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Shock US and UK ban hits SA pax

DAVE MARSH

WHILE direct US flights operated by SAA and Delta Air Lines are not affected by the US Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) ban on carrying certain electronic devices in the cabin, many SA passengers travelling via Mid-East hubs are nevertheless affected.

On March 21, the DHS announced a ban on all electronic devices larger than a cellphone/smart phone on board the aircraft in carry-on luggage or other accessible property on flights from certain airports to the US. Six airlines operating indirect services to the US out of SA use hubs included in the ban.

The airlines and hubs are Emirates (DXB), Turkish Airlines (IST), Etihad (AUH), Qatar (DOH), EgyptAir (CAI) and Saudia (JED).

The UK then followed with its own ban on devices larger than 16cm x 9,3cm x 1,5cm on flights from Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other Middle East countries that do not have services to SA. At this stage, the UK has not included flights from Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha.

The DHS made the announcement earlier this week as a result of intelligence they received that terrorist

groups were looking at innovative ways to smuggle explosive devices on board commercial flights. It is a trend rather than a specific alert and the measure is seen as an enhanced security measure. At this point it affects 10 of the 250 airports with flights into the US. No

domestic flights in the US are affected. Medical devices are excluded.

In South Africa, where theft out of suitcases passing through its airports has been rampant and check-in staff routinely caution travellers to leave nothing of value in their checked-in luggage, this ban poses a particular problem.

The DHS said that, as the threat picture changed, other airports and even domestic flights might be affected.



Electronic devices that cannot be carried in the cabin on certain US flights:

- Laptops
- Tablets
- E-Readers
- Cameras
- Portable DVD players
- Electronic game units larger than a smartphone
- Travel printers/scanners. ■



Cheap fares to the UK!

British Airways has reduced its fares to London by up to 20% as part of VisitBritain's #OMGB (Oh MY GREAT Britain) 'Britain, Home of Amazing Moments' promotion. World Traveller (economy) fares start from R9 976 (including taxes). The promotion runs until April 3. Low season fares are available for travel between March 14 and June 21, July 11 and November 30, or December 24 and February 28, 2018. Pictured all kitted out in party gear at the launch of the #OMGB campaign, are (from left) Lorna Feldtmann, regional business manager, Africa, UK Visa and Immigration; Peter Boxer, Deputy UK High Commissioner in SA; Carol Maddison, project manager APMEA of VisitBritain; and Sue Petrie, commercial manager Southern Africa, British Airways. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Airlines slap agents with spate of ADMs

CHANA BOUCHER

SEVERAL agents have written to TNW after being slapped with a series of ADMs for cancellations that they say were made on requests from their clients.

Although churning is a practice frowned upon in the travel industry,

what about legitimate cancellations made to accommodate client requests? For some airlines it seems there's no difference, and agents are paying the price.

David Pegg, md of Sure Viva Travels, recently received an ADM from Etihad for "excessive

cancellations" – something he has never experienced before. "I'd like to know what percentage of bookings is considered excessive?" he says.

Another agent who prefers to remain anonymous had a similar experience with Etihad. He explains that

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Top web stories



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- SAX, shape-up or ship-out

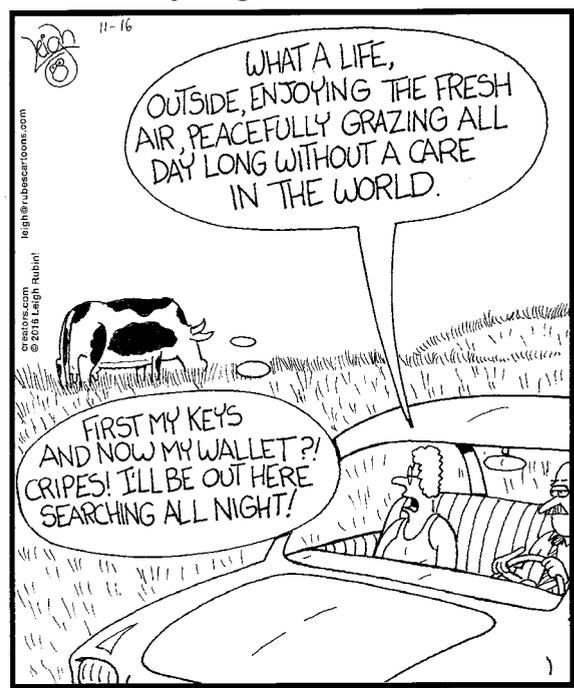
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Rubes® By Leigh Rubin



Leisure travellers look for luxury for less

CANDICE MAY

LEISURE travellers are looking for value-for-money luxury products as opposed to more expensive options, **Sue Garrett**, marketing and product manager of Flight Centre Holidays, reported at the Flight Centre Travel Group Leadership Conference at the Sun City Convention Centre.

Sue says, with the introduction of good-value luxury products, the mass market has realised that the highest price tag does not necessarily mean the best product.

She says Flight Centre Holidays has noticed a significant shift in demand for all-inclusive packages versus traditional half-board packages requested on luxury holidays. "All tour operators who offer value luxury packages are flourishing!" she says.

Sue adds that Flight Centre Holidays has also

seen an increase in demand for premium economy over business class, and in four-star over five-star properties.

She says Flight Centre has seen a marked difference in the increase in the number of nights spent by luxury travellers at four-star and entry-level five-star properties versus deluxe five-star properties.

"With the introduction of good-value luxury products, the mass market has realised that the highest price tag does not necessarily mean the best product."

Since the beginning of the year, stays at value-for-money luxury properties have increased by 1 968 room nights compared with the same time last year, whereas stays at deluxe five-star properties increased

by 761 room nights.

Mary Shilleto, ceo of Thompsons Travel, says this does not mean that customers are settling for a lower standard of product, adding that if a deluxe five-star property is going at a good price, it is just as appealing.

Other industry players have seen the same trend this year. **Theresa Szejwallo**, md of The Travel Corporation, reports a drastic increase in sales of budget brands that offer luxury for less, such as CostSaver and Busabout. **Michelle Bergset**, chief operational officer of Pentravel, says this growing trend has encouraged travellers to explore value-for-money destinations other than Thailand. She says Zanzibar and Bali are two luxury destinations where affordable deals are offered and are seeing a huge influx of travellers.

For more on the FCTG Leadership conference, see page 6. ■

New long-haul, no-frills flights on the cards

TESSA MARSH

BUDGET-CONSCIOUS travellers could be in for a treat if low-cost carrier, WOW Air, which is eyeing potential new direct, long-haul routes, starts operations to South Africa. The Icelandic, no-frills airline, recently announced that it would launch flights as soon as 2018 to destinations in Africa. There's a high possibility its base for these flights would be London.

WOW plans to launch its second long-haul base next year but the airline's founder and ceo, **Skúli Mogensen**, has yet to announce the location. He says London is in the running. He adds that new high-tech and fuel-efficient aircraft are a major contributor to the airline's potential route expansion. "There is a great opportunity with the arrival of new aircraft – the A320neo, the A321neoLR, and the A330neo. The timing is perfect for us to expand," says Skúli. "The real winner will be

the consumer. Fares will fall, there will be better aircraft with more innovative technology."

June Crawford, ceo of Board of Airline Representatives South Africa, says while Africa is yet to see a low-cost carrier coming to the continent, she believes fastjet is an example of a carrier that

"New high-tech and fuel-efficient aircraft are a major contributor to the airline's potential route expansion."

could ultimately get long haul right. "They have the right aircraft and are economical." She believes there would be demand for a reliable and safe low-cost carrier into Africa. "If the fares are good there would definitely be interest." Agents, however, seem less optimistic. "Personally, I wouldn't choose a low-cost carrier for long-haul flights and neither would my clients as the Gulf carriers

have excellent rates to the UK and Europe," says **Yumna Kharodia**, md of Sweet Life Travel. "For short distances domestically and within Africa, people are still adventurous and would consider low-cost carriers, but for long distance they look for aircraft types, reliability of airline etc," she says.

Tracy Teichmann, manager of SureTravel, says while there is certainly a demand for lower fares on the London-Johannesburg direct route she isn't convinced a low-cost carrier is the answer. She says the fares will have to be dirt cheap and presumes low cost will mean paying high fees for checked baggage, preferred seating, priority boarding and maybe even paying for meals on board and headsets. "Pretty soon the carrier will be dubbed 'that cheap-skate' airline that pretends to have low fares and makes you freeze and starve for 11 hours and the only entertainment is to listen to your iPod until the battery dies." ■

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FlySafair offers cheaper fares under own GDS code

LEANNE CUMMING

FROM Friday, March 17, FlySafair is live on both Amadeus and Travelport – offering more affordable fares – under its own carrier code, FA.

“It’s been a process getting here, but we finally have

something that offers a solid, reliable and competitive option for the trade to secure our inventory via their preferred GDS,” says **Kirby Gordon**, head of sales and distribution of FlySafair.

The FA fares include a checked bag of up to 23kg, priority boarding

and two changes without penalty fees.

Since the end of November, FlySafair’s inventory has been available on the GDS via a Hahn Air agreement under the code H1. However, the inventory was expensive for the local market because of a segment fee FlySafair

had to pay in order to be integrated with the H1 code, and this drove up the cost of the fare considerably, says Kirby.

However, under its own code, FlySafair has a much lower segment fee to pay to the GDSs directly (as well as a small percentage that is

added to take the payment), Kirby explains.

He says it makes sense for FlySafair to be available under the Hahn Air agreement as it gives the airline access to many international markets, which means it can list on several GDSs globally. ■

SAA introduces upgraded website

SAA has launched a new-look website, promising more speed, options and simplicity for users.

Agents can use the new website to book the Step Up ancillary on behalf of clients. Step Up enables passengers to upgrade from economy to business class by submitting an offer to the airline, which then approves or denies the request within 24 hours of departure.

“Flysaa.com assists passengers with travel needs, from booking a ticket to advance checking in, to upgrading travel class, or finding accommodation and renting a car,” says **Kim Thipe**, SAA head of Marketing.

The website’s new features include a simple design and content elements (making it easier to navigate), user-friendly icons and a rebooking feature that allows customers to rebook international flights. It is fully accessible for customers with special needs, including passengers who rely on assistive devices such as screen readers.

The website is geo-located and can facilitate transactions in multiple currencies.

Flysaa.com will continue to be upgraded with new features and functionality throughout the year. ■



Kids stay free!

As part of the Family Siesta offer at the four-star Tamassa resort in Mauritius, two children under 12 sharing with parents, stay free of charge in a superior room. The offer is currently available for booking for stays until October 31. Pictured are (from left) **Alexis Bekker**, head of sales and marketing and **Glen Taylor**, sales executive, LUX* Resorts & Hotels. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Cash shortage at Zim ATMs

TRAVELLERS in Zimbabwe may not be able to draw cash from their bank of choice as the ongoing cash shortage at ATMs continues.

Travellers are advised to bring cash in US dollars as some banks do not have cash for the ATMs every day.

The UK’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office has issued an update for those travelling to the country, advising them that “Zimbabwe is currently experiencing a severe shortage of cash. It’s not currently possible to make cash withdrawals with an international bank card”.

But **Ross Kennedy**, Africa Albida ce, says the cash shortage in ATMs is variable. “Some banks’ ATMs have cash today, but could have none tomorrow. It all depends on each bank’s supply of notes.”

Some of the machines are dispensing the local bond notes, while others

are dispensing US dollars, says a spokesperson of the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority. “It all depends on the financial institution and which bank the traveller is using,” he says.

Visa and MasterCards can still be swiped, say tour operators on the ground, who have also indicated that many areas frequented by business and leisure travellers do provide card swiping facilities.

“Cash withdrawals are very restricted at most ATMs, so we recommend that all clients bring some US dollar cash with them for incidentals and certainly if they are going to remote areas. However, credit cards are widely accepted, so clients can pay for most things using their Visa or MasterCard,” says **Laura Dacomb** of Travel Wild Africa. “We recommend that travellers prepay for activities and meals where possible.” ■

No direct US-Kenya flights just yet

DORINE REINSTEIN

LAST month, Nairobi’s Jomo Kenyatta International Airport was officially granted Category 1 Status by the US government. Airlines, both in Kenya and the US, will be allowed to operate direct flights between the two countries. However, despite the certification, airlines have no plans to launch any direct flights just yet.

Delta Air Lines and Kenya Airways previously expressed interest in the route. Delta told TNW it did not foresee interest in the route in the near-term.

A spokesperson said: “Delta Air Lines remains interested in a service to Nairobi-Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in the event that NBO is approved

by the US government as a last point of departure. Given the current state of security affairs, economic climate, and the competitive landscape, however, we do not foresee interest in the near-term, but we continue to evaluate security and other factors on an ongoing basis.”

Kenya Airways’ md and ceo, **Mbuvu Ngunze**, said it planned to undertake a commercial evaluation with the relevant authorities to determine the viability and timing of operations. He said, if the airline were to launch any flight to the US, its first priority would be to pursue codeshare arrangements with its partners in SkyTeam. “This will enable us to sell tickets to and from any US state and drive revenues directly to us.” He said

although it would take time, the airline would start immediately.

American Airlines and United Airlines also told TNW that they had no immediate plans to launch direct routes to Kenya.

Experts say Ortia’s position as a hub could be under threat, given Nairobi’s new aviation status. “Thanks to its geographical location, Nairobi gives easy access into East Africa. This will undoubtedly affect Johannesburg as a hub,” said **Barsa ceo, June Crawford**.

The airport’s certification would undoubtedly strengthen Nairobi as a hub to be reckoned with in Africa, said **Chris Zweigenthal**, Aasa ceo. He said it was good news for aviation in Africa as it would increase competition. ■

To the point

Turkish Airlines will operate three weekly flights between Istanbul and Samara, and twice weekly flights between Istanbul and Voronezh, in Russia. The Samara service will be launched on April 11 and Voronezh on April 4. Flight TK 487 will depart Istanbul at 20h30 on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays and arrive in Samara at 00h55 the following day. Return flight TK 488 will depart Samara at 02h05 on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays and arrive in Istanbul at 04h45. On Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays Flight TK 481 will depart Istanbul at 01h05 and arrive in Voronezh at 03h45. Return flight TK 482 will depart Voronezh at 04h40 and arrive in Istanbul at 04h40.



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Flight Centre Travel Group industry leaders and the group's partners gathered at the Sun City Convention Centre on Friday, March 10, for two days of conferencing and networking. Candice May reports.

Agora ups Flight Centre productivity

FLIGHT Centre's retail division has made exceptional productivity gains since introducing Agora, its internal real-time, online booking and accounting system at the beginning of March, reports **Sue Garrett**, marketing and product manager of Flight Centre Holidays.

"Agora pulls inventory straight off the wholesale system in an easy-to-use format, which allows travel

agents to quote, book and hold packages for customers within a matter of minutes," says Sue. She explains that the system links to Flight Centre's mid- and back-office systems to allow for invoicing from quote.

Sue says all Flight Centre's contracted rates for hotels, tours, cars and transfers are available on the system. "Agents can easily book everything a customer needs,

allowing us to deliver a seamless overall experience."

She says the productivity gains are because agents no longer have to go through Flight Centre's wholesale division for quotes and payments as everything can now be done through Agora. She says while the results have been largely noticeable, no statistics are available yet as the system only launched a few weeks ago.



Opening the show

Andrew Stark, md of Flight Centre Travel Group Africa, is pictured opening the first day of the conference held in the Warrior Halls. He later moderated a panel discussion that featured six of the group's partners.
Photo: Flight Centre

New training spikes cruise sales

DEVELOPMENT Promotions has seen an amazing 300% increase in cruise sales over the last five months after changing the way it teaches leisure agents to sell cruising, said **Jackie Adami**, md.

"Over the past year we moved away from traditional PowerPoint presentations that merely explain the specs of different cruise liners and started teaching agents how to profile their customers so they know exactly which package will suit them – whether it be a family, honeymooners or someone interested in expeditions," says Jackie.

She says the GSA also started sending agents on the different cruises that the company offers, including

Crystal Cruises, Norwegian Cruise Line, and Royal Caribbean International cruises. "This has helped agents become more confident when selling cruising to consumers who can come across as very intimidating because they have often done their homework on the different packages before consulting an agent."

Another reason for the increase in sales is that Development Promotions now offers many affordable five-star-plus and six-star packages to exotic destinations like Croatia, according to Jackie. "These packages are also appealing as they are all-inclusive, so customers do not have to worry about paying for any extras like WiFi."

Fun and festivities



A group of Flight Centre leaders ready for Friday night's Shisa Nyama dinner at Botsalanong Boma. It was a memorable evening of feasting on traditional African cuisine and playing board games. Pictured are (from left): Ester De Lima, Claudia Naude, Sara Park, Jethro Breet and Angelique Andrade. Photo: Flight Centre

Trafalgar updates automated nurturing programme

TRAFALGAR announced updates to its automated nurturing programme, which focuses on monitoring customers before, during and after a trip.

Theresa Szejwallo, md of The Travel Corporation, says the programme now entails three touch points. As soon as a customer makes a booking, they are sent an automated yet personalised e-letter to say thank you. Next, they receive a questionnaire to complete while on their trip. Lastly, they are welcomed home with another personalised e-letter.

"The questionnaire feedback is especially useful to us. For example, if a customer says they would travel to Italy with us again in two years, we would make a note in our system to automatically send them our Italy specials in a year's time," Theresa says.

The personalisation does not stop there. "Any time after making a booking, a client can log in to our new website, My Trafalgar, to activate their booking. There they can add personal details, such as whether they are vegetarian or have an interest in history. We

use this information to tailor-make their trip and personalise our e-letters to them," Theresa says. Customers can also send photos from their trip to friends and family and load emergency contact details on the site.

The updated programme also comes with perks for both clients and agents. If a client pays a deposit and then cancels a booking, they do not lose their money. "Instead, they are credited with the full amount, which they can redeem if they book with the same travel agent in future," Theresa says. ■



In the mix

Otto de Vries, ceo of Asata, has a little-known hobby – DJ-ing! He pleased the crowd by showcasing his mixing skills in a spin-off against Flight Centre's resident DJ. Photo: Flight Centre

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VISA UPDATE

Brazil transit visas explained

Many agents are confused as to whether or not clients travelling via Brazil need transit visas. Candice May clears up the confusion.

A RECENT post on Travelinfo's new travel agent collaboration platform, Open Jaw, read: "I have a client planning a trip to South America. I read somewhere a while ago that travelling from Brazil to Argentina (or vice-versa) requires some kind of visa?"

In 2015, SAA announced that passengers who were travelling to South America via Brazil only needed to obtain a transit visa if they were travelling on separate tickets. According to the Embassy of Brazil in Pretoria, this is still the case today.

In short, passengers who can't produce their full itinerary from point of departure to final stop upfront will need a transit visa when travelling via Brazil.

Take the example of a passenger flying from Johannesburg to Buenos

Aires through Brazil. If the passenger receives both boarding passes when departing from Johannesburg, she won't need to leave the transit area of the airport in Brazil and therefore won't need to produce a transit visa. But if the passenger doesn't have her complete itinerary, she has to go through immigration and customs to check in for her next flight, where she will be asked to produce a transit visa.

The Embassy of Brazil in Pretoria says separate tickets are usually only issued when a passenger is flying on different airlines that don't have codeshare agreements. Before an agent books a client on two different airlines to travel through Brazil, the Embassy advises agents to double check whether the airlines have codeshare agreements to avoid the need for a transit visa. ■



Maun hotel opens soon

Known as the gateway to the Okavango Delta, Maun is also a launching point for the wildlife activities on offer in Botswana. Cresta's new hotel, the 83-bedroom Cresta Maun Resort, opens this year. Features include wireless Internet, a gym, swimming pool, restaurant, bar and conferencing facilities seating 300 people. The hotel is on the banks of the Thamalakane River, which is 15 minutes' drive from Maun International Airport. Pictured is Francois Joubert, Group Sales manager of Cresta Hotels. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

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Brush up on your training!

Michelle Colman rounds up some training courses that will give travel consultants an edge.

IN a recent poll conducted on eTNW agents said they needed training across all areas of their daily operations. TNW has sourced affordable courses that will make a difference to your skill levels and can be done in a reasonably short time.

Development & Training Strategies

"ADMs currently plague the industry and can often cost a travel agency a good amount of money," says **Cheryll Watt**, director of Development & Training Strategies (DTS) in Bedfordview. "Consultants are under pressure when it comes to understanding fare rules, re-issuing and refunding tickets. Best practice in these disciplines will help reduce the ADMs received by agencies."

In this vein, DTS provides three one-day seminars:

- Unravelling fare rules and reducing ADMs;
- Domestic and International

Re-issues (content depends on level of re-issue expertise);

- Domestic and International Refunds Calculations.

These seminars are presented as either scheduled courses (check the DTS website for dates) or as in-house courses tailored to clients. Costs are from R1 560 per consultant, but can be negotiated for in-house training. In addition, the company recently launched DTS Online with a number of courses.

Travelinfo Workshops (TIWO)

The online Travelinfo Workshops available through the Travelinfo portal, are free and can be done in the travel consultant's own space and are self-paced.

Agents who are Travelinfo-registered simply need to click on the homepage link to start the workshop. Each workshop ends with a compulsory

evaluation, in which the pass mark is 80%. Successful graduates are automatically entered into a draw for enticing travel prizes.

Currently running are workshops on Réunion Island, Mauritius, Intrepid Travel, Airlink, Fairmont Zimbali, RwandAir, First Car Rental and AKTV Resorts.

Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) Academy

The internationally developed Fundamentals of Business Travel course is available through the local GBTA SA Chapter.

This is a one-day course which can be presented to a group of individual members or as a corporate member group initiative. Dates can be obtained from the GBTA SA website.

The core curriculum includes topics such as managing the supplier relationship, security and risk management,

travel technology basics and measuring success through trends, forecasting and reporting value.

The course is R5 000 per person but, depending on delegate numbers, prices can be negotiated.

African Business Travel Association (ABTA)

ABTA offers training through its training partners, Nina & Pinta. Courses cost between R1 500 and R2 500 per person for a full day.

Among the more popular courses are:

- The A-Z of corporate travel (particularly good for new entrants in the sector);
- Why RFPs fail and how to improve your approach;
- Negotiation strategies
- Selling to procurement;
- Customer service excellence within the corporate travel sector.

Some are available online but most are designed for a face-to-face learning environment. ■

To the point

The Ritz Hotel in Sea Point, Cape Town, will reopen this month following a R120m refurbishment by hospitality services and investment company, Shimmy Luxury Collection. Accommodation includes 212 luxury bedrooms and the five conference rooms can host 1 000 delegates. The Bertus Basson flagship restaurant at the top will again be a revolving restaurant and guests can enjoy an all-day restaurant, sitting indoors or poolside. The Ritz's lobby area offers fast, unlimited WiFi, printing facilities and working space to accommodate guests and business travellers.

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Tour Operators



The relationship between tour operators and travel agents is as crucial as it is complex. This co-dependency can make a partnership productive or dysfunctional. Sue van Winsen finds out more about the formula behind successful relationships.

Unexpected ways tour operators make your life easier

WHILE travel consultants may have their gripes when it comes to the tour operators they work with, at the same time there are many ways operators can alleviate some of the burden and pressures that agents face when selling and booking travel.

Joanne Visagle, sales and marketing manager of Beachcomber Tours, says one of the main reasons the job of a consultant can be so difficult is that they are tasked with selling the whole world.

With this in mind, one of the ways operators can assist is simply through sharing their in-depth product knowledge. "The tour operator is normally an expert on the destinations they sell and can answer many questions the agent might have, like climate, visas required, or even diving opportunities," she says.

Greg Taylor, gm of Pure Tours, which comprises Pure Skiing, Pure Sport and Robinson Club, agrees



"Sharing direct knowledge may be an obvious way tour operators can help agents, but it's also an important one."

Greg Taylor

and says sharing direct knowledge may be an obvious way tour operators can help agents, but it's also an important one. "Should

the agent never have been to the destination, they rely on the tour operator's suggestions."

But time constraints and the pressure consultants face in terms of getting quotes back to clients with ever-shorter turnaround times often mean there isn't time for agents and tour operators to share insights and destination knowledge, says **Annemarie Lexow**, sales and marketing manager of Travel Vision. "We rely on agents giving us some information on clients' needs, interests and demands in order for this to work well."

Live availability

Going through the painstaking and time-consuming work of preparing a quote only to discover there's no availability for your clients' requested dates can be extremely frustrating.

Travel Vision only quotes on availability, which becomes increasingly important around this time of year when booking

travel to destinations like the Mediterranean – which are popular not only with South Africans but also with travellers from elsewhere in the world – where accommodation tends to get snapped up quickly, says Annemarie.

Additionally, Travel Vision introduced an online reservation tool to retail agents over the last year, which puts consultants in almost direct contact with accommodation suppliers so that they can get an immediate response.

Similarly, Joanne says that to improve agents' productivity, Beachcomber created a powerful, efficient and easy-to-use live booking system. "Through this system, agents can book and pay for their clients' holiday through our 24/7 live system in a very short space of time," she says.

Of course, not all agents are comfortable using technology and systems, and for this reason most tour operators that provide agent technology still give consultants the option of calling them directly.

Greg says that while online tools can be extremely helpful, he still believes traditional telephone conversations are the way to go as it helps both parties get a better feel of the client's needs. "I think the connection between operator and agent has grown too far apart, with too many emails and too little conversation," he adds.

Telephone contact is also

particularly useful when consultants need to book various aspects of their clients' holiday, says Joanne. "Airfare, accommodation and transfers can all be booked on one call."

This was also emphasised by **Theresa Szejwallo**, md of The Travel Corporation, who said that tour operators were able to take care of all the details, with multiple vendors on every tour or guided holiday. "If travel agents were to book the intricate itineraries that we put together it would take them hours, from receiving invoices and having to make several payments, to then collecting commissions from multiple service providers. This saves them an enormous amount of time – never mind the risks involved."

Peace of mind

Another way tour operators make agents' lives easier is by offering peace of mind. "Travel agents can be sure their money is safe when dealing with a tour operator like Beachcomber, whereas, when dealing with overseas hotels and land operators, there is always a worry whether the services will actually be provided," says Joanne. Also, as quotes are done in rands, there are no currency risks, she adds.

Theresa agrees and says that should any catastrophe or mishap occur whilst guests are travelling, Trafalgar and Cost Saver would take care of everything.

Did you know?

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Are workshops dying a slow death?

WITH many agencies facing staff shortages and ITCs struggling to spend time away from their desks, agent workshops are beginning to decline in popularity.

Annemarie Lexow of Travel Vision says the dwindling attendance at workshops is not only due to the pressures consultants face. She says that many workshops just adopt the same old formula over and over again, and consultants have grown weary of the repetition. "It's up to tour operators to innovate and offer something fresh so that agents want to come to their workshops," she says.

"For example, we host training breakfasts with ITCs, but instead of just



"We know that we are training agents who actually sell our product."
Alet Steyn

bringing in Travel Vision staff, we also invite suppliers like airlines and cruise lines so that it's beneficial for the agent to attend."

Another issue is that often tour operator workshops don't attract the right audience. **Alet Steyn**, gm of Wendy Wu Tours, says sometimes it's only the junior agents who sell domestic travel who attend, which isn't relevant to an international operator. "Online workshops and even private training sessions at the travel agent shop or training in small groups at a breakfast are more feasible for us, since we know that we are training agents who actually sell our product."

Annemarie says if tour operators don't innovate,

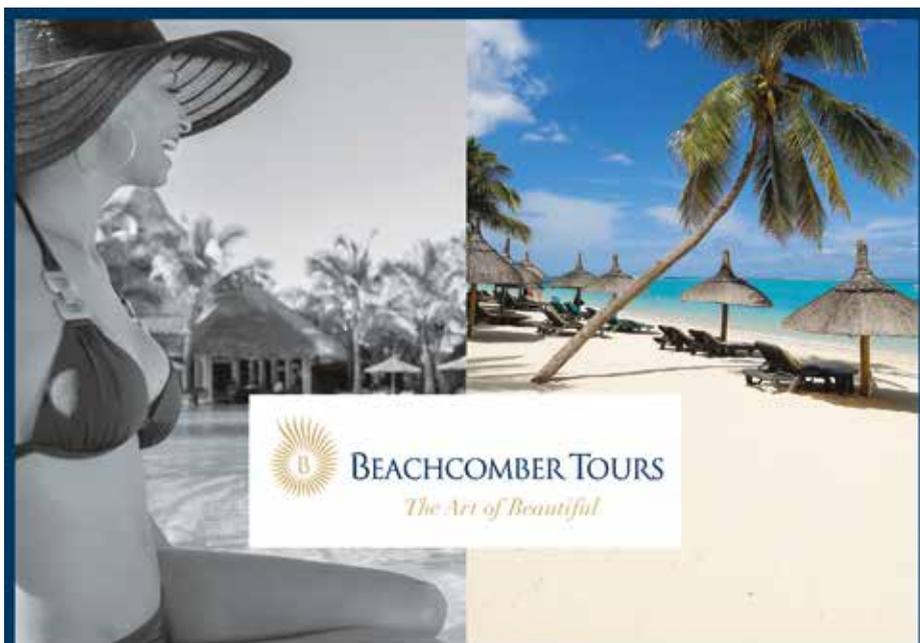
the lifespan of workshops as we know them may be short lived. She says there is definitely potential for workshops to move into the online realm. "For example, Sure Travel and Travel Counsellors offer suppliers slots on webinars for their staff." Annemarie believes there is opportunity for a neutral company to provide this service so that the audience is broader than just one consortium. **Ross Volk**, md of MSC Cruises SA, agrees and says online workshops that the trade could participate in at their leisure would be a great evolution.

Face-to-face time

But, technology doesn't completely replace face-time, and many operators have devised less

time-consuming, more convenient strategies for maintaining relationships with their agents. **Joanne Visagie** of Beachcomber says instead of asking consultants to come to them, they go to the travel agency.

"We offer ongoing and very regular face-to-face training in retail travel agency stores. We train them on what they need to know, whether it be hotel and destination information, food and beverage choices at our resorts, five-star-only training, as well as sessions on how to upsell. Training sessions are customised to the travel agents' needs and we meet them where they can and when they can," she says.



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Long live the workshop!

Greg Taylor of Pure Tours believes there's no real replacement for the traditional workshop at this stage. "They are great in terms of getting face-time with consultants like ITCs, who work from home, or retail agents who often can't engage due to busy shops." Workshops also offer some of the few opportunities the outbound travel trade has to network with one another.

He says workshops provide a platform where agents can engage with many different brands, getting the required information to hopefully investigate the operator at a later stage. "The shortcoming of workshops is usually information overload – but with all the information packs given, the ball is transferred to the agent to study further,

so without this step, the workshop is only partially effective, he adds.

Technology and workshops can also go hand in hand. "In the future, I would like to see workshop apps where operators could easily upload material that agents could access during and after the event, making it more convenient for them," says Greg.

Theresa Szejwallo of The Travel Corporation agrees that workshops are great as they give the trade insight into many suppliers and what they have to offer. "They also only have to leave the office for one workshop – whereas if they had to have a sales call or training for so many different suppliers, it would take weeks, if not months, to cover the same amount of supplier visits."



Robinson Club's new resort in the Maldives is accessed by a 45-minute seaplane flight.

Robinson Club to open two new resorts in Asia

ROBINSON Club will open two new resorts in Asia within the next year – one in Khao Lak, Thailand, and the second on the island of Orivaru in the Maldives.

The Robinson Club Khao Lak, on the west coast of Thailand about 85km from Phuket, is situated in the Khao Lak rainforest.

The property spans over 280 000sqm and is located on the beach. The resort will have 320 rooms and villas in 14 categories, with the largest being 350sqm in size. There will also be

three speciality restaurants offered on a full-board basis. Sporting activities will be available, with a focus on wellness programmes along with tennis, football, basketball, volleyball and archery. Watersports such as SUP and kayaking will also be offered, as well as trekking and cycling excursions.

Construction work began in January this year, with the current resort undergoing various upgrades, such as the construction of the sports complex and the

addition of a theatre. The main restaurant including the buffet, kitchen and main bar will also be extensively renovated and extended.

The Robinson Club Noonu in the Maldives will open its doors in spring 2017. The property covers 150 000sqm and has its own lagoon. A total of 60 water villas, 50 beach villas and 40 double-storey villas with high-quality furnishings and fittings are being developed on the island. Transfer time is about 45 minutes by seaplane.

New ships for MSC



MSC is launching three new classes of ship between 2017 and 2020. The soon-to-be-launched *MSC Meraviglia*, *MSC Seaside* and *MSC Seaview* will offer clients a choice of popular international destinations, including the Mediterranean (such as Venice, pictured above). In addition, early bookings are now open for the 2017/18 season and early booking discounts of up to 50% apply.

Did you know?

Wendy Wu has just launched its 2017 brochure which includes more Classic, Discovery (active-paced, off-the-beaten-track) and Exclusive (five-star) touring options.



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Seven amazing specials

TNW rounds up some of the best special offers currently available.

1. Beachcomber is offering a 50% discount on room upgrades for selected room types at its five-star properties until October 31. Upgrades are available 14 days prior to check-in and are subject to availability. Valid only for existing bookings that are paid in full and not applicable to Royal Palm.



Ski in the Austrian Alps. Photo: Pixabay

2. Pure Skiing is offering a low-season ski package to Austria with rates starting from R21 580pps. The rate includes seven nights' accommodation on a bed and breakfast basis, resort guide, six-day ski pass, six days' ski hire, 10 days' travel insurance, and five dinners at different venues. It excludes ski lessons, flights and meals not specified. Applicable for stays between January 6 and 13, 2018.



3. LUX* is offering discounted rates in Réunion for bookings made by June 30 for stays until October 31. For LUX* Saint Gilles, a 10% discount applies, while at Hotel Le Reclif, a 15% discount applies.

The poolside area at LUX* Saint Gilles. Photo: LUX* Resorts and Hotels

4. Wendy Wu is offering reduced rates on its 'Burma Explorer' tour, with rates starting from R58 655pps, reduced from R64 655pps. The 11-day fully inclusive tour includes stops in Rangoon, Mt Popa, Mingun and Ava, Amarapura, Mandalay and the opportunity to explore Inle Lake.

5. Robinson Club is offering a 20% discount on hotel stays at its four-star property in the Maldives for bookings made before July 31 for stays from December 16-23. Rates start from R22 870pps, including return transfers, seven nights' accommodation in an economy double room on full board, but excludes flights.

6. Wendy Wu is offering a 'Wonders of China' special with rates starting from R46 532pps, reduced from R54 532pps. The 17-day fully inclusive escorted group tour includes stops in Beijing, Xian, a four-night Yangtze cruise, Guilin, Yangshuo and Shanghai.

7. Beachcomber is offering families the opportunity to book a family suite at the five-star Trou aux Biches Beachcomber Resort & Spa for the price of a family apartment at the four-star Le Victoria. The special is valid for travel on certain June/July school holiday set departure flights. The Escape Beverage Package will be charged at the standard Trou aux Biches rates.



Trou Aux Biches. Photo: Beachcomber Hotels

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'Use genuine customer reviews to close a sale' – Trafalgar

TRAFALGAR has urged the trade to take advantage of Feefo's unedited and genuine customer reviews when selling holidays. "Feefo reviews are really useful for travel consultants. The

consultant is able to show testimonials per trip or tour, and this helps them to close a sale more quickly," says **Theresa Szejwallo** of The Travel Corporation. Feefo is a ratings and reviews, and customer

analytics platform that collects genuine, purchase-verified reviews on behalf of over 3 000 businesses. Feefo ensures that all feedback is authentic, by matching it to a legitimate transaction. ■

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Golfing in style



Beachcomber Tours held an educational in Mauritius at the beginning of this month. Pictured playing golf at Paradis (from left) are **Leana Meyer**, manager of Montrau Travel; **Dineo Refilwe Mwanza**, representative of Air Mauritius; **Noleen Saville**, manager of Noleen's Travel; **Dergs de Labauve d'Arifat**, manager of Imwe Chete; **Roopal Dullabh**, consultant of Flight Centre Mall of the South; **Vladi Wessels**, sales executive of Beachcomber Tours; **Lindy Post**, consultant of Flight Centre Brooklyn; and **Clarisse Pruneau** consultant of Exotic Vacations.



Hello, Captain!

Air Seychelles has promoted five pilots in its domestic operations to the rank of captain. They are **Christopher Mousbe**, **Michael Afif**, **Andy Benoit**, **Gavin Hermitte** (pictured) and **Balaji Naidoo**.

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Appointments

■ **Celeste Visser** has been appointed Satsa's new sales and sponsorship manager for South Africa, excluding the Western and Northern Cape. Celeste has worked for more than 20 years in the car-rental industry. **Alushca Ritchie** will take on the role of the Western Cape co-ordinator and will drive new Satsa membership in both the Western and Northern Cape. Alushca was recently appointed president of the World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations. **Lizzie Mokgothu**, Satsa's membership manager, has decided to take an early retirement. **David Frost**, Satsa ceo, thanked Lizzie for her many years of hard work and dedicated service.

■ **Rita Pires** is the new chief marketing officer of African Bush Camps. Rita will oversee the marketing department activities within the African Bush Camps group and sister air and road transfer company, Safari Logistics. She was previously marketing manager of Robin Pope Safaris.

Pick of the week

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Serena hotel is open for business

The Dar es Salaam Serena Hotel completed the second phase of its refurbishment earlier this month. The hotel is ready and open for business and upgrades include a new pool bar and Maisha Health Club; improvements to the Serengeti Restaurant, the Kibo Bar and ballroom. In phase one, changes included upgrades to the lobby, a new coffee shop and shopping arcade. Pictured are (from left), **Liane Venter**, Sales Account manager, **Melissa Menteath**, Reservations consultant, **Karin Sieberhagen**, Sales and Marketing manager for SA; and **Lusinda Landman**, Sales account manager.

Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

SAA's Ghana-US route to get the chop?

SAA's popular flight to Washington via Ghana could be at risk as the Ghanaian government says it is reviewing fifth-freedom traffic rights allocated to foreign airlines.

Widespread media reports quoted Ghanaian Minister of Aviation, **Cecilia Dapaah**, as saying: "The fifth freedom traffic rights are for a specific period. We will renegotiate and get

the best for Ghana." The Minister's announcement comes as the government is pushing ahead with plans to establish a new national Ghanaian airline by 2019.

But, SAA spokesperson, **Tiali Tiali**, told TNW that SAA had not been notified of any pending changes to the airline's fifth freedom rights in Ghana.

"Our agreement with the Ghanaian authorities

is based on the excellent relationship that exists between the two countries," he said.

SAA currently operates four flights a week from Johannesburg's OR Tambo International Airport to Accra's Kotoka International Airport and then to Dulles International Airport in Washington DC.

Said Tiali: "This schedule has been operational since

August 2015 and has proved to be very popular with our customers. We have seen an increase in demand on all ends of the market and we are continuously evaluating options to further enhance the operations to serve the ever-growing demand. This is a clear indication of the success of this route."

Ben Langner, md of Carlson Wagonlit Travel,

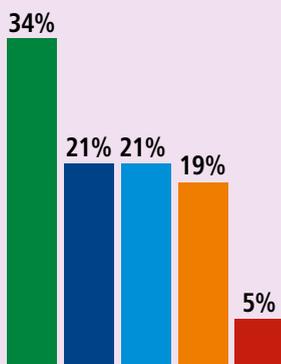
says he has seen a fair demand for the SAA route between Johannesburg and Washington. "The withdrawal of SAA traffic rights between Ghana and the US would be a setback for SAA. The current arrangements enhance the commercial viability of the route, as the airline taps directly into the demand from two areas, South Africa and Ghana." ■

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Itineraries for visas...

Have you created an itinerary just for visa purposes?

- Yes, free of charge
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- No, there are too many risks involved
- Yes, and charged a fee
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Airlines slap agents with spate of ADMs

From page 1

the ADMs were supported by a spreadsheet listing the bookings made and then cancelled. "Unfortunately, this list also included examples of where the customer was sold an EY ticket and then changed the date." He adds that the ticket type allowed for a change, subject to a fee, which was collected. Despite this, the agency was still penalised for the cancellation.

According to an Etihad spokesperson, bookings that don't materialise and generate revenue have double impact. "On the one hand, inventory is blocked from sales, which results in loss of opportunities, on the other, the airline pays fees to the GDS for every booking made and consecutive actions taken on it." The spokesperson adds that the airline takes measures to "observe the agencies' actions and curb such behaviour to minimise financial impact".

As for why the list of cancellations resulting in an ADM included instances where a sale had materialised, the spokesperson said: "ADMs are not raised for particular instances, and are forwarded to agencies only when they have exceeded or gone above

the cut-off level."

According to the airline, an "industry standard" is followed when determining an acceptable level of cancellations. "Cancellation levels surpassing the average percentages set for the country are considered excessive."

It's not only Etihad that is levying ADMs that agents believe are undeserved. **Allan Wolman**, md of XL Rosebank Travel, who was penalised by Lufthansa, says clients, particularly corporates, demand multiple bookings and quotes, usually in line with their procurement processes. "We do not wantonly sit on our GDS and book and rebook for no reason."

However, **André Schulz**, Lufthansa gm for Southern Africa, says: "The Lufthansa Group ADM policy is known to the travel trade. All ADMs are issued as a result of fare rules not being observed."

Airlines say agents are aware of the limitations on cancelling bookings and tickets, but the opposite seems to be true. "After 44 years in this business I don't know what this industry standard is and it's never been communicated [to me]," says David.

Meanwhile, IATA's response is that issuing ADMs related

to cancellations is a matter for the individual airline. "From the perspective of the ADM Working Group activities, it is not one of the major ADM root causes and thus, the ADM Working Group has not had discussions relating to the subject," the association told TNW.

Otto de Vries, ceo of Asata, says: "There is a lack of consistency in the application of ADMs on all matters, including so-called cancellations (or churning). We agree that, in most cases, the agent is trying to help the client, but as long as there are commercial risks and costs related to the practice for the airline, we can expect there to be a level of penalties that will be applied by the carriers."

"When customers request bookings and multiple changes and quotes are required, what action should we take? Should we tell the customer we cannot provide the level of service for fear of this type of draconian action of ADMs for churning?" says Allan.

Otto says agents must convey the risks or costs of churning to their clients. "If clients book directly, they would be charged cancellation and/or change fees and it would be completely acceptable." ■