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TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

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New deal to boost Tsogo in SA

SUSAN REYNARD

TSOGO Sun is set to enter a deal with Hospitality Property Fund (HPF) that will give the group expanded exposure to the hotel market in South Africa.

As part of the deal, HPF will buy a portfolio of ten hotels from Tsogo Sun in exchange for shares. The result will be a majority shareholding by Tsogo Sun in HPF of just over 50%. The ten Tsogo Sun owned and operated hotels that will be added to HPF's portfolio are: Southern Sun Bloemfontein; Southern Sun Newlands; Garden Court OR Tambo; Garden Court South Beach; Garden Court Polokwane; Garden Court Milpark; Garden Court Kimberley; SunSquare Cape Town; StayEasy Century City; and StayEasy Rustenburg.

Tsogo has also acquired Majomatic and Extrabold, taking over the Holiday Inn Sandton and Crowne Plaza Rosebank leases, which are HPF-owned hotels.

Marcel von Aulock, ceo of Tsogo Sun, told *TNW*: "Tsogo was considering creating its own hotel and entertainment-focused property

company. We decided that HPF would make the ideal entity to inject our hotel assets into and entered into the current deal to take control of HPF rather than form a new propco. This deal is a win for both parties as it stabilises HPF, introduces new assets into the company and provides a pipeline of additional potential deals for HPF.

"From a Tsogo viewpoint, it allows us to get exposure to some great hotel assets operated by good operators such as Radisson, Starwood and Marriott. Tsogo's hotel portfolio expands to a multi-managed, multi-branded one, expanding on the assets we already had under the InterContinental brands."

Marcel adds: "The non-Tsogo related hotels – Radisson, Westin and Protea – continue to be leased and managed by the relevant operators in terms of their leases, while Tsogo will continue to lease and manage the Southern Sun, Garden Court, SunSquare and StayEasy branded hotels as well as the Holiday Inn Sandton and Crowne Plaza Rosebank."

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Tourism Ireland South Africa is challenging travel agents to go all out, dress in green and green their offices on St Patrick's Day, March 17. Agents can send their greened pic to *TNW* (etnweditor@nowmedia.co.za). The best pic will be published and the agency will win a hamper filled with Irish goodies to the value of R2 500 courtesy of Tourism Ireland. Ready to #GoGreen4PatricksDay (from left) are **Shelley Phillips, Development Promotions sales manager; and **Gina Stanford**, Development Promotions key account sales executive. Photo: Megan Fischer**

Namibia clamps down on business visas

DORINE REINSTEIN

THE Namibian government is clamping down on visitors who require a business visa, actively interviewing travellers entering the country.

"Corporate travellers have always had to apply for a business visa, however it was treated as a 'grey' area," says **Cristina Cicognani**, Namibia Tourism's area manager for Cape Town. "Before,

corporate travellers often indicated that they would come to Namibia for leisure to avoid the hassle of applying for a business visa. This is now no longer possible."

According to Cristina, several travellers have been turned back during the past few months because they didn't have a business visa.

South African business travellers to

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To the point



Registrations have opened for Asata's annual conference, to be held at The Lord Charles hotel in Somerset West from May 20-23. "The focus and format will be similar to previous years and we are confident that the networking, breakaway sessions, guest speakers and overall programme will be informative and valuable," says **Otto de Vries**, ceo of Asata. The association will host its Asata Diners Club Awards during the conference. The conference will be open to day visitors. Agents can register on the Asata website.

Visit AgentConnect.biz your dedicated website.



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- TNW pick: Cruise agent in hot water
- Namibia - SA pax need business visa
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Hong Kong scraps fuel levy, SA must follow – Asata

DARISE FOSTER

ASATA plans to engage lawmakers in its fight to lobby for new legislation that will regulate airlines' fuel surcharge policies.

SAA and Cathay Pacific have scrapped their fuel surcharges on flights into and out of Hong Kong, following a ruling by the Hong Kong Civil Aviation Department that airlines operating into and out of the city would no longer be allowed to charge a levy because of the decrease in fuel prices.

SA law does not provide the necessary channels to legally challenge the fuel surcharge, says **Otto de Vries**. "Despite successes in other parts of the world, other countries are all supported by appropriate legislation and strong consumer lobby groups."

He argues that fuel is a fundamental cost of doing business and should be

presented in the base fare so that South Africans can see in a transparent manner what they are paying towards the airfare.

"It would be much more transparent if the base fare was increased and the fuel levy done away with. It's easier to explain to clients. Since the airlines are the ones who bleat about the fact that agents must be transparent in their charges, why not they themselves too!" **Inge Beadle**, manager of Corporate Travel Services, commented on TNW's online sister publication, eTNW.

Surcharges are also a challenge for frequent flyer card holders. "In most cases, travellers can only use their frequent flyer points to pay for the actual fare, not for any levies or government taxes. So, when airlines categorise a large chunk of the fare as a surcharge, your free loyalty

ticket has suddenly become a lot more expensive," says Otto.

Last year, Asata completed a study into fuel surcharges, which was accepted by the World Travel Agents Associations Alliance (WTAAA) as an international document and will now be lobbied on an international scale. The report was sent to Aasa and Barsa and requested to engage their members, says Otto. "We then requested an opportunity to meet and discuss with the carriers, but they declined."

In the past, agents have lamented the fuel surcharge, saying it is an ingenious way for airlines to avoid paying commission on what is actually revenue or override agreements. However, airlines have said the issue is more complex, with the need to consider various factors, such as airlines' fuel hedging strategies. ■

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Rubes® By Leigh Rubin



Kenya Airways boosts Joburg flights

KENYA Airways will add four flights a week between Johannesburg and Nairobi, increasing the service to four daily flights on Mondays, Tuesdays, Saturdays and Sundays, effective April 2. The airline currently operates three daily flights on the route. KQ 767 will depart

Johannesburg at 05h00 to arrive in Nairobi at 10h05. Return flight KQ 766 will depart Nairobi at 00h55 to arrive in Johannesburg at 04h10 on the same days. "This frequency is as a result of numerous requests from our guests to increase our offering to the market as well as a

variety of departure times for seamless connectivity to Nairobi and beyond," says **Helena Maxwell**, Kenya Airways area manager for Southern Africa and Indian Ocean Islands. The new flight will be operated using a 98-seat Embraer ERJ-190. ■

Etihad to launch new aircraft on Joburg route

DORINE REINSTEIN

ETIHAD Airways will deploy its A330-200 on the Johannesburg route from April 1, replacing the Jet Airways configured aircraft. From November the airline will operate its new Boeing 787 Dreamliner to Johannesburg.

Using the Jet Airways aircraft under the Etihad banner has been a challenge as Etihad cannot guarantee the same service, says **Geraldine Boshoff**, Sure Travel marketing manager. Travellers complained on TripAdvisor that the seats were smaller and closer together and that the experience was overall substandard. One traveller said: "Avoid, avoid, avoid!

This is a huge scam. You think you are flying Etihad and instead you are subjected to the cramped planes and horrendously bad service level of Jet Airways." Etihad deployed the Jet aircraft on the Johannesburg route in October 2014. Although the aircraft is operated by Etihad crew and the in-flight entertainment is provided by Etihad, the airline still made sure it notified consultants on the GDS of the fact that they would be booking an Etihad flight on a Jet Airways aircraft, important information that is crucial for agents to pass on to their clients, says Geraldine. Etihad Airways' new Dreamliner will feature 28 Business Studios with fully

flat beds of up to 205cm long and 271 Economy Smart seats. It will feature the latest Panasonic eX3 entertainment system, providing more than 750 hours of on-demand entertainment, improved gaming, and high-definition screens across all cabins. The aircraft also has full mobile and WiFi service. **James Hogan**, president and ceo of Etihad Airways, says Johannesburg is among the airline's most popular markets. "Today's travellers are looking for greater comfort, higher standards, more choice and better convenience as priorities in their decision-making and we, at Etihad Airways, are striving to meet their high expectations." ■

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Motorsport tours set to increase this year

WHILE last year was arguably a challenging one for motorsport tours because of the focus on the Rugby World Cup, we believe we will be all systems go again this year. This is good because there are many motorsport events that keep sport-loving travellers entertained all year round, and at F1 Grand Prix Tours, we offer them all.

There is a big market for motorsport tours in South Africa – and when I say ‘motorsport tours’ I do not just mean Formula 1. There are motorsport fanatics in South Africa who enjoy all forms of the sport such as MotoGP (which is done on motorbikes); the 24-hours of Le Mans endurance race in France, which attracts a crowd of 400,000+ and we also have people attending the Isle of Man TT motorbike race. Travellers also have the option of attending historic races such as the Classic 24-hours of Le Mans endurance, which takes place every two years.

Travellers also have the option of attending historic races such as the 24-hour Le Mans endurance race in France. The Goodwood Revival – a three day festival held each September at the Goodwood Circuit in Sussex, United Kingdom – which is also very popular – is an annual event where people dress in the fashion of the 1950s or 1960s and enjoy spit braais and good old fashioned entertainment. The Malaysia Grand Prix is popular because of the pricing, making it probably among the more affordable options in terms of motorsport tours.

The Malaysia Grand Prix is popular because of the pricing, making it probably among the more affordable options in terms of motorsport tours.

The Monaco Grand Prix is also very popular, however it is more expensive as is the Italian GP, but it is one of a kind. I can assure you, you will not find the passion for the sport anywhere in the world as strongly as you will find it in Italy. This one is definitely for the true fanatics.

For MotoGP fans, the Italian, Spanish and Malaysian events are the most popular with the South African market, simply because of the indescribable passion at these races and also the good value for money.

Some people will be surprised to learn that South Africans are historically motorsport fans from the days of Kyalami and the fact that we used to have Formula 1 here as well as motorbike Grand Prix events.

The majority of travellers who join us on these kinds of tours are generally motorsport fans. Similarly, this is not a typical choice for families looking for a holiday because the cars and motorbikes are extremely loud and can be difficult for children’s ears to bear.

Often, as there are people in corporate groups who are less interested in motorsport, we package our tours in such a way as to ensure that other things are included.

At F1 Grand Prix Tours, our clients appreciate that we are specialised in this particular field. We have competitors that offer a motorsport product but do not offer the full spectrum as we do. We only package motorsport tours – we do not just offer any holiday – and travellers looking for this sort of product tend to appreciate that.



Johan van Veelen

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New products, new winners!

Gateway Travel and Tours, with the Globus family of brands, welcomed members of the trade to its 2016 products launch on February 18 at the Radisson Blu in Sandton. The launch saw over R200 000 worth of travel prizes given away. Pictured here is Gateway Travel and Tours md, Keith Gow (left) with Adriaan Kruger, director of 2life Travel, who won two prizes on the day. Photo: Megan Fischer

Indian visas now available online

TARYN NIGHTINGALE

INDIA’s e-Tourist visa (eTV) has been extended to South African passport holders.

First secretary at the High Commission of India in Pretoria, **Anil Kumar Gupta**, told *TNW* it formed part of India’s plan to include more countries into its eTV system.

Travellers applying for the eTV must submit

their applications online by uploading their photo and supporting documents. The visa is then paid for online with either a debit or credit card. The visa then takes three to four days to be issued via email and the applicant can then print it to take when visiting India. The eTV is a single-entry visa and is valid for one month.

Applicants for this visa need to ensure that their

passport has at least six months’ validity from their date of arrival in India and has at least two blank pages. In addition, travellers need to ensure that they have sufficient funds to spend in India as well as either a return or onward journey ticket.

Travellers endorsed on either a parent or spouse’s passport would not be eligible for the eTV. ■

BA drops UMNR service

TARYN NIGHTINGALE

BRITISH Airways has scrapped its unaccompanied minor service, meaning that children who are under 12 will no longer be able to fly on their own. This decision applies to

all flights across BA’s network, except those operated by Comair.

“It’s a niche service. Of the five- to 11-year-olds who fly with us, more than 98% now do so accompanied by an adult. Nine out of ten young people aged over 12 who

travel alone with us do so without making use of the service,” the airline told *TNW*.

The airline will still accompany children over 12, but those aged 11 and younger must be accompanied by an adult aged 16 or over. ■

Angolan visas cost more

TARYN NIGHTINGALE

ALL applications for Angolan visas must now be submitted online at an additional cost of \$40 (R643). This is in addition to the existing R1 750 fee for a tourist visa.

Once applicants have submitted their documentation online,

the consulate will then determine whether the applicant is eligible for a visa and, if so, the applicant will then be required to submit fingerprints and supporting documentation at either a visa office or the consulate.

“If you don’t submit

the application online, it will not be accepted by the consulate,” Visas & Passports Unlimited, a visa and passport services company, told *TNW*.

The consulate in Cape Town confirmed that the new service would not affect the processing time for visas. ■

For the record

Anthea Hay is the owner of Peak Adventures. She is not the owner of ITC Peak as was incorrectly stated in *TNW*’s March 9 issue. *TNW* apologises for the error.



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*Image depicts Club World cabin, available on long-haul flights to London and beyond.



Luxury Travel

Luxury travel is booming and has been recognised as the strongest-growing travel market segment worldwide. Dorine Reinstein reports.

Travellers won't hesitate to pay

THE international luxury travel market has grown twice as fast as any other type of travel, showing 48% growth over the last five years, according to the World Travel Monitor compiled by IPK International and commissioned by ITB Berlin last year.

The largest source markets for luxury travel are the US, with 9,2m foreign luxury trips last year, and China with 6,9m. Other major source markets are Japan, Canada and Australia. In Europe, most luxury trips are taken by the British, with 1,5m trips per year, ahead of the French and the Germans. According to tour operators, South Africa is not lagging far behind.

Although the economic situation in South Africa might seem dire, there has not been a dip in enquiries and sales for luxury travel, says **Pieter Beyers**, gm of Insight Vacations.

He says the company's bookings have remained constant year on year.

"The luxury market seems to

be quite resilient."

Lieria Boshoff, brand manager for Uniworld, attributes the market's resilience to the fact that the wealthy do not compromise on their much-needed down time.

World Leisure Holidays has also seen a strong booking trend over the past few months, says national sales manager, **Cathie Bester**. "Some people are prepared to pay that little bit extra for the personalised service, they want to be pampered and have a holiday that caters for their unique requirements," she says.

According to Pieter, when it comes to the luxury market, price is not the defining factor; rather the experience is what it's all about.

Liezl Gericke, country manager for Virgin Atlantic in South Africa agrees and says luxury is less about cost and more about agents making sure they understand what the needs of their customers are, ensuring that they give them something that is unique and better than what is out

there in the industry.

In line with this, sales and marketing manager for TravelVision, **Annemarie Lexow**, says luxury suppliers try to give superior service and the customer knows it, as such they will not hesitate to pay the rates that come with luxury travel.

"Although the economic situation in South Africa might seem dire, there has not been a dip in enquiries and sales for luxury travel."

Luxury cruise sales up

In terms of cruising, **George Argyropoulos**, md of Cruises International, says he has seen a greater rise in luxury cruise sales than mass-market sales. "I think it is because the more affluent are less affected by the exchange rate fluctuations," he says, adding that South Africa's affluent class is one of the fastest growing in the world.

George says there are a number of other reasons why luxury travel, and specifically luxury cruising, is growing at a steady pace. He says consumers have started placing higher value on unique and meaningful experiences rather than on "collecting stuff". "A luxury cruise experience, with the lifestyle it offers on board and on land, meets this requirement," he adds.

Mass-market travel has become too "mass market", says George. "There is no quality of experience, no personalised attention, long queues, a lot of hassle and stress to travelling around. A luxury cruise, on the other hand, acknowledges each and every guest as a unique individual and offers a high quality of service and personalisation of the experience."

The all-inclusive nature of luxury travel is another significant reason why this type of travel is popular in South Africa. "Even though a luxury cruise may require

higher payment upfront, the all-inclusive nature of the cruise often makes it a better value-for-money proposition than a mass-market cruise, where you are required to pay on board for many items, services, activities, entertainment, dining and other amenities," says George.

Lieria agrees and says Uniworld introduced a fully inclusive offering in 2014 in response to guest feedback. "This is a step towards creating a seamless environment on board where our guests' only cares are what to do and when to do it."

All-inclusive land packages are also attractive for the luxury traveller, says **Joanne Visagie**, national sales and marketing manager for Beachcomber Tours. "Our forward bookings for 2016 are looking very positive, although we don't know yet what the effect will be of the latest drop in the rand. This we will only know going forward. However, I believe clients will choose the all-inclusive options and rather travel to Mauritius than to Europe or the States."



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Pax want unique experiences, not just bling

THE luxury travel segment is, without a doubt, a lucrative niche for travel agents, but tour operators warn that agents should be aware that the definition of luxury has changed dramatically and is now less about 'bling' and more about 'experience'.

"Luxury today means unique experiences combined with the highest levels of comfort and individual services. The real luxury is having time," says Dr **Martin Buck**, Messe Berlin's director of Travel & Logistics.

Luxury as a lifestyle has changed dramatically, agrees **George Argyropoulos** of Cruises International. "From the accumulation of luxury goods, houses, cars and jewellery, we have seen a move towards unique experiences, voyages of discovery, internal growth and development, charitable work and a more subtle and discerning enjoyment of life."

"While luxury décor and facilities are a priority with luxury travelers, their true

needs are fulfilled through the specialist individual service offered, choice of dining and excellent food," agrees Beachcomber's **Joanne Visagie**. She says at Royal Palm Mauritius there is a ratio of four staff to one suite.

According to George, luxury brands such as Crystal, Seabourn, Azamara, Oceania and Seadream, have dramatically evolved over the years to adapt to this changing trend. "Gone are the large portions of food, the midnight buffets, the heavily decorated staterooms and public areas. Instead, the fitness areas have been turned into oases, with the latest equipment including Pilates, yoga and Tai-chi."

What customers want Virgin Atlantic's **Liezl Gericke** says it is important to understand the customer's wants and needs and to make sure that there are some pioneering differentiating factors to the product. "So with Virgin,



Seadream is one of the luxury cruise brands. Photo: Cruises International

for instance, we were the first airline to have seat-back TV screens, we were the first to introduce a premium economy cabin, and more. She adds that those passengers who want to have a little bit of luxury will rather book premium economy than economy class because it is a little bit more exclusive, it is a smaller cabin and is a bit more private.

Any company can offer five-star hotels and call

themselves luxury, comments Insight Vacations' **Pieter Beyers**. Key for agents in choosing the right luxury provider is to opt for a company that provides experiences that are original and not easily obtained.

"For example dining in a Michelin-starred restaurant or exclusive inclusions such as after-hours visits to the Vatican will be features most operators cannot offer."

When it comes to accommodation, travellers

also want something more. "We've seen more of a demand for sophisticated five-star boutique properties and those that are steeped in history and culture," says Pieter.

What's more, length of stay has increased in the luxury travel market, according to Uniworld's **Lieria Boshoff**. She says travellers are willing to pay more to extend their holiday in order to get the experience they're looking for.



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Tips for selling luxury travel

THE role of the travel agent in the sale of a luxury product is absolutely crucial. Affluent travellers usually don't have the time or the interest to do all the research themselves, says Cruises Internationals' **George Argyropoulos**.

"More and more travellers are valuing the personal element experienced on their travels and this begins with the travel agent and the service they receive," agrees Beachcomber Tours' **Joanne Visagie**.

Know your client

Affluent travellers cherish the opportunity to sit with an expert who understands their needs, aspirations, lifestyle and reasons why they want to embark on a luxury trip, says George.

Joanne also points out that different people's perceptions of what makes travel luxurious can vary wildly. However, every traveller wants to deal with an experienced sales person who cares. "Travel

agents require more depth of understanding and a sophisticated level of knowledge and confidence in the sales process – delivering a seamless personal service," she says.

Match client to product

Uniworld's **Lieria Boshoff** advises travel agents to develop their knowledge of the different choices in the market to give clients the best possible options. "For agents to book a luxury holiday they need to be able to ensure their client will find that the trip is worth the money. This is where product knowledge is vital as the agent needs to be able to articulate what makes the product unique."

Insight Vacations' **Pieter Beyers** says agents have a key role in defining their top-end guests and pairing them with the holidays that will best suit them. "It's also up to the agent to explain the value in these packages and point out



"Agents should not try to sell a product because the majority of the market is travelling to that destination." **Annemarie Lexow**

the great opportunities and experiences clients will have."

Travel agents need to be good "profilers" and

not just audit takers. They should not try to sell a product because the majority of the market is travelling to that destination or because they earn higher commissions in selling certain products or destinations, adds TravelVision's **Annemarie Lexow**.

Seek tour ops' advice

Listen to your clients' requirements and offer great travel solutions for them, says WLH's **Cathie Bester**. "Anything is possible," she says, adding that the tour operator can very often assist the travel agent with offering something special to the client.

Go the extra mile

Affluent travellers are looking for travel agents who will stand by their side from their initial meeting all the way until they are safely back home, comments George. "This engagement comes with huge rewards:

very high commission earnings, repeat business and great referrals! We have some very successful consultants in south Africa who have created a business solely on selling luxury cruises."

Don't undersell

Don't sell an entry-level category hotel or room straight off the bat without getting to know the clients' requirements first and where they have stayed prior and what they are truly looking for, advises Joanne.

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Popular places for SA travellers

India

India is a top destination to consider for affluent South African travellers.

Although Europe will always be a wonderful choice, says Insight Vacations' **Pieter Beyers**, the company has received more enquiries for India over the past few months.

"India is on many people's bucket lists but it is also a country that you want to do in style. You want to visit the Taj Mahal at dawn before the crowds and savour the tropical beauty of the Kerala backwaters as you cruise by traditional houseboat – and we do this in superb style."

TravelVision agrees that India is a destination well suited to luxury travel.

"The most luxurious product we offer is our luxury rail offering in India," says **Annemarie Lexow**. "Travellers are treated like royalty, the service is

outstanding and all the excursions are included in the package."

Mauritius

Mauritius has long been a popular option for luxury travellers from South Africa. "It is free from political or natural disasters and is a safe choice for families or luxury travellers," says Beachcomber's **Joanne Visagie**.

She says a big drawcard is that the waters are safe and that the island is surrounded by a coral reef. It is also a convenient holiday destination as travellers don't need taxis to go to the beach or to dine, and they don't pay for most water or land sports.

Due to the popularity of the destination, **Cathie Bester**, says WLH has increased its portfolio in Mauritius to include a number of five-star superior properties.



Mauritius has long been a popular option for luxury travellers from South Africa.

Abu Dhabi

Despite SAA stopping its service to Abu Dhabi, the Emirate has become an attractive destination for SA luxury travellers. Since opening a dedicated Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority office in Johannesburg last year, the office says tourist arrivals from South Africa have grown over 50%.

WLH has also recognised the potential of Abu Dhabi with the South African public and has increased its portfolio of hotels in the emirate.

Victoria Falls

Victoria Falls remains a firm favourite with South African luxury travellers, says

Lindi Mthethwa, regional manager for African Sun Hotels.

She says the Victoria Falls Hotel, known as "the grand old lady of the Falls" is a particularly popular choice, as the hotel is a member of the exclusive Leading Five Star Hotels of the World group. The Victoria Falls Hotel was also recently refurbished to combine the charm of the past with all the modern conveniences.

South Africa

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Inside Thornybush's newest lodge

The Thornybush Collection recently invited media to view its latest acquisition, River Lodge. Taryn Nightingale attended as a guest.

TUCKED in the far south of Thornybush Private Game Reserve, nestled between the thorn trees, marulas, mopanes and medlars, lies the River Lodge, the newly acquired property that forms part of

the four- and five-star luxury safari properties that together comprise the Thornybush Luxury Game Lodge Collection.

Thornybush acquired the property in April last year, turned it from a private lodge

and introduced it into the commercial market.

The group now manages and markets the property along with another eleven properties that form part of the collection. "River Lodge is owned by a consortium



River Lodge, the newly acquired property that forms part of the Thornybush Luxury Game Lodge Collection. Photos: Thornybush

of three gentlemen, one of whom is now a shareholder in the Thornybush Collection," says **Nic Griffin**, ceo of Thornybush. The lodge was originally built for syndication says Nic, with people able to buy periods of time as an investment.

River Lodge is a secluded intimate lodge with a warm, inviting atmosphere. The luxury five-star property reminds one of home; with an open-plan kitchen, homely reception and comfortable dining area that extends on to a deck with a pool – all completely surrounded by bush.

However this was not always the case. Nic says that when the group had first acquired the lodge it was "soulless" and took some work to get to the standard it is now.

"Being new to our offering and young on the lodge market, the property is still in the process of acquiring its own character," comments **Andre Celliers**, national sales

manager for Thornybush, adding that as the lodge gains popularity its reputation will grow.

Nic describes River Lodge as the game reserve's "best kept secret", most appropriately suited to the guest who prefers an intimate environment. He also says that, as with all properties in the Thornybush Collection, the lodge aims to provide very good value.

The lodge has four suites, comprising three separate luxury suites and the Royal Suite. Ideally, the lodge provides accommodation for eight people.

Each suite at the River Lodge has a private plunge pool and balcony with a view of the seasonal Monwana River. The lodge also offers free WiFi in all rooms, including the main lounge and reception, where the main swimming pool can be found. Meals can either be enjoyed communally or, on request, brought to the guests' suite.

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Luxury travel

Thornybush Game Lodge undergoes major refurb

AMONG the other eleven properties grouped in the Thornybush Collection, is the Thornybush Game Lodge situated in the north on the opposite end of the reserve. The main lodge recently began an almost R1m upgrade to its entire front deck and walkway.

"All the suites at the Game Lodge will be undergoing a complete renovation over the next twelve months, where all the rooms will be gutted, replastered and repainted," says **Melanie Parker** general manager of the Game Lodge.

The wooden deck was also replaced with silicone-treated pinewood designed to withstand greater humidity and moisture.

Changes to the bathroom will include restructuring of the showers and the replacement of the cement screed floors with wooden floors. The upgraded Game Lodge will also offer USB and international plug points in all rooms, to accommodate the strong market of international visitors at the lodge, but also to cater for the type of traveller that would need to bring their electronic equipment into the bush.

The Thornybush Game Lodge is much larger than the River Lodge and is designed to accommodate bigger groups of guests. It is a more family-friendly property, which, unlike the



The refurbished deck at Thornybush Game Lodge. Photo: Thornybush

River Lodge, offers a kids' programme.

When asked what makes the Thornybush Luxury Game Lodge Collection different from other lodges, **Andre Celliers** said: "The stability and trust offered in our service is how we give the client the best experience." He adds that a lodge can offer the most beautiful product, but if the management is unstable

then operations begin to crack, ultimately affecting whether the service offered is luxurious or not. Most of Thornybush's staff have been around for years, with Melanie having been manager at the Game Lodge for five years.

Looking to the future, Nic says there is the possibility of Thornybush exploring building a very comfortable luxury tented camp in the

north of the Thornybush reserve. He says the Thornybush Collection sees a gap in what it deems the "six-star market", and would like to investigate the possibility of developing a "super-deluxe, tented camp" that operates using green energy, adding that there is a growing demand for luxury accommodation that offers modern and up-to-date ecological energy facilities.

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NEWSFLASH

Air Mauritius business-class fares are not being increased this year on the airline's 'beyond routes'. The airline offers a lie-flat product on its A340 and A330 aircraft beyond Mauritius and from Johannesburg four times weekly. Business-class fares (excluding taxes) departing from Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban are listed here: Perth: R18 400

China: R22 450 (Beijing, Shanghai and Chengdu)
Hong Kong: R18 800
India: R18 100 (Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore and Chennai)
Singapore/Kuala Lumpur: R18 990
Air Mauritius also offers a free stopover in Mauritius on all non-connecting flights, including accommodation, meals and transfers. ■



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Man-power – GIT

Industry experts were invited to a meze lunch hosted by Gentlemen in Travel (GIT) at the Rosa, Palazzo at Montecasino on March 3. At the event, Robert Jasper was nominated an honorary member of GIT by George Argyropoulos, md of Cruises International. Pictured here, from left are: **Jose Cruz** (national client services manager for Rennis Travel); **Conrad Mortimer** (commercial director, Tourvest); and **Robert Jasper** (gm of Palazzo Hotel). Photo: Taryn Nightingale



Knowledge is power

The Travel Corporation suite of brands recently hosted on-site training for all Gauteng agents looking for first-hand knowledge directly from the team. Dubbed 'Wanderlust training sessions', the monthly workshops are hosted at the company's head office in The Travel House, Rosebank, and provide insightful information on brands such as Trafalgar, Insight Vacations, Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection and Contiki Holidays. Pictured here (from left) at February 18 session are **Rashida Suliman** (co-owner of RnB Travel); **Lieria Boshoff** (brand manager for Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection); **Kelly Jackson** (gm of Contiki Holidays); and **Bilquees Mahomed** (co-owner of RnB Travel). Photo: Darise Foster

Appointment

Thompsons Holidays has appointed **Marie-Louise McDonald** regional manager for KZN, effective May 1. Marie-Louise started out in travel in 1999 as an intern at Sure Protea Travel followed by a stint in the UK and US which included time in the hospitality field. On returning to South Africa,

she joined Thompsons in May 2005 in the Far East department. After a short break for maternity leave Marie-Louise re-joined Thompsons in 2009 and has gained extensive experience as the team leader in the Thompsons Holidays KZN reservations department.

To the point

Whitestar Cruise and Travel is upgrading its offices. As of March 4, the physical address will be Hereford Office Park Block 1, 37 Peter Place, Bryanston, 2192. Telephone, fax, docex and postal address information will remain unchanged.

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Namibia clamps down

From page 1
Namibia are required to apply for a visa at the Namibian High Commission in Pretoria. To apply for a business visa, travellers need a visa application form, an original passport, a motivation letter explaining the purpose of their visit, an invitation letter from

the host institution and an itinerary. Travellers will also need to bring two passport-size photos and a copy of the air ticket. The cost of the visa is R80 for the handling fees and R390 for the visa itself. The processing time is between two and three working days. ■

Tour ops cry foul as hotels overbook rooms

DANIELLA DI GASPERO

SOME hotels in Cape Town are overbooking rooms, bumping tour groups at the last minute who then have to find alternative accommodation.

One tour operator, who asked to remain anonymous, recently had a group bumped because the hotel was overbooked for a conference. The operator said that while tour groups were usually re-accommodated in another equally graded hotel, these types of incidents were damaging, as inconvenienced clients believed the error was the fault of the tour operator.

Another operator, whose clients were also bumped from a hotel, said it had to re-accommodate guests at its own expense. The tour operator said this was a growing trend among the hotel groups in Cape Town and suggested that hotels were carrying out this practice to increase profits.

It's fraud

According to the Consumer Protection Act (CPA), hotels that overbook could face legal action, says Advocate **Louis Nel**.

Louis says tour operators who have pre-paid tour groups bumped from hotels must examine the terms and conditions when they paid for the rooms. He says the terms and conditions might state that guests could be bumped from rooms even if payment had been made, if the hotel was overbooked. If it did not state this, Louis says the hotel could be held liable for fraud.

The CPA states that a supplier, in this case the hotel, must not accept payment or other consideration for any goods or services if the supplier has no reasonable basis to assert an intention to supply those goods or provide those services; or intends to supply goods or services that are materially different from the goods or

services in respect of which the payment or consideration was accepted.

The CPA also states that if a supplier makes a commitment or accepts a reservation to supply goods or services on a specified date or at a specified time and, on the date and at the time contemplated in the commitment or reservation, fails because of insufficient stock or capacity to supply those goods or services, or similar or comparable goods or services of the same or better quality, class or nature, the supplier must —

(a) refund to the consumer the amount, if any, paid in respect of that commitment or reservation, together with interest at the prescribed rate from the date on which the amount was paid until the date of reimbursement; and

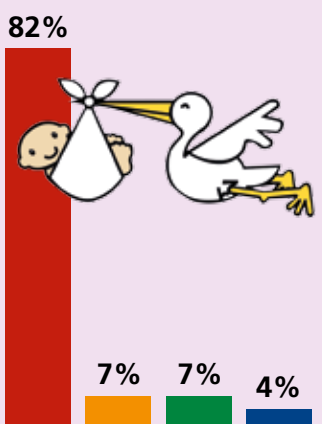
(b) in addition, compensate the consumer for costs directly incidental to the supplier's breach of the contract, except to the extent that subsection (5) provides otherwise. ■



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New deal to boost Tsogo in SA

From page 1

Gerald Nelson, non-executive director of HPF, says there will be no change in the current relationship (including existing negotiated commissions and discounts) between the travel trade and the hotels in HPF's expanded portfolio. "HPF's existing portfolio is multi-branded and the agreements currently in place with the various tenants/operators as well as HPF's own code of ethics preclude disclosure of confidential or strategic

information to competitors. The common ownership structure does not in any way influence or impair competition between the various brands at the operational level."

Gerald says responses from the other hotel groups to the deal have largely been positive. He explains that HPF's properties are leased to tenants who generally contract with various managers, who in turn operate the properties under their respective brands. The Tsogo Sun properties

have similar leases and management structure, and HPF will assume an asset management role for the additional ten hotels.

Marcel sums up: "The exciting part will hopefully come in the future as the fund is now able to expand and grow more successfully with a stable shareholder in Tsogo."

The transaction is subject to regulatory approval from the competition authorities and is expected to take effect on November 1. ■

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