



TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

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Distress over BA card clampdown

British Airways disallows card payments for private fares

TESSA REED

BRITISH Airways notified the travel trade recently that it would no longer accept credit cards as a form of payment for private fares.

The airline will still take credit card payment for corporate fares and published fares. Lodge cards and eNett's virtual card solution will also

no longer be accepted for private fares.

Marco Ciochetti, ceo of XL Travel, explains that by not accepting credit card payments for private fares BA is forcing agents into one of two scenarios when clients don't want to pay cash or make an EFT. Either agents will have to quote corporate or published fares, which are priced

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IAG ADMs for agent card use

SARAH ROBERTSON

FROM June 1, International Airlines Group (IAG) will raise ADMs for the unauthorised use of agency cards or virtual cards as a form of payment for airfares. The penalty will be 5% of the unauthorised payment amount. IAG is the holding company for British Airways, Iberia and Aer Lingus.

Following recent amendments to Iata Resolution 890, agent credit cards are now accepted as a BSP form of

payment subject to airline approval.

IAG's ADM policy applies to cards issued in an agency's name, in the name of a person permitted to act on behalf of the agent or in the name of the agent's officer, partner or employee. The policy also applies to virtual cards or alternative payment methods such as eNett or Wex.

The airline release explains that the handling of agency cards comes at an increased cost to the airline compared

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Clifford Ross to step down

TESSA REED

CITY Lodge Hotel Group chief executive, **Clifford Ross**, who has become synonymous with group, will be stepping down from his position at the end of June due to ill health. He has spent 31 years at City Lodge, 15 of them as chief executive.

Clifford started his career in the hospitality industry in 1974 as a trainee at Holiday Inn on an internship. He was with the company when Southern Sun acquired Holiday Inn and left at the end of 1986, joining City Lodge.

He was appointed general manager at City Lodge Bryanston (then Randburg), the group's sole property at the time, although hotels were under construction in Katherine Street, Sandton, and at the airport.

When Clifford took over as operations



Clifford Ross

director, the group had eight hotels – all in South Africa. Today the group has 61 hotels and operates in six countries in Africa. Clifford lists the African expansion among the highlights of his career. Another was in 1995, when the company gave one million shares to staff, excluding management. He points out that this was before any BEE legislation.

Peter Schoeman, former divisional director of Sales and Marketing at City Lodge Hotels, says Clifford made his job easier because he was good at building relationships. Peter also credits him with being a very open-minded chief executive, brave enough to go ahead with City Lodge's unconventional advertising campaign.

"Clifford contributed immensely to the

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Hitch a ride

Transfers can now be booked on the Amadeus GDS following the roll-out of a fully integrated transfer solution that lets agents book transfers within a single workflow under a single PNR. For more on this and how it works, read our car-rental feature on page 10. Pictured here from left are **Andy Hedley**, gm Southern Africa, Amadeus; **Caroline Smallwood**, senior manager account management and training, Amadeus; and **Marisa van der Linde**, solutions specialist, Amadeus. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

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NEWS

Visa centres violate VIS rule

CANDICE MAY

A NUMBER of visa lodgement centres are violating a Visa Information System (VIS) rule that requires Schengen visa applicants' biometric data to be stored on a database for up to five years.

The rule was introduced in November 2015 and eliminates the need for travellers to have to appear in person every time they apply for a visa.

At some lodgement centres, including those for The Netherlands, Greece and

Austria, travellers have to appear in person each time they apply. Other lodgement centres require to see only certain applicants.

The rule came into effect as part of the European Commission's worldwide introduction of VIS, a process that aims to better protect applicants against identity theft and to prevent document fraud and so-called 'visa shopping'. This is the practice of applying for visas at different consulate posts in the hope of finding that one will be more sympathetic and thus approve the application,

or in order to process the application faster.

According to **Liam Flett**, owner of Simply Visa, it has been rumoured that lodgement centres are requiring to see some – if not all – applicants in person as some biometric data was not captured properly when the rule was first introduced. "Applicants can risk assuming that they will not need to appear in person at certain lodgement centres. However, to stay on the safe side, I would recommend that agents advise their clients that they should be prepared to go in anyway." ■

FNB ramps up consumer travel offering

TESSA REED

FNB will make it even easier for consumers to book travel using eBucks when it makes this service available through its mobile app. The bank unveiled the plan to the media on May 16.

At the moment, FNB customers can book travel using eBucks, their bank card or a combination of both. This can be done on the eBucks website and online banking. FNB says the functionality will be coming to the app soon.

Last month, agents cited

the discounts offered to private banking clients as one of the biggest threats to travel agents, quickly overtaking the Internet.

Asata ceo, **Otto de Vries**, points out that where banks have a loyalty offering for their clients that includes discounted travel, the fulfilment is outsourced to an agent or TMC. "The skillset and the complexity of the industry is of such a nature that they still need to bring in travel professionals to provide the fulfilment."

Otto says this underscores

the value agents offer and presents an opportunity for agents who can secure these contracts.

But this doesn't mean other agents shouldn't take a shot at earning revenue from these offerings too. Otto suggests that agents should offer to fulfil their clients' bookings on loyalty programmes. Agents should also establish themselves as specialists, either on particular destinations or types of travel. "You have to drive value in order to ensure your sustainability in the future." ■

British Airways disallows card payments

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higher, or agents will have to swipe the client's card, absorb the merchant fee and issue the ticket as cash.

The latter will push up the agent's lata guarantee, which puts pressure on, especially, small agencies, who are already struggling, says Marco.

He also speculates that BA is trying to get around the cost of the merchant fee.

"Effectively, they are passing the merchant fee on to us."

Marco says the move is a "bad decision" that affects everyone in the travel chain and may hurt the airline. He says if agents quote the higher corporate or

published fare, the customer may opt for another airline.

Franz von Wielligh, Flight Specials gm, highlights these challenges, but says the upside is that agents will not need to disclose their service fee.

However, Marco says that while there's an industry push for transparency, this move goes against this. ■

IAG ADMs for agent card use

From page 1

with payment methods such as BSP.

The group said it was looking into implementing a permissions process for agent cards in line with lata TIP implementation.

Exceptions where agency cards may be used include internal bookings for travel agency employees, charges processed through airline contact centres and ancillary service purchases where BSP is not available as a payment option.

Dinesh Naidoo, group

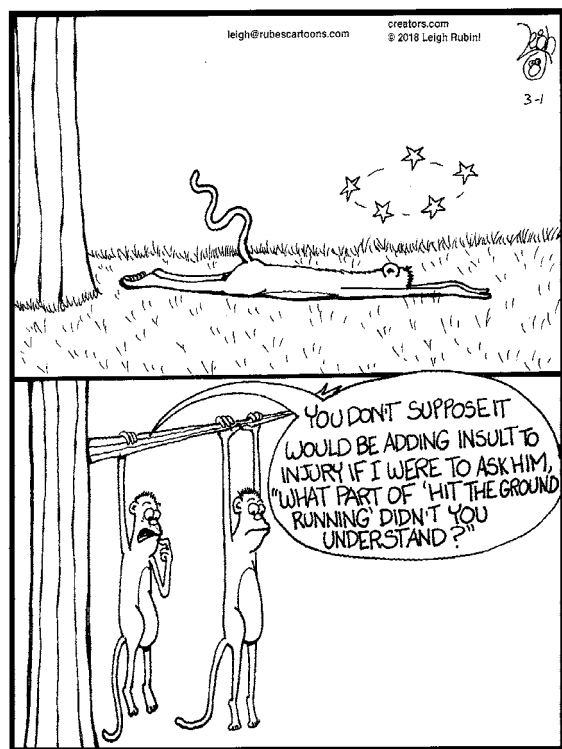
operations director of SWG, says they have been using eNett cards for the last two years and that this development affects their workflow process. He adds that SWG is off-selling carriers that have barred virtual cards where possible, following similar announcements from Cathay Pacific, Lufthansa, Qatar and SWISS.

"We find this decision surprising as airlines take on far greater risk when processing a client's card. eNett is one of the most

secure debit cards in the market and charge-backs do not apply to them. Additionally, an increase in BSP cash ticket sales also substantially impacts an agency's cash flow due to higher lata guarantee requirements."

Asked about the new ADM policy, a BA spokesperson told TNW that the airline had never allowed general usage of agent cards and that the latest release had been issued in response to an increase in agent questions about its policies. ■

Rubes® By Leigh Rubin



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A330 -300 is scheduled 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

IHG opens hotel in London's theatre district

INTERCONTINENTAL Hotels and Resorts has opened the Hotel Indigo London – 1 Leicester Square, in the city's theatre district. The 95-room hotel takes inspiration from its surroundings, with three bedroom designs representing the different stages of creating a theatrical production. The property takes advantage of its views of The Shard, Big Ben, the Houses of Parliament, Nelson's Column, the London Eye, and the Gherkin with floor-to-ceiling windows in the rooftop restaurant and balconies leading from seven of the property's rooms.

New lodge opens on the Zambezi

WILD Horizons recently opened its latest Victoria Falls property, the Old Drift Lodge, on the banks of the Zambezi River in Zimbabwe. The lodge is seven kilometres from the town of Victoria Falls and consists of ten air-conditioned double canvas suites and four family suites with private lounges, indoor and outdoor showers, plunge pools, star beds and outdoor baths overlooking the Zambezi. Transfers to and from the lodge are by cruise boat and take 15 minutes from Victoria Falls.

Relavant and up-to-date information tops the list of what travellers want from their travel agent.

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Independent surveys have found that more than 80% of passengers want their travel agent to keep them informed throughout their journey with real time updates on all aspects of their journey.

The need for real-time information becomes more pronounced still when the traveller is faced with disruption during the trip. For travellers – disruption is personal. It's a missed business meeting or another night away from home at the end of a long business trip. And, it's precisely at these times that the traveller wants immediate answers.

For the travel agent however, it can be a real challenge to keep track of flight delays and cancellations around the world 24/7. That's why Amadeus has recently launched Amadeus Travel Alerts Notifier (ATAN).

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What do
travellers look for
in a travel agent?

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Lufthansa celebrates top agents



The Lufthansa and SWISS group hosted agents at the Space Conference Centre at 10 Bompas in Johannesburg to celebrate its top performers. Lidia Folli, ceo of BidTravel, which walked away with the award for Top Supporting Consortium 2017 – nationwide, is pictured with Dr André Schulz, gm Southern Africa – Lufthansa. Photo: Tessa Reed

LUX* bags new property

TESSA REED

LUX* Hospitality has taken over management of La Palmeraie, a hotel on the east coast of Mauritius.

The renovation of the hotel began on May 15 and

the reopening will coincide with the launch of the new brand in November. The property will be closed until November 1 and guests with bookings during that period will be accommodated at another LUX* resort. "We are delighted to

announce that LUX* has taken over the management of La Palmeraie in Mauritius," says **Alexis Bekker**, head of Sales & Marketing South Africa. Hinting that there's more news to come, Alexis says: "Watch this space." ■

Iata migrates to new IBSP software

SARAH ROBERTSON

IATA has released new IBSP software and is planning roll-outs in markets around the world. The South African roll-out, which had been planned for July, has now been postponed so that the association can ensure that the amended billing reports will meet current fiscal requirements in the country.

IBSP is the redevelopment of the Iata Industry Settlement System, using new technology and improving security, speed and automation. The software is fully PCI DSS compliant.

Currently, various systems are being used by Iata in different regions and the new software will replace these with one single package around the world, maintaining reference information once across all markets.

The software's functionalities include new remit processing, variable commission processing, commission control, multiple remittance calendars and additional refund validations.

Benefits include the option to create outputs using standard nomenclature, user-friendly explanatory notes in the header,

report structures that display information better, statistical outputs based on calendar month and date of issue of document. Tax breakdown is now also an optional parameter at country level, which Iata says can reduce the number of pages for billing reports by up to 80%.

Iata has released online training modules about the new report formats. Contact ibspsame@iata.org for more information. If there are any questions that you would like to have answered relating to the report format changes, email sarahr@nowmedia.co.za. ■

Helen Johnston selects the top specials from Travelinfo

- **Thompsons Holidays.** Five-star Zanzibar offer from R15 991pp sharing. Offer includes return flights departing Johannesburg, approximate taxes, return transfers and seven nights' accommodation with breakfast, lunch, dinner and selected drinks daily. Valid until May 31.
- **British T.I.P.S.** Royal Windsor day package offer from R1 415 per adult and from R1 090 for children aged 5-15. Offer includes standard-class London-Windsor return rail tickets, hop-on hop-off bus tour, 40-minute river cruise and entrance ticket to Windsor Castle. Valid until December 31.
- **Kulula holidays.** Unwind in Mauritius from R12 042pp sharing. Offer includes return flights departing Johannesburg, approximate taxes, return transfers and seven nights' accommodation with breakfast, lunch and dinner daily. Valid from June 16-23.
- **Peninsula All Suite Hotel.** Pay for two nights and stay for three from R2 500 per night in a one-bedroom apartment, including breakfast. Two-bedroom apartment from R3 800 per night, including breakfast. Valid until August 31.





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A season to work...

In the latest Who Is... Sarah Robertson chats to star eTravel ITC, Angela Blythe from A2BTravel

“HONEY! TNW wants to know what my hobbies outside of work are?” called out **Angela Blythe**, owner of eTravel A2B Travel, to her husband during our telephonic interview. “People!” came the muffled reply on the other end of the line. “Whenever you have nothing to do you call someone,” responded Adrian Blythe dryly.

It turns out that after 20 years of marriage Adrian is a good judge of his wife’s character. Personal relationships form the cornerstone of Angela’s busy Somerset West business, which was founded almost 11 years ago. Since then she has been recognised as eTravel’s top ITC for 2017 and was honoured to receive the Asata top ITC award for 2018.

“My very dear father once told me that in life there is a season to work and provide for your children and a season to enjoy the fruits of one’s labour.”

“My biggest goal in life is to clear my inbox down to a manageable level,” quips the 40-year-old ITC with the characteristic wry sense of humour that has drawn clients to her over the years.

“Maybe I’ll also find time to go for a run before I turn 50,” she adds.

Angela had worked as an agent for 10 years when she decided that she wanted to spend more time at home with her daughter.

“I quit and initially spent time with Dani, who was five, and helped Adrian with his business.

After a few months I was bored stiff and Adrian encouraged me to meet with Tammy about starting up as an ITC, even if just to fill up a few hours of my day,” she says.

The business took off within the first month and was almost immediately a full-time job.

She had her second daughter, Emma, shortly afterwards and the business is doing so well that her husband has now been recruited to help her out (although Adrian flatly denies any involvement).

Relying purely on word-of-mouth referrals, she boasts a client list from around the country and even internationally.

“With e-ticketing, Skype and email you can really be located wherever you want to be these days,” she explains.

“I don’t really think of my clients as corporates or leisure pax. They have all become close friends

over the years.”

Family is extremely important to Angela and, to get the work balance right, the foursome go away for weekends as often as possible and try to take an international holiday once a year.

As a small-business owner work never stops and Angela explained that they had to select destinations with similar time zones to South Africa so that she could stay in touch with her clients.

This year the family and Angela’s laptop are looking forward to a European skiing trip.

“I remember taking my laptop to hospital when I went into labour with Emma,” recalls Angela, who was trying to issue a Voyager ticket from her hospital bed when she had to pause for the next contraction.

“My client suggested that I should maybe get off the phone and I said to her that as I didn’t know how long this would take it was probably best to just get it done now.

“My very dear father once told me that in life there is a season to work and provide for your children and a season to enjoy the fruits of one’s labour. This, right now, is our season to work and we may as well do the very best that we can.

“If I could teach my children one thing in life it would be the value of hard work and that you reap what you sow.”

Being a working mother is never easy and Angela says that while her domestic worker helped out wherever she could, she had to breastfeed Emma while working at her desk for the first few months of her life. “In return, the flexible schedule has also allowed me freedom to spend time with my family when needed and has also allowed my clients to contact me at all hours for assistance,” she says.

A hopeless romantic, Angela met Adrian on a holiday to Cape Town when she was 13 years old and says that she knew immediately that she wanted to marry him.

She returned to Durban, finished school and then au-paired in Germany for six months. Afterwards she did a travel course in Cape Town before returning home to Durban where she planned to start her career.

A short while later she flew down to Cape Town for her graduation. “Adrian took me out for a drink and I never left... My mother had to ship all my belongings down to me and we were married a year later. He is my soulmate and I couldn’t do without him at my side.”



Angela Blythe

Getting to know Angela

- Angela wouldn’t change anything about her life. She loves her family and her job more than she can express.
- The Blythes plan ‘family fundays’ every Sunday and love boating, skiing and crayfishing.
- On weekends, when they aren’t at rowing regattas, netball or hockey matches, the entire family can be found cuddled up in Angela and Adrian’s super-king-size bed watching movie marathons.
- Angela loves eating out and does so at least twice a week, which helps to get the family around the table at the same time.
- She has always wanted a bigger family and says she is privileged to have so many nieces and nephews now studying in Cape Town who pull in for the weekends when they want to take a break from the hostels.
- “Being the best agent I can be, involves asking myself ‘What makes me any different to the Internet?’”
- “It’s super to have Adrian in the office when things go crazy as I have mini heart palpitations. He has a soothing way of dealing with me and also knows how to use our coffee machine very well!” ■

Air Mauritius readies for corporate growth

SARAH ROBERTSON

AIR Mauritius has created a corporate sales position at its Johannesburg office to capitalise on the growing corporate market travelling to the island and beyond.

Kerry Jerin, who previously ran her own graphic design studio and started up the corporate gifting division for Sally Williams, has been appointed corporate sales executive.

Carla da Silva, Air Mauritius regional manager, Southern Africa and Latin America, said Kerry would be servicing both local and global corporate contracts and that her role was created when the airline identified substantial growth in its corporate market segment.

“Air Mauritius is not a point-to-point airline,” said Carla, who explained that, due to its geographical location, it was often able to take customers to their final destinations in less flying time than its competitors.

She added that corporate South

Africa was also investing in Mauritius by opening up branches and satellite offices on the island, which has resulted in a substantial increase in corporate business.

The island has been positioning itself as a reduced tax region and growing African business hub for a number of years now. The development of Ebene Cybercity, a high-tech office community on the outskirts of Mauritius’s capital, Port Louis, has drawn well-known companies including Standard Bank, Investec, Barclays, Accenture, and PWC.

A substantial investment in high-speed Internet has also helped to draw business. The Mauritian corporate tax rate, which, according to the *SA Tax Guide*, is set at a flat rate of 15%, is also very attractive when compared with South African corporate tax, which is currently 28%.

“The Mauritian Board of Investment and the two largest banks in Mauritius have now set up offices in South Africa for this exact reason,” added Carla. ■



Congratulations!

Serendipity’s **Sudhika Dasrath, Monwabisi Gongota and Vashni Moodley** (from left to right) are the first travel consultants to receive the designation ‘travel practitioner’. The designation is awarded by the Asata Professional Programme and is recognised by the South African Qualifications Authority. Consultants can apply for the designation by registering on the programme. For more information, visit app.asata.co.za

For the record

In *TNW*’s Corporate Travel feature (May 16), we incorrectly quoted **Monique Swart**, founder of the African Business Travel Association (ABTA), as stating: “Once all avenues have been utilised, agents then need to start looking at reducing classes of travel and accommodation.” In fact, she had said that corporate buyers would have to reduce classes, as it was not in the agents’ power to do so and they would need the go-ahead from their clients. *TNW* apologises for the error.

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The Indian Ocean island is geographically fascinating, has great appeal to adventurers, offers a winning incentive offering and is just a short flight away, writes Michelle Colman.

Selling Réunion – advice for the travel agent

ASK travel industry experts on how best to position Réunion as a holiday destination, and you'll get a variety of answers. Romantic getaway, family holiday, adventure playground and scenic wonderland. Each description is as appropriate as the next.

Perhaps the best explanation comes from **Alexis Bekker**, head of sales and marketing, South Africa & Africa for LUX* Resorts & Hotels. "We have dubbed Réunion the bucket-list island in the

Indian Ocean. It is a must-see, must-do-all, adventure island. While relatively small in size, the terrain is quite diverse in that it is mountainous and not flat at all, so it does take a while to get from one end to the other."

There is, however, all-round accord that self-drive is the best way to see it all. Thompsons Holidays' PR and media manager, **John Ridler**, says this mode of travel keeps costs down and, if coupled with the use of accommodation throughout the island, is the path to a

true cultural experience. The tour operator offers four-, five- and seven-night self-drive packages.

Chantelle Pearson, owner of Travel2Reunion, says distances between attractions are short, but jam-packed with sightseeing opportunities.

Driving is on the right but, Alexis points out, "the road infrastructure is better than most of the roads we've seen across Europe".

Here follow some tips when selling Réunion, gleaned from experts promoting the island.

Hélène Bezuidenhoudt, regional director of Atout France (representing Réunion):

- Réunion is a four-hour flight from Johannesburg on Air Austral and SA passport holders do not require a visa for a stay of up to 90 days.
- The island is blessed with natural

beauty and a tropical climate.

- Accommodation ranges from B&Bs, guesthouses and world-class hotels.
- The island is a region of France and therefore visitors get to sample French infrastructure, cuisine and culture with an Indian Ocean Island flavour.



Brenda Mitchell, director of Sales at World Leisure Holidays:

- Réunion has a tropical climate with year-round sunny skies and warm seas. There is a hot and humid

season from November to April when the temperature can reach up to 30C. The cool and dry season is from May to October. Bring light summer clothing for the day, with warm layers for the evening.

- Roland Garros International Airport near Saint-Denis is the main airport.

Isla Moffett, GSA: Sales and Marketing Manager of Air Austral:

- The best time to visit is the southern winter, from May to October, because it's the coolest and driest, and falls outside the cyclone season. The temperature at the coast still hovers

around 25C, making it warm enough to enjoy water sports. Inland, and in the mountains, it can be surprisingly chilly all year round, so pack warm clothing and beach clothing. The west enjoys excellent weather and is more sheltered from the wind than the east coast.

Volcano heads the list of 'must-sees'

WHILE Réunion has some great beaches on its west coast, such as the 2km-long Ermitage (or l'Hermitage as the locals say) and Boucan Canot off the resort village of Saint-Gilles-les-Bains, it is far more than a sun, sea and sand destination.

It is Piton de la Fournaise (peak of the furnace), an active volcano in the east, that is the jewel in Réunion's multi-faceted tourism crown.

According to LUX* Resorts & Hotels' **Alexis Bekker**, it's a 'friendly' volcano, emitting no ash or dangerous gases, and even when it is in flow, visitors can stand on the side of its crater and observe. "When not in flow, you are able to walk on the volcano surface, which can be compared to the surface of the moon," she says.

A highlight of a Réunion trip is to view the volcano from the air, by helicopter or microlight. "But the best way to discover the volcano is the hard way – trekking," comments Travel2Reunion's **Chantelle Pearson**.

The volcanic landscape includes three calderas, or cirques. Mafate, some 2 000m above sea level, is "sort of incommunicado with the rest of the world," says Chantelle. "No roads, no chance to come across a car or a bus, the only way to visit Mafate is on foot." The starting point of many hikes is the Maïdo, a peak that, when summited, offers spectacular views of the island.

The second caldera, Cilaos, is accessible by road and is known for its impressive canyons and waterfalls, where extreme sports like canyoning and rock climbing can be

practised. "Here you will also discover the small village of Cilaos, well known for traditional products like lentils or its old-style sugarcane rum," she says.

The third caldera, Salazie, contains Voile de la Mariée (Veil of the Bride), a waterfall famous for the optical illusion it produces, and the village of Hell-Bourg which World Leisure Holidays' **Brenda Mitchell** describes as "fairytale".

There's also a dormant volcano on the island, Piton des Neiges, the island's highest point and best visited early in the morning before clouds envelop the peak.

Our panel of experts highlighted these attractions too:

- Saint-Denis, the capital of Réunion, is on the north and often referred to as the old city. It is home to Creole-style mansions, museums and cultural monuments.
- Eden Garden, in the heart of Saint-Gilles, a 2,5ha botanical garden with over 700 species of plants.
- In Saint-Gilles les Bains is the Aquarium of Réunion Island, showcasing 500 species of fish and natural coral reefs.
- Saint-Paul Market, open on Fridays and Saturdays on the waterfront of Saint Paul, is the spot to explore the island's culinary culture.
- La Vanilleraie is a vanilla plantation on the estate of Le Grand Hazier in Sainte Suzanne.
- Saga du Rhum is a museum in a family-owned rum distillery in St Pierre.
- The green Takamaka Valley holds five waterfalls, streams and rocky peaks.



Piton de la Fournaise.

Adventure above and below

HIKING got the thumbs-up as a spectacular activity from all the Réunion specialists interviewed for this feature.

Thompsons Holidays, says **John Ridler**, offers hiking trails from one day to eight nights covering the three calderas and the volcano. **Alexis Bekker** of LUX* Resorts & Hotels, says hikers can camp along the way or make use of backpacker accommodation for overnighting.

The activity can be supplemented with

pursuits such as river rafting, canyoning, caving, mountain biking and horseback riding. Down on the coast one can snorkel, paddle a glass-bottom kayak, wakeboard and whale watch.

"Scuba diving is also a must-do activity as the ocean is rich with marine life and the reef formation is very interesting," says **Chantelle Pearson** of Travel2Reunion. Up above, one can paraglide, helicopter flip and fly a microlight.



Visitors can tunnel through the lava tubes of Piton de la Fournaise.

Airline and tourist board offer trade support

IN LATE April, Air Austral, the regional carrier that flies between Johannesburg and Réunion, moved one of its twice-weekly services from Wednesdays to Tuesdays.

The airline operates on Tuesdays and Sundays, with an additional frequency on Fridays during high-season periods, which this year are from July 6-August 10 and October 12-26 inclusive. (There's also a high season in May, for future reference.)

A B737-800NG with a two-class configuration is used on the four-hour flight.

Border Air is the local GSA for Air Austral. Sales and marketing manager, **Isla Moffett**, says: "We have a sales and reservations office in Johannesburg and sales executives in

Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. Our marketing efforts are supported by the Réunion tourist bureau in Southern Africa [Atout France]. Air Austral also has a resident country manager, **Lenel Vining**, in South Africa who is very active with the trade."

Isla says the airline offers excellent fares throughout the year, and tactical fares over low-season periods.

According to **Hélène Bezuidenhout** of Atout France, which represents Réunion Island as a department of France, workshops, training, educationals, marketing assistance and information dissemination are support services offered to the trade.

Did you know?

Travel2Reunion has over 35 different itineraries, and can tailor make more. A new morning beach excursion offered from St Gilles is geared for kids – young ones get to draw what they see underwater and then paint it.



The waterfall at Cirque de Salazie. Photo: Thomas McGowan

Getting the incentive formula right

"PERSONALLY, I think Réunion is one of the most spectacular destinations for group incentive travel," says **Martine Sanderson**, groups manager for World Leisure Holidays. "It has so much in terms of teambuilding and exploration and offers that 'wow' factor that our clients are looking for."

The island ticks many of the boxes for incentive travel success. It's a short flight away, has sophisticated infrastructure and variety in sights and activities. That it is growing exponentially in incentive travel, according to Atout France's **Hélène Bezuidenhout**, is little surprise.

"A perfect incentive should include an immersion into the culture and cuisine found in some of the towns," says Hélène. "It should include some time in the air – helicopters – getting a feel of all the delights of the island

and the volcano, which is one of the most active in the world and monitored continuously.

"It could also include some unique natural experiences such as dinners in full view of some of the many waterfalls that grace the hills and valleys, or experiences on water – kayaking, paragliding, paddle-boarding, or waterskiing. There are some great options for conferencing too at some of the hotels."

Martine points out that while Réunion is not strong on all-inclusive packages, as most hotel guests are offsite exploring during the day, packages are well priced but often misconceived as pricey.

"In some cases, Réunion can come in cheaper than Mauritius depending on the time of year. On the average five- and four-star packages on half board, including air plus taxes, land and transfers, you are looking at around

R18 000 to R22 000pp for seven nights," she says.

"With groups we often cost in the lunch and/or dinner portion in euros, so the client knows exactly what they are spending. The same applies for any offsite teambuilding – it will be included in the overall package, making it easier for the group not to spend too much offsite."

Thompsons' **John Ridler** adds that eating at local restaurants is very affordable.

LUX* Resorts & Hotels has two properties on Réunion – the five-star LUX* Saint Gilles and the three-star Hotel Le Recif, both with beach positions. Says the group's **Alexis Bekker**: "Being the only five-star beach resort on the island with conferencing facilities, LUX* Saint Gilles is extremely popular. We have welcomed some blue-chip SA companies over the last few years." ■



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CAR RENTAL

With the availability of more transport options than ever, car-rental companies have to adapt or die. By Chana Boucher.

The road ahead

MORE car-sharing, streamlined reservations, check-in/check-out processes and self-service models, are what international transportation experts predict for the car-rental industry over the next three to five years.

The evolution of technology has created an on-demand environment, especially among younger travellers who are used to doing things on the go from their smartphone or tablet.

Added to that, in the US ride-sharing is becoming increasingly popular. Apps like Turo (described as being 'Airbnb for cars') allow people to rent a car from someone in their vicinity, eliminating the need to make a reservation with a car-rental outlet.

A report by travel and expense report management software company Certify, found that in the US, Uber's share of the ground transportation market continues to grow while car rental declined from 33% in 2016 to 25% in 2017.

If international trends are anything to go by, the South African car-rental industry is in for a shake-up. While **Lance Smith**, executive: sales at

Avis Southern Africa, says ride-hailing services have had no measurable impact, **Melissa Nortje**, executive head: strategy, development & marketing at First Car Rental, says the biggest impact has been on one/same-day rentals. She says there's yet to be a noticeable impact on rentals requiring multiple journeys over greater distances because the Uber equivalent is more costly than renting a car.

"Interestingly though, availability of products deemed safe, such as Uber Black and the quality of vehicles of Uber X, are often an issue. Uber drivers cancelling bookings due to proximity to destinations is another problem, from airports specifically," she adds.

Wils Raubenheimer, CEO of Hertz Rent a Car Southern Africa and Firefly Car Rental South Africa, says: "We're of the opinion that Uber has its place in the mix, particularly in respect of customer demand for short-term, one-day rentals. We've seen some decline in areas like Gauteng, for example, where Uber is filling this demand, but there's been very limited impact on longer term rentals."

Martin Lydall, chief commercial officer of Europcar SA, says although there are areas where car-rental organisations and other transport services can be seen as competing companies, their service offering is complementary. "We believe there will always be a space to provide cost-effective short-to medium-term transport solutions."

Tracy Teichmann, manager of Sure Adcocks Travel in Pietermaritzburg, says the biggest impact on car-rental bookings came from the Gautrain. "We had a lot more corporate Joburg car rentals before the Gautrain. A combination of the Gautrain and Uber is more convenient for our corporates flying into OR Tambo for meetings in the Sandton area.

"They take the train and then taxi or Uber to the meeting. They don't have to worry about finding and paying for parking," she adds.

However, **George Corbett**, operations executive at Bidvest Car Rental, says the traditional car-rental customer base has maintained the use of car rental but may supplement this with Uber for after-hours usage.



Lance Smith

Mixing it up

With more options, particularly in urban areas, many travellers take a multimodal approach to getting around. This entails a combination of ride-hailing, public transport and possibly even vehicle rental.

A multi-faceted solution, says Lance, is not something Avis is considering at this point. "But, our travel partners are already offering this to customers. We have our Avis Rental offering as well as Avis Point 2 Point and Avis Chauffeur Drive. If customers want to book a combination of these offerings it is definitely possible."

Wils says Hertz is looking into multimodal ground

transport in Gauteng, but not other regions as yet. The company is at an advanced stage with the development of its car-sharing business in international markets. But, he says: "I believe it is still a long way off in South Africa due to lack of public transport, culture of ownership as well as security and related issues."

According to Martin, internationally, Europcar has made extensive investments in car sharing and ride hailing.

"With car sharing, there are some local challenges. In order for these services to be effective, they need to operate in high density cities with an effective and complementary public transport system. There is also a higher risk in SA due to the low level of insurance in the market," he says.

Martin says Europcar's core product offerings are car-rental and transfer solutions, which are underpinned by a dynamic and flexible home-grown operating system that is easy to integrate with other booking and reservation systems. "Further development to enhance these interfaces and to enable integration into multimodal systems is under way."

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How to book transfers on the GDS

AMADEUS'S new transfer solution allows travel agents to book transfers for travellers locally and internationally within a single workflow, under a single PNR.

The solution is the first of its kind in the South African market and was rolled out in April.

Because the solution is fully integrated within the PNR, agents do not have to manually create a new segment when booking transfers. Instead, the segment is created within the PNR and will be cancelled once it has been cancelled in the platform.

Within the Amadeus GDS screen, agents now have a drop-down menu, where they can access transfers. The point and click system

lets agents select an airport where a traveller needs to be collected and then input the destination, date and time. Thereafter, options are displayed side by side and the agent can make the selection.

Once the agent clicks book, they input the client's details and flight number, after which the provider sends a confirmation. The transfer providers also track flights in case flights are delayed.

Andy Hedley, gm of Amadeus Southern Africa, explains that the integration allows agents to simplify their processes and save time. He says agents can book transfers with confidence because the providers have already been vetted.

CAR RENTAL



Keeping up to speed

COMPARED with many of the ground transport services on offer, car rental is considered by many to be the most cumbersome due to paperwork, queues, credit card validation and so on. But car-rental companies are embracing technology to reduce the hassle.

First Car Rental, for example, offers corporates a Show&Go Corporate Checkout via their mobile phones at all major airports. Leisure travellers can make use of the Quick Checkout technology to view, change and add features and benefits to their rental before arriving at the branch.

Says **Melissa Nortje**: "This gives the renter total control of what they would like included with their rental before they get to the counter, saving them time, and completing the customer checkout process in half the time."

To remain relevant and competitive, **Lance Smith** says Avis is constantly enhancing the car-rental experience through innovation and technology.

"We have led innovation for many years in making car rental easier for our customers with our global preferred service programme."

"This service has been significantly enhanced with the launch of our preferred loyalty app, rental apps, in-store tablets for digital rental agreement completion, Avis Now for bypassing the rental kiosk, the ability to change your allocated vehicle on your phone and open that vehicle with your phone."

Europcar's **Martin Lydall** says due to more competitors in the market, Europcar ensures the ease of booking and renting, price points and value propositions remain attractive to customers. "We not only pay attention to existing competitive solutions but



Martin Lydall

also emerging technologies, both domestically and internationally. We gain significant insight from sharing ideas and projects with our international franchisor," says Martin.

Europcar's Ready Service counter offers re-loaded customers an express check-out process that requires no paperwork and comes with a service promise of keys in hand in under 30 seconds.

"We have platform agnostic Internet booking that customers can access on any device at any time, mobile apps, e-vouchers, pre-checkout data collection via Ready-2-Go and a system that records customer details so that it is not necessary to recapture details on every rental check-out," he adds.

Michelle Minnaar, manager at Harvey World Travel Plettenberg Bay, says she has noticed that fewer people are hiring cars, opting instead for alternatives that offer cost savings and more convenience.

"To hire a car, you have to have a credit card. What about those who don't own one? And then you worry about being charged for damage." When

she's rented a car, Michelle says she makes sure to take pictures of any damages or paint chips before she gets in, to avoid any disputes on return.

"Damage to rental vehicles is a fact of life, often resulting in long-winded claim and billing procedures that lead to customer disputes," says Hertz's **Wils Raubenheimer**. Working with a team of software and operations experts, Hertz developed a proprietary Vehicle Events (VE) damage assessment app to streamline the process. Damage to a vehicle is assessed and charged out immediately upon return with this technology.

Tracy Teichmann of Sure Adcocks Travel believes car-rental companies need to make the pick-up process quicker for everyone. "I think some clients can be put off by long waiting times at the counter."

Bidvest Car Rental, says **George Corbett**, has looked at ways to make the process simpler and more efficient. "The introduction, for example, of a keyless car-rental offering, SnappDrive, is a good example of technology being utilised to make the customer experience seamless." He says the pre-qualification process and registration are also examples of reducing hassle.

Martin highlights that autonomous (self-driving) cars are another rapidly developing technology that will materially change the vehicle market and related industries.

"This will be relatively short in developed countries where extensive experiments are already under way. In developing countries, however, items such as road conditions, road markings and lawlessness are less favourable, and will pose some challenges," he says.

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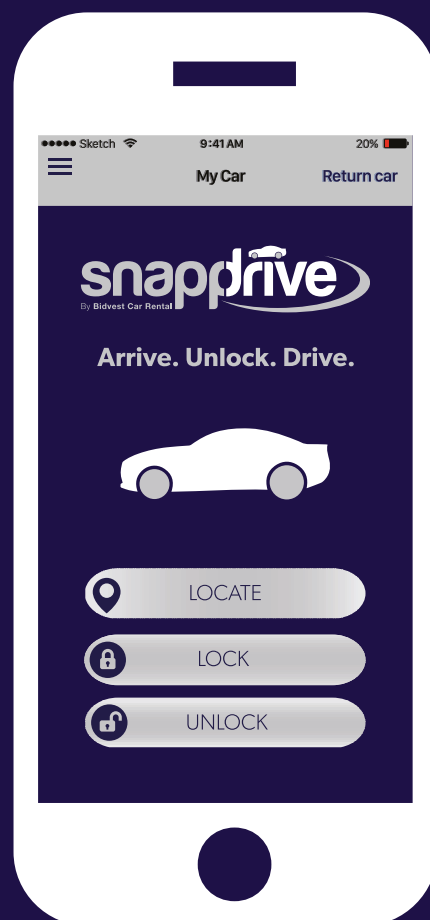
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Paying the price

THIS year has seen a VAT increase and a rising fuel price, which makes purchasing and operating cars more expensive. What can we expect prices in the car rental industry to do?

Avis's **Lance Smith** says these factors will lead to a rise in the price of car rental, which will impact the industry as a whole. **Martin Lydall** of Europcar SA, explains: "The cost increases are real and the industry will have to recover

"The consumer is very price sensitive and price does play a big role in the decision-making."

some of these increases via price increases. We remain focused on our own cost efficiencies so that we are able to offer very competitive pricing."

Further, he says increased prices result in fewer people being able to afford car rental, in which case they will seek alternatives and reduce usage. "We have already seen this in the form of a softening market in the first quarter and a significant shortening of rental length," says Martin.

Wils Raubenheimer of Hertz Rent a Car Southern Africa and Firefly Car

Rental South Africa, hopes there will be price increases ahead for car rental but believes it is unlikely. "The car-rental environment is extremely competitive, making it difficult to adjust or increase rates," he explains. He agrees that the VAT and fuel price increases will impact the whole industry, adding that there has already been a decline in volumes compared with previous years.

Karen Schwartz, international sales manager of Hertz Rent a Car and Firefly Car Rental, says price, followed by convenience, plays the most important role in car rental decisions. "With respect to rewards, the Hertz Gold Plus Rewards programme is a bonus, with features and benefits that do contribute to the overall convenience factor."

Bidvest Car Rental's **George Corbett** says the VAT increase has resulted in inclusive rates being adjusted accordingly, but adds that fuel remains a direct customer usage cost and, as such, does not affect the actual customer rate.

"The consumer is very price sensitive and price does play a big role in the decision-making, whilst it is important that the service offering and rental experience are of the highest standard as a differentiator."

Some prefer aggregators

Tracy Teichmann of Sure Adcocks Travel, says car-rental companies who give clients more options for booking a car (through an app, for example) take business away from travel agents in the same way that booking flights online has. "We don't want our clients steered away from us for the sake of convenience. We need to maintain our place as 'their convenience'."

Yumna Kharodia, md of Sweet Life Travel in Pretoria, says she prefers to book rental cars with an aggregator such as Car Hire Bookers.

"It's easier getting a car and not having to call individual car-hire companies during peak periods. The rates and inclusions, especially unlimited mileage, are a huge plus point as well," she says.

Michelle Minnaar of Harvey World Travel Plettenberg Bay, also uses brokers, saying it is more convenient for her and her clients as everything is prepaid.

An added bonus for agents, she says, is that agents earn more commission since they earn on insurance as well as the rental.

PRODUCT NEWS

Tech investment

Hertz and Firefly (Hertz's low-cost car-rental brand) are constantly looking to use technology to streamline processes and offer added benefits.

A nominally priced, add-on option to the rental agreement, the Mobile Assist App, was launched in May.

The app's primary services include roadside, medical and legal assistance.

There are also plans in place for Hertz to go entirely paperless in the near future. Soon, all documentation will be online.



Europcar now offers a minor damage waiver.

Minor damage

Europcar has introduced a minor damage waiver to help reduce the costs related to and time spent on minor damage to rental vehicles.

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We love Bali!

The top 10 performers from Thompsons Travel recently visited Club Med Bali. Pictured here, expressing their love for the beautiful island, are (from left) Charles Moyawa, Chantelle Fernandes, Mary Shilleto, Kaps Phiri, Gugu Magaya, Jenny Black, Deborah Ford, Byron Van Den Berg, Lizette Titus and Sandy-Lee Du Plessis.



SA Flighties live it up!



Flight Centre Travel Group (FCTG) recently held a Global Gathering in Cancun. Pictured here, dressed up for the theme and representing FCTG South Africa in true 'Flightie' style, are (from left) Natalie Francisco, digital marketing manager; Michelle Jolley, business leader – corporate marketing; Nicky Potgieter, business leader – leisure marketing; and Kirsty Rebello, head – air contracting.

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Clifford Ross to step down

From page 1
hotel and hospitality industry, championing issues facing the sector,” says Federated Hospitality Association of Southern Africa ceo, **Tshifhiwa Tshivhengwa**, describing Clifford as a true captain of industry. “We are sad to see him go.”
Clifford will be succeeded

as ceo on July 1, by **Andrew Widegger**, who has been the group’s financial director since 1994. A new position has also been created in the group, that of chief operating officer. This will be filled by **Lindiwe Sangweni-Siddo**, who joined the group as a divisional director: of operations in 2015. ■

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- Yes, free of charge
- No, it is a waste of time



Response	Percentage
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Yes, but charge a service fee	30%
Yes, free of charge	26%
No, it is a waste of time	6%

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Michelle to steer FCTG's retail brands

CANDICE MAY

FLIGHT Centre Travel Group (FCTG) South Africa has appointed **Michelle Bergset** as general manager – Retail Travel Brands.

Michelle joined FCTG last year July as area leader – Transformers (FCTG's 15 retail groups in the southern suburbs of Cape Town) after 17 years at Pentravel, where she began her career as a travel consultant, rising to shop manager, national trainer, Cape regional manager, and national sales manager.

Andrew Stark, md – MEA of Flight Centre Travel Group, says Michelle will be responsible for Flight Centre and Cruiseabout brands, driving growth in the South African leisure market. He says Michelle is a great

culture fit for Flight Centre and that she has exceeded all expectations over the past year.

“What makes Michelle so successful is that she understands not only what customers want, but also what the consultant needs to thrive and build a successful business. In her new role, Michelle is determined to draw on her many years’ experience to usher Flight Centre into an era of even greater success.”



Michelle Bergset

Michelle told *TNW* that the opportunity to drive FCTG's retail brands was a natural progression for her, having managed a team of regional managers and trainers in her 18 years of retail travel

experience. “I am looking forward to leveraging my particular passion for people development as well as driving new business opportunity and team management for the benefit of FCTG and the entire travel industry,” she added.

In her new position, Michelle replaces **Marieke Tucker**, who will be redeployed to Flight Centre Australia to advance her career after 14 years with the South African company. Commenting on Marieke's departure, Andrew says: “She will be sorely missed, but I am delighted to see her follow her dream to work in an overseas Flight Centre country.” ■

Qantas debuts new distribution platform

CANDICE MAY

QANTAS has unveiled the Qantas Distribution Platform (QDP), a new technology platform that it says will enable travel agents to provide customers with a more personalised experience.

“The fares and availability currently accessed by travel agents via a GDS will be the same as that available on the QDP,” says **Michi Messner**, regional manager – Africa of Qantas.

Michi says the QDP is not designed to replace the GDS

and that GDSs connected to the QDP will also be able to deliver the benefits through the GDS systems. “Travel agents have options to access the content available via the QDP by connecting directly to the QDP or via an approved trade partner, including GDSs.” Michi says Qantas is in discussions with several partners and will continue to update the list of approved partners via the QDP website.

According to Michi, the most compelling benefits of the QDP are that it will enable Qantas to communicate richer information about its products

and services at the point of sale; build and distribute new merchandising offers that leverage rich data; and create a more personalised customer experience overall.

Over time, Michi says Qantas will be working to deliver new, dynamic functionality and content.

There is currently no commercial incentive for transactions booked via the QDP.

Travelport also announced on May 23 that it had signed a multiyear agreement with Qantas that included distribution of QDP. ■