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High rates stifle local travel

DARISE FOSTER

DESPITE the perception that domestic tourism will boom as a result of the weak rand, local travellers are being excluded from the South African market as SA becomes more attractive to international markets.

Several high-end, rand-based accommodation providers have announced they will raise 2016 rates – some by as much as 20% – in response to the weakening rand, citing increased input costs as the reasoning behind the price hikes.

The weak rand will result in a buoyant inbound tourism market and consequently push up prices in the tourism sector, says **Martin Wiest**, ceo of Tourvest Destination Management. “It will become very expensive to travel locally but those travelling internationally will be spending at least 30% more money than they used to.”

On the contrary, there are currently great deals for South Africans wanting to travel abroad, says Pentravel ceo, **Sean Hough**. A holiday in Thailand and Mauritius is likely to be cheaper than a holiday in Cape Town. “Rather than assuming they need to start selling more domestic travel, agents should look for international markets that still offer value, because they are out there,” he says. Pentravel’s forward bookings are up for all international destinations, he adds.

“Trafalgar has early bird booking

specials and a rand guarantee, while Club Med is launching 15% off skiing packages. These are great gestures and offer excellent value for the traveller,” Sean says. Air fares are also good at the moment because of the low fuel price, he adds.

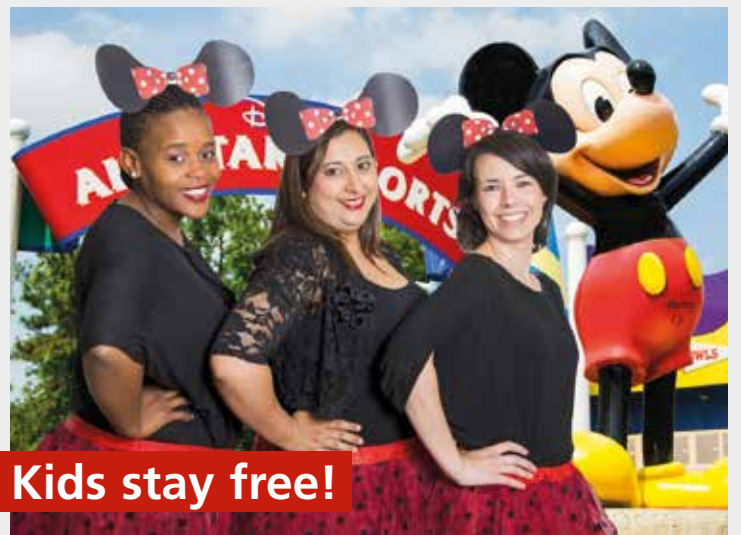
“I don’t believe there will be a great resurgence in domestic travel,” says Sean. “Local restaurants and accommodation providers have already started increasing their prices because of the influx of inbound tourists, and South Africans will ultimately lose out as a result. Other service providers will probably follow suit and it will become even more expensive to travel in South Africa than it already is,” he says.

Selling domestic packages is also not as lucrative for travel agents. “If agents contract directly, they can get good commissions but if they book through a tour operator, for instance, they may only get 7% commission as opposed to 12% on international bookings.”

“Most South Africans are taking up camping and self-catering,” says **Gill Maskell**, owner of Africa 2000 tours. “Better value can be found in an international trip. For example, Mango has excellent travel specials for South Africans travelling to Zanzibar,” she says.

Online travel agency, Travelstart, has seen a surge in domestic bookings, with low domestic air fares also making local travel more attractive. But there is still scope for people

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Kids stay free!

Travel Vision is running a special for travellers visiting Disneyland. Travellers can spend seven nights at Disney’s All Star Resorts in Orlando with kids staying free, paying only for airfare, taxes and park entry fees. The offer is valid between March 20 and April 1 for R30 341 per adult and from R17 997 per child (depending on age). The offer includes return flights on Emirates, seven nights’ accommodation at any All-Star Resort, complimentary return airport transfers and free transportation throughout Disney. Pictured here (from left) ready to visit the ‘Happiest Place on Earth’ are travel Vision’s **Khanyisa Bonase**, reservations consultant, **Zaheera Suliman**, reservations consultant and **Carla Seaman**, reservations supervisor. Photo: Megan Fischer

Agents: beware risky tour ops!

DEBBIE BADHAM

SHOCKWAVES from the drastic weakening of the rand in recent weeks are yet to be felt in the travel industry – and tour operators with risky business practices are likely to be hardest hit, industry experts say.

When you consider how much money tour operators receive in advance – and the fact that the weak rand has

weakened further – it is likely some tour operators are currently sitting in a bad position, says **Terry Munro**, md of Beachcomber Tours, especially when you consider the history of tour operators that have failed under similar circumstances.

Terry is referring to the practice whereby some tour operators hold the money that clients have paid them

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SA pax seek good deals for Turkey

DORINE REINSTEIN

THE weak rand is more of a deterrent than the threat of terror for South Africans travelling to Turkey, tour operators say.

On January 12, a suicide bomber killed 12 foreign nationals and wounded 15 others when he detonated a device in a popular tourist area of Istanbul near the historic Blue Mosque.

Crystal Cruises has since announced it will reroute two of its upcoming voyages set to call in Turkish ports.

However, South African tour operators feel that local travellers are more deterred by the weak rand than by the threat of terrorism. "Currently our own domestic challenges – poor economic growth, possible interest rate hikes, the devaluing rand and rising costs of living – are impacting on travel patterns far more than these attacks," says **Megan D'Arcy**, product manager of

kulula holidays. "Unless there are further attacks of a similar nature it's doubtful that the Istanbul attack will have a lasting impact on confidence to the destination," she says.

Travellers often believe that cities or countries that have recently experienced an act of terror will be on high alert, therefore making it a safer destination, says spokesperson of Thompsons Holidays, **John Ridler**.

However, there is a limit to how much violence is tolerated by travellers, especially when tourists are being targeted in public areas. "We have few visitors to Turkey in the winter months and our current enquiries are for dates between May to November. By that time the situation may have settled down and it will hopefully be business as usual."

LUX* Resorts and Hotels is building a new 60-room, five-star hotel in the Bodrum Peninsula, expected to open in

May 2017. The group debated the decision to announce the launch of the new property in the midst of the attacks but decided to go ahead and broadcast the positive message of a new acquisition, says **Alexis Bekker**, head of sales and marketing. "The destination is popular for tourism and while terror attacks bring fear, tourism will resume in time."

South Africans may have the expectation that the crowds will have dwindled in Istanbul as the result of the attacks and that prices will be lower to entice visitors back, John says. But those expectations are not necessarily warranted, says Megan. "Should any discounts be made available, it's probable that they will be filtered through to the stronger markets rather than across the board." She explains that Russia and Germany are the two biggest markets for Turkey, while South Africa is a relatively small market. ■

City Lodge opens new Joburg hotel

THE City Lodge Hotel Group has opened the first phase of its 148-room City Lodge Hotel Newtown. The property is expected to be fully operational by the end of February.

Situated in Newtown on the western side of Johannesburg's CBD, the seven-storey hotel has two boardrooms (a 16-seater

and a 10-seater), a mini-gym, swimming pool, coffee shop and lounge.

The hotel offers easy access to the CBD and motorways and is within easy reach of Park Station from where the Gautrain links to OR Tambo International Airport.

The new property is adjacent to the Newtown

Junction shopping centre and Museum Africa and is within reach of the SAB World of Beer and the Market Theatre.

The opening of City Lodge Hotel Newtown comes shortly after the opening of the 90-room Road Lodge Pietermaritzburg in December. ■

Agents: beware risky tour ops!

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rather than paying it directly to suppliers, using the cash to earn interest. These operators then run into cash flow issues when the rand weakens significantly.

The bad news for consumers is that should a tour operator suddenly be forced to close its doors as a result of mismanaged cash flow, leaving the traveller out of pocket, travel insurance will not offer the traveller protection. **Simmy Micheli**, sales and marketing manager of Travel Insurance Consultants (TIC), says that while most South African travel insurance products contain a Travel Supplier Insolvency Benefit, to the best of her knowledge there are none that include tour operators in the definition of suppliers.

Proving that a tour operator's risky trading practice is fraud could also be a challenge. Partner at Hogan Lovells

South Africa, **Gareth Cremen**, says fraud is defined as trading "with the intention to defraud a party". He says that the facts of each case will differ but simply put if an operator closed its doors on a Monday and was still accepting clients' money on a Friday, it would be considered fraud. The affected party would, however, need to be able to build a case history in order to lay a claim.

Gareth warns that where agents may need to be particularly wary is when they have been involved in a contractual relationship, which in fact makes them liable. "If a travel agent continues to use a tour operator knowing there is financial distress involved, they could also be liable."

There are a number of checks agents can put in place in order to mitigate the risk of falling victim to fraud,

says Terry. Asata membership offers some protection as it proves that for the last 18 months the operator has been solvent; however agents should establish whether an operator has a history of good business, he says.

"Agents have the right to investigate the tour operator in question before they hand over their client's money," agrees **John Ridler**, PR and media manager of Thompsons Holidays. He recommends agents ask the operator to provide them with letters of reference from some of their suppliers and airlines, and even their bank.

If one understands how the operator's finances work and whether they are quoted primarily in dollars or euros, this could also help, Terry says, as operators who deal primarily with rands are not a risk when it comes to the volatile exchange rate. ■

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SAA considers additional security on Hong Kong route

TARYN NIGHTINGALE

AFTER three confirmed incidents of pilferage and theft on board flights between Johannesburg (JHB) and Hong Kong (HKG), SAA is considering introducing additional security measures and procedures in order to counteract the reoccurrence of such incidents. **Tlali Tlali**, spokesperson for SAA, told TNW the episodes that occurred within three weeks of one another. Two occurred en route

from HKG to JHB and one en route from JHB to HKG. “The incidents occurred within a short space of time on one route and has therefore raised suspicion that a syndicate could be involved,” said Tlali. “We are exploring a number of practical interventions to eliminate their reoccurrence,” Tlali added. The issue was first raised in December when a witness reported a suspected act of pilferage aboard a JHB - HKG flight.

SAA has established contact with the victim and have initiated processes to recover the victim’s belongings. The second incident occurred on December 24 aboard a HKG-JHB flight. The suspect was restrained and then arrested on arrival in Johannesburg. The suspect has since been banned from flying on SAA, says Tlali. The third incident is alleged to have occurred in January and is currently under investigation. ■



Operation Hydrate

MANGO Airlines has joined forces with Operation Hydrate to provide relief to some of the communities most affected by the worsening drought conditions in South Africa. Operation Hydrate, launched on January 11 and saw the airline purchase water to the value of R500 000 for distribution to communities in?. The airline is calling on all customers to act fast and contribute to the cause. Pictured here (from left) are Mango’s stakeholder relations, communication and corporate affairs HOD, **Hein Kaiser**, with cabin crew member, **Kylie Werner**. Photo: Megan Fischer

Kenya introduces incentives to entice travellers

KENYAN President, **Uhuru Kenyatta**, has introduced initiatives as part of a strategy to help the country’s tourism sector to recover. Incentives include the expansion of Malindi Airport, a reduction on Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) park fees, and the continued construction of Dongo Kundu bypass, a proposed road that will connect Mombasa mainland (south and west) without having to pass through Mombasa Island. KWS park fees will be reduced from US\$90 (R1 481) to US\$60 (R988) for the 2016/17 financial year. The president has directed the National Treasury to follow up on the directive and amend the respective laws for full implementation. The construction of the Dongo Kundu bypass is under way and, once completed, will allow tourists the option of travelling from the mainland to the South Coast without using a ferry. ■

LUX* reveals plans for expansion

DARISE FOSTER

LUX* Resorts and Hotels has revealed significant plans for expansion. Speaking to TNW, LUX* Resorts and Hotels head of marketing for South Africa, **Alexis Bekker**, said the brand would launch five new properties in 2017 – in Réunion, the Maldives, China, the United Arab Emirates and a new destination – Turkey.

at 100% occupancy over the festive season,” she said. “We only focus on five-star properties and travellers looking for this sort of product are still travelling,” Alexis maintained. LUX* is looking to establish a footprint in Africa. “Nothing has been signed as yet but we are looking to spread into Africa as it is such an important market for LUX*.” She noted, however, that LUX* is not ultimately looking to become a conglomerate of massive properties. “We look at niche destinations and specifically the types of unique properties on offer in those destinations, which is great because the South African traveller is always looking for something new,” she said. LUX* will focus on strengthening personal ties with the travel trade this year. “We have to get the trade behind us because without it, we will not have much hold in the market,” Alexis concluded. ■

“We only focus on five-star properties and travellers looking for this sort of product are still travelling.”

“We also have a number of plans for 2018 as well which we cannot disclose as yet,” she said. Alexis said that while the fluctuating exchange rate was a concern for LUX*, there is some relief for the brand in that its target audience continues to travel. “In Mauritius, we had over 93% occupancy from June to December last year and we ran

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Seabourn upgrades

Luxury cruise line Seabourn, represented by Cruises International in this market, has announced upgrades to its vessels and itineraries. Seabourn will also be welcoming new cruise ships, *Encore* (in December) and *Ovation* (in 2018). Pictured here at a press event to announce the new developments are (from left): Alex Lindsay (business development manager, Seabourn Cruises), and George Argyropoulos (md, Cruises International). Photo: Taryn Nightingale

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How to formulate a fair service fee

DARISE FOSTER

TRAVEL AGENTS should not compromise on charging a service fee. Instead, they should have a good understanding of the financial side of their business, what the costs are and what is required to sustain the business in order to establish a fee that is fair, says Vanya Lessing, ceo of Sure Travel. Vanya was speaking at last year's Sure Travel Management Forum which was held at the Protea Hotel Fire & Ice! Menlyn from November 20-22.

"Customers understand that there are costs and that you are in business to make a fair profit," Vanya said. "Fees should not be hidden as this

undermines your right to charge a fair fee and is likely to damage your relationship with your customer."

To this end, Future Proof Travel Solutions founder and president, Nolan Burris, suggests agents adopt a basic formula when determining a particular service fee. "When considering professional fees, the most important figures to understand are your costs per transaction multiplied by the product type," he said. "Only when you know what it actually costs you to sell a cruise or tour can you determine the amount you should charge."

The various fees the agency is responsible for should be considered, such as fixed costs like rent, insurance,

wages, taxes, furniture, computers, he said.

"Agents should set themselves a revenue return and work their model around that return," he said. "Once the revenue stream has been established, they must work backwards to establish the various transaction fees that will give them the revenue that they are wishing to achieve."

He also provided attendees at the forum with examples of how to use a computer-based spreadsheet to estimate an average fee that agents could charge. He suggested agents analyse all factors pertaining to business, such as agency expenses, non-air sales, non-air revenue and air revenue to establish an average cost per transaction.

The industry weighs in

TNW asked industry heads to weigh in on the subject of professional service fees.

Rod Rutter, coo of the XL Group, agreed that agents should take all expenses into account when establishing a service fee. Rod suggested agents first earn the revenue stream they wish to establish, then work on a service fee that will enable this to happen. Management and auxiliary fees should also be considered during this process, Rod added.

"Travel agents are professional people, just like doctors and lawyers, and should therefore charge accordingly for the time spent serving a particular client," said Allan Lunz, md

of BidTravel.

He warns against relying too heavily on supplier revenue when calculating service fees. "When the supplier revenue dries up and you're not charging adequate fees, it means you don't have a sustainable business model and you probably won't be in business much longer," he said.

Once an agent understands how much time goes into completing one transaction, and this figure is compared against the various costs of the agency coupled with the intended revenue return of the agent, a fair professional fee can be established. But, as Allan pointed out, many agents are opting against a

service fee because of the competitive nature of the industry. This is a problem that needs to be rooted out, he said.

Garth Wolff, ceo of eTravel, agreed: "travel agents must charge a service fee, and it should rise with the level of service being offered."

"Agents offering a superior service should charge a higher fee. "For example, an ITC with 50 years' experience and unbelievable service in a particular area has much more to offer a client and therefore is in a position to charge an extra fee because they can go the extra mile," he said. "Ultimately, however, the service fee should not be compromised." ■

Wings acquires another TMC

WINGS Travel Management is expanding its presence in Europe and has acquired Travelnet Stavanger in Norway for an undisclosed sum, effective March 1.

Founded in 2001, Travelnet Stavanger specialises in providing travel management services to clients predominantly in the oil, gas and marine sector from its office in Stavanger on the west coast of Norway. The company's client portfolio ranges from start-up businesses to multi-national blue-chip

organisations with a spend in excess of £3m (R73m). The Travelnet Stavanger team, who collectively have some 80 years' business travel experience, will migrate to Wings' global technology platform over the next two months and fully re-brand as Wings Travel Management during the course of the year.

Tony Sofianos, ceo of Wings Travel Management, says: "This acquisition is of strategic importance because the oil, gas and marine sectors account for around 60% of Wings' global

business and Norway is a key market in this sector. Stavanger, in particular, is a hub for the oil and gas industry with close ties to Aberdeen.

"By having a wholly owned presence in Norway using our global standardised technology platform, we will be able to source competitive fares globally from any of our operations. Other benefits include effective consolidated data integrity, irrespective of where the service is sourced." ■



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In a tough economic environment, agents need to package travel creatively in order to convince corporates to part with their spend. Darise Foster reports.

Cost-conscious corporates to cut back

AT THE time of publishing, the South African Rand stood at R16,66 against the US dollar and R23,87 against the pound.

While travel is often the first place corporates will look to cut costs, they still need to travel. "They will just change their behaviour to accommodate the increased cost pressures," says **Jean Martins**, country manager of the Tourism and Culture Authority Abu Dhabi. This is often done either by reducing the star-rating of the hotel or the length of stay of the traveller, she says.

"Corporates are travelling to cheaper destinations," agrees **Cathie Bester**, national sales manager of World Leisure Holidays. However, that "wow" experiences can still be enjoyed in strategically selected locations. "It often becomes a case of doing a local or regional incentive, where corporates used to go international," she says.

Regional hotel groups are reporting positive performance. Cresta's corporate three-star hotels in Zambia, Botswana and Zimbabwe are popular among business travellers

during tough economic times, says Cresta Hotels' group commercial manager **Sibo Gumpo**.

Sibo says that hotels should have various products on offer to suit different budgets without compromising on quality.

Janine Pienaar, regional sales and marketing officer of Central Hospitality International (previously Centara Hotels) has also noticed that corporates are opting for regional trips. "Alternatively, they select point-to-point destinations to avoid travelling around as this can become costly," she says.

Paying for value

"Most corporates are looking to see where and how they can get more value for their money as opposed to cost-cutting," says **Enid Maullin**, group sales executive of Beachcomber Tours.

"A number of corporates will still choose a good hotel with added value, as they want their group to have a memorable experience, however some of them are looking at shorter stays," she says.

Mauritius has remained popular among corporates. "Travellers get more for their money in Mauritius and it is still a unique, memorable experience," Enid says. "It is easily accessible and is just a short flight away from South Africa, and the all-inclusive packages on offer on the island cannot be beaten."

To keep up with changing trends in corporate travel, Air Mauritius has had to evolve to offer the corporate traveller more choice and added value, says the airline's sales and marketing manager for Southern Africa, **Wouter Nel**. "We have



Wouter Nel

lowered our costs for travellers upgrading from economy to business class as well as increased our luggage allowance to further attract the corporate traveller," he says.

Additionally, the airline has introduced a free stopover in Mauritius on all non-connecting flights on its international network. "The stopover allows travellers to spend the night in a four-star hotel with selected meals, typically dinner and breakfast, subject to stopover time, and return transfers," Wouter says.

All-inclusive is key

Corporates are opting for all-inclusive packages because this is often the most cost-effective way to go, says Discover The World's sales and marketing executive, **Anneli van den Berg**.

"One of the best ways for agents to upsell to a cost-conscious corporate is to offer an "experience" rather than a destination."

Cruising is a good option for corporates looking for value-for-money. "Cruises are definitely more cost-effective when compared to land-based alternatives because they include state-of-the-art conference facilities and itineraries, meals and accommodation," she says.

One of the best ways for agents to upsell to a cost-conscious corporate is to offer an "experience" rather than a destination. "Agents should focus on experiences that a specific destination has to offer and that can be incorporated into a trip. This does not need to be expensive," says Janine.

These could be cultural shows, barbecues on the beach or even cooking classes, she says. "In Thailand, for example, there are great cooking classes, which can either be experienced at a local restaurant with the ingredients sourced from a market or at the hotel with the hotel chef," she says.

However, Jean urges agents to remember that tending to the client's needs should always come first. "Let's face it – clients are more inclined to part with budget if a creative experiential programme is presented to them. However, while experiential travel is the trend at present, selling what the customer needs is more important than focusing on experience."

Jean says that gaining an intimate understanding of the corporate customer's overall business goals and how their travel policy can help them achieve this is where the travel agent's "sales" focus should be. "At this time, there is no substitute for proactive, customer-centric service in the TMC environment," she says.

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Build your destination knowledge

IT HAS never been more important for agents to learn as much as they can about the various destinations on offer for corporates – particularly those offering easy access and value for money.

“We believe that agents are better equipped to sell destinations when they have experienced the product, however we understand that agents are always pressed for time and therefore encourage them to travel with their families when they have time off,” says Cresta Hotels’ **Sibo Gumpo**.

Cresta Hotels offers discounted rates for travel agents throughout the year (subject to availability).

“Additionally, we try to ensure the content on our websites is very educational with key information not just about the properties but also about the destination,” she says.

Cresta’s free Victoria Falls mobile app is proving to be a very useful destination educational tool for Victoria Falls, says Sibbo. “We intend to introduce similar apps for the other cities in Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe where we have properties,” she says.

Destination workshops

With limited access to educationals, agents should attend destination workshops. “These are extremely helpful for agents to sell a destination with conviction,” says **Anneli van den Berg**.

First-hand experience is best but not always possible, TCA Abu Dhabi’s **Jean Martins** agrees. “In the absence of first-hand experience, TCA Abu Dhabi has a dedicated travel sales executive whose role it is to train South African travel agents about the destination using visual tools to bring the destination to life,” she says.

Jean recommends that



“When selling to the cost-conscious, it is important to talk with the hotel and see what previous events they have held and where they can add benefit or include affordable activities into the programme.”

agents speak to their customers who have travelled to different destinations before. “Agents should also keep up-to-date with what is happening in the destination and use the internet to research travel sites where visitors and residents have posted on-the-ground experiential information,” she adds.

CHI’s **Janine Pienaar** further points out that if an agent has not been to a particular destination themselves, they can call on local hotel sales offices or tourism offices to guide them as to what kind of destination experiences could be included in an incentive trip.

“When selling to the cost-conscious, it is important to talk with the hotel and see what previous events they have held and where they can add benefits or include affordable activities into the programme,” Janine advises.

Book it!

Air Mauritius has a MICE special for group departures from Johannesburg. Subject to availability, corporates can pay R1 800pp travelling in a group of 10 or more until March 15. Travellers flying from South Africa on Air Mauritius’ A340 aircraft can also upgrade to business class for only R1 850pp. Those flying on the A319 can also take advantage of Air Mauritius’ lie-flat seats by upgrading for just R1 600pp. This offer is irrespective of the class of travel initially booked.

Silverbirch completes expansion



The long-awaited expansion of Silverbirch@Birchwood has finally been completed. Due to the popularity of the Birchwood Hotel and OR Tambo Conference Centre’s quieter portion dedicated to the more discerning traveller, 80 more rooms have been added to the premium product. The new rooms offer the same upmarket facilities, including access to The Grill @ One Twenty fine dining restaurant, The Hotspot Bar and Lounge, and the Mangwanani Spa. Currently being renovated is the Birchwood’s on-site café, which will change its name to The BC Café in honour of the hotel’s late founder, **Brian Clarence**. Pictured here showcasing Silverbirch’s new garden and rooms are The Birchwood Hotel and OR Tambo Conference Centre’s sales manager, **Njabulo Mabuza**, and key account manager (corporate), **Kerry Daly**. Photo: Megan Fischer

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Delegates can enjoy a tour of Soweto with Soweto Bike Tours. Photo: Tessa Reed

Township conferencing is the next big thing

MORE corporates are looking for something different – and as a result township conferencing is thriving. **Barba Gaoganediwe**, senior manager of the Gauteng Tourism Authority's destination and corporate communications, says:

“Organisers are looking for modern ways to spice up the conferencing space, and township conferencing offers that very opportunity,” Barba says. He says attendees are tired of the same routine at conferences. They want something new, where they can get more out of the conference than just its subject matter.

“The township experience gives delegates exposure to a new, real life experience during their conference,” Barba says.

Township conferences offer a range of different activities for delegates to enjoy both pre- and post-conference. Additionally, organisers are guaranteed a better rate in comparison to suburban areas but still enjoy high standards both in terms of facilities and services.

“In Soweto, for example, delegates can enjoy the bike tour of Soweto, visit the old house of Nelson Mandela, or even bungee jump off the Orlando Towers. Overall, it is the flair and flavour of the township that adds a completely new element to any conference.

“Ultimately, it’s about packaging township conferences as an experience and guaranteeing a change in the way delegates perceive a conference,” he concludes.



Varied Formula 1 itineraries are a viable incentive option.

Motorsport incentives – not just for fanatics

INCENTIVE organisers often don't consider motorsport to be an incentive option because it is a niche interest and they have to cater for big groups. They also assume it does not offer much value beyond the sporting event itself but this is not true, says F1 Grand Prix Tours founder and ceo, **Johan van Veelen**.



“We acknowledge that not everybody is a motorsport fan and that is why we package our tours in such a way as to include as many additional activities as possible,” Johan adds.

For instance, a typical tour in Maranello, Italy would include a visit to the Maranello racing museum, after which participants get the chance to drive a Ferrari. “Thereafter we would go to lunch in a castle overlooking Maranello,” Johan says.

“Corporates would typically buy a standard package but they don't realise how much more they can do. Varied packages are the perfect option for corporates looking to reward their employees.”

Admittedly, this comes at an extra cost, Johan says.

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Agents should consider more creative elements in conferences.

How to 'wow' delegates

Any experienced agent involved in planning meetings is familiar with the basics involved in pulling off a successful event, but is this enough in today's competitive and fast-paced business world? Liesl Venter speaks to Zelda Coetzee, national chairman of SAACI about improving your service offering to add that extra pizzazz.

CONFERENCE planning has moved beyond simply ticking items off of a checklist and offering the basic services. According to **Zelda Coetzee**, it has kicked up a notch or two. "One could say that it is no longer just about organising a conference but rather about designing it," she explains. "As it's an experience that you are designing you have to take a more creative approach to the services on offer. This requires conference organisers to embrace design thinking principles and to allow for process design."

"One could say that it is no longer just about organising a conference but rather about designing it."

She explains this does not mean a new checklist of services for organisers, but rather adding another tick box to the existing list.

"So you still tick off the essential services that have to be provided but you also have to tick the creative box. What about this conference offers the delegate a superior experience and how are we delivering that to the delegate? What are we adding to conference services to improve it?"

It is important that organisers think about the conference as a process from the delegate's point of view, from the first moment they arrive to when they leave, says Zelda. "How have we added value and made it all worthwhile? This does not necessarily mean we need to provide great entertainment or special effects. It's actually not through these kinds of elements that one wows a delegate."

Keep it personal

According to Zelda improved service is not about impressing delegates with good entertainment during lunch. Rather it is about delivering a personal experience to the delegates that was not expected.

This could come in the form of simply registering an account with a taxi provider and taking care of each delegate's travel arrangements individually or giving each person the choice of what they want in their delegate bag. "It's all about choice and meeting personal preferences. That is how one creates 'wow' these days. So instead of them having to worry about airport transfers, for example, it is all taken care of or maybe some delegates don't want a physical programme," she says.

These gestures can also be of more of a flashy nature. Like installing a signboard at the registration that personally welcomes each delegate as they step into the venue.

"This is not difficult to implement and immediately says to each person: 'We know you and we want you here'. The gesture can be personalised even more by adding a photograph of them," says Zelda.

It all comes down to dedicating time during the organising process to take the creative elements into consideration. And it is becoming more and more important, says Zelda.

There is no need for creative consideration to be costly or time-consuming.

"Yes it does require more time from the organiser but there are simple ways in which one can provide delegates with a better service," she says.

Book it

The Riverside Sun in Vanderbijlpark is offering business travellers and their families a discounted rate of R950 per double standard room. Kids under 18 stay for free with free breakfast if sharing with adults. The rate includes breakfast, free parking and 500mb of free Wi-Fi and is subject to availability and site inspection of the hotel. The rate is not valid for groups and is limited to one room per agent. Bookings must be made directly with the hotel.

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TNW7406SD

Millennials vs baby boomers – do you know your traveller?

THE WAY business travellers view travel can differ significantly from generation to generation. The Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) Foundation released a study derived from the latest Business Travel Sentiment Index featuring statistics to help travel agents and managers profile their travellers.

According to the study, millennials are nearly twice as likely to want to travel more for business than Baby Boomers (45% to 26% respectively), while a strong majority of millennials (57%) believe technology can never replace face-to-face meetings to get business done.

Additionally, millennials are far more likely to rely on social media to meet up with friends when travelling than baby boomers (46% to 17%) and are far less

likely to want to use their personal credit cards to float business expenses (53% to 69%).

Wi-Fi is a must

In terms of travel amenities, baby boomers would prefer not to pay a fee to check in luggage (47% compared with 34% of millennials), while millennials expect free Wi-Fi on a business trip (30% compared with 17% of baby boomers).

“Millennials are the newest generation of road warriors and, like their more experienced peers, they understand that face-to-face meetings remain key to getting business done,” said **Michael McCormick**, GBTA executive director and coo. “Over the last quarter, business travellers across the board – Millennials, Gen Xers and Baby Boomers – reported that their goals

were met on business trips, leading to greater satisfaction.”

“Millennials in particular are interested in business travel and see the value it brings to their companies and their careers,” said **Susan Chapman-Hughes**, senior vp, American Express Global Corporate Payments. “This generation may see more upsides to business travel because they’ve found new ways to stay connected to their personal and professional commitments while on the road.”

Smooth security procedures

Given a choice, business travellers across generations prefer travelling through security easily (52%) compared with other airport amenities, however, smooth travel through security is much more important to



Millennials view travel differently to baby boomers.

Baby Boomers (54%) and Gen Xers (56%) than to Millennials (35%). While almost one-half (48%) of business travellers across age groups want free Wi-Fi at the airport, this is more important to Millennials (54%) than Baby Boomers (44%). Additionally, regardless of age, two in five business travellers (39%) want airports to offer non-stop flights to their destinations.

The study also revealed that another significant concern for all business travellers was their lack of confidence in the economy.

The percentage of travellers who believe the overall health of the economy was excellent dropped from 32% in quarter two to just 21% in the final quarter of 2015.

This is despite the fact that travellers’ views of the health of their own company or industry remained virtually unchanged and much more positive, the GBTA said. According to the study, more than half of business travellers feel their own company is in excellent financial shape (62%) and that the overall health of their industry is excellent (51%). ■

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Fairmont launches new hotel in Morocco

FAIRMONT Hotels & Resorts has announced the development of Fairmont La Marina Rabat-Salé, a new luxury hotel in Morocco.

The 200-room hotel, set to open in 2019, will be located in La Marina Morocco, a coastal mixed-use development between Rabat and the ancient city of Salé. Ample meeting space and a range of restaurants, including an all-day dining concept, lobby lounge and bar. A speciality restaurant and pool bar and grill will also be available, as well as

spa and fitness facilities complete with an array of leisure options.

Fairmont La Marina Rabat-Salé's situation on the Bouregreg river-mouth benefits from triple water frontage: the marina, river and ocean. Close to key heritage sites in Rabat such as Kasbat Oudayas and Tour Hassan as well as being close to the Hassan district, the project offers views over the Atlantic Ocean from the north and Bouregreg River and The Mausoleum of Mohammed V from the south.

News flash

Cresta Hotels has refurbished several hotels in its portfolio. In Botswana, Cresta Botsalo recently underwent a bathroom refurbishment, Cresta Mowana added a new outdoor function venue and Cresta Riley improved some of its rooms as well as its pool area. Meanwhile in Zambia, Cresta Gofview added a 350-seater marquee for outdoor events.

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14 ■ Wednesday January 27 2016

QUICK READ FOR DECISION-MAKERS

Resignation

■ **Ed Winter** has announced his resignation as chief executive of fastjet. His resignation announcement comes within weeks after the company's shares dropped to a record low of 43,75p (R10,37) on December 2015 according to the London stock exchange. Ed will remain in the post until a new chief executive is appointed and stay at the company in an advisory capacity for an agreed period of time.



Resignation

■ **South African Tourism** coo, **Stembiso Dlamini**, is currently serving as acting ceo, until a formal appointment for the role of ceo is made.

■ **Bob Johnson** has been appointed as vp of sales for Hotel Internet Services (HIS). The veteran business strategist has more than 20 years of experience in the software and internet industry and has been credited with numerous accomplishments, including building Internet Services Provider, Earthlink, from a 15-person startup to the second largest ISP in the United States. In his new role at HIS, Bob will be tasked with directing the expansion of the company's North American sales team.



■ **La Petite Ferme**, a hillside hospitality and wine estate in Franschhoek, has appointed **Riaan Kruger** as gm and **Wicus Pretorius** as the new winemaker.

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TNW7522

High rates stifle local travel

From page 1

to travel abroad, says head of communications, **Russell Jarvis**. “Mauritius offers good packages and South East Asia offers a range of well-priced destinations,” he says. “If someone weighs the value of a four-star holiday in Thailand versus Cape Town, they will likely get more value from the Thailand trip and there is not much difference in price,” he says. “But South Africa offers options for people travelling on all kinds of budgets and if they can’t afford to go overseas, they will find something they can afford within our borders.” ■

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Easter on the island!

LUX* Resorts and Hotels is offering a special for travellers visiting Mauritius over the Easter period. From R19 426pp, travellers can enjoy six nights at the Merville Beach Grand Baie in Mauritius. Alternatively, for R13 878, travellers can enjoy four nights at the Hotel Le Recif on Réunion Island. Pictured here (from left) ready for an island Easter egg hunt are LUX* Resorts and Hotels’ **Natalie de Lange** (sales manager – Western Cape), **Glen Taylor** (sales manager – Gauteng and KZN) and **Evi Moller** (sales manager – Gauteng). Photo: Megan Fischer

D-day for lata’s new financial criteria looms

DEBBIE BADHAM

THE deadline for the implementation of lata’s new financial criteria is just a month away, but the majority of agents are confident that they’re ready for the change.

IATA’s area manager for South Africa, **Janaurieu D’Sa**, confirmed that following its December 10 notification to agents, many agents have already met the criteria. lata is confident that most if not all agents will be ready by the deadline. “We have seen no indication of agencies not doing the necessary to comply,” Janaurieu says.

TNW conducted a snap survey among 15 agencies with their own lata licences, 12 of which said they were ready for the looming deadline.

Both **Mladen Lukic**, gm of Travel Counsellors South Africa and **Garth Wolff**, ceo of eTravel commented that their ITCs are also ready. However, the heads of travel consortiums agree

that smaller travel agencies will need to rethink the way in which their businesses operate.

“Not all agents have taken heed of the new financial criteria,” says md of Harvey World Travel Southern Africa, **Marco Cristofoli**. While HWT has made it its mandate to educate its members about the new requirements, Marco says only around five or six out of 90 of the group’s members have responded with queries to HWT’s notifications about the new criteria.

While the readiness of each agency to implement the new criteria will depend on the makeup of each particular business, those smaller agencies with prolonged account status’ are going to struggle and will be forced to seek out alternatives, says Mladen.

“As a result some agencies will need to remit twice monthly or even four times a month,” agrees **David Pegg**, md of Sure Viva Travels.

Although, he says this is not ideal as agents earn interest off of that money.

Rod Rutter, coo of XL Travel, believes the majority of agents will opt for the DIP and pay the R11 per ticket. However, he says they would be wiser to opt for the guarantee as this is money they won’t “lose” and that will earn them interest. He adds that XL Travel has been proactive in focusing on the reduction of its cash sales in order to reduce its guarantees rather than opting for the DIP.

However, agencies that rely on the “airlines’ money” are mismanaging their businesses, says Garth. With the DIP acting as an additional cost, he believes that many smaller agents will ultimately become ITCs. He says eTravel has seen an increase in interest from potential ITCs as a direct result of the lata bonding and tough economic conditions. “Very small businesses are going to struggle to support continuous cash flow,” he says. ■

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