

TNW

TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY



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The travel agent is back!

TARYN NIGHTINGALE

THE leisure travel agent is making a come-back this year. Industry experts say the number of leisure travellers choosing to book with a travel agent is on the rise as consumers are overwhelmed by the options available online; are under-skilled to handle a travel crisis; and are in the dark about what they should know about booking travel.

In a survey conducted on eTNW last week, 86% of respondents said the number of leisure travellers choosing consultants over online platforms was increasing. When asked whether they were positive about the leisure consultant's relevance in 2017, 85% of respondents said there was a clear need for the agent to provide a professional service that consumers couldn't source online and 15% said they doubted their relevance because their clients believed the Internet could give them better solutions than they could. Despite 86% of respondents reporting that at least 50% of clients

did research online before coming to a travel agent, 80% said they saved the leisure traveller money, time and effort and that their clients had confirmed this. However, 17% reported that they could save the client money but that the consumer refused to believe the agent. Only 3% were not confident about whether they provided a valuable service to leisure travellers.

Marco Ciocchetti, CEO of XL Travel group, says: "The abundance and complexity of some of the travel options and restrictions on the online travel sites have made it more confusing to figure out what the sites are selling." He says for this reason more leisure travellers are booking through consultants, particularly with complex bookings.

Ceo of Asata, **Otto de Vries**, agrees and says today's consumers are demanding a personalised service more than ever before, but lack the expertise to navigate through the streams of information available online. He says

2017 will bring a return to the acknowledgement of the role that travel agents play. "Only travel agents can answer the questions Google can't."

Survey respondents agree, with 66% saying travel agents could demonstrate their relevance most in 2017 by offering clients a personalised service, and 19% said agents' knowledge of holiday destinations and other travel requirements, such as airfares, visas and insurance, were also important. Some 15% said agents were most relevant when sorting out a crisis.

Said one agent: "Providing the pros and cons of the Internet usually gets them to appreciate us. Clients are often not aware of the risks of booking online."

"There will always be a need for travel agents – we have super powers!" another agent said.

Said **Michelle Bergset**, coo of Pentravel: "It only takes one poor experience at a hotel booked online, a missing visa or a cheap daily airfare deal that goes horribly wrong for the consumer to lose their confidence and revert to a travel agent for guidance." ■

80%
of agents say they are cheaper than booking online

86%
of agents say more leisure travellers prefer booking with a consultant



Fresh faces!

There have been some new appointments at TNW recently. Pictured (from left) are new publisher, **Anton Marsh**; new TNW editor, **Taryn Nightingale**; and deputy publisher responsible for sales, **Natasha Schmidt**. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Key appointments at TNW

TARYN Nightingale has been appointed the new editor of TNW and eTNW. This was announced by the new publisher, **Anton Marsh**.

Taryn, who joined Now Media in 2015, started working on eTNW and TNW as a journalist, shortly afterwards she was appointed news editor and then acting editor. She will be the ninth editor since the newspaper was founded in 1968. Anton Marsh is the grandson of the founders, John and Leona Marsh. He

joined Now Media in 2007 from the IT sector.

Previous editors that remain involved with TNW include recently appointed deputy publisher responsible for sales, **Natasha Schmidt**, and **Kate Nathan**, the group's sales director. Another past editor is Anton's father, **David**, chairman of the group that now includes over a dozen print and online media titles including *Travel & Meetings Buyer*, *Travelinfo* and SA *Tourism Update*. ■

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Rubes® By Leigh Rubin



UBC still a prerequisite – DHA

DESPITE the DHA's recent announcement to airlines that they would no longer need to verify that SA minors travelling on an SA passport to South Africa were carrying an unabridged birth certificate, spokesperson for the Department of Home Affairs, **Mayihlome Tshwete**, told TNW that the requirement had not been scrapped and was still required for departing SA.

In a letter to Barsa, the DHA stated: "The Department has decided that minors who are South African citizens travelling to South Africa with South African passports may be accepted by airlines for travelling purposes without presenting birth certificates (containing parents' particulars). Such minors will be assisted by Immigration Services upon arrival at South African ports

of entry. The status quo will remain in respect of minors who are South African citizens departing from South Africa with South African passports to provide the required documentation as specified in the advisory on the Department's website."

"Travel agents should still advise clients to carry the necessary documents while travelling to and from the country."

Mayihlome said the changes stipulated in the letter were introduced to accommodate South Africans with children living overseas who were not in possession of a UBC. These citizens will now be able to travel to SA to obtain the

documentation at the DHA. These passengers will, however, also need to carry a UBC when departing from South Africa.

He says travel agents should still advise their clients to carry the necessary documents while travelling to and from the country.

June Crawford, ceo of Barsa, says the new requirements will soon be uploaded in Iata Timatic to ensure all airlines are aware of the new requirements. When TNW asked the DHA for clarification on the documentation required in specific instances, for example, an unaccompanied minor or a child travelling with a divorced parent, it was told the Minister would address the issues at a soon-to-be-announced media briefing. ■

Blue Train ups Hoedspruit services

THE Blue Train has made changes to its 2017 schedule with an additional service on its Pretoria-Hoedspruit-Pretoria service.

The extra service will depart from Pretoria to Hoedspruit on Friday, June 16, at 15h00 and arrive at 10h00 the following day. The return service will depart Hoedspruit for Pretoria on Saturday,

June 17, at 15h00 and arrive at 10h00 the next day. Other Pretoria-Hoedspruit services are also offered on March 17, July 7 and August 11. The return Hoedspruit to Pretoria services operate on March 18, July 8 and August 12.

The Cape Town-Pretoria service that departs at 08h30 on September 6 has been moved to

September 8 and will arrive at 15h00 in Pretoria the following day.

The Blue Train has also updated its seasons and rates per person sharing. High season is now valid from September 1-November 15.

Low season rates will be applicable from January 1- August 31 and November 16-December 31. ■

Courtney Canham selects the top specials from Travelinfo

- **Airlink.** Cape Town to Windhoek from R3 090 return. Fare includes taxes and is valid for travel between February 6 and March 15.
- **Azure Travel.** Eight-day Egypt Pharaohs and Red Sea tour from R6 444pp sharing. Rate includes two nights' accommodation in Cairo with breakfast and dinner, five nights' accommodation in Hurghada with breakfast, lunch and dinner daily, transfers and sightseeing tours. Valid until April 30.
- **Kulula holidays.** KZN offers from R2 047pp sharing. Offer includes two nights' accommodation in the Drakensberg with breakfast daily. Valid for SADC residents only. Available until March 31.
- **Air Holidays.** Swakopmund Experience from R6 935pp sharing. Offer includes return flights from Johannesburg to Swakopmund, four days' group B car hire, unlimited mileage, second driver, three nights at Swakopmund Plaza Hotel with breakfast daily, seal and dolphin cruise and a living desert tour. Rate excludes taxes of approximately R3 200pp. Valid for travel until June 30.
- **Air Seychelles.** Return flight from Johannesburg in economy class to Seychelles from R6 342. Fare includes taxes. Minimum and maximum stays apply. Book by January 31.



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Avis expands in KZN

AVIS Rent a Car and Avis Van Rental recently opened a new branch on the corner of Rex Henderson and Turnbull Streets in Empangeni, KwaZulu Natal.

It is 15km from Richards Bay and is open Monday to Friday from 07h30 to 17h00 and on Saturday from 08h00 to 12h00.

“The opening of the new branch in Empangeni is an exciting addition for us as it allows us to expand our footprint and cater for our customers in the area who travel for business and/or leisure and also those who need to rent commercial vehicles,” said **Rebone Motsatsi**, executive: Commercial and Licences at Avis. ■



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Visa news you should know

Myanmar introduces new visas

EFFECTIVE December 1, 2016, the Embassy of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar in South Africa introduced two new multiple-entry business visas for South African passport holders.

The new three-month multiple-entry business visa costs R3 000 and the six-month visa costs R6 000. The price of the one-year multiple-entry business visa remains the same at a cost of R9 000.

A social visa – for former Myanmar citizens, a spouse who married a Myanmar citizen or former Myanmar citizen, and their children – has also been introduced. This visa costs R750.

Belgium changes visa application process

Since December 15, 2016, travellers applying for Schengen visas to Belgium must lodge and pay for their applications with the TLScontact Visa Acceptance Centre. Previously, applications were submitted to and processed through the Belgian Consulate.

On its website, the Consulate says the outsourcing of visas to TLScontact is expected to make it easier and faster to

apply for a Schengen visa, also referred to as a C-visa, which applies to travellers visiting Belgium for a maximum of 90 days.

Applicants will need to create a Visa on Web account, fill out an application form and book an appointment on TLScontact's Belgium Visa Application Centre website. Applicants must print the application form and appointment confirmation letter, which they must

present at the appointment for capturing biometric data. Applicants can submit their visa application only 90 days before the intended travel date. Both the short-stay tourist visa and short-stay business visa are €60 (R867). TLScontact's service fee is a mandatory €27 (R390).

Applications for long-stay visas – for stays of more than 90 days – will still be processed through the Consulate. ■



Hitting the big time

eTravel recently hosted a Billion Bash party in celebration of the ITC group's biggest success yet. Last year eTravel achieved R1,007bn turnover for year-to-date sales July 2015-June 2016. This is up 8% from the previous year's R933m. eTravel ceo, **Garth Wolff**, drinks to the group's achievement. Photo: eTravel

Airlink to fly PZB-CPT, ups flights

AIRLINK is expanding its network with the launch of a new route between Pietermaritzburg and Cape Town on February 6.

The airline will offer a daily return service operated by a 37-seat Embraer 135.

Flight SA8721 will depart Pietermaritzburg at 07h00 and arrive in Cape Town at 09h10. Flight SA8724 will depart Cape Town at 17h35 and arrive in Pietermaritzburg at 19h30.

The airline has also announced a number of extra

flights that will be added during 2017.

The carrier will introduce a third daily flight from Cape Town to Windhoek from February 6. It has also upped frequencies between Nelspruit and Livingstone to a daily service. The additional flights will operate on Thursdays and Sundays from March 26.

Airlink will also offer a daily flight between Johannesburg and Vilanculos from April 13. The additional flights will operate on Thursdays and Sundays.

Frequencies from Nelspruit to Vilanculos will increase. Currently flights operate on Thursdays and Sundays. From March 26, there will be an additional flight on Tuesdays and Fridays.

On July 4, Mondays and Saturdays will be added to the schedule, and from August 7 there will be a flight on Wednesdays.

From June 6, the Cape Town-Maun service will increase to daily. The additional flights will operate on Tuesdays and Thursdays. ■

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INDUSTRY FORECAST

Last year was full of surprises, with major political, economic and technological developments impacting travel. *TNW* speaks to industry players to see what 2017 will bring.

Embrace the uncertainty

THE impact of a weak rand and flailing economy will be one of the biggest challenges for sectors across the travel industry in 2017. However, agents can embrace this uncertainty by offering value-for-money options when clients turn to them for advice.

The performance of the rand will continue to have an important impact on travel this year and will influence many decisions for leisure travel, says **Marco Ciocchetti**, ceo of XL Travel Group.

He says because travellers are looking for affordable prices, agents should encourage selling value-for-money destinations.

"Tough times lie ahead for the leisure market," agrees **Joanne Visagie**, sales and marketing manager for Beachcomber Tours South Africa.

She says if the rand stays at rates seen recently, fewer passengers will travel

overseas.

Corporate South Africa also remains under severe pressure, which in turn depresses demand and price, says **Martin Lydall**, chief commercial officer at Europcar South Africa. He says the car-rental industry has felt the impact of a weak South African economy.

"The currency devaluation and the impact on new car prices are going to be very challenging to absorb and some of this will have to be passed on to customers."

Clifford Ross, ceo of the City Lodge Hotel Group, says demand will be the main challenge for hotels next year. He says this is directly related to the economy, business confidence and investment by the public and private sectors. "We



Clifford Ross

need a stronger economy and more confidence, which can then translate into more business – and leisure – travel. This will improve occupancies."

The current economic situation has seen travellers cut back on spend and create

a shopping environment, says **Alexis Bekker**, head of sales and marketing for South Africa and Africa of LUX* Resorts & Hotels.

She says this could lead to 'price dumping' in the market, where competitor hotels drop rates. "This causes an issue across the market as there is no real benchmark for pricing against star ratings." As a result, travellers don't know how to judge reasonable prices for certain room categories.

Airlines likely to cut capacity

CAPACITY cuts by airlines could become a reality this year.

The economy will more than likely be the biggest game changer in 2017 for the airline industry, says **Hein Kaiser**, spokesperson for Mango. He says anticipated growth remains flat and economic conditions will likely remain tight.

Hein says the local aviation market will likely see an increasing fight for market share. "It is likely that some low-cost competitors continue to price unsustainably," he says, and that capacity reductions in the market are also likely. "Over-capacity will impact all airlines again and economic conditions will dampen growth prospects. We expect very little growth and more than likely an industry-wide period

of consolidation."

Locally and internationally the operating environment will remain difficult, says **Erik Venter**, Comair ceo. He says measures such as the introduction of biometric data gathering at OR Tambo are also making the South African environment challenging.

However, **Dean Bibb**, Sabre vp Middle East and Africa, believes there is a significant opportunity for African carriers to grow brand affinity and improve areas like check-in ahead of the African passport introduction in 2018. "In a recent survey conducted by Sabre, check-in dissatisfaction was the number-one gripe of African travellers. However, it's totally in an airline's control. If airlines can fix this using technology, they'll grow their customer base."

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The experts' survival guide for 2017

1. Adapt to new technologies

Agencies still relying on outdated methods of completing transactions between wholesalers, suppliers, distributors and customers could face serious challenges, says XL Travel's **Marco Ciocchetti**.

Club Travel ceo, **Wally Gaynor**, says travel agents will need to open their minds to what's happening with technology and see how they can use it to get an edge on the competition.

2. Charge for great service

It's important for travel agents in 2017 to evolve from charging transaction fees to charging for great service, says Marco.

"Move from transaction fees to full consultancy. Fees should not be associated with the booking or the transaction, but with high levels of service, highly detailed consulting and research, and the incorporation of non-commissionable value adds."

3. Sell value, not specials

Annamarie Lexow, sales and marketing manager of Travel Vision says people are very cautious where they spend their money, which makes it easy for suppliers to lure them with specials and discounts. She warns,

however: "We have to be careful to continue offering customers value-adds. Discounts are only a short-term solution and not sustainable."

"Don't sell just cheap to win a booking for today but lose a client forever," agrees Beachcomber's **Joanne Visagie**.

"Rather make sure you find out the travellers' needs and sell them a holiday that will make them happy so they come back to you next year when they travel."

4. Know your worth

Promote your value to corporations and suppliers, advises Sabre's **Dean Bibb**. "Offer a high-yielding channel for business travel, and compliance and security tools that are critical for corporate travel."

5. Sell cruises

Consultants who take an interest and invest their time in understanding and selling cruises will retain and even expand their customer base and their sales, says **George Argyropoulos**, ceo of Cruises International. George says a cruise is one of the very few products that offer substantial commissions and is still affordable compared with land-based alternatives.



Agents should charge for high levels of service, consulting and research.

6. Don't discard a destination

For those agents who have the pleasure of numerous repeat clients, **Lesley Simpson**, spokesperson of the Tourism Authority of Thailand in South Africa, advises agents not to exclude Thailand just because clients have been previously.

"Rather look to another region that suits their interests, for example Udon Thani, which is an important regional hub connecting north-eastern Thailand with the rest of the country as well

as neighbouring Laos. It has its own airport so is easily accessible from Bangkok."

7. Continue to upskill

"The need for training and upskilling of staff is still a very important matter in trying to grow an industry," says **Kim Botti**, director at Lee Botti and Associates. "There is an urgent need to upskill to ensure that travel remains an attractive and exciting industry to people."





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This year's top destinations

DESTINATIONS that offer value for money will draw South Africans in 2017.

Beachcomber's **Joanne Visagie** says Mauritius will remain a very popular destination. "Clients find it a trusted destination with great value for money."

Thailand will also continue to appeal to the South African market as it is still regarded as an exotic and affordable holiday, says TAT's **Lesley Simpson**.

She says although TAT will continue to promote the southern section of the country, including more of Krabi, Koh Samui and Phuket, a greater emphasis will be placed on the northern section, including Chiang Mai and the Golden Triangle, especially for repeat South African travellers. "It's not just

about Phuket, there is so much more to explore."

Wally Gaynor of Club Travel, says we can expect destinations such as Turkey to become hugely popular as a result of cost effectiveness.

"The Turkish lira has fallen as much as the rand, so it's a value-for-money destination offering everything to SA travellers, from great shopping to sights, beaches and so much more."

"Tourism to Turkey is on the increase – we believe this will be one of our best sellers for 2017," agrees **Alexis Bekker** of LUX*.

Visa-free countries will be enticing for cost-conscious South African travellers, comments **Megan Wilson**, marketing manager of Border Air (GSA for LATAM

Airlines). She says LATAM Airlines' flight to South Africa has opened up a new market as Latin America was previously not an obvious destination for many travellers.

"Latin America is a very cost-effective destination for South Africans. Many of the countries in the region have experienced similar currency devaluation to South Africa."

Local will also be lekker in 2017. **Annemarie Lexow** of Travel Vision, says people will definitely be shopping around for the best price this year.

"The travel magazines are boosting local travel and adventure outings by province and by theme.

"It's really nice to see how much our own country has to offer, without breaking the bank!"

Opportunities in mobile

MOBILE technology will be a big opportunity for agents this year.

"The typical traveller of 2017 – whether they travel for leisure or business – wants the ability to self-serve and manage their own bookings, which means that mobile technology and apps are becoming increasingly important," says **Robyn Christie**, country manager, South Africa, Travelpart.

Paul de Villiers, vp, Amadeus Africa, says mobile devices are already shaping the market and their role as a major disruptor in the industry will continue to grow in 2017. "Their portability is driving demand for 24-hour



"There is potential for integrated corporate mobile booking tools, where the tool fully incorporates the corporate's travel policy." **Yolande Bouwer**

services during travel.

"Micro-moment searching and booking are likely to grow," he says, with consumers taking advantage of short moments to glance at their mobiles through the day.

A game changer in technology could be a more complete offering in the mobile booking tool space, says **Yolande Bouwer**, gm of Agentivity Southern Africa. "We

see the potential for integrated corporate mobile booking tools, where the tool fully incorporates the corporate's travel policy." She says this is something that is not happening extensively today.

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Rise of the sharing economy

INCREASED competition from the sharing economy will feature in both the hospitality and car-rental spaces.

This year will continue to bring a competitive environment for hotels, with the more traditional hospitality industry competing with Airbnb and guesthouses, says City Lodge's **Clifford Ross**.

However, he says travellers will increasingly look for more consistency of experience and service delivery in a diversified market. Car-sharing programmes do have an impact, mostly affecting same-day rentals, says **Melissa Storey**, executive head: Strategy,



"Uber works in a complementary fashion, servicing demand for short rentals that are not necessarily profitable for the car-rental industry." **Martin Lydall**

Development and Marketing at First Car Rental. On multiple-journey rentals that involve greater distances, the sharing economy has less of an impact because the Uber equivalent is costlier than renting a car. For Europcar's **Martin Lydall**, car-sharing trends such as Uber can in many ways be seen as both a threat and an opportunity. "Uber does cannibalise certain segments of the

market but also works in a complementary fashion, servicing demand for short rentals that are not necessarily profitable for the car-rental industry."

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Travel will get more personal

TMCS expect technology that allows greater personalisation will play an increasingly important role in the travel industry in South Africa.

"Voice technology and personalisation will be the talking points of 2017 and beyond," says Club Travel's **Wally Gaynor**.

XL Travel's **Marco Ciocchetti** says technology that can meet the unique expectations of millennials – such as mobile apps that will evolve into 'real companions' that can predict individual needs – will be one of the main game changers for 2017.

"Retail will permeate people's lives as mobile virtual assistants point out nearby restaurants and shops, and guide people's purchasing choices based on their personal preferences, buying history and moods at different times of the day," says **Paul de Villiers** of Amadeus.

He says the effects of

this new world, driven by consumer expectations, will rapidly spill over into the travel distribution industry.

Artificial intelligence is closer than everyone thinks and next year will see more experimentation of this in travel, says Sabre's **Dean Bibb**.

"For example, 'Logan' is a prototype chat bot embedded into Facebook's messaging system that you can ask to find flights, get check-in information and find hotel locations."

Stephen Forbes, spokesperson for British Airways in SA, says airlines have tapped into technology to improve both customer experience and operational efficiencies.

"Our parents' generation returned to the same resort or hotel year after year because of the comfortable familiarity of being recognised and having their needs anticipated.

"Today our digital profiles allow airlines, hotels and

even restaurants to provide more intuitive customer service."

"Personalisation is one of the major strategies adopted by airlines seeking to deliver a seamless experience and service throughout the passenger's journey while being responsive to the individual requirements of travellers," agrees **Robyn Christie** of Travelport.

Sabre recently asked African travellers how much they would pay to personalise their trips and the results showed that it was over US\$100 (R1 379). "Yet today, airlines on average only make US\$16 (R220) per passenger, so that's a lot of lost revenue for carriers," says Dean.

He says leveraging customer data insights and making ancillary services available across all distribution channels, including the agency one, will be key to success.



Crystal Symphony heads to Cape Town this year.

Photo: Crystal Cruises

Expect growth in cruising

CRUISING experts expect growth in the sector for the year ahead, with luxury cruise sales, in particular, likely to rise.

Jackie Adami, md of Development Promotions, says the cruise industry is growing and becoming a popular way to travel for South African consumers.

The opportunities for cruising in 2017 are endless, says Jackie, as more ships are being built. "This increases the diversity of cruising and the destinations one can cruise to."

George Argyropoulos of Cruises International, says

there will be an increase in sales of luxury cruises. "As the economy struggles and consumers are financially challenged, it will be the affluent sector that will grow.

"Early in 2017 Seabourn will launch its first generation of luxury ships. Towards the end of the year *Crystal Symphony* will operate a number of cruises between Mauritius and Cape Town, and a Cape Town to Cape Town holiday cruise. And *Crystal Symphony*, will commence its world cruise on January 7, 2018, in Cape Town!" says George. ■

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Valentine's Day Specials

How can agents entice clients to extend their Valentine's Day travel this year? Debbie Badham asks the experts.

'The more you offer, the more they spend'

TO ENTICE clients to stay longer and do more on a Valentine's getaway, agents need to combine their extensive product knowledge with a good understanding of what makes their clients tick.



Genine de Witt

"The more you get to know your clients, the more you can offer them – the more you offer them the longer they will have to stay to fit it all in," says **Mandy McEvoy**, travel manager at Club Travel.

She recommends first doing an extensive search on Google to locate trips with a difference. "TripAdvisor has some very interesting suggestions from past travellers. Get an idea of the clients' interests." She says if they are adventurous, for example, then they may want to go caving. "Do some research and find an option

to advise on. Tell them how to get there and that a hike pack can be arranged by the resort."

Selling activities in the area and including them in the package is another good idea, says **Karen Lewis** of Club Travel Ontdekkers.

She suggests canopy tours or

balloon safaris.

Agents should make use of the extras offered by tour operators, says md of Trafalgar SA, **Theresa Szejwallo**. "Holidays for couples should be effortless, authentic and fun."

Agents can also offer additional extras at the hotel itself, like a romantic boat trip or dinner on the beach, says Club Travel ITC, **Genine de Witt**. "Some hotels include special discounts on spa treatments or à la carte restaurants, which can also

add value to their holiday."

"Always try to upgrade the room type and meal plan," says Mandy, pointing out that usually the cost is not much more than the standard rate but the value-add is huge.

She says if the client doesn't have enough leave but would like to experience a little more than just their end destination, agents should suggest a day in the transit city.

"Some airlines offer free day trips or hop-on, hop-off buses from their hub."

Agents can also persuade clients with the promise of saving them money. "Valentine's Day getaways don't have to break the bank," says Genine. She says Valentine's Day normally falls outside the school holidays so agents should be able to get good deals.

Karen adds that Valentine's Day falls on a Tuesday this year, so looking for a mid-week special could also help the client's pocket and make the booking go further.

Love Mauritius



Air Mauritius is offering a special to woo your clients. Selected return flights ex-JNB to Mauritius are priced at R1 470 (excluding taxes) for departure dates January 13-March 23 with a minimum and maximum stay of three days and one month respectively. Last return date has to be booked for March 30. Pictured is Wouter Nel, head: Sales and Marketing, Southern Africa, Air Mauritius. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Five great romantic offers

1. With Thompsons Travel, travellers can spend two nights at the five-star Oyster Box in Umhlanga Rocks from R6 038pps. The package includes return flights from Johannesburg to Durban (including taxes), two days' car hire, breakfast daily and one high tea. The offer is valid until April 30.
2. Travellers can spend

seven nights cruising the Middle East on *Vision of the Seas* with Cruises International. Fares are from R10 120pps including compulsory charges. Highlights include Dubai, Muscat, Khasab and Abu Dhabi. Valid for February 13 departure.

3. World Leisure Holidays is offering seven nights in the Seychelles at the

Paradise Sun Hotel from R24 700pps. The package includes accommodation in a superior beach bungalow on a half-board basis, return flights from Johannesburg to Seychelles (including taxes), return coach transfers, a sunset cruise and use of paddle boats and snorkelling equipment. The offer is valid until March 26.

4. Beachcomber Tours has five-night packages in Mauritius from R14 670pps. The package includes accommodation at the four-star Le Canonnier Beachcomber Golf Resort & Spa, return airfares departing Johannesburg (including taxes), return transfers and breakfast and dinner daily. Free land and motorised water sports

are available as per the brochure. The offer is valid for travel until March 23.

5. Trafalgar is offering special 'his and hers' toiletry bags packed with goodies with any booking made in February on any of its Rome Explorer, Italian Holiday, Rome and Tuscan Highlights, Great Italian Cities and Italy Bellissimo tours. Valid for travel on any date in 2017. ■

Births, deaths, marriages, promotions – we want to know! Please e-mail TNW's Taryn Nightingale, at tarynn@nowmedia.co.za.

TWO INDUSTRY GIANTS FALL

Adieu, dear Izy

ADMIRER and respected travel and airline industry icon, **Izy Etkin**, died on December 21, 2016.

Izy, who'd been diagnosed with melanoma in July 2016, died of a heart attack.

He was born in the Belgian Congo (DRC) on April 21, 1941 to a Spanish mother and a father of Russian extraction.

He joined the travel industry after Sabena approached him to be its SA regional manager in 1979. His great love of people and his experience of leaving home and joining the army, which he said "helped open my mind," meant the industry was a natural fit, says wife and partner of 25 years, **Roselyne**.

After 21 years of service with Sabena, Izy joined Wings Travel Management where he spent the ensuing 14 years as the director of supplier relations and industry affairs.

After a very successful career with Wings, Izy decided to open a swimming pool business in Ballito with Roselyne and her daughter Sabine.

Izy was a true romantic: after a seven-year courtship with Roselyne he whisked her to Europe where the pair wed in Rome.

Regarded as a mentor and father figure by many travel folk in SA, and a very dear friend by others, Izy will be missed.

"He was a wonderful man who was highly respected by everybody in the industry from far and wide," says **Tony Sofianos**, ceo of Wings Travel Management.

Mary Shilleto, ceo of



Izy Etkin

Thompsons Travel, says: "Izy was an incredible entrepreneur and colourful character in the industry."

Says **Wilma Van Vuuren** head of yield management, Wings Travel Management:

"Joyce Meyer (the author) said: 'You cannot have a positive life and

a negative mind.' This resembles Mr Etkin – no matter which cards life dealt him he always played the game well."

He is survived by his wife, his daughters in Australia and Spain, his stepdaughter and stepson, and his three grandchildren and four step-grandchildren. Izy lost his eldest son, Michael, in 1991 to cancer.

Fly well, Usman

FOUNDER and md of Flywell Travel, **Usman Ahmed**, died in the early hours of December 24 in Cape Town following a tough fight with lymphoma.

Usman, 66, established the XL Flywell Travel Group in 1967 with no formal training. Over the years, he carved out a niche market for the business and grew Flywell to one of the largest operators to the Middle East, says his brother, **Aboobaker Ahmed**, md of XL Flywell Travel.

It was this passion that not only helped Usman build a successful business, but also moved him to organise charter aircraft from SA to the Middle East before the larger carriers entered the market.

"His experience and understanding of the industry in South Africa was widespread, he was a pioneer in much that he did and fearless in tackling new opportunities," says **Rabih Saab**, Travelpoort president and md MEA. To Rabih, Usman started out as a customer, but soon became

a dear friend.

"Believe me, he most definitely kept us on our toes and his knowledge of Galileo was extensive, doing his own bookings till the very end. I will miss Usman greatly and extend my



Usman Ahmed

sympathy to all those who knew him," says Rabih.

"He was my brother, he was my father, he was everything to me," says Aboobaker.

Usman is survived by his wife and daughter.

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Spain picks new visa company

SOUTH African travellers to Spain (including the Balearic and Canary Islands) must now apply for a Spanish Schengen visa through BLS International. As of December 17, VFS Global stopped processing applications on behalf of the Embassy of Spain.

The following changes have also been made to visa fees. The Schengen short-stay visa is now R871 as opposed to R1 057, and a visa for children between the ages of six and 12 will now cost R508 as opposed to R616.

Applicants will be charged a service fee of R224 by BLS International.

According to the

Consulate General of Spain in Cape Town, none of the required documentation has changed.

To apply for a visa, applicants must download and fill in a form on the BLS International Spanish Visa Application Centre's website.

Applicants will also need to make an appointment via the website at the BLS centres in Pretoria or Cape Town in order to capture biometrics.

BLS International says the processing time for a visa is between five and 10 days and that applications must be submitted at least 15 days before the intended date of travel. ■



Coming your way soon

Travel Counsellors will be hosting roadshows for travel agents who want to start a career with the ITC group. The group will host a live demo of its systems on January 22 in Pretoria at 14h00, and in Johannesburg at 18h30; on January 23 in Durban at 19h00 and on January 24 in Cape Town at 18h30. Pictured are (from left) Travel Counsellors Roshnee Govender and Marijke Davel. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Acsa tariff cut – a drop in the ocean for airfares

AFTER two years of negotiations, Acsa has announced a 35,5% cut in tariffs. Whether this reduction will translate into cheaper airfares for travellers remains to be seen, according to industry experts.

From April 1, domestic travellers will pay a Passenger Service Charge of R82, instead of the previous R127, whereas international passengers will pay R223 instead of the current R346. Passengers departing from Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia or Swaziland will see a R94 reduction in charges and will pay R169.

Tlali Tlali, spokesperson for SAA, says the reductions will result in a drop in the total fare that passengers pay, and is therefore good news for the consumer.

Kirby Gordon, head of Sales and Distribution of FlySafair, says the reduction in Passenger Service Charges is a 35,5% saving on a small portion of an airfare.

“You’re looking at about a

R45 fixed saving per ticket.”

Acsa also announced there would be 35,5% reductions to airlines’ landing and parking charges. Whether or not these savings will mean a further reduction in fares will be at the discretion of each airline, says ceo of Aasa, Chris Zweigenthal.

“The reduction in Passenger Service Charges is a 35,5% saving on a small portion of an airfare – about a R45 fixed saving per ticket.”

He says airlines will look at the reduction of these charges in combination with the volatility of other cost elements, such as the cost of fuel and the fluctuation of the exchange rate.

Kirby says the Acsa reductions to parking and landing fees will reduce the direct cost of operating a flight, but says external elements will impact on

these savings. “As a direct cost, fuel is about 40% of the price of a flight, so that will have a stronger influence on determining fares. For the time being, we will see some savings but we don’t know how long that will last because it is dependent on the oil price.”

Spokesperson for Mango, Hein Kaiser, is optimistic about fuel prices for 2017. “Some economists have forecast a relatively stable oil price at around the US\$50-60 range markers.”

Acsa has also said that tariffs will rise by 5,8% in the 2018/19 financial year and 7,4% in the 2019/20 financial year.

The airline industry agrees that, however small the savings (as a result of the tariff reductions) are, any saving is a step in the right direction. “Will it be a major benefit for the consumer: no, probably not. But the reduction in tariffs is still a good outcome for the airline industry and the consumer,” says June Crawford, ceo of Barsa. ■

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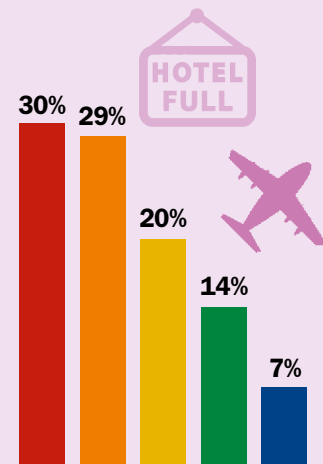
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To the point

Airports in Namibia and Zambia have implemented new passenger charges, effective immediately. The Namibian Airports Company has introduced an Airport Security Charge of NA\$71 (R71) per passenger on all flights departing from all Namibia’s airports. The Civil Aviation Authority in Zambia has implemented a new passenger safety charge of US\$10 (R137) per passenger for departures from all Zambian airports. According to Air Namibia’s country manager for South Africa, Margaret de Gois, the new charges will be added to tickets and will appear in the fare breakdown as an additional charge.