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INSIDE	<b>NEWS</b> <b>TURKEY</b>	<b>NEWS</b> <b>BA COMAIR</b>	<b>FEATURE</b> <b>TRAVEL TECHNOLOGY</b>
	Terrorist attacks deter tourists	Vitality hits agents' business	Turn 'bookers' into top consultants
	Page 2	Page 4	Page 8

## Govt calls for TMC bids

NATIONAL Treasury has published its long-awaited tender for the appointment of TMCs to provide travel management services to government.

In the tender document, Treasury stipulates that it expects to appoint an undisclosed number of TMCs from October 1 for a period of three years.

A management fee – determined by the TMC during the bidding process – will be paid for services rendered. However, the TMCs will need to adhere to the negotiated non-commissionable fares and rates and will not be allowed to earn override commissions. They will be required to maintain an open-book policy whereby any commissions earned through the government's volumes will need to be reimbursed to government.

"Government has been receiving poor value for money with departments overspending on their budgets as well as high incidences of unauthorised, irregular and fruitless and wasteful expenditure," Treasury said in the tender document.

In a first phase, the Treasury will select and appoint TMCs to panels on National and Provincial Levels. TMCs will be evaluated and scored on criteria including TMC experience and structure; quality management systems;

HR management; account management; service delivery; risk management; cost management; technology; management information; financial management and customer satisfaction.

Only TMCs that reach a total score of 70% or above will be considered.

In a second phase, the individual government organisations may issue their own tenders inviting the qualified TMCs on the respective panels to bid once their existing contracts with their current TMCs have expired.

"By and large it is a very well-thought-out document."

Other requirements for TMCs applying for the tender include a commitment to paying suppliers on time; an lata licence; and, if ticketing through a third party, agents would need to provide proof that the third party was lata accredited. TMCs could be asked to change GDS providers and would be expected to work overtime and during weekends and public holidays.

"By and large it is a very well-thought-out document," says **Otto de Vries**, ceo of Asata, adding that the government has asked Asata to distribute the tender, which is open to

all travel agents, through the Asata channels.

However, Otto, who could not go into specifics at the time of going to print, adds that there are a few items that are of some concern to Asata as the representative forum for the industry. "We are working through those currently and will be addressing those with Treasury and other stakeholders very urgently," said Otto.

Travel agents worry that the two-phased approach could take a considerable amount of time.

One travel agent, who spoke on condition of anonymity, explained that it could take several months before the provincial departments appointed TMCs under the new tender.

In the meantime, non-commissionable rates are being applied by government departments while TMCs have not been able to adjust their service fees, leading to unsustainable practices.

However, the travel agent mentioned that government had now started communicating with the trade after months of silence. "I'm cautiously optimistic, as it seems that government has opened the lines of communication.

"However, I will only believe it when I see that actual steps are being taken."

To page 2



**Ready, steady, GO!**

MD of Now Media, **Anton Marsh**, is online with new smartphone-friendly site, *Let's Go*, which distributes specials on Travelinfo to the public and directs them to use an agent. Each special has a short reference number which can be loaded in Travelinfo's Powersearch. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

## New mobi-site to drive business to agents

THE publishers of *TNW* and Travelinfo have launched a new smartphone-friendly site with the aim of getting South Africans to spend more of their discretionary money on travel through travel agents.

Now Media launched *Let's Go* last week, leveraging travel content from Travelinfo and its extensive event database with the idea of becoming the primary source of travel deals and event information for South African consumers

looking for fresh ideas to go out and do things.

They range from travel to live music, theatre sport events and attractions.

Content is updated throughout the day and geo-located to make it more relevant to the fast growing number of SA smartphone users that PWC Consulting expects to top 35 million by the end of next year.

Suppliers that now load travel specials on Travelinfo will also have the best ones

To page 2

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Top web stories



# Turkey takes a knock

- Travellers hit by major delays at OR Tambo
- TNW pick: Magic Travel in a fix
- Sodwana guesthouse shuts down
- Club Travel offers free tours to Turkey
- Tanzania VAT: Tour ops scramble to adjust rates

DEBBIE BADHAM

THE terrorist attack that shook Istanbul on June 28 has had a dramatic effect on short-term travel to Turkey. Tour operators, however, believe travellers will not be deterred in the long run.

Topdeck Travel has cancelled all its Turkey trips from now until October. Steve Cooke, business development manager, says travellers have indicated they will not be travelling to Turkey.

"We are still operating our Blue Lagoon sailing trip because it doesn't require travel through Istanbul, but any other trip that requires travel through Turkey has been rerouted."

Celebrity Cruises has also cancelled all its upcoming calls to Istanbul.

The cruise line says after reviewing all the available information and after discussions with its global security team in Miami, it decided to replace Istanbul calls with Athens.

Clients currently in the quoting stages are asking for alternatives, says Megan D'Arcy, kulula holidays product manager for Europe. She says the operator has a number of passengers booked to Turkey for future dates in 2016 but these clients have not yet decided to cancel.

Erica Barrett, ceo of Dreams, agrees that travel to Turkey seems to have been affected only for the immediate future, and that the operator is still quoting for late August and September.

Incidents such as these will also raise questions about where airport security should begin, says John Ridler, pr and media manager for Thompsons Holidays, and will likely prompt travellers to hit the ground running in an effort to move airside as quickly as possible.

"Incidents such as these will also raise questions about where airport security should begin, and will likely prompt travellers to hit the ground running in an effort to move airside as quickly as possible."

These kinds of tragedies show that there is a growing challenge for governments to keep people safe in the landside parts of the airport, comments Tony Tyler, lata dg and ceo.

"Moving people airside more quickly can help to mitigate risk. The industry

has a number of initiatives in place to achieve that aim and we are working with governments and airports to implement them."

Despite possible safety concerns, travellers remain strongly influenced by the promise of a good deal. Shortly after the attack in Istanbul, Club Travel began offering free tours of Turkey, starting from November, in support of the destination and its national carrier.

Interested parties were invited to take advantage of free five-star accommodation, transfers and daily breakfast.

Md, Wally Gaynor, says the response from travellers has been overwhelmingly positive. "The post on Facebook reached nearly 16 000 viewers. We have had requests from as far away as Australia asking if they could join the tour."

Looking at Turkey as a hub, John says it is likely people will initially avoid connecting through the country. "However, South African travellers have short memories and they will soon forget about this incident."

June Crawford, ceo of Barsa, believes that, overall, this incident will not have a negative effect on Turkey as a hub, saying that passengers still choose an airline based on fare and route schedule. ■

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**Rubes®** By Leigh Rubin

"Frankly, I expected a bit more than 'You have your entire life ahead of you.'"

## How TMCs can submit a bid

From page 1

Interested TMCs should note that they will have to complete the bid electronically, but they are also required to submit a hard copy of the bid before the closing date on August 5. If the hard copy is not received, the bid will not be valid.

Bidders are invited to attend one of the non-compulsory bid information sessions and training sessions on July 12, 13 or 14 at the National Treasury, 40 Madiba Street in the Budget Council Meeting Room in Pretoria.

Briefing sessions will be held on these dates from

10h00 to 12h00 and will give bidders the opportunity to obtain clarity on the aspects of the process and to voice their concerns and issues.

Training sessions will be held in the afternoon from 13h00 to 15h00 and will show bidders how to use the the electronic bidding system. ■

## New mobi-site

From page 1

exposed to the consumer through Let's Go. Consumers will be directed to a travel agent to make bookings. Travel agents will be able to see details of the special the client is interested in by entering the number they quote in the Powersearch bar on Travelinfo.

The first phase of the project is live and can be found on smartphones or desktop at www.lets-go.co.za.

Said Now Media md, Anton Marsh: "With the launch of \$4 smartphones in Dubai last month, we have great faith that the way to reach consumers will

increasingly be through these devices. Having the best content will be key to attracting audiences. In addition to having some 20 journalists and researchers updating content, the Now Media group is also investing heavily in the development of new media applications such as Let's Go." ■

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# Vitality eats into agents' business

NATASHA SCHMIDT

**B**A COMAIR'S bookings through travel agents have fallen by around 30% over the past five years, as a big chunk of these customers are now booking through Discovery's loyalty programme, Vitality.

This was the word from **Wendy Clausen**, Comair's senior manager of Selling Channels and Distribution, who was speaking at the Aviation Festival and Airports Show, held in Sandton from June 28-29.

Wendy addressed delegates on the issue of distribution and how airlines could boost their competitive advantage by finding a good mix of channels coupled with the right strategy.

"BA Comair and kulula have come a long way in terms of developing and optimising their distribution strategies. The airlines have learnt from the retail sector, tailoring their e-commerce offerings to customers and finding new revenue opportunities from different channels," she said.

Five years ago, the GDSs made up about 70% of BA Comair's distribution. This had fallen to 40%, as more customers were now booking online, particularly through Vitality, which had eaten into a big chunk of this distribution channel, Wendy said. The GDS channel makes up 25% of kulula.com's bookings, while partnerships also make up 25%. The LCC's direct website accounts for

30% of bookings.

However, the trade still plays a pivotal role as the highest yielding distribution channel for both airlines, as the majority of corporate business comes via this channel. "This is the segment purchasing flexible fares. We've also seen an increase in government bookings of late," she said.

BA Comair's inbound international booking channels also make up a substantial portion of its distribution, with 26%. "Only 5% of kulula.com's traffic comes from this channel but it holds big potential and is growing as the airline continues to establish alliances with other international carriers," said Wendy. ■

## SAA enhances African network

SAA has enhanced its Central African route network. With effect from July 31, flights will operate from Johannesburg to Brazzaville and Pointe Noire on the same flight number.

This operation to the Republic of Congo does not utilise any domestic rights, meaning SAA does not carry any passengers between Brazzaville and Pointe Noire, or vice versa.

Flight SA084 will depart Johannesburg at 17h20 on Mondays, Wednesdays

and Saturdays to arrive in Pointe Noire at 20h30. The flight will then depart Pointe Noire at 21h30 to arrive in Brazzaville at 22h30. It then departs Brazzaville at 23h30 to arrive in Johannesburg at 04h20 the following day.

SAA will continue to serve Cotonou in Benin utilising its service to Libreville, Gabon, thus introducing a new sector between Libreville and Cotonou. The airline has secured traffic rights enabling it to pick up

and drop off passengers between Libreville and Cotonou in both directions.

Flight SA090 departs Johannesburg at 15h00 on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays to arrive in Libreville at 18h55, before departing at 19h45 to arrive in Cotonou at 21h55. Return flight SA091 departs Cotonou at 22h45 to arrive in Libreville at 00h55 the following day. It then departs Libreville at 01h45 to arrive in Johannesburg at 07h20. ■

## To the point



Applications for Schengen visas for travellers to the Czech Republic are now accepted at VFS Global Centres in Johannesburg and Durban. Travellers can also apply through the VFS Global Centre in Pretoria and Cape Town and for short-term visas at the embassy of the Czech Republic in Pretoria. Applications for long-term visas and residence permits still have to be lodged at the embassy in Pretoria.



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**Seabourn unveils on-board private sanctuary**  
ULTRA-luxury cruise line, Seabourn, has revealed details of The Retreat, a sanctuary on board the 600-passenger *Seabourn Encore*, which launches in December. Located on Deck 12, The Retreat comprises 15 private cabanas, each with a luxury living room featuring a large HD flat-screen TV and a refrigerator stocked with a personalised selection of beverages. A spa treatment cabana offers guests a range of personalised services. The cabanas can be reserved for a full day. At the centre of The Retreat is a whirlpool with step-up access to temperature-controlled water. Guests can make use of the 28 sun loungers, bar area and tables and chairs for drinks and snacks. Other amenities include fresh fruit baskets, sun lotion, Evian mist spray, towels and personalised bathrobes.

**Bookings open for Crystal World Cruise**  
CRUISES International has opened bookings for *Crystal Serenity's* World Cruise in 2019. This is part of long lead 'Save the Dates' timelines for the newest vessels in the Crystal fleet, to allow travellers and travel agents plenty of time to plan their trips. *Crystal Serenity* will set sail on its World Cruise on January 14, 2019, from Los Angeles to Monte Carlo, exploring Hawaii, Australia and New Zealand, South Africa and the Mediterranean by way of the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific. Spanning 84 days (available in four segments), the cruise will include a variety of wilderness and wildlife adventures when it calls at ports. These will include Big-Five safaris in South Africa, walks in the outback of Australia and Madagascar, and trips to the top of volcanoes and bottom of the ocean in Hawaii. Guests can also enjoy VIP access to the Sydney Opera House, Barcelona's Sagrada Familia and the Prince's Palace in Monte Carlo.

## Cruise line upgrades WiFi

MSC Cruises has partnered with satellite communication provider, Marlink, to launch new Internet packages on its entire fleet in the coming months. The packages will have guests' Internet and social media access habits in mind and include the Social package, for those who need to be connected to social media but have a limited budget, allowing the posting of pictures and chatting with friends. The Surfer package is designed for moderate Internet users who want to be updated on news, sports scores and to catch up on emails. This package also includes access to social media platforms. The Streamer package has been created for heavy Internet users and gives full Internet and social media access, including audio and video. The new services are now live on board *MSC Preziosa*, currently deployed in the Western Mediterranean, and *MSC Divina* in the Caribbean.

## G Adventures launches new Africa operation

G ADVENTURES has launched its G Africa operation, a newly formed company that will deliver travel experiences in Southern and East Africa with representation in Cape Town, Kenya and Zambia.

G Africa will focus on inbound travel to Africa and travel across Africa and work closely with G Adventures' innovation department to develop products in the region.

The company's new fleet of 10 Landos was introduced on most G Adventures overland trips in Eastern and Southern Africa from June, with the roll-out being completed by the end of this month.

The Landos will operate on 22 G Adventures Yolo

itineraries (adventures for 18- to 39-year-olds) covering Botswana, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, Tanzania, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. G Adventures' Yolo trips in Africa are primarily camping trips (with some hotel accommodation) and are fast-paced, cover large distances, and are designed to give younger travellers the opportunity to see as much as possible at an affordable price.

Each truck features full-body seatbelts, reclining seats, in-built WiFi, USB chargers at every seat, large front windows for better views, and windows designed specifically for photography.

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# BON Hotels enters Bloem, exits Shelley Point

THE BON Hotels group has opened a new hotel days before cutting another.

The group added BON Hotel Bloemfontein Central – previously Protea Hotel Bloemfontein Central – to its South African portfolio. The 115-room hotel is situated in the Bloemfontein CBD and officially launched as BON Hotel Bloemfontein Central on July 1.

Plans and improvements to the hotel included repainting the exterior, revamping the

porte cochère and public areas, installing new air-conditioning systems and refurbishing the popular Courtroom restaurant and Judge's bar.

The group will no longer continue with the management of BON Hotel Shelley Point.

BON Hotels was instrumental in the successful business rescue of the three-star hotel on the Cape west coast in 2014 and subsequently took over marketing and management

of its operations.

Guy Stehlik, ceo of BON Hotels, said that, regrettably, despite their best efforts, the industry had seen a decline in conference and corporate business, and this had been difficult to overcome. The 88-room hotel enjoyed strong support from the leisure market, but, according to Guy, “notwithstanding its wonderful aesthetics and resort-like feel, the lack of midweek business has made sustainable targets a challenge”. ■

## Air Namibia to suspend tourist route

TYRAN NIGHTINGALE

AIR NAMIBIA will indefinitely suspend Windhoek-Maun flights on October 30 as part of its flight schedule rationalisation plan.

The flight was launched in 2005 and has been operating for the past 11 years.

Wimpie van Vuuren, Air Namibia's senior manager for sales and marketing, told *TNW* the route was predominantly “one-directional” with passengers transiting

through Maun and not returning the same way and only saw traffic during the tourist high season between July and November.

The flights were part of a triangular route where passengers flew Windhoek-Maun-Victoria Falls-Windhoek. Because Air Namibia could not obtain fifth freedom rights on the route, it missed out on passenger traffic between Maun and Vic Falls, said Wimpie. The airline will continue to operate the

scheduled service to Victoria Falls, minus the stop in Maun. “We've seen excellent growth on the Vic Falls flights and we want to continue with that.

“Over the last few years the actual growth achieved on the route did not justify the continuation of flights and we give preference to routes where there is better growth potential.”

The airline said affected passengers would be accommodated on alternative flights or refunded. ■

## Premium economy – a lucrative upsell

TESSA REED

PREMIUM economy is a profitable upsell for agents who want to capitalise on time-pressed travellers who can't afford to fly business class.

Passengers get more than just a little extra leg-room, Kamal Hingorani, senior vp and head inflight services and customer experience at SpiceJet, told attendees at last month's Aviation Festival Africa and Airports Show.

He said LCCs, particularly, were adding benefits to the premium economy product to make it more attractive, with services such as extra baggage allowance, priority baggage handling and disembarkation appealing to time-pressed clients.

Premium economy also offered great value for money, said Kamal. “It comes at a very nominal

price compared with business class.” In Asia, he said, a business-class ticket was on average four times the price of premium economy, adding that premium economy would not eat into business-class revenue because the segment that travelled business class, primarily business executives and government officials, would continue to do so.

Travellers in Africa, like many emerging economies, also wanted to be seen to be travelling in the premium cabins, said Kamal.

Kamal said SpiceJet was the first LCC to introduce a premium economy product in the Indian market but that other LCCs were following suit. He said it was lucrative for airlines, adding that LCCs in Asia tended to see 10-15% of their revenue from ancillary services. ■

## Ethiopian launches newest aircraft

ETHIOPIAN Airlines, which will be the first African airline to operate the Airbus A350 XWB, will eventually deploy the aircraft on its Johannesburg route.

The airline will initially use the aircraft on its Lagos and Dubai routes. With an expected delivery of another 13 A350 XWBs over the next three years, Ethiopian Airlines will soon be flying the aircraft into OR Tambo International Airport.

The aircraft offers 313 seats in economy class (in a 3-3-3

configuration) and 30 seats in business class (in 2-2-2 configuration).

Abel Alemu, Ethiopian Airlines regional manager for Southern Africa, told *TNW* the aircraft would mainly be deployed on long-range intercontinental flights. “This includes flights to North and South America as well the Far East,” he said.

“These aircraft will operate to destinations with huge passenger traffic, including Johannesburg, Lagos and Dubai,” said Abel. ■

### To the point

Etihad Airways and Avianca Brazil have signed a codeshare. Etihad's 'EY' code is placed on domestic flights operated by Avianca and Avianca puts its '06' code on Etihad flights between Abu Dhabi and São Paulo. Travellers on Etihad flights between São Paulo (GRU) and Abu Dhabi (AUH) and beyond benefit from connections to and from eight other Brazilian destinations on Avianca Brazil – Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba, Florianópolis, Fortaleza, Porto Alegre, Recife, Salvador and Maceió.



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# Travel technology

Technology is key to transforming agents from travel bookers into top consultants. Debbie Badham reports.

## How agencies can turn 'bookers' into top consultants

**A**GENTS are under pressure to shift their focus from booking processes to high-touch consulting, and technology enables them to make this transition more effectively.

Tavellers are becoming increasingly demanding, says **Robyn Christie**, Traveport country manager for South Africa. "They seek more choice, personalisation, flexibility and connectivity than ever before. This means that travel agents must be able to constantly demonstrate the added value they provide as well as excellent customer service."

She says it has become more and more challenging for travel consultants to ensure they have access to the necessary tools to show consumers that they are still relevant.

Part of this involves taking advantage of the training opportunities available through technology leaders like Traveport, says Robyn.

**Garth Wolff**, ceo and founder of the eTravel Group, says it is equally critical for agencies to make sure their consultants



**Claude Vankeirsbilck**

have the ability to integrate new technology with their practical knowledge and experience. "Technology is advancing at a rapid rate but technology is nothing without the back-up and support of a competent consultant."

### Customer centricity

The ultimate goal for travel companies is to develop a customer-centric end-to-end solution. **Richard Addey**, Sabre's country director for South Africa, says this will ultimately improve

customer experience, reduce complexity, minimise non-value interactions, and save time and money. "Presenting the right offer or experience at the right time in the right context increases revenue, differentiation, loyalty and engagement," says Richard.

Sabre has been working on the release of its new Sabre Red Workspace to cater for this objective. The technology will be rolled out to selected customers from September and will include data insights, ancillary shopping and consumer-grade user experience. Richard says Sabre's new travel agent interface provides unique market insights, decision support modules and enhanced product information, including branded fares and ancillaries, integrated into the workflow.

He adds that the product's great UX design (designed for efficiency) is key to driving adoption and maximising agent productivity, enabling, for example, new hires to deliver revenue more quickly.

Robyn says that in the quest to transform from trip bookers

to consultants, knowledge of travel is an agent's biggest asset. "Traveport's Rich Content and Branding has the capability to help agents become experts in delivering personalised customer service over and above any OTA. Our Travel Commerce Platform creates synergies and network effects that facilitate revenue growth across the travel value chain."

The latest version of Smartpoint includes enhancements such as upgrades to its itinerary management solution, Traveport ViewTrip, and changes to the flight, hotel and graphical user interface.

Immediate access to inventory is critical to travellers, travel bookers and travel management companies, with accuracy remaining pertinent to their requirements, says **Claude Vankeirsbilck**, chief sales and marketing officer of Tourvest Travel Services. He says Traveport incorporates these requirements through various components, such as significantly enhanced search mechanisms; ability

to pay vendors using a virtual credit card and easy financial reconciliation with quick access to invoices.

Agents can also enhance the service they provide to clients through the use of videos, visuals and fact sheets of the product they are selling, says **Joanne Visagie**, sales and marketing manager of Beachcomber Tours South Africa. She says agents should tap into Beachcomber's online system for quotes and make use of the operator's tools.

### Mobile and mobility

Mobile is another key consideration for travel agents, says Robyn. "Mobile travel technology providers such as MTT are leading the industry and pushing boundaries in terms of creating mobile travel applications and intelligent mobile services that deliver a highly customer-centric experience."

In line with this trend, First Car Rental incorporated all its WebLink cases into its iPhone and Android apps, by allowing

To page 10

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Tourvest Travel Services developed this internal platform and it is so much more than just a booking solution. Designed for the African corporate marketplace, it manages and seamlessly integrates every aspect of the travel management process to improve oversight and reduce travel spend.

*"We can customise and integrate the solution to meet your exact business requirements. We know that we can deliver savings on your total cost of travel,"* says Morné du Preez, Tourvest Travel Services CEO.

Travelit's holistic solution starts with bookings — online

or traditional — and ends with reporting and around-the-clock support. Requisitions, approvals, travel policy enforcement, adherence to procurement processes, payments, reconciliations, and ERP integration are all managed by marketleading workflow technology.

Using an online travel booking solution makes life easier. High volume domestic and point-to-point international travel bookings become simple; travel documents are received five minutes after booking approval; bookings can be changed online without consultants; everything is on one page; GPS co-ordinates accompany hotel and guesthouse vouchers.

This system is user-friendly and fast. The traveller never has to leave the one screen, regardless of how simple or complex the booking is. Yet, when support is needed, expert consultants are only a click or call away.

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login credentials to drive the correct rates and accounts for that particular customer, should they prefer to make their own bookings. However, the agency still receives its commission.

The mobility of the agents themselves is also key, says **Jannine Adams**, senior manager marketing of Amadeus.

"Agents can then offer a 24-hour service as they can change reservations on any device. They need to be able to book and issue invoices anytime, anywhere." As Amadeus Selling Platform Connect is URL-based and only requires user authentication, agents can be accessible anywhere, anytime.

Jannine says Amadeus has researched its customers' needs and noted the movement of the market from bricks-and-mortar to mobile agents. "Mobility was their greatest need," she says.

The system is customisable, so benefits for larger agencies include flexibility and workflow, Jannine comments. "Agents can do everything via their mobile devices and, importantly, can go to cryptic mode making use of graphics at the same time. They can also run several fare searches at the same time."

## TRAVEL TECHNOLOGY

# Ways to enable efficiency

NOWADAYS there is more pressure on consultants to offer clear, concise and accurate travel documentation and advice with a quicker turnaround time. There are a number of tools that enable agents to do this.

Travelit was designed to enable its travel consultants to be more efficient, with a key focus on improving customer service, says **Claude Vankeirsbilck** of Tourvest.

"Our decision to incorporate the online technology within the framework of Tourvest Travel Services has also enabled us to offer the solution to our franchisees and ITCs."

He adds that consultants can make any travel booking offered within the solution in a far shorter time – with the added benefit of autoticketing – leaving agents the time to proactively consult with the customer when needed.

Amadeus's **Jannine Adams** agrees, saying the ideal is for agents to be able to change tickets within 15 minutes, however it usually takes longer if the change has airfare and



**Joanne Visagie**

tax implications – and even longer if it involves rerouting. "Amadeus Ticket Changer automates this process for travel agents; it takes four steps and does all the recalculations for you."

Beachcomber has put electronic processes in place to make it easy for agents to sell effectively, quote, add extras to their quote and pay online. "More information is better consulting," says **Joanne Visagie**.

She adds that the tour operator's online quoting and payment system is being developed into a booking system in the near future.

"Also included in the system is an agent portal called Beachcomber e-assistance, within which are a number of different tools to help consultants sell expertly and close deals."

"Time is truly a commodity these days," says **Melissa Storey**, First Car Rental executive head: strategy, development and marketing. To help agents save time, the company drives information on their behalf via its WebLink personalised booking engine as part of a three-step process with direct availability and electronic confirmations.

### Data and visibility

To manage their offices effectively, managers and owners need good visibility of their businesses.

Jannine says Amadeus Agency Insight – Productivity Tracker will enable them to do this, helping agencies

determine the management fee travel agents should charge.

Travelit is another tool that offers tangible and accurate data. It provides operational management with insight into areas within Tourvest's business operations that may need to be fine-tuned in order to achieve the best results to service the customer, says Claude.

Due to the increasing need for data, companies like First Car Rental provide agencies with weekly or monthly reporting on spend and travel trends. "We are also able to dump data at any given location in a pre-defined format at various intervals, which can be utilised by agencies in whichever way they see fit," says Melissa.

### Cost savings

Technology can also enable agents to achieve significant cost saving for their clients. Claude says Tourvest has achieved, on average, 25% savings on the total travel costs for its clients who have adopted Travelit.

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## Growing demand for online booking

THE debate about how technology is going to change the way in which travel agencies operate rages on, with the majority of agents agreeing that client demand for online interaction is on the rise.

In a recent survey conducted by TNW's online sister publication, eTNW, an overwhelming 79% of respondents said they were witnessing increased demand from clients to offer an online booking platform. The survey was conducted among 176 travel agents.

Agents report that email is the most popular form of consultation, with 67% saying clients prefer to use email. While 19% said their clients preferred face to face, 10% said their clients preferred to consult telephonically. A meagre 4% said their clients used mobile.

However, at least 51% of respondents said the demand for mobile engagement was increasing.

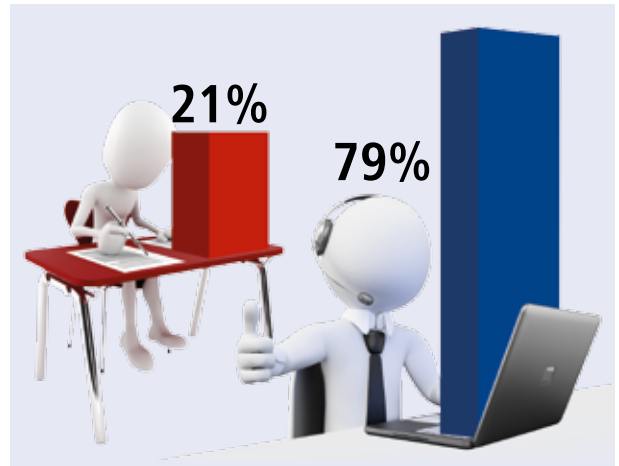
Some believe that the industry will undergo complete transformation as a result of the increasing demand for online interaction. **Gané Ivanovic**, who is leaving South Africa to manage a major online booking tool in Nigeria, believes that travel agencies will no longer exist in their current formats but rather will sell travel via online booking engines. "As our technology generally follows three or four steps behind the US market, it is easy to predict what will happen to travel agencies here," he says, adding that large overseas agencies are already going this route.

"Five years ago everyone had an insurance broker, now they do everything online," says Gané, who believes travel will

head in the same direction. "The future is closer than we think and the sooner agencies switch to online, the better their chances of survival will be."

### Can expertise be replaced?

However, other players believe some functions performed by travel agents will never be able to be replaced by an online booking platform. **Sean Hough**, ceo of Pentravel, says when it comes to leisure travel, the current portals available are restricted in that they cannot take care of the complexities required in bespoke, tailor-made packages. While he says that technology is changing so fast it is likely a good tool will be developed in the future, he also says that face-to-face remains a significant channel because people still want expert advice and someone



79% of agents say clients increasingly demand online booking platforms.

they can trust.

"The online customer is there and we are going to see more customers going online to transact," says **Vanya Lessing**, ceo of Sure Travel. However, she says an agent's decision to move online should be based on their business strategy and whether they can expand their customer base by going online. "It will also depend on how much money the agency has, as it will need significant budget if it wants to compete with the likes of Travelstart.

On the corporate side specifically, Vanya says the take-up in the South African market has been slow. "However, most corporates are asking TMCs if they have an online solution. So every TMC must have a tool of some sort available."

**David Pegg**, md of Sure Viva Travels, says ultimately consultants who are able to

add value beyond the simple booking processes available online will still have a place in the industry. He says it would be impossible for technology to beat the experience and knowledge of agents who have been in the industry for years.

Rather than a future scenario in which agencies as we know them no longer exist, **Franz von Wielligh** gm of Flight Specials, says agencies will evolve into travel solution specialists. He says online is becoming an increasingly important part of the travel agent's offering, but key to this will always be the back office fulfilment. While this offering is likely to become more sophisticated it will not replace face-to-face interactions with clients, he believes. "There is a misconception around what online actually is," says Franz. "In the end it is just a different avenue for distributing our service."

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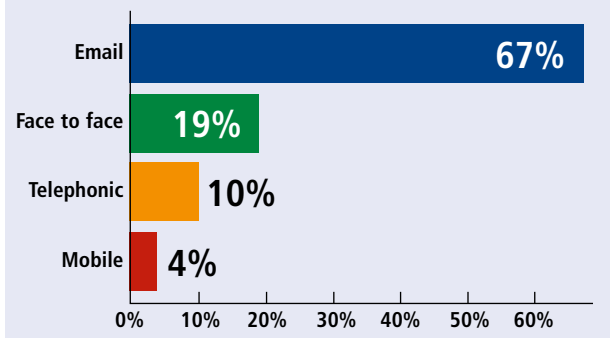
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### How do clients prefer to consult?



### More mobile please



51% of agents say the demand for mobile is increasing.



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## What do clients want from a tech solution?

A TMC's technology offering plays an important part in whether a corporate will choose to partner with them or not. *TNW* spoke to **Howard Stephens**, chairman of the GBTA, to investigate what exactly it is that travel buyers look for in a technology offering.

A buyer's first consideration, says Howard, is where the company's technology strategy is headed. Leading on from this is the question of whether the TMC's technology system has the ability to interface with the system that the corporate currently has in



**"Some corporates have their own preferred system in place."**  
Howard Stephens

place. "Some corporates have their own preferred system in place."

He notes that there might be some security risks involved in engaging with a different technology platform. "Would it be a seamless integration from the time the order is placed all the way through until payment is made?" he questions.

In terms of corporates who require the TMC to develop a bespoke solution for them, Howard says the key is that the solution is easy to change. In other words, it should really just be a matter of changing the corporate badging.

### Cost versus savings

Another major consideration for clients is how much it will cost to implement the solution. If the corporate is unable to do the implementation themselves, will the TMC do it or are consultants needed?

Howard says this is closely followed by the question of whether the cost implementation will be recovered during the life of

the system and, if so, will the corporate be locked into a partnership with the TMC in question? "It becomes difficult to change TMC," he says.

An alternative to this is that the TMC develops a system that is built into the corporate's system. "Then all that's needed is a link into their system," Howard comments.

### Necessary training

Important to corporates is how much training of staff will be required once the system has been implemented. Howard says this all comes down to the strategy around how the solution is rolled out. For example, if it is rolled

out across desktops, then there will be significant hassles in training employees across the company. "It also becomes an ongoing concern because if those people leave, then new people must be trained."

### Are you buying products you want?

Howard points out that some TMCs have their own products, which they might want to promote via their online booking platform. As

such, clients will want to ensure they are buying the products they want to engage with and not the ones put forward by the TMC.

### System flexibility

The ease with which the system can be changed to accommodate the corporate's particular requirements is another important factor that comes

into play. "If, for example, my company often requires three-leg flights and the system can't handle this, is it flexible enough to be changed?" asks Howard.

### Data security

Corporates are often required to pass on a significant amount of personal information to TMCs, such as health needs or religious requirements. This can be a sensitive issue given that it's OK for the employer to have this information but becomes trickier once a third party is introduced into the equation. It becomes an issue of the corporate's duty of care

responsibility towards their travelling employees.

As such, corporates want to know how protected that information is by the TMC, notes Howard. He adds that this also becomes an extremely important consideration when it comes to the travel details of the company's top level executives. "For example, is the CEO travelling tonight?"

### Reporting

A TMC that is able to simplify the company's reporting processes has something very valuable to offer. Key, says Howard, is for the TMC to be able to produce consolidated information on travel trends and other information that is useful to the travel manager.

In summary, Howard says that TMCs, through

the use of their technology, must be able to make travel arrangements simple for travellers, they must be able to implement quality control behind these arrangements, produce relevant information around the travel and then, as a bonus, be able to benchmark the company's system in relation to what the rest of the market is doing.

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Lilanie Kruger, Executor Travel Johannesburg

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### Newsflash

Cruises International has recently launched Shipmates 2.0. The re-engineered tool continues to provide a one-stop shop of readily accessible cruise and travel information to the travel industry. However, it now has enhanced features such as rewards for performance and engagement, interactive and fun weekly challenges, access to cruise lines' latest deals, marketing collateral and learning capabilities designed to develop agents' expertise. ■

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



## Wishes do come true

Beachcomber Tours recently hosted an educational for coastal and Cape Town travel agents at four-star Le Victoria Hotel in Mauritius. The hotel hosted a beach barbecue for the group with a private chef grilling fish, steaks and prawn skewers. Pictured here, making a wish, are **Natalie Boshoff** of Pentravel, Port Elizabeth, and **Claudi Marx** of Flight Centre, George.



## Keeping it cool

Pentravel recently visited Réunion Island for its annual Elites Conference. Now in its third year, the conference is a high spot on the company's calendar and invites top-performing agents to come together to acknowledge hard work and strengthen team relationships while reviewing whether the location is a viable holiday destination. Pictured here are Pentravel ceo, **Sean Hough** and national sales manager, **Michelle Bergset**.

## Appointments



■ Mhondoro Game Lodge has appointed new lodge management couple, **Fritz** and **Ronel Breytenbach**. The Breytenbachs bring combined hospitality management and service industry experience of 28 years to the new five-star safari lodge, which is situated in the Big-5 Welgevonden Game Reserve in the Waterberg. Fritz and Ronel spent four-and-a-half years as lodge managers of five-

star Tintswalo Safari Lodge in the Manyeleti Game Reserve where Fritz, who is a passionate conservationist and experienced game ranger and field guide, also held the position of head guide. Ronel holds a National Diploma in Business Management. A wellness therapist and spa manager by training, her international experience includes four years on international cruise liners.

Before joining Mhondoro, the couple also held management positions at Molori in the Madikwe Game Reserve, Zwahili in Limpopo province and Shamwari in the Eastern Cape.

■ **Stuart Cason** has been appointed new executive chef of Hilton Sandton.

He started his career at the InterContinental Johannesburg Sandton Towers Hotel. In 1999, he received a bronze medal in his first Salon Culinaire competition and at the age of 21, became the youngest chef to win the Unilever Chef of the Year competition.

"With over 17 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Stuart has a wealth of knowledge in culinary arts that we are excited to see blending with the all-day dining experience at Hilton," said **Gert Venter**, hotel manager of Hilton Sandton.

## Pick of the week

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## Who's going to the USA?

Travelinfo launched a survey recently with the aim of learning more about agents' operational needs. "With a total of 659 responses in ten days – the survey was a huge success," says Linda van der Pol, divisional head, Travelinfo. Every day until July 4, a lucky agent who completed the survey, won R1 000. A grand draw for two economy-class tickets (excluding taxes) to the US on Delta Air Lines was held on July 5 and the winner was Chantelle Pearson of Travel With Options. Pictured here, picking the winner, is Aileen Rudolph (left) sales manager GSA, Delta Air Lines, with Odilia da Mata, workshops, surveys and banners co-ordinator, Travelinfo. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

# ORTIA biometrics delays highlight bigger issues

DEBBIE BADHAM

**T**HE introduction of biometric capturing has highlighted a bigger issue – the need for more staff – at OR Tambo International Airport.

The chaos that erupted following the changeover to the biometric system on July 1 resulted in travellers experiencing delays of up to three hours.

The process includes capturing fingerprints and an eye scan and is for both inbound and outbound travellers.

"I had family members spend two to three hours in a crush of people trying not to miss their flight on Friday night," said one TNW reader. "Eventually, my 67-year-old aunt stamped her own passport in desperation in order to catch the soon-to-depart plane after the immigration agent inexplicably left her standing for 15 minutes. She was then arrested and spent the night in jail."

The normal processing time for passport holders is 40 seconds, says John Murray, administration manager of the Airline Operators Committee (AOC). "Biometrics takes three times as long as that. If

you have 10 staff and 1 000 passengers being processed at 120 seconds per person, it starts to add up."

DHA spokesperson, **Mayihlome Tshwete**, says the department is aware that the introduction of biometrics requires a slightly longer clearance time per passenger, especially during the first capture of a full set of fingerprints. "However, for subsequent movements, processing times will significantly reduce as it only requires verification of one fingerprint."

Industry authorities say the fundamental problem is that the airport is short-staffed.

"There are definitely not enough staff at the airport," says **June Crawford**, ceo of Barsa, adding that staff shortages have been a problem for months. "The situation has simply been compounded by the biometrics."

John says biometrics are a good thing. Aside from enabling future visas on arrival, the initiative will also allow authorities to implement fast-track projects. "We support Home Affairs in this initiative. There's just a lack of manpower to implement it. As people go they can't replace

them. In government, there are strict rules about replacing people who've left," he says.

"When I arrived at the South African passport holder entry points on May 31, only three desks out of 12 were manned by staff. Another five desks out of 15 were open for foreign passport holders," says corporate travel expert, **Inge Beadle** of XL Corporate Travel. "If there were more staff attending to passengers during this period we would have a lot fewer delays."

"OR Tambo has long had a problem with skeleton staff working on public holidays and weekends," commented another agent.

In response, however, the DHA says it has deployed sufficient staff to process travellers and, when necessary, strengthens capacity through the deployment of additional officials.

Agents are advised to tell their travellers to factor additional time for check-in and immigration processes.

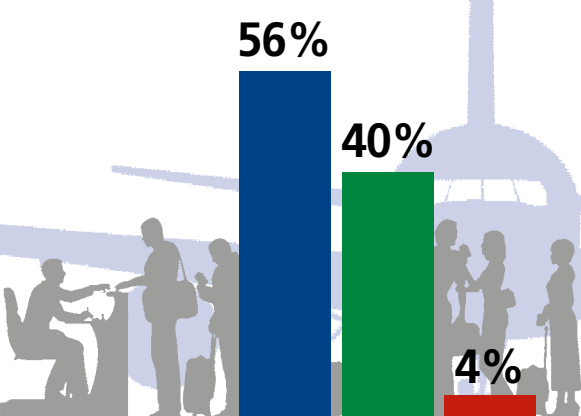
While the roll-out of the biometric system may cause complications at other airports around the country, John says these would likely be to a lesser degree as they don't process the same volumes as OR Tambo. ■



### Find me another flight!

Do instances such as the terror attack in Turkey on June 28 influence the choice of airport that travellers connect through?

- Yes
- It might initially but not in the long-run
- No



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## Letter to the Editor

### Racial profiling at Brussels Airport?

A traveller on her way to South Africa wrote to TNW sharing her recent experience at Brussels Airport.

I TRAVEL regularly between Brussels and South Africa to see my daughter, who emigrated to South Africa over 10 years ago. But my latest trip to South Africa two weeks ago made me feel more than a little uncomfortable.

The tragic events (bombings at Brussels Airport and Maelbeek metro station) that occurred on March 22 were at the top of my mind when travelling to the airport. My son works in a building adjacent to the airport so, when the news of the terrorist attack broke, fear gripped me. Fortunately, he was not harmed in the attacks. Still, arriving at the airport where so many people's lives were taken, was confrontational to say the least.

Armed police and rigorous security measures at the

airport remind all travellers that terrorism has changed our lives and our holiday experiences forever. Of course, I'm truly grateful for the security, but there was something that made me feel highly uncomfortable.

Today, travellers are asked to follow one organised queue into the airport. So far, so good. However, police officers asked all the people of colour and all those wearing religious Muslim clothing to enter a tent that was set up next to the airport building. I'm not sure what happened in the tent, but people emerging from the other side were adjusting their clothing and putting on shoes. It seems they were asked to undergo additional security screening.

I admire the men who

put their lives on the line to keep us safe, however the blatant racial profiling at the airport made me feel highly uncomfortable and evoked strong feelings of injustice. It seemed to convey the horrible message that 'all Muslim people are potential terrorists'. Surely there must be a better way to ensure the safety of all people?

• *Brussels Airport responded to TNW saying: "Like every airport in the world, we have general security checks." They also pointed out that security measures installed after the March 22 attacks were not the responsibility of Brussels Airport Company but of the Federal Police of Belgium. The Federal Police had not responded to TNW's questions at time of going to print.* ■