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TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

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Chaos looms

No clarity from Home Affairs on new immigration regulations. Dorine Reinstein reports.

CONFLICTING information and a lack of communication by the Department of Home Affairs on new immigration regulations has travel agents and their clients bracing for chaos as the deadline for implementation is only days away.

Sandri van Wyk, marketing director of Flight Specials Pretoria Travel, applied for her children's unabridged birth certificates in July last year. When following up with the department regarding the delay, she was advised that the certificates would be issued "for travel purposes only" and would only be valid for six months.

TNW contacted the Department of Home Affairs on several occasions to get clarity on what the difference is between a temporary 'travel' certificate and an official unabridged birth certificate and why there was a difference. Unfortunately, we also received conflicting information. On two occasions, officials told us that unabridged

birth certificates issued specifically for travel purposes had indeed limited validity and carried a stamp with an expiry date. Travellers could, however, also apply for a 'general' unabridged birth certificate with no expiry date. But on another two calls, officials told us there were no expiry dates on any of the birth certificates.

"Airline staff are currently not well trained to understand the new regulations."

Mayihlome Tshwete, spokesperson for Home Affairs, could not clarify. He told TNW: "I don't 'think' there is an expiry date on the birth certificate." When asked to elaborate on this and other issues, Mayihlome told us we were "nitpicking" and "trying to portray isolated incidents as general truth". He told us he would get back to us on the validity of the birth certificates, but that he did not have time to discuss the matter any further, after which he hung up the

phone. We didn't hear back from him by the time of going to print.

The Department of Home Affairs has published an official guide on its website: "New immigration regulations: requirements made easy!", which summarises the new rules, however industry authorities have advised that it portrays conflicting information and that a new brochure clarifying issues would be published "in the next week or so". The brochure advises that citizens applying for unabridged certificates contact the DHA's Civic Branch: "Contact details are on our home page... We care!" the brochure says.

Meanwhile, industry authorities are concerned that chaos will ensue at airports, come June 1, as airline staff and customs officials will not be given accurate information.

Airline staff are currently not well trained to understand the new regulations, says **Thulani Nzima**, ceo of SA Tourism. He was addressing the



Liezl Gericke with brand ambassador Richard Branson.

Virgin appoints SA country manager

VIRGIN Atlantic has appointed **Liezl Gericke** as its country manager for South Africa. She takes over from **Simon Newton-Smith**, who assumed the role of vp of sales and distribution in North America. Liezl, who takes up her position this month, served as the head of sales and marketing for South Africa for the past three years, having worked for the airline since 2012. She was previously the gm for STA Travel in South Africa. Commenting on her new position, Liezl said: "Southern Africa is a strategically important

region for Virgin Atlantic and this is an exciting time for us. I am really looking forward to taking up this new and challenging role." Liezl is now responsible for Virgin Atlantic's Southern African operation which includes the Virgin Atlantic daily services between Johannesburg, London Heathrow and beyond to North America. She revealed the airline will invest £300m (R5bn) in customer experience and will welcome the new Boeing 787-900 aircraft onto the Johannesburg route later this year. ■

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Rubes® By Leigh Rubin



It's wine o' clock

Thompsons Holidays hosted a Lindt Chocolate and Riedel Glassware 'appreciation course' for a chocolate and wine tasting experience. Attendees recently gathered at the Design Quarter Shopping Centre in Fourways to enjoy the delicious Lindt Excellence range, paired with wines that are relished out of the "finest glasses" from Riedel. Pictured here at the event (from left) are: **Hennie Olivier**, (marketing services executive of Thompson Holidays), **Dilene Boyd** (Lindt chocolatier) and **John Ridler** (media and PR manager of Thompsons Holidays). Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Protea now under Marriott International on GDS

PROTEA Hotels has undergone a systems changeover on the GDS, now falling under the Marriott International umbrella. The changeover was fully completed on May 15. The Protea Hotels chain code

(PR) remains the same but Protea Hotels will now also be bookable through the Marriott International (EM) chain code. Agents can search for Protea Hotels using the chain code along with the city, such as CPT/PR or CPT/EM. There will

be changes to property codes for Amadeus and Worldspan, therefore the best way to search for properties is by city. Should any problems occur, a message will be generated to advise agents to contact a help desk. ■

Comair could relook investment in SA

DORINE REINSTEIN
COMAIR ceo **Erik Venter** has warned that if the court rules in favour of SAA in its current legal battle, the airline will be forced relook its investments in South Africa. Comair has taken SAA to court questioning the constitutionality of government's bailouts of the

national carrier (see TNW May 13). Erik told TNW the airline would not consider pulling out of South Africa entirely. However, "when making investments in aircraft, we would have to consider the risk of not being able to rely on government complying with its own policy and legislation," he said. If, in turn, the court rules

in favour of Comair, this could have far-reaching implications for SAA. Three South African banks – Nedbank, Standard Bank and Citibank – submitted affidavits on the grounds that if Comair was successful and the extension of the guarantee was declared invalid, then their loans to SAA would be at risk. ■



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Flight Centre launches SA holiday packages

FLIGHT Centre has expanded its exclusive tailor-made Red Label Holidays to include destinations across South Africa. Red Label Holiday destinations include the

Western Cape (Bantry Bay and Camps Bay), Eastern Cape (Shamwari game reserve), Kwazulu Natal (Fairmont Zimbali Resort), Limpopo (Mabula Game Lodge) and the North West

(Sun City and Thakadu River Camp). North West – Red Label holidays offers both Family Fiesta and Just for 2 packages to Sun City, and a Just for 2 package at. ■

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SOUTH AFRICAN AIRWAYS





In the fast lane

Abu Dhabi Tourism hosted industry partners for a night at the Movies@Montecasino to watch *Fast and Furious 7*! The UAE plans to position itself as a major hub for filmmaking and production, and Abu Dhabi's featured spotlight in the film gave guests an exciting glance at the city. Pictured here at the event are (from left): **Tracey Krog**, Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority country manager, **Cleo Geldenhuys**, Pentravel Clearwater Mall shop manager, and **Natalia Rosa**, Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority media and PR exec. Photo: Darise Foster

AirHeads



A snapshot of the week's airline news

Etihad increases capacity to Heathrow

ETIHAD has introduced a second A380 on its Abu Dhabi - London Heathrow route. Two of the airline's three daily flights to London will now be operated by the A380. The A380 has full mobile and WiFi service, with USB and power points at every seat. The Abu Dhabi - London Heathrow flight schedule operated by the A380 is as follows: Flight EY11 departs Abu Dhabi at 02h55 to arrive in London at 07h35, before EY12 departs London at 09h30 to arrive back in Abu Dhabi at 19h25. EY19 departs Abu Dhabi at 08h35 to arrive in London at 13h05, before EY20 departs London at 15h05 and arrives in Abu Dhabi at 01h00. A Boeing 777-300ER will be used for flight EY17 departing Abu Dhabi at 13h50 and arriving in London at 18h20, and return flight EY18 which departs London at 20h40 and arrives in Abu Dhabi at 06h35.

Qatar adds three US destinations

QATAR Airways has added three new US destinations to its portfolio. The airline will fly to Los Angeles, Boston and Atlanta in 2016. Daily flights to Los Angeles will commence on January 1, operated by the Boeing 777. From March 16, the airline will fly daily to Boston using the A350 XWB. The airline launches daily flights to Atlanta on July 1, also operated by the Boeing 777. In addition, a second daily service to New York will also be launched from March 1. It will be operated by the Airbus A350 XWB.

Peermont property opens in Limpopo

PEERMONT'S newest property, the Thaba Moshate Hotel Casino and Convention Resort in Burgersfort, Limpopo, has officially opened its doors. The resort is 30 minutes from Ohrigstad and close to the Panorama Route, 170km from Polokwane.

The resort features a conference centre that comprises two rooms – the main Ebandla Room, which caters up to 180 delegates cinema style, and the 14-seater Seboi Boardroom. The Ebandla Room opens on to a private courtyard, enabling pre- and post-assembly

gatherings. A grass platform is also available for tent structures. It overlooks the resort and offers views across the valley. Opening specials for meeting planners start from R240 per delegate for a one-day conference package.

The property also features a three-

star Metcourt Hotel with 82 rooms (including two special assistance and eight self-catering rooms), a swimming pool, loungers and an outside bar. Free WiFi is available across the resort. The casino houses 150 slots and 21 tables in smoking and non-smoking areas. ■



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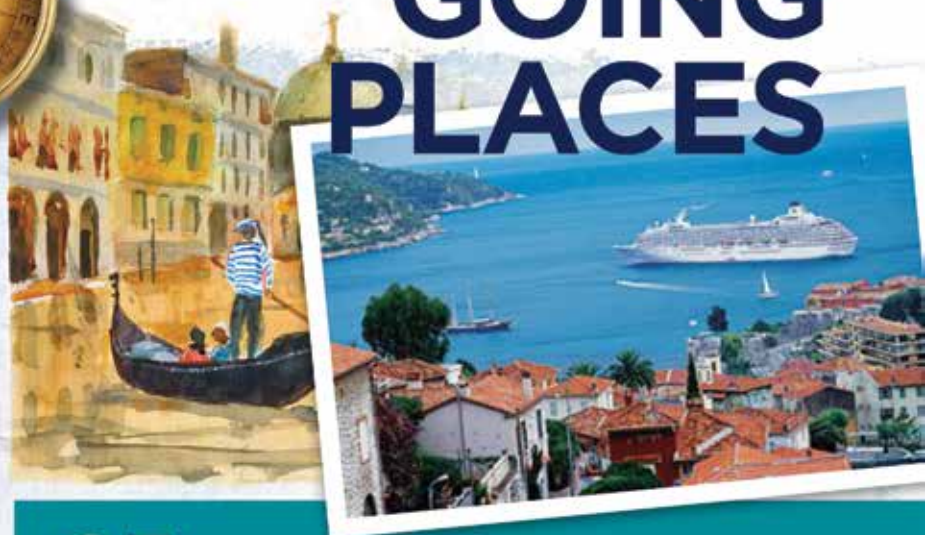
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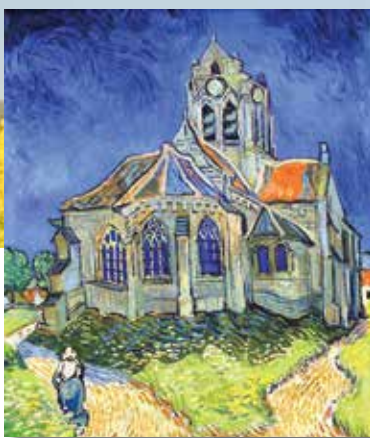
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SCENIC FRANCE



TNW's Kate Nathan sailed along the Seine as the guest of Amadeus Cruises, represented in SA by Austria Connection.

In-Seine luxury

RIVER cruises are an excellent solution when clients request 'something different' from their European holiday. A river cruise is an exciting addition to a European itinerary, says **Inge Dohibal**, owner of Austria Connection. And it's hard to argue – spending seven days sailing in France certainly is a satisfying, relaxing and luxurious way to round off a European experience.

River cruises are especially attractive to travellers older than 45, and people with special interests such as art (especially the impressionists) or European history (with an accent on World War II and the Normandy landings). Key draw cards include the fact that they offer travellers the opportunity to experience seven French destinations in seven days with a prepaid package; plus, clients can enjoy five-star luxury – along with gourmet food and wines and excellent service – at a four-star price.

Consider the excellent value that Amadeus River Cruises's Paris and River Seine seven-day cruise offers. The package includes beautifully-appointed, comfortable cabins and suites, with fine dining, including five course meals and regional wines (enthusiasts may order from a special wine list offering the produce of well-known vineyards of the region for their own account). Added to this, complimentary coffee and tea are available



Versailles – opulence

throughout the day and night in the library, and entertainment ranges from the Captain's gala dinner to a show about Normandy folklore.

Compare Prices

Prices start from €1 075 (R13 795) pps, with single supplements starting from 15%. Consider that seven nights in a five-star hotel in Paris with daily lunch and dinner, plus some drinks, including three full-day excursions (Versailles, Normandy, Rouen) and a city tour of Paris would come to a minimum of €3 000 (R40 247)pps. In contrast, a cruise in cabin category B-1 (middle deck with French balcony) with all 10 excursions would cost €2 574 (R34 532)pps.

Excursions are excluded.

Inge explains: "This enables cruisers to structure their holidays as they like. Some of them may have visited Europe before, so they might already have seen some of the sights. Others may appreciate a day or two of rest." Inge points out that an economical way to add excursions is to purchase them in packages beforehand, as this brings a 15% discount. A 'C' package, incorporating all 10 excursions is €574 (R7 700), and offers excellent value, with transport and the services of a knowledgeable English-speaking guide included.



Welcome aboard – cruise director **Kerstin Scholl** and Captain **Jerome Comere**



Auvers sur Oise. Insert: Van Gogh's painting

Exciting excursions

EXCURSION options include stop-offs at the following destinations, where must-see attractions are located.

- **Auvers sur Oise** – Vincent Van Gogh's last abode.
- **Rouen** – A museum dedicated to Joan of Arc as well as two 7th Century abbeys.
- **Étretat and Honfleur** – Stunning views are offered from the white cliffs at Étretat and the dinky traditional fishing harbour of Honfleur.
- **Bayeux, Caen and Pont l'Eveque** – The iconic Bayeux Tapestry (measuring 70m in length) depicts the conquest of England by William of Normandy in 1066. Enjoy an authentic Normandy lunch with local cider followed by a Calvados tasting and tour while you are here.
- **The battlefields of Normandy** – During WWII, 170 000 Allied troops landed on the beaches of Normandy, heralding the liberation of France. Lunch is included in this excursion.
- **Les Andelys** – This excursion starts at Chateau Gaillard, built by Richard the Lionheart, then travels on to Giverny, to the house and garden of famous impressionist Claude Monet. It was here that he painted his best known waterlily landscapes.
- **Versailles** – Enjoy priority access to the world-famous palace built by Louis XIV, where extravagance is taken to the highest degree. The last tenants of the palace were Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette.
- **City Tour of Paris** – There's so much to see in the French capital, including the Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame, Les Invalides and the Louvre. A night cruise down the Seine is a memorable experience.



Étretat



Monet's garden – Giverny



Richard the Lionheart's Chateau Gaillard. Photos: Kate Nathan

Book It!

Austria Connection is currently offering an Amadeus 2-for-1 promotion on specific sailing dates. The offer is valid for the Paris & Seine Cruise and other European cruises.

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Protea snaps up another property

HUNTERS Rest hotel in the Magalies Mountains has joined the Protea Hotels portfolio. The hotel has already undergone a R15m refurbishment, with more plans to upgrade the property. Already complete are the chapel and an open-air boma for guests wanting to host weddings and big functions. The hotel, which is an hour's drive from Pretoria, features a swimming pool; a golf course; a newly renovated spa; and a nature reserve with a viewing deck. For children there is a farmyard, horse riding, putt-putt and a heated pool.

Luxury Victoria Falls camp adds exclusive facility

WILD Horizons has opened Elephant Camp West, an extension of Elephant Camp in the Victoria Falls, which can be booked on an exclusive use basis. Like the main camp, this new extension overlooks the Victoria Falls National Park. The new camp consists of four tented suites overlooking the gorge and accommodating a maximum of eight guests. Each suite has a private viewing deck and plunge pool as well as its own lounge area. The suites have en-suite bathrooms with a bath as well as inside and outside showers. The new facility is independent of the main camp, with its own manager, chef and guide. The suites can also be equipped with sleeper couches for up to two children.



Travel Vision kicked off its 2015 Greece Roadshow in Johannesburg earlier this month, inviting trade to the Silver Birch Restaurant at Lifestyle Garden Centre to meet with various trade partners promoting the destination. Pictured here at the event (from left) are: Nancy Mgauli, Computicket, with Maria Fakka, Sani Resort and Annemarie Lexow, Travel Vision. Photo: Darise Foster

SAA Voyager and Thornybush team up

SAA VOYAGER and The Thornybush Collection have joined forces to offer exclusive prices to Voyager Lifetime Platinum and Platinum card members for five- and four-star lodges within the Collection. Partnered by SA Express, rates are inclusive of flights, which are offered direct to Hoedspruit from both Johannesburg and Cape Town, with a 20-minute transfer to the Thornybush Private Nature Reserve.

As part of the promotion, SAA Voyager has negotiated that the first night of a three-night stay at any of the participating lodges will be

complimentary to Lifetime Platinum and Platinum members, their spouse/partners and up to two others sharing a suite. For the duration of the trip, the guests of the SAA Voyager premium members will be charged at the same rate as the premium members.

Both the five-star (promotional code SAAPLAT1) as well as the four-star packages (promotional code SAAPLAT2) include return flights from OR Tambo International Airport to Hoedspruit, airport transfers to and from the lodge of choice, three nights at the

selected lodge, all meals as well as dawn and dusk game drives daily. Additional nights' accommodation and flights from Cape Town packages are also available on request for both packages.

Participating lodges in the five-star package are the Thornybush Game Lodge, the River Lodge and the Shumbalala Game Lodge, at the rate of R12 952 pps. The four-star package is R10 837 pps at Chapungu Tented Bush Camp, Serondella, Monwana or Jackalberry Lodge. The offer is valid until July 7, and then again from December 1 to December 20. ■

Trafalgar premiers new programme

TRAFALGAR has released its worldwide 2015/2016 autumn, winter, spring programme, offering a selection of seasonal experiences across Europe, Asia, USA and Canada.

Valid for travel from November to March, the programme features 52 itineraries across eight different trip styles, including three 'Christmas Spectacular' guided holidays, one being the new 10-day 'Christmas Markets of Strasbourg,

Colmar and the Black Forest' guided holiday.

Trafalgar has also incorporated its new trip style Hidden Journeys – an intimate-sized group offering taking clients to lesser-explored destinations – into the programme. The addition of the eight-day 'Secrets and Winter Wonders of Yellowstone' Hidden Journey will offer clients an in-depth experience of America's first official national park – Yellowstone National Park.

Clients will spend two nights at Mammoth Hot Springs, before staying overnight at the 320 Guest Ranch in Montana.

Bookings and payments completed in full before August 31 will qualify for early payment discounts of up to R6 030pp. Past passenger discounts of 5% per person (land only) are also available for travellers who have previously travelled with The Travel Corporation's family of brands. ■

Mango launches fares from R1

MANGO Airlines has made fares available from R1 for a limited time, in celebration of the launch of its new app.

The Mango app can be downloaded in app stores for Android, Apple, Blackberry and Windows 8.1

devices.

The R1 sale is exclusively available through the Mango app on the Windows 8.1 platform and will run until May 31, for travel until the end of June 2015.

"A core business value

of Mango has always been accessibility to our market and Mango holds the widest distribution and payment method network in domestic aviation," says spokesman

Hein Kaiser. ■

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Skiing



The Naked Agent

Scenario: A group of university graduates want to tick skiing off their bucket lists. They would like to travel in December and the trip should include some exciting après-ski activities. Their parents have provided a healthy budget.

Get excited!

Flight Centre, Clearwater Mall



All the agents were busy when I walked into the office but one greeted me with a smile, offered me a seat and said that someone would be with me shortly. Once free another agent came over to assist me and after

listening to my requirements, advised that it would be best to travel next year as the ski season would already be over. She handed me brochures about alternative destinations. The agent did not introduce herself or ask

me for my name until I was leaving, when she took my contact details. She was friendly and helpful, although she didn't follow up to find out if I had changed my mind about the type of holiday I was looking for.

Makro Sure Travel, Strubens Valley



This agency's location is a bit obscure. Even if you are familiar with the area, its location inside an office park, with little signage, means that it's hard to find. Nonetheless, Makro Sure Travel is a clean, cosy agency with a friendly receptionist. After telling her that I wanted to go skiing,

she directed me to the appropriate agent. Sadly, the consultant in question had an unfortunate manner: she wasn't friendly, didn't smile at all and, when she heard my request, told me abruptly that the ski season was over and I wouldn't be able to travel this year. I waited

for her to offer some more information or alternatives; after a few minutes she said she could give me some Contiki brochures to look through. There was no exchange of contact details, visa information or budget indicators, and I left 10 minutes after arriving.

Pentravel, Clearwater Mall



Cleo Geldenhuys shouted, "hey babe" as soon as I walked into Pentravel, and I felt like I was sitting in front of a friend. Instead of trying to dissuade me from choosing a skiing holiday altogether, she asked me



Cleo Geldenhuys

Contiki package and talked me through the tour she recommended, explaining why it was the best option. As an addition, she suggested we spend three nights in London before going on

if I would be interested in travelling a little later when the ski season reopened. She said that the first week of January would be cheaper and that December was a festive time of year in South Africa, "so why leave?" Once she had me on board, she got out a pen and paper and began noting airline preference, budget details, and reasons for travelling. She suggested a

to Austria to ski, making the most of the two visas we would have to buy in order to fly via London. Half an hour after leaving the agency, I received a call from Cleo to tell me that she had found something but it was out of my budget and that she had requested a quote from a second operator and would get back to me as soon as she received it, which she did.

Cleo's tips for selling skiing

1. Make your client feel comfortable: get involved and share their excitement about their upcoming travel experience.
2. Profile the client correctly to ensure that you are offering them the best holiday option. Find out what they would

- prefer – an all-inclusive resort or one known for its après-ski activities, for example.
3. Skiing is a niche market so be sure to provide key information, such as the best time to ski and the sort of risks involved in such a holiday.

Take note!

The purpose of the Naked Agent in this series of 'Sell more...' features is to assess the experience from only a sales skills perspective and not the effectiveness of the travel agency. *TNW* believes that sales skills are increasingly important to travel agents and, in many cases, improvement in selling skills is the easiest way to increase the prosperity of the agency and its consultants. The Naked Agent is designed to raise awareness of the opportunity and build awareness of the need.



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Skiing in France is Fun

Rendez-vous-en-France

It may be a niche option for holidaymakers, but skiing can be a lucrative avenue for travel agents and worth the time invested learning more about it. Dorine Reinstein reports.

Do you know what you're selling?

SKIING used to be viewed as an exotic holiday option for South African travellers but the niche is gaining interest, and although sales can be lucrative, it's also an area where a significant amount of knowledge is required.

The rapid growth of South Africa's middle and upper classes is fuelling the demand for luxury holidays, says **Greg Taylor**, gm of Pure Skiing.

Vicky Steinhardt, land product manager at Pentravel, has also observed the trend. She says ski sales have grown "incredibly" over the past year. "More clients are requesting quotes for ski packages as the pricing is similar to Mauritius at certain times of the year."

When selling ski holidays, agents need to be on top of their game and know their stuff. For example, the location of a ski resort is very important. South Africans are usually reluctant to use public transport to arrive at the ski slopes, says Greg, so the resort should be located near the slopes. The distance to the airport should also be taken into account; most South Africans balk at the idea of spending too much time in transit to a ski resort after a long plane trip.



Greg Taylor

The size of the ski area is also vital. For example, parents holidaying with their children may be concerned about the possibility of their children crossing country borders, as is often the case in larger resorts.

Travellers' abilities must also be taken into consideration. Often, larger resorts that cater for the more advanced skier are considerably more expensive and not necessarily suitable for beginners.

When it comes to helping travellers budget for their holiday, agents should be aware that seasonality has a significant effect on price.

Greg says that New Year is considered peak season for a skiing holiday and the price will be considerably higher during that time. However, South African families can still enjoy a value-for-money skiing holiday during early December or late January. These months are, in fact, ideal for skiing. March is also an excellent option, thanks to warmer weather, while many resorts offer April specials.

A skiing holiday presents several opportunities for up-selling. Agents could, for instance, persuade clients to enrol in advance skiing lessons, either private or in groups "Although basic equipment is included in ski packages, you could also encourage clients to hire professional gear," Greg says. Although agents cannot earn commission on these extras, they enhance the client's experience, increasing the likelihood of repeat business. Agents should also inform clients of additional entertainment options, from tobogganing to welcome dinners and farewell parties, which can be booked through them. Other avenues for additional income include private transfers and superior accommodation categories.





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Meribel chalets.

Where to go

SOUTH Africans largely prefer Austrian destinations like Saalbach, with their beautiful surroundings and fantastic après-ski activities, says **Claus Martin**, director of Pure Skiing. Livigno in Italy is another favourite as,

in addition to good snow conditions, it is a tax-free town offering great shopping opportunities.

France is also popular as it is the largest skiing area in the world, says **Hélène Bezuidenhout**, regional

manager of Atout France. Courchevel, Meribel and Val Thorens are particularly famous, with the latter recently being named the Best Ski Resort in the World in the 2014 World Ski Awards.

'Insurance is non-negotiable'

"MICHAEL Schumacher's freak skiing accident shed a spotlight on skiing safety, and highlighted how badly things can go wrong," says **Simmy Micheli**, sales and marketing manager of TIC. Schumacher reportedly struck his head on a rock while skiing without wearing a helmet.

Admitting that her company is kept very busy managing ski claims during peak season, Simmy advises that keen skiers must understand that insurance is non-negotiable on a skiing holiday, because of the dangers associated with the sport. "Damaged knees are the most common injury, followed by shoulder and then wrist or hand injuries."

Remember, too, that if a



Simmy Micheli

traveller is participating in a tournament or competition, this would require a sports extension for special cover and terms at an additional premium, Simmy says.

News flash!

ATOUT France's 'Ski in France' workshops present useful educational opportunities for agents. The workshops will be hosted in Johannesburg at the Radisson Blu Gautrain Hotel on May 18, at Durban's Elangeni Hotel on May 20, and at the Forum V&A Hotel in Cape Town on May 21. Contact info.za@atout-france.fr for more information. ■

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Corporate Hotels



The global hospitality scene offers an increasing number of lifestyle hotel brands that will need to find new ways to differentiate themselves if they want to stand out from the crowd. Michelle Colman and Lisa Witepski investigate.

Battle of the brands – adapting to traveller demands

WITH the goal of increasing their market segmentation, hotel groups are introducing multiple branding strategies with distinct products for different types of customers – Hilton Worldwide encompasses 12 brands, Starwood Hotels and Resorts has nine, Hyatt has nine and Marriott, owner of the local Protea chain, has a considerable 18.

Multiple brands are the hospitality industry's response to a growing need for customised travel experiences, particularly corporate travellers, says **Jan van der Putten**, Hilton Worldwide vp of operations: Africa and Indian Ocean and gm of Hilton Sandton. This, complicated by varying income brackets, has led to hyper segmentation.

Brands were initially based on price – luxury to budget. However, more recently lifestyle has become the central focus as hotels strive to attract different demographic groups such as baby boomers, millennials, etc. Lifestyle brands have exploded into the market and, according to Jan, these brands will continue to grow with more millennials travelling.

While acknowledging that younger generations are more inclined to aspire to lifestyle brands with their philosophy of 'I work to travel', **Peter Schoeman**,

the City Lodge Hotel Group's divisional director of sales and marketing, says the market will dictate whether more lifestyle brands will be needed. City Lodge's four brands, based on grading (Road Lodge – one star; Town Lodge – two star; City Lodge Hotel – three star; and Courtyard Hotel – four star), were recently "refreshed" for clearer differentiation. The group plans to evolve these rather than introduce new ones.

Style vs service

Protea Hotels, now owned by Marriott (and slotted under Marriott's Modern Essentials group of brands), was one of the first local chains to establish a lifestyle brand, namely Protea Hotel Fire & Ice!. Group marketing manager, **Nicholas Barenblatt**, says: "Millennial travellers, as well as the new emerging market, are looking for a hotel experience that is extraordinary in the sense that it goes beyond the standard hotel experience in terms of design, food and beverage concepts, entertainment line-up and service culture. At the end of the day, the lifestyle brands that will succeed in this category are the ones that ensure they differentiate on service as opposed to merely the physical style of their hotels."



Kevin Clarence

The Birchwood Hotel and OR Tambo Conference Centre has discerned a clear need for services that facilitate business travel. "Companies are placing extra pressure on employees by squeezing a two-night itinerary into one night. Hotels need to accommodate these needs – travellers will no longer accept queues at reception, for example," says director **Kevin Clarence**. The hotel has responded with the introduction of the Silverbirch Hotel, situated in a separate area on the Birchwood property, which offers services catering to the "discerning" business traveller.

Some hotel groups, however, reject the strategy around multiple identities, adopting a 'keep it simple' approach. The

Preferred Hotel Group, a global provider of sales, marketing and distribution services to 650 independent luxury hotels, recently announced its move away from a multi-branded business model to one master brand, Preferred Hotels and Resorts. The group has, however, grouped its properties into five collections, "defining its hotels based on experiences rather than brands or stars".

Wayne Hill, gm of hotel and resort operations for Peermont's Emperors Palace, believes that, in future, "differentiation will not come from lifestyle brands but from the ability to deliver on our promises consistently, with the 'experience' in mind".

Consistency is all important in the management of brands, and extends from the physical appearance of the property to every level of service and product. Delivering on brand promises and keeping brands relevant is a considerable challenge for hotel groups.

The 'task' mentality that prevails in hospitality service must be replaced with an 'experience' mentality, says Wayne. Employees must be trained for success, retained, and engaged with the higher purpose of the organisation. Peter agrees that consistency demands staff training and commitment to service excellence.

What's ahead?

What corporate travel trends can we expect to emerge in the next five years or so? Hotel representatives made the following predictions:

- Increased use of mobile devices to access hotel services, mobile check-ins and mobile payment.
- All selling to take place on apps.
- More savvy guests who conduct extensive research online.
- A growing influence of peer-on-peer recommendations.
- No queuing. Loyalty programmes will include priority pass systems, hotels will have to ensure sufficient data to facilitate faster check-ins and install 'honesty systems' for check-out.
- The increasing prevalence of facilities and amenities geared towards independent female business travel.
- More demand for healthy food and dining options in line with health trends at the time.
- A requirement for exceptional standards of cleanliness and hygiene.
- Increased demand for sustainable product and hotels that reduce their carbon footprint.



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What travellers want

LEADING hotel groups have noticed a number of trends in business traveller

demands and behaviour. Here are a few of the most prominent ones.

Technology

Technology rears its head in just about every sphere of hotel guest interaction, from the reservation process where there is growing emphasis on last-minute availability and rate parity, to efficiency of service delivery before, during and after the guests' hotel stay, to demand for speedy WiFi and connectivity across

multiple devices.

Fast, easy reliable access to the Internet has become imperative, says **Sigal Geva**, HR and marketing manager at Premier Hotels & Resorts. "Hotels need to provide not only a great room, great shower and great culinary journey, but must also ensure hassle-free connectivity."

Design

Design increasingly features as a requirement. **Nicholas Barenblatt** at Protea Hotels claims this is created through clever design of bedrooms and public spaces, to create a social atmosphere

and vibe.

A range of MICE offerings, such as dedicated business lounges and meeting space, has become essential for business travellers, adds Hilton's **Jan van der Putten**.

Service

"Guests don't want to queue, wait or be put on hold," says Peermont's **Wayne Hill**. Further, they want only one point of contact for conflict resolution with managers who follow through with problems until a

resolution is found.

Short reservation lead times, shortened stays, ease of booking and increasing price consciousness are observed by the City Lodge Hotels Group, says **Peter Schoeman**.

Mega conference centre opens in Malawi

ON May 1, the Umodzi Park precinct and the President Walmont Hotel opened in Malawi's capital of Lilongwe. Peermont Hotels, Casinos and Resorts will manage the hotel and the Umodzi Park precinct, which aim to attract conference delegations within the continent and boost Malawi's tourism sector.

The 130-room hotel includes a

gym, health spa, lobby bar, lounge and restaurant. The Umodzi Park precinct can seat 1 500 conference delegates.

At the launch, Peermont ceo, **Anthony Puttergill**, said: "The opening of Umodzi Park is a proud moment for Peermont. It is the culmination of a long journey with our partners in Malawi – both the Malawian Government and the Umodzi Board."

Facelift for Cresta Mowana



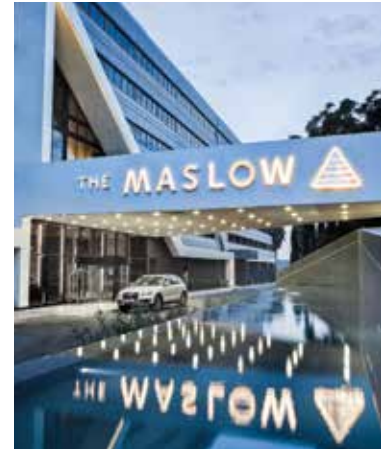
In expectation of the hosting of the 2015 Illegal Wildlife Conference in March, Cresta Hotels invested over R1 million in upgrades to the Cresta Mowana Safari Resort & Spa. Improvements included paving the main road leading to the hotel and replacing an old jetty. A number of suites were extended, while walkways throughout the establishment were improved and bedroom door locking systems, safes and the WiFi system were upgraded. Photo: Cresta Hotels

TEP, Maslow partner on new BBBEE codes

THE Tourism Enterprise Partnership (TEP) has partnered with The Maslow Hotel as part of TEP's new Enterprise and Supplier Development Solutions (ESDS) programme, which aims to help corporates meet the new amended Broad-Based Black Economic-Empowerment (BBBEE) codes.

TEP has secured three contracts with SME suppliers: Gugu & Daughters Farming, Tassy's Caterers & Suppliers, and ML Sebogodi Transport Projects.

"We are delighted and honoured that we have been able to sign up The Maslow Hotel as our first ESDS client and we hope that other corporate entities in our industry will follow their lead," said TEP ceo, **Salifou Siddo**. "TEP will facilitate any technical training and mentoring that these



The Maslow Hotel. Photo: The Maslow

Maslow beneficiaries may require. The socio-economic impact of the project will also be carefully monitored and reported." ■

News flash!



African Hotels & Adventures is introducing a new 200-seater conference facility at Lesedi African Lodge and Cultural Village. The facility will open its doors in June. The group will also be updating Thakadu River Camp in Madikwe Game Reserve with a soft refurb, to be carried out during June. The project will include repairs to all tents, wooden decks and furniture.

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Time for lunch

Industry professionals gathered at the Travelbags luncheon at the Forever Hotel Centurion last month. The lunch offered a unique vintage lunch experience. Pictured here, at the event, are (back row, from left): **Bonolo Pitsoe** (Avis), **Louanne du Plessis** (Harvey World Travel), **Janine Thomas** (Harvey World Travel), **Leeann Naidoo** (Carlson Wagonlit Travel) and **Nhlanhla Ntombela** (Club Corporate Travel). In the front row are (from left): **Angeline Nel** (Rennies Travel), **Kathy Venner** (Avis), **Nadia Gouws** (Carlson Wagonlit Travel) and **Lindy Mutuda** (Club Corporate Travel). Photo: Jabulani Nkosi

Appointments

■ LAM Mozambique Airlines has appointed **Faizal Sacugy** as the new area manager for South Africa. He brings with him vast experience in management, having served as the LAM



area manager in Pemba and Namula. He holds a Masters degree in Marketing and Corporate Communications and a Honours degree in business communication and event management as well as an additional Honours degree in Engineering, telecommunication and information technology.

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Lunch is on us!



Agents who book any branded fares and ancillaries through Travelport Smartpoint v5.1 between now and June 30 could win lunch courtesy of Travelport. Simply visit the Galileo customer portal after booking your branded fare and ancillaries, and log your name, booking reference (PNR) and PCC details. See Travelinfo for more details. Travelport Southern Africa's business development manager, **Karen Green**, gets ready to serve up lunch! Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Apply for Oz visas on behalf of your clients

THE Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection has made organisational ImmiAccounts available to travel agents, enabling them to lodge online visitor visa applications on behalf of their clients.

By having an organisational ImmiAccount, agents will not need to create a new ImmiAccount for each client.

Agents will need to provide the Organisation Registration Number (the company or organisation number as it appears in the relevant authority's register) and registered name. Once the registration form has been submitted, the application will be processed by the

Department of Immigration and Border Protection in Australia.

The processing time for visitor applications for South Africa, Botswana and Namibia passport holders is 20 working days for tourist visas and 10 working days for business visas. Business and tourist visas for other nationalities require 20 working days' processing time, after which the agent will be notified of the decision by email.

Agents should take note of required supporting evidence, often forgotten at the time of lodgement:

- Unabridged birth certificated for minors
- Form 1229s for minors travelling without both

parents

- Travel insurance for over 75s
- Medical examination for over 75s (done prior to the lodgement of the visa)
- Evidence of funds
- Passport biographical page copy

An airline ticket is not a visa requirement. "We recommend that clients do not make unalterable or non-refundable travel arrangements until they have confirmation that they have been granted a visa to travel to Australia," the Department said.

Information on the organisational ImmiAccounts, and how to register, is available on the Australian immigration website. ■

Chaos looms

From page 1
press at Indaba 2015 this month. "For as long as the details of how this legislation is going to be implemented are not clear, it is a problem. The airlines, which are the first point of contact for the traveller, are not well-trained to understand exactly whether to accept the travelling family into the aircraft or not. They might choose not to accept the traveller at all when faced with uncertainty." Airlines have warned they will not be able

to be lenient when it comes to the necessary documentation, as the regulations are imposed by the government. In terms of re-bookings or cancellations of airline tickets, airlines have reported that normal ticket rules would apply.

Travel insurance companies have also advised that clients will not be covered by their travel insurance if they fail to obtain the necessary travel documents in time for their trip.

Although travel agents

foresee some confusion and chaos on June 1, most feel they are well prepared to face the challenges the new regulations will bring. Most retail agencies have tried to minimise the risk of a passenger 'not knowing', by providing extensive information on the new regulations. "It will be the passengers who book online who might get stuck, again enhancing the value of a travel agent," says **Monica Horn**, product manager of Harvey World Travel's franchise support team.

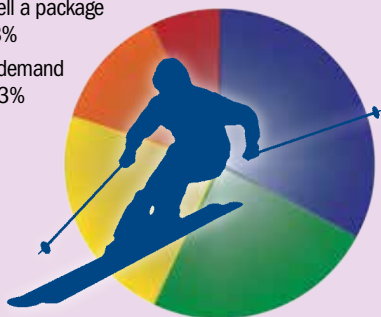
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FAQs

TNW asked agents to send through their questions and concerns about the new immigration regulations that require children under 18 to travel with an unabridged birth certificate and supporting documents. We managed to get a few of your questions answered by Home Affairs:

My client has a handwritten birth certificate. Is it valid?

Although a handwritten birth certificate is valid, the Department of Home Affairs advises clients in possession of a handwritten document to go to their nearest Home Affairs office and

exchange the document for a computer-generated birth certificate.

My client lost his children's unabridged birth certificate while on holiday. What can he/she do?

Any person who has any problem while on holiday should go to the nearest South African embassy, according to Home Affairs Mayihlome Tshwete. The embassy will assist people in case of loss or theft of documents and make sure the passenger is cleared for travel.

Where can my client get an unabridged birth

certificate while living overseas?

Russell Jarvis, Travelstart's head of communications, explains one question that keeps coming up at Travelstart is how passengers travelling with minors can obtain an Unabridged Birth Certificate if they're coming into South Africa from a country such as the UK.

South Africans living abroad can apply for abridged and unabridged birth certificates from the South African embassy / consulate in their country. Be advised, however, that it may take six months to process a birth certificate from abroad. ■