

# TNW

TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY



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# Magic Travel in a fix

TARYN NIGHTINGALE

**M**AGIC Travel, an agency that does a large amount of its business with government clients, has gone into business rescue.

"I have been informed that it might be the agency's government accounts that haven't been paid, but I cannot confirm that until I have reviewed all of the information," says **Koos Benadie**, business rescue practitioner of NVS Inc., who confirmed the agency's current financial distress.

At the time of going to print, the agency was yet to have its first meeting of creditors to determine how they would proceed and were thus legally unable to comment.

Ceo of Asata, **Otto de Vries**, commenting on Magic Travel's current financial situation, says: "It has been the agency that has battled the most to get payments out of government and is one of the members for whom Asata has worked closely with Treasury in an effort to help recover outstanding payments."

"I'm not surprised to hear that Magic Travel is in business rescue. We've warned government that some of us would have to

close shop, and now it's happening," says one travel agent, who spoke to *TNW* on condition of anonymity.

"Not only are we bleeding money because of their decision to cut all commissions and overrides, but whatever is due to us in outstanding payments from government is also being delayed."

Following government's announcement of a standard remuneration

**"Government has essentially put a lot of BEE businesses, which they wanted to support and grow, into some hard financial times."**

model in March (see *TNW* March 23/30), TMCs doing government business were given notice to restructure their business models and submit new service fee proposals to make up for any loss of income as a result of the government's move to scrap overrides.

By the end of May, National Treasury was expected to publish a tender, with the aim of selecting a panel of 10 TMCs that would be approved to deal with government travel (see *TNW* April 13). Asata said it was unaware of this tender

being published. This panel is expected to be selected by October this year.

TMCs working with government have submitted their proposals for temporary service fees until the new panel is selected. However, *TNW*'s source says government has not reacted to the proposals.

"We're not getting any compensation but we're still providing the service. These are the 'unintended consequences' of the government's ill-thought-out decision."

"Government has essentially put a lot of BEE businesses, which they wanted to support and grow, into some hard financial times," says **Lance Smith** executive sales of Avis Budget South Africa. The car-rental company has yet to meet with Treasury to discuss where government would like to take their transfer and vehicle rental spend.

According to Otto, there is currently a lot of confusion between suppliers, TMCs and government departments and a lack of certainty around what policy to apply and which rates to use. He explains that despite ongoing efforts by Asata to get updates and engage with Treasury on changes to travel

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## Pack your bags!

Air Mauritius has changed its baggage policy to two pieces each for travellers to Mauritius and all worldwide destinations, effective for all tickets issued after June 15. Economy-class travellers are allowed two pieces of luggage of 23kg each and business-class travellers two pieces of 32kg each. The airline is also offering a special promo fare of R1 490, excluding taxes, ex-JNB to MRU, effective for travel from July 20-November 30, excluding school holidays. Pictured here, ready to go, are Air Mauritius's **Wouter Nel**, sales and marketing manager Southern Africa, and **Carla da Silva**, regional manager for Southern Africa and Latin America. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

## What does Brexit mean for SA travellers?

DARISE FOSTER

THE rapid depreciation of the British pound in the days following the UK's vote to exit the European Union is good news for South African travellers to the UK

because they will get more rands for their pounds, says economist, **Roelof Botha**.

At the time of going to print, the rand was R20,10 to the pound, having dropped from R22,29 on June 1.

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**Rubes®** By Leigh Rubin



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**"Dude, maybe next time you could just skip all the huffing and puffing and try knocking first?"**

# St Helena flights still 'on the cards'

TARYN NIGHTINGALE

ALTHOUGH flights to St Helena are technically safe to operate, ceo of Comair, **Erik Venter**, says the airline cannot legally operate a commercially viable scheduled service under the landing restrictions currently in place at the airport.

After conducting a series of trial flights on April 18, the airline experienced wind shear (change in wind speed and/or direction over a short distance) on the northern approach of the runway – the ideal approach to land. "The wind shear causes too much turbulence when landing," says Erik.

"We could land from the other end of the runway (southern approach) but this would mean we would need a longer runway."

He says although there is sufficient runway length to land, the restrictions on the airport do not allow the Boeing 737-800 (the aircraft with which Comair has been contracted by the UK government to operate a weekly scheduled service to St Helena) to use more of the runway.

Part of the airline's contract with the UK government is that it flies 80 passengers a week to the island.

Technically, a Boeing 737-800 could land from a southern approach, but under the current regulations it would need to be weight restricted, meaning there would be fewer passengers on board, says **Ian Jones**, spokesperson for the St Helena government.

"This then gives rise to a number of

commercial considerations," says Ian.

"Flights could be operated with a smaller aircraft like an Embraer 135 with about 40 seats," says Erik, but if the airline were to do that, cost per seat would double. "Ticket prices would be horrendous – about R20 000-R30 000 a ticket."

Although the St Helena government is currently exploring options to put in place an interim service for aircraft that can land from a southern approach, the airport aims to commence operations from a northern approach in the long term.

"No date has been set yet for the commencement of a scheduled air service as we are currently in ongoing commercial discussions with Comair," says Ian.

Flights to St Helena were originally scheduled to launch on May 20. ■

## What does Brexit mean?

From page 1

"While the rand weakened against the dollar in the aftermath of the referendum, the pound took a dip to levels last seen three decades ago, making it cheaper for travellers to visit the UK at the moment because the pound is so weak," Roelof says.

Studies done by Iata reveal that the UK currency is expected to remain in the region of 10-15% weaker than would have been the case under a no-Brexit scenario, although it is expected to recover somewhat over the medium to long term.

These currency fluctuations during Britain's exit from the European Union will make

long-term planning a bit tricky, says **Susan Thesan**, operations director of British T.I.P.S.

At the same time, the weak pound is bad news for inbound tourism to South Africa, says Roelof.

"The UK is South Africa's biggest source market, so the fact that their currency has depreciated so greatly means they are less likely to travel, at least until the pound stabilises," he says.

**Impact on visas**

The free movement and working rights of EU citizens will remain unchanged for the time being, according to a White Paper released by the UK House of Commons, titled

*Brexit – What Happens Next?*

What happens in practice in the longer term would depend on the approach taken by the UK government and the 27 Member States during the UK's withdrawal negotiations, the report said.

It added that, while it was possible to argue that Brexit could lead to enhanced visa options for Commonwealth nationals (including South Africans), it was not possible to state with any certainty what a post-Brexit UK immigration policy might look like.

There is also the possibility that with Britain leaving the EU, it could have different implications for different visa categories. ■



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# Beware of blasé attitude to local travel threats

DARISE FOSTER

CORPORATES' nonchalant attitude toward local safety threats could land them – and their TMCs – in hot water.

Recent events, such as the unrest in Tshwane and the US terror alert issued in South Africa (terrorist groups allegedly planning to carry out attacks in places where US citizens congregate), have highlighted the issue.

**Vanessa Krook**, BCD Travel's manager of marketing, communications and supplier relations, says consultants at BCD warned their corporate clients about the alerts and the potential threats they posed but did not get much reaction from travellers.

"Corporates are generally more concerned with incidents that take place abroad rather than

alerts affecting local travel," she says.

GBTA chairman, **Howard Stephens**, agrees and says the travel manager will evaluate whether the alert pertains to

**"Both corporates and TMCs are required to alert their travellers about potential threats in writing as soon as the trip is confirmed and regardless of where the traveller is travelling."**

the destination that the traveller is visiting before issuing a warning themselves.

"Overall, though, corporates generally don't do anything specific with regard to alerts for local travel," he says.

However, both corporates

and TMCs are required to alert their travellers about potential threats in writing, as soon as the trip is confirmed and regardless of where the traveller is travelling, says Advocate **Louis Nel**. Failure to do so constitutes a breach of duty of care in the form of negligence, he says.

Making a booking but failing to advise passengers of imminent danger is thus a breach of duty of care, says Louis, and there is no difference whether the intended journey is of a local or international nature.

"Given that travel agents should be properly trained and have the skills and knowledge to adequately advise clients, the failure to impart that knowledge could see the court find that they breached a duty of care and they will be held liable for the consequences," Louis says.

"Section 49 of the Consumer Protection Act requires certain aspects of the transactions to be brought to the attention of the consumer in writing as soon as the payment is made or activity is embarked on and it must be done in such a way that it will 'attract the attention of an ordinarily alert consumer'," he says.

On the other hand, the law will not hold any person liable for

harm done that was not foreseeable, says Louis, even if it was caused by a breach in duty of care.

Foreseeability is determined by whether the harm is likely to come to fruition, the chance that the risk would turn into actual harm and the probable severity of the harm if it were to occur.

"Conversely, if it is proved that the harm was not foreseeable, there is no duty of care," says Louis. ■

### To the point

Air Mauritius will launch weekly flights to Guangzhou, China, on July 12. It will be the airline's fifth Chinese destination after Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai and Chengdu. "The launch of the new route in China is in line with our vision of connecting Africa with Asia," Air Mauritius said in a statement. Economy-class fares will start from R8 500, all-inclusive, and business-class fares from R28 500, all-inclusive, subject to class availability and currency fluctuations. Passengers on this route will also receive a free night in Mauritius on return, including accommodation, selected meals and transfers.





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# Oneworld change complicates multi-sector travel

DEBBIE BADHAM

PASSENGERS travelling on a multi-sector oneworld itinerary will need to leave additional time between connecting flights if they are travelling on separate bookings as they may need to re-check luggage and obtain new boarding passes when connecting between alliance member airlines.

Last month, oneworld announced that member airlines were no longer required to check passengers and their baggage through to their final destination where the itinerary included multiple flights and multiple booking references.

Vp of corporate communications, Michael Blunt, says this is to avoid the service delivery problems that come with using separate tickets for different sectors. "An airline operating a sector

covered by one ticket may change the schedule for that flight, making the planned connection impossible. If the connecting flight was covered by that same booking, the airline making the schedule change would be aware of the implications for the connection. The appropriate action to maintain the customer's itinerary could be taken well in advance, not dealt with at the last minute when the customer checks in and it is often too late to put workable alternatives in place," he says.

Michael adds that member airlines are free to offer service above and beyond the alliance minimum standard if they so choose, so some may continue to offer through check-in for customers who choose to travel on multi-sector journeys on separate bookings.

Cathay Pacific advises agents to remind travellers

opting to travel on two tickets that additional connecting time at their transfer point is required as they will need to check in again, either after landing or at the transfer point, depending on the airport's set-up and facilities. A landing visa for the transfer point might also be required, the airline said.

What's more, while customers who are 'through checked' should be looked after in times of disruption, Cathay warns that the airline is not responsible for any missed connections other than the flight it operates or connecting flights booked in the same PNR as the flight it operates.

Qantas will implement the new policy from September 1 when travellers will need to book connections as part of a single booking in order to be eligible for through check-in to their final destination. ■



Flying high!

Singapore Airlines' brand-new, spick and span Airbus A350 made its debut in Africa and in South Africa on Monday, June 27, when it landed at OR Tambo on its maiden flight. The airline will be using the aircraft on the SA route, initially three times a week, increasing gradually to seven. Pictured here is Alvin Seah, Singapore Airlines' gm Central and Southern Africa, photographed in one of the aircraft's 42 'biggest business-class seats in the sky'. Photo: Kate Nathan



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# Young Entrepreneurs – Fresh Ideas from Passionate People

In South Africa, and particularly in the tourism market, anyone under the age of 35 is considered to be youth, and few people have forged a successful independent career before that age. So young achievers really have to be admired.



**Bongani Mathebula** from Jozi TriAngel

28-year-old **Bongani Mathebula** got involved in tourism 7 years ago when a friend asked him to join him doing walking tours in Maboneng. Bongani took to the task due to his excellent knowledge of history and soon decided to train to be a certified guide. His work has gone from strength to strength over the years, with word of mouth recommendations causing his business to grow. He formed Jozi TriAngel and has tailored specialist tours around Sophiatown as well as graffiti. His constant enthusiastic interaction with the broader tourism industry has led to support from bigger companies, which have included his tours in their itineraries. His current objective is to improve his website to make it more informative, convincing and authentic. His advice to young people starting out in tourism is "Go for it! Tourism transcends barriers of age and race, is always fascinating and is a great way to support your family!"



**Mpho Mache** from Tshuku Tours

31-year-old **Ayanda Hermanus** manages Zaza's Guest House and Spa in Soweto, which she co-owns with her family. She worked on international cruise ships as a massage therapist and when she got back to South Africa in 2012 she had enough money to start a business which now employs two people and is busy expanding in scope and possibly also space, depending on the successful acceptance of a current offer on a neighbouring property. Ayanda qualified as a somatologist, which is basically an advanced skin care specialist and beauty therapist. She is devoted to service perfection, which, on a typical day, sees her dealing with e-mails, interacting with guests at breakfast and delivering massages, which are her passion. She sometimes gives up to five massages in one day. She is adept at a variety of massages, including hot stone massage, deep tissue massage, Swedish massage and aromatherapy massage. She loves giving massages, despite the fact that this work can be very physically and mentally demanding. She aims to have several branches in five years' time and her advice to young people is "the sky is the limit!"



**Ayanda Hermanus** from Zaza's Guest House and Spa

35-year-old **Mpho Mache** got the travel bug as a boy from going to family functions, which bit even deeper when he was a student and liked to travel with friends to parties, even if the trips involved were long. When he qualified as an auditor he did even more driving, and then quite a lot of flying, and he began to realize that the journey was a critical part of the travel experience. So he used his good credit to buy a 10-seater Quantum and took the leap into the transport business. He soon found that, despite knowing a lot of people, he didn't really have the right client base, and he worried initially that his business might flounder. However, when once he had recruited



**Raymond Rampolokeng** from Boni4Kasi

Things have been quite a lot tougher for **Raymond Rampolokeng**, largely because he has always had a passion for nature and bird watching, so his clientele has always been a bit limited. After 15 years in tourism he has received some notable awards, including the Birdlife SA Owl Award for his contribution to the conservation of birds and their habitat, a Lilizela Award and is a co-recipient of Youth Group in Business in 2014 and a shared silver Award for the Township Stand at Indaba 2016. He has also received remarkable media coverage over the years and has been on air and in newspaper and magazine articles dozens of times. He was chosen as a young tourism achiever in Soweto to be interviewed by Prince Charles and Camilla Parker-Bowles. His abiding memory of this interview was the royals' interest in young females in conservation. Raymond has also diversified into cycling tourism with Siphos Tati and others through a company called Boni4Kasi. Recently, Raymond explored the

combined interest of birding on bicycles, which included guiding 31 members of Rand Barbets around Soweto. Rugby legend Cheeky Watson was on the tour. Despite the fact that Raymond is now 41 years old, he was invited by John Kinghorn to join the Youth Birding Club in support of the theme "Making gains in avi-tourism". Raymond does a lot of work with environmental youth groups and his contact with kids has kept him young at heart. Raymond's advice to young people is "to seek out good mentoring and use all the advice you are given. The biggest challenges that young people in tourism are likely to encounter are finance and market access." Like Bongani, Ayanda and Mpho, Raymond believes that tourism success is driven by passion. Quite clearly there are niches which can be carved in the tourism industry, but young people can succeed if they have vision, passion, determination and the will to stay inspired and to keep working hard.

enough clients his business and client base grew by word of mouth recommendations. He realised that you have to be very flexible and reshuffle plans continuously. He found that the phrase "Tshuku will take you there!" gained a lot of traction, supported by creating a positive vibe through playing CDs using his positive interaction skills to make long journeys go by in a flash. Today he uses social media to do marketing, and finds that he gets good demand for events like the Durban July and the

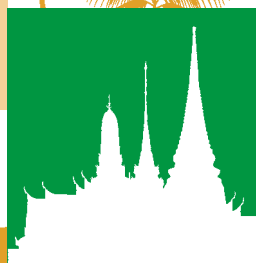
Cape Town Jazz Festival. He believes that it is now time to start to tailor his own tours, like the skiing tour that he is currently embarking on, as well as possible future birding tours with the likes of Raymond Rampolokeng. Tshuku Tours now employs six drivers, two administrators and four casuals. Despite this, Mpho Mache still likes to stay in touch by driving trips himself. After all, it was his passion for travel that made this astonishing young tour operator so successful in the first place.

For more information on what's happening in Gauteng, what to do and where to go, visit [www.gauteng.net](http://www.gauteng.net) download our Gauteng Travel Guide APP on Google Play and App Store, follow us on Facebook [ilovegauteng](https://www.facebook.com/ilovegauteng), on Twitter [@visitgauteng](https://twitter.com/visitgauteng) with #GPLifestyle #GeePeeShotLeft





# TOURISM OFFICES



Tourism offices have upped their game in order to help agents promote international travel to South African travellers. Taryn Nightingale reports.

## New initiatives drive international travel

WHEN TNW released the findings from its tourism authorities survey last year, it was clear that agents felt there was room for improvement in terms of the service delivery that authorities provided. In response to this, tourism authorities have implemented a number of proactive initiatives over the past year.

Since its inception in March 2015, the TCA Abu Dhabi in South Africa has arranged eight educational trips to Abu Dhabi, hosting over 100 travel trade and MICE delegates, says **Jean Martins**, country manager of the Tourism and Culture Authority (TCA) of Abu Dhabi. TCA Abu Dhabi's key focus this year was ensuring it positioned the Abu Dhabi

product in such a way that it remained attractive for South African travellers. The tourism authority has a dedicated trade executive who trains the retail and wholesale trade and incentive travel staff about Abu Dhabi. "We arrange, on average, six training sessions per week and urge travel trade agencies to contact us should they require any training," says Jean.

The depreciating rand has significantly reduced South Africans' spending power and had a negative effect on travel to most international destinations, says Jean. Instead of admitting defeat, TCA Abu Dhabi saw it as a way to improve its service delivery. "We saw the opportunity for us to

increase awareness about the destination and its status as an affordable and easy-to-access destination for South Africans with varied interests."

In the last quarter of 2015 going into 2016, the weak rand was also cause for concern for the Seychelles Tourism Board (STB), says **David Germain**, director of Africa and the Americas. "We were concerned it would have a negative impact on potential travellers to Seychelles from South Africa."

Air Seychelles also recently increased the number of flights on the South African route – from three to five weekly flights – creating pressure on the tourism authority to maintain flights on the sector. To counteract its concerns, the authority, aggressively started marketing the Seychelles in South Africa and Africa earlier than usual in 2016. The STB's main focus was showing the trade that Seychelles, despite perceptions, is accessible to people with all types of budgets.

"We took part in new tourism activities in South Africa and Africa and we extended our marketing efforts in the regional African countries that have good air access to South Africa and same-day connections with Air Seychelles to Seychelles," says David.

### Growing traveller numbers

Although Thailand is well known as an affordable destination for South Africans, the Tourism Authority of

Thailand has also found that it has had to put greater emphasis on its cost-effective reputation at both consumer and trade shows. "We have focused more strongly on creating an awareness regarding the travel experience that Thailand provides to holiday-goers as a whole. We have also ensured that travel agents and tourists are increasingly aware of lower-priced off-season travel packages," says **Lesley Simpson**, spokesperson of the Tourism Authority of Thailand in South Africa.

**"We arrange, on average, six training sessions per week and urge travel trade agencies to contact us should they require any training."**

Highlighting Thailand's affordability has proved successful for the authority and it has seen an increase in the number of South Africans travelling to the destination: "In fact year to date, we can proudly report that statistically we are up 12% on last year's figures," says Lesley.

The Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA) on the other hand has targeted the high-end of the market. "They are less likely to be affected by the financial challenges caused by a volatile rand," says **Devendra Babooa**, research and development manager of the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority. The MTPA and its

local agency in South Africa are working closely together to effectively address current challenges and increase growth in numbers of those travelling to Mauritius, in a fun, exciting and informative way. The 2016 winter season strategy includes a focus on trek, trail and marathons in July to discover the inland treasures; Mauritian gastronomy in August, including a Rum festival and international culinary event around game cooking; followed by focus on cycling in Mauritius in September.

Tourism Ireland has placed focus on advising travel agents and their clients that the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland offer real value for money, says **Helen Fraser**, pr spokesperson of Tourism Ireland. "South Africans don't require a visa to visit the Republic of Ireland, the VAT on tourism and hospitality has also been reduced from 13,5% to 9% and air travel tax for travellers departing the Republic has been abolished," she says. South Africans can also save money by doing a self-drive holiday or by making use of the public transport and the many affordable bed-and-breakfast establishments, Helen adds.

The authority hosts a fully funded annual 'mega fam trip' for two travel agents who are chosen through a lucky draw. Agents who complete Tourism Ireland's comprehensive online training via the authority's Ireland Specialists programme are entered into the draw. The fam trip is expected to take place in August this year.

Time to learn more about Destination Abu Dhabi

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# How to combat misperceptions

ANOTHER challenge in growing international travel is counteracting the existing perceptions South African travellers have of each destination.

“A big challenge is bringing the message across that Abu Dhabi is more than a stopover destination,” says TCA Abu Dhabi’s **Jean Martins**. She adds that a large part of changing this perception comes in addressing the belief that Abu Dhabi offers the same as Dubai. “Although both are part of the UAE, Abu Dhabi offers completely different experiences,” she says.

TCA Abu Dhabi addressed this issue by running marketing campaigns, including a radio campaign in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban to showcase Abu Dhabi as more than a stopover destination, as well as a specific niche marketing campaign around golf packages to Abu Dhabi.

“We’ve taken part in MICE and trade events like the World Leisure Holidays Roadshow, WTM Africa 2016 and the Travel Counsellors annual conference. Our first roadshow held in September 2015, reached over 600 agents countrywide,” says Jean.

The authority has also been placing

significant emphasis on forming joint marketing projects with tour operators in order to promote Abu Dhabi as both a holiday and MICE destination.

Another incorrect perception that the South African travel trade has, is that a visit to Thailand can be summed up by travelling to Phuket, says TAT’s **Lesley Simpson**. However, Thailand comprises 76 provinces that travellers can choose to visit. “It has been our objective this year to promote as many other regions as possible, including Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai in the north and national parks such as Kho Sok and Hua Hin, an optional beach destination. We’ve also been putting greater focus on promoting lesser known islands such as the Similan Islands on the west coast (easy access from Phuket and Kho Lak); Kho Lanta on the south west and Kho Chang on the east coast close to Cambodia.”

The authority has also focused on using the workshop platforms available on Travelinfo and by contributing towards agent educationals, having sponsored nine group trips to Thailand in the last year.

TAT has also made use of various platforms to promote itself this year.



Abu Dhabi is affordable and easy to access for South Africans. Photo: TCA Abu Dhabi

These included WTM Africa where TAT hosted six Thai suppliers, including Destination Asia, Centara Hotels, Amari in Phuket and Zeavola Resort on Phi Phi Island. This platform proved successful in combating the perceptions about Thailand and has encouraged the tourism authority to explore other ways of servicing the trade and promoting itself. “A good example of this would be our collaboration with STA Travel this year, where we contributed towards the branding of local tuk-tuks in Johannesburg. Ultimately our plan with this project is for TAT South Africa to have its own original tuk-tuk imported into South Africa for promotional use, which effectively brands the organisation in a uniquely innovative way,” says Lesley.

## Top tips from the trade

**THOZI Zwane**, travel expert at Flight Centre Bedford Square, shares his top tips for dealing with tourism authorities:

- Always be nice to whoever you’re speaking to. People are more willing to help you with information when the person they are speaking to is friendly.
- Tourism authorities are a great contact for info you can’t get from a tour operator – I suggest using them for unconventional requests from clients.

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# TOURISM OFFICES



Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

## Specialist packages give agents the edge

TOURISM boards are increasingly asked to offer direct assistance to the public. Tourism Malaysia says although this shift is small, it is, however, a recurring issue the authority has tried to address by working with the trade. To overcome a drop in sales, some travel agents have opted to work exclusively with Tourism Malaysia to assist them to redevelop their packages, rethink their ideas and strategies on promotions and add new in-demand products to their itineraries that they have not promoted in the past, says **Khairul**

**Nizam Bin Zakaria**, director of Tourism Malaysia Johannesburg. Specialist packages are the only way travel agents seem to gain a foothold and demand in the market as the traditional simple packages can now be booked online by the clients themselves at prices that are cheaper than those the agents have to offer. "The more you have to offer, the more value for money you create for your clients and positive word of mouth will play a role in marketing your products thereafter," says Khairul.

## Adapting to the digital age

IN AN age where the growing influence of mobile phone usage and social media offers alternative information channels to the travel agent and client, tourism authorities have had to adapt their communication methods to stay relevant.

TCA Abu Dhabi South Africa keeps itself current with online platforms such as its website [www.visitabudhabi.ae](http://www.visitabudhabi.ae) and its interactive tourist app, Visit Abu Dhabi, which was upgraded in April this year.

"We also use the Development Promotions Facebook page to promote Abu Dhabi destination news and we are very active in the PR domain.

"We distribute content not only in the mainstream and trade press, but also through the blogs of retail and wholesale travel partners,"

says the authority's **Jean Martin**.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand has recently launched an online bi-monthly TAT newsletter, which has received a very positive response so far. The authority also has a Facebook page and makes its literature and brochures available for order through this channel or through Travelinfo.

The Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority has implemented a social media and digital strategy to respond to demands of the trade and consumers and recently launched Facebook and Twitter accounts for the SA market.

"Our Ireland.com website is very user-friendly and features all local tour operators' packages.

"We are very active with updates on social media and regular ezines," says Tourism Ireland's **Helen Fraser**.



The market in Mahé, Seychelles.

## Going the extra mile

SOMETIMES tourism authorities have to deal with strange requests that test their ability to provide the best service possible to the trade.

"I received a call from a travel agency in Port Elizabeth, and the lady on the phone wanted to know if her client could take meat to the Seychelles," says STB's **David Germain**. At first he responded by sending the travel agent the information the authority had available, but she contacted him again saying the client was still not satisfied and wanted to be absolutely certain. To ease the traveller's and agent's worries, STB then put the traveller in touch with the health authority in Seychelles who provided her with the procedure for transferring meat into the country. "The satisfied client was on the plane to Seychelles the following week," he says.

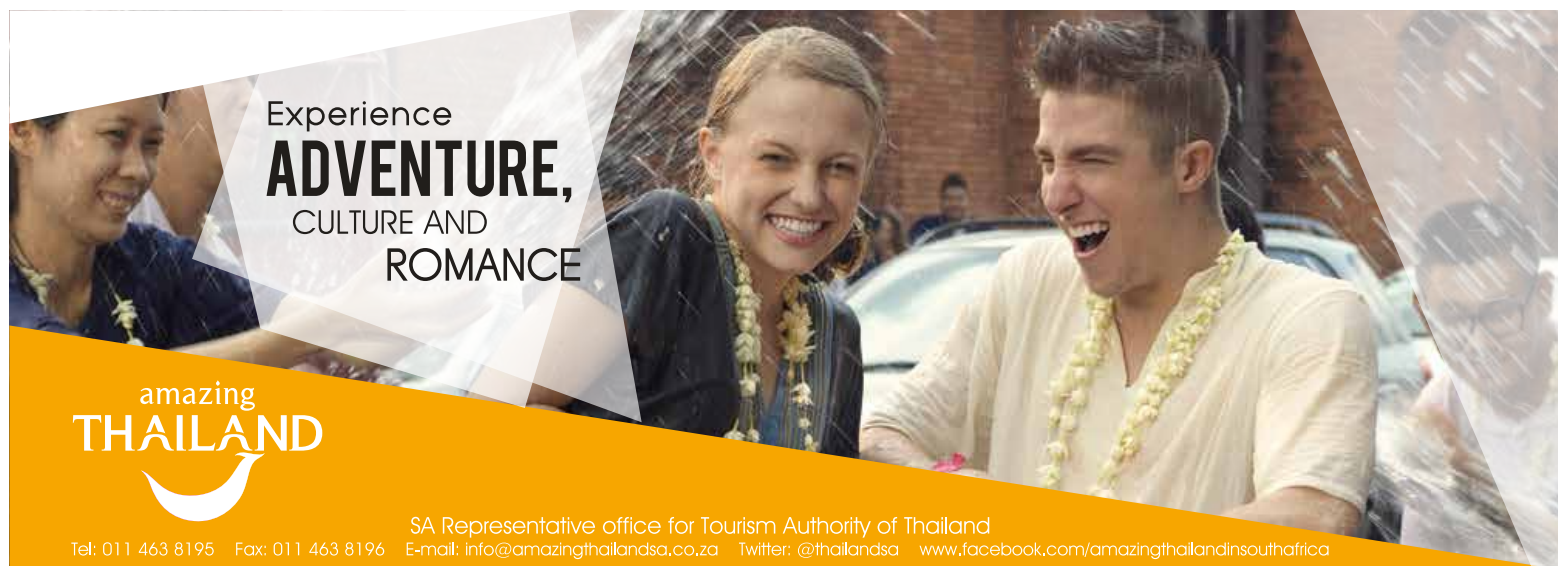
In October 2015 TCA Abu Dhabi received a call from an anxious Flight Centre agent who was querying a visa that had not arrived for a client travelling the next day.

"Although we are not responsible for issuing visas, we made a call to our contact at TTS visa services in Abu Dhabi and managed to get the visa issued in time," says **Jean Martins**. The tourism authority, with the help of a


designated DMC, also assisted Carlson Wagonlit Travel MICE in drawing up an incentive itinerary, within budget, for one of its major banking clients, he adds.

In another instance, a family already in Kuala Lumpur called their agent for advice: they wanted to know the most affordable way of travelling to Sunway Lagoon theme park from Seri Pacific Hotel. The agent called Tourism Malaysia and the authority advised the travellers to take the light rail transit (LRT) outside the hotel from Putra World Trade Centre station to Masjid Jamek station, then to take the Rapid KL LRT (Kelana Jaya Line) all the way to the end of the rail line (Kelana Jaya Station). The family was then advised to use the bus, which only cost RM1 (R3,66), to Sunway Pyramid where the theme park is based.

The same family requested assistance to get to Genting Highlands resort. Tourism Malaysia established their location and discovered they were within walking distance of Pekeliling bus station where buses travelling to the resort operate one way every 30 minutes for RM15 (R55). The authority advised the family to get maps from the hotel they were staying at, which then directed them to the bus station. ■



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## Moving house!

In June, several eTravel independent travel consultants moved into their new premises at Redlands Road, Milnerton. Europcar was on hand to wish them well at their new offices. Pictured here (from left) are: **Brendan McCarthy** (Europcar); **Mandy Maggen** (Tella Travel); **Irma Kotze** (Travel Notes); **Susan Jacobson** (Travel Guru); and **Bronwyn Protheroe** (B There Travel).

## Appointments

■ As of June 20, **Anthony Batistich** has been appointed gm of Holiday Inn Sandton. Anthony has been with Tsogo Sun since 2001 and his previous position was gm of Southern Sun Montecasino and Pivot Conference Centre. In this position he was responsible for managing the Café Cru and Cobblestone Pub restaurants and all conferencing and ballroom venues in Montecasino.

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# Interair SA closes down

HILKA BIRNS

**I**NTERAIR South Africa has closed down after ending its last remaining operation – a codeshare with Air Austral between Johannesburg and Réunion – at the end of April, confirms ceo, **Gary Tokoph**.

This follows the termination of the airline's last remaining scheduled operation to Ndola, Zambia, in May last year and the death of its chairman and director, **David Tokoph**, in a plane crash in New Mexico, US in August last year.

This week, Gary confirmed that all Interair flights had been cancelled and that all Interair flight data (airline code D6) on the GDSs had been blocked. He said the airline handed back its licences to the International Air Service Licensing Council.

He was not prepared to comment on the reasons for the airline's demise, nor

on his future plans.

Interair's codeshare partner, Air Austral, stopped receiving passenger name lists from the airline at the end of April. It had received no official notification that the airline had closed down and Interair was not responding to queries from its codeshare partner.

However, Interair's commercial manager, **Deon Visagee**, said all D6 flight data would be removed from the GDSs after he received notification on June 28 from Airline Tariff Publishing Company (ATPC) – the data supplier of all major pricing engines – that all Interair flight data had been removed, effective June 24. *TNW* is in possession of an email confirming this from ATPC senior business analyst, **Kelly Garrison**. Amadeus senior manager marketing & communications, **Jannine Adams**, also confirmed all D6 flights had been

suspended in Amadeus.

Meanwhile, Deon said all Interair's passenger payments had been processed through BSP and Hahn Air would be notified to terminate its eticketing partnership with Interair. He said the airline's assets, including a B737, were in the process of being sold.

Jeweller, **Robbie Schwartz**, started Interair in 1994 as part of the Interjet group of companies. It initially operated domestic services, expanding to regional services in April 1995.

In 1997, it was saved from insolvency by David Tokoph, a US citizen from El Paso, Texas, who was previously md of Aero Zambia and who was repeatedly linked by the media to arms dealing in Africa.

As an IATA member, Interair operated scheduled regional services and charters from Johannesburg to West Africa and Zambia. ■



**ClubRed**, the rewards programme for travel agents who book with Avis or Budget, has upgraded its website and launched a new ClubRed card. With the card, members will be awarded ClubRed Roses on car-rental bookings. The points can then be converted either into cash on the card or eBucks, which can be spent at any eBucks partner. Pictured here, ready to spend, is **Lance Smith**, executive sales, Avis Budget South Africa. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

## Where is Air China?

DEBBIE BADHAM

THE SA travel trade is frustrated by its inability to reach Air China's sales representative in South Africa.

**Alet Steyn**, gm of Wendy Wu Tours in South Africa (China specialists), says the operator has tried various avenues in South Africa to make contact with Air China but has been unsuccessful. "It seems there is no local representation for the airline in South Africa. We have now consulted with our head office in the UK to assist us in getting in touch with the airline." Wendy Wu currently uses Cathay Pacific and Singapore Airlines to get clients to China.

Another tour operator who books travel to China and who wanted to remain anonymous, said it had received calls from frustrated agents who were unsure how to get in touch with Air China. "Where is Air China's rep in South Africa?" they all ask." This operator said it could see that Air China was seldom booked by local agents.

Another concern for agents is the poor connection options from cities outside

Johannesburg.

One agent told *TNW* that the earliest flights to Johannesburg from Cape Town, Durban, Bloemfontein, East London or Port Elizabeth, left very little time to connect if passengers were hoping to catch flight CA868, which departed at 08h55.

She further pointed out that Air China did not offer

**"It seems there is no local representation for the airline in South Africa. We have consulted with our head office in the UK to assist us in getting in touch with the airline."**

STPC, meaning travellers would have to absorb the cost of accommodation if they chose to catch a flight the day before.

While **Keith Gow**, md of Gateway Travel and Tours, agreed that the connecting times to Johannesburg were tight, he said this would not affect the bulk of the route's traffic, which consisted primarily of Chinese travellers who worked in Southern Africa and were returning

home. "The bulk of these travellers come from Gauteng." Air China could not be reached for comment.

Keith said the route had been relatively successful since its launch in October but was still only serviced three times a week. An indication of greater success would be if they upped this to four, five or six flights weekly, he said. "The plan is to go daily," said Keith.

After initial teething problems the route did appear to be running smoothly, said **Terry Fenton-Wells**, md of SA Magic Tours, which books inbound travel from China to South Africa.

She said demand for travel to South Africa from China had been extremely high since the visa issue was resolved in November.

While **Bradley Brouwer**, Asia Pacific president of SA Tourism, agreed that the route was performing well, he said it needed more bookings from South Africa to make the flight more sustainable. "If SA travel agencies would support the flight it would most definitely support the sustainability of the route." ■

## Magic Travel in a fix

**From page 1**

policy and outstanding payments to travel agents with government accounts, Treasury is not responding to any of Asata's requests.

Says Otto: "Nobody knows what rates are meant to be applied. Nobody knows from when these rates are supposed to be applied. New rates are being withdrawn, new rates being brought in, new rates being held back and the old rates being used again."

However, suppliers deny that there has been any 'confusion' with regard to the agreed fares or rates since April 2016, and have welcomed the new regulations and policies. **Brian Kitchin**, Comair's executive manager sales, says Comair is pleased about the prospects of the new regulation as it will level the playing field when it comes to government business.

Brian says Comair has filed new deals for both National and Provincial Departments to reflect the nett fares. "These fares are based on the deals initially agreed to with National Treasury," he says.

Spokesperson for SAA, **Tlali Tlali**, told *TNW* he was not aware of any confusion or fluctuations in fares since SAA agreed on its

'gross' fares with Treasury.

The hospitality industry, on the other hand, has seen some changes in rates. Although government had initially implemented a R1 300 spending cap, on April 1, the Treasury adjusted the maximum rates in line with the star grading of the establishment and services provided. This was stipulated in the new National Travel Policy (NTP), which was circulated to government departments.

**Alastair Dooley**, divisional director of finance at the City Lodge Hotel Group, says this resulted in the rates for the lower star categories being capped below the R1 300 limit. However, maximum rates for four- and five-star properties were higher than the previous R1 300 limit. Because certain departments had then implemented the new NTP and others hadn't, some rates were revised to limit the number of queries on the rates, says Alastair.

He says the policy is expected to be fully implemented by all government departments by June 30 and as a result, we may see rates move once all entities subject to the circular have implemented the revised policy. ■