

TNW

TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

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'Badly run country' – travel takes a dip

DORINE REINSTEIN

THE latest BSP figures for the South African travel sector show that travel got off to a very slow start in 2015. The industry BSP stats for January showed a 15% drop in domestic air spend and an 11% drop in international air spend. Industry experts attribute the drop in numbers to the negative outlook on the South African economy and continuing political uncertainty.

Wally Gaynor, md of Club Travel, says it hasn't been the best start to the year. Club Travel has been performing better than the industry, he says, but sales are still flat. The weak rand has had an impact on international sales, but domestic travel shows an even greater drop. "On the domestic side, there is a generally negative sentiment about the economy and companies both small and large are looking to save on their travel spend," Wally says.

Rod Rutter, XL Travel coo, agrees, saying a weak rand and a general lack of consumer confidence could be contributing factors. "Load shedding could be a factor. Corporates are reluctant to

leave home knowing their families could be in the dark for a couple of nights while they are away."

The negative trend is solely ascribed to the current economic conditions, says **Claude Vankeirsbilck**, chief sales and marketing officer of Tourvest Travel Services. He says corporates are under immense cost pressures, which means TMCs needs to support customers in

"The South African travel industry can expect a very tough year ahead."

finding ways to contain costs. "This will be a trend that will certainly continue for the rest of the year," says Claude.

"It's simply a badly run country right now, resulting in higher unemployment and lack of investment," says **Garth Wolff**, ceo of eTravel. The South African travel industry can expect a very tough year ahead while the government continues to chase investors away, he says.

South African companies are not investing for the moment, agrees **Mladen Lukic**, gm of Travel Counsellors. January

was relatively quiet for Travel Counsellors, with only 1% differential compared with 2014. February, on the other hand, was a phenomenal month with 38% increase in sales compared with last year, Mladen says.

He says most corporates are increasingly suspicious of service providers in general, and there has been a move away from the long and standard five-year contracts. "Companies have become very careful who they do business with. They want their service providers to show them value," he says, adding that in South Africa a lot of TMCs are just chasing overrides.

Sean Hough, ceo of Pentravel, says January 2015 was Pentravel's third-best month ever, beaten only by January 2014 and September 2014. "January saw a small decline but against a record month last year."

However, Sean says there is no question the industry is operating in a tougher environment with load shedding, new immigration rules and the weak rand. "Ask anyone who has recently returned from an overseas trip, the weak rand is making

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Grand Slam!



Pure Sport is calling on tennis fans to take advantage of its Grand Slam specials. The operator is offering packages for the Wimbledon ladies' quarter final, from July 5-8, from R20 900pps, including transfers; three nights' three-star hotel accommodation; match tickets and memorabilia. Packages are also available for the US Open from August 30-September 5, from R27 360pps. It includes stadium transfers, six nights in a four-star hotel, match tickets and memorabilia. Specials exclude flights, taxes and meals. Serving up some hot deals, is gm of Pure Sport, **Greg Taylor**. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl.

Review of regulations moves beyond Home Affairs

TESSA REED

THE review of South Africa's new immigration regulations will not be a dialogue between the Department of Home

Affairs and the Department of Tourism alone and follows a decision taken at a meeting of Cabinet, says Tourism Minister, **Derek Hanekom**.

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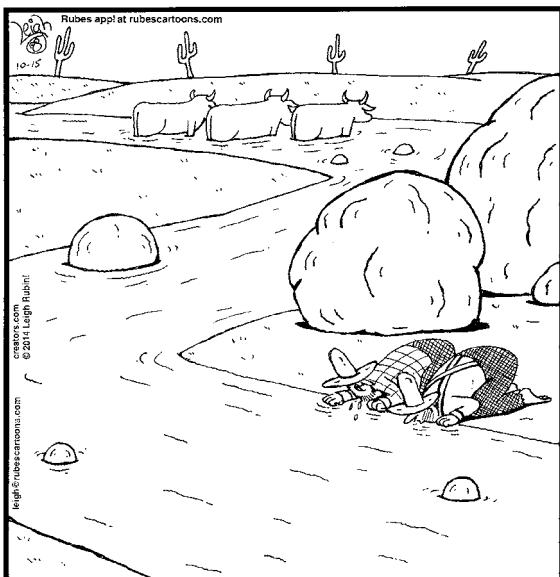
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Au revoir, Izy!

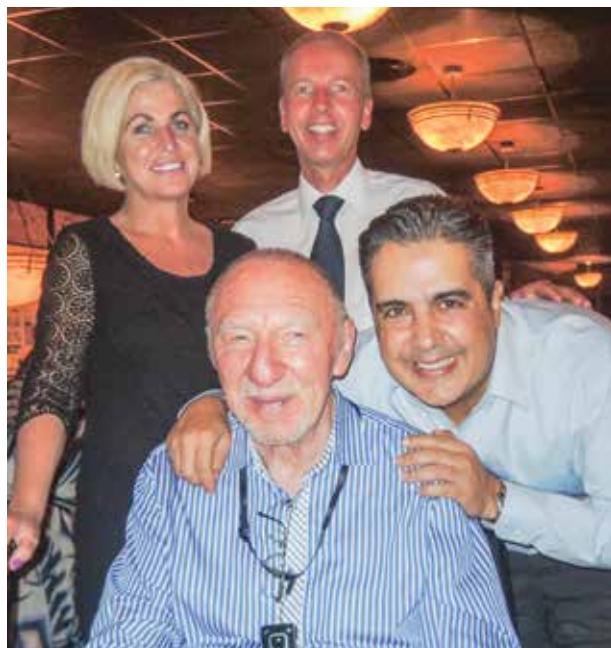
TRAVEL and airline industry doyen, **Izy Etkin**, retired from his position at Wings Travel Management at the end of February.

Izy's airline career began with Sabena in 1979, when he was appointed South Africa country manager, lasting through the merger between Sabena and Swissair. His 21 years of service ended as Swissair folded and ceased trading in 2001.

After a few months, Izy joined Wings Travel Management where he spent the ensuing 14 years as the director of supplier relations and industry affairs.

Regarded as a mentor and father figure by many travel folk in SA, and a very dear friend by others, Izy will be missed.

"I enjoyed every single day," Izy told TNW. ■



Saying their farewells to Izy (front) are (from left): Wilma Van Vuuren (Wings head: yield management); Frank Palapies (Wings coo Africa, Middle East); and Tony Sofianos (Wings ceo). Photo: Kate Nathan

Review of regulations moves beyond DHA

From page 1

Speaking to TNW on the sidelines of Meetings Africa, the minister said: "The Minister of Trade and Industry has an interest [as does] the Minister of Foreign Affairs." He added that a meeting would be convened at a high level, probably by the Deputy President.

The purpose of the review is to relook at the unabridged birth certificate requirement and the visa regulations

to find a way to strike the right balance," said Derek, explaining that the country required Home Affairs to protect the country's national interests, while the country also needed to protect tourism and investment growth.

The minister was referring to the requirement for people to make visa applications in person and for children to travel with an unabridged birth certificate or the equivalent

from their country. "The requirements are onerous." He added that visas on arrival and multiple-entry visas needed to be considered.

"I wouldn't want to predict the outcome of the review, but I can say that the review has to happen. It has been announced by the President." He added that the review needed to be concluded sooner rather than later because the current uncertainty was not healthy. ■

Nikita Tavlet selects the top specials from Travelinfo

- **Beachcomber Tours.** Early-bird Mauritius rates – 30-35% discount. Five-night packages are from R10 260pp sharing. Add airport taxes of R3 550pp. Special includes airfares ex-JNB, return airport-hotel transfers, four-star accommodation, breakfast and dinner daily plus land and motorised water sports as per the brochure. 30-day advance purchase required. Rate is valid for travel from May 17 to June 25.
- **Falcon Africa Safaris.** Seven-night packages to Zanzibar are from R11 990pp sharing. Rate includes return flights ex-JNB, accommodation with all meals, soft drinks, selected activities and airport transfers. Excludes airport taxes of approximately R3 200pp. Rate is valid for travel from March 1 to June 30.
- **Faircity Hotels and Apartments.** Easter promotion: Roodevallei Conference and Meeting Hotel. 20% off all rates, valid for stays between March 12 and April 30.



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SOUTH AFRICAN AIRWAYS

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER

The state of the local business events industry was in the spotlight last week as delegates from around the world converged on the Sandton Convention Centre for Meetings Africa 2015. Debbie Badham reports.

Africa needs more meetings

WHAT can be done to draw more meetings to Africa? This was a central point of focus at Meetings Africa 2015. Celebrating its tenth consecutive year, the event took place at the Sandton Convention Centre from March 23-25.

Meetings Africa itself is evidence of the continuing growth of the African meetings industry, says SANCB chief convention bureau officer, **Amanda Kotze-Nhlapho**. The event has experienced year-on-year growth of 10% since its

inception. Not surprising, since Africa currently boasts some of the fastest growing economies in the world, creating considerable opportunity to drive business tourism off the back of trade deals, she says. The average spend generated per delegate travelling for business event purposes is far greater than the average spend generated per tourist.

However, industry heads believe a great deal more can be done to capitalise on these opportunities.

Speaking at the event's media briefing, SA Tourism

ceo, **Thulani Nzima**, said while South Africa had done well to invest in business tourism development, for many other African countries allocating budget towards this was not enough of a priority. There was a need for African countries to work together in providing business tourists with a more regional experience, rather than individual countries competing with one another for travellers' full spend, he said. A key issue raised by **Nina Freyse-Pretorius**, International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA)



Nonnie Kubeka

president, was that African countries wanting to attract large-scale association events needed to have a number of critical elements in place first, including the right infrastructure, political will and ambassadors.

Visa regulations were also a point of concern, for South Africa in particular. Delegates from different African countries complained that it was taking up to 45 days to acquire a visa, when the advertised wait time was significantly shorter. Thulani responded, saying that during the immigration regulation review, the South African government would look to try and balance the country's security and tourism interests. "We don't want to put money into processes that don't work," he said. "We don't want a leaking bucket."

Corporates are still choosing Gauteng

ARGUABLY the country's most popular business destination, Gauteng, has a major role to play in driving business event growth. It currently hosts more corporate meetings than any other province in South Africa, says **Nonnie Kubeka**, head of the Gauteng Convention and Event Bureau (GCEB).

Nonnie believes that the destination is most popular for its accessibility, infrastructure, facilities

and service. What's more, she says that people are travelling less, which adds to the destination's appeal. "Although companies are travelling less they are definitely still acknowledging the importance of face-to-face meetings, in spite of their ability to conduct meetings digitally. We have seen growth in the number of networking functions being held."

Nonnie says that events

such as Meetings Africa act as important platforms for generating business leads for the bidding and hosting of events. Last year, the GCEB won business for 52 different events off the back of Meetings Africa, she says.

Large-scale international events are important contributors toward economic growth. Nonnie says the indirect employment generated by the business

events industry continues to grow. "We are creating a significant value chain extending through to hoteliers, caterers and the like. The economic spin-off is considerable."

To encourage international delegates to spend more time in Gauteng, the province offers pre- and post-tours, which can be linked to conferences and feature negotiated prices. "Hoteliers

offer specials, which are linked to a particular conference, and we invite delegates to take advantage of those specials before and after the conference," Nonnie says. "As part of our 'Accompanied Persons Programme', delegates can also bring their family along to join them for dinners and breakfasts on conference, and then to tour the province with them thereafter."

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Hosting business events key to tourism growth

TESSA REED

OVER the next five years, South Africa will play host to 177 major meetings, which will attract a quarter of a million delegates and contribute nearly R3,5bn to the economy, Tourism Minister **Derek Hanekom** told delegates at Meetings Africa.

"Bring your events to our destination. While you are here, enjoy our hospitality."

Opening the 10th Meetings Africa Show, the minister said business events played a crucial role in tourism growth and creating jobs. "According to research conducted by our National Convention Bureau, 40% of all convention delegates attending meetings in South Africa return in the next five years as tourists, boosting tourism growth and

job creation years into the future," he said.

According to the minister, the 184 qualified international buyers attending the show had the potential to bring 54 000 delegates to the country, and contribute R1bn to the economy. The top source markets represented by the buyers at this year's show are India, the US, Canada and China. He added that 60% of the buyers in attendance were attending the show for the first time.

"During this Meetings Africa, we invite the world to rise with us," said Derek. "Bring your events to our destination. While you are here, enjoy our hospitality. And plug into our local knowledge economy in fields as varied as mining, astronomy, design, health and medicine, telecommunications, environmental conservation and many others." ■

You've heard that running your own travel business from home can be lucrative. In one month I earned more as a Travel Counsellor than I did in one full year working in a retail agency. Isn't it time to...

It's certainly no myth," said Marijke Davel a Travel Counsellor for the last five years.

"The earning potential of running your own business with Travel Counsellors is absolutely out of this world," said married mom of two Marijke.

A fact borne out by the company's top five earners who take home on average more than R900,000.00 a year. And doubly underlined by Marijke's incredible achievement – "In February I earned more as a Travel Counsellor than I did in a year working in a retail agency," she said.

Marijke is a Gold Travel Counsellor, one of the company's top franchise owners bringing in well over R1,800,000.00 of commission a year. They're an elite group who enjoy recognition and 'reward' trips to luxury destinations and resorts in places like Cancun, Spain and Las Vegas.

"It's a lovely feeling to get that recognition and status," said Marijke. "But business doesn't just walk in through the door. You get out what you put in."

"I've got brilliant head office support, the flexibility of working from home, and a client base that grows by relationship building and recommendation.

If you'd like to chat about reward, recognition and relationships... why not give me a call."

Marijke Davel
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On the road



An excellent turnout of travel consultants showed their interest in the product innovations offerings of World Leisure Holidays by attending the Johannesburg roadshow on February 17 at the Hyatt in Rosebank. The gms of six Mauritius hotels attended and gave presentations. Here they are – from left: **Cleancy Romeo** (gm Ambre); **Rene Egli** (gm Le Touessrok); **Alessandro Schenone** (gm Long Beach); **Nicolas De Chalain** (gm Sugar Beach); **Johann Strydom** (md World Leisure Holidays) and **Andrew Sloane** (gm La Pirogue). Photo: Kate Nathan

You're invited!

LEGACY Hotels and Resort's luxury properties will be showcased at the Michelangelo Hotel in Sandton, Johannesburg, on March 10 from 09h00-16h00. Travel agents and buyers are invited to discover all the latest news, information and promotions, and have the opportunity to meet the senior management of the group. RSVP to **Tebogo Ramokane** by emailing Sales1@legacyhotels.co.za or calling 011 806 6807. ■

Yellow fever confusion persists at OR Tambo

DORINE REINSTEIN

DESPITE the South African Department of Health officially lifting the yellow fever requirement for travel between Tanzania and Zambia and SA at the end of January, travellers have reported that immigration officials at OR Tambo are still insisting on seeing the certificate.

Andy Hogg, co-founder of the Bushcamp Company

in Zambia, says on arrival in South Africa last week, immigration officials at OR Tambo demanded that he show his yellow fever certificate before granting him entry into the country. "At least half of the people on my flight were asked to produce the certificate."

Andy says immigration officials were quite aggressive. He says the official who stopped him kept referring to

a laminated piece of paper in her cubicle that outlined that travellers from Zambia still needed to have a yellow fever certificate. However, she wouldn't allow Andy to take a picture of the paper. When he asked to speak to a supervisor, the immigration official refused.

Ade Coley, Safari Camp owner at Flatdogs Camp, says he has received feedback that travellers are being stopped

at the airport with officials requesting the yellow fever certificate.

Dr. Lucille Blumberg, deputy director at the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, reacted with shock to the reports. "This is concerning. It is an issue for port health at the National Department of Health to respond to and manage. Clearly, the messages with regard to the changes

have not reached all."

Spokesperson for the National Department of Health, **Joe Maila**, reacted with disbelief to the reports and assured TNW he would launch an immediate and thorough investigation into the matter. He said he would ensure that the protocol stipulating that the yellow fever certificate was no longer required for these destinations would be circulated once again. ■



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New captain for Lufthansa

NATASHA SCHMIDT

LUFTHANSA has restructured its South African office, appointing a general manager for the region, **Dr André Schulz**, effective April 1.

Director for Southern Africa, **Axel Simon**, has come to the end of his tenure and will not be replaced. Rather, the new gm will report to the director for sub-Saharan Africa, based in Nigeria.

André was previously head of marketing and pricing for central Europe at Lufthansa. In this role he was responsible for the implementation of the central marketing strategy, the optimisation of fare structures and steering parameters as well as the development of online and mobile business in central Eastern Europe.

"I am looking forward to getting to know the South African market. It is a great country with great people and I'm sure it will be a great learning experience and



Lufthansa has appointed a new gm for South Africa, **Dr André Schulz**. He is pictured here (right) with outgoing director for Southern Africa, **Axel Simon**. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

adventure," he told TNW.

Meanwhile, the office has also split its Lufthansa/SWISS operations, in line with global practice. **Danica Helfrich** has been appointed country manager for South Africa. However, the Lufthansa and SWISS sales team will remain

integrated and unchanged.

Axel will leave Lufthansa at the end of March and will be looking for new opportunities in SA, having decided to stay in the country. He will take a few months off in Germany before returning home to Cape Town at the end of the year. ■

Complimentary short-term visas for UAE

ETIHAD Airways is offering complimentary 96-hour tourist visas to guests transiting through the UAE, effective immediately.

The visas, ideal for travellers making stopover visits en route to their final destination, are being offered in co-operation with the Radisson Blu Hotel on Yas Island. The offer is valid for

travellers previously eligible for Etihad Airways' paid-for visa service, available at a cost of AED 300 (R960) for passport holders from Bangladesh, Belarus, Canada, China, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Morocco, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Russia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Turkey and Vietnam. Eligible guests must have confirmed overnight accommodation at the Radisson Blu Yas Island, available at promotional rates from US\$70 (R822) per person per night.

Guests booking a three-night stay will also receive a complimentary Abu Dhabi City Tour. ■

To the point

From February 16, all visa applications for Russia must now first be completed online at <http://visa.kdmid.ru>. The completed forms must then be submitted in print to the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Pretoria or the Russian Consulate in Cape Town. SA passport holders must provide their printed visa application in person.



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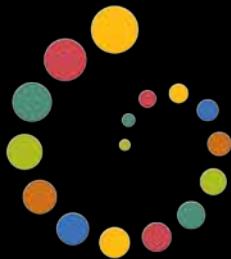
Fly between Cape Town and George, gateway to the Garden Route, from R560* one way all inclusive of taxes and 20kg free baggage allowance, valid until 30 June 2015. Look out for low fare availability (V, L, G and W class) on both the early morning and late afternoon flights. *Ts & Cs apply. Visit www.flyairlink.com

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GAUTENG Business Capital of South Africa



Nonnie Kubeka, Head – Gauteng Conventions & Events Bureau

Meetings Africa, where South Africa flexes its business events muscle

Gauteng offers a well-established professional and innovative Meetings, Incentives, Conferencing and Events (MICE) industry and a wide range of accommodation and event venues. Support services include meeting planners, event organisers, IT, transport, translation and decor services. With almost all key sectors of the South African economy headquartered in Gauteng, and proximity to all levels of government, it makes sense to locate your business meeting, conference or event in the province.

Following the success of the Tourism Indaba, South African Tourism secured Meetings Africa as part of its broader strategy to grow the business events sector. Business tourism accounts for 5% of total foreign tourist arrivals in SA, contributing almost R5bn to the economy.

Meetings Africa is Africa's most relevant and influential gathering of business events professionals. In 2015, this premier trade show will celebrate its 10th anniversary under the theme 'Advancing Africa Together', attracting more business events



Sandton Convention Centre – home to Meetings Africa 2015

to realise the full potential of this exciting sector and its contribution to economic growth of the region, the continent and South Africa.

At the three-day trade show, destinations position themselves for the right to host international meetings and conventions to profile their destination and boost

their economies. Gauteng, through its top-of-mind infrastructure and related institutions, continues to be a dominant player in the African market. However, we should not take this for granted and need to continue positioning Meetings Africa as a must-attend and participate in trade show for the industry.

Job creation

The New Growth Paths commits us to a target of 225 000 tourism jobs nationally over the next five years. We, as Gauteng, have set an ambitious target of delivering on 34% (76 500) of those jobs by 2017 (15 000 direct jobs/year over the next three to five years) across all aspects of the value chain in partnership with industry.

The labour-intensive nature of the tourism industry means it can help to fast track job creation and it is important for us, as government, to recognise that, because tourism is highly market driven, employment growth is largely dependent upon our ability to grow our market share of international and domestic visitors.

Stay Another Day!

Many of our business travellers want to experience our beautiful leisure offerings – taking another day to visit the continent's biggest shopping hub, Sandton City, our world-class golf courses, or visit our national heritage, cultural and historic sites, drink with the locals in Soweto and explore some of the best attractions in the inner city.

We have included packages for day visits to our signature attractions as part of our bigger 'Stay Another Day' campaign in the Meetings Africa delegates' itinerary. Statistics show that business travellers spend five times more than leisure travellers and frequently return with families and friends.

We will take some of the delegates and media on pre-arranged post tours to sample our conferencing, meetings and leisure offerings following Meetings Africa 2015. This will ensure equitable exposure for our regions and, while Sandton serves as the host area, the expected benefits will reach areas such as West Rand, Sedibeng and Ekurhuleni. ■

Gauteng means business

Our successful hosting of the FIFA 2010 World Cup and countless international events has enhanced our credentials for hosting world-class mega-events. With the increased number of hotels and other facilities used during the World Cup, our portfolio of events and meetings venues has grown, with competitive rates ready to take on the world.

We have successfully leveraged the City of Johannesburg's standing as the main business, meetings and conferences hub and working with the national and city's convention bureaus, we have hosted major regional and international conferences.

Gauteng City Region is a prime destination for meetings and conferences. Ekurhuleni is a

much-preferred area for sessions relating to airport and airline-related services, Tshwane hosts a multitude of research meetings and conferences, the Cradle of Humankind sees many global anthropological gatherings and Sedibeng continues to be a favourite destination for team building, corporate functions, strategic planning sessions and breakaways.

Advancing the African agenda together

Gauteng is focusing on the following key areas:

- Selling and promoting destination Gauteng as Africa's business

tourism venue;

- Positioning the event as a true African premier business events gathering with countless networking

and business opportunities;

- Highlighting our destination, business tourism venues and facilities to the rest of Africa and the world.

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Cruising



Photo: Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection

Despite a depressed economy, the cruise market is holding its own. The proof is in the numbers, reports Dorine Reinstein.

Top cruise trends for SA travellers

MSC Cruises SA, operator of cruises around the South African coast, has reported a phenomenal 99,7% average occupancy for the first 23 cruises that have run since the start of the 2014/15 season, which

began last October. **Allan Foggitt**, sales and marketing director, says: "In spite of a stagnant economy, weak rand and a budget-conscious market, the cruise sector continues to perform, even in tough economic times. We have experienced

a strong demand from the travelling public throughout the current season, which bodes well for the new 2015/16 season where our passenger targets are 25% higher than this season."

It is a trend also noticed by **Alet Steyn**, business

development manager for Wendy Wu Tours, who has noticed a definite increase in enquiries for both ocean and river cruises over the past few months. "A cruising holiday provides the convenience of an all-inclusive holiday as you sail to each destination," she

says. "With a river cruise, clients feel they can get much closer to the destination and its cultural, historical and culinary traditions."

TNW identified the following five trends in discussions with cruising operators and suppliers.

1. Exotic off-the-beaten-track destinations

The withdrawal of the US ban on travel to Cuba has created excitement about it as a new port of call.

George Argyropoulos, md of Cruises International, says while the island is lovely to visit, it is not easy for South Africans to reach. Seasoned South African cruisers are interested in off-the-beaten-track locations such as Myanmar, Antarctica

and Alaska, while those less-seasoned favour the Mediterranean and Asia.

"Asia is not an expensive destination for South Africans, and this is why we see an increasing number, mostly families, travelling there. But Asia's popularity is a global trend. It is for this reason, that Royal Caribbean has decided that its newest smart ship, *Quantum of the*

Seas, will be home ported out of China."

Janine Pretorius of Encore Cruises, general sales agent for Regent Seven Seas Cruises, says: "Asia is certainly growing with Regent. We put this down to the fact that Regent guests are very well travelled and are looking for new destinations.

"We have found a great interest in cruises that

include China and Japan."

Jolene Campbell, brand manager for Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection, says she has also seen an increase in enquiries for destinations such as Vietnam and Cambodia. Uniglobe is introducing India and Ganges river cruising options for 2016.

Abu Dhabi is an up-and-coming cruising destination,

says **Annemarie Lexow**, sales and marketing manager for Travel Vision. "Abu Dhabi is a rapidly growing cosmopolitan metropolis where skyscrapers pierce the sky and five-star resorts spread across natural islands where you'll find golf courses, beaches, marinas, upscale malls, a Formula 1 car track, amusement areas and cultural institutions," she explains.



Arriving on 19 November '15 **MSC SINFONIA** will reveal itself revamped, extended and including stunning NEW features, new Balcony Cabins, purpose-built areas for children created in partnership with Chicco and LEGO, and a new Baby Club, Mini Club, Juniors Club, Young Club, Teens Club and a new Spray Park.

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River cruising offers a hassle-free cruising experience. Photo: Austria Connection

2. River cruises

Alet says river cruising has been reinvented to appeal to younger and active travellers, by offering more adventurous shore excursions. At the same time, it has become more luxurious, with luxury cabins and on-board amenities.

Inge Dobihal, owner of Austria Connection, says travellers love the fact that they don't need to check in and out of hotels. "There is also flexibility with excursions. We offer three different excursion packages at reduced prices, or passengers have the choice of booking any of the offered excursions on the spot at the full price," she says.

Jolene agrees: "We see more experienced travellers looking for a different style of holiday and river cruising offers a hassle-free cruising experience. Docking in the heart of the city gives guests the opportunity to explore on their own and know that their floating hotel is waiting for them. Being able to unpack once and wake up in a new city just about every day is certainly very appealing."

She believes the fact that river cruises are often all-inclusive is a big draw card too. "We offer all-inclusive cruises in Europe, allowing guests to avoid the

unnecessary expenses of drinks and tipping in punishing euros. To know that everything is taken care of and there are no hidden costs, gives guests peace of mind and they are less affected by fluctuations in the rate of exchange."

George says river cruises offer a totally different cruising experience from ocean cruising. "River cruises sail through the heart of the destination and, for travellers who are more destination focused or seasoned cruisers who have done all there is to do on an ocean cruise, this offers a delightful alternative that is out of the ordinary."

3. Going solo

Solo travel is gaining in popularity and cruise lines have started focusing on how to best meet the needs of solo travellers.

George says cruise lines cater for this market by offering solo traveller fares. "In this way, solo travellers are not penalised with a double-occupancy rate. However, the fares are on selected sailings, not all."

When it comes to entertainment, cruise lines are ensuring solo travellers don't feel left out. "Cruise lines like Crystal, for example, have ambassador hosts on board who will keep the guest company or join the guest for a dance, if this is what the guest would like," says George.

Wendy Wu has also started catering for solo travellers. Says Alet: "If you are a single traveller who is willing to share, Wendy Wu Tours will match you up with another single traveller of the same



Van Gogh Lounge. Photo: Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection

gender on your tour and neither of you will pay the single hotel room option. If we cannot find another single traveller who is willing to share, we will waive the option."

Jolene says Uniworld has always been a firm favourite with solo travellers. "We have single supplement waivers on many of our cruises. The intimacy of our cruises and the size of ships lend themselves to providing the ideal environment for solo

travellers. Solo guests find it very easy to meet new people on our cruises and our open-seating policy in the dining rooms also allows an opportunity for this."

Amadeus River Cruises, too, has adjusted its offering for solo travellers. "We have a fantastic offer for solo travellers on some of our ships, which have proper single cabins and where the cruise price is the same as one pays per person in a double cabin," says Inge.

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Alfresco dining. Photo: Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection

4. Flexible dining options

Assigned seating times are gradually becoming a thing of the past.

Alet says there are no longer captain's tables at dinner on Pandaw cruises in Indochina and Myanmar. Instead, everyone can dine together, alfresco style.

Royal Caribbean has introduced the 'Dynamic

Dining at Sea' concept, says George. It gives Royal Caribbean guests on *Quantum of the Seas* and *Anthem of the Seas* 18 restaurant concepts to choose from, as varied as dining in the world's most cosmopolitan cities.

Guests can also choose from five complimentary, full-service restaurants,

offering more choice and flexibility than ever before.

Traditional dining is still available on the other ships in the RCI fleet, which also include earlier family dining times.

Annemarie says Azamara has also introduced smaller dining restaurants with no pre-seating.

5. Technology: better and faster

On-board technology is becoming increasingly sophisticated to meet travellers' demands. Cruise lines are responding by introducing better and faster technology on board ships.

Jolene says WiFi has become a given on Uniworld's fleet of river cruise ships.

"Once a guest is connected to the ship's WiFi on their mobile devices or tablets, they also gain access to iGuest, which is a complimentary interactive ship information portal. Here they can find information on the daily activities and available tours as well as catch up on international news or even contact fellow guests."

Uniglobe's ships also have an advanced infotainment unit in each stateroom, which serves as a television and a

portal for all information pertinent to the cruise.

Internet is also available on Pandaw cruises, says Alet, with a computer connection in one of the shops and, although the connection may not always be reliable, the crew will advise where the on-board connections are available.

"It is just amazing what some of the passenger cruise lines have on board to entertain guests," says Annemarie.

"Spaces like theatres are replaced by lounges that are converted into modern entertainment areas by night just by changing displays on windows and projecting holographic images. Then there is the iLounge – Apple's first retail store on a ship. There is the North Star – an observation capsule that ascends 100 metres above the sea, with a 360-degree view."

Easy-to-use systems

RCI's *Quantum of the Seas* offers unparalleled bandwidth to keep guests connected; easy-to-use systems to expand guest choices and simplify schedules; and Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology to speed up the boarding process and allow guests to keep track of their luggage every step of the way.

The ship offers smart check-in, a smart concierge, smart connect as well as smart experiences and smart service. With smart experiences, guests can place orders via tablets and then have fun watching robotic bartenders hard at work mixing cocktails, while the smart service allows crew members to keep better track of guests' tastes and preferences through a custom app.

MSC Sinfonia returns 'bigger and better

THE 2015/16 local cruising season will see the return of one of South Africa's favourite ships, the *MSC Sinfonia*, which is currently undergoing enhancements.

Allan Foggitt says: "MSC *Sinfonia* was always a popular ship in South Africa and will return bigger and better with additions specifically modified for the SA market." It will feature new purpose-built areas for children created in partnership with Chicco and

Lego, and a new Baby Club, Mini Club, Young Club and Teens Club. MSC Cruises has also improved the on-board dining experiences, keeping the buffet open 20 hours a day and installing fresh new dining spaces, a brand-new lounge and an extended restaurant.

The MSC Aurea Spa will have additional massage areas, and a new outdoor spray park will be added on deck 13 – an exciting series of

water features and jets.

The 2015/16 season is open for sale with discounts of up to 50% for early bookings.

"These discounts have proved a major incentive for forward thinkers looking for the best deal and have generated nearly 5 000 bookings since launch," says Allan. "MSC's dynamic pricing policy means discounts decrease as bookings increase, so early booking is essential to secure the best pricing."

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Seven Seas Voyager. Photo: RSS

Regent Seven Seas explores new destinations

REGENT Seven Seas Cruises recently unveiled its 2016 summer and fall collection, featuring more than 60 destination-rich itineraries, three Grand Voyages and 11 new ports not previously visited by the luxury line.

A new Grand Voyage is a 47-night London

to Copenhagen sailing, introducing fascinating new destinations such as the fjords of Greenland with stops in Nuuk and Qaqortoq. It also visits less-frequented ports such as Denmark's Torshavn (Faroe Islands) and Iceland's scenic cities of Akureyri

and Isafjordur.

For selected sailings in the Mediterranean, Asia and Africa, Regent Seven Seas Cruises will introduce new options to its free Extraordinary Land Programme, which includes three-night hotel stays and complimentary guided tours.

Seven Seas Explorer sets sail in 2016

SEVEN Seas Explorer will set sail on its maiden voyage as part of the cruise line's summer 2016 schedule. The highly anticipated voyage will be a 14-night cruise from Monte Carlo to Venice

on July 20, 2016. The inaugural season reveals a line-up of destination-rich Mediterranean itineraries. The ship will visit exotic and sought-after ports of call such as Venice (Italy),

Kotor (Montenegro), Zadar (Croatia), Istanbul (Turkey) and Haifa (Israel), plus new locales Sanary-sur-Mer (France), Portimao (Portugal), Agadir (Morocco) and Catania (Sicily).

Book it



Cruises in Indochina take guests deep into the interior.
Photo: Pandaw River Expeditions

Majestic Yangtze and Indochina itineraries

A 15-day fully inclusive 'Majestic Yangtze' cruise from Wendy Wu sells for R42 830pps, departing Johannesburg. Commencing with a visit to the commercial powerhouse of Shanghai and then a four-night Yangtze River cruise, this tour includes a visit to historic Xian, the capital Beijing and a visit to the Panda Research Centre in Chengdu. The 10-day Halong Bay and Red River tour allows first-time travellers to view the key sights of northern Vietnam by Pandaw river ship. The ship traverses the Red River delta and its main tributaries, connecting the wonders of Halong Bay with the excitement of downtown Hanoi and then on into the interior. Sailing deep into Highland Vietnam, travellers will discover the mountain villages and a number of tribal areas. ■

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Dubai, United Arab Emirates

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| 7-NIGHT DUBAI Fares from \$644.00 pp | December 14, 2015 January 4, 11, 18, 25, 2016 February 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, 2016 March 7, 14, 21, 28, 2016 | Dubai, United Arab Emirates • Khasab, Oman • Muscat, Oman (overnight) • Cruising • Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates • Dubai, United Arab Emirates (overnight) |
| 7-NIGHT HOLIDAYS IN DUBAI Fares from \$787.00 pp | December 21, 2015 | Venice, Italy • Cruising (2 nights) • Athens (Piraeus), Greece • Cruising • Haifa, Israel • Jerusalem (Ashdod), Israel • Suez Canal (Passage) • Cruising (4 nights) • Salalah, Oman • Cruising (2 nights) • Dubai, United Arab Emirates (overnight) |
| 7-NIGHT HOLIDAYS IN DUBAI Fares from \$787.00 pp | December 28, 2015 | Dubai, United Arab Emirates • Khasab, Oman • Muscat, Oman (overnight) • Cruising • Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates • Dubai, United Arab Emirates (overnight) |
| 16-NIGHT SUEZ CANAL Fares from \$1,102.00 pp | April 4, 2016 | Dubai, United Arab Emirates • Cruising (2 nights) • Salalah, Oman • Cruising (4 nights) • Suez Canal (Passage) • Jerusalem (Ashdod), Israel • Haifa, Israel • Cruising • Santorini, Greece • Athens (Piraeus), Greece • Cruising (2 nights) • Venice, Italy |

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TRAVEL INSURANCE

Recent global events have seen providers adapting their products to more varied risk.

Adapting to a changing world

HISTORICALLY, travel insurance has been a grudge purchase but it's a small price to pay in the greater scheme of things, particularly as travel managers become more aware of their duty of care to their travellers. Taking out travel insurance is more necessary than ever, even as the sector becomes more difficult to navigate and products change with the needs of their customers.

For example, in November last year, TIC introduced a 'Weather Conditions' benefit to its product. It falls under the 'Cancellation and Curtailment' section of TIC's policies and provides cover for travellers when adverse weather conditions interfere with their journey.

The Bidvest product is also to undergo revision. **Wybrandt Lubbe**, travel manager of Bidvest Financial Services, says his company's product offering is being revamped, with new options to be available from the middle of the year.

However, insurance companies need to exercise caution when considering significant changes to their products.

Jason Veitch, head of travel insurance for TIC, says although there may be sporadic increases in certain

risk categories, these have not yet changed the general risk profile enough to warrant a major change in policies. "When considering terrorism risk it must be noted that the majority of these events are isolated and typically in areas where the majority of travellers would not be exposed. Weather conditions, although sometimes devastating in a specific area, are short-lived, and modern transportation systems and emergency services are now far more capable of enabling tourists to make alternative arrangements. Emergency medical treatment and illness are still the major risk factors." TIC does offer hijack, hostage and wrongful arrest coverage, however.

Similarly, **Anrieth Symon**,

head of travel for Zurich Insurance, says the company strives to continuously update its portfolio but that it has not seen an increase in claims for natural disasters, weather or terrorism versus illness or hospitalisation. Zurich's policies have 'including terrorism' as part of their death and permanent total disablement clauses, as well as separate options for hijacking, kidnapping and wrongful detention and evacuation cover in the event of a natural disaster.

"We have noticed an increase in medical out-patient, travel delay and cancellation of flights claims," she says. "The value of cancellation claims is increasing from year to year."

Effective communication and reliable information are key elements of a solid duty-of-care programme. As a result, insurance providers are looking at ways to keep their clients continuously updated.

"TIC provides its policy purchasing solution through its website, which is available to travel agents, brokers and the public. This is continuously updated to provide more efficient solutions," says Jason. TIC is also considering launching a mobile app for clients.

Bidvest Travel Insurance is also looking at new products in the tech space. "We have listened to the travel trade – watch this space," says Wybrandt.

Top 5 claims

According to TIC's **Jason Veitch**, the percentage split in value of claims in terms of the benefits is:

- 1) Medical costs: 70%
- 2) Luggage loss: 15%
- 3) Cancellations: 6%
- 4) Curtailment: 5%
- 5) Others losses: 4%

Keeping track with technology

TRAVELLER tracking has become critical for companies during the current global unrest and TMCs and travel managers are increasingly relying on innovative technology to assist with this difficult task.

There is a wide range of mobile applications available to assist with travel tracking. "Online GPS-based reporting has greatly enhanced a company's ability to keep abreast of travellers' plans prior to travel as well as their whereabouts during travel. These reports are often customised to accommodate the company's most important needs. Pre-trip reporting enables them to make the right decisions from a risk-avoidance perspective, while booked data enables them to swiftly locate travellers," says md of HRG Rennies,

Bronwyn Philips.

However, technology cannot be the sole answer to travellers' safety, says **Wally Gaynor**, md of Club Travel. "While cellphone technology allows for easier and immediate communication with our travellers, they often use in-country SIM cards, meaning they are not available on their SA numbers when travelling."

Monique Swart, founder of the African Business Travel Association (Abta), agrees: "Ensuring strong and regular contact with travellers is still of vital importance, tracking tool or not."

"It's also important to ensure that whichever app is in use, it is likely to continue working – those based on phone and network coverage could experience issues when networks go down."

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3 helpful tech tools

1. Amadeus Mobile Messenger

Amadeus Mobile Messenger provides professional assistance for handling disruptive incidents such as weather events, political unrest or natural disasters, and allows communication with travellers at any time.

The product's main interface is a map on which travellers are represented by pushpins that indicate their location according to their travel plans. This allows the travel manager to locate travellers according to their booking data or GPS location and feed them real-time information about disruptions or other events that require their attention. The app works both ways and

travellers can also actively ask for support or react to communication that is sent to them.

The information from Amadeus Mobile Messenger can be received either in a smartphone application or via SMS, whichever is more appropriate in the given situation.

2. Travelport's Agentivity

Agentivity, Travelport's business intelligence tool, provides various reports that can easily be compiled to quickly and accurately locate passengers at any given moment. The report offers the user a search by airport, city, country, or combination of items like airline and city (e.g.

where there is a strike on a specific airline but only in a certain city).

Travelport also offers variations of these reports to include items like a mini itinerary and, as usual, they are all downloadable via Excel. One version of the report can be used to produce a passenger list categorised according to specific flight numbers (for the agency/TMC), which comes in handy during airline disasters.

3. Sabre Traveler Security

Sabre Traveler Security allows travel managers and TMCs to instantly pinpoint travellers' locations and contact info during Sabre-booked trips. When users log in they will see



Tech tools allow communication with travellers at any time.

a world map, which they can drill down to find the number of travellers in a specific locale and grab detailed contact and reservation information.

It also allows managers to quickly identify those who have plans to travel to volatile or disrupted areas in the future, and make necessary last-minute itinerary changes.

Travel managers will also receive alerts when key personnel are all booked on

the same flight, exceeding the corporation's maximum number allowed. They can then make the necessary changes.

The technology further allows users to generate reports on corporate travel trends and provide data when negotiating preferred rates. These reports can be scheduled to run daily, weekly or monthly to meet a variety of operational or business data needs.

Corporate travel – the wider the cover, the better

EMPLOYERS are starting to ask more relevant questions with regard to health, safety and procedures to follow in case of emergency events, and agents need to know their options.

Companies are increasingly realising that medical costs have the potential to run into exorbitant amounts, which would have a far more substantial financial impact on the business than the cost of an annual corporate

policy, says **Wybrandt Lubbe**.

"The majority of corporate companies no longer base their decision on price alone but rather on the availability of comprehensive benefits and assistance services as part of their Corporate Travel Insurance Policy," he says.

More specific queries are coming through, often related to the most recent and top-of-mind event, says **Simmy Micheli**, TIC

manager of sales and marketing. When it comes to selecting cover options, Simmy advises travel managers to observe the terms of cover closely to ensure employees are travelling with the widest cover possible. "Most of our corporate travellers are travelling into Africa where malaria dominates medical risks. Observe the terms of tropical disease cover closely and make sure you opt for unconditional cover."

Read the fine print

CONSULTANTS should advise their clients to keep the following points in mind when taking travel insurance:

1. If participating in high-risk activities (such as skiing or mountain climbing), coverage is dependent on whether the traveller is participating in a recreational or professional capacity.
2. Check that cover includes the cost of an unplanned flight home if the traveller is incapacitated.
3. Understand that specialised medical needs may cost an enormous amount, particularly in developing countries with
4. Check for age restrictions or clauses about pre-existing medical conditions.
5. Familiarise yourself with the claim process. Must the traveller claim online from their destination or wait until they get home? Do they need statements or reports from the authorities in the country they have travelled to? ■



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Ladies' day out



Travelpoint hosted the top ladies in travel at the 'Celebration of Women' event on February 12 at the Momentum World of Golf. It kickstarted the Ladies Executive Group, which was formed for senior ladies of the travel industry to bond, share ideas and develop a sisterhood. The event was held by Robyn Christie, gm of Travelpoint, together with Avis and Pro Shop, and the ladies were taught the finer intricacies of golf, followed by an entertaining mashie competition. Pictured here enjoying their day on the course are (from left): Robyn; Camille Janse Van Rensburg (Avis national account manager – travel sales); Evelyn Kidder-Ralphs (Lufthansa Group regional sales manager for Southern Africa); and Mary Reynolds (SA Reynolds Travel Centre). Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Appointments

■ **Rainer Gottschick** has been appointed ce of Avis Rent a Car Southern Africa, effective March 1. He started with Avis as financial manager for the regional countries and held various positions during his 16 years with the company. He joined the Avis executive team in 2007 as executive for commercial and regional countries and in 2013 was promoted to chief financial officer at Avis Rent a Car Southern Africa. Rainer takes over from **Keith Rankin**, outgoing ce. Keith has been appointed ce of Barloworld Automotive.



from his position as gm of Road Lodge Carnival City. He joined the City Lodge Hotel Group in 2007 as a junior assistant gm at City Lodge Johannesburg Airport, having come from the Court Classique Suite Hotel in Pretoria where he was the front office manager.

■ Etihad Airways has appointed new gm in South Africa, **John Friel**. Based at the airline's offices in Johannesburg, John is responsible for leading Etihad's commercial operations in South Africa. He joined the airline in June 2014 as regional business development manager in South Africa, before which he worked for 16 years in various airlines. "South Africa is a very important market for us and John has a wealth



of commercial management experience and the right credentials to accelerate the growth of our business there," said **Maurice Phoheli**, Etihad Airways vp Africa Sub-Sahara and Indian Ocean.

■ **Sandra Kneubuhler** has been appointed global sales director – Africa at Hyatt Regency. She will be responsible for assisting African companies with their international travel programmes as well as assisting other multinationals in the region with travel. Sandra began her career at the Hyatt Regency Johannesburg as a corporate trainee 10 years ago and since then has held various sales positions in Grand Hyatt Doha and Hyatt Regency Oubaai Resort and Spa, most recently as director of sales & marketing and acting gm at the Hyatt Regency Oubaai.

■ **Abia Rakoma** has been appointed gm of Town Lodge Menlo Park with effect from March 1. This is a promotion

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TNW7293



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TNW7296

'Badly run country'

From page 1

a massive dent and the unabridged birth certificate is causing uncertainty."

Although industry players agree that the BSP figures are important, they also warn that stats for January should be taken in context.

Wally says that when analysing BSP figures, it is important to note that stats do not include bookings made with airlines such as FlySafair, which don't participate in BSP. "Also on the international side, the BSP will not show tickets that have been issued offshore to obtain better availability and fares."

Rod adds that January is probably not the right barometer to measure travel

trends for 2015. Although forward bookings look soft for the moment, he says it could be too early to make predictions.

Andrew Stark, md of Flight Centre, agrees that January is generally a strange month. The drop in BSP sales for January could partly be attributed to negative yields on airfares. He says airfares (domestic and international) have dropped considerably this year compared with last year, which means that yield is down.

Despite the fact that disposable income is down, Andrew says demand for travel from both the corporate and the leisure sides remains good. ■

Is SAX's loss Airlink's gain?

DORINE REINSTEIN

SA EXPRESS has been granted a further government guarantee of R1,1bn from Treasury to allow the airline to continue as a going concern, and to host an annual general meeting before the end of October this year.

Jabulani Sikhakhane, spokesperson for the National Treasury, told TNW the guarantee was made up of an extension of the R539m guarantee that was due to expire at the end of February as well as an additional R567m guarantee. Jabulani says, to date, SAX has borrowed the full R539m against the existing guarantee.

He further explained that Treasury had agreed to the guarantee after SAX showed it had revised its business case and its financial modelling. "Taking comfort from the revised projections, the Minister of Finance concurred with the issuance of the guarantee to SA Express."

The R1,1bn guarantee is subject to stringent conditions, including regular reporting on the progress in implementing cost-cutting measures and

reasons for any delays in meeting cost-cutting targets. The airline will also need to identify the individual managers responsible for delivering cost-cutting targets and provide a fully documented funding plan within 30 days. Jabulani adds: "Also, the shareholder compact must be translated into performance agreements for the airline's executive management and be the basis for setting their remuneration."

SAX ceo, **Inati Ntshanga**, could not be reached for comment at the time of going to press. Inati was quoted in *Business Day* saying the airline was working on internal 'austerity measures' to bring the airline to 'sustainable profitability'. This included a review of the airline's flight schedule.

This could bode well for SA Airlink, as the two airlines have been competing heavily on certain routes over the past few years. **Rodger Foster**, Airlink ceo and md, told *TNW* that, despite the fact that both Airlink and SAX were separate feeder airlines to SAA, the two performed exactly the same function and,

as such, competed with each other for market opportunity.

"I can't comment on SAX reducing or having reduced activities on routes that overlap with Airlink. What I can say is that there has been uneconomical overlapping of franchised activities, and just as you would not have two franchised fast food outlets on the same street corner, the abuse of franchise intellectual property by one franchisee by encroachment on another franchisee's licence rights has had to be rationalised by order of the franchisor."

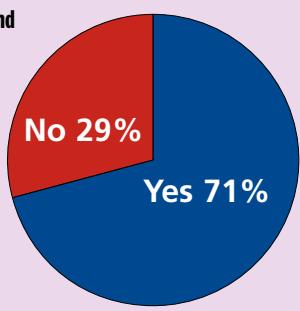
Whereas SAX is owned by the state, Airlink is a private company where the state has a minority interest of less than three per cent held by SAA. SAX and Airlink both have a separate franchise relationship agreement with SAA, the franchisor. These separate franchise agreements entitle them both (SAX and Airlink) to make use of certain SAA franchise intellectual property, and each airline is separately licensed by SAA accordingly. Airlink does not rely on the state for any funding or any financial underpinnings of any nature. ■

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Tech-free travel on the rise

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TNW7136

SAA shoots down idea of domestic dogfight

NATASHA SCHMIDT

SAA will not give up its domestic services. The airline has refuted a speculative report in the *Sunday Times* that suggested the airline had "hinted that it may drop all local and short-haul, 'full-service' flights, making way for its low-cost carrier, Mango, to fill the gap".

The story caused a commotion among travel agents and their clients. New domestic carrier, Skywise, jumped on the bandwagon, releasing a statement saying the LCC had "learned with concern the breaking news of SAA's intention to cease operating its domestic routes" and that "unfortunate as the situation appears, Skywise, like any other competitor,

welcome[d] taking up the challenge by filling SAA's big shoes".

Tiali Tiali, spokesperson for SAA, told *TNW*: "This is not the case at all. The SAA Group, which comprises SAA and Mango as well as airlines such as SAX and Airlink that carry the SAA code, will continue to service all South African network points optimally and efficiently."

"SAA will continue to operate in the domestic market. There is no decision to pull out of any of the routes or points we serve in the domestic market."

SAA hosted a media lunch last week with **Nico Bezuidenhout**, SAA acting ceo, who updated attendees on SAA's 90-Day Action Plan. At the lunch, at which *TNW* was

present, Nico said the airline was looking at rebalancing its domestic capacity versus its African capacity.

He said SAA had generated losses in the domestic market, while Mango had seen a profit and – like airlines such as British Airways, Air France and Lufthansa, which were changing their short haul stable to develop their LCC subsidiaries – SAA would need to adjust its output in the domestic market.

"Currently, SAA has 60% of its aircraft assigned to the domestic market, whereas it has less than 30% assigned to its African routes. Yet it is clear that there is greater demand and higher margins in the African market, where SAA is seeing the highest growth from a low base," he said. ■

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