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TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

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# Get ready for IATA's new financial criteria

DORINE REINSTEIN

**A**FTER drawn-out negotiations, IATA has finally announced the new local financial criteria (LFC) – including a minimum financial guarantee – applicable to BSP ZA. This LFC also covers BSP-BW. The new criteria come into effect on February 1, giving agents less than three months to comply.

Under the new criteria, agents will have the option to remit monthly, fortnightly or weekly. The new criteria have also introduced minimum financial security amounts of R160 000 for weekly remittance, R250 000 for fortnightly remittance and R500 000 for monthly remittance. For agents who have previously defaulted in the preceding 12 months from the date of review, the security amounts could be even higher, as they will need to provide financial security that covers the 'sales at risk'. To calculate this risk, the new criteria introduce a new financial risk formula calculation that takes into consideration a 12-month average sales period. This is as opposed to six months in the current criteria.

Agents fear that smaller agencies will be heavily affected. **David Pegg**, md of Sure Viva Travels, says it will be extremely difficult for

these agencies to afford a bank guarantee of at least R160 000.

Meanwhile, larger agencies will need to manage their cash flow very carefully to avoid running into trouble, particularly corporate agencies servicing government, says another agent, who preferred to remain anonymous.

One of the changes in criteria is that the financial test will be more specific. In the past, when agents passed the financial test as stipulated in the financial criteria, their financial guarantee could be nil. Agents who pass the financial test will be able to receive discounts but will still need to provide a minimum financial security, says **Janaurieu D'Sa**, IATA's area manager for Southern Africa. "One important point is that, in the past, remittance was only fortnightly or monthly; now there is an option for a weekly remittance. This will give agents more choice and options." He adds that, under the new financial criteria, sales will be assessed over 12 months instead of six, taking into account seasonality and peak periods.

Janaurieu adds that IATA is at an advanced stage of approving a Default Insurance Programme (DIP) provider. "Once the process is complete, travel agents will

be able to opt for either the bank guarantee or the DIP. Introduction of the DIP will be made in the near future," he says. "Premiums for the DIP will be calculated on a per-ticket basis. The DIP has been introduced elsewhere in Africa and indeed around the world with great success as it removes the need for agencies to put up a bank guarantee."

The changes to the LFC have come about after a lengthy consultative process between airlines, agents and Asata in the Agency Programme Joint Council (APJC) to meet the constantly changing business environment while aligning with Resolution 800f, IATA's baseline criteria.

The LFC had not been updated in over 15 years. Furthermore, earlier this year, it transpired that BSP Southern Africa was amongst the 14 BSPs with the most unrecovered debts in 2013. The current changes to the LFC are one way to make sure that any gaps that led to this situation are addressed, Janaurieu says.

Asata ceo, **Otto De Vries**, told *TNW* Asata was reviewing the LFC on behalf of industry and would be making comment in due course. "Asata has a number of concerns regarding the financial criteria but would like

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## Beach and bush

**Airlink will connect leisure travellers looking for a 'beach and bush' experience, with flights between Cape Town and Maun, Botswana, starting on March 11. The flights will depart Cape Town at 10h35 and arrive in Maun at 13h05. The return flights will depart Maun at 13h35 and arrive in Cape Town at 16h10. Flights will initially operate on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Pictured here (from left): Airlink marketing public relations officer, Olivia Wadi, and Airlink marketing public relations officer, Nelda Branco-Prinsloo. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl**

## Tough times put damper on festive fun

DORINE REINSTEIN

TRAVELLERS are not putting their December holiday plans on hold but they are being more cautious when it comes to their spend.

Over 60% of travel agents who voted in *TNW's* recent poll, reported that there had been notably fewer leisure bookings for the festive season this year compared with last. But tour

operators say travel has not been put on hold.

"Beachcomber Tours' Mauritius bookings are well up on last year with over 10% more passengers booked. We are expecting our best December ever," says **Joanne Visagie**, sales and marketing manager.

"We've seen a surge in last-minute bookings for our December guided holidays,

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"So, let me get this straight. If I cross your path, it's bad luck, and if you cross my path, it's bad luck... but if we cross each other's path, does the bad luck double, or is it automatically cancelled out?"



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# Amadeus appoints new gm

**A**MADEUS has appointed a new general manager for Southern Africa, **Andrew Hedley**, effective November 23.

Andrew will be based at head office in Johannesburg, taking over the reins from **Immanuel Banza**, who was appointed acting gm for Southern Africa following the resignation of **Peter Long** in July.

Andrew's previous role was head of technical business

at Travelstart, where he was responsible for overseeing processes to improve customer experience and conversion rates. He also drove the implementation of new products and expanded distribution channels across the Middle East and Africa.

At Amadeus, Andrew will oversee commercial and



**Andrew Hedley**

operational strategies for the markets across Southern Africa, leading initiatives to grow the brand across the region while driving technological innovation.

Immanuel will continue to manage the strategic relationship with

customers in Southern Africa. ■

## No joy for flyafrica

**W**HILE flyafrica Zimbabwe struggles to resume operations following issues with its Zimbabwean partner, the group has also been forced to ground its Namibian operation.

Flyafrica Namibia was grounded earlier this month after the Namibian Department of Civil Aviation requested further information about its aircraft. This was only a few days after the airline launched flights between Windhoek and Cape Town on November 2.

"The DCA requires some time to read over all the information required before

we can resume flights," flyafrica ceo, **Adrian Hamilton-Manns**, told *TNW*.

Meanwhile, flyafrica Zimbabwe remains grounded, after the Civil Aviation Authority in Zimbabwe (CAAZ) raised concerns over the relationship between flyafrica.com and its Zimbabwean partner (see *TNW* November 11). The parent company has since laid charges against its partner.

"Our lawyers are positive, and there is no further discussion required as the judge has all information needed to make a ruling,"

Adrian said.

"This has been a very tough couple of weeks for flyafrica.com and our customers. We have been fighting very hard to overcome the obstacles in our way to resume normal flights. Despite this we had to cancel flights and disappoint and inconvenience many of our customers. We totally understand the disruption this has caused and we apologise unreservedly for that. We are committed to our loyal customers and will do everything in our power to resume operations," Adrian said. ■

## Tough times put damper on festive fun

**From page 1**  
particularly the Christmas Markets we have on offer," says **Theresa Szejwallo**, md of Trafalgar.

Although bookings are strong for the festive season, industry players admit that travel and booking trends are changing.

**Chantelle Brown**, senior product manager of kulula holidays, says various factors, such as the unabridged birth certificate requirement and the weakened rand have affected travel as a whole. "Our market is currently unstable and consumers are being far more cautious with purchases."

Travellers are staying closer to home and taking shorter holidays this year as a result of the weak rand, says Flight Centre strategic marketing specialist, **Sharmila Ragananan**. "As opposed to a seven- to 10-night stay, they are now opting for five to seven nights."

Thompsons Holidays has also noticed a trend toward domestic bookings. PR and media manager, **John Ridler**, says: "We have seen

an early trend to move to domestic holidays for those who feel the exchange rate is crippling. This, in turn, has pushed up occupancies in South Africa, especially in the Cape, over the festive season."

The lead time to book has also shortened, according to Sharmilla. "Where domestically it was six to 12 weeks, it is now three to six. Lead time to book international travel was three to nine months but is now two to four. In this environment, any overseas destination is carefully planned around where the rand goes the furthest."

**Cathie Bester**, national sales manager of World Leisure Holidays, says although regular clients have booked well in advance for the December period, WLH is still getting requests from travellers with budget constraints. "People are waiting to see if there is money to travel." She adds that travellers are also waiting to receive unabridged birth certificates and documentation before booking their holidays.

**Flora Fubbs**, The Holiday Factory's senior manager contracting, marketing and operations, adds that demand for luxury accommodation seems to have taken a knock. "Bookings for December are busy but there is definitely a trend towards three-star hotels."

Chantelle adds that couples who do not need to consider school holidays are also more open to travelling during November or January, avoiding the peak season completely. "We also saw this in 2014 and are expecting this behaviour to become more popular in the coming year," she says.

In terms of destinations, travellers are opting for more budget-friendly places. **Vicky Steinhardt**, marketing and product manager of Pentravel, says ski holidays don't seem to be as popular this year, with travellers opting for more affordable beach holidays in Zanzibar and Mauritius. "New Zealand is also up 33%, which may be attributed to the visiting family and friends sector," she says. ■

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# Turkish lands in Durban

DORINE REINSTEIN

**T**URKISH Airlines landed for the first time in Durban on November 5, where the airline's Airbus A330-300 was greeted with a traditional water cannon salute.

The airline now flies to Durban on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays as an extension of its direct Istanbul-Johannesburg route.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony at King Shaka International Airport, **Ilker Ayci**, Turkish Airlines' chairman of the board, said the airline was looking at introducing daily direct frequencies to Durban in the near future. "Our decision to launch this flight was driven by an increased demand for international travel to Durban."

Ilker said 2015 was the 'Year of Africa' for Turkish Airlines, with the launch of routes to Bamako in Mali, Maputo in Mozambique, a direct flight to Cape Town and now the Durban route. "It is a breakthrough, considering that we flew to only 10 destinations



To celebrate Turkish Airlines' inaugural route to Durban, **Ilker Ayci** (left), exchanged gifts with **Michael Mabuyakhulu**, (centre) and **Durban Deputy Mayor, Clr Nomvuzo Shabalala** (right). Photo: Dorine Reinstein

in Africa 10 years ago. Now we fly to 46 destinations on the continent; more than any other airline."

KwaZulu Natal economic development, tourism and environmental affairs MEC, **Michael Mabuyakhulu**, added that Turkish Airlines was an important strategic partner

for KZN, as the airline flew to many destinations in Eastern Europe, including Russia, which is part of BRICS.

"Turkish Airlines' footprint in that part of the world will be of fundamental importance to help develop and build strong trade relations with Eastern Europe," he said. ■

# US simplifies entry for UK passport holders

FROM December 3, UK passport holders can register for Global Entry into the US, where they will be able to skip long customs queues and be privy to clearance if they have been pre-approved and are considered low-risk travellers.

Global Entry is currently available at 46 US airports and 13 preclearance locations. To register, UK passport holders need to apply through the UK Home Office website and pay a £42 (R908) processing fee. If the applicant passes the

UK vetting, they will receive a UK access code, which applicants will enter when applying for Global Entry through the US Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) Global Online Enrolment System.

The non-refundable application fee for a five-year Global Entry membership is US\$100 (R1 432). Applications must be made online. Once the application is approved, a CBP officer will conduct a scheduled interview with the applicant and then make a final eligibility determination. ■

# Want to know more about TTC?

THE Travel Corporation (TTC) suite of brands now offers on-site training for all Gauteng agents who would like to get first-hand knowledge directly from the team.

The new training sessions will be hosted monthly for

agents at The Travel House, Rosebank. The next training session is scheduled for January 28 next year. Agents can book their seats by emailing Lara at [lara.may@travcorp.net](mailto:lara.may@travcorp.net). Further sessions will be hosted on February 18 and March 17. ■

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## Asata upgrades website

**A**SATA has launched a consumer website that aims to educate leisure, corporate and government customers about the benefits of using an Asata member.

The new website offers travellers informative updates and travel news as well as key information about Asata.

The trade resources will still be available to members of the Asata trade portal. "Asata is also at present developing the CRM (customer relationship management) system, which will allow us to tailor our communication to specific segments of our membership," says Asata ceo, **Otto de Vries**.

Otto told *TNW* that, by segmenting and expanding Asata's current database, it would be in a better position to tailor more relevant notifications to meet the interests of members. "The

system will integrate with existing technology platforms being utilised by Asata, reducing the requirement for manual intervention."

Asata also plans to further streamline and automate a number of the administrative functions around membership applications and renewals.

Otto says: "Our aim is to ensure that there is easy access to relevant content that supports our members in their day-to-day lives. On the website, for example, travel agents have access to various consumer campaigns and research that Asata has already invested in on behalf of agents."

Members are able to keep abreast of global trends and local best practice, while passing relevant information on to their customers. In addition, members have access to the products that Asata has developed. ■

## City Lodge makes changes to comm payout

CITY Lodge has made changes to its agent commission payment structure, effective February 1.

Under the new system, agents will be required to bill the City Lodge Hotel Group for their commission. They will no longer be able to deduct their commission from the amounts that are payable to the City Lodge Hotel Group on behalf of their clients who have stayed at the group's hotels and used its services and facilities.

In the middle of each month travel agents will receive a commission advice from the City Lodge Hotel Group.

This will be accompanied by a request to issue a tax invoice to the group for the commission amount, which will include VAT. Once a tax invoice has been received, the group will pay commission amounts to travel agents, subject to its normal payment terms and conditions.

"City Lodge has decided to do this to ensure that we

comply fully with legislation relating to the issuing of tax invoices, which applies to commission, and to enable us to better manage and control the terms and conditions that apply to payments that are due to us," says City Lodge Hotel Group divisional director of finance, **Alastair Dooley**.

The change has also been brought about to coincide with the roll-out of a new property management system across all the group's hotels, he says. ■

## Serena introduces new activities

SERENA'S safari lodges in Tanzania and Zanzibar now offer new activities for guests.

Manyara Serena Safari Lodge in northern Tanzania, Zanzibar Serena Hotel, and Lake Duluti Serena Hotel in Arusha, now offer cooking lessons, Swahili lessons,

jogging and other exercises, and traditional musical instrument lessons.

The aim is to showcase the rich culture of the Tanzanian people and expose guests to authentic African experiences, says the hospitality group.

The cooking lessons teach

guests how to prepare local dishes under the guidance of a chef. In the Swahili lessons guests learn words that can be used while on safari in Tanzania. Lake Manyara Serena Safari Lodge has also opened a 350m jogging track, which is supervised by a first-aid-certified guide. ■

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## G Adventures launches new experiences

NATIONAL Geographic and G Adventures have joined forces to launch 'National Geographic Journeys with G Adventures', a series of 70 experiential trips to destinations around the world.

The collection is designed for travellers who want to explore new places but seek the structure and security that comes with travelling in a group. A local guide will lead each group, while travellers have the opportunity to connect with local people and cultures. Examples include spending time in a family home in Jaipur; sharing a meal with a local author and her storytelling troupe in Botswana; meeting a traditional weaver in Ecuador;

and sipping homemade limoncello with a farmer at his lemon orchard in Italy.

Many trips will feature visits to projects sponsored by G Adventures' non-profit organisation, Planeterra, which develops sustainable projects to support local communities. A portion of the travel programme's proceeds will support the National Geographic Society's non-profit work in conservation, exploration, education and cultural preservation.

National Geographic Journeys with G Adventures for 2016 will be published on the companies' websites on December 15, with departures from January 5. ■



Seen here at the dinner celebration are Wayne Hill, gm of hotels and resort operations at Emperors Palace (far left) and assistant food and beverage manager, Greg Rorich (second from right) along with two of Aurelia's talented chefs. Photo: Debbie Badham

## Aurelia's reveals new offering

AURELIA'S restaurant, part of the five-star Peermont D'oreale Grande at Emperors Palace, has undergone an extensive refurbishment. The hotel's new offering was unveiled at a dinner celebration on October 1.

The restaurant has increased in size and now seats 120 people inside, between 40 and 70 outside and has introduced two

new upmarket private dining facilities. A new lounge area with free WiFi has been designed to cater for hotel guests who arrive early from the airport. The area provides light snacks and refreshments while travellers wait for their hotel room to become available.

A new menu has also been introduced, with the aim of heightening the dining experience. It introduces the

art of molecular gastronomy, coupled with a fusion of new-age Mediterranean and South African cuisine. Molecular gastronomy combines cooking and science to create unique culinary experiences.

The design also includes a new chef station at the centre of the restaurant, enabling guests to see the chefs adding finishing touches to their meals. ■



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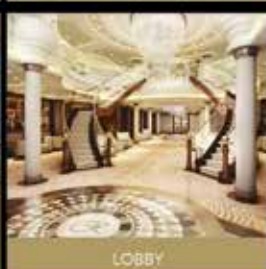
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# AGENT TRAINING & RECRUITMENT

Travel agencies and suppliers are finding it increasingly important to provide regular training to new graduates in-house rather than rely on travel and tourism qualifications. Darise Foster reports.

## Travel qualifications leave recruits unprepared

**N**EW entrants to the travel industry are often surprised to discover that travel and tourism is a sales-based profession. Agents need to be prepared and adequately trained to sell and deliver a high quality of customer service while remaining solutions driven. However, tertiary institutions offering travel and tourism are not providing this foundation at all, believes **Wouter Nel**, sales and marketing manager for Southern Africa at Air Mauritius.

“When someone completes a travel and tourism qualification, they are very ill-equipped for the job of travel adviser,” agrees Pentravel ceo, **Sean Hough**. It is for this reason that Pentravel does not require its applicants to be in possession of a travel and tourism diploma or degree. “They do need to have a tertiary-level education because it shows that they can start and complete something but they do not need to have travel and tourism specifically. We

train extensively within the company itself,” he says.

The failure of travel and tourism colleges to prepare graduates, results in a lack of confidence in the workplace, says Club Travel HR manager, **Claire Rushworth**. “New agents often have a confidence problem when dealing with clients. As such, developing communication and consulting skills in college – such as learning to qualify a client’s needs – would be beneficial,” she says.

**Robyn Christie**, Travelport

country manager for Southern Africa, says the recent #feesmustfall protests across South Africa indicate that education is under the spotlight and requires urgent attention. “While the discussion began with the proposed fee increase, it is very clear that one of the things the students were protesting about is poor levels of education at all levels. Tourism, for instance, is a subject offered at some schools but the focus on outbound travel is minimal.” What’s more, as a result

of the focus on domestic tourism and not the various aspects of the travel industry, graduates end up better suited to a job in a hotel rather than a travel agency, says **Cheryll Watt**, director of Development and Training Strategies. “There are some good colleges out there, but most of the courses being offered are not relevant to the travel industry,” she says. “This is why some agencies have started running their own travel programmes or learnerships.”

### In-house training is a must

The lack of adequate preparation at tertiary level means a two- to four-week training course is crucial for new recruits when they enter the industry, says Wouter. “Most travel consortiums invest quite heavily in training new recruits while balancing this with ongoing training for experienced staff.” This is good news, Wouter says, because it is during this training that they will learn to understand the customer profile, techniques on how to best serve their customers and identify customer needs and wants – all things that play an integral part in the travel consortium’s success. “At the end of the day, this is a 100% customer-driven industry so new recruits need to develop these skills from the outset,” he says.

Club Travel provides a six-month Work Integrated

Learning Programme for students, which Claire says provides students with practical, on-the-job training while providing the agency with a larger pool from which to recruit. “But outside of the agency, webinars are a fantastic tool for product training,” she says, adding that they are quick and informative.

Claire argues that not all travel agents are undertrained because they can’t afford time out of the office. “We have successfully rolled out training initiatives to meet business objectives and staff development,” she says, adding that training should ideally be held internally so that it is company-specific and easier to attend. “Training must add value – and if it does, people will attend.”

Sean agrees. “Agents cannot afford not to

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**AIR MAURITIUS**

## Agents need first-hand experience

### From page 7

spend time out of the office to attend training. It is too important," he says.

"Our new recruits are trained at Pentravel's Travel Academy where our Amadeus-accredited trainers spend two weeks training agents on all the various systems that we use, our own booking software, reservations software, who our preferred partners are, etc.

"Then within the first two or three months, they come back to the Travel Academy for 'Sunshine Induction Training', after which they return for 'PULSE (Pentravel Ultimate Leisure Sales Expert) Training', and then they come back again for 'Brand New Training'." Pentravel agents also receive constant preferred partner training and coaching, Sean adds.

INDUSTRY experts agree that, in addition to insufficient training at a tertiary level, another issue in the travel industry is the fact that too many travel agents are not well travelled – and this leads to a lack of context when attempting to sell travel.

"Not only are travel and tourism courses not adequately preparing students but we also face a challenge in that some of the students have not been on an aeroplane or checked into a hotel, therefore they do not fully understand the service they are selling," says **Claire Rushworth**.

As such, she believes the best way for a travel consultant to gain experience is to attend educationals. "This is the best way to gain the experience of travelling in their clients' shoes so they can pre-empt their needs and offer value-adds," she says.

**Theresa Szejwallo** agrees. "One of the best ways agents can learn the nuances of travel is to experience it first-hand. Educationals put



**Theresa Szejwallo**

agents in a better position to advise clients what travel is all about," she says. The Travel Corporation conducts educationals across its brands. "Taking part in a familiarisation trip goes a long way in exposing agents to the type of travel their clients will experience," she says.

**Sean Hough** says educationals are part and parcel of Pentravel's training



**Sean Hough**

philosophy. "I don't think there is a travel company that invests close to what we do in staff travel and I think it is so sad that travel companies do not send their agents away as much as they did before," he says.

Not surprisingly, online supplier workshops are an increasingly popular training tool. **Linda van der Pol**, divisional head of TravellInfo,

says her team had noticed a demand for agent training but also a high number of no-shows at traditional workshops being hosted by suppliers. As such, TravellInfo introduced its online workshops, which have been well received by agents and suppliers alike.

"We have a high percentage of repeat customers making use of our workshops and those suppliers that have experienced it often come back," she says. However, she does not think they can serve as a substitute for educationals. "They serve different purposes," she says. "The problem with educationals is that only a certain number of agents can attend. It is also costly and takes time out of the office. However, with online workshops you can reach a high number of agents across the region.

"Ultimately I think they complement each other very nicely, but nothing beats experiencing the product yourself."

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# Recruitment remains a challenge

IT'S understandable that travel agents cannot afford time out of the office to attend training courses because of the pace at which agencies operate, says **Theresa Szejwallo**, md of Trafalgar and The Travel Corporation. This, coupled with the dwindling opportunities to travel as part of an educational group, has seen fewer millennials take an interest in the travel industry.

"Those who have followed a tertiary qualification in travel and tourism show more of an interest in pursuing it as a career," says **Kim Botti**, director of Lee Botti and Associates. "The travel industry has always held a certain allure. However, without the travel perks and educational exposure from previous years, compounded by the salaries, which are lower compared with other industries, the appeal to become involved in the industry has reduced."

Kim says there is an expectation that a relevant qualification will afford candidates access to the



**Kim Botti**

industry when there are actually few opportunities. They also have unrealistic expectations of earnings. "The glamour of the industry paints an attractive image, yet the practicality of it is hard work and long hours. However, at least those who have studied in the particular field are better equipped for the real world of the travel industry," says Kim.

She believes the industry is still attractive to youngsters but the entry-level opportunities are rare. "Qualifications do not guarantee employment but attitude and customer service skills, combined with travel knowledge and experience go a long way to make a youngster more marketable."

Pentavel only recruits staff who are completely new to the travel industry. "To work for us, you cannot have worked for another travel company as an employee. This happens very, very rarely," says **Sean Hough**. "I think one of the weaknesses in our industry is that we recruit a lot from each other – so it is kind of like moving deckchairs around. For this reason, I find it very important to recruit new people," he says. He says recruitment is a large part of Pentavel's philosophy. "We are more of a recruitment business than a travel business," he says. "I will have meetings about recruitment and optimising our travel careers website rather than about travel itself."

# Suppliers play a crucial role

IT IS absolutely crucial for travel agents to have weekly training on new products and services available from suppliers, stresses **Wouter Nel**.

As such, suppliers are also an integral part of agent training. **Theresa Szejwallo** says suppliers use ongoing training to ensure that agents who are exposed to TCC brands are getting the complete picture of what is it they are selling as well as how to sell the range of brands and products.

According to Theresa, The Travel Corporation offers on-demand webinars to accommodate agents who require training on the company's various products.

An online e-Learning platform will also be introduced and updated in February, 2016.

"Moreover, we recently introduced our TTC Wanderlust Training Academy to ensure consistent and relevant training to cater for each specific individual's needs and to showcase how to

sell our various brands," Theresa reveals. She says the academy will look at each brand's unique selling points and distinguish features of each TTC brand while applying a specific focus on how to sell them. "We will also introduce agents to our 'behind the scenes' teams in our finance and reservations departments so they can put faces to names and ask pertinent questions," she adds.

Travelport, on the other hand, has plans to train those who teach tourism. As a member of the Global Travel and Tourism Programme, Travelport can provide direction and support to the educators who teach tourism in schools.

"Travelport has invested in providing a training course for educators that provides a better understanding of the role of technology within the outbound travel industry," says **Robyn Christie**, adding that it is the first initiative of its kind in the region. ■



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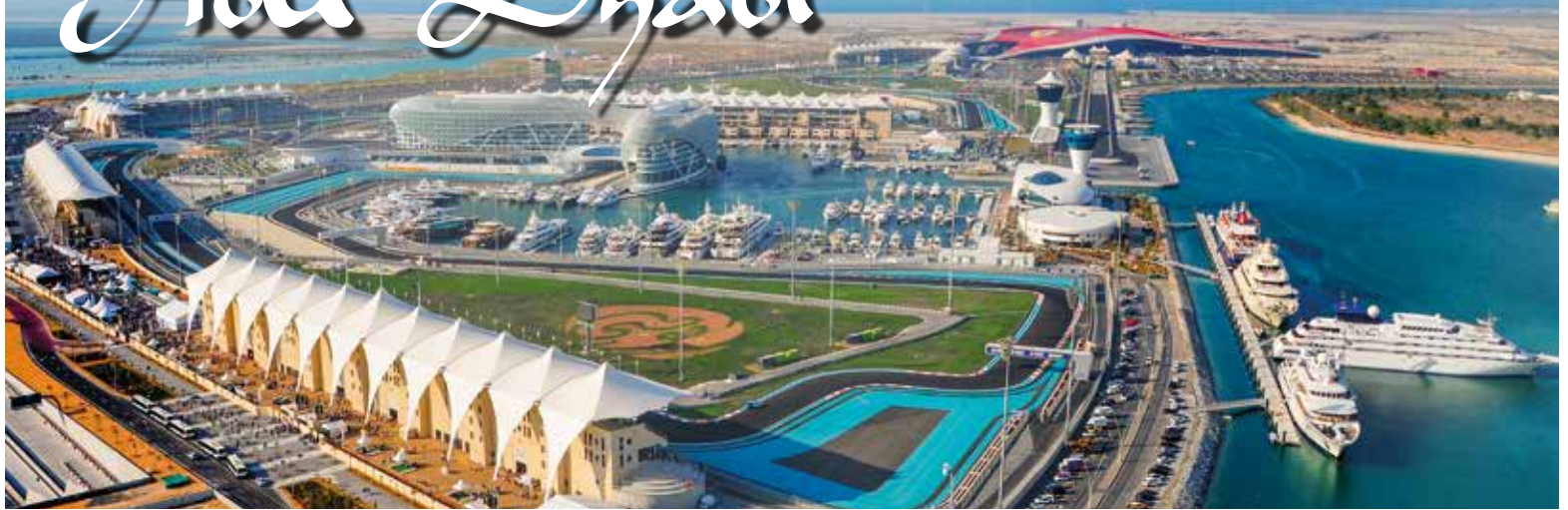
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# Abu Dhabi



With its prime geographic location and ongoing list of exciting developments, Abu Dhabi is growing in popularity with travellers around the world, presenting a significant sales opportunity for agents. Carina Borralho reports.

## A new hub rises in the Gulf

AS PART of its 2030 plan to accelerate urban development to ensure the city's self-sustainability outside oil production, over the last few years Abu Dhabi has invested significantly in infrastructure development, as well as improvements to its tourist attractions, in an attempt to gain a sense of global acknowledgement.

The drive to increase arrivals seems to be paying off when it comes to South African travellers. According to TCA Abu Dhabi, the first few months of 2015 showed a 34% increase in guest arrivals, equating to 13 442 travellers from South Africa. These figures represent 46 242 guest nights for an average stay of 3,44 nights.

The capital's rapid growth and development can be attributed to the Al Nahyan family, which has been in power since 1793, and accelerated the transformation of Abu Dhabi's desert land into a modern hub suitable for the business and leisure needs

of the Western world.

In an attempt to promote tourism, Abu Dhabi has invested significant amounts of money in the country.

An example of such an investment is the development of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, which is not intended to be a replica of the popular French museum but rather to introduce art and culture to the Middle East.

Abu Dhabi bought the name 'Louvre', and plans to rotate art with the Louvre in Paris and from other galleries around the world. Abu Dhabi has a growing cultural sector, and so the development of the Louvre will not only appeal to travellers seeking an artistic and cultural experience, but also greatly benefit the locals.

Other developments that will cater for arts and culture lovers include the Abu Dhabi Performing Arts centre, which will house five theatres, an arts centre, music hall and an opera house.

Another world-class development in the pipeline is the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, set to be completed in 2017.

### Something for everyone

Abu Dhabi caters particularly well for families. The region is sprinkled with fun activities for children of all ages, including Yas Water World, the Abu Dhabi Wildlife Centre, Capital Gardens, Khalifa Park and the Emirates Park Zoo.

Many hotels provide child-friendly play areas as well as carers, so parents can have some time off. "Abu Dhabi has been built not only around business needs but also those of the family. The residents of Abu Dhabi are very family orientated and the city has catered for these needs," says **Jean Martins**, SA country manager for Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority.

Abu Dhabi is also a top choice when it comes to the required facilities to host MICE says **Paul Simmons**,

Abu Dhabi Southern Sun director of sales and marketing.

"The country is home to some of the world's best hotel brand names, which come fully equipped with everything a business traveller would need, including boardrooms, WiFi and transfer services."

What's more, the geographic location of Abu Dhabi makes it a perfect stop-over destination for travellers visiting Europe, Asia or even America.

Because a vast number of activities can be covered in Abu Dhabi within a few days, it is recommended that leisure stopovers for travellers should range between three and five days. A business stay depends on the nature of the trip, but agents should recommend that business travellers see at least one of the destination's major attractions if possible, or incorporate them into a planned business event.



Ferrari World.

## Four top attractions

Abu Dhabi offers a variety of activities for all interests. However, the destination is well known for several attractions which should not be missed.

- Visit the Yas Marina, which is home to the Formula 1 race track;
- Make a trip to the famous Ferrari World

for car fanatics;

- Tour the Yas Mall and markets for a unique shopping experience;
- Charter a catamaran cruise along the coast of the city, which allows travellers to explore Abu Dhabi's city scape and beaches at a leisurely pace.

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## ABU DHABI

### Advise your travellers...

ARABIC is the official language of the UAE, although English is widely spoken in Abu Dhabi. Despite the general perception that the UAE is strictly Muslim, Abu Dhabi demonstrates a respect for other beliefs and is not opposed to people freely practising their religion, so long as it does not interfere with Islam. As a token of respect, women are often required to cover up in certain areas, particularly those of religious importance, but are welcome to wear bathing

suits on public beaches, for example. The country is virtually crime-free, and public services are readily at hand to aid tourists. As part of federal law, all visitors to the UAE are required to have medical insurance prior to travel. Abu Dhabi has a sub-tropical, arid climate, with sunshine almost all year round and very little rainfall. The best time to visit the Emirate is between November and April, when the temperatures average 24°C during the day and 13°C at night.

### WLH unveils new offering!

World Leisure Holidays has recently expanded its portfolio to include the exciting new destination of Abu Dhabi. The operator is currently offering luxury packages to the five-star Park Hyatt Abu Dhabi. Agents can book seven nights in a Park Room (with a sea view) from R35 100. The offer includes breakfast, return flights from Johannesburg to Abu Dhabi on SAA, a tourist visa and return transfers. The special is valid from January 18-March 8. Showing off their new Middle Eastern offering in style are Johann Strydom (md) and Cathie Bester (national sales manager). Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

### Book it!

Avoca Travels is offering 'Abu Dhabi & Beyond' specials. Book four nights in Abu Dhabi as well as the option of an additional two nights in the Seychelles at the Coral Strand Seychelles from R13 197pps, or an additional four nights at the Ramada Patong Phuket from R14 797pps. The offer includes return flights from Johannesburg (including taxes), breakfast daily, Yas Island Rotana and Downtown Grand Millennium experiences as well as a two-day pass with entrance fees to Yas Waterworld and Ferrari World. The package is valid from January 15-March 16.

### Did you know?

Halal tourism is a growing niche market for which Abu Dhabi is well geared. Avoca Travels sales director, Noorjehan Vadachia, recently attended the World Halal Tourism Summit in Abu Dhabi and commented that she was highly impressed with the latest developments in Halal tourism infrastructure and visitor attractions. "These provide added value for a growing niche market and, as such, now feature in our latest range of packages that showcase Abu Dhabi."

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# How to sell Abu Dhabi

Thompsons Holidays recently launched its new itinerary for Abu Dhabi. *TNW's* Carina Borrhalho was invited as a guest of Thompsons on the inaugural press trip to experience the new offering first-hand.

ABU Dhabi is home to a myriad of cultural and architectural gems. Its religious culture alone offers a refreshing new perspective to the traditional western way of life. However, there are a number of must-see attractions for both leisure and business travellers alike, all of which agents can book through Thompsons Holidays.

**1.** The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque (pictured above) is spectacular. Made entirely of white marble imported from Macedonia it is truly a must-see for tourists. As a significant symbol of faith, the mosque is designed and built entirely on symmetry and repetition, with each element having been carefully chosen to contribute to the importance and religious meaning of the

mosque. Its white vastness is somewhat balanced by the warmth in colour and detail it offers inside its walls.

**2.** The Falcon Hospital is the largest in the world and treats around 11 200 falcons a year. Visitors can witness veterinarians repairing broken feathers. The intricate procedure requires the veterinarians to keep a vast collection of different types of feathers, which are then surgically glued on to the falcon, which is anaesthetised during the procedure. This is done to give the falcon its flight back. Boasting facilities that are better than some hospitals around the world, the Falcon Hospital demonstrates Abu Dhabi's love of the desert, passion for sport, and its respectful relationship with nature. One veterinarian

at the hospital says: "The falcons are members of the family, not pets."

**3.** Further away from the desert, the 23-metre *Belevari Cruise* – the largest catamaran in Abu Dhabi – is open for cruising every Friday and Saturday, and boasts a trampoline on board that can accommodate up to 70 people. As part of the cruise, travellers can experience two hours of free time on a private island to enjoy tanning, snorkelling and beach sports. The cruise also includes unlimited water, soft drinks and light snacks and is a great add-on for small groups and meetings, incentives, conferences and events. Some lucky travellers may spot dolphins while cruising along the Corniche during the winter season.



Park Hyatt Abu Dhabi.

## Where to stay...

### Southern Sun Abu Dhabi

A hotel brand well known to South Africans, the Southern Sun is situated in the heart of Abu Dhabi close to the airport and around 20 minutes' drive from Saadiyat Island. Equipped with WiFi, a range of restaurants and a list of South African chefs who head up the main restaurant's daily buffets, the 353-room hotel is ideal for leisure and business travellers. "Although we are rated a four-star, we boast all the facilities of a five-star hotel at affordable rates," says Southern Sun Abu Dhabi gm, **Pierre Delfau**. He says the locals are rating conscious, which means they are more inclined to stay at hotels rated as five-star. Because of this, the local hotel industry continuously strives for five-star status in an attempt to attract local travellers.

extravagant facilities to make a luxurious stay truly memorable.

The Emirates Palace, which is reserved for the international and local elite, is a glamorous seven-star hotel, with every amenity imaginable. With 14 diverse restaurants, every guest's culinary taste can be satisfied. The hotel even boasts a gold ATM, where guests can purchase pieces of gold on the spot. A stay at this luxury hotel starts at around R4 500 per person per night for a standard room during off-peak season. Situated on the Corniche, also known as the beach promenade, Emirates Palace is about a 40-minute drive from the airport, and features one of the largest conferencing rooms in the region, making it the ideal stay for the business traveller with a healthy budget.

Anyone can visit the Emirates Palace but tour groups need to give notice of their intention to visit in advance. Security measures are tight, and conservative dress is advisable. South African travellers can expect to pay around R250 for a gold-flaked cappuccino in the hotel's opulent lobby lounge.

The Arabian-inspired architecture of the hotel features 114 spectacular domes, ornate finishes of gold and marble, all within and around 302 luxury suites and 92 'standard' suites. A private butler is also available to serve guests at all hours of the day.

Further down the Corniche is the five-star Jumeirah Etihad Towers. A stay at this hotel starts at R2 300 per person per night. The hotel has free WiFi and parking, a private beach, a full-service spa, pool and health club, and is about 1,8km from the Marina Mall and F1 race track. The Etihad Towers offers guests a 360-degree view of the city. ■

### Park Hyatt Abu Dhabi

The Park Hyatt Abu Dhabi, which is also suited to both leisure and business travellers, is situated on the beachfront and comprises 306 rooms, suites and villas, each with its own balcony. It also features a nature reserve with protected endangered turtles. As part of the hotel's ethos, the Park Hyatt supports the conservation of these sea creatures by having dedicated sections of the beach for their breeding activities, as well as an in-house environmental officer who heads turtle night watches for hotel guests. The Park Hyatt is surrounded by gardens, and borders the Saadiyat Beach Golf Course, which was designed by Gary Player.

### Emirates Palace and Jumeirah Etihad Towers

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## Living it up in Mauritius!



Beachcomber recently hosted an educational in Mauritius. Travel agents from various agencies were treated to some fun in the sun – and lots of rum! Pictured here enjoying an early morning rum tasting are (from left), **Kysle Andrews of Pentravel Rosebank; Marcos Pedro of Flight Centre Broadacres; and Marcele Smit of Flight Centre Kolonnade.**

## Trogs celebrates

TRONGS (Travel Reps on the Go) held its year-end function in November at the luxurious Oyster Box Hotel. Travel trade from KZN gathered to enjoy the Latin Fiesta-themed event. Pictured here (from left) are: **Nicky Pearsal, manager of BA/Comair in Durban; Debbie Bunyard of Pumula Beach Resort, and TIC's Noleen Hanson.**



## Tourism KZN is on the move

TOURISM KwaZulu-Natal (TKZN) has relocated its head offices in Durban from the city centre to a new building at the Durban Point Waterfront.

From November 16, the new home of TKZN is in the Ithala Trade Centre at 29 Canal Quay Road.

The information office that is currently located on the ground floor of the Tourist Junction building will also relocate to what will be the flagship tourism information office at the uShaka Marine World theme park.

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## Appointments

**William Perry** is the new president of the Skål Johannesburg Club. This follows the resignation of **Jaco Steyn-Venter**, who has relocated to Durban to take up a new position.

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To the point



Kulula has signed an interline agreement with Virgin Atlantic Airways, allowing travellers to book on a single ticket for their journey with the convenience of one-stop check-in and baggage transfer. **Liezl Gericke**, Virgin Atlantic's country manager for South Africa says: "As part of our commitment to the South African market, this partnership with kulula will allow us to open up other convenient connections from multiple destinations across the country to London Heathrow."

# Lufthansa grows profit, hails GDS charge

DORINE REINSTEIN

TWO months after implementing its controversial GDS surcharge, Lufthansa has seen little impact on booking trends while profits have soared.

The impact of the Distribution Cost Charge (DCC) has been "broadly neutral" in terms of revenues and profits, ceo, **Carsten Spohr**, said in a press conference following the publication of the airline's Q3 results for 2015.

The results show that net profit for the period from July to September jumped by 41,5% to €794m (R11,9bn). The Lufthansa Group is also on course for a significantly improved full-year result. After the first nine months of 2015, the adjusted EBIT increased by 71,4% year on year to €1,7bn (R25,6bn). "These encouraging results confirm that we are on the right track and that our chosen strategy is having its desired effect," said Carsten.

Although SA travel agents do not support the move, they have not opted to off-sell the airline but to rather pass the fee on to clients. Ceo of Pentravel, **Sean Hough**, says he doesn't agree with the

new charge but that there have been no issues with the implementation of the DCC. "It's all working fine; like any other tax," he says.

"We are not happy with the move but we cannot off-sell a legacy carrier like Lufthansa," says **Rachael Penaluna**, business manager of Sure Maritime Travel.

But agents are steering clear of Lufthansa's agent portal, which doesn't carry a surcharge for bookings. "We need to keep our GDS segments up, so we have not offered our passengers that choice," says Rachael.

"We can't do without Lufthansa but we don't venture anywhere near its portal," agrees **Allan Wolman**, ceo of XL Rosebank Travel. He says the portal is slow and cumbersome as well as inefficient for travel agents. "Bookings via the portal don't allow agents to track a client's booking or provide adequate reporting. It also takes the control away from us in the event of change or amendment of booking."

**Jonathan Gerber**, director of TAG, says Lufthansa will need to discount its fares in order to be competitive in the South African market, as agents will continue to pass on the charge to their clients. "Our

clients generally want three quotes. The Lufthansa quote would include the additional charge. If clients want to know what the additional charge is for, we tell them that it is a direct charge from Lufthansa."

eTravel operations director, **Tammy Hunt**, agrees that if Lufthansa "outprices" itself via the GDS, clients will start opting for more economical routings.

The effect of the DCC on corporate travel buyers has been considerable, research by the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) has found. According to an online global survey, in which 434 travel buyers worldwide participated, 42% said they had reduced bookings with Lufthansa, 93% said they were currently not considering the option to book directly on Lufthansa's site and 39% were seeking alternative carriers. Only 2% of travel buyers surveyed said they would book directly with Lufthansa to avoid the DCC.

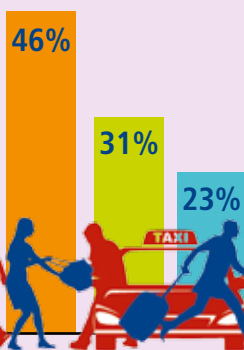
"The resulting actions demonstrate the high value that travel buyers place in the existing distribution network. The efforts by Lufthansa to fragment the distribution system by artificially adding cost is not working," said **Michael McCormick**, GBTA executive director and coo. ■

*pulse poll*  
brought to you by eTNW and TRAVELINFO

## Touts pester travellers at SA airports

Are your clients being harassed by taxi service agents?

- Yes, they intimidate passengers
- They are a bit of a nuisance
- No, it is not an issue



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## Get ready for lata's new financial criteria

**From page 1**  
the opportunity to review it properly before we give further comment."

To help agents comply before February 2016, lata has announced it will undertake an extraordinary financial assessment in December

2015. At that time, the new local financial criteria will be applied against the current audited financial statements as held by lata. The assessment will be based on the 12-month sales period between December 1, 2014 and November 30, 2015.

"Travel agents will have to provide a minimum amount of financial security subject to the remittance frequency selected or a value higher, subject to the calculated amount at risk based on the financial assessment results," lata said in a statement. ■

freedom to connect

## Pretoria's Wonderboom Airport to Cape Town the easy way.

Airlink's new direct 'City to City' flight, in partnership with South African Airways, provides Tshwane's business and leisure travellers with a convenient choice of flights between Pretoria's Wonderboom Airport and Cape Town. Airlink offers up to 3 return flights a day between the two cities. Pretoria's Wonderboom Airport offers travellers a convenient walk on - walk off airport experience, affordable parking in close proximity to the terminal building, as well as airport accommodation, restaurants and lounge facilities. Visit [www.flyairlink.com](http://www.flyairlink.com) or [www.flysaa.com](http://www.flysaa.com)

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