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TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

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INSIDE

NEWS
TRAVEL TO KENYA
 FCO softens travel advisory
 Page 2

Shap Shap!
 New Cape Town Township tour
 Page 6

FEATURE
LCCs & Budget Travel
 Lower fares, but for how long?
 Page 12

Mauritius – travellers thrown by blacklisting

DORINE REINSTEIN

TRAVEL agents are urged to educate themselves and their clients on new travel restrictions for foreigners entering Mauritius who have recently visited West Africa. Travellers who are unaware of the new measures could face having to cancel their vacations, without a refund.

The Mauritius High Commission recently announced that any foreign nationals, including South Africans, who have visited one or more of the countries affected by Ebola in the two months prior to their travel to Mauritius, will temporarily not be allowed to enter the country. The affected areas include Nigeria, Guinea,

Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the DRC. **Kirsten Rembold**, md of Ginkgo Travel, says one of her clients wanted to fly his family from South Africa to Mauritius and join them there after his work trip to Nigeria.

"I advised my client and his family against booking a trip to Mauritius. They are booking flights to Europe instead," said Kirsten.

Little impact

Silvana Polo, operations manager of Beachcomber Tours, says Beachcomber has had a handful of bookings that were affected by this new measure but overall it will not have a huge impact on the Mauritius holiday season. "We have had cancellations,

but not many. It is more important that we are kept abreast of the changes the island makes so that we can pass on accurate and factual information to make agents' lives easier."

According to Silvana, it is important for travel agents to be aware of the new regulations and advise their clients accordingly, as insurance companies and airlines will not give a refund if clients need to cancel because they will be denied access due to the Ebola virus.

Travel insurance

Uriah Jansen, md of Oojah Travel Protection, confirms that the standard travel insurance policies will only provide cancellation cover for 'named

reasons'. "Cancellation due to a government prohibition – as is the case with Mauritius – is a general exclusion to the cover provided under the Named Reason Cancellation product. The Cancel for Any Reason product will provide cover for cancellation due to this. However the traveller has to purchase this benefit within 24 hours of paying for his/her trip."

Johann Strydom, md of World Leisure Holidays, says Mauritius has taken the right decision.

"The protection of clients against illnesses, in this case the Ebola virus, will have a positive impact on tourism to the island. It is the responsible thing to do to safeguard the many tourists visiting from around the world." ■

UK won't be swayed by visa pressure

DORINE REINSTEIN

THE UK won't be influenced by SA's Minister of Home Affairs' attempt to 'persuade' them to scrap visa requirements for all South African travellers.

In an on-going tit-for-tat response to the introduction of visa requirements on all South Africans by the UK in 2010, **Malusi Gigaba** late last month announced that all officials and diplomats of the UK would now have to apply for a visa in person at the SA High Commission in Britain before visiting SA. Other British passport holders do not yet require a visa to visit South Africa.

The minister said: "The department and government at large have attempted over the years

to persuade British authorities to review their visa requirements. At our end, we will continue to engage with our British counterparts to change their stance on this matter. Obviously, on our part, the first is a

"The UK determines visa requirements based on strict criteria and existing circumstances."

full exemption for all South African passport holders, but at the least we can start with exempting the Diplomatic and Official passport holders."

Despite SA adopting a "principle of reciprocity", the UK is unlikely to

To page 16



A snowy Christmas

Do you have clients who are ready to hit the slopes this festive season? Pure Skiing is offering Christmas and New Year specials for Saalbach in Austria. The 'White Christmas' packages start from R34 252 per adult sharing and are available for travel from December 20-27. New Year specials start from R33 825 per adult sharing and are valid for travel from December 27 until January 3. The specials include return flights on SAA (including taxes), return transfers, seven nights' B&B accommodation, a six-day ski pass and ski hire, a Pure Skiing resort guide, travel insurance and a New Year or Christmas dinner. Ready for some festive fun is **Greg Taylor**, Pure Skiing gm. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl.

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Ethihad Airways will launch daily flights between Abu Dhabi and Dar es Salaam from December 1. Flight EY681 will depart AUH at 08h20 and arrive in DAR at 13h00. The return flight, EY682, will depart DAR at 14h00 and arrive in AUH at 20h25 on the same day. The flights will be operated by an A320, with 16 business-class and 120 economy-class seats and will offer connections via Ethihad's Abu Dhabi hub to 45 destinations across the Middle East, Europe, the Indian subcontinent, north and south-east Asia, and Australasia.

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Rubes® By Leigh Rubin

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Phone: (011) 327-4062
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E-mail: tnw@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 Schmidt natashas@nowmedia.co.za
Features Editor: Michelle Colman michellec@nowmedia.co.za
Contributors:
Debbie Badham Chana Boucher
Hilka Bims Caro Malherbe
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:
Courtney Canham courtneyc@nowmedia.co.za

PRODUCTION
Design Head:
Dirk Voormeeld

SUBSCRIPTIONS
Circulation tvsub@nowmedia.co.za

NOW Media
A Division of Circulations of South Africa

abc
Audi Bureau of Circulations of South Africa

When in Rome...



Holiday Tours is offering 'Delicious Rome' packages for food lovers, from R5 899pps. The special includes four nights' accommodation at the Milani Hotel in Rome with breakfast daily; a walking tour with a food connoisseur to discover coffee shops, gelaterias and the most famous tiramisu shop in Rome; and an Italian cooking lesson in the countryside as well as return transfers to and from the airport. The offer is valid between December 1 and 27. Tucking into local cuisine is Megan D'Arcy, Holiday Tours product manager.
Photo: Shannon Van Zyl.

FCO softens Kenya travel advisory

CARO MALHERBE

THE United Kingdom's Foreign and Commonwealth Office has softened the travel advisory for Kenya by lifting it against travel to parts of the country.

On September 29, the FCO removed advice against all but essential travel to some low-income areas of Nairobi. However, it still advises against all but essential

travel to the Eastleigh area of Nairobi as well as areas within 60km of the Kenya-Somali border; the Garissa district; Mombasa island and within 5km of the coast from Mtwapa Creek in the north down to and including Tiwi in the south (not including Diani or Moi International Airport); Lamu county and those areas of Tana River county north of the Tana River.

Vivian McCarthy, gm of Acacia Adventure Holiday in

London, said: "The lifting of the advisory is in line with our own experience that Kenya is a safe and secure destination."

He said the announcement came at an opportune time, with Kenya's Magical Kenya Expo about to begin in Nairobi in October. "Having attended this event in the past we know how valuable it can be both for Kenya's tour operators and for visiting agents and buyers alike." ■

Impact of Air France strike still to come

AIR France pilots have called off a two-week strike that cost the airline close to €300m (R4,3bn). But uncertainty around the airline's future, as a result of the action, could prove more costly.

The reason for the pilot walkout was Air France's plan to develop a low-cost venture, Transavia, to tap into new markets in both France and elsewhere in Europe. The pilots' union said it didn't oppose plans to build the new business but rejected the labour conditions that management had planned. Although the pilots didn't

reach a deal, Air France did offer to abandon its plans to develop Transavia outside of France. The airline will continue the accelerated development of Transavia within France, a project that is expected to quickly create 1 000 jobs, including 250 pilot jobs.

Although this offer was needed to end a long and costly strike, it could have far-reaching consequences for the airline's plans to return to profitability as Transavia was earmarked to deliver about €100m (R1,4bn) a year of extra core earnings, before

aircraft leasing costs, by 2017.

However, Air France is positive it will be able to turn the tide. A spokesperson for the airline told TNW: "The strike has been costly and damaging. It has lasted too long. But the end of the conflict strengthens the company's determination to develop its business model to reinforce its leadership. Air France is now totally mobilised to regain its customers' trust, restore serenity among staff and promote corporate cohesion. And Air France stays one of the major airlines of the world." ■

Sharmaine Scott selects the top specials from Travelinfo

- **World Leisure Holidays.** Fully inclusive rates at Azanzi Beach Hotel in Zanzibar are from R10 140 per adult sharing. Includes return flights ex-JNB, airport taxes, return coach transfers, four nights' accommodation in a superior room, all meals, selected wines, local beers and soft drinks between 10h00 and 22h00, and non-motorised water sports. Travel must be completed by December 15.
- **RH Hotels and Management.** Holiday Inn Express Durban. uShaka Marine World package - rates are from R1 500 per room per night. Rate includes accommodation for two adults and two kids under 18, free Express Start breakfast plus four combo tickets to uShaka Marine World Wet and Wild valued at R740. Offer expires December 11.
- **Bon Hotel Riviera On Vaal.** Weekend breakaway rates are from R675pp sharing and R1 195 single, including breakfast. Minimum two-night stay required. Special valid for Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights only until December 14.
- **Sirius Travel.** Adriatic cruise special - rates are from €790pp (R11 305) from Dubrovnik on *M/S Splendid* and from €890 (R12 736) from Split on *M/S Kleopatra*. Includes seven-night cruise with breakfast, lunch, welcome dinner and free WiFi on board. City tours of Dubrovnik, Korcula, Hvar and Split on *M/S Kleopatra* cruise. Cruises depart on Saturdays, May-September 2015. Discount of €100 (R1 430) for bookings paid before December 31, 2014.



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Avios signs up new partners

BRITISH Airways Executive Club and Avios Travel Rewards Programme have joined Standard Bank's UCount Rewards programme, providing UCount Rewards members with broader flight and accommodation options.

As a bonus, UCount members who convert their rewards points to Avios before November 30 will receive 1,5 Avios for each reward point converted. Thereafter, the conversion rate of one reward point for one Avios point will apply.

UCount members can access a variety of local and international flight options, accommodation resorts, car hire and specialist packages through the 'one-stop travel shop' available at the UCount Rewards Travel Mall.

British Airways Executive Club and Avios Travel Rewards programme have

also partnered with hotel booking site, Rocketmiles.

Members can collect Avios on hotel bookings in South Africa and internationally, receiving 1 000 to 5 000 Avios for each hotel night booked through Rocketmiles. Members will receive 7 000 Avios per booking, meaning a couple of hotel stays could give members enough Avios for a return flight from Johannesburg to destinations such as Durban, Harare, Livingstone or Port Elizabeth, plus R700 Reward Flight Saver to cover taxes and charges.

British Airways Executive Club and Avios Travel Rewards members can find and book their accommodation through the Rocketmiles website. Their account will be credited with Avios automatically within five days of the end of their stay. ■



IDC Travel takes off

IDC Travel celebrated its launch at a special ceremony on August 29 during which Foskor handed its lata licence to the IDC, officially enabling it to operate as a travel agent. The new travel office will take care of the travel needs of the IDC and its three subsidiaries, including Foskor. Celebrating the launch (from left) are Busisiwe Khumalo (head of department: support services) and Maureen Masuku (corporate travel manager). Photo: Debbie Badham

Emirates changes baggage dimensions

EMIRATES will change the required dimensions for checked baggage from next month.

For tickets issued on or after November 15, individual baggage items with total dimensions exceeding 300cm cannot

be transported as checked baggage and must be sent as freight. For tickets issued prior to November 15, items with total dimensions of 300cm and up to 400cm will still be accepted.

If the free baggage allowance is exceeded,

normal excess charges apply.

In economy class, the baggage allowance is 30kg, in business class, 40kg, and in first class, 50kg. Emirates Skywards Platinum, Gold or Silver members are entitled to additional allowances. ■

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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.

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

Cape Town township tour unveiled

CITY Sightseeing, in partnership with So We Too and Soweto Outdoor Adventures, is launching a new tour of Langa and Gugulethu Townships in Cape Town.

'LaGuGu Tour', which launched on September 20, offers flexibility for travellers, according to ceo of City Sightseeing South Africa, **Claus Tworeck**. "LaGuGu Tour travellers can hop off at the various stops along the route and spend as much time as they want interacting with the township people and soaking up the culture, while always under the watchful eye of one of the locally trained community chaperones," said Claus.

Fifteen-seat minibuses depart from City Sightseeing's tour office in Long Street, with the first tour leaving at 09h00. It makes its way to Langa, where guests can hop off at any of the

stops along the route and/or do a free hour-long walking/bicycle tour before re-joining the tour and making their way to Gugulethu.

Stops in Langa include the Township Heritage Museum, Brenda Fassie's house, Sobukwe Square, the Langa High School, the Old Beer Hall and a look at the N2 Gateway Housing development.

In Gugulethu visitors will be taken to the Gugulethu Seven Monument, the Amy Biehl Monument and then on to Mzoli's Restaurant.

For the hop-on hop-off facility, the LaGuGu Tour taxis run every 20-30 minutes along the route. For those who prefer to stay on board for the entire tour, it is a two-hour round trip. The last taxi of the day departs from Long Street at 15h00 and returns at 17h00.



Bakubung Bush Lodge. Photo: City Lodge Hotel Group

Pilanesberg lodge announces expansion

BAKUBUNG Bush Lodge in Pilanesberg National Park is to build new guest rooms, set to be completed by January.

The 24 luxury rooms will consist of one presidential suite, ten suites, two executive rooms and 11 standard queens.

Bakubung currently offers 76 fully equipped rooms, with facilities including air-conditioning, bath and shower, telephone, colour TV and Internet connectivity. All rooms have doors leading on to either a patio or balcony that provides panoramic views of the park and the hippo pool.

New wildlife tour showcases Mpumalanga

THOMPSONS Africa is offering a new tour, 'Regal Mpumalanga and Wildlife Tour'. The fully guided, five-day tour starts at OR Tambo International Airport, with a night in Johannesburg.

The tour visits Dullstroom, Lydenburg, Robber's Pass and Pilgrim's Rest. After lunch at a local restaurant, it proceeds to Sabie, Loan Creek Falls and the Long Tom Pass.

Next day the journey resumes along the Panorama Route to visit God's Window, Bourke's Luck Potholes and the Blyde River Canyon. Lunch is taken at a private game reserve in the Drakensberg. The rest of the day is

spent in an open-vehicle game drive, finishing off with an evening meal.

The fourth day begins before sunrise to search for nocturnal animal species, followed by snacks as daylight breaks. Guests then travel to the Kruger National Park for an early-evening sundowner game drive.

On the final day, a sunrise game drive is followed by breakfast back at the camp before returning to Johannesburg where guests can explore shopping malls or take an optional Soweto tour.

The tour departs on a Sunday and is combinable with Thompsons Africa's Garden Route Splendour Tour.

Sample a taste of Africa at moyo

MOYO has launched a new, broader menu across all five of its properties in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town.

Nick Eleftheriadis, md of moyo's brand management company, Fournews Developments, described moyo – meaning 'soul' in Swahili – as a restaurant that gave people an African-mood drink and food experience.

Chef, **Ane van Zyl**, who created the new menu, said it offered meals that drew inspiration from across the continent, taking people on a culinary journey, experiencing a taste of Africa.

Menus include Nigerian sweet potato and chickpea koftas, Moroccan spiced beef fillet, Zimbabwean chicken thigh dovi and Mozambican peri-peri prawns.

The menu still offers old moyo favourites and has a strong appeal to the broader South African taste, focusing on the important local market, says Nick. Some of the traditional, re-worked, South African dishes include peri-peri chicken livers, bunny chow, west coast mussels, ostrich neck potjiekos and Cape Malay bobotie. ■

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Challenges complicate travel procurement

The oil and gas sector is expanding geographically, with more sites coming on stream, often in more remote locations. Each comes with its own access, health and security challenges. Michelle Colman reports.

IN MANY organisations, travel purchasing typically sits in the 'indirect procurement' category; the purchase is important to the company but is not always seen as business critical, says **Chris Pouney**, director of business travel for Severnside Consulting, a TMC with offices in London and Dubai.

"For oil and gas clients, however, and some other industries such as mining and shipping, travel is absolutely a 'direct procurement activity' and unless it's managed effectively, then the profitability and reputation of the organisation are under serious risk."

The implication, says Chris, is that travel suppliers – and in particular TMCs – are placed under tremendous pressure to get it right.

High emphasis is placed on quality of staff, availability and robustness of systems and processes.

He points to the complexities of travel patterns in the sector, which require an advanced level of expert travel management.

"Crews may be on rigs for month-long rotations, and when they come off they need to get home as quickly as possible. Oil and gas clients will have intricate crew-rotation plans set up months in advance but needs may change at a moment's notice. Airlines have developed highly complex products that are only normally available to expert TMCs in this sector."

Tracking mechanisms are another priority as staff safety is paramount. Chris says TMCs must be able to locate travellers at any time of the day or night, and have robust and tested plans to support and evacuate personnel at short notice.

Further, visas and work permits are critical and relationships with embassies and high commissions must be delicately managed.

"When looked at internationally, we need



"Unless travel is managed effectively, then the profitability and reputation of the organisation are under serious risk."
Chris Pouney

suppliers who understand local market nuances, such as local fares and safety, yet operate to global standards and can report, sometimes hourly, in line with global standards."

Among the challenges for corporate clients working in the oil and gas sector is a global corporate directive that restricts oil and gas travellers from using European Union-banned air carriers, says **Costa Papoutsis**, Wings Travel Management's head of business development: oil and gas for sub-Saharan Africa. Many domestic carriers that travel on routes to oil and gas sites, often located off the beaten track, do not qualify for EU regulations and are therefore blacklisted, creating access issues for workers.

Costa says traditional oil and gas travel is rotational, in line with 28-day work cycles.

A rig worker's replacement has to arrive onsite before that worker can leave, in back-to-back fashion.

"In some regions there is no alternative but to amend travel policy or

to seek more expensive alternatives," he says.

Visa issues

Within the African region, this critical travel becomes more challenging.

Government visa departments are slow and it is expensive to process work visas. After every trip, the traveller has to re-apply and go through a bureaucratic process that changes often.

Long-term visa validity, such as the ten-year visa one would get in First World countries, is not available.

In some instances, even when visas are obtained from national embassies outside of the home country, like Tanzania, the traveller may be forced to re-purchase an entry visa on arrival.

Travellers may experience additional concerns when having to visit an ATM to withdraw



"In some regions there is no alternative but to amend travel policy or to seek more expensive alternatives."
Costa Papoutsis

local currency for the fees, while Passport Control holds the passport.

Often visas, which can only be applied for 48 hours ahead of travel, are delayed, resulting in multiple flight ticket changes.

These types of challenges are outside



"Flights to and from Luanda on a Friday, when there are shift changes of oil and gas workers, are problematic. Flights are full, so there is little discounting."
Alan Reid

of normal travel policy, causing frustration and added expenses for travel buyers. That is why it is essential for TMCs to understand and have proven solutions for crucial travel within the African continent, says Costa. "Travel is project-driven with cost centres that are price sensitive. These budgets are set without the understanding of air ticket yield management, logistical abnormalities being more the rule than the norm. Hotels are still a scarcity in key locations, driving up the prices due to their being at maximum capacity."

Travel procurement specialist, **Alan Reid**, who is associated with a global energy business, adds: "It used to be quite quick to get an Angolan visa but the country requires more and more documentation all the time.

"A Nigerian visa is costly. For Tanzania, leisure travellers do not need a visa but business travellers do, and the fee is applied inconsistently."

Complex ticketing

Destinations frequented by travellers in this sector are often off the normal business travel network, says Alan.

Those in Africa come with a specific set of challenges, with flight issues springing to the fore. Periodical shortages of flight frequencies, a shortage of seats and, as a result high fares, spring first to mind.

He illustrates with an example. "Flights to and from Luanda on a Friday, when there are shift changes of oil and gas workers, are problematic. This affects both workers bound for Johannesburg and Europe. Flights are full, so there is little discounting."

Air services are often scheduled at inopportune times, so that it is difficult to get a full day's work in a destination, necessitating a stay-over, which escalates trip costs.

For instance, Alan says, travellers from Johannesburg to Windhoek can take an early flight out but return flights take place in the late afternoon and – taking airport time into account – this cuts into the day. Flights to Tanzania from Johannesburg depart mid-morning arriving mid-afternoon, once again wasting the better part of a day.

Alan says it is his impression that the airlines are willing to lay on more flights but these are at the behest of governments and bureaucratic negotiations.

Travel to West Africa, he says, is affected by ageing and congested airports with "woeful infrastructure".

Trips entail hours getting through customs and immigration on arrival and departure.

On the plus side, says Alan, is the appearance of more and improved hotels in Africa, more international hotel brands and better hotel rates.

"It will be interesting to see what effect these new brands have on corporate agreements."

Credit cards could also be more widely used, he suggests. ■



Calling all CSIs!

Travel professionals took part in an evening of mystery and intrigue on September 9, courtesy of Cruises International. The CSI, or Cruise Specialists in Incentives, event showcased incentive offerings available from Cruises International while providing agents with an evening of crime solving and entertainment. Ready to solve the mystery are (back from left) Lauren Ferreira and Alesia Kuhn from Smooth Events; along with (front from left) Helen Sheer and Kay Ellison from Thompsons Holidays. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl.

What do business travellers want from a hotel?

ALTHOUGH corporate travellers appreciate little luxuries during their hotel stay, there has been a clear shift towards more productivity-driven perks. A recent American Express survey shows that, with too much to do and too little time to do it, road warriors need hotels with amenities aimed at increasing efficiency.

The single-question survey, which was administered to the US Internet population through Google Consumer Surveys, asked, 'When travelling for business, what factor influences you most in choosing a hotel?'

The results showed that free WiFi topped the list, with 35,2% of business travellers saying it influenced their choice of hotel. The proximity of the hotel to the meeting/working space was important

for 28,2% of respondents, while 25,5% favoured free breakfast. Surprisingly, only 10,9% mentioned their enrolment in a hotel's loyalty programme.

Danny Bryer, director of sales, marketing and revenue for Protea Hotels, says the absence of free WiFi is generally a deal-breaker the world over, including South Africa. "Now that technology is commonplace, naturally the question is 'What's the next thing that's going to make my life easier?'," says Danny, adding that Marriott International is actively looking into facilities such as mobile check-in and several other developments involving mobile.

Danny adds that Gen Y business travellers, especially, value time over just about everything else, so anything that can streamline their stay

will earn the hotel repeat business. "For that very reason, some hotels are also installing iPads in their public areas, which, in effect replace the traditional newspapers and business centres."

The main difference between US and SA travellers seems to be the importance they attach to loyalty programmes. In the US, loyalty programmes rank quite low in the list of priorities. According to Danny, in SA it's the opposite, with an increase in demand for loyalty programmes. He says the secret to loyalty programmes is to remain relevant by continually re-evaluating their value and to reassess and reinvent where necessary. "Loyalty programmes that can't do that will become less relevant to travellers. Those that can, will become more important." ■

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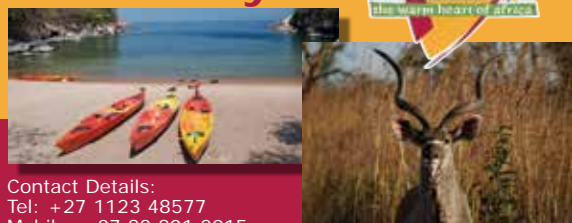
Avis launches shuttle service to Skukuza

AVIS car-rental company, which is a partner of SA Airlink, has launched a shuttle service between Skukuza Airport and Skukuza main camp in the Kruger Park. Reservations can be

made on the SA Airlink website or on arrival at the airport.

Avis was recently appointed official car-rental service provider at the refurbished Skukuza Airport. ■

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REPORT VENUE INSPECTOR

Conferencing in the heart of Jozi

TNW's sister publication, *Meet*, enlisted the help of a meetings expert to inspect the newly refurbished Garden Court Milpark in Johannesburg. After a detailed walkthrough and interviews with key staff, the venue inspector provided us with her independent assessment of the venue.

The inspector

Clare Coomer, director of Network Conferences, has been in the conference industry for 35 years. Her career in hotels started in Zimbabwe with Meikles Hotel and Southern Sun Hotels, after which she moved to South Africa in 1981 where she joined the Southern Sun Hotels sales team. Clare founded Network Conferences in 1994 and now operates as a professional conference organiser, this year celebrating 20 years in the MICE industry. She is also an executive committee member of the PCO Alliance Network, which upholds a professional code of ethics in the conference industry.

The hotel

Situated within Johannesburg's academic precinct, the Garden Court Milpark provides easy access to the highway and is only 30 minutes' drive from OR Tambo International Airport. It is also conveniently close to the Johannesburg CBD and other local hot spots. The



Clare Coomer

hotel opened originally in 1974 and is now owned by the Southern Sun group of hotels. The most recent renovations were completed in December 2013, with all bedrooms, the lobby, lounge and corridors being refurbished and the addition of three new conference rooms and a fitness centre.

What Clare found...

The hotel has 251 spacious and comfortable bedrooms, with options from standard to executive. Each unit is designed around the concept of the Johannesburg skyline, particularly well depicted in the unusual curtain design. All rooms have tea- and coffee-making facilities, a built-in safe, flat-screen TV with DSTv and air-conditioning. A unique feature – the Rea Vaya bus route – has been translated

into the hotel's carpet design, mapping out different routes for guests to follow as they walk through the hotel. Each level of the hotel has its own route number with a unique accent colour for each of the three wings of the hotel, serving as an effective way of directing guests while adding a stylish touch to the interior design.

The venue's new state-of-the-art conferencing facilities, which include the Westcliff rooms 1 and 2 as well as the Parktown, can accommodate up to 140 people cinema style. The rooms are modern and contemporary, offering standard conference equipment and WiFi connectivity.

It was very refreshing to meet the general manager of the Garden Court Milpark, **Noel Macquet**. Noel has great passion for his newly refurbished three-star hotel, which is a definite four-star in the making. His eye for detail and knowledge of his hotel from top to bottom brings whole new meaning to the word enthusiastic. The gm was so knowledgeable about his hotel during my site inspection, that I left feeling I knew the hotel inside and out in just a short space of time. Under the care of such a hands-on gm, the Garden Court Milpark is well equipped to provide an enjoyable and successful stay. I would certainly not hesitate to recommend this hotel to my clients.

Size and capacity

- **Westcliff 1 and 2 (90,5sqm)**
Seats: 140 cinema, 80 schoolroom, 48 boardroom
- **Westcliff 1 (47sqm)**
Seats: 60 cinema, 36 schoolroom and 26 boardroom
- **Westcliff 2 (43,5sqm)**
Seats: 60 cinema, 36 schoolroom and 26 boardroom
- **Newtown (39sqm)**
Seats: 54 cinema, 20 schoolroom, and 26

- boardroom
- **Parktown (36,5sqm)**
Seats: 48 cinema, 20 schoolroom and 26 boardroom
- **Melville (31,4sqm)**
Seats: 25 cinema, 15 schoolroom and 16 boardroom

A few facts

- The restaurant offers a full English breakfast buffet, while the onsite Family MacRib serves both lunch

DCP rates from R325pp

- and dinner, along with an 18-hour room service.
- Secure covered parking is available opposite the main entrance to the hotel.
- For those who enjoy the outdoors, a lovely pool area with manicured gardens is available to guests.

The venue in under 60 seconds

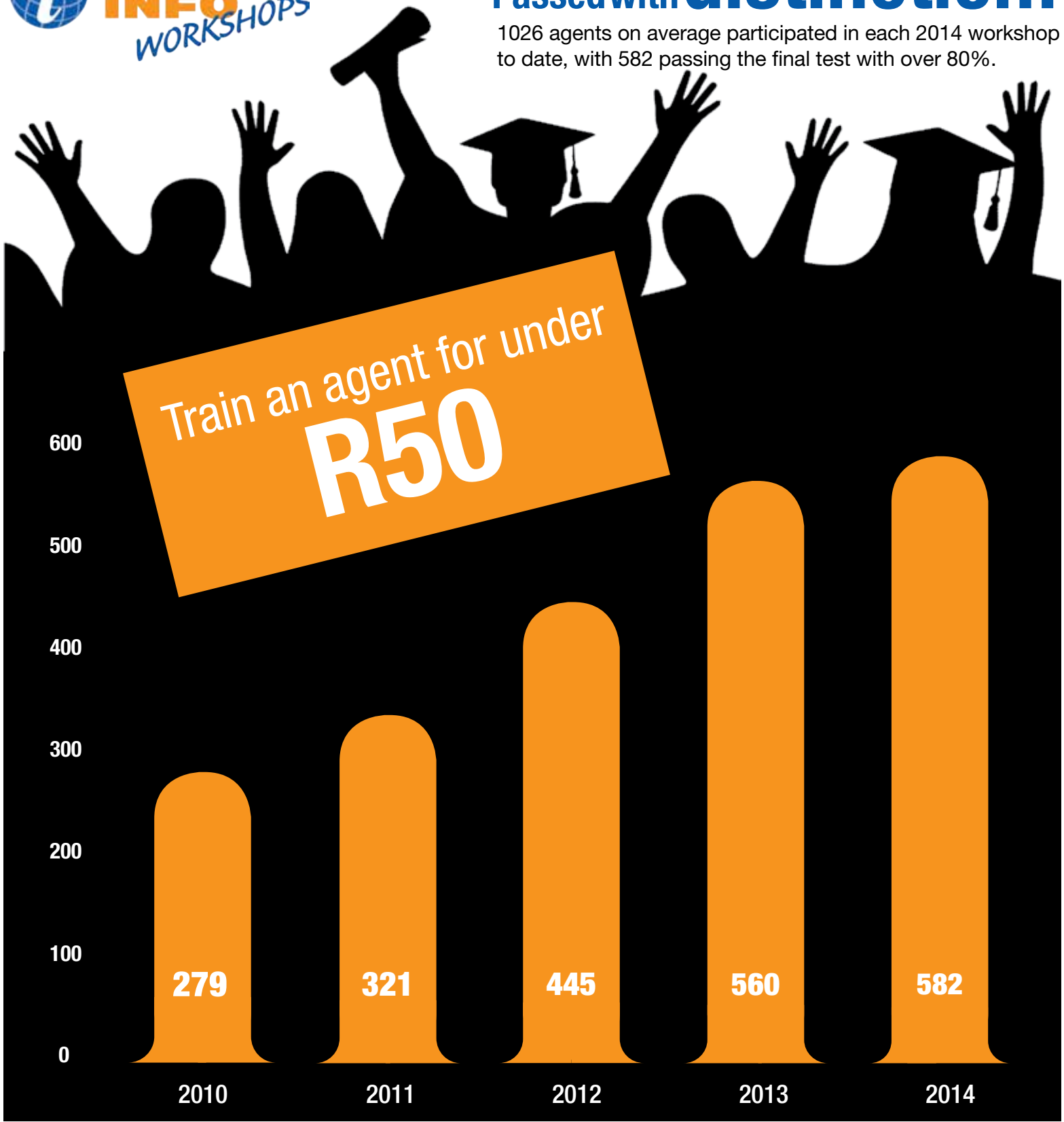
For more on the Garden Court Milpark, including slideshows, panoramic

shots of the venue and interviews with the general manager and deputy general

manager of the hotel, visit www.meetmag.co.za and click on the October edition. ■

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LCCs & Budget Travel



More low-cost carriers do not mean a price war, say airline authorities. Michelle Colman reports.

Expect lower fares – but for how long?

SOUTH African air routes will be a lot busier if all the recent potential entries to the LCC market succeed in launching operations.

After its competitors blocked the start of operations a year ago, FlySafair takes to the skies on October 16 with services between Cape Town and Johannesburg, adding routes from the Mother City to Port Elizabeth and George shortly thereafter. The airline's pricing model is based on a base rate for a seat and two pieces of carry-on luggage weighing not more than 7kg. Meals, checked luggage and pre-booked seats cost more, representing considerable savings for the passenger.

Dave Andrew, FlySafair ceo, has said that the new airline's

announced fares are not simply opening ploys and that the low-cost model applied is sustainable. The average fare across all seats in aggregate exceeds the cost of operating the flight, he says.

Skywise, another new venture planning to fly between Johannesburg and Cape Town, has yet to take off, although ceo, **Rodney James** told *TNW's* sister publication, *Tourism Update*, last month that they were in the midst of negotiations regarding the airline's structure. Its Air Service Licence (ASL), cancelled by the Department of Transport due to the delay, was reinstated after a court order.

Fly Blue Crane, a subsidiary of Blue Crane Aviation and headed by former SAA and

SA Express ceo, **Siza Mzimela**, also announced its intention to fly between Johannesburg and Cape Town in May this year.

"The possibility of an all-out price war is unlikely."

Regionally, fastjet, with its ultra-cheap fares is certainly making its presence felt. Now flying from Dar es Salaam to Johannesburg, Lusaka, Harare and Entebbe, and in the process of establishing a Kenyan operation, it has been named the cheapest LCC in Africa and fifth-cheapest worldwide by the flight comparison website, WhichAirline.com.

A second regional LCC

entrant is flyafrica.com, which commenced services between Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe and Johannesburg on August 1, and will begin services between Harare and Johannesburg on November 1.

As these new airlines come into the picture, the travel trade and travelling public can expect more competitive domestic and regional airfares. Taking into account the price-sensitivity of the South African market, both LCCs and traditional carriers could well react with reduced fares of their own. But will it be just a matter of time until sustainability rears its head?

SAA-affiliated Mango is one of the stalwarts on the South African LCC scene. Head of communications, **Hein Kaiser**, says the introduction of

competitive domestic airlines does have a positive effect for consumers, but for a limited period. Mango will continue to offer a weekly ticket sale on Tuesdays, but the possibility of an all-out price war is unlikely. With the negative growth in passenger numbers in recent years, additional capacity could affect the delicate equilibrium between supply and demand.

Comair ceo, which also operates LCC kulula.com, **Erik Venter**, recently told *Business Day* that FlySafair's launch did not indicate significant changes in the airline's ticket prices, other than ensuring some competitive rates for a few weeks. He said at a profit per passenger of R51, the airline could not sustain lower fares.

Earn commission on flyafrica.com

FLYAFRICA.com has released pointers to assist agents in the booking process:

Agent incentive: To book flights via the flyafrica.com website, a positive account balance or credit card is necessary. Payments can be deposited into an agency account or through a card payment gateway. As an incentive, 5% will be added by the airline to any funds

placed into the agency account.

Name changes: Flyafrica allows changes to be made to the spelling of names within 48 hours of creating the booking. The airline will process the change within 24 hours.

Group bookings: The group travel policy has been amended. Agents must submit a request form on the

airline's website under 'Group Bookings' and a quote will be emailed in return. Ten or more passengers are classified as a group.

For bookings 40 days or more prior to departure date, an email will be sent advising flight and fare information. To proceed, agents must contact the airline's call centre within 48 hours of the email's sent date, and

provide a 33% non-refundable deposit.

Thirty days prior to departure, the airline requires 66% payment, while the full balance must be received 15 days ahead. Five days before departure, all passenger names, dates of birth and passport information are required. At the same time, baggage and seat bookings can also be made. These are

charged separately and must be paid for at this time.

If the group has to be cancelled after full payment has been made, 67% will be transferred to a voucher for future travel with flyafrica, or, if paid from a travel agent account, the amount will be refunded to that account. Group bookings less than six days prior to departure will not be accepted.

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Budget hotels increase services

DESPITE some growth, demand for lower-end accommodation in South Africa is perhaps lagging behind its international counterparts.

Reports from the US, for example, indicate a significant move by lodging investors into the select-service sector, attracted by lower operating costs and higher returns.

Peter Schoeman, sales and marketing director for the City Lodge Group, says the local budget hotel category has grown a lot, but possibly not as much as in other countries. "Of our group's 54 hotels in South Africa, Kenya and Botswana, 12 are Town Lodges and 21 are Road Lodges, showing our commitment to the so-called budget end of the market."

Peter declined to comment on budget room returns compared with mid-market hotel rooms. "All hotels'

returns are based on occupancy, room numbers and rates, so the same principles apply across the grades. Returns are also related to the ownership of the property on which the hotel is developed."

He pointed out that budget hotels were nowadays offering an increasing amount of services.

The Road Lodge brand now provides wireless Internet, limited breakfast facilities, vending machines and parking, along with comfortable rooms. "We believe the standard is high and have encapsulated this in our most recent advertising campaign, which demonstrates Road Lodge using its one star for what counts," he stated.

Even at low rates, City Lodge still offers City Saver specials on Road Lodge and Town Lodge accommodation, and these are published on the group's website.

FlySafair revels in positive reception

JUST ahead of the launch of services this month, FlySafair has been overwhelmed with positive response from the public and trade alike.

Says ceo, **Dave Andrew**: "There is plainly a real appetite within the South African domestic travel market for access to cheaper airfares, and an air product that allows the consumer to exercise choice. Bookings for peak periods over the Christmas and Easter holiday periods are well in advance of expectations, with some flights already achieving 70% load factors. Our launch flights are filling up fast and we are excited about starting our flying programme from the Mother City."

As expected, the Cape Town-Johannesburg route is "wildly popular". Dave says it's the 10th busiest air route in the world, and FlySafair's

arrival has re-stimulated this market. An ultra-low lead-in price of R499 (inclusive of tax) is allowing people who have never travelled by air before to do so. Bookings on the George and Port Elizabeth routes are also "building nicely".

Trade support has been encouraging, reports Dave, adding that at the recent Travel Trade Airline mini-fair in Parktown, Johannesburg, the feedback was extraordinary. "We were welcomed with open arms. Agencies from across the region were eager to tell us where we should fly next or expand services to. The agency and tour operator community totally understand that if airfares come down, people make more trips and can spend more on the other components such as car, hotel and experiences. We salute the travel trade and look forward to working with them!"



SmartClass offers advance premium seat allocation among other benefits. Photo: Fastjet

Fastjet launches 'SmartClass' and 'Freighty' services

FASTJET is offering a premium fare, SmartClass, on all its flights.

SmartClass offers advance premium seat allocation, increased baggage allowance up to 32kg, and the ability to change flight dates as many times as required at no additional cost. An upgrade on international routes costs US\$450 (R5 060) one way.

International passengers can also now take up to 80kg of hold luggage by purchasing the Freighty upgrade package

at a cost of US\$80 (R900).

This package is designed to appeal to passengers who fly with fastjet to either collect or purchase wholesale produce from the port and markets in Dar es Salaam to sell in their home markets.

Fastjet chief commercial officer, **Richard Bodin**, said: "By creating SmartClass we can provide additional flexibility, quick disembarkation from the front rows, and the ability to travel with a baggage allowance more appropriate to


the needs of today's business traveller – all as part of a single, simple, all-inclusive fare.

"We have also learned a great deal from talking to our international passengers on flights from Harare and Lusaka and their feedback has led us to introduce the innovative Freighty product. It's a simple product enhancement, which is easy to administer and will allow our passengers to benefit from the large capacity of our aircraft's holds."

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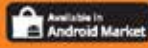
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A340-300s will be used on the LCC operation. Photo: Ingrid Friedl, Lufthansa

Affordable long-haul leisure flights from Lufthansa

LUFTHANSA is planning to radically alter its approach to intercontinental leisure-dominated routes by offering more affordable flight options. Whether the low-cost model will be available in South Africa is not yet known, according to **Axel Simon**, director Southern Africa for Lufthansa. "Lufthansa is currently in the planning stages and has not yet revealed which leisure-dominated destinations are being considered."

The LCC operation forms part of the Wings concept – new low-cost 'platforms' (subsidiaries and joint ventures) under the Wings name to operate budget flights within Europe and to selected long-haul destinations, targeting leisure

travellers. One option being considered is based on the Sun Express model, which is a 50-50 joint venture between Lufthansa and Turkish Airlines.

The airline will fit up to 14 Airbus A340-300s from its long-haul fleet with a cabin that is optimised for leisure travel, in an attempt to make its long-haul operations more profitable. Commencing with the 2015/2016 winter flight timetable, this A340-300 sub-fleet will fly at a much lower cost. The aircraft will operate with 18 business-class seats, 19 in premium economy and 221 in economy, and will serve new leisure travel destinations from which Lufthansa would otherwise have to withdraw.



Cresta Marang Gardens, just outside Francistown. Photo: Cresta Hotels

Cresta properties target self-drive market

CRESTA Hotels has budget properties in Zimbabwe and Botswana, located in popular stopovers on self-drive trips.

Francistown is Botswana's second-largest city and a convenient stopover on the way to Kasane, Maun or Victoria Falls. It is undergoing an economic boom due to the resuscitation of the gold mining industry, and new growth in the property and transport sectors. Its attractions include the Supangwao Museum, the Tachila Nature Reserve, craft markets and Birds and Game Botswana, an animal orphanage.

Cresta Marang Gardens, set in tropical gardens on the banks of the Tati River just outside Francistown, was refurbished last year and is popular as a wedding venue. A well-appointed campsite is also available on manicured lawns under the shade of a large tree. Campers have access to all hotel amenities, including the use of the pool and gym and WiFi connectivity.

Jwaneng is another popular Botswana pit-stop, especially for those driving between South Africa and Windhoek along the Trans-Kalahari Highway. Tourists can visit the local Jwaneng

diamond mine and the Jwana Game Park with its Cheetah Conservation Botswana field unit.

The Cresta Jwaneng is only five minutes from both these attractions. It has 65 air-conditioned bedrooms with en-suite bathrooms, a swimming pool, restaurant and bar, Internet access and satellite television. It also has conference facilities for 200 people.

In Zimbabwe, Cresta's Oasis Apartments in Harare appeal to all types of tourists, notably long-stay guests. It is situated in the CBD, and banks, businesses and key government offices are all within easy reach.

Apartment guests also enjoy all the amenities at the Cresta Oasis Hotel, such as two conference venues, a business centre and the Café Afrique restaurant.

The apartments are generously proportioned, feature a seating area, a work station, and a kitchenette for self-catering. Guests receive a free weekly pack of tea and coffee.

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World Leisure Holidays recently hosted Durban consultants on an educational to Mauritius. Soaking up some island sun are (back from left) **Mada De Beer** (eTravel); **Yasmin Walker** (HWT Overport); **Sameer Mitha** (Sure Mithas travel); **Nadine Bauling** (Flight Centre Shelley Beach); along with (front from left) **Donna Calmeyer** (Travel Counsellors); **Ashley Hewitt** (WLH Rep); **Kaajal Bhogal** (Best Buy Holidays); **Shantelle Ketley** (ZA Travel); **Jermina Moletsane** (Flight Centre Gateway); and **Mbali Tembe** (Flight Centre Pinetown).

Island style!



Touring Thailand!

Holiday Tours recently hosted an educational to Thailand. Getting ready to explore are (back from left) **Soheni Khadua** (Holiday Travel); **Alysha Buckle** (Achievement Awards); **Ingrid Palos** (Red Carpet Travel); **Mireille Kearns** (XL Boland Travel); **Nompilo Zondi** (Tourvest); **Candice Lombard** (XL Aloe Travel); **Lisa Hutton** (Holiday Tours Johannesburg); **Damelza Selyer** (Travel 2000 Zimbabwe); and **Megan Petersen** (Just Holidays Namibia). In front (from left) are **Sarah Tallents** (Holiday Tours CPT) and **Ban Thai's** representative.

Appointments

■ Umfolozi Hotel Casino Convention Resort in Empangeni has appointed new gm, **Hennie Steenkamp**.

Hennie has more than 16 years' experience



throughout the travel and tourism industry. He joined the Peermont group in 1998 as human resources manager and eight years later was appointed gm of the Frontier Inn and Casino in Bethlehem. Two-and-a-half years later he was appointed gm of Graceland

Hotel Casino and Country Club, where he has worked for the past six years.

■ Perfect Destinations welcomes new gm, **Zephnie Viljoen**. Zephnie previously worked as a manager at Amazing Holidays and Imagine Holidays.

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Thai Airways launches tickets for the trade

THAI Airways International has launched trade fare, or ADOO tickets, for its service to Bangkok.

The fare is available to all full-time employed travel consultants only. Family members and friends do not qualify.

Applications must be submitted to Thai Airways with an IATA resolution 880 company application form.

Travel is restricted to the month of November and for the JNB-Bangkok-JNB route only. ■

UK won't be swayed

From page 1

change its stance. **Isabel Potgieter**, spokesperson for the British High Commission in Pretoria, told TNW the High Commission respected the right of South Africa to determine its immigration policies but that, although the UK would continue to work closely with South Africa on migration and border issues, the country determined visa requirements based on strict criteria and existing

circumstances. "This is true with South Africa as with all countries around the world."

Isabel added: "The UK-South Africa bilateral relationship is deep and broad-based, with close co-operation across a wide range of issues from foreign policy and trade, to science and innovation, climate change, and cultural relations and we are confident this relationship will continue to strengthen and grow." ■



A new era

Asata members have elected a new board for 2014/15. At the helm as the organisation's new president is **Vanya Lessing** (Sure Travel ceo). No stranger to the organisation, Vanya has in the past held the positions of ceo and vice president. **Travel With Flair** md and founder, **Johanna Mukoki**, joins Vanya as vice president, with **James Sedgwick** of Sure Travel Fish Hoek as treasurer. Additional board members include: **Bronwyn Philipps** (HRG Rennies Travel), **Claude Vankeirsbilck** (Tourvest Travel Services), **Johann Strydom** (World Leisure Holidays), and **Lance Smith** (Avis). Pictured here at the Asata AGM 2014 are (from left): James, Vanya, Johanna, **Otto de Vries** (Asata ceo) and Johann. Photo: Natasha Schmidt

Domestic travel hard hit

CHANA BOUCHER

LOCAL airlines, hotels and car-rental companies are seeing a drop in domestic travel, but the retail trade seems to be weathering the storm, with some agents saying numbers are up.

In its annual financial results, Comair said the domestic market had contracted by 4%. **Hein Kaiser**, Mango's communication manager, says: "Statistically airlines are only able to provide numbers on air travel, however, one can assume that concomitant to a decline in domestic passenger numbers, a consequent decline in travel numbers may be expected."

He says the shrinking of the domestic market is likely a consequence of an increased cost of living, a weakened economy and a hangover from the global financial crisis. Similarly, **Danny Bryer**, director of sales, marketing and revenue for Protea Hotels, says the domestic market is "slightly down" as a direct result of the national economic climate. **Clifford Ross**, ceo of the City Lodge Hotel Group, believes South Africans in the lower LSMs (living standards measure) are cutting down on travel as costs escalate and disposable income dwindles.

Lance Smith, head of executive sales for Avis Rent a Car SA, says Savrala statistics show that domestic travel is down, "mainly driven by less corporate and government travel". He predicts that the next 12-month window will see further tightening of belts.

But, it seems, the trend has not affected agent bookings.

Andrew Stark, retail gm of Flight Centre South Africa,

says the group is currently tracking 15% up year-on-year on domestic ticket numbers.

Andrew says customers are increasingly seeing the benefit of being able to book their full holiday package through an expert rather than going through multiple suppliers. "We also have a large repeat customer base and some of those customers are changing their travel purchases to have more of a balance between international and domestic holidays," he adds.

"GDS segments are 9% down for the year. While this would be a combination of all outbound travel, the trend is very worrying."

Marco Cristofoli, md of Harvey World Travel, which has also seen some growth in its domestic figures, says the discrepancy in figures between suppliers and agents could be because the market that books directly with the airline is under pressure. "The direct market is generally your price-sensitive consumer who travels mostly through loyalty programmes such as Discovery, etc."

"Despite the general slowdown in the South African economy, the Harvey World Group has not experienced a decline in domestic figures, in fact quite the opposite, with general overall growth, albeit small. The domestic market is vitally important to Harvey World, considering the majority of our corporate client base falls within the SME sector, which have a high propensity to travel locally to grow their business within SA borders."

Not all retail brands are experiencing an increase

though. **Garth Wolff**, ceo of eTravel, says he has noticed a decline in domestic travel.

"Economic conditions this year have been extremely tough, starting with the impact of the strikes and the government not doing much to attract international investment."

According to **Jonathan Gerber**, director at TAG, there is reason to believe that South African GDS segments are 9% down for the year. "While this would be a combination of all outbound travel, the trend is very worrying. I think the inflated domestic airfares coupled with the weakening economy are major contributing factors," he says.

George Harb, Travelport's md for Southern Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, says: "What we can see from the latest figures is that there is a small decline in domestic and international GDS bookings compared with last year, which could be in part down to various factors ranging from economic slowdown, impact of elections and labour strikes that had influenced April and May volumes and bookings that are made on supplier websites which do not appear in GDS reports."

Recovery ahead?

Jonathan believes the introduction of FlySafair into the market will help domestic numbers "as lower prices may well turn into more travellers".

Garth believes the market will recover sooner rather than later, as everything works in swings and roundabouts. "Once the economy recovers we will see an increase once more. The recovery will be soon and by March 2015 we will have forgotten that things were this flat." ■

mpulse poll
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UK and Europe top the list for visa woes

Which visa application process frustrates your clients most?

	UK 34%
	Schengen 21%
	Nigeria 14%
	Angola 11%
	India 11%
	USA 7%
	China 2%

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