

# TNW



TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

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## 'Don't tar all ITCs with the same brush'

DORINE REINSTEIN

There are differences between the various ITC models in the South African market and these differences need to be clearly showcased to avoid all ITCs being tarred with the same brush by consumers.

This is one of the "specific views" that Travel Counsellors gm for South Africa, **Mladen Lukic**, plans to air, using the Asata platform.

Travel Counsellors and its 143 agents have officially joined Asata as members. Mladen says the decision to join is the result of the two parties having reached common ground on the group's model. "We have always supported the value of Asata and even joined the association in 2007. Our decision to leave was, at the time, due to different points of view of retail travel segmentation."

The fact that ITCs are all tarred with the same brush is a huge problem, not only for Travel Counsellors but also for the industry in general, Mladen says, particularly when fraudulent incidences occur, which involve ITCs or home-based agents. "The mere fact that people work from home, doesn't make them identical," he says.

This echoes the sentiments of eTravel ceo, **Garth Wolff**, who, at the launch of the group's recruitment video, drove home the point the would-be ITCs must understand the difference in the options open to them. All eTravel ITCs are members of Asata.

A recent example is the alleged fraud by ITC **Kim Robbertse**,

which was covered extensively in the consumer press in December last year (see TNW January 21, 2015). "Suddenly, all ITCs have become one undistinguishable, faceless mass. It's preposterous," says Mladen. Not only will these kinds of views taint the consumer's perception of ITCs, they will also stifle opportunities for people who want to start their business in the travel industry."

Mladen says the main reason Travel Counsellors exited the Asata fold was because the association had insisted on classifying Travel Counsellors as a consortium. "We're not a consortium and never have been. We are a single-entity company."

Mladen says the differences between a consortium and a single-entity business are considerable and have a wide-reaching impact on a number of business practices, including supplier relationships. Each ITC operating under the umbrella of a consortium will also have its own commercial process as well as its own bank account. Travel Counsellor ITCs, on the other hand, report to a head office with one centralised bank account.

The decision to join Asata now, ensures that Travel Counsellors adds its voice and influence to that of the association's, resulting in helping to strengthen the travel industry in general, says Asata ceo, **Otto de Vries**.

As more travel companies join Asata, the association increases its role as an unofficial regulatory body for an

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## Win a ticket to anywhere



British Airways is offering travel agents who book their customers in either First or Club World a chance to win two fully paid for Club World tickets to anywhere on the airline's extensive network. To enter, when making an eligible booking, provide the keyword POFR ZA and the customer's Executive Club number, along with your name and email address. The offer is valid until June 30. Each ticket sold equates to one entry in the draw, which will take place on July 10. **Sue Botes** (left), BA commercial manager for Southern Africa, and corporate account manager, **Salama Detlefsen**, encourage agents to take a trip around the globe. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

## SAA direct to JFK year round

SAA has resumed a non-stop service on its daily flight from Johannesburg to New York-JFK.

In 2013, SAA introduced a one-hour refuelling stop in Dakar, Senegal, on the New York-bound flight during the low-season winter months.

The airline said at that time change was instituted to account for summer take-off conditions in Johannesburg, with its high-

altitude geographic location, which often resulted in weight restrictions.

However, due to the popularity of this route, SAA has decided to once again make the service between New York and Johannesburg non-stop in both directions on a year-round basis, reducing the travel time by nearly 90 minutes.

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# Govt clamps down on 'overused' work visas

DEBBIE BADHAM

**T**HE Department of Home Affairs has tightened regulations for work visas, making it more difficult for international companies to relocate their executive staff in South Africa.

The rule is part of the new immigration regulations, which were officially introduced in May last year, and continue to cause confusion in the travel industry and corporate space.

TNW has received reports that global companies (such as airlines) now need to submit a succession plan, proving that a local candidate will ultimately fulfil the role of, for example, gm or regional manager, before a work visa is granted.

Immigration expert and director of Intergate Immigration, **Monya Flier**, says this latest bout of confusion relates to the Intra Company Transfer Visa. The visa was introduced years ago to make it very easy for companies to inject critical skills from abroad into their South African operation, she says. At the time, the permit was seen as an effective way of fostering economic growth. "Not all individuals would be eligible for this visa – there would need to be a very particular kind of relationship in place between the international organisation and their South African operation."

Perhaps as result of the visa being overused and continuous need to bring in foreign skills, government has decided to introduce stricter requirements for the visa, says Monya. "The visa requirements communicate

that government is questioning why, in the time that the Intra Company Transfer Visa has been available, companies have not been making more of a concerted effort to grow local members of staff into the role. Why have companies not been making more of an investment in their South African workforce such that it is no longer necessary to bring in skills from overseas?"

**"Why have companies not been investing more in their SA workforce so that it is no longer necessary to bring in skills from overseas?"**

As a result, companies wanting to apply for the Intra Company Transfer Visa will now need to produce a Skills Transfer Plan, which demonstrates how foreign staff members will invest back into the local labour market through skills transfer to existing South African staff and how they are planning to grow a South African candidate into the position," says Monya. "We will reach a stage where the Department of Home Affairs is going to start calling out companies that fail to meet these requirements, creating potential problems for them and their future reliance on utilising the Intra Company Transfer Visa vehicle."

However companies go about developing their Skills Transfer Plan has largely been left in the company's hands and can be put together in accordance with its own internal regulations,

adds Monya.

Meanwhile, for those companies that genuinely require highly specific skill sets to take up certain positions within their portfolio, there are other work permit categories through which they can operate. These include a General Work Visa and a Critical Skills Visa.

Monya says the Critical Skills Visa is a new and exciting introduction to the immigration regulations. "This visa speaks to short-staffed professions possessing skills that we need in South Africa. It aims to make the uptake of these professions in South Africa more attractive."

On the list of professions that qualify for the Critical Skills Visa is a corporate general manager. "However, it's important to note that not just anyone can apply for this permit," cautions Monya. "They would first need to prove they have the relevant education and experience to fulfil the role."

If a General Work Visa is sought, on applying to the Department of Labour for the relevant recommendation, corporates would need to provide proof that they had exhausted the South African labour market, making it necessary for them to draw skills from other markets.

She points out that, for corporates operating within a statutory environment, the process is even more complicated. "In these cases, there are many other standard South African legislations to comply with." Things are somewhat easier for those companies operating in a non-statutory environment. ■

## SAA direct to JFK year round

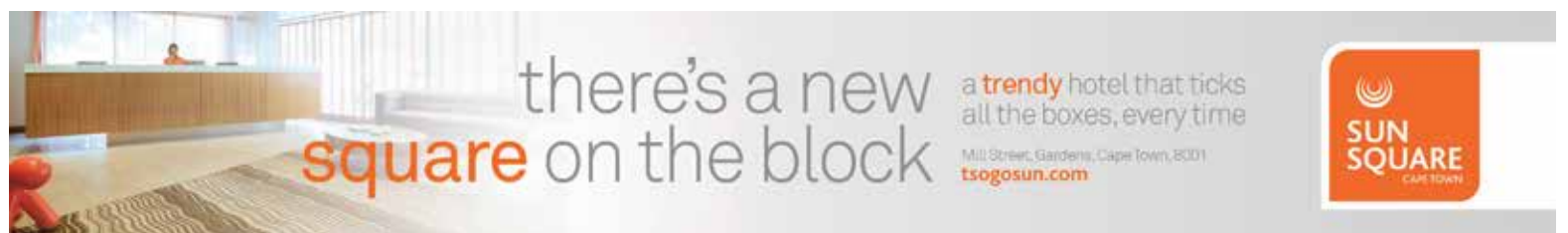
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"We listened to our customers, who want to travel between North America and Southern Africa as fast as possible,"

said **Marc Cavaliere**, SAA executive vp, North America.

"Our round-trip non-stop service between New York and Johannesburg will save

both business and leisure travellers some precious time, while making the travel experience even more convenient." ■



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Air Mauritius is offering a new checked baggage allowance of 30kg per passenger in economy class for travel to India. This is for all bookings from Durban to Mumbai, Bangalore and Chennai. Business-class allowances stay the same. Air Mauritius regional manager for Southern Africa and Latin America, **Carla da Silva**, squeezes in those essential items. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Qatar – three flights a day to SA

QATAR Airways will launch flights to Durban via Johannesburg four times a week from December 17. This will bring the total number of flights to Johannesburg to 14 (a double-daily service), up from 10 weekly flights. This is in addition to planned daily, direct flights to Cape Town, starting October 1.

The carrier will have three flights a day between Doha and South Africa. All three routes will be operated by the Boeing 787 Dreamliner.

The schedules are as follows:

**Doha-Durban (via Johannesburg):**

On Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays flight QR1365 will depart Doha at 07h45 to arrive in Johannesburg at 15h20. The flight will then depart Johannesburg at 16h20, to arrive in Durban at 17h35.

The return flight QR1366 will depart Durban at 19h00 to arrive Johannesburg at 20h15. It will depart Johannesburg at 21h15 and arrive Doha at 06h05 (next day).

**Doha-Johannesburg (direct daily):**

Flight QR1363 departs Doha at 01h25 and arrives in Johannesburg at

08h45. QR1364 departs Johannesburg. QR1364 at 14h30 and arrives in Doha at 23h20.

The second daily flight, QR1365, departs Doha at 07h45 and arrives in Johannesburg at 15h20. QR1365 departs Johannesburg at 21h15 and arrives in Doha at 06h05 (next day).

**Doha-Cape Town (direct daily):**

Flight QR1369 will depart Doha at 01h20 and arrive in Cape Town at 10h15. QR1370 departs Cape Town at 12h45 and arrives in Doha at 22h50. ■

Cruises International to host MICE roadshow

CRUISES International will host its inaugural 'Meetings at Sea' roadshow for the local meetings, incentives, conference and exhibitions sector this month.

The events will take place in Johannesburg on March 24 at the Inanda Club, and in Cape Town on March 26 at

the Protea Hotel Fire & Ice! Cape Town.

They will showcase Royal Caribbean International's ships as well as other cruise options for the MICE market. Royal Caribbean cruising options start from R1 300 per person, per day.

"Cruise ships are built

for business as they have excellent conference and meeting facilities, full Internet and WIFI access, and great opportunities for customised branding excursions, team-building and entertainment," says **Dalene Oroni**, groups and incentives manager of Cruises International. ■



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KEEP CLIMBING







eTravel hosted its preferred partners at eTravel House in Bryanston on February 27 for an exclusive first look at its new eTravel Corporate DVD. Pictured here, at the launch, are: **Royal Eizenberg** (left) and **Elias Maseko** (right) of Progressive Travel with eTravel ceo, **Garth Wolff**. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

## eTravel launches recruitment drive

DORINE REINSTEIN

**M**ORE agents are being drawn to the ITC sector, making it one of the fastest growing models in the South African travel industry. Consortiums have noticed the trend and are actively recruiting.

eTravel has embarked on several initiatives to drive recruitment, the first being the launch of its Corporate DVD. The video serves

as a 'one-stop shop' for consultants to learn everything there is to know about eTravel and what goes into starting a travel company. ITCs will be able to view the video on the upcoming new eTravel website (to be launched in the next few months) or by contacting eTravel, who will then send on the link.

**Garth Wolff**, ceo of eTravel, says he believes the emergence of ITCs has changed the travel industry

landscape in South Africa for the better. He says the ITC model is making it easier to retain those highly professional travel individuals who would have otherwise left the industry. "This alone means the industry is not losing the intellectual capital that would have otherwise been the case. Being an ITC you can manage your own time and be correctly rewarded for the hard work and long hours." ■

## Fastjet Tanzania launches new route

**BOOKINGS** have opened for fastjet Tanzania's new domestic route between Mwanza and Kilimanjaro.

Flights will launch on March 30. The route will be serviced by four flights

a week on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays.

The new route will be serviced by fastjet Tanzania's Airbus A319, with flights departing from

Kilimanjaro International Airport at 12h20 and landing at Mwanza Airport at 13h25. The return flight to Kilimanjaro departs Mwanza at 14h05 and lands at 15h10. ■

## PillowTalk

A brief look at this week's hotel news

### Sandton Sun closes for refurbishment

THE Sandton Sun in Sandton, Johannesburg, closed on February 5 for a complete refurbishment of bedrooms, bathrooms and corridors. It will reopen in September. The San Deck and Restaurant will remain open for lunch and dinner. The Sandton Sun Spa will also stay open over this period.

### Hilton Garden Inn to open in Namibia

HILTON Worldwide has signed a management agreement with Out of Africa Hospitality to open a mid-market Hilton Garden Inn hotel in Windhoek, Namibia. It is expected to begin welcoming guests in early 2017. The 180-room hotel will be adjacent to the existing Hilton Windhoek and form part of the Freedom Plaza development, adding significant additional meeting space across the two properties. It will feature complimentary WiFi, a 24-hour Pavilion Pantry and pre-arrival room selection. It is approximately 42km from Hosea Kutako International Airport and five kilometres from Eros domestic airport.

### Hyatt launches free WiFi

ALL Hyatt hotels and resorts worldwide now provide free WiFi to guests, independent of booking method or loyalty programme participation. This offer is available to guests on an unlimited number of mobile devices or laptops in guest rooms and social spaces at Hyatt-branded hotels but does not extend to meeting rooms. Platinum and Diamond Hyatt Gold Passport members receive a free upgrade to premium WiFi service in those spaces wherever available, and guests have the option to purchase premium service in those locations. "For Hyatt, it didn't feel natural to put barriers around something travellers view as an essential part of their hotel stay," said **Kristine Rose**, vp of brands, Hyatt. The sign-on process to access free WiFi varied by property, the hotel said.

### Legacy Lifestyle launches new app

LEGACY Lifestyle has launched a new app in line with the programme's significant progress in the rewards market over the last three years. It is free to download and rewards members for their spend at Lifestyle partners. With Legacy Lifestyle's new account management console, users are able to manage their Lifestyle profiles, update their details, check their balances and monitor their transactions. Additionally, members can now link their Dischem Benefits Card to their Lifestyle accounts, convert Lifestyle Rands to Voyager Miles and vice versa, nominate a charity as their beneficiary, and refer a friend to become part of the experience. Legacy Lifestyle Rewards has also aligned virtual currency with the rand, making 100 Lifestyle Rands equivalent to R100. Users will also soon be able to order a new card via their mobile device, transfer Lifestyle Rands to another member and much more.

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# SAA 'no longer subject to conflicting mandates'

HILKA BIRNS

**S**AA plans to lower its fares, fill up its planes, boost capacity and improve its operational efficiencies in order to grow its business, says chief commercial officer, **Sylvain Bosc**.

Speaking at a Satsa Western Cape chapter meeting in Cape Town, he said SAA was making quick progress in tackling its revenue problems and the "road ahead is clear" now that it was no longer subject to conflicting mandates but had one clear instruction from Treasury to become profitable.

SAA is now empowered to act on a strategy already devised two-and-a-half years ago but never implemented because of governance challenges. The airline has also rebuilt its commercial team with experienced airline

staff and is restructuring its domestic market business. "I am very confident that you will hear a lot more good news from SAA in the next few months and years," said Sylvain.

**"We have not abandoned Emirates. It's not a political but a business decision."**

He said network cuts – such as the March 29 withdrawal from major loss-making routes Beijing and Mumbai – would halve SAA's operating losses. "Although we have 80% load factors [on the India route], the yields are so low that we lose money on every flight; we're not even covering the operating costs of the services. So the earlier we stop flying there, the better."

Although Hong Kong is loss-making, SAA is fighting to keep the route, its last remaining Asian route, by offering more competitive fares. Axing Hong Kong would damage SAA's São Paulo services because of through traffic from Brazil, he said.

## Emirates vs Etihad

Sylvain also shed light on SAA's unique dual codesharing relationships with rival UAE carriers, Emirates and Etihad, and its plans with the Abu Dhabi-based airline. While SAA intends to maintain its long-standing codeshare with Emirates, it does not give SAA reach beyond Dubai on Emirates' global network, nor is Emirates prepared to let SAA operate its flights to SA. Etihad, meanwhile, is willing to operate on an equal basis hub-to-hub, allowing SAA to extend its reach and gain

access to attractive fares on Etihad's network to Asia. Etihad, in turn, gains access to African regional traffic.

"We have not abandoned Emirates. It's not a political but a business decision." He said it had become impossible for SAA to operate to Asia because its direct flights could not compete with the Gulf carriers.

Ebola fears were also affecting SAA and United Airlines' codeshare flights from Washington DC, said Sylvain, because US passengers avoided routing via Dakar and preferred to fly via the Gulf. He said SAA and Etihad's codeshare allowed passengers to clear US immigration at Abu Dhabi airport's US Immigration Pre-Clearance facility and arrive at a domestic terminal in the US.

SAA's London flights were breaking even and



**Sylvain Bosc**

its Frankfurt and Munich services were profitable, said Sylvain. Consequently, SAA had no plans to cut its European routes, especially since it had re-negotiated reduced leasing costs of the fuel-guzzling four-engine A340s used on those routes.

He said there was "not too much appetite in Pretoria" for new routes, as these took two to three years to become profitable. "Treasury has made it clear that there is no money coming our way." ■

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## What's in 'store' for Flight Centre?

Flight Centre SA recently appointed **Andrew Stark** to take over the running of the business as its managing director. *TNW's* Dorine Reinstein spoke to Andrew about the changes he plans to introduce in the company over the coming years.

### **TNW: What can we expect from Flight Centre for the years to come under your leadership?**

AS: We have a very ambitious growth plan in place, which will see us expanding the Flight Centre brand outside South Africa and into Africa. The aim for the next five years is to have 300 businesses in Africa, employing over 2 000 people. By 2020, we would like to effectively double our growth model.

All of the new businesses will be built as Flight Centre's new 'Stores of the Future'. Existing businesses will gradually be revamped. All 'Stores of the Future' feature interactive plasma screens and iPads and offer clients a similar experience to that of an Apple iStore.

These are innovative stores where people can conceptualise their holiday.

### **TNW: You have experience in the corporate travel sector through your roles at Corporate Traveller and FCm Travel Solutions. Will this background influence your new role at the helm of Flight Centre?**

AS: I think the equilibrium will be tipping more towards the corporate side in the years to come. For the last 20 years, about 70% of our business has come from our retail brands. I see that equilibrium tipping more to between 60% corporate and 40% retail over the next five to 10 years.

We'll continue to grow retail with a focus on attracting new customers and retaining existing customers.

We are still seeing good

growth in our retail businesses.

### **TNW: How do you plan to ensure the Flight Centre brand stands out and remains relevant?**

AS: The differentiator for businesses over the next few years is to be unique and exclusive. Those companies that get it right are the ones that will survive beyond 2020.

*"Flight Centre has always been the outcast in many ways. Whether it's time to be more inclusive, time will tell."*

Flight Centre will continue to create its own unique products through the Red Label Holiday products. We've identified high-demand products for South Africa and we'll capitalise on this. It's the vertical integration model on steroids: taking it to the next level and having your own wholesaler providing your stores with your own unique products.

### **TNW: Do you feel online and mobile booking tools will replace traditional agencies in the near future?**

AS: We have an online portal but we're seeing 99% of our business through our bricks and mortar. Some 95% of our customers are still doing a lot of their own research. They are coming to our stores for validation.

As a global company, we can see trends in markets like the US, UK and Australia. Those markets are often the yardsticks of what will happen in SA. There, we can see a lot of growth in bricks and mortar.

Online booking tools were a big fad, but they are losing momentum. You need to find the balance; you need to have an online presence but you also need a solid store offering.

### **TNW: What is the greatest challenge facing the travel industry in general, and how does Flight Centre plan to tackle this challenge?**

AS: The brain drain in leadership in the travel industry is one of the greatest challenges we face. Flight Centre currently has 160 businesses, which means we need at least 160 bright, young and eager business leaders. That continues to be a massive challenge. People need to see a future in our organisation and in the travel industry.

Currently, there is a lack of appetite from youngsters to join the travel and tourism industry. Fewer universities and colleges offer travel and tourism courses. It's just not in demand and we need to change that.

Everyone in the travel industry needs to build up a brand perception that conveys that the industry is futuristic and innovative. We need to be the industry that our future leaders and generations want to join.

### **TNW: Flight Centre has resisted being a member of travel industry associations, such as Asata. Would you consider bringing Flight Centre under the Asata umbrella?**

AS: Flight Centre has always been the outcast in many ways. Whether it's time to

be more inclusive, time will tell. There might come a time when we'll need to be more inclusive. I'm not closing the door at all on Asata. The more I speak with my peers in the industry, the more I understand why they are members of Asata. If the benefits were there and we were shown these, I don't see why we wouldn't join. But it is not in the strategy of the next few years.

### **TNW: What opportunities remain untapped in the travel industry and how will you take advantage of these?**

AS: Many South African consumers have never travelled before. Once you get the trust of that market, you'll have a customer for life. Every

business, every consortium, is trying to grow their market and tap into these new markets. There's a lot more we can be doing on that front.

Also the inbound tourism sector is presenting opportunities. Flight Centre has been looking to venture into the inbound side of the business. We might even look at acquisitions down the line. ■



Andrew Stark. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

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# Luxury Travel



## Affluent travellers are keen to spend

Despite a challenging economic climate that has put tremendous strain on travel, luxury travel is still in demand. Dorine Reinstein reports.

**L**UXURY travel, without a doubt, is one area of the travel industry that is immune to the economic downturn," says **Wally Gaynor**, md of Club Travel.

He says the Club Travel division that deals with high-end clients is showing strong growth. "Let's face it, if you had over R1bn and are now down to R900m, you're still going to pamper yourself."

Luxury clients are not affected as much by economic downturns and rate of exchange fluctuations, agrees **Joanne Visagie**, Beachcomber

Tours sales and marketing manager. Beachcomber has seen exceptional year-on-year growth in the luxury space. "Trends that affect the mass market generally escape the luxury seeker. They travel on their own terms and are happy to purchase lunch and drinks at their own pace in the resort," she says, adding that high-end travellers are less concerned with cost-saving measures, such as going all-inclusive or visiting local destinations.

Affluent people prioritise their holidays, says **Theresa Szejwallo**, md of Trafalgar. For the luxury segment of

the market, a holiday is a 'given'. If they are at all affected by the economic downturn, they are likely to shorten their trips by a day or two rather than consider a 'budget-style' trip, she says.

Proof is that Trafalgar's top-end range of guided holidays is doing better than the company's budget product.

"Our high-end product is up by 27% while the budget product is flat," Theresa says.

Hardworking corporates want seamless and pleasurable experiences, such as one can expect

from four- and five-star resorts, says **Terrence Goosen**, group marketing manager of Premier Hotels and Resorts.

"This is the area where they splurge. Good service, attention to detail and convenience are still very much in demand."

The cruising industry has also enjoyed increased support from travellers looking for luxury. **Janine Pretorius**, general sales agent for Regent Seven Seas Cruises, says there are still many guests who demand the best and expect to pay for it.

Austria Connection does

tailor-made luxury itineraries for Croatia, Prague and Vienna for clients who want to stay in top hotels and have private guides, as they don't want to join regular excursions, says owner, **Inge Dobihal**. "There has always been a demand for this, and this year we've seen the same."

### The discerning traveller

But whereas the high-end market continues to value luxury travel, they are not spending carelessly.

**Michele Abraham**, marketing communications manager of Anantara Hotels

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## Affluent travellers are keen to spend

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Resorts and Spas, says travellers are still treating themselves to indulgent and unique getaways but they also shop around and do their research. "Particularly when it comes to considering a new destination, they are actively looking at what deals are out there."

**Zahedah Borhat**, regional and game lodges product manager of Holiday Tours, agrees that most luxury travellers feel the need to justify their spend by ensuring that they are getting value for their money. "They are looking for specials and discounts on their stays."

Upper-end clients will, as a rule of thumb, always have the capital to spend on up-market accommodation and services, provided the deal is good value for money in the price range they are looking at, adds **Megan D'Arcy**, Holiday Tours Europe and USA product manager.

There is an expectation to provide superior product and service, keeping suppliers on their toes. "We have a number of clients who are not prepared to compromise on quality," says **Cathie Bester**, national sales manager of WLH. She says hotels in general have started offering better product to cater for



**Zahedah Borhat**

the luxury traveller. "Travellers have become more discerning and now that clients have access to online information about travel, they are able to make comparisons on luxurious product offerings," she says.

### Experiential travel

The concept of luxury has changed over the years. Michele says there is still a market to travel to beautiful places and be accommodated comfortably but the emphasis is moving towards the holiday 'experience'. "Luxury travellers have the capacity to be able to indulge in unique experiences that may be prohibitive to other travellers

where costs are concerned."

Theresa agrees that luxury travel has moved away from purely "travelling in style", with customers putting more value on the actual experience their trip provides. This is one of the reasons Trafalgar launched its Hidden Journeys product. "The five-star hotel and business-/first-class ticket are still very much in play but we find our guests are looking for something more important – the kind of experience that is unique and off the beaten track."

The trend can be seen among travellers to Mauritius, with clients asking for more than just the typical 'luxury' experience. "Beachcomber encourages its guests to engage with local culture and experiences incorporating, for instance, local Creole cuisine and themed evenings. Even our younger guests engage with the local culture, dressing up for sega theme evenings," says Joanne.

"The demand for luxury travel has become more complex," says Terrence. "Luxury now has many different facets to it; for example, we have found customers want high-end coffee brands as well as boutique-brand alcoholic beverages and drinks, such as craft beer and coconut water."



Passengers are always willing to pay for luxury on long-haul routes. Photo: SWISS

## Opulence in the air

THE demand for premium-class air travel is on the rise, with airlines noting an increase in demand as luxury products become more accessible to travellers.

Bookings for business class on Air Mauritius flights have increased year on year, says **Wouter Nel**, sales and marketing manager. It helps that Air Mauritius makes luxury travel more accessible to passengers, he says, with last-minute upgrade offers at the airport of R1 600 one-way, subject to seat availability.

"This is very popular and exposes the product to a wider range of consumers. In general, luxury travel has become more obtainable. Travel was a grand affair in the past and something

everyone aspired to. It was expensive and deemed only for the rich, but globalisation has changed this," he says.

On long-haul routes, such as South Africa, passengers will always be willing to pay a premium for a luxury experience, says **Andrea Carlyle**, brand manager of SWISS International Air Lines. "In Europe, an ageing demographic – the so-called 'Best Agers' – has been identified. These customers are well off and like to spend their money on luxury travel experiences, including comfortable flights in business and sometimes even first class, especially on long-haul flights between Europe and South Africa."

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## Which cities have the most expensive hotel rates?

MELBOURNE, Sydney and Singapore have the most expensive average hotel room rates, according to the 2014 HRS Annual Hotel Price Radar.

Based on data collected from all hotel bookings made via the HRS hotel portal in 2014, the analysis looks at per night room rates and found that hotel rates fluctuated widely across Asia-Pacific throughout the year.

Closely following Melbourne is sister city, Sydney, which takes the second spot on the hotel rooms rate list.

"Hotel room rates are a key indicator of both tourism and business travel levels throughout the year and our analysis shows that companies have confidence in the APAC region and are continuing to push for global growth," said **Todd Arthur**, md of APAC at HRS.



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# Book these specials!

## 1. Luxurious lodging

African Hotels and Adventures' (AHA) Thakadu River Camp (right) in the Madikwe Game Reserve is running a winter special, from R1 720pps per night. The offer is valid from May 1 to September 30. Rates include bed and breakfast, lunch and dinner and two game drives daily. Rate excludes beverages and gate fee. Children pay 50% of the adult rate. Ivory Tree Game Lodge and Shepherd's Tree Game Lodge in the Pilanesberg Game Reserve recently joined AHA's portfolio, which has increased the number



Photo: AHA

of properties suitable for luxury travel. Other luxury properties include Gondwana (Garden

Route), Makalali Private Game Lodge (Hoedspruit) and Azanzi Beach Hotel (Zanzibar).



Dinarobin Hotel Golf and Spa. Photo: Beachcomber Hotels

## 2. Unlimited golf at Paradis and Dinarobin

Beachcomber Tours is offering unlimited complimentary golf at Paradis's 18-hole championship golf course for guests staying at a villa at either Paradis Hotel and Golf Club or Dinarobin Hotel Golf and Spa. The special is valid from May 10 to September 30. Guests at the villas will also be entitled to welcome gifts such as a golf shirt, three Paradis

Golf Club balls and a bag of tees; bottled water; golf carts and practice balls; and free green fees for a game at Tamarina Golf Estate and Heritage Golf Club. They will also receive a complimentary upgrade from bed and breakfast to half-board basis when booking their holiday, for travel between May 10 and July 31, and September 1 to 30.

## 3. More-itius

- World Leisure Holidays is offering a seven-night special at the five-star Sugar Beach for R15 490pps. This special includes return direct flights from Johannesburg to Mauritius on Air Mauritius, return coach transfers and breakfast and dinner daily. Kids under 12 stay free when sharing with adults and a maximum of two children between two and 11 years old fly free. This special is valid for travel between May 4 and May 26 and between May 31 and June 24.
- Holiday Tours is offering a seven-night special for St Regis Mauritius Resort and Spa from R25 500pps. The special is valid for travel from May 1 to September 30, with block-out dates between June 25 and July 20. The special includes return flights on Air Mauritius from Johannesburg; accommodation in a Deluxe Ocean View room; breakfast, lunch and dinner daily; return airport-resort transfers and all pre-payable airport taxes and fuel levies.



## 4. Just cruising

Encore Cruises is offering a Verona Opera and Cruise that includes a 10-night sailing on the *Seven Seas Mariner* around Italy and through the Adriatic. The Deluxe Veranda Suites are US\$7 629pps (R89 527) and the Concierge Suites are US\$8 829pps (R103 610).

Included are ship-hotel transfer, two nights B&B at

the Palazzo Victoria Hotel, Verona, gold tickets for *Don Giovanni* at the Arena di Verona and a two-hour guided walking tour of Verona. Guests also receive special VIP entrance to Arena di Verona, private area for pre-opera dinner, a backstage visit prior to the show, an opera programme book, and drinks throughout the evening.

## 5. Easter fun

Legend Lodges is offering an Easter holiday special from R2 800pps at Dugong Beach Lodge in Mozambique. It includes accommodation, three meals daily, selected beverages during dinner, all non-motorised water sports

and a sundowner dhow cruise. The offer is valid for travel until June 30.

Legend Golf and Safari Resort is offering a special from R990pps, including accommodation (B&B) and two game drives. Valid from March 25 to April 30.



The Oyster Box. Photo: Red Carnation

## 6. The ultimate spoil

Holiday Tours is offering a three-night special at the Oyster Box in Durban from R5 569pps, from March 1 to May 31. The special includes accommodation in a sea-facing Cabana, breakfast daily, return economy-class flights from Johannesburg and return

airport transfers. Guests will also receive welcome canapés and a glass of Moët & Chandon on arrival, a R750 spa voucher per person to enjoy during their stay, a seafood dinner for two in The Grill Room, and breakfast in bed served by their own private butler.

## 7. Hidden Canada

Trafalgar's Hidden Journey in Canada focuses on Newfoundland and Labrador. Priced from R42 900pps, it includes Insider Experiences such as a local expert telling the story of Signal Hill, where Marconi's first transatlantic wireless signal was recorded.

## 8. Go east in style with MK

Air Mauritius has a special business-class fare of R18 100 (excl. taxes of about R6 900, route dependent) on flights from JNB to Perth, Hong Kong, Beijing, Kuala Lumpur, Mumbai and Delhi. Included is a free stopover in a five-star hotel, with transfers and selected meals.

## New premium service on LH

LUFTHANSA passengers can now experience the new first-class service on all long-haul flights from Munich on the A340-600.

"The retrofit of the new first- and business-class cabins on the remainder of the long-haul fleet will be completed this summer. By the end of 2015, all Lufthansa long-range aircraft will feature the new premium economy cabin," the airline said.

First-class passengers can look forward to individual service and a wide selection of top-quality food and drinks. The eight seats recline to

become a 207cm lie-flat bed.

The new business-class seat converts into a 198cm lie-flat bed. Passengers can choose from the expanded inflight entertainment programme and view it on their personal 38cm monitor. "During the course of this year, Lufthansa will offer its business-class passengers a new, more personalised, restaurant-style service," the airline added.

The new premium economy class offers 50% more space than economy class and passengers can check in two items of baggage.

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## Premier buys Sani Pass Hotel

PREMIER Hotels and Resorts has purchased the Sani Pass Hotel in the mKhomazana Valley at the foot of Sani Pass in the southern Drakensberg.

Premier's plans for the hotel include upgrades to the facilities and the addition of new hotel rooms, chalets and conference venues. The existing entertainment and sporting facilities, which include a nine-hole golf course, volleyball and tennis courts, bowling greens, and a wellness centre, will also receive extensive upgrades.

## Regent Seven Seas welcomes new ship

REGENT Seven Seas Cruises' *Seven Seas Explorer* will sail on its maiden voyage and inaugural season as part of the summer 2016 schedule.

There are ten categories of suites (a total of 375 suites), featuring "the largest verandas in the cruise industry". Each suite has "European king-sized Suite Slumber Beds and oversized bathrooms with rich marble and decorative

tiles," the cruise line said in a statement. All suites include a private balcony, with 93% of the verandas extending beyond 7,7 sqm.

Accommodations range from 28 sqm entry-level Veranda Suite to the lavish 360 sqm Regent Suite.

"Carrying only 750 guests, *Seven Seas Explorer* will boast one of the highest space ratios in the cruise industry and an exceptionally high staff-to-guest ratio."

## Destroyed lodge to be rebuilt after fire

TINTSWALO Lodges Group will rebuild its Tintswalo Atlantic Lodge after fires in the Cape Peninsula destroyed it earlier this month. The lodge is expected to reopen on December 1.

Due to public interest, Tintswalo will document the rebuild, which can be followed on its Tintswalo

Atlantic rebuild blog. **Gaye Corbett**, Tintswalo Lodges Group owner, will be contributing to the contents of the blog, giving a personal account of what is happening on the ground.

Staff will remain employed and will be assisting in the rebuilding of the property. An office has been set up in Hout Bay as their central

hub for the next months.

As a token of their appreciation towards the City of Cape Town emergency services, NSRI, the fire department, volunteers and Hout Bay's community, Tintswalo will host an annual charity event on March 2 (the date the property was destroyed).

## New ownership for Crystal Cruises

NIPPON Yusen Kabushiki Kaisha (NYK), Crystal Cruises' parent company since its inception in 1988, has entered into an agreement with Genting Hong Kong (GHK), under which Crystal Cruises will be acquired by GHK. The acquisition is expected to close in the second quarter of 2015.

"With the support of

GHK's financial strength and expertise in ship design, Crystal Cruises' fleet size will expand with a new ship, elevating the standard of luxury cruising," says **Edie Rodriguez**, president and coo of Crystal Cruises. Crystal's fleet currently features *Crystal Symphony* and *Crystal Serenity*.

"The new ship will offer a number of innovations

in design, public areas, accommodation, dining, entertainment and wellness, which will appeal to both our traditional and 'new to Crystal' clients. In addition, a third ship will allow us to offer a far wider choice of destinations and imaginative itineraries," he said.

Cruises International represents Crystal Cruises in South Africa. ■

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ASATA



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## Asata stalwart retires

**REGINA Nhlapo** is retiring from Asata after nearly 25 years of service and 42 years in the travel industry. Regina started at Asata as the accounts administrator when the offices were in downtown Johannesburg. She was later transferred to manage the Asata airport office. She then moved to head office to

continue her administrative role. Asata ceo, **Otto de Vries**, says: "Always welcoming and friendly, Regina's is the voice one hears when calling in to the association. We will miss her. However, we wish her all the best for her well-deserved retirement and express our gratitude for her long-standing loyalty."



**Regina Nhlapo**

## CI launches club for agents



Cruises International has formed a special club in Cape Town for travel agents selling cruises. The Cruises Crew Club will meet every two months to educate agents about new products and how to sell them. A similar initiative could be considered for Johannesburg if the Cape Town idea proves a success. The club is by invitation only, exclusively for the top 20 agents who have supported Cruises International, says Cruises International's, **Lizelle van Zyl**. Pictured at the launch event at the V&A Waterfront are (from left): **Charlene Ross** (Travel Counsellors); **Daniel Meier** (German Overseas Travel); **Harold Cox** (Kenilworth Travel); and **Lizelle** (centre).

## Appointment

The transport sector B-BBEE Charter Council has appointed Board of



Airline Representatives South Africa hr and training consultant, **Carol-Anne Cairns** (pictured) as a member. This follows the announcement that the Department of Transport was finalising a transport sector BEE audit to provide a clear picture on the participation in the sector by previously disadvantaged individuals. Barsa ceo, **June Crawford**, said the inclusion of Barsa's representative on the Charter Council was an indication of the importance government placed on the international airline sector for its contribution to the economy.

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# Don't tar all ITCs

From page 1

unregulated travel industry, says Otto. Asata ensures that all its members are financially sound by auditing them on an annual basis, he adds.

"We also ensure our members abide by stringent membership criteria, which, in

turn, mitigates the risk to the consumer."

ITCs whose financial risk is not carried under a head office, like that of Travel Counsellors or eTravel, for example, will require annual auditing in their own right to be an Asata member. ■

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**Wendy Wu goes live**

Wendy Wu Tours has launched a new website. Some of the new features on the website include a contact form for quotes or booking requests and a Wendy Wu video tab, which agents can show clients on the home page. Among other features, agents can sign up on the website for the e-newsletter. Alet Steyn (left), business development manager, and Mitzalyn Cruz, sales executive, reveal Wendy Wu's new look. Photo: Shannon van Zyl

# 'Retrenchments will be last resort' – SAA

DORINE REINSTEIN AND  
NATASHA SCHMIDT

AS SAA nears the end of its 90-day Action Plan, which aims to steer the airline back to the full implementation of its Long-Term Turnaround Strategy, the airline has admitted it is looking at possible job cuts.

During a recent media event, SAA's acting ceo, Nico Bezuidenhout, said the airline was in the process of re-benchmarking its staff numbers in line with 2009

figures, when the airline employed 1 700 fewer people.

He said that SAA was engaging with management to get back to the "optimal headcount".

Tlali Tlali, spokesperson for SAA, told TNW: "The reality is that SAA's staff headcount grew over the past few years beyond sustainable levels as losses continued to impair business stability."

Tlali pointed out that the reduction in

head count would be a consultative process with all stakeholders in the company, with SAA exploring various options, including early retirement and voluntary severance packages, whereby retrenchments would only be a last resort.

"We are not able at this stage to make available the number of personnel that will be affected by the exercise as there is a due process that needs to be followed," he said. ■



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