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TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

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Agents report Black Friday boom

SARAH ROBERTSON

BLACK Friday – or ‘Flyday’ as the promotion has been dubbed in the travel industry – has taken off locally as an opportunity to boost sales during November. It is traditionally a slow month for travel bookings with corporate clients curtailing

business trips for the year and leisure clients holding out for their pre-booked December holidays.
Theresa Szejwallo, md of The Travel Corporation comments: “This is the first year all our TTC brands had active Black Friday specials in the market and the resulting levels of enquiry over the time

frame were very satisfying. The promotions definitely got the phones ringing and I was happy with the special offers each of the brands offered our clients. We’ll definitely look at doing this again in 2018.” **Ruzandri Stoltz**, aka Hotels and Lodges marketing manager agreed, and said sales from its promotion had

increased by 136% compared with its 2016 promotion. Travelstart claims to be the first South African travel company to have adopted Black Friday promotions in the local market, with 2017 marking its third successive year of offerings. Founder, **Stephan Ekbergh**, said this year’s promotion had

run from Thursday, November 23 to ‘Cyber Monday’ on November 27, and that the company exceeded its R80m sales target, reaching a record R90m over the five-day promotion. Stephan said the company had also seen a spike in mobile device bookings,
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More agents to bypass GDS surcharge

CANDICE MAY

TRAVELPORT has concluded an agreement with British Airways and Iberia that enables TMCs and agencies with private channel deals with these airlines to bypass the £8 (R150) per sector GDS surcharge implemented on November 1.
Agencies will only be able to bypass the surcharge if they have entered into an agreement with the airlines. A similar deal, which was announced last month, saw Flight Centre Travel Group, Amex and HRG exempted from the surcharge when booking BA and Iberia on Amadeus. Last month Sabre also announced that its deal with BA and Iberia would allow agents to negotiate “content commitments” with the

airlines, adding that agencies that did not, would be subject to the surcharge.
The deals come as GDSs ramp up their NDC connectivity and TNW understands that agencies entering into agreements with the airlines gain access to the airlines’ surcharge-free content.
Robyn Christie, country manager of Travelport South Africa, says Travelport is working to develop NDC connections and is on track to achieve lata Level 3 status in coming weeks. “We are confident that the evolving technology and commercial changes in airline distribution strengthen the value of our travel commerce platform as a dynamic aggregator working at unprecedented scale and speed, and with unmatched reliability and cost. ■



Hello India!

Air Mauritius has reduced the YQ tax to India, with effect from November, resulting in cheaper fares to Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore and Chennai. Pictured are **Shirley Arrow** (left) and **Samantha Bronkhorst**, business development sales executives for Southern Africa and Gauteng respectively at Air Mauritius. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

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To the point

Travelstart has bought a majority stake in Cape Town-based SafariNow.com, South Africa's largest accommodation booking website, with the aim of strategically fast-tracking the group's accommodation offering. SafariNow's 40-man team represents more than 23 000 accommodation listings in both informal (self-catering and vacation rentals) and formal sectors (hotels, guesthouses and B&Bs). SafariNow.com will continue to run as a standalone business, focusing on its core business of selling accommodation, and will retain its own brand, ceo and team.

Rubes® By Leigh Rubin



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Workshop participants awash with cash

R10 000 cash from Travelinfo is on its way to **Ginty Kellmann** of American Express in Port Elizabeth.
The next monthly R10 000 cash draw will be in January and all consultants who have been doing product workshops regularly will automatically be entered.
Five more suppliers have joined the 365/24 on-demand travel classroom and their workshops will be

going live this month.
For the first time, skills workshops are being added for Travelinfo Plus users. The first two to go live are selling skills and an ADM workshop that has been written by senior travel experts specifically for their South African



Ginty Kellmann

colleagues.
The R10 000 draw is for five-star agents who have accumulated 2 400 completion points.
There are a further R200 000 worth of vouchers, holidays and flights available for just completing one specific workshop on Travelinfo. ■

Allan Lunz hands over the reins

TESSA REED

TRAVEL industry heavyweight, **Allan Lunz**, deputy chairman of BidTravel, will retire from his day-to-day functions at the company at the end of December. Thereafter, he will remain on the BidTravel board until the end of July



Allan Lunz

next year, which coincides with his retirement age at Bidvest.
Allan has been in the travel industry for over three decades and has been with BidTravel since its inception, when Bidvest purchased his business. For the last 12 years, he has been the head of BidTravel.

Bidvest Travel Holdings ceo, **Lidia Folli**, said many of the successes at BidTravel and the other companies led by Allan had been as a result of his foresight and successful conclusion of negotiations with large travel management companies. "His wise counsel will certainly still be sought in the coming years."
Commenting on his plans, Allan said: "I will be staying in the travel industry in some shape or form." ■

SA travellers opt for Thailand instead of Bali

THOUSANDS of tourists were left stranded in Denpasar International Airport in Bali at the end of November with the airport closed over fears of an 'imminent' second eruption of Mount Agung.
Although the airport has reopened, **Sally George**, market development manager for Singapore Airlines, says the situation in Bali is still considered 'fluid' and the airline has cancelled a number of flights to the island until December 14. She says South African travellers have now started opting for Thailand instead.
Kim Taylor, customer care team leader for Flight Centre, says the agency has received some cancellation requests, however these have been minimal. Kim says the

majority of customers have continued with their trip and many who are still due to travel during December have opted to wait it out and see what their options are closer to their departure date.
Travellers will be covered by their travel insurance if flights are cancelled as a result of weather conditions, says **Simmy Micheli**, manager sales and marketing for TIC. If pre-paid accommodation is damaged to an uninhabitable extent because of weather conditions, TIC will also reimburse the non-refundable portions of travel and accommodation arrangements.
Simmy says the cover kicks in if flights are cancelled by the airline as a result

of the weather conditions. "Disinclination to travel is not covered on a travel insurance policy."
Meanwhile, the FCO has warned travellers to be prepared for being delayed in Bali. They should also ensure that they have enough time left on their visa. Further advice includes bringing enough medical supplies in case of delays as well as bringing a face mask, as tourist areas of Bali may experience volcanic ash clouds, which can cause respiratory problems.
Indonesia's National Disaster Management Authority said on December 5 that Bali was still safe to visit, even though further eruptions by Mount Agung remain unpredictable. ■



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New itinerary for MSC Lirica

MSC Lirica will operate a new itinerary in the east Mediterranean for northern hemisphere summer 2018. The ship will homeport in Venice and depart for its first cruise on April 6. The new itinerary starts at Venice or Bari and will call at Mykonos (full day), Heraklion/Crete, and Corfu (extended stay); Dubrovnik; and Bari. MSC Lirica will offer the seven-night eastern Mediterranean itinerary until October 26. Sales are now open.

Celebrity introduces three new ports in 2019

CELEBRITY Cruises will introduce Nauplion, Rijeka and Santa Margherita to its 2019 Europe summer sailing season. The newest ship in the fleet, *Celebrity Edge*, will join *Celebrity Infinity*, *Celebrity Constellation*, *Celebrity Reflection* and *Celebrity Silhouette* in European waters.

MSC World Cruise sales open

SALES have opened for the MSC World Cruise 2020. The 117-day cruise will visit 43 destinations in 23 countries across five continents. *MSC Magnifica* will depart from Genoa on January 5, 2020. The itinerary includes Italy, France, Spain, Cape Verde, Brazil, Uruguay, Peru, French Polynesia, New Zealand, Australia, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Jordan, and many others.

Senior staff scarcity puts pressure on juniors

SARAH ROBERTSON

SENIOR travel industry staff, and fare experts in particular, are more in demand than ever before.

With centralised ticketing, a sharp increase in ADMs and a drain of senior consultants leaving the industry to start up their own ITCs, junior consultants are relying more heavily on fare and ticketing experts.

Lee Botti, md of Lee Botti and Associates, points out that there is a severe shortage of senior staff in the outbound travel market at present. **Nono Mantju**, recruitment consultant travel for PCS, says there is a shortage in the market of

staff with specialised fares knowledge.

The shortage had been exacerbated by a drain of senior staff leaving formal employment positions in order to start their own ITCs. She says agencies have responded by substantially increasing salaries for this sector of the market and that many companies are also focusing on internal training of intermediaries to develop the skills that are missing.

According to **Albert Visser**, fare administrator at eTravel, his position assists ITCs with complicated fares, liaises and negotiates with airline suppliers and works on both ADM prevention and disputes. Albert says he is constantly

communicating with the eTravel ITCs regarding new airline rulings and ADM trends and that, due to this high level interaction, the number of ADMs that the consortium actually receives is extremely low, considering the volume of tickets that they issue.

Johann Ehrensperger, a fare and ticketing specialist for a local tour operator, says in a travel agency scenario, a fare specialist is only needed if the consultants are fairly junior and that the position would not be a necessary appointment for a senior reservation team.

• What are your thoughts on the matter? Let us know by emailing tessar@nowmedia.co.za ■

Gamble saves agent thousands

SARAH ROBERTSON

AN AGENCY was saved tens of thousands of rands when a client travelled on a ticket with one letter omitted from his name.

Earlier this year **Rudy Botha** was consulting at a Joburg-based agency when he booked four business-class tickets on United Airlines to the US at R52 000 each. Tickets were emailed to the client at the time but neither Rudy nor the client picked up that one letter had been omitted from one of the passenger's names. A week before travel, the client checked his ticket and noticed the error.

The airline advised the agency that a new ticket

had to be booked at the current available fare and that the old ticket, with the incorrect name, needed to be submitted for a refund. Full cancellation penalties would apply. However, when they priced a business-class fare for the same travel dates the cost of the ticket had increased to R112 000. This meant that the agency needed to pay in R60 000 more for the new ticket before cancellation penalties for the original ticket were taken into account.

After much consideration, the agency decided to advise the client to travel on the original ticket despite the error, hoping that the airline would not pick up on it at check-in. Rudy speculates that if the client had been

stopped, rerouting him could have incurred even greater costs.

However, in the end, check-in boarded the client using the incorrect ticket and he travelled to the States and back without incident.

Rudy says most agencies do not have the resources to take on the liability involved in issuing tickets and an insurance that covers agencies against the possibility of incurring ADMs and other airline penalties is needed.

While airlines have been communicating about tightening up in date change procedures for the last few years, in practice they will often unofficially waive these policies if an agent appeals to the right person. ■

Gina Richter selects the top specials from Travelinfo

- **Legacy Hotels & Resorts.** Indulge at the Michelangelo Hotel, Johannesburg, from R1 600pp sharing per night. Offer includes one night's accommodation in a superior room with breakfast at the Piccolo Mondo Restaurant and a choice of spa treatment. Valid Fridays, Saturdays and public holidays until January 31.
- **Selborne Golf Estate, Hotel & Spa.** KwaZulu Natal. Couples' retreat from R920pp sharing. Offer includes one night's accommodation with breakfast and dinner. Valid until December 31, 2018.
- **Beachcomber Tours.** Mauritius early-bird discount from R15 600pp sharing. Offer includes return flights departing Johannesburg, approximate taxes, return transfers, seven nights' accommodation at the four-star Mauricia Beachcomber with breakfast and dinner daily and free land and motorised water sports as per brochure. Offer must be booked at least 60 days before travel. Valid for travel from June 1-22.
- **Seyunique.** Specials to the Seychelles from R25 950pp sharing. Offer includes return flights, approximate taxes, return transfers and seven nights' accommodation with breakfast and dinner daily. Valid from January 9-February 10.



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AVIS

WHO IS VANYA LESSING?

‘Life is serious – be strong and confident’

In the latest Who Is... Candice May chats to ceo of Sure Travel and president of Asata, Vanya Lessing.

WHEN Vanya Lessing was appointed ceo of Sure Travel in 2007, she restructured the organisation and turned it into a strong, financially stable organisation, delivering value to all its stakeholders.

Vanya started her career as a management consultant involved in restructuring and positioning companies. When she was offered the opportunity to restructure Connex Travel, today's BCD Travel, in Durban, she grabbed it with both hands and her love for travel was born. Vanya was appointed to the senior management team responsible for corporate strategy. She was tasked to tender for and manage Parliament's travel. "It was a very interesting time in South Africa. I learned how the public sector worked and met lots of interesting people."

Vanya also managed the logistics for Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki's presidential inaugurations. Throughout this time, Vanya was involved in broader industry affairs through Asata.

"In this industry, you are swimming in a sea of sameness, so it is critical to find ways to remain relevant."

After nine years, Vanya was appointed md of Leisure Online to right-size the business and get it ready for sale. At the end of her 12-month contract, Asata announced that it was looking to appoint a new ceo and key industry players encouraged Vanya to apply for the position.

"When I started, the travel industry was entering a phase of change – its financial model was under threat," she explains. "The industry was not ready for the change and negotiations took almost four years. I brought key industry players together and got everyone moving in the same direction."

The next step in Vanya's career was where she is now – the ceo of Sure Travel in Cape Town. She was also appointed president of Asata in 2015. She will be stepping down from this position in the next month when a new president has



Vanya Lessing Photo: Nicole Jacobs

been nominated.

One of the biggest lessons that Vanya has learned in her career is that in order to lead an organisation forward, you have to listen to and respond to all the dynamics. This is where her motto of 'be honest, strong and confident because life is a serious business' comes in. "You have to allow things to evolve to a certain point in order to properly understand what is going on and then take charge and move forward," she explains.

Vanya has also learned the importance of remaining focused on market trends and what is happening globally.

"In this industry, you are swimming in a sea of sameness,

so it is critical to find ways to remain relevant," she says. "Progress is only possible when everyone in the organisation is committed to making a difference. I have a strong team at Sure Travel who know what we have to do to take the company into the future."

A passion for leadership and wanting people to have successful careers and good lives is a driving force that led her to mentoring young people both in- and outside the travel industry.

According to Vanya, one major misconception about working in the travel industry is that you spend all your time travelling. "It is actually an office job in a tough environment, requiring you to have a very organised mind."

Who is Vanya?

- When Vanya isn't at her desk, she is travelling. Her idea of a perfect holiday is spending the first week doing lots of activities and then spending the rest of the time relaxing, preferably on a tropical island like Réunion Island. Her favourite place to escape to is her family holiday home on the Breede River, where she enjoys winding down and spending time with her horse, Mishka.
- Vanya has a special place in her heart for animals. In fact, when she was young, she wanted to be a vet. She has two cats and four dogs, including a Husky that she rescued and who she loves taking for walks on the Sea Point Promenade and through Green Point Park. Vanya is also an avid foodie whose favourite hotspots include Saigon for traditional Vietnamese cuisine and Buzbey Grill for decadent steak.
- Although Vanya loves being out and about, she equally enjoys kicking back at her Sea Point home with a good book. On her reading stand at the moment is Jacques Pauw's *The President's Keepers* and Deepak Chopra's *Perfect Health*. ■



Vanya with her rescued Husky.

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REPORT VICTORIA FALLS



Photo: Candice May

The Victoria Falls, on the Zambezi River between Zimbabwe and Zambia, is the world's largest stretch of falling water and one of the Seven Natural Wonders. Candice May, who visited as a guest of Fastjet and Africa Albida, rounds up some top favourites along with the new and unusual.

Something for everyone

Old favourites

Sunset by steam train

THERE is something evocative about a journey aboard an authentic steam train. But that experience takes on a new dimension when the Bushtracks Steam Safaris steam train chugs and toots on to the Victoria Falls Bridge. Add a five-course dinner, bottomless drinks and one of the world's most surreal sunsets and

you have the perfect romantic evening. The dinner, prepared by the Victoria Falls Hotel, includes an amuse bouche, soup, starter, main course, dessert and tea and coffee. In between courses, the train stops on the bridge and those lucky enough to be in Victoria Falls at full moon get to watch the rare 'pink' moon rise.



Take a journey back in time on the steam train. Photo: Fastjet

Buffet at The Boma Restaurant



The Boma offers traditional Zimbabwe fare. Photo: Fastjet

The Boma Restaurant at the Victoria Falls Safari Lodge was voted the best restaurant in Victoria Falls with good reason – it offers a unique dining experience as well as a fun night out. There is an extensive buffet with a superb selection of Zimbabwean dishes, ranging from peanut butter rice, warthog steak,

and the local speciality – mopane worms! While you feast on these delicacies, you are entertained by the songs, dances and drumming of Ndebele performers. You can even ask for your own drum and join in the music-making. After dinner, you can consult the restaurant's very own sangoma.

New and unusual

Art among the elephants

Art meets wildlife at the Wild Horizons elephant camp (pictured above), where easels and palettes await in front of a wallow where an elephant herd descend to splash and play in the puddles. A private tutor guides guests through a fun painting workshop, using their

brushes to capture the moment. The activity finishes with a home-cooked lunch of traditional roast with some special additions like grilled Zambezi bream, in the open-plan thatched boma, which offers uninterrupted views of the beautiful Masui River.



Lunchtime at the vulture restaurant. Photo: Fastjet

Vulture culture experience

Victoria Falls Safari Lodge allows guests a unique perspective on vulture behaviour during a daily feeding experience. From a secluded hide in front of the lodge, guests watch staff put down leftover meat as vultures in the area swoop down from

the sky to grab their share of the scraps. The 'vulture restaurant', as the staff call it, isn't only an eye-opening experience, but also an important part of conserving dwindling vulture populations in the area.



The new Victoria Falls International Airport. Photo Candice May

How to get there

Fastjet reintroduced direct flights between Johannesburg and Victoria Falls on July 31. The recommencement of the route is one of the steps in the fulfilment of the airline's stabilisation plan. The flights operate on Sundays, Mondays and Thursdays. Flight FN 8501 departs VFA at 10h35

and arrives in JNB at 12h10. Flight FN 8502 departs JNB at 12h35 to arrive in VFA at 14h15. Fastjet's JNB-VFA route was previously suspended in January. The decision was part of the same stabilisation plan, which required a full overhaul of the business.



The pool at Victoria Falls Safari Lodge. Photo Candice May

Where to stay

Victoria Falls Safari Lodge is just 4km from the Victoria Falls. Positioned high on an escarpment overlooking the Zambezi National Park, it boasts spectacular views and its own waterhole, which is much visited by elephants and herds of buffalo. There is plenty to keep guests busy, including bird watching, game drives, night drives, full-day safaris, picnics and bush dining.

Guests looking for gentler pursuits can savour vintage wines on a wine-tasting activity or practise their swing on the 18-hole golf course nearby.

The standard rooms are spacious and elegant with extra-length beds, luxurious bathrooms and private balconies. The suites are duplex, with bedroom and en-suite bathroom upstairs. Downstairs, a cosy lounge leads on to an exclusive balcony.

For something more lavish, the deluxe room offers prime views of a waterhole, while the deluxe suite has all the comforts of a suite with the addition of a Jacuzzi.

General facilities at the lodge include a restaurant, bar, swimming pool, WiFi, computer facilities, library and baby-sitting services.

MaKuwa-Kuwa Restaurant and Buffalo Bar both overlook the game-rich waterhole, with seating on spacious wooden decks for optimal views of sunrise and sunset. Breakfast consists of an extensive continental buffet and an à la carte selection of cooked dishes. The lunch menu offers locally influenced dishes such as venison pie and at dinner, fine-dining fare is on offer. The Buffalo also serves light meals between 10h30 and 18h00. ■

NEW WORKSHOPS

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UK freezes Y-class APD

SARAH ROBERTSON

THE UK government has frozen the controversial air passenger duty for economy-class passengers as part of its autumn budget announced by Chancellor of the Exchequer, **Philip Hammond**, last month.

The freeze applies to passengers on short- and long-haul economy-class flights and has been funded by an increase in the tax for premium and private jet travellers.

This means that from April 2019, business- and first-class flights to the UK will increase by £16 (R300) per ticket while economy-class taxes will

remain at the current level.

The UK's unpopular departure tax, which is the highest in Europe and the second-highest globally, has been dubbed the 'poll tax' of the skies. The tax was initially introduced as an environmental measure. However, previous Chancellor, **George Osborne**, conceded that it was now considered a pure revenue raiser. Calls are being made for the tax to be scrapped entirely.

In 2014 the tax was scrapped for children under the age of 12 and then in March 2016 all children under the age of 16 travelling in economy class were also exempted from APD.

Ticketing under-16s

A consultant who wished to remain anonymous said the tax exemption currently applied to all children under 16. While it would automatically price in the GDS for child fares, agents needed to insert the teenager's age into the name field for the exemption to price for children between the age of 12 and 16. The consultant said the discount for this age group amounted to about R1 400pp for a return economy-class fare between

SA and the UK at the moment.

However, **Bronwyn Pienaar**, owner of Travessentials advised that the tax could unfortunately not be applied to consortiums' corporate fares, even though the discounted taxes did price in the GDS when paired with a corporate fare. She said the reason for this was due to the airline corporate fare rulings, which stated that the fares were only applicable for adults. ■



Globus hosts agents

Globus held the Johannesburg leg of its first-ever tour director roadshow at Fairlawns Boutique Hotel & Spa, where agents learned the ins and outs of selling river cruises and guided holidays. Pictured here (from left) are **Shona Pittaway**, md of Perfect Destinations; **Zephnie Viljoen**, director of Perfect Destinations; **Patricia Williamson**, tour director of Globus Family of Brands; **Ray Smith**, manager: GSA business development of Globus Family of Brands; and **Tony Williamson**, cruise director of Avalon Waterways. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

To the point

Emirates is to increase capacity between Johannesburg and Dubai over the peak December period, adding another A380 to the route from December 15 to January 13, 2018. The airline will switch from a B777 to an A380 on one of its flights, adding 159 extra seats over that period. Flight EK762 out of Johannesburg and return flight EK761 from Dubai will operate with an A380. Currently flights EK764 and EK763 are operated with an A380.



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Season's Greetings

The end of 2017 has finally arrived and travel professionals across the industry have been celebrating after another year of hard work. Readers sent us their festive greetings and photos and we feature the first batch this week. Look out for more in next week's TNW!



▲ Avis Budget Rent a Car. From left: André du Preez, Nomzamo Ngubane, Elsie Mtsweni, Nathalie Cloete, Camille Janse van Rensburg and Martin Botha.

► Beachcomber Tours. Front, from left: Umr Khan, Terry Munro and Damian Perrins. Middle: Samuel Mphela and Pete Munro; and back, Vito Polo.



▲ Contiki. From left: Kele Scheppers, Jacolette Calitz-Marais, Pieter Beyers and Darsha Soobramoney.



► The Travel Corporation sales team. From left: Puleng Putu, David Robinson and Lara May.



▲ eTravel. Back, from left: Charlene Fick, Feroza Ismail, Lauren Hare, Sharovsky September and Sandra Oosthuizen. Middle row: Lauren Visagie, Bianca February, Liesl Cronje, Fayzal Kalan, Alison Sinclair, Shelley Roberts and Angela Fredericks. Front: Shonna Bernhardt, Micaela Jansen, Charnelle Thomas, Mickey Lu, Maree Adkins, Michelle Thomas, Jaya Ranchod, Gadijah Rogers, Barbara Lucas and Ruan van Niekerk.

◀ Club Travel. Back, from left: Talene Deetlefs, Gerschen Thys and Luana Visagie. Front: Tatum Vermaak and Minette Fourie.

Thompsons

Holidays

Happy HO HO HOlidays and
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Season's Greetings



▲ British Airways. Back, from left: Salama Detlefsen, Tracey Lanjopoulos, Nothemba Jara, Rindira Sing and Sue Petrie. Front: Cristina Graham and Kermashnie de Sousa.



▲ Delta Air Lines. Back, from left: Rosemary Wong, Shareen Akoodie, Brian Dore, Elyse Kabamba, Lisa van der Haar, Justin Glanville, Gillian Moses, Husmitha Bhulla and Theresa Kuuya. In front: Yolanda Williams and Taslim Abader.



▲ FlySafair. From left: Siphokazi Mpomane, JJ van Zyl, Thola Kubeka, Chantelle van Deventer, Kirby Gordon and Sunisha Jular.

▲ Wendy Wu Tours. Bianca Morais (left) and Alet Steyn.



▲ The Travel Corporation brands team. From left: Gail Gilbert, Linda Chiu, Jessica Clarke, Bronwyn Strydom and Lieria Boshoff.

New Year's Resolution

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Births, deaths, marriages, promotions – we want to know! Please fax or e-mail TNW's Candice May, at candicem@nowmedia.co.za or (011) 214 7330.

Travelbags hosted agents at Mount Usambara for a White Christmas-themed lunch. They indulged in a five-star feast and were showered with gifts, with some lucky agents walking away with prizes. Pictured here are Nicole Gasser (left), operations manager, and Candice Sammy, implementations support manager of Tourvest Travel Services. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl



White Christmas



'We love Namibia!'

Sure Travel held its annual Management Forum in Namibia this year. As well as the business and networking events, members enjoyed the 'living desert experience', quad biking, sand boarding and a marine cruise. Pictured here are Sure Travel members enjoying drinks and lunch on the beach in Swakopmund.

Appointments

- Faircity Hotels and Apartments has appointed **Miranda Evangelou** as its new group sales and marketing manager. Previously, she worked for Kievits Kroon Estate and Spa, Extraordinary Hotel Group and, most recently, Forever Resorts South Africa, where she did the sales and marketing for the group's 22 properties in SA.
- **Norman Wallace** has been appointed chief operating officer of aha Hotels & Lodges, a division of Tourvest Accommodation and Activities. He spent 33 years with Tsogo Sun, retiring in 2016 after 18 years as operations director, responsible for managing the group's properties in Africa, the Seychelles, Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Since then, he has run his own consultancy, advising hotel property owners on new or repositioned projects.



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MSC unveils newest ship

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MSC Cruises has launched the *MSC Seaside*, its newest ship and the largest in its fleet. The ship has set sail for Miami, where it will cruise the Eastern and Western Caribbean, including stops at Jamaica, the Cayman Islands, Mexico, Bahamas and the US.

The ship has been designed to bring guests closer to the sea and is inspired by the beach condos characteristic of Miami, its home port. Features designed to blend outdoor and indoor areas include a glass-walled atrium offering ocean views and spanning two decks, a glass-bottomed skywalk and two panoramic elevators. The *MSC Seaside Waterfront Boardwalk* is the widest ever constructed on board and surrounds the ship, offering access to bars, restaurants and shops.

The ship boasts 11 different dining venues, including an

Asian Market Kitchen – the creation of celebrity chef, **Roy Yamaguchi**; 19 bars and lounges, including a champagne bar; and plenty of options for those with a sweet tooth, including a gelato stand and an artisanal chocolate and coffee bar. The extensive entertainment options include a 934-seat theatre, bowling alley, an arcade featuring a Formula 1 simulator, six pools, waterslides and zip lines.

The ship has over 2 000 suites and can accommodate over 5 000 passengers. Luxury suites have private Jacuzzis and hanging gardens. For families, there are modular connected staterooms that can accommodate up to 10 people.

The *MSC Seaside* also features the largest kiddies' area on an MSC vessel, at 70sqm. It has dedicated areas for babies, toddlers, small children and teens.

As one of MSC's modern ships, the *MSC Seaside*


features interactive screens where guests can check activity programmes, book excursions and spa treatments and also make theatre reservations. The MSC for Me app offers similar functionality and also helps guests navigate around the ship.

Speaking at the launch, **Pierfrancesco Vago**, MSC executive chairman, outlined MSC's ambitious plans to launch at least one ship a year from now until 2026. At this stage, the group hopes to carry five million passengers a year, more than double its current passenger numbers.

According to **Angelo Capurro**, MSC Cruises executive director of Emerging Markets, ships under construction include a Seaside Class; Meraviglia Class; and Meraviglia Plus ship, while the expansion plan will culminate in the launch of four World Class ships, accommodating roughly 7 000 passengers. ■



About to board the *MSC Seaside* are, back: **Ross Volk** of MSC Cruises, middle: **Stephen Howarth** of Sure Travel, **Talene Deetlefs** of Club Travel, **Serena Janse van Rensburg** of Development Promotions, **Claudia Naude** of Flight Centre, **Anthea Hurly** of MSC Cruises, **Marco Cristofoli** of BidTravel and, in front, **Gayle Bannatyne** of Development Promotions. Photo: Tessa Reed



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Yes

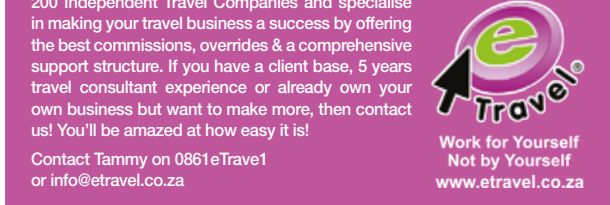
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GDS launches PCI DSS compliance tool

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TRAVELPORT is the first GDS to launch an online PCI DSS (Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard) compliance referral service to help its agents' businesses achieve PCI DSS certification, a requirement by the card industry for every business that touches card payments. Agencies have until March 1 to achieve PCI DSS compliance or risk losing their lata licence. In response to agents asking for guidance on PCI DSS certification, Travelport chose to partner with

SecurityMetrics, a leading provider in data security and compliance for organisations worldwide, to make the process of becoming PCI DSS compliant as simple, low cost and streamlined as possible. The PCI DSS certification tool provides agents with an online Wizard Tool that guides agents through the self-assessment questionnaire process, enabling them to achieve PCI DSS compliance. **Alexandra Fitzpatrick**, VP Travelport Global Payment Solutions, commented on the launch of this tool: "The purpose of this tool is to empower

agency customers to adhere to industry regulations to meet and retain compliance, enabling them to and become a trusted partner to their customers, especially when it comes to card payments and day-to-day cybersecurity." Alexandra says it takes a minimum of three days to complete the PCI DSS certification process using the tool. "Given the short length of time it takes, if agents start now, there will be sufficient time for them to become compliant before the deadline and fix any vulnerabilities that may arise during the process." ■

Agents report Black Friday boom

From page 1
with 26% of its Black Friday bookings generated from these devices. Joburg to Cape Town and Joburg to Mauritius ranked its top mobile domestic and international routes. **Black Friday spoilsports** Stephan says Travelstart's online booking site was

plagued with attempts from unscrupulous travel agents to book their travel deals through the consumer web portal before marking them up and selling them on to unsuspecting customers. Travelstart's B2B selling platform, Next, also ran Black Friday deals, but the Travelstart website is aimed purely at consumers. "We

have adapted our terms and conditions so that we reserve the right to recharge travel agents who sell our tickets with their own mark-up," said Stephen. "It happens often when we run campaigns. The sad thing is that unwitting consumers end up paying a lot more for travel than they should." ■