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TNW7521SD

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## Immigration Act under fire... again

DORINE REINSTEIN

**S**A'S Immigration Act is again in the spotlight, this time raising concerns about the requirements for hotels to keep personal details of guests.

The Department of Home Affairs (DHA) requires all accommodation establishments to keep a register containing details of all guests – including locals. According to the Act, the register must contain guests' full names, a copy of their ID or passport, residence status and address. Failure to comply with these regulations could mean jail time of up to 12 months for both the hotelier and the guest. Previously, South Africans only needed to show their ID to verify their identity as they do for airline and

vehicle rental companies.

However, establishments say guests are refusing to comply because of privacy concerns. **Donovan Muirhead**, chairman of the National Accommodation Association SA, says accommodation establishments have experienced pushback from clients, particularly with repeat guests where the documents have been submitted before. "Guests refuse to have a copy of their ID made due to ID theft issues," says **Lyndsay Jackson**, gm of Guest House Accommodation of SA.

"As an industry we are concerned because of the level of resistance from our clients who do not want to provide their IDs for copies to be made. The implications are immense, with some accommodation establishments opting

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## UK hikes premium visa service rates

DORINE REINSTEIN

TRAVELLERS looking to get a priority visa to visit the UK will now pay substantially more for the service.

The Priority Visa Service, which allows travellers to have their application processed ahead of others, now costs £150 (R3 278) instead of £120 (R2 622). The Super Priority Visa service, which allows eligible customers to apply for a visa in Johannesburg and Pretoria and receive a decision within 24 hours, now costs £750 (R16 394) instead of £600 (R13 113).

"These changes ensure that the Home Office can achieve a self-funding system, while continuing to provide a competitive level of service and a fee structure that remains attractive to businesses, migrants and visitors," the UK government said in a statement.

For the cost-conscious traveller who wants to save money, these hikes will have an impact on their travel planning, says **John Ridler**, spokesperson for Thompsons Holidays.

He says travellers planning to visit both Europe and the UK might drop one

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**New record for eTravel!**

The eTravel Group is rapidly closing the gap toward its R1bn target, posting R97,5m turnover in February. Founder and ceo, **Garth Wolff**, attributes this feat to the strength of the "true" ITC model, which he says is making a comeback. See story on page 2. Photo: Megan Fischer

## New financial criteria – much ado about nothing?

DEBBIE BADHAM

DESPITE initial concerns that the introduction of new local financial criteria (LFC) would cause a significant drop-off in IATA accreditation as agents struggled to meet the requirements – just one month after implementation on March 1, the transition seems to have been seamless.

Of the 287 legal entities that were asked to increase their bank guarantees, an overwhelming majority (90,9%) have stepped up to the plate and done exactly that, says IATA's area

manager for Southern Africa, **Janaurieu D'Sa**. These 287 entities do not include those candidates that opted for the Default Insurance Programme as an alternative.

"This percentage will rise as 11 currently suspended agencies complete the process of securing their guarantees," he adds. Each entity is at a different stage of the process and suspension will be lifted as each one complies. Of the remaining entities, 11 voluntarily relinquished their IATA accreditation and four terminated their

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## New financial criteria

From page 1

accreditation for reasons unrelated to the new LFC.

**Otto de Vries**, ceo of Asata, says implementation of the new LFC has generally gone smoothly, largely because of the comprehensive and timeous communication

strategy that Asata implemented nationwide. "There were one or two members that had issues but we were able to assist our members by engaging lata on their behalf and the matters were resolved within 24 hours." ■



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# eTravel records unprecedented growth

DEBBIE BADHAM

**E**TRAVEL has recorded unprecedented growth over the last three months, posting R97,5m turnover in February, rapidly closing the gap towards its elusive R1bn target.

The group showed 16% growth in December 2015, 19% in January 2016, and 20% in February compared with the previous year, despite a weak economy. This feat is attributed to the strength of the "true" ITC model, which is making a comeback, says ceo, **Garth Wolff**.

While the emergence of straightforward ticketing business models initially hampered growth, Garth says the appeal of original

ITC models is drawing agents' interest. He says agents have become disillusioned with the ticketing model because it doesn't grant them access to the full suite of services they need.

For example, more agents have taken an interest in the VAT invoicing side of eTravel's offering. "Very few people actually know how to manage cash. It's important for agents to be free to stick to what they know."

eTravel launched its own ticketing solution, 'Just the Ticket' in July 2014 to cater for emerging demand at the time; however, the group hasn't seen much uptake, with members preferring to sign up for eTravel's full suite option instead, says Garth.

The result is that, to date, of eTravel's 187 independent agents, only eight are on the Just the Ticket option.

eTravel's success has to do with the company sticking to what it specialises in and doing that well, says Garth.

"eTravel is solid, we've been around for 17 years and we've kept our promise to pay more commissions to ITCs each year and will continue to do so."

He also emphasises the importance of institutional memory and developing an experienced team of staff who are happy. "I believe staff are king," he says, adding that most of the managers at eTravel have been with the company on average for about eight years. ■

## SAA's financials delayed again

DORINE REINSTEIN

THE tabling of SAA's outstanding 2015 financials and annual report has been delayed yet again by another month.

Last month, National Treasury requested an extension until March 14

(see TNW February 24). The Minister has since requested another extension for the tabling of the Annual Financial Statements to April 30. "SAA submitted an application for a going concern guarantee on December 21, 2015, which is under consideration. Given the potential implication

for the sovereign and for the economy the matter requires extensive and careful consideration. SAA's annual financial statements cannot be finalised until a decision is taken on their application," **Phumza Macanda**, spokesperson for National Treasury, told TNW. ■



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# Trafalgar focuses on the trade in 2016

**T**RAFALGAR'S initiatives to engage with and assist agents are gaining momentum.

Aside from its Acclaim trip to Europe (see back page), Trafalgar also offers on-site training for all Gauteng agents through The Travel Corporation's Wanderlust Training. Training sessions are hosted monthly, providing agents with the opportunity to get first-hand knowledge of Trafalgar's products and more in-depth training, as well as an introduction to the entire TTC team from reservations, to the brands and accounts teams.

All agents who attend are entered into a lucky draw where they can win a travel prize for two on any of the brands (Uniworld, Trafalgar,

Insight Vacations, Contiki and Busabout) for up to ten days.

Md, **Theresa Szejwallo**, says Trafalgar, as part of TTC, constantly pursues innovative initiatives – a drive that comes right from the top of the company's leadership. In fact, chairman of TTC, **Stanley Tollman**, has set up the Chairman's Innovation Challenge, to reward staff for thinking outside the box by suggesting creative ways to improve the operator's business and its clients' experiences – particularly when it comes to cutting costs.

One of the ideas to come out of the Chairman's Award is the group's Use it Don't Lose it policy, through which agents have the opportunity to incentivise clients. Simply

put, travellers are provided with a second chance to book a trip with TTC without forfeiting their deposit. In the past, travellers who booked and paid a deposit with any TTC brand would lose their deposit if they cancelled their holiday, but this policy has been reversed.

Now clients who booked their trips up to three years ago will have a future travel credit of the deposit amount to put towards any trip they wish to book. The credit can also be gifted to family and friends. The offer applies to Trafalgar, Insight Vacations and Contiki.

"Second chances can lead to the best holidays," says Theresa, "and our new Use it Don't Lose it promo will allow just that." ■



## Autumn inspiration

Ladies in travel were invited by Air Mauritius to enjoy an Autumn-themed Champagne brunch at the Saxon Hotel in Johannesburg. Guests were treated to inspirational talks by stylist, Janine Starkey, and author of *Clear your Clutter*, Kate Emmerson. Pictured here with Air Mauritius regional manager for Southern Africa and Latin America, **Carla Da Silva** (right), is **Sue Garrett** (Flight Centre's gm of marketing and product).

Photo: Natasha Schmidt

## SAA resumes Douala flights

SAA has resumed flights to Douala in Cameroon following the reopening of the airport on March 21.

This follows the re-routing of Douala operations to Yaoundé last month after Douala airport was temporarily closed for runway and parking area repairs.

SAA's four weekly flights from Johannesburg to Libreville (Gabon) and onwards to Douala will operate as per the normal schedule to Douala – flight SA086 departs Johannesburg at 14h50 on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays to arrive in Libreville at

18h40. It then departs Libreville at 19h25 to arrive in Douala at 20h20.

Return flight SA087 departs Douala at 21h20 on the same days, to arrive in Libreville at 22h15. It then departs Libreville at 23h20 to arrive in Johannesburg at 05h00 the following morning. ■

## UK scraps APD for under-16s

AIR Passenger Duty (APD) has been abolished for passengers under 16 travelling in economy class departing from airports in the United Kingdom, effective March 1.

Virgin Atlantic Airways confirmed in a statement that it would not charge APD on passengers travelling in economy class who were younger than 16 but that if they booked or upgraded to premium economy or Upper Class, they would

incur the tax.

British Airways has requested travel agents booking flights from the UK to state clearly whether any passengers are under 16 to avoid the airline charging APD.

"Depending on your type of flights and when you purchased them, you may be eligible for a refund. If you are eligible, you must take action at least 72 hours before you travel to qualify," British Airways said in a statement. ■

## Airlink launches new service

AIRLINK has commenced a direct service between Cape Town and Maun.

The flight operates five times a week on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Airlink

intends to add more days as the destination moves into its peak season from August.

The route is operated by an Embraer ERJ 135 regional jet aircraft with flights departing Cape Town at 10h35 and

arriving in Maun at 13h05. The return flight departs Maun at 13h35 and arrives in Cape Town at 16h10.

Airlink also operates daily services from OR Tambo to Maun and Kasane. ■

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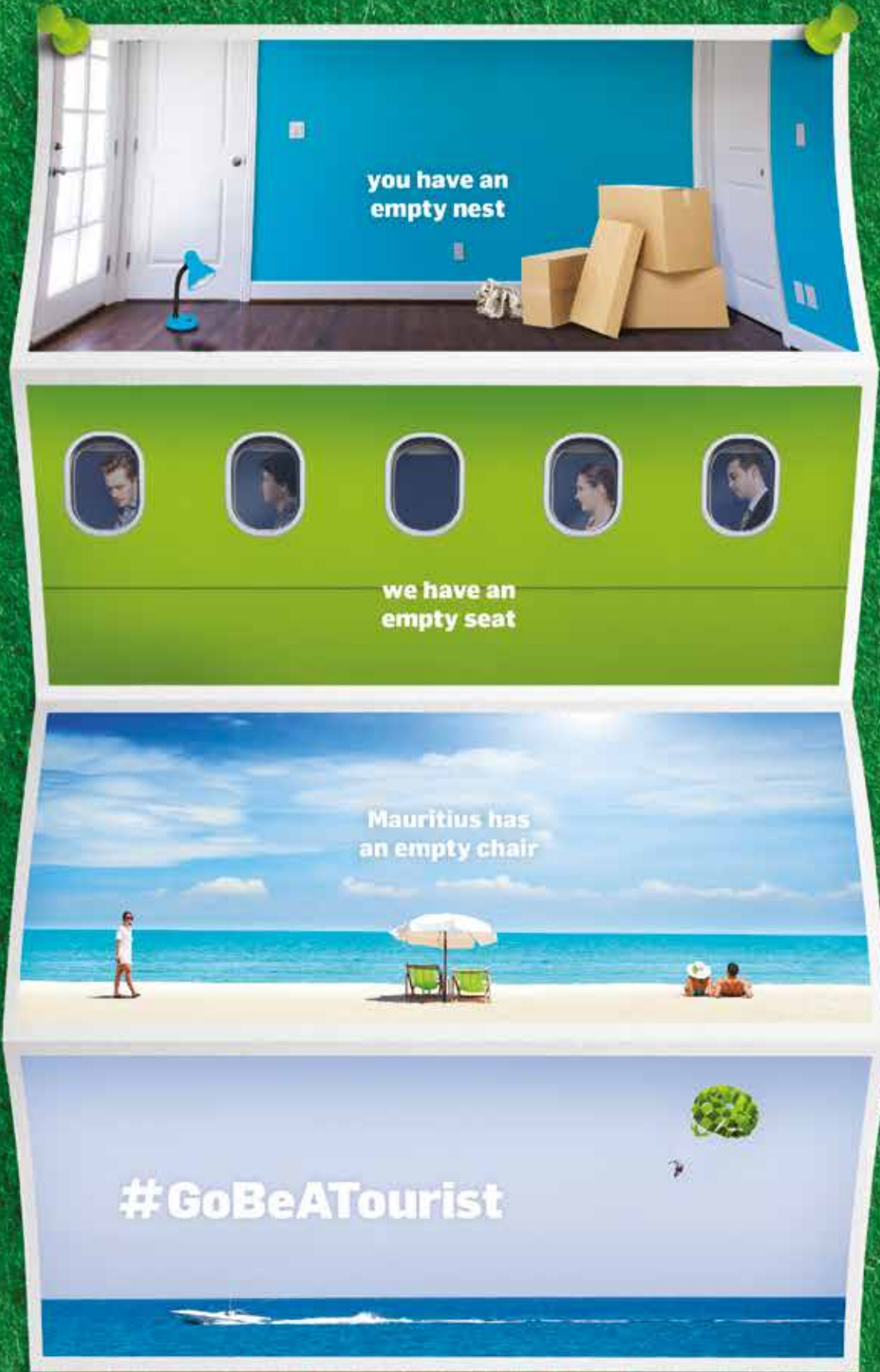
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India is already a popular destination for South Africans and the introduction of an e-tourist visa will make access more convenient. By Michelle Colman

## Free e-tourist visa to boost travel

**T**HE introduction in late February of an e-tourist visa, at no charge to South African nationals, could well increase traffic to India, which has seen tourist numbers from South Africa drop with the loss of direct flights.

Director for the Government of India Tourist Office in South Africa, **Manas Pattanaik**, is upbeat about the development. He says it enables South African travellers to take advantage of short-notice travel specials, while those resident outside the four cities where visa issuing authorities operate (Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town) will no longer have to travel to obtain them. South African passport holders can now apply for the e-tourist visa from anywhere in the world.

The visa is a single-entry document valid for 30-day stays. It is available to South Africans and residents of most neighbouring countries whose reason for travel is recreation, short-duration medical treatment, casual VFR and 'casual business visits'. Manas says an example of



**Manas Pattanaik**

a casual business visit is a trader purchasing Indian market goods for re-sale in South Africa; the visa would not extend to conference delegates, incentive tour participants, and corporate travellers with an intensive itinerary of meetings.

The e-tourist visa allows entry and departure from 16 Indian airports and can only be used twice in a calendar year. It is not available to official, diplomatic or service passport holders.

Online applications (<https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/info1.jsp>) should be submitted four to 30 days in advance of the proposed date of travel. Photographs and a scan of the passport's photo page need to be uploaded too. Applicants receive confirmation of the application by email and are able to track its status online. Visas are issued in 72 hours or less.

On departure, airline officials are able to verify visas by scanning a bar code. The visa must be presented to officials on arrival in India, where biometric details are captured.

India initiated the e-tourist visa in November 2014, extending the option to 43 countries. It has since added more to the list, announcing a final 37 countries in November, to make a total of 150. In January this year 88 162 tourist arrivals in the country had e-tourist visas, up 252% from 25 023 in January 2015.

Travellers requiring long-stay, multiple-entry visas and travelling multiple times a year, will have to continue to apply as in the past.

## Lack of direct flights hurts market

**FOLLOWING** the end of the SAA-Etihad partnership, there is market speculation that SAA will re-introduce a direct flight to India. But the national carrier is not saying much other than general assurance from spokesperson, **Tlali Tlali**, that the termination or launch of routes will be communicated appropriately to all stakeholders.

Without doubt, the lack of direct flights has affected tourist numbers. According to statistics from the Government of India Tourist office, in 2012 South African tourist arrivals stood at 50 161, rising to 58 023 in 2013, but falling to 56 246 in 2014 when SAA decreased flights from seven a week to four. Statistics for 2015, when SAA cancelled the direct flight in March, are not yet available.

As the weak rand limits the range of affordable destinations for South Africans, India is an obvious choice for local travellers. The good news is that there are many air connections via other African and Middle Eastern points.

Emirates, which serves 10 Indian cities from Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town, is best in terms of convenience, says **Noorjehan Vadachia**, sales and marketing director at Durban-based Avoca Travels. "This is very helpful in designing

an itinerary for India, as a client may enter in the north and exit from the south, eliminating the need to backtrack and spend a lot on internal airfares," she says.

Noorjehan says clients also use Qatar Airways, which serves 12 cities in India, and there are other economical options like Ethiopian, Air Seychelles and Kenya Airways, with short stopovers in Addis Ababa, Mahé and Nairobi respectively. Air Mauritius is a good option for clients who want to take an island beach break en route.

Many of these airlines serve Durban, from where there is much need for Indian routes. "The traffic from Durban to India is mainly fuelled by the huge demand from the ethnic Indian market for which India remains its favourite tourist destination. There have been some upward trends in terms of tourists from the non-Indian community, and business travellers from Durban also have multiple reasons to visit India," says Noorjehan.

Ethiopian Airlines is a recent entrant to Durban, where it began a direct operation from Addis Ababa last December.

Regional manager Southern Africa, **Abel Alemu**, says the proportion of travellers of Indian descent out of Durban to India is higher than any other segments.

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## Convenient connections

### Emirates

Indian points served from Dubai by Emirates are Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kochi, Kolkata, Kozhikode, Mumbai, New Delhi and Thiruvananthapuram. In South Africa, the airline flies to Cape Town twice daily, Durban daily and Johannesburg four times daily.

### Ethihad

From Abu Dhabi, this airline serves both Johannesburg and Mumbai daily.

### Turkish Airlines

Turkey's national carrier flies from Istanbul to Mumbai and New Delhi. In South Africa, Johannesburg is on its route network (seven times a week but increasing to 10 in July) with four weekly flights going on to Durban. Seven weekly flights operate to Cape Town.

### Qatar Airways

In South Africa the airline serves Johannesburg twice daily, Cape Town daily and Durban via Johannesburg four

times a week. Qatar Airways offers daily flights to Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Amritsar, Goa, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Kozhikode, Trivandrum, Chennai, Bengaluru and Nagpur, with 11 flights a week to Cochin and double-daily flights to the capital, New Delhi. Overall frequency is 102 passenger flights each week on 254-seat B787 Dreamliners and 335-seat B777 aircraft.

### Air Mauritius

Air Mauritius flies to Mumbai four times a week and New Delhi twice a week, and once a week to Chennai and Bengaluru. Airbus A330 and A340 aircraft are used, offering lie-flat seats in business class. "We offer a free stopover in Mauritius on all non-connecting flights," says sales and marketing manager, **Wouter Nel**. "Passengers enjoy one night at a four-star hotel with selected meals and transfers free of charge. Our India route also sees the launch of new meals created



### Numerous carriers offer connections through Mumbai Airport.

by our executive chef, to complement the route with authentic meals. Air Mauritius offers passengers travelling to India via Mauritius a 40kg baggage allowance in economy class and one free date change."

### Air Seychelles

The airline offers services from Mahé to both Johannesburg and Mumbai. Through codeshares, the following points in India are served: Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Kochi,

Kolkata, New Delhi and Thiruvananthapuram. Through a codeshare with SAA, Cape Town, Durban, East London and Port Elizabeth are served.

### Ethiopian Airlines

Ethiopian Airlines operates double-daily services to both Mumbai and New Delhi, having increased frequency on the second route at the end of March. "This will make our frequency 28 a week to two of the major cities in India," says **Abel Alemu**. "Together with our

interline partners [Air India and Jet Airways], we provide a smooth connection for domestic flights in India." The airline flies to Durban and Johannesburg 10 times a week, to Cape Town nine times weekly and three times a week to Durban.

### Kenya Airways

Kenya Airways added a fourth daily frequency to its Johannesburg-Nairobi network on April 2, increasing its weekly schedule from 21-25. It flies direct from Nairobi to Mumbai twice daily.

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## Take the train!

IMAGES of overcrowded trains in India are iconic. Some travellers would not dream of leaving their coaches, but to others they are attractively adventurous. What advice should you offer your clients?

According to **Annemarie Lexow**, sales and marketing manager for TravelVision, the budget traveller can travel safely in affordable trains operated and managed by the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation, a Government of India enterprise. "It sells packages of up to seven or eight nights and includes insurance. These trains only operate from September through to March, with a block-out period during the monsoon period, April to August." The India Tourist Office's **Manas Pattanaik** points out that the service will soon introduce e-ticketing.

He also recommends travel on the superfast Rajdhani Express trains, which connect New Delhi to all state capitals. They are air-conditioned in all three classes and fares include meals.

The Shatabdi Express, too, is air-conditioned and fast,

and connects cities to tourist centres. Its New Delhi-Bhopal route will get the traveller to Agra in two hours.

At the top of the luxury scale is the five-star-plus Palace on Wheels, reputed to be one of the most luxurious train journeys in the world. Currently, TravelVision is promoting a seven-night package travelling from Delhi to Jaipur, Sawai Madhopur and Chittorgarh, Udaipur, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Bharatpur and Agra, ending in Delhi.

It sells for the handsome price of R64 680 per person sharing, and includes a night's accommodation in Delhi pre- and post-trip, transfers, meals, conducted sightseeing, all entrance fees, a cultural programme, and special treats such as a camel ride at Jaisalmer, a boat ride at Udaipur and a rickshaw ride at Bharatpur.

A highlight, says Annemarie, is a visit to the Pink Fort at Jaipur, which includes an elephant ride up the steep hill to the entrance.

The package is valid for September this year, with departures each Wednesday.

## Personalised tours cater for all budgets

SPOTTING tigers in Ranthambore National Park or houseboat stays in Kerala are some of the more unusual activities travellers with Discoveries Worldwide can count on.

South-east Asia is one of the specialties of this niche outbound tour operator, which is based in Johannesburg. It offers tailor-made options to clients who want a personalised tour, says operations manager, **Michelle Jansen**.

"We naturally have suggested our sample itineraries, but will always custom tailor, based on where clients would like to be, how long they would like to be there and what they would like to do. Our itineraries are based on what the client has

expressed as important to them – be it cost, sightseeing, religious or special events."

Budget-wise, Discoveries Worldwide offers three five-star options but will take specific budgets into account. "We offer land-only as well packages that include flights. Our trips are as inclusive as possible – so that clients don't get 'unexpected surprises' with additional costs when they reach the destination."

The tour operator offers all the popular touring options, such as the Golden Triangle and the beaches of Goa, but the personalised, private nature of its tours makes it possible to add in special aspects such as culinary experiences, yoga classes and more.

## INDIA

# Things you may not know about India

IT IS no surprise that India, with its population, depth of history, diversity and size, should offer countless special interests for visitors. Cultural attractions are usually the first to be explored, but visitors return repeatedly to delve into its spirituality, disciplines such as yoga and Ayurveda, and its many adventure pursuits.

Some lesser-known facets of the country are provided below, courtesy of Avoca Travels.

- It has world-renowned spas like Ananda in the Himalayas at Narendra Nagar and Oberoi's Wild Flower Hall in Mashobra.
- Self-drive 4x4 safaris are designed so that clients get to see tourist attractions and also enjoy off-road driving.



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- Snorkelling and scuba diving in the azure blue waters at Havelock Island in the Andaman Islands are gaining popularity.
- Adventure activities such as mountain climbing in the Himalayas, trekking, white-water rafting and paragliding are just some items on a long menu of offerings.
- A homestay with an Indian family is a unique way to immerse oneself in the culture of the country.
- Properties like the Oberoi Udaivilas and Hotel Lake Palace in Udaipur, Hotel Aman Bagh in Alwar, The Lodhi in Delhi and Hotel Rambagh Palace in Jaipur, offer ultimate experiences in luxury. ■

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# EASTERN EUROPE

Gdansk, Poland.

Eastern Europe is ideal for travellers looking for more authentic cultural experiences. Taryn Nightingale reports.

## How to sell a 'different' Europe

WHEN approached to sell travel to Eastern Europe, agents often find themselves dealing with seasoned travellers who have already seen parts of Western Europe.

Visitors to Eastern Europe are well travelled in all the more "touristy" destinations and are now looking for something more authentic, says **Jackie Adami**, md of Development Promotions. She says it will also appeal to travellers who are looking for an authentic experience from the outset and those whose taste veers more to the "less commercialised". When selling Eastern Europe, therefore, the points agents should highlight are fewer tourists; the unspoiled environment; better value for money; and the warm, friendly locals.

These travellers are looking for another taste of the continent, something that would offer history, culture and sightseeing but with a different flavour, agrees

**Theresa Szjewello**, md of Trafalgar, adding that travellers requesting Eastern European guided holidays have generally done the more traditional parts of Europe such as France, Italy and The Netherlands. "Eastern Europe holds a certain mystique and offers something a little different – be it the cuisine, or the history." Theresa says Trafalgar's 'The Highlights of Eastern Europe' and the 'Imperial Europe' guided holidays feature an array of culturally enriching experiences. Guests learn about the Slovenian capital, Ljubljana, while exploring the opera house, cathedral, National Museum, castle and the Three Bridges Square. There are also visits to the concentration camp at Auschwitz and the Jasna Gora Monastery in Poland, as well as the Palace of Culture and Science. "These two trips are loaded with cultural and historical experiences," says Theresa.

**Inge Dobihal**, owner of Austria Connection, says Eastern Europe can be categorised in different ways: "Politically, it refers to all those countries behind the Iron Curtain that, over the decades were under Communist rule." These destinations would include Slovenia, Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Albania and Croatia (formerly part of Yugoslavia) but would exclude Turkey. When speaking geographically, however, she says Greece should be included in this list as well. Other destinations could include the Baltic States – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

**Treasure chest of culture** There is one thing that all these countries have in common, says Inge. "They are treasure chests of art and architecture, have a highly interesting history and have maintained their individual cultures." She says when agents sell Eastern Europe they should note that most



"Visitors to Eastern Europe are well travelled in all the more 'touristy' destinations and are now looking for something more authentic."  
**Jackie Adami**

of the cities are vibrant, with street cafés, pubs and jazz clubs and numerous festivals. Each country, she says, has specific highlights and that a prospective client who is interested in the subjects featured in each trip, matched suitably, will love a trip in the region. For travellers who are more interested in the atmosphere and street life, Inge says the old town of Bratislava in Slovakia is full of

charm and vibrancy. For those who prefer the beach, she says: "Croatia is highly popular for its picturesque bays and beaches, the crystal-clear sea and island-hopping cruises." However, Theresa warns against trying to fit travellers into boxes. She advises agents to look at their clients objectively to ensure that they offer the product that fits all the criteria the client is looking for in a holiday.

**Ask the right questions** She says agents still need to ensure that they ask the basic questions like 'Where have you travelled to before?', 'Do you prefer travelling independently or would you like all the arrangements to be taken care of for you?', 'What sort of experiences would you like to enjoy?', 'Is getting the best value for your rand an important factor?', 'Would you like VIP access to the iconic sights?', 'Will you be travelling with family?', 'Would you like to go off the beaten track?'



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# Getting around

TRAVELLING by coach is the most organised and easiest way to travel through Eastern Europe.

"Navigating the roads is not a simple case of hiring a vehicle and driving off. One has to be mindful that the road signs are not universally English and road rules themselves may differ from country to country," says Trafalgar's **Theresa Szejwallo**. She adds that South African travellers should remember that most Eastern European countries drive on the right.

For the independent

traveller who does not want to travel by guided coach the travel options vary says Austria Connection's **Inge Dobihal**. "Whilst it is easy to travel by train through the Czech Republic, Poland, Bulgaria, or mainly by bus through Croatia, we suggest that travellers hire a car for exploring the countryside in Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary. The best way to explore Romania is with a private car and driver or guide, she adds. "Considering the enormous advantages of travelling in this way, it is



Tatra National Park in Slovakia.

still affordable."

For travellers who do not like moving around too much and changing hotels too often there is the option of seeing some of the countryside by using the

main city as a base.

Regular excursions could then be done from there, says Inge. This option would apply to places like Prague, Budapest, Krakow and Ljubljana.

## Brush up on visa requirements

VISA requirements should be an agent's top concern when booking travel to Eastern Europe, says **Tessa Hattingh**, travel manager from Sure Etnique Travel. Tessa sells trips between Slovenia, Croatia and Montenegro and says many of the countries in the region do not fall under Schengen and thus require special care when

arranging the correct travel documents.

She gives the example of booking a trip between Slovenia, Croatia and Montenegro and says the easiest way to obtain a visa is to apply for a multiple-entry Schengen visa that would still be valid for stays in Croatia and Montenegro. She emphasises that travel

agents need to be aware of the details when arranging their clients' documents: "You can apply for a Croatian visa on the client's behalf, but you can't do it when applying for the Schengen visa," she says. She emphasises



Tessa Hattingh

that embassies for Schengen countries do not permit agents to apply for their clients' visas, even if the clients have applied for Schengen visas previously. Schengen visas have to be applied for in person, says Tessa.

## Top sellers

TOP sellers for Eastern Europe vary from operator to operator. Trafalgar's guests specifically request cities like Vienna and Bratislava as they work well together logistically, says **Theresa Szejwallo**. On the other hand, **Inge Dobihal** says Austria Connection's top destinations include Croatia; Prague; Budapest; and Slovenia.

Gm of Lufthansa Southern Africa, Dr **André Schulz**, says Poland is the biggest and most competitive Eastern European market and, as a result, Lufthansa flies to nine destinations in the country.

Krakow is the best town to visit in Poland, says Inge, with buildings dating back to the 15th and 16th centuries. "Krakow is a must for people with a Jewish interest, with the nearby Auschwitz concentration camp and the revived [modern and trendy] Jewish district Kazimierz." She says other highlights include the nearby Wieliczka Salt Mines, which reflect a 700-year-old history of salt mining.

André says his favourite destination is Budapest, as he lived there for two years and says the "so-called Pearl of the Danube is excellent for sightseeing".

Inge advises that to really see Hungary, travellers should not restrict their visit to Budapest. A must-see is the Puszta (Great Hungarian Plain)

where animals such as sheep, pigs and horses are bred on a large scale. She says the hierarchy that exists among the herdsmen is of particular interest with those ranking the highest being the ones who look after the horses. The Ciskos, the Hungarian cowboys who gallop at full speed, reining five horses while standing on two, and a visit to Esztergom to see the Basilica, seat of the Roman Catholic Church in Hungary, are also not to be missed, Inge says.

Trafalgar offers an Insider Experience to Hungary where travellers are invited into the home of the Schieszl family, who had their vineyard taken from them and who were deported from Hungary during WW2.



The Ciskos are a must-see on a visit to Hungary.

**Konrád Schieszl** reveals some of the country's rich history by telling the story of how one of the young boys his family had rescued during

WW2 later became a lawyer who helped the Schieszls return to Hungary and buy back their land during the Communist rule.



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• **Last-minute Scandinavia and Russia:** 13 nights at R29 499pps. The price includes return flights from Johannesburg to Copenhagen on Emirates; 11 nights on the *Regal Princess*, sailing from Copenhagen to visit Oslo, Berlin, Tallinn, St Petersburg, Helsinki, Stockholm, and Copenhagen; all meals, entertainment and taxes; return airport-pier transfers in Copenhagen. Price valid for departure on May 12. This special can be booked until departure and is subject to availability. (Alternative dates are offered at applicable rates.) ■

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# New flight to boost travel to Madagascar

Airlink launched flights between Johannesburg and Nosy Be on March 20. Taryn Nightingale attended the launch as a guest of the airline.

**A**IRLINK has relaunched flights between Johannesburg and Nosy Be in Madagascar, enhancing access between the two destinations.

This follows negotiations that started between Airlink and the Malagasy government in August last year.

“Nosy Be is a tourism gem,” said **Rodger Foster**, ce and md of SA Airlink, adding that the island was an affordable leisure destination for the South African traveller who was looking for a more authentic island experience.

“Most of the properties on the island are two-, three- or four-star,” said Rodger “and it is likely to appeal to the traveller who wants a less-commercialised experience.” He described the island as “unspoilt” and added that it offered “diving like no other destination [does] and [that] the ocean is teeming with fish”.

The island currently has 5 800 beds on offer but only reaches a capacity of 25% during peak season.

“Air access to Nosy Be has been historically difficult,” said Rodger. Airlink used to service Johannesburg to Nosy Be in 2008, but flights were pulled in 2009 due to a coup, which had a detrimental effect on demand to the destination.

## A boost to tourism

Following a discussion in May last year, on the importance of reintroducing air access to Nosy Be with the then South African ambassador to Madagascar, **Gert J Grobler**, Airlink travelled to Nosy Be in August to explore the prospect of opening up air access to the island and met with both Madagascar’s President and the Minister of Tourism.

However, it was on the recommendation of **Mike and Harriet Joao**, owners of MadagasCaT Charters and Travel that Airlink took up the Malagasy government’s invitation to open up air access to Nosy Be.

MadagasCaT Charters and Travel has contracted for an advance purchase of 20 seats on each Johannesburg-Nosy Be Airlink flight. The route is operated by an Embraer ERJ 135 and the remaining 17 seats will be made available for sale in the GDS.

The operator is passionate about Nosy Be and has been providing charters to the island since 2008. “I would like to propose that we create a Zanzibar for Madagascar – an affordable, efficient and unique island destination,” said Harriet. MadagasCaT and a team of marketers are currently in negotiations with the tourist industry



Pictured here, are some of the key role players that made the launch of the route possible: From left: **Chris Hoare**, chief revenue officer SA Airlink; **Ulrich Andriantiana**, Madagascar Minister of Tourism, Transport and Meteorology; **Rodger Foster**, ce and md of SA Airlink; **Maud Dhlomo**, SA Ambassador in Madagascar; and **Gert J Grobler**, former SA Ambassador in Madagascar. Photo: Taryn Nightingale

in Nosy Be to grow South African tourist numbers to the area. Harriet says the launching of the Johannesburg-Nosy Be route is an integral part of growing tourism to the area.

“We would like to increase frequency and capacity over time as demand

grows. Our short-term objective is a second weekly frequency, which will offer more travel combination options. Airlink will be able to adjust capacity according to demand by offering a larger aircraft should it be required,” said Rodger.

## Johannesburg-Nosy Be flight schedule

THE new route operates once a week on Sundays. Flight SA 8246 departs JNB at 09h30 and arrives at NOS at 14h00. Return flight SA 8247 departs NOS at 14h45

and arrives in JNB at 18h45. Due to the flight duration and prevailing headwinds there will be a scheduled en-route technical fuel stop in Beira on the return flight.

## Opening up the destination

ALTHOUGH Airlink’s current focus is on the JNB-NOS route, the airline has revealed that the possibility of introducing other routes into Madagascar is on the cards.

“The MOU signed on Sunday March 20 between the Madagascar Ministry of Tourism, Transport and Meteorology and SA Airlink, witnessed by the SA Ambassador to Madagascar, will facilitate Airlink participating in domestic markets within Madagascar by way of a joint venture with a

Malagasy partner airline business,” says Airlink’s **Rodger Foster**.

Airlink currently operates a daily flight that departs Johannesburg at 10h00 and arrives in Antananarivo at 14h10. It has been allocated additional frequencies on the route, which it intends to activate to ultimately increase the service to two flights daily. The existing flight times will remain unchanged. The second flight will depart Johannesburg in the early afternoon and leave

Antananarivo for Johannesburg mid-morning. “A start date for the additional flights has not yet been established – this will be determined to coincide with the commencement of domestic services that will be operated by the joint venture business,” said Rodger.

The tourism authorities in Madagascar have also expressed a desire to connect other tourist destinations such as Diego Suarez and St Marie with Johannesburg.

However, the airline has yet to commit to introducing this triangular service (Johannesburg-Diego Suarez-St Marie) and/or other possible flights to destinations within Madagascar. “Airlink will need to understand the travel market between these points prior to making a commitment to service routes beyond Nosy Be at this stage, however we will examine the data that we have been presented with and investigate the request further,” said Rodger. ■



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## Upskilling the industry

Travelport commenced its upskilling Learnership Programme in South Africa last year with the two students taking part due to complete their studies last month. Under the programme, two well-deserving candidates who wish to have a career in the travel industry, have taken part in a year-long third-level course at the Gauteng Travel Academy with the goal of qualifying with a national certificate in general travel. Pictured here are students **Patience Sathekge** and **Frank Maluleke**. Photo: Travelport

## City Lodge embraces Earth Hour



Properties across the City Lodge Hotel Group did their bit for Earth Hour between 20h30 and 21h30 on Saturday, March 19. They reduced their lighting to a minimum wherever possible and used candles at reception and in the bar area. Seen here doing their bit for Earth Hour at City Lodge Hotel Bryanston are (from left): **Dirco Botha** (assistant gm) and staff member, **Kerwin Kim**.

## Appointments

Executive chef, **Henrico Grobbelaar**, has joined the Southern Sun The Cullinan in Cape Town. Henrico is one of South Africa's most celebrated young chefs, with a long list of accolades that include: Sunday Times Chef of the Year 2009; San Pellegrino International Young Chef of the World 2009; Executive Chef to the World Economic Forum in Switzerland 2010 and the 2010 FIFA World Cup; Captain of the South African Culinary Olympic Team from 2008-2012 and part of the national culinary team since 2005.



Town and banqueting manager at the Hilton Sandton.

Fair Trade Tourism has appointed two new non-executive directors to its board as well as a new representative based in Europe. The new board members are Kenyan sustainable tourism expert, **Judith Kepher-Gona**, and South African tourism industry stalwart, **Caleb Mabaso**. **Matthias Leisinger**, new EU

representative, will be based in Zurich and is a specialist in corporate social responsibility and sustainable tourism.

**Malika Mahomed** has been promoted to branch manager of Lee Botti and Associates' Cape Town office.



Malika is well known in the industry, having consulted with the company for five years.

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# Brussels attacks – pax seek safer options

SUSAN REYNARD

TOUR operators expect to see new travel trends to Europe and the US in the wake of the recent Brussels terror attacks, with many South Africans thinking twice before booking their holidays.

Usually resilient travellers, South Africans may become jittery due to the repetitive nature of terror attacks, says **John Ridler**, pr and media manager of Thompsons Holidays. “People are more circumspect about where they go and attacks in city centres will drive people to visit the countryside and outlying areas instead. We have outside city centre destinations that were devised to help contain costs but these would also work for safety reasons.”

John speculates that cruise business may pick up as it answers many questions regarding security and disrupted travel arrangements and cruise ships can alter their itinerary should trouble arise at a port of call.

Travellers are already cautious about visiting Europe and the US due to the volatile rand, with the terror attacks further confirmation they should wait and travel locally instead, says **Annemarie Lexow**, sales and marketing manager of TravelVision.

They can also expect tighter restrictions when visiting these areas. Travellers should prepare for delays at check-in as additional security checks are carried out at airports, train stations and transport hubs, says Flight Centre’s

strategic marketing specialist, **Sharmila Ragunan**. They should also stay abreast of travel alerts and advisories.

Sharmila urges travellers to provide their details on the Registration of South Africans Abroad (ROSA) website ([www.gov.za/services/travel-outside-sa/register-south-africans-abroad](http://www.gov.za/services/travel-outside-sa/register-south-africans-abroad)). This voluntary service allows the Department of International Relations and Cooperation to assist South Africans in the event of emergency.

**Theresa Szejwallo**, md of The Travel Corporation SA, told TNW the Brussels incident had elicited less of a response from travellers than expected but clients feeling uncomfortable about going to Brussels might move their trips.

## What agents need to know

Agents and travellers should be aware of what their travel insurance covers in the event of a terrorist attack. The biggest risk for travellers is medical cover, as expenses for doctors, hospital visits, disability or death can run into millions, says **Simmy Micheli**, TIC’s manager of sales and marketing. Policies must

specify medical cover in the event of terrorist attacks.

Changing or cancelling travel plans because a traveller is frightened to travel is not covered. At the time of the Brussels attacks, 86 TIC policyholders were at the destination and just under 200 future travellers were booked for the remainder of March. No claims have been

received by TIC to date.

As of March 30, Brussels Airport said a date for the partial recommencement of operations had not been decided. For those affected by the closure, the airport has provided extensive information on a special website, [www.brusselsairport2203.be/en/](http://www.brusselsairport2203.be/en/). ■



## See Europe at Christmas!

Trafalgar is offering agents the chance to experience Europe over the Christmas season. During an eight-day trip, which includes airfares, participants will explore the Christmas markets of Strasbourg and Freiburg. To qualify for Trafalgar’s Acclaim Trip to Europe from November 23-30, all agents need to do is book 10 clients travelling on any Trafalgar trip in 2016 and complete all Trafalgar’s new e-learning modules. Pictured here (from left) are Trafalgar’s reservations consultant, **Puleng Putu**; marketing manager, **Bronwyn Strydom**; and senior reservations consultant, **Nicole Elisio**. For more on how Trafalgar is engaging with the trade, see page 4. Photo: Megan Fischer

## UK hikes visa service rates

From page 1

of these destinations to save money. “Increased costs might also deter travellers from spending a few days in the UK en-route to or from the US.”

South Africans are already bypassing the UK due to the

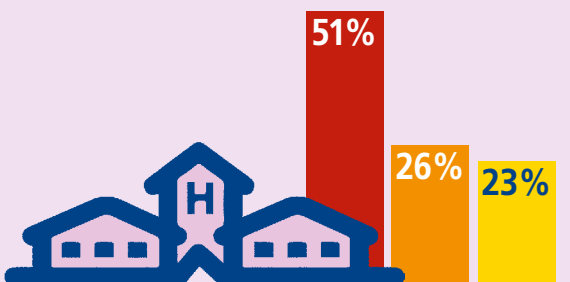
costs and inconvenience of applying for the UK visa when visiting Europe, says **Megan d’Arcy**, product manager of kulula holidays. However, VFR and business travellers will continue to visit the UK, she adds. ■

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### Direct bookings hit hotels

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- No, my clients trust me to take care of everything
- I am wary but it’s not much of an issue%



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## Immigration Act under fire...

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not to comply for fear of losing business and damaging relations with their major long-term clients, especially the corporate segment,” says **Mmatšatši Ramawela**, ceo of the Tourism Business Council of South Africa.

She says the industry believes the DHA should have informed the public upfront about this regulation instead of leaving it to them to field the anger and abuse from guests who feel they are being treated as immigrants in their own country.

### Conflict with POPI

Other concerns, Mmatšatši says, are around the regulation’s conflict with the Protection of Personal Information (POPI) Act.

In terms of the POPI Act, a guest registration page or card must now be used, says Donovan. “This hard information should be stored in a secure file with

all the relevant supporting documents for the booking and payment. If documents are kept electronically, establishments must ensure that the appropriate security considerations are implemented and that their systems are regularly updated with the latest security software to protect the data.”

“When we realised that the challenges of implementing the regulations were increasing, we brought the matter to the attention to the Department of Home Affairs,” says Mmatšatši. The purpose is to engage with the DHA to find viable ways to comply with the regulations. “We want to work with government to improve security in the country but we need government to do their bit to inform the public when they change regulations, which will make it easier for us to implement, and thus comply.”

Why has the DHA introduced the regulation? Spokesperson,

**Mayihlome Tshwete**, says the legislation aims to ensure the safety of hotel guests in the event of accidents or natural disasters. “The DHA is also obligated to know the whereabouts of those sojourning in the country.”

Guests who want to take part in illegal or dubious activities are put off by the fact that a copy of their identity is now required, says Donovan. “Guests wishing to bilk or make fraudulent reservations with other people’s credit cards run a greater risk of getting caught.”

Communication has been key in terms of the successful implementation, says **Nicholas Barenblatt**, sales and marketing manager of Protea Hotels.

“We have used all available touchpoints with our customers, both individual travellers and our travel partners, to make them aware of this requirement prior to check-in.” ■