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TRAVEL NEWS WEEKLY

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lata to slash ADMs

LATA is banking on a 'significant reduction' of ADMs by 2018, as the recently established ADM Working Group of airlines, travel agents, GDSs and ATPCO is making headway.

The ADM Working Group was established in June 2015 to tackle the number of 'inefficient' ADMs, to reduce the time between an agent sale and an airline issuing an ADM, and to generally improve the airline/travel agent relationship. The Working Group, which has more than 115 participants from all lata regions, including South Africa, first met in October 15, 2015, and subsequently in April 6 this year.

Katherine Kaczynska, lata corporate communications manager for the Middle East and Africa, told *TNW* that since this initial meeting, the lata project team had started putting together a Root Cause analysis report. "This report includes solutions and actions to reduce airlines' need to recover through Debit Memos," she

explains. Katherine says the Working Group relies heavily on data to ensure a factual approach to the issue of ADMs rather than a compilation of subjective feelings from each of the stakeholders.

The data shows, among other findings, that the categories that mostly attract ADM volumes are tax issues, bookings, commission, exchanges, reissues and, lastly, refunds.

In the report lata proposes more than a dozen specific actions, system enhancements and a set of best practices with the aim of improving current processes and achieving significant reductions in ADMs in coming years.

"Some of the proposed enhancements will completely eliminate the need to collect through ADMs for specific reasons, such as withholding taxes. Some will

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Awesome Asia

Trafalgar is delving deeper into Asia with the introduction of India, Sri Lanka and Laos in its new Asia 2017 brochure. Your clients will get to explore cities such as Jaipur and catch a rickshaw in Old Delhi. In Sri Lanka they can learn how Ceylon tea is made and can immerse themselves in local customs in Laos. Help your clients to save up to 10% across Trafalgar's Asia 2017 programme with early-payment discounts of up to R11 590 per person (when itineraries are booked and paid in full before November 25). Pictured here from Trafalgar, are (from left): **Jacqui Lawrence** (documents manager); **Linda Chiu** (marketing assistant); and **Celiwe Sibiyi** (reservations agent). Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Hope blooms after July gloom

DARISE FOSTER

IN A snap survey run by *TNW*, six out of six travel experts agreed that July 2016 was the worst month the travel industry had seen in a long time. But the recent municipal elections have inspired a positive atmosphere among the South African public – and experts expect this to translate into increased bookings.

Harvey World Travel md, **Marco Cristofoli**, says his July 2016 bookings were down compared with both July 2015 and June 2016. **Mladen Lukic**, md of Travel Counsellors and **Wally Gaynor**, md of Club Travel, both agree

that bookings were flatter than usual in July.

Marco Ciocchetti, ceo of the XL Travel Group, told *TNW* industry growth in July was down 10% year-on-year but that he expected a recovery following the renewed positivity among both agents and travellers as a result of the elections and the subsequent strengthening of the rand.

There is renewed hope in the industry because of the stronger rand and the positive energy that emerged in the aftermath of the elections, says Air Mauritius regional manager for Southern Africa and Latin

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Tsogo bags HPF

KIM EMMANUEL

TSOGO Sun will acquire control of Hospitality Property Fund (HPF) by vending a portfolio of hotels into Hospitality Property Fund in exchange for shares, after a deal was approved by the Competition Tribunal. The deal will add 16 hotels to Tsogo's portfolio.

"We now own an additional 16 hotels as a result of this merger. The hotels continue to be operated and leased by the existing third parties, including Radisson, Protea,

aha and, in the case of the Holiday Inn and Crown Plaza, by Tsogo," **Marcel von Aulock**, ceo of Tsogo Sun, told *TNW*.

In response to the fact that Tsogo Sun now owns hotels managed by competitors, Marcel said multi-brand multi-operator property funds were quite common globally. "To the extent that there are sensitivities around certain information from the third-party operators, this has been addressed through a protocol agreed with the Competition Authorities," he added. ■

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Rubes® By Leigh Rubin



Avis Budget answers ClubRed issues

TARYN NIGHTINGALE

AVIS Budget has addressed the delays behind the new cash option in ClubRed.

The car-rental company recently launched a new reward option on its loyalty programme that allows travel agents to convert points earned on ClubRed into cash that can be drawn via a bank card.

Frustrated agents told *TNW* that, despite registering on the system, they could not access their cash and “nothing” was being done by the customer care department to resolve the problem.

“For the past seven weeks I’ve been waiting to access the cash that’s been loaded on my card and each time I speak to Avis – they say I have to wait another week before the problem is sorted,” one agent told *TNW*.

“Nobody from ClubRed communicates with us – I’ve sent three emails to them and haven’t heard from anyone to even tell me they are working on the problem,” says **Meagan Pollock**, travel manager of MICROmega Holdings.

“The delays experienced had been as a result of teething issues.”

Travel agents could now expect cash to be loaded on to their ClubRed VISA cards within two business days, once they had redeemed their Roses, **Lance Smith** executive sales of Avis Budget Southern Africa told *TNW*, adding that the delays experienced had been as a result of teething issues. “However, the initial registration for the card may take between two and five working days.”

He says Avis Budget experienced a high volume of calls during the launch of the new ClubRed website that may have caused delays. “The volumes have now decreased and we welcome agents to call us.”

Some agents say they were not warned the new reward option would result in service fees on cash withdrawal. However, Lance says this was explained in the personalised pack agents received when Avis Budget first launched the updated programme.

“As the ClubRed card is a fully functioning bank card, the pack highlighted that additional charges would apply when drawing cash at a VISA ATM.”

Lance says agents who prefer not to pay the bank charges still have the option to redeem points for eBucks on the same basis as in the past. ■

Flight Specials plays trump card

DEBBIE BADHAM

FLIGHT Specials is set to launch its own consumer loyalty card before the end of the year in a bid to differentiate its service offering.

“Service is not enough of a differentiator any more,” says gm, **Franz von Wielligh**, explaining that travel agencies that sell the same product at the same price need some way of enticing customers to remain loyal to their brand. He uses the example of a coffee franchise. “If you know one franchise allows you to eventually receive a free cappuccino with your points, you will go back,” he says.

The card will operate on a ‘points’ basis. “A percentage calculated from the traveller’s total booking spend will go into a basket as a rand-value amount,” says Franz. Travellers will then be able to redeem those points, either on future travel or with a selection of retailers.

The card may also be used as a gift card.

While loyalty strategy is not necessarily new in the travel retail environment, Franz says Flight Specials is the first agency to partner with retailers outside of travel.

Loyalty expert and ceo of US-based Loyalty 360, **Mark Johnson**, says a well-designed loyalty programme can have

a dramatic effect on the customer’s behaviour, and thus profit.

“If the programme is administered effectively, the company could expect to see anywhere between a 5% to 10% increase in top line sales during the first year. Thereafter, the increase in top line sales will drop but the overall profitability increases with continued strength in bottom line sales,” says Mark.

He says travel agencies in the US that have experienced significant disruption as a result of travel aggregators like Expedia, are looking at options like loyalty strategies to provide value and service for their customers. ■

Hope blooms after July gloom

From page 1

America, **Carla Da Silva**. “If there is confidence in the economy, consumers are more comfortable spending money as opposed to being concerned about tomorrow.”

The rand sat at R13,44 to the US dollar at the time of going to print. It was R14,15 to the dollar on July 15, and R15,07 on June 15.

“We have already seen a difference since the elections, with the call and booking rates going up substantially in both the outbound and domestic markets,” says Thompsons Holidays pr and media manager, **John Ridler**.

The stronger rand allows airlines to maintain lower

prices, says FlySafair vp of sales and distribution, **Kirby Gordon**, because the prices of air tickets – particularly in the domestic market – are determined by the rand/dollar exchange rate and the price of oil.

While the low exchange rate at the beginning of the year created expectations that South Africans would cut back on travel in order to save their rands, **Sean Hough**, ceo of Pentravel, says people are still travelling.

“There was a massive shift toward regional and local travel this year but there was also massive growth to Zanzibar – 285% year on year – as well as nice growth to

Mauritius, and Cape Town too, from a domestic perspective,” he says.

Wally agrees there is still business out there. “At Club Travel, for instance, we have enjoyed 48% growth in bookings compared with last year,” he says, adding, though, that there has not been an increase in the number of people travelling, and agents have had to take business from their competitors.

South Africa also regained its status from Nigeria as the strongest economy in Africa after the elections following the strengthening of the rand, the South African Government announced in a statement dated August 11. ■

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Iberia's back!

Iberia resumed its services between Johannesburg and Madrid on Tuesday, August 2. A media lunch was held at Sandton Sun hotel to mark the occasion. Pictured here (from left) are **Sadiq Dindar**, manager Trade Relations: Global at South African Tourism; **Abby Swartz**, assistant manager: International, Marketing at South African Tourism; and **Emilio Garcia Martínez**, Iberia's portfolio manager.

Photo: Kate Nathan

Superior content lures agents from GDS

DEBBIE BADHAM

CLIENT demands are increasingly forcing agents away from the GDS and on to alternative online platforms.

"It seems that, instead of us being able to issue more airlines on the GDS, we're able to issue fewer," says **Angela McLoskey**, md of Sure Dynamic Travel. She says there are many airlines, for example many Chinese airlines, on which South African agents are simply not able to issue tickets. The end result, she says, is that agents are forced to go the route of booking through sites like Expedia or directly through the airline's site, which is not good for the continuity of the booking.

"It also has to do with the fact that online platforms have greater content and sometimes offer cheaper prices."

Marco Cristofoli, md of Harvey World Travel Southern Africa, says there is no doubt that agents are making increasing use of online booking platforms like Expedia, especially from a leisure perspective, but is unsure that this is due to shrinking content on the GDS. "It also has to do with the fact that online platforms have greater content and sometimes offer cheaper prices."

A possible reason for this, says **Garth Wolff**, ceo of the eTravel Group, is that there is a growing trend among airlines toward shifting their content away from the GDS. "Airlines want to reduce that cost." But he adds: "Suppliers will receive a significant amount of resistance from agents, who loathe going anywhere but the GDS."

David Pegg, md of Sure Viva Travels, agrees that airlines are avoiding distributing their content via the GDS in South Africa. "They're in business to make money the same way we are and airlines' smart yield management systems know how to manipulate the sale of tickets across different markets."

Asked if there were now fewer airlines available to SA agents via the GDS than in the past, Amadeus was unable to comment. Travelport said it had recently announced a multitude of deals with African carriers such as Fly Blue Crane, Air Namibia, Mauritania Airlines as well as a landmark agreement with low-cost carrier Mango. "These recent agreements are a testament to the value that our airline partners in the region see in Travelport's technology and merchandising solution," says **Will Owen Hughes**, director, Air Commerce, Middle East and Africa. Travelport now has more than 160 airlines live on this air merchandising solution. ■

Vietnam to introduce e-visa

LEIGH HERMON

VIETNAM plans to issue electronic visas for visitors, starting next year.

Nguyen Zuan Phuc, Prime Minister of Vietnam, said the programme would be up and running by January. The announcement was made at a tourism development conference in Hanoi recently. "We anticipate that this will have a positive impact on visitor arrivals, provided that the visa fees are kept in line with existing fees and at similar levels to our neighbouring countries," said **Kenneth M Atkinson**, vice chairman of the Tourism Advisory Board in Vietnam.

Kenneth told *TNW* that the country was also looking

at expanding the list of visa-exempt countries and increasing the length of stay from 15 to 30 days.

Currently, applicants have to apply for visas through the Embassy of Vietnam in Pretoria.

Craig Cassim of Visas International in Johannesburg, said a lot of countries already offered electronic visas. "I don't think it will persuade tourists to choose e-visa destinations but it will make the process easier." When applying through an embassy, travellers have to take the required documents to the embassy where the visa is pasted in their passport. Electronic visas can be applied for online, printed out from an email confirmation and presented to immigration on arrival. ■



Let's lunch!

The Hyatt Regency Hotel in Rosebank was packed to the brim with Johannesburg-based travel experts for the monthly Travelbags luncheon on Friday, July 27. Pictured here enjoying the event are (from left): **Carla Bushkin** inbound tour specialist of Sandown Tours and Incentives; **Lois Graham** head of BCD M&E; and **Giovanna Green**, product manager of XL Sandown Travel. Photo: Leigh Hermon

More flights on JNB-Mthatha route

AIRLINK will introduce a third flight between Johannesburg and Mthatha on September 5.

The additional flights will operate Monday to Friday, departing from OR Tambo International at 12h00 and arriving in Mthatha at 13h15. The return flight will depart from Mthatha at 13h35 and arrive at OR Tambo International at 14h50.

Afternoon flights have also been added on Saturdays and Sundays, departing from OR Tambo at 14h30 arriving at Mthatha at

15h45. The return flight will depart from Mthatha at 16h30 arriving at OR Tambo at 17h45.

The addition of a 19th aircraft to Airlink's 37-seat Embraer ERJ135 fleet has made the additional flights possible. The third flight will also allow Airlink to introduce additional capacity on the route and compensate for its having to reduce capacity on the route from an 85-seat Avro RJ85 to a 37-seat Embraer ERJ135, as a result of operational constraints at the airfield. ■

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New gm shares plans for SA market

DEBBIE BADHAM

SINGAPORE Airlines has recently appointed new gm for Central and Southern Africa, **Kian Hwa Chua**.

Kian, or Ken as he is known, has worked for the airline for more than 20 years, and has spent time as country manager in China, Canada, Europe and Singapore, before being stationed in South Africa

from early July.

“Our plan is to grow the South African market through a three-pronged strategic approach,” says Ken. He explains that the first pillar of this strategy is product. The airline recently deployed its A350 on the Johannesburg route, with plans to introduce it on the Cape Town route at the start of the Northern hemisphere winter.

Interestingly, Johannesburg is

only the second destination for Singapore Airlines’ new aircraft, with Amsterdam being the first.

The second and third pillars are service and network. Ken says the airline places significant focus on service delivery to its South African customers – even when it comes to destinations beyond Singapore.

“We have an extensive network and are a gateway for South Africa to South East

Asia,” he comments. The airline offers good connections to countries such as China, Japan, Korea and Hong Kong. Together with its subsidiaries, SilkAir and Tiger Air, it offers connections to 130 countries.

Ken is cognisant of the importance of working together with the travel trade, particularly in a country as trade-centric as South Africa. “We plan to work closely with travel agents.” ■



Kian Hwa Chua

Cape Town air access takes off

HILKA BIRNS

CAPE Town has gained thousands of outbound seats on new and expanded non-stop services in the past six months, thanks to Cape Town Air Access, a division of Wesgro dedicated to expanding direct air routes.

Since February, Cape Town Air Access has already secured about 200 000 additional outbound seats for the city. This follows at least

five new non-stop routes and the expansion of four direct services this year. Its efforts have already earned it a Routes Africa marketing award.

Now the focus is on establishing direct air links with China, the Western Cape’s seventh-largest tourist source market and the province’s seventh-largest export market. Cape Town Air Access project manager, **Paul van den Brink**, will

travel to Chengdu next month in an effort to find a direct air access provider and to attend the World Routes Conference on September 24-27, as Cape Town Air Access has been shortlisted for the World Routes Marketing Award.

A breakdown of numbers shows that 70 000 seats have been added to the Dubai route, with Emirates having upped its service from two to three times daily,

and 55 000 will be added to Istanbul when Turkish Airlines starts flying daily year-round in November. Some 40 000 seats have been added to Addis Ababa after Ethiopian Airlines increased its schedule from two to four times a week, plus four flights via Johannesburg.

There are 15 000 more seats to Amsterdam with KLM now flying daily year-round, and 5 000 seats will

be added to Frankfurt in December when Lufthansa starts servicing Cape Town three times a week year-round. Nairobi also sees the same number of seats with Kenya Airways’ thrice-weekly flights, while another 5 000 seats are provided by Airlink, with five services a week to Maun. A further 5 000 seats will be added when British Airways starts thrice weekly services to London Gatwick in December. ■



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Domestic travel on the rise – Acsa

DARISE FOSTER

DOMESTIC travel has seen a healthy increase so far this year. The number of domestic travellers passing through Airports Company South Africa's nine airports had increased for the first and second quarters of 2016, Acsa ceo, **Bongani Maseko**, told members of the media at the recent launch of the Acsa Aviation Barometer. The barometer, a quarterly indicator of air traffic movements through Acsa's airports, is expected to provide stakeholders with early insights into trends in air traffic. For January to March 2016, domestic arrivals increased by a healthy 11,4% – 3,4m passengers – compared with the corresponding period in 2015. Domestic departures in the first quarter showed a corresponding increase of

11,3% when compared with the year before. "With an earlier than usual Easter holiday period in March, there was a significant growth in passenger numbers during that month to 1,2m arrivals (compared with 1,1m in March 2015), which contributed to the overall growth in Q1," says Bongani. In Q2, domestic arrivals grew by 5% year on year while departures increased by 6,6% year on year. While the winter months typically tend to produce less domestic air travel, the Cape Town-Johannesburg route, which falls into the top-10 busiest city pairs in the world, contributes highly to the continued growth of domestic travel, Bongani says. "Domestic arrivals and departures are now running at well in excess of 3,2m per quarter."

Key indicators Q1 2015 vs Q1 2016*



Key indicators Q2 2015 vs Q2 2016*





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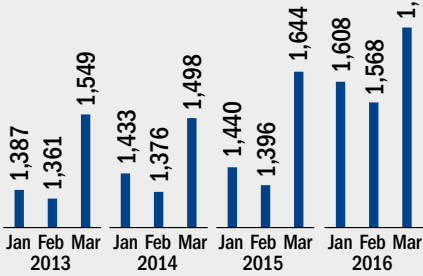
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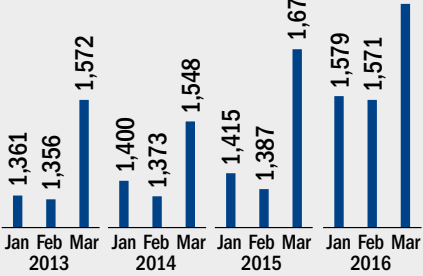
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Total arrivals and departures for Q1*

Total arrivals – passengers
Numbers in millions

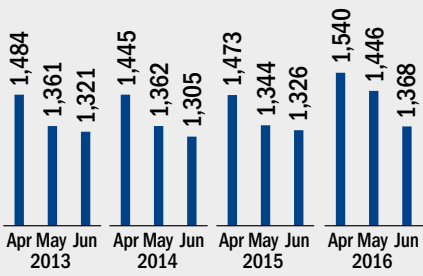


Total departures – passengers
Numbers in millions

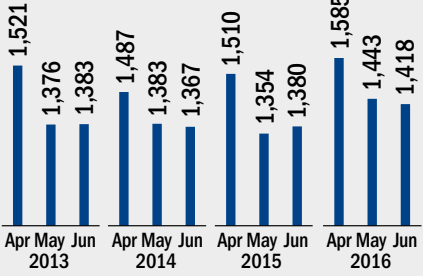


Total arrivals and departures for Q2*

Total arrivals – passengers
Numbers in millions



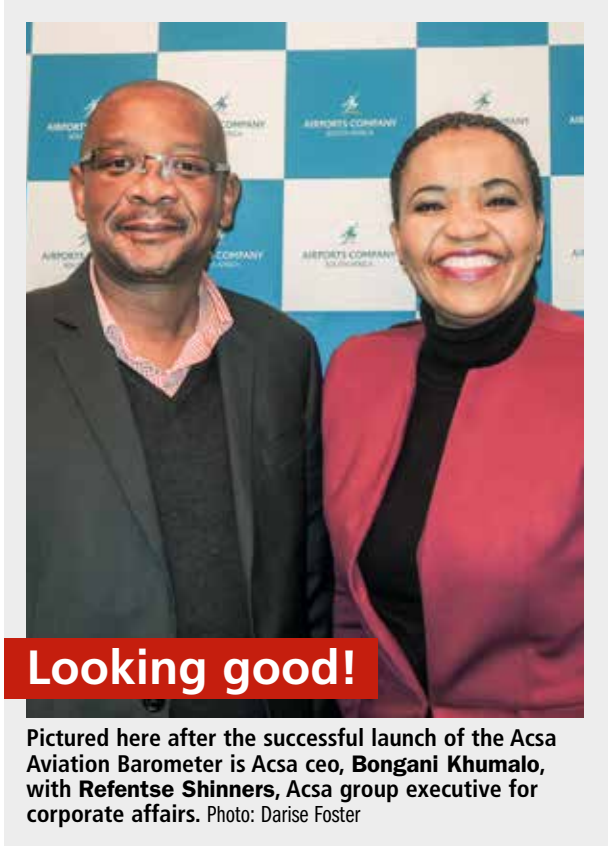
Total departures – passengers
Numbers in millions



Overall departures and arrivals increased by 8,4% and 8,6% respectively in

the first quarter of 2016, driven chiefly by a strong performance in the domestic

market during the summer holiday season and the Easter holidays in March. ■



Looking good!

Pictured here after the successful launch of the Acsa Aviation Barometer is Acsa ceo, **Bongani Khumalo**, with **Refentse Shinnars**, Acsa group executive for corporate affairs. Photo: Darise Foster

* Aviation Barometer Q1 and Q2 2016. Credit: Airports Company South Africa



Some interesting facts about Agentivity:

Did you know? In 2009 a consultancy business was formed by two friends in the United Kingdom and by 2011 the first version of Agentivity – a unique agency GDS data analysis tool – was born, developed and co-founded by Riaan Van Schoor and Edd McArdle.

Did you know? Although Agentivity is a UK-based company, our development team is a virtual network of support based throughout Europe. We have clients worldwide but recently took the decision to expand and open our South African operation in Johannesburg to address and grow the needs of the South African market – still our biggest market to date! The Johannesburg office is represented by newcomer, Yolandé Bouwer.

Did you know? Since its launch in 2011, Agentivity has enjoyed substantial growth and now services travel agencies in over 50 markets around the world. We’ve now analysed over 81 million bookings to date!

Did you know? Agentivity is an independent company. We work with all the big and some smaller TMCs and even leisure agents in Southern Africa. We currently analyse the majority of Agency GDS data generated by *TNW* readers’ markets.

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Did you know? Agentivity as a reporting tool empowers travel managers with intelligent data to manage agency, consultant, client and supplier behaviour and growth. We achieve this by offering intelligent reporting in one place where data is available and up to date at any point in the day, empowering managers with knowledge to manage the results of that data.



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Destined for the travel industry

As part of the series, Who is..., Taryn Nightingale profiles ceo and founder of Fly Blue Crane, Siza Mzimela, who says she's lucky to work in the travel business.

“I WAS always interested in airplanes but didn’t think I’d end up in the aviation industry,” says ceo of Fly Blue Crane, **Siza Mzimela**. “It’s only when I reflect on it that I can see there were a lot of events, even in my youth, pointing me in that direction. It was destiny I ended up in the travel business.”

As a little girl, one of Siza’s favourite pastimes was going to air shows. “It’s the most beautiful sight to see an aircraft take off. Everybody takes it for granted, but there was a time when something that huge couldn’t lift off the ground that easily. So many people, so much cargo – something must be said about the marvel of the mechanics behind it.”

Siza is the second-last born of her parents’ eleven children. She has five sisters and five brothers. Though born in South Africa, she was raised by her eldest brother in Swaziland. “My mother sent my brother to study in Swaziland and because he decided to settle there, he took the responsibility of raising some of his siblings. I attended school there and came back to South Africa after university.”

Siza majored in Economics and Statistics at university and first worked as a research analyst at Standard Bank for three years. She then worked at Total, whose offices happened to be across from SAA’s when she was employed there, she says.

“One day I got a call from

someone who said SAA wanted to talk to me. I hadn’t sent them a CV or anything and thought, ‘why not – they’re across the road – I can go see them’ and that’s how I got into aviation.”

Siza started working at SAA as a route analyst. Her first interview was a particularly tough one and she describes how her two interviewers, one of them the current ceo of the Airlines Association of Southern Africa, **Chris Zweigenthal**, grilled her during the process. “If there is ever anyone to blame for me getting into aviation – it’s Chris,” Siza says.

She entered the industry at a very difficult time, she says. SAA wanted someone who could withstand the climate and Chris liked her independence. The other interviewer seemed to think she couldn’t do the job and that motivated her to take on the challenge. “Don’t dare me to do something – that’s dangerous.”

Taking on the industry

Once Siza joined the industry she completely fell in love with it. “We’re spoilt in the travel industry and a lot of us don’t actually know it because very few of us will leave it and try another, and those who do, quickly come back.”

In March 2015 Siza started her own airline, Fly Blue Crane, which took to the skies in September that year.

She says starting Fly Blue Crane taught her there is only so much she can

control. “When you are dependent on other people and entities it never quite works out the way you planned.”

“Starting the airline was a natural progression. I had run a regional airline, I had run the biggest airline at the time and I was ready for the next challenge. It’s one thing to take over something that is already working but to start something from scratch is entirely different.”

She says there was a tremendous amount of work before the company could even call itself an airline. “To be effective, we had to hire the right staff – the most senior people – because they ensure you have the proper building blocks.”

As a new airline, especially in South Africa, you’re not going to enter the market with the same terms or contracts as every other established party, she says. “Everyone says, pay upfront – because they’re still very nervous about you.”

And to date it’s still the same challenge, she says. “Our whole team went through a learning curve.” Many of Fly Blue Crane’s staff are ex-SAA employees and find they are being treated very differently to what they had become accustomed to at SAA. “When you said you needed something by tomorrow you didn’t have to call ten times to have it delivered on time. Now we find ourselves at the bottom of the food chain and have to chase people, but that’s life and it’s a very humbling experience.”



Siza Mzimela

Getting to know Siza

- People closest to her describe her as good listener, a problem solver, impatient and someone who can keep a secret. “As a result, people feel very comfortable talking to me.”
- The thing that makes Siza happiest is her family: if she could have dinner with any three people in the world, living, past or famous, it would be her husband, son and daughter.
- One of her favourite songs currently is Coldplay’s *Hymn for the Weekend*.
- She recently enjoyed reading *You Can, You Will: 8 Undeniable Qualities of a Winner*, by **Joel Osteen**. ■

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Photo: Pierre Lognoul

Ireland

A 'quieter' destination with a European flavour, Ireland is a good option for travellers uncertain of the safety of travelling to Europe. Darise Foster reports.

'Quiet' Ireland sees growth

TOURIST numbers for Ireland are up in spite of some travellers' negative perceptions surrounding travel to Europe.

Enquiries for Ireland have shown double-digit growth over the past year, says **John Ridler**, pr and media manager at Thompsons Holidays, adding that this could be attributed to the terror attacks across Europe over the past six months, which Ireland has managed to steer clear of.

Ireland continues to enjoy traffic growth in the midst of uncertainty across Europe, agrees **Jane Davidson**, director of Development Promotions, the GSA for Tourism Ireland in South Africa. She says South African tourist arrivals to Ireland have increased by over 10% year-on-year.

Jane agrees that Ireland's popularity has grown since the attacks increased.



Jane Davidson

"We do not believe the recent attacks have impacted negatively on travel to Ireland at all – in fact, outbound travel from South Africa to the destination is growing and this is indicated in the increased numbers we are seeing to Ireland," says Jane.

Travel agents should be

pushing quieter destinations in Europe in the midst of travellers' fears of terrorism, and Ireland is the perfect option, says Sure Travel 24/7 consultant director, **Taryn Classens**.

"Enquiries and bookings for Europe are down at the moment following the terror attacks as well as the uncertainty surrounding Brexit, but I do think agents could benefit from pushing quieter destinations like Ireland which are close enough to the action but away from the hotspots where incidents have already taken place," she says.

The relaxed environment of Ireland, the pubs, the fun, the humour of the Irish all keep South Africans intrigued, and family links to Ireland for many South Africans also have a strong influence on keeping the market interested in the destination, says Jane.

Top attractions to seal the deal

IRELAND has many attractions to entice potential clients.

St Patrick's Day in March remains the main festival attraction for South Africans annually, says Jane, however there are several events throughout the year, including the Kilkenny Arts Festival, Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann Inis, an Irish music festival, and the Celtic Fringe Festival in September, which celebrates Ireland's rich and vibrant cultural traditions.

The development of the Wild Atlantic Way is a further attraction that draws people to Ireland, adds Jane. The tourism trail on the Republic of Ireland's west coast is a 2 500km driving route that offers visitors 160 highlights to take in, from rocky coastlines to green hillsides as well as land and sea adventures.

"The growing fascination with *Game of Thrones* has also been captured in Northern Ireland, which served as the film location for several of the popular series' famous sites such as The Dark Hedges (The Kindroad) and Dunluce Castle," says Jane.

The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland enjoy strong cultural ties and similar interests, she adds.

According to John, most visitors spend two or three nights in Dublin before

moving into the countryside to enjoy the gentle, charming towns and fishing villages.

Trafalgar Tours offers a Secrets of Ireland guided holiday, offering travellers a complete circle of the destination from the cityscape of Dublin to the wild Cliffs of Moher, and allows visitors the chance to take in the countryside. Fairytale castle stays such as Ballynahinch Castle in Galway are also available on these packages, which have received 100% guest review ratings on Trafalgar's website.

Alternatively, on Trafalgar's 'Best of Ireland' tour, guests will enjoy insider moments like foraging for wildflowers, free-growing herbs and seaweed on the untamed Atlantic shores near Lahinch, before taking them back to an Irish friend's restaurant to see how they're used in local dishes. Travellers can enjoy this from R22 300pp twin share for 10 days when booked by September 30.

Ireland is also popular with golfers and has a growing reputation as a gastronomic destination because of its strong relationship between food and culture, adds John.

"Overall, Ireland offers excellent value for money and is known for its breath-taking views and the legendary friendliness of the locals," John says. ■

Book it!

Trafalgar recently launched its Preview offer, which includes significant discounts on travel to Ireland. Travellers get a significant 10% off 2016 prices for travel in 2017 on the operator's best-selling Europe and Britain holidays. What's more, travellers who pay a deposit of R3 000 within seven days of booking and the balance by January 27, 2017, get an extra 10% off. The Travel Corporation also extends its past guest discount to any guest who has travelled on the sister brands, which means an extra 5% discount is on the cards as well. The special will run until September 27. As part of this special, guests can enjoy Insight Vacation's 'Best of Scotland and Ireland' tour, which is now on sale for R41 535 per person twin share for the 14-day tour.



Killarney National Park. Photo: Ian Keating

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TRAIN TRAVEL

Trans-Siberian Railway. Photo: Trans-Siberian Railway

Are South African travellers opting for rail as a more convenient, less stressful option to get around Europe? Sue van Winsen speaks to industry experts to find out.

Relaxing rail beats airport angst

THE spate of terrorist attacks in Europe has resulted in increased security measures across major airports, sometimes resulting in lengthy delays and, in some cases, high levels of stress and frustration when moving through security and customs. For itineraries that include multiple destinations, trains can offer a comfortable, hassle-free alternative, with several operators reporting an

increase in business from the South African market. **Annemarie Lexow**, sales and marketing manager for Travel Vision, has noted a growth in the European sector over the past month. She says this may be due to the fact that rail travel is “slightly more relaxed” than opting to travel by air. “You do not have to go through customs in some countries, and in others this is done on board the train,” says Annemarie.

“Should you cross a border, customs officials board the train and passengers do not have to disembark.” Other benefits include much quicker check-in times than air travel – which means less time wasted. “You also have the leisure of wake-up calls and breakfast at the time of preference on some of the European overnight train

services,” she says. However, Annemarie adds that rail remains a niche product for the South African market, making it very difficult to gauge any growth trends simply by looking at passenger volumes. “South Africans’ perception of rail is based on what they experience in South Africa: either very expensive or not safe. This is a total misconception in terms of the rail experience in countries like Canada, Australia, Italy, Britain and Peru, to name a few,” she says, adding that rail tends to be more popular with repeat travellers who already have some insight into the logistics of train travel. While rail is showing growth in popularity, train travel is not immune to security concerns, with the metro being targeted in the terrorist attacks in Brussels in April of this year.



Inge Dobihal

There are also other factors that have affected train travel. **Inge Dobihal**, owner of Austria Connection, says that at the height of the refugee influx in Europe, there were some issues with delays, with some stations even being closed for

several days. “However, these problems do not exist any more and we have not seen any decrease in the demand for train travel.” In fact, Inge says the positives far outweigh the negatives – not only when compared to air travel, but road as well. “Instead of driving a car, you can relax in a comfortable seat or move around along the passage, go to the dining car and enjoy a cup of coffee, glass of wine or a meal, while watching the scenery passing by,” she says. “This is especially true for ‘city hoppers’”. Most old town city centres in Europe are closed to traffic, so having a car can be more of a burden than a pleasure. Parking is very difficult to find, mostly restricted to a very short time-span and expensive,” adds Inge.

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Three top tips for train travel

WITH rail not being a common mode of travel for South Africans locally, some may feel a bit daunted by the different options when it comes to classes and ticket bookings. **Inge Dobihal** offers some useful guidelines. •There is very little difference between first and second class. The upholstery in first class will be a fraction

softer and there are free additions like a copy of the daily newspaper (in the language of the country they are in) and Internet connectivity, both of which the average tourist does not really need. •Holding a ticket does not guarantee travellers will have a seat, unless they have a separate seat reservation.

It may happen, especially in high season, that when travellers board a train all seats will already be occupied and passengers may have to stand or sit on their suitcase in the passage. Most of the time, there are always seats available, but school holidays, public holidays and long weekends may be problematic.

•The advantage of holding a ticket without a seat reservation is that travellers can board any train on that particular route on that day, and often also on any train within the next three days. This gives them the flexibility to decide on the spur of the moment if they want to depart in the morning or perhaps in the afternoon.

Warn your clients!

AGENTS should advise rail travellers that in Europe, some trains may split halfway, with one section going to one destination, and the other section going somewhere else, warns **Inge Dobihal**

“It is clearly signposted and, if in doubt, one can always ask the conductor,” she says. “This happened to me in the freezing cold winter time. I was sitting in the right coach and decided after a while to go

to the dining car. There I got engaged in an intense discussion with someone about the problems of the world, when I realised that the dining car was heading to another destination and my luggage and coat went to

the destination I wanted to go to! With the help of the conductor, I was able to take another train to my planned destination and my luggage and coat were waiting in the ‘lost and found’ office,” she says.



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Five bucket-list rail journeys

SOME may argue that there is no more stylish or elegant way to travel the world than by train. *TNW* rounds up some of the most sought-after, once-in-a-lifetime rail experiences.

1 The Trans-Siberian Railway

At almost 10 000km, the Trans-Siberian Railway is the third-longest single continuous service in the world, linking Europe with Asian destinations like China and Japan. The train is used by locals and was not designed purely with tourists in mind, but that doesn't mean it isn't extremely popular with travellers, as it offers them the chance to view many of

the region's most remote destinations, from the warmth of a comfortable train coach. Passengers are each allocated a flat berth to sleep on, which can be converted into a seat during the day. There are washrooms and toilets, as well as a restaurant car.

2 Venice Simplon-Orient Express

This is one of the world's most well-known luxury trains, travelling from London to Venice. The overnight journey takes about 24 hours, during which passengers can relax in the vintage carriages, while being served four-course meals, breakfast in bed, and some of the world's best

wines and Champagne. The 1920s and 1930s cabins have been restored to recreate a sense of what it was like to live in the 'golden age' of rail travel. The Venice Simplon – Orient Express is operated by Belmond.

3 The Canadian Rockies on the Rocky Mountaineer

The 'Journey through the Clouds' gives passengers the chance to view Canada's spectacular scenery along scenic valleys, the Coastal Mountain Range and the Fraser Canyon while on board the Rocky Mountaineer. The journey takes passengers from Vancouver, through Kamloops and ends in Jasper. This train trip is included in Travel Vision's seven-night Canadian Sky itinerary. Guests travel by train but overnight in hotels in each of the destinations.

4 The Indian Pacific on The Great Southern Rail

The Indian Pacific is the longest stretch of straight railway in the world across the length of Australia.



The luxurious lounge on The Blue Train. Photo: The Blue Train

Landscapes shift from the coastline of Perth, through the barren outback all the way to Sydney. The total distance covered is 4 352km, taking three nights and four days. Passengers can choose between Platinum- and Gold-class cabins, with all meals and drinks included in the fare. Coast-to-coast trips can be booked through Travel Vision, with Sunday departures until March 31, 2017, starting from Perth along Kalgoorlie, Cook, Adelaide, Broken Hill and ending in Sydney.

5 Kruger on the Blue Train

The iconic Blue Train offers

charters between Pretoria and Hoedspruit, stopping at Hoedspruit station, where passengers are then transferred to their preferred lodges in and around the Kruger National Park. For 2017, special routings will also depart Pretoria on March 17, July 7 and August 11, arriving in Hoedspruit the following day. Return trips will depart on March 18, July 8 and August 12. The one-way journey takes approximately 19 hours, during which guests can enjoy the luxury facilities the Blue Train has to offer, including fine dining, WiFi and on-board entertainment such as movies and music.



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Austria and Slovenia by train

ONE of the key benefits of rail travel is that it allows passengers to take in the sights and scenery along the way, while easily fitting multiple destinations into a single itinerary. Austria Connection's 'Austria and Slovenia by Train', is an interesting route and includes accommodation, train tickets and select excursions, says **Inge Dobihal**.

Inge provides a summary of the itinerary below:

Days 1 and 2: Salzburg, Austria

Fly into Salzburg, or take a train from Munich to Salzburg. This city is renowned as Mozart's birthplace and the location for 'The Sound of Music'. Travellers can take an optional half-day Sound of Music Tour, or explore the scenic Salzkammergut lake district.

Days 3 and 5: Ljubljana, Slovenia

Travel by train through countryside to Ljubljana,



Postojna Caves, Slovenia.

the capital of Slovenia. Travellers can explore at leisure. On day four, guests will be taken on a half-day tour to Bled to view Lake Bled and Lake Bohinj, while on day five, a half-day tour to the Postojna Caves is included.

Day 6: Graz, Austria

In the morning, depart for another scenic train trip to Austria, stopping in Graz. Here, travellers can learn about the Middle Ages through a visit to the Armoury, the world's biggest collection of medieval arms and weapons.

Days 7 and 8: Vienna, Austria

The last train trip travels along the Semmering Pass to Vienna. Optional activities include a half-day city tour, or a hop-on, hop-off tour. Travellers can also walk through the old town, and shop in Kaerntnerstrasse and Graben.

Day 9: Departure

The Austria and Slovenia by Train itinerary costs €775pps (R11 537) and includes accommodation, breakfast, excursions to Bled and Postojna Caves and train tickets. ■

Births, deaths, marriages, promotions – we want to know! Please fax or e-mail TNW's Taryn Nightingale, at tarynn@nowmedia.co.za or (011) 327 4094.



Urban Hip Hospitality has added the Cradle Boutique Hotel, on the privately owned Cradle Nature Reserve, to its portfolio. The hotel offers private guided safaris to two major fossil exploration sites, Gladysvale and Malapa, in partnership with the University of the Witwatersrand. Pictured here at the launch are (from left): **Kobus Botha**, md of Urban Hip Hospitality; **Professor Lee Berger** of Wits and **Tim Nash**, owner of the Cradle Boutique Hotel.

We rock the Cradle!



Merry cruises

Uniworld hosted a Christmas in July event at Skoobs bookstore in Montecasino, Johannesburg, to showcase its early-booking savings for its 2016 Christmas Markets cruises in Europe. Pictured celebrating Christmas in July with Uniworld brand manager, **Lieria Boshoff** (second from left), are Cruiseabout specialists, **Rozelle de Villiers** (Menlyn); **Charlene Krog** (Clearwater Mall); **Noreen Adams** (Clearwater Mall); and **Lize Greyvenstein** (Menlyn).

Appointments

■ **Michelle Hinrichsen**, sales director of Iconique Brands, took over from **Belinda Coetzee** as the president of Travelbags at the organisation's function at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Rosebank, Johannesburg. Belinda, who is a sales executive for the City Lodge Group, was president for 11 years and on the committee for six.



brand management, sales, public relations, digital media and television production.

■ Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection has appointed **Ellen Bettridge** as president and ceo. Ellen succeeds **Guy Young**, who is being promoted and will take on two new roles at The Travel Corporation, Uniworld's



parent company. Ellen will be responsible for managing and overseeing Uniworld's global business, including operations and financial performance, product development, the industry's foremost guest experience, service enrichment and onboard/onshore programming. She will also specifically focus on growing and expanding Uniworld's business, as well as furthering its leadership and innovation in the river cruise industry.

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Cook up a storm

Travel Vision is offering a Cajun Spice special as part of its Discover the USA brand. The package includes four nights in New Orleans at the Maison-Dupuy, with breakfast and lunch daily, a French Quarter guided walking tour and a Cajun cooking demonstration. It is valid for travel from September 29 to November 30 from R5 685pps. Booking is already open. Pictured here are Travel Vision's Annemarie Lexow (left), sales and marketing manager, and Leigh Tayob, reservations consultant. Photo: Shannon Van Zyl

Trade mourns industry darling

TARYN NIGHTINGALE

BELOVED, admired and respected industry stalwart, **Shariefa-Allie Nieftagodien's** passing has left a void in the travel community. Shariefa died peacefully in her sleep on August 12. A mentor, speaker, coach, strategist, author and operations director at XL Nexus Travel for the last ten years, Shariefa will be remembered most for her desire to encourage people to be their best selves. Md of Fair Trade Tourism, **Nivashnee Naidoo**, says: "Her innate ability to provide support to anyone she encountered, regardless of what their need was, certainly set her apart as a true humanitarian. Her dynamism is what I will miss the most." Shariefa had a passion for empowering women in the workplace and encouraging them to develop their own businesses. Shariefa was born in District Six on March 20, 1964. Her parents were forced to find



Shariefa-Allie Nieftagodien

a new home in Kensington, one of several new coloured group areas. She attended Kensington High School where she developed a love for teaching, dancing and athletics. In 1983 she started a BA degree at the University of the Western Cape and also completed a Higher Diploma in Education at the University of Cape Town in 1986.

She was an avid runner, completing over ten Comrades marathons and numerous other races. In 2015 she was a finalist for the Margaret Hirsch Woman in Business Achiever of the Year and the Woman of Substance – Woman of the Year awards. Her excellence and ardour for the travel trade were highlighted when she was named XL Travel Manager of the Year in 2010, 2013 and 2014. "Not only was she a delightful energy and character but perhaps the way she approached every facet of her life, makes the void incomprehensible. Her smiling face in the audience of industry meetings, her unwavering desire to make a difference in the lives of everyone she met and, equally as important, her beautiful and dignified demeanour, will remain embedded in my mind for a very long time," says **Robyn Christie**, gm of Travelport Southern Africa. Shariefa is survived by her husband, two children and two brothers. ■

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Thailand: Business as usual

DEBBIE BADHAM

THE bomb blasts that took place across Thailand on August 11 and 12 have done little to deter cost-conscious South Africans. Destination Asia md for Thailand, **Pornthip Hirunkate**, says while there will be some initial fallout from markets across the world, the South African market has been largely unaffected by the recent incidents. **Flora Fubbs**, senior manager contracts and marketing of The Holiday Factory, says the operator received calls from a couple of concerned clients who were scheduled to travel to Thailand immediately.

However, even these travellers decided not to cancel their travel plans. "It's business as normal," says Flora, adding that incidents such as these are the "new norm" and, given Thailand's history of small incidents occurring often, travel to the destination will quickly return to normal. **Daleen Pretorius**, owner of Dream Kist Tours, says there is a general sense that this kind of incident can occur anywhere. "Money also still plays a significant role," she says, explaining that, because of Thailand's status as a cheap destination, travellers are not easily put off. The Tourism Authority of Thailand says while it is not

yet known who was behind the blasts, or if the attacks were linked, an investigation is in process. In terms of travel advice, spokesperson for TAT, **Lesley Simpson**, says the situation is normal in Bangkok and the rest of Thailand. "There is an increased security presence at all major attractions and shopping areas as well as in airports and train stations to ensure the safety of tourists and locals." Pornthip says Destination Asia recommends that clients departing Thailand on international flights should reach the airport approximately three hours prior to their flight departure time. ■

lata to slash ADMs

From page 1 progressively reduce the number of related ADMs, such as commission set-ups, fare filing and automatic refunds through GDS," she says. Ceo of Asata, **Otto de Vries**, says one has to wonder what the outcomes of the working group would look like from an agent's perspective. "There are applications of ADMs that

are done by certain airlines and not by others – why would that be? Also the issuance of ADMs is quite cyclical. There are periods where a large number of ADMs are being issued and then not." As part of the working group, Otto says Asata hopes to clarify the application of ADMs and rectify the abuse of the issuance thereof.

Katherine says the ADM Working Group will continue to meet regularly and will focus in 2016 on the Root Cause analysis. "In 2017 and 2018, we expect that most system enhancements will be developed and implemented," she says. The third working group is set to take place on November 10-11 in Geneva. ■