



TNW

TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY



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Trade thrilled about direct DUR-LHR flights

CANDICE MAY

DURBAN will get its first non-stop link to Europe in more than two decades when British Airways starts direct services between Durban's King Shaka International Airport and London's Heathrow Airport (Terminal 5) three times a week on October 29.

Sue Petrie, commercial manager of BA Southern Africa, says the direct flights should provide a more convenient and alternative service for the province's business travellers and holidaymakers wanting to get to the UK and Europe.

There has been talk of UK airlines looking to launch direct services out of Durban since mid-2016. **June Crawford**, ceo of Barsa, says BA's new service will be welcomed by both corporate and leisure travellers. "The launch of this route is indicative of how

real incentives bear fruit. It is all about route profitability, and these incentives reduce operational costs," she explains. Commenting on the new service in light of the number of airlines that have recently cut their Durban route, she says: "Sustainability is, of course, the real test."

Michelle Boshoff, gm of central services at Pentravel, reiterates that the new service is exciting news. "Durban clients are always having to put up with the inconvenience of transiting somewhere en route to London – either Johannesburg or internationally – so this means shorter travel times and healthy competition for travellers to London and beyond." **Vicky Steinhardt**, product manager of Pentravel, says families with young children will be especially thrilled.

However, Michelle points out that it is up to the Durban community to support the

route and ensure that it grows in popularity. "Hopefully this will encourage other international airlines to launch services out of Durban as well."

BA's DUR-LHR service will be operated by its newest aircraft, the Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner, with return fares from Durban starting from R11 679, including carrier surcharges and airport taxes. In winter, flight BA41 will depart LHR on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays at 15h45 and arrive in DUR at 05h35 the next day. Flight BA40 will depart DUR on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays at 07h35 and arrive in LHR at 17h45.

In summer, flight BA41 will depart LHR on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays at 16h45 and arrive in DUR at 05h35 the next day. Flight BA40 will depart DUR on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays at 07h35 and arrive in LHR at 18h45. ■



Hello, Port Elizabeth!

Airlink's newly launched flights between Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth are scheduled to maximise Eastern Cape corporate travellers' time in Johannesburg. The cabin layout features two-two seating, giving every traveller a choice of either a window or an aisle seat. Pictured here ready for a hard day's work is **Linda Mazibuko**, Airlink marketing and customer relations officer. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Visa appointment backlog threatens bookings

CANDICE MAY

LEISURE and business travellers are being forced to cancel trips to Greece, Portugal and Spain because

of a lack of available visa application appointments. **Michele Kendall**, md of Visalogix, says while application centres require 15 calendar days to process

an application, travellers have to wait a number of weeks for an appointment. **Jaendre Terblanche**, owner of Visas Zone, points out that while the Greek

Embassy requires a 15-day lead time for applications, business travellers are often only told about business trips at the last minute.

Bobbi Markantonis, manager of Claudia's Travel, had two clients book a trip to Athens departing May 13. The clients tried to

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Checkout reverts to B-C focus

TESSA REED

CHECKOUT Tours has been amalgamated into Checkout Travel, consolidating the business.

Director, **Giles Clinton**, says the company brought its preferreds with agencies to an end last year, moving away from dealing with agents to focus on its traveller customers.

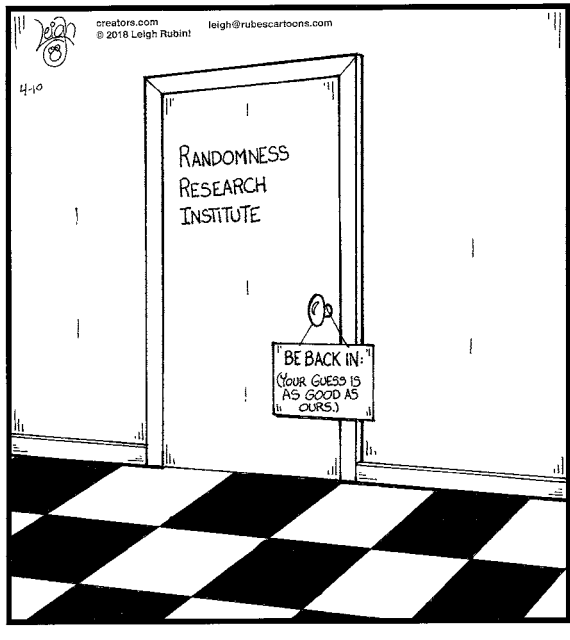
"Our main source of income was always

Checkout Travel, which gave Checkout Tours about 80% of its business," he says, explaining that the decision was taken to focus on Checkout Travel.

Last month, the company took this one step further, consolidating the tours into the travel business.

The realignment will also see the agency refine its offering, specialising in experiential and cultural travel. ■

Rubes® By Leigh Rubin



NEWS

New insurance product to shake up the market

TESSA REED

ESTABLISHED insurance provider, Old Mutual Insure, hopes to leverage its existing corporate client base with the roll-out of its corporate insurance product, Travelsure.

The company provides insurance to business including general and short-term insurance, which includes insurance for their pivotal assets.

Magcino Gule, senior manager: Travelsure at Old Mutual Insure, describes the company as well-established, and says by diversifying its offering, Old Mutual Insure will be able to service corporates across its portfolio of insurance needs. She says the roll-out of this new product follows research and feedback sessions with corporates

as well as TMCs.

The product, which covers worldwide travel, has three defined packages at different price points, offering different levels of cover. It is charged as an annual policy, quoted on the amount of annual trips declared.

Magcino says the product is differentiated by its assistance partners, through which it offers value-added benefits and technology offering.

Added benefits include automatic cover for accompanying spouses and dependants; telephonic medical advice and medical foreign language translation; and arrangements for medical repatriations. Old Mutual Insure can also provide additional services, including security and crisis management.

"Assistance services are a big

need for corporates," she says, highlighting the proliferation of risk in Europe and emerging markets, and the obligation of duty of care.

Corporates have the option to integrate the product into their booking system, in which case they will not need to manually capture trip details. An app tracks traveller movement for the corporate and provides a panic button for the travelling corporate. The traveller and corporate will also receive alerts for emergencies or if the political situation has changed, as well as directions to safe havens or designated charters.

Magcino would not comment on whether Old Mutual Insure would offer commission to TMCs, due to "pending regulation on the FAIS Compliance Act with regard to travel insurance". ■

Jet Airways to close JNB office

SARAH ROBERTSON

JET Airways is in the process of closing its Bedfordview-based Johannesburg office, TNW has learned from internal sources.

The airline operated out of South Africa for two years between 2010 and 2012. Since discontinuing these

services, the Johannesburg office has operated offline, promoting flights beyond Mumbai in conjunction with its Etihad and Air Seychelles codeshare agreements.

The contact details for the Johannesburg office now direct passengers to call the Indian call centre; there is no answer on the old

Johannesburg office number. TNW understands that local staff contracts have not been renewed but that the airline may be considering appointing a general sales agent locally.

TNW contacted Jet Airways for comment but had not received a response at time of publication. ■

TNW

TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

www.etnw.co.za

Published by
Travel & Trade Publishing (Pty) Ltd
Printed by Juka Printing (Pty) Ltd

Phone: (011) 327-4062
Fax: (011) 327-4094
E-mail: tnw@nowmedia.co.za
Web: www.nowmedia.co.za
Address: Now Media Centre,
32 Fricker Road, Illovo Boulevard,
Illovo, Johannesburg.
PO Box 55251, Northlands,
2116, South Africa.

NOWmedia



Audit Bureau of Circulations
of South Africa
Registration No. 100 100 100

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Gina Richter selects the top specials from Travelinfo

- **IOI Holidays.** Five-star Mauritius offer from R41 549 per couple. Offer includes return flights departing Johannesburg, approximate taxes, return transfers, seven nights' accommodation with breakfast and dinner daily and all non-motorised water sports. Valid between May 8 and August 30.
- **Azure Travel.** Bali from R5 895pps includes return transfers, 10 nights' accommodation with breakfast daily, two full-day tours, one half-day tour and the assistance of a local representative. Offer excludes flights. Valid between July 1 and October 31.
- **Sandton Sun.** Romantic package from R4 385 per couple. Offer includes one night's accommodation with breakfast and dinner, and Sea Whisperer massage for two. Valid until January 31.
- **Globus Family of Brands.** Morocco from R7 480pps. Offer includes six nights' accommodation, meals and sightseeing as per itinerary and private guide or tour director. Visit Casablanca, Rabat, Meknes, Fez, and Marrakesh. Set departure November 4.



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A330 -300 will be added to start flying Johannesburg / London route effective 25 March 2018. SAA reserves the right to change aircraft type any time due to operational reasons.

TNW6602SD

Kenya tourism growing despite political unrest

CATHERINE BOWER
AND JASON SIMPSON

KENYA'S tourism sector recorded growth in 2017, despite a prolonged electioneering process and negative travel advisories from some countries, says Kenya's National Bureau of Statistics' Economic Survey 2018, released on April 25.

While the period of unrest saw a dip in arrivals, overall arrivals for the year increased in 2017, compared with 2016. Overall, international visitor numbers rose by 8,1% from 2016 to 2017. This includes significant increases in leisure and business arrivals. As a result, earnings rose by a remarkable 20,3% to US\$1,19bn (R14,9bn) in 2017. **Wausi Walya**, PR and corporate

communications manager of the Kenya Tourism Board, says it also noted an increase in minor categories, such as medical travel, and VFR tourists. Germany, the UK and the US provided the most international visitors, while visitors from Australia and New Zealand grew by about 51%. South Africans have also been returning. **Lance Zackey**, sales and marketing at

Rove Africa, says while Kenya as a destination for South African travellers showed slow growth between 2014 and 2017, the uptake in 2018 has been quite remarkable. "Comparing last year and this year, we have seen around a 40% growth in terms of bookings and enquiries," Lance says. He puts this down to the general stabilising of Kenya as a whole. ■

How's that!

Fastjet has recorded a 90% on-time performance rating across its network for flight departures in the first quarter of 2018. Sharing the good news is **Pretty Mvune**, sales executive of Aviareps, the GSA for Fastjet. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl



Changes to MK Asia routes

AIR Mauritius will launch a Mauritius-Wuhan route on July 6. It will be served by an Airbus A340-300 and will operate once a week on a Thursday. The Mauritius-Guangzhou route has been cancelled indefinitely. Air Mauritius's new Airbus A340 began servicing the

Cape Town route twice a week on March 28. The service operates every Wednesday and Sunday, departing Cape Town at 22h05 and arriving in Mauritius at 05h10. The return flight departs Mauritius at 16h15 and arrives in Cape Town at 20h20. ■

To the point

Protea Hotels by Marriott will open a Loftus Park hotel later this year. The hotel will be located in the Loftus Park corporate, retail and lifestyle precinct adjacent to the stadium. It will offer 152 rooms and conference facilities and meeting rooms catering for up to 180 people. Facilities include a restaurant, coffee shop, rooftop pool, and a bar and lounge.

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New look for Paradis Villas



Beachcomber's Paradis Villas in Mauritius are getting a new look and feel, with work on all 12 villas to be completed in November. Operations will not be affected by the refurbishment. Pictured here is the new look, featuring the new beige and white palette and details inspired by the surrounding vegetation and sea. Photo: Beachcomber Hotels & Resorts

Govt zeroes in on PCO commissions

ZIA TAYLOR

TREASURY has been looking into its policy for PCOs, and concerns have abounded in the industry about the likely implications should it prevent PCOs from earning commissions when organising public-sector events. Just last year, Treasury implemented a new national travel policy framework that did away with all TMC commissions and override

agreements, in an effort for complete transparency and nett fares. According to the regulation, TMCs are entitled to a management fee and any commissions that might be paid are to be reimbursed to government. The knock-on effects of eliminating commissions are substantial, and many professional conference organisers have baulked at the notion of not earning commissions. Says

Riedwaan Jacobs, md of Ilios Conferences: "Commissions allow us to keep our fees reasonable and affordable." He believes that steep management fees would drive associations and corporates to organise their events in-house, and this could potentially result in a drop in standards. Rudi van der Vyver, ceo of SAACI, explains: "We are assisting Treasury to avoid unilateral decisions that could affect the entire industry." ■

Celebrity Cruises stretches fitness offering
CELEBRITY Cruises has partnered with lifestyle real estate company, Canyon Ranch, to create 20 new fitness classes and wellness seminars. These include Sweat, a Japanese cardio and training programme; a Pilates programme called Conditioning; Longevity, a wellness programme; Mindfulness, a cycling programme; Nutrition, which provides information on detoxifying; and Acupuncture.

R200m cruise terminal for Durban
THE Transnet National Ports Authority has concluded an agreement that will see over R200 million invested in building the KwaZulu Cruise Terminal in the Port of Durban by October 2020. The detailed design phase will commence this month followed by an 18-month construction phase between January 2019 and July 2020, opening in October for the 2020/2021 cruise season.

Silversea Cruises rolls out free WiFi
SILVERSEA Cruises now offers free unlimited WiFi to all guests. All guests can now use one device without time restrictions while those staying in larger suites, such as Silver or Owner's suites, will have unlimited WiFi for up to two devices per guest. Silversea will send its expedition ship, *Silver Discoverer*, to the Seychelles to coincide with the cruise season there, which lasts from October to April.

U by Uniworld's second ship sets sail
U BY Uniworld's second ship, *The A*, set sail on its maiden voyage along the Rhine on April 14. The 120-passenger ship offers inclusions such as mixology classes, silent discos, yoga, wine tastings, farm-to-table dining and more. The ship has four suites, 26 balcony bedrooms, 29 studio bedrooms, and two studio bedrooms with triple occupancy. All accommodation has waterfront views, flat-screen TVs, built-in bluetooth speakers, and USB ports.

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Embracing the next chapter of life

In the latest Who Is... Sarah Robertson chats to Mary Shilleto, much-loved ceo of Thompsons Travel.

ALWAYS full of energy and enthusiasm and so unquestionably at the top of her game, **Mary Shilleto**, ceo of Thompsons Travel, is now preparing to hand over the Thompsons reins in order to begin the next chapter of her life.

Mary started her career at SAA, where she worked for seven years, moving through a number of departments. She spent a few years with Japan Airlines and worked part time for KLM when her two children were small.

She then took a morning job at International Travels where she worked for many years, attributing much of her knowledge of customer service to industry stalwart, **Tony Tomasicchio**.

“I have tried to be trustworthy and to take accountability, to work as hard as my team does and to build strong but straight-talking relationships with our partners.”

At 40 Mary decided to go out on her own, opening up a retail agency called Wisdom Travel for Logans. When Logans went bust a few years later, Mary paid off all their creditors overnight and moved the agency, all the consultants and clients to the Micor Travel Group. Some of the consultants who started out with Wisdom Travel have remained with Mary ever since, with some relationships stretching back 20 years or more.

A few years later the agency merged with Seekers and Mary went on to run the agency's corporate and franchising department, eventually handing over to Tourvest's **Morné du Preez**, when she moved over to the then small corporate department at Thompsons Travel.

She later took over as ceo for Thompsons Retail, overseeing its national leisure, corporate, groups and incentives divisions for Cullinan Holdings.

Over the past 15 years in this role, Mary has grown the business to a team of 90 people with growth in turnover of more than 800%.

Mary feels at ease with her

decision to move on to the next chapter of her life, saying she would never have dreamt that she would live such a life of privilege, being exposed to so much during her career.

She has been married to Michael for 46 years and is a proud mother to Gina (36) and Marc (34) and grandmother to Sophia, Levi and Holly. While Mary may continue with some part-time consulting, she is also looking forward to spending more guilt-free time with her grandchildren and continuing to explore beautiful South Africa.

“I am an all-or-nothing person, which means that this job has always been an all-or-nothing position. I feel ready to step down from 12- and 15-hour days and to walk away confident that our tightly knit team will continue to run things smoothly.”

As a ceo, Mary says the people she works with are the business. “I have tried to be trustworthy and to take accountability, to work as hard as my team does and to build strong but straight-talking relationships with our partners.

“Despite the ever-growing pace of technological changes, our role as agents is still about providing good service, using the tools that are available to us and maintaining personal relationships with our clients. Sometimes we make mistakes in life and it is those relationships that allow us to apologise and to continue to be trusted even when the ball is occasionally dropped,” she explained with characteristic humility.

Mary has travelled the world extensively, beginning on her honeymoon with Michael, where the couple visited Japan, Taiwan, the Greek isles and England, foregoing a big wedding in order to see more of the world. Since then, Mary has visited six continents and travelled extensively. Some of these highlights have been a Delta Air Lines trip to watch Royal Ascot from the Queen's Enclosure and sitting with Travelpart at the finishing line of the Formula 1 GP in Abu Dhabi. Another highlight was the 46th anniversary trip, where she and Michael travelled to Phuket with six couples who had attended their wedding decades earlier.



Mary Shilleto

Getting to know Mary

- Mary is an outdoor girl who is looking forward to having more time to walk, cycle and garden.
- Characteristically, when her husband, Michael, suffered a stroke 10 years ago, the couple refused to let the experience get the better of them. Michael now paints magnificently with his non-dominant hand and instead of giving up on travelling, the couple instead learned the tricks to travelling with disabilities.
- Mary is a self-declared open book, saying there isn't much that she could share with TNW that everyone doesn't already know about her.
- She has been a board member of the XL group since 2005 and took over **Dudley Randall**'s place as chairperson when he died in 2016. Mary says it has been a huge privilege to work with ceo, **Marco Ciocchetti**, and a super group of agents.
- She was honoured at the Asata awards this year with an award for Exceptional Commitment.
- Some of Mary's favourite authors are Jennifer Hobbs, Khaled Hosseini and Paulo Coelho.
- She avidly reads any travel-related reading material and is a loyal subscriber to all travel magazines. ■

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CORPORATE TRAVEL

The economy, technology and other trends are shaking up the way corporate agents book business travel. Sue van Winsen investigates.

Booking more on the same budget

CORPORATE agents are likely to find themselves in the impossible situation of having a smaller budget at their disposal, yet having to make it go further than before, putting on pressure to negotiate extremely effectively.

Monique Swart, founder of the African Business Travel Association (Abta), says travel buyers need to be more realistic when it comes to their budgeting. "For the most part, travel costs are increasing, so to expect to travel in the same way from one year to the next without increasing your budget is, firstly, unrealistic, and secondly, puts a lot of pressure on TMC partners, particularly those that are already doing all they can



Monique Swart

to ensure every opportunity for savings is identified and utilised."

Earlier this year, *TNW's* sister publication, *Travel &*

Meetings Buyer, ran a survey where 200 corporate travel buyers and bookers provided details of the size of their travel budget for 2018, compared with last year.

The majority (42%) said their budget would remain the same, while 38% expected an increase and 20% a decrease.

Despite this, most respondents (61%) would be expected to book more business travel by this year, while just 23% thought levels would remain steady and 16% predicted a decrease.

Making conditions even trickier, the vast majority of respondents (85%), said they expected overall travel costs to rise in 2018. Respondents said they expected accommodation rates to

increase the most, followed by car rental.

Containing costs

So, what can agents do to make their clients' budgets stretch further? According to **Aadil Esack**, gm: Product and Marketing for XL Travel, the solution isn't simply to negotiate harder with suppliers.

"This has usually already been done to the best of the TMC's ability in terms of finding a mutually beneficial commercial agreement between the relevant parties."

Instead, he says, agents are going to have to utilise the tools at their disposal – particularly technology – to maximise travel bookings while keeping costs on a par

with what they were before. One of the ways technology can assist agents is through providing data that may prove useful when discussing preferred rates with suppliers, adds Monique.

She also suggests that agents focus on compliance and ensure minimal leakage within air and hotel spend.

"This is of vital importance to ensure corporate deals remain in place, as well as better planning pre-trip to reduce last-minute bookings."

"Once all avenues have been utilised, agents then need to start looking at reducing classes of travel and accommodation from business to economy and suites to standard rooms wherever possible," says Monique.



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Are online booking tools destroying transaction fees?



Refurb for Cresta Mowana

Cresta Mowana Safari Resort and Spa in Kasane, Botswana, commenced a renovation project in April. Changes will include a renovation of its rooms, the redesign of the Serondella Restaurant, Savuti Bar and the boma area, and an update of the reception area and conferencing facilities. The property will remain open and upgrades will be done in stages to ensure minimal disruption to guests.

Major upgrades for African Sun

DURING its annual financial results announcement, African Sun detailed a number of planned upgrades and refurbishments that are already under way or scheduled to begin at its properties across Zimbabwe. These include:

- The rebuilding of the Great Zimbabwe Hotel and the addition of a modern conference centre to the property.
- Following improvements made to the exterior of Caribbea Bay Resort, the focus will shift to interior improvements with an artist's impression already completed.
- The refurbishment of one floor of the Holiday Inn Mutare is under way.
- Increasing the conference capacity at The Kingdom at Victoria Falls by 400.
- Exterior painting of the Elephant Hills and The Kingdom at Victoria Falls.
- Refurbishment of the public areas for Monomotapa Hotel.

All these projects are planned to capitalise on increasing traveller numbers due to Zimbabwe's improved airport infrastructure, as well as an anticipated boost in business travel as a result of the completion of the Beit Bridge-Chirundu Highway project.

ONE of the main features of corporate self-booking tools is functionality enabling corporates to book simple routings themselves without having to send the request via their corporate agent. But, with many agencies reliant on transaction fees for their revenue, what impact has this had on profitability and are there opportunities for consultants to make up for this lost remuneration?

According to **Aadil Esack** of XL Travel, solutions vary across different groups and consortiums. "Sometimes TMCs present the self-booking

tool offering to their client at a minimal cost to make up for lost transaction fees," he says, emphasising that there are other models for generating revenue – it'll just come from a different channel.

Monique Swart of Abta agrees. "Agents are still earning transaction or management fees for many of the services they provide and many corporates still prefer to use their TMC for more complicated bookings. This is where TMCs need to strive to identify additional services they can offer their clients that they may be willing to pay for."

She says data is one of the major services being considered by TMCs and clients due to the strategic advantage it can give them when managing their travel programmes.

"What's important to consider," says Aadil, "is if you want to retain a client or grow your clientele you're going to need provide an OBT. You shouldn't look at the tool as a cost, but rather an investment to secure future business. If you are tendering for business and you don't offer a self-booking solution, you're going to be the odd one out."

Corporates want more from TMC tools

A new global study by the Expedia Affiliate Network, which included respondents from Europe, the Middle East and Africa, focused on how TMCs were keeping up with the corporate traveller, investigated the popularity of online booking tools and uncovered some interesting results.

It found that while 52% of frequent corporate travellers said they were booking all their own travel, only 20% said they were doing so through an approved tool or agency.

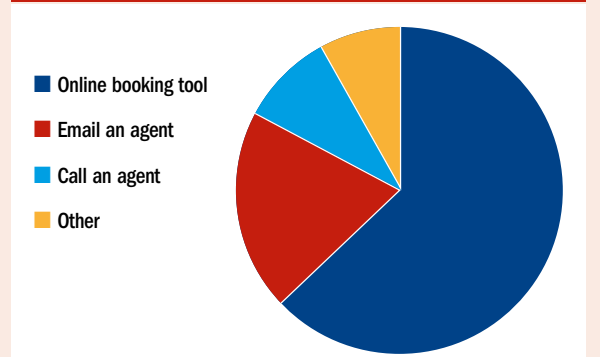
To emphasise this point, 68% said they booked half or more business travel outside their employer's approved tools, with 31% stating that this was because the tool offered no benefits. It seems that consumer-focused online

travel agencies (OTAs) and direct channels are tempting travellers to book outside their managed programmes as they are more user-friendly.

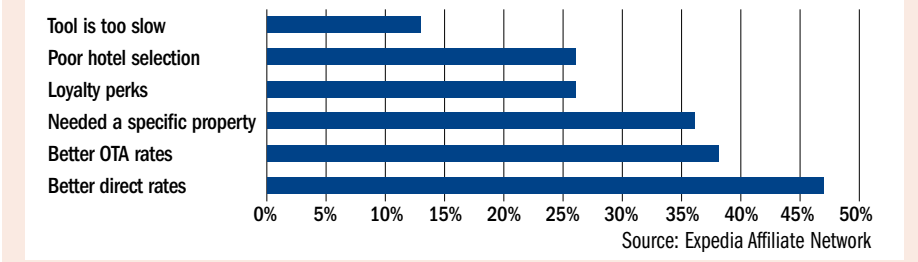
The findings of the Expedia

Affiliate Network study were that TMCs needed to offer consumer-like, well-supported booking tools in order to recapture the market that is increasingly opting to book outside these channels.

How are your corporate travellers booking business travel?



Reasons for booking outside an employer's approved tool



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What is the price of personalisation?

PERSONALISATION is one of the current buzzwords in the corporate travel industry, with many surveys and reports indicating a growing expectation that corporate travel agents address and cater for individual traveller preferences. But how does this tie in with agents' mandate to book within policy and keep costs from spiralling out of control?

Personalisation is a balancing act between choice and control, says **Monique Swart** of Abta. "Giving more freedom to make their own choices will reduce traveller friction, but could open a

Pandora's box regarding tracking the travellers from a safety perspective, and tracking spend."

Choice is key

Monique says: "For me, the key is to be more strategic within their choice architecture; making sure travellers have more options than usual but still ensuring that those options are trackable. A good place to start would be identifying where travellers could have more choices that are less impactful on the policy and budget, and where the policy is non-negotiable. By

having some freedom to move, travellers will be more respectful of areas that are non-negotiable."

Indeed, research has shown that personalisation can actually play a key role in managing costs and motivating travellers to book through traditional channels and stay within policy.

A study, *Managing the Modern Business Traveller*, conducted by the Association of Corporate Travel Executives (Acte) and underwritten by American Express Global Business Travel (GBT) showed that taking a more traveller-considerate approach could

improve compliance levels, which in turn helps contain costs and provides better leverage when it comes to negotiating preferred rates with suppliers.

Greeley Koch, executive director of Acte, says: "Business travellers now expect a personalised experience, but many organisations still take a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to travel policy, driving travellers to work outside the normal channels." He adds that considering the traveller's point of view is likely to encourage them "to do the right thing".

Agents can upgrade their corporate travellers to business class at the last minute at a special rate with **RwandAir**. For flights originating from Southern Africa (including Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa), a special upgrade rate of US\$200 (R2 523) applies. This is sellable on the day of the flight, three to five hours before departure at a **RwandAir** office and must be done before the passenger checks in. The upgrade special rate is subject to economy booking class and business-class fare availability. Sales and travel must be completed by July 30.

Opportunity for agents

Beyond motivating travellers to book within policy, personalisation also presents an opportunity for agents to deliver 'true value' to clients.

Aadil Esack of XL Travel says agents can use personalisation

functionality to upsell when it comes to 'bleisure' trips.

"Corporate booking tools can plug in to providers to send relevant push notifications to business travellers' smartphones – for example, when they're

in the vicinity of their favourite restaurant."

He explains that this kind of technology is readily available and doesn't require investment by agencies, provided they belong to a consortium or group that has already

done all the development work in the background.

"It's important to remember which generation is now entering into the workplace – with younger travellers willing to be more adventurous during business travel," he adds.

Book it!

Air Mauritius is offering discounted return fares from R1 800 between JNB and MRU and from R3 000 between CPT and MRU. The travel period runs until June 18 and from July 18 to September 24. Sales must be before May 31.

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Airlines refine cabins to cater for biz travellers

New app for KZN bleisure travellers

Tourism KwaZulu-Natal has launched a new KZN Travel Guide app available free of charge from iTunes and Google Play. It features local travel and tourism information that could be of interest to bleisure travellers visiting the province. Users can search for restaurants, activities accommodation, local events, shopping and conference events. The QR Scanner allows travellers to access location-specific information, and other functionality includes the ability to build a customised 'favourites list', search for weather information and navigate maps with locations of interest pinned for easy reference.

WHILE airlines continue to put a huge amount of focus on improving their distribution channels and pre-travel offerings and interactions, another area that has received a great deal of attention in recent months is the overhaul of aircraft cabins – and many of these improvements seem to be for the benefit of the corporate traveller in particular.

Corporate sales manager of Turkish Airlines, **Trevor Brown**, says there have been so many exciting new on-product enhancements being rolled out across the airline industry over the last few months, it's almost as though air travel is regaining some of its former prestige.

He says increased airline competition means corporates

are enjoying more choice.

"For corporate travellers, the on-board product on a lot of airlines has improved and it's almost as if we are going back to the early glory days of travel, when it first started."

The improvement of in-flight food and beverages has been a focus, part of a larger movement to look after the general wellness of passengers.

This has extended to more space and comfortable seating and even improved airflow and technology to reduce the effects of jetlag. Connectivity through the availability of WiFi is also becoming more commonplace, as is the ability for passengers to charge and use their own devices during their flights.

The cost

Fortunately for corporates, it is quite unlikely that these enhancements will come with significant fare increases. Trevor says, at this stage, Turkish Airlines' Europe fares have remained relatively unchanged for the past 10 years. A survey by TNW's sister publication, *Travel & Meetings Buyer*, also reflects this – when reviewing all suppliers, business travel bookers named airlines as the least likely to hike prices this year.

Global research is showing a similar trend, with American Express GBT predicting only "marginal" increases in airfares this year due to increased capacity and therefore greater competition between airlines.

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Basic economy a no-go for biz travel

Several UK and US airlines have opted to introduce 'no-frills' basic economy fares that essentially provide passengers with just a seat, and often exclude checked-in baggage, seat allocation and offer no flexibility in terms of changes or cancellations.

How are these options being received by corporates? **Marco Cristofoli**, coo of BidTravel,

says the concept is very new to the South African market.

"Due to the extreme long-haul nature of our location, it is very unlikely that a corporate will be travelling with only hand baggage and these fares often become expensive when baggage and seats are added separately," he says. For the same reason, it's also unlikely that a client would

accept a 'no seat allocation' policy.

Marco adds that another major concern is that a corporate client could arrive at the airport and only then realise they must pay for baggage. "There needs to be in-depth consultant training to ensure that a corporate is made aware of this fact if they insist on taking the cheapest 'new' type of fare."

What's new on-board

Below are just a few of the upgrades recently made to cabins that will likely benefit corporate travellers.

• **Air Mauritius:** The airline's A350-900, its new flagship aircraft, includes several cabin improvements, both in business and economy class. It has been fitted with new seats, an in-flight entertainment system and in-flight connectivity. The 28 business-class seats are fully horizontal lie-flat with a screen and direct aisle access due to the 1-2-1 configuration. The 298 economy-class seats are in a 3-3-3 configuration with a 79-84cm seat pitch and 29cm screen. To enhance passenger wellness, the aircraft features an air management system that renews the cabin air every two to three minutes. The cabin has been equipped

with LED ambient lighting to mimic natural lighting and reduce the effects of jet-lag.

• **Joon:** A subsidiary of Air France, Joon operated its first flight between Paris CDG and Cape Town last month on its newly refurbished Airbus A340. The aircraft features two-metre-long, lie-flat beds and 40cm HD touch screens in business class and passengers are also given welcome and comfort kits. The 49cm-wide seats in premium economy recline to 133 degrees with 99cm of leg-room. Economy seats have 78cm of leg-room, recline to 118 degrees and are fitted with the latest-generation touch-screen and USB port for device charging.

• **Virgin Atlantic:** As part of its economy overhaul,

Virgin Atlantic announced three new options: Economy Delight, Economy Classic and Economy Light.

Economy Delight includes 86cm leg-room, free advance seat assignment as well as priority boarding and check-in. At the other end of the scale, Economy Light does not include checked luggage, refunds or changes.

• **Lufthansa:** The airline will take delivery of its A320 family of aircraft in 2019 which will feature new seats on short- and medium-haul routes. The new seats are designed for ergonomic pressure distribution. Passengers will be seated at a 20-degree recline for the duration of the flight, with business-class passengers able to set the backrest to 26 degrees at cruising altitude.

Shangri-La to manage Bahrain Marina hotel

HONG Kong-based Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts has been appointed management company for the luxury hotel and waterfront villas in Bahrain Marina – a waterfront complex currently under development in the capital, Manama.

The hotel will feature 250 rooms and 21 waterfront villas and is scheduled to open in 2022. It will also offer extensive meeting facilities, five restaurants, a rooftop lounge, private beach, two outdoor pools, a health club and spa.

Along with the hotel, Bahrain Marina will be a multi-use complex and include residences, a yacht club, shopping district, family entertainment centre and waterfront dining, retail and recreational spaces.



An artist's impression of the Shangri-La Hotel in Bahrain.

Did you know?

The Mercure Johannesburg Bedfordview in Bedfordview has 120 self-catering rooms, ideal for corporate travellers, as well as meeting rooms catering for up to 80 delegates. It is located in easy distance of OR Tambo International.



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City Lodge targets intra-African biz travellers with new hotels

CITY Lodge says the expansion of the group into East and Southern Africa is good news for business travellers.

In the next few months, the group will open the City Lodge Hotel Dar es Salaam in Tanzania and City Lodge Hotel Maputo in Mozambique, while two further hotels are being developed in Polokwane and Umhlanga.

Outside South Africa, the City Lodge Hotel Group already operates three hotels in Kenya (The Fairview Hotel; Town Lodge Upper Hill, Nairobi; and City Lodge Hotel at Two Rivers Mall) and one each in Botswana (Town Lodge Gaborone) and Namibia (Town Lodge Windhoek).

City Lodge Hotel Group spokesperson, **Angus MacMillan**, says: "The City Lodge Hotel brand within the group is currently focusing on communicating the comfort and style it offers guests, rather than merely being functional and convenient accommodation, with added features such as #Cafe, parking, wireless Internet and meeting rooms." He adds that rooms have been redesigned and upgraded to meet today's business travellers' needs.

Gauteng property completes R1,6m refurb

AHA Kopanong Hotel and Conference Centre, situated 12,5km from ORTIA in Gauteng, has completed an extensive refurbishment.

The upgrade included an overhaul of the hotel's conference centres which now feature new décor, lighting and carpeting. Other changes include new furniture in the Business Centre and Conference Centre lobby, as well as a soft refurb of the reception area, restrooms and all public areas.


Aha Hotels & Lodges ceo, **Neil Bald**, says: "We've realised flexible places for informal meetings are a priority as well, which has resulted in the creation of more breakout spaces outside the meetings rooms where delegates can continue their discussions. In addition to this, we've enhanced the wireless connectivity with ample bandwidth in all areas, affording delegates and guests seamless and uninterrupted connectivity."

Did you know?

While predominantly focusing on leisure, Travel Vision is also positioned to assist agents with their corporate travel needs. It has an 'Access to Africa' department in its office that offers specialised services such as accommodation, transfers, security, special vehicles and MICE logistics in more than 47 African countries. Travel Vision's online booking engine, TravelVisionOnline, can be used to book corporate accommodation worldwide.

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Ethiopian Airlines has just launched flights to Nosy Be in Madagascar.

ET launches more African routes

ETHIOPIAN Airlines has launched flights to Kisangani and Mbuji Mayi in the DRC, as well as Nosy Be in Madagascar.

Kisangani flights depart Addis Ababa at 10h00 on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, arriving at 11h50. The connecting flights depart Kisangani on the same days at 12h50 and arrive in Mbuji Mayi at 14h15. The return flight

departs on the same days at 15h15, landing in Addis at 19h30.

Speaking at the launch of the flights, group ceo of Ethiopian Airlines, **Tewolde GebreMariam**, said: "When we open these three destinations, we may look at only the direct services we are going to operate between Addis and these places. But, what is more important and may not

be visible, is that we are connecting these destinations with more than 100 destinations all over the world.

"Kisangani and Mbuji Mayi will be two additional points to the three we already fly to in the DRC; so we are now flying to Kinshasa, Goma, Mbuji Mayi, Kisangani and Lubumbashi," added Tewolde.

Mythbuster: It's more dangerous to travel now

ZIA TAYLOR

WHETHER it is due to the proliferation of news and personal experience stories making the headlines on platforms such as social media, many people have fallen into the trap of being more afraid to travel and to leave their comfort zone. But, is it actually more dangerous to travel now than it was in the past?

Simmy Micheli, manager sales and marketing for Travel Insurance Consultants (TIC), doesn't believe that it's any more dangerous to travel now than it was 10 or 20 years ago. "The risks have not really changed over the years. Risks like terrorism and malaria have and always will be around. That's why it's important to have travel insurance."

Co-ordinating security manager at International SOS, **German Castro**, agrees that it is safer to travel now, despite perceptions to the contrary. "It's important to remember that terrorist attacks result in mass casualties, and therefore they make the news. It is high impact but low probability."

Rather than bombs and mass shootings, the smaller risks, such as illness, and muggings occurring in dangerous areas, are the ones that are most likely to impact travellers, and those, he adds, are relatively easy to mitigate.

German says that with media entities and services providing us with timely and useful information, it is easier to be informed and, in turn, to make prepared decisions. He does note, however, that while there has been an improvement in air travel, road travel remains a concern as accidents are far more prevalent.

While travel may not be any more dangerous today, it's still essential that corporates take steps to mitigate risks wherever possible. Simmy says travel managers need to stay informed and that, should travellers be concerned about medical issues when travelling, they would be better off going for medical check-ups before they travel to determine if they are fit to do so. Other unanticipated medical emergencies are sufficiently covered by insurance.

Did you know?

As part of Virgin Atlantic's new focus on offering three economy-class categories, the airline will be rolling out several other improvements. These include an automated bag drop at London airports – four kiosks at London Gatwick and 18 at London Heathrow – as well as the introduction of USB charging points on every economy seat across its routes with access to high-speed WiFi. In addition, the 12 new A350-1000 aircraft that will join Virgin Atlantic's fleet will have a new economy cabin.

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MICE roadshow



Cruises International recently hosted MICE principals, Alex Acosta of Royal Caribbean and Alexis Puma of Celebrity Cruises, in South Africa. The pair did trade presentations in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. Pictured here are agents who attended the Cape Town presentation on a yacht called the *Tigger 2* at the V&A Waterfront.



SQ pays a surprise visit

The Singapore Airlines Flash Team will be making surprise visits to one agency every Thursday for the next two months. Most recently they visited Flight Centre Sandton, where agent Tankiso Selokoma correctly answered the three questions about the 10 weekly services between Johannesburg and Singapore, which will operate between July 1 and August 31, and won a hamper. Pictured here with Tankiso (centre), are (from left): Carolee Pacak, Taririo Marongwe, Mohsin Mohammed and Rachael Mhlanga of Singapore Airlines.



Proudly South African

A mom travelling on an SAA flight from New York back to Johannesburg had a massively proud-to-be-South-African moment on board recently. Air hostess, Mavis, offered to take the mom's baby girl out of her arms and 'beletha'd her (strapped her on her back), then carried on serving other passengers so that the mom was able to eat her meal in peace. Fifteen minutes later, Mavis returned to the mom's seat with a fast asleep baby!

Appointment

■ First Group, a hospitality managing agent, has announced the appointment of **Jerod Flaum** as the new regional manager for the KwaZulu Natal region. Jerod's credentials comprise five years at Sun City in various hotel management positions that include resident manager at The Palace of the Lost City and gm of The Cascades Hotel at Sun City. In addition, he held gm positions at Zimbali Coastal Resort and Mabula Game Lodge. He was the operations manager for Coastlands Hotels and Resorts and the regional operations manager with Premier Hotels in the Eastern Cape.



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Business travellers to Angola – beware!

CANDICE MAY

THE Consulate General of Angola in Johannesburg has warned that immigration will be clamping down on business travellers who try to pass as tourists to obtain a tourism visa on arrival rather than apply for a business visa prior to travel.

Toward the end of the year, Mozambique undertook a similar clampdown, implementing fines for businesses meeting with business people visiting on tourist visas.

Jaendre Terblanche, owner of Visas Zone, says it makes sense that business travellers would take the opportunity to travel through as tourists. "Obtaining a tourism visa on arrival rather than a

business visa beforehand eliminates the processes in South Africa, which are time consuming and costly," he explains. "Business travellers always have time constraints, so they might use gaps like this to their advantage."

According to Liam Fletcher, director of Simply Visa, another reason why business travellers may go this route is because a lot of them struggle to obtain the documents required to apply for a business visa.

If there is an influx of travellers obtaining tourism visas on arrival, Jaendre says immigration will likely pick up on the pattern and question those who look suspicious. If immigration finds business travellers guilty of trying to pass as tourists, they can deny them entry, Jaendre adds. ■



New on the Beachcomber board

Beachcomber Tours South Africa has appointed two long-time senior staff members, Silvana Polo and Joanne Visagie, to its board of directors. Silvana is the operations manager and Joanne is the national sales and marketing manager. Terry Munro, md, said on announcing the appointments: "Both managers have outstanding records of excellence in their years at Beachcomber Tours. Their impact on the company's success is immeasurable and has in no small way contributed to our strong standing in the local travel trade and among the travelling public." Silvana (left) and Joanne are pictured here.

Reduced discounts for SAA corporate fares

SARAH ROBERTSON

FOLLOWING SAA's withdrawal of its corporate and government fares last month, the airline has now released its new offering, realising predictions that discount levels would be reduced.

Carlos Luis, brand leader air and land contracts for Flight Centre Travel Group (FCTG), confirmed that SAA had reduced corporate discount levels for many fare classes and had removed them entirely for the lower booking classes.

"Flight Centre understands that SAA is doing what it can to improve its financials. Discounts of up to 30% that had previously been extended to government departments would have been very difficult to justify in its new business model. People generally understand the predicament that they are in," he said.

Vanya Lessing, ceo of Sure Travel, said while it was still too early to gauge the private sector's reaction, she believed corporates would take SAA's competitors' prices into consideration when booking tickets but that Voyager was likely to remain

a very strong drawcard for this sector when fare selections were made.

"Travel Counsellors have an obligation to ensure that our customers receive the best possible outcome when booking an air ticket and we provide our corporates with a spectrum of rates to choose from," said Mladen Lukic, gm of Travel Counsellors.

"SAA is bucking the trend at a time when other airlines are currently renewing corporate agreements providing generous discount levels."

"Should a particular supplier price themselves poorly compared with their competitors, it is likely that there will be a negative outcome for the supplier in question. This is true, not just for SAA but for all our suppliers," said Mladen.

Sailesh Parbhu, md of XL Nexus Travel, confirmed that SAA's public sector fare discounts, which had previously been capped at around 30%, had now been

reduced to caps of between 18% and 20%.

"Treasury and SAA met regarding the discount levels and deemed that a discount reduction would be the best solution to SAA's current financial predicament. Public sector departments don't have much choice but to accept the new offerings," said Sailesh.

He added that the public sector were staunch supporters of SAA, in many instances directing more than 80% of their travel bookings to the airline. Sailesh believes the sector will continue to support the airline but that this would not necessarily result in a huge increase in travel spend based on the higher fares. "Treasury has also implemented a number of cost-saving initiatives and is encouraging departments to book lower classes of travel wherever possible," he explained.

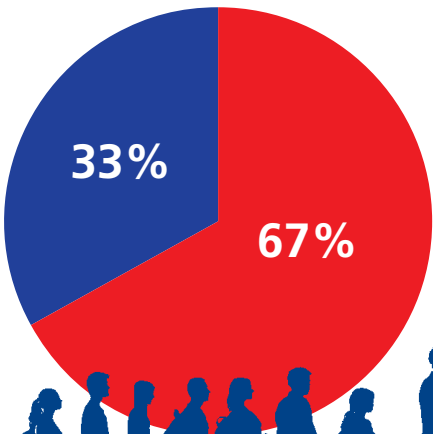
According to the agents canvassed, it is also interesting to note that SAA is bucking the trend at a time when other airlines are currently renewing corporate agreements providing generous discount levels. ■



Department of Headache Affairs

Has queueing time at the DHA (Department of Home Affairs) improved?

- No
- Yes



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Visa appointment backlog

From page 1
make an appointment on April 30, but the earliest available date was May 14. As a result, they had to cancel their trip. Bobbi

wrote to the embassy to negotiate an earlier date but received no response. Michele added that mid-year was always a busy period for the industry.

While agents and visa companies double up on their workload to manage the influx, visa application centres and embassies do not. ■