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TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

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New dawn for SAA trade deals

DORINE REINSTEIN

SAA HAS been given the nod from the Competition Commission, allowing the airline to review its override agreements with the travel trade.

TNW first reported on SAA's intentions to restructure its override commission agreements with retail travel agencies earlier this year (TNW March 24). Although agents were unclear about exactly what changes would be made, it was believed that the airline would move from a volume-based to growth incentive model.

SAA's acting ceo, **Nico Bezuidenhout**, announced at Indaba earlier this month that the airline would develop "a new distribution strategy", which will see SAA "closely embrace and leverage travel agency and TMC partners".

The initiative would focus on revenue gain, which would include addressing several commercial areas. "To optimally cast SAA's revenue-net and claw back past inefficiencies, a cohesive approach is required, which will see SAA's internal efforts supported by aligned marketing and communication activities."

Sylvain Bosc, SAA's chief commercial officer, told TNW: "Previously, SAA was seen as a dominant player in the market so the competition authorities tried to make sure that the incentive contracts that SAA put in place would not bar potential airline competitors from being able to compete with SAA. This was tying the hands of SAA with regards to its relationships with the trade."

According to Sylvain, SAA has now extensively engaged with the competition authorities to explain the new market reality, in which SAA is no longer as dominant. "There has been a tremendous influx of capacity in the domestic, regional and intercontinental markets. So, today, it's a very different game that SAA plays. We need to revise the way we can engage with the trade in order to boost our efficiency against new dominant carriers in the market," he said.

The new strategy re-introduces the notion of "pay-for-performance" in trade incentive contracts, he says. "We've now been given the tools to compete more efficiently against other airlines that are extremely active in the SA market."

Sylvain adds that negotiations with the trade have, so far, been very positive. "It's always very constructive to speak to our partners. Every one of them has different views on how we can improve the contracting exercise that we are rolling out. The trade in SA is very supportive of SAA because they know it's extremely important for the SA market, to have a strong and commercially viable SAA."

"SAA is definitely on the right track with its new strategy. They have restructured their agreements to reward TMCs and travel agents based on growth and on support and are rewarding those that have been supporting the airline consistently. That is definitely the way to go," says **Dinesh Naidoo**, Serendipity Tours group operations director. ■

Bring on the weekend!



Cape Town Tourism and Thompsons Holidays have teamed up to promote weekend travel to the Mother City in their new campaign titled: "What type of weekend person are you?" Thompsons is offering two night packages exiting Johannesburg or Durban from R3 102 pp (based on four people sharing). The package includes flights, car rental and accommodation. Pictured here (from left) are: Thompsons Holidays travel advisors **Tiisetso Lehau, Irene Jamieson, Octavia Mlambo and Tyron Watson**. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Pretoria gets airport hub

CARINA BORRALHO

WONDERBOOM Airport, in the north of Pretoria, has opened up for commercial flights, giving travellers direct access from the Tshwane municipal area to other larger urban centres, starting with Cape Town.

Tshwane Mayor **Kgosientso Ramokgopa** announced the news during a State of the Capital address. He said scheduled passenger flights would be available from Wonderboom

Airport to Cape Town International Airport from August this year, operated by SAA and SA Airlink. "We are proud to welcome SAA and Airlink in this regard, who have entered into a commercial joint venture for the purpose of providing new scheduled air services at the airport." Three daily commercial flights from Wonderboom to Cape Town are planned. Other cities would follow, Ramokgopa said.

The Wonderboom Airport is

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TGCSA sets out to modernise grading

DORINE REINSTEIN

THE Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA) is working on a new technology system that will integrate a variety of online travel reviews with the traditional grading system. The project will launch in the next couple of months.

The new technology will enable the TGCSA to search the web and access all online travel reviews of graded establishments from various travel review platforms, including TripAdvisor and various social media. The reviews will then be integrated into the TGCSA's grading system and provide it with a comprehensive view of establishments' quality experience offerings.

Thekiso Rakoljane, TGCSA marketing and communications manager, told TNW: "While

the TGCSA's grading criteria and minimum requirements of entry evaluates the tangible offerings of an establishment, the online reviews will provide access to their service related offerings."

A lot has been said and written about the irrelevance of grading in a world that is all about online user reviews and instant gratification, **Graham Wood**, chairperson of the TGCSA, said at Indaba, which took place in Durban this month. "The existing grading system is the objective assessment of whether establishments are providing the right quality experience. Nowhere does the grading system integrate what our guests actually say about the experience."

In "real life" a five-star graded hotel may well offer a substandard experience from a service delivery perspective. Or

a three-star graded hotel could be delivering a five-star service experience, he said. "The experience is also relevant to the quality the establishment delivers. That is why for the next 12 months, we'll run a pilot that will look at how we are going to integrate the opportunity of online consumer reviews with our physical objective grading system."

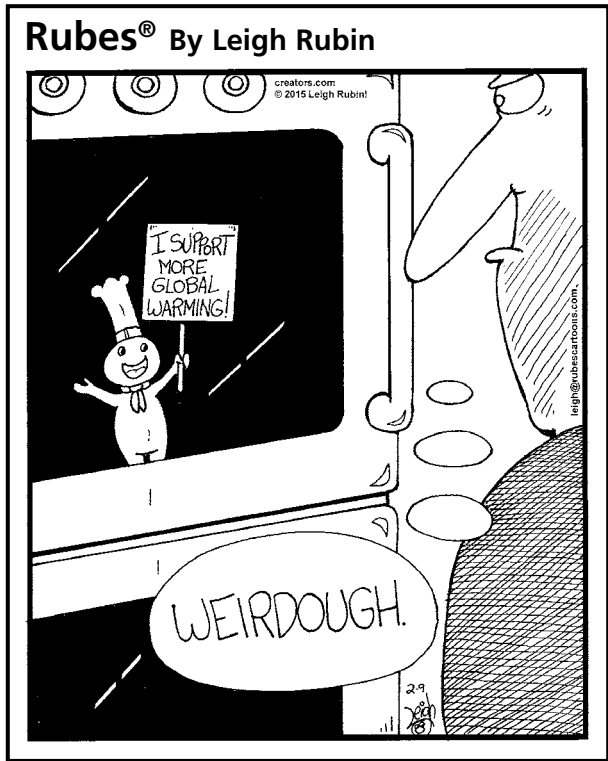
Minister of Tourism **Derek Hanekom** added: "The value of a grading system is self-evident. We're dealing with a very competitive environment, so quality assurance and service excellence, reliability, the integrity of a quality assurance system, are critically important. Twenty years ago, [travellers] would go back home and talk to their friends and family about [their experience]. Now it's communicated instantly to the whole world." ■

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Pretoria gets airport hub

From page 1
convenient in terms of location for residents, as well as neighbouring provinces such as Limpopo, Northwest and even Mpumalanga. "There is a strong link between Cape

Town and Tshwane, especially from a government office relations point of view," he said. "Wonderboom will also contribute to creating more capacity for OR Tambo to concentrate on the movement

of larger aircraft," says Ramokgopa.

Airlink and SAA will release a joint statement with further details regarding scheduled flights in the coming weeks, TNW was told. ■

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Cemair – more flights, easy check-in

CEMAIR will introduce additional flights between OR Tambo International and Margate on June 22, operating a same-day service – an early flight out to Johannesburg and returning to Margate in the early evening. Cemair customers can now also check-in online, via the airline's website, 48 hours before their flight. Passengers can pre-select their seats and print their boarding passes.

If passengers have no luggage to check-in, they can proceed straight to the boarding gate. The service is available for all airports, with the exception of Sishen Airport. For online check-in of GDS bookings, a unique ticket reference number must be obtained by calling the FlyCemair call centre. The carrier has also increased capacity from a 19-seater to the Dash 8, a 37-seater aircraft. ■

Amadeus launches new ship

THE newest arrival on the European river cruising scene, Amadeus' *Silver II*, launched at the end of April, with its "baptism" conducted by the youngest daughter of the Lueftner family, which owns the shipping line. The vessel is already operating itineraries on European waterways for the current season, and is fully booked for 2015. Her 2016 season will see her make over

30 departures on six different routes, on the Rhine, the Main, the Danube and the waterways of Belgium and Holland. *Silver II* is 135m long, with 72 16-17sqm cabins, mostly with French balconies and luxurious bathrooms, plus 12 Amadeus suites. She carries 168 pax. Lueftner Cruises is represented by Austria Connection in the South African market. ■

Leisure bookings keep car rental afloat

DESPITE the weak economy, car rental has demonstrated growth in the leisure space, according to Avis Budget Southern Africa executive of sales, **Lance Smith**. "In the current economic climate, the car rental industry in South Africa remains under pressure," he says. "Last year, there was no growth in the overall fleet size and number of rental days, however, local and international leisure has bucked this trend." Of the four main segments in the car rental market – namely the corporate/government, insurance replacement, foreign inbound, and

leisure markets – only the latter two have shown growth. "The largest segment, corporate/government, is down 5,5% year-on-year, which reflects the weak economy, while the insurance replacement market is down 12,6% due to 2014's hail storms in Gauteng," Lance says. "Yet foreign and domestic leisure continues to provide an air of positivity with every province experiencing growth in this segment." Avis Budget figures indicate that local and international leisure has grown at 9,5% and 10,8% respectively. ■

The Capital enters the Cape

THE Capital Hotel Group will open The Capital Mirage in De Waterkant, Cape Town later this year. It will mark the first The Capital hotel outside of Gauteng. The group currently owns six properties across Sandton. The property will feature 65 hotel rooms and apartments comprising retail, residential and hotel facilities,

a Sky Bar and pool on the roof, multiple restaurants, a gym and a spa. Exclusive services include in-room dining; a concierge service; uncapped, complimentary WiFi; full-bouquet satellite TV; complimentary parking; and shuttles to the V&A Waterfront and Cape Town International Convention Centre. ■

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Minor continues expansion in Africa

MINOR Hotel Group continues its aggressive expansion throughout Africa with the addition of six Kenyan camps to its portfolio.

This follows the group's acquisition of Cheli & Peacock Group of Companies by the Elewana Collection. The group now has a portfolio of 25 properties in seven countries across three of its hotel brands – Anantara, AVANI and the Elewana Collection.

In late 2013, Minor announced its partnership with Rani Resorts. The two companies formed a

joint venture company for five of Rani's Mozambican resorts, which have since been rebranded. In August last year it was announced that Minor would take

ownership of eight of Sun International's hotels in Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Swaziland and Zambia, to the cost of R679,5m.

The acquisition of the six Cheli & Peacock properties – namely Elsa's Kopje, Elephant Pepper Camp, Joy's Camp, Totillis Camp, Kitich Camp and Lewa Safari Camp – will see the properties merge under the banner of the Elewana Collection. Cheli

& Peacock Safaris tour operator will continue to act independently of the Elewana Collection.

Stefano Cheli, ceo of Cheli & Peacock Safaris, said: "This merger will allow us to take our combined experience and really focus on the intricacies that go towards guaranteeing guests an outstanding safari experience in a wider region of East Africa."

MHG also revealed that it will add a fourth brand to its portfolio later this year, when Essque Zalu Zanzibar, which is currently managed by MHG, is rebranded to Per AQUUM. ■

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Club Travel takes top spot

HILKA BIRNS

THE Club Travel Group in March 2015 controlled an overall spend of R2,4bn, with its market share having increased to 9%, placing it among the top five consortia in South Africa.

This was the word from financial director, **Gary Mulder**, at Club Travel's 2015 conference in Cape Town on May 16.

Returns to its preferred partners tripled from R11,5m in 2011 to R33,3m in 2015, he said, adding that Club Travel's sales were up by 10% for the first quarter of 2015, while the industry as a whole was experiencing negative growth.

Franchise director, **Jo Fraser**, added that Club Travel grew from 20 franchisees in 2005 to 320 franchisees in 2015, whose combined air turnover over the same period grew from R127m to R1,4bn.

The Club Group is in a strong position having sold

R1,8bn worth of airline tickets last year, says md **Wally Gaynor**. "I have never been more excited about Club Travel's place in this industry and where we are going." He said the company had been adept at reinventing its business model over the years, which had ensured its survival.

"We have a lot of exciting new projects on the go over the next few months, [including] new partnerships and new technology."

Wally said Club Travel was consolidating its preferred partners and channelling its spend to those who supported the company. He told delegates to avoid those who didn't treat them well.

"The airline that sent you an ADM for R60 000 on a R6 000 ticket, where they have lost no revenue, you have to avoid them," he said.

Wally also called on the industry to clean up its act. "The travel industry in South Africa is not in a great space.

It is not growing and that makes for ugly competition. We see it particularly in the corporate market, where there is unethical, unprofessional and fraudulent behaviour."

The industry also needs to "wake up" and act against unfair competition from global online travel agencies targeting South Africa, Wally said. "We are not afraid of competition, but when the competition is unfair, then I have a problem.

"Just one example: on the online stage there is a company called Tripsta, with a .co.za website and a Cape Town number on their website. If you phone them, the phone is answered in Eastern Europe, where they are based. I have no problem with that but when they get better availability than we have in this market, even on our national carrier, then I have a problem. They are taking money and jobs away from the South African industry." ■



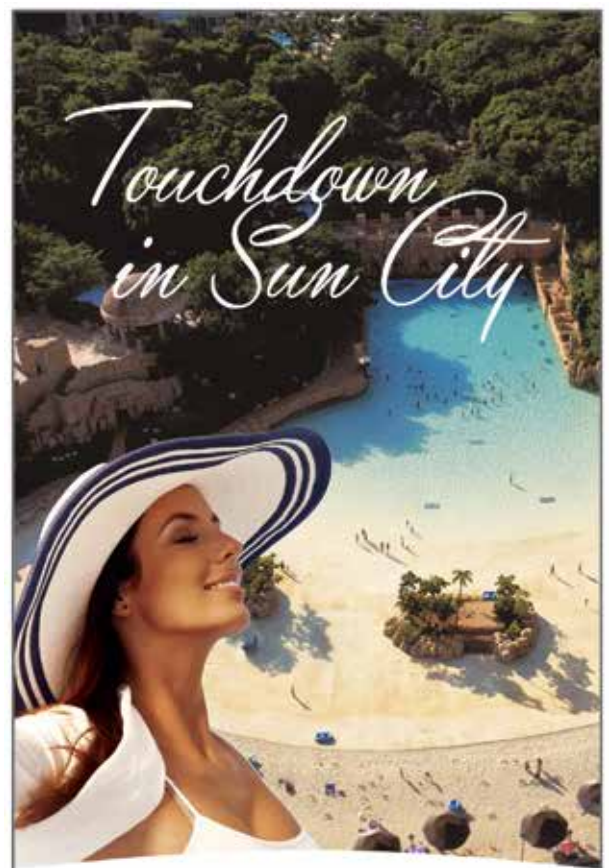
▲ From left: Heidi Niemand (One2Travel, Malmesbury) with Jo Fraser (Club Travel franchise director) and Wally Gaynor (Club Travel founder and md).



▲ Natalie de Lange of Lux Resorts & Hotels (left) and Khashiefah de Kock of Club Travel Cape Town head office.

◀ What Sweetie Pies! Lina da Costa and Rayno Daniels of Bidvest Car Rental.

Photos: Hilka Birns



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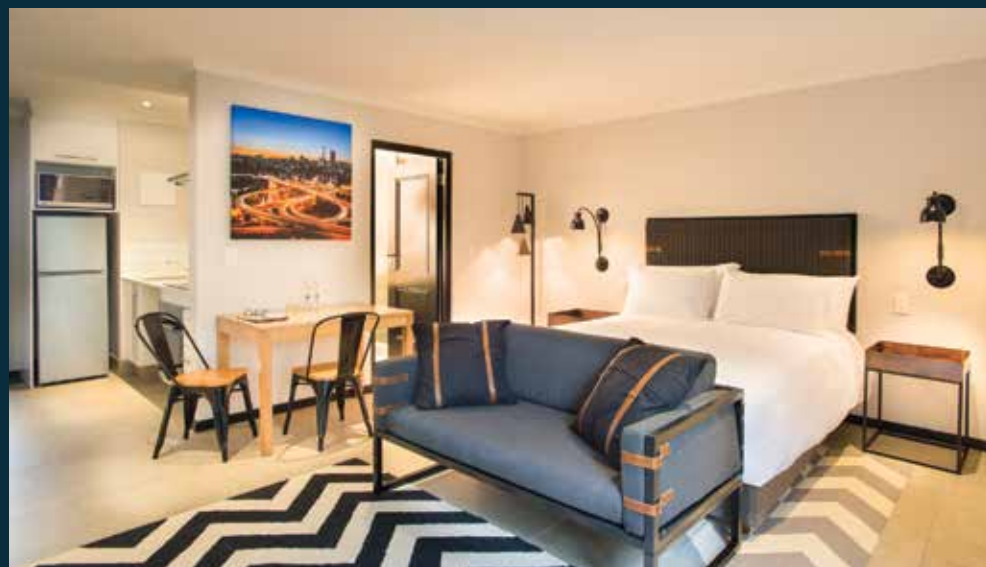
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Demand for out-of-town venues is on the rise. Liesl Venter speaks to industry experts to find out more about this trend.

Escape to the countryside

CONFERENCING in the countryside is the latest 'in' thing.

There is a lot of movement towards places that are "unplugged" from technology, says **Adriaan Liebetrau**, ceo of the South African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI). "There are big investments being made in countryside venues to beef up their conferencing and other facilities, indicating that there is a definite trend towards using these venues," he says.

More conferences are focused on achieving a deeper level of engagement, so the trend of using venues out of town makes sense, Adriaan says. "The mere fact that these venues are not in the heart of the city ensures that delegates are in a different frame of mind and the conference immediately starts off on a different footing. The move towards conferencing in the countryside is therefore not surprising at all."

The Drakensberg and Cape Winelands have, in particular experienced a boom. "From a pure investment perspective there is significant activity. Venues and facilities are

being developed and upgraded at a rapid pace and it is undoubtedly a reflection of the interest, enquiries and business they are getting, especially for conferences and events," he says.

Anton Meiring, gm of the African Pride Mount Grace Country House and Spa in Magaliesburg, says countryside conferencing in Gauteng has also grown over the past few months. "We have seen a good improvement in the market place year-on-year. There is definitely an increase in demand – more companies are contacting us for availability," he says.

The increase in demand for conferences outside the city is, in part, due to more conferences actively incorporating fun elements into their events. "Companies are making the extra time in their meetings schedule to incorporate elements such as yoga sessions in the mornings or outdoor teambuilding activities, to encourage bonding among their delegates and to set the stage for a relaxed environment. This in turn stimulates better participation from their

delegates," says Anton.

However, the nature of demand has changed in respect to the size of conferencing groups, says **Wayne Siepman**, gm of the African Pride Arabella Hotel and Spa near Hermanus in the Western Cape. "We have seen a decrease in large events that would traditionally book out the entire hotel – 200 delegates and above. These have been replaced by smaller groups ranging in size from 30 to 60 delegates."

He says the decrease in demand for large groups can be attributed to the fact that transportation costs have increased significantly. "There is a perception that countryside venues are difficult to access. Traditionally large groups comprise corporates travelling in from around the country. Airfares are up, and the cost of hiring a coach has increased."

Keeping it close

There is the perception that countryside venues are far out and difficult to reach. "This is, however, not the reality and there are many venues that fit the description of being 'in



Anton Meiring

the countryside' but which are also very close to the big city centres," says Adriaan.

Countryside properties need to focus on showing the value of conferencing outside of an urban environment, says Wayne, which significantly outweighs the travel time and logistics of getting there.

However, conferencing outside the city is not without challenges, such as the difficulty of making last-minute adjustments to outdoor activities scheduled during an event. The weather can be somewhat temperamental

and, on occasion, days need to be exchanged to work around this, or last-minute options need to be put into play to make the whole event a success.

One also has to remain cognisant of the supply chain in outlying areas and deliveries, which are made less frequently, says Adriaan. "This might require the organiser to take special items with them as they won't readily be found in the countryside."

On the upside, countryside conferencing undoubtedly offers a more focused event with fewer distractions and less chance of losing delegates along the way, says Wayne. "In a city you always have a chance of losing delegates to bars, restaurants and shopping centres, whereas in the country there are none of these temptations. You have a better chance of achieving the goals of the event. Country conferencing also offers you more privacy and exclusivity, as there is less foot traffic in and out of the hotel due the isolated nature of most venues."

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How cost-effective is countryside conferencing?

Will taking your conference to the countryside provide you with a greater return on investment? Liesl Venter reports.

COUNTRYSIDE venues are often perceived as a more cost-effective option for meeting planners because of the dynamic that exists between location and demand. But after all the pros and cons have been weighed up, does countryside conferencing really offer a greater return on investment?

In the current economy, companies are looking for value – a venue that offers not only business facilities but a fun element or team building experience too, says **Sean Granger**, gm of Granny Mouse Country House & Spa. The best way to learn is to throw some fun and team spirit into the mix, he says.

If you take this into account then, yes, he says, there is definitely a greater return on the investment. “Better results are gained when there are a variety of elements at play and not just an expectation that delegates sit in a conference room and listen to speakers.”

Adriaan Liebetrau, ceo of the South African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI) agrees it is not necessarily a rand and cents return on investment. Being out of the city has some very real benefits. “Is one seeing a greater return on investment in the traditional sense of the word by conferencing in the countryside? Not necessarily, but that does not mean there is not a



Lush gardens set the tone for relaxed conferencing.

Photo: Granny Mouse Country House & Spa

return – and a big one at that.”

Now, more than ever, there is a real challenge for meeting planners to get more creative and deliver a conference that adds value and ensures real return on investment, Adriaan says. “The days of tea and coffee in the

foyer of a hall somewhere in the city that is close to work are long gone. Now it is about being creative, thinking out of the box and delivering something out of the ordinary. Countryside venues are often able to facilitate this more easily due to their location or niche offering.”

Greater engagement

There has been a move toward the countryside, says professional conference organiser, **Carla Rossouw**. “When looking at business placed during the previous tax year, country conferencing remains at just over 50%. Taking into account that most countryside venues are limited in terms of the number of rooms they offer and the size of their conference facilities, this is quite impressive.” She says many of her city clients have always preferred the countryside for conferencing.

There are many benefits, says **Sean Granger** of Granny Mouse Country House & Spa. “The rush is taken out of the task. City centre



Carla Rossouw

hassles are gone and there is nothing but fresh air, rejuvenation and a sense

of freedom. It also allows delegates to get out of their comfort zones and push for better results, with clearer thinking and vision thanks to the surrounds of wide-open spaces.”

There is no doubt that the level of engagement is far greater in the countryside, says **Adriaan Liebetrau** of the SA Association for the Conferencing Industry. “It is about giving people experiences, about their walking away with a sense of having engaged far more. That is the real return on investment and that is far more easily achieved in the countryside due to the benefits of the location of these venues.”

Pushing the boundaries

“Generally speaking, time is money,” says **Sean Granger** of the Granny Mouse Country House & Spa. “Companies push for the best and fastest results, not always thinking of what creates the ultimate outcome. The time it may take to travel to a countryside destination might be seen as a challenge but the return on this is far greater due to what is achieved, thanks to a change of scenery and being out of the city.”

Adriaan Liebetrau, ceo of the South African Association for the Conference Industry says often decisions are made based simply on what is familiar. “We sometimes choose the city because that is all we know and we don’t want to take a



Adriaan Liebetrau

chance. No one wants to pull off a conference where they lose it all, but at the same time we have to push the boundaries now more than ever to deliver products where there is a return on the investment – in other words, delegates walking away satisfied and wanting to return for more.” ■

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Elephant polo in India. Photo: Roderick Eime

India

Business travel to India is booming, with travellers seeking to extend their stays and experience more of what incredible India has to offer. Lisa Witepski reports.

Mixing business with leisure

THE introduction of South Africa into the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) community has resulted in a steady stream of business tourism between South Africa and India.

The meetings, incentives, conferencing and events industry is growing with New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Kolkata attracting a large number of international conferences and events, says Tourism India Management Enterprises (TIME) representative **Ravi Shaw**. He adds that India's status as the IT capital of the world has drawn significant numbers of travellers to conventions in Pune, Bangalore and Chennai.

More business travellers are displaying interest in adding a leisure component to their trip. Shopping is a major draw card, says Serendipity Tours

group operations director **Dinesh Naidoo**, especially for travellers planning traditional events such as weddings. The choices of traditional attire in India are superior to what's available in South Africa, he says, not to mention cheaper.

Medical tourism is another fast-growing niche, with medical care of quality on par with South Africa's private sector offered at a fraction of the price, says Dinish.

There's plenty to entertain adventure lovers too, Ravi says, with activities ranging from river rafting to trekking and paragliding, while the sports tourism sector is buoyed by golf and less conventional offerings like elephant polo, a form of polo played on the back of an elephant. The Twenty20 cricket Indian Premier League (IPL) has also helped raise the country's profile.

A number of hotels in India

have launched promotions centred on cuisine and cooking lessons, and this has done much to attract travellers with a keen interest in food, says **Sailesh Parbhu**, md of Nexus Travel.

Spiritual tourism is also very popular, says Ravi, not only because of the prevalence of magnificent temples but because of tourist sites significant to religions such as Buddhism.

India is a vast and varied country, with each city offering a unique experience, says **Alet Steyn**, business development manager of Wendy Wu Tours. One of the best experiences for a first-time visitor is to explore the Golden Triangle of Delhi, Agra and Jaipur, she says. "Delhi is a fast-paced metropolis where Old Delhi – filled with ancient monuments, fascinating museums and bustling food markets – meets New Delhi,



Ravi Shaw

with its modern museums, world class hotels and stylish restaurants. Agra, meanwhile, is home to the Taj Mahal, the monument built by the Emperor Shah Jahan for his wife, Mumtaz Mahal. Finally, Jaipur is the capital and largest city in Rajasthan and will amaze visitors with ornate palaces, forts and museums."

For those looking for an off-the-beaten track experience, Dinesh recommends the backwaters of Kerala, where visitors can stay on house boats. With a little forethought, a seven-day Indian holiday can

combine beaches, lakes and mountains, he says.

India is a surprisingly family friendly destination, Alet says, with entertainment options ranging from rickshaw rides in Delhi's Chandni Chowk to a Bollywood performance at the Kingdom of Dreams in Gurgaon and searching for Bengal tigers in Ranthambore National Park.

Agents and clients need to bear in mind that many differences may exist between South African and Indian hotel standards. Because of this, Ravi suggests that agents upsell on accommodation, offering clients upgrades. Additional nights at a reduced rate of 50% are also available at many hotels. Agents could also earn extra revenue through selling add-ons such as special dinners, including a live cultural programme and airport pick-ups and drop-offs, he says.

India unaffected by Nepalese quakes

ALTHOUGH the ripple effects of the recent Nepal earthquakes have been felt in India, tourism to the country remains unaffected.

Tremors from the earthquakes were felt in several parts of India,

including Bihar, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Assam, Jharkhand and some parts of Odish, informs TIME

representative **Ravi Shaw**. Fortunately, he says, there have been no reports of

damage or loss of life in India.

However, Ravi says that although Nepal has seen a substantial decrease in arrival figures – with the quakes impacting significantly on tourists travelling to Nepal for

religious and spiritual reasons – India's tourism sector remains unaffected.

According to Serendipity Tours' **Dinesh Naidoo**, this is largely because north-eastern India, which bore the brunt of the quakes, is not a popular

tourist zone for South Africans. "It's still early days, but we haven't seen many cancellations from travellers," he says, adding that there is no need for travellers to India to feel wary about their upcoming trips.



Mumbai Airport. Photo: Chris Hoare (Flickr)

A new passage to India

SAA CUT its unprofitable flight to Mumbai in March, putting a halt to direct flights between India and South Africa. But, with many major airlines offering connections to the sub-continent from their hubs, access is not the issue.

The pressure is on, however, for agents to find flights that are as convenient and cost effective as possible. A direct flight to India from SA takes eight hours. Travel time for passengers flying on Middle East carriers, for example, has now extended by an average layover of four hours, with a further four-hour flight to the final destination, taking twice the amount of time as it would have in the past.

For some agents, SAA remains the answer, thanks to its codeshare with Etihad and, by extension, Jet Airways. The domestic carrier provides daily flights to Abu Dhabi from where Etihad connects with seven Indian cities: Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Trivandrum and

Mumbai. "This gives travellers more choice over their final destination in India," says **Ravi Shaw**, of TIME.

Sailesh Parbhu, of Nexus Travel, believes Emirates Airline to be the best option; not only because the airline flies daily from three South African destinations (Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town) but also because fares are favourable. The airline covers airports in 10 Indian destinations: Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kochi, Kolkata, Kozhikode, Mumbai and Thiruvanthapuram. The Mumbai route is serviced by a new A380, which was introduced in mid-2014.

Dinesh Naidoo, of Serendipity Travel, agrees: "The layover in Dubai is shorter plus, with the new Abu Dhabi airport being revealed only in 2017, Dubai's airport environment is a more pleasant experience," he says.

Air Seychelles' decision to re-launch its Mahe-Mumbai

route in December last year has also been welcomed by the industry. The airline's route operates four times a week and, thanks to a codeshare with Jet Airways, offers connecting flights to Ahmedabad, Kochi, Thivandrum and Jaipur.

The shortest travel time to India is offered by Air Mauritius, says the airline's regional manager, **Carla Da Silva**, with a four hour trip to Mauritius, then additional six to seven and a half hours onwards to India. "Air Mauritius flies to four major points in India: Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore and Chennai, with seamless connections from South Africa on the outbound sector, and a one-night stopover in Mauritius on the return flight." This stopover is provided free of charge. Air Mauritius also offers value-adds, such as 40kg of checked luggage and 8kg of hand luggage for economy passengers and one free date change.

Uniworld launches new destination

UNIWORLD Boutique River Cruise Collection will debut its newest destination, India, in January 2016.

The newest itinerary, "India's Golden Triangle and the Sacred Ganges" takes guests on a 13-day journey that delves into the spirit of the country, including seven nights aboard the 56-passenger, all-suite Ganges Voyager II and five nights onshore at Oberoi hotels in New Delhi, Agra, and Jaipur.

The itinerary includes visits to the Taj Mahal, Jaipur's City Palace, Mother Theresa's tomb and former home in Kolkata, a Vedic temple in Mayapur, and five Unesco sites.

The new Ganges Voyager II features the one-of-a-kind Maharaja Suite, two Viceroy Suites, two Heritage Suites, and 20 Standard Suites. Guests staying in the Maharaja and Viceroy Suites will enjoy a daily butler service, laundry service,

and one complimentary spa treatment per person. Public areas include the Governor's Lounge with onboard entertainment and cultural events, the observation deck with 360-degree views, a spa and fitness centre, and the East India Restaurant with menus featuring both Indian-inspired cuisine and Western food.

Rates are from R91 200pp. Couples who book and pay in full by June 30 can save up to R12 000.



Go for gold

Travel Vision is offering six days in India's Golden Triangle (Delhi, Agra and Jaipur) from R12 947pps. The special includes return airfares from JNB, airport taxes, all taxes and portorage, two nights each in Delhi and Jaipur, one night in Agra, with four-star accommodation (breakfast included), all transfers, sightseeing and tours with entrance fees, transport services, English-speaking local guide, and an elephant or Jeep ride at Amber Fort in Jaipur. Valid until June 18.

Photo: BockPix (Flickr) ■

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News flash!

Lloyd Orr has been appointed the official representative of TIME (Tourism India Management Enterprises) – a specialised DMC based in New Delhi. Lloyd Orr will be focusing its efforts on promoting luxury experiences in India, such as deluxe trains, resorts, and wildlife lodge experiences as well as MICE travel to the country. **Ravi Shaw** has been appointed account manager.



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TNW7378

The Eastern Cape



Air access and infrastructure in the Eastern Cape have improved significantly in recent years, thanks to the province's growing reputation as a business destination. Dorine Reinstein reports.

Why business is booming

A VIRTUOUS circle has been created in the Eastern Cape, with demand from business travellers resulting in improved hospitality offerings and better facilities attracting more travellers.

The East London International Convention Centre is a case in point. The relatively new facility, which is managed by Premier Hotels & Resorts, has hosted a number of diverse events, from government conferences to sporting events and multinational blue chip company conventions. **Terrence Goosen**, group marketing manager of Premier Hotels & Resorts, says the Eastern Cape has benefited significantly from hosting one of the country's four international convention centres, with the local economy receiving a boost as more groups and associations choose to conference in the region.

Terrence adds that this popularity is set to grow as the province undertakes initiatives to improve its image. For instance, the East London ICC team are engaging with stakeholders in various areas, encouraging them to

participate in a project to clean up the beachfront.

The improvement of roads in the region has also contributed to the boost in visitor numbers, with the N2 – the major highway into East London – receiving an upgrade. **Mandlakazi Skefile**, Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism ceo, says that this has had an important influence on the region as the route connects the two major economic hubs in the area, Port Elizabeth and East London. Further improvements have been made to the main road into Gonubie and the R72, the major coastal road connecting East London and Port Elizabeth. Mandlakazi says: "In 2014, the SA National Roads Agency Limited confirmed that it has completed the conceptual designs for the multibillion-rand expansion of the R72. The project includes resurfacing the road and the addition of lanes where necessary, and has an estimated cost of R5,3bn."

The region is also home to leisure attractions, such as Mpongo Private Game Reserve, which is convenient for business travellers wanting to extend their trips.

Port Elizabeth has also grown



Peter Schoeman

exponentially over the last few years as a business hub. The city is well equipped for corporate travel, with a range of hotels – from two to five-star properties – catering for every budget, says **Peter Schoeman**, divisional director, sales and marketing of the City Lodge Hotel Group.

It, too, has attracted attention from corporate travellers wishing to combine business and leisure. Mandlakazi attributes the city's popularity to its proximity to major attractions and business facilities. "Corporate travellers can be in a boardroom with a beach view in the morning, and then visit a game farm within 30 minutes' drive from the city centre." A further plus is the fact that the city is equidistant to all major South African centres.

More airlift please!

THE local aviation industry has paid close attention to the rise in demand for travel to the Eastern Cape, with an increasing number of daily flights connecting the region with Durban, OR Tambo and Cape Town international airports, says **Mandlakazi Skefile** of Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism.

The Garden Route has become one of Mango Airlines' top performing routes, with capacity between Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth growing by up to 200% in 2013/14. Spokesperson **Hein Kaiser** says that, during the first calendar quarter of 2015, Mango enjoyed a load factor in the upper 80% range between Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth, while the Johannesburg-George route – which is heavily affected by seasonality – also registered an average of above 80% for the period.

Hein adds that Mango's market share between Johannesburg and Port

Elizabeth has grown from just over 6% to 19,5% over the last 12 months. The airline's market share between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth grew by more than 20% from 2% to 22,8% for the same period. Johannesburg-George saw growth of just more than 3%, from 6,4% to 9,5%.

Shaun Pozyn, head of marketing for kulula.com and Comair, says the airline has also observed an increase in demand for flights to the Eastern Cape – and the airline expects this to keep growing. "The Garden Route and surrounding areas are very popular with both local and international travellers," he says.

Driven by demand for flights, kulula.com recently added a double daily service operating Sunday to Friday between Johannesburg and East London. "We have also been able to increase overall capacity by deploying larger aircraft."

Giving back

Premier Hotel & Resort's Mpongo Private Game Reserve recently opened an education centre which assists local schools in educating

learners on a range of subjects, from local plant life to animal care. Curricula include both practical and theoretical components. ■



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Obituary

Tourism industry mourns death of SA brand ambassador

THE tourism industry mourns the death of tourism industry stalwart, **Anitha Soni**, aged 57.

Soni had been unwell since September last year. Her husband Advocate Vas Soni resigned from his post in February this year in order to provide support and to spend more time with her and their children.

Anitha had extensive knowledge of the tourism industry and held several executive management positions in SA and the USA. She lectured and trained many of today's leaders in the SA tourism industry. She was instrumental in setting up key tourism institutions and agencies, including South African Tourism, KZN Tourism Authority, Durban Africa, Tourism Grading Council and the Tourism Enterprise Programme.

"Today South Africa has lost a passionate

and committed brand ambassador. Anitha was a patriot in the true sense of the word, she used her innate skills and ability to serve our country," says Brand South Africa's chairman, **Chichi Maponya**. "Under her leadership as chair of the Board, Anitha led the rebranding of the then-International Marketing Council (IMC) to Brand South Africa. It was also during her tenure that Brand South Africa began to focus on the domestic market as well as international. This was based on the understanding that a successful nation brand is built by citizens of the country, from the inside out."

Craig Drysdale, former Satsa chair and global sales manager of Thompsons Africa, said: "When I started my career in 1996, Anitha was one of the first people I met in the industry. Anitha



Anitha Soni

was always so encouraging and inspiring, and a formidable debating partner. The industry has lost a true ambassador and angel. She will be sorely missed."

"This is devastating news for those of us who have worked and interacted closely with Anitha for many years" says the Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA) ceo, **Mmatšatši Ramawela**. "She was a true tourism champion and a true inspiration, particularly for us as women in the travel and tourism industry."

Appointments

■ Former Flight Centre SA md **Janine Salame** has been appointed as gm of Topdeck Travel UK/Europe.



Janine started with Flight Centre as a travel consultant in 2000. Says **James Nathan**, md of Topdeck Travel UK: "During her time as md, turnover doubled and profits trebled. Her achievements were formally recognised at Flight Centre's global gathering in Macau last year by receiving the Directors Outstanding Achievement award." Janine will officially take up her role in London on July 1.

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New regulations: airlines will bear the brunt

DORINE REINSTEIN

WITH just a few days to go before South Africa's stringent new immigration regulations come into force, the Department of Home Affairs has finally released the Standard Operating Procedures for minors travelling into and out of South Africa – and the brunt of the responsibility for ensuring that travellers have the right documentation will rest on the shoulders of airline check-in staff at international airports.

Check-in crew for airlines around the world are meant to police this complex set of rules, says **David Frost**, ceo of Southern African Tourism Services Association (Satsa). If they make the wrong call as to whether to allow a passenger onboard or not, it could have far-reaching implications for both the traveller and the airline. "Home Affairs had a year to put this together,

but we only received the standard operating procedures with 12 days to go. If it weren't so tragic, it would be laughable. It's absolutely impossible for the tourism industry to be ready in time."

TNW contacted various airlines that fly into South Africa to enquire whether they have engaged with check-in staff about the new regulations. Most airlines refused to comment. However, there are a few that say they have implemented training and will be as prepared as possible, come June 1.

"We are ready, the best we can be, for the implementation of the new regulations," says SAA spokesperson **Tlali Tlali**. He says SAA began training staff the moment the new regulations were announced last year. "We conducted training and briefing sessions with staff who are at our customer touch points, including call

centre staff, in order to enable them to assist our customers with queries at the time of booking. The same is the case with the check-in staff."

Tlali says all SAA staff have now received Home Affairs' SOP guidelines,

"If it weren't so tragic, it would be laughable. It's absolutely impossible for the tourism industry to be ready in time."

which they can use as a reference in case there is any doubt or dispute regarding the required documentation for travelling minors.

Andre Schulz, Lufthansa's gm for Southern Africa, says the SOPs are a helpful tool for airlines. He feels Lufthansa's staff is well prepared to deal with the new requirements. "Our check-in staff have been

briefed for over a year now, with training taking place within the regular flight briefing. We also employ Stallion Security to check our documents and they have undergone in-house training."

Lenél Vining, Air Austral manager for South Africa, says the standard operating procedures are quite clear and adequate for airlines. However, she also points out that the new procedures are not exactly the same as the original instructions, which were sent out in 2014.


Some changes, she says, include: "The unabridged birth certificate had to be translated into English by a certified translator, now it is accepted in other languages. The affidavit had to be no older than three months, now it is four months. At the time Air Austral had already prepared a guideline for the Réunion market, with the more stringent

requirements. The airline will now have to make last-minute changes, which is of course inconvenient for all concerned."

Lenél says Air Austral implemented training immediately once the airline received the official standard operating procedures, and she is confident the airline staff will be ready by June 1. However, she warns the new regulations will place a huge burden on the employees who are expected to perform the checks. "I also think that, where there is the slightest doubt about correct documentation, passengers will not be accepted, resulting in loss of revenue and a possibility of increased claims in case of incorrect decisions."

To see the full document on Standard Operating Procedures for minors travelling internationally, see www.etnw.co.za/doc/SummaryImmigrationMinors.pdf. ■

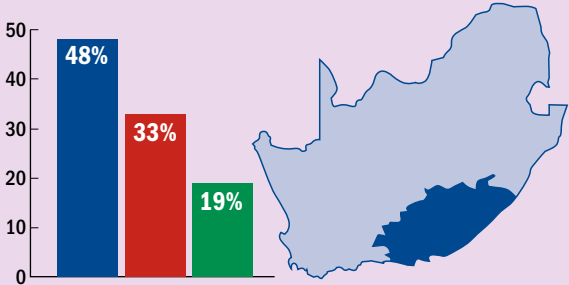
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The Max team is ready for bookings! Pictured here (from left) are: **Ajay Chathley, Sarah Blythe-Mills, Danielle Nagel and Priya Chathley**. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

There's a new kid on the block

A NEW luxury apartment hotel will open next month in Illovo.

Max Executive Apartments, at the heart of Sandton's economic and entertainment hub, will officially open on June 1. The hotel is owned and managed by property developers **Priya and Ajay Chathley**.

The property is a natural choice for both business and leisure travellers from South Africa and abroad. The address is close to Sandton City, the Sandton and Rosebank Gautrain Stations, Wanderers Stadium and Golf Club, Melrose Arch, Rosebank and many other convenient business and entertainment

options, says Priya.

Single, two-bedded and three-bedded apartments are suitable for short or long stays, single travellers, small groups of corporate travellers, couples travelling together or families of up to six. Every bedroom is equipped with satellite TV and a full kitchen.

Max's concierge service is a matter of some pride, says Priya. "We use the concept of working within the community to provide every possible service to our customers. It's a European concept – what we do is book high-quality services located near our property on behalf of our clients. If a client wants his

fridge stocked with deli food and fine wines, we will place an order with Thrupps. We will book personal trainer sessions at Planet Fitness, a fourball at the Golf Club, a hairdresser's appointment, or a massage session for our clients."

The Seconds Lounge is Max's on-premises restaurant and bar. It offers breakfast and an all-day menu. An intimate library is suitable for private one-on-one meetings. For a bigger group, Max's boardroom offers full meeting facilities for up to 16 delegates.

Max Executive Apartments offers agents 10% commission on bookings. For more details see Travelinfo. ■