Trade unfazed by changes at SAA

DORINE REINSTEIN

THE SA travel trade remains supportive of SAA as turmoil and instability continue at the embattled airline’s top management level.

The national carrier saw its sixth change of leadership in three years last week when SAA suddenly announced that acting ceo, Nico Bezuidenhout, would return to Mango, effective immediately.

On the evening of July 29, just two days before Nico was expected to arrive in Ghana to attend the launch event of SAA’s first flight between Accra and Washington DC, SAA staff received a communication from chairperson, Dudu Myeni, to say that “at the request of the Mango Airlines Board, the SAA Board has acceded to Mango’s request that Mr Bezuidenhout be returned to his primary role as ceo of Mango Airlines”.

She continued to say that the 90-Day turnaround plan, which was led by Nico, was “now fully operational and which was led by Nico, was immediately.

“Nico Bezuidenhout has normalised the reins of the airline. She has several qualifications, including a BCom from Unisa and a postgraduate certificate in Business Management from Warwick University in the UK. She started her career in banking and has worked for two of the top banks in South Africa.

“There has been so much turmoil at SAA over the years, the trade has hardened itself.”

SAA did not respond to questions on why Thuli had been chosen to replace Nico as acting ceo.

National Treasury’s acting chief director of communications, Phumza Macanda, told TNW: “These are board decisions and the Minister has requested and is still waiting for the board to explain the circumstances surrounding the departure of the ceo and the appointment of the acting ceo.”

SAA’s leadership challenges won’t impact on the travel trade, industry players say.

“Thuli Mpshe, has taken over the reins of the airline. She has several qualifications, including a BCom from Unisa and a postgraduate certificate in Business Management from Warwick University in the UK. She started her career in banking and has worked for two of the top banks in South Africa.

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SAA’s leadership challenges won’t impact on the travel trade, industry players say. “There has been so much turmoil at SAA over the years, the trade has hardened itself,” says Allan Lunz, md of BidTravel.

He says although it is disturbing that SAA can’t seem to find a ceo, the trade’s relationship with the commercial team of SAA is unaffected.

Pentravel ceo, Sean Hough, agrees that as long as the commercial team at SAA remain consistent, the changes at top level won’t affect the trade.

The commercial team at SAA are very invested in the trade and will do everything to nurture this relationship, says Chris Zweigenthal, ceo of Aasa.

“A change in leadership doesn’t mean the place will fall to pieces,” he says. However, in the long term, a permanent solution is needed to bring stability to the airline and ensure SAA continues on the turnaround course set out by Nico.

During his tenure as acting ceo, Nico made great progress in improving SAA’s operations and significantly reduced costs. The 90-Day Action Plan, which was completed at the end of

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Mediterranean dreams

NATASHA SCHMITT

DREAMS is growing! The tour operator has expanded its international portfolio, venturing into the Mediterranean.

Dreams, which gained independence from Sun International in April last year, has launched its Eastern Mediterranean product, including travel packages to Turkey, Greece, Israel, Jordan and Egypt. It is also expanding its African portfolio with the introduction of packages to Namibia.

“Are these all value-for-money destinations for South Africans,” says marketing manager, Stacey Barnett. “The airlift is convenient and competitive and they cater for all types of travel, from family holidays, honeymoons and culture vultures to incentives and corporate groups.”

The packages can be tailored to customers’ wants and needs, Stacey adds, including all-inclusive options and elements thereof.

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‘I’m back to turn Birchwood around’ – ceo

DARISE FOSTER

K EVIN Clarence has returned to the Birchwood Hotel and OR Tambo Conference Centre in an operational capacity to implement a turnaround strategy that will promote efficiencies within the business and restore the establishment’s “damaged” reputation. He spoke exclusively to TNW to outline his plans for the hotel. “Previously, I was sitting at board level, practising top-down communication with management,” Kevin says he watched as the business he started with his late father back in 1998 began to hire more staff than necessary, promote employees into positions that did not match their competence and prioritise its BEE scorecard above its clients and the day-to-day management of the business.

“In a way, we are entering an exciting phase because it is almost like we are re-launching the Birchwood.”

The hotel’s reputation began to take a knock, as service levels dropped. Tough economic conditions and complex lease agreements added to the pressure, Kevin says. “But we are starting to clean things up now.”

Under Kevin’s leadership, the Birchwood will redeploy and retrench 180 staff. The company is also looking at new opportunities to improve customer service, with the introduction and expansion of products such as Silverbirch®Birchwood – an offering launched in March to appeal to the discerning corporate traveller. “In a way, we are entering an exciting phase because it is almost like we are re-launching the Birchwood. With Silverbirch, we can go back to what we know and what the customer wants while bringing in people who are competent enough to be able to create that experience,” Kevin says.

Helen Johnston selects the top specials from TravelInfo

• Mozambique GSA. Four nights at Flamingo Bay in Mozambique from R10 480pp sharing. Offer includes flights ex-JNB to Inhambane, all airport taxes, accommodation in a water chalet with breakfast and dinner daily. Honeymooners receive additional value adds. Offer valid for travel until September 30.

• World Stays & Events. Four nights at the Park Inn Radisson Berlin Alexander Platz Hotel in Germany from R2 480pp sharing. Rate includes accommodation in a standard double room and breakfast. Special is valid until December 15.

• Beachcomber Tours. Early bird Seychelles packages are from R24 990pp sharing. Offer includes return flights ex-JNB, return airport-hotel transfers, five nights’ accommodation in a Garden Villa, breakfast and dinner daily and land and water sports as per brochure. Excludes airport taxes of approximately R3 100. A 30-day advance purchase applies. Offer is valid for travel from December 21-31.

• Kenya Airways. Flights to Hanoi (Vietnam) are from R7 210 ex-JNB.

Helen Johnston selects the top specials from TravelInfo

• Dream Kiss Tours. Prague, Vienna and Budapest combo package from R7 929pp. Rates include three nights at the residence Leon D’Oro in Prague, three nights at Papageno in Vienna, four nights in Agape Apart Hotel in Budapest, breakfast, return airport-hotel transfers and a hop-on, hop-off bus ticket in each city. Special is valid for travel from December 21-31.

• Kenyan Airways. Fares to Hanoi (Vietnam) are from R7 210 ex-JNB.}

Trade unfazed by changes at SAA

From page 1
March, brought about a 35% improvement in the airline’s operating position, year-on-year.

“The constant changes don’t look good overseas for brand South Africa and they create uncertainty here at home,” says Sean. “There is no question the airline needs consistent leadership but it’s becoming increasingly difficult to fill the position of ceo. I’m not sure the environment is right to attract the right business person.”

“It’s important that SAA’s plan of action remains the same,” says Dinesh Naidoo, group operations director of Serendipity Worldwide Group. “SAA can’t keep treating the symptoms; it needs to address the virus.” Although a new ceo will undoubtedly bring about a different style of leadership and he or she might modify certain aspects of the turnaround strategy, this doesn’t mean all the positive changes Nico brought about will be undone, says Chris.
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SANParks opens bookings for winter 2016

THE City of Cape Town, the Western Cape government and various private-sector agencies are addressing the negative impact that seasonality has on the industry and on economic growth in the city and across the province. ‘We live in a global village and if we want to be a world-class city then we need to stop being complacent and only enjoying the benefits of tourism in our summer months,’ said executive mayor of the City of Cape Town, Patricia de Lille. ‘If we can re-position Cape Town as an all-year destination by leveraging events and business tourism, our incoming flight numbers, income generated from the tourism industry and jobs in tourism will improve significantly.’ A workshop was hosted at Cape Town’s Cullinan Hotel for 50 major influencers from the Western Cape government, the private sector and outside industry partners on Tuesday, July 28. A broad agreement was reached on the need for the city to examine its positioning and to bring about an integrated events calendar for all stakeholders, focusing on growing organic world-class events across business and leisure tourism.

Western Cape government tackles tourism seasonality

WITH the recent award of a Certificate of Excellence from TripAdvisor, Bill Harrop’s ‘Original’ Balloon Safaris has cemented its position as one of South Africa’s most popular travel experiences. The award celebrates attractions listed on TripAdvisor, which consistently achieve outstanding traveller reviews. Taken into account are the quality and quantity of recent opinions submitted by travellers who have experienced the activity, as well as a business’s tenure and ranking on the site’s Popularity Index. Bill Harrop’s choice of the Magaliesberg as suitable terrain for ballooning was made after much research. It offers exceptional year-round weather and scenic interest. Flights float over the Cradle of Humankind, the Segwati Game Reserve and the Hartbeespoort Dam. At the village of Skeerpoort, Bill has constructed a clubhouse where passengers can watch the inflation of the balloons. After a flight of an hour or so, passengers are served a lavish breakfast with local champagne. There is a fleet of six balloons, some carrying up to 18 passengers. Some 50% of patronage comes from the corporate world, which makes use of ballooning as an incentive or team-building experience.

Microbrewery opens in the Garden Route

THE Tsitsikamma Microbrewery has opened at the Tsitsikamma Village Inn in Storms River. The Microbrewery offers daily tasting tours and also sells four different types of beer, including CBC, Robertson, Darling and Mitchells, as well as two ales: Storms River Ale and Redwood Ale, which are indigenous to Storms River. All beers are brewed according the 1487 German Reinheitsgebot Purity Law. Chris Sykes, gm and one of the owners of Tsitsikamma Village Inn, said: ‘I wanted the brewery to be a place where people can learn about craft beers.’ The final permits came through and three beers were put on tap on April 24.
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To Fly. To Serve.

*Image depicts Club World cabin, available on long-haul flights to London and beyond.
SWISS revamps its commercial strategy

**Natasha Schmidt**

SWISS International Air Lines has made several changes to its commercial strategy, with the aim of offering customers a more personalised, premium service.

“Today, we cannot serve our customers with a ‘one size fits all’ strategy. We have to offer our customers more transparency in relation to our offers and products,” Peter Pullem, SWISS vp of international sales and marketing, told TNW in a recent interview when visiting South Africa.

This forms part of the Lufthansa Group’s plans to restructure its sales and marketing strategy in each market. “Our strategy in the B2B space has been to appoint one sales lead carrier – for example in the South African market it would be Lufthansa – to represent all five brands; therefore only one sales person, representing all the airline brands, would go out and call on travel agents. With regard to B2C business, SWISS has a different strategy: each airline takes care of its own marketing and sales for direct bookings within a market. The core team is focused on a particular brand suited to the different needs of the traveller. “Our strategy is to focus on the premium customer, offering them a seamless, hassle-free experience throughout the value chain, from beginning to end,” he said.

“With these two different directions, we’re able to service both our agency customers and direct customers more effectively,” Peter said. SWISS introduced a new fare concept for its European network in June, aiming to address the individual needs of travellers with more fare options. “Historically, people travelling in Europe would use legacy carriers to connect to different destinations but with the rise of low-cost carriers, things have changed. People are able to fly point-to-point, one-way for less. Today’s travellers have different needs – some don’t require luggage because they’re going on a short trip and they want to pay less. With implementing the new fares Light, Classic and Flex we want to give the traveller the option to book exactly the fare that meets their specific needs and to pay only for the services they actually require,” he said. The new fare concept, which doesn’t apply to intercontinental passengers, is a good option for travellers who want to purchase a separate ticket for travel within Europe.

The airline’s commercial strategy also separated it from the competition, particularly with regard to Middle Eastern carriers, Peter said. “SWISS is facing pressure from Middle Eastern carrier competition, particularly as Switzerland has a liberal agreement with the UAE and Qatar. We’ve made a conscious decision to focus on our unique selling points – our ‘Swissness’, our premium service – for travellers who prefer to fly directly from and to Switzerland.”

SWISS will usher in a new era in the history of its long-haul fleet next January with the arrival of the first of its nine new Boeing 777-300ERs, which will be deployed primarily on services to Hong Kong, Bangkok and Los Angeles from the 2016 summer schedules. San Francisco, São Paulo and Tel Aviv will also receive Boeing 777 service several times a week. The new aircraft will seat 340 passengers (eight in first class, 62 in business class and 270 in economy).
MHG plans 50 African hotels in five years

MINOR Hotel Group has officially opened a regional office in Johannesburg to represent its ten properties in Southern Africa – a strategic move that will enable it to strengthen its position and maximise opportunities within Africa. “Now that we have set up an office in Johannesburg, expansion into Africa will be easier,” says CEO, Dillip Rajakarier, noting that the group continues to look for opportunities to add to its portfolio of 26 hotels in Africa. “Our goal is to have at least 50 hotels in different locations in the next five years,” he adds. Specifically, MHG sees significant opportunity to launch its Tivoli brand because of the link between the brand’s origin in Portugal and former Portuguese colonies on the continent. Five hotels in Southern Africa were rebranded to MHG’s AVANI brand at the beginning of July. The five properties form part of the portfolio in which MHG invested a total of R679,5m in its strategic partnership with Sun International, announced in August last year. The 212-key Zambezi Sun in Zambia has been rebranded to AVANI Victoria Falls Resort; the 196-key Gaborone Sun in Botswana has become AVANI Gaborone Resort & Casino; the 158-key Lesotho Sun and 105-key Maseru Sun, both in Lesotho, have been rebranded to AVANI Lesotho Hotel and Casino and AVANI Maseru Hotel respectively, and the 173-key Kalahari Sands in Namibia has reflagged to AVANI Windhoek Hotel and Casino. The sixth property in the portfolio, the Royal Livingstone Resort, will not be rebranded. Dillip is positive about MHG’s joint venture with Sun International, saying that as Sun International places greater emphasis on managing casino operations and MHG’s core focus is on hotel management, marketing and distribution, there is considerable opportunity for more partnerships of this nature in the future.

New hotel group enters South Africa

DUSIT International, a leading Asian hospitality group, has entered into an agreement with SA-based eLan Property Group to manage several hotels and resorts in southern Africa and the Indian Ocean region. The agreement, which was signed in Franschhoek on July 26, will see Dusit managing five hotels and resorts: two in SA, two in Mozambique and one in Mauritius. Dusit will also work closely with eLan Property Group on a regional hospitality education project. Thai minister of commerce, General Chatchai Sarikalya, Dusit International CEO and MD, Chanin Donavanik, and CEO of eLan Property Group, Mark Taylor, were present at the signing.

Dusit International comprises four hotel brands: Dusit Thani, dusitD2, Dusit Princess and Dusit Devarana. It also operates its own signature Devarana Spa.
LUX* looks beyond Indian Ocean Islands

LUX* Resorts and Hotels has evolved as a group over the past four years, since rebranding from Naïade Resorts in 2011, and is now looking to expand its reach, seeking new management contracts and projects, "taking its Mauritian product standards to the world", chief sales and marketing officer, Julian Hagger, told TNW on a recent visit to South Africa.

The hospitality group is venturing into the Middle East. It will open its first property in the UAE in 2016 – LUX* Al Zorah. The resort is situated along the coastline of Ajman, only 40 minutes’ drive from Dubai airport.

Home to one of the UAE’s few undisturbed ecosystems, Al Zorah Nature Reserve is recognised as a rare hub for marine life, migratory birds – including pale pink flamingos – and a variety of flora. It is located on a natural peninsula bordered by a mangrove forest, offering a variety of activities for guests. The five-star resort will also feature its own 18-hole golf course, shopping facilities and other modern amenities.

"It will be a new benchmark for the LUX* brand,” said Julian.

LUX* has already launched its presence in Asia, with the opening of the unique LUX* Tea Horse Road Lijiang in Yunnan, China. Lijiang is the first of six luxury boutique hotels along the new circuit, located in the Greater Shangri-La region. LUX* Tea Horse Road Benzilan, at the shores of the Yangtze River protected by the high mountains, will open in October.

Following Lijiang and Benzilan, the route will then take guests to the sacred territories where pilgrims still worship majestic natural landmarks such as Baima and Meili Snow Mountain. The group will also open a property, LUX* Dianshan Lake, in the Shanghai region of China in 2017.

Other new properties in the pipeline are LUX* North Malé Atoll in the Maldives and LUX* Sud Sauvage in Réunion.

Sanctuary Retreats adds first SA property

SANCTUARY Retreats has added Makanyane Safari Lodge in the Madikwe Game Reserve in North West province to its portfolio of boutique safari camps and lodges across Africa, effective August 1.

Sanctuary Makanyane Safari Lodge’s eight glass-fronted suites, each have a private sun deck and outside lounge. The main lodge overlooks a waterhole and the lounge and dining area open on to a wide outdoor deck. The lodge has a spa, air-conditioned gym and swimming pool and guests can sleep under the stars at the ‘Star View Sleep-Out Hide’.

Makanyane is home to wild dog, cheetah, giraffe, hyena and over 360 bird species. Activities include morning and night game drives, guided walks, birding expeditions, bush dinners and sundowners.

Pieter van de Schee, global sales director of Sanctuary Retreats, said: “We are delighted to expand our luxury collection of safari destinations with this stunning property in South Africa. Sanctuary Makanyane Safari Lodge enables us to offer South Africa for the first time as a destination for a luxury safari with Sanctuary Retreats.”

Game drive at Madikwe. Photo: Nina Hale, Flickr
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**Kingdom of adventure**

Swaziland is small country with a big travel offering. Karolien van Rooy asked Chantal Nieuwenhuizen, account manager for Swaziland Tourism, about the destination’s wide range of attractions.

1. **Explore ‘The Valley of Heaven’**

Situated in the Ezulwini Valley, also known as The Valley of Heaven, the Mantenga Nature Reserve is a must-see during a visit to the Kingdom of Swaziland, says Chantal. Visitors staying at Mantenga Lodge can admire the reserve’s surroundings and the Mantenga Waterfall. On a visit to Mantenga Cultural Village they can learn local dances and explore a traditional Swaziland village.

2. **Stop at Shewula Mountain Camp**

The Shewula Mountain Camp is the first community eco-tourism project in Swaziland and one of the most successful in southern Africa. The camp is fully owned and run by the community, with all profits shared by them in an effort to continually develop and improve this impoverished area. Chantal says while at the camp, guests can enjoy cultural music and dancing as well as sunsets and nature walks. They can also take up the challenge of a mountain bike trip around the plateau.

3. **Visit the Swazi Candle Factory**

Malkerns is home to the Swazi Candle Factory, where craftsmen work their magic with coloured wax. The craft market also features a number of other arts and crafts shops. At Baobab Batik wax is used to make patterns on fabrics used for clothing and other items; Rosecraft produces hand-woven mohair items; Kwazi Swazi sells memorabilia and books; and Amarast and Swazi Creations sell locally produced bags, baskets and pillowcases.

4. **Sunday lunch at Foresters Arms**

Travellers can cosy up by the fire at Foresters Arms, a luxury country lodge that is a short distance from the capital, Mbabane. Chantal recommends the Sunday Feast, where guests can mingle with locals and international travellers. The European-inspired lodge has an idyllic setting, centrally located for enjoying the Kingdom’s top activities and adventures.

5. **Navigate white rapids**

Budding rafters can make their way down the Usutu River, with rapids that run through gorges, stretches of bush and grazing land. During their trip they can expect views of impressive rock formations, as well as rural Swaziland with its riverbank community life and a variety of wildlife. Travellers can opt for half- or full-day, guided trips.

6. **Zipline through forested gorges**

Malioloja Nature Reserve in the Sihlotswane Gorge is home to Swaziland’s only tree-top canopy tour. Participants zipline down the gorge over the forest canopy and Majomomba forest, encountering striking rock formations, towering cliff faces and views of the lush forest canopy.

7. **Stay in a beehive village**

Chantal recommends Millane Wildlife Sanctuary, the country’s foremost conservation area, in the secluded Ezulwini Valley. Travellers can stay in a village in one of the traditional beehive huts – dome-like structures made from woven grass – and explore the sanctuary on foot or horseback, by mountain bike or self-drive, or on a guided game drive.

8. **Witness glassblowing**

In operation for more than 23 years, the Ngwenya Glass factory has become one of the most popular tourist spots in Swaziland, says Chantal. On weekdays, visitors can witness the art of glassblowing first hand.

9. **Discover off-road trails**

Paths and trails throughout the country allow for hikes of varying duration and give access to areas that are inaccessible by vehicle. There are also several unofficial 4x4 routes that provide opportunities to see the less accessible parts of the country. Travellers should note that all off-road driving must follow standard environmental guidelines. Those who want to explore below ground can try caving with Swazi Trails. The tour explores a unique cave system formed by the Kophola River, which flows underground between Msunduza and the Kophola Mountains.

10. **View 400-year-old rock art**

The Nsangwini Rock Shelter is an impressive cultural attraction of 400-year-old San art. The paintings are remarkably clear and informative interpretations are given by members of the Nsangwini community, who manage and maintain the site. Chantal says, en route to the shelter travellers can stop off for lunch at Maguga Lodge which overlooks the vast and spectacular Maguga Dam.
The Kingdom of Swaziland offers a holiday to remember

South African families do not need to go very far to enjoy a great holiday. Whether it’s the mountainous scenery, adrenaline pumping activities, vast rivers, traditional beehive hut accommodation, world class hotels, guest houses, Nature Reserves or the Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries.
With airlines squeezing as many passengers into economy class as possible, and business and first-class fares simply too expensive for many travellers, demand for premium economy seating is on the increase, especially on long-haul flights. While premium economy has been around for many years – Virgin Atlantic first launched premium economy as Mid Class in 1992 – many airlines have recently upgraded their premium economy cabins as part of large-scale upgrades across all cabins. This month, Singapore Airlines becomes the latest airline to launch a premium-economy class, while other airlines such as British Airways, Air France, Delta Air Lines, Virgin Atlantic Airways, KLM and Lufthansa have recently undertaken or announced cabin refurbishments and refreshes.

There has been a move by many airlines to offer some sort of hybrid – something better than economy but cheaper than business class, says Linden Bims, md of Plane Talking PR. "It has really been driven more by the airlines than customers, because airlines are looking to maximise the yields they can generate from a flight," he says. The premium-economy cabins of today have many of the bells and whistles of business class but without the lie-flat seat. These cabins have taken on-board experiences to the next level. There are wider seats, more leg-room, greater seat recline, WiFi connectivity, universal power sockets, in-seat USB ports, high-tech entertainment systems and a fantastic choice of meal options.

Services offered in premium economy make it a very attractive option for corporates and higher-end leisure travellers. Take Virgin Atlantic’s newly designed premium-economy product, for example. Premium passengers have a dedicated check-in desk, priority boarding, get a pre-flight drink, a complimentary newspaper and a choice of meals served on china dinnerware, in-seat laptop power and a comfortable, spacious seat that rivals the comfort in business class.

### Multiple tech touch points

SAA spokesperson, Tlali Tlali, says the new trend in premium class is personalisation at every touch point of the customer experience. "From a technology perspective, this includes a personalised welcome note on the passenger’s personal television and the ability to link a passenger’s mobile device to the entertainment system. This means that while customers watch a movie they can use their smartphone, tablet or laptop to view other applications such as the route map or duty-free shopping application.”

Another significant trend is on-board connectivity. Jimmy Eichelgruen, Delta Air Line’s director of Sales for Africa, the Middle East and Indian subcontinent, says WiFi is becoming a fundamental part of travel, and airlines that don’t have it will soon be left behind. "Being able to answer emails en route means businesses can stay productive while in the air or avoid missing out on deals because they couldn’t log in on time."

Sally George, Singapore Airlines’ market development manager, says a WiFi connection is available to all Singapore Airlines’ premium-economy passengers. “Having on-board connectivity opens up many possibilities in terms of passenger servicing and interaction throughout the travel journey.”

SAA, Delta Air Lines and British Airways have equipped their cabin attendants with tablets or phablets that are being used to store passenger preferences, take passenger orders, solve problems and access information via the Internet. Tlali points out that while real-time connectivity is trending in the Northern hemisphere, SAA’s research shows mixed demand to be connected throughout the flight as many of SAA’s long-haul flights are at night. “Research also shows that customers are not prepared to pay high amounts to be connected,” says Tlali.

Wireless content distribution is a trend SAA is following closely. “A server with TV programmes and other entertainment is being installed on board the aircraft and passengers can connect to the server using their own devices. This is of particular interest to passengers on longer regional flights where limited entertainment is being offered,” says Tlali.

Camilla Barrett, BA’s deputy head of International PR Europe, Africa, Asia Pacific and Middle East says BA’s premium customers are increasingly turning to technology to check in online using the BA app and, on some routes, even print their own bag tags, which saves time at the airport.

### The power of choice

Premium passengers are seeking customised, top-quality service on the ground and on board and want to choose services that increase their comfort at their own convenience, says Tjalling Smit, senior vp E-Commerce Air France KLM. “Ancillary services offer customers choice, such as finding flight offers; booking, viewing and changing flights; selecting seats; check-in; accessing boarding passes and more.”

In terms of premium-class seating, Tlali Tlali says the trends are increased privacy, aisle access for each passenger and greater comfort. “Power and now added USB ports are a must to ensure that all portable electronic devices can be powered. Noise cancellation headphones are equally a must.”

On-board dining options are another attractive selling point, with some airlines offering a carte menu in first class and gourmet dining options in economy class.

With Delta’s Dine and Rest option in its new DeltaOne cabin, passengers receive all courses at once so they can eat quickly and focus elsewhere. And Singapore Airlines’ Book and Cook service features curated dishes that premium-economy passengers can pre-order.

### Next-level comfort...

First-class cabins have also been taken to the next level. The Residence by Etihad, for example, is a three-room private cabin in the sky that offers a living room, double bedroom and en-suite shower. It comes complete with butler and gourmet à la carte meals or a custom menu.
Quick and efficient service

Helping premium renters on their way as quickly as possible and providing a more personalised, efficient service is driving South African car-rental companies to greater innovation.

One such is First Car Rental’s Corporate Show&Go Mobile Checkout feature, which Melissa Storey, executive head: Strategy, Development & Marketing, says was a world first in mobile check-out facilities when the company launched it in September 2011.

“Gone are the days when our premium renters had to walk to the car-rental kiosk, stand in queues and deal with paperwork and payment tasks. With Show&Go Mobile Checkout, a First Car Rental agent meets our corporate clients at the airport arrivals terminal with their rental car, checks their identity and in less than a minute they’re on their way.”

Most car-rental companies offer premium renters their own dedicated kiosks for a fast, efficient check-out service. For example, Bidvest Car Rental has a designated area called Flythru, where renters simply have to produce a driver’s licence to be on their way.

“This is achieved by gathering all necessary information when the corporate or premium account holder opens an account facility with Bidvest Car Rental,” says Gaynor Von Loggenburg, sales and marketing director.

Corporate renters also benefit from Europcar’s ‘Ready Service’ kiosks, where they simply have to produce appropriate identification to get the keys.

Some car-rental companies have exclusive offerings for their top renters. For example, Europcar offers an exclusive, invitation-only platinum card programme that includes a dedicated platinum support service, 24-hour call centre, upgrades, guaranteed vehicle availability and 24-hour valet parking at Acsa’s Executive Car Port at OR Tambo International Airport.

Innovative new technologies

Technology is also being used in innovative ways to personalise renters’ experience.

Europcar is launching a Data on the Go product, a mobi broadband router, which provides customers with 1 GB of data a day at an affordable rate, available from Europcar’s rental kiosks.

The company is also launching a new mobile-friendly website and new mobile app in September for customers who want to make, amend or cancel reservations from their mobile phones. First Car Rental is launching a booking app this month, available in the Apple Store (Android version to follow) enabling renters to book, view and amend their rentals via their smart phones.

Bidvest Car Rental’s new app, also currently in development, will allow customers to check in online and change their profile and requirements on the move. Innovative in-car technologies are also becoming important to the traveller. “Most vehicles coming on to the market today have Bluetooth, GPS, USB and auxiliary inputs that come as standard,” says Gaynor Von Loggenburg.

“enabling renters to charge and use their smart devices on the move.

“Future technologies will facilitate a totally paperless car-rental environment and will enable customers to see standing stock virtually so they can choose the vehicle they prefer to drive.”

Book it!

Encore Cruises is offering an attractive 20-day cruise from Singapore to Dubai aboard Regent Seven Seas Cruises’ Seven Seas Voyager from April 12-May 2, 2016. The cruise fare, from US$9 999 (R127 340), includes a choice of up to 69 shore excursions; beverages on board, including fine wines, beer, selected premium spirits, soft drinks, bottled water, specialty coffees and teas; and all meals on board from four gourmet restaurants, including the iconic steakhouse Prime 7, and Cordon Bleu-inspired Signatures restaurant. Also included is 24-hour room service and all gratuities. As part of the package price, travellers can choose a three-night ‘Temples of Angkor Wat’ pre-cruise land programme or a three-night ‘Opulent Cities of the Emirates’ post-cruise land programme.

First Car Rental Show&Go vehicles ready for clients. Photo: First Car Rental

Innovative new technologies

Technology is also being used in innovative ways to personalise renters’ experience.

Europcar is launching a Data on the Go product, a mobi broadband router, which provides customers with 1 GB of data a day at an affordable rate, available from Europcar’s rental kiosks.

The company is also launching a new mobile-friendly website and new mobile app in September for customers who want to make, amend or cancel reservations from their mobile phones. First Car Rental is launching a booking app this month, available in the Apple Store (Android version to follow) enabling renters to book, view and amend their rentals via their smart phones.

Bidvest Car Rental’s new app, also currently in development, will allow customers to check in online and change their profile and requirements on the move. Innovative in-car technologies are also becoming important to the traveller. “Most vehicles coming on to the market today have Bluetooth, GPS, USB and auxiliary inputs that come as standard,” says Gaynor Von Loggenburg.

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CRUISE companies are recognising the growing need of high-end consumers for customised services, greater flexibility and choice. Demand for niche, luxury cruising has grown, says Margarethe Booysen, Cruises International’s brand manager: Luxury Portfolio, with affluent consumers seeking expert advice, luxurious environments, fine dining, spa treatments and top-class entertainment.

Crystal Cruises offers one such top-end all-inclusive luxury experience. The cruise line offers complimentary golf clinics on board, hosted by PGA pros, where guests can practise their swing and putt. “Guests can also choose their preferred pillow for a good night’s rest,” says Margarethe.

Christine Lucas, Development Promotions’ key account sales executive, agrees that today’s high-end travellers are looking for more personalised, tailor-made trips that take into account their personal preferences and offer flexibility when it comes to dining options, accommodation and daily shore excursions. “In the past, shore excursions were broad-based and set, without flexibility or options. Now cruise passengers have the option of active or bus-based tours, depending on their interest and physical capability,” she adds. “Cruise lines are also offering longer stays in port and allowing for destination immersion during the cruise by infusing local culture within meals and activities. They are also personalising the experience by treating guests to a concert or live performance on board or during an evening ashore.”

Activities – variety is key

AFFLUENT cruisers want to experience destinations in a variety of ways, says Margarethe Booysen. She notes that recreational activities that attract a lot of interest amongst high-end consumers relate to art, history, specialised shopping, sailing, skiing, adventure and wildlife as well as food and wine.

Seabourn, for example, offers Ventures by Seabourn, where guests share their voyage with a team of scientists, scholars and naturalists who provide in-depth insights into the history, ecology and culture of destinations. The cruise line also provides access to an exclusive marina where guests can enjoy complimentary water sports such as swimming, kayaking and water-skiing.

Oceania offers a cooking school at sea and through its Artist Loft enrichment centre, guests are guided by talented artists-in-residence who offer step-by-step art instruction on board. Culinary food and wine pairings are also popular with the older generation, adds Christine Lucas, while the younger generation enjoy the on-board waterparks and deck parties. Cruise lines are also recognising the importance of digital technologies and most now offer WiFi throughout the ship. Crystal Cruises has an app that lets guests share their photos with family and friends and teaches them to create their own video with on-board iMovie classes.

Some cruise lines even enable passengers to upload photos to the shipboard internal programme to share them on the ship’s pool deck big screen. Other on-board tech developments include on-demand movies in staterooms and cabin facilities such as checking one’s on-board account and ordering shore excursions and room service through the TV’s remote control.
INTRODUCING THE NEW SINGAPORE AIRLINES PREMIUM ECONOMY CLASS

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## FIRST CLASS

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**Quick Read for Decision-Makers**

**Premium class**
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**PREMIUM ECONOMY**

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**Disclaimer:** TNW has made every effort to ensure the accuracy of this table but accepts no responsibility for incorrect information supplied by the airlines. Where airlines did not respond to requests for information, details were taken from Travelinfo.
How to anticipate guests’ needs

TNW asked Jean Hanekom, Emperors Palace Hotel operations manager, to provide insights into the latest trends and traveller demands in premium accommodation.

Q: What do premium travellers want? The biggest trend is that guests want easy access to hotel products and services at affordable prices. WiFi tops the list of services required, while travellers expect value for money and anticipation of their needs.

Guests also want to build their own ‘packages’ to suit their individual needs while travelling – we’re able to offer products and services at great value by packaging different elements at affordable rates. These additional products and services can be booked through Peermont’s online shopping basket tool such as private airport transfers, daily newspapers, wine, cheese boards or a romantic dinner.

Q: How do you go the extra mile for these clients? At Peermont D’Oreale Grand we always endeavour to upgrade premium guests to the Club Floor, where they receive personalised check-in and check-out, concierge services, an exclusive Club Floor breakfast, private meeting room, a Club Lounge to relax in, and concierge services with a private business centre.

We strive to get to know our guests. By understanding their preferences we can, for example, ensure that their favourite drink is available in their room on arrival, and take their dietary preferences and pillow choice into account.

Q: How do you personalise your premium product? Offering personalised services and products remains a challenge because of the multitude of individual preferences that exist. Making it easy for a guest to tell us what they want is the only way to ensure we get it right, and Peermont’s online shopping basket tool enables that.

Q: What will future premium services include? There are already major technological advances in the hospitality industry such as hotel keys that are available on guests’ private mobile devices, or their own personalised hotel key that is remotely programmed when making a reservation and then activated on their day of arrival. This means hotels of the future might not have reception desks.

Q: And future premium hotel rooms? Premium rooms will have all the comforts of home, with added luxuries offered by the hotel. They will offer greater interactivity, with guests interfacing their devices with the TV. Through a hotel app, guests will also be able to order a meal directly from the kitchen.

Q: How does technology enable customisation? Our extremely progressive guest feedback platform provides comprehensive insights into guest likes and dislikes and enables us to engage with our guests one-on-one.
Silverbirch expands

Due to the success of Silverbirch @ Birchwood since it launched in September 2014, the Birchwood Hotel & OR Tambo Conference Centre has decided to add 80 more rooms to the new offering from November, says director, Kevin Clarence.

Silverbirch @ Birchwood caters for discerning business travellers seeking privacy, services and quality, and is set in a tranquil section of the Birchwood grounds away from the bustle of conference goers. It currently has 153 rooms with free WiFi, a business centre, dedicated check-in area and its own fine-dining restaurant – The Grill at One Twenty.

What’s more, Birchwood’s Recharge product is a great offering for weary business travellers landing at OR Tambo International Airport who need proper rest. For R499, business travellers can rest in a comfortable Birchwood hotel room for five hours, use the gym, squash courts and pool, get R100 off a Mangwanani Spa treatment, access free WiFi throughout the hotel complex, and enjoy free transfers to and from the airport. There is also an overnight option for R999.

Singapore Airlines unveils new premium economy

FROM August 9, South Africans travelling on selected flights to Sydney from Singapore will be among the first to experience Singapore Airlines’ new premium-economy class on its A380 aircraft.

“We’ve worked hard to give our customers more space, comfort and freedom in premium economy to make the flying more enjoyable,” says Sally George, Singapore Airlines’ market development manager. Premium economy will also become available on other routes served by the airline’s A380s, its B777-300ERs and its future fleet of Airbus A350s. It will be progressively introduced on the Beijing, Delhi, Hong Kong, Frankfurt, London, New York, Shanghai, Tokyo and Zurich routes later this year and early in 2016.

The premium-economy seats range between 47cm and 49.5cm in width, and recline to 20.3cm, and have 33.7cm full HD monitors, the largest in their class. Seats also have calf and foot rests, two USB ports, and stowage space for mobile phones and laptops. Premium-economy customers also have a wider choice of food and beverage on board, including free-flowing champagne. They can select meals from the Book the Cook service, enjoy priority boarding and baggage handling, as well as a baggage allowance of 35kg.

KrisFlyer members receive 10% more miles when flying in premium-economy class.

There are no plans as yet to introduce premium economy on the South Africa-Singapore route.

BA introduces more efficient services

British Airways passengers who have an Apple Watch, can now keep track of their flights with a glance to their wrist, using the BA app. Through the app and the watch, they can check their flight number, departure time, on-time status, gate status and even the weather at their destination.

At selected airports, passengers can also use their watch to display their mobile boarding passes for scanning at security check points and boarding gates. BA passengers can also use the app to check in online, choose their seat, download their mobile boarding pass, get boarding area WiFi passwords, and trace their Avios points.

Business-class passengers also have dedicated speed-through channels at Heathrow’s Terminal 5 while the airline’s Club counters enable speedy check-in at many airports for business-class passengers who haven’t already checked in online. And for speedy entry into the US, BA’s business-class-only service from London to New York enables customers to clear US customs and immigration at Shannon Airport in Ireland, enabling them to arrive in the US as domestic passengers.

Did you know?

Through Air Mauritius’s UpgradeNow service, economy-class passengers can bid for upgrades to business class. The airline’s economy passengers can also take advantage of last-minute airport upgrades to business class at really attractive prices.
KLM brings new business-class service to SA

KLM’s new World Business Class service is expected on the South African route before the end of the year. The new service provides business-class passengers departing South Africa with priority check-in and boarding as well as priority bag pickup at their destination.

Features of the cabin include a 190cm-long sleeper seat that reclines up to 175 degrees and is equipped with a massage unit, a privacy canopy, personal entertainment system and in-seat power. Customers can also enjoy a three-course meal on board, extra baggage allowance, access to KLM’s Crown lounges and can also earn up to 175% in Flying Blue loyalty miles.

Economy-class passengers travelling on KLM can upgrade online to Economy Comfort zone seats up to 48 hours before departure, while passengers already on board can also request an Economy Comfort seat, where available. These seats have 10cm more legroom, up to double the recline and are at the front of the economy-class cabin for quick disembarkation.

Meanwhile, KLM’s new smartphone app anticipates customers’ needs by showing the most relevant information for different stages of the passenger’s flight journey and the next action to be taken, such as time to check-in or have their boarding pass ready.

Customers can also use the app to book flights and ancillary services, store their travel details, check in online and access their boarding passes. “With this app we have reached the next level in anticipating our customers’ needs, keeping them one step ahead of their journey,” says Tjalling Smit, senior vp E-Commerce Air France KLM.

Premier gets personal

PREMIER Hotels & Resorts has adapted its service offering to meet clients’ need for individual attention. Its kiosk in the OR Tambo arrivals hall provides a convenient service for both corporate and leisure customers. Grant Sandham, Premier Hotels & Resorts group sales and marketing manager, says the kiosk offers great convenience for guests arriving on international flights. “It provides our valued guests with immediate contact as they arrive in the country before catching our complimentary shuttle to the Premier Hotel OR Tambo Airport.”

The kiosk has a hotel reservation and enquiry facility, so guests can make and change bookings where required. The facility also enables passengers who have not yet arranged accommodation to book at any of the Premier Hotels & Resorts properties countrywide.

Passengers whose flights have been delayed or those with a long layover can also use the kiosk to arrange a day room at Premier Hotel OR Tambo at a special rate, or overnight accommodation where necessary. “It’s a great option for delayed or layover passengers as they can relax in a lovely environment, enjoy free WiFi, a meal, make use of gym facilities and get a free shuttle to and from the hotel.”

Experience the comfort of our Business Class, with wide seats that recline to a lie-flat mode, dine-on-demand options, priority boarding, a generous baggage allowance and a warm, all-Seychellesian cabin crew.

Air Seychelles operates three flights a week to the Seychelles.
While Cape Town has long been viewed predominantly as a leisure destination, the city's drive to position itself as a leading business destination in Africa is paying off. Dorine Reinstein investigates.

The Mother City ‘back in business’

Cape Town is increasing its status as a leading business destination on the continent. Indeed, the city was voted number-one destination for business events in Africa on the ICCA rankings, and the PricewaterhouseCoopers’ South African Hospitality Outlook for 2015 it was predicted that the bulk of growth in the overall hotel market in South Africa would be generated in Cape Town over the next five years.

Rick Taylor, ceo of The Business Tourism Company, says Cape Town is very much becoming a destination for business people. He argues that this is the result of at least 15 years of hard work and planning. “Positioning Cape Town as a business destination has been part and parcel of a long-term view of Cape Town as an attractive place for both business and leisure. It didn’t happen overnight.” Cape Town has, over the years, evolved into a more corporate-focused destination, agrees Kamil Abdul-Karrim, director Pam Golding Tourism & Hospitality Consulting, who says the corporate segment is the largest segment at the mid-market (three-star) level and increasingly more influential at both the upscale (four-star) and luxury (five-star) levels. “Interestingly, business tourism demonstrates high demand at the luxury level, indicating that the level of business events attracted to the city may be of a higher level than elsewhere in SA.”

According to Kamil, demand from the corporate market is far more balanced in terms of seasonality than the leisure market and, as such, growth within this sector has the added benefit of mitigating the seasonality effect. “The Cape Town hotel market is currently more dependent on the corporate market than ever before. Increases in supply of commercial office space mean a growth in hotel demand, as there are more companies present with more employees and more accommodation demand.”

Attracting events

Investment in the city’s offering has allowed the Cape Town Convention Bureau to increase the target number of event bids for the city, reveals Rob Kucera, gm of The Westin in Cape Town. He says the Bureau’s focus on low-season business to help extend the peak season will further help Cape Town drive MICE revenue. “The expansion of the CTICC and the opening of Century City will also assist in increasing footfall into the city.”

Kamil agrees and says that the effort put into positioning Cape Town as a business events destination has paid accelerated dividends. “The forward event booking at CTICC up to 2018 is ticking over. Business tourism, driven hugely by the CTICC, plays a major role in reducing the low season, which in the past stretched from May to mid-September and currently spans from June to July. What’s more, where the occupancy in the low season used to drop as low as 40%, it has now improved to over 50%, with hotels in the CTICC vicinity recording occupancies of over 60%. The stats show Cape Town is achieving its fair share of the conferencing and events market in relation to Johannesburg and Durban,” he comments.

The Western Cape’s academic offering is another drawcard when it comes to driving business events. Corne Koch, head of the Cape Town and Western Cape Convention Bureau, says the Western Cape is an intellectual magnet, with four world-class universities and other research institutions in fields as diverse as astronomy, science, medicine and social politics, which offers an increased investment

Cape Town’s popularity as both a leisure and business destination has brought new investment and substantial improvements to the city for both travellers and locals, says Mariette du Toit-Helmbold, owner of tourism marketing agency, Destination. “From the airport to the road infrastructure, improved public transport, and recreational areas like the Sea Point Promenade and Green Point Urban Park, Cape Town is a city evolving continuously.”

The city has indeed seen a significant number of new investments. Cape Town International Convention Centre is expanding its space, which is currently under development. The V&A Waterfront precinct has also announced new developments in its Silo district, which will comprise 35 000 sqm of mixed-use, sustainable development, including new corporate offices, a residential development, a gymnasium and a mid-range internationally branded hotel. The Zeits Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (Zeits MOCAA) will also be located in the heart of the district.

In addition, a new high-tech conference centre will open in Century City in February 2016. With the capacity to accommodate 1 900 guests across 20 different venues, the Century City Conference Centre and Hotel will provide the ideal platform for a wide variety of events, from corporate conferences and product launches, to expos, cocktail parties and weddings. The centre forms part of a R1bn mixed-use development within the Bridgeway precinct.

Western Cape minister of economic opportunities, Alan Winde, adds that the hospitality sector has also seen a boost in investment with Tsogo Sun constructing a 500-bedroom, R640m complex on the corner of Buitengracht and Strand streets. The new hotel development will include a 200-bedroom SunSquare hotel and a 300-bedroom StayEasy hotel, and will offer banqueting and conference facilities. “Tsogo Sun’s continued investment in the Western Cape speaks of the confidence they have in our province as a business destination.”

The Zeits Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (Zeits MOCAA) will also be located in the heart of the district.
More nice, more price

The popularity of the city and the region as a whole has boosted competition among accommodation establishments and attractions, pushing property owners to increase the quality of their service offering. However, with demand rising as more travellers enter the city, prices have also steadily increased.

Michael Nel, gm of The Twelve Apostles Hotel and Spa, says there has indeed been an increase in rates across accommodation establishments in Cape Town but he argues that it was not based on increased demand alone. “In general, hotel rates have increased based on the increasing costs involved in running hotels. There is more competition around and therefore hotels have to remain competitively priced while still covering their costs and allowing for profit margins that make the business viable.”

The city is definitely not pricing itself out of the market according to Mariette du Toit-Helmbold. She says rates for hotels and attractions in Cape Town depend on the establishments’ running expenses and competitor pricing. “Major attractions are not overpriced when compared with other attractions around the world, and offer fantastic off-peak season and family rates.”

Alan Winde argues that, although there has been a slight increase in room rates, major investments in the hospitality sector will ensure the establishments’ rates remain competitive.

What’s more, Kamil Abdul-Karrim points out that, while demand for hotel accommodation in Cape Town has increased consistently since the 2009 recession, with the period 2011 to 2014 reflecting an average approximate 5% per annum growth, demand will likely now be affected by the implementation of the new visa and unabridged birth certificate regulations. “Accented pricing competition could well result in pricing decreases.”

Are standards improving?

The quality of Cape Town’s service has steadily improved and the hospitality sector has earned international acclaim, says Alan Winde. “These accolades garner international exposure for the establishments and for the destination as a whole. They also point to growing service excellence in our tourism sector.”

The increase in tourism has had a positive impact on standards, agrees Michael Nel. “Cape Town Tourism is very proactive and works closely with Wesgro and the CTICC. Our streets are being cleaned more regularly, there is more visible policing and security cameras have been erected in the city centre.”

However, Rob Kucera disagrees, saying that hard development has been increasing at a phenomenal rate, the concern is that service levels are not adequate and that available resources are not being increased at the same rate. Businesses are under pressure with the increased numbers – many hotels, restaurants and sights can’t increase their head count without enduring rising costs or investing a huge amount of money on training,” he maintains.

Business meets pleasure

The main attraction for Cape Town as a MICE destination is that it is seamlessly able to tack lifestyle and leisure activities on to a business stay, with the CBD’s heritage and culture, the Peninsula’s stunning coastlines and the Cape Winelands right on its doorstep, says Mariette du Toit-Helmbold. More nice, more price

Despite Cape Town’s success in the MICE sector, Nicholas Barenblatt, group marketing manager for Protea Hotels, warns that it is unlikely the city will become a business hub of the same calibre as Johannesburg and Sandton, as the majority of South African corporates are headquartered in Johannesburg and government is based in Pretoria.

Rick agrees that Johannesburg will always be the business hub of Africa. “It’s where things happen business-wise.” However, he believes there are niches where Cape Town can position itself as a leading local destination, such as, for example, the IT sector. “Cape Town could become the Silicon Valley of South Africa. The possibilities are endless.”

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A new home for Etihad

Etihad Airways has relocated to new premises in Sandton, Johannesburg. The move is a result of the expansion of its operation within the region, and will provide increased access for trade and regional partners. The new premises are now on the sixth floor of the Ernst & Young building in Sandton. Pictured here (from left): Etihad Airways crew member, Donray Gaven; Etihad Airways gm for South Africa, John Friel; UAE Ambassador to South Africa, Etihad Airways vp Sub Saharan Africa and Indian Ocean, Maurice Haman Hareb Alhasi; Etihad Airways gm for South Africa, John Friel; UAE Ambassador to South Africa, Etihad Airways vp Sub Saharan Africa and Indian Ocean, Maurice Haman Hareb Alhasi; Etihad Airways vp Sub Saharan Africa and Indian Ocean, Maurice Haman Hareb Alhasi; Etihad Airways vp Sub Saharan Africa and Indian Ocean, Maurice Haman Hareb Alhasi; Etihad Airways vp Sub Saharan Africa and Indian Ocean, Maurice Haman Hareb Alhasi; Etihad Airways vp Sub Saharan Africa and Indian Ocean, Maurice Haman Hareb Alhasi; Etihad Airways vp Sub Saharan Africa and Indian Ocean, Maurice Haman Hareb Alhasi; Etihad Airways vp Sub Saharan Africa and Indian Ocean, Maurice Haman Hareb Alhasi; Etihad Airways vp Sub Saharan Africa and Indian Ocean, Maurice Haman Hareb Alhasi; and Etihad Airways crew member, Refiloe Motloung. Photo: Feitlman Hillard

Appointmen

With over a decade of experience in the travel industry, Warren Tanner-Ellis has joined Diners Club SA as manager of Corporate Inland. He will, among other things, be involved in the business development of the new Diners Club Dynamic Virtual Card (DVC).

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**Call to Action**

Let’s do lunch!

The monthly luncheon event, Travelbags, was hosted by the City Lodge Hotel Group last month. Friends of the travel industry gathered on a very chilly afternoon at the Hyatt Regency in Johannesburg. Pictured here at the event are (from left): Mary Shilleto of Thompsons Travel and Lidia Folli of Tourvest Travel Services.

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**Quick Read**

For Busiest People

Wednesday August 12 2015

Births, deaths, marriages – we want to know! Please fax or e-mail TNW’s Debbie Badham, at debbieb@nowmedia.co.za or (011) 327 4094.
Airbnb gaining popularity with corporates

Will Airbnb gain traction in the SA leisure and corporate market?

- It may appeal to some corporates, particularly those using B&Bs
- Yes, in the leisure space but not corporate
- No, South Africans prefer tried-and-tested accommodation

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BRITISH AIRWAYS

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Hola España!

BERIA is considering re-introducing direct flights to Johannesburg in either 2016 or 2017. The Spanish airline suspended its thrice-weekly flight between Madrid and Johannesburg in April 2012, citing the sharp rise in fuel prices and the continuing world economic crisis as the main reasons.

A direct flight could considerably boost the popularity of Spain for South African travellers. Theresa Szejwallo, md of The Travel Corporation, says all five TTC brands represented in South Africa have touring or river cruising options in Spain. She says although the destination is quite popular already, a direct flight would boost numbers out of South Africa.

Currently, the best way to get to Spain is through the Middle East or Europe. “Qatar, Emirates, Air France and SWISS all offer night flights with arrivals in Madrid between mid-morning and lunchtime. The connectivity is good but a direct flight is always going to be trumps in that it offers more capacity and no stopovers.”

“Although the destination is quite popular already, a direct flight would boost numbers out of South Africa.”

Megan d’Arcy, product manager of kulula holidays, told TNW that although access was not a big issue currently “it would be great to see Iberia picking up the route again”, as passengers factor in direct access when deciding on a holiday destination. Other factors that are important to customers are price and the flight schedule, Megan adds. “Does the flight, for example, connect with the cruise the client is boarding on a specific day? Are there daily flights and when do they depart and arrive? Does the flight from SA connect seamlessly to onward destinations?”

The airline is currently exploring its options – Tokyo, Toronto, San Juan, Doha, Brasilia, Managua, Gaudalajara and Asuncion are all currently being considered. “The new destinations will be announced before the end of the year following negotiations and profitability studies,” spokesperson for Iberia, Laura Tirado Martinez, told TNW. The airline is currently doing a feasibility study of each route. “Most critical is return on investment. Flights must be sustainable and profitable both now and in the medium and long term,” she says.

FlySafair will temporarily withdraw its Cape Town-George route from August 23 and resume services on December 10 in time for the busy holiday season. However, it will increase frequencies on other routes to meet high demand. The airline says flights between George and Cape Town are very popular during summer months, with an increase in demand of 130% in the first six months. Demand has, however, decreased dramatically during the winter months. “It does not make business sense for us to continue operations during the winter months if we want to manage our costs and continue to provide our passengers with the lowest fares in the market,” says Elmar Conradie, ceo of FlySafair.

Unlock the world with roses

By securing Avis bookings on qualifying discretionary rates during June, July and August, agents stand a chance of winning the grand prize of R10 000 in Club Red Roses, or a share of R5 000 in Club Red Roses per month, which can be used to unlock the beauty of South Africa. Agents can win a starlit gourmet dinner among Namaqualand’s flowers, hosted by bush chef, Justin Bonello, when they book customers with Avis. Pictured here is Avis Budget Rent a Car key accounts manager, travel and sales department, Bonolo Pitsoe. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl