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TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

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'Agents at the mercy of lata'

THE communications between travel agents and lata remain problematic, South African travel agents say. One of the effects of the perceived "unequal" relationship is a major reduction in the number of lata-accredited agencies according to industry players.

Ceo of Asata, **Otto de Vries** says that during the past five years, the number of accredited agents has dropped from about 1500 to 500. "I think the drop in numbers is indicative of a general problem in the agency programme. It is too complicated, too onerous and too expensive to be an lata-accredited

"We would never consider applying for an lata license now. Small agencies are totally at the mercy of monolithic giants like lata."

agent," he says. But he also says recently there have been several lata developments to smoothe the relationship with agents, such as the introduction of ICE statements. The New Generation lata Settlement Systems are also an indication that lata has recognised the need for new business models, says Otto.

"I have had several run-ins with lata. They are a very powerful organisation that wields a big stick over travel agents and I feel it could be better," says **Rachael Penaluna**, business manager of Sure Maritime Travel.

Rachael recently experienced a case of misallocated payments with lata. Even though she had paid her weekly billings on time, lata sent her a warning for non-payment giving her two days to address the situation. But lata still terminated her ticketing facilities that day.

Rachael sent through copies of BSP billings, bank letters and payment confirmation as well as the agency's ICE statement, which all showed that lata had misallocated the funds. "After two days of negotiation, lata agreed to activate our account again," she says.

Says Rachael: "These problems arise because discussion with lata is not an option. I believe agents should be given at least 48 hours to challenge or rectify a default issued by lata. We are at a huge disadvantage in the South African market, because the portal only operates for three hours a day and the SA representatives of lata have no power to make decisions."

"We severed our relationship with lata several years ago, due to a similar incident," says **Henry Sudwants**, md of Disa Travel and Tours. Henry says in his case it took lata several months to admit the error, causing the agency huge embarrassment with airlines. "Although we were eventually reactivated, we decided to ticket through Club Travel. We would never consider applying for an lata license now. Small agencies are totally at the mercy of monolithic giants like lata."

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Thompsons' festive fun

Don't miss Thompsons' festive special at the three-star Protea Hotel by Marriott Durban Umhlanga. For R5 500pp sharing it includes a three-night stay, return flights and taxes from Johannesburg, three days car rental, and breakfast daily. As a bonus, two children under 12 stay free at the hotel when sharing with two adults. Valid December 1 to January 31, 2017. (Supplements and block out dates apply between December 23 and January 5). Says **John Ridler** pr and media manager, "Remember, Thompsons always goes the extra mile by ensuring they check property availability when quoting, even in the high season". Loving the beach are: **Angela Sibeko**, travel advisor and **Virgil Standers**, team leader, Indian Ocean Islands. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

TBCSA fights DHA delays

DEBBIE BADHAM

THE TBCSA has devised a contingency plan to alleviate the lengthy delays caused by DHA staff shortages at major airports across the country. The implementation now relies on Home Affairs.

The TBCSA put forward a multi-action proposal during a meeting on November 4 between the Minister of Tourism, captains of the tourism industry and National Treasury. DHA wasn't present. Ceo of the TBCSA, **Mmatšatši Ramawela** says The Department of Tourism is meeting with the DHA and other government departments on an unknown date to

see that the initiatives in the proposal are taken forward.

In the short to medium term the TBCSA has suggested that all immigration counters remain staffed by bringing in SAPS officials to man the stations on the departures side of the airports. "This was done in 2010 and there were no issues of congestion despite the fact that we were welcoming a lot of people in one go," says Mmatšatši.

She says the biggest requirement for officials on the departures side is security clearance, which SAPS officials already have, so all they would need would be a one or two-day course in

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Top web stories



- TNW pick: Home Affairs – no hope
- Letter to the editor: Airlines lack loyalty
- UK priority visas increase
- Minister hopeful UBCs will be scrapped
- OR Tambo launches smart security checkpoint

Clients getting FOMO?

NEW start-up, FOMO Travel, launched in the South African market a few weeks ago, offering travel agents a new 'lay-by' payment solution for their clients.

With no credit checks and no interest, FOMO Travel allows travellers to save for their holiday by paying a deposit and a monthly fee prior to travelling. Forty-five days before departure, the holiday needs to be paid in full.

Travel agents can either refer their clients to FOMO to explore payment options, or they can upload packages onto the FOMO website. "We urge all travel agencies that are battling to convert sales to join our team of affiliates and offer this as an alternative payment method for their clients. Travel agents are charged a 'referral' fee for FOMO to create, monitor and convert the sale. The fee is usually 50% of the commission the travel agent would earn on the package,"

says **Andrew Katzwinkel**, ceo of FOMO.

FOMO Travel is not a travel agency, Andrew says. "We are a B2B, B2C company that facilitates the travel industry by providing a unique payment mechanism that converts a sale that previously wasn't there for the affiliate."

"Fewer people can afford to travel and agents need to be creative in helping people plan and save for their holiday."

Andrew says FOMO Travel currently works with several affiliates, including the Singer Group and XL Embassy Travel. "We have relationships with tour operators such as Beachcomber, Holiday Factory, Pure Sports and Pure Ski," he says.

Greg Taylor, md of Pure

Tours, says Pure Tours provides FOMO Travel with the package price and they structure the payment terms with the end user. Although Greg says Pure Tours has seen a slow start with this new model, he believes it has potential with the low to medium-priced packages. "Our target market tends to have the money to pay in full," he says.

Travel agents say this kind of lay-by payment model would work well in the South African market and would appeal to the emerging middle class especially. "This model could be a positive way of growing new markets," says **Sean Hough**, ceo of Pentravel ceo.

Monica Horn, product manager of the Harvey World Travel Franchise Support Team, says it's a reality that fewer people can afford to travel and agents need to be creative in helping people plan and save for their holiday. ■

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Rubes® By Leigh Rubin



Contrary to popular belief, the cow was not the first to travel over the moon.

'Agents at the mercy of lata'

From page 1
David Pegg, md of Sure Viva Travels, says he has never had any major run-ins with lata other than one incident when he took over a travel agency in Bloemfontein.

However, David explains that he turned to the lata travel agency commissioner **Andreas Korosi**, who is based in Helsinki but who deals with Africa.

"Travel agents need to

know their rights. If they feel that lata has infringed upon their rights, they should appeal to the travel agency commissioner," he says.

TNW tried to contact lata, but got no response. ■

Founding Editors:
John H Marsh (1914-1996) Leona Marsh (1923-2003)

EDITORIAL
Acting Editor: Taryn Nightingale tarynn@nowmedia.co.za
Deputy Editor: Debbie Badham debbieb@nowmedia.co.za
Deputy Publisher: Natasha Schmidt natashas@nowmedia.co.za

Journalists:
Dorine Reinstein Leigh Hermon
Hilka Birns Max Marx
Michelle Colman

Photographer: Shannon Van Zyl
Production Editor: Ann Braun

GROUP PUBLISHER
David Marsh davem@nowmedia.co.za

SALES
Sales Director: Kate Nathan katen@nowmedia.co.za
Ad Co-ordinator: Anthea Lucas antheal@nowmedia.co.za

PRODUCTION
Design Head: Dirk Voorneveld

SUBSCRIPTIONS
Circulation: tvlsubs@nowmedia.co.za

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Azamara Club Cruises is offering a double upgrade on select *Journey* and *Quest* voyages. Travellers will receive a complimentary double upgrade from a Club Interior to a Club Veranda stateroom on cruises booked up to November 30. Pictured sailing away are (from left): **Thaybz Khan**, Cruises International's manager; contemporary brands, **Tracey Krog**, Cruises International's sales manager and **Dionne Potiphar**, Cruises' trade relations manager for Gauteng. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

HM flies to DUR, ups JNB capacity

EFFECTIVE March 30, Air Seychelles will commence a twice-weekly service from Durban to the Seychelles and increase its capacity on its Johannesburg service with the deployment of an A330 on the route.

The Durban flights will operate year-round. Flight HM62 will depart Durban on Thursdays and Saturdays at 13h45 and arrive in the Seychelles at 21h05. Flight HM63 will depart the Seychelles at 09h25 and arrive in Durban at 12h50 every Thursday and Saturday.

The route will be serviced by an

Airbus A320, which has 16 business and 120 economy class seats.

The airline will also take delivery of its second A330 aircraft to be deployed on its Johannesburg service at the end of March. The airline flies to Johannesburg five times a week. The aircraft will increase capacity on the service by 236 seats a week. The A330 will have a two-cabin configuration of 18 business class and 236 economy class seats, and will operate on the Johannesburg route every Thursday and Saturday. ■

Etihad's new bird lands in JNB

ETIHAD welcomed the arrival of its Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner to Johannesburg on Tuesday, November 1. The aircraft has been deployed on the airline's daily Johannesburg-Abu Dhabi route.

The new aircraft features two cabin classes, with 28 Business Studios and 271 Economy Smart seats. The Business Studios offer direct aisle access; a fully-flat bed; a 45,7cm touch-screen TV; and noise-cancelling headphones. The Economy Smart

seats offer passengers adjustable lumbar support and a 28,2cm TV. All seats across both classes have WiFi and power points.

Speaking at the launch function at ORTIA, **Calum Laming**, Etihad's vp of Guest Experience, said SA is an incredibly important and growing market for EY and the use of this new aircraft on the route (one of the first to receive the B787) not only provides more seats every day, but also demonstrates EY's commitment to the SA route. ■



Growing SA tourism

SA Tourism recently hosted a breakfast welcoming new ceo, **Sisa Ntshona**. Growing the tourism sector's contribution to the country's GDP is a key goal for Sisa in his new role. Tourism contributes roughly 9% to GDP, comprising direct and indirect contributions. SA Tourism's aim is to grow tourism arrivals by five million in the next five years, adding one million domestic tourists and four million international tourists, he said. Pictured here (from left): **Margie Whitehouse**, SAT chief marketing officer; **Sthembiso Dlamini**, coo; **Sisa Ntshona**, new ceo; and **Amanda Kotze-Nhlapo**, chief convention bureau officer.

OR Tambo launches smart security

OR TAMBO International Airport is the first African airport to implement a Smart Security checkpoint, which includes features that speed up passenger progress through security.

The pilot implementation of the Smart Security system went live on November 8 at the international departures security point and allows for up to seven passengers to be processed at one time.

Some of the new system's features include an x-ray machine used to

scan luggage for prohibited items; a diverter that automatically separates cleared trays from trays that need further inspection; and a full body scanner.

"Passengers will find that with the new system there will almost be no need for physical pat-downs," said **Bongiwe Pityi**, gm of OR Tambo International Airport. There will also be less frequent requirements for laptops to be removed from bags and switched on. ■

Protea expands East African property

THE four-star Protea Hotel by Marriott Entebbe, located on the shores of Lake Victoria and one kilometre from the airport, is undergoing a refurbishment and expansion, which is scheduled to be completed by December.

"Having good occupancy levels at the hotel in the past, we have

decided to add 13 rooms, including one suite, to meet the demand. We will also refurbish all the existing bedrooms and corridors, with new-look bathrooms, new air-conditioning, beds and carpets," says **Stuart Cook**, md of Protea Hotels Uganda.

The hotel remains open during the 13-week refurbishment. ■

Courtney Canham selects the top specials from Travelinfo

- **Bon Hotel Riviera on Vaal.** Spring specials from R850 per room per night. Offer includes one night's accommodation for two people. Minimum two-night stay. Valid until November 30.
- **Protea Hotel Balalaika.** Retail therapy special from R1 088pp sharing. Offer includes one night's accommodation, breakfast, shuttle to Sandton City, valet parking, free WiFi throughout the hotel, access to in-house gym. Plus free R800 Sandton City shopping voucher. Valid weekends (Friday, Saturday and Sunday) until December 16 and every day from December 16-January 8, 2017.
- **Orion Hotels & Resorts.** 24-hour conference specials from R999pp sharing at The Venue Country Hotel in Magaliesberg. Offer is valid until November 30. Visit Travelinfo for half- and full-day packages.



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Quality in Tourism

More choices this December

December is almost upon us and with popular tourism spots filling up quickly, industry experts offer alternative destinations agents can book for their clients' holidays. Debbie Badham reports.

THERE are still spots in Asia, Europe and even the Indian Ocean where agents can send December travellers, travel experts say.

Thompsons Holidays still has availability in Zanzibar, says pr and media manager, **John Ridler**. He says with one call agents can solve any issues they might have finding accommodation. "During the high season period Thompsons calls the property to ensure that the accommodation is available, to enable us to prepare a suitable quote."

The operator currently has a seven night package for the four-star Dream of Zanzibar at R18 888pp sharing. It is for set departure from December 6-13. It includes flights from Johannesburg (including taxes), transfers and accommodation in a deluxe room with breakfast and dinner daily. Afternoon tea is served daily and complimentary land and water activities are offered.

Annemarie Lexow, sales manager of Travel Vision says agents should explore offering options like Mayotte as it is not as well known as the other Indian Ocean Island destinations.

She says it is a good alternative to Mauritius.

Beyond the Indian Ocean, Thailand also offers travellers affordable beach holidays. "There has been a slowdown in Thailand, which means that there is still availability," says **Carlos Luis** land product leader of the Flight Centre Travel Group. Bali is also still open for business, he says.

In Europe, Spain and Turkey still have availability, Carlos adds. "Paris is also still OK in terms of availability." While packages to Europe can be pricey, he says those that are still available, are not "dirt cheap but not too pricey either".

Dreams says there are several hotels in Zimbabwe that have availability. **Wendy Goutier**, gm, says Ilala Lodge in particular has availability throughout the December season.

On the local side, Legend Golf & Safari Resort is not yet fully booked, says Wendy. This could be a good option for travellers looking for somewhere to go over New Year as the resort is hosting a "shebeen-type" celebration. ■

Tips from Louis the Lawyer – cancellations



In each installment in this series, Advocate Louis Nel discusses aspects of the Consumer Protection Act (CPA) that affect the relationship between travel suppliers and consumers.

IN THIS insert we are going to tackle the topic of non-refundable deposits and cancellation fees.

When dealing with this section, it's important to remember that the consumer is entitled to cancel a trip. However, the supplier is entitled to ask for a reasonable deposit in advance and impose a reasonable cancellation charge.

The cancellation charge can be deemed unreasonable if it exceeds a fair amount under the circumstances. What is considered to be fair is not entirely clear but may be determined by the following conditions: the nature of the goods or services; the length of cancellation notice given by the consumer; the reasonable potential of the supplier to replace the booking; and the general practice of the industry in question.

Note that a cancellation penalty may not be imposed if the individual for whom the booking was made dies or is hospitalised. This only relates to the actual passenger and not any other members of their travelling party.

What to do

- Suppliers should not automatically and categorically refuse any form of refund. They should first make a concerted effort to resell the same product/same date to another customer. It may be argued by the consumer that a popular destination in peak season can be resold. This is particularly the case when the client has given ample notice of cancellation, even if the supplier's window for refundable notice of cancellation has closed. In such a case, the supplier can argue that any resale efforts cannot be considered a certainty and are a show of goodwill only.
- Be aware of suppliers' Ts and Cs.
- Make sure your customer understands that the concession mentioned above only applies to the passenger who has passed away or been hospitalised and not the entire travelling party.
- Insist on original documents of proof of death or hospitalisation. In other words, proof from the hospital and not just a doctor's note.

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EVENTS CALENDAR



Vaal Meander Wine Route. Photo: BON Hotels Riveira on Vaal

What's hot and happening in Gauteng?

The Gauteng Tourism Authority provides an impressive list of events for agents to package in 2017. By Max Marx.

THERE are a host of exciting events taking place in Gauteng in 2017:

Vaal River Meander Wine Route

The Vaal Meander Wine Route takes place from June 24 - July 30 (Saturdays and Sundays from 12h00 to 18h00). Dozens of wine estates are represented along the route – made up of 17 different venues in the vicinity – with more than 200 wines to sample. Each venue offers a minimum of eight wines, with some venues having 20 different wines to taste. There are

options of wine tastings on a luxury river cruise, aboard a houseboat, in a wine cellar, a pub, an upmarket hotel and even a township. Other options include a wine tasting lunch on a luxury cruiser, spa treatments and wine and food pairing. Visitors can make use of different modes of transport to get to the different venues, including a water taxi, vintage car, or chauffeur-drive.

For info and packages email info@vaalwineroute.co.za.

Good Food & Wine Show

The Good Food & Wine Show takes place from October 27-29 at the Ticketpro Dome in Johannesburg. Visitors can expect innovative culinary experiences, cooking demonstrations by top local and international chefs and culinary

master classes. Also on offer are baking classes, talks on healthy eating, a baking theatre where guests can learn to bake, a cake decoration lab and a wine theatre where guests can sample wines and learn about wine and food pairing.

Details around bookings will be revealed at a later stage.

Soweto Wine & Lifestyle Festival

The Soweto Wine & Lifestyle Festival takes place from March 3-5 at the Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication in Kliptown, Soweto. The festival has become one of Africa's premium wine, food, music and lifestyle events. The

event showcases wines from some of South Africa's most exciting vineyards and offers a platform for new producers trying to penetrate the market. Visitors can enjoy a variety of foods and shop for funky lifestyle products.

Tickets will be made available to the public on December 1 through Nu Tickets.

BMW South African Open Championship (Golf)

The 2017 BMW South African Open Championship will be held at the Glendower Golf Club in Ekurhuleni from January 12-15. This is the third event on the European Tour's 2017 schedule. The field is open

to 156 competitors, who will fight it out for the winner's trophy over four rounds of 18 holes each. Rory McIlroy and Ernie Els will be among those playing for the R15m prize money.

Tickets to the event can be booked through Ticketpro.

Tshwane Open golf tournament

The Tshwane Open takes place at the Pretoria Country Club in Waterkloof from March 2-5. This highly anticipated 72-hole stroke play championship will see 156 professional golfers participating.

The Tshwane Open forms part of the 2016 Sunshine Tour and is co-sanctioned with the European Tour. Some of the best local and international players will compete for the R18,5m prize money.

Tickets for the tournament will be available through Ticketpro.

DSTV Delicious International Food & Music Festival

The DSTV Delicious International Food & Music Festival, a festival for food and music lovers, takes place during the last weekend of September 2017

at a venue still to be confirmed. Attendees can expect delicious food, street chefs and an excellent music line-up of international and local acts.

Tickets for the event can be booked through Ticketpro.

RMB Winex 2017

South Africa's premier wine show, RMB Winex takes place at the Sandton Convention Centre from October 25-27. Visitors can sample wines from more than 100 local and international wine producers, learn about wine pairing and

viniculture, and order bottles of their favourite wines to enjoy at home. There is also the Table Talk pop-up tasting programme where exhibitors talk about their wines and other topics.

To book visit www.winex.co.za.

Sansui Summer Cup

The Sansui Summer Cup is one of South Africa's premier horse racing events. It takes place at the Turffontein Racecourse in Johannesburg towards the end of November 2017 (date to be confirmed). Race goers can expect

thrilling horse race action throughout the day. There are several hospitality and ticketing options available with the emphasis on family, food, fun and entertainment. Many of South Africa's well-known musicians will entertain the crowd.

Bookings can be made through Computicket.

Also on in 2017

- Decorex
- Soweto Derby
- Standard Bank Joy of Jazz festival
- 702 Walk the Talk

- FNB Joburg Art Fair
- Joburg Shopping Festival
- Arts Alive Johannesburg
- Telkom 947 Cycle Challenge
- BMW International Polo Series ■

AGENT TRAINING & RECRUITMENT



Inadequate tertiary courses leave agents unprepared for the working environment. Leigh Hermon takes a closer look at how the industry is addressing this challenge.

Industry moves to address training challenges

INDUSTRY experts agree that the current courses available at tertiary institutions are not adequate in preparing aspiring agents for a career in the travel industry.

The biggest challenge is that travel makes up a small part of a travel and tourism qualification, says **Robyn Christie**, gm of Travelport South Africa. There seems to be the common misconception that a tourism qualification provides you with enough training to enter a travel agency, she says.

“So when prospective agents leave college there’s very little that they can take into an organisation. They then need to begin the real life, on the job training.”

In order to make up for the lack of training and preparation at tertiary institutions, companies need to spend time and money on the training of a new agent, says **Kim Botti**, director at Lee Botti & Associates. “Unfortunately, when companies are under

pressure and times are tough, they don’t necessarily have the resources to do training and the agency starts to feel the impact of that later rather than immediately.”

The industry is working to find solutions to this problem.

Asata is currently working with the Culture, Art, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport Sector Education and Training Authority (CATHSSETA) and travel industry members to update the curriculum for travel qualifications at tertiary

institutions and make them more relevant.

Flight Centre also has plans to open its own Flight Centre Academy to train graduates. The academy will offer an accredited certificate in travel with both theoretical and practical components.

Junior consultants are not the only staff members that need to be trained. There is also a need to upskill experienced staff, says **Marco Cristofoli**, md of Harvey World Travel SA. This training needs

to move beyond the basics of taking a phone call and making a booking. He says the right training interventions can generate skilled agents, who can then move into a consultative role. “We are in the people business. We sell dreams, and to be able to sell a dream, you have to have the right people.”

“Finding the right person is not just about experience and skill, it’s whether they fit into the culture of the company and have the right attitude

to do their job,” says Kim. Agents need to have the right attitude and willingness to learn to make it in the travel industry, she adds.

Marco says that the Bid Travel group has employed people who do not have the technical skills but have the right mind-set. “They’ve been such gems that they’ve then fulfilled roles that they weren’t employed for.” He uses the example of senior consultants who have moved into sales or account management roles.



TI adds new workshops!

Important for any training platform is that the content be kept fresh so that agents are not wasting their time processing the same information over and over again. This is part of the reason why Travelinfo is constantly updating its workshops. Divisional head, **Linda van der Pol**, says a number of new suppliers have signed on to run TI workshops, one of which is aha. Agents can now learn all about aha’s wide range of properties across the country’s provinces. Pictured here: aha’s **Ruzandri Stoltz** (left) partners with TI’s **Gina Richter** (right) to bring agents effective online product training. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl



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AGENT TRAINING AND RECRUITMENT

Plugging the skills drain

THERE is a trend within the industry for agents to become ITCs, which drains agencies of their skilled agents.

"A lot of our consultants have left and become ITCs, so we have lost consulting experience. People want the flexibility of working from home and not necessarily in formal employment," says **Vanya Lessing**, ceo of Sure Travel.

One way to avoid the brain drain is for agencies to establish their own ITC model. HWT has done just that. Besides evolving the Harvey World business, **Marco Cristofoli** says the model is a means of retaining experienced staff, while also offering them the freedom to be their own boss.

But what about agents who are looking for stable employment? How can employers encourage their staff to commit to their organisation in the long-term?



Kim Botti

Kim Botti of Lee Botti & Associates says that one way of retaining staff is feeding their passion for the industry: to travel. Having incentives where staff can obtain these opportunities is important.

"Along with this are the career opportunities for promotion," says Kim. It speaks volumes to staff if this happens within an organisation

as opposed to having to leave a company to gain that opportunity. "Internal promotions are very powerful for an organisation." Promotions not only help to recognise and reward the efforts of staff, but also create loyalty, says Kim.

According to Kim, training and developing skills are often key factors in keeping a staff member. "People always want to learn and grow, and if given the opportunity this creates less need for them to go looking for it elsewhere."

Identify the gaps

AN IMPORTANT part of training is making sure it addresses the agency's needs.

When there is a lack of training, gaps occur that can cost an agency money, says **Yolandé Bouwer**, gm of Agentivity Southern Africa. "Our tool allows agencies to identify where there are training gaps." Agentivity provides feedback to agency managers and bosses based on an agent's behaviour when using the GDS.

Agentivity has identified two areas where additional training is needed. The first issue is that agents do not use the corporate rate codes when making a hotel booking on the GDS.

Without the corporate rate code, the booking will not count towards the agreed target between the hotel and corporate company.

The second problematic area is the pre-paid hotel voucher. When agents do not generate a voucher, the client will have to remake the booking at the front desk when they arrive and pay a rate that is not pre-arranged. This is dependent on whether there is a room available. "What if the traveller was the ceo, and there wasn't space for them at the hotel?" Yolandé asks.

Both of these scenarios can be avoided if agents are trained correctly, she comments.

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ITCs still need training

AS ITCs operate remotely, it's particularly important for them to make sure they stay on top of industry developments.

Tammy Hunt, operations director of eTravel, says that it is important for any specialist in their field to stay current with industry changes. Even with experience, ITCs cannot simply say they know everything and those that do are at risk of being left behind, she warns.

Thankfully, there are courses and workshops available to agents in order to stay current with the latest changes in the industry.

At eTravel, the team hosts ITC meetings two or three times a year to discuss



Michelle Viljoen

changes in the industry and offer information to agents that will guide them in the running of their business. Tammy says that this can range from operational and industry changes to new technology.

eTravel also organises workshops with its suppliers on various topics, including air, car rental, hotels, tour operators and travel insurance. ITCs also benefit from training with eTravel's fares specialists.

Even though ITCs come with a wealth of experience, it is vital to stay up-to-date, agrees fares manager and trainer of Club Travel, **Michelle Viljoen**.

Club Travel offers web training that focuses on

the company's preferred suppliers. "We show our various ITCs what suppliers we have, what deals we have with them, and where they can find any additional special rates."

Michelle says that if agents have joined, or are planning to join a consortium, it is important to stay abreast of the negotiated deals available. "They've got their own fares, rates, and specials." Club Travel, therefore, offers its ITCs courses on fares and dynamic packaging as well as an advanced fares course.

The fares and dynamic packaging training helps agents find the cheapest fares and build it into land arrangements. Instead of going through tour operators all the time, the course looks at various online tools agents can use to build their package from scratch, says Michelle.



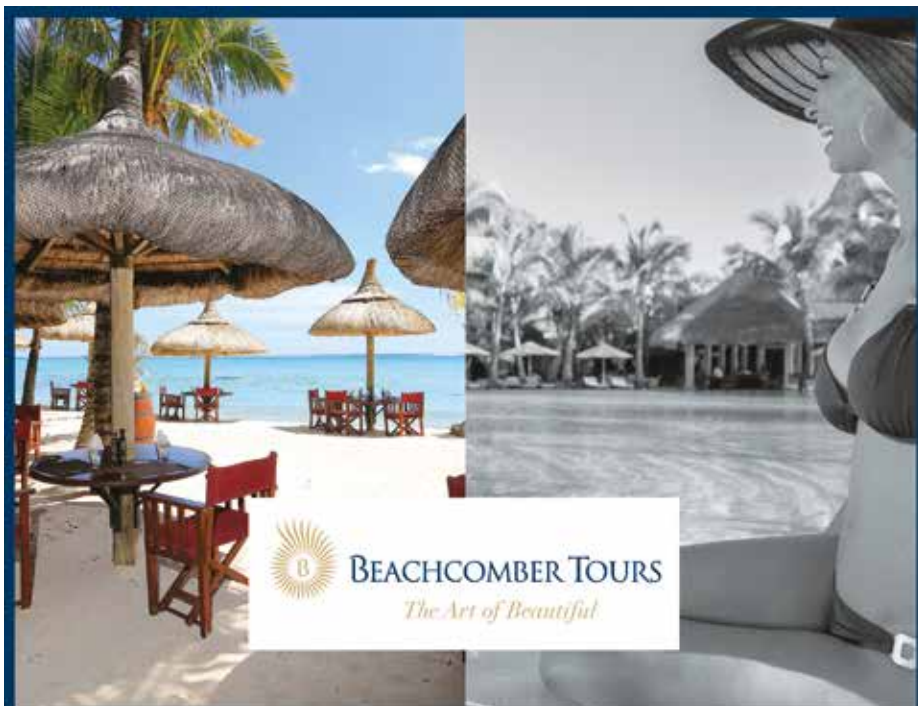
Courses and workshops help agents stay up-to-date with changes in the industry.

The added benefit of this training is that agents not only make more commission but can also pass the savings onto their clients, she says.

Following this, agents can progress to the advanced fares course. The course covers how to find and build more complex fares that include multiple destinations. This is offered across all GDS platforms.

In order to fully understand the full functionality of its

travel commerce platform, Travelport offers beginner, intermediate and advanced courses for Smartpoint. "It is a bit like a mobile phone. You know how to make calls and take photographs but do you know how to get the maximum benefit of all the functionality that you've got in the system? There's so much more to SmartPoint than just a basic booking entry," says **Robyn Chrsitie**, gm of Travelport SA.



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Jennifer Davis, travel agent of ACT Travel, attended an educational at Mnarani Club in Kenya in August. "Marketing a destination across borders is tough, she says." Jennifer had never travelled out of South Africa before and relied on her own creativity and imagination to sell the destination to her clients. The educational allowed her to experience the

destination in the same way her clients would.

For Jennifer, this was also a great opportunity to meet with the people she corresponds with on a regular basis. "The difference that putting a face to an email address can make in any professional relationship still amazes me."

On return, Jennifer says she felt like she'd been underselling the destination and was inspired by the trip. "I brought back insights that could never otherwise have been obtained otherwise. No amount of explaining, photographs or videos could ever compare to the value of being there to enjoy the experience myself."

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Get suppliers involved

PARTNERING with suppliers to remain up to date with product knowledge keeps agents at the top of their game. Many brands offer a range of different training tools designed to cater for differing training needs and preferences.

Cruises International offers product training to agents across all brands as well as general cruising information.

Henuti Purhotam, product manager of Cruises International, says her team offers everything from face-to-face presentations to online training manuals and quizzes on all the brands. "Training covers all topics from ship facts and information on how to close the sale."

Agents can find out more about Cruises International's training by visiting its travel agent portal, Shipmates – a one-stop shop for any information regarding cruise lines and upcoming training sessions. "We are in the process of preparing for the next training programme for 2017." These new sessions will be made available on Shipmates as soon as the dates have been confirmed. "We also arrange for



"Training covers all topics from ship facts and information to dining and how to close the sale."

Henuti Purhotam

one-on-one training with travel agents and their teams, which we have found is a preference amongst the trade," says Henuti. Closing that sale can be tough, which is why Cruises International also provides additional support to agents during this process and will meet with the agent and their client to clarify any details, she says.

Beachcomber Tours'

sales and marketing manager **Joanne Visagie**, says Beachcomber also offers training for agents in a variety of forms, including one-on-ones and groups. "Almost every day a rep of mine is training an agent," says Joanne. "We do workshops every week or whenever it suits the agency."

Training sessions focus on the Beachcomber brand, why agents should sell Mauritius, the hotels on offer and their features, how to sell the product and upsell, and what is available to couples and families.

Paging through long brochures can be a laborious task, which is why Beachcomber has



"Trafalgar will be launching an online-based training system early in 2017."

Bronwyn Strydom

focus features booklets that highlight the important points of the destination. Joanne says agents can keep it in their drawers as a handy reference guide on the products available. When it comes to quickly selling a hotel, The Right Choice flyer summarises the selling points of each Beachcomber hotel into an elevator pitch, says Joanne.

Trafalgar will be launching an online-based training system in early 2017, says **Bronwyn Strydom**, marketing manager. It will be available on Trafalgar's website and will be tied to the company's incentive programme. Agents will be able to earn points based on their progress through Trafalgar's e-learning platform and these can be used to pay towards travel packages. Three modules will be made available and will include an introduction to Trafalgar, why agents should sell guided tours, and useful sales tips.

Bronwyn says that The Travel Corporation's Wanderlust (TTC) sessions are available on a monthly basis at the company's offices and anyone can join. These sessions expose agents to all TTC's brands. ■



Shipmates – a one-stop shop for information on cruising. Image: Cruises International

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Wish you were here!

Beachcomber's latest educational was a trip to Sainte Anne Island in the Seychelles. The Pentravel group spent a day exploring the sights of Mahé. Pictured at the Mission Lodge viewpoint on Mahé are (from left to right) **Tracey Trautmann** (Pentravel East Rand Mall), **Nikki Briant** (Beachcomber Tours), **Sandra Touzel** (Pentravel Gateway), **Bernadette Berriman** (Pentravel Mall of Africa), **Karien De Villiers** (Pentravel Centurion) and **Andrea Vermeulen** (Pentravel Fourways Mall).

Appointments

Lee Botti & Associates welcomed back **Tracey Ciorovich** earlier this month. She returns to the company's travel division as a consultant after a two-year break.



Development Promotions has appointed **Michelle Hunter** as its new MICE manager. Previously she was the gm of groups and incentives at World Leisure Holidays.



Ralf Masermann has joined the Hahn Air team as the vp Travel Management Companies. This is a newly created position in response to the increasing role TMCs have in the corporate travel buying process. Previously, Ralf held the position of director global account management at Hahn Air.

The Palazzo in Fourways has appointed **Lebohang Mokoena** as its new senior sous chef. Previously, he was the senior sous chef at 54 on Bath in Rosebank. Lebohang started his career as a trainee at the BON Hotel Riviera on Vaal before pursuing a career in the Kruger National Park's Selati restaurant. He later went on to spend three years in Abu Dhabi at the Staybridge Suites.



Executive director and chief executive of Sun International, **Graeme Stephens**, has resigned and will leave the group at the end of April 2017. Following five years at Sun International, Graeme will take up the role of ceo of SKYCITY Entertainment Group. Graeme will be succeeded by **Anthony Leeming** who is the current cfo of Sun International.

Following a successful tenure at the Flamingo Casino in Kimberley, **Peter Guthrie** has taken up the position of gm at Sun International's Meropa in Polokwane. He has 26 years of experience in the hospitality and gaming industry. Peter says there are big changes coming to the complex in 2017 with the opening of a new hotel and a revamp of the food and beverage offering.



The Blue Train has appointed **Bafana Mlambo** as its new reservations manager. He has twelve years' experience with the operating division during which he managed and facilitated the bookings and sales of The Blue Train.



Two new executives have joined Cape Town Tourism. Marketing executive, **Leigh Franks**, has experience across European, African and domestic markets in various sectors, including tourism.

Tourism services executive, **Thembi Kunene**, has over 18 years' experience in tourism. She has worked for Acsa, was the ceo of the Tourism Grading Council at South African Tourism and currently serves on the Board of Trustees of Brand South Africa and Stenden University as a tourism expert.

Tintswalo Atlantic has announced the promotion of **Justine Suntut** to the position of executive chef. She began her career at Tintswalo Atlantic as a sous chef in December 2013 and worked under former executive chef, Jeantelle Van Staden.



Kim Nixon is the new md of Wilderness Safaris Botswana. She started her career as an overland guide in Botswana in the mid-1990s. Previous Botswana md, **Grant Woodrow**, will take on his new role as Wilderness Safaris chief operating officer. **Nathaly Ahrens** has joined the Wilderness Safaris Namibia team as gm of both the tour operator's reservations team and Travel Shop as of September 2016.

Ryan Reid has been appointed the new director of sports and recreation at Fancourt, replacing **Lloyd Martindale**. Ryan has been the operations director of the Serengeti Golf and Wildlife Estate in Johannesburg for the last seven years.

Pick of the week

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TAAG charms JNB-LIS market

TARYN NIGHTINGALE

THERE'S a new airline on the block capturing the business of the Portuguese community in South Africa, with cheap fares and better connections than other carriers flying to Portugal, travel experts say.

Angolan carrier, TAAG, is not an obvious choice when flying to Lisbon, says **Ricky Da Silva**, director of XL Novo Mundo Travel. "But now, TAAG has specials and hip Emirates aircraft on its flights to Lisbon. The fares are almost half the price than any other carrier so many people are now choosing to fly TAAG when they wouldn't have before," he says.

In 2014, Emirates and TAAG announced that Emirates, in its position as majority shareholder of TAAG would take a role in the management of the airline.

Ricky says TAAG has been offering specials on flights to Portugal for approximately

the last five months, but before that, Iberia had been the popular choice for the SA Portuguese community. Iberia offers a Europe summer seasonal flight from Madrid to Funchal, Madeira and when the airline relaunched its direct flights from JNB to Madrid in August, it offered many specials to recapture the SA market. Ricky says about 65% of the Portuguese community in South Africa is from Madeira, so the connecting flight to Funchal and the specials on the route put Iberia flights in demand.

But since Iberia's specials and seasonal flights have stopped, agents have had to find alternatives. **Sonia Da Rocha** of Luso Globo Travel, an agency that also specialises in serving the Portuguese community, says to get travellers to Madeira currently, the agency will book a flight to Lisbon and then a connecting flight onto Funchal. She recently quoted a client six

different options and the client had chosen TAAG because they were by far the cheapest: The flight from Johannesburg to Lisbon was R 5 700 on TAAG versus R 11 100 on Iberia for the same dates.

"TAAG also allows two pieces of baggage and pre-seating where other airlines may charge for both," says **Paul Da Silva** director of XL Novo Mundo Travel. He says the flight from Johannesburg to Luanda is less travelling time than other connections via Dubai, London or Frankfurt. "It's only three and half hours to Luanda with a three-hour delay at the airport and then a seven-hour flight to Lisbon."

Sonia says TAAG also offers a waiver on the Angolan transit visa requirement for South Africans connecting via Luanda. "The airline is also offering their flights to Lisbon on a daily basis now as opposed to four times a week – probably to keep up with demand," she says. ■



Premier upgrades

Premier Hotel Sani Pass is undergoing an R75m refurbishment to be completed by February 1, 2017. The renovations will upgrade the hotel from a three-star to four-star property and will include the addition of 120 new rooms and a conference room which will seat 300 delegates. Other features include a Wellness Centre, gym, spa, cinema and WiFi (available throughout the hotel and garden rooms). Pictured is **Grant Sandham**, group sales and marketing manager of Premier Hotels. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Pilot shortage to hit South Africa

LEIGH HERMON

A LOOMING global and local pilot shortage could see local airlines being forced to scrap routes and frequencies in the long term, aviation experts say.

According to Captain **Jimmy Conroy**, chairman of the SAA Pilots Association, approximately 60 pilots from several SA carriers have left mostly for the Middle East over the past year. "Under normal circumstances we'd expect to lose maybe 20 pilots a year," he says.

Jimmy says airline markets in the Middle East and Asia are opening their doors to pilots. These regions have reduced regulations and are offering more attractive salaries.

But, it is not only Middle Eastern airlines that are drawing pilots from SA. There is a new threat from the East.

Previously, China did not recognise South African pilot licences, but in the last six months, this has changed. "China has a requirement for 100 pilots per week for the next 20 years to satisfy the current and suggested demand," says **Rodger Foster** ceo and md of SA Airlink.

In the near future, recruiters for Chinese airlines will be in SA to source pilots and they are specifically looking for those who can fly Airbus aircraft, says Jimmy. "There's only one airline in South Africa that operates Airbus [aircraft] and that's SAA."

SAA's spokesperson, **Tlali Tlali**, says the airline's pilot turnover currently sits at 2%. "This does not necessarily present a concern that we may lose pilots in droves."

"We are extremely concerned and we think the rest of the industry also needs to be

concerned," says Rodger.

He says route cuts and frequency reductions due to a lack of pilots is definitely a concern in the long term. "I know some airlines are starting to struggle to find suitably qualified pilots," says Jimmy.

ALPA-SA president, **William Rooker-Smith** says the world's air forces used to be the suppliers of pilots, but this has changed over the years. According to Rodger, the South African Air Force does not do as much training and recruitment as they used to.

Jimmy says SAA used to run a highly successful Cadet Training Programme, but this was closed due to the high cost of training new pilots. But Tlali said, that the airline is engaging with stakeholders to get the programme up and running again. ■

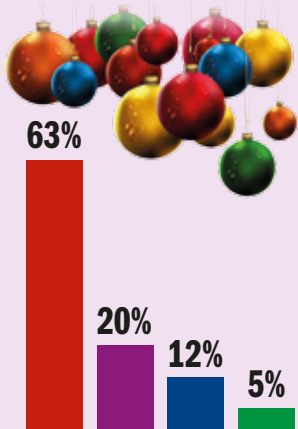
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SAs tighten their belts this December

What trends are you noticing in bookings for the upcoming festive season?

- There have been notably less leisure bookings compared with this time last year
- Mauritius and Thailand are as always, popular bookings for December
- Most clients are booking locally affordable beach and safari getaways
- South Africans are looking for new experiences and are booking 'out of the box' getaways



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TBCSA fights DHA delays

From page 1

order to qualify for the task.

Mmatšatši says ushers are also needed to direct travellers entering arrivals. "At the moment all they see is three queues: one for South Africans, one for travellers who require visas and one for those that don't." She says this is a problem for non-English speakers who may join the wrong queue.

The third measure is to

improve the experience of travellers standing in queues by providing them with water and things to nibble on.

However, she says these measures are subject to the approval of the DHA, NDT and other parties within and outside of government.

Spokesperson for the DHA, **Mayihlome Tshwete**, was unable to confirm whether it would be introducing any of these measures and says

only that the Department is working with stakeholders to ensure more efficient facilitation of travellers at ports of entry.

For the long term the parties will have to find a solution to the 'austerity' employment procedures in government, which mean that the DHA cannot replace someone without a procedure verifying the job needs to be filled, says Mmatšatši. ■