LCC flyafrica launches with VFA shake-up

NOSHUA TIPPEL

CLAIMING to be Africa’s first “true” low-cost carrier, flyafrica.com – which guarantees low fares and “no fuel surcharges ever” – has opened flights for sale.

The airline’s website, which carries the tagline ‘It’s a revolution’, is now live, selling tickets between Zimbabwe and Johannesburg from as little as R99. Fares are quoted on a one-way basis and exclude airport and government taxes of R570. “flyafrica.com will never apply fuel surcharges,” says ceo, Adrian Hamilton-Manns.

The first flight from Vic Falls to Johannesburg will be on July 16. For the first four weeks, flights will be operated three days a week on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays, after which the airline will expand operations.

The low-fare airline, which is based on Asian LCC models such as Tiger Airways and AirAsia, will operate scheduled regional flights in Africa from various hubs. “This is not a South African airline. We will be launching from multiple bases in Africa, first from Vic Falls, Zimbabwe, and rolling out other destinations at a later stage. Details on these destinations will be revealed in coming weeks,” Adrian told TNW.

Flyafrica.com offers a turnkey solution for airlines and start-ups by partnering with local investors and operators to assist with installing distribution.

On the ropes – Kenya plays tit for tat

DORNE REINSTEIN

IN A move that has surprised the entire SA tourism industry, the Kenyan High Commission has announced that, from July 1, all South African travellers will need a visa to visit Kenya.

When asked for the reasons behind the move, deputy High Commissioner, Helen Gichuhi, said: “Countries make decisions based on their interests. Diplomacy is also based on the principle of reciprocity.”

Visa applicants travelling to or transiting through Kenya will have to pay a visa fee of US$70 (R750).

Travellers applying for a visa will also have to follow stringent requirements, including appearing in person at the embassy in Pretoria for biometrics.

“Kenya is yet to open a consulate in Cape Town, Durban or Johannesburg. As such, any application for a visa will have to be lodged at the Kenya Mission in Pretoria, 302 Brook Street, Menlo Park,” Helen told TNW.

Other requirements include providing an invitation letter from their host in Kenya, a letter from their employer/institution/college/school, proof of funds (bank statement), a return air ticket and two passport photos.

The processing period for the visas is five working days. Visas will no longer be issued on arrival in Kenya. The announcement comes at a time when Kenya is battling with rapidly dwindling tourism numbers because of the constant threat of terrorism.
**New Immigration Act – your questions answered**

Since the Department of Home Affairs announced new regulations for child travellers early last week, the inbound and outbound travel industry have raised numerous questions. Under the new regulations, parents travelling with children must produce an unabridged birth certificate for children under the age of 18. This is in addition to the child’s passport.

While many of the questions have yet to be answered, Ricardo Abramse, a spokesperson for the DHA, has responded to some of them. Other answers were sourced from the DHA through the process of applying for an unabridged birth certificate.

Q: Do the new regulations apply to outbound travel only?
A: They apply to all travel across South African borders: inbound, outbound and transit.

Q: Does it apply for domestic travel as well?
A: No. The Immigration Act applies to those travelling across SA borders, including land and sea.

Q: What documents do parents need to apply?
A: Mother’s ID, father’s ID and the child’s abridged birth certificate. Although, when applying for an unabridged birth certificate at the DHA, TNW’s journalist did not have to produce any documentation and was only asked to fill out the relevant forms.

Home Affairs has advised that applications forms will no longer be available on its website and SA citizens must visit their nearest Home Affairs office to obtain original application forms.

Q: What does it cost to apply for an unabridged birth certificate?
A: R75

Q: How long will it take, after application, to receive an unabridged birth certificate?
A: The DHA says six to eight weeks. However, TNW has received reports from agents and parents who said they had to wait several months.

Q: Can clients travel with certified copies of unabridged certificates?
A: Yes, a certified copy will suffice.

Q: What documents do travellers need if they are...

- a) one parent travelling with a child?
  A: An unabridged birth certificate and:
  - (i) consent in the form of an affidavit from the other parent registered as a parent on the birth certificate of the child authorising him or her to enter or depart from the Republic with the child he or she is travelling with;
  - (ii) a court order granting full parental responsibilities and rights or legal guardianship in respect of the child, if he or she is the parent or legal guardian of the child; or
  - (iii) copies applicable, a death certificate of the other parent registered as a parent of the child on the birth certificate; Provided that the Director-General, in the event of the parents of the child being both deceased and the child is travelling with a relative or another person related to him or her or his or her parents, approve such a person to enter into or depart from the Republic with such a child.

- b) an adult travelling with a child who is not his/her biological child?
  (i) a copy of the unabridged birth certificate of the child; or
  (ii) an affidavit from the parents or legal guardian of the child confirming that he or she has permission to travel with the child;
  - (iii) copies of the identity documents or passports of the parents or legal guardian of the child; and
  - (iv) the contact details of the person who is to receive the child in the Republic, containing his or her legal capacity or guardianship in respect of the child.

- c) an unaccompanied minor?
  - (i) the parent’s ID, if available;
  - (ii) a letter from the person authorising the child to travel into or depart from the Republic with such a child, or
  - (iii) a copy of the unabridged birth certificate of the child;
  - (iv) a copy of the unabridged birth certificate of the parent or parents or legal guardian of the child; and
  - (v) a letter from the person issuing the travel document of the child or the parent or parents or legal guardian of the child, authorising him or her to enter into or depart from the Republic; and
  - (vi) the identity document or passport of the person authorising the child or the parent or parents or legal guardian of the child.

- d) a child travelling alone?
  - (i) an unabridged birth certificate;
  - (ii) a letter from the person authorising the child to travel into or depart from the Republic with such a child.

**Rubes® By Leigh Rubin**

When 007 absentmindedly orders up a soft drink

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**TNW**

**RUBES®**

When you ask a question, expect a shake, not stirred.

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**NEWS**

**RUBES®**

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**NEWS**
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NEWS

Acsa launches free airport app

CARO MALHERBE

Acsa has launched a new airport app to help passengers navigate their way through any of its nine airports in South Africa using their smart phone devices.

The app, which is called ‘Airports Company South Africa’, allows customers to keep track of their flight via their flight number, including flight schedule changes, delays, boarding gates allocation, baggage- belt allocation and weather updates at the airport.

In partnership with TomTom, the app also provides airport maps that allow users to navigate through the airport and search for locations. This includes parking navigation and a parking cost calculator.

There is also a list of car-rental companies, taxi services and shuttles, and passengers in Gauteng can check departure and arrival times for the Gautrain. Traffic updates let passengers plan their trip to the airport.

“One of the main objectives was to develop technology to improve efficiency, allowing passengers to be in control of their airport experience.”

The app also lists airlines that operate at the various airports. Users are able to find customer care contact details and have access to a messaging service that allows them to type and send messages to airlines directly.

Users can use the app to search for restaurants and shops within the airport. Acsa’s group manager of customer care, Claudia Ramsden, said one of the main objectives for the group was to develop technology to improve efficiency within the industry, allowing the passenger to be in control of their airport experience.

Phase two will see further advancements in technology. Passengers will be able to tag their cars on arrival at the airport. Built-in geo-navigating systems will direct them straight back to where they parked. Baggage-tagging will let passengers keep an eye on the whereabouts of their bags throughout their airport experience.

The second phase will also introduce real-time tracking, where users will be able to see themselves live on the airport map, and their location in the airport.

The app is available to all iOS, Android and Blackberry users.

Letter to the Editor

Thank you, wholesalers!

In the May 7/14 issue of TNW I’m quoted in the article “How are you helping?” where I said not all operators were willing to offer help and training to students.

I would like to give feedback on that article and send a thank-you to suppliers who responded positively.

We hosted a very successful Travel Expo at Boston College and saw many suppliers enthusiastically participate – to name but a few: Air Mauritius, Malaysia Airlines, Qantas, Emirates Airlines, OVC, SA Parks Board, Contiki and Amadeus. They all set up a booth at our college on the day and spent the day sharing their valuable info with our travel, tourism and hospitality students.

We also held a Novice Training Day for the second- and third-year students at Boston last month and Tourism Ireland, Contiki, Busabout and Overseas Visitors Club were absolutely fantastic. They spent the day giving students the type of product training they’d receive as a junior or novice travel agent.

So a very big thank-you to those suppliers who were willing to give their time and effort to train up new potential consultants!

Genevieve Schultz
Travel Lecturer
Boston City Campus and Business College

African Pride 15 on Orange adds new features

The African Pride 15 on Orange Hotel in Cape Town has recently added new features to cater more effectively for the needs of guests. On the list of new additions is an 18-seat private dining area, a 140-sqm gym and extensions to the spa. The ground floor concierge and porte cochere are still scheduled for remodelling.

The new dining area will complement the existing 12-seat, glass-walled private dining suite adjacent to Savoir Restaurant. The latest developments follow the construction of a new conference centre last year, which was completed at the same time as the refurbishment of the Atrium public space, as well as a make-over of Murano Bar.

Cheetah Plains offers flights to Madikwe

CHEETAH Plains in the Kruger National Park, now offers flights to sister lodge, Jaci’s, in Madikwe Game Reserve, North West.

Flights are available on SA Airlink, Federal Air and General Air from Cheetah Plains (Sabi Sand) to Madikwe every Wednesday. Flights depart Sabi Sand at 10h00 and arrive at Madikwe East at 11h40.

The return flight departs at 12h00 and arrives at Sabi Sand at 13h40. Fares are R6 540 per person one way, with a minimum of two people. Charter flights can be arranged any other day of the week for R6 980 per person one way, with a minimum of four people.

Hoedspruit Airport is one-and-a-half-hours’ drive from Cheetah Plains and Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport is a two-and-a-half-hour drive. Road transfers from HD or MQP can be booked directly through Cheetah Plains.

Protea Hotel Stellenbosch offers faster Internet

PROTEA Hotel Stellenbosch has gone live with a high-speed fibre-optic line that offers conference delegates and guests highly increased connectivity. The hotel now has a 1:1 20 Mbps line.

Protea Hotels director of sales, marketing and revenue, Danny Bryer, says the new fibre-optic system is particularly exciting from a group and conference and MICE perspective. “The potential for uninterrupted high-definition video calls that don’t freeze or lag comes with this sort of system, as well as the facility for corporate guests to connect their networks via VPNs that work properly and fast.”

Misty Hills unveils new reception area

MISTY Hills Country Hotel, Conference Centre and Spa in Muldersdrift has opened its new reception area. The flagship hotel of the Recreation Africa Group was damaged after a fire last year and since then reception has been redesigned to include a new bird-watching walkway that overlooks the gardens and water features. The reception also hosts a gallery of ornithological paintings and other local art, such as a larger-than-life bronze statue of David Livingstone, by local sculptor, Adam Madebe.

Pillow Talk

A brief look at this week’s hotel news

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How to earn more commission on cruising

Debbie Badham

TRAVEL agents can earn considerable commissions when booking cruise holidays for clients. Cruise operators are now doing more to extend commissions, offering agents the opportunity to increase their earning potential. Cruises International has introduced a sliding scale of commission for all its brands. Standard commission is currently 8% but can be increased to as much as 13% for bookings of $200 000 (R2 145 899) and above.

The cruise operator encourages agents to buy into its HULLA sales strategy, through which they can increase their earnings. HULLA stands for higher categories, upsell, long cruises, luxury cruises and add-ons – representing the various ways agents can earn extra commission.

Commercial manager, Tracey Krog, notes that agents can earn particularly well on the operator’s luxury brands, such as Crystal and Seabourne, where the price is higher and all-inclusive and agents can earn commission on a higher cruise fare level. She says most of Cruises International’s cruise lines offer commission on cruise insurance as well as pre- and post-accommodation. What’s more, Royal Caribbean International offers commission on contracted groups. Significantly, Tracey believes it will only be a matter of time before other mass market lines begin offering commission on pre-booked on-board services on both local and international cruises, including drinks packages and spa packages.

David Randall, MSC Cruises marketing manager for SA, says MSC’s commission initiative is fairly unique to the cruising industry. He says the offering forms part of MSC’s strategy to increase on-board revenue as well as the uptake of pre and post transfers and hotel stays.
MSC announces changes to 2014/15 itinerary

MSC Cruises SA has announced changes to its 2014/15 South African itinerary, including new destinations. Changes include longer stops at Portuguese Island and Inhaca being added as a new destination in Mozambique. MSC Cruises will no longer call at Bara Lodge but instead at Inhaca during its four-night cruise itinerary. The seven-night cruise to Madagascar now also includes a stop at Inhaca as well as at Madagascar's Fort Dauphin, replacing a stop at Anecho. MSC has partnered with The Pestana lodge in Inhaca.

Pre-book drinks packages with Norwegian

NORWEGIAN Cruise Lines now lets passengers pre-purchase drink packages through the ‘My NCL’ section of ncl.com when they register and open their account. Guests can add the Ultimate Drinks, the Corks and Caps and soda packages to their booking in the same way that shore excursions and specialty restaurants are booked. The Ultimate Drinks package, for passengers aged 21 and older, costs US$54 (R581). The Corks and Caps wine and beer package costs US$44 (R473). Passengers 13 years and older pay US$4.50 (R5) for soda packages and children 12 years and under pay US$4.50 (R5). All packages are per person per day, plus 15% gratuities.

New BON Hotel opens

B

ON Hotel Riviera on Vaal has officially opened its doors.

BON Hotels took ownership and management of Riviera on Vaal Hotel & Country Club in April this year.

The hotel, described as an “old girl”, will see a number of renovations this year under its new ownership. CEO and founder of BON Hotels, Guy Stehlik, emphasised BON’s focus on corporate markets and the need to upgrade conferencing facilities and technology.

The hotel has already begun offering free WiFi and there are also plans to improve customer service using technology such as the ability to place a room service order via SMS. The property is situated on a bend in the Vaal River next to the Riviera on Vaal Country Club golf course. Each of the 91 rooms overlooks the river and the golf course.

The five-storey property has 30 standard twin rooms, 28 luxury twin rooms, 20 luxury family rooms, seven executive suites and six garden rooms. The conferencing facilities can cater for up to 400 delegates,

Guy says Riviera on Vaal is a three-star-rated hotel, where “people pay for three-star but get way more than three-star service”.

Guests pay less than R1,000 a night, including breakfast. The property also features the Zorgvliet Spa and a gym. Other facilities include three restaurants, a bar, a floating restaurant and a helipad on the premises.

Guests who enjoy water sports have access to wakeboarding, skiing, and tubing activities and speedboat river cruises.

BON Hotels plans to announce the takeover of three more hotels in Sandton, Rosebank and Illovo later this year.

Moz tourism takes another knock

THE UK’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has issued a renewed travel advisory for Mozambique and is warning against all but essential travel to Sofala Province, with the exception of the provincial capital, Beira.

The FCO says there have been armed clashes between government of Mozambique security forces and the armed Renamo opposition, the most recent on June 4 in Sofala Province on the main north-south N1 road. There have also been isolated incidents in Manica, Nampula and Inhambane Provinces.

The political unrest and ensuing travel advisories have had a severe impact on the country’s tourism sector, with tour operators reporting dwindling numbers to the country. Sunway Safaris has seen a definite decline in the number of bookings on its tours into central Mozambique. The operator also received a substantial number of cancellations. Shaun Waring-Jones, founder of Sunway Safaris, says he is advising travellers that the southern regions from Maputo to Inhambane are relatively safe but that the areas north of Inhambane should be avoided.

Ema Batey, a consultant at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) – a federal government agency responsible for administering civilian foreign aid – says the tourism losses Mozambique incurred as a result of the recent situation were reported in ‘Economic cost of conflict in Mozambique: Assessing the economic impacts of renewed conflict on the tourism sector’, which was published in April.

According to Ema, direct losses to Mozambique’s tourism industry caused by the conflict are estimated at slightly more than US$10m (R107m) between November 2013 and January 2014. She said operators reported a 50% drop in business over the peak season (December-January) compared with previous years. The average occupancy rates being achieved across all market segments in Vilanculos in March 2014 was 5% to 10% compared with 35% to 60% in 2011. Ema further added that tourism establishments were foreseeing a reduction in staff by 30% to 50% in 2014 if tourism didn’t recover to pre-2012 levels within six months.

Ema explains in the report that arrivals from South Africa had declined considerably between 2010 and 2013 with 872,017 arrivals in 2013 compared with 946,583 in 2010. Despite the declining numbers, SA accounts for the bulk of Mozambique’s regional traffic with a 44% share of all regional visitors to the country.
Airline ALLIANCES

Star Alliance, oneworld and SkyTeam have all been welcoming new members this year. New members mean more choice for travellers in terms of connections, lounges and frequent flyer points. By Dorine Reinstein.

Airline Alliances: who’s signing up in 2014 and beyond?

oneworld

“2014 has already seen oneworld complete the biggest expansion programme since its launch 15 years ago,” says Michael Blunt, vp corporate communications.

SriLankan Airlines joined on May 1, as the first carrier from the Indian subcontinent to enter any of the global airline alliances. The addition brings two new airports on to the alliance network – Hambantota and Tiruchirapalli. With an extensive schedule serving southern India and the Maldives, SriLankan also significantly strengthens oneworld’s presence throughout south Asia, one of the world’s fastest growing regions for air travel demand.

TAM Airlines, the main airline in Latin America’s leading economy, Brazil, joined oneworld on March 31, alongside its partner in Latam Airlines Group, LAN Airlines. The addition of TAM consolidates oneworld’s position as the leading alliance for flights within Latin America and between the region and both the United States and Europe.

The US Airways merger will bring new routes to several oneworld members, including Lufthansa, Iberia and Air Eurolines (Aegean Airlines).

Mr Blunt continues: “With oneworld’s increased presence in the Americas, we’re now in a position to offer a much-improved level of service to our customers. As our goal is always to offer the best and most seamless service to our customers, this is great news.”

SriLankan Airlines, one of the new entrants to oneworld. Photo: oneworld

Star Alliance

Air India is at the centre of Star Alliance’s expansion plans for 2014. This is its second attempt at joining Star Alliance after its previous application was suspended in July 2011. Star Alliance ceo, Mark Schwab, announced that Star members would hold a meeting in London on June 23 to formalise the approval for Air India, which could become a member as soon as July.

He said during a recent press conference in Mumbai: “We still have some work to do but I don’t see any barriers. Without giving a specific date, one can say that we will complete all the groundwork and formalities of Air India’s entry into the Star Alliance club by this summer. After that, they will be ready to join straight away.”

Mark said Star Alliance had long held the opinion that India was an important aviation market that should be fully represented in the alliance but that the level of change in the domestic market in recent years did not make it easy for an airline to become an alliance member.

“The market in India is now showing signs of stabilisation. Today we see an Air India that has successfully completed its merger with Indian Airlines and is building up a new fleet that forms the basis for a much-improved level of service. “The market in India is now showing signs of stabilisation. Today we see an Air India that has successfully completed its merger with Indian Airlines and is building up a new fleet that forms the basis for a much-improved level of service. This is why we believe the time is now right to recommence the integration process.”

Also on the cards for the second quarter of 2014 is the integration of Avianca Brazil, a sibling of current Star member and Colombian flag carrier, Avianca.

Besides expansion plans, Star Alliance has also focused on enhancing its customer service. The alliance recently introduced four additional round the world (RTW) fare levels. Customers can now choose from a total of 14 RTW fares; three for travel in first class, four for travel in business class and seven for travel in economy class.

“Today we see an Air India that has successfully completed its merger with Indian Airlines and is building up a new fleet that forms the basis for a much-improved level of service.”

The alliance has also improved its Conventions Plus product for delegates and organisers. Delegates have a wider range of fares to select from, the booking fee for the online tool has been eliminated, and organisers benefit from a new support programme and a more simplified contracting scheme.

“We have seen that the conventions and meetings travel market has been one of the most reliable market segments in our own company’s 17-year history. We have managed to achieve year-on-year growth – both in terms of contracted events and delegates travelled – ever since we introduced Conventions Plus in 2002,” said Horst Findlesen, vp commercial and business development at Star Alliance.
**SkyTeam**

SkyTeam has brought only one new member on board this year. Garuda Indonesia joined the alliance on March 5. Garuda’s membership adds Jakarta as an alternative gateway to and from south-east Asia, as well as 40 new destinations to SkyTeam’s global network. “Garuda Indonesia’s domestic and growing international network will give SkyTeam a footprint in Indonesia as we strengthen our presence in the south-east Asia region,” says SkyTeam md, Michael Wisbrun.

For the future, SkyTeam is looking towards Brazil and India. SkyTeam spokesperson, Chris Karanja, told 7W: “In the past we have mentioned Brazil and India as two white spots. However we see positive developments in Brazil. Bilateral ties exist between individual member airlines and low-cost airline GOL, allowing providing access to over 60 destinations throughout this market. Regarding India, we are monitoring developments with many fundamental changes witnessed lately.” SkyTeam will also start focusing more on customer service products. Michael says: “With our global network almost complete, our priority is now shifting to creating a seamless travel experience for our customers. SkyTeam’s key driver so far has been on gaining global presence, and now provides a network with access to the most relevant traffic flows worldwide. But the next stage of co-operation is about developing customer products and services that bring seamlessness to a new level.”

In January this year SkyTeam launched an online booking tool for customers wishing to book a ‘Go Round the World’ pass on any of its 19 member airlines. Available on Skyteam.com, the intuitive tool offers customers a seamless planning and booking experience with cost-effective fares and access to 1,024 destinations worldwide.

Chris says: “Our main focus continues to be offering an enhanced customer experience so that we can become the preferred alliance of millions more global passengers. Our focus remains on building a truly consistently superior customer experience. Our focus will be on SkyTransfer programme, which enhances seamlessness and efficiency for our 26m passengers connecting across the alliance annually. We will implement different projects across the 11 leading hubs within the alliance – ATL, JFK, AMS, CDG, FCO, MAD, CAN, PEK, PVG and SEL. More details will be shared soon.”

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**Is Etihad building the fourth alliance?**

ALTHOUGH Etihad has always refused to join one of the three big airline alliances, travel industry players around the world suggest the airline might just be building the fourth alliance.

Etihad has been working hard on its effort to dominate the world, and its ‘alliances’ are growing rapidly. Whereas the big three global alliances are based on cooperation between separate entities with a joint venture or two thrown in, Etihad has opted for a different tactic, called the equity alliance.

**Maurice Phohleli,** Etihad Airways vice president Africa Sub-Sahara and Indian Ocean, says the main difference is that where commercial arrangements are largely focused on revenue growth, equity investments are about cementing partnerships and opportunities for the successful, profitable development of the airlines. “Our minority shareholdings have allowed us to develop and introduce wide-ranging revenue and business synergy opportunities, with significant cost savings and efficiency improvements coming through network alignment, resource sharing, joint fleet and engine procurement, standardised practices, product development and marketing initiatives – the sort of benefits previously available only through mergers or takeovers.”

So far, Etihad has taken minority stakes in seven airlines – airberlin, Air Serbia, Aer Lingus, Air Seychelles, Etihad Regional, Jet Airways and Virgin Australia. The tactic seems to be paying off. Etihad Airways raised its profit by 48% with nett profit reaching US$62m (R641m) in 2013. According to Maurice, Etihad Airways has deliberately chosen not to join one of the major global airline alliances, as the airline believes it can achieve more with its own strategy of working with identified partners, to create a wide-ranging global network that connects to and through its strategically positioned hub in Abu Dhabi. He adds: “We do, however, partner with airlines from all the major global airline alliances and have codeshare or other partnering arrangements with members of each alliance.”

Etihad has established bilateral commercial agreements with 47 codeshare partners, providing the airline with a combined network of over 420 destinations, more than any other Middle Eastern airline. Etihad is planning to pursue its strategy of minority investments. Says Maurice: “In 2013, partner airlines added significant value to our business – with a contribution of US$820m, or 21% of our overall passenger revenue.”
West African hub a prize for SAA

SAA currently operates 24 routes into Africa, with more on the cards, says Ohis Ehimieaghe, the airline’s regional manager for Northern, West and Central Africa.

In its West Africa schedule, the national carrier will be increasing frequencies to Kinshasa in July, while Lagos will receive eight flights a week from August. Abidjan services have recently been increased to three flights weekly.

SAA has for a time been seeking a West African hub as a critical part of its Africa growth strategy, with Lagos, Accra and Dakar in the running.

It considered buying a stake in Senegal Airlines but that was found to be not commercially viable. At the time of going to press, the money seems to be on Accra.

SAA recently confirmed it was considering buying a stake in the privately owned airline, Aasy (of which SAA’s Star Alliance partner, Ethiopian, holds a strategic stake), which currently operates from Lomé in Togo.

SAA spokesperson, Tlali Tlali, says the airline plans to meet with both Ethiopian Airlines and Aasy to investigate the feasibility of such a venture. He adds that SAA will consider partnering with Ghanaian investors to acquire part of Asky and then relocate the airline to Accra.

“We are now focusing on Ghana, as we fly to Accra. There are no commitments at this stage and the outcome of our engagements will inform the steps we need to take, mindful of SAA’s current financial position,” says Tlali.

A West African hub would be useful in giving the airline a central geographic presence, allowing it to compete on the high-demand transatlantic routes, scooping passengers from all over Africa across the Atlantic to the Americas, and within easy distance of European cities.

Nigeria is open for business

THE Nigeria SA Chamber of Commerce has one main purpose – to ease trade between the two countries.

Osayaba Giwa-Osagie, who heads up the chamber says: “Where there are impediments we help to remove them, speaking to the authorities, and ensuring the citizens of both countries are able to travel with the least possible hindrance. A lot of emphasis has been on the oil and gas industry, which accounts for 80% of the Nigerian economy, but there are many opportunities opening up in agriculture, mining, infrastructure, tourism and in the movie industry.”

Osayaba says while there are several formal Nigerian businesses in SA, there are many more South African businesses in Nigeria (which has a population of 170 million), with staggering potential as a market. His advice to South African companies wanting to enter the market is:

• While it is not mandatory to have a local partner (except in the oil and gas business), it is recommended that companies involve a reputable local partner for their local knowledge, local connections and their understanding of local business. This, he says, opens doors.

Osayaba Giwa-Osagie, head of the Nigeria-South Africa Chamber of Commerce, with Toyin Cameron, executive secretary.

• SA corporates wanting to open a business in Nigeria will benefit by approaching the chamber first, even before coming to the country. They should visit www.nsacc.org.ng. The chamber will point out potential partners, help arrange introductory meetings and assist with legal requirements.

• Know your business/product well and have a good business plan prepared by professionals.

• You need high standards, a good brand, a niche market orientation and a good management team.

Safety first

MANY South Africans are concerned about the security situation in Nigeria. While the nature of terrorism makes it impossible to predict where the next incident will be, travellers to Lagos should be aware that the area where most Boko Haram terrorism activity takes place is 1 600km north-east of Lagos.

That said, travellers must be prepared for levels of security higher than those we have in SA. Office buildings, supermarkets, shopping malls and public buildings have security checkpoints. The Lagos airport has high security and many queues. Arriving at the airport with four hours to spare before your flight is advisable.

From left: Thobi Duma, SAA’s country manager for Nigeria; Kim Thipe, SAA head marketing; Ohis Ehimieaghe, the airline’s regional manager, North, West and Central Africa and Kemi Loko-Bamtefa, SAA head of sales and marketing, Nigeria.

TNW’s Kate Nathan travelled to Lagos as the guest of SAA and Tsogo Sun, spending four days experiencing first-hand the thrilling energy of the powerhouse of Africa.
Southern Sun shines in Lagos

TSOGO Sun’s commitment to Lagos is clear, even though the group has no immediate plans to develop more properties, over and above Southern Sun Ikoyi, in Nigeria.

Andrew Hosking, Tsogo Sun offshore operations director, says when Southern Sun Ikoyi opened in 2009 the group’s only involvement was a management contract but in 2013 it invested R700m in acquiring 75.5% of the hotel, with the remainder held by its local partner.

“Whereas many hotel groups entering the Nigerian market have done so with management contracts, we have invested in the property, and now we plan to consolidate. While we have no immediate plans to increase our presence in West Africa, we are always looking for prospects,” he says.

Lagos’s infrastructural problems are well documented. They are a challenge for all businesses, especially hotel operators, who need to prioritise the comfort of guests. Southern Sun Ikoyi is independent of city services, with its own generators, sewage and water purification plants (a real comfort in a city where power outages sometimes occur six times in an hour). “We run on generators around 40% of the time,” says Andrew.

Occupancy growth has been good, says Andrew. Considering the hotel opened during a dearth of hotel rooms in Lagos, it has sustained high occupancy – more than 70% – and it has been able to maintain its rates and grow the business.

Marcel von Aulock, Tsogo Sun ceo, told TNW that its offshore operations are responsible for 20% of the group’s hotel business revenue and operating profit, and the Ikoyi property alone is responsible for 50% of this.

The Southern Sun Ikoyi is a welcoming sight to South Africans. Photos: Kate Nathan

A home away from home

SOUTHERN Sun Ikoyi’s hotel business is about accommodating SA business travellers and it has become a firm favourite for South Africans in Nigeria.

The property has a familiar, South African feel and is filled with the style, décor and service that South Africans associate with the iconic brand.

But it also has a wider reputation among Lagos residents for its food and beverage services, with Sunday brunch being hugely popular. Andrew Hosking believes that true SA-style warmth, hospitality and service are what set Southern Sun Ikoyi apart.

“Our company culture is different from that of other hotel groups and our recruitment process is different too. We look for a specific EQ component. Our staff at Ikoyi have been trained in our company culture and are exceptionally proud of and loyal to the brand.”

The hotel has 195 rooms. There is a pool and a fitness centre and the restaurant serves high-quality international cuisine along with West African favourites and some typically South African treats. For those working late, there is 24-hour room service.

Arrivals at Lagos can be easy

LANDING at Murtala Mohammed can be a bewildering experience. One could not fail to be impressed, as I was, by the efficiency and local knowledge of Sure Platform’s meet and greet service, which met our group at the airport and then shepherded us through both arrivals and departures at the airport. Travellers, especially first timers, can only benefit by the services of a reputable and efficient destination management company such as Sure Platform, which provides a range of services, including those relating to security, airport transfers, chauffeured vehicle rental and journey management, plus immigration services, family support, company registrations, airline reservations and property rentals.

Look at the website www.sureplatform.com, or contact i.venter@sureplatform.com for more info.
Deaths

Former SATSA ExCo member, John Rothschild, died in Australia towards the end of May after a long and painful battle with cancer. John served on the SATSA ExCo for several years and also served as CEO of SATSA. He was a highly respected and well liked member of the industry.

Appointments & resignations

Marketing manager Elena Reuss has resigned from Air Mauritius, effective July 31. Elena has decided to pursue her passion in freelance marketing, focusing on promotions and event co-ordination. Effective August 1, Air Mauritius South Africa is outsourcing its PR/marketing portfolio to Glass Slipper Communications under the leadership of Louise Churches.

Comair has appointed Kirsten King as financial director for the group, effective June 9, following Yasas Sri-Chandana’s move to Australia in January.

Kirsten joined Comair as the revenue accountant in February 2011. During her time with the group she has gained significant exposure to the challenges facing the industry and managing the accounting function in the group.

Johan Cronje has been appointed gm of Protea Hotel Fire and Ice in Menlyn to lead the new hotel’s start-up team. Johan joined the Protea Hotel Fire and Ice Cape Town in 2007 as food and beverage manager. He then worked in the rooms division before he was appointed gm of the Cape Town hotel in June 2010.

TravelBags, together with Premier Hotel OR Tambo, hosted members of the travel industry for lunch on May 30. Travel professionals from across the city took the opportunity to network and enjoy a few drinks together, (From left) Laila Cook (office – national executive client services manager, HRG Rennies Travel); Fiona Treu (owner of Harvey World Travel Bolchurg); and Koos Pretorius (national travel sales – key account manager,AVIS) join in the festivities. Photo: Shannan Van Zyl,

Out to lunch...

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**LCC flyafrica launches with VFA shake-up**

From page 1

Operating systems, safety standards and requirements, staff training, marketing initiatives, and more. Adrian, who has many years’ experience working with LCCs, including Mandala Airlines, Tigerair Indonesia, Pacific Blue, and IndiGo Airlines, believes the time is now right in Africa to launch a “true low-fare airline”, as the continent continues major infrastructure developments at main airports. Flyafrica.com is set to revolutionise the travel industry in Africa, with fares more than 60% less than our competitors and a unique business model that enables passengers to tailor-make their travel requirements, he says. “We believe each passenger should only pay for what they want. That’s why we have separated our fares and products for maximum transparency and flexibility. Economy fares do not include customised travel products (CTPs), which customers can elect to pay for. These include baggage (up to 30kg), a second carry-on bag, priority baggage, seat selection, and access to airport lounges. Business class includes some CTPs, such as lounge access, priority baggage and Q-Jump. But how can the airline sustain such low fares in the current tough economic climate? Adrian says the company will spread its costs over multiple bases. It will also save on costs by removing certain services that Adrian says are unnecessary, such as check-in. Passengers will be checked in using the information provided when booking their ticket. They will be emailed their boarding pass and will need to check in at the airport. There will be a desk where they can drop their luggage should they have any, but no boarding passes will be issued at the airport, Adrian says. Each aircraft will be branded with the flyafrica.com logo. The airline will initially launch with a fleet of five B737s, offering 102 seats in economy. Every airline will be put through the ICAO certification process to ensure safety of the highest standard, Adrian says. “We expect our Zimbabwean airline to be certified within six months of the launch.”

How to book

“African airlines do not have proper distribution, as they can’t afford to join the GDS. As a result, they can’t sell their product effectively. Flyafrica.com flights are displayed on all GDSs in partnership with ‘My Air’, Adrian says. Payment is processed via normal BSP channels. Agents can also visit the website and register with the group to get unique log in details to the agent site along with a unique bank identification reference to track payments. “Website bookings require either a positive account balance or credit card. As an incentive for using the agent-account option, we will add 5% to any funds you place in your account,” Adrian says. Flyafrica.com provides a reporting system to allow agencies to view all transactions on their account. A call centre is also available 24/7 for bookings, with a local number 010 300 3540. Customer support desks are available at all airports flyafrica.com flies to where last-minute payments and changes can be made. A service fee will apply for these transactions.

**On the ropes – Kenya plays tit for tat**

From page 1

He says foreign travellers are avoiding Kenya for safety concerns, even though the safari circuits are perfectly safe and the vast majority of attacks in the recent past have not targeted tourists. “To further give travellers, in this case South Africans, reason to rather choose another destination over Kenya is suicide and will certainly impact arrival figures just ahead of the migration – Kenya’s high season,” he says. John Echelle, director and owner of Falcon Africa Safaris, says: “Lodge occupancies are down; evidence is that we can get still get availability in the Masai Mara during August and September, which is the peak season due to the wildebeest migration. The visa requirement will undoubtedly have a further negative effect, which Kenya cannot afford. The economy employs heavily on tourism. I am sure that the Kenya Association of Tour Operators will do everything in its power to have the decision reconsidered. “To assist our clients booked for the migration, we will cover the cost of the visa and we request our travel agents to facilitate the visa for clients.”

John Ridler, spokesperson of Cullinan Outbound Tourism, says South African beaches lovers will rather opt to holiday in Mozambique or on the Indian Ocean Islands, whereas game lovers will drop Kenya in favour of Zimbabwe and Namibia. Also Malawi could benefit from renewed attention. “The timing for Kenya could not be worse and there will be resistance to the cost of R750 and having to appear in person. Not a good idea” he says. The Kenya Tourist Board refused to comment at the time of going to press. The organisation told TNW they would need all the details about the new visa requirement before they could communicate on the matter.

**Spread the love...**

**A**

IR Namibia will open its own commercial offices in SA from July 1. The airline ended its five-year relationship with Aviareps in May. Air Namibia’s steady growth in the SA market prompted the move, says Michél Fourie, commercial manager of sales and marketing for SA, who will lead the new local team. Through the new offices in Johannesburg and Cape Town, Air Namibia will carry out all reservations and ticketing and provide full travel trade support. The airline will also manage its own sales and marketing functions. The new offices will be located at El Ridge Office Park (near OR Tambo International) in Johannesburg and at the Ikon building on the corner of Loop and Hans Strijdom streets in Cape Town. Air Namibia’s new commercial team consists of eight staff members, including the sales executive for Gauteng, Joseph Simatata, and the sales executive for the Western Cape, Eloise Liebetrau.

Cape Town Tourism and Thompsons Holidays have launched a joint campaign to inspire South Africans to travel to the Cape in the winter months. The ‘Love Cape Town City Break’ packages start from R3 185pp and include return flights to Cape Town on Mango, two days’ car rental, two nights’ accommodation and meals as specified. The offer is valid until August 31. Agents stand to win a trip for two to Cape Town when booking these packages. All bookings must be paid in full by July 15 to qualify for the draw. Ryno Claasens and Jessica Ferreira, sales executives for Thompsons Holidays, show their love for the Mother City. Photo: Shannon Van Yl

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