

# TNW



TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

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## Agents cry foul over new Voyager

DORINE REINSTEIN

TRAVEL agents are up in arms about the new SAA Voyager RE5 programme, which was launched on February 1, and which, according to agents, has seen Voyager miles devalue drastically overnight. SAA has changed its loyalty programme from a mileage-based to revenue-based system.

“On Friday, I still had Voyager miles to the value of over 12 return tickets to London in Business Class. On Monday, I suddenly could only redeem one and a half return tickets with my miles,” said one travel agent, who would like to remain anonymous.

“It’s like waking up one morning and finding that the hard-earned money in your bank account has been devalued and is worth nothing any more,” said another agent.

A return economy ticket from Cape Town to London used to cost about 55 000 miles; under the new system travellers would need about 169 000 miles, the agent said. For a business-class passenger, the discrepancy is even bigger. Where a business-class Mileage Keeper ticket used to cost 87 500 miles, business-class travellers now need to fork out 731 000 miles for a D-class ticket.

“The main problem was that SAA kept saying its new system would be

much better and more user-friendly but they refused to divulge how many miles travellers would need to book their tickets in the new system, he says. “I must have logged over 100 calls to SAA since the announcement of the Voyager RE5 system asking this very question, but nobody could answer.”

The new Voyager programme is “just a clever way” for SAA to write off a huge debt in Voyager miles, the agent said. “SAA should give existing loyalty members leniency and allow them to redeem their miles under the old system for at least another month.”

Existing members were given 64 days to exercise their right to redeem miles in the mileage-based model,

says **Suretha Cruse**, SAA executive of Customer Loyalty. She adds that SAA Voyager has negotiated discounted fares for its members compared with the fares available to revenue passengers and that these discounts, which may vary between routes and regions, will be passed on to members when miles are converted to the required rand value for an SAA-operated flight. Members receive one mile per R1,60 spent and the accumulation of miles under this earning structure counts towards tier status.

For example, the 19 000-mile threshold for a previous Domestic

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## New expat immigration policy creates confusion

DEBBIE BADHAM

REPORTS are circulating that some expatriates with permanent residence in South Africa are being stopped at airports when travelling back into the country and asked to produce residence certificates.

There is a great deal of hearsay surrounding the matter, says ceo of Asata, **Otto de Vries**. “Some sources say the ruling was already in place and others say it came into effect from January 1.”

Meanwhile, Home Affairs has failed to respond to enquiries about the new policy, leaving travellers in the dark. The department did not respond to numerous requests sent by TNW to comment on the situation.

Immigration expert and director

for Intergate Immigration, **Monya Flier**, says Home Affairs informally announced a change in policy more than six months ago. The announcement stated that Home Affairs would no longer issue permanent residence stamps in passports, requiring travellers to rely on their permanent residence certificates.

Monya says the new policy was implemented without notice or proper communication – it was simply displayed as a notice on the walls of the Home Affairs building, she says.

For the moment, while Home Affairs no longer issues residence stamps, it seems travellers are allowed to use the old stamps as a form of verification, says Monya. “We have had no reported incidents on this account yet.”

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Mango is offering flights from Johannesburg to Zanzibar for R2 754 (all-inclusive), and from Zanzibar to Johannesburg for R3 236 (all-inclusive). The offer is valid until February 28. Celebrating the island vibes are Mango’s **Koos Mhlongo** (head of sales) and **Fran Heron** (revenue management). Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

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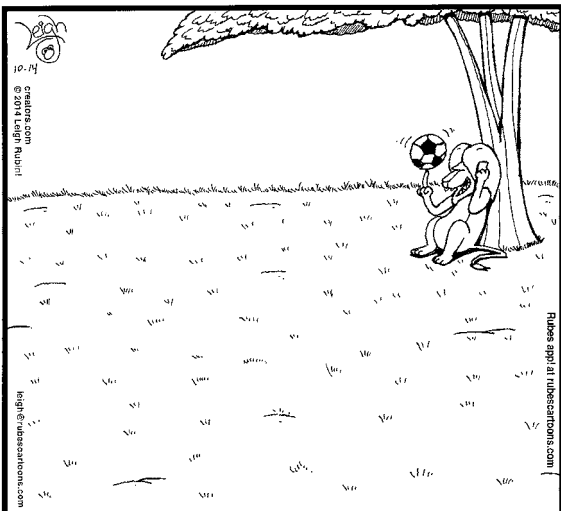
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## Airlink ups flights on two routes

**A**IRLINK will increase flights on its Johannesburg-Nelspruit and Johannesburg-Pietermaritzburg routes, and make schedule changes to its Durban-Maputo route, effective February 16.

Airlink will introduce morning flights on its Johannesburg-Nelspruit route. Flights will depart Nelspruit at 06h55 arriving in Johannesburg at 07h50, Monday to Friday. On Saturdays the first flight will

depart Nelspruit at 08h30 arriving in Johannesburg at 09h25. Evening flights depart Johannesburg for Nelspruit at 18h05 arriving at 18h55, daily.

Afternoon flights will be added on the Johannesburg-Pietermaritzburg route. Afternoon flights will operate Monday to Friday departing JNB at 15h30, 17h00 and 18h15. The return flights from Pietermaritzburg to Johannesburg will depart at 14h00, 17h00 and 18h25.

This will be in addition to the three return flights on Saturdays and Sundays.

The airline has changed its schedule between Durban and Maputo. Flights on Tuesdays and Thursdays will depart Durban at 06h45 and 16h00 with the return flights from Maputo departing at 08h30 and 17h35. Midmorning flights on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays will depart Durban at 10h10 and depart Maputo at 11h45. ■

## Agents cry foul over new Voyager

**From page 1**

Mileage Keeper Award was capacity controlled and excluded the fuel levy, which was payable in cash. "It is therefore not comparable with the pricing of Dynamic Awards, which are inclusive of fuel levy in addition to being available on any booking class for the desired flight," she says.

Suretha adds that the changes to Voyager allow more redemption options and minimise the cash cost of redemption. "The restriction on the availability of SAA Voyager seats and the requirement of having to pay for the fuel levy were SAA Voyager's top two customer complaints," she says.

"Within South Africa, there are about 80 loyalty programmes and the return

in 'cash' value based on the rand value spend, equals between 0,025 to 2,5%. We are therefore immensely proud that SAA Voyager's return equals 5%. In other words, for R5 000 spent on SAA-operated flights, a member will have R250 to spend towards future travel on SAA-operated flights."

**Upgrades**

A major benefit of the previous Voyager system, agents say, was that travellers could confirm the upgrade of their seats with Voyager miles up to a year in advance. Under the new system, upgrades can only be confirmed 24 hours to 48 hours before the flight.

There will be instances when SAA will know 48 hours prior to departure that the potential

sale of seats at normal cost will not be reached, says Suretha, and therefore SAA could confirm an E-Class seat (i.e. seat allocation for SAA Upgrade Awards). "Members will know that the mileage thresholds required for Upgrade Awards do not in the least relate to the price in rands to upgrade from economy class to business class."

SAA Voyager will have the technology to implement part payment (miles and cash) for SAA-operated seats within the next three to four months, Suretha says. "This will allow members to upgrade dynamically from economy class to business class for immediate confirmation. The mileage threshold required will be higher." ■

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## New expat immigration policy

**From page 1**

However, the issue remains murky and travellers should not rely on their old stamps continuing to be accepted, she says. "I strongly advise permanent residents to travel with their certificates."

In situations where a permanent resident tries to re-enter South Africa without proof of residence, officials at the point of entry will have every right to assess that traveller as a temporary visitor, says Monya. "For non-visa-exempt individuals, their immigration is highly controlled. It is highly likely that, should they fail to produce the necessary proof,


they will not even be allowed to board the plane.

"Also very worrying is the fact that these stories all relate to the original certificate and not a copy, which most travellers would be uncomfortable travelling with," says Otto.

Monya adds that permanent residence certificates are not easy to replace. "Historically, these certificates have taken about a year to replace by means of a Proof of Permanent Residence application." She, therefore, strongly recommends that travellers check with immigration officials whether or not

they are able to travel with a South African ID book instead. "The notice didn't provide any clarity on whether or not this would be possible, however an ID book is far easier to replace."


Otto says the deafening silence from Home Affairs concerning clarification around the issue is perhaps an indication that the department itself is uncertain of the ins and outs of the new policy. In general, all the new changes around South African immigration policies have created massive uncertainty, he says. "Quite frankly this is a mess." ■



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Something to smile about

Ethiopian Airlines is offering a 'buy one, get one free' Valentine's Day ticket special on its flights to the Seychelles, Mombasa and Zanzibar. The special is valid for sales until February 14. Pictured here is Fasika Berhanu, Ethiopian Airlines new regional manager in South Africa. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

# Beachcomber launches new sales tool

BRUCE DENNILL

**B**EACHCOMBER Tours has launched a new sales tool, Plus Factor, which provides travel agents with a list of value-add activities – usually considered extras – that they can sell to their clients.

The document is available for download in the agents' portal on the

Beachcomber website.

"Our aim is to remind the industry of the inclusions in our Mauritius packages, which are often taken for granted," says **Joanne Visagie**, Beachcomber's sales and marketing manager.

"Plus Factor offers a handy summary of extras, including discounts, complimentary items, treats, family extras

and more. There are two benefits: making sales easier for travel agents and making clients' stays special."

Plus Factor specials for 2015 include a 10% saving on honeymoons and wedding anniversaries; 25% to 35% Early Bird discounts; free WiFi in rooms at all five-star properties and free water skiing and wakeboarding. ■

## Sharmaine Scott selects the top specials from Travelinfo

- **Singapore Airlines.** Singapore 50th birthday accommodation offer: Category-A rates are from SG\$1pp (R8,6) for the first night and SG\$99pp sharing (R850) for additional nights. Booking must be made before February 28. Offer is valid for travel until June 15. Refer to Travelinfo for more rates.
- **Air Seychelles.** Special fares to the Seychelles are from R6 125 including taxes. Last ticketing date is February 16. Outbound travel permitted until May 31. Black-out period between March 24 and April 12 applies.
- **Austria Connection.** Receive US\$300pp (R3 488) off luxury cruise prices in Croatia. Special is valid for booking until February 15 on M/S Princess Aloha and M/S Vita. Offer applies to selected departures during May and July ex-Dubrovnik.
- **United Europe.** ICC Cricket World Cup packages – land-only packages are from R9 150pp sharing. Package includes two nights' accommodation including breakfast plus category-A ticket. Valid for knock-out stage matches from March 18-29.
- **Saudi Arabian Airlines.** Special fares to Medina – fares are from R6 000, excluding taxes. Sales and travel period until March 31.



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**New full-board packages from Beachcomber PACKAGES** to Trou aux Biches are now available on a full-board basis. A light buffet lunch is included until October 31 and is valid for all room types, allowing guests to experience full board at half-board rates. In other news, Royal Palm Marrakech has become a member of the Leading Hotels of the World. To become a member, an institution needs to adhere to strict quality criteria and welcome guests in optimal conditions.

**New resort opens in Mozambique**  
 PLANHOTEL Hospitality Group will open the five-star Diamonds Mequfi Beach Resort in Mozambique in May. The resort is at Mecufi Bay on the southern Pemba peninsula, close to the Quirimbas National Park. Accommodation will be based on either a dinner, bed and breakfast or an all-inclusive basis. Accommodation comprises 40 deluxe beach bungalows and 10 beach suites. All rooms will have private verandas with ocean view and an outdoor shower. Rooms feature four-poster beds or twin beds with mosquito net, a sofa bed, ceiling fan, digital personal safe, TV with satellite channels, WiFi, mini-bar with coffee- and tea-making facilities and an en-suite bathroom.

# Ponant – new name, new sales opportunities

BRUCE DENNILL

**F**RENCH boutique cruise company Ponant Yacht Cruises & Expeditions not only has a new name, but a new ship and destinations to offer the SA market.

The company, previously known as Compagnie du Ponant, rebranded in September to highlight its boutique luxury product and unique selling points, says international sales director, **Stephen Winter**.

Ponant will launch a new ship, *Le Lyrial*, in April, expanding its fleet, which currently comprises *Le Ponant* (the company's original luxury yacht, built in 1991), *Le Boreal*, *L'Austral* and *Le Soleal*, to five vessels. "We're using first-generation green

ships, on which everything is recycled," Stephen adds.

Ponant sails to a number of unique destinations, with new offerings this year including Alaska and the South Pacific islands (Easter Island, Tahiti and New Caledonia).

The locations the ships can access are a big draw card, says Stephen. "In Antarctica, we are able to organise 100 people to go on to the ice at a time. On a large ship, that means a good deal of waiting but we have 264 passengers at most, so the turnaround is much faster.

"Themed cruises are also doing well and we're seeing an increase in ships being hired for events by clubs and associations. People want more than the old-fashioned model of having drinks

around the pool," he says. Ponant is considering South Africa as a possible destination, with Cape Town as a stopover on its Antarctic cruises before heading back to Europe via Senegal, Stephen says.

Development Promotions, which represents Ponant in SA, offers Agent Rewards, an online incentive programme for SA travel agents. "We also have a programme where the agent is guaranteed commission if a customer they've sent us books a second trip with us directly through our on-board reservation offices. Agents who would like to experience the product, also have access to specials of up to 75% off sailings depending on availability," says Stephen. ■

# New hotel opens at OR Tambo

INTERCONTINENTAL Hotels Group has announced the opening of the new 151-room Holiday Inn Johannesburg Airport, expected to open in the first quarter of this year.

The new Holiday Inn will be a conversion of the current Airport Grand Hotel & Conference Centre near OR

Tambo International Airport. The hotel features meeting rooms and function spaces, a restaurant and two bars. This will be IHG's third Holiday Inn in South Africa.

**Pascal Gauvin**, COO, India, Middle East and Africa, IHG, said: "Holiday Inn has enjoyed a long and

successful history in South Africa since we launched our first hotel in Johannesburg in 1971. Today, South Africa ranks amongst the top business events and leisure travel destinations in Africa and we are confident in the market's long-term growth potential." ■



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The Eden Bleu Hotel enjoys great views of the Eden Island Marina. Photo: Eden Bleu

## Eden – where business and pleasure meet

With significant development taking place on Eden Island, the Seychelles is gearing up to attract a greater number of South African conference-goers. Debbie Badham attended the launch of the Eden Bleu Hotel as a guest of the establishment to find out more.

IT IS becoming more common for corporates to combine conferences with incentive trips – a trend that has increased the popularity of destinations such as Mauritius, which not only offers SA corporates a paradise getaway on their doorstep but is also well equipped to meet conference requirements.

While the Seychelles has traditionally been perceived primarily as a leisure destination, the recent launch of the Eden Bleu Hotel, along with the development of Eden Island as a whole, will likely go a long way to altering this perception. **Craig Heeger**, executive chairman of Eden Island Development Company, says the island has received a great deal of attention from South African companies demonstrating interest in holding their conferences in the Seychelles.

Eden Island is the result of a huge amount of time and investment, according to Craig. Thirteen years ago the residential and commercial marina was nothing more than a white patch of coral. Craig was approached in 2003 by Seychelles Tourism to invest in the island, the result of which is a bustling development 100 metres off the coast of Mahé.

Aside from the picturesque marina and Eden Bleu Hotel, Eden Island is also home to Eden Plaza, the only purpose-built retail centre in the Seychelles, which houses shops, boutiques, restaurants and bars, banking and medical facilities, a spa, and diving and boating charters.

The hotel, which is situated close to the international airport and the capital Victoria, features the most high-tech conference facilities on the archipelago. Its conference centre can accommodate 340 guests theatre-style and 240 guests banquet-style while leaving space for a dance floor. The venue is also sub-divisible and soundproofed so that two different events can take place simultaneously.

**“The island has received a great deal of attention from South African companies demonstrating interest in holding their conferences in the Seychelles.”**

“With our conference and meeting facilities and exceptional digital technology, the Eden Bleu Hotel is seamlessly able to combine business and pleasure,” comments **Peter Smith**, marketing director, Eden Island Development Company.

Eden Bleu itself offers 74 deluxe rooms, 12 luxury suites and a presidential suite. However, a rental pool of apartments, maisons and villas provides conference organisers with greater capacity to work with as well as a wider variety of accommodation options. The hotel’s banqueting team can produce menus to suit the event or conference in question and



Victoria is home to vibrant street markets. Photo: Debbie Badham

provides alternative dining options in the Marlin Bleu Restaurant, which is complemented by the adjacent Bourgeois Bar with views of the marina.

Eden Plaza’s variety of dining options offers delegates the opportunity to kick back and relax island-style on the marina’s boardwalk. The plaza provides a highly atmospheric setting with its live music and proximity to the open water.

The concept behind the commercial development as a whole was to create a hub from which visitors can explore the island and all that it has to offer, unlike other conference and incentive destinations that are designed to keep people in one place.

The destination serves as an ideal base for island hopping, further promoting its selling point, which is based on putting together unique conference and incentive packages.

The overall aim is to market the Seychelles as a destination that has something for everyone, offering excursions ranging from historical trips to Victoria to cultural, culinary and beach experiences.

Mauritius has long been the hotspot for South African corporates looking to combine conferences with incentive experiences. However the Eden Island Development Company believes that the Seychelles will be able to compete effectively with other island getaways such as Mauritius as the Eden Bleu Hotel is quite aggressively priced according to the market in which it operates. In fact, the team believe they have managed to develop a five-star product that offers four-star pricing. What’s more, Seychelles is easily accessible from Johannesburg, with flights taking less than five hours.

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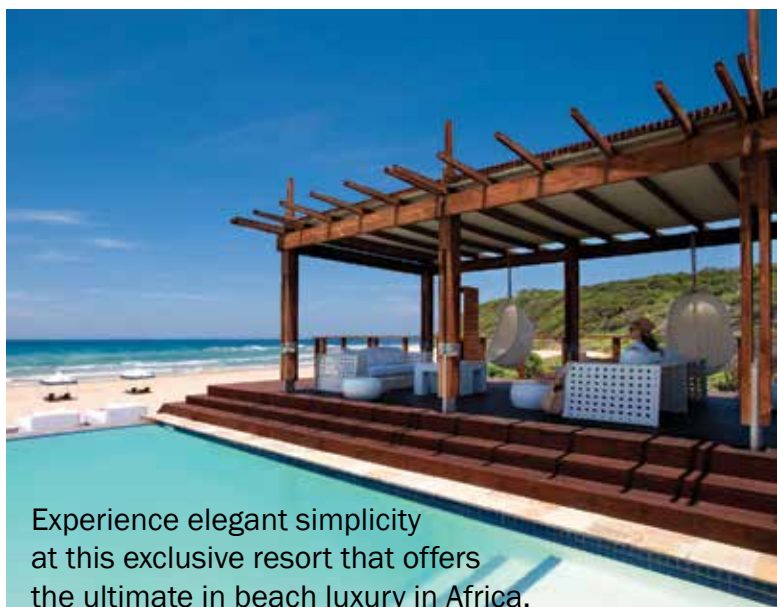
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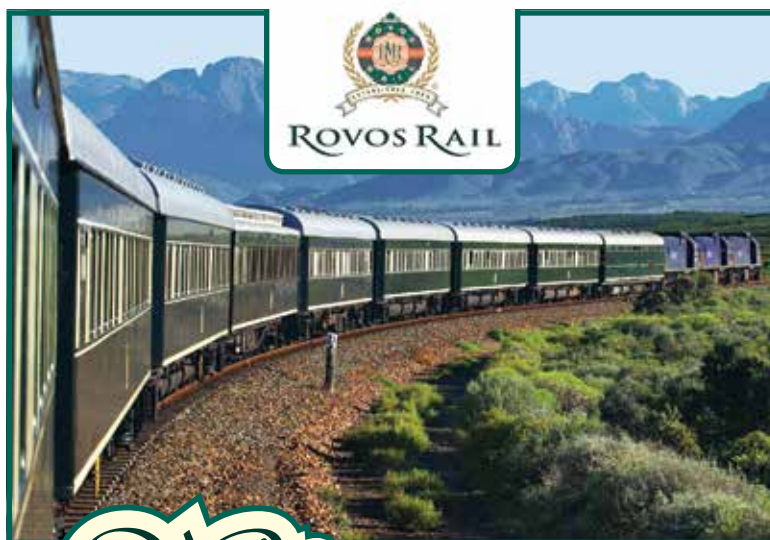
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## State-of-the-art technology

The Eden Bleu Hotel is well equipped to handle large conferences with the most demanding technological requirements. Its conference centre is equipped with three high-definition LED screens to which presentations, HD videos and a variety of other content, from a Twitter feed to a live video conference, can be broadcast wirelessly.

The biggest of these LED screens is close to six metres wide – the largest of its kind in Africa. What's more, the projectors are not sensitive to light, enabling delegates to enjoy the venue's natural light. Power points are located throughout the conference centre's floor space, making it easy for delegates to charge laptops and mobile phones.

A business centre is available with work stations and four meeting rooms, and forms part of a large public area well suited to displays and cocktail events. The hotel also has a small boardroom that seats eight, two slightly bigger venues that can accommodate 14 people each and a large boardroom that accommodates 18. Technology across the boardrooms is also state-of-the-art and features a touch-panel smart board able to be wirelessly interfaced with a laptop or other electronic devices. This means that notes can be taken from the smart board and e-mailed directly from the screen.

Each of the hotel's meeting rooms is designed with large, sliding doors that open on to the terrace at the front of the hotel, offering delegates views of the marina.

"This is not just technology for technology's sake," maintains Peter. "Every innovation is designed to give our guests the best possible experience by allowing them to access the information, services or facilities they need in the most efficient way possible."

One such innovation is an interface that guests can download on to their mobile device before their booking is even made, enabling them to access in-room facilities, menus, hotel services, island activities and more. Every business travel requirement



Visitors can enjoy taking a catamaran out to the middle of the harbour. Photo: Debbie Badham

has been taken into consideration and addressed. For example, guests who do not have roaming on their mobile phones can make use of the hotel's customised iPhone 5s kitted out with a local number and airtime.

## Cultural excursions

The range of activities that conference and incentive planners can organise on a trip to the Seychelles is perhaps more diverse than one might imagine.

For a more historical and cultural experience, delegates can participate in a tour of Mahé. Giant tortoises and Coco de Mer fruit are some of the unique discoveries visitors will make when calling on the island's botanical gardens. Following on from this, guests will explore Victoria, which also happens to be the smallest capital in the world, where they can experience local markets, learn more about the history of the Seychelles and develop a greater understanding of the island's unique and vibrant culture.

The tour includes a visit to Mahé's Mission lodge ruins, which tell a sad tale of the island's history, which was intertwined with slavery. At the same time they will visit the appropriately named La Misère viewpoint which



The pool area is alongside the marina and offers easy access to Eden Plaza. Photo: Eden Bleu Hotel

provides unrivalled views of the island with some truly breathtaking scenery.

In between visits, a stop-off at Takamaka Bay for lunch on the beach is a great way to further appreciate the island's beauty. The tour ends with the exploration of the restored colonial plantation, Jardin du Roi, which is rich in Creole history.

The Eden Bleu Hotel's location on the marina makes it highly convenient for guests to board a catamaran

for a trip out to the middle of the harbour. From here they can take part in several different activities such as boarding a semi-submersible vessel to take a closer look at the underwater marine life, stopping to feed the fish and snorkelling through crystal-clear coral reefs. A visit to Moyenne Island enables travellers to spend some time exploring and relaxing, whether they prefer to go for a swim or spend some time sunbathing on the beach. ■



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Photo: Atout France

# RÉUNION

Réunion is not the average Indian Ocean island getaway, making it an interesting option to introduce to clients. Bruce Dennill reports.

## More than just resorts

**M**OST island holidays involve booking into an all-inclusive resort where the guests' needs are all catered for. Réunion has more to offer the intrepid traveller.

"I advise my clients not to stay in the same hotel for seven nights, as the various parts of the island are all completely different," says **Manisha Lala** of Nelumbo Travel in Johannesburg. Manisha advises booking clients in at a B&B in Cilaos, a town up in the mountains, which is like a European village, and a few nights at one of the resorts on the west coast, where they can watch whales.

"Most Réunion hotels don't offer

all-inclusive packages – it's usually breakfast only or half-board – as people are out most of the day. We help book our clients' activities, such as paragliding, dolphin cruises and mountain biking as well as guided excursions to Saint Denis through the local company, **Horizon Réunion**."

Travel Counsellor, **Tamarin Seymour**, says Réunion's biggest attraction is its diversity. "The natural beauty is incredible and very different on opposite sides of the island. Visitors wanting a Mauritius-type beach holiday can be booked into resorts around Saint Gilles. The south coast is very wild – not for swimming – and the east coast has black beaches, which some tourists find intriguing."

### Accessibility

Réunion is only a four-hour flight from Johannesburg on Air Austral. South Africans can also fly on Air Mauritius, with an additional 45 minutes connecting time.

Air Austral operates two flights a week with a B737-800 non-stop from Johannesburg, leaving at 11h30 and arriving in Saint Denis at 17h20 on Thursdays and Sundays.

Air Mauritius flies from Johannesburg to Mauritius 12 times a week, arriving at 14h45, 15h55, 16h00, 16h30 or 19h35, with connections to Réunion three times a day at 10h30, 15h30 and 21h45.

"We have seen an increase in South Africans combining Mauritius

and Réunion," says **Wouter Nel**, sales and marketing manager Southern Africa for Air Mauritius. "Many South Africans use Air Mauritius to get to Réunion as we have daily flights from JNB via Mauritius."

"Now that South Africans don't need a visa for Réunion, there is a definite growth in traveller interest," says **Hélène Bezuidenhout**, manager of Atout France. "We've also found that more tour operators have been getting involved. Workshops and educationals with agents have helped to raise the profile of the island as a place to go for a different kind of island holiday."

### Self-drive

Visitors who want to explore the island can get around easily by renting a car. "I'd advise booking a car through a South African operator like Thompsons or Europcar before

guests leave, as they arrive in Réunion quite late and having it organised reduces stress," says Tamarin. An international or French driver's licence is required.



On a volcano hike, travellers go underground into lava tunnels.

Photo: Atout France

### Staying active

The range of sports that can be enjoyed in Réunion is wider than just the water sports usually associated with island holidays. To name a few – guests can go snorkelling, golfing, mountain climbing, paragliding and spelunking.

"There are amazing things to do, including helicopter flips and a volcano hike, where you go underground into lava tunnels. A highlight for me was an 'aqua hike', where you dress in a wetsuit and then jump into a pool off a six-metre-

high cliff before using your body to raft down the river," says Tamarin.

"Agents can pre-book these activities via Thompsons Holidays or LUX\*, although my issue with pre-booking is that the weather might be bad on the day. Guests who prefer to book their activities on the day can do so via the hotels."

Some operators in Réunion are Dodo Excursions (4x4 trips), Ile Réunion (hiking, paragliding, diving and more) and Vanille Excursions (day trips to Cilaos and Salazie).

### Book it!

- LUX\* Resorts & Hotels is offering a 10% discount for Réunion bookings made until March 16 for travel until December 19. The discount applies to stays at both the five-star LUX\* Ile de La Réunion and three-star Hotel Le Recife, both situated near Saint Gilles in the west of the island.
- Air Austral is offering Johannesburg-Réunion return fares from R4 457 (including taxes). The offer is valid until February 28 for travel between March 29 and May 3. ■

# SINGAPORE



Clarke Quay, Singapore. Photo: Randy Tan

Singapore is generally regarded as a stopover destination but there is more to do and see in the city and its surrounds than travellers might think. Bruce Dennill reports.

## Singapore raises the bar

**S**INGAPORE has long been a popular hub for passengers connecting to the Far East and Australia. But the rise of the Middle East hubs has meant that the city has had to think of new ways to make the destination more attractive to travellers for longer stays.

"Where the average stay used to be between one

and two days to catch up on a few local tours and some shopping, the city is now building a name as a gourmet destination. Also, the F1 Grand Prix held at night in the streets is drawing bigger crowds every year," says **John Ridler**, spokesperson for Cullinan Outbound Tourism.

"There are new spectacular

buildings in the style of Dubai and Shanghai to give the city a more iconic look. The bar has been raised with the new Mandarin Bay Sands Hotel sporting a spectacular 57th floor rooftop pool stretched across three tower blocks and, with newer attractions like Universal Studios and the Singapore Flyer, there certainly is more to attract

the crowds," he says.

**David Bradshaw**, Travel Vision's strategic products manager, says Singapore is a big destination for the operator's Far East department, particularly corporate bookings.

"Leisure clients may stay for two or three nights. The corporate bookings are usually a lot longer. We are

seeing a steady, ongoing increase in travellers to Singapore."

Singapore Airlines' market development manager, **Sally George**, agrees that travel from South Africa to Singapore is increasing. "Our 2015 load factors are up on last year; we have strong bookings for March and our Easter period is busy."

## 10 things to do...

TNW asked South African travel agents what attractions they would suggest for visitors to Singapore. Here are their suggestions...

### 1. The Old Ford Factory

The old Ford Motors assembly plant, a favourite of **Megan Clark** from Flight Centre Ballito, is where the British surrendered Singapore to the Japanese on February 15, 1942. It's now a war museum, giving visitors an idea of what life was like during the Japanese occupation in World War 2. Travellers can catch bus 170 to get there. Entry costs SGD3 (R25,50).

### 2. Cooking classes at Sunrice

Cooking classes at Sunrice (at the top of Fort Canning Park) are a culinary adventure, says Carlson

Wagonlit's **Sonika Troskie**. For around SGD80 (R680) per class, visitors can learn from professional chefs and enjoy a tasting session.

### 3. Play 18 holes at Ria Bintan

Playing at the Ria Bintan Golf Club, a championship layout designed by Gary Player, is an idea suggested by **Liz Potgieter** from Sure Epcot Travel in Brakpan. Excursions can be booked through Travel Vision. For direct bookings, the Ria Bintan resort offers an Express Package, comprising a return ferry ticket from Singapore to Bintan; a round of golf with a shared buggy and caddy; immigration clearance into Bintan; transfers from the ferry terminal to the resort; golf bag handling fee and golfer's insurance, for SGD149 (R1 270) Monday to Friday or SGD189



Legoland miniland. Photo: Legoland

(R1 600) on weekends or public holidays.

### 4. Legoland Malaysia

**Doriane Ribeiro** from Sure Travel Scene in Kempton Park suggests a day trip to Legoland Malaysia – only 40km from Singapore. The average price of SGD56 (R475) includes return bus

transport from Singapore and entrance tickets.

### 5. A stroll around the MacRitchie Reservoir

Close to the city centre (travellers can catch bus 51071) is the MacRitchie Reservoir, part of Singapore's water catchment system. Trails surround the park,

which has a visitor's centre with a café, restrooms and information station, says **Heidi Bedford** from Go Travel in Port Alfred. The best views are from the TreeTop Walk, a 250-metre suspension bridge across the rainforest canopy. Take hiking shoes and bring water. Entrance is free.

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From page 12

## 6. Picture perfect at the Ritz Carlton Hotel

There are a number of reasons to pop into the Ritz Carlton Hotel, says **Olena Doyle** from Sure Ritz Travel Windhoek. The amazing artwork, which can be viewed for no charge, should be a priority, she says.

## 7. Get spooked by the Asia Paranormal Investigators

For the low-down on urban legends, **Charles Goh** is the man, says **Charlene Muller** from The Departure Lounge in Randburg. Charles, the co-founder of Asian Paranormal Investigators, is known for his night tours. It's a three- to four-hour guided tour with a history lesson thrown in. Tours cost SGD45 (R382) per person.

## 8. Tea and art jam at Arteastiq

**Tasmia Walters** from One Stop Travel and Tours recommends going for high tea at Arteastiq at the Mandarin Gallery – a worthwhile experience for



The German Girl Shrine, Singapore.

SGD48 (R408). The venue is a restaurant that combines tea and an art experience. Customers are provided with a canvas, unlimited acrylic paint, brushes, sponges and a palette.

## 9. To hell and back

'A holiday in hell' is not a negative thing for **Gillian Gerber** from XL Travel Bedfordview, who urges visitors to head to Haw Par Villa on Pasir Panjang Road, a theme park containing over 1 000 statues. The best known attraction is the Ten Courts of Hell, featuring gruesome depictions of hell in Chinese mythology and Buddhism. Entrance is free.

## 10. The German Girl Shrine

A shrine to an unnamed girl who became a deity is situated on the island of Pulau Ubin, off the coast of Singapore, something that **Liz Budge** of XL Oceanair Travel says is a fascinating place to visit. Inside a small yellow hut is an altar covered with items like nail polish, brushes and lipstick. The girl remembered here died just before World War I trying to escape when British soldiers came to round up her family. It is a five-minute 'bumboat' ride to the island, costing SGD2 (R17) from Changi Point jetty.

# High-speed thrills

F1 GRAND Prix Tours is offering packages to the Singapore Grand Prix night race, to be held this year on September 6. Packages include return flights; four- and five-star hotel accommodation options on the circuit and all transfers. Corporate and

private hospitality packages offer race viewing from suites; F1 Paddock Club entry; unique F1 team hospitality and after-parties with the drivers. F1 Grand Prix Tours is the official F1 ticket agent for the event. Packages are commissionable to agents.

## Book it!

- Singapore Airlines has launched a new product – 'Singapore Explorer Pass 2015-16' – offering travellers access to 22 different attractions and benefits in Singapore. The pass can be purchased by SIA or Silk Air passengers transiting through Singapore or travelling to Singapore as their final destination. It is valid for sale until September 30 this year, for redemption at tourist attractions until March 31 next year. It cannot be combined with the Singapore Stopover Holiday Package.
  - 1-day pass: SGD45 (R382) per adult, SGD30 (R255) per child
  - 2-day pass: SGD80 (R680) per adult, SGD55 (R467) per child
  - 3-day pass: SGD100 (R850) per adult, SGD70 (R595) per child
- Four-star Parc Sovereign Hotel: From R12 960 per person sharing, valid from May 1 to June 26. The package includes return flights from Johannesburg to Singapore on SQ; four nights' accommodation in a superior room; daily breakfast; return airport hotel transfers; and all pre-payable airport taxes and fuel levies (approx. taxes of R5 135).
- For 2015, Travel Vision is booking a number of sightseeing tours, including the Night Safari Tour, SGD66 (R566); City Tour with Singapore Flyer, SGD79 (R677) and the Sentosa Tour, SGD92 (R789). It offers a list of 'Best Buy' hotels suited to different budgets, allowing it to tailor-make packages to travellers' tastes. ■

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\*Excludes airfare and surcharges. Bookings must be made by 28 February 2015, for travel by 15 June 2015. Hotel accommodation is based on per person in a twin room, in a category A hotel. Additional night rates start from SGD99 per person. Terms and conditions apply.



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

## Appointments

■ Hilton Sandton's new hotel manager, **Gert Venter**, took over at the beginning of January. Gert previously led the team at Conrad Pezula Resort & Spa and has worked with various global and local brands since 1993.



■ Conrad Pezula Resort & Spa has appointed new gm, **Victor Chalfoun**, who took over from **Gert Venter** on January 1. Victor is a graduate of Hilton Worldwide's Elevator programme and has been in the hotel business for over 15 years, with experience working in Dubai, Egypt, the Kingdom of Bahrain, Canada and SA.



■ **Brondwyn Nel** has been appointed marketing co-ordinator at the City Lodge Hotel Group. Brondwyn gained a taste of the travel industry while working at Flight Centre and is looking forward to learning about the hotel and hospitality industry, as well as co-ordinating and scheduling agendas and activities in the City Lodge Hotel Group's busy sales and marketing department, which is headed up by **Peter Schoeman**.



## Asata Diners Club Award finalists revealed

ASATA and Diners Club SA have announced the finalists in the 2014 Asata Diners Club Awards. This year sees a 35% increase in nominations, and the winners will be announced at a Gala Evening on February 28 at Montecasino in Johannesburg. The finalists are:

### Exceptional Commitment

- **Gary Mulder**, Club Travel Head Office, Cape Town
- **Laurie Wilkinson**, Sure Travel Studio, Pretoria
- **Lidia Foli**, Tourvest Travel Services Head Office, Johannesburg
- **Mary Reynolds**, South African Reynolds Travel Centre, Springs
- **Matthew Fubbs**, The Holiday Factory Head Office, Johannesburg
- **Rene Haarhoff**, University of Technology Free State, Bloemfontein Tomorrow's Leader
- **Archie Mabusela**, Tourvest Travel Services, Johannesburg
- **Minette Fourie**, Club Travel Head Office, Cape Town
- **Robyn Daneel**, Sure Stellenbosch Travel, Cape Town

### Leisure Consultant

- **Gillian McMaster**, Flight Specials, Centurion
- **Lydia Dando**, Tourvest Travel Services, Johannesburg
- **Marcha Lourens**, South African Reynolds Travel Centre, Springs
- **Tessa Hattingh**, Sure Ethique Travel, Bloemfontein
- **Riaana Ferreira**, Sure African Imprint Travel, Pretoria
- **Sagren Narismula**, HRG Rennies Travel, Durban

### Corporate Consultant

- **Celia Kluever**, Sure African Imprint Travel, Pretoria
- **Maria Simitopoulos**, Sure Glenwood Travel, Centurion
- **Tammy McFie**, SA Reynolds Travel Centre, Springs
- **Tommy Wolmarans**, Tourvest Travel Services, Cape Town
- **Razia Allie**, Tourvest Travel Services, Cape Town

### Key Accounts Executive

- **Anisah Buffkins**, Tourvest Travel Services, Cape Town
- **Bridgette Gonggryp**, Harvey World Travel, Kloof
- **Cathy Koele**, Travel with Flair, Pretoria
- **Jackie Cabo**, HRG Rennies Travel, Johannesburg
- **Natasha Meyer**, XL Bay Travel, Port Elizabeth
- **Shannell Movers**, Tourvest Travel Services, Johannesburg

### ITC Independent Travel Consultant

- **Dawn Neusinger**, Ithuba Travel, Randburg
- **Janine Corry**, 24Point7 Travel Studio, Cape Town
- **Lisa du Chenne**, Travelshoppe, Hyde Park, Johannesburg

### Wholesale Representative in a Tour Operator

- **Enid Maulin**, Beachcomber, Johannesburg
- **Jeanette Gordon**, Travel Vision, Durban
- **Tania Bezer**, The Holiday Factory, Cape Town

### Wholesale Consultant in a Tour Operator

- **Kuben Moodley**, Thompsons Travel, Durban
- **Natalie van Wyk**, Travel Vision, Johannesburg
- **Yolande van Zyl**, Beachcomber Tours, CPT

## Obituary



■ **Brian MacMahon** died on January 2 in Cape Town, aged 68. Brian was born in Sri Lanka and worked for Union Castle Line, the President Hotel Johannesburg, Beachcomber Hotels in Mauritius and Budget Travel. He started Destination Marketing, which included hotel representation, airline marketing and destination marketing (to Malawi, Swaziland, Lesotho and the Comores). He then joined Young's Travel & Incentives before starting Passport To Pleasure, a wholesale business dealing mainly with Mauritius packages. Brian is survived by his wife Heather, two sons and four grandchildren.

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**Da Silva returns to Air Mauritius**

After resigning as regional manager, Southern Africa and Latin America, in October 2014, **Carla da Silva** re-joins Air Mauritius, as of February 1, in her previous role. Carla took up the position of country manager, Virgin Atlantic, late last year. On her move back to the island's national carrier, Carla quotes Robin Sharma: "Sometimes you have to get off track to remember the right path."

# FlySafair calls Mango out on fare reductions

DORINE REINSTEIN AND NATASHA SCHMIDT

**F**LYSAFAIR has called Mango out on its decision to "reduce fares across the board, following [the] fuel price benefit" starting with Cape Town-Port Elizabeth, as a tactic to compete with the newcomer in the market.

Mango said in a statement: "The airline will reduce its fares on all routes, rolling out with immediate effect. The move comes as the airline passes on benefits to travellers following a recent reduction in the cost of fuel, despite currency weakness continuing to impact input costs.

"Travellers should expect to pay from R395 [excluding taxes] one way between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, while reductions in fares across all other network points will be rolled out this week [from February 2]."

**Dave Andrew**, ceo of FlySafair, has commented on the announcement, saying Mango's attempt points to FlySafair's success. "The decision by Mango to copy our lowest pricing of R399, to within R5, on the Cape Town to Port Elizabeth route is the perfect illustration of how FlySafair is fast becoming the consumer's champion by driving the cost of air travel down in South Africa."

Dave adds that, before FlySafair operated on the CPT-PLZ route, the cheapest fare on that route from Mango (as of July 22, 2014) was R830, and the average fare between October and March 2015 was around R1 400. "FlySafair's R399 fare represented a 52% reduction on Mango's then cheapest offering."

Mango spokesperson, **Hein Kaiser**, insists the current price reduction is in response to the dropping fuel price. "We are reducing fares across all

classes and all routes. Several flights between JNB and CPT are priced well below R1 000 [excluding taxes] too and this is possible due to Mango's unhedged fuel position."

In his presentation of the SAA group's financial results at the recent AGM, cfo, **Wolf Meyer**, said SAA's domestic operations remained profitable for the year ending March 2014, with 10% growth in its profit contribution from R722m to R791m. "SAA's domestic performance was driven by less competition and strong Mango growth."

In terms of how well FlySafair routes have been performing, Dave says: "Over the busy summer holidays we had an average load factor across all routes of just under 80%. Our latest on-time performance (OTP) stats show that we achieved 94,7% in January, and our OTP since starting operations back in October sits at 88%." ■

# SAA cuts direct flights to India, China

NATASHA SCHMIDT AND DORINE REINSTEIN

SAA will cut its Beijing and Mumbai routes from April.

The airline revealed further details of changes to its loss-making international routes at its AGM. For the year ending March 2014, SAA's international routes recorded a R235 million increase in operating losses to R1,6bn.

The China route will be serviced by Air China as part of a codeshare agreement. Air China will begin direct services to South Africa in May.

From April 1, SAA will redirect its flights to all Indian destinations via Abu Dhabi through its new direct service, with onward codeshare connections with Etihad and Jet Airways into the subcontinent.

Passengers booked on flights departing after the end date of the direct service will be accommodated on the reconfigured network.

SAA's recently announced partnership with Etihad offers travellers a broader choice of destinations within India, says **Rod Rutter**, ceo of XL Travel. New destinations in India include Delhi, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Madras among others.

"SAA scrapping its flight to Mumbai will not in any way

affect travel or trade," agrees **Jose Cruz**, HRG Rennies national client services manager.

"At this point Emirates carries a big chunk of the Indian market as it is cost effective and has many options from Dubai into India."

**Wally Gaynor**, md of Club Travel, says India is an up-and-coming destination for SA travellers. "With the imminent visa-on-arrival for South African passport holders, India will become a major tourist destination for South Africans looking for alternatives to the likes of Thailand."

SAA is also considering re-routing its direct flights to New York and Washington to include a stop either in Senegal or Ghana. Industry leaders agree this added stop will impact on corporate travel. "There is no way our corporates will make a stop in West Africa. I think Delta will probably score from this," says **Geraldine Boshoff**, marketing manager of Sure Travel.

SAA has more than doubled its nett loss for the 2014 financial year to R2,5bn from R1,17bn in the previous year.

A weak rand and high fuel prices had affected the financials for period in review, said cfo, **Wolf Meyer**. Also, revaluation of seven wide-body aircraft owned by SAA resulted

in an impairment of R782m.

While SAA's international routes remained loss-making, its contributions from domestic and regional operations grew by 10% and 17% respectively.

SAA has been reliant on guarantees from the South African Government for several years and the delay in the release of the financial statements for the 2013/14 financial year is directly related to the continued weakness of the company's balance sheet and due to the company being technically insolvent. Currently, guarantees total R14,3 billion.

"The lack of implementation of several critical aspects of the Long-Term Turnaround Strategy during the latter half of the period in review has resulted in the need for a further guarantee, as issued in December 2014, to ensure the continued going-concern status of SAA over the short-term," the airline said.

"A full review of the LTTS is under way to ensure revalidation in line with the current needs of the business, given SAA's failure to adequately implement the plan. The 90 Day Action Plan period ends on March 24, whereafter implementation of a revalidated LTTS will be resumed." ■

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