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VFS Global denies link to Guptas

DORINE REINSTEIN

THE Department of Home Affairs has denied the link between visa facilitation service company, VFS Global, and Duduzane Zuma and Rajesh Gupta.

Last week, the Democratic Alliance's **Haniff Hoosen** questioned in parliament why a Gupta-directed company was issuing receipts for people applying for visas through VFS Global. He claimed Home Affairs had appointed VFS Global to handle South African visa operations but receipts were being issued by a company called Islandsite Investments, whose directors include **Duduzane Zuma** and **Rajesh Gupta**. "**Minister Gigaba** manufactures new permits and the Guptas rake in the cash," he said, also questioning

what Minister Malusi Gigaba's role had been in the appointment of VFS.

During a media briefing on Monday (April 25), VFS Global coo, **Jiten Vyas**, said VFS worked with a self company called Islandsite 309, which was not linked to the Gupta family. Only Islandsite Investment 255 is linked to both Zuma and Gupta. The two companies, he said, shared similar names but were different. "VFS categorically denies any links to the Guptas and Zumas whatsoever," he said, adding that VFS Global's ownership and directorships were available to the public via their website.

DHA director general, **Mkuseli Apleni**, said the allegations were "wild and baseless". Apleni said the documentation at his disposal

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Hip, hip hooray!



It was an especially festive Thirsty's in Cape Town last month, with **Jo Fraser**, Club Travel's franchise director, celebrating her birthday with travel friends and colleagues. She's pictured here with md of Club Travel, **Wally Gaynor** (middle) and **Marc Harding** of Virgin Atlantic Airways (right). For more pics, see page 9. Photo: Natasha Schmidt

Agents stick to financial guarantees

DEBBIE BADHAM

DESPITE the big outlay of cash, the majority of South African travel agents have chosen to stick with posting an lata financial guarantee rather than opting to join the Default Insurance Product (DIP) scheme.

It's been three months since the launch of the DIP – an alternative solution to posting a guarantee according to lata's new local financial criteria (LFC) which came into effect on March 1 – which allows agents to pay per ticket. Since then, 112 agents

have joined the scheme, about 25% of the available market, says **Charmaine Brogden** of Jack and Seach Insurance Brokers, the appointed agent to administer the DIP on behalf of insurer, Lloyd's of London.

"We would have liked to have seen around 50% uptake," says Charmaine, adding that the scheme would benefit from critical mass, as the guarantee requirement could then stand to fall away.

lata's new LFC presented agents with an adjusted minimal financial guarantee of R160 000 for weekly

remittance, R250 000 for fortnightly and R500 000 for monthly remittance. The DIP presented agents with the alternative of paying a cost per ticket rather than posting a guarantee, as long as they entered the scheme before the March 1 deadline. Those agents who already had a guarantee in favour of lata before the new LFC kicked in were still required to post a guarantee whether they entered the DIP scheme or not. "It is hoped that on renewal of the insurance product that this requirement will fall away, however

this will depend on the uptake and performance of the facility," says Charmaine.

The conservative uptake may be because agents are confused by or unaware of the full list of options available to agents, she says. "In the initial phases, we had many agents phoning, trying to understand how the scheme operates. It soon became clear that many agents did not realise they could opt for a combination of DIP and a bank guarantee in favour of lata.

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Airline postpones SA launch, again

DARISE FOSTER

MEGA Maldives Airlines, which planned to launch twice-weekly flights between Malé and Johannesburg in November last year, has yet again postponed services to SA, citing rand instability as a deterrent.

The airline, which first announced plans to launch flights to South Africa in 2013, postponed services citing similar concerns at the time. However, in September last year, the carrier said it had reconsidered the route, no longer deterred by the weak rand. "Given MEGA Maldives' fleet growth and our route network development, the timing is right for us and we believe it is right, too, for the

market. The current devaluation of the rand has of course not gone unnoticed by MEGA Maldives but there are several factors why it is still viable to fly into this market," the airline said (see TNW September 23).

However, the airline has again
"The airline will re-evaluate the launch in its next planning cycle."

postponed its plans.

"We decided to postpone the launch of the route to Johannesburg for a variety of reasons, including concerns about currency stability and allowing us more time to get our airline on the GDS," says **George Weinmann**,

MEGA Maldives ceo.

He adds that the airline will reconsider the launch of the Johannesburg route "in due course". "It is certainly still in our overall plans. Our goal is to make the Johannesburg route not only the best connection to the Maldives but also to be an outstanding and easy one-stop connection to other Asian markets such as India, Thailand, Malaysia, and China."

The airline will re-evaluate the launch in its next planning cycle, says George. "The postponement is not indefinite and it's not entirely based on the South African economy, although a stable currency and any economic good news would certainly be positive factors in our consideration." ■

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Rubes® By Leigh Rubin

"I told him, 'Use a longer jump-rope.' But did he listen? ... No-o-o-o-o."

Agents stick to financial guarantees

From page 1

This would apply to larger agents where the LFC require them to post a guarantee in excess of R5m." For example, an agent who was not required to post a guarantee prior to the LFC and now had to put up a guarantee of R8m could opt for the DIP scheme and then simply post a guarantee for the balance of R3m.

Marco Cristofoli, md of Harvey World Travel Southern Africa, says the reason most agents have opted to stick with the financial guarantee could be that the DIP is a relatively unknown option to agents and, secondly, because many agents already had guarantees in place before the new LFC were introduced. He adds that around 30% of HWT agencies have opted for the DIP.

Director of XL Rosebank Travel, **Allan Wolman**, says he opted rather to put up a guarantee than enter the DIP

scheme because it was more economically viable. Rather than losing money per ticket, he is able to earn interest off the guarantee, he says.

On the other hand, **David Pegg**, md of Sure Viva Travels, says he opted to enter the DIP scheme rather than tying up half a million of the agency's money. He says his agency opted to increase its service fees to compensate for the cost per ticket as required by the scheme, and in this regard it has proved to be self-funding.

The current uptake of the DIP may also be an indication of the financial stability of the local travel industry, says Sure Travel ceo, **Vanya Lessing**. She says it was expected that, because of the substantial guarantees that would have to be put up, many agents would forego their lata licences. However, in the end, all Sure Travel agents were able to come up with the bonding

that was required. "Essentially for us, this is a very positive reflection," she says.

Marco agrees, and says this indication of financial stability is contradictory to the current economic environment, and proves what a resilient industry the local travel sector is.

Ceo of Asata, **Otto de Vries**, says to kick off with over 100 agents is very positive. "One must remember that this is a new scheme. Could more members consider the value of the scheme and switch? Of course. Is there a possibility that there is lack of understanding of how the scheme works? Maybe. The lead time for its implementation was short. We are going to give our members a chance to find out more about the scheme and the options at our conference next month. The insurer has been given a slot to engage and discuss with industry." ■

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A more flexible form of cruising

SUSAN REYNARD

YACHTING offers cruise goers a good alternative to big-ship cruising as it offers more flexibility. South Africa has a “mature” cruising market and the exclusivity of yachting has grown in appeal, says **Thomas Harrison**, SeaDream Yacht Club sales director for Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Belgium and South Africa. He was in the country on a three-city (Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban) educational on selling yachting versus cruising.

Thomas said yacht cruising typically appealed to ‘baby boomers’ and those in their 40s; well-educated (executives); well-travelled (prefer boutique hotels and villas); active (outdoorsy,

boat owners, empty-nesters); experienced (well versed in cruising); and those who prefer smaller ships.

He said yachting’s appeal was that it was relaxed, exclusive, there were no crowds, the atmosphere was casual, and vessels could stop at smaller ports and stay overnight, allowing passengers more time to experience destinations.

Themed yacht trips featuring on-board specialists and land excursions, such as the wine region in France, are popular.

SeaDream Yacht Club currently has two mega-yachts: *SeaDream I* and *SeaDream II*. Each vessel accommodates 112 guests and is serviced by 95 crew members. Discussions are under way to build another two mega-yachts

and add new sailings and itineraries. These yachts can be chartered either by one travel agent or a consortium to resell under their own banner.

Service on SeaDream is highly personalised, with the emphasis on anticipating specific guest needs. Monogrammed pyjamas embroidered with the names of each guest is a taste of the attention to detail one can expect throughout the trip.

Thomas said during trips, the aim was to maximise experiences above deck and explore destinations rather than spend time in a stateroom or suite (hence no balconies). Activities include Champagne and Caviar Splash with a beach barbecue on the Caribbean cruises; Shaken, Not Stirred martini deck party on the Mediterranean cruises; gaming; piano bar; movies under the stars; and even sleeping under the stars.



George Argyropoulos (left) with Thomas Harrison on his recent educational trip to SA. Photo: Susan Reynard

Wellness options include Tai Chi and yoga; spa sessions; and a fitness centre.

Cruises currently include sailings in the Mediterranean and Caribbean. The Mediterranean itineraries run from May to October and include Spain, France, Italy, Greece and Dalmatia. The Caribbean cruises run from November to April to the Virgin Islands, Leeward

Islands and Windward Islands. Itineraries ranged from six- to nine-day voyages and guests could combine two voyages without too much overlap, said Thomas.

Cruises International md, **George Argyropoulos**, who hosted Thomas in Johannesburg, says any South African who takes international holidays can usually afford a cruise or yacht experience. ■



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Another airline launches flights to CPT

KENYA Airways will launch three flights a week from Cape Town to Nairobi, effective July.

Flights will operate on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays and will fly via Livingstone.

Flight KQ 783 will depart

Cape Town at 14h15 to arrive in Livingstone at 17h10. It departs for Nairobi at 18h00, arriving at 22h00.

Return flight KQ 782 will depart Nairobi at 07h20 to arrive in Livingstone at 09h30. It departs Livingstone at 10h20 and

arrives in Cape Town at 13h25. “Passengers will not need to change aircraft in Livingstone,” the airline said in a statement.

The service will be operated using an Embraer E190 with 12 seats in business and 84 in economy class. ■

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Bid for business-class upgrades – Ethiopian

DARISE FOSTER

ETHIOPIAN Airlines has introduced a programme that gives passengers the option to bid for an upgrade from economy class to Cloud Nine (business class). SAA introduced a similar programme – Step Up – last year.

Using 'Upgrade to Cloud Nine', customers with a valid Ethiopian Airlines economy-class ticket can make an individual bid for an upgrade. If they are not successful in their bid, they will retain their economy-class ticket. The programme is now available on selected Ethiopian Airlines routes.

How does it work?

Eligible passengers who have booked an economy-class ticket will receive an email about seven days prior to their trip inviting them to submit an offer. Passengers can also submit an offer by going to 'Book' on Ethiopian Airlines' website and selecting 'Upgrade to Cloud Nine'. If their flight qualifies for an upgrade, they will be

directed to the 'Upgrade to Cloud Nine' page where a bid can be placed.

Bids can be edited and retracted up to 50 hours before the scheduled departure time. After that, the bid becomes binding.

Prior to the flight, Ethiopian Airlines will select the passengers who will be upgraded to Cloud Nine. Selection criteria will take into account the bid amount, original ticket price as well as other criteria, including the amount of seats available in Cloud Nine and the number of bids that have been placed.

All passengers who have placed a bid will receive email notification within 24 hours prior to departure, informing them whether or not the bid has been accepted. If their bid is accepted, the credit card on file will be charged with the corresponding amount and they will also receive an updated e-ticket.

If the bid is not accepted, passengers will fly economy class as planned and will not incur any additional costs. ■



Tips from Louis the Lawyer – CPA

With each instalment in this series, Advocate Louis Nel will explain various aspects of the CPA that impact on non-refundable deposits and cancellation fees.

WHEN considering how the issue of non-refundable deposits and cancellation fees as contained in the CPA applies to you and your business, most important is to first look at what common law states as this will apply, whether or not you need to apply the CPA. It is my view that the CPA has not revoked the common law, as such common law duties such as 'Buyer Beware' and 'Signatory Beware' should still be applied. This is stated in Section 2(10) under Interpretation.

This means that travellers cannot simply sign documents blindly and then when they find themselves in a pickle, cancel and expect the CPA to come to their rescue. They have to be responsible – read all the terms and conditions, ask questions and make sure they are satisfied with the explanation before they sign and pay for their trip. Similarly the travel agent is required to explain (in more detail than before the CPA) the ins and outs of a trip, especially aspects such as non-refundable deposits and cancellation fees.

The CPA does not mean the end of the common law, but rather that common law will be developed within the context of the CPA, bearing in mind the new safeguards it contains as stated in Section 4(2) under Consumer Rights.

What to do?

- Revisit your documents (booking forms, quotes and T&Cs);
- Be aware of your rights as a supplier as detailed in the CPA;
- Ensure that you have brought all onerous aspects of the journey (such as cancellation, deposits, visas, passports, etc) to the attention of the traveller at least once during your relationship with them. Get them to initial or at least acknowledge in some way the pertinent clauses/that you've brought to their attention – especially with first-time travellers. DO NOT assume anything!
- Don't panic when you receive a consumer complaint and/or letter from the consumer commissioner! ■

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When to tailor your clients' trips

When does it make more sense to go the tailor-made route? Debbie Badham speaks to agents across the industry.

IT'S no secret that a well-put-together package can save agents a great deal of time and research, while providing them with great commission-earning potential. However, many agents still prefer to go the tailor-made route for various reasons, the most common being the ability to cater more particularly for clients' needs.

The primary benefits of a packaged trip, says md of Flight Centre South Africa, **Andrew Stark**, are that the logistics are all taken care of, with no need to worry about linking your transfer time with your flight or your pre and post nights' accommodation before your flight the next day." The other significant benefit comes with the supplier pre-packaging meal plans, drinks plans, excursions and other activities into one price, all in South African rands."

While Pentravel ceo, **Sean Hough**, agrees that all-inclusive packages provide great value for clients, particularly with the weak rand, he says it's also about aligning yourself with brands that can provide the best possible experience to travellers.

Commodities are very price-driven, says Sean, but that's not what Pentravel's business is about. He explains that agencies simply can't offer the infrastructure required to provide all of the value-adds and special touch points



"The primary benefits of a packaged trip are that the logistics are all taken care of."
Andrew Stark

throughout the trip that a tour operator can.

Manager for Travel Experts, **Rishen Radhella**, points out that a good agent will generally qualify the client and guide them towards making the right decision, whether it is pre-packaged or tailor made. Rishen says a customised holiday allows the agent to use their knowledge and expertise, shifting the focus from price to quality of holiday and relationship.

"I like to research hotels for my clients. I love looking at the hotel website,

TripAdvisor and Google Maps to find a hotel that will really appeal to my clients. They will get there and know that I actually understand their needs," agrees Travel Counsellor, **Donna Powell**.

A tailor-made tour enables agents and operators to direct clients to what they want to see and do, says **Anne Hill**, md of British T.I.P.S. "Yes it is time consuming, but the excitement lies in not knowing what challenge awaits."

What's more, tailor-made itineraries create the opportunity to source new and different offerings. "It means that we are not tied to one supplier and can source exciting offerings at excellent prices for the client," notes **Jan Jenkins**, md of Umvuselelo Tours and Travel, adding that tailor-made itineraries also enable greater flexibility when it comes to altering services and dates.

Complex itineraries

As another agent points out, tailor-made trips work well for more complicated itineraries. "I contact the local DMC for the country in question, who has on-the-ground local knowledge, especially for regions such as Central and South America as well as Russia and the Far East," she says.

The agent cautions, however, that the decision to tailor make ultimately depends on the price

received from the tour operator and whether it can be bettered by tailor-making through a DMC. "If looking at a regional holiday it is easier to suggest a packaged tour."

Senior travel consultant for Sure Giltedge Travel, **Carol Maasch**, agrees, saying that for Southern African bookings she definitely prefers tailor-making individual itineraries. "You get to learn far more about what is out there and get to interact directly with various hotels, lodges and other suppliers."

However, she also agrees that for the Indian Ocean Islands and certain other overseas destinations, packages are much easier through suppliers like Beachcomber, Club Med, On the Go Tours, TravelVision, World Leisure Holidays, and so on.

Popular destinations vs off-the-beaten track

For more popular destinations it is, in fact, quite likely that agents might find cheaper deals for their clients by booking a pre-packaged tour.

"Tailor-made packages are generally more expensive and come with a great deal of knowledge needed about the destination to tailor make an ideal holiday yourself," says Andrew.

"Ideally off-the-beaten track destinations allow for tailor-made itineraries. Generalist destinations usually make more sense to package for

the South African market, as volume deals have gone into the overall pricing."

Generally pre-packaged trips are put together during a very specific time-frame because it is at this time that tour operators are able to access the cheapest flights, explains sales and marketing manager of TravelVision, **Annemarie Lexow**. "As such, pre-packaged trips make a lot of sense for clients who are available during that time-frame and who want the convenience of being able to just go ahead and book the trip."

Mladen Lukic, gm of Travel Counsellors South Africa, says ultimately, the decision to tailor make your own package will depend on the strategy of the agency in question. Travel Counsellors has its own platform, Phoenix, which enables agents to put together their own packages. Mladen says the advantage to this lies in the agent's ability to provide clients with differentiated product and to improve their earning potential significantly.

He adds, however, that it is also important for agencies to be wary of jeopardising their relationships with suppliers, noting that it makes the most sense for agents to tailor-make packages when it comes to trip requests that are not already well catered for by existing operator packages. ■

TNW's Thirsty's

IT MAY have been a rainy evening in Cape Town, but the atmosphere inside the Premier Hotel Cape Manor in Sea Point was warm and buzzing as travel friends gathered to drink, eat and

catch up on industry issues and gossip. The next TNW Thirsty's will be held this month at the Protea Hotel Balalaika in Johannesburg. Keep an eye out for your exclusive invitation! ■



▲ From left: Trevor Brown (SAA); Chantal Kliche (Thompsons Travel); Ken Tweedie (Global Travel Alliance); and Wayne Van Niekerk (Thompsons Travel).

◀ Caught reminiscing about the 'good ol' days' were TravelVision's Cheryl Smith (middle) and TNW's Hilka Birns, joined by Marc DeJager (Travel Counsellors).



▶ The Cape Manor's gracious hosts made sure guests were well taken care of. From left: Nick Paul, Rudi Linsley-Noakes and Liesel Bryce.



◀ From left: Jacqui van Dooren (Development Promotions); Pippa Evans Khalpe (Travel Deals) and Rikke Hackner (Travel Deals).

▶ All smiles for the camera – Cape Corporate Travel's Heather Casteling (left) and Cemair's Sharon Fergusson.



▼ Pentravel's lovely ladies (from left): Sianna Book and Adele Palm.



▶ Cape Town's friendliest faces are, from left: Sean Hough (Pentravel); Lee Botti (Lee Botti & Associates), and Des O'Loghlen (Mauritius Holidays).



▲ Travel Counsellors Tracy Graskie (middle, left) and Rachel Boyd (middle, right) network with Turkish Airlines' Huseyin Saridogan (far left) and Abdul Karriem Hoosain (far right). Photos: Natasha Schmidt

Disrupter plans to 'wake up' Amadeus

As part of the series, Who is..., *TNW* profiles different personalities in the travel industry. This week Taryn Nightingale chats to the new gm of Amadeus.

NEW to his role as gm of Amadeus Southern Africa, **Andy Hedley** believes it's important to think before you make a decision, so that you don't just react but have a plan. "The best advice you can give anyone training a sheepdog, is for every 10 minutes you spend in the field training it, spend 20 minutes in the chair thinking about how you're going to do it," he says. This philosophy is a principle Andy applies to life.

He says in every job he has had he spends time "thinking, pondering, working out and letting his mind run".

"If you get too down in the trenches, you never get out and you need to put your head out and see what's going on in this world."

Born in Dumfriesshire, Scotland, in 1963, Andy's first job was as a sheep farmer. Part of the reason he started work as a farmer was "basically to annoy my father", who had fixed ideas about college and the type of career one should follow.

"I always wanted to follow my own path," he says, adding that he got a job as a farmer by "pure chance". He had answered a phone call meant for his brother – who at the time had been helping a friend who did some work on a farm – and eventually found himself lugging a toolbox down to a local farmer who needed a hand to fix his tractor.

Andy asked the farmer for a job, who obliged after seeing his efforts with the

toolbox, and Andy remained a farmer until he was 38.

In 2001, after the foot-and-mouth epidemic ravaged the UK's economy, Andy left and went on to buy a seafood restaurant in Florida.

At this time 9/11 had just hit the US and Andy thought there might be some businesses to pick up. He says he "hated, loathed, detested it" but that the experience of owning and running a restaurant taught him that you don't have to do something that you enjoy doing, you can still get on and do it."

"If you get too down in the trenches – you never get out and you need to put your head out and see what's going on in this world."

After a year he managed to turn around the restaurant, "leaving it as a far higher end, well-run, profitable establishment".

He then went on to sell European online booking engines to the American market.

He did this for seven years before moving to Cape Town (his second favourite place in the world after Scotland) and working for Travelstart.

A new challenge

Andy sees a problem as a challenge, knowing there must be a way around it.

The reason he decided to work at Amadeus was

because he needed a new challenge, he says. While being interviewed for the job of gm he was asked to explain his process as an innovator.

At the time Andy says he wouldn't describe himself as an innovator. He says he doesn't "try to dream up things from a blank sheet" but would rather take something that wasn't done too well and then make it work.

After five years as head of technical business at Travelstart, Andy developed a reputation as a "disrupter or trouble-maker". He says disruption is not a bad thing and that essentially it is about moving forward.

He says he takes "calculated risks" and approaches all aspects of his life "with his eyes open". He used to be an avid fox-hunter and describes the thrill of picking up the scent of a fox. "You didn't know where it was going, you just went where the fox went."

Andy says technology suits him as it's always on the move and in travel, you've got to keep thinking out the box to get anywhere.

As gm of Amadeus he says his vision for the company is to get more customer-focused and that being from the TMC side he is not blind as to where the weaknesses in Amadeus are.

He says at Amadeus they are "waking-up". "Too many GDSs have a tendency to be inward-looking and we're looking outward and forward."



Andrew Hedley

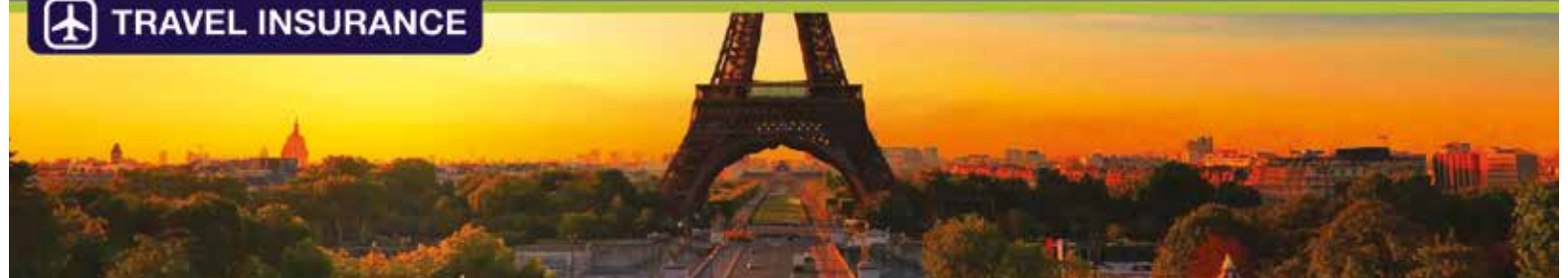
Getting to know Andy:

- When asked what is the biggest lesson he's learned as an adult, Andy says: "Take responsibility because if you take responsibility you're more inclined to do something about it."
- Andy's favourite band is Queen.
- He relaxes by cooking.
- He describes himself as loyal and someone who has integrity. "I know I'm bright – everyone's always been telling me that." He says that he can also be quite sarcastic.
- His favourite author is Terry Pratchett.
- Andy used to be a serious dog-trainer and has had 992 dogs in his life. He now has a ridgeback and Bernese mountain dog.
- "I like adrenalin," he says. Some of his hobbies included white-water kayaking, show jumping, bodyboarding and fox hunting.
- Andy owns a 1200 cc Ducati Diavel he calls Daisy. ■

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AUSTRALIA

Adding short breaks to a VFR trip is one way of upselling Australia, writes Michelle Colman.

Depth of diversity lends itself to upselling

ACCORDING to a 2011 census, 145 683 Australians claimed to be South African by birth and 108 955 by ancestry. There were some 32 000 South African migrants resident in Sydney, 29 000 in Perth and 21 000 in Melbourne. When the next Australian census takes place in August this year, the statistics could well be higher.

No surprise then, that South African travellers to Australia are largely VFR visitors.

Kim Moore, public affairs manager for Tourism Australia, says consumer marketing activity conducted in South Africa in the past bears this out.

For the South African travel consultant, it would then seem there is little in the sale of travel to Australia besides a return airfare. But with Australia's diversity, encouraging VFR travellers to see and do more – often within easy distance of the three main cities South Africans visit – should not be too much of a stretch.

Comments **Jackie Adami**, md of Development Promotions: "Agents could be proactive in providing VFR clients with interesting and inspiring information on the country and suggestions or recommendations on must-sees, activities, places of interest, heritage and culture to motivate and encourage the client to book additional tours and cruises.

"Because of the natural diversity of the continent, Australia offers a plethora of unique experiences found nowhere else on earth," she continues, illustrating with examples such as feeding wild lorikeets, watching Aboriginal didgeridoo and dance performers, and tobogganing down the world's tallest sand dunes.

Increased knowledge and information on the destination equip consultants with the ability to upsell. A means of obtaining this knowledge is through Tourism Australia's Aussie Specialist online training programme, at <https://www.aussiespecialist.com/splash.html>. Currently, there are nine Aussie Specialists in SA, says Kim.

Cost-effective solutions
Cost, with the current exchange rate, is of course, a consideration. Jackie suggests utilising value-for-money products, like affordable and flexible camper vans that offer accommodation and transport in one, or combining hotel passes with self-drive.

Trafalgar, which offers Australian and New Zealand tour programmes, has some good news too. "Agents should keep top of mind that Trafalgar's products were priced in 2015 so guests are getting to travel in 2016 at last year's prices. And by opting for these guided holidays now, they won't feel the sting of any currency fluctuations either, which could happen if guests bought excursions and guided holidays in Australia or New Zealand once they arrive," says md, **Theresa Szejwallo**.

Short breaks and weekend getaways are ideal for the VFR market, enabling clients to spend the lion's share of their stay with family and friends, and keeping travel costs down. They have, after all, made their way to Australia, which involved time and distance, and they may as well make more of the journey.

Short break suggestions

From Sydney:

- Famous for its blue-tinged escarpment and Three Sisters rock formation, graceful hotels and quaint townships, the Blue Mountains National Park is just a few hours from Sydney. The mountains are popular for walking, climbing, mountain biking and abseiling.
- In the Hunter Valley, travellers can indulge at wineries, restaurants and day spas.
- The Central Coast has good beaches and family-oriented attractions.
- Capital city, Canberra, is only a three-hour drive from Sydney.

From Melbourne:

- World-class wines, artisan cheeses and handmade chocolate are on offer in the Yarra Valley, 90 minutes' drive east of Melbourne. The Healesville Sanctuary is the spot to photograph koalas, and the nearby Dandenong Ranges have quaint villages and towering forests to explore.
- Wineries and surf beaches are found in the Mornington Peninsula, a

90-minute drive south-east of Melbourne.

- West of the city is the Bellarine Peninsula, known for its historic villages, food and wine.
- Phillip Island has beaches, good food and the nightly Penguin Parade at sunset is its premier attraction.

From Perth:

- Rottnest Island is only 19 kilometres from Perth and has over 60 beaches, coral reefs to snorkel and, shipwrecks to dive. It's also home to a cute little marsupial, the quokka, found only in Western Australia.
- The Pinnacles in Nambung National Park, two hours north of Perth, is one of Western Australia's most well-known tourist attractions. Most people go up on a day tour, but with time to spare, there's a lot more to do in the area.
- A drive 25 minutes north-east of the city centre to the Swan Valley will take the traveller to a region of 40 vineyards. Visitors can cycle through the vineyards or take a river cruise, sipping local wines.



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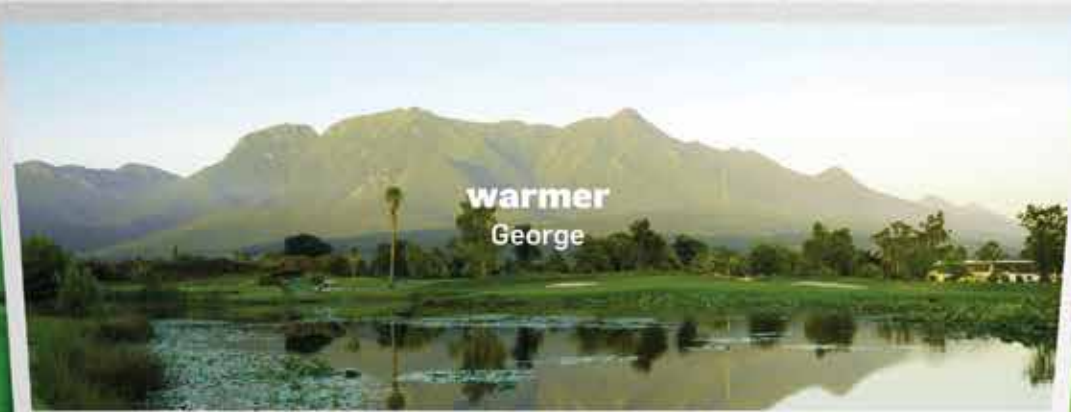


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Encounter ancient cultures

TRAFALGAR products may well entice VFR travellers to explore beyond their host cities.

Theresa Szejwallo highlights some cultural and geographic attractions.

She points out that the country's indigenous people, the Aborigines, are among the world's oldest surviving human cultures. "On a Trafalgar guided holiday travellers will get the chance to meet these people so they can learn about their fascinating civilisation first hand."

The Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park in Cairns celebrates the history of the inhabitants of the rainforest. Here Trafalgar guests learn about the medicinal uses of 'bush tucker' and watch a show mixing Aboriginal dance, fire making and storytelling. As well as viewing Aboriginal rock art at Ubirr and Nourlangie, guests have the chance to paint their own boomerang.

No trip to Australia is complete without a trip to Uluru, or Ayers Rock, says Theresa. The incredible 348m-tall sandstone rock is a geological feature sacred to the Aborigines.

New Zealand too, she says, is crammed with geological wonders. The sacred water of Wai-O-Tapu is a thermal wonderland south of Rotorua, where travellers can witness boiling mud pools, geysers and



Ayers Rock is sacred to the Aborigines. Photo: Tourism Australia

tracts of volcanic land.

The Hole in the Rock, off Cape Brett, showcases an 18-metre arch created by centuries of wind and waves. On a boat trip guests can sail through the arch, which the Māori call Motu Kōkako.

At the opposite end of New Zealand is Milford Sound. This fjord's slender inlet is enclosed by sheer rocky walls, with a shallow entrance and deep basin of dark, oxygen-deprived water. The highlight is the incredible 1 692m-high Mitre Peak.

For some 'out-of-the-box' experiences, Theresa recommends the four-day Cairns & the Great Barrier Reef guided holiday, in the company of a marine naturalist. Snorkelling equipment is provided to view

this natural phenomenon up close.

"On our New Zealand Splendour, we take our guests to visit Shenandoah for a Be My Guest experience. The historic villa's owners, Simon and Claudia, show guests around their property, which includes a unique private collection of Harley-Davidson motorcycles. And then we enjoy afternoon tea in their garden before taking a short tour to see the local wildlife," says Theresa.

An optional Farmstay in a country home is also offered on this itinerary. Hosts provide Kiwi hospitality with a wholesome dinner and a cooked breakfast, comfortable accommodation and a tour to introduce guests to their lifestyle.

Top tips from the experts

TNW approached some Aussie Specialists for their recommendations on selling Australia.

Adriaan Kruger of 2Life Travel in Pretoria, said: "We use the services of a number of local operators in Australia, but we also endeavour to let our clients experience their own discoveries." He points out that there are many activities cash-strapped South Africans can experience at no, or very little cost. These are his basic tips:

- Don't just tick the boxes when planning your clients' visit to Australia. It is a huge country. Make use of a reputable agent who will give you the best advice on the areas they should visit first, as the country necessitates more than one visit.
- Self-drive is easy and should be high on the priority list.
- Advise clients against being 'just a tourist' or photo snapper; let them get to know the people and their culture.
- Plan their itinerary for international flights by casting the net a bit wider. Direct is not always the best option. Add a destination like Singapore or Hong Kong.
- Australia's star-rating for hotels is supposedly very similar to South Africa's, but Adriaan says he would downsize grading by half a star.
- **Tracey Elliott**, senior travel consultant at Embassy Travel in Cape Town, had a wealth of information to impart:
- Give your client a minimum

of three hours connecting time in Sydney when transferring from an international flight to a domestic flight or vice versa. You first have to find out where to connect, and then you have to wait in that area for a bus to transfer you from one terminal to the other. This can be a bit nerve-racking if your client has not left enough time, as the bus runs on a schedule.

- Know the temperature in all the cities your client will be visiting. You can have sweltering 'Durban' weather in Darwin, and three days later be in gale force winds and rain in Melbourne.
- Australia is a big continent – it is about 50% larger than Europe and about 33 times larger than the UK! You need to take this into consideration when planning an itinerary as the distance between major cities and destinations is significant.
- To hire a car, clients must be 21 years or older. There are many toll roads in Australia and many of them do not take cash. Check with car-rental companies if the vehicle is fitted with the relevant electronic tag or whether your clients will need to call the number displayed on the toll road to pay for the trip.
- Australia has three time zones – Western Australia is GMT +8; Northern Territory and South Australia are GMT+ 9,5; Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania are GMT+10.

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AIR MAURITIUS

Stop over in Mauritius!

AIR Mauritius offers South Africans access to Perth from both Johannesburg and Cape Town. Comments sales and marketing manager, **Wouter Nel**: "Not only is Perth only six and a half hours from Mauritius, Air Mauritius also offers South African travellers the best fares and unique value propositions."

South Africans can enjoy a generous 40kg luggage allowance to Perth. In addition, passengers have the advantage of one free date change as part of the airline's Beyond Bonanza offer. "All-inclusive fares start from as little as R9 999 in economy class and only

R24 999 in business class on our lie-flat product from Mauritius and Johannesburg," says Wouter.

The carrier offers all passengers a free STPC (stopover) in Mauritius, inclusive of accommodation, transfers and selected meals. "This voluntary stopover has encouraged South Africans to explore the island en-route back from their trip to Australia, a perfect relaxing break," says Wouter.

Air Mauritius flies between Johannesburg and Mauritius daily, between Cape Town and Mauritius three times a week, and between Mauritius and Perth twice weekly. ■

Births, deaths, marriages, promotions – we want to know! Please fax or e-mail TNW's Debbie Badham, at debbieb@nowmedia.co.za or (011) 327 4094.



MSC celebrates top agents

MSC celebrated its cruise consultants who have sailed through the season with impressive sales and top customer service achievements for the 2015/2016 cruise season. Pictured here (from left) are **Johnathan Govender** for recognition of most cabins sold; **Nicole Michalowsky**, who was recognised as the top consultant overall; **Kholofelo Rantho**, who recorded the highest number of calls received as well as being the most improved consultant overall; and **Creswill Brown**, who won the customer service award. Photo: MSC Cruises.

Happy birthday!



Isibindi Africa recently celebrated the first anniversary of its most recent development – the Rhino Ridge Safari Lodge in the Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park. The four-star lodge in KwaZulu Natal, opened its doors on March 1, 2015 as part of a vision to uplift and empower the surrounding Mpembeni community. Pictured here are Rhino Ridge spa therapists, **Lungi** and **Promise** (left and right, respectively) with receptionist **Nomvelo**. Photo: Isibindi Africa.

Appointments

■ Extraordinary has appointed **Kate Davidson** head of sales and marketing for the group, with effect from May 15. She has spent seven years with the Extraordinary brand. In this role, Kate will be responsible for the supervision of all sales executives and marketing for the Extraordinary Group. Kate will relocate from Durban to the Extraordinary head office in Johannesburg.



■ **Michael Pownall** has joined the Performance Management Reimagined Hospitality team and will work alongside managing partners, **Tony Romer-Lee** and **Euan McGlashan**. Michael's hotel industry experience spans three decades, during which he has lived and worked on four continents. He has held positions including deputy gm of the Cape Sun Hotel and gm of the Mount Nelson Hotel. Most recently he has served as md Southern Africa for Taj Hotels, Resorts and Palaces, prior to which he was gm, tasked with the building, launching and operating of the Taj Hotel Cape Town.

Vacancy Notice



Air Mauritius Account Assistant Based at Bedfordview office

Requirements

- Matriculation – Grade 12 of which Mathematics must have been done at school level
- Diploma an advantage in the accounting, financial area of an airline
- Minimum 3 years' airline experience in a finance division or department of an airline
- Airline terminology – BSP knowledge is an added advantage
- Cognos and Oracle system knowledge is an added advantage
- Computer literacy is imperative, Excel essential

Responsibilities

- Assist the Accounts Officer with the following:
 - Basic administration in finance
 - Data Capturing on Oracle both AP and AR
 - Sales Reconciliation
 - Daily BSP reconciliation and accounting
 - Any other duties required by the Accounts Officer and management
- Only qualifying parties may submit a CV by email to Ailsa Goddard at agoddard@airmauritius.com no later than 17h00 on 13 May 2016. Air Mauritius reserves the right to reject profiles that do not meet the minimum requirement. Applicants must have South African citizenship. We conform with the Employment Equity Act.

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Adventure in Egypt!

TravelVision is offering a special seven-night package for travellers visiting Egypt, available from R20 518pps. It is valid for travel from May 1 to September 30 and includes return airfare and taxes departing Johannesburg, three nights in Cairo at a four-star hotel with breakfast, four nights on a five-star Nile cruise on full-board basis with land excursions, meet and assist at Cairo, Luxor and Aswan airports as well as all transfers to and from each airport. A private full-day tour of the Pyramids, Sphinx, Egyptian museum and Khan El Khalil bazaars is also included. Pictured here preparing for their Egyptian adventure are TravelVision sales executives, **Salmoné van Heerden** (left) and **Refiloe Makhetha**. Photo: Megan Fischer

Flyafrica Zimbabwe to rebrand, relaunch

DEBBIE BADHAM

FLYAFRICA Zimbabwe plans to relaunch flights under a slightly different name – flyafricazim – with the backing of new investors.

The airline terminated its franchise agreement with the Flyafrica group after the parent company was placed into liquidation earlier this year (see TNW March 9).

The 'new' airline owns the Flyafrica brand name in Zimbabwe and can therefore continue to operate under this name, says the company's principle investor and chairperson, **Cassidy Mugwagwa**. Additional investors have been signed on to the tune of US\$25m (R362m) to develop a pan-African operation, says Cassidy.

The airline plans to begin operations on the Johannesburg-Harare route

from mid-May.

Flyafricazim also plans to establish operations between Johannesburg and Bulawayo as well as domestic routes within Zimbabwe.

After the termination of its franchise agreement with Flyafrica Ltd, Cassidy says flyafricazim needed to source new aircraft, reservation

"Contracts have also been entered into with other service providers. Aircraft have been sourced from Star Air Cargo and key staff, who originally worked for Flyafrica Ltd, have also been retained – so we are good to go."

Not unlike the original flyafrica.com LCC model, the new airline's strategy is to operate in a number of different countries "in order to spread its common expenses", says Cassidy.

"Each country must be profitable, operate with a local partner and be able to sustain itself with minimal operating financial support from head office. In other words, one country must not be able to pull another down," she says.

The airline aims to launch subsidiary airlines in four countries over the next two years. ■

"Each country must be profitable, operate with a local partner and be able to sustain itself with minimal support."

support, as well as web support and marketing. The company has done this through its purchase of Airconnect, which Cassidy explains handled many of these functions for Flyafrica in the past.

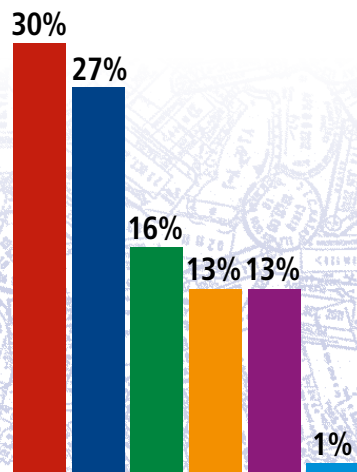


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BRITISH AIRWAYS

Skywise looks to sell off a 'sizeable' stake

SKYWISE Airline, which shut down operations on December 2, 2015, due to unpaid airport charges, announced on April 25 that it was now considering selling off a "sizeable stake" in the company, according to a press release.

The airline said six companies had expressed interest, two of which were based in South Africa.

"We are open to let go of more than 50% of our share but only to the local investors."

"The current expressions of interest from the

local investors are being analysed," said co-chairs **Tabassum Qadir** and **J. Malik**.

Due to the Air Services Licensing Act allowing only a 25% foreign shareholding, the offers from the foreign carriers are under negotiation. ■

VFS Global denies link to Guptas

From page 1 showed no link between VFS Global and Islandsite Investments. He said the department could also not dictate to companies that do business with government who they partner with abroad.

Another probe

Hoosen, who says he has been working on the case for over two years, will submit a request to the Public Protector to launch a full investigation into the matter. "The evidence presented in parliament was only the tip of the iceberg. There is so much more to uncover: how did VFS secure these tenders in the first place? A full investigation is warranted to uncover the bigger issues."

This is not the first time VFS Global has been investigated. In

July 2014 the company was investigated by the South African Competition Commission following allegations of abusive market dominance and unlawful tender procedures, resulting in excessive visa application prices and hidden fees (see TNW July 9, 2014).

VFS Global has exclusive rights to accept visa applications in South Africa for the embassies of Austria, Canada, Denmark, Greece, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden, UAE and The Netherlands, charging an average R1 180 service fee per applicant.

At the time, the Commission ruled that as "VFS does not determine prices independently, it was unlikely that prices were excessive".

The Commission said, however, it would engage

with foreign governments to discuss the likely impact of exclusive agreements. In its letter to the foreign governments, the Commission highlighted that it was concerned that the exclusive agreements could enhance VFS's dominant position in the market and enable it to charge higher prices to the detriment of visa applicants. It was also concerned about the level of service VFS could offer clients with no competition in the market, the letter stated.

Jaco Badenhorst, former md of Visa Request in South Africa, says the monopoly VFS has created in the market has led to the downfall of a number of visa companies. "The company charges excessive prices for its services, which clients are forced to pay as there is no alternative." ■