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TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

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lata tightens the screws on agents

TARYN NIGHTINGALE

GOVERNMENT and corporate travel agencies could be forced to drastically overhaul their business models if lata's plans to increase agencies' remittance frequencies as part of phase two of its changes to the Local Financial Criteria (LFC) for BSP ZA become a reality.

During Asata's recent regional meetings, lata outlined the second phase of its new LFC implementation. The first phase of the LFC was implemented in February last year and saw travel agents paying minimum financial security amounts of R160 000 for weekly remittance, R250 000 for fortnightly remittance and R500 000 for monthly remittance. As part of the second phase, lata wants to do away with monthly remittance frequencies.

"Increasing remittance frequency lowers the risk amount for travel agents, thus also reducing Financial Security requirements," says **Janaurieu D'Sa**, area manager Southern Africa of lata.

"This has been a long time coming," says **Janet Aldworth**, md of Sure Voyager Travel in Durban. She says when lata introduced the minimum guarantee during the first phase of the LFC last year, the expectation was that it would force the market to go over to a weekly remittance.

Dinesh Naidoo, group operations director of SWG, agrees and says his company switched to fortnightly remittance as this considerably reduced the company's lata guarantee.

However, industry players say if the change is implemented it will drastically

change how both corporate and government travel agents do business.

"The motivation to retain 30-day remittance with lata is so that travel agents can accommodate their own billing with their corporate clients," says **Otto de Vries**, Asata ceo. He adds that most corporates and government accounts expect a 30-day account with their travel agents.

Government agencies will likely be hardest hit. **Sailesh Parbhu**, md of XL Nexus Travel, says scrapping the monthly remittance would have a huge impact on agencies working on government accounts as it would considerably reduce the TMC's cash flow.

According to Sailesh, travel agencies would have to make significant changes to their business models. They might have to look at increasing their service fees and invest in a more robust back-office that allows for more frequent invoicing.

TMCs would also need to educate government departments on the advantage of using corporate lodge credit cards, he says. The use of credit cards by government departments would alleviate any frustrations with late payments and would also allow travel agents to remit more frequently.

The Agency Programme Joint Council (APJC) will meet on March 31 to discuss the proposed changes. "I'm not surprised that lata wants to tighten the screws, but I would be surprised if members of the APJC would approve this proposal," says **David Pegg**, md of Sure Viva Travels.

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100% departures guaranteed!

Trafalgar has announced that 100% of its Europe, Britain and Asia departures are confirmed as definite this year. This is the first time that the tour operator has achieved this milestone. "Our extensive portfolio includes 109 guided holidays for summer in Europe and Britain and 17 different trips across Asia," says md, **Theresa Szejwallo**. Pictured, celebrating the victory, are (from left) area sales managers, **Esmari Buys** (Pretoria) and **Puleng Putu** (Johannesburg) of The Travel Corporation. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Sars investigation heats up

TARYN NIGHTINGALE

ISSUES concerning Sars' inquiry into how the travel industry has been applying the VAT Act in terms of zero-rating on international air travel is heating up.

Asata reports that several of its members have now received audit findings from Sars. Industry experts also confirm that currently the Act is open to interpretation with no clear rule on how it should be applied in terms of rebates, overrides and commissions received on international air ticket bookings.

The 'arrangement' of international travel (as stated in the Act) is zero-rated in terms of section 11(2)(d) of the VAT Act, which says a supply of services would be charged with "tax at the rate of zero per cent where the services comprise the insuring or the arranging of the insurance or the arranging of the transport of passengers or goods" on international travel.

Asata says, based on the Sars audit findings its members have received, Sars believes that the service of arranging international transport is provided to the traveller, not the airline,

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'Come clean, Alitalia!'

CHANA BOUCHER

FAILURE by Alitalia to communicate changes to its codeshare agreement on flights from SA has left agents frustrated.

The airline cancelled its codeshare agreement with Air France KLM, which resulted in passengers who were meant to fly on an AF or KLM flight being rebooked to an Etihad flight. Travel agents, however, were not notified and only discovered the change when trying to book on the GDS.

David Pegg, md of Sure Viva Travel, says: "I received a message on the GDS that the Alitalia-AF KLM codeshare flights were not operating. I called them and they didn't know anything about it. They said they were going to find out from head office. That leaves us agents running around trying to find out what to do."

According to David, the change causes major

inconvenience for his clients. The flying time is longer as passengers now have to fly via Abu Dhabi as opposed to flying straight to either Paris or Amsterdam. He also says the business-class offering is not the same as was offered on AF and KLM aircraft.

TNW made numerous attempts to get further information regarding the cancellation of the codeshare agreements from Alitalia, Etihad and Air France, but none of the airlines responded at the time of publishing.

According to Routes Online, effective March 26, Alitalia is downsizing its codeshare partnership with Air France KLM on many of its routes, including intra-European and long-haul routes, affecting JNB-Paris and CPT-Amsterdam.

ItalyEurope24 reports that the agreement was terminated in 2015, but only expired this year. The *Financial Times* previously quoted Alitalia's former ceo, **Silvano Cassano**,

as saying that the agreements were no longer beneficial "either commercially or strategically, to the new Alitalia and its ambitious turnaround plan. They were negotiated when Alitalia was in a very different position, with the result that the agreements in their current forms favour the other party." He said the agreements undermined Alitalia's ability to restructure its network and airline effectively to achieve long-term sustainability.

Meanwhile, the *Wall Street Journal* claims Alitalia is on the brink of bankruptcy as Etihad's strategy for the Italian carrier to turn a profit for the first time in 20 years this year "flopped". The newspaper said "it is only weeks away from grounding its fleet and seeking another reboot".

Alitalia's board of directors is preparing to approve an adjusted business plan to turn the airline around. ■

lata tightens the screws on agents

From page 1

Janet, who is a member of the APJC, says lata has thrown a rock in the pond with its announcement and that the majority of travel agents in the APJC would need to agree on lata's proposal, which is unlikely to happen.

She also says a financial

model with only weekly or fortnightly remittance is not unheard of. "Australia has been on daily remittance for years," she says, adding that most, if not all, corporates in Australia work with lodge or credit cards.

Aside from the increase in remittance frequency, lata

also wants to look at removing financial security discounts and using Resolution 800f as a guideline, review both the financial ratios and financial security calculation.

The proposed changes could be approved at the next PaConf in October and if not, the one following, in March. ■

Sars investigation heats up

From page 1

and that all commissions, overrides and rebates received from airlines are not considered part of "arranging international transport" but for a separate supply, being the selling of tickets.

According to Asata, Sars is of the opinion that commissions, overrides and supplier rebates received, do not fall within the ambit of "international transportation" or "arranging" thereof and therefore cannot be zero-rated.

Sars told TNW that, although the supply of arranging international transport may be zero-rated, "whether or not the supply is that of arranging international transport depends on the facts of each case."

Ceo of Asata, **Otto de Vries**, says the association's opinion is that commissions, overrides and supplier rebates in the case of international travel are also zero-rated because these are not two separate supplies and the arranging of

international transport and the selling of tickets is the same thing.

Otto says that in 2005 Sars provided Asata with a ruling stating how the industry was expected to address zero-rating on international travel. In 2011 Asata was aware that Sars had withdrawn a number of rulings, including this one, but Sars had not provided Asata with any formal communication on the matter. Sars also didn't provide the industry with any clarification or new ruling on how to approach the zero-rating on international travel going forward. "As a result, the industry continued to approach the zero-rating on international travel as it had for the last 15 years," says Otto.

Trudie Botha, tax expert of Zeelie Auditors, says currently, section 11(2)(d) of the Act is open to interpretation. And until Sars issues a practice note on how the Act should be applied, agents have the right to dispute any audit findings

on how zero-ratings should be applied to international travel.

"Individual agencies should go to their auditors, legal counsels, or find an HDip tax specialist to assist them with a formal dispute by following Sars' Dispute Resolution process. They should lodge a completed ADR1 (notice of objection) of which the wording is of utmost importance as it should refer to all the relevant sections in the Act that would support their case." If Sars disallows the ADR1, agents can then file an ADR2 (Notice of Appeal) and this might go to court, says Trudie.

If Sars wants to implement a specific application of zero-rating on international transport for the industry it would have to issue a binding ruling, she says.

In the meantime, Asata has taken a consultative approach with its members by assisting them with what it deems the most appropriate way for individual businesses to respond. ■



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Asata on the road to Saqa accreditation

CANDICE MAY

ASATA is making headway to be recognised by the SA Qualifications Authority (Saqa) as a Professional Body, which will allow it to accredit travel agents with Professional Designations.

Jacqui McKnight, programme manager of Asata, says the evaluation and application process may take a few months but that a high-level delegation recently made a site visit and the feedback was very positive.

Initially, Asata will aim to offer the basic level accreditation, the Travel Practitioner. Once Asata is Saqa approved, it will work closely with a designation committee and neutral industry experts to award agents with

this designation.

Asata and Saqa will set the criteria to qualify for a Professional Designation. Agents will need a minimum qualification, proven competencies, recognition of prior learning, continuous professional development and workplace experience. Asata will also consider how long an agent has been in the industry.

Jacqui says Asata will also apply to be able to award designations such as Travel Professional and Certified Travel Professional.

In due course, Asata will announce the process for the application and certification of designations. Meantime, it will use its online Professional Programme to gather details on agents who wish to apply. ■



Wendy Wu launches new brochures

Wendy Wu Tours will launch its new brochures at the Travelbags lunch at Phaze restaurant, Randburg, on March 24. The brochures will be available on Travelinfo, online and delivered to your office from March 27. This year, they're bigger (they've been bumped up from 40 to 60 pages) and include more discovery and exclusive tours, says **Alet Steyn**, gm of Wendy Wu Tours in South Africa. Pictured are (from left): **Bianca Morais**, sales representative; **Alet**; and **Rene Swart**, tour consultant, of Wendy Wu Tours. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl



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Zim airline delays JNB flight launch

RAINBOW Airlines has postponed the launch of its Harare-Johannesburg flights to March 26.

Earlier this month, the airline's ceo, **Ed Berry**, told *TNW* that the airline would launch flights on March 5.

"The aircraft, a CRJ 100, scheduled to fly this route, is currently undergoing a service," a source at Rainbow Airlines told *TNW*.

The airline will start with three flights a week, on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays, departing Harare at 08h00 and arriving in

Johannesburg at 09h40. The return flights will depart Johannesburg at 19h00 and arrive in Harare at 20h40.

SAA, fastjet, British Airways and Air Zimbabwe currently offer direct flights between Johannesburg and Harare. ■

New baggage policy at Dubai

AGENTS are advised to warn clients flying to and from Dubai International Airport about a new baggage policy that came into effect on March 8.

Bags must now have at least one flat surface and those that do not comply will be rejected at check-in, including irregularly shaped and oversized items.

The new baggage policy

is an effort to enhance the performance of check-in operations, improve services and reduce the risk of mishandling, and applies to all airlines operating from the airport.

"Passengers, who show up at the airport with non-compliant baggage, will have the option of having it repacked in boxes, at a fee," said vice president

of terminals operations at Dubai International, **Ali Angizeh**.

"Bags that are round or do not have a flat surface of any kind are by far the largest source of baggage jams. These jams can shut down sections of our systems, delay baggage delivery to the aircraft and inconvenience our customers." ■

Virgin introduces flights to Barbados

VIRGIN Atlantic will launch two direct weekly services to Barbados from London Heathrow on December 12, 2017.

Flight VS 131 departs Heathrow at 13h15 on Tuesdays and Saturdays, arriving in Barbados at 17h55.

The return flight, VS 132, departs Barbados at 20h15 and arrives in Heathrow at 07h55 the next day.

According to Virgin, these are the only direct flights between Heathrow and Barbados that will operate year round. The route will be operated by an Airbus A330 with 33 seats in Upper Class, 48 in premium economy and 185 seats in economy class.

Liezl Gericke, sales and marketing manager of Virgin Atlantic South Africa, said: "The new

flights will allow people from South Africa to seamlessly connect to the Caribbean island of Barbados with a single check-in and bag drop at OR Tambo International Airport. We are really pleased to offer an exciting new holiday destination for our South African customers this Christmas."

The flights are available for booking. ■

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The Fares Team from left: Michelle, Veronica, Rafeeqa & Bonita (Fairuz not pictured)

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There is no doubt that the role of a travel consultant is more challenging than ever before. With a myriad of OTAs, direct airline websites, point of sale and tough competition around every corner, when getting the chance to engage with a potential client, a consultant really only has one chance to clinch the deal.

Gone are the days of finding the best airfare on a GDS and this is why Club Travel's Fares and Routing Desk is so popular amongst consultants who are eager to get the sale! Club Travel's Corporate, Leisure ITCs and Associates come through to Michelle's team to double check that they have the very best airfare/routing available and more often than not, the team are able to better the fare and/or offer a more suitable routing for the client.

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- Mandy McEvoy ”

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- Susan Williams-Knill ”

“ The Fares Team is really fantastic when I need help with awkward routings or difficult fares. If I have a routing I need the fare to be checked on, they either send me a better option or advise if I already have the best possible deal.
- Heidi McGregor ”

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Thailand

The Naked Agent

SCENARIO: A 10-night trip to Thailand for a couple in mid-August. The couple are in their late 30s, and are looking to stay somewhere quiet and away from the crowds, with great beaches. They enjoy snorkelling and

eating out. The couple are also interested in stopping over for a night or two on the way in or way out.

Agencies were contacted digitally, either via email, or using the contact form on each agency's website.

An increasing number of travellers reach out to agents via online technology, so this approach was used to measure the readiness and responsiveness when requests are sent through electronically.

Make it personal!

Flight Centre, Midrand: Carlswald

After submitting my booking request via the contact form on Flight Centre's website, I got an automatically generated email stating that I would hear back from one of their consultants within 24 hours. As promised, **Naledi Ngcobo** contacted me the following afternoon, but I missed her call, so she left a short, friendly voicemail message saying that she had a few options to suggest, and that she'd be emailing them through to me, which she did a few hours later.

The tone of the email is what really stood out – not only was the content informative and comprehensive, but she had clearly given thought to my specific requests and kept things upbeat and personal. She started off by saying: "I see you are looking to go to



Naledi Ngcobo

Thailand. I have never been myself, but my cousin was there in December and will not stop talking about it – definitely on my bucket list."

She recommended Abu Dhabi as our stopover destination based on the great specials currently available – two nights for the price of one.

She suggested Phuket and chose hotels that were "quiet and good for couples, with water sports available at both, including snorkelling". After detailing two options, she also offered to book any add-ons such as excursions and day tours for us.

Finally, she sent through a booking cut-off date of March 20 due to the validity of the special rates – this was a great way to spur an indecisive travel shopper into action. She added that she would follow up with a phone call to discuss our travel plans further.

Another great touch is that Flight Centre includes a box on each consultant's email signature detailing their years in the industry, number of countries visited and favourite city in the world.



WINNER

Pentravel, Centurion

Within a few hours of emailing the agency directly via the details provided on the Pentravel website, I received a response from the agent thanking me for the enquiry and letting me know that she was working on putting together a few options.

The consultant said she just had a few additional questions to ask me. She wanted to know what kind of hotel I had in mind, and asked if I would be happy with a good tourist-class hotel that was central, clean and affordable, or whether I wanted something a bit more special.

She advised us to break up our stay and suggested two nights in Singapore (as our stopover), followed by four nights in Phuket and

four nights in Krabi.

After emailing the consultant and advising that we would prefer a more upmarket hotel – she got back to me within a few hours with a quotation. She advised that she didn't choose the cheapest hotels, but instead quoted on really good properties either on the beach or across the road from the beach.

She offered to look at alternative options if we weren't satisfied with the quote. The consultant seemed very familiar with the destination – as well as our stopover options and showed that she had taken our requirements into consideration when formulating the quotation.



Harvey World Travel, Midrand: Carlswald

I contacted Harvey World Travel's branch in Midrand, Carlswald, via the contact form on the Harvey World Travel website. The contact form only gave me the option of sending through my name, email and contact form, along with a box for 'Additional Information or Special Requests'. I submitted the

form, but did not get any response from the agency – not even an automatically generated response after sending through the 'Contact Us' request. Perhaps there may have been a technical glitch and the information was not relayed over to the branch.



Naledi's top tips for selling Thailand

- Know what your clients are looking for when it comes to resort styles and locations. Some hotels are better suited to an adult crowd, while others cater for children, making for an enjoyable holiday for all. You don't want to put a family somewhere with a lot of noise from party-goers, nor do you want to

- put a young couple in a resort where there are a lot of children.
- It helps to emphasise that Thailand is a year-round destination, so your clients can travel there regardless of the season. Also, it's worth mentioning that it is very cost-effective for South Africans as the rand is stronger than the baht.

Take note!

The purpose of the Naked Agent in this series is to assess the experience from only a sales skills perspective and not the effectiveness of the travel agency. *TNW* believes that sales skills are increasingly important to travel agents and, in many cases, improvement in selling skills is the easiest way to increase the prosperity of the agency and its consultants. The Naked Agent is designed to raise awareness of the opportunity and build awareness of the need.



Thailand

Upgrades offer better regional access

THAILAND has announced plans to upgrade 39 airports throughout the country as part of a THB36bn (R13,38bn) project.

Thai media reports have said that the improvement project will be divided into two phases, with the first spanning 2017 to 2021 and requiring a budget of THB24bn (R8,91bn). This will include the upgrading of Krabi, Nakhon Si Thammarat (southern Thailand), Khon Kaen and Trang airports. The second phase will run from 2022 to 2026 and will require a budget of THB12bn (R4,45bn).

Ebrahim Vadachia, director of Avoca Travels, says 2016 saw a record 32,6 million foreign tourists visiting Thailand, with an expected total of 24 million-plus projected for 2017. "This airport development is necessary given the increase in tourists to Thailand."

He expects that, once complete, the expansion will impact all arrivals



Annemarie Lexow

positively. "This will help clients gain easier access to the hubs and small cities and support a better tourist experience."

Better access

Indeed, it is anticipated that one of the most positive developments that will come out of the airport enhancement project is that tourists will have better access to the mid-sized regional

hubs and small city airports.

Annemarie Lexow, sales manager of Travel Vision, says it has been part of the Tourism Authority of Thailand's plans to promote other parts of the country rather than just the ever-popular destinations like Bangkok, Phuket and Krabi. She says this will only be possible if infrastructure and airports are improved in these smaller destinations as, at this stage, most groundhandlers only offer road transfers, which can be very time consuming.



Phi Phi. Photo: Tourism Authority of Thailand

Four great specials

TNW rounds up some of the best travel specials now on offer.

- **Travel Vision** is offering a seven-night Phuket and Krabi package from R13 488pps. The package includes return airfare from Johannesburg to Phuket (including taxes), four nights in Phuket at the four-star Kata Palm Resort, free Phuket orientation tour, three nights in Krabi at the four-star Krabi Thai Village Resort, daily breakfast and all land transfers. Valid from May 1 to June 30.
- **Kulula holidays** is offering a nine-night package to Phuket and Phi Phi Island with rates starting from R11 189pps. The package includes seven nights at the three-star Nipa Resort in Phuket, two nights at the three-star Phi Phi Bayview Resort, breakfast daily, return flights from Johannesburg to Phuket on Singapore Airlines, all pre-payable airport taxes and fuel levies, return airport transfers and return ferry transfers to Phi Phi Island. Valid for travel from May 2 to June 17 and July 16 to October 31.
- **Travel Vision** is offering a seven-night Phuket and Phi Phi Island package with rates from R13 080pps. The package includes return flights from Johannesburg to Phuket (including taxes), four nights in Phuket at the three-star Sunset Beach Resort, three nights on Phi Phi Island at the three-star Bay View Resort, daily breakfast and all transfers. Valid from April 15 to June 30.
- **Thompsons Holidays** is offering discounted seven-night holidays to Phuket from R8 699pps including return flights from Johannesburg, transfers, accommodation and breakfast.

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THAILAND

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FAM TRIP EXPERIENCE



Club Travel in Thailand

The itinerary: **Carla Nichols** and **Lucinda Tyler** spent two nights in Krabi (one night at Elephant Hills Camp, one night at Rainforest Camp), one night in Khao Lak, one night in Phuket and one night at The Village Coconut Island.

Expectations:

We have both been to Thailand before. Carla has been to Bangkok, Phuket and Phi Phi Island, while Lucinda has been to Bangkok, Pattaya and Phuket. Based on the itinerary

received prior to departure, we expected to be extremely busy, but at the same time we were very excited to visit places that were 'out of the norm' – and were looking forward to

experiencing these places first-hand. We were also looking forward to travelling on a new route via Qatar into Krabi, and spending a little time out in nature with elephants.

The agents



Carla Nichols (left), leisure consultant at Club Travel head office and **Lucinda Tyler**, product manager at Club Travel head office.



Canoeing on the Sok River, Krabi.

Trip highlights:

Visiting Elephant Camp was a definite highlight. We loved interacting with the elephants in nature – watching them swim, washing them and feeding them.

Rainforest Camp was an unexpected treat. It is completely off the grid and everything is run on solar power. There are no plug points, no cellphone coverage and only a backpack is allowed. This

meant we could really enjoy the beauty and the silence, with only the jungle noises of the birds, monkeys and other wildlife – absolute bliss!

We think that inland experiences like the Elephant Camp and Rainforest Camp should be included in an itinerary – there is nothing else like it and it provides a truly memorable experience. Travellers get a much better feel of what Thailand is about, which is more than

shopping and beaches. The countryside is beautiful and Thailand has so much more to offer.

Khao Lak was a lovely experience as well. It reminded us of a sleepy coastal village – a bit like Langebaan in the older days – quiet and very laid back with beautiful beaches, off the beaten track from the hustle and bustle of Phuket. It's a great option for families with small children.



Floating accommodation at Rainforest Camp. Photos: Lucinda Tyler

Top tips:

Travel times on this trip varied from one-and-a-half to three hours, depending on the condition of the roads and traffic. In an itinerary such as ours, there was a lot more driving than expected, especially between The Elephant Camp and Rainforest Camp. This was a three-hour journey, plus the boat ride, which makes for a long day with lots of travelling. We would recommend an extra night at either of the two camps – as two nights felt quite rushed.

The food was out of this world, and we didn't tire of it at all. Whether it was a

hosted lunch at a hotel, or in a local restaurant, the food was always excellent. Meals in local restaurants are affordable and good value for money at around THB150-300 (R55-R120) depending on what you eat. A beer is between THB60 and THB80 (R22-R30), while a bottle of water is THB7 (R3) and a soft drink is THB40 (R15). The food at Elephant Camp and Rainforest Camp is included in the accommodation price, but we found the drinks there to be a little more expensive, but not much more – which is impressive considering where we were.

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IATA

THAILAND

The best markets...

TNW spoke to travel experts to find out which are their 'must-visit' markets.

Ebrahim Vadachia of Avoca Travels, says Chatuchak in Bangkok is his favourite Thai market. "It's Bangkok's biggest and best and you can buy everything from antiques and souvenirs to clothing. And you can stave off thirst and hunger pangs brought on by too much shopping, at the many Thai-style food stalls."

Lesley Simpson of Lesley Simpson Communications, which represents TAT in South Africa, also named Chatuchak in Bangkok as her favourite market due to the diversity on offer. "It is the largest open-air market in South East Asia, covering 11 hectares and has 15 000 booths – so one needs

to spend a whole day exploring. It only operates on a Saturday and Sunday, and I generally always try and plan my visit to Bangkok accordingly."

Annamarie Lexow of Travel Vision, says, based on her travels to Thailand, in her opinion Bangkok's markets are the most diverse and offer higher quality items. "I found silk clothing in Bangkok but couldn't find it in Phuket, Krabi or Khao Lak. It was also at Bangkok's market where I saw the food vendors frying rats, scorpions and tiny chicks still in the shell! Probably not ideal for the faint-hearted."

John Ridler, pr and media manager of Thompsons



Chatuchak market in Bangkok offers shoppers a huge diversity of things to buy.

Holidays, says Wang Lak in Bangkok is a great food market. "Half the fun is getting there, by water taxi across the busy Chao Phraya River after taking a taxi from the centrally

located Grand Palace." He says visitors should expect a "sensory explosion" and recommends that they buy plenty of small taster portions in jiffy bags, or try the unusual

fruit juices. "Or you can have a meal in a small eatery with gaudy décor." He says night markets are also a 'must do' and can be found in every town or village.

Take a 'Thai-Licious Journey'

FOR many travellers, sampling local cuisine is no longer one of the perks of travel – it is the reason to travel – and with world-famous street food and restaurants, Thailand is one of the most popular foodie destinations.

At the recent ITB trade expo in Berlin, TAT launched a new tourism marketing campaign, 'Thai-Licious Journey'.

Speaking at the launch at ITB, **Yuthasak Supasorn**, TAT governor said: "Thai cuisine has successfully captured the attention of consumers globally. Realising that 'foodie tourism' works as

a catalyst to command attention, TAT has launched the campaign to motivate foodies to taste signature dishes in renowned venues across Thailand as the way to explore 'Thainess' through food'."

The campaign comprises three key elements: Travel and Eat like Locals; Food That Comes with a Story; and Delightful Taste. **Lesley Simpson** of Lesley Simpson PR, says a number of food-based tours have been developed to showcase this offering.

"We get a lot of enquiries from small groups of women who explore Thailand by

way of interactive cooking courses. For example, they start in the south in Phuket, include Bangkok for the best shopping and then continue to the north where food and culture can be combined."

John Ridler, of Thompsons Holidays, says food has always been a big drawcard for travellers to Thailand. "Street food has become popular and is a great way to buy local delicacies at ridiculously low prices, while food markets with both fresh and cooked food on offer are popular as are the floating markets – a unique way of purveying food."

Book it!

Avoca Travels is offering a seven-day culinary training and cooking tour in its Bangkok package. Travellers will get the opportunity to train in a professional Thai culinary school and learn how to prepare between 25 and 30 different Thai dishes. The itinerary includes a tour of a Thai vegetable market, five cooking classes, six nights' accommodation, daily lunches and dinners, a basic Thai cooking diploma, ingredients and return airport transfers. Rates are from R11 897pps, excluding flights. ■

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East Africa

Despite some challenges, East Africa remains popular with SA travellers seeking affordable adventure. *TNW* rounds up some of latest happenings in the region.

Four activities along the Kenyan coast

1. Visit Watamu turtles

The Watamu Turtle Watch and Local Ocean Trust is a not-for-profit organisation that works to protect Kenya's marine environment. Watamu Turtle Watch is a rehabilitation centre in Watamu on Kenya's northern coast. Visitors are taken on a tour of the facilities and taught about the myriad threats turtles face, including pollution and development of the beaches where they nest. The turtle project was started by local residents and includes a nest-monitoring programme. Sick and injured turtles are also rehabilitated at the centre and then released into the ocean. The centre is open from Tuesday to Friday from 09h30 to 12h00 and 14h00 to 16h00, on Monday afternoons from 14h00 to 16h00 and Saturday mornings from 09h30 to 12h00.

2. Snorkelling and diving

Kenya has four marine parks – Malindi, Watamu, Mombasa and Kisite Mpunguti – with dive operators based in each of these areas. The coral

reefs boast a diversity of fish and marine creatures. Larger species that can be spotted on a dive include Green sea turtles, dolphins, Reef sharks and Manta rays. There are also plenty of tiny species, and wrecks and caves can be explored. Although diving is offered year-round, October to February is considered the best time. Recommended dive spots include the Vuma Caves near Kilifi Creek outside Watamu, the purpose-sunk *MV Dania* off the coast of Mombasa, and the Pinnacles, which offer an advanced deep dive, north of the Mombasa Marine Reserve.

3. Explore the Gedi ruins

The Gedi ruins are about 15km south of Malindi and 10km north of Mombasa, on Kenya's northern coast. Local guides offer tours of the ruins, which date back many centuries. The ruins were inhabited by a nomadic Ethiopian tribe, the Aroma people, between the 12th and 17th centuries, after which they were abandoned. It is not known why this happened,



The centuries-old Gedi ruins

although theories include the lack of fresh water and possible conflicts in the area. The ruins are built from crushed coral and cement and are in a tropical forest. The archaeological site has yet to be fully excavated because of a lack of funding.

4. Discover Mombasa

Mombasa, Kenya's second largest city after Nairobi, is a historic city, with Kenyan school history books placing its founding as far back as AD 900, while it is mentioned as a trading town by Arab geographer, Al Idrisi, in 1151. The city is also a cultural melting pot, with immigrants from Portugal, Britain, Asia and the Middle East influencing its architecture and cuisine. The historic old town boasts spice markets and ancient buildings, including the Unesco World Heritage Site, Fort Jesus, built by the Portuguese and dating from the 16th century.

Laikipia ups security for travellers

THE Kenyan government is assuring tourists visiting Laikipia that the conservancies and ranches in the county are safe. This follows a series of incidents, including the murder of **Tristan Voorspuj**, co-owner of Offbeat Safaris and Sosian Ranch in Laikipia, who was killed in an ambush in early March.

Kenya Police spokesman, **Charles Owino**, said police had heightened security in the county to protect visitors, investors and tourist facilities, including camps and lodges.

According to the Kenya Tourism Board and Kenya Tourism Federation, the present unrest is restricted to a few localities and a small number of ranches. The well-known wildlife conservancies, and tourism facilities in the rest of Laikipia are not affected and remain calm and peaceful.

Sosian Ranch has suspended its tourism activities until the end of April as a result of the unrest in Laikipia. Other operators in the region are continuing with business as

usual and say they remain unaffected.

Serena Hotels issued a statement that read: "Sweetwaters Serena Camp and Ol Pejeta House are on the 44 500-ha Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Southern Laikipia.

"Government, private sector and the pastoralist communities are working hand in hand to reinforce law and order whilst they seek a lasting solution."

"We regret the current problems brought about by the drought in the area and remain confident that government, private sector and the pastoralist communities are working hand in hand to reinforce law and order whilst they seek a lasting solution."

The affected area is about 100km from the Ol Pejeta Conservancy. "We remain vigilant and will continue to provide updates on the situation," adds Serena.

Book it!

RwandAir is offering promotional fares to destinations throughout Africa. Flights from Kigali to Nairobi start from R5 750, Entebbe from R5 450, Dar es Salaam from R4 470, Kilimanjaro from R4 470 and Mombasa from R6 850, including taxes. Tickets must be issued on or before March 30, for travel up to April 30. Subject to availability of N-class only. ■

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Turkish Airlines' irresistible offer for golfers



There are extraordinary packages available for golfers in Turkey. Antalya is blessed with 300 days of sunshine a year and EdoTourism is offering a R14 000 package that includes games at five of its 16 courses, seven nights' accommodation, meals and all drinks, including even the mini bar! With Turkish Airlines flying out of Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town with seats under R10 000 to Antalya, it is no wonder that the airline sees its golf offering as something exciting for South Africans. To promote it to the trade it runs a worldwide golf tournament at each of its stations. Pictured at Blair Atholl outside Johannesburg this year are members of the trade participating in a mannequin challenge (when everyone in the club has to freeze).



Gimme more Beachcomber

Beachcomber Tours launched its 2017 brochure in January, which includes focused information on each resort as well as quick facts and a referencing guide. The brochure is available from Beachcomber Tours representatives or an e-version is available on its website and travel agent portal. Pictured are (from left): **Kirsten Johnston, Nikki Briant and Vladi Wessels**, sales executives of Beachcomber Tours.

Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

The TAG Foundation – a non-profit organisation founded by **Jonathan Gerber**, ceo of TAG – that provides financial and social support to learners who have the potential to become leaders, recently received a donation of R8m. The foundation currently pays for the school fees of 16 young men at King Edward VII School in Johannesburg. Jonathan said the money would be invested with the aim of putting five boys through KES each year, in perpetuity. Jonathan is pictured with **Jethro Pieterse**, a TAG Foundation learner.



TAG Foundation gets R8m donation

Appointments

■ Jim Eastwood

has been appointed global sales director of Travel Counsellors. He will be responsible for driving Travel Counsellors' leisure and corporate sales internationally. Jim will also be working closely with the company's Travel Counsellor franchisees to continue to improve the support it offers globally. Jim was previously part of Groupon, where



he held several senior leadership roles and was most recently the firm's vp of sales for the UK and Ireland.

■ Dennis Huk

(right) has been appointed head of global account management of Hahn Air. Together with **Robert Jason Heerenveen**, who has occupied the position since February 2015, Dennis will lead a team of more than 20 directors of global account



management and service partners around the globe, who are responsible for sales and marketing as well as training and product presentations for 100 000 travel agencies worldwide. Dennis takes over from **Susan Strössinger**, who left Hahn Air at the end of last year. Dennis previously held several sales and account management positions at Aegean Airlines, Austrian Airlines and LATAM Airlines. For the past five years, he worked in manager partnerships at Avis Budget Autovermietung.

Pick of the week

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To the point



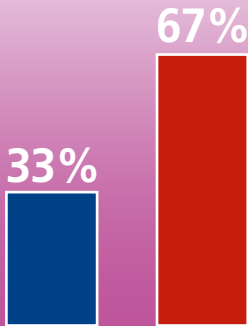
Amadeus has launched a railway booking interface, the merchant model, which provides travel agencies around the world with one link to sell multiple rail operators. This new offering sees Amadeus acting as a sales agent for rail operators, simplifying contractual agreements, financial flows and invoicing with travel agencies. Amadeus handles all set-up, billing and settlement activities, and assumes financial and legal risks of selling via travel agencies. Currently, the full offers of DB (German), RENFE (Spanish), SNCF (French, available in CESE* only), Trenitalia (Italian) and selected eastern European rail operators are available as part of this model, with more expected to join, says Amadeus.

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Trump caused the slump?

Have you seen a decline in travel to the US since Trump took office?

- Yes
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A SADC passport? Not so fast

CHANA BOUCHER

IT MAY be some time before all citizens from the SADC region travel with the same passport.

According to **Mayihlome Tshwete**, spokesperson of the SA Ministry of Home Affairs, while all African countries support the theory of free movement, the technicalities need to be figured out first. "To do this, the right foundation is needed, as are certain preconditions."

One of these preconditions is a national population register, which Mayihlome says is needed to ensure that people coming from a particular country can be identified as such.

Earlier, media outlets quoted Tanzania's Foreign Minister,

Augustine Mahiga, as saying that the SADC states were "busy working on a common regional passport that would also stimulate regional trade" creating a borderless region and continent.

However, Mayihlome said at a recent meeting between SADC countries that it had been agreed that the introduction of a regional passport had to be approached with caution to prevent any backlash or fallout. "To say someone is coming from the SADC is not good enough for some countries. If something happens and they want to send that person back, they need to know where to send them back to."

He added that skipping the vital first steps and not taking security measures

into account would have a negative impact on South Africa's relationships with other countries and regions. "An SA traveller is a citizen of South Africa, not the SADC. Whatever we do, we have to be accountable for our citizens. If someone is travelling with our documents and they are not in line with the rules of other countries, it will have a negative impact," says Mayihlome.

He pointed out that some progress had already been made, for example, in Lesotho, where travellers were only required to be fingerprinted to cross the border, eliminating the need for passports. These, he said were essential building blocks in realising dynamic free movement throughout the region. ■

Comair still flying... for now

DORINE REINSTEIN

COMAIR found itself in the High Court in Pretoria earlier this month over allegations that it didn't comply with South Africa's restrictions on foreign ownership and, if found guilty, could see the airline losing its licence to fly.

In 2014, FlySafair laid a complaint against Comair for non-compliance with the Licensing Act in terms of foreign ownership, which states that the maximum percentage of voting rights allowed by foreigners on domestic airlines is 25%. While Safair withdrew its complaint, the Air Services Licensing Council (ASLC) pursued the matter.

The matter was brought before the High Court on March 10. However, according

to a report in *Moneyweb*, the court was told that the allegations against Comair were based on a misunderstanding.

The ASLC mistakenly thought that fund manager, **Allan Gray**, who is a natural person living in Bermuda, invested in Comair. However, the foundation, Allan Gray, owns 26% of Comair.

The council based its case on an analysis of 26% shareholding of Comair by BB Investments. They say that a portion of BB Investments' shareholding should be classified as foreign, because BB Investments is 100%-owned by Bidvest; 46% of Bidvest's shareholders are foreign and by applying that percentage to BB Investments, the council says Comair's total foreign

shareholding is above the legal limit.

However, Advocate for Comair, **Mike van der Nest**, says Bidvest's shareholders do not own the assets of Bidvest or any of its subsidiaries. They merely own shares in Bidvest, a South African company, and that it is incorrect to apply Bidvest's foreign shareholding directly to BB Investment.

A spokesperson for Comair told *TNW* that Judge **Joseph Raulinga** had reserved judgement on the matter, and the ASLC has been interdicted from suspending Comair's air services licence until the matter has been finalised.

"No specific timeframe has been provided on when a judgement is to be handed down," the spokesperson said. ■



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