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TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

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The end of an era

NATASHA SCHMIDT

HOLIDAY Tours will merge into kulula holidays from July 8, ceasing to exist as a standalone brand after 38 years in the market.

“Through the consolidation of brands and resources, the business can now focus on marketing one brand to strengthen its existing market share and increase the kulula footprint,” says **Brian Kitchin**, Comair executive manager of sales.

Holiday Tours, which was established in 1977 by **Gavin Simpson**, was bought by Comair in 2011, “with the intention of going this route,” Brian says.

What does this mean for travel agents?

Holiday Tours’ product, team and back office processes will remain the same – only through a new interface, Brian says. He adds: “Agencies with deals in place won’t be affected. The only change will be that when these are up for renewal, they will fall under the kulula holidays brand.”

Agents will also benefit from kulula’s stronger buying power, resulting in more competitive pricing for their clients, Brian says. “Kulula has always been a well-known customer facing brand. We can now leverage the airline’s economies of scale with the kulula marketing engine to drive kulula holidays’ brand awareness. Traditionally, kulula has had a lot more volume, carrying millions of passengers a year and, as a result, more negotiating power compared to Holiday Tours.”

The amalgamated brand will boast an increase in destination offerings, including a wider range of international products as well as access to real time domestic and regional packages. “We plan to keep building our product offering, adding more punch to Thailand, the Americas and Europe,” Brian says.

Existing travel agents will be able to access the new and improved booking portal – www.holiday.kulula.com – using their Holiday Tours log-in details. ■



Thirsty Durbanites!

The Durban travel trade came out to play at *TNW* Thirsty’s last month, hosted at the SunSquare Suntowers. For more pics see page 10. From left: **Tamaryn Linden** (SATC Travel Dimensions), **Leanne Moore** (SATC Travel Dimensions), **Erica Kennedy-Smith** (Lee Botti), **Jill Morris** (Lee Botti), and **Lucy Arrigo** (Amalfi Travel). Photo: Natasha Schmidt

Emirates’ agent deals under scrutiny

DORINE REINSTEIN

FIRST Comair and now Emirates – airlines’ override commission agreements with travel agents have come under scrutiny lately and are being thoroughly investigated by the South African Competition Commission.

A complaint has been lodged with the Competition Commission claiming that the override deals Emirates

offers travel agents are unfair. A spokesperson for Emirates says it offers travel agents a growth-based commission structure. “The airline takes compliance with competition law very seriously and, as such, it will co-operate fully with the Commission’s investigation,” the spokesperson said.

For years, the Competition Commission tied SAA’s hands when

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Bye-bye billback burden

TOURVEST travel agents are saying goodbye to the administrative headache that surrounds billback payments through its end-to-end online travel management solution, Travelit.

The automated process, which eliminates the costly and time-consuming process of capturing billbacks, has been welcomed by the hospitality industry.

How it works: each corporate trip is issued with a unique reference

number, against which individual purchase orders and invoices are issued. These are then reconciled against the lodge card statement. The system issues electronic vouchers with a one-time credit card number, making it easy for corporates to keep their accounts up to date and accommodation providers are paid immediately on capturing the virtual card number.

For more on Travelit, see page 6. ■

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Top web stories



- TNW pick: Beware of bullying bilkers
- Gov dismisses damning decline in travel stats
- Greek banks closed, withdrawals limited
- 'Set your own commission' – Flyafrica
- SAA denies 'snubbing' Emirates

Greek financial collapse – what you need to know

DORINE REINSTEIN

TRAVELLERS to Greece are likely to be affected by the nation's financial collapse.

The country officially defaulted on its €1,5bn (R13,5bn) payment to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on June 30. Banking services – including credit card processing and servicing of ATMs – could become limited at short notice, warn government advisories.

In the short-term, travellers are advised to carry cash with them when travelling to the country.

"It's imperative that South Africans travelling to Greece in the immediate future are well prepared for their travels regarding availability and accessibility to euros. Though we have been advised that the current crisis won't affect travellers, we strongly recommend that tourists carry a reasonable amount of cash on them in case the situation becomes dire," says Asata ceo, **Otto de Vries**.

Gerry Rice, director of

communications at the IMF says this means that Greece will now be cut off from access to IMF resources until the payment is made. It also means Greece could be exiting the Eurozone in the near future, according to financial analysts.

But Greece's financial troubles should not deter travellers from visiting the country, tour operators say.

Theresa Szejwallo, md of Trafalgar, says it's business as usual. She says the Greek Tourism Ministry has assured Trafalgar that travellers will not be affected by the current cash restrictions in the country.

Whereas Greek bankcard holders are only allowed to withdraw €60 (R812) per account, the same restrictions don't apply to foreign cardholders.

However, as ATMs in Greece are rapidly running out of money, most tour operators do advise travellers to take enough cash with them to cover their costs while on holiday.

Megan D'Arcy, kulula holiday's product manager for Europe, says: "A shortage of physical cash could prove to be a challenge. Travellers should have a number of different note dominations in the kitty."

Paying with cash could see travellers get interesting discounts in Greece as cash is currently hard to come by in the country, says **John Ridler**, spokesperson for Cullinan Outbound Tourism. He adds that travel agents should advise clients to pay for as much as possible in advance, such as transfers, accommodation and sightseeing trips.

Travellers should exercise extra caution when carrying large amounts of cash, the US Embassy in Greece has advised. Petty criminals are likely to be aware that tourists have been advised of the necessity of having cash on hand. It is therefore advisable that travellers do not carry all their money with them but to rather keep it in the hotel safe. ■

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"Oh, sure, it's comfortable and all, but what's the point of flying first class if you can't even roll down the window?"

Legend extends offering, rebrands

LEGEND Lodges, Hotels & Resorts is extending its portfolio of properties following a rebranding initiative: in May it changed its name to Legend Hospitality Group.

The company has acquired Phofu Eco Safari Lodge in the Kang area of Botswana – an exclusive game reserve that can cater for up to 18 guests in either thatched, stone or tented accommodation. Guests can enjoy game drives, nature walks, swimming and game viewing from an underground hide. It has also acquired Mogotlho

Safari Lodge, north of Maun, Botswana. The lodge is situated near the River Khwai and has 13 river-facing, en-suite tents, a dining room and an elevated viewing deck.

Group ceo, **Piet Cilliers**, said: "Rebranding the Legend Group is certainly a very exciting endeavour for our company. We believe that it is important to continuously keep innovating and evolving in order to keep up with an ever-changing industry whilst still remaining true to the core values of our brand and creating Legendary

experiences at all of our properties."

The expansion follows the recent opening of the Signature clubhouse at Legend Golf and Safari Resort and the completion of renovations to the pool deck-area at Dugong Beach Lodge, near Vilanculos in Mozambique.

The Ravineside and Lakeside lodges at Entabeni Safari Conservancy will also complete refurbishments this winter.

Legend also has plans for more properties in Botswana and Namibia. ■

Gina Richter selects the top specials from Travelinfo

- **Checkout Tours.** Eight-night Phuket packages are from R9 395pp sharing at the three-star Ibis Phuket Patong Beach Hotel. Offer includes return flights ex-Johannesburg, airport taxes, return airport-hotel transfers and accommodation with breakfast. Offer valid until October 31.
- **Perfect Destinations.** Packages to Bali are from R11 990pp sharing. Offer includes flights ex-Johannesburg, airport taxes, airport-hotel return transfers, seven nights' accommodation with daily breakfast plus three tours. Offer is valid for travel from January 15 to June 30.
- **United Europe.** Experience Holland on a bicycle and on a boat from R11 660pp sharing. Package includes seven nights' accommodation on board *MS Serena*, all meals, bike rental, daily briefing of bike tours. Electric bike rental upgrade available from R1 590pp. Cycle approximately 30-60km daily, mostly flat and easy to cycle. Tour starts and ends in Amsterdam and is valid for Saturday departures until August 31.



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Founding Editors:
John H Marsh (1914-1996) Leona Marsh (1923-2003)

EDITORIAL
Group Editor: Natasha Schmidt natashas@nowmedia.co.za
Features Editor: Debbie Badham
Contributors:
Tessa Reed Hilka Birns
Max Marx Dorine Reinstejn
Carina Borralho Darise Foster
Photographer: Shannon Van Zyl
Production Editor: Ann Braun

PUBLISHER
Kate Nathan katen@nowmedia.co.za

GROUP PUBLISHER
David Marsh davem@nowmedia.co.za

ADVERTISING
Sales:
Advertising Co-ordinator:
Anthea Lucas antheal@nowmedia.co.za

PRODUCTION
Design Head:
Dirk Voormeeld

SUBSCRIPTIONS
Circulation tvsub@nowmedia.co.za

Audit Bureau of Circulation of South Africa

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Hotel chains are thriving in Africa

AFRICA is proving to be the growth hub for hotel brands in the 21st century, according to a report by W Hospitality Group called *Hotel Chain Development Pipelines in Africa 2015*.

The report was conducted following the participation of 37 hotel chains across Africa that have operations in more than one country.

In 2011, the number of reported hotel chain development pipelines in North Africa was 75 and is now 79. The number of rooms has risen from 17 038 to 18 565.

The number of planned sub-Saharan hotels has risen from 76 in 2011 to 191 at present,

and the number of rooms from 13 700 in 2011 to 31 150 currently. Sub-Saharan Africa continues to grow much faster than the North African region.

A sub-regional breakdown of hotel rooms in the pipeline in sub-Saharan Africa reveals that 12% are in Central Africa, 24% in East Africa, 11% in Southern Africa, and 53% in West Africa.

Nigeria ranks first in the top 10 countries by number of planned hotel rooms. The country currently has 51 hotels with 8 563 rooms planned. Egypt follows with 6 440 rooms and then Morocco with 5 474 rooms. These have been the top

three countries since 2011.

South Africa comes in sixth with 13 hotels and 1 662 rooms in the pipeline.

The top ten hotel brands by number of hotels and rooms in Africa are:

1. Radisson Blu (5 372 rooms)
2. Hilton (4 965 rooms)
3. Marriott (2 316 rooms)
4. Sheraton (1 862 rooms)
5. Hilton Garden Inn (1 682 rooms)
6. Kempinski (1 618 rooms)
7. Park Inn by Radisson (1 581 rooms)
8. Noom (1 332 rooms)
9. Four Points by Sheraton (1 250 rooms)
10. Courtyard by Marriott (1 154 rooms) ■

CemAir ups Bloem flights

CEMAIR will increase flights between Bloemfontein and Johannesburg from July 20.

The airline will operate three return flights per day on weekdays and one flight on Sundays.

The new flight will depart Bram Fischer Airport at 06h15, arriving in Johannesburg at 07h15. Return flight departs OR Tambo International Airport at 18h30, arriving in

Bloemfontein an hour later.

CemAir ceo, **Miles van der Molen**, said the extra flight would accommodate business travellers from Bloemfontein who required a full working day in Johannesburg. ■

Hahn Air adds more airlines

HAHN Air has added 15 interline partner airlines, which are now available on the HR-169 ticket system and can be booked by travel agencies through all major GDSs.

The new airlines are:

- Seaborne Airlines (BB), Puerto Rico, based in San Juan;
- Jet Asia Airways (JF), Thailand, based in Bangkok;
- Mokulele Airlines (MW), USA, based in Honolulu, Hawaii;
- Insel Air Aruba (8I), Curacao, based in Oranjestad, Aruba;
- Avianca Brazil (06), Brazil, based in São Paulo;
- SunExpress Deutschland (XG), Germany, based in

Frankfurt;

- Thomas Cook Airlines UK (MT), UK, based in Manchester;
- Thomas Cook Airlines Belgium (HQ), based in Zaventem;
- Air Méditerranée (ML), France, based in Juillan;
- flynas (XY), Saudi Arabia, based in Riyadh;
- Airlines PNG (CG), Papua New Guinea, based in Port Moresby;
- bmi regional (BM), UK, based in North West Leicestershire;
- CemAir (5Z), South Africa, based in Johannesburg;
- Jazeera Airways (J9), Kuwait, based in Kuwait City;
- Air Algérie (AH), Algeria, based in Algiers. ■

WLH expands portfolio

WORLD Leisure Holidays has added two new Mauritius properties to its stable. The tour operator has established a partnership with Maradiva Villas Resort & Spa and its sister resort, Sands Suites Resort & Spa.

The properties are situated

on Mauritius's west coast.

Sanjiv Ramdane, ceo of Maradiva Villas Resort & Spa, says: "We are thrilled at having forged this exciting new collaboration with World Leisure Holidays in South Africa, opening new horizons to us." ■

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MSC upgrades fleet, expects growth

CARINA BORRALHO

MSC SA is responding to an increase in demand with the upgrade of its fleet. The cruise line went into detail about recent renovations to the *MSC Sinfonia* at a recent event at the Four Seasons Westcliff Hotel in Johannesburg.

The cruise industry could expect growth in the coming years as cruises continued to offer a complete holiday package for the whole family, said MSC SA sales and marketing manager, **David Randall**.

In light of this, *MSC Sinfonia* has undergone renovations and will accommodate more passengers in its upcoming season. "We are almost fully booked. MSC has noticed an increase in demand over the past few years and we are responding to this demand by upgrading our fleet," he said.

MSC Sinfonia emerged from dry dock in late March, with renewed amenities and enriched on-board spaces as

part of the MSC Renaissance programme. A 24-metre midsection was inserted, which has 193 extra cabins and 94 new balcony cabins. The interior was given new carpets, reupholstered seating and repainted ceilings. Every cabin has been redesigned and refurbished with new carpets, fabrics and features.

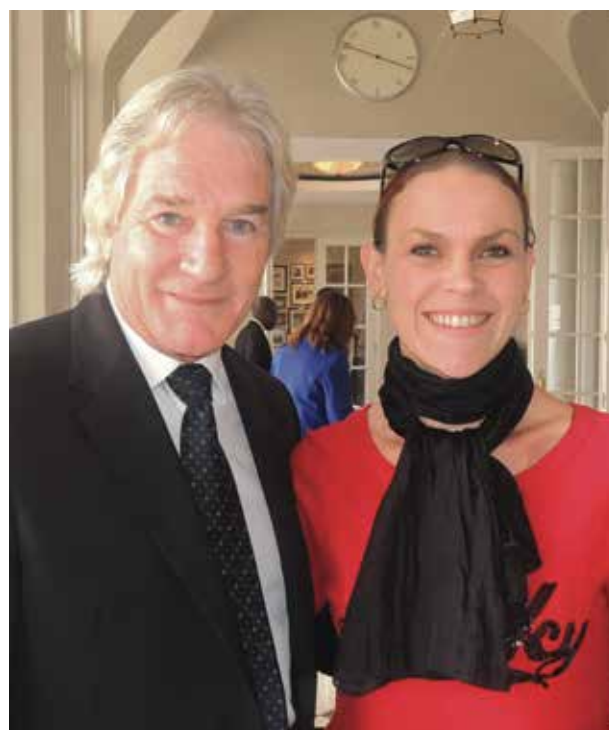
Key improvements with South African market appeal include the purpose-built areas for children, created in partnership with Chicco, Lego and arcade specialist, Namco, and a new dedicated baby club, mini club, young club and teens' club. Parents can leave infants with carers for up to an hour. Also, a new doremi spray park (water park) has been added on Deck 11. "The spray park is one of the most popular features on our ships and this one can cater for a larger amount of passengers," David said.

An extra 600 sqm is dedicated to dining, with three restaurants offering guests more choice. A new bistro

provides an informal lunchtime option and the buffet will be open 20 hours a day and offer increased service over peak periods. Additional mobile bars and soft drink stations will also be available. Passengers can choose from a variety of beverage packages before departure, allowing them to control their budgets. Drink prices are unchanged from the previous season and compared competitively with local upmarket hotels, David added.

MSC Sinfonia will now host 20 hours of entertainment per day. The *MSC Aurea Spa* has additional massage areas, while an exclusive solarium on Deck 13 offers passengers extra space for relaxation. Two restyled open pool areas, two whirlpool baths and a power walking track are also available.

MSC Sinfonia is the line's second ship to undergo restyling and extension, after sister ship, *MSC Armonia*, returned to service in November. ■



MSC Cruises revealed future plans at a luncheon held at the Four Seasons Westcliff. Pictured here are founder of MSC Starlight Cruises, **Allan Foggitt**, and MSC Cruises press officer, **Ingrid Roding-Tudor**. Photo: Carina Borralho

An advertisement for Budget car rentals. The background shows a young couple smiling and posing for a photo against a blue sky. The woman is wearing a yellow hat and sunglasses, and the man is wearing sunglasses. Overlaid on the image is a large blue banner with white text that reads "THERE'S PERKS FOR YOU TOO". Above this banner is a smaller orange banner with white text that reads "BUDGET AND GO BECAUSE...". Below the main banner, there is a small image of a silver Opel Adam car. To the right of the car, there is text that reads "Introducing the Opel Adam and a chance to drive it for a month." Below this, there is a white box containing text that reads "Book your customers car rentals with Budget and the Opel Adam until 30 September 2015 and you'll be rewarded with Club Red Roses. The perks? You could even stand a chance to win exciting monthly prizes, as well as the grand prize of the Opel Adam to use for a month!". Below this text is a link "For more information visit clubred.co.za". At the bottom right of the white box is the Budget logo. At the bottom left of the white box, it says "Terms and conditions apply".

TNW7116SD

Tourvest's new end-to-end online travel management solution - Travelit - is revolutionising the way corporates manage their travel. Ceo of Tourvest Travel Services, Morné du Preez, speaks about the cutting-edge technology.

Travel's first end-to-end online solution

WHAT do corporate clients want? In short, they want to streamline their travel processes, improve reporting and have full visibility of every aspect of their travel spend - while saving tons of money.

“Online booking tools, stand alone, are a thing of the past.”

It sounds simple but, to date, no online booking tool has been able to deliver an online solution as effectively as Travelit has in the South African market, says

Morné du Preez, ceo of Tourvest Travel Services.

“Online booking tools, stand alone, are a thing of the past. What corporates want and need is a holistic, end-to-end travel management solution that is designed to integrate requisitioning, work flow approval, expense management, fulfilment and budget controls in one sitting.”

Travelit is the “aggregator of aggregators” Morné adds. It provides access to an unlimited range of inventory - airlines, accommodation, car rental - and travel bookers have access to a wealth of content, with detailed information on particular hotels, airline product and car rental groups.

It's personal

The system enables travellers to develop and manage their own profiles. Travellers can literally manage all aspects of their itinerary from the single online platform, which includes access to pre-trip requirements such as visa information, forex and travel insurance, to name a few value-adds. Post travel, corporates can capture expense claims and reconcile these via the online platform.

A highlight of the new technology is that all of these different aspects of the travel

itinerary can be booked and managed from one screen. For example, travel bookers can begin booking their flights and then, without exiting that booking process, can start booking their accommodation and car rental. The entire booking process is quick and efficient - once a booking is approved, travellers will have their documents in hand roughly 30 seconds later. What's more, the system is mobile enabled, meaning bookings from start to finish can be handled via the traveller's mobile device.

It's compliant

Traveller profiles are also linked to the company's overall travel policy, ensuring compliance. Inventory is returned based on the category level within which the traveller falls and the company policy dictates. Travellers are able to book out of policy but these transactions are flagged, holding them accountable for any digressions. “There are times when travellers may be required to book out of policy but these should be exceptions. Through a transparent booking process, good behaviour is re-enforced,” Morné says.

The system is designed to enforce and monitor compliance through a five-prong approach:

Adoption rates monitors traveller buy in, enabling travel managers to reward and incentivise travellers with good adoption rates.

In or out of policy makes use of yellow smiley faces and red sad faces to acknowledge travellers' behaviour. The system will allow travellers to continue with bookings outside of policy, catering for the fact these are sometimes necessary. It is then up to the approver to determine whether

the booking is truly necessary. Another benefit is that the system works according to the company's approval process. For example, it can incorporate mobile approval.

Missed savings alerts travellers to the fact that while their booking may still be in policy, they can generate additional savings if they choose a different option.

“Through a transparent booking process, good behaviour is re-enforced.”

Advance bookings measures how far in advance travellers make their bookings, enabling travel managers to encourage advance bookings which will save the company money. The system also starts to learn traveller behaviour. For example, if a traveller often makes changes, the system will issue red flags, encouraging them to rather use a more flexible ticket.

Changes to bookings are also measured so that these costs can be managed more effectively.

It's a first for Africa



Morné du Preez



Claude Vankeirsbilck

The technology is designed by South Africans for South Africa, specifically catering to the nuances of this market and travel into the rest of Africa.

“The system has been built around issues that are unique to South African corporates, such as lack of inventory, outdated payment solutions, costly billback processes, and duty of care concerns.

The administrative headache that surrounds billbacks is eliminated through the system's automation of the entire process. Each trip has its own unique reference number against which individual purchase orders and invoices are automatically issued. These are then easily reconciled against the lodge card statement. The system issues electronic vouchers with a one-time credit card number making it simple for buyers to keep your accounts up to date. Chief sales and marketing officer at Tourvest Travel Services, **Claude Vankeirsbilck**, says the response from hotels to this technology has been overwhelming, which is not surprising as the establishment is paid as soon as it captures the virtual card number.

Another area of increasing concern for corporates is duty of care. To manage this effectively, Travelit features a duty of care page, which is customised to each corporate's requirements. For example, many companies utilise risk profiling for each destination. It also takes care of the basics such as prompting travellers to record their in-case-of-emergency contacts where they are easily accessed again by management.

It's for everyone

Travelit serves all Tourvest's operating brands, namely American Express Travel Services South Africa, Seekers Travel, Maties Travel and Indojet, and is developed with its consultants in mind. The system can be used by travel consultants on

behalf of their clients. This is particularly helpful when it comes to more complex itineraries or booking changes. The nature of the system also means that it isn't necessary for consultants to be trained according to any particular GDS.

It's the future

The uptake of the new system has already been highly positive. Tourvest expects that around 75% of its customer base will be using the new platform by the end of 2016, Claude says. The success

of the new technology is already evidenced by the average 25% savings that the company has been able to generate for clients currently using the platform, he adds.





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Namibia



South Africans now have easy access to the 'adventure capital' of Namibia through Air Namibia's recent launch of direct daily flights from Johannesburg and Cape Town to Walvis Bay. Debbie Badham attended the launch celebration as a guest of the airline and Legacy Hotels and Resorts.

A desert adventure on our doorstep

TOGETHER Walvis Bay and neighbouring city Swakopmund make up a Namibian hotspot alive with new development. Now, just over two hours by air from both Johannesburg and Cape Town, the area offers South Africans a wildly different landscape, geared towards adventure experiences.

Michell Fourie, SA sales and marketing manager of Air Namibia's Commercial Services, says the airline decided to reopen direct services between South Africa and Walvis Bay because of the considerable development taking place

in and around the area. "In particular, the development of a new harbour in Walvis Bay signalled the right time for us to relaunch flights," she says.

Two new hotels in Swakopmund – roughly a 20-minute drive from Walvis Bay – will open by the end of the year: Gondwana Collection's The Delight (scheduled for completion in November) and O&L Leisure's Strand Hotel (set to open in October).

There is also a growing MICE interest in the region.

Janet Wilson-Moore, gm of Swakopmund Hotel and Entertainment Centre, says

MICE travel to Swakopmund was booming in the early 2000s but dropped off largely as a result of the global decline in incentive travel. However, she says business has picked up again.

"Other popular incentive destinations have been so overdone. We've been campaigning for South Africans to come and try something different," says Janet.

So far the uptake of flights to Walvis Bay has been phenomenal. "Interest in the area's MICE offering is definitely growing," says Michell.

The strength of Namibia as a MICE destination lies in the diversity of its offering. Its combination of sand and sea lends itself to a wide range of adventure-type activities. It can also accommodate groups of all sizes at some of its more versatile conference venues. The Swakopmund Hotel has hosted events of up to 700 delegates, says Janet. "We are able to provide groups with huge variety in terms of breakaways and the way in which we personalise the event through corporate branding like banners and such."

Driving tourist numbers

Air Namibia is collaborating with other airlines to increase connectivity to the country. Namibia's new Minister of Environment and Tourism, **Pohamba Shifeta**, was quoted as saying in media reports that tourist arrivals in Namibia had been negatively affected by South Africa's new strict visa regulations as many travellers transit through SA.

Michell confirmed that the airline was in strategic talks to improve connectivity through alternative hubs, which included talks with Turkish Airlines and Kenya Airways.

5 things to do in the desert

1. Cruise with dolphins and seals

For those who appreciate the finer things in life, a catamaran cruise from the Walvis Bay Yacht Club with Catamaran Charters is a good choice. Prepare to welcome a variety of fun characters aboard in the form of the resident pelicans and seals, which guests have the opportunity to interact with and feed. Dolphins can also be spotted frolicking alongside the catamaran while the vessel's skilled guide provides engaging commentary on the region's marine life and visible landmarks. When passengers grow tired of snapping away at the scenery they can relax below deck with oysters (Walvis Bay is famous for its incredible oysters) and champagne.

2. Desert quad biking

If your clients want to get the adrenalin pumping while getting up close and personal with the desert, they should consider quad biking with Desert Explorers. Experienced bikers and complete novices are able to enjoy this thrilling exploration of the desert. Riders are given a choice of an easier more scenic pace

or a more adventurous race through the dunes. A guide is provided to take riders out into the endless sea of sand where they can have fun shooting up to the top of the dunes and careening back down again.

3. Living Desert Tour

At first glance there appears to be little that moves or breathes in the desert. But just beneath the surface of the sand the dunes are alive with activity. Tommy's Living Desert Tour is renowned in Namibia – and it's easy to see why. Namibia's very own desert guru, 'Oom Tommy', bolts up and down the desert dunes in an interactive exploration of the region's wildlife. Using small signs that are completely hidden to the untrained eye, he uncovers a range of unusual species, including chameleons, desert spiders and colourful geckos and lizards. The desert sidewinder (Peringuey's Adder) is also a common sighting on the tour.

4. The Brauhaus

A quaint town with significant German heritage, Swakopmund has retained much of its European charm. The seaside

town's Germanic influence is perhaps best captured by the Swakopmund Brauhaus, which offers a full range of traditional German favourites – some of which South Africans would know well and others that provide the opportunity to try something new. Decorated in typical Bavarian style and adorned with flags from across the world, the restaurant provides a warm and relaxing atmosphere.

5. Dinner in the desert

Ideal for those extra-special evening events, a celebration in the desert is hard to beat. Event planners have the opportunity to surprise guests, driving them out to a dinner set up under the stars, illuminated only by the moon and surrounding lanterns. Special touches like a bonfire and blankets ensure that guests remain comfortable and warm while they breathe in the incredibly still and peaceful night-time atmosphere. Specialist outdoor caterers are able to provide a delicious three-course buffet – impressive when you consider that you are literally dining in the middle of a desert. ■



Thrill seekers can enjoy racing through the desert dunes.



Meet a variety of marine characters on a catamaran cruise in Walvis Bay. Photos: Debbie Badham

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TNW's Thirsty's

DURBAN'S travel trade came together last month to eat, drink and socialise at TNW Thirsty's, hosted at the bright and cheerful SunSquare Suncoast – the only hotel to offer beachfront accommodation

in the city. The evening was filled with music, good food and laughter.

Thirsty's is heading back to Johannesburg next month. For more information, email katenathan@nowmedia.co.za. ■



▲ Generous and sociable host of the evening: SunSquare Suncoast Durban's gm, **Adrian Penny**.

▼ **Leonie Gauche** (Bidvest Bank) and **Carl Coetzee** (Amon Ra Travel and Tours).



▲ From left: **Lynette Stander** (Sure Non Stop Travel), **Dorine Reinstein** (TNW), **Bronwen Remke** (Marketing Solutions in Travel) and **Lisa Muil** (Bidvest Insurance).

▶ SunSquare Suncoast's **Seshni Padayachee**, beautiful in her traditional dress, is with **Jeannet Gordon** of Travel Vision (left) and **Charmaine Lewis** of Holiday Tours (right).



◀ The glamorous ladies from BCD Travel (from left): **Melissa Pillay**, **Pearl Khuzwayo**, and **Zama Mthethwa**.



▲ Travel Counsellors (from left) **Heather Kaal**, **Helen Busse** and **Kirsty Shelley** enjoy a glass of vino.

▶ The lovely Pentravel ladies, **Vicky Steinhardt** (right) and **Tanya Nothnagel** (left) catch up with **Swinton Johnson** of Thompsons Holidays.
Photos: Kate Nathan and Natasha Schmidt





TOURIST OFFICES

Tourist offices have the potential to be valuable sources of information for travel consultants. But are they engaging sufficiently with the industry? Lisa Witepski investigates.

Trade calls for improved services

TRAVEL consultants believe tourism authorities could improve their services, according to the results of an eTNW snap survey.

In particular, consultants mentioned lack of access to quality information as one of the biggest

issues they faced when dealing with associations.

The survey, which ran on eTNW for a day, aimed to elicit the industry's opinion about the services provided by tourism authorities, and outline where they could improve. Some 84 consultants took part.

What role should authorities play?

Tourism authorities play a number of roles, from promoting destinations to providing information about these countries and answering questions posed by interested parties. Asked what they considered to be an authority's prime role, 58% of respondents answered: "Providing reliable product and destination

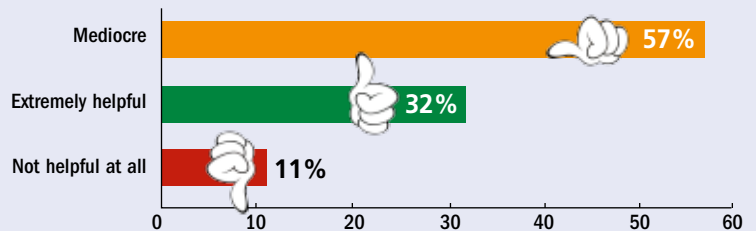
information". A relatively small percentage (29%) maintained that authorities should be involved with the promotion of a destination, while 1% indicated that their job should be predominantly to answer queries. Some respondents (12%) thought that the authorities should address all of these activities.

Destination info is mediocre

Consultants were asked to rate the service they received from tourism authorities when searching for information about a destination. More than half (57%) described the service received as 'mediocre', claiming that they still had to consult other sources of information. Thirty-two percent of respondents

said they found tourism authorities provided excellent service, making them the first port of call when information was needed. A small percentage (11%) said they usually refrained from consulting tourism authorities as they were not at all helpful.

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TOURIST OFFICES

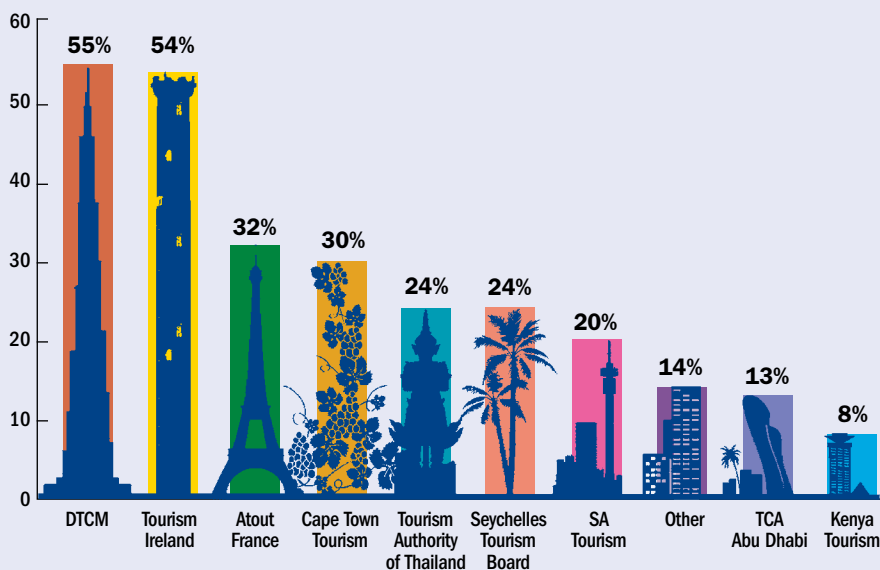
From page 11

DTCM is tops!

Respondents were asked to pick the three top tourism authorities that they believed provided the best service. The Dubai Department of Tourism and

Commerce Marketing and Tourism Ireland received the most votes (55% and 54% respectively) while Atout France came third with 32%.

Top ten tourist offices according to agents



Where can they improve?

When asked where tourism authorities fell short in their interactions with the industry, most respondents referred to access to information as a major bugbear. Linked to this was a dearth of relevant collateral. **Doriane Ribeiro** of Sure Travel Scene in Kempton Park, said: "There is a lack of material to offer agencies. If we had more brochures and posters, we could raise more awareness of the destination and clients would be more interested in knowing more." Another respondent said authorities failed to provide promotional literature and keep consultants informed of up-to-date travel news.



David Bradshaw

Currency of information was another issue. Websites are sometimes out of date, while the information about destinations and, for instance, the relevant regulations is often inaccurate or insufficient.

Turnaround time was also mentioned as a challenge. Many respondents felt that authorities should reply to queries within 24 hours, but indicated that this was not the case. They said that, often, it was difficult to access the relevant people at the authorities, as contact details were hard to obtain.

By far the most common

complaint, however, was a general lack of engagement with the industry, with some indicating that this was a recent problem.

Clara Fugareu of Park Travel Pretoria said, in the past, a greater effort was made to connect with the industry through fam trips. **David Bradshaw** of Travel Vision in Blackheath said his greatest gripe was that while tour operators were not usually invited to participate in roadshows, hotels and other suppliers were invited by tourist offices to showcase their products, which means they solicit direct business. Road shows were also singled out as an issue by **Sonia van Niekerk** of Travel Too Live in Port Elizabeth. Her concern was that these events tended to focus on the larger regions.

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A cycle tour round Soweto. Photo: Tessa Reed

GTA launches township experiences

THE Gauteng Tourism Authority has launched a series of workshops and township experiences, combining stops in Mamelodi,

Soweto, Alexandra, Sebokeng, Fordsburg and Maboneng, which will show consultants how to package interesting encounters for visitors.

Tourism authorities take up the challenge

ALTHOUGH general industry sentiment reflects a need for greater engagement on the part of tourism authorities, the authorities say they employ a variety of channels to forge relationships with consultants.

For instance, Tourism Ireland works with local travel partners across South Africa – including traditional and online tour operators and travel agents (leading consortiums, online intermediaries and websites popular with potential leisure and business travellers) to help influence overseas consumers to visit Ireland, says **Sara Park**, account manager at Development Promotions which represents Tourism Ireland in SA. “This is a key element of what we do as we need our partners to showcase our destination by providing affordable and exciting packages and airfares for potential visitors.” Promotional activities range from online advertising to outdoor sites and print channels. Tourism Ireland further offers an online training system for members of the travel industry to become Ireland Specialists – a programme where they can win prizes and participate in fam trips. Added to this, Sales Missions are hosted every one or two years, with Irish industry experts flying to South Africa to engage with local players. A tourism authority should



“With the advent of the digital age, tourism authorities need to adapt and stand out from the crowd.”
Tracey Krog

be a one-stop shop when it comes to sourcing information about a destination, says **Chantal Nieuwenhuizen** of the Swaziland Tourism Authority. “Whether you have questions about the destination, want to participate in training or visit as a guest of the tourism board for a first-hand experience, the tourism authority should come to mind first – even before Google.” Chantal says Swaziland Tourism’s favoured method of addressing travel consultants’

needs is hosting workshops. For the time being, it has concentrated on Johannesburg and Durban. Since Lloyd Orr Communications was appointed to represent the authority in November 2014, its first phase has focused on the core regions immediately surrounding the country, namely Johannesburg, Durban and Mpumalanga. However, informative sessions, starting with Johannesburg and then moving on to other regions, are planned for later in the year, and the authority will also be hosting dedicated Swaziland seminars. “We also engage with the trade through surveys, which aim to establish how they interact with the destination. The majority say that Swaziland sells itself but they still stay updated through the authority about its offerings.”

The inspiration business

The role of the tourism authority has changed, maintains **Tracey Krog**, country manager Tourism & Culture Authority Abu Dhabi, who says that, whereas in the past authorities focused on marketing to consumers and trade and distributing information, they are now “in the inspiration business”. “With the advent of the digital age and a world that merges traditional and digital media



“Educating the trade is critical when it comes to promoting a destination.”
Lesley Simpson

bombarding travellers with an incredible array of information and choices, tourism authorities need to adapt and stand out from the crowd.” She likens tourism authorities of today to “storytellers” who must empower trade partners, influencers and consumers to spread the word about the destination. In addition to a new consumer website and an online destination training tool for agents, TCA Abu Dhabi has launched the #inabudhabi hashtag, allowing individuals to post about their experiences.

Workshops and roadshows are other vehicles used, while the authority partners with the trade to target special-interest groups like golf and halal tourism. The travel trade is key to its marketing strategy, and a full-time trade executive has been appointed to meet and engage with members of the industry.

The Gauteng Tourism Authority has also taken a proactive stance in partnering with tour operators, often undertaking joint marketing initiatives that target travel publications and multimedia platforms like Wayn and TripAdvisor. This is necessary as the authority’s aim is to influence travel decisions, a goal that can be challenging, given that many travellers still consider Cape Town and the Kruger National Park to be South Africa’s main tourist attractions, says senior manager: destination and corporate communications, **Barba Gaoganeidiwe**.

To overcome this, the authority has focused on packaging experiences, which are publicised in trade magazines, and hosting fam trips. The authority is, furthermore, hosting a series of workshops and visits to highlight township experiences as part of its mission to promote small, township-based operators.

Focus on education

Educating the trade is critical, says **Lesley Simpson** of Lesley Simpson Communications, which represents the Tourism Authority of Thailand. Time is an issue, however, as destination training requires an investment in hours. That said, it’s an important investment, as TAT has been mandated to work with partners in the trade to increase product knowledge. Key tools include the TAT roadshow (at present restricted to major centres, although there are plans to include Port Elizabeth in the next itinerary), which is supported by an e-newsletter with travel

tips, and online brochures and product news. TAT also hosts fam trips.

Strong relationships with the trade are key to success at Dubai Tourism. Director for Southern Africa, **Wendie White**, says the authority is fortunate to have created firm ties by hosting annual workshops, participating in partner workshops around the country, and conducting at least six fam trips each year, targeting various market segments. Wholesalers and specialist agents are hosted at the annual Arabian Travel Market, and an e-newsletter is distributed to a wide database.

Did you know?

Since Abu Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority (TCA Abu Dhabi) appointed dedicated representation in SA this year, the emirate has reported an increase of 58% in the number of South Africans visiting Abu Dhabi in April 2015 compared with April 2014. SA tourist arrivals in Abu Dhabi have also steadily increased and, in fact, doubled since the February 2015 launch of the TCA Abu Dhabi office in Bryanston, Johannesburg.

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TOURIST OFFICES



Thai splendour

A group of South African tour operators were recently hosted by TAT SA in Thailand. Pictured here (from left): **Ronel Coston** from Travel Vision; **Shona Pittaway** from Perfect Destinations; **Giles Clinton** from Checkout Travel; **Bua** from Elephant Hills; **Kathy Ridler** from Bobcat Travel;

Karen Camm from Holiday Tours; **Jacqueline Carr** from The Holiday Factory; **Chris Kaiser** and **Julia Schoen** from Elephant Hills; **Hermine Sennelo** from TAT South Africa; **Henda Heyneke** from Heyneke Tours; and freelance journalist, **Sarah Whiteside**.

Exploring Madagascar

Air Madagascar and the Madagascar Tourism Board hosted tour operators from South Africa in Madagascar from May 23-30. The guests visited Nosy Be, Diego Suarez, and Antananarivo. Pictured here at the Red Tsingy near Diego Suarez are (from left): **Barbara Plebankiewicz** from Safpol Safaris; the local tour guide; **Mandi Marais** from African Fusion; **Erna Van Aswegen** from Barefoot Breaks; **Kim Bibb** from Dynamic Tours; **Benjamin Combrink** md of Air Madagascar SA; and **Lalaina Rajaonahsoa** from Air Mad TNR. Photo: Madagascar Tourism



Seychelles Tourism hits the road

THE Seychelles Tourism Board will host its annual roadshow from July 21-23 in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town.

The roadshow will offer the South African trade the opportunity to learn about new products as well as the chance

to network with the industry. Details of the workshops are as follows:

- Tuesday, July 21: Balalaika Hotel, Johannesburg;
- Wednesday, July 22: Coastland Hotel, Durban;
- Thursday, July 23: Lagoon Beach Hotel, Cape Town.

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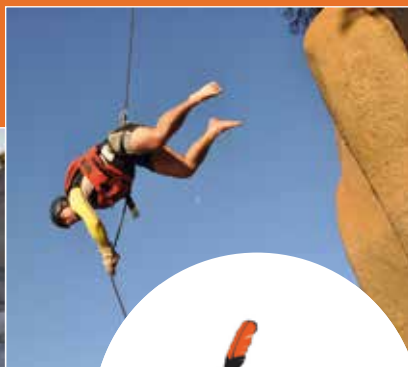
TRAVEL agents who complete Tourism Ireland's online training programme during July stand to win tickets to Lord of the Dance in August. The programme

must be completed at www.irelandspecialists.com. Five sets of double tickets are up for grabs. Agents living outside the Johannesburg area will win an exciting Irish hamper. ■



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More sales opportunities with SAA and Air Mauritius

NATASHA SCHMIDT

AIR Mauritius and SAA have strengthened their codeshare, effective July 1, moving from a 'soft block' to a 'free flow' arrangement.

Air Mauritius regional manager for Southern Africa and Latin America, **Carla da Silva**, says the airlines will have more scope to collaborate and co-ordinate flight schedules and

inventories and open up sales opportunities. "There are no restrictions as with our previous arrangement, which had a set amount of seats," she says.

The agreement will cover all MK- and SAA-operated flights between Mauritius and Johannesburg and beyond, whereby each airline will codeshare on the other airline's operated flights. ■

Emirates' agent deals

From page 1

it came to its loyalty override agreements with travel agents, as SAA was seen as a dominant player in the market. Only at the beginning of this year, the airline received permission from the Commission to review its override agreements towards a growth-based incentive model as opposed to a volume-based incentive model.

Last month, SAA lodged a claim with the Competition Commission questioning the payment of incentives by

Comair to travel agents (see TNW June 17).

Now the Competition Commission has allegedly received information from a member of the public regarding some aspect of Emirates' operations. "The Commission appears to have initiated a complaint against Emirates. As part of their investigation, the Commission has contacted various airlines, including SAA and travel agents, requesting industry information," spokesperson for SAA, **Tlali Tlali**, told TNW. ■



A day out with friends

The eighth annual Friends of City Lodge Golf Day took place at the River Club in Johannesburg last month, with forty-four golfers braving the chilly weather to play a round of golf. Pictured here (from back to front): Gary Bisset, City Lodge operations director; Morne du Preez, Tourvest; Alex Davidson, Standard Bank; and Sophy Msimang, Mindpulse Consulting. Photo: City Lodge

'There could be amendments to Immigration Act' – Gigaba

TESSA REED

THE Department of Home Affairs hosted the first day of a two-day colloquium on June 30, with a view to developing a paradigm around SA's new controversial immigration regulations. While the process might lead to changes in regulations, this was not a certainty and any changes were still far off, said Home Affairs Minister, **Malusi Gigaba**.

Speaking about the purpose of the two-day event, the Minister said the aim was to develop a new Green Paper that would be submitted to Cabinet by March next year and then developed into a White Paper at the end of 2016, following input from Cabinet and the public. "This colloquium is a very crucial step towards the development of a new international migration paradigm," he said.

"The current White Paper of international migration is now outdated. It is unable to assist us ... to manage what is obviously a very complex and dynamic process." After the colloquium, the department hoped to emerge with "a more dynamic and futuristic policy framework that responds to the current challenges and realities", he said.

Asked whether the process could bring changes to existing regulations, which

include the requirement for minors to produce an unabridged birth certificate at South Africa's ports of entry, Malusi said he did not want to presuppose an outcome as the process was still under way. He said, however, that once the White Paper was finalised, the department would look at the Immigration Act to see if it responded sufficiently to the new White Paper. "There could very well be an extensive amendment to the Immigration Act."

However, the regulations would remain in place, he reiterated. "We are continuing to implement the new regulations. There is no way we are going to allow any child to leave this country without being in possession of an unabridged birth certificate."

He said Cabinet had asked the DHA to look at potential unintended consequences and work with other departments, including the Department of Tourism, to address those. "The issue is no longer the regulations. The issue is the implementation of the regulations."

He added that the department's responsibility was to produce unabridged birth certificates without any inconvenience and to ensure it had mechanisms in place to enable people to apply for visas conveniently. Malusi also emphasised that

tourism was a crucial sector in the current global financial climate as a significant source of income for the country.

He insisted that the colloquium was not a reaction to criticism that had been levelled against the department with regard to its existing regulations. "The process we are undertaking today is a culmination of the roundtable discussions we started last year. This process is bigger than the tourism sector and will go far beyond what the tourism sector is concerning itself about."

According to Malusi, delegates at the event included business, trade unions and immigration experts. He said the tourism industry was also invited, however associations such as TBCSA and SATSA were not represented.

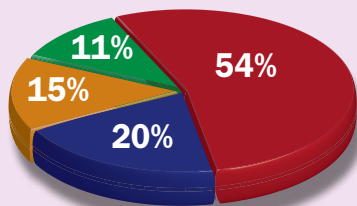
According to the Minister, recently South African children who had been victim to child trafficking were brought back from Malawi. "We have a case in court of a father who wants his children brought back into the country that were abducted by his ex-wife without his consent," he added. The department faced litigation because it had allowed children to leave the country without the consent of both parents, said Malusi. ■

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UBC requirement bugs agents

As a travel agent, the most frustrating news I have heard recently is:

- The requirement for unabridged birth certificates for minors travelling to and from SA
- Lufthansa adding a surcharge to its bookings
- The US Consulate being unable to process visas
- The restructuring of SAA's override commission agreements with the trade



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