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Reward programmes a 'huge threat' to agents

SARAH ROBERTSON

LOCAL reward programmes operate travel programmes that offer their members substantial discounts on market prices, which often undercut the prices that are available to agents, costing them business.

While the reward programmes remain tight-lipped about how these partnerships work, responding suppliers insist that they offer rate parity in the market and that cash-back rewards are entirely subsidised by the reward programmes and therefore beyond their control.

Discovery advertises travel rewards of up to 35% on Emirates, kulula.com, BA Comair and Qantas flights and discounts of up to 20% on suppliers such as Royal Caribbean, World Leisure Holidays and Contiki. eBucks Travel offers discounts of up to 40% on Emirates, kulula.com and Avis prices and 10% off Sun International and Topdeck rates. Lesser known programmes such as Investec Rewards and Momentum Multiply also say travel discounts are available to their members.

Monica Horn, marketing manager for Harvey World Travel, said it perceived travel reward programmes as one of

its biggest competitors. "The subsidised prices that they offer are incredibly difficult to compete with. They are a huge threat to us."

Zain Mahomed, reservations supervisor at Sure Mirage Travel, said the discounted airfares offered by Discovery Vitality in particular had resulted in loss of business. However, he said agents tried their best to beat the rates on reward programmes.

"The subsidised prices are incredibly difficult to compete with. They are a huge threat to us."

"We then try our best to match the price in the system and, if we are unable to do so, we send the quote through to the airline that has offered the cheaper fare and ask them if they can help us to match it."

He said Emirates had a policy that offered a number of price match fares per month. "If the monthly allocation of price matches has already been used up the client will then book their airfare directly through Discovery," said Zain.

Ramesh Jeenaarain, md of World Leisure Holidays, confirmed that it had been working with Discovery's travel programme for about eight years. However, he

insisted that neither WLH nor Discovery provided any discounted pricing to the passenger. "Discovery offers their members a cash-back reward for qualifying spend on holidays and other partner benefits ... World Leisure Holidays does not have the tools to calculate the cash back that the Discovery client is entitled to on their purchase."

Ramesh said WLH did not cut agents out of reward programme transactions, confirming that it offered agents commission for these bookings. "In my opinion the travel agent should be able to close the sale far more easily due to the client's Discovery allegiance and also gain the client for future business, including other destinations or hotels not covered by the Discovery loyalty programme."

Thaybz Khan, contemporary brand manager of Cruises International, and **Kelly Jackson**, gm of Contiki, both said they offered rate parity in the market. "Discovery subsidises additional discounts and we can't dictate how agents use their commission to win business," said Kelly.

Partner airlines and reward programmes, however, remained tight-lipped

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Take the train!

Kulula holidays is offering a New York to Washington DC train package that includes three nights' three-star accommodation in New York, two nights' three-star accommodation in Washington DC as well as a sightseeing bus ticket in New York and a moonlight tour in DC. Prices start from R13 140pps. Pictured here are **Chantelle Browne** (left), senior product manager, and **Megan D'Arcy**, product manager for USA, Europe, Cruising, Touring, of kulula holidays. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Letter to the Editor



Virgin responds to TNW report

THE headline in your previous issue on Virgin removing ticketing authority from agents who have not completed a transaction in the last six calendar months, has inappropriate shock value. If you don't read the article, it portrays Virgin Atlantic in a very negative way and it is not indicative of the strong relationship that we have built

with our travel agent partners. The process is common practice by airlines and affects a very small portion of agents, for instance businesses that may have closed down but did not communicate it with the airline. In this specific instance, only seven dormant regional agents are impacted, five of which no longer exist.

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Reward programmes

From page 1
about how discounts were calculated and funded.

Lindsay Hartmann, senior reputation manager of Vitality said: "We cannot disclose

details specific to our business model related to benefits and reward partners." Airlines said their policy was not to comment about partnerships and deals. ■

Wendy Wu Tours ASATA

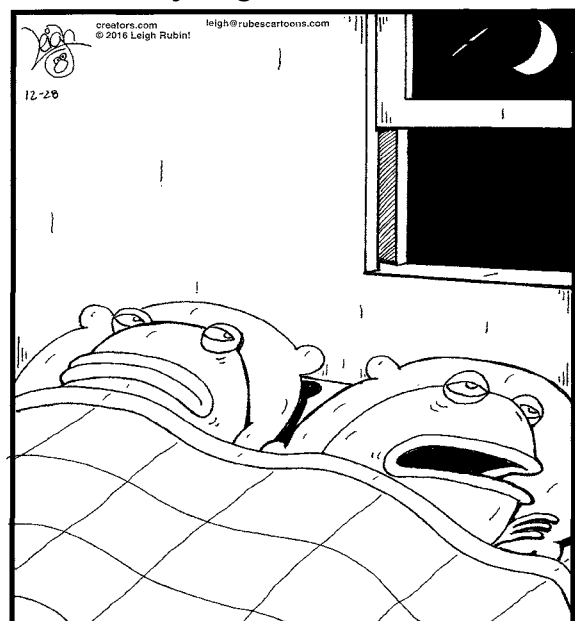
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Long-haul LCCs could become common in South Africa

DAVE MARSH

A SECOND European LCC, Air France's Joon, has announced that it will launch long-haul flights into Africa. The first was Lufthansa's Eurowings.

Legacy carriers that saw their regional business decimated by low-cost carriers like Europe's easyJet and Ryanair are facing up to the LCC threat to their long-haul routes.

The most notable long-haul success story has been Norwegian Air, which is one of the world's fastest growing airlines and has just been given rights by the US government to start

transatlantic flights out of the UK. Using fuel-efficient aircraft and with a culture of tight cost controls, its share price jumped almost 7% on the news.

BA's parent, IAG, has started Level out of Spain in its bid to contest the LCC long-haul market starting with North and South America.

In August, Eurowings announced that it would launch flights from Cologne to Cape Town on November 5. Then, last week, Joon announced that it would launch flights from Paris to Seychelles in summer 2018.

A spokesperson for Eurowings told *TNW* that

while the carrier might be the first LCC to launch these flights, they were sure others would follow. They said the popularity of Cape Town in particular was likely to drive more European LCCs to launch flights to SA.

The spokesperson went on to explain that, like LCC travellers in Europe, those in SA are well educated as to the offerings of LCCs and have an expectation of high quality, service and experience despite the low cost.

For this reason, the factor of excellent value will become increasingly important for LCCs that launch long-haul flights into Africa. ■

Tighter visa rules for US

TRAVEL agents in South Africa have reported that it has become increasingly difficult to obtain US visas for their clients, particularly young clients.

Angela Roberts, owner of Four Seasons Travel, said her client had applied for his visa with a return air ticket, proof of employment stating that he would return to South Africa and resume his job, valid bookings and itinerary. However, his visa application was immediately denied and he was told not

to reapply within the first 90 days.

Recently the US announced that it would further tighten its visa rules.

US Secretary of State, **Rex Tillerson**, also advised embassies around the world that visitors who required a visa must follow through on their stated plans for at least three months. If during the first three months after applying for visas, travellers did something that they failed to mention in their visa interview – such as get

a job, go to school or marry an American citizen – it would be presumed that they had deliberately lied.

The consequences would be that it would become difficult for them to renew a visa or get a new one. And if the visitors remained in the US, they would be eligible for deportation. If any of these things happened after the initial three months, this would still be problematic, but wouldn't be considered 'wilful misrepresentation'. ■

Jittery clients disrupt booking trends

SARAH ROBERTSON

WARINESS arising from political and economic instability in the country has resulted in a general shift toward later booking patterns, operators report.

Moreover, South Africans are losing out on early-bird discounts to international travellers who book well in advance

Ramesh Jeenarain, md of World Leisure Holidays, says the company has noticed a change in booking patterns this year due to political and economic uncertainties in South Africa. December is an important travel month for the operator, which generates a third of its total sales for the period. "Last year we saw a lot of uptake for December bookings more than six months out, while this year the spread has been more even...

we are seeing a high demand for Mauritian five-star family resorts such as Sugar Beach and Long Beach."

Travellers are also booking over the shoulder season to realise savings. Says **Flora Fubbs**, gm markets and operations of The Holiday Factory: "It is not the peak season dates between Christmas and New Year that sell out first but the early December and January dates, as the package prices are so much more affordable and our school holidays are long enough to allow for some flexibility when it comes to travel dates."

John Ridler, pr and media manager of Thompsons Holidays, says while South Africans are generally fairly resilient travellers, the recent large-scale attacks in Europe have certainly shocked the travelling population, although

no specific cancellations were received due to terror attacks. Turkey, however, has now started to recover as a destination. The increase in security coupled with excellent prices has resulted in a slow increase in demand recently.

The Indian Ocean islands remain the most popular region for December holiday-makers. According to a poll on *eTNW* this month, over 40% of agents reported that the islands were most frequently requested by clients, followed in popularity by Asia, local holidays and then European trips.

Terry Munro, md of Beachcomber Tours, says forward bookings for the period are currently level with last year but that they are expecting further sales over the months to come, resulting in another bumper December. ■

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Réunion sees surge in SA travellers

CANDICE MAY

RÉUNION Island hosted 145% more travellers from South Africa in the first half of this year than it did in the same period last year.

The island hosted 2 463 SA travellers in the first half of 2017 compared with 1 005 in the first half of 2016. **Hélène Bezuidenhout** of Atout France says this can be attributed to growing demand and increased efforts in the market. "We are confident this will increase further when we

take into account the busy periods in the latter part of the year," she says.

Hélène says Réunion is becoming a strong contender as a sought-after holiday destination for South Africans as there are no visa requirements for SA passport holders and there are three flights a week from Johannesburg with a flying time of just under four hours. "Réunion offers the ultimate experience, whether clients are travelling for business or pleasure. It is diverse, from people to scenery to activities." ■



A new wing, exclusively for adult guests, opens at Victoria Beachcomber Resort & Spa on December 1. The Victoria for Two offers 40 spacious rooms, including 17 Swim-Up rooms (step directly from room to water) situated alongside a large swimming pool. The resort offers an alternative to guests travelling without children. Guests will still have full access to all other resort facilities. Pictured here is one of the Swim-Up rooms. Photo: Beachcomber

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Thompsons' online booking system gains traction

SARAH ROBERTSON

THOMPSONS Holidays introduced a new online booking system called Easiclick earlier this year.

The B2B system allows agents to quote, package, sell and pay online for any of the operator's South African product, with plans to expand by adding its Indian Ocean island product to the system.

EasiClick consultant, **Orisha Nagan**, said about 800 agents had registered on the online system and that online sales were growing exponentially as agents became more comfortable with the processes.

"We initially struggled with uptake as agents like to work with people but sales are now growing strongly.

"Agents are able to

book flights, hotels, car hire, sightseeing and transfers on the system and to email the quotes to themselves. They are then able to book and eventually process payment online themselves. The system is available 24/7 allowing agents to bypass the necessity of calling in during office hours for quotes," said Orisha. ■

Saqa to drive much-needed skills development

CANDICE MAY

ASATA'S roll-out of SA Qualifications Authority (Saqa) Professional Designations has been welcomed by industry decision-makers, who expect it to make a fundamental difference to the SA travel agent industry by upskilling agents of all ages, thus making them more marketable.

Asata says the roll-out of designations is one of the most significant opportunities the industry has seen in the past year. "The process has taken almost five years, but the reward is the

overwhelmingly positive response we have had from agents and TMCs who recognise the importance of professional designations for the sector," says programme manager, **Jacqui McKnight**.

Marco Tomasicchio, director of XL International Tours, says the designations will fill the gaps in the currently loosely designated industry.

Rachael Penaluna, business manager of Sure Maritime Travel, highlights the need for direction in the industry. "We need direction, as managers, agents

and indeed the public. If we do not regulate ourselves, who will? I certainly do not want our industry to be regulated by the government!"

Andrew Stark, md for MEA of Flight Centre Travel Group, says upskilling will help agents stay relevant to clients, who are growing increasingly knowledgeable about travel through online searches. "A strong person-to-person ethos coupled with expert knowledge is difficult to beat online and will therefore give clients a real sense of trust when parting with their hard-earned money." ■

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Sha'p Sha'p!

Local is lekker! City Lodge Hotels has 54 hotels across all SA provinces. Here is the latest news in domestic tourism.

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Shuttle flights to northern KNP

FEDERAL Airlines (Fedair) now offers direct flights from Johannesburg to Pafuri, in the north of the Kruger National Park, from October 2, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

In partnership with The Outpost and Pel's Post Lodges, the flights will leave from the Fedair private lounge at OR Tambo and the Pafuri airstrip.

Flights will depart Johannesburg at 12h30 and arrive at Pafuri at 14h00. The return flight departs Pafuri at 14h15 and arrives in Johannesburg at 15h45.

The schedule allows for connections

with Fedair's existing route network – namely the Lowveld and Madikwe shuttle flights via Johannesburg – and also facilitates inbound international arrivals, as well as morning flights from Cape Town.

Flights are open for bookings, which can be made through The Outpost or Federal Airlines reservations offices. The fare is R5 500 per person, per way on a return flight basis and R5 900 per person, per way on a one-way basis. Children receive a 25% discount on the headline fare.

The Healing Safari comes to SA

THE Healing Safari is now available in South Africa. Healing Safaris combine a traditional animal safari with a health and wellness retreat where travellers take part in yoga and meditation sessions.

The original Healing Safari started in Tanzania, led by **Dr Tanya Pergola**, the award-winning author of *Time is Cows: Timeless Wisdom of the Maasai*, and **Lekoko Ole Sululu**, a Maasai elder from Ngorongoro. The Tanzanian tour

starts at an eco-lodge overlooking Mt Kilimanjaro before flying into the Serengeti to witness the great migration.

Dr Pergola will also lead the new South African Healing Safari. It will start in Cape Town, travel through the KwaZulu Natal Midlands and end in &Beyond Phinda Forest Lodge in Phinda Private Game Reserve in KwaZulu Natal. The next Healing Safari in South Africa is scheduled from May 12-21, 2018.

Sabi Sand lodge completes upgrades

SAVANNA Lodge in the Sabi Sand Reserve in Limpopo has reopened after a six-week closure for renovations and refurbishments.

All suites have newly designed showers and feature their own outdoor gardens.

The Savanna and the Executive suite decks have all been replaced and the private plunge pools have been revamped. All seven tented suites now have modernised canvas roofs lined with drapes.

The four luxury suites now feature an enlarged area with a wooden deck and private plunge pool. The patio leads into the refurbished suite through a double glass sliding door. New baths are the central feature in the bathrooms, and both indoor and outdoor showers have been renovated.

The main lodge refurbishments include soft neutral shades and leather and brass feature lighting that extends to the safari shop.



Vineyards in Stellenbosch.

#lovingStellenbosch campaign launches

STELLENBOSCH is one of South Africa's premier tourist destinations and is also one of the world's top food and wine destinations, known for its high-quality and global award-winning wines and cuisine. Stellenbosch 360, the official tourism organisation for the area, launched the #lovingStellenbosch Tourism Campaign last month.

The strategy, devised by Stellenbosch 360 with the

assistance of Hatch Communication and Skript advertising agencies, has four videos depicting the various marketing pillars as the foundation to expose the 'magic' of what the town has to offer global visitors. Social media platforms – including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube – as well as an extensive PR and promotional strategy, will be utilised during the next ten months.

Drakensberg resort reveals renovations

BUSHMANS Nek Berg and Trout Resort in the Drakensberg has undergone a R4,6 million revamp. The work is part of managing agent, First Group's large-scale four-year refurbishment programme for eight properties, with a total investment of R179 million.

Extra-length king-size beds have been added to all the rooms, and the self-catering rooms now have

fireplaces and wall panel heaters. The outdoor braai areas now have roofing to ensure use throughout the year.

Activities include trout fishing, horse riding, archery, paintball and picnics. La Vita wellness spa offers treatments for the whole family and there is a breakfast, lunch and dinner menu at the Bushpot restaurant. ■

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Travel industry mums lose out on maternity benefits

SARAH ROBERTSON

WHILE the travel industry has long been female dominated in terms of staff numbers, many travel companies still only offer the minimum maternity benefits as required by law.

A recent snap survey on eTNW, revealed that, of 69 travel industry respondents, 56% received

no pay at all during their maternity leave; 13% of respondents reported that they received 25% of their salaries as maternity pay; 16% said they received 50% of their salary, 7% received 75% of their salary and only 7% received 100% of their salary. These conditions contrast with more generous maternity policies offered in industries such as banking

and insurance, who assist their female staff with fully paid maternity leave even though these industries are male dominated in terms of staff numbers.

According to the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, pregnant workers are entitled to at least four consecutive months of maternity leave, although maternity leave is not required to be paid.

South African law also

stipulates additional rights for breast-feeding mothers who are legally entitled to two 30-minute breaks per day to breastfeed or express milk, in addition to their usual lunch and tea breaks. Although not required by law, many companies go out of their way to provide a private room for staff to hygienically express milk during these breaks.

However, according to

the eTNW survey, 53% of respondents advised that their companies did not allow new mothers daily breastfeeding breaks, a violation of basic conditions of employment. Additionally 84% of polled respondents advised that the travel companies that they worked for did not provide private facilities for their staff to express milk, even if the legally required breaks were allowed. ■

New report to measure travel industry

THE Association of Southern African Travel Agents (Asata) has commissioned Grant Thornton to create an annual *South African Travel Market Index Report* to determine the state and size of South Africa's travel sector.

"The exact state and size of the travel industry in South Africa is currently unknown, and there's no one source that pulls all trade data together to form an accurate picture of the market," explains **Otto de Vries**, Asata ceo.

"We feel that data and market trend analysis are integral parts of strategic management. A report of this nature would provide a baseline against which the industry would be

able to measure growth and track the market's changes over time.

"The Index will also monitor important statistics such as employment numbers, B-BBEE and market concentration, and draw correlations between industry-specific trends and the overall economic climate."

Among other insights, the *SA Travel Market Index Report* will include the number of travellers by route, sector and value, passenger arrivals and departures, B-BBEE statistics and employment statistics.

The Index will collate and examine a range of data sources from TMCs and travel agencies and third-party stakeholders such as GDSs, Iata and Acса. ■



Thompsons highlights Disney

Thompsons Holidays hosted workshops with agents in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg in September, highlighting its Disney destinations portfolio. Pictured here are (from left) **Henno Olivier**, marketing executive, Thompsons Holidays; **Kay Ellison**, product and contracting executive for Europe, UK, Americas and Cruising, Thompsons Holidays; and **Brigid McDonnell**, head of sales International Markets, Disney Destinations International. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Discover St Helena island



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LCCs & Budget Travel

In our volatile economy travellers are pressuring travel agents for additional value. Chana Boucher reviews this trend.

How to get more nice for less price

NOT everybody can afford a five-star facility. However, paying less never means compromising service levels or product offering," says **Greg Hoffman**, marketing manager of Birchwood Hotel & OR Tambo Conference Centre. He believes budget-conscious travellers are and will continue to be "exceptionally important to travel agents, especially due to the unpredictable economy".

As more and more people tighten their budgets, there are ways and means of securing a better deal.

1. Longer lead times

According to Greg, lead times are an important factor. "The earlier one can be aware of a requirement, the easier it is to ensure the best possible accommodation is received for the need. It is not always possible, but helps dramatically if it can be pulled off. When there is a lot to offer on the property itself, without having to outsource suppliers or products, pricing is positively affected."

FlySafair sales distribution



Samantha Winchester

manager **Samantha Winchester**, adds: "There are cheap seats on every flight, but the early bird always gets the worm. Cheap seats for the December holidays start selling out as early as May."

2. Take advantage of deals

Instead of itemising each individual component required, Greg says agents should look for a package that incorporates all the client's requests as part of the deal. Mango HOD sales, **Koos Mhlongo**, says

agents should always check what deals are in place between the client and their airline and apply them, as they can amount to cost savings. Also, he reminds agents to check for hidden or undisclosed costs before taking a quote to the client.

Avoca Travels, says director, **Ebrahim Vadachia**, has redefined budget packages designed to offer the best quality at the lowest price. "We use our decades of experience and network of partners to capitalise on various market scenarios, for example, a new hotel wanting to enter into the market aggressively and offering special introductory deals to build their brand." Another instance could be hotels offering discounts in low season.

3. Ditch the frills

Signature Lux Hotels keeps its rates attractive by excluding money wasters, says spokesperson, **Cleo Johnson**. For example, she asks whether it is necessary to book someone on a bed and breakfast basis if they leave the hotel at 06h00. Do they really need the



Greg Hoffman

five-star frills if they are only spending six hours in the room, sleeping? "We focus on giving guests what they require and no extras. This allows for budget travel to still be classy and corporate-worthy," she says.

Excluding elements such as swimming pools, gyms and spas down to slippers and gowns, Signature Lux offers only the necessities, including free coffee, free high-speed uncapped WiFi, free parking and prime locations. "The new generation of travellers tend to prefer the budget accommodation options, leaving more money in the pocket. Studies have shown that they'd rather spend their money on experiences. Travellers do not travel to spend their days in the hotel, it is merely a place to lay your head down," Cleo says.

Ebrahim, however, cautions against 'short changing' clients. "[Don't] put them in a dump, albeit in a good location, or in a fairly good hotel that's in a dodgy, distant or non-tourist area." He adds that budget travellers want the best for way less than the

going rates. "We normally give them a basic no frills land arrangement package consisting of transfers, accommodation with breakfast and optional tours and airfares. Intercity travel options at the selected destinations are either coach, train, regular ferry or low-cost carriers. This way, clients are free to choose what best suits them."

4. Flexibility

Samantha says one of the ways to secure a well-priced flight is to be flexible on travel times and dates. "Peak periods, like holidays or commuter flights, tend to sell out fast, but there's often a great deal to be had during the week." She says travelling light also helps. "With FlySafair, you can save by opting not to take checked-in luggage, so if you can get away with just your hand luggage, you're bound to save."

Robyn Christie, country manager SA for Travelport, says it is really important that agents offer multiple options and alternative dates where availability and pricing are better. "In such a price-sensitive market, customers are often willing to be flexible with their travel dates if it means a better rate."

5. Turn to technology

Ebrahim encourages agents to couple their industry experience and product knowledge with cutting-edge technology. "Use metasearch engines that return comparative pricing across your selected range of aggregators and service providers."

Says Robyn: "By recommending the right hotel and car rental,

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IATA

TNW83745D

The South African market is distinctly different from its European counterparts when it comes to low-cost carriers, says Traveport South Africa country manager, **Robyn Christie**.

Local LCC landscape has its differences

The low-cost carrier (LCC) landscape in South Africa has developed with its specific variances, and does not resemble the models we find in other regions of the world. At present, it's confined to the domestic market, where it has made enormous impact over the last 25 years or so.

However, on the international travel scene, the high cost of fuel, taxes and labour are not variables for airlines, and with South Africa falling largely into the long-haul category of

destinations, these factors have, to date, worked against international LCCs, despite a number of them announcing their low-cost intentions.

Domestically, we've seen many low-cost start-ups over the years, some of them collapsing in major failures. South African travellers, however, are a resilient lot, and more recently we seem to have settled into a relatively stable environment, with most domestic LCCs flying at capacity.

Interestingly, tickets sold by LCCs are not consistently low-cost. In Europe, customers can be confident that LCCs offer cut-price fares year-round. In South Africa with its relatively small market, LCCs remain heavily influenced by yield and demand; when there's a major sporting event, for example, fares are not that low.

With the rise of LCCs airlines are having to look for more flexibility to grow and to hit challenging revenue targets.

The dilemma for the traditional airlines, particularly in their short-haul and domestic networks, is how to compete with low-cost rivals, and on long-haul, how to compete with traditional carriers. The answer – by differentiating on a product basis rather than purely on price.

Price, of course, is a driver. But for business travellers, efficiency is just as important a consideration. While leisure travellers focus on the cost of the airfare, for corporates

the issue is the cost of travel – combining airfare with accommodation, car and time out of the office.

As a result, many business executives want to confine domestic trips to one day. They need to maximise time and fly at peak times, incurring higher fares. They might favour traditional carriers, rather than depend on an LCC with fewer daily frequencies and a smaller fleet, avoiding costly inconveniences in the event of rescheduled flights.

Online: Trade together with GDSs can compete

There's a fundamental perception among budget travellers that booking online is less expensive, and more convenient than using a travel consultant.

This is not always true. With the flight booking

process evolving beyond just a basic ticket to include ancillary services and involve many more touch points, the traditional GDS concept has also evolved. Travel consultants have the benefit of GDSs such as Traveport, which offer incredible searching tools to locate the most competitive prices, workflow automation, customer servicing, agency robotics, customer booking changes, integrated itineraries as well as the provision of data for customer reports and invoicing, among other services.

Our Best Buy Plus (BBP), for example, will continue searching for cheapest fares on un-ticketed PNRs even after flights have been confirmed. Predefined criteria are used as a set of rules that BBP uses to determine whether a saving can be made. Consultants can customise fare search options to include

waitlisted classes and more. Our Fare Shop facility includes millions of fares and hundreds of thousands of itinerary options in the search.

Digital travellers searching online expect simplicity and a frictionless experience but do not always have the experience to tick the right boxes. For example, they may reject paying a slightly higher fare that protects their options to change bookings, not anticipating the high penalties involved in altering flights. A travel consultant's service fee is often the lesser evil.

Travel consultants are nine times more likely to book airline ancillaries when using our merchandising tool and if both LCC and traditional carriers are combined in the booking, will ensure the information is carried through to all airlines. Our Traveport Smartpoint product pulls through all ancillary product information and facilitates the booking of network airlines alongside LCCs.

Budget travellers using travel consultants have, through Traveport, access to rich hospitality content that includes budget hotels and B&Bs. Through our powerful metasearch abilities, consultants can source a collection of budget properties from multiple sites at a glance, all mapped to offer convenient alternatives and with the ability to lodge special requests. If budget travellers are utilising an off-peak flight at an inopportune time, the consultant can check whether the property selected will be open to receive them.

As long as budget travellers focus on prices rather than service, travel consultants will find themselves coming up against consumer resistance. Consumer trust needs to be built; industry members need to promote themselves as best they can, and leverage their membership of professional associations such as Asata.

Some might argue that younger generations will trust an online peer review faster than a travel consultant's advice. The influential TripAdvisor is now integrated into Traveport's platforms, and at a click, travel consultants can access a myriad of peer reviews without having to enter the TripAdvisor site.

As the general shift in traveller sentiment toward self-service continues, we see a growing desire by travellers to self-service their own trips. Traveport is answering these needs through innovation in mobile and digital travel technology.

The itinerary app, developed by Traveport with Trip Assist technology for consumer use on mobile applications, is cutting-edge. Consortiums can brand the app and make it available to travellers, enabling them to hold everything pertaining to their booking on a smartphone. XL Travel, to name an example, offers the app as XLGO. ■



TNW7833

IndiGo's (6E) branded fares and ancillaries can be booked today with Traveport Smartpoint. Excess baggage, meals, seat selection, lounge access, priority check-in and fast forward service can be booked without having to visit multiple websites or leaving your workflow. Shop IndiGo content and apply credit card payment to create bookings without having to request any login credentials from IndiGo. Access and understand the most relevant travel content and offer your customers the best choices.

TNW8381SD

From page 8 agents can add value to customers and revenue for the travel agency." She says a challenge for agents is rapidly finding suitable and available options at an acceptable price.

"Any offering that does not address all these is unlikely to convert to a booking, so agents need to quickly search and then book all the extras, such as bags and meals, for both traditional and low-cost flights, without the tedium of checking details from multiple websites."

Travelport offers the tools to instantly compare fares and view images in a single window, suggesting options that clients may not have previously considered. These tools empower agents to respond to travellers' queries at the initial time of asking, and they assist travel bookers in making decisions based on information beyond rate and availability alone.

Agentivity, says ceo, **Riaan van Schoor**, can assist agents in saving their clients' money. The most obvious benefit is time savings. Agents can research fares in depth, use

the data gathered by Agentivity to understand their clients better, present options to them they know will work without wasting the client's time." Further, he says agents should avoid booking for quotes as it takes inventory out of the system, thereby driving prices up.



Themba Mthombeni

6. Cultivate cost-saving

"Make client savings part of the culture of your TMC by measuring and rewarding it," says **Themba Mthombeni**, ceo of Duma Travel. He says cost savings and customer service are always top of mind for all bookings. "Our consultants get rewarded for, among other things, showing great savings reports for their customers. We regard cost savings as the key reason for our existence as the TMC." He adds that TMCs have to consistently show value-add through savings they can garner for their clients. "The

corporate travel game is shifting toward providing actionable travel information to the client, which can be used to make proactive cost-saving decisions, and changing travel behaviour," he says.

This is echoed by Ebrahim: "We believe cost saving, especially in these challenging times, is a sign of respect for our valued clients and their hard-earned money."

"Today's travellers have very high expectations and are generally looking for much more now than a simple point-to-point travel booking," says Robyn. "No matter where they're jetting to, they still value the expert opinions of a travel professional. With booking choice no longer about price alone, the successful agent is the one who knows how to convert that knowledge into bookings that offer the most value for money."



Travel trade vital to LCCs

AGENTS can secure lower prices for their clients by booking low-cost carriers.

This has not always been a popular move, particularly for corporate clients. But that is all changing, according to many in the travel industry.

"At inception, Mango's mandate was to make flying affordable for the 'previously unflown' and thus our primary target was the end user," says Mango's **Koos Mhlongo**. Later, this was extended to the "budget corporate" – SMMEs with a minimum travel spend for self-booking or through their own travel administrator.

Over the years, Koos says this mandate has been extended to all possible distribution channels, with the travel trade being the most strategic.

"Mango has structured deals with the travel trade that were initially available online. These deals are for the benefit of the mutual corporate client. In a bid to make our product easier and simpler to sell, we have extended our reach to the GDS. This ensures seamless transactions for the travel trade, from reservation, book and hold, various payment methods, to ticketing," he explains.

Best days for a flight deal

FlySafair's **Samantha Winchester** says the best deals are usually found midweek.

"Tuesdays and Wednesdays are, on average, the cheapest days to fly. Mondays

and Saturdays are not bad. The most expensive flights are those on Fridays and Sundays."

Find it difficult to locate your clients?

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agentivity

Catering for corporates

FlySafair's **Samantha Winchester** says there has been "massive interest" from corporates. "Feedback has been that our fares fall within their budgets and our on-time performance is making us a very attractive option."

She says FlySafair's different fare types work for corporate travellers. The lite fare works for those who are in and out the same day and luggage-free. For longer trips where changes may occur, the standard fare, which includes a checked bag, priority boarding and two free penalty changes to the date, time and route, is popular.

Luane Lavery, brand communication manager for kulula.com, says there has been a "massive increase" in business travel on kulula as customers are becoming more price sensitive due to the economic climate.

She says the airline caters for business customers with elements such as flexible branded ticket fares and add-ons like best fares of the day on kulula.com and British Airways, free flight changes (only the difference in fare and taxes apply) and no booking fees.

Other features include competitive car-hire rates with Europcar and hotel rates with the City Lodge Hotel Group; invoicing and reporting; account management and access to the Corporate Reservations team.

"We also offer pre-paid seating so that business travellers can, for instance, secure their seat in the front of the plane [so that they can disembark] as quickly as possible to make that early morning meeting," adds Luane.


To page 12



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Package excludes:


- Beverages and meals not specified
- Travel insurance
- All items of a personal nature

Booking conditions:

- Valid for set departures ex Jo'burg

Valid for travel: 9 - 16 Dec '17

Solana Beach from **R17 550 pps**

4 star   

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- All pre-payable airport taxes and fuel levies
- Return airport to resort transfers
- 7 nights* accommodation in a Superior Classic Room
- Daily breakfast and dinner

Package excludes:

- Beverages and meals not specified
- Travel insurance
- All items of a personal nature

Booking conditions:

- Valid for set departures ex Jo'burg

Valid for travel: 9 - 16 Dec '17

Ravenala Attitude from **R20 560 pps**

4 star   

- Return flights from Jo'burg to Mauritius
- All pre-payable airport taxes and fuel levies
- Return airport to resort transfers
- 7 nights* accommodation in a Couple Suite
- Daily breakfast and dinner

Package excludes:

- Beverages and meals not specified
- Travel insurance
- All items of a personal nature

Booking conditions:

- Valid for set departures ex Jo'burg

Valid for travel: 9 - 16 Dec '17

Le Meridien Ile Maurice from **R30 330 pps**

4 star   

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- All pre-payable airport taxes and fuel levies
- Return airport to resort transfers
- 7 nights* accommodation in a Deluxe Room
- Daily breakfast and dinner

Package excludes:

- Beverages and meals not specified
- Travel insurance
- All items of a personal nature

Booking conditions:

- Valid for set departures ex Jo'burg

Valid for travel: 23 - 30 Dec '17

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All prices of packages are correct at the time of printing.

Legal stuff Guideline prices are from a starting price, per adult sharing and are subject to currency fluctuations & availability based on the exact departure. Peak season surcharges, block-out periods and minimum stay conditions may apply. Booking, change and cancellation conditions apply. Travel insurance is not included in the advertised price but is strongly recommended. Prices are correct at the time of publishing. Standard kulula.com legal stuff apply. E&OE (Errors & Omissions Expected).

kulula
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LCCs & Budget Travel

From page 10

LCCs are evolving

Samantha says travel agents are hugely important in selling the airline.

"We actively work together with the travel trade in educating them on our product offerings and gaining their support."

Robyn Christie of Travelport, says lata is forecasting passenger demand to double over the next 20 years, which will change passenger behaviour.

"Budget travel no longer has the stigma of a few years ago and low-cost carriers are expanding fast to evolve into hybrid LCCs to win over new customers, including the business traveller.

"Making up around 25% of the industry today, LCC flights are becoming more and more popular, so it's essential agents include them in all traveller recommendations," she says.

Robyn adds that Travelport has connected and fully integrated more than 120 LCCs into its platform.



"LCCs have reached their distribution ability and if they want to increase any further they'll have to adopt more traditional distribution chains."

Riaan van Schoor

"With Travelport Smartpoint, network airlines and low-cost carrier options are returned side-by-side within the search results, so agents can always offer the best choices,

advice and value."

Further, Robyn explains that Travelport makes it possible for agents to see an airline's full range of fare families to enable upsells and the sale of ancillary products.

"That's seats, bags, WiFi on board, fast-track security, whatever the airline wants.

"Some 230 of the 400 airlines we have are presently implemented with this capability, driving better revenue per seat for our airline customers," she says.

Duma Travel ceo, **Themba Mthombeni**, says the inflight facilities of budget and traditional carriers are very comparable.

"It is catering that can be an issue for corporates in particular, but this can be avoided by striking corporate deals with LCCs," he says.

According to Themba, attitudes toward using low-cost carriers, particularly for corporate travel, are becoming more positive in the challenging economic climate. But, he says, the decision to utilise them has to be taken at the top level, otherwise there

can be resistance.

Themba warns of the potential pitfalls with budget tickets, namely that they are usually non-refundable and non-changeable.

"It is critical to explain the terms and conditions for budget travel arrangements to avoid a scenario where the corporate has to pay penalties for changing the booking. More for less travel arrangements work well for clients who are disciplined or do not change once arrangements are fixed," adds Themba.

Riaan van Schoor of Agentivity, says these days the route plays the most important role in determining the choice of carrier.

He says there has not been a major increase in LCC bookings.

"It's sort of settled and I personally don't think it will increase as drastically as in the beginning.

"LCCs have reached their distribution ability and if they want to increase any further they'll have to adopt more traditional distribution chains."



Greece is an affordable option. Photo: Photo Express

Stretching the rands

FOR leisure clients looking to go where their rands will stretch a little further, suggest one of the following hot, yet affordable destinations:

- Zanzibar
- Greece
- Thailand
- India
- Mauritius
- Victoria Falls
- Ireland
- Vietnam
- Croatia
- KwaZulu Natal

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The Naked Agent

Keep your word

SCENARIO: A family of four is looking to get away on a tight budget of around R20 000. With no specific

destination in mind and flexibility on dates, the objective is to get the best possible holiday.

Flight Centre, Eden on the Bay

WINNER

I was greeted immediately and discussed my options with **Amelia Shand**. She asked whether I was hoping to go overseas or travel locally. I said an international trip would be first prize. She told me it might be difficult as my budget was small but that she had recently seen some great specials for Bali and would look into it for me. She said Thailand was also an affordable option and Mauritius when there were good specials. She showed me a special for Bali and said it might be in my price bracket and promised to



Amelia Shand

send me a few options by the next morning, but the choice may have to be local. I left the store feeling hopeful that there was a chance of finding a really good deal on an international trip, which would prove that it is worth going to a travel agent rather than booking online to get the best deal. Amelia called the next day to say she had found a Zanzibar package that was slightly outside my budget and that she would continue to look for other options.



Sure Travelways, Bayside Mall

The agent greeted me immediately. I told her my budget and she said she had to be honest, it was very small and that local travel would be the only way to go. She suggested self-driving to Port Elizabeth, which I'm not sure would be the best option for a family with a one-year-old baby. She mentioned Durban as an alternative but pushed PE as safe with warm sea water for the

kids. She looked up flights and accommodation for PE while I sat there, which was a nice way to see what my budget could get but she didn't suggest the next step. I wasn't sure if she was just offering advice for me to go and book my own holiday or if she was interested in doing it for me. I asked if she could send me the information and perhaps some other options and she said she would.

I thought she had forgotten about me as days went by without any correspondence. About a week later, she sent me two packages for PE only, which I thought were quite pricey for a local holiday, considering that I had asked for budget options. I also hoped that she would look at other destinations as I had asked her to do this.



The Travel Arena, V&A Waterfront

I felt a little sheepish walking into his agency due to its location. I imagined that most of their clientele would be international tourists with strong currencies to spend and my request for a budget holiday wouldn't be taken seriously. I was pleasantly surprised when I got a warm greeting from this consultant. She spoke about some of the destinations that might fall within my budget,

related to my needs for a family holiday and gave great advice on the positives of travelling locally when on a tight budget. KZN was her destination of choice but she said she would look for international options as well as cruises. She also asked about passports and the ages of my children. She promised to send me options via email. After a few days I had heard nothing so followed up with an

email. She responded, saying she was unable to reach me on the phone and wanted to speak to me about what she had found. I asked her to call me the next morning to discuss and she said she would but I have yet to hear anything further. This was disappointing as she seemed genuinely interested in assisting me.



Take note!

The purpose of the Naked Agent 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.

96 New Rooms Launching Soon

John Smith @ModernBusinessTraveler
The new ValuStay @ Birchwood exceeded my expectations. Not my budget.
4 October 2017

ValuStay @ Birchwood offers simplicity, comfort and excellent value for money. An affordable, comfortable offering for budget and group travellers. While all ValuStay guests benefit from a more affordable rate, they still have access to our complimentary airport shuttle service, free Wi-Fi, a choice of four on-site restaurants, the Mangwanani Boutique Spa, gym, splash pool and squash courts.

- 96 Upgraded Rooms
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For bookings or more information, please contact us on 011 897 0000 or visit www.birchwoodhotel.co.za

TNW8377SD



SLOW XS lounge at Lanseria International Airport.

Lounge around with kulula

KULULA.COM customers as well as qualifying FNB, RMB and Comair Limited VIP guests now have access to the newly opened SLOW XS lounge at Lanseria International Airport.

Kulula's **Luane Lavery** says: "The lounge is aligned to the company's broader strategy to provide our customers, business travellers and their families with the exclusive

opportunity to experience one of the greatest aspects of business travel: the tranquil respite of a luxury travel lounge with all the touchpoints a business customer would need."



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LCCs & Budget Travel

Silverbirch @ Birchwood

This year the Le Grande Centre at the Birchwood will be completely upgraded with the goal of incorporation into the Silverbirch@Birchwood product offering.

Following the upgrade, guests will enjoy superior conferencing packages, upmarket facilities and exclusive dining options.

Le Grande Centre has the capacity to hold groups of up to 400 people and incorporates bar and lounge facilities.

Silverbirch @ Birchwood recently won a Certificate of Excellence from TripAdvisor for consistent and constantly positive guest reviews.

FlySafair is on the up and up

FLYSAFAIR continues to grow in the South African market. The low-cost carrier recently announced that it would launch new routes between Durban's King Shaka International Airport and East London as well as between

Durban and Port Elizabeth. The first flights depart on November 27 and tickets are on sale.

The airline has also been ranked the world's most on-time airline for 2017 by OAG, with an annual on-time performance of 95,94%.

New fare search tech coming to Duma

THE Duma group recently joined the global travel company Uniglobe.

Currently, Duma is in the process of implementing Uniglobe's global fare search

programme.

Duma's **Themba Mthombeni** says this enables the TMC to book cheap flights in any travel jurisdiction in the world.

Book it!

Avoca Travels is offering special land-only deals to South America and Morocco.

- South America, from R6 997 excluding taxes, includes twin accommodation with breakfast, three nights in Rio de Janeiro, three nights in Iguazu and three nights in Buenos Aires, plus three tours. The special is valid from the end of October until mid-December.
- The Morocco package includes seven nights in hotels in Casablanca, Rabat, Fez and Marrakesh with breakfast, lunch and dinner, a dinner with Fantasia Show, return airport transfers, multilingual tour guide, entrance fees to monuments, portage and tips. Valid from November until mid-December, and priced from R8 597 excluding taxes. ■

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TNW8372SD

14 ■ Wednesday October 4 2017

QUICK READ FOR DECISION-MAKERS

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

Exploring Port Louis



Five agents were hosted in Mauritius recently on a Beachcomber educational. They viewed seven hotels and participated in a pedestrian rally before finishing with some retail therapy. The pedestrian rally saw them enlisting the help of locals to answer a questionnaire in a race to beat the other team. The aim was to share the historical significance of Mauritian tourist destinations to the agents through an interactive learning experience. Pictured (from left): **Melinda Scholtz**, Flight Centre Bloemfontein; **Naomi Govender**, Flight Centre Greenstone; **Nikki Briant**, Beachcomber Tours; **Shirani Gaymans**, Hashtag Holidays; and **Silvia Steinbruck**, Rennies Travel Windhoek.



Vladi Wessels, Beachcomber sales executive, hosted a breakfast for her travel counsellors on Spring Day to welcome the new season. Pictured (from left): **Alta Lotter**, **Petrone Schoeman**, **Vladi**, **Annelie Trollip**, and **Charlene Pieterse**.

Hello, spring!



Food for the soul

Club Travel, as part of its 30 Wishes campaign, joined forces with The Red Ribbon Foundation, to sponsor 250 meals for the foundation's weekly community nutrition drive, as well as the purchase of non-perishable items. The Red Ribbon Foundation provides support for individuals with HIV and their families and raises awareness for the challenges they face. This wish was made possible with the help of partners Avis and Budget. Pictured: **Tatum Vermaak**, marketing co-ordinator at Club Travel, and **Gerschen Thys**, marketing co-ordinator at Club Travel.

Appointments

■ Faircity Hotels has appointed **Francois Stremmelaar** gm of Kievits Kroon Country Estate, just outside of Pretoria. Francois has been in the industry for 22 years, with experience in project management, strategic planning, resource utilisation, revenue growth, sales and marketing, as well as cost management.

■ **Alia Bellamy** has been appointed marketing manager of Elewana Collection. She has over 15 years' experience in the industry, starting her career with Abercrombie & Kent and then moving into advertising, branding and marketing, working on brands such as Coca-Cola, Nestle, Barclays and Safaricom.

Pick of the week

brought to you by



Sales/Key Account Manager – Edenvale

Quick Software
Outgoing dynamic person required to look after existing and new clients. Minimum of 5 years' travel industry/QuickTrav experience. Able to travel occasionally. Email: vacancies@quicksoftware.co.za

Travel consultant – Dur

Flight Centre Travel Group
Sell travel experiences. From adventures to Thailand to city breaks in London. Provide outstanding customer service while managing every aspect of their trip. Email: jobs@fctg.co.za

Corporate consultant – Jnb

Flight Centre Travel Group
Provide a dedicated travel management service for your portfolio of clients. 2 years' experience as a travel consultant – senior level. Email: jobs@fctg.co.za

Senior Inbound FIT Consultant (Italian speaking) – Jnb North

Professional Career Services
Minimum 3 years' experience handling FIT bookings for inbound tour operator. Knowledge of Southern & East Africa. Email: jeancv@pcs-sa.co.za

Intermediate Consultant – Cpt CBD

Professional Career Services
Minimum 3 years' consulting in corporate and leisure travel. Domestic to international travel. On-call after-hours & weekends. Sabre. Quicktrav exp. Email: nonocv@pcs-sa.co.za

FIT Reservationist – Dur

Lee Botti & Associates
Solid inbound experience, outstanding South African tourism knowledge and a winning personality secures. Salary negotiable. Email: ericaks@leeibotti.co.za

Senior Corporate Consultant – Dur

Lee Botti & Associates
Umhlanga. 10 years' experience as a senior doing complex booking for VIP's. Stable agency, competitive salary and benefits. Email: ericaks@leeibotti.co.za

Bookkeeper – Jnb North

Equity Connections cc
Run full functions of bookkeeping including VAT returns, foreign currency revaluations, management accounts etc. Accpac essential plus 3 years' bookkeeping experience. Email: equitycon@mweb.co.za

Southern/South Africa Expert – Jnb

Equity Connections cc
Book local/inbound travellers into South/Southern Africa. Design, cost tailor-made itineraries. Must have in-depth Africa knowledge with 4 years' inbound experience. Email: equitycon@mweb.co.za

Top Junior Corporate Consultant – Cpt

Wendy's Travel Personnel
Galileo and working with corporate accounts essential to enjoy the benefits of working for this major retail agency! Email: wtp@icon.co.za

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Thompsons launches Sri Lanka packages

CANDICE MAY

THOMPSONS Holidays has launched packages to Sri Lanka for the first time.

Candice Perry, marketing, media relations and social media co-ordinator of Thompsons Holidays, says the tremendous growth that Thompsons Holidays has seen in travellers wanting to travel to Sri Lanka prompted

the move.

“The appeal for this fascinating country is due to its unspoiled beaches, rich history, incredible tea and warm welcome of the locals,” Candice says.

“We have something suitable for every budget and experience,” Candice says. Thompsons Holidays is also able to tailor-make packages to Sri Lanka. ■

Letter to the Editor

Virgin responds

From page 1

Also, being switched back on is a very simple process. Our sales team work closely with potential agents at risk and it's a very consultative process with both parties to reach an agreement. If there are any concerns we encourage agencies to speak to us.

Darrin Thomas

Manager Marketing and Communications South Africa

• Ed's note: TNW did ask VS for comment but as this letter explains, the story did not give full context. This resulted in the headline being unfair, for which we apologise. ■

Air Namibia hits the road



Air Namibia's annual roadshow will take place in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg on October 18, 19 and 20 respectively. Pictured here (from left) are Air Namibia's Nicolene Tjihitja, commercial reservations and ticketing supervisor, Johannesburg; Este McGalty, Aviareps GSA, key account manager for Air Namibia, and Marcelle Ellis, reservation and ticketing agent, Johannesburg, Air Namibia. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl.

SAX is collapsing says Scopa

SA EXPRESS has been unable to satisfy the Auditor-General that it can continue operating as a going concern, while the chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Scopa) says the airline is collapsing.

“South African Express is collapsing and we are trying to rescue it,” Scopa chairperson **Themba Godi**, said in a statement after he met with the airline's management and staff recently.

Its inability to satisfy the Auditor-General that it can continue as a going concern was the reason given by Public Enterprises Minister, **Lynne Brown**, for the failure of the

airline to table its annual financial statements for the 2016/17 financial year before the end-September deadline.

The Minister wrote to Speaker of the National Assembly, **Baleka Mbete**, explaining that the annual report and annual financial statements would be tabled as soon as the going concern status of the airline had been resolved and the audit had been concluded.

SA Express is losing an estimated US\$400 000 (R5,36m) monthly in lease rates for grounded aircraft that are not in use, because there is no money to pay suppliers for parts to service the aircraft, and is having to pay

to charter aircraft.

Scopa identified a number of challenges during the oversight visit, according to Themba.

“The culture of non-compliance with the Public Finance Management Act and Treasury Regulations was a very big concern,” he says.

“As Scopa, we are going to work closely and babysit this entity until everything is corrected as we believe that, to remedy the current undesirable situation, we need collective efforts from everyone involved in order for South Africans to be able to see SA Express as a national asset as opposed to its being a national liability,” Themba told TNW. ■

pulse poll

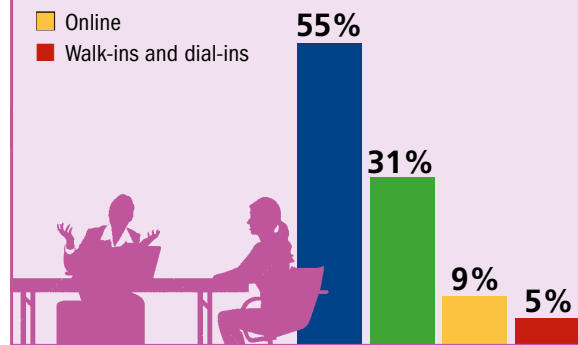
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- Referrals
- Online
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Eastern Cape visa applicants hit by extra travel costs

SARAH ROBERTSON

A RECENT ruling by the Spanish consulate-general has redefined jurisdictions for visa applications within South Africa. Eastern Cape clients must now apply through the Cape Town application centre.

Agents in the region report that confirmed client biometric appointments are being rejected after travel arrangements to Pretoria have been booked, with clients incurring enormous costs.

When TNW contacted BLS: Spain Visa Application Centre in Pretoria, a consultant advised that the office was now rejecting all

Eastern Cape applications. The consultant said affected applicants would now have to travel to Cape Town for their biometric processing, regardless of the increased travelling costs. “Our office had too much work and could not cope with the number of applications that we were receiving. Eastern Cape now falls under Cape Town jurisdiction,” TNW was told.

“While BLS Pretoria has been processing visa applications for some of the Eastern Cape clients who already had confirmed visa appointments with its offices, other clients' applications have been rejected after biometrics

have been processed by the office,” says **Michele Kendall**, business owner at Visalogix. She adds that one client with a confirmed appointment in Johannesburg booked flights and then received a notification from BLS advising her that she fell outside their jurisdiction.

Michele says coastal Schengen visa applications have been one of the biggest challenges since the introduction of the biometric ruling in 2014. She says, while all Schengen consulates are supposed to keep biometric data on file for five years to reduce the admin cost and time to reapply for visas, few do. ■