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TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

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SAA adds 27 destinations

SAA's daily, direct flight to Abu Dhabi is a game changer, reports TNW's Dave Marsh, who was on the inaugural flight.

SAA's new strategic partnership with Etihad Airways was consummated last week with the launch of SAA's inaugural daily service to Abu Dhabi. The new service dramatically improves SAA's offering to the Middle East, Asia and even parts of Europe.

The cash-strapped airline, unable to finance the new aircraft it would need to open new routes, has instead tied up with Etihad in a close alliance that improves passenger options without putting additional aircraft in the air.

"New routes are as diverse as the Maldives and Manchester."

Today you can book SAA on 27 new routes, as diverse as the Maldives and Manchester. For more details on routes see page 2.

Etihad and SAA have co-ordinated each of their daily flights so that both airlines can offer services between Johannesburg and Abu Dhabi (AUH) every 12 hours.

More codeshare destinations are being finalised, adding to the 27 onward destinations already in place. Etihad is waiting for regulatory approval to add its code to 17 destinations in Africa that SAA operates.

Barry Parsons, SAA's chief strategy

officer, told TNW the alliance worked well for both parties. Etihad is free to allow SAA to specialise in Africa on its behalf while Etihad focuses on other new international routes that will need to be developed for the 200 new aircraft it has on order.

SAA has cleared regulations to allow for close parity pricing with Etihad, a development that will take effect over the next few months.

Barry dismissed the idea that the closer relationship with Etihad meant that SAA would consider leaving the Star Alliance. Etihad is not a member of any major alliance but there were many examples of airlines in alliances dealing with non-members, he said. With regard to SAA's codeshare with other Gulf carrier, Emirates, to Dubai, Barry said the arrangement worked well for both airlines but that SAA did not have the right to operate onward to other destinations, which the Etihad agreement allows.

Peter Baumgartner, Etihad Airways' chief commercial officer, said there would also be reciprocity across the airlines' respective loyalty programmes, sharing of lounge facilities and the review of the airlines' cargo, training and procurement operations.

SAA will use an A330-200 aircraft, with 36 business class and 186 economy seats, on the Abu Dhabi route. (See page 2). ■

Exploring new opportunities



A delegation of senior SAA management, South African government officials and visiting travel trade and media representatives were welcomed to Abu Dhabi when flight SA278 touched down at Abu Dhabi International Airport on March 29. Outside the Al-Sayed Grand Mosque on a recce are (from left) **Johan Groenewald** (Wendy Wu Tours); **Sean Bradley** (SAA Holidays); **Craig van Rooyen** (Tour d' Afrique) and **David Frost** (SATSA). Photo: Dave Marsh

Air China – 'unlimited' connections

DORINE REINSTEIN

AIR China will launch its inaugural flight from Beijing to Johannesburg on August 30, departing Beijing at 23h15 to arrive in Johannesburg at 07h35 next day.

The airline will operate flights from Johannesburg on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, departing at 11h40 to arrive in Beijing next day at 07h10. The return flight from Beijing operates on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays.

Bradley Brouwer, SA Tourism president of Asia Pacific, told TNW the allocated time slots were optimal, offering unlimited connection opportunities within China.

Spokesperson for Air China, **Xingyu Zhao**, says compared with the previous SAA flight, the proposed Air China flight schedule will offer more convenient connection times.

Xingyu says the recent state visit to China by President **Jacob Zuma** has led to enhanced co-operation between the two nations in the aviation sector. "Air China and SAA announced a further strengthening of their bilateral co-operation within the Star Alliance. The key element in this relationship will be some network reconfiguration for both airlines to provide better passenger and cargo services between South Africa and China and countries adjacent to both." ■

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Rubes® By Leigh Rubin



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India: SAA loses 2 flights, may pick up 87

THE significance of the SA/EY codeshare is best illustrated by the example of India.

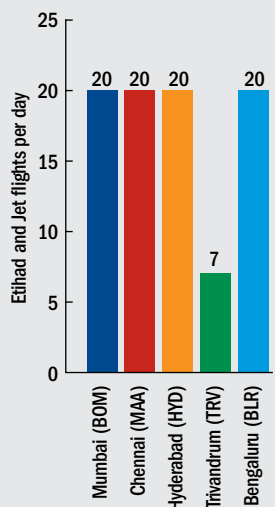
Ethihad has a 24% stake in Jet Airways, which serves 52 destinations in India.

Over and above the Etihad flights, SAA is in negotiation with Jet to extend the codeshare to the many flights Jet operates out of Abu Dhabi.

If successful, the daily flights into India that SAA can offer from Abu Dhabi on either Etihad Airways or Jet Airways are shown in the table (right).

Etihad and Jet operate to 11 destinations in India out of Abu Dhabi. The ones listed in the table are the destinations SAA is already selling on its system.

Daily flights to India ex Abu Dhabi



SAA's new destinations

- Abu Dhabi
 - Bahrain
 - Kuwait City
 - Muscat
 - Bangkok
 - Kuala Lumpur
 - Singapore
 - Jeddah
 - Riyadh
 - Dammam
 - Malé
 - Edinburgh
 - Manchester
 - Dublin
 - Jakarta
 - Bangalore
 - Mumbai
 - Delhi
 - Chennai
 - Hyderabad
 - Trivandrum
 - Colombo
 - Seoul
 - Ammam
 - Narita
 - Nagoya
- NB More are being added*

JNB-Abu Dhabi timetable

Etihad Airways and SAA's Johannesburg-Abu Dhabi schedule, effective March 29. Flights are being

temporarily advanced an hour to compensate for extra flying time to circumvent war-torn Yemen.

Route	Flight No.	Departure	Arrival	Aircraft	Frequency
Johannesburg (JNB) - Abu Dhabi (AUH)	SA278	09:15	20:25	Airbus A330	Daily
Abu Dhabi (AUH) - Johannesburg (JNB)	SA279	01:05	08:15	Airbus A330	Daily
Johannesburg (JNB) - Abu Dhabi (AUH)	EY603	20:00	06:20 + 1	Airbus A330	Daily
Abu Dhabi (AUH) - Johannesburg (JNB)	EY604	09:30	16:05	Airbus A330	Daily



Accessing Dubai's business centre

The doubling of daily flights to Abu Dhabi has been welcomed by corporates who can now travel down the relatively quiet ten-lane E11

highway to Dubai's industrial and commercial centres that lie between the Dubai CBD and Abu Dhabi. Etihad's regional business development

manager, **John Friel**, adds that Abu Dhabi International Airport is situated close to Dubai, and Jebel Ali is only 50 minutes' drive away. ■

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SOUTH AFRICAN AIRWAYS



Birchwood launches premium product

DARISE FOSTER

THE Birchwood Hotel and OR Tambo Conference Centre has officially opened bookings for its new product, Silverbirch@ Birchwood, which is designed to cater for the 'more discerning' business traveller.

The R25m investment sees the launch of Birchwood's 'hotel within a hotel' concept – 153 rooms situated on the property in a separate area, with separate controlled access, away from the hustle and bustle of the main hotel and conferencing area.

Other extras include larger workstations, unlimited and uninterrupted high-speed WiFi access and a business centre, and a dedicated check-in area within the hotel's main



Birchwood's Bradley Partridge (corporate sales) and Jacqueline Engelbrecht (events manager) celebrate the launch of the brand's new offering at a special event held last month. Photo: Darise Foster

reception. Silverbirch also offers clients a complimentary airport shuttle service and a dedicated porter facility.

Fine dining away from the crowds is available at the

Grill At One Twenty.

The new product would cater for clients who were looking for a more premium service, said Birchwood events manager, **Jacqueline Engelbrecht.** ■

New economy fare concept from SWISS

SWISS International Air Lines will adopt a fundamentally new fare concept during the European summer to address the individual needs of travellers. The concept will apply to all European services from Zurich and Geneva.

Travellers will now have a choice of three types of fare in economy class, along with the business-class fare. With the additional services offered under the SWISS Choice programme, travellers can select the fare that meets their needs and pay for only the services they require.

The new economy fare options are Light, Classic, and Flex. The Light fare is already a well-established option for SWISS travellers from Geneva and will now be extended

across Europe. The new fare types can also be combined with return travel. All options include the price of the flight, one item of carry-on baggage, a snack and drinks on board, an assigned seat when checking in within 23 hours of departure and Miles & More award and status miles.

Light fares are the most inexpensive option for travellers, who only have carry-on baggage and do not need flexibility in their travel plans.

The Classic fare offers all the services currently offered to economy-class travellers. It is for customers who make use of services such as one piece of free checked baggage and advance seat reservation.

Flex fares are for customers, such as business travellers,

who need to keep their travel plans as flexible as possible and who also wish to experience an extended product offering. The Flex fare includes advance seat reservation in the 'preferred' seating zone at the front of economy-class.

New destinations

SWISS has launched flights to 22 new destinations from its Zurich hub, including Bari and Brindisi, Italy; Thessaloniki, Greece; Izmir, Turkey; Malta; Santiago de Compostela and Bilbao, Spain; Porto, Portugal; Gothenburg, Sweden; Helsinki, Finland; Riga, Latvia; Ljubljana, Slovenia; Krakow, Poland; Sarajevo, Bosnia; Sofia, Bulgaria; and Zagreb, Croatia. ■

Fourways hotel receives refurb

THE Palazzo Hotel at Montecasino, Sandton, recently received a comprehensive refurbishment that included the transformation of all rooms as well as the addition of a new restaurant and function venue. The new function venue, Rosa, was built in the garden alongside the colonnade leading through to the Montecasino complex to meet demand for overflow breakfast and function space.

Global hotel group rebrands

PREFERRED Hotel Group has rebranded to Preferred Hotels & Resorts. Each property within the new brand portfolio has been aligned with one of five collections – Legend, LVX, Lifestyle, Connect, and Preferred Residences. Guests can browse and book stays at any of the 650 hotels, resorts, and luxury properties within the Preferred Hotels & Resorts portfolio via the new brand website. On the new website, guests can search for a hotel by collection or by other preferences such as hotel name, experience, location and price point.

Garden Route property gets a makeover

FANCOURT has completed a series of facility upgrades, including a makeover of the Club Lounge and Proshop and Members' Bar and Lounge for golf club members.

Leading off the main hotel reception area, the revamped Club Lounge has been turned into a welcoming meeting space for hotel guests, day visitors and golfers.

The Island Bar has been built in the shape of a horseshoe beneath a lowered ceiling, while the new built-in banquet seating creates private pockets for small groups.

Mozambican resort undergoes extensive refurb

&BEYOND's Mozambican island retreat, &Beyond Benguerra Island, has closed for a refurbishment. It will reopen on June 1.

Guest rooms will be reconfigured to ensure that the beds have views of the beach. The Dhow Bar will be restyled to function as an area where guests can enjoy meals on the beach throughout the day with the lodge's refurbished rim-flow swimming pool nearby. Both the lodge's casinhas and cabanas will be revamped. The lodge's boats, including its double full catamaran, the *Stiletto*, are also being refurbished and will be available for half- or full-day cruises.

Stellenbosch hotel undergoes refurb

PROTEA Hotel Stellenbosch is undergoing a refurbishment of its bedrooms. The deluxe rooms will now each have a corner couch that can be converted into two single beds. A larger television, extra plug points and a desk that doubles as a dining table for four people have also been added. There are larger cupboards in the deluxe rooms and high-spec connectivity allows guests to connect through any device to the 127cm TV. Upgrades will be finished by the end of May.

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Sandton braces for month-long shutdown

SANDTON, Johannesburg, will close certain roads for the month of October, making it a 'car-free' district to promote Transport Month and the EcoMobility World Festival and Exhibition.

Closed lanes will be used for public transport, walking, cycling and other forms of eco-mobility during October, said executive Mayor of the City of Johannesburg, **Cllr Parks Tau**. Alternative transport in and out of Sandton during the Festival would be provided, he added.

The City of Johannesburg said major changes to transport patterns were envisaged for Sandton in the long term and the festival would serve as a glimpse of a future where public transport took precedence and infrastructure was in place to encourage walking and cycling. "We want to show residents and visitors that an eco-mobile future is possible and that public

transport, walking and cycling can be accessible, safe, attractive and cool!" said Mayor Parks Tau.

Sandton has seen numbers of incoming commuters increase at 3,4% per annum – a number likely to increase at 3% per annum at the current rate. An estimated 85 797 vehicles travel in and out of the district every morning between 06h00 and 10h00 and 89 217 travel in and out during the 15h00-19h00 peak period.

By 2017, the district will roll out Rea Vaya Bus Rapid Transit lanes and services, cycle lanes, public transport lanes, wider sidewalks, park-and-ride facilities, bike share schemes, park-and-ride facilities for corporates as well as Metrobus restructuring and recapitalisation, in an effort to promote the use of public transport and to accommodate people entering the business hub. ■



Bidvest launches new brand

Bidvest Car Rental celebrated the launch of its new brand at a big event, held at the African Pride Hotel at Melrose Arch on March 26. Ceo, **Paulette McGhee**, thanked staff for chasing the clock to ensure the brand was launched timeously. The roll-out of new signage began at the end of February. She also thanked supporters for standing by and being patient. Pictured here, at the event, are (from left): **Sanchia Webster** (Travelport), **Dorcas Dlamini** (Protea Hotels) and **Alden Luttig** (Bidvest Car Rental). Photo: Darise Foster

Downturn forces Kenya hotel closure

HEMINGWAYS Watamu Hotel has decided to close from April 15 to November 30 due to a "serious downturn in tourism business to the Kenya coast," said **Alastair Addison**, ceo of Hemingways Holdings.

"The decision was not taken lightly, however we are taking the opportunity to

re-look at the business model that is Hemingways Watamu. During the closure, work will commence on the first phase of the apartment project and initially we intend to offer 18 luxury apartments for sale and subsequent rental to the market place," said Alastair.

The recently refurbished north wing of 26 luxury

bedrooms will reopen on December 1, operating as a boutique-style hotel. More details on the overall operations of the hotel will be revealed as the reopening period approaches.

The other Hemingways Collection properties in Nairobi and Ol Seki Mara are operating as normal. ■

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Amanda Lerena, Virgin Atlantic with **Lorenzo Lorenzini**, Delta Air Lines.



Julia Page, eTravel, with **Tammy Hunt**, eTravel, **Jackie Turnbull**, The Holiday Factory and **Garth Wolff**, eTravel.



Ana Jones, Car Hire Brokers with **Wouter Nel**, Air Mauritius.

Avril Leigh Shackleton, eTravel, with **Karen Botha**, TIC, **Simmy Micheli**, TIC, **Jackie Williams**, Tsogo Sun, and **Leanne Muir**, Tsogo Sun.



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Open for business!

The City Lodge Hotel Group hosted members of the travel trade at an official unveiling of City Lodge Waterfall City in Midrand last month. Waterfall City is a multi-use property development and is being developed around the R3,5bn regional Mall of Africa shopping centre situated within the 311ha Waterfall Business Estate. Pictured here (from left), **Emile van der Merwe** (City Lodge); **Mosina Ramogale** (Colgate-Palmolive); **Patrick Tate** (City Lodge); **Mary Reynolds** (SA Reynolds Travel Centre) and **Nanesh Parbhoo** (City Lodge) celebrate the newest addition to the City Lodge Group. Photo: Angus Macmillan

Clash of the carriers: bad news for pax?

DORINE REINSTEIN

GULF carriers have responded to US carriers' attempts to limit their operations to the States, saying protectionism would restrict competition and be bad news for customers.

But US carriers argue that Gulf carriers, which receive government subsidies, are creating an uncompetitive environment. Delta Air Lines, American Airlines Group, and United Airlines have lobbied the Obama administration to renegotiate the existing open-skies agreements with the UAE and Qatar.

The airlines released a contentious report, Restoring Open Skies, outlining that Etihad Airways, Emirates Airline and Qatar Airways have received US\$40bn (R494bn) in government subsidies, which are "fuelling a massive expansion in the Gulf carriers' fleets – and, in the case of Etihad and Qatar, their continued existence – and seriously distorting the commercial marketplace to

the detriment of US and third-country airlines".

Emirates president, **Sir Tim Clark**, has reacted to the White Paper, saying it is based on "wrong assumptions" and "leaps of logic". "Open skies between the USA and UAE have been hugely successful for US consumers, trade and the overall economy. There should be no reason for the US government to do a freeze or a U-turn just to protect the interests of a narrow few and their European JV partners, especially not when the restriction or denial of competitive choice on international routes will be to the detriment of consumer interest."

James Hogan, president and ceo of Etihad Airways, says open skies has been "a model of success" and to limit this would be to limit consumers' choices. "No US carrier flies into Abu Dhabi. There are very few US carriers operating to where we do in the Indian subcontinent, in SE Asia or in the wider Middle East."

Any restriction of competition

is bad for the consumer, says **Jim Weighell**, director of operations Southern Africa for the GBTA. He says, with this report, US carriers are attempting to set definitions of 'fair competition' based on their own criteria. "The likely effect of any restriction to the open skies policy would technically be a form of 're-regulation' favouring incumbent airlines." He says it would limit competition on the route, which is bad for customers.

Chris Zweigenthal, ceo of Aasa, says: "SAA operates two daily direct services to the US and there are many daily operations via the EU by SAA and its alliance partners. If there is huge demand, there are sufficient frequencies available to increase flights to the US and the EU by the non-Gulf carriers."

However, Jim says if the US carriers were successful and their subsidisation criteria were to be applied globally, it could be found that SAA would also be deemed to be receiving state subsidisation. ■

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Intimate venues

5 ways boutique hotels do intimate better

Boutique hotels are uniquely positioned to combine the efficiency of large hotels with the personalised service associated with smaller establishments and are well equipped to handle intimate conferences. Liesl Venter investigates.

1

The perfect fit

Emma Conradie, events administrator at Monte De Dios, says the first consideration when orchestrating a more intimate conference is the venue. She maintains that the size of the venues available at boutique establishments is a major

advantage when one is looking at creating a more intimate setting. These hotels, by their very nature, are smaller, with unique and intimate facilities, meaning organisers are not having to transform large ballrooms into smaller areas.

2

Exclusive and private

Emma says while budget continues to play a role in the decision-making for conference venues, there is also increased focus on value for money. "The exclusive use of a facility goes a long way when it comes to intimate conferencing and that can be achieved at a boutique hotel."

Mandy Pawley, marketing manager at Cabanga Conference Centre, says boutique hotels offer greater privacy, which can be a significant advantage when trying to create a more intimate atmosphere. "It makes a difference when you are not just one of 500 people across the venue making use of its facilities."

3

Personalised service

While most establishments, from large hotel chains to small independently owned lodgings, will claim personalised service, it is commonly accepted that what distinguishes a boutique hotel from larger establishments is the greater sense

of connection between guests and staff.

Says Emma: "The personalised service offered by boutique hotels encompasses real attention to detail, which can make a tangible difference when there are only a handful of people attending a conference."

5

Budget friendly

With companies remaining cost conscious, boutique hotels will become a far more viable option for event organisers, says Mandy. "Budgets are tighter and the trend is to host smaller conferences where only the people who really need to be there attend. The boutique hotel can cater very easily for a specific budget." According to Magel, establishments offering cost-effective packages are in demand. Effective service is about delivering the glitz and glam if need be but also the plain and simple, she says.

4

Tailor-made packages

Magel van de Venter from the Maropeng Conference Centre, says one of the major benefits of boutique hotels is their ability to tailor-make a package to suit the specific needs of any event co-ordinator. "We can take care of the small but important things and offer intimate

and personal care to enhance the overall experience." These hotels are ideally suited to create the out-of-the-ordinary experiences that smaller groups require, she says. Emma agrees, saying smaller hotels also offer more flexibility for the conference organiser.

Hot specials!

Bon Hotel Midrand (Midrand)

The Bon Hotel Midrand in Gauteng is offering a discounted fully inclusive conference package for R765 per person sharing or R1 290 single occupancy per night until April 30. The rate includes accommodation, breakfast, dinner, full-day conference package, parking, and WiFi.

full-day conference package at R395 per person for up to eight hours of conferencing, and a half-day conference package at R295 per person for up to four hours of conferencing. The special is available until the end of July. A proxima overhead projector and WiFi are provided, with meals and beverages dependent on the type of package chosen.

Zebra Country Lodge (Pretoria)

Zebra Country Lodge in Gauteng is offering a 24-hour conference package that is valid for arrivals until April 30. Single rates are R1 200 per person per night while the sharing rate is R880. The rate includes accommodation, three meals, two tea breaks, the use of the conference venue and standard equipment.

Simon's Town Quayside Hotel (Western Cape)

Simon's Town Quayside Hotel is offering overnight conferencing specials from R1 435 per person per night and R1 170 per person sharing per night. The special includes breakfast and dinner in a superior sea-facing room, a standard conference package with lunch, mid-morning and afternoon tea with snacks, 500MB Internet voucher per session per night, and complimentary use of the Protea breakaway room and data projector and PA system. Valid until October 31.

Lord's Signature Hotel (Vanderbijlpark)

Lord's Signature Hotel in Vanderbijlpark is offering a



Ivory Tree Game Lodge pool-side dinner. Photo: AHA

Langholm Lodge (Bathurst)

Langholm Lodge in the Eastern Cape is offering a 20% discount on all conference packages during April and May.

Ivory Tree Game Lodge (Pianenberg Game Reserve)

Ivory Tree Game Lodge is offering an all-inclusive overnight conference package

at R1 995 per person per night sharing, until July 31. This rate is subject to a minimum two-night stay.

Grande Roche (Cape Winelands)

Grande Roche Hotel in the Western Cape is offering a full-day conference special at R470 and half-day special at R420 until October 31. Overnight stays will

receive 15% off the advertised rate.

Stillpoint Country Manor (Johannesburg)

Stillpoint Country Manor in Johannesburg is offering a 24-hour conference special at R995 per person sharing and R1 310 per single until April 30. The offer includes complimentary post-conference canapés and cocktails.



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and peaceful nights rest. There is a dedicated check-in area in the hotel main reception. A business centre is provided for your convenience and all rooms feature free, high speed wireless internet access.

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Revamps to boost The Michelangelo

EXCITING times are ahead for The Michelangelo Hotel on Nelson Mandela Square as the property moves to meet the increase in demand for more intimate meeting spaces and positions itself as 'the place to meet' in Sandton.

The hotel's Il Ritrovo lounge, lower entrance lobby, smoking lounge and first-floor Intermezzo Lounge are all being refurbished. The aim is to position the property as the premier lounge, high tea and meeting place in Sandton, says ceo and chairman of the Legacy Group, **Bart Dorrestein**.

The hotel is also perfectly positioned on Nelson Mandela Square to benefit from the extensive renovations that are taking place in the precinct. "The Nelson Mandela Square revamp has been part of a hectic debate between all who feel passionate about the Square, with discussions taking place to strengthen its links to Nelson Mandela's heritage," Bart says.



The Michelangelo on Nelson Mandela Square.

A number of new retail outlets and restaurants will be introduced on a rejuvenated piazza area. "From the Michelangelo Hotel's point of view, we are in discussions to add external terraces off the Piccolo Mondo and Il Ritrovo," he says.

Work to the Square has already commenced and is expected to be complete towards the end of this year.

The Michelangelo Hotel offers conference facilities for up to 250 delegates. The

daily conference package rate is from R530 per delegate.

In terms of leisure travel, 80% of the Michelangelo Hotel's occupants are international visitors (20% of whom come from other African countries). However, the property has seen a good uptake in its weekend travel packages by local South African guests. The package includes spa treatments, breakfast and dinner, and a variety of special treats.



Nelson Mandela Square.

Book it!

The Michelangelo Hotel on Nelson Mandela Square is offering a weekend 'Indulge Package' that includes a night's stay at the five-star hotel for R1 480pps. The offer includes accommodation in a superior room, limited complimentary WiFi Internet, a romantic turndown, breakfast at Piccolo Mondo restaurant and a choice of spa treatments. The offer is valid until January 31, 2016. ■



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EASTERN EUROPE



Eastern Europe offers good upselling opportunities for agents. South Africans are drawn by the region's multifaceted culture, rich history and magnificent scenery. Max Marx reports.

Europe – with a twist

EASTERN Europe is a popular destination for South Africans, especially those who have explored Western Europe and are interested in new cultural, traditional, historical and architectural experiences.

Top-sellers are Croatia, Hungary and the Czech Republic, with Poland a new up-and-coming destination.

Theresa Szejwallo, Trafalgar md, says there has been an exponential increase in interest in Trafalgar's Eastern Europe trips in 2015, with people wanting to explore more unknown, less-visited destinations. "Prague and Budapest are hot favourites, especially for the more adventurous Trafalgar traveller," she says.

Croatia is the most popular Eastern European destination, says **Inge Dobihal**, owner of Austria Connection. She says most South Africans spend between seven and 14 nights in Croatia on island-hopping cruises, self-drive tours or combined cruise or coach tours.

"South Africans love island hopping off Croatia's coastline, visiting Split with a day trip to the nearby Krka National Park, and visiting Dubrovnik with its lovely beaches," says

Pentravel Tyger Valley's **Landi Groenewald**. She adds that another top seller is coach tours starting in Vienna, travelling through Salzburg to Budapest, with the Czech Republic as an add-on.

Pentravel Tyger Valley's **Marelize van Zyl**, says her clients mainly visit Croatia on big cruise lines but that she also sells island-hopping and self-drive packages. "Sometimes my clients combine Vienna with either Croatia or Slovenia, with the latter receiving a lot of interest in recent months."

Rather than selling a cruise to Croatia, the country is better explored on a self-drive trip starting in Zagreb, driving to the lakes region and then to the coast for a few nights in Split and Dubrovnik, she says. "Or, if clients only want to visit the coast, I would fly them into Split or Dubrovnik and they could island hop for seven nights." Marelize recommends a minimum of 10 days to explore Croatia or two weeks if clients want to island hop as well.

Excursion add-ons

Inge says when South Africans visit the Czech Republic and Hungary, they generally spend only a few nights in Prague or Budapest. "This is a great

pity because both countries offer so much more, which can easily be experienced by self-drive, train or coach tour." She suggests that travellers spend a few more days in Prague or Budapest going on day excursions, which is a great up-selling opportunity for agents. For example, in Prague agents could include a Grand City Tour or a sightseeing river cruise; an excursion to the gothic Karlstejn Castle outside Prague, visiting Kutna Hora (a town that was home to several kings and offers a journey into the Middle Ages); or a tour of Jewish Prague and a visit to Terezin concentration camp.

In Budapest there are hop-on, hop-off city tours; a sightseeing Danube cruise; or an excursion to Szentendre (a baroque town and shopper's paradise for Hungarian arts, crafts and porcelain). The Puszta Tour includes a guided walk in Keckemet, a performance by the famous horsemen in Lajosmize, a horse-drawn carriage ride through the Puszta, and a traditional Hungarian meal with live gypsy music.

Poland is another destination that's growing in popularity.

Inge points out that while Jewish interest used to be the main reason for visiting



Photo: Prague Tourism

Clients can visit Dubrovnik then spend a few days island hopping along the Croatian coast. Photo: Austria Connection

the country, travellers are beginning to realise that Poland has more to offer than Warsaw and Krakow. "They're showing interest in places like Gdansk on the Baltic Sea, the historic city Torun, the mountain village of Zakopane – which boasts the best ski resort in Poland – and bustling Wroclaw."

For an off-the-beaten-

track Eastern European destination, Inge recommends Romania. "Historically highly interesting, not only because of Dracula, it's a country of diverse culture and beautiful scenery. The ideal way to tour the country is with a private driver or guide, which is not as expensive as one might think."

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EASTERN EUROPE



Gdansk, on the Baltic coast – Poland is an up-and-coming destination for South African travellers. Photo: Mariusz Kluzniak

Traveller tips...

EASTERN Europe is very different from Central Europe, so agents should advise clients to travel with an open mind, says **Theresa Szejwallo**.

"Culturally, these countries are not as cosmopolitan as, for example, Italy and France, and there may be a language barrier as not everyone speaks English." It makes things easier to have a travel guide who speaks both English and the local language, she says.

Landi Groenwald agrees, and recommends organised tours in places such as Prague and Budapest because of the language barrier. "The benefit of taking a tour is that the tour operator arranges access to attractions and there's no queuing, all

transport needs are taken care of, there are a lot more inclusions and it's more cost effective."

She also advises agents to carefully check visa requirements for Eastern European countries.

"Some visas can only be applied for in person in Johannesburg, which can present a challenge for those living outside Gauteng. In some instances, clients visiting two countries in a region may have to apply for two different visas, so they need to be applied for timeously."

Marelize van Zyl says agents should be aware that in some places in Croatia, only the local currency, the kuna, is accepted and not euros.

Inge Dobihal advises travellers in Prague to be aware of taxi drivers who invariably like to take the long route to the destination. "Travellers should have some basic knowledge of how far their destination is and ask the driver upfront what the approximate fare would be."

In Poland, says Inge, there are often many unlicensed taxis without meters lined up in front of hotels and airports. "Travellers should never take just any taxi outside a hotel. They should always ask the hotel reception to order a taxi for them, and at the airport look for the official taxi rank."

"Lastly, in Romania, 'prost' means 'dumb head', not 'cheers' as it does in German!" says Inge.

Book it!

• Trafalgar's 'Highlights of Bohemia' is a 15-day Cost Saver guided holiday priced from R24 000pps, which travels through Germany, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Austria and the Czech Republic. Trafalgar's 'Prague, Vienna & Budapest' is a 10-day At Leisure trip, priced at R19 100pps. With later starts and longer stays of three nights in each of the main cities, this guided holiday explores Eastern Europe at a slower pace.

Upselling tip: Agents should point out to clients that Trafalgar's Eastern European Cost Saver tours are 30% cheaper than going it alone, and then encourage the client to invest the money they have saved on an Insider Experience – a more intense exploration of the destination that includes Be My Guest dining, local specialists, authentic accommodation and cultural insights.



Karlstejn Castle is one of the most famous and frequently visited castles in the Czech Republic.

Photo: Brad Hammonds

- Austria Connection's six-day 'Classic Romania' tour is an individual tour in a private car with a driver guide, which takes in Bucharest, Cozia, Sibiel, Sibiu, Biertan, Sighisoara, Brasov, Bran and Sinaia. Highlights include a sightseeing tour of Bucharest, a visit to the Cozia and Sinaia monasteries, dinner in a local farmhouse in Sibiel, and visits to the Bruckenthal Art Gallery Museum, the medieval town of Sighisoara, and the Black Church in Braslov. The package, from R14 818pps, includes air-conditioned car, an English-speaking guide, mostly four-star accommodation, five dinners, all entrance fees to tourist sites and portorage.
- Austria Connection's four-day 'Dracula – The True Story' tour takes in Bucharest, Curtea de Arges, Cozia, Sibiu, Medias, Biertan, Sighisoara, Brazov, Bran and Sinaia. Highlights include visits to various monasteries, churches, and historic buildings where Dracula or his ancestors lived and died. The package starts from R7 961pps and includes private car and guide, three- and four-star accommodation with breakfast, a farmhouse dinner and entrance fees to tourist sites. ■

Book it!

United Europe is offering F1 hotel accommodation and ticket packages. Packages for the Austrian F1 are R9 930pps, while packages for the Hungarian F1 are R7 790pps. Both offers include three nights at a three-star hotel and general admission tickets, as well as breakfast and hotel/track return transfers on Saturday and Sunday. The Austrian package is valid from June 19-22 and the Hungarian package is valid from July 24-27.



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Appointments

■ **Sastri Ramiah** has been appointed new gm of the two Gold Reef City Hotels, after previously serving as gm of the Garden Court Eastgate. **Andrew Richard** has been appointed new deputy gm of Tsogo Sun's Southern Sun Montecasino Hotel and **Goitsi Tzolanku** is the new sales manager for Tsogo Sun Properties in the Mpumalanga region. **Wayne Wilson**, former gm at Gold Reef City, is the new gm for Sabi River Sun Resort, while **Roger Petyt**, former gm Sabi River Sun, is the new gm of the Drakensberg Sun Resort. **Yashvir Jithoo** (pictured) joins the Riverside Sun Resort as new gm after working as the food and beverage manager at Southern Sun OR Tambo.



■ **Refilwe Telela** has joined the CSIR International Convention Centre as a banqueting supervisor. She has over nine years' experience in the hospitality industry.



■ **Andy Conn** has been appointed Africa Albida Tourism's new group operations manager and will oversee the running of the company's portfolio of properties, which includes its flagship Victoria Falls Safari Lodge. He will take up the position from this month, after returning to Zimbabwe from South Africa, where he was gm at Mount Grace Country House and Spa, near Johannesburg. Previously he was general manager at Victoria Falls Safari Lodge in 1998, remaining with the company until 2006.



It's a man's world

Gentlemen in Travel (GIT) hosted its first lunch of 2015 at The Local Grill steakhouse in Parktown North last month. A new committee was announced with a new chairman, **Conrad Mortimer** (Tourvest Travel Services). Pictured here, at the event, are from back, left: **Jose Cruz** (HRG Rennies Travel), **Marco Cristofoli** (HWT), and **Jörg Zwinscher** (Protea Hotel Balalaika). Front, left: **Valen Govender** (BLS International) and **Robert Jasper** (Tsogo Sun). Photo: Natasha Schmidt



For CANSA



Club Travel partnered with Holiday Inn Express to host one of the most popular fundraising events on the South African calendar, the CANSA Shavathon, at its head office in Cape Town on March 6. Holiday Inn Express provided the equipment and staff to spray and shave the Club Travel employees, and donated R50 to CANSA for each staff member who had their head shaved or sprayed. Pictured here are the Club Travel employees getting their shave on!



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Travel and Meetings Buyer, www.tamb.co.za, has officially launched!

Exciting changes!

ETNW's new daily, interactive sister website for travel and meetings buyers, www.tamb.co.za, has officially launched!

The new platform combines the best of *Meet Digi-Mag's* (a publication for meetings managers) in-depth monthly content with the up-to-the-minute news updates from the *Travel Buyer + Meet* daily newsletter in a highly interactive and cutting-edge format.

News will be broken throughout the day and will be smartphone enabled.

The new format has been inspired by the success of

online publications like the *Daily Maverick*, *Huffington Post* and *Newsweek*.

"We have learnt a lot about interactive publishing through the monthly *Digi-Mag*," says group publisher, **Dave Marsh**. Since the launch of the *Digi-Mag* just over a year and a half ago, the publication has grown considerably. "We did a similar upgrade to our inbound tourism daily in February and the number of unique users to the site doubled from the previous year to over 20 000. One-third are now using smartphones or tablets to get their daily update." ■



Cultural conferencing

African Hotels and Adventures's Shakaland in KwaZulu Natal is offering a half-day conference special at R250 per person or a day conference special at R300 per person, including Zulu dance entertainment. Accommodation rates will be R790pps and R1 000 single. The offer is valid until June 30. From left: **Carmen Greaver** (AHA sales co-ordinator); **James Robb** (AHA sales executive); and **Ruzandri Stoltz** (AHA marketing manager), prepare for a cultural experience. Photo: Shannon Van Yil.

Acsa involved in price-fixing scandal

DORINE REINSTEIN

ACSA has agreed to pay a R2m fine following a recent finding of the Competition Tribunal that the company had been involved in price collusion with Bombela Concession Company over the charges for car-rental parking bays at OR Tambo International.

The Competition Commission began its investigation in July 2012 and found that a former Acsa employee shared sensitive information about

car-rental parking bays with the Bombela Concession Company. According to a statement released by Acsa, the employee, who left the company in 2012, did not have authority or permission to discuss such information with Bombela.

Acsa further states that, at the time of the discussion, the company had already entered into a five-year agreement with the various car-rental companies, which would have made it impossible to readjust prices. The statement

reads: "Airports Company South Africa derived no financial and/or undue benefit from the actions of the former employee."

Acsa has committed to rolling out an internal awareness campaign around Competition law across its network of airports during the course of the year. Ceo, **Bongani Maseko**, says he has made a commitment that the company will take all the relevant actions to ensure that the employees act responsibly and with integrity. ■

St Helena is open for business

COMAIR has been appointed the official provider of air services to St Helena, with the Island's first airport opening in 2016. St Helena is a tropical island of volcanic origin in the South Atlantic Ocean.

Comair will operate a scheduled service between Johannesburg (OR Tambo International Airport) and St Helena Airport. The weekly Saturday service will be operated using a new B737-800 aircraft in a two-class configuration (business and

economy class). The flight time from Johannesburg to St Helena is approximately five hours.

Bookings will open for sale later this year, subject to the conclusion of regulatory approvals.

Mantis has been selected as the preferred operator to manage the 32-room hotel to be created at 123 Main Street out of three historic buildings in St Helena's capital, Jamestown. Construction is due to start in July and the hotel is

expected to open during the first half of 2016.

"For a new and developing international tourism and investment destination, quality and trust are paramount. That St Helena is entering into partnership with two of the most respected and trusted brands in their respective fields – Comair and Mantis – sends out a very strong message. St Helena is open for business," says Enterprise St Helena's chief, **Niall O'Keeffe**. ■