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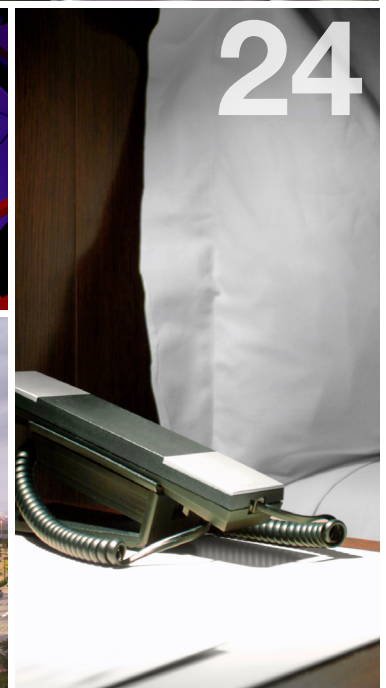
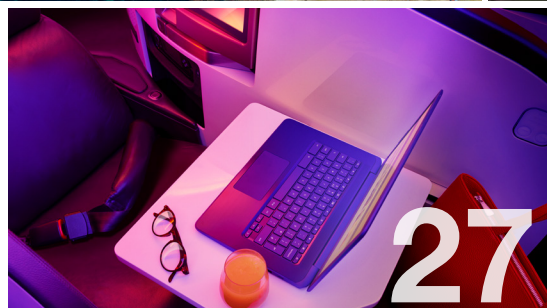
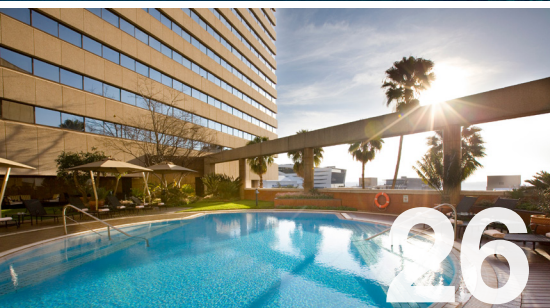


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GARDEN ROUTE, WESTERN CAPE,
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Contents



Century City Conference Centre & Hotel

This property shook up the Cape Town hotel and conference scene when it opened in 2016 and now it is set to take the next step, announcing plans to open a second hotel in 2021 – in the process taking its room count from 125 to 205, and further bolstering what is already an impressive offering.



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14 Cape Town

The water crisis of the past few years has had a big impact on Cape Town's visitor numbers, but the city is attempting to put this behind it and reclaim its position as South Africa's premier leisure and conference destination. Many of the basics are in place – now it's a question of Cape Town convincing the world that its troubles are indeed in the past, and it is equipped to provide a quality traveller or conference delegate experience.

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I do love to gaze into the future from time to time, but what do you say to intergalactic getaways, fast-food nutrient pills, two to three-hour working days and adaptable, personalised hotel rooms that can transport guests everywhere from jungles to mountain ranges?

Those were just some of the predictions emerging from a report commissioned by Hilton Hotels & Resorts in celebration of its 100th anniversary recently.

The report looked at the future trends set to dominate the travel and hospitality industry over the next 100 years and was supported by expert insight from the fields of sustainability, innovation, design, human relations and nutrition.

No surprise that one of the key predictions to emerge, with regards the hotel of the future, was that of 'personalisation', with the report suggesting that "Personalisation is King".

It went on to say that "technology will allow every space, fitting and furnishing to continuously update to respond to an individual's real-time needs. For example, the lobby will conjure up anything from a tranquil spa to a buzzy bar, giving every guest the perfect, personal welcome."

That personalisation could extend to the menus of the future, with one of the predictions suggesting that chefs will be provided with biometric data for each guest, so that they are able to create meals based on preferences and nutritional requirements.

The report also suggested that microchips under the skin will enable us to wirelessly control the setting around us based on what we need, whenever we need it.

Hmmm...not sure how I feel about a microchip under my skin...

Interestingly, the Hilton report predicted that "in a world filled with Artificial Intelligence, human contact and the personal touch will be more critical and sought after than ever," freeing up hotel staff to focus on helping guests connect with one another.

Sustainability was also listed as a key element of the future, whilst the report also touched on "Futuristic Fitness and Digital Detoxes".

I could certainly see myself engaging in the latter, as "offline becomes the new luxury", but what about these activities of the future? Outswimming a virtual sea turtle in the pool? Challenging yourself to climb the digital face of Mount Everest?

Even better, the report predicts that our exercise energy generated from workouts could be used to power our hotels, providing a zero-impact, circular system.

Now, that'll be doing our bit for the future.

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Radisson's Plans for Indian Ocean

Radisson Hotel Group has identified the Indian Ocean as a key market in its African development strategy and plans to double its hotel and resort portfolio in the region by 2022. As part of its five-year development plan, Radisson aims to add a further 50 hotels to Africa, of which 65% of its future hotel supply will come from its newer brands, specifically Radisson, which is positioned in the full-service upscale segment, and Radisson Collection in the affordable luxury segment. The development strategy in the Indian Ocean focuses on both leisure and business segments for resorts, hotels, serviced apartments and mixed-use developments across its five hotel brands. In Mauritius there are plans to expand to five brands on the island, which currently has two Radisson Blu hotels in operation and one Park Inn by Radisson under development. Radisson Collection, Radisson and Radisson RED will round out the offering. Seychelles is an important resort destination for the group and it's aiming to introduce the Radisson Collection and Radisson Blu brands, primarily on the islands of Mahé and Praslin. There is also interest to enter Reunion Island's capital city, Saint-Denis, with the Radisson Blu, Radisson and Park Inn by Radisson brands.



Lufthansa Receives First A321neo

The Lufthansa Group has received its first A321neo in Frankfurt, which will be operated by Lufthansa. The aircraft features a new, improved seat and will be jointly introduced on the three network airlines, Lufthansa, SWISS and Austrian Airlines. Each row of seats has its own USB ports in the current and future standard, which for the first time in the Lufthansa Group will also be available on short-haul flights. In future, Lufthansa Group passengers will also be able to set up their own tablets even more conveniently. A special column has been inserted into the table to facilitate the tablet holder. In addition to benefits for customers, the reduction of weight and thus CO₂ emissions, as well as maintenance costs, were the focus of development.

RwandAir to Fly to Tel Aviv

RwandAir commenced direct flights to Tel Aviv, the economic and technology centre of Israel, from its Kigali hub on 25 June. This new route will operate on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays with a Boeing 737-800NG offering 16 seats in business class and 138 seats in economy class. Tel Aviv will be the 29th destination of RwandAir and its second destination in the Middle East after Dubai.

New CT Signing for Hilton

Hilton has signed a management agreement with Growthpoint Properties to open a hotel under its lifestyle Canopy by Hilton brand. The 150-room Canopy by Hilton Cape Town Longkloof is expected to begin welcoming guests in 2021 and will be the brand's debut property in Africa. Canopy by Hilton launched in 2014 to appeal to travellers seeking locally-inspired stays and wishing to immerse themselves in the culture and history of local neighbourhoods. Located near the city's historical epicenter, the Company's Garden, the hotel will bring to life the heritage of a 112-year-old site, Longkloof Studios. The project forms part of a precinct redevelopment by Growthpoint, representing a R550m (\$37m) investment in the city.



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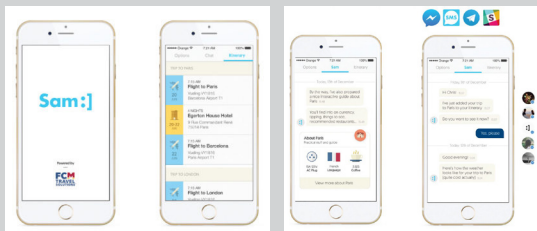


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Corporate Traveller Introduces Sam:] to SA



Corporate Traveller is rolling out travel chatbot Sam:] to its customers across South Africa. Sam:], Flight Centre Travel Group's Smart Assistant Mobile app, was first launched to customers in the UK and USA in 2018. Sam:] is programmed to keep travellers updated at all times, from weather updates at the destination to information on the traveller's departure gate, flight time changes and where to collect baggage. The app will also suggest which restaurants and attractions to visit, alert travellers about traffic delays and will soon be able to connect travellers with a consultant via a live text or phone chat if the need arises. The new version grants travel managers, PAs and bookers access to view their current travellers' itineraries, as well as receive notifications about events that affect each traveller, such as flight delays or cancellations. The app prompts travellers to report they are safe via a push notification. The roll-out to Corporate Traveller customers follows Flight Centre Travel Group's full acquisition of Sam:] in 2019, which allows the group to use and develop the functionality of the product in line with the needs of its clients.

Wings Expands Tech Services

Wings Travel Management has announced an expansion of its technology solutions division, following the acquisition of Alchimea, a specialist software developer of workflow integration, process automation, application design and management in the areas of global mobility, business travel and related support services. This acquisition will strengthen Wings' technology offering and elevate its value proposition in bespoke technology solutions. Established in 1999, Alchimea has partnered with organisations to develop solutions in the areas of enterprise cloud applications, system integration, and business intelligence solutions.



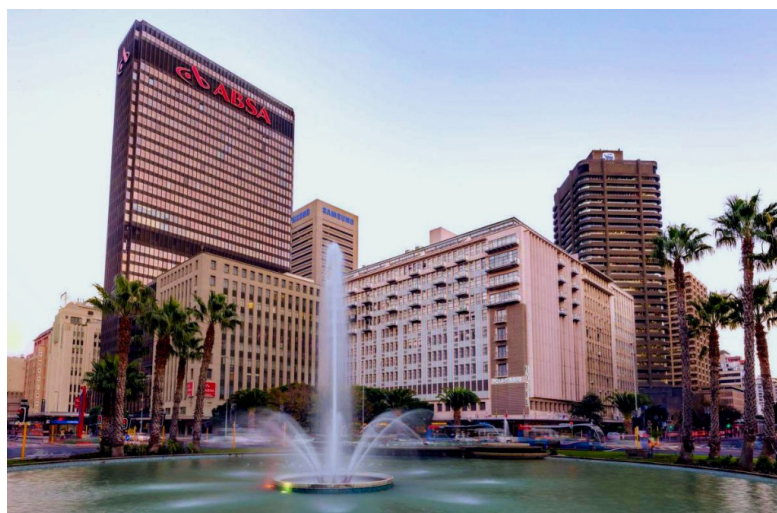
Air Mauritius Flies to Seychelles

Air Mauritius will commence operations to Seychelles effective 2 July. The flights will be operated twice weekly by an Airbus A319, offering 16 business and 108 economy class seats. Flight schedules for the Mauritius-Seychelles service have been designed to optimize connecting possibilities for passengers through the Mauritius hub. The flight will depart Mauritius at 08h30 on Tuesdays and land in the Seychelles at 11h10. The return flight leaves at 12h00 and arrives back in Mauritius at 14h40. On Fridays, the flight will depart Mauritius at 22h30 and touch down in the Seychelles at 01h10 on Saturday mornings. The return flight will take off from the Seychelles at 02h20 and land in Mauritius at 05h00.



Air Seychelles Launches New Daily Jo'burg Service

Air Seychelles has launched a new daily service between the Seychelles and Johannesburg. The flight is operated by an Airbus A320 aircraft featuring 16 business class and 120 economy class seats. The Jo'burg leg departs O.R. Tambo International Airport at 13h45 and arrives in the Seychelles at 20h40.



Best Western Adds Cape Town Hotel to Portfolio

Best Western Hotels & Resorts has added Fountains Hotel, Cape Town to its growing portfolio of properties in Africa. The 156-room Best Western Fountains Hotel is in the heart of the city's central business district. The hotel offers a buffet-style breakfast, lunch and dinner, and 24-hour room service. Event facilities include five conference rooms for up to 250 and a cocktail lounge.

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The boutique Ngoma Safari Lodge, is located in Chobe, Botswana.

Africa Albida Tourism is committed to sustainable tourism through community involvement and education. We are committed to protecting our wildlife and environment, as well as engaging with our local communities to create success for all.

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Trevor Ward
MD: W Hospitality
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An Eye on West Africa

I've written on a few occasions in this column about how the hotel chains are expanding in Africa, signing deals with investors who are looking for professional management and a brand. We have a look each year at what they're signing, mostly reporting growth in the number of hotels and rooms in their pipeline.

But this year, based on data provided in the first two months, we saw, for the first time in 11 years, a reduction in the number of hotels in the development pipeline – that's hotels which the brands have signed which were to open sometime in the future. Or not. Because between 2018 and 2019 we count no fewer than 74 hotels with over 12,000 rooms which the chains have removed from their lists, projects that once upon a time they made a great fanfare about, and as travellers we looked forward to them opening. That's the equivalent of 18% of the hotels in last year's pipeline, and 16% of the rooms. So 12 months ago those hotels were expected to open as Hiltons, Sheratons, Marriotts, Radissons et al – but now won't.

Although almost 100 deals were signed by the chains in 2018, it wasn't enough, when taking into account openings, to make up the difference, and the overall total fell.

Add to that the fact that another metric we look at, the performance in terms of opening hotels on time, was also down. In early-2018 the chains expected to open 115 new hotels in the same year, but actually opened only 46 hotels. That's a 39% 'actualisation' rate, down from 54% in 2017. Adjusting by the hotels due to open in 2018 that were 'canned' by the chains gives a figure of 45% actualisation – still not a terrific performance, was it?

What happened?

Well, it's usually the money that didn't (happen). Of the total 16 hotels that the chains have removed from their pipelines in West Africa, 11 are in Nigeria, where there are several 'hulks' littering the landscape, including the Meridien in Ikoyi (Lagos) and the Four Points in Benin City, which started but the money wasn't there to finish them. And several others which never went beyond 'the paperwork' because of lack of finance, and the chains ultimately lost patience with the promoters. It is not uncommon for chains to be tied into a non-compete clause – they sign a deal to manage a promoter's hotel, and commit not to manage another hotel with that brand in a certain geographic area. If that promoter doesn't deliver the hotel, then the chain is likely turning away other projects, because of that

commitment. In those circumstances, the chain will invoke an option to walk away – and that's what has been happening in some of these projects.

Looking at the hotels that didn't open as planned last year, I can see that a lack of finance was very often the reason, but also there can be time-consuming challenges, particularly here in West Africa, such as government permitting and licences, disputes over land title and poor planning, as well as delays at the ports holding up building materials and operating supplies, and construction difficulties, the latter including meeting brand standards, a condition precedent for the chain to open the hotel. And then, exceptionally, there is the impact of external uncontrollable events, tragedies such as the Ebola crisis in 2014 which delayed the opening of the Noom hotel in Conakry, and renewed conflict in Mali delaying hotels from opening in Bamako.

So these pipelines are not always what they appear. Of the total pipeline this year – that's 401 hotels with just over 75,000 rooms – around half are under construction, and half are not yet on site. Of those 'under construction' there are many here in West Africa on which work started or has stopped, and some where progress is painfully slow, way behind schedule. In Lagos, for example, there's a pipeline of 4,500 rooms, of which 56% are 'under construction' – but half of those are closed sites, with nothing happening!

There are 22 branded hotels with 3,010 rooms slated to open in 2019 in West Africa. A few have already opened, including the Noom and Radisson Blu hotels in Niamey, and the Mantis Providence Hotel in Lagos. Then there's another 28 hotels with 4,910 rooms due to open in 2020 – somewhat ambitious, because 25% of them are not yet under construction!

So they're not all going to open, either on time or at all, but we're way ahead of where we were 10 years, even five years ago, aren't we? ■

Trevor Ward
Managing Director
W Hospitality Group, Lagos

www.w-hospitalitygroup.com



Travel agent vs travel tech

Although you're probably interacting with a lot of travel technology – from apps and booking tools to online payment solutions – the real reason your trip is as seamless and hassle-free as it is, has more to do with your travel management company (TMC) than your travel tech.

Here's why:

Your travel agent is a travel obstacle course pro

Although booking a return flight between Johannesburg and Cape Town is something you could do on your online booking tool (OBT), corporate travel is much trickier than nabbing a good deal on a domestic flight. Your TMC is an expert on all the aspects of business travel, including visas, early check-ins, car rentals and duty of care. They know more about the business of business travel than most, so even if you could arrange your business travel using a tech tool, your TMC would be able to do it much faster than you could.

Your TMC is more connected than you think

As much as your travel tech can be updated with flight delays and weather changes, your TMC has a host of travel industry relationships with insider information that your tech doesn't. A business trip to that little town in the back-of-beyond? Your travel agent has the low-down on that little B&B; the internet does not.

Customised customer service

True personalisation comes with understanding the human factor of customer service. While you could fill out a traveller profile in your OBT, are you doing it in a way that will benefit your travel? Tech can only help you as far as you tell it to, but an expert TMC can identify the blind spots. They'd know exactly what you'd need as a first-time traveller or what blisure to recommend for that off-day between meetings.

The real 911

Unlike your travel tech, a TMC can handle travel emergencies, especially when you're trapped in a board meeting in Hong Kong. Your TMC can locate your lost luggage or make arrangements around a lost passport your travel tech can't.

So trust your ASATA-accredited TMC. Travel tech may be cool. We rely on it! However, when you need a sympathetic ear on the other end of the phone, it helps to have a travel professional on speed-dial. ■

Otto de Vries
ASATA CEO



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CENTURY CITY HOTEL BRIDGEWATER

OPENING 2021



Artist's impression

A new hotel is an exciting addition to the Century City Hotels brand: Century City Hotel Bridgewater will be opening its doors in 2021.

The new Hotel will increase our inventory from 125 rooms at Century City Hotel, to 205 rooms in total - and almost 700 rooms within walking distance of the CCCC.



CENTURY CITY
CONFERENCE CENTRE

*Century City Hotel Bridgewater is a direct result of the positive impact that the award-winning **Century City Conference Centre** has had on the node, driving a significant increase in footfall for the area. Built in response to the market demands – which have now been met and exceeded – the conference centre remains a primary contributor to promoting business travel to Cape Town, and a key source of pride for the precinct.*



To make the distinction between the two hotels, the existing hotel will take on the name *Century City Hotel Urban Square*, named for its location on the bustling square, and together with *Century City Hotel Bridgewater*, both hotels will fall under the Century City Hotels umbrella.



CENTURY CITY HOTEL
URBAN SQUARE



Century City Hotel Bridgewater guests will enjoy the same great benefits of Century City Hotel's convenient location, as well as picturesque views of the Century City Canal, a ground floor deli that will serve as a relaxed leisure space for casual dining and hosting business meetings.

Coming out fighting

It's been a rough couple of years for Cape Town, largely due to the Western Cape's water crisis, but the Mother City has come out the other end determined to put its troubles behind it and re-establish itself as South Africa's destination of choice.







The water crisis may be over, but the hard work for Cape Town has only just begun.

That's because there is much to claw back after a forgettable few years.

The drought in the Western Cape began as far back as in 2015 and resulted in a severe water shortage in the region, most notably affecting the city of Cape Town. With dam levels predicted to decline to critically low levels, the city announced plans for 'Day Zero', when if a particular lower limit of water storage was reached, the municipal water supply would largely be shut off, potentially making Cape Town the first major city to run out of water.

Through water-saving measures and water supply augmentation, by March 2018 the city had reduced its daily water consumption by more than half to around 500

million litres per day, resulting in the initial forecast of Day Zero in April being re-forecast to 2019, before eventually being scrapped.

But the damage was done.

South African Tourism went to great lengths to reassure the world that Cape Town was open for business and that all visitors were welcome, throughout the crisis, as long as they were willing to play their part in conserving water.

But the statistics tell a story.

Figures released by Cape Town Tourism in January showed a mixed performance for 2018 and clarity that the city's recovery in terms of tourism was stabilising, notwithstanding a poor performance in the early part of the year.

Cape Town Tourism identified a couple of key factors that influenced travel choices in 2018, including a third quarter recession and the drought as

primary factors.

"Tourism in general is in a period of slow recovery following the drought and recession, and the figures reported bear this out," said Cape Town Tourism CEO, Enver Duminy. "The recovery of water supplies in the latter part of 2018 following healthy rainfall and the implementation of additional water supplies came a little too late to counteract bookings to the city, although December, in general, offered an indication that tourism is on track to becoming a more stable economic environment once again."

Cape Town's operators would seemingly agree, having been on the receiving end of a challenging few years that forced them to re-look their offerings and make some adjustments, in terms of their expectations and projections.

"Despite the current relaxation of the water restrictions in Cape Town, we lost traction as a global destination at the time of the drought," says Gary Koetser, Joint-CEO of Century City Conference Centre & Hotel. "Given the longer lead times this market segment enjoys, Q1 and Q2 of 2019 has been incredibly difficult, as we are still suffering from the hangover of the drought."

Koetser, though, is bullish about the rest of the year.

"That being said, Q3 and Q4 are poised to be record-breaking months as a result of the entrenched relationships we share with our loyal supporters," he says.

Strong relationships aside, plenty of work remains, with all the major players required to



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put in a shift to turn around a situation that has had a serious impact on Cape Town's tourism.

"It has been a mammoth task on the part of stakeholders to work towards sustainability within the tourism sector throughout 2018, and the figures for December offer some reassurance that this is paying off," said Alderman James Vos, Mayoral Committee Member for Economic Opportunities and Asset Management.

CAPE TOWN AIR ACCESS

Cape Town, though, still has much to be positive about, and it's interesting that despite the hangover from the drought, Cape Town International Airport still showed some growth, in terms of its numbers, in December.

International passengers, according to Airports Company South Africa, were recorded as being up by 4% in December (year-on-year) and by over 9% in total for 2018.

Those numbers were a reminder that Cape Town remains a serious tourist drawcard, despite its perilous situation over the past few years.

A lot of credit must go to Wesgro, the official tourism, trade and investment promotion agency for Cape Town and the Western Cape, and some of the measures it has put in place.

One of those measures is Cape Town Air Access (CTAA), the "focal point for international air route development in the Western Cape and a collaboration between the Western Cape Provincial Government, the City of Cape Town, Airports Company South Africa, Cape Town Tourism, South African Tourism, Wesgro and private sector partners."

Since its launch in 2015, Cape Town Air Access has contributed to the landing of 13 new routes and 19 route expansions. This has resulted in Cape Town International Airport doubling its international seat capacity by more than 1.5 million seats, which helped the airport reach the 10.7 million passenger mark in 2017. International terminal passengers grew by 20% in 2017 reaching a total of 2.4 million.



Cape Town International Airport



Cape Town International Airport



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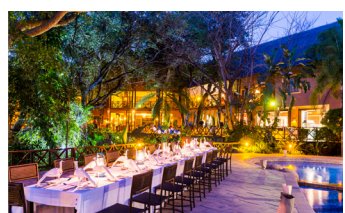


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“Data proves that increased international air traffic and access have a direct impact on economic growth.”

The latest addition is that of United Airlines, which will begin flights to and from New York in December. United will operate three weekly non-stop flights to Cape Town, which will decrease the current travel time between the two cities by more than four hours and provide customers from more than 80 US cities with easy one-stop access to Cape Town.

“Cape Town was not on the map,” says Paul van den Brink, Project Lead for Cape Town Air Access, speaking to Daily Maverick about the programme. “No-one attended events like World Routes, which every airline, airport and aviation stakeholder attends annually. Now we engage with the right decision makers.”

It took Van den Brink’s team two years to convince United Airlines that returning to Africa to fly the New York-CT route would be viable and profitable.

What shouldn’t be underestimated is the role the private sector has played in the success of Cape Town Air Access, with an obvious incentive for those corporates with a significant presence in the Mother City.

“Data proves that increased international air traffic and access have a direct impact on economic growth, and increased jobs and

JO'BURG MORE POPULAR THAN CAPE TOWN?

Johannesburg has emerged as the most popular destination city in Africa for the fifth consecutive year, according to the annual Mastercard Global Destination Cities Index.

The City of Gold attracted 4.05 million international overnight visitors in 2017. Close on its heels was Marrakech in Morocco. Polokwane (1.88 million), Cape Town (1.73 million) and Djerba in Tunisia (1.65 million) rounded out the top five African cities ranked in the index.

The Mastercard Global Destination Cities Index ranks the world’s top 162 destination cities in terms of visitor volume and spend for the 2017 calendar year. It also provides insight on the fastest growing destination cities, and a deeper understanding of why people travel and how they spend around the world.

Cape Town and Polokwane ranked third and sixth in terms of the African cities with the highest international overnight visitor expenditure in 2017, with visitors spending \$1.62 billion and \$760 million respectively. Visitors to Cape Town stayed 12.5 nights and spent \$75 per day on average. Shopping is also a drawcard for visitors to both Cape Town and Polokwane, accounting for 22% and 60% of their total spend respectively.

The Mother City attracted the largest proportion of long-haul visitors in South Africa, with travellers coming from the United Kingdom (14.4%), Germany (12.4%), United States (10.9%), and France (6.6%). Cape Town’s highest number of African visitors came from Namibia (6.2%).

decreased unemployment. These are challenges we believe cannot be solved by government alone and are best addressed through public-private partnerships," says Anika Ebrahim, Corporate Impact Director at Naspers.

There are now four new African airlines flying in and out of Cape Town, in the form of Angola's TAAG, Kenya Airways, Ethiopian Airlines, and RwandAir. This means eight African cities are directly accessed from Cape Town.

The Western Cape market is also being opened up to Latin American travellers who fly from Rio de Janeiro or Sao Paulo via Luanda.

Opening up travel routes stimulates the economy beyond tourism. To date, the CTAA initiative has added R6-billion to the local economy, according to research conducted by Wesgro. The opening up of the New York route – and by extension, the North American market – will be a further "game changer," says Van den Brink.

Another consequence of the increased traffic is that Cape Town International has embarked on a R7-billion expansion project that will see a new runway being built together with extensive upgrades to the domestic and international terminals.

Construction is expected to begin early in 2020 and will take five years to complete.

HOTEL DEVELOPMENT

Despite the impact of the drought, Cape Town's hotel supply has actually grown in the past two years, off the back of the positive sentiment enjoyed in 2016 and 2017, before the water crisis fully took hold.

As a result, at least five new hotels have opened in Cape Town over the past two years – a period that coincided with the worst drought in decades and a drop in the number of overseas tourists.

The result has been that hotel occupancies in Cape Town decreased by an overall 6.5% in 2018 to 65% (from 71.5% in 2017), according to figures from global hospitality research group STR. Revenues, as measured by average daily room rates, declined by 1.7% to R1,765 over the same period.

Figures released by Stats SA in January showed a similar year-on-year decline (-1.6%) in overseas tourists to South Africa between January and November. That followed a bumper 2016 and 2017, when the tally of overseas visitors rose by 12.8% and 7.2% respectively after a 6.8% drop in 2015.

The 2016/2017 uptick was seemingly driven by the relaxation of visa regulations.

Last year's decline in Cape Town occupancies and revenues coincided with a number of new projects opening in the city, pushing the estimated number of hotel rooms in central Cape Town to just over 11,000.

These included the 188-room AC Hotel by Marriott at the Yacht Club, the 252-room Radisson Red and the 87-room Signature Lux – all near the V&A Waterfront.

There was also the 214-room Radisson Blu Hotel & Residence in the CBD and Tsogo Sun's SunSquare and StayEasy hotel complex at the intersection of Buitengracht, Strand and Bree streets (504 rooms in total).

Gorgeous George, a 32-room boutique hotel, opened on St George's Mall in central Cape Town earlier this year, whilst Hilton Hotels & Resorts is set to add to the supply.

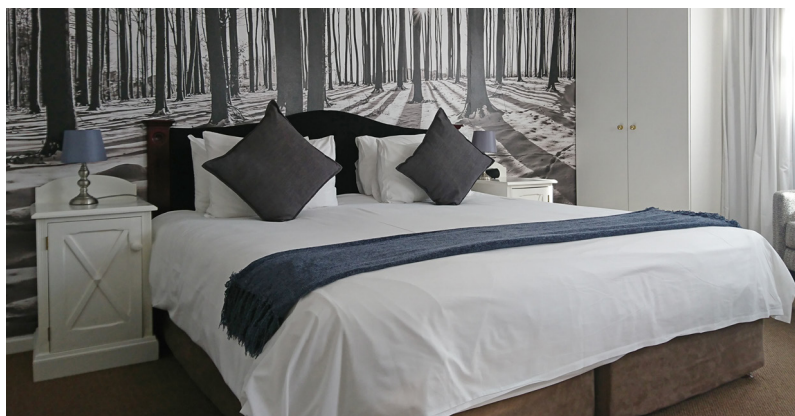
It recently announced that it had signed a management agreement with Growthpoint Properties to open a hotel under its lifestyle

Canopy by Hilton brand.

The 150-room Canopy by Hilton Cape Town Longkloof is expected to begin welcoming guests in 2021 and will be the brand's debut property in Africa. Canopy by Hilton launched in 2014 to appeal to travellers seeking locally-inspired stays and wishing to immerse themselves in the culture and history of local neighbourhoods.

Also recently, Best Western Hotels & Resorts and Fountains Hotel announced the rebranding of the Fountains Hotel.

With 156 guest rooms and suites, the Best Western Fountains Hotel is located in the heart of Cape Town's CBD. Ideal for both business and leisure travellers, the hotel offers a choice of comfortable



Snug at the foot of Table Mountain, this Apart-Hotel, Best Western Cape Suites, consists of fully air-conditioned serviced studios, one, two and three bedroom apartments offering free Wi-Fi, an onsite restaurant, a pool, shuttle service and secure parking.

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Radisson Red



SunSquare & StayEasy Cape Town City Bowl



“Cape Town has enough solid building blocks in place, across both the leisure and business travel spaces.”

bedrooms, the majority with views over the harbour, the bustling Thibault Square or Table Mountain.

CONFERENCE INDUSTRY

There's no doubt that the emergence of the Cape Town International Convention Centre has played a big role in changing the perception of the city and what it has to offer in the business travel space.

Since it opened in June 2003, CTICC has helped Cape Town position itself as Africa's top business events destination, in terms of the ICCA rankings, and this year has once again seen the city come out on top, with 42 international association meetings – 16 more than second-ranked Kigali and 26 more than sixth-ranked Johannesburg.

It's been an interesting few years for Cape Town's conferencing industry, with CTICC completing a massive expansion project in 2017, barely 18 months after the opening of a second conference centre “down the road” in Century City.

SOLVING WINTER

Cape Town Tourism has launched a digital campaign to promote the city and its surrounds as an ideal winter getaway destination with a tongue-in-cheek video parodying Mother City clichés and good-naturedly teasing its residents.

The video features cameos by a number of celebrities and the idea was to develop a concept to increase the number of domestic tourists to the city during the winter period – in doing so, achieve the ultimate aim of flattening out the curve between high and low season arrivals, so that the industry stays buoyant throughout the year.

“Cape Town in winter is more inviting than upcountry South Africans think, with loads of great deals and things to do,” says Cape Town Tourism's Marketing Executive, Leigh Dawber. “We wanted to communicate this in an innovative and brave way, especially as our key target market is millennials who are inundated with content every second of the day.”

To complete the full content experience, viewers are encouraged to explore further and start booking and planning their trip immediately by ‘cliquing’ through to an e-book featuring special deals delivering great value on travel, accommodation and numerous activities.

Cape Town Tourism's ‘A Winter Song’ can be viewed at: <https://youtu.be/kqY6y971goo>.



The Commodore

The Century City Conference Centre & Hotel has the capacity to accommodate close to 2,000 guests in 19 venues and officially opened for business in February 2016. The conference centre forms part of Century City's mixed-use Century City Urban Square development.

In the months leading up to the launch, Glyn Taylor, Joint Chief Executive Officer of Century City Conference Centre & Hotel, said the development was in response to soaring demand for conferencing and hotels in the precinct, and had been designed to complement Cape Town and Century City's existing facilities.

With a different offering to CTICC, the industry consensus seems to be that the two venues do indeed complement each other, as opposed to being in direct competition, and Cape Town is set to continue benefitting from this development, which has added another element to an already attractive MICE offering.

Further to that, Century City Conference Centre & Hotel is going to make another addition to that offering, after unveiling plans to build a second hotel in close proximity. The new hotel will increase the inventory from 125 rooms at Century City Hotel to 205 rooms in total.

"Century City Hotel Bridgewater is a direct result of the positive impact that the award-winning Century City Conference Centre has had on the node, driving a significant increase in footfall for the area. Built in response to the market demands – which have now been met and exceeded – the conference centre remains a primary contributor to promoting business travel to Cape Town, and a key source of pride for the precinct," said a Century City Conference Centre & Hotel statement.

Century City Hotel Bridgewater guests will enjoy the same benefits of Century City Hotel's convenient location, as well as picturesque views of the Century City Canal and a ground floor deli that will serve as a relaxed leisure space for casual dining and business meetings.

CONCLUSION

What's interesting to note is how Cape Town has been able to leverage its natural beauty and appeal in the leisure space, and use that as the foundation



Century City Conference Centre & Hotel

on which to build a compelling business travel and events offering.

But that has counted for nothing in the face of the water crisis of the past few years, and the numbers back that up.

However, with that now

hopefully behind it, Cape Town has enough solid building blocks in place, across both the leisure and business travel spaces, to ensure it bounces back and once again becomes South Africa's number one destination. ■



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Why say something in 100 words when we can sum it up in just a few: all we want to do is offer you a seamless end-to-end journey from the time you book your trip to the time you're safely back home. It can be challenging to find the best deal for your hotel accommodation.

Every search can mean trawling through four or five different websites, calling hotels directly, cross checking and double checking before finally making a booking - all the time hoping no mistakes are made with all these manual tasks. After all this, you end up with flights, hotels and cars all sold through different channels. This means that if anything goes wrong, you'll need to contact multiple suppliers and you'll be faced with complicated reconciliation work with multiple records on multiple systems for just one trip.

IT'S A COMPLEX ECOSYSTEM

As the hospitality sector is experiencing both consolidation

and a multiplication of distribution channels, the hotel business is set to grow by 4.9% in global business travel spend in 2019. Approximately 550,000 new hotel rooms are projected in 2019 and hotel rates are expected to rise by 3.7% globally (Source: GBTA).

The corporate traveller is evolving too - and times are changing fast. Business travellers' expectations are being shaped by their leisure experiences. Travellers have become more empowered and demanding than ever before. They want choice, transparency in pricing and personalisation, whether travelling for business or leisure. Shopping around has become the norm.

What if we could tell you that you can shop around and

browse multiple hotels on one platform with your trusted travel management company?

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The Amadeus Hotel platform offers an extensive breadth and depth of choice in hotel accommodation. We remove the complexity, cost and inconvenience of having to shop multiple websites and booking systems by offering a wide variety of properties from combined sources, available to book in real time through **one centralised content platform**.

This Amadeus Platform allows your travel agent to access GDS hotel content (both hotel chains and independent hotels), plus hotels aggregators and **Amadeus Value Hotels** (Amadeus' own aggregator), in the same front office platform (either in Amadeus Selling Platform Connect or in their own front office through



Amadeus web services).

With full integration of all hotel booking data to mid and back-office systems, your travel agency will have better visibility and tracking capabilities on true hotel spend at agency, corporate client or individual traveller level.

“At Amadeus, we believe there is significant fragmentation in the way South African TMCs and corporations book their hotel content. The Amadeus Hotel Platform solves this problem by allowing to book the existing sources of content as well as incremental sources under the same booking screen. This adds fantastic efficiency to the TMCs and reduces the probability that hotel reservations are closed outside the TMC environment. Agencies that are taking full advantage of the Amadeus Hotel Platform are showing more than 50% of their PNRs with a hotel reservation included, and we think this number can still be improved,” says Vicente Bosque, Commercial Director – Business Travel Africa, Amadeus.

AND SO MUCH MORE...

The acquisition of **TravelClick, Inc.**, a leading global IT provider that serves more than 25,000 customers across 176 countries, marked an important step in the hospitality sector for us at Amadeus. We have a portfolio of innovative solutions serving hotels and chains of all sizes worldwide. This acquisition enhances our presence in the hospitality industry, not only broadening our portfolio, but also our know-how

and global presence. TravelClick provides innovative cloud-based solutions, including an independent and mid-size hotel Central Reservation System (CRS) and Guest Management Solution (GMS), as well as business intelligence and media solutions.

Our new distribution agreement with **Booking.com** will boost our accommodation content by 30%. No matter how and where travellers shop, they want greater choice and convenience when booking a trip. Every day 1.5 million room nights are reserved across 228 countries and territories worldwide via the Booking.com platform. Thanks to a new partnership between our two companies, travel sellers will now access the vast and rich content of the company's extensive listings. This includes everything from hotels, motels and resorts to homes, apartments and many other unique places to stay provided by Booking.com through the Amadeus Travel Platform.

Amadeus Value Hotels is our net rate hotel program, giving your travel consultant even more choice when booking hotels for you. As today's travellers demand choice and value for money, Amadeus Value Hotels ensures you, as the customer, will get a wide variety of accommodation options at the best possible price. What's more, there's no sign-up charge. In fact, we recently successfully launched Amadeus Value Hotels in South Africa earlier this year.

“Amadeus Value Hotels is great for several reasons, the

first being that it's so easy and straightforward to use. The product also provides great customer service – if a booking needs amending or cancelling you can just give them a call and they will resolve it quickly. One of the most beneficial aspects of it is that the rates are really competitive compared to other systems we have used in the past,” say Latisha Calland, Reservations Co-ordinator at Insight Booking Solutions Limited.

Hotels and accommodation should be on every business travel agent's agenda. Why?

Business travel is inherently valuable, generating over €1.3 trillion for the global economy in 2018 and growing at 7% per annum. In today's global economy, business travel is a strategic necessity in making organisations successful.

The hospitality sector is one of the most dynamic segments of the travel industry and continues to evolve. Twenty years ago, guests came to expect bathrobes in their hotel rooms, mini-bars, and hair dryers. Now they expect super-fast wi-fi, the latest tech in rooms, modern design, and personalised service.

The rise of smartphones and social media, combined with technological amenities like AI-enabled chatbots and in-room technology, make it ever more likely that guests of the future will place much higher demands on the travel and hospitality industry. At every stage of a journey – from booking agents to airports, hotels, meetings, restaurants and visitor attractions – no detail can be overlooked in the race for rich experiences. More than ever, the human touch of hospitality and travel consultants must be integrated with technological innovation – be it devices, platforms or applications – needed to meet modern consumer expectations.

WANT TO HEAR MORE?

Contact your trusted Travel Management Company or your Amadeus sales representative now. www.amadeus.com ■



JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA



INTERCONTINENTAL JOHANNESBURG SANDTON TOWERS

BACKGROUND: This five-star hotel is operated by South African hospitality company Tsogo Sun – which recently celebrated 50 years of operations – under franchise agreement with InterContinental Hotels Group, with a second InterContinental property operated by Tsogo Sun at O.R. Tambo International Airport. The Sandton property is one element in Tsogo Sun's 'Sandton Mile', consisting of the adjacent Sandton Sun and Sandton Convention Centre properties, and the Garden Court Sandton City on the other side of SCC. The InterContinental Johannesburg Sandton Towers opened in 1993 and underwent a refurb in 2008/2009.

WHERE IS IT? In Maude Street in the heart of Sandton, a two-minute walk from Sandton City Shopping Centre and a drive of about half an hour to O.R. Tambo International Airport, depending on traffic. The local Gautrain station is a walk of about 10 minutes away and thereafter is a 15-minute train ride to the airport. The hotel offers a complimentary shuttle to the station.

ROOMS: The InterContinental Johannesburg Sandton Towers has 231 rooms over a number of floors. After being directed from reception to the Club Floor for VIP check-in, we found our way to our 61.5m² Club Deluxe Suite, a corner room with a view over the rest of Sandton. Well, two rooms, actually, dominated by a large lounge and dining room with huge flat-screen TV, lounge suite, work desk, dining room table and coffee counter. The bedroom was 'small', but only in comparison with the large

lounge, and was more than adequate, with a king-size bed facing another large flat-screen TV and with decently-sized bathroom-en-suite. We gave the wi-fi a try and it was seamless to connect to, with great speed. Additional amenities included a walk-in closet, DVD player, Nespresso coffee machine, electronic safe, mini-bar, and 24-hour room service. The hotel's 'Standard' rooms are 36m², whilst the other options are 'Club Floor' rooms, 'Corner Deluxe' rooms, and the Penthouse suite, which is spread over two floors and comes with its own butler.

FOOD & DRINK: Having arrived around lunchtime and with one eye on an afternoon nap, we opted for room service, which for me meant sampling the Club Sandwich, which is my 'go-to' option. A generous portion, with French Fries, arrived about half an hour later and I wasn't disappointed. An excellent version of this simple, yet classic dish. For more formal dining, the hotel has the Atrium Restaurant on the ground floor, which has large windows looking out onto Sandton. Here, breakfast, lunch and dinner are served. We had breakfast on our way out, after a short stay, and here I went for the scrambled eggs, croissant and bacon combo, which was done just right. I'm not a fan of crispy bacon, so that was important, as was the quality of the coffee, which was hot and tasty. Throw in some attentive service and I can say that breakfast was a success!

BUSINESS: Guests in the Club suites also enjoy access to the Club Floor facilities, which include two private lounges, breakfast, snacks, canapés and

drinks, as well as a valet service for up to three items per stay, VIP check-in and one hour's use of a private boardroom. That boardroom is located across the road at sister property, the Sandton Sun. Otherwise, if you're looking for something bigger, the adjacent Sandton Convention Centre can be accessed directly from the hotel and is a walk of barely a minute. Here, Tsogo Sun can accommodate groups of virtually any size, from six people up to several thousand.

LEISURE: The hotel has a fitness centre and a heated outdoor pool, whilst Sandton City is situated over the road. It has a host of restaurants and movie theatres. If you're looking for a spa treatment, the adjacent Sandton Sun is where you'll need to go.

VERDICT: A premium property in the heart of Sandton, with quality service, good food, comfortable accommodation, and an inviting club lounge, if you're a corporate traveller who likes a bit of exclusivity. Certainly, if you need to be in Sandton and the budget allows, you can't go wrong.

Dylan Rogers ■

FACT FILE

CONTACT

A: Corner of Fifth & Maude Streets

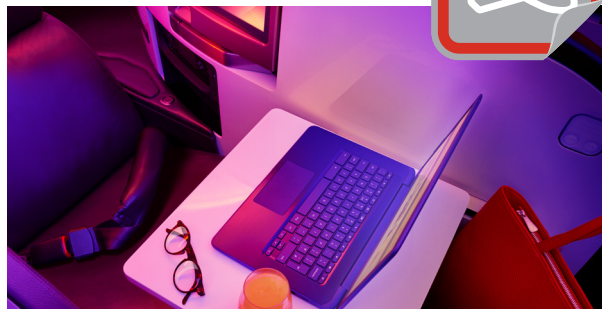
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LONDON-JOHANNESBURG



UPPER CLASS B787-9 Dreamliner

BACKGROUND: March 2018 saw Virgin Atlantic announce that it was launching a second daily flight between London and Johannesburg from October. The new flight – also operated by a Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner – was scheduled to depart Heathrow at 16h45 and land in Johannesburg at 05h40 local time. The return flight was scheduled to leave Johannesburg at 22h20, landing at Heathrow at 07h30.

CHECK-IN & SECURITY: I jumped off the tube and followed the signs to the correct terminal, where I found nothing in the way of a queue at check-in. Virgin Atlantic and Delta share a check-in area at Terminal 3 and Virgin has a dedicated desk for Upper Class passengers. I was early, but decided to use the self-service counters nearby, checked in, and printed my boarding pass. Thereafter, I was directed to the elevator next to the check-in desks which took me upstairs to Virgin Atlantic's private security screening area. Just a warning that the Heathrow security processes are pretty stringent. Don't leave this late!

LOUNGE: I then made my way to the Virgin Atlantic Clubhouse, which has many separate areas including an upstairs 'den' with a pool table, a quiet working area sectioned off by a glass wall, a kids' section, spa, and various seating options on different levels. I did struggle to find a spot with a plug for a few minutes, but eventually did in a bar-type area where a waiter quickly appeared to take my order. I stuck to water ahead of my flight and gladly

wolfed down a delicious hamburger from the à la carte menu. I had some time on my hands after that – and even though you'd usually struggle to get me to leave the Clubhouse – I popped out to do some duty-free shopping, having stored my bag with the lounge staff.

BOARDING: On return, the lounge staff said they'd call my 22h30 flight and they did at around 21h40. I made my way to Gate 13, where I had priority boarding, although I first went into a waiting room and waited about 10 minutes before priority boarding actually took place. So, there was a slight delay there. Once boarded, I was offered champagne, orange juice and water, had my coat taken, and I settled into my seat.

THE SEAT: The seat I found comfortable with fairly basic controls. To put the seat into the fully-flat position requires the help of a flight attendant – unless you've done it before – and you need to leave your seat. Otherwise, everything was fairly user-friendly, including a convenient plug point to charge my laptop and cellphone. I checked out the inflight entertainment and picked a movie, before doing a quick tour to see the bar area at the back of Upper Class. There was also a snack area where you can help yourself to a variety of drinks and snacks. Back in my seat, I explored the Herschel amenity kit and made myself comfortable.

SEAT PREFERENCE: The seat configuration in Upper Class is a herringbone configuration, in 1-1-1

layout. This means that the seats face away from the window. The seats on the left-hand side of the cabin are the more private, as the middle aisle backs onto you, so you are just looking at the wall to the rear of the seats. My preference would be for seats 1A to 11A, although 1 is closest to the galley and 11 closest to the bar. The middle seats are numbered 1G-9G and these look directly at 1K-11K, so bear that in mind, if picking a middle seat. Again, I would avoid 1K and 11K for the reasons already stated.

THE FLIGHT: There is wi-fi available onboard, but I opted not to try it out and instead went straight for a movie, whilst looking forward to a late dinner. This was in the form of the rump steak in rich braising sauce, with tomato and mozzarella tortellini and sautéed garlic kale. Delicious. I skipped desert, stayed hydrated with water, and settled into my movie, before passing out later. I woke about 90 minutes before landing, having enjoyed a great night's sleep on the flat bed, and requested a cup of tea, which arrived promptly. The same could be said for our flight, which landed bang on time in Johannesburg.

VERDICT: Outstanding option for the London-Johannesburg route, particularly if you've got time to explore the Clubhouse!

Dylan Rogers ■

FACT FILE

W: virgin-atlantic.com



Rob Collins

Group Chief
Strategy &
Operations Officer -
Sun International

Taking stock

*It's a pretty tough operating environment, with South Africa staring at a possible recession, and the hospitality industry is positioned to bear the brunt of that. It's against this backdrop that **Rob Collins**, Group Chief Strategy & Operations Officer at Sun International, took time out to talk to Business Traveller Africa, whilst also providing an update on the group's activities.*

Q: What's your view on the current state of the South African hotel industry?

A: Leisure travel has decreased because discretionary spend has been reduced. There is quite a nice hold in international travel, but the hotels benefitting from this market are in typically tourist destinations. The slide in the Rand's value has actually made South Africa more affordable for foreign travellers, but it must still be noted that even Cape Town is heavily down year-on-year, and so are all other hotel nodes. A good barometer is typically Sandton, where hotels right now are down. Aside from the economy, there is also a lot of new competition, not just from new hotels per se, but new styles of accommodation. There is a huge oversupply of accommodation at the moment from apartments masquerading as hotels, particularly in the Sandton node. And then there is Airbnb which came out of left field.

Q: What's your view on the opportunities in the different hotel market segments – 'luxury' versus 'mid-market', for example?

A: The weaker the Rand becomes the more bang foreign tourists get for their buck. If you're travelling with pounds, dollars or euros, you can now step up a notch and buy more luxury, because your currency goes a lot further. We're finding that bookings in premier deluxe hotels, like our Table Bay Hotel in the V&A Waterfront, are roughly 85% foreign tourists taking advantage of our weak Rand. In terms of domestic travel, people are looking for best price and best value for money. They frankly can't afford to stay

in five-star hotels. Many local businesses now have policies that prohibit staff from staying in top star hotels because everyone is trying to survive the pending recession. To save money, they've got systems, processes and software forcing employees to stay in two and three-star accommodation, four-star at a push. There's a lot of great accommodation in the three-star and four-star space, so it's not like it's a burden to stay in these hotels.

Q: What has been the market response to your 'three-tier' hotel offering at The Maslow at Time Square?

A: The Maslow Time Square is a five-star experience from the check-in and check-out, and breakfast – all of those are a premium deluxe experience. We built a five-star hotel with rooms of different sizes, to address different needs. There is the entry level room, which is typically for a guest who plans to spend an evening at the casino, and just needs to put his head on a pillow for a few hours before leaving the next morning. He doesn't need a lounge and multiple TVs, and he's not entertaining guests. Guests spending more time in the hotel will opt for a bigger room with more facilities, again, depending on what they are using it for. Proper five-star suites are obviously the biggest, and these are situated on the upper levels of the hotel. So we don't see The Maslow Time Square as being a three-tier hotel, but rather a five-star hotel experience with three different price points.

Q: Is The Maslow Time Square going to be your last hotel

opening for some time, or do you have your eye on any other hotel openings in the short-term?

A: As a group, we regard ourselves as innovative, strategic and relevant. We are a premium brand in the hospitality industry, and while The Maslow Time Square is our latest hotel, it's far from our last foray into the hospitality space. We actively look for relevant opportunities. We look for value add, whether that's through managing, or through bolting onto one of our precincts or resorts, or by adding more hotels to our existing portfolio of hotels. Sun City and GrandWest may even be ready for another hotel. We may even look at other ways of using our brand to appropriately get into alternative hospitality spaces.

Q: Does Sun International still regard itself as more of a gaming company, as opposed to a hotel operator?

A: Worldwide, gaming and hospitality go hand-in-hand. I don't know of any decent-sized casino that caters for food and beverage, entertainment and lifestyle that doesn't have a hotel, regardless of the casino offering. A hotel is an essential part of any integrated resort. Sun International never regards itself as either a gaming or hospitality company. We are invested in both industries. There is a strong bias on the gaming side, which is where the majority of our revenue is generated, but gaming cannot exist in isolation from hospitality. It would be more correct to describe Sun International as a gaming, lifestyle, hospitality and entertainment company. ■



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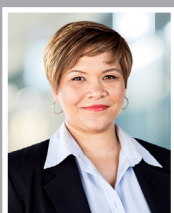
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Chairman

Carla da Silva, Air Mauritius Regional Manager Africa and Latin America, has been re-elected as Chairman of BARS (Board of International Airlines

South Africa). She was re-elected with an overwhelming vote from the African and international airlines present. BARS is the voice of the industry and works very closely with government stakeholders and the aviation value chain, to make sure that the cost of doing business for African and international airlines is sustainable.



Director

FCM Travel Solutions has appointed a new Director, **Melanie Walljee**, who took up the position at the beginning of June. Walljee joined the Flight

Centre Travel Group 12 years ago as a Travel Consultant. Her rise through the ranks has been steady, and she quickly moved from Consultant to Team Leader within the group. In 2017, Walljee briefly served as Director and GM of FCM Travel Solutions before becoming Operations Leader and Systems and Implementation Manager at FCM Travel Solutions.



Joint-CEO

The Comair board has appointed **Wrenelle Stander** as Joint-CEO: Airlines. Stander holds an MBA from Oxford Brookes University in the UK, as well as a

BA (Hons) degree from the University of Cape Town. She has held a range of executive leadership positions within the South African civil aviation industry, including Managing Director: Air Traffic and Navigation Services Company; Deputy Chief Executive Officer: South African Civil Aviation Authority; and Chief Director: Aviation and Maritime Regulation: Sasol Gas.

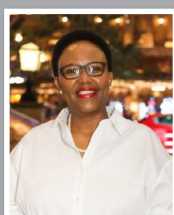
Country General Manager

Mövenpick Hotel & Residences Nairobi has appointed **Mehdi Morad** as General Manager and Country General Manager for Kenya. His focus will be on strengthening the positioning



of the hotel and driving operational performance and productivity. Additionally, as the Country Manager, Kenya for Accor, Morad will oversee the country

operations for five properties. With over 18 years of experience in the hospitality industry across Europe, Asia-Pacific, Middle East and Africa, Morad has held senior managerial positions with leading hotel companies, including Hyatt Hotels, Radisson Hotel Group, and Emaar Hospitality Group.



HR Manager

Montecasino has appointed **Tebogo Mphamo** as its new HR Manager. She started at Tsogo Sun as a Personal Assistant in Gaming in 1999 before

moving to Montecasino to work in Casino Operations in 2008. Before joining Tsogo Sun, Mphamo worked as an administrator for the SA Football Association, a Client Liaison Officer for Bop Recording Studios, and as an Executive Secretary for the IEC. Her studies have included the Management Development Programme (MDP) and a Senior MDP from Stellenbosch University Business School, BA (Hons) degree from the University of Lincoln (UK) and an Executive Development Programme through Stellenbosch University Business School.



General Manager

Garden Court Polokwane has appointed **Taku Borerwe** as the new General Manager. Borerwe completed a Higher National Diploma in Hotel

Management at the Bulawayo School of Catering in Zimbabwe. After the four-year programme he worked for two years at the Victoria Falls Safari Lodge before moving to South Africa. Borerwe then worked for a couple of smaller hotel groups before joining Tsogo Sun in 2006. Since then he has gained much experience within the food and beverage space, with some high level exposure to rooms and revenue management. He is currently studying a BCom in Financial Management with UNISA.



General Manager

Southern Sun Elangeni & Maharani has appointed **Wayne Smith** as General Manager of Durban's iconic complex. In this new role, Smith will be responsible

for overseeing the property, while supporting growth objectives, driving operations as well as maintaining service excellence. With a career spanning more than 20 years, Smith began his journey at Drakensberg Sun Resort, where he was first employed as a switchboard operator. Over the years Smith has developed a passion for the hospitality sector, which quickly saw him secure management roles at Southern Sun Cullinan, Umhlanga Sands Resort, Garden Court Blackrock and Garden Court South Beach. Most recently, he worked as the Hotel General Manager at Holiday Inn Sandton.



General Manager

Holiday Inn Sandton has appointed **Deborah Pillay** as its new General Manager. Pillay started her career at Garden Court Sandton and then moved to the

Sandton Sun in various roles including Front Office Manager and Revenue Manager. She has moved back into operations from head office where she was General Manager for Revenue and General Manager Corporate Sales.



General Manager

Sun International has appointed **Myan Moodley** as General Manager for Sibaya Casino & Entertainment Kingdom. Moodley moves from the Wild

Coast Sun Casino. His first job in the industry was as a trainee chef at the Southern Sun Hotel Inn. He moved to the Ritz Protea as a Night Auditor before advancing to Night Manager and then Front Office Manager. During his career, Moodley has been the General Manager at nine properties and was part of the leadership team that opened four hotels for the Southern Sun group, including Southern Sun Maputo.

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I'm **not** a robot



Claude Vankeirsbilck
CHIEF OPERATING
OFFICER: TOURVEST
TRAVEL SERVICES

*A few eyebrows were raised when CEO Morne du Preez said that Tourvest was “not just a travel management company, but a technology company that provides travel management services,” but the point was made and the industry took note. Here, Tourvest Chief Operating Officer, **Claude Vankeirsbilck**, further illuminates the point, whilst running through the details of the Amex GBT-HRG deal and its impact, over coffee in Johannesburg with editor Dylan Rogers.*

It's the biggest South African TMC story of 2019.

The details – for those in the industry – are well-known, but here's a quick recap.

American Express Global Business Travel (Amex GBT) acquired the Hogg Robinson Group (HRG) in 2018 and cemented its position as the world's largest TMC, whilst at the same time causing a major shift in the South African TMC industry.

That's because in South Africa the HRG relationship sat with Rennies Travel, but Amex GBT already had an existing long-standing partnership with Tourvest, who have been the holders of the local licence of American Express Travel Services for some time.

Something had to give and in early-2019 Rennies decided to part ways with HRG and join BCD Travel, paving the way for the consolidation and strengthening of Tourvest's relationship with Amex GBT.

A major development in the South African TMC space, with an impact on market share, but probably not the last of the change to the industry, according to Vankeirsbilck.

“We've certainly seen a contraction in the market and many companies are applying travel freezes, due to the economic conditions in South Africa, and that has to have an impact,” he says. “I think there will be more consolidation and the global brands are probably more suited and have the ability to ride out these kinds

of waves.”

No surprise that technology (duty of care is the other) comes up for discussion when I push Vankeirsbilck on what the most topical issues in his space are, particularly as Tourvest has invested significantly in its Travelit product and Du Preez has made it clear where the company's priorities lie. Tourvest has also found synergy with Amex GBT, which has also recently been promoting the tech at its disposal, including the likes of products such as online expense and booking tool, KDS Neo.

“Customers are quickly realising that there are better ways of doing things and it's being driven by the travellers,” says Vankeirsbilck. “The travellers know that there are technology solutions out there that can make their lives easier and their transactions more efficient, and that's what's driving the procurement guys to look at technology and how it can improve cost of travel, cost of programme, and how it can make travellers' lives easier.”

That includes the evolution of Artificial Intelligence and its greater adoption in the travel management industry. Vankeirsbilck concedes that South Africa remains a little behind the more developed markets, but that this technology is developing all the time and will find its way to these shores.

“There's a lot of work going on behind the scenes to get that learning, that traveller behaviour,

and ensure that it becomes part of the booking process,” he says. “You're going to find that these technology solutions, and particularly the Neo product, have some really exciting functionality that is gained from learning what the traveller does, and his or her behaviour.”

That being said, and despite Tourvest driving a ‘tech first’ agenda, Vankeirsbilck strikes me as a little more cautious when it comes to the categorization of Tourvest as a tech, rather than a travel management company.

“We recognise that we still have to provide travel management services to our customers and that we're not robots,” he says, to the extent that Tourvest actually has a company slogan that goes something along those lines.

“We really live up to that, because we still have to engage our customers, we still have to talk to our customers, and we still have to build a relationship with our customers, although we know that what's driving our relationship with our customers is technology,” says Vankeirsbilck. “We have to remember that we're still in a people business and we can't act like robots, even though what's driving the transaction is robotics. So, it's a bit of a balance of the two.”

Nicely put, and that's probably the issue most travel management companies are currently grappling with.

Now, where's that robot...

Dylan Rogers ■

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