

TNW

TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

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Pax out of pocket as SAX delays refunds

SARAH ROBERTSON

MORE than six weeks after South African Express was grounded, many clients and agents are still waiting for their promised refunds, leaving frustrated clients out of pocket.

Shaun Beckley, area sales manager Africa and Indian Ocean for GTA, said he cancelled a SAX East London ticket on May 31 and was told that the refund would take 21 working days.

"I have not received any funds to date," he said. "When I follow up they advise that they are waiting for management signatures."

Nawahl Isaacs, consultant at Club Travel Tygervalley, said its office's SAX refunds had not been received. She said so many of Club Travel's refunds were still outstanding that the consortium was now chasing these with SAX from

a head office level.

Karen Foley, manager at Harvey World Travel Highway, said she had received one refund from SAX but other refunds submitted on the same day had not been processed.

However, some agents have received their refunds. For example, **Amanda Harrod**, of Sure Astral Travel, advised that its refunds were received in the June BSP and **Christo Hauptfleisch**, director of XL Wild Travel, contacted TNW this week to advise that its refunds had just come in.

Otto de Vries, ceo of Asata, said this situation demonstrated the double standards that existed between lata's airline and agency operating procedures. He said lata was quick to hold agency funds to protect clients against potential agent default, but that there were no similar requirements in place

to safeguard clients against airlines going bust or failing to timeously deliver on promised refunds. He urged lata to implement reciprocal airline risk-management processes in the industry as soon as possible.

A recent update on the SAX website confirms that the Civil Aviation Authority has approved the airline's Corrective Action Plans to resolve its level 1 and level 2 findings, and reinstated the airline's Aircraft Maintenance Organisation approvals on June 22. SAX is embarking on the re-certification process on its Air Operator's Certificate, including verification of the airworthiness of aircraft.

TNW approached SAX to find out what turnaround times were to be expected. The airline had not responded at the time of going to print but undertook to make a statement in a few days. ■

We've got you covered



Travel Insurance Consultants, in conjunction with Santam, will host workshops offering professional insight into the risks faced by travellers and the solutions available. The Travel Doctor, **Dr Albie de Frey**, ceo of NHC Health Centre, will be the key speaker. Topics will include: travel health risk management and an explanation of benefits and insight into what isn't covered by travel insurance. There will be 11 workshops between August 14 and September 19, in Cape Town, George, Durban, Johannesburg, East Rand, Centurion and Port Elizabeth. Pictured: **Albie and Simmy Michell**, sales and marketing manager at TIC. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Letter to the Editor

Cruises International responds to TNW report

I WOULD like to respond to the article titled 'Storm At Sea', which appeared in the July 11 issue of TNW.

The article is the result

of an email that I sent to decision makers in the industry, bringing to their attention the risks involved when placing reservations

for Royal Caribbean, Celebrity and Azamara (RCL) and other brands, through operators who are not authorised, either by

Cruises International and/or RCL to do so. If anything goes wrong with any of these reservations or if, for any reason, the client

has any pre or post or during sailing complaints or disputes we, Cruises International, will not be

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IATA restructures SA team

IATA has made changes to its office in South Africa as part of re-organisation it hopes will "overcome some of the organisation's unique geographical and operational challenges".

Janaurieu D'Sa has left the Johannesburg office to take up the position of IATA regional head of Financial and Distribution Services, Africa and the Middle East. He will be based at IATA's regional office in Amman, Jordan.

Alexandru Stancu, regional head Account Management, South and East Africa, has taken over the accountability of the Local Governance

Activities (BSP Operations) within the new Cluster and will be based in Johannesburg.

Cecelia Meyer has left IATA and has been replaced by **Felister Asuma**, as manager Financial and Distribution Services, South & East Africa. She will be the new local point of contact and will also be based in Johannesburg.

Fred Ng'Ang'A has taken up the role of manager Passenger Experience, South & East Africa and will continue in Johannesburg.

Further appointments from IATA are expected in the coming months. ■

NEWS

Exhibitors call for Into Africa online travel expo

SUPPLIERS of corporate and leisure travel services targeting South Africans travelling into Africa on business or leisure, will be able to reach new prospects at a virtual expo on September 13.

The Online Expo is designed to reach geographically dispersed corporate travel buyers, travel management consultants, leisure agents and consumers throughout the country.

Attendees will not have to leave their desk to attend the exhibitor hall or enter the auditorium to hear a line-up of authoritative speakers addressing travel issues and trends.

The new Online Expo technology was run for the first time this month when a cross section of nearly 400 people attended The Now Media Show.

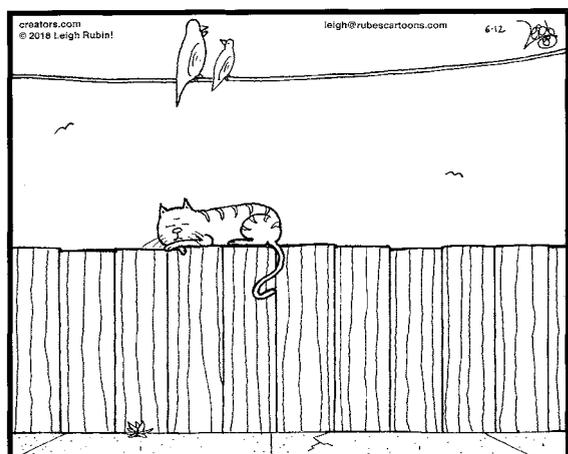
Media partners for the Into

Africa show include *Travel News Weekly*, *Travel & Meetings Buyer*, *Travelinfo* and *Let's Go*.

Exhibitors set up stands featuring their company in much the same way they would in a physical show but instead will live-chat with people calling at their stand from their office.

Contact show organiser, **Natalie Cumberlege**, at nataliec@nowmedia.co.za for details. ■

Rubes® By Leigh Rubin



"Yes, my son, according to Ecclesiastes, 'for everything, there is a reason.' In other words, there's a time to hold it in and a time to let it out. Can you guess which time it is?"

SAX grounding causes domestic fares price hike

SARAH ROBERTSON

THE grounding of SA Express has been met with a spike in the price of domestic fares, with some agents accusing Airlink of taking advantage of a monopoly on routes previously operated by SAX.

Roan Havenga, director of Sure Etunique Travel, said clients were complaining about the increase in Airlink's Johannesburg-Bloemfontein fares when compared with SAX prices. In contrast, he said prices had remained relatively stable on the Bloemfontein-Cape Town route, despite Mango's having a monopoly there since SAX's grounding. Roan said international travel ex-Bloemfontein had also increased as Airlink was the only airline with add-on fares.

A Durban-based agent, who wished to remain anonymous, said she had seen increases

of more than R1 000 per ticket on the Johannesburg-Sichon route.

However, **Rodger Foster**, ceo and md of Airlink, explained that it had been difficult to plan in advance when it came to the SAX activities that Airlink had temporarily taken over. Initially there had only been certainty that Airlink would step in for 24 hours, which was then extended into the weeks ahead. Airlink's fleet of aircraft range from 29- to 98-seaters and when, amid the confusion of the grounding, many existing SAX passengers did not show up for the flights that Airlink had arranged for them, the airline adopted a conservative approach when deploying aircraft size to market, while its analysts established the actual demand for each destination.

Rodger said where smaller aircraft were used, the fewer

cheaper seats sold out faster, leaving only the higher-yielding fares. "As Airlink accumulates its own data and gains an understanding for each market, we are increasingly able to predict demand and plan airlift supply accordingly. The right size matching of aircraft to market will normalise over time, and so too will fares."

A number of agents have defended Airlink, saying how helpful it had been in assisting stranded SAX passengers.

Maria Kalogeropoulos, manager of Sure Turn Key Travel, said the G-class price on the Hoedspruit routes had remained very similar to SAX's pricing, and **Miriam Philander**, a consultant at Flight Centre Kimberley, said while Airlink's peak holiday period pricing on the Kimberley routes had initially been expensive, the airfares had come down for travel in August and beyond. ■

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Global B2B operator appoints local rep

SARAH ROBERTSON

A GLOBAL B2B online booking operator has set up representation locally after identifying South Africa as a potential market for growth.

RezLive is an Indian-based company that has been in operation for 19 years. Its online reservations system, offered exclusively to travel agents and tour operators, offers a portfolio of 250 000 hotels and

apartments worldwide, 45 000 attractions in 500 cities and 5 000 transfer options in over 900 cities.

Sunitha Ganesh, ex-sales manager at Jet Airways, has been appointed business development manager in SA for the operator. RezLive offers XML linkage to agent websites and also has a point-based rewards system where agents can redeem the points they earn from booking. These can be redeemed against

purchases from retailers including Woolworths and Takealot, and travel packages.

"I have started directing almost all of my business to them," said **Wasim Dawood**, director of Travel 54, an SWG agency, who described the operator as top of market. "I find that they are well priced, particularly in the Dubai and Turkey markets, and their operations team have always gone out of their way to assist me when contacted." ■



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CemAir could pull Plett flights

SAVANNAH FREEMANTLE

CEMAIR might be forced to cut its flights to Plettenberg Bay due to a lack of infrastructure provision at Plettenberg Bay Airport and unsustainable demand, **Miles van der Molen**, ceo of CemAir, told *TNW*.

This comes after agents raised concerns about frequent flight cancellations that have seen clients rerouted to George with an added two-hour transfer to/from Plett, or forced to delay their travel plans.

A travel agent, who spoke to *TNW* on condition of anonymity, said that her bottom line had been impacted as consumer confidence in CemAir

declined. "We are about R400 000 down on CemAir ticket sales since the beginning of the year when compared with the 18-month period before that. We now simply don't sell tickets on the days we know they usually cancel flights."

Miles told *TNW* that while the airline had experienced capacity challenges when it came to filling the aircraft on certain days, its biggest concern was lack of infrastructure at Plettenberg Bay Airport. "We would like to be able to place more focus on these routes and address concerns. However, the Bitou Municipality (BM) in Plett is failing to deliver the basic infrastructure required for us to service the route. Without this in

place, we will be left with no option but to consider cutting the Plett routes at the end of the summer season."

He added that, despite months of attempting to communicate with the municipality to resolve these issues, the airline had been blocked at every turn. "BM has now suggested that it may issue a tender for management of the airport. As to whether, or not this would improve our outlook on the route depends on who is granted the tender. If the relationship remains unsustainable, CemAir's aircraft would be better deployed on the more lucrative routes that have become available since SA Express was grounded." ■



Oli (top), pictured with Anneke Geldenhuys, gm Harvey World Travel SA, and Marco Cristofoli, coo of BidTravel Leisure and ceo of BCD Travel.

Virgin eyes Asia, Latin America

TESSA REED

VIRGIN Atlantic has set its sights on Latin America and Asia, **Shai Weiss**, the airline's incoming ceo told captains of industry on Thursday, July 5. Shai will take up the reins as ceo at the beginning of next year, replacing **Craig Kreeger**.

The airline currently services Delhi, Hong Kong and Shanghai and does not have destinations in Latin America.

Shai also said that approval for the deal with Air France KLM, which has announced plans to buy

just over 30% of Virgin Atlantic, was expected next year.

Oliver (Oli) Byers senior vp, Global Sales & Customer Loyalty of Virgin Atlantic, told *TNW* that this deal, together with a joint venture with Delta Air Lines, would offer travellers more choice, and also opportunities for frequent flyer programmes, giving customers more flights on which they could earn and redeem rewards.

He added that the joint venture with Delta would be the biggest on the transatlantic. ■

TMCs and travel buyers agree – ditch the RFP!

ZIA TAYLOR

TRAVEL buyers are looking at alternatives to the traditional RFP process, with some opting for the less formal approach of shortlisting and interviewing possible matches.

A survey by UK-based consultancy, Festive Road, showed that, for buyers, the RFP process was too time consuming, often causing other projects to stagnate. From the TMCs' perspective, they felt that an RFP rarely allowed them to demonstrate their skills and creativity.

The consultancy suggests that doing away with a 100-page, canned response RFP and instead introducing a dialogue process, will help clients get the best culture

match for their company.

Open dialogue between the client and the TMC during the selection process allowed them to sum each other up and decide whether they would be a good match. Travel buyers who had more interaction with their TMCs claimed to have a better success rate.

Sharon Leong, national sales manager for Thompsons Travel, says: "I believe it could speed up the process of tenders, as both parties would not need to spend time on information overload and, instead, a shortlisting of providers can be done upfront."

TMCs also believe that establishing a relationship and building rapport is

more effective than simply filling out an RFP and hoping for the best.

Mary Shilleto, ceo of Thompsons Travel, says she believes in matching clients or consultants to a client's corporate culture. "This invariably ends up being a win-win business partnership."

While it is likely that this new approach would work better for SMEs, which do not necessarily have to work through as much red tape as larger corporations, there has also been interest from big companies. **Ryan Potgieter**, gm of Flight Centre Business Travel, says over the last six months, larger corporates are starting to employ the same dialogue-based process too. ■

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Nikita Tavlet selects the top specials from Travelinfo

- **Thompsons Holidays.** Golf & Spa special fly-in package from R3 833pp sharing. Offer includes return flights departing Johannesburg to Durban, incl. taxes, two nights' accommodation at the Selborne Golf Estate Hotel & Spa, breakfast daily and one round of golf for one, or one spa treatment pp per stay. Self-drive package from R1 667pp. Valid until August 31.
- **Tripistery B2B Travel.** Pearl of the Caribbean offer from R22 160pp sharing. Offer includes two nights in Havana, two nights in Trinidad, one night in CienFuegos, two nights in Vinales, breakfast, lunch and dinner daily, return transfers and entrance fees. Highlights: Museum of Revolution, Havana Club Rum Factory, Che Guevara's Museum and Mausoleum, Santa Clara and Tobacco Factory. Valid until November 30.
- **Falcon Africa.** Rates from R13 200pp sharing. Offer includes return transfers, three nights at a game lodge on a private reserve in the greater Kruger Park, all meals, and selected drinks. It also includes two game drives per day, bush walks and concession fees. Valid until July 31.



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Sha'p Sha'p!

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

Sha'p-sha'p: (Sharp-sharp) (a)
A South African term used to express
our good health and well being.



Airlink has changed schedules on the CPT-HDS route to avoid late arrivals in Hoedspruit.
Photo: FransDely-BAE Systems

Airlink enhances Cape Town-Hoedspruit route

FROM July 31, Airlink will introduce further enhancements to its Cape Town-Hoedspruit services.

The changes address concerns from the trade and lodges about the late arrival

in Hoedspruit, which has impacted guests' afternoon game drives.

The revised schedule will operate seven days a week. Flights will depart Cape Town International at 10h50

(previously 12h20), arriving in Hoedspruit at 13h20 (was 14h50).

Flights will depart Hoedspruit at 14h00 (previously 15h20) and arrive in Cape Town at 16h40 (was 18h00).

Cape Town Golf Festival returns

THE Federated Hospitality Association of Southern Africa has arranged the second Cape Town Golf Festival, to address the multiple challenges associated with seasonality in the province.

The week-long event will be held on four golf

courses: Metropolitan, Milnerton, Royal Cape and Westlake from August 19 to 25.

The festival package includes golf apparel, a trip to Robben Island, a complimentary wine tasting each day at the relevant golf clubs courtesy of

Steenberg, Diemersdal, Cape Point Vineyards and Groot Constantia, as well as a lunch at Groot Constantia, South Africa's oldest wine farm, on August 22.

Entries close on July 31, and cost R4 885 per person, excluding accommodation.

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Big Five head to Graaff-Reinet

MOUNT Camdeboo Private Game Reserve in Graaff-Reinet, in the Eastern Cape, will introduce elephant and lion into the reserve this year, making it a 'Big Five' reserve. The reserve is already home to leopard,

rhino and the Cape buffalo.

Historically, these species occurred in the region and the move forms part of the reserve's long-term plans to reintroduce naturally occurring species to the area.

Regency Group opens new hotel in Menlyn, Pretoria

THE Regency Group opened its newest hotel, The Regency Apartment Hotel, in Menlyn, Pretoria, on June 28.

Each apartment is fitted with a full suite of appliances, air-conditioning, free WiFi, and 24-hour room service. The Platina all-day-dining restaurant offers fusion and international cuisine, with other facilities including a bar, bespoke gym, pool terrace and premium security.

The conference and meeting

rooms can accommodate up to 80 people. They are available for corporates on request, and there are plans to become a big player in the conferencing industry, says managing director of the group, **Siyanda Dlamini**. "Currently our facilities comfortably cater for conferences with a group of 80, however, we are in the process of building an adjoining facility next door to accommodate conferences of up to 250 guests."

Customised itineraries for special-needs travellers

SOUTHERN Africa 360 has designed two custom-made itineraries to cater for travellers with special needs.

The private guided nine-day Cape Highlights and the 12-day Cape Town to Addo Circular, provide accommodation that is wheelchair friendly.

A 13-seat Quantum is used for the duration of the tours, equipped with hydraulic lifts for mobility-impaired clients. The lift has a lifting capacity of 350 kilograms, and is suitable for electric wheelchairs. Unwin mounting systems keep wheelchairs secured. ■

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Zimbabwe



The inauguration of Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa last year has resulted in positive sentiment about the country's tourism prospects. Jason Simpson gathers viewpoints and predictions.

Tourism prospects the best in years

COUNTRY director of Cresta Hotels in Zimbabwe, **Chipo Mandela**, says the improvement in Zimbabwe's tourism fortunes began some time ahead of last year's change of political leadership.

An upturn in leisure tourism arrivals was seen in early 2017, part of a general resurgence of interest by Northern hemisphere travellers in Southern African countries.

"After the change in political leadership in Zimbabwe in November, this trend has not only continued but has, in fact, increased

significantly, with indications highlighting that the new political dispensation has created a greater interest in this country among travellers from many source markets across the world," Chipo says.

The growth in Zimbabwe's hospitality sector is not limited to leisure tourism. Chipo says hotels in the main business



Chipo Mandela

centres have seen a dramatic increase in business visitors who are keen to examine the prospects for trade and investment.

"This trend is likely to continue, too," she says, expressing the belief that prospects for tourism growth in all spheres,

including events and meetings, are better than

at any time since the boom years of the 1990s.

Irene Kufa, tour director of destination management company Ventures into Africa, has noted strong growth in the number of bookings to Zimbabwe in the first few months of 2018, with a hike of 20%-30% in January, February, and March over the same period last year.

Though bookings remain encouraging, they did slow in April, May, and June, possibly because of uncertainty surrounding the upcoming elections on July 30.

"It's always been like this in Zimbabwe. When there is an election coming up, bookings

normally do go down, and I think we're seeing some of that this year," she remarks.

Buoyed by the promise of sustained growth in the coming years, the focus is now on local product, ensuring it is geared for the upsurge, says Chipo.

Cresta Hotels, for one, has stepped up its programme of product improvement.

So far, the programme has seen major work undertaken at Cresta Lodge in Harare and Cresta Churchill in Bulawayo and is continuing with current work at Cresta Oasis Hotel and Apartments and at Cresta Jameson, both in Harare.

Victoria Falls still leads the way

THE Victoria Falls remains the major attraction in Zimbabwe, and is likely to hold that position for the foreseeable future. While other destinations around the country have seen increased, or renewed, interest, the Falls has recorded particularly strong growth this year.

Africa Albida Tourism group chief executive, **Ross Kennedy**, says monthly figures from 10 hotels in Victoria Falls show a 13% increase in occupancy during the first three months of 2018. "These bookings suggest that Victoria Falls is becoming a one-season destination – high all year,

with a few short troughs here and there," he says. "Talking to colleagues in the town it is clear that forward bookings are much stronger than usual for the rest of 2018, and all indicators for 2019 reflect continued growth."

In preparation for the increased custom, The Victoria Falls Safari Club, which is part of Africa Albida Tourism's portfolio, recently underwent a \$600 000 (R8,3m) refurbishment, with a new swimming pool, sundeck and gazebo, a new restaurant, and the expansion of its central building. It was completed in March and feedback has been positive. The property

boasts strong forward bookings for the rest of the year and into 2019.

Ilala Lodge in Victoria Falls has added a deluxe extension with 16 rooms and one executive suite, says **Michele Brown**, head of marketing. "There are now 73 rooms in total after the extension: three executive suites, 36 deluxe rooms, two standard suites and 32 standard rooms." Facilities include The Palm Restaurant, an outdoor swimming pool, pool bar, boardroom and spa. Activities include sunset cruises on the *Ra-Ikane*.

On June 1, Matetsi Victoria Falls joined the Africa

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From page 7

In Focus regional product portfolio. It is set on a 15km stretch of the Zambezi River, and is made up of Matetsi River Lodge and Matetsi River House.

Matetsi River Lodge has two intimate river-facing camps, each with eight suites and a two-bedroom family suite. A personal butler is available as well as the option of booking a private safari vehicle.

Matetsi River House is a spacious exclusive-use villa, with four air-conditioned, en-suite bedrooms, and guests are looked after by a private chef, butler,

guide and tracker.

Amenities include alfresco lounge areas, a 20m lap pool flanking the river, a fitness studio, library, boardroom, shopping boutique, iPads for guest use, in-room Bluetooth speakers, a free laundry service and free WiFi.

Properties aren't the only new developments at the Falls. The Skydive Tandem Company launched last year and director, **Chris Wilkinson-Pearce**, told *TNW's* sister publication, *Tourism Update*, that guests could charter flights to any Zimbabwean destination of their choice, however the company would

start flying between Victoria Falls, Hwange and Chobe.

He says the skydiving option is open seven days a week, from 06h00 to 18h00. The runway is 5km from Victoria Falls town. Depending on air traffic, guests freefall from 3 000m for around 45 seconds, reaching speeds of up to 200kph. All tandem instructors are certified and their licences are renewed annually. Equipment is checked daily and packed by a rigger. Those with disabilities will be accommodated once the company takes delivery of a specially made harness.

Heritage tourism deserves a place

THE cultural and heritage tourism market has been neglected in recent decades, says Cresta's **Chipo Mandela**, who puts it down to the harsh operating environment.

"At the Zimbabwe Council for Tourism's annual Tourism Achievers' Awards ceremony in Harare earlier this year, a call was made for Zimbabwe to focus more on the development of cultural tourism that taps into the rich heritage that the country has to offer, inclusive of reaching out to travellers interested in people, history and artistic endeavours.

"Operators are now working with local communities and their leaders to examine how to ensure that cultural tourism grows, but not at the expense of the culture overtaken by the weight of commercialism," says Chipo. "A key factor in Zimbabwe, too, is the effort to encourage greater participation in travel and

tourism by women and young people. There is widespread recognition that environmental sustainability is key to the survival of tourism and to its future continuation."

The Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) has initiated a programme to empower rural communities through its recently revealed heritage tourism programme that aims to create jobs and improve livelihoods.

Corporate affairs head of ZTA, **Godfrey Koti**, said five places of interest had been identified, all of which were in rural areas and would be promoted under the heritage tourism package.

"We are on a drive to market all places of historical significance that are dotted all over the country," said Godfrey. "This is about packaging our history. It is pleasing to note that government has backed the project. It is recognition of the value of heritage tourism in reviving business

in the country. The ZTA has planned to make these areas selling points in our brand Zimbabwe campaign. These are exciting times for the tourism sector because we foresee a boom in terms of revenue to rural communities and the creation of jobs as people start to visit heritage sites."

Earmarked sites include Old Bulawayo, the Pupu Shangani in Matabeleland North, Tangwena Village in Manicaland, Masvingo's Trabablas trail and the Chinhoyi battle site.

"There is no way we can ignore the value of tourism to local communities. In as much as the industry benefits, so do villagers around these sites. It is ZTA's view that locals are empowered so that they have an interest in helping us market Zimbabwe better. We are planning to work with publicity associations, teachers and culture experts in all areas known to have a historic site," said Godfrey.



Matobo Hills National Park.

Renewed interest countrywide

WHILE Victoria Falls remains the focus of the country's tourism industry, other destinations have seen growing interest.

Cresta Hotels' **Chipo Mandela** says there have been increased numbers of visitors in most destinations around the country, including Hwange National Park, Lake Kariba and the Lower Zambezi, Bulawayo and the Matobo Hills, Great Zimbabwe, the Eastern Highlands and the Gonarezhou area of the Lowveld.

The new Kariba Safari Lodge is set to open in Kariba in September. It is part of the Zambezi Cruise and Safaris' portfolio. The property will have nine individual accommodations fitted with en-suite bathrooms and private patios with views of the lake. The main lodge will have an elevated deck, an open-plan lounge, a restaurant, outdoor patio, and a bar. There will also be a separate conference and wedding venue, which has been built with lake vistas, a swimming pool, and communal boma area. Free WiFi will be available and private aircraft charter can be organised from Victoria Falls International Airport.

Africa Albida Tourism's **Ross Kennedy** says a number of new camps and lodges opened recently, or are about to open, in Hwange, representing significant investment.

According to Chipo, the key to facilitating significant and sustained increases in arrivals in all these destinations is the creation of satisfactory scheduled air services to connect them, so that it becomes appealing for visitors to Victoria Falls to tag on other attractions during their stay.

"Domestic air travel is not yet conducive to such growth and it is pleasing to hear plans being laid for improvements in air services and airports around the country. Flowing from this will be increased

offers of packages that facilitate inclusion of two or more additional destinations in a Zimbabwean holiday visit, over and above the Victoria Falls."

Airlines operating in the region are already increasing frequencies in and to Zimbabwe. **Hein Kaiser**, gm marketing and communications at fastjet, says the airline has already upped frequencies between Johannesburg and Harare to four daily returns, while flights between Harare and Victoria Falls grew by 85% last year. He adds that the carrier is positive about the Zimbabwean market, with the forecast GDP growth continuing on an upward curve.

Thembele Dladla, country manager for RwandAir, South Africa, says the fifth freedom granted by Zimbabwe to the airline, enabling it to link Cape Town and Harare, has been very well received by the travelling public. Travellers are sharing positive experiences with the improved ease of travel. He adds that RwandAir views the Zimbabwean market as very important and is working on a long-term plan to upgrade the aircraft on the Cape Town-Harare route to a B737-800NG, replacing the current CRJ 900.

Self-drive visitors have often reported multiple challenges on Zimbabwe's roads, but there are indications that driving is becoming viable once again.

Brett Mc Donald, md of destination management company Flame of Africa, says: "The road to Kariba is brilliant. Between Harare and Kariba there is 377km of perfect tar road." He suggests that those who want to make the drive should consider a stop at the Chinhoyi Caves, which are about halfway between Harare and Kariba, or at the Lion's Den, where they can refuel their cars and have what he considers to be the best steak roll in the world. ■



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CRESTA
Hotels

Exciting developments at Cresta Hotels

Cresta Hotels has relaunched the Cresta Churchill hotel in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, after completing a \$700 000 refurbishment.

The property has more than 50 bedrooms and suites and can accommodate up to 120 people in its main conference room. The refurbishment included a complete restyling of all bedrooms and suites, the reception, conference rooms, restaurant and cocktail bar, and a comprehensive replacement of all bathrooms. The hotel is situated on the main road from Bulawayo to the nearby Matobo Hills, a Unesco World Heritage Site.



The hospitality brand is also undertaking a \$2,5-million upgrade of Cresta Oasis Hotel and Apartments in Harare. The refurbishment will focus on transforming all apartments, bedrooms, public areas and conference rooms. A new conference room will be added and the old nightclub (on the eastern side of the hotel) will be transformed into a new bar and entertainment centre. The main entrance will open on to Kwame Nkrumah Avenue.

Cresta country director, **Ms Chipo Mandela**, described the refurbishments as a major sign of confidence in travel and tourism in Zimbabwe. "We in Cresta are excited by the prospects for growth and development in travel and tourism that have opened up in recent months. We are ready and able to play our part in supporting the national drive to make travel and tourism one of the leading economic contributors, if not the leading economic powerhouse of the country."

Ms Mandela said Cresta Hotels firmly believed that Southern Africa and Zimbabwe were about to experience a golden age of travel and tourism. "This will be spurred on, in part, by the changes that have taken place and continue to take place in the macro-economic environment. Between 1988 and 1999 Zimbabwe was the go-to destination of Africa and we at Cresta believe a return to this positioning is on its way."

She added that, in the past six years, the group had undertaken a significant transformation of its operations across Zimbabwe. "This has been driven by the need to remain relevant and to be the market leader in our area of chosen participation – the three- and four-star market. We believe that Southern Africa in general, and Zimbabwe in particular, is worth investing in."

Cresta has 'walked its talk' in recent years, upgrading and expanding all its properties. "We built and opened a new major conference centre at the Cresta Lodge property in eastern Harare – Cresta Sango – opening up a new opportunity for conferencing, banqueting and eventing for up to 1 000 people.

"We then undertook a complete renovation of Cresta Lodge and it is now a popular hospitality establishment with excellent feedback from guests across the board. It will celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2018 and looks forward to a continued growth in the business travel market," Ms Mandela said.

Shortly after this renovation, Cresta Hotels entered into an arrangement to take over and revamp an existing hotel in Victoria Falls,



and in 2013 opened it as Cresta Sprayview. "Business has been good, and in the past 12 months in particular, this hotel has established itself as one of the most attractive accommodation offerings and event venues in Victoria Falls town. This year, Cresta Sprayview marks six operational years as a Cresta establishment."

The group also undertook a series of upgrades and changes at Cresta Jameson in Harare, a hotel that will celebrate its 60th anniversary in 2018.

Cresta Hotels is one of Southern Africa's best-known hospitality groups, with operations in three countries: Zimbabwe, Botswana and Zambia.

USA & Disney



Disneyland, California.

Despite some recent fluctuation, the rand has stabilised significantly over the past two years, making 2018 a good year to send travellers to the USA. Debbie Badham reports.

Travellers flock to the US while the going is good

NOW seems to be the perfect time to send clients to the US.

Bookings are booming and travel experts say it's largely the result of a stronger rand.

While the rand has recently taken a few knocks, it is generally much stronger than it was two years ago (currently it is R13,30 to the dollar). Consider that at the start of 2016 the rand was almost R17 to the US dollar, while at the start of this year it was just over R12 to the dollar.

"It's definitely easier for clients to travel to the US at the moment, with the rand being a lot stronger against the dollar," says Travel Counsellor, **Nicole Barrett**.

"We have seen a 60% increase in bookings to the US for travel in 2018 compared with 2017," agrees **Janine Pienaar**, sales and marketing manager at the Globus Family of Brands, adding that it's not as expensive to travel to the US as



Janine Pienaar

it was last year.

She says the stronger rand, together with good airfare deals this year, has played a part in the increase in bookings.

"Most of our bookings have been with Cosmos Holidays, which is our value brand, and which includes the key components of travel that you expect from

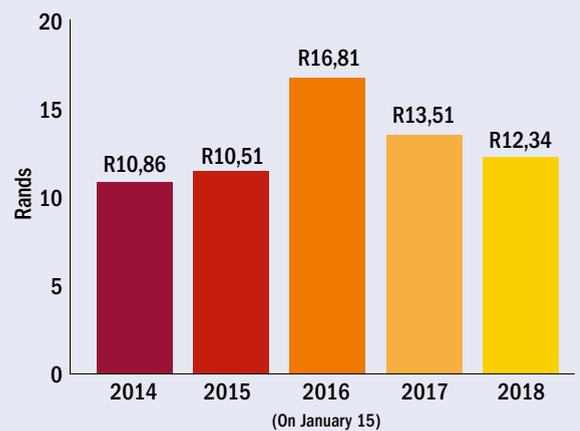
a guided holiday. It is a good and affordable way to explore the US," Janine comments.

At the moment Globus's top seller is the Eastern US and Canada Grand Vacation.

The price starts from US\$2 269pps (R30 250) for a 15-day tour. The tour covers New York, Boston, Quebec City Area, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Niagara Falls, Lancaster, Washington DC and finishes in Philadelphia. "It includes guided sightseeing, accommodation and transportation, as well as the services of a qualified tour director for the duration of the tour," Janine says.

Annemarie Lexow, sales and marketing manager at Travel Vision, agrees that the rand has played an important part in the US booking boom, though she says there are probably a number of other factors involved, including the increase in consumer confidence.

Rand value of US\$1



After weakening dramatically against the dollar in 2016, the rand has stabilised significantly this year.

Consumer confidence rose to an all-time high in the first quarter of this year, with the First National Bank Bureau for Economic Research Consumer Confidence Sentiment Index jumping eight points from the previous quarter to reach 26 points.

South Africa also recorded improved business confidence in 2018. The South African Chamber of Commerce and Industry reported that in the first quarter of 2017, the index was 95,7, compared with 98,7 in the first quarter of 2018.

Discover the best of the US on a budget

IF YOUR client has a tight budget, there are many ways to help them to save.

Cruising is a cost-effective way to visit a number of different places, says **Thaybz Khan**, marketing executive at Cruises International. "The value for money in terms of inclusions like dining and entertainment is exceptional." She says with a cruise holiday travellers can maximise both time and

money spent on a vacation.

Thaybz points out that cruising is a particularly good option for clients travelling with families, especially those looking to make a stop in Walt Disney World, Orlando. "A Disney cruise option is both a cost-effective and convenient option for families," she says.

Currently, Cruises International's most popular itineraries are its Eastern

and Western Caribbean cruises, which depart from Miami and Orlando respectively.

When choosing the right cities to stay in, travellers can save by staying close to popular tourist areas rather than in them. For example, says Thompsons Holidays PR and media manager, **John Ridler**, when visiting New York, stay in New Jersey rather than Manhattan. "Rates and taxes are lower

and you have easy access to Manhattan just across the Hudson."

He says it's not difficult to find good hotel chains that offer very good rates, comfortable and clean accommodation and also include a basic breakfast in their rate.

Travel Vision's **Annemarie Lexow** agrees, saying three-star hotels in the US tend to be very reasonable.

To get around, Travel Vision

recommends self-drive packages. "Car hire is very reasonable and includes unlimited kilometres, GPS, waivers and more," Annemarie comments.

Another way to save money is to take an all-inclusive guided tour, says the Globus Family's **Janine Pienaar**. With Cosmos Holidays, this includes accommodation in hand-picked hotels, a variety of transportation options and guided sightseeing.

A round-up of convenient air connections

Journeying to the US can be arduous so, naturally, agents focus on making it as painless for their clients as possible.

Direct to the US

THERE are many different ways of travelling to the US – possibly one of the most popular being Delta Air Lines, which, along with SAA, offers the only direct services between South Africa and the States.

“Non-stop travel is clearly preferable, as customers reach their destination in the shortest time. From our hub in Atlanta, customers can access more than 200 destinations in North America, Latin America

and the Caribbean, making it easy and convenient to get anywhere in this part of the world,” says **Jimmy Eichelgruen**, Delta sales director Africa, Middle East and India.

A significant advantage for travellers flying Delta is that the flights between Johannesburg and Atlanta both leave in the evening, meaning passengers get a full day in the city. “This is particularly important for business travellers who

naturally want to maximise their time on the ground,” comments Jimmy.

Orlando – home to Walt Disney World – has long been one of Delta’s most popular destinations. Currently the airline offers more than a dozen daily flights from Atlanta. “It’s easy for customers to connect to Florida from our Johannesburg flights and make the most of their time there rather than having to overnight in Atlanta first,” Jimmy points out.

Connecting via the UK

The UK has also always provided local travellers with a convenient connection to the US. Virgin Atlantic’s VS 602 from Johannesburg, for example, arrives at London Heathrow at 06h35. This means it connects seamlessly to all the airline’s US flights, destined for Atlanta, Boston, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Orlando, San Francisco, Seattle and Washington DC.

As it’s currently the Northern hemisphere summer, Virgin Atlantic will offer more direct flights between the UK and US through its partnership with Delta.

“Together we have over five million seats available between the UK and US,” says **Liezl Gericke**, head of Middle East and Africa



Liezl Gericke

at Virgin Atlantic.

She reveals that the airline recently announced a number of new routes and services between London and the US, most notable of which is its flight to Las Vegas, launching on March 31,

2019. The new service was available on the GDS from May 19, 2018.

“We will also be adding a second daily Boston service,” Liezl comments.

Also convenient for travellers connecting on Virgin Atlantic is the airline’s launch of three different ways to fly economy.

“Recognising that one size doesn’t fit all, from spring 2018 Virgin Atlantic will introduce ‘economy delight’, ‘economy classic’ and ‘economy light’.

These three new ways to fly allow customers to choose the product that suits their budget and travel style – but never compromise on inclusive food and drink, unrivalled service, and inflight entertainment,” says Liezl.

Connecting via Europe

Europe is another convenient stopover for South Africans bound for the US.

KLM is a natural choice when connecting to the North Atlantic because of the daylight flight on the return from Amsterdam, says **Tracy Armitage**, marketing for Air France KLM in SA. “Passengers can connect swiftly in Amsterdam when arriving from the US, thus avoiding the necessity of waiting until the evening to catch their flight back to South Africa.”

KLM and Air France offer numerous destinations to which travellers can connect. Together, the airlines fly direct to 12 major cities in the US from their respective hubs. Due to the airlines’ codeshare

with Delta Air Lines, they have access to a further six US cities direct from their hubs.

“What’s more, our codeshare partnership with Delta extends to its entire US domestic network. All Air France KLM fares are valid on Delta so that removes the need for separate tickets, which can be costly,” adds Tracy.

The most convenient city to connect to using Air France KLM is definitely New York’s JFK International Airport. This Northern hemisphere summer, Air France has 28 weekly flights to New York and KLM has 20. Codeshare partner Delta offers a further 21 flights from the AF KLM hubs, as well as seven flights a week from Nice to JFK.



The airline has been granted permission for direct flights.

RwandAir heads to the US

RwandAir recently announced that South African travellers departing from Johannesburg and Cape Town now have even more options to reach the US, as the airline has been granted a licence to start direct services to the US. RwandAir revealed that it

will fly from Kigali to New York and confirms that it will be operating an A330 with full on-board connectivity. Another advantage will be the minimum connecting time through RwandAir’s hub, which the airline has planned carefully to ensure short layovers.



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USA AND DISNEY

Ziplining at sea



Cruises International's newest offering, *Symphony of the Seas*, will homeport in the Caribbean from November, conducting seven-night Eastern and Western Caribbean itineraries. Photo: RCI

Beyond bright city lights, the price is right

AMERICA'S major cities will always be a massive drawcard for South African travellers. But there's a great deal to explore beyond the bright lights of the cities – and sometimes at a more affordable price.

"Portland, Maine, is a jewel with its array of lakes, and St Hood, which is great for skiing," says **Annemarie Lexow** of Travel Vision. She points out that a city like Miami can also be a good option, because, although South Beach is expensive, if travellers stay behind the port, it is far more reasonable.

The southern states offer a wonderful experience and exceptional value for money, says Thompsons Holidays' **John Ridler**.

For a more relaxed pace, where everyone greets you with 'y'all', Annemarie recommends South Carolina. Myrtle Beach, a city and vacation resort on the Atlantic coast, has a beautiful promenade and has been the inspiration for many Nicholas Sparks novels, she says. "Do visit Brookgreen Gardens, a national historic landmark and America's first sculpture garden. The preserve has more than 1 700 works on display, as well as a Butterfly House, which opens between April and October.

Journey through time

John advises those



"Portland, Maine, is a jewel with its array of lakes, and St Hood, which is great for skiing." **Annemarie Lexow**

interested in beautiful beaches and fantastic golfing opportunities to experience Charleston, the South Carolina port city, and Savannah, the oldest city in Georgia. Annemarie says these cities will also take you on a historic yet hip journey through time with beautifully restored buildings and plantations. On the other hand, Missouri is a must for wine lovers," she comments.

"The mountains of Georgia also have spectacular autumn foliage and beautiful small towns," adds John. "After the bright lights of the cities, small town America is a must – perfect for a

relaxed, self-drive holiday and the best way to get to meet the people."

The magic of music

If your clients love music, then they cannot miss out on Nashville, Tennessee, or Birmingham, Alabama, advises Annemarie.

"Many South Africans are interested in our Dixieland & Rhythms Cosmos tour, which includes highlights near and dear to music lovers' hearts," says **Janine Pienaar** of the Globus Family of Brands.

In Nashville, travellers can visit the Country Music Hall of Fame, with its rare instruments and RCA Studio B, Nashville's oldest recording studio. "This is where Elvis Presley, Dolly Parton and many more stars recorded their biggest hits," comments Janine. She says in Memphis, travellers can see where the film, *Walk the Line*, was filmed and visit Graceland, Elvis's palatial estate.

"Other tour highlights include a trip to the top of the Gateway Arch in St Louis. There travellers can experience a ride on the Amtrak City of New Orleans train from Memphis to New Orleans. In Louisiana, they might enjoy an optional boat cruise through the swampy waterways," says Janine.

The 11-day tour starts from US\$1 829pps (R24 820).



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The lighthouse in Portland, Maine.

How to choose the right Disney experience

DISNEY remains a firm favourite for South African travellers. In fact, Travel Vision's **Annemarie Lexow** says the majority of the tour operator's enquiries at the moment are all for Disney.

Travellers should choose their Disney experience (Disneyland or Walt Disney World) depending on which side of the US they are touring, says Travel Counsellor, **Nicole Barrett**.

"Walt Disney World in Florida is closer to South Africa being on the east coast. It is also bigger and offers more than Disneyland in California," says Thompsons Holidays' **John Ridler**.

Annemarie says the size of the respective theme parks and length of time travellers want to spend experiencing Disney also play an important part in which experience they choose. "Disneyland is a maximum two-day visit, whereas Walt Disney World has four parks and two water parks, so we advise clients to have a minimum stay of seven nights," she says.

"I would recommend seven days at least, especially during the summer," agrees Nicole. "Aside from Walt Disney World's two amazing water parks, it now also has the new

Pandora Park (World of Avatar)."

For Walt Disney World, she recommends that travellers purchase the Park Hopper package, as it allows them to visit more than one park in a day. "The FastPass also allows guests to skip the line for selected attractions, shows and character greetings," says Nicole.

In terms of accommodation, Nicole says travellers should stay in a Disney hotel in the resort as this involves additional benefits, such as extra park hours for guests and dining packages. "Travellers can also have any items bought at a store delivered to their hotel rooms, and access to the Memory Maker, which includes an unlimited selection of photos taken at the various attractions by the Disney PhotoPass photographers," she adds.

Nicole also suggests that travellers take advantage of the special events that take place in both Disneyland and Walt Disney World year round. "Around Halloween, Walt Disney World has a 'Mickey's Not-So-Scary Halloween Party' and around Christmas it has a 'Mickey's Very Merry Christmas Party' with holiday parades, live entertainment and awesome fireworks.



Cinderella's Castle at Walt Disney World, Florida.

Christmas is also super festive at Disney and one of the best times to travel to the US."

Exciting new attractions for travellers to take note of, advises Annemarie, include Toy Story, which

opened this year at the Disney Hollywood Studios Park in Walt Disney World, as well as the Star Wars Galaxy Edge, a new themed experience opening in both Disneyland and Walt Disney World in 2019.

Tips to upsell

- Upsell on the park tickets by offering tickets with more options, says Annemarie.
- Always sell clients the dining add-on as it's fantastic value for money, suggests John.
- Save clients money by

suggesting Value Resorts, the least expensive accommodation in Disney World, Annemarie advises.

- Advise clients to download the Disney app before they travel, says John.

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The Empire State building, New York.

Globus covers the US

The Globus Family of Brands has released its new Cosmos USA tours for 2019. They include the following.

Essential Hawaii

This island vacation encompasses the very best of Hawaii. From Honolulu to Maui, the tour provides a good mix of sightseeing and free time to enjoy the soothing pace of island life.

Travellers will take a tour of Honolulu, including a sightseeing cruise through battleship row at Pearl Harbor followed by a few days of relaxation or optional sightseeing. Once in the 'Valley Island' of Maui, travellers will explore the island with a tour of the Iao Valley, and can opt for whale watching, zip-lining, or attending a traditional luau.

New England and the Hudson Valley

A guided tour of New England and New York's Hudson Valley introduces travellers to America's historic east coast.

The trip begins in the Big Apple, where travellers will see iconic sights from Broadway to the Empire State Building. They'll also visit the Hartford, Connecticut, homes of legendary American authors, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Mark Twain.

Continuing north to Lexington, Massachusetts, travellers will experience the scene of the first battle of the American Revolution. They'll journey through history in Concord and Boston, and see the Old North Church of Paul Revere's famous midnight ride. They'll encounter the setting of the infamous Salem witch trials, visit a legendary lighthouse on Portland's rocky shore, and view New Hampshire's covered bridges.

Next up is the picturesque countryside of Vermont, where travellers learn the art of making maple syrup. They'll spend two nights at the Essex Culinary Resort and Spa, and visit a local vineyard and heritage park reminiscent of old New England life. They'll then take the Lake Champlain ferry for a scenic crossing into

New York, and travel through the Adirondack Foothills to Lake Placid – host city of two winter Olympic Games.

On the way to the Berkshires, travellers will stop in Saratoga Springs for a tour of the spa setting. They'll also visit the Norman Rockwell Museum in the Berkshires and travel along the Hudson River to the lavish Vanderbilt mansion, then to West Point to learn about the famous military academy.

Finally, travellers will stay overnight in the mythical locale of the Legend of Sleepy Hollow, before returning to New York City.

America's Greatest Treasures

This affordable American vacation through Colorado, South Dakota, Wyoming, and Utah takes travellers west for adventure and treasure. From Denver to the lofty peaks of the Grand Tetons, they'll experience the Wild West with its stunning vistas and historic lore.

Travellers will pass through the black hills of South Dakota, where the legends of the frontier made their mark, and stand at the national monuments to presidents at Mount Rushmore, and to Native American legend, Chief Crazy Horse.

The tour follows the trail of pioneers and history-makers to Wyoming – home of Buffalo Bill and the natural splendour of Yellowstone National Park – visiting Old Faithful and

thundering waterfalls and the desert of the Great Salt Lake.

Spirit of the American Wild West

This guided tour of the American West spans Colorado, South Dakota and Wyoming, allowing travellers to follow in the pioneering spirit of the wild frontier.

It begins in the 'Mile High City' of Denver, where travellers are invited to take in historic sites at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, including Red Rocks Amphitheatre and the Buffalo Bill grave and museum.

The tour then heads north to Rocky Mountain National Park for an exploration of the alpine vistas from Trail Ridge Road over the Continental Divide. Travellers will experience the old-world charm of an overnight stay at Estes Park's Stanley Hotel – inspiration for Stephen King's thriller, *The Shining*. They then continue on to the black hills of South Dakota to see the famous monument of four US presidents carved into Mount Rushmore.

Travellers will also be introduced to the rich history of the Native American tribes, including the Lakota people, as they travel through the Badlands of South Dakota to Custer State Park and the Crazy Horse Memorial.

The tour next visits the Wild West town of Deadwood – known as a lawless frontier town during the legendary gold rush days. ■



Autumn on the Hudson River.



Wedding bells

Anneke Jordan, gm of Harvey World Travel Group SA, married **André Geldenhuys** on June 15, three years after they first met. The couple were married at Askari Game lodge, the venue of their first date, followed by a honeymoon in Greece, with a group of close friends.



Driving Miss Jane

Jane Kotze, travel manager at Flight Centre Travel Group SA (pictured), walked away with a brand-new VW Polo, courtesy of Emirates and FCTG, at the group's recent annual ball. The event recognised FCTG's top performers, who will jet off to Berlin to the Flight Centre Global Gathering. Seven other travel managers who showed exceptional growth this past year were **Tracy Wedd, Nicky Rademeyer, Michelle Leitão, Susan Holder, Leigh Anne Naidoo, Michelle Eriksen** and **Riaan Schoeman**. **Jaclyn Passero** got the nod for Top Novice Travel Manager.

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Appointments

■ Clinton Thom

has been appointed general manager of Radisson Blu Waterfront Cape Town. He has been with Radisson Hotel Group for four years and started in hospitality 19 years ago at the Crowne Plaza Pretoria.



■ **Nikki Wood** has joined Auto Europe as sales manager Gauteng, Mpumalanga and Free State. Nikki has almost 30 years of industry experience and says her long-standing relationships and commitment to service excellence are her key attributes.

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Winter warmer

Valid until July 31, aha's winter school holiday promotion allows agents to book a two-night stay from R974 per room per night, for a maximum of two guests per room. Properties include: The Rex Hotel, Knysna; Simon's Town Quayside Hotel; Casa Do Sol Hotel & Resort, Hazyview; Greenway Woods Resort, White River; and Ivory Tree Game Lodge and Shepherd's Tree Game Lodge, Pilanesberg. Offers are applicable to online bookings and are subject to availability. Terms and conditions apply. PROMO CODE: WINTER. From left: Feroza Moosa, sales executive, aha Hotels & Lodges; and Celeste Schroder, aha national sales manager. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Travel with Flair rubbishes labour equity allegations

TESSA REED

TRAVEL with Flair has refuted claims that it has fallen foul of employment equity requirements.

City Press reported that TWF was facing litigation for allegedly operating

without a transformation plan, along with other companies contracted by the Department of Labour.

TWF Group ceo, **Johanna Mukoki**, said the company was legally compliant and had a long-standing commitment toward transformation.

"In respect of the allegations raised against us, we have engaged with the Department of Labour and will be meeting with its high-level representatives in the very near future," Johanna said. "We are confident that these allegations will be dismissed." ■

Latam clamps down on hidden groups

SARAH ROBERTSON

LATAM is clamping down on a number of booking policy violations, including hidden groups, which could result in agent fines, ADMs, invoices, or loss of access to the carrier's inventory. Latam is one of the first airlines in this market to ADM for hidden groups.

The airline says a hidden group consists of 10 or more individual bookings, made by the same agency lata number, travelling on the same itinerary on the same date. A spokesperson for the airline said hidden groups affected the control over the airline's inventory and was the reason the policy was being enforced.

Karen Foley, manager at Harvey World Travel Highway, told TNW that while it would be impractical for her to manage her 30-passenger groups through the GDS, she could understand why agents made hidden group bookings for

smaller groups, because group fares in some cases cost more per person than GDS fares.

The Latam spokesperson said the airline could not say as a rule if a group fare would be cheaper or more expensive than market fares, saying that

"Instead of issuing restrictive ADM policies, airlines should examine their fare structures so that they are not open to fare manipulation in the first place."

each group request was analysed individually and approved according to demand.

"Our groups department offers price advantages and flexibility as groups can be released free of charge up to 61 days before departure. Tickets only have to be issued 30 days before departure and

group bookings receive more attention regarding contingency or schedule change issues," she added.

David Pegg, md of Sure Viva Travels, said that instead of issuing more restrictive ADM policies, it would be more effective for airlines to examine their fare structures to ensure that these did not open them up for fare manipulation in the first place.

He also felt that airline policy updates continued to discriminate against agents. Karen said she also found it frustrating that the same restrictions were not placed on direct passengers and she wondered if Latam's new policy had been motivated by a desire to reduce its GDS fees.

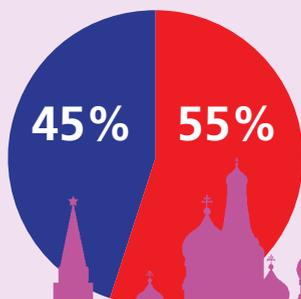
Latam said, while the policy affected agent bookings only, individual bookings were controlled by a system 'robot' that automatically cancelled bookings falling into this category. ■



No rush for Russia

Has the 2018 FIFA World Cup generated more interest in Russia as a destination?

- No
- Yes



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Cruises International responds

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able to step in and assist in resolving these issues. We urged our partners to act responsibly and to channel their business with Royal Caribbean International and its affiliate brands through Cruises International, RCL's only official local representative, and our appointed re-sellers. Whether they book directly with us, or they use any of our appointed distributors, such as wholesalers or the online tools we offer. Furthermore, we have access to the reservations

placed through the appointed channels and we have direct access to the highest levels of management in order to resolve any issue or dispute effectively and to the client's satisfaction. Using unauthorised channels places both the agent and their client at risk, which will result in financial and reputational damage. In order to protect the trade and the consumers, RCL is taking all necessary steps to put an end to this practice.

Our trade partners are

exactly that. Our partners. We are here to support them at all times, assist them to grow their cruise sales and stand by them and their clients when there is a service failure or a dispute of any kind. We welcome any feedback that will assist us to continually improve. After all, Cruises International can only be as successful as our trade partners are.

We reassure our partners that there is no 'storm' whatsoever.

George Argyropoulos, ceo Cruises International ■