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UBCs: Industry holds its breath

TESSA REED

THE DEPARTMENTS of Tourism and Home Affairs were “close to an agreement” on the requirements for minors travelling into and out of South Africa, said Tourism Minister **Derek Hanekom**.

But while the travel industry is hopeful, there is concern that the discussion may centre on international travel and that requirements for South African children are not included in the talks.

The requirement for children under the age of 18 to travel with an unabridged birth certificate was implemented in 2015, exasperating those in the travel industry, who warned that the regulations would hinder travel. At the time, the Department of Home Affairs said the regulations were to deter child trafficking.

According to Hanekom, an announcement on the rules could be made “within weeks”, while Home Affairs Minister, **Malusi Gigaba**, has said that he is looking

at international best practice.

“It is very encouraging that the discussions are taking place and that consideration is being given to global best practice to guide the decision going forward,” said Asata ceo, **Otto de Vries**. “However, I am concerned that there hasn’t been any specific commentary regarding the impact that it has had and will continue to have on South African travellers wishing to travel abroad.”

Satsa ceo, **David Frost**, said he was incredibly optimistic. He said the tourism industry had looked into

the issue, delving particularly into international best practice. “What became apparent is that we needed to find an equitable solution. Elsewhere in the world, people are vigilant, but they do not apply the heavy-handed approach of making airline check-in staff be your front-line immigration officers.”

He said internationally there was a more sophisticated, nuanced and targeted approach to preventing child trafficking that included more specific policing and traveller profiling. ■

Usual favourites drive Easter bookings boom

SARAH ROBERTSON

AGENTS and operators report that sales were up for the Easter holiday period compared with last year. Mauritius, Thailand and South Africa remained the most popular holiday destinations with agents reporting an increase in interest to Bali, Zanzibar and the Maldives.

Pentravel had a strong start to the year and reported its strongest sales month in history during March, says **Vicky Steinhardt**, marketing and product manager. She says she always lumps March and April sales figures together to give a better overview of Easter holiday sales due to the fluctuating travel dates. With this in mind, Vicky reported that the ever-popular destinations like Mauritius and Thailand had done well, with Pentravel

reporting a particular boom in cruise and Northern Lights bookings as well as growth in beach resort sales for Bali and Zanzibar.

Andrew Stark, md of Flight Centre Travel Group (FCTG), agreed, saying the group was having a good year and had reported double-digit sales growth in April compared with the previous year. He added that enquiries were also already streaming in for the December and January travel period and that the number of long-haul enquiries boded well for forward bookings.

Beachcomber sales for the period had been similar to last year but **Joanne Visagie**, sales and marketing director, said forward bookings for the remainder of 2018 were looking amazing.

Jacqui Carr, gm of United Europe, also

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Better BZV connections

TAAG has changed the schedule for its Luanda-Brazzaville flights, which now allow connections from Johannesburg, departing on Tuesdays and Sundays and returning on Wednesdays and Sundays. Waving the Republic of Congo's flag is **Nikki Samuels**, sales manager South Africa for TAAG. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

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Globus unveils new exclusive touring concept

TESSA REED

GLOBUS has introduced a new touring concept, Globus Private Touring, which offers groups as small as two passengers the opportunity to explore Europe with their own private vehicle and tour director.

The product is available on any Globus European and Religious brochure itinerary. It offers the same opportunities as these itineraries, including

exploring hidden gems and meeting with locals.

"Being able to book as few as two people or the entire coach, Globus Private Touring allows your passengers to be more immersed and enjoy a more intimate side of travelling," says **Janine Pienaar**, Sales & Marketing Manager for the Globus Family of Brands in South Africa.

Cindy Williamson, senior consultant at XL Turners

Travel, expects the product to be well received in the market, particularly with couples and families. "People prefer travelling privately over travelling with other people," she says.

Globus recommends the product for family and friends; special-interest groups; religious and faith-based groups; school, universities and college groups; and corporate and conference groups. ■

Treasury revises govt travel caps

TESSA REED

GOVERNMENT travel caps for domestic accommodation and meals have been revised upwards by 2%-3%.

While Treasury sent notification to government departments last month, TMCs canvassed by TNW had not yet been informed about the revisions.

New caps for five-star

hotels are R2 140, R2 250 and R2 570 for bands one, two and three respectively. New caps for four-star hotels are R1 275, R1 380 and R1 595.

The revisions are to allow for the increase in VAT as well as sugar tax, and follow engagement between Fedhasa (Federated Hospitality Association of South Africa) and

the government.

Tshifhiwa Tshivhengwa, Fedhasa ceo, said as a result of the increases it would be difficult to retain government clients without a corresponding review of the maximum caps.

While Fedhasa has welcomed the revisions, Tshifhiwa said they were not enough to compensate for rising inflation. ■

EU court ruling expands pax compensation

PASSENGERS on EU airlines and on non-EU airlines departing from the European Union will be entitled to compensation if they are delayed as a result of strikes, even 'wildcat strikes' (those not formally initiated by a trade union).

This was the ruling of the EU Court of Justice in a recent case against German airline, TUIfly. EU regulations entitle

passengers on a delayed flight the right to compensation of up to €600 (R9 000). However, airlines are exempt from paying in the event of 'extraordinary circumstances', which could not have been reasonably avoided.

The ruling was made after several cases were brought against TUIfly, which was affected by a wildcat strike in 2016.

While the airline argued this was an extraordinary circumstance, the court ruled against this.

The court stated that "the 'wildcat strike' at issue in the main proceedings cannot be regarded as beyond the actual control of the air carrier concerned" and therefore could not be classified as an 'extraordinary circumstance'. ■



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Arik Air looks to reinstate JNB flights

CANDICE MAY

ARIK Air is seeking to resume intercontinental flights after a government-backed takeover forced the airline to retreat into the domestic Nigerian and regional West African markets last year.

Haidi Sirika, Nigerian Minister of State for Aviation, says the government has engaged its counterparts in the United Kingdom over Arik Air's proposed return to

London Gatwick, but cannot disclose timelines.

After the launch of London flights, the airline will look to reinstate both a Johannesburg and New York service.

In February last year, the Asset Management Corporation of Nigeria assumed managerial control of debt-ridden Arik Air. The move coincided with the termination of long-haul flights to Johannesburg, London and New York. ■

Lufthansa cuts Berlin-New York route

LUFTHANSA is to end flights between Berlin Tegel and New York JFK. The service was introduced following the collapse of airberlin last year. It will, however, retain a Berlin-New York link, selling seats to Newark on flights

operated by partner, United Airlines.

Lufthansa Group will also take delivery of the Airbus A320 family of aircraft in 2019, featuring new seats on short- and medium-haul routes. ■



Prosecco on tap

Pictured at the April Travelbags lunch held at Shepstone Gardens are (from left): **Joanna Hutchison**, owner of Tidal Travel; **Kim Muller**, owner of Focus on Travel; and **Alison Van Niekerk**, Essential Travel. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

PCI DSS: industry on latest version

TESSA REED

AGENCIES that have been certified PCI DSS compliant are up to date with the latest requirements, certifier Foregenix has confirmed.

Richard Henwood, business development at Foregenix, explained to *TNW* that the latest update, PCI DSS 3.2, was the version on which

it certified travel agencies in South Africa. He added, however, that a new version was expected to be rolled out in January or February next year.

Perry Flint, head of corporate communications, North America, said lata's PCI DSS compliance requirements did not change with the release of a PCI DSS updated

version, and that the release of a new PCI DSS version did not invalidate current compliance certificates.

"When two PCI DSS versions co-exist because of the roll-out of a new updated one, the market participants can decide against which version they certify, until the older version is withdrawn," he said. ■



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Into Africa

The Single African Air Transport Market has been widely proclaimed, but until it is implemented, Africa's aviation landscape remains patchy. By Michelle Colman

Network gaps shackle trade

WHILE the network of African air connections available to South Africans is adequate in our immediate neighbourhood, there are significant gaps further afield that hamper travel and, thereby, trade.

West and Central Africa are two of the soft spots. SAA serves some points directly – namely Accra in Ghana, Abidjan in the Ivory Coast, Dakar in Senegal, Lagos in Nigeria and Kinshasa in the DRC, but there are few reciprocal services.

Nigeria, despite being one of the largest African economies, has no national carrier and few privately owned carriers that operate internationally. However, Air Peace has announced its intention to serve Johannesburg in the future.

The DRC's flag carrier, Congo Airways, founded in 2015, has just commenced operating outside its domestic network, with services from Kinshasa to Johannesburg launched in February. Senegal Airlines ceased operations in 2016, and a new airline established that same year, Air Senegal, is in the process of ordering equipment that will facilitate long-haul flights.

Ghana's national carrier ceased operations some time ago, but the Ghanaian government last year signed an MOU with Air Mauritius for assistance in establishing a new carrier.

These regions are particularly affected by the critical challenge of city-to-city connectivity across borders.

According to **June Crawford**, ceo of the Board of Airline

Representatives of South Africa (Barsa), lack of and limited intra-African air connectivity, especially among smaller economies, restricts business-related travel and creates inefficiencies.

There's a paucity, too, of flights to North Africa, where EgyptAir has been the only consistent airline between Johannesburg and Cairo for many years.

Recently there has been a spate of new services operated on a fifth freedom rights basis – examples being Kenya Airways' Nairobi-Livingstone-Cape Town route and RwandAir's Kigali-Harare-Cape Town service.

Chris Zweigenthal, ceo of the Airlines Association of Southern Africa (Aasa), believes this development could be laying the



June Crawford

groundwork for the advent of the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) launched in January.

At the time, 23 African states committed to an open-skies policy.

But he cautions that fifth

freedom rights permitted where third and fourth freedom rights already exist are counter-productive. "Fifth freedom rights should be granted in markets not currently served and to increase the number of city pair connections," he says.

Widely welcomed, SAATM will create much-needed efficiencies and expand intra-continental connectivity. "The SAATM provides for a flexible air transport services licensing regime that will make it possible for airline operators to invest in new routes in Africa, without the limitations of stringent regulation," says June.

Chris points out, however, that signees must start putting their money where their mouths are, while lata has appealed for effective implementation.

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SADC and East Africa well served

IN SOUTHERN Africa, the aviation experts agree that South Africa's air connections to its largest trading partners, the SADC economies, are well served, with the exception of a few smaller ones that lack home-based carriers.

Barsa's **June Crawford** says, with almost 90% of total South African exports into Africa going to the SADC countries, most business-related travel out of the country is to neighbouring and sub-Saharan states. The dominant routes are Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola.

Aasa's **Chris Zweigenthal** says most capitals in the region are adequately served in terms of airlines

and frequencies, and even countries that were a little behind – such as Namibia, Mozambique and Angola – are opening up and enjoying increased air links.

Further up into East Africa, links with Kenya and Ethiopia are good. "Both Kenya and Ethiopia are home to most UN-based Africa programmes, with the latter being the headquarters of the African Union," says June. "Therefore, from a meetings and conferences point of view the East African region also sees a lot of business-related travel. Besides, Kenya's capital, Nairobi, is a convenient major hub for especially other African and Asian markets."

SAA has played a

significant role on all these Southern and East African routes. Kenya Airways has long been a feature on the East African network, although in recent times it has had financial troubles, from which it is emerging. Ethiopian Airlines is a relatively new force that has made its expansionist aims obvious.

"RwandAir has also introduced a dynamic connection to the Great Lakes region, also a traditional, yet fast-growing trade region for South Africa," says June.

She says the entry of low-cost carriers on regional routes benefits both leisure and business-related travel, as well.

Big hotel brands continue to eye Africa

WITH sub-Saharan Africa attracting growing interest from international hotel operators in the last five years, there's increasing competition among the world's biggest brands, all looking for a strong presence in a market that is said to hold nine of the world's 20 fastest growing economies.

Brands involved in this heavy investment, expected to reach US\$1.9bn (R23,4bn) this year, include Marriott International, Four Seasons, Hilton and the Radisson Group, says **Christine Davidson**, vice president of dmg Events MEA. Dmg Events is managing The Hotel Show and Hospitality Leadership Forum, taking place from June 24-26 in Johannesburg as part of Africa Hospitality Week 2018.

Christine says there is currently pent-up demand as investors seek to expand. Hospitality investment is considered low-risk by more mature economies, and African governments are supportive of it because of its value to job creation.

Countries benefiting most from this interest are Nigeria, with more than 30 projects announced in the past year; Kenya with 25, followed by Ethiopia, with a similar number. All three countries, says Christine, have seen an increasing number of flight routes and frequencies, closely linked to a requirement for more beds.

It's not just the international chains that are investing. Christine says Africa's homegrown brands are making

a huge impact, such as **Guy Stehlik's** BON Hotels, which has a strong presence in Nigeria and is further extending its footprint into Central and East Africa. She also names Casablanca-based Onomo, Malian Azalai Hotels, and the West African chain, Mangalis Hotel Group, as being on the expansion path.

Christine says investment in the island paradises of Mauritius and Zanzibar is also huge, while successful growth will also come from those hoteliers who choose to develop properties in appropriate second or third cities in key destinations – the secondary city strategy.

"This has become its own growth area and there are people working for all the major hotel groups whose job is to identify new investment districts," she explains. Big operators may open a mid-market brand somewhere completely new, set up services for that hotel and establish it as a place of work, and then move bigger brands in.

"This secondary city strategy can be applied across Africa, offering investors new destinations but, more importantly, cheaper land and start-up costs."

Christine says the financing of African hotels is increasingly following the US model, where management contracts and franchise patterns dominate. Investors, in partnership with hotel operators, look for a return from both the building and hotel business, not solely from the property.

Did you know?



Kampala Serena Hotel in the Ugandan capital has completed the first phase of a refurbishment programme themed 'Excellence Redefined'. It recently unveiled the remodelled Pearl of Africa restaurant, which now includes a Champagne Bar. It is suitable for corporate and special events and accommodates up to 40 people. The five-star property, a member of the Leading Hotels of the World, has 186 rooms and suites, seven food and beverage outlets, multiple conference rooms, and is set in seven hectares of lush garden. Photo: Serena Hotels

TMC expects business travel upturn

WITH a strong African customer-base, TMC Wings welcomes the impending opening of air traffic in Africa and the jobs and economic activity SAATM will trigger.

The company says the current EU banned carrier list restricts it to the use of only 70% of African carriers and an open-skies

policy will allow it to offer its clients more options, direct flights and budget savings, while still sticking to a 'safety first' policy.

Andre van Straaten, regional manager Business Development Africa, says the oil and gas industry is climbing out of the recent energy sector slump with an

anticipated upturn in business travel. Airlines that reduced schedules are refilling them.

In general, travellers in Africa suffer from infrequent, expensive and circuitous commercial flights, legal barriers, regulatory hurdles, inadequate infrastructure and high taxes. ■



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THE CAPE

Cape Town is still a favourite travel destination for South Africans, despite the challenges it continues to face. By Chana Boucher

Lower fares in the offing?

RECENTLY described as “a destination beloved by many for its incredible food scene and wine production, and outsized dose of natural beauty” by *The Hollywood Reporter*, the Mother City remains the number-one destination in South Africa for local and international tourists. But could this change as South Africans tighten their belts to cope with rising costs brought on by issues such as the fuel and VAT increases? Perhaps SAA’s decision to transfer a portion of its local flights to Mango could be a welcome boost for budget-conscious travellers.

Enver Duminy, ceo of Cape Town Tourism, says: “Mango is considered a low-cost airline, so let’s hope that flight cost reductions will carry through to passengers. We’d love to see more locals offered the opportunity to explore the country.”

According to **Carlos Luis**, Flight Centre brand leader, Air, Land and Sea Product, SAA’s 27% reduction of seats on its domestic routes has had a limited effect. “The overall capacity for domestic travel is only down 2% from last year’s numbers, with some low-cost carriers taking up most of the seats lost due to SAA’s reduction.”

But the move has had the largest impact on the Cape Town-Johannesburg route. He adds that full-service



“In terms of supply and demand an increase in capacity on the route would technically mean a drop in price.”
Kirby Gordon

carriers accounted for 47% of the total number of domestic seats available to Cape Town a year ago, but this has dropped to 40% in 2018.

“I suspect that the pricing on the remaining full-service carriers’ options will go up due to supply and demand, but the overall package price for a Cape Town holiday should see a reduction as more low-cost carriers pick up the remaining load,” says Carlos.

Kirby Gordon, head of sales and distribution at

FlySafair, says: “In terms of supply and demand an increase in capacity on the route would technically mean a drop in price, but in reality what we’re seeing is simply a shift in the same capacity from one carrier to another. Of course, the big difference is that these seats are now going to be low-cost seats as opposed to full-service seats, so it’ll be interesting to see what effect that has.”

According to **Nic Vlok**, acting ceo of Mango, the low-cost carrier added 20 return frequencies to its schedule and has experienced load factors of more than 90% on the Johannesburg-Cape Town route. “The Joburg-Cape Town route is one of the busiest in Africa and most of the growth has been through low-cost carriers, although deploying both the Mango and SAA brands on the route has shown a demand for both services,” he adds.

Changing behaviour

While the reduction of SAA’s local flights could see full-service clients considering low-cost carriers as a permanent option due mostly to availability, Carlos suspects that full-service carriers will increase their pricing thanks to increased demand for their product.

Kirby says due to the recent holiday season, it’s premature to attribute



“The Joburg-Cape Town route is one of the busiest in Africa and most of the growth has been through low-cost carriers.”
Nic Vlok

increased demand on its Cape Town services to changes in the industry. But, he adds: “What we certainly have experienced is increased interest from corporates and the trade, who appear to be concerned about the changes that are afoot, and we’ve certainly noticed an increased appetite for our services from that particular market segment.”

John Ridler, PR and media manager of Thompsons Holidays, says Mango flights don’t offer business

class, which will affect business travellers wanting premium-class travel. “There is a distinct shortage of business-class seats and they are often sold out a week in advance.” This affects business travellers when making last-minute changes, he says.

According to Nic, Mango has a substantial share of the corporate market in its own right. “Guests making use of the SAA sales channels and booking flights operated by Mango receive the same benefits on Mango as on SAA. They receive a voucher to spend on a variety of items offered for sale on board, the same baggage allowance as they would receive on SAA, lounge access and they earn Voyager miles. These miles can be redeemed on both SAA and Mango.”

He says the route performance is dependent on the prevailing general economic conditions, but Mango has experienced consistent growth. “The mix of travellers is sufficiently diverse to support further growth,” he adds.

The water crisis notwithstanding, Kirby says the indications that domestic tourism will continue to grow in the Cape are good. “The cost to fly domestically is still far lower than it’s been in a long time and there is certainly no shortage of amazing things to see and do in the city.”

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A prime cruising destination

A 2011 report by the City of Cape Town, says visiting cruise ships carrying around 2 000 passengers result in spending of R2,2m per day. It's a no-brainer then to establish the Cape as a prime cruising destination.

Kirby Gordon of FlySafair, says it's not uncommon for people to take tours and cruises in a destination to get a broad overview of a place, only to return to spend more time in their favourite spots. "Opening up Cape Town as a cruise stop not only has an immediate effect in terms of visitors to the city off the ships, but it will also undoubtedly serve as a long-term marketing initiative for

the area – give them a little taste, but leave them hungry for more," he says.

Cape Town Tourism's **Enver Duminy**, says the city's terminal is well positioned at the heart of the V&A Waterfront precinct, which is home to 450 shops retailing a vast range of products, as well as some renowned restaurants. "The V&A is one of Africa's most-visited attractions, and its lively atmosphere is boosted by some remarkable views of Table Mountain. Cruise ship passengers enjoy retail experiences as well as short trips in destinations, and the city is perfectly placed to offer these," he adds.



MSC Cruises is the only cruise line offering departures from Cape Town. Photo: MSC Cruises

All geared up

According to Enver, during the 2016-17 season, the terminal hosted 44 vessels, including Cunard Line's *Queen Mary 2* and *Queen Elizabeth*, and processed 47 000 passengers and crew members.

Although most of the ships that currently call at Cape Town carry fewer than 1 000 passengers, the revamped cruise terminal can process up to 3 000.

He says the upgraded cruise terminal meets international standards and that there are additional plans to add more value to the space with another restaurant and viewing deck.

Currently, it encompasses a 4 777sqm space with reception and waiting areas, baggage-handling services, an information desk, bathrooms, a restaurant and more, all accessible to disabled passengers. Further, as a result of improved customs facilities, Enver

says, on average, visitors spend just 20 minutes going through the embarkation and debarkation process.

Limited local options

Flight Centre's **Carlos Luis** says while cruises calling at the Cape offer a different experience and the opportunities to explore the west coast and Namibia, the only cruise line offering departures from the Mother City is MSC Cruises, and its numbers are limited.

He points out that MSC's 2019 season includes just three cruises out of Cape Town. "Durban waters are generally more stable than Cape Town's Atlantic Ocean waters," he says.

According to **Ingrid Roding-Tudor**, MSC Cruises' press officer, previous seasons included a dedicated ship operating out of Cape Town only, but the wind posed a constant challenge. "As such, current departures are limited to ensure cruise

departure and passenger comfort and safety.

MSC does include Cape Town in its itinerary with departures up to Walvis Bay and Lüderitz, but weather does play a part in regular departures. High winds have a tendency to close the port, which restricts ships entering or leaving the harbour."

Ingrid adds that South Africans prefer three-, four- and five-night cruises, which further limit itineraries to the west coast and Durban, due to distances.

Thaybz Khan, brand manager for Cruises International, says more cruise lines are working on having a local presence in South Africa, mostly as part of world cruise segments, because of travellers' interest in Cape Town globally. "Cruising offers international clientele who are concerned about safety, the opportunity to explore our beautiful country with peace of mind," she says.



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Water-offset tool launches in Cape Town

THE world's first water-offset tool, My Water Footprint, has been launched by the Western Cape Minister of Economic Opportunities, **Alan Winde**, as part of a bid to boost water-wise travel in Cape Town and the Western Cape.

The offset tool was created by Wesgro, in conjunction with For Love of Water (FLOW), as part of its campaign to encourage travellers to continue to visit the Cape and be water conscious when doing so.

The My Water Footprint tool allows visitors to the

Cape to calculate their daily water usage and then to offset this usage by donating money to water conservation projects. The tool is accessed at www.mywaterfootprint.com.

By doing this, visitors to water-scarce destinations, such as Cape Town will not only be incentivised to check their usage when making use of this tool but will also play a part in the water-wise solution.

Through an interactive interface, visitors will select how many showers they plan on taking, how many water-based beverages

they will consume and how many times their room will be cleaned, as well as declare and quantify any other water-consuming practices that will take place during their visit to the Cape.

Based on the information given, a calculator built into the tool will generate 'flowcoins' – a currency created around water usage.

Visitors can then use these 'flowcoins' to offset their usage by donating to water-saving projects, thereby supporting local water initiatives. ■



A right royal celebration

Cunard's *Queen Elizabeth* recently visited South Africa and stopped in Port Elizabeth on April 21 – which was also the Queen's ninety-second birthday. Port Elizabeth agents joined Whitestar Cruise & Travel for a ship's tour and lunch. Pictured here are (from left): **Melanie Wilson** of Flight Centre Walmer Park; **Bianca Price** of Cruiseabout Baywest; **Erika Horowitz** of Flight Centre Associates and **Christelle Botha** of Flight Centre Greenacres.

Meet the Quarter Kitchen!

The restaurant in Cape Town's Portwood Hotel has undergone a name change, from The Quarterdeck to the Quarter Kitchen. Not only is the restaurant celebrating an intriguing new menu, but also the publication of a special cookbook packed with sumptuous recipes for traditional Cape Malay meals. Pictured here is **Rodger Newton**, gm of the Portwood Hotel.



Appointments

■ Asata has appointed travel and tourism industry expert, **Nivashnee Naidoo**, as its new Professional Project and programme manager. Her new role will combine the existing roles of programme manager and gm. "I would like to thank **Kim Koen** and **Monique Diez** for their hard work and unwavering support in building the foundations on which Asata will build its future efforts," said ceo, **Otto de Vries**.



Safaris, comments: "We are confident Wernich is the right person to take Taj Cape Town forward and are excited to see how he evolves its already strong offering. His depth of experience, honed over a stellar career spanning 25 years, will bring immeasurable value to our special Cape Town hotel."

■ Seychelles President **Danny Faure** has announced a Cabinet reshuffle, with a reduction in the size of the Cabinet, that sees **Didier Dogley** appointed Minister of Tourism, Civil Aviation, Ports and Marines.

■ Travelport has appointed **Damian Hickey** as md of agency commerce for EMEA following the departure of **Rabih Saab** earlier this year. Damian will take up the role

from June 1 and relocate to Travelport's Langley, UK base from Singapore, where he currently oversees the air commerce business in the Asia-Pacific region. Damian has been at Travelport since 2012 in a number of leadership roles. He is a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin and has worked in the travel technology sector for over 20 years.

■ **Conni Lyners** has been appointed gm for BON Hotel Swakopmund in Namibia. She was born and raised in the country, then went on to achieve a Diploma in Hotel and Tourism Management, and a Diploma in Strategic Marketing Management. Conni started as a waitress at the Novotel London Heathrow, followed by work in various top hotels across the globe.

Pick of the week

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UK visa delays – build in additional time

DUE to increased volumes of applications, there has been a delay in the processing of UK visas.

A consultant at Visas and Passports Unlimited confirmed the delay: “The usual turnaround time was approximately a week. We are now looking at 15-20 working days. Priority visas have also

been affected, and now take between five and seven working days.”

Jose Cruz, national executive client services manager of HRG Rennie’s Travel, says he has experienced two cases where priority visas had been delayed to the point of clients nearly missing their flights. ■



I’ll drink to that!

Celebrating Club Med’s all-inclusive specials to Bali and the Maldives is **André Dafel**, national sales manager – Trade. Seven-night packages to Club Med Bali start from R16 789 per person sharing and from R24 706 per person sharing at Club Med’s Kani resort in the Maldives. The offers are valid for May-October 2018 departures and include flights, transfers, accommodation, gourmet cuisine, drinks and cocktails, expert childcare and so much more. Kids under six also stay and play free.

Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

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BA Comair through-fare glitches persist

SARAH ROBERTSON

PASSENGERS travelling domestically on BA Comair and connecting to international flights are frequently unable to check luggage through to their final international destinations or to receive their international boarding passes.

Pamela Passmore, managing member of Wings Worldwide Holidays, said she frequently experienced this problem with BA Comair add-ons. Her passengers have been affected when travelling internationally with Ethiopian Airlines, Air Mauritius, Lufthansa and Air France in the past.

Amy van Rensburg from Talk Travel in Cape Town also has passengers who were affected on an Air Mauritius ticket issued with BA Comair add-ons last month. “They were pretty stressed out as their connection in Joburg was only about two hours long,” she said.

According to a Port Alfred-based agent, the problem also extends to online check-in of through-fares when paired with BA Comair add-ons.

“Our clients now have to collect their bags at ORTIA domestic, take them across to international and stand in another queue in order to check in for their international

flights. We have received no communication from BA Comair about the issues and are therefore not able to advise passengers when to expect that problems may arise or to specifically book longer connecting times for affected airlines,” he added.

“As you can imagine this caused unnecessary stress before we had even started our journey, especially as we were flying with young children.”

Another UK-based passenger told TNW that, despite booking a London-Johannesburg-Durban through-fare on British Airways and BA Comair, her family had had to collect their bags and check them in again at ORTIA.

“Worried about the short connection on our return leg, I spoke to two different call centre staff. One said it goes all the way, the other said we have to collect it and re-check it through for our connecting flight. As you can imagine this caused unnecessary stress before we had even started our journey, especially as we were flying with young children,” she said.

Luckily, following

engagement with call centre staff, the passengers’ bags were eventually checked all the way through to London for the return leg.

TNW initially contacted BA Comair about this in February but was told that it was not an ongoing problem. **Luane Lavery**, brand communication manager British Airways, BA Comair and kulula.com, said it was BA Comair’s policy to through-check baggage wherever interline agreements were in place. However she added that occasional problems related to the system that was used at check-in.

“The system has agreements with certain airlines, which allows through checking of baggage and the printing of boarding passes. If the system does not have agreements with an airline, the process is denied,” said Luane. However BA Comair was not able to provide TNW with a list of airlines that were affected by these problems.

When TNW contacted BA Comair again this month about ongoing complaints, Luane advised: “We are aware that there have been occasional instances of human error and have implemented training to refresh staff on the policy of through-checking at all airports at which we operate.” ■

Easter bookings boom

From page 1
reported growth compared with last year, with an increase in bookings to the US, Dubai, Italy and London. She added that they had also noted an increase in bookings to Greece and Turkey, despite it

being unusually early for the season.

Jacqui attributed United Europe’s growth for the period to improved conversions due to its recent investments in R&D, which enabled faster quoting through online

inventory access. She also said many of its April travellers had finalised their bookings at the beginning of the year when the rand was at its strongest, which was also a contributing factor to the increase in booking numbers. ■

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