55251, Northlands,
2116, South Africa.



Founding Editors:
John H Marsh (1914-1996) Leona Marsh (1923-2003)

EDITORIAL

Editor: Natasha Toppel natashat@nowmedia.co.za
Features Editor: Michelle Colman michellec@nowmedia.co.za

Contributors:

Mandy Watson Debbie Badham
Hilka Bims Chana Boucher

Dorine Reinstein

Photographer: Shannon Van Zyl

Production Editor: Ann Braun

PUBLISHER

Kate Nathan katen@nowmedia.co.za

GROUP PUBLISHER

David Marsh davem@nowmedia.co.za

ADVERTISING

Sales: katen@nowmedia.co.za

Advertising Co-ordinator: courtneyc@nowmedia.co.za

PRODUCTION

Design Head:

Dirk Voorneveld

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Circulation tvsub@nowmedia.co.za

Edusport acquires Peak Incentives

EDUSPORT has acquired incentive travel solutions provider, Peak Incentives.

The acquisition is a strategic move in line with Edusport's focus. "We have seen strong growth over the past few years in corporate incentive travel and believe that, by acquiring a focused incentive travel business

with the credentials of Peak Incentives, we will be better positioned to deliver exceptional travel experiences to our clients," says **James McIntosh**, Edusport ceo.

Previous owner of Peak Incentives, **Mike Doveton**, will remain with the company as gm of the

incentive division, which will continue to trade as Peak Incentives. "Having direct access to international sport packages through Edusport means our clients will benefit not only from a cost saving but also from the experience that Edusport has in this arena," says Mike. ■

Schengen visas

From page 1

month to significantly change its approach and policies; including freezing Air Passenger Duty and aligning its procedures with the Schengen visa area to simplify UK access for travellers.

Theresa Szejwallo, md of

The Travel Corporation, says when the UK first implemented visas for SA passport holders, the company saw a shift in business, with clients wishing to start their tours in Continental Europe and avoid the UK altogether.

"This has led to our travellers

using alternative carriers into Europe and, of course, being subjected to the whole Schengen visa process." Theresa says she looks forward to the implementation of a touring visa, which will have a positive impact on travel to Europe. ■



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BA's Denize McGregor and Tony Davies (regional customer service manager, Southern Europe) with cabin crew, celebrate the opening of the airline's new lounge at Cape Town International Airport. Photo: Chana Boucher

BA continues to invest in CPT

CHANA BOUCHER

BRITISH Airways has opened its new R19,8m lounge at Cape Town International Airport, an investment that proved its commitment to the Cape Town-London route, the airline said.

BA will increase its Cape Town-London flights from seven to 10 a week next month.

The lounge is twice the size of the previous BA lounge, accommodating up to 148 travellers. It is the first in South Africa to be modelled on the airline's Galleries Lounges in Heathrow's Terminal 5.

The facility integrates both British and South African

design. It features two large bathrooms, each with a luxury shower, complimentary WiFi and power points for up to 90% of guests.

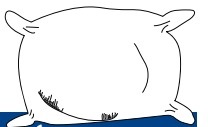
BA's chefs also worked with local suppliers to create a new lounge menu that includes a choice of two hot dishes, soups, a selection of wraps and filled rolls, a cheese board and snack selection. A new feature is the wine area, similar to an upmarket wine bar, which showcases some of the Cape's best wines. It also has a dedicated tasting area where local estates will occasionally present tastings.

Speaking at the opening event, **Denize McGregor**, BA's

head of customer service and operations, said: "Lounges are an important part of our customer service experience for our premium customers and most loyal frequent flyers. In fact our Executive Club members rate lounges as one of the top benefits of the loyalty programme."

Alan Winde, Western Cape MEC for Economic Development and Tourism, commended BA on the lounge as well as its increased frequencies to Cape Town. "When other airlines are ending their summer season flights as we head into winter, BA is doing the opposite," he said. ■

PillowTalk



A brief look at this week's hotel news

More hotels, easier comparisons with Gateway
GATEWAY has launched Easy Rate Display (ERD) in its hotel booking engine. The new feature allows agents to make a quick and easy comparison of rooms and rates. In the past, the same hotel featured several times in results from the same search when offered by more than one supplier. ERD now sorts different rates for the same hotel into one display, supplying a clearer overview immediately, which could make it easier for agents to upsell the room category on the property they are looking at. The new display option also makes it easier for agents to compare room types, services and conditions (e.g. meal basis and cancellation policy). Gateway 2 Travel has also extended its hotel inventory with 45 000 new hotels, primarily in southern Europe and the Mediterranean. The Best Western group has also been integrated directly into Gateway's booking engine.

World's tallest hotel unveils second tower
THE JW Marriott Marquis Hotel in Dubai has opened its second tower. The new tower has 294 rooms, bringing the hotel's total room count to 1 098. There will be 1 608 rooms when tower two is complete in September. The new tower will feature two new food and beverage outlets and offer presidential suites and king rooms, twin rooms, comers suites and rooms for disabled guests. All rooms have LCD TVs, iPod stations, WiFi and master room control tablets.

Shangri-La At The Shard opening in May
SHANGRI-LA Hotels' At The Shard will open in London on May 6 and reservations are open for rooms and event space. The meetings and events space consists of the Ren, with reception space for 140 guests; Li, 30 guests; and Yi, 10 guests. The hotel will feature a cocktail bar, restaurant and a deli, a 24-hour gym and an infinity pool, which will open in July along with the cocktail bar.

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Sha'p Sha'p!

Local is lekker! City Lodge Hotels has 52 hotels across all SA provinces. Here is the latest news in domestic tourism.

Sha'p-sha'p: (Sharp-sharp) (a)
A South African term used to express
our good health and well being.



Visitors can take a virtual tour on Robben Island's new website.

Robben Island unveils new website

ROB BEN Island Museum (RIM) has launched a new website that features a virtual tour and information. "It is an interactive website aimed at honouring the multi-layered history of Robben Island – looking at the island as a place of isolation,

banishment, military post, leper colony, and a site of political imprisonment," says **Sibongiseni Mkhize**, RIM ceo. The new website hopes to enhance the visitor experience by giving visitors the opportunity to orientate themselves through the

website with a virtual tour, says Sibongiseni. Visitors can also view ex-political prisoners talking about their experiences. The site can be used to book tickets and also access information on the weather and ferries.

Tracker launches safe cycling facility

THE Tracker RideFree Bike Park at Central Park Trails in Modderfontein, Johannesburg, was officially launched on March 12. The park features newly upgraded facilities that provide visitors with a safe way to enjoy the outdoors. **Bronwynn Tippett**, chief marketing officer of Tracker,

explains: "This initiative is one we are very excited about. There is a big need to offer cyclists a safe alternative to being on our roads and RideFree is Tracker's answer to the public's call for safer cycling. Until we make our roads safer, bike parks such as the RideFree bike park at

Modderfontein will provide enthusiasts the freedom to ride." Riders of all levels and experience can use the park's facilities, with its four different routes ranging from 10km fun rides to 50km red trails for something a bit more challenging.

Blue Marlin completes first phase of renovation

THE Blue Marlin Hotel in Scottburgh, KwaZulu Natal, has completed the first phase of an extensive renovation. In the initial phase, the reception, dining and recreation areas have been refurbished, along with the swimming pool.

The second phase, which will begin in July, will see the hotel's 120 rooms renovated. The upgrades will be carried out in phases and the hotel will remain open throughout the period, with minimal impact to guests.

DumaZulu opens aviary

GOODERSON Leisure's DumaZulu Game Lodge and Cultural Village in KwaZulu Natal has opened an aviary. It covers 3 000 square metres and features an elevated walk way, waterfall, and seating areas. The aviary is home to species including White California quails, Black

swans, Cape teal, Stone partridges, and Silver pheasants as well as Blue-winged kookaburra and Brown Bahama pin tails. Guests and day visitors will have the option of guided walks, where they can learn more about the species in the aviary, while a self-guided option is also available.

Cheetah Plains adds bush cottage

CHEETAH Plains Private Game Reserve in the Sabi Sand Reserve has added a two-bedroom unit to its accommodation offering. The Bush Cottage is situated on the outskirts of the camp and consists

of a master bedroom and guest room with two single beds, a lounge/kitchenette and a bathroom with a bath and shower. Both bedrooms open on to the patio and offer views of the surrounding bush. ■





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'I went to jail for fraud'

Locked up, pregnant and sharing a cell with 16 other convicts – is this worth R100 000? Andrea Penrose shared her story with TNW's Chana Boucher.

ANDREA Penrose, an ex-Seekers Travel employee, served eight months of her sentence in prison and is currently under house arrest after being found guilty of defrauding the company of R100 000.

Responsible for recruiting in-house agents for Seekers, she and her ex-husband falsely claimed a recruitment fee for his recruitment company.

"Once you are convicted of the crime and charged, there's no chance of negotiating the sentence or offering to pay the money back. Once you are in court it is the state versus you and the state wants to win," she says.

Andrea was pregnant with her second child on the day she was sentenced but says the court was unsympathetic about her daughter, even suggesting that she be placed in foster care if necessary.

On the day of sentencing she dropped her daughter off at her mother's house and told her she would see her later. "I was under the impression that I

was not going to jail, but 'later' turned out to be a year later," she says, explaining that once she was sentenced she was removed from society immediately.

"Prison is humiliating. They take everything away from you, strip you naked in a room full of strangers and conduct a cavity search."

Andrea says all she was given was an ID card, which she was told to keep safe so that if she were to die they would be able to identify her body.

Because she was pregnant, she was locked up in the maternity section of the prison, which had around 17 prisoners sharing a cell built for 10.

Shackled to hospital bed

On the day she gave birth she was shackled to the hospital bed and had to deliver her baby naturally without any painkillers.

Describing her experience, she says that, despite being pregnant, she lost 29kg because of how bad the food was. "You are locked up and

do absolutely nothing for 24 hours a day. There is no peace and quiet, no privacy. It definitely wasn't worth the R100 000." Once released, Andrea managed to find a job but was fired once they discovered she had a criminal record. "I will always have a black mark next to my name. The criminal record never actually goes away," she says.

Andrea remains under house arrest until March next year. She was fortunate to be offered a job as the operations manager of a travel agency but says she doesn't work with anything linked to finances. She adds that she is earning what she got when she first started working.

She has permission to go to work every day but has to be home by 21h00. On weekends she has to be home by 16h00. She says she is often unable to attend school evenings with her children or travel anywhere out of Gauteng without permission.

Andrea now speaks at



*"You are locked up and do absolutely nothing for 24 hours a day. There is no peace and quiet, no privacy."
Andrea Penrose*

industry events, sharing her experience and message with others in travel. Her advice to others in the industry is: "If you suspect that you have put yourself at risk, come forward."

She says the fraud she committed cost Tourvest

Travel Services around R100 000 but that the company was willing to pay a lot more in legal fees – around R700 000 – to see justice done.

"It's not about the money; you can't commit a crime and get away with it. The travel industry is taking a stance against fraud."

Fraud is 'just too easy'

Andrea says she is not a devious person and didn't concoct the plan to defraud the company. She believes fraud is a massive problem in travel because it is "just too easy". "I didn't think that I was doing anything wrong because the clients had the budget and I also thought I was entitled to it because I worked hard," she says.

Andrea says the travel industry is self-governing, which opens it up to fraud. "There is no regulatory body governing the industry and in many cases fraud is due to bad management." Andrea adds that trust is a big factor in the industry, in that clients and managers trust travel professionals to do the job honestly.

Not an isolated incident

Unfortunately, there are many stories like Andrea's in the travel industry. One agent, also previously employed by Seekers Travel, was sentenced to three years in prison in August after pleading guilty to theft and fraud amounting to R600 000. The investigation found that the agent defrauded her previous employer and several clients of more than R2,5 million, says **Christo Snyman**, director of forensics at Mazars.

The agent was investigated for theft of cash payments received from clients for their travel arrangements, theft of cash payments received for fictitious airport tax invoices raised, fraudulent use of client card details to pay false invoices, fraudulent use of client refunds to pay invoices, fraudulent use of client card payment to complete payments on cash invoices raised and for fraudulent transfers

and credit notes.

Christo says the agent attempted suicide shortly after the scheme was uncovered when queries were raised about unpaid commissions by travel brokers contracted to Seekers Travel.

Another travel industry professional, previously employed as an administrator at Club Travel, received a suspended sentence of five years in prison after pleading guilty to defrauding the company of more than R130 000, on condition that she paid the money back during this time. She was also placed under house arrest for three years and has to do community service. The agent made payments into bank accounts belonging to her and two accomplices under the impression that the payments were for franchisees and ITCs. According to her charge sheet, she was heavily

in debt and the financial pressure was what led to her committing fraud.

Kim Botti, director of Lee Botti & Associates, says a criminal record check is done at offer stage and is only done if the candidate gives permission for it. If they are found to have a criminal record, she says this information is presented to the employer who will usually decide based on the merit of the case whether or not they will still employ the person. She says, because fraud is so rife in the travel industry, if the agent has been convicted of fraud there's a good chance they will not be employed.

Kim says not all travel companies use recruitment agencies and that they often employ people by word of mouth without checking references. Companies are often unaware that they are employing people who have committed fraud in the past. ■



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The beautiful people

Sun International Dreams hosted a table of travel industry glitterati at the Miss South Africa beauty pageant, hosted at the Sun City Superbowl, where **Rolene Strauss** was crowned the 2014 winner. Looking dashing in their couture outfits, are (from left): **Peter Schoeman** (City Lodge); **Erica Barrett** (Sun International Dreams); and **Rudi Theunissen** (Thompsons Travel). Photo: Natasha Toppel

Kenya – we need the trade

DEBBIE BADHAM

THE Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) took to the road in March, hosting workshops across South Africa, with the aim of strengthening its relationship with travel agents, who, the tourist office says, are key in promoting the destination, particularly through tough times.

Kenya has been in the spotlight lately, following terrorist threats that have resulted in the deployment of additional security forces at Nairobi airport and in shopping malls and areas frequented by tourists.

KTB's marketing manager, **Fatma A Bashir**, says the incidents have affected tourist numbers but she believes the travel trade's views of the destination have not been affected.

"The trade is a vital point of contact. Their geographical knowledge of Kenya enables them to contextualise negative events covered by the media and provides them with an understanding that travellers



Fatma A Bashir

to a particular part of the country will be unaffected by an isolated event far away," she says.

As part of its drive to create greater awareness, KTB visited Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town to offer agents and operators training on its products and, at the same time, hopefully create confidence in selling Kenya.

"We believe the best way to handle negative events is to keep communication channels with the trade open and keep them informed of the situation," says Fatma. "The

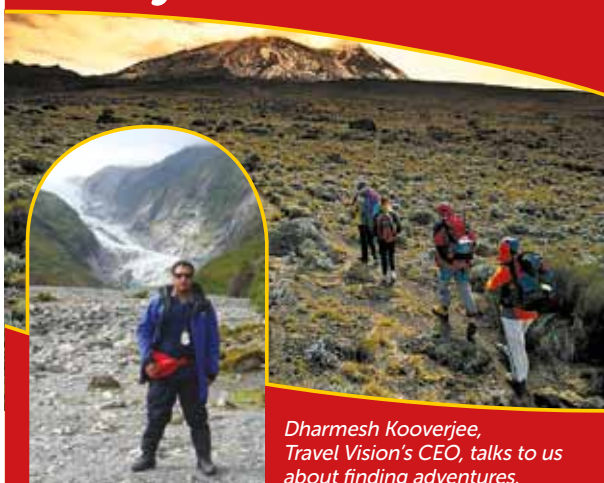
response we've received from the trade has, so far, been very positive."

A major part of the board's agenda on the road show was to promote Kenya's coastal strip. KTB's marketing strategy is to promote Kenya as a "white beach" honeymoon destination, which is ideal for weddings and exotic beach getaways, Fatma says.

Kenya recently increased its park fees to help fund its conservation initiatives – a move that wasn't well received by agents and operators. "Naturally, the initial response from the industry was to start labelling Kenya as an expensive destination but we think our message has been received that the money will be well spent so that our wildlife will still be there for travellers to experience in years to come."

Fatma stresses that the travel trade has a particularly important role to play in promoting African destinations, "which is why we are here to give them the tools to do just that". ■

Find your adventure..



Dharmesh Kooverjee, Travel Vision's CEO, talks to us about finding adventures.

Towering 5,895m above the African plains and measuring up to 40km across, Mount Kilimanjaro is the world's largest free standing mountain and the only place on land where you can clearly see the curvature of the Earth. Far from a remote destination, Kilimanjaro attracts over 25000 people yearly, all eager to take on the challenge of summiting "The Roof of Africa". This epic trekking journey traverses dusty African plains, fields of maize, sleepy villages, jungles and, as you reach the summit, provides a view of the warm sun glinting on the glacial ice that accompanies you along the crater rim to Uhuru peak.

Exodus has the highest success rate of any operator on Kilimanjaro. Their ascents are at least one day longer than the average Kili climb allowing more time for acclimatisation. The company organises circular trips on both the Rongai and Lemosho routes which have gentler ascents, are far away from any crowds and allow climbers the opportunity to view more varied scenery. From a safety perspective Exodus boasts the highest staff to client ratios on the mountain. All guides have first aid training and carry portable oxygen with them to treat altitude sickness.

Contact Travel Vision to find out more or visit www.exodus.co.uk to download our full Kilimanjaro trekking guide.



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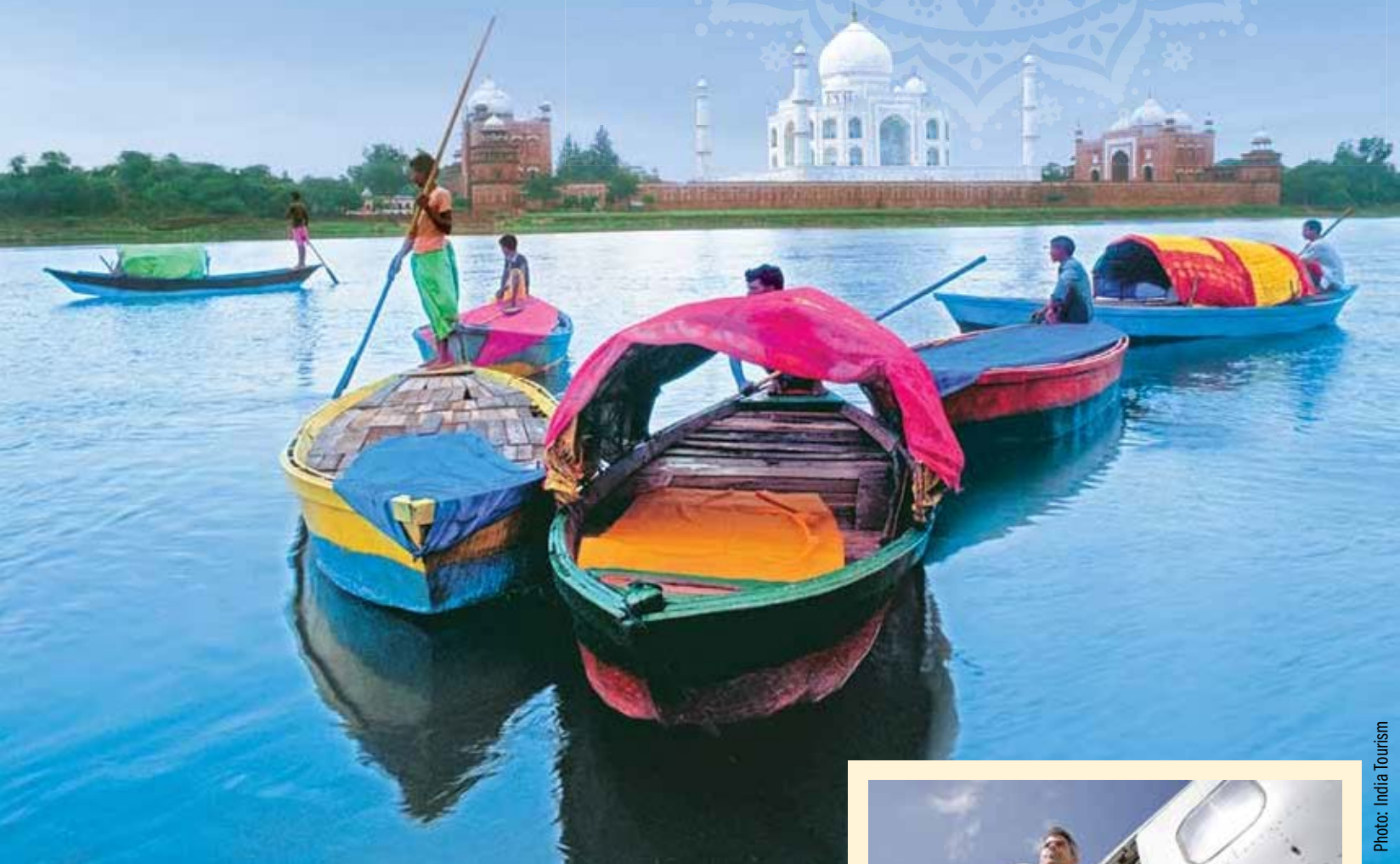
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India



The travel industry believes India has the potential to be a top holiday choice. Chana Boucher finds out why.

Easy visas, more travellers

ALTHOUGH some travellers may still choose to apply for their visas prior to travel, tour operators believe the introduction of visas on arrival in India is a positive move.

Last year, the Indian government announced that it would relax the visa regime, allowing travellers from 180 countries, including South Africans, to obtain a visa on arrival from October this year.

While **Alet Steyn**, business development manager at Wendy Wu Tours, says there haven't been any difficulties in obtaining visas on behalf of clients, she does think that visas on arrival will see more travellers visiting India.

"This can make last-minute travel possible and requires less administration for clients than obtaining the visa here," she says,

further pointing out that travellers won't have to take time off from their busy schedules to apply for visas.

Many members of the travel trade share these sentiments but some have a few concerns about how the new system will be

"This can make last-minute travel possible and requires less administration for clients than obtaining the visa here."

implemented. Travel agents feel that the long queues on arrival at Indian immigration will be aggravated by the new visa regulations.

Another concern is that the visa on arrival will only be a single-entry visa, valid for 30 days from the date of the tourist's arrival.

Vikas Rustagi, regional director: West Asia and Africa for India Tourism Dubai, previously told *TNW* that this was indeed a concern that needed to be addressed and said the Indian government would surely deal with this problem in the near future.

The Indian Tourism Ministry is reportedly also looking at an online system application similar to the one used by Sri Lanka, which offers electronic visas on arrival.

According to the BBC, the electronic visa on arrival will be available at 26 major airports in India. The government is expected to launch a website that will enable tourists to apply for the visa and pay the fee before departing for their trip to India. The visa will then be available for collection on arrival at any airport.



SA businesses are showing great interest in India.
Photo: Kuoni India

Boosting business travel

EMIRATES regional manager Southern Africa, **Fouad Caunhye**, says in the long-term, passenger traffic from South Africa to India is expected to grow. "Besides the emerging middle class and VFR traffic, growing business relationships between South Africa and India will mean a spike in business travel as well as cargo. Onward from Dubai, we see great interest from SA businesses in these emerging economies."

Fouad adds that the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) formation is growing in influence

as well as value for the countries involved. "Seismic shifts in business markets have meant that the sphere of influence has moved from the west to the east."

SAA spokesperson, **Tlali Tlali**, agrees: "With SA and India being part of BRICS, there is a fair amount of corporate travel that is taking place and this includes government travel [for example the Department of Trade and Industry] as well as business travel [such as] companies participating in exhibitions and travel for other business interests."

Good rand value for SA visitors

THE number of South Africans travelling to India in the coming months is expected to increase due to factors that include better access, affordability and the strengthening business relations between the two countries.

Vikas Rustagi says South Africa is the largest African tourism market for India, with more than 50 000 nationals visiting in 2012.

Fouad Caunhye says there has been a steady increase in South African tourists to India. "On our network we have seen a healthy growth year-on-year in passenger numbers on our SA-India route. South Africa provides a good mix of inbound tourists to India, from business travel to leisure and VFR."

Fouad adds that South Africa has the largest Indian population outside the sub-continent, leading to significant VFR traffic.

"According to our data, the top leisure destinations for South Africans travelling onward from Dubai are India and Thailand, followed by Europe. Asian destinations

are popular amongst South Africans for factors ranging from visa relaxation, good rand value and ease of connectivity."

Xenia Adamou, gm of Etihad Airways South Africa, says the airline is experiencing growth in the number of South Africans travelling to India for both leisure and business, and reciprocal growth in the number of Indian travellers to South Africa.

"This can be attributed to several factors, including the strength of the South African rand against the Indian rupee, which goes a long way to make India an attractive destination for both business and leisure travellers," she says.

Tiali Tiali agrees that India is an affordable destination, one of the reasons being that the rand is stronger than the Indian rupee.

However, he says there has been a drop in the number of people visiting India in this fiscal climate. "Inflation is the main reason for the decline."

Alet Steyn says people who are interested in travelling to India are those who are well travelled and looking for a



Royal Bengal tiger – just one of the magnificent animals that can be seen in Indian national parks. Photo: India Tourism

different experience, as well as those who are open minded or combining business with leisure.

She says past travellers who have visited China and Indochina with Wendy Wu Tours often choose India as their next holiday.

To further increase travel to India, Alet believes there needs to be more awareness of the country and what it has to offer.

"India offers colourful religious festivals, deserts lined with historic forts, tented camps nestled in sand dunes, flavoursome food, royal palaces, abundant wildlife such as the Asian elephant; the Royal Bengal tiger; and the One-horned rhino, which can be found in numerous national parks and wildlife

sanctuaries," she says.

She adds that India can be a culture shock for first-time travellers. "You need a reputable operator that has the necessary infrastructure in place to take care of your clients – a factor that makes an escorted tour the best option to explore India."

Fouad says India's attractiveness lies in its affordability but that South Africans also value the outdoors and adventure it has to offer.

"Skiing holidays in Kashmir, white-water rafting over the Ganges to quaint backwaters, to Kerala, India satiates all kinds of holiday appetites," he points out.

Tiali believes traveller numbers from South Africa to India should grow in the

coming months. "The two key channels that support travel from South Africa to India are retail and corporate.

"Retail agents and tour operators continue to package India as an affordable destination with packages for budget travellers and luxurious hotel packages for travellers who are looking for comfort and luxury."

Xenia is confident that India will continue to be a popular destination for South Africans.

"The tourism sector is enjoying significant growth and, according to a recent report by the World Travel and Tourism Council, the country's travel and tourism industry is expected to welcome 7,36 million tourists this year, equating to growth of 7,3%," she says.

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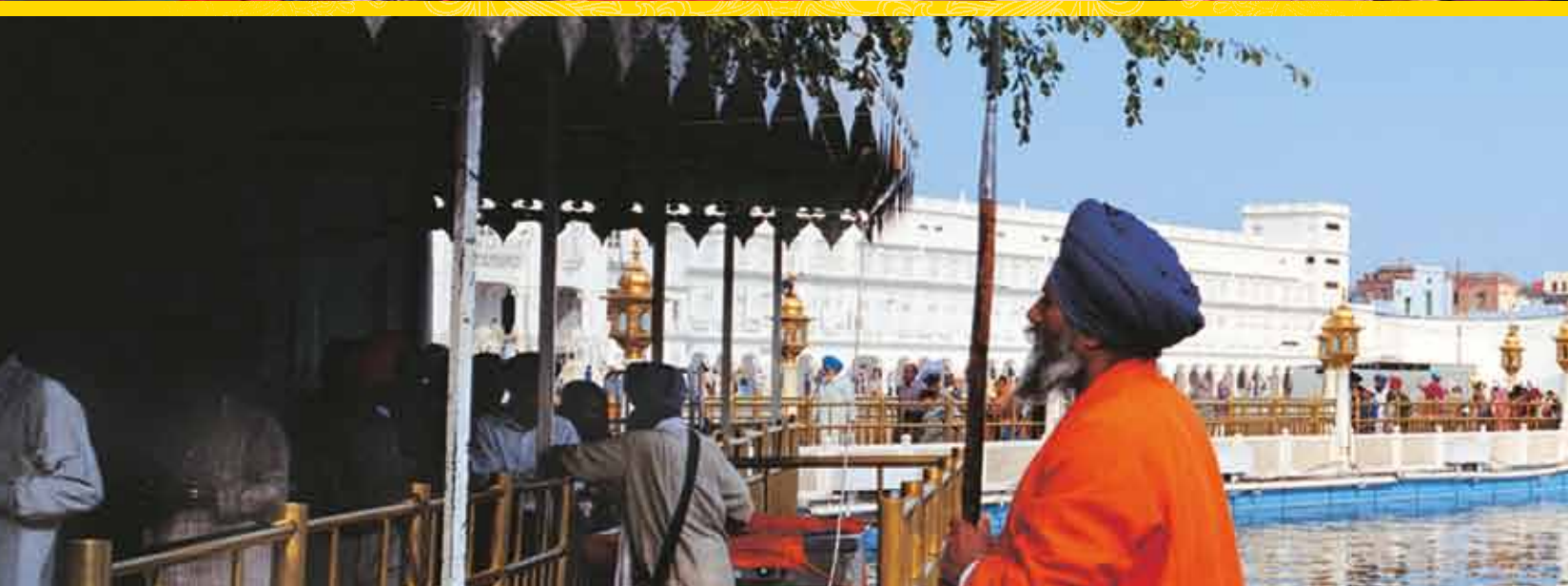
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The Lotus Temple at Kalkaji in New Delhi. Photo: Wikimedia

Deluxe group tours from Wendy Wu

WENDY Wu has introduced deluxe India holidays that include economy-class airfares and a maximum of 20 participants per group. The tours use deluxe hotels from internationally recognised chains as well as boutique resorts and resort heritage hotels.

Travellers can expect a high level of service and attention to detail from the national escorts. The groups will experience highlights of each city with entrance fees included. There are currently three deluxe holidays on offer – Golden Triangle Deluxe, Highlights

of India Deluxe and Rajasthan Panorama Deluxe.

Alet Steyn says the Golden Triangle is a brand-new group tour ideal for first-time visitors to experience the 'must-see' destinations in India – Delhi, Agra and Jaipur. The tour is 10 days in duration, with set departure dates and is priced from R28 010 per person.

"The Golden Triangle is our most accessible group tour to India yet and will appeal to those with time and budget constraints that preclude longer stays," says Alet.



Emirates' A380 – heading to India soon. Photo: Emirates

Middle East carriers a popular option

EVEN though direct flights are possible from South Africa to India, many business and leisure travellers are opting to travel via Middle Eastern hubs on carriers such as Emirates and Etihad.

Xenia Adamou says: "Etihad Airways continues to experience growth in the number of South Africans travelling to India via its Abu Dhabi hub. Together with our partner, Jet Airways, we offer seamless connections to 17 Indian destinations."

She points out that the added benefit of travelling with Etihad Airways is the option to stop over in Abu Dhabi at no additional cost before proceeding to a final destination in India.

Emirates operates six daily flights between South Africa and Dubai and onwards to India, where it offers up to 185 weekly flights across 10 major cities, says **Fouad Caunhye**. "Through the Dubai hub, Asian destinations are within a three- to eight-hour radius, making them an attractive proposition for leisure travellers."

He says Emirates welcomed the recent decision by Indian aviation



"Through the Dubai hub, Asian destinations are within a three- to eight-hour radius, making them an attractive proposition for leisure travellers."
Fouad Caunhye

authorities to lift restrictions on A380s. "Any decision to deploy an A380 on the route is dependent on passenger demand as well as the ability of airports to handle the aircraft. We look forward to serving Indian travellers with our flagship aircraft in the near future," adds Fouad.

EY continues to invest in Indian market

Etihad Airways considers the Indian market to be key to the airline's business model, which is why there have been a number of recent initiatives to expand its presence in that market.

Last year, Etihad purchased a 24% stake in Jet Airways. It also tripled the number of seats available on its Abu Dhabi-Mumbai and Abu Dhabi-New Delhi routes and now offers double-daily services on both.

The airline also now offers Diamond First Class on its Abu Dhabi-Mumbai route and has increased capacity on its Abu Dhabi-Chennai route to 174 seats, from 136.

This year, Etihad launched a new route between Abu Dhabi and Jaipur on April 1 and will be increasing frequencies to some of its other Indian destinations.

The airline plans to increase four routes from daily to double-daily services, namely Abu Dhabi-Kochi from June; Abu Dhabi-Bangalore and Abu Dhabi-Chennai from July; and Abu Dhabi-Hyderabad from October.

Tourist police to curb harassment

IN A recent media statement, the Indian Ministry of Tourism highlighted the steps it has taken to ensure the safety and security of tourists in the country.

It has proposed the setting up of tourist police at prominent tourist spots. It says the state

governments of Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha, have already deployed tourist police.

The ministry also

adopted the Code of Conduct for Safe and Honourable Tourism, which is a set of guidelines to encourage tourism activities with respect for dignity, safety and freedom from exploitation of tourists and local residents, particularly women and children. ■



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Appointments & resignations

■ Dorcas Dlamini

has been appointed new sales director for Protea Hotels. Dorcas



began her career with the group in 2003 as a junior sales co-ordinator and was national sales manager prior to her appointment as sales director. Protea Hotels director of sales, marketing and revenue, **Danny Bryer** congratulated Dorcas on her new role, saying her thorough industry knowledge and strong leadership skills would stand her in good stead in her new role.

■ David Mabunda

has left his position as ceo at SANParks after having completed his second term with the organisation.

"David had a distinguished career at SANParks," comments **Gert Dry**, chairperson of the human resources and remuneration committee of SANParks' board. He added that David was known nationally and internationally for his knowledge of biodiversity. The process to appoint a new ceo has already started.

■ Rozell Möller

has been appointed accounts manager in Cape Town for Qatar Airways. Rozell has considerable industry experience having worked for Air Mauritius, South African Airways, Tsogo Sun, Avis Car Rental and Flitestar/Luxavia.

■ Seabourn

has appointed **Robin West** as manager of expedition operations and planning.



Robin will be responsible for heading up cruise programmes in Patagonia and the Antarctic, as well as for developing new expedition land elements and tours in other regions across the world. The appointment comes after Robin's success as expedition leader during Seabourn's inaugural season of four voyages aboard *Seabourn Quest* in Antarctica and Patagonia between November 2013 and February 2014.



Dining in style with Beachcomber

Enjoying a night out at Le Victoria hotel during Beachcomber's educational, held in Cape Town from February 22 to March 1, are (from left): **Lynne Buys** (XL Aloe Travel), **Manja van der Merwe** (Flight Centre Platteklouf) and **Salomi Joerdens** (XL Boland Travel).

Raising awareness



RWANDAIR has adopted all five of the gorillas at the Johannesburg and Pretoria zoos to drive awareness of the need to protect the Rwandan Mountain gorillas. There are fewer than 700 of these

endangered animals still living in the forests of the Virunga Mountains in Central Africa. Pictured here, with the newest members of the RwandaIR family, is country manager **Dennis Rwiliriza**.

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Get into gear!



Woodford Car Hire is offering Easter drive specials, with car hire from R160 per day, valid from April 10 to May 10. The offer includes taxes and insurance as well as 100km free. The company is also offering travel agents a booking incentive – make three reservations or more during this period and you stand a chance to win car hire for three days and a R250 Woolworths voucher. Inviting agents along for the ride is Woodford business development supervisor, Sulayman Ebrahim. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Agents make plans for 'Facebook-ing' tools

MAX MARX

TRAVEL consortiums in South Africa are turning to Facebook to launch new booking capabilities for customers.

Club Travel, Sure Travel, and Uniglobe Travel are among those developing booking engines that will feature on their Facebook pages.

The booking engines will be powered by GDS companies, either using products developed by GDSs and, in some instances, altered to meet an agency's needs, or through apps developed by the consortiums themselves.

Some will offer both booking and payment mechanisms, while others will only have booking capability.

Club Travel plans to launch a Facebook booking engine in the next eight to 10 weeks. Initially, users will only be able to book and pay for flights, with a GDS providing fare search content, says md, **Wally Gaynor**.

The booking engine will, initially, only be available on the main Club Travel Facebook page but, once tried and tested, all Club Travel agencies will have access to it on their personal Facebook pages.

Wally says the booking

engine will be similar to booking apps found on mobile devices, which require simple solutions with a minimum amount of click-throughs to get to results.

"We've had a great response from social media platforms, where we feature packages, specials and destinations. While we don't foresee packages being automated to any great extent, we think Facebook will become another avenue for booking flights, hotels and car rental," Wally says.

"Facebook will become another avenue for booking flights, hotels and car rental."

Abigail Pires, Sure Travel's group solutions manager, says Sure Travel will be adding a booking engine to Facebook within the next six months, initially only offering flight bookings, with car rental and accommodation to follow.

"However, we are not convinced that a booking engine on Facebook will be the optimal platform. Social media is all about driving inspiration, content and awareness – it's not really a booking platform. Mobile apps are more where we expect to see the bookings grow," she says.

Uniglobe Travel will launch its Facebook booking engine following the launch of its mobile app this month. Ceo, **Mike Gray**, says the booking engine is about providing a seamless service in a trusted community-based environment.

OTA, Travelstart, has had a booking engine on Facebook for the past two years, selling flights and car rental but it has not been as successful as the company hoped, says **Nick Paul**, Travelstart's social media manager. "While Facebook users often respond to or add information to newsfeeds, they do not spend much time on Facebook pages. These booking engine apps are not widely used because people rarely visit the pages they appear on," he says.

"Booking engines are usually placed in tabs at the top of a Facebook page. The majority of people tend to view Facebook from their mobile phones, which don't show these tabs," he adds.

Nick says Travelstart has found advertising and posting links to specials through Facebook far more effective. "It's an effective tool to build awareness of products and services, and many users then return to the company's website to book." ■



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Fastjet launches private trade fares

FASTJET has launched private seasonal fares for South African travel agents and tour operators offering travel packages to Tanzania.

The fares are valid for 12 months and are not dependent on booking class availability, giving agents and tour operators the ability to create, price and market cost-effective Tanzanian travel packages in advance.

The fares, which include one item of checked

luggage per passenger, can be accessed through the dedicated fastjet agent booking portal, www.fastjet.com/za. The portal allows the trade to check availability, plan itineraries, make and manage bookings and complete all general administration processes relating to their clients' flights.

"Tanzania offers a diverse range of destinations and activities," says **Richard Bodin**, chief commercial officer of fastjet. "South

African tour operators can now create cost-effective packages that include some or all of these remarkable destinations, without being held hostage to exorbitant and highly fluctuating fares charged by the competition on the Johannesburg-Dar es Salaam route," he adds.

Agents can access the private low-cost fares on the fastjet booking portal once they have registered with fastjet. Contact justin.glanville@fastjet.com for more information. ■

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