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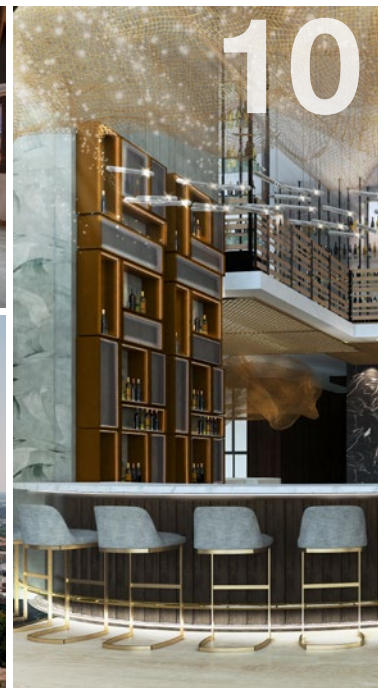
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Africa's tallest building is an ambitious project for Legacy Hotels & Resorts, but it is set to redefine how we view mixed-use living and working, and there is no doubt that it will leave its mark on the Sandton business and property landscape. It's been a project many years in the making, but it looks to be worth the wait, offering a range of premium services and options, and being ideally situated in the heart of South Africa's financial capital.



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It's basically "in the eyes of the beholder" nowadays, with premium or 'luxury' now a lot more subjective than it used to be, thanks to changing views on what constitutes luxury and an emerging travel class that has a different take on this travel industry segment. No longer is it about old school 'bells and whistles', but rather a more personal and authentic experience, which has meant that suppliers in the premium space have had to put their thinking caps back on and come up with innovation and new products that speak to this revised view of the luxury experience.

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**T**hey say that times are tough in South Africa, and they are. The economy is under pressure, projected growth is minimal, and the country just can't seem to drag itself out of the abyss it fell into during the Jacob Zuma years.

But, it's not all doom and gloom.....or at least not for everyone, and it's perhaps slightly comforting to see that some South Africans are finding a way to still live out their travel dreams.

In fact, according to online travel agency Travelcheck.co.za, even though South African travellers face unfavourable exchange rates, stagnant economic growth and less disposable income, international travel continues unabated.

The August 2019 analysis by Cape Town Air Access, a division of Wesgro, revealed the top outbound destinations for flights originating in and returning to South Africa based on passenger volume recorded between 2016 and 2018. In 2018, the top spots were occupied by regional destinations: Lesotho, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Botswana and Namibia respectively. Further afield, the top 10 was rounded out by the UK, Spain, Mauritius and USA, in that order.

There was a 3% increase in outbound travel between 2017 and 2018 and the number of outbound departures was forecast to increase by another 3% by the end of 2019.

To understand current outbound travel trends, Travelcheck reviewed bookings made through its website over the past couple of months. In July 2019, London was the most booked destination, while Harare was the most popular choice in August. Based on the same data set, Mauritius, Windhoek and Munich were also popular outbound destinations in those two months.

According to Travelcheck, increased air access has helped offset the limitations imposed on overseas travel in a challenging economy, with Cape Town making significant strides in this area in recent years.

In 2018, RwandAir, Kenya Airways, Austrian and Cathay Pacific started direct flights to Cape Town. As a result, international passenger numbers at Cape Town International Airport grew by more than 9% last year. In August, Kenya Airways announced increased frequency between Cape Town and Nairobi.

In 2019, more carriers have entered Cape Town's air access pipeline, including United Airlines, which is confirmed to take off in December this year, linking the Mother City with New York.

Another interesting result saw Wesgro's data measuring the number of international trips taken for leisure purposes versus those taken for business in 2018. The report said that 64% of outbound international trips from South Africa were for leisure, while 36% were for business.

That's a pretty big number – or percentage – particularly for a country with economic challenges.

**Dylan Rogers**  
Editor  
[dylan@thefuture.co.za](mailto:dylan@thefuture.co.za)

#### PUBLISHER

Richard Lendrum

#### EDITOR

Dylan Rogers  
[dylan@thefuture.co.za](mailto:dylan@thefuture.co.za)

#### JOURNALIST

Kate Kennedy

#### CONTRIBUTORS

Jenni Reid

#### DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Nadette Voogd

#### SUBSCRIPTIONS AND PRODUCTION

Mabel Ramafoko  
[mabel@thefuture.co.za](mailto:mabel@thefuture.co.za)

#### SOUTH AFRICAN OFFICE

Postal Address:  
PO Box 1746, Saxonwold, 2132  
Physical Address:  
6 Rodwiella Rd, Edenburg  
Telephone: +27 11 327 6107

#### NIGERIAN OFFICE

3rd Floor, EuniBrown House 195,  
Ikorodu Road, Palmgrove, Lagos, Nigeria  
Tel: +234 1 740 3236  
Mobile: +234 803 963 0155

#### PUBLISHER – NORTH & WEST AFRICA

Tope Ogbeni-Awe  
[tope.ogbeni-awe@topcommng.com](mailto:tope.ogbeni-awe@topcommng.com)

#### EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Mohammed Abdullahi

Business Traveller Africa is published under licence from Perry Publications Limited.  
Warwick House, 25 Buckingham Palace Road, London, SW1W 0PP.  
Tel: +44 20 7821 2740  
[www.businesstraveller.com](http://www.businesstraveller.com)

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## Marriott Announces New Africa Signings

Marriott International has announced that it expects to add 40 properties and over 8,000 rooms across Africa by the end of 2023. The group made the announcement at the Africa Hotel Investment Forum in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Marriott also announced signed agreements to open its first property in Cape Verde and further expand its presence in Ethiopia, Kenya and Nigeria, adding to its existing portfolio of 140 properties. Key markets fuelling Marriott's growth in Africa include Morocco, South Africa, Algeria and Egypt. Marriott's recent signings in Africa are the 128-room Four Points by Sheraton São Vicente, Laginha Beach (Cape Verde); the 241-room Four Points by Sheraton Mekelle (Ethiopia); the Protea Hotel by Marriott Kisumu (Kenya); and the Residence Inn by Marriott Lagos Victoria Island (Nigeria).



## Airlink Introduces Additional JHB-Pemba Flight

Airlink has increased the frequency of its service between Johannesburg and Pemba in Northern Mozambique, in response to market demand. From 24 September, Airlink added a Tuesday flight to its weekly schedule. Flights depart Johannesburg at 10h10 and arrive in Pemba at 13h00, before departing Pemba at 13h30 and arriving back in Johannesburg at 16h25. The additional flight will complement Airlink's current schedule which operates on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, operating one of Airlink's Embraer ERJ135 37-seat regional jets.

## Amadeus to Offer Hertz's Full Inventory

Amadeus has signed a new agreement with The Hertz Corporation to provide travel agencies and travellers around the world with access to Hertz's full inventory across its Hertz, Dollar, Thrifty and Firefly brands. Additionally, Hertz is also the first vehicle rental provider to leverage open technology through XML to offer options and features with more agility. Through this agreement, Hertz will gain access to Amadeus's suite of digital media and business intelligence products to reduce cost and improve fleet management.

## Radisson Reports African Growth

The Radisson Hotel Group has signed 11 new hotels in Africa in the first nine months of 2019. To date this year, Radisson has opened three hotels in Africa – the Radisson Blu Hotel & Conference Center, Niamey in Niger, the Radisson Blu Hotel, Algiers Hydra in Algeria, and the Radisson Blu Hotel & Residence Nairobi Arboretum in Kenya. One more opening is scheduled before year end – the Radisson Blu Hotel Casablanca (Morocco), which is scheduled to open in November. In addition to the portfolio of six hotels signed in Egypt earlier this year, the remaining new hotel deals include the Radisson RED Johannesburg Rosebank, South Africa; the Radisson Hotel La Baie d'Alger Algiers, Algeria; the Radisson Blu Hotel Antananarivo Waterfront, the Radisson Hotel Antananarivo Waterfront, and the Radisson Serviced Apartments Antananarivo City Centre in Madagascar.

## New Hotel Opens in Cape Town

The Signature Lux Hotel by ONOMO has expanded its portfolio with the opening of the Signature Lux Hotel Foreshore. Located on Heerengracht Street in the Cape Town city centre, Signature Lux Hotel Foreshore is conveniently situated on the MyCiTi bus route and offers guests a complimentary daily shuttle service to and from the airport and the V&A Waterfront. The hotel has 157 rooms, a bar and a 'trendy-but-tasteful' dining area where guests can work and relax. ONOMO Hotel Group is present in business capitals such as Casablanca, Douala, Dakar, Abidjan, Libreville, Bamako, Lomé, Johannesburg, Durban, Conakry, Kigali and Rabat.



## Wings Travel Enjoying Significant Growth

Wings Travel Management is on track to experience 40% energy sector growth of up to \$100 million, after already winning over \$50 million in new business around the globe over the last six months. New business includes the regional appointment in the Middle East and North Africa to one of the world's largest providers of drilling, pipeline and construction products and services with a contract value of approximately \$35 million. In addition, Wings has secured the global appointment to provide travel and logistics services to one of the world's largest oil and gas drilling contractors in the USA, Canada, Mexico and South America.



## Corporate Traveller Launches 'CT Lifestyle'

Corporate Traveller, a division of the Flight Centre Travel Group, has launched CT Lifestyle, a dedicated leisure service for South African business travellers. CT Lifestyle provides exclusive access to the Flight Centre Travel Group's strategic partnerships and global buying power for their clients' leisure and 'bleisure' travel. Leisure travel perks for corporates include access to the world's most comprehensive choice of airfares as well as a range of tailor-made holidays through the Flight Centre Travel Group.

## Rennies and BCD SA Join Forces

BCD Travel South Africa is merging with Rennies Travel. Earlier this year, Rennies Travel joined BCD's Global Network after parting ways with HRG. That followed the 2018 news that American Express Global Business Travel had bought out HRG. Amex GBT already had an existing long-standing relationship with another of South Africa's big players, Tourvest, who have been the holders of the local licence of American Express Travel Services for some time. Hence, Rennies leaving the HRG stable and joining forces with BCD, who already had a South African partner in Connex Travel, trading as BCD Travel South Africa. With both these entities owned by Bidvest, a merger was the logical next step. The merged agency will operate as Rennies BCD Travel and the new management team will be headed up by CEO Bronwyn Philipps, who previously served as CEO of Rennies Travel. BCD SA CEO Marco Cristofoli will remain a member of the senior leadership team. (For more, see page 32).

## CFS Launches Pure Flight Programme

Comair Flight Services has launched its carbon offsetting initiative, the CFS Pure Flight Programme. CFS is the first airline in Africa to go carbon neutral on all its flights and the offset cost is automatically included in the price of any of its charter flights. The CFS Pure Flight Programme will offset aircraft CO2 emissions by supporting various projects that not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but also aim to alleviate poverty.



## Air Namibia Continues to Fly as Scheduled

After requesting emergency financial aid from the Namibian government, Air Namibia has said that it will continue to operate as scheduled. No decision has been taken by the shareholder, the Namibian government, or the board to close Air Namibia, nor is there any pending application for the liquidation of Air Namibia by the end of September, as reported in the media. Air Namibia says it shall continue to fly as per the published schedule for the foreseeable future. The airline is receiving assistance from its shareholder as per the budgetary provision and allocation as announced at the beginning of the current financial year.

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**Wayne Troughton**  
CEO: HTI Consulting

# African hotels need to woo the millennial market

In 2019, business travel doesn't look much like it did 10 years ago. A younger, more tech-savvy global workforce has emerged over the past decade and is demanding more bang for its working buck.

As the largest consumer group in the world today, it's impossible to ignore the impact this generation is having and will continue to have for decades to come, as they settle into their prime spending years.

By 2020, millennials (those born from 1981 to 1996) will comprise half of the global workforce and, according to the 2015 GTBA Business Traveler Sentiment Index, are twice as likely to want to travel more for business than Baby Boomers.

If millennials had a LinkedIn profile, it would likely say:

- Proficient with and adaptive to technology, but still value face-to-face meetings as a priority
- Adaptable
- Interested in international travel and new cultural experiences
- More preferential toward social travel amenities (free unlimited wi-fi, social spaces, shared workspaces)
- Focused on work-life balance
- Quick to change for a better deal or more value (high importance placed on value of services and brand loyalty)
- Emotionally-connected to brands (viewed as extensions of their own values)
- Open to giving feedback (i.e. review sites and social media)
- Frequent users of the sharing economy (accommodation and transit)

## THE AFRICAN MILLENNIAL BUSINESS TRAVELLER

The millennial impact is already being keenly felt in Africa, where millennials have overtaken their predecessors, the Baby Boomers, as the largest demographic. South Africa alone has over 14 million millennials making up approximately 27% of the population.

What makes this so important is the fact that Africa's youth are driven by similar concerns and realities to their global counterparts. This makes it critical for hotels operating in Africa to understand the unique challenges and opportunities of the continent's millennial customers – and to build meaningful relationships with them and cater to the level of service they demand.

The African hotel space remains largely dominated by traditional hotel brands catering to the Baby Boomer market, with millennial brands remaining very limited. Those that have entered the continent are largely concentrated in South Africa and include the Radisson RED V&A Waterfront, Signature Lux by Onomo in Sandton and Cape Town (V&A Waterfront and Foreshore), and, to some extent, the Protea Fire and Ice! by Marriott.

There has been increased interest from international operators to introduce their brands that target millennials to the continent. Once their core flags have been established, operators will look to differentiate and focus on sub-segments and niche markets. Brands such as JO&JOE, 25hours and Mama Shelter (Accor); Canopy, Motto and Tru by Hilton; Aloft and Moxy by Marriott; Hyatt Centric and Radisson RED have been developed specifically for the millennial traveller, however location remains key to the success of such developments. Whilst hotel opportunities across the continent are diverse, not all represent an opportunity for millennials.

Another area that remains largely untapped in Africa is the co-living environment. Accor, with its JO&JOE brand, represents one of the few global hotel groups that have entered this space. Co-living represents group living with shared kitchen and social spaces. Whilst this type of living is increasingly being adopted in global cities, it is also a space that represents an opportunity for hotels in much the same way as hotel apartments, but for millennials. Co-working integration is also a trend that is gaining traction globally.

Hoteliers entering this space include Accor with the creation of the WOJO and MAMA Works brands. These will be springboards in creating a work/stay/play ecosystem that appeals to the flexible lifestyles of millennials. Off the back of the early successes indicated by the co-working spaces provided in Africa through the likes of WeWork, integration of co-working space or a re-think of lobby space in some of operator's more contemporary brand offerings could be likely to cater for the diverse needs of young professionals.

Next month, I'll look at what African millennials expect from their customer experiences, how to gain their loyalty and the things that matter most to this up-and-coming group of business travellers. ■





## Delivering value in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

**J**ust because you can, doesn't mean you should. That seems to be the over-arching outcome of a recent ASATA survey among South African business travellers, who were asked to weigh in on the value they believe their travel agent should provide.

Almost five years after ASATA conducted its 21st century travel agent study, we're launching the 2.0 version, looking at how the value proposition has changed.

In addition to online surveys, we conducted telephonic interviews with our customers – corporate travellers and corporate procurement managers – to see where the gaps lie and how we need to re-engineer our respective businesses to ensure we're delivering the value our customers expect.

Flexibility, security, value and insider knowledge by far emerged as they key areas where TMCs could deliver value to corporate

travellers. It's also true that many of you were willing to take ownership over several elements of planning and booking travel instead of relying on your TMC.

However, when it came to saving time, helping with complex travel plans, being available and delivering a knowledgeable, personalised service, nothing beats your TMC for corporate travel peace of mind.

Travel management is no longer about cost-cutting. It hasn't been for a while. Today, buyers and TMCs are more concerned with balancing company needs and the overall needs of the traveller – improving productivity, staff retention and travel policy development.

This fresh take on our 21st Century Travel Agent is aimed at equipping our members with the insights we need to ensure we evolve our value proposition and align it with what their corporate

travel customers most desire.

Beyond safety and travel alerts, our customers expect us to have advanced destination information, knowledge about product and even the best business class seats on an aircraft, helping you sift through the plethora of information that exists around travel.

These and other insights were shared at ASATA's recent Travel Summit, which brought together industry stakeholders to examine the biggest risks facing travel businesses and what the new battleground is for clients and what it requires from us as the travel industry.

With more choice than ever before in the history of travel, now more than ever it's essential we look for opportunities to clearly define our value. ■

**Otto de Vries**  
ASATA CEO



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# THE LEONARDO Introducing the lap of luxury

*There's a building in the heart of Sandton that has undergone steady growth as it branches into the sky. It's one that now towers above all, can be seen when approaching Johannesburg from all directions, and is now taking centre stage in Africa's financial capital. This is The Leonardo.*

**S**tanding 55 stories in the sky, The Leonardo is Africa's tallest and most iconic building.

It's the latest venture between the Legacy Group and Nedbank CIB and is a glorious mixed-use development that is raising the bar, in terms of lifestyle, concierge and luxury living, whilst at the same time taking centre stage at the very heart of Africa's richest square mile.

The Leonardo is the most exclusive residential, commercial and retail development in Sandton and comprises street level shops; an above-ground, four-level podium with a swimming pool; exclusive Aurum Restaurant and various other facilities; commercial, sectional title office space; 240 apartments; eight

penthouses; and the pièce de resistance, The Leonardo Suite – a 3200m<sup>2</sup> three-floor penthouse with a 360-degree view and 1300m<sup>2</sup> garden area, with an asking price of R250 million that makes it the most expensive sectional title property ever sold in South Africa.

More than just an apartment building, The Leonardo boasts offices, apartments, a kids' play area, a Nurture to Nature Creche, a future hotel, a 360-seater Leonardo Conference Centre, a restaurant, a 25-metre swimming pool, gym and spa, exclusive sky bar called Alto 234, manicured gardens and an upmarket bar with separate wine cellar, to name just a few of its luxury amenities.

The sheer scale of the property is unlike any other attempted in Africa and totals 120 000m<sup>2</sup>,

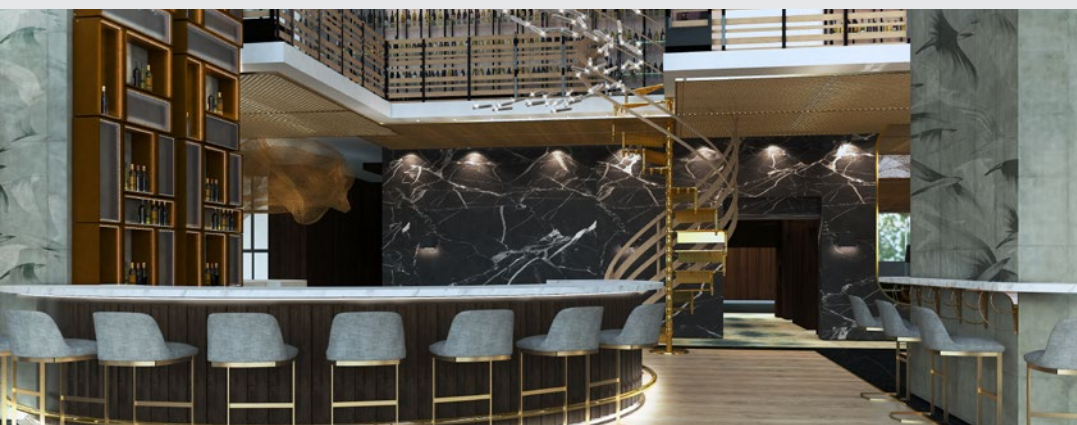
making it the biggest development Legacy has ever undergone – the culmination of decades of experience in developing some of Africa's most iconic luxury lifestyle, resort and hotel developments.

## WHAT MAKES THE LEONARDO UNIQUE?

Beyond its luxury finishings, furnishings and modern bespoke trappings, it has been shaped around the concept of 'lifestyle living'. When you venture into the building, you may never have to leave. From the concierge services at the very ground level that follow you through its retail floors, business areas and concierge offices, to your children's school, the culinary options on offer and the apartments themselves – you can live, work, play and shop in one city, within a city.

The concierge services for businesses are like no other and a first at this level in Africa. What you can expect as a business owner or tenant is a new form of business living where, for example,





your car will be parked for you, a team will fully service your offices to a luxury service level, and you will be offered all the trappings that to date have been reserved for only some of the wealthiest corporate businesses.

Additional office services include an office rental pool that will be managed on your behalf by Legacy, as short-term business rental options exist for commuting businessmen who need an office for a short duration. There are also multiple central meeting areas on offer, all of which can be fully served, catered for and managed on your behalf. Again, as a result of its lifestyle element and being a fully-serviced mixed-use development, it is the perfect environment from which to avoid the notorious Sandton traffic.

The interiors are not only luxury, they are downright lavish, and no expense has been spared

in creating an interior palette that rivals the best in the world. From its furnishings to its finishings and right through to the bespoke artworks that adorn every space, wall and pause area – the property is a literal gallery that celebrates and lauds the works of Africa's finest artists and creative minds.

Due to its location, The Leonardo will prove to be one of the most accessible and convenient properties in the Sandton market. Not only does it stand as an all-inclusive and self-contained city within a city, it has direct access to the amenities of Maude street, is an amble away from Sandton City and Nelson Mandela Square, and is within walking distance of the local Gautrain station – offering direct access to O.R. Tambo International Airport.

The Leonardo is also a stone's throw from Legacy's other premier Sandton developments,

including The Michelangelo, The Michelangelo Towers, The DAVINCI Hotel and Suites and The Raphael Penthouse Suites, not to mention the Legacy Mall, Legacy Corner Mall and the Maximillien, Parc Ferme and Piccolo Mondo restaurants.

This is not premier-grade living, it is superior-grade living and stands as a beacon of hope for all Africans in what are trying and tough economic times, not just for South Africa, but the continent as a whole.

### INTERESTING FACTS

- R3 billion investment
- Over 230m high
- Africa's Tallest Building – certified by Council of Tall Buildings & Urban Habitat International
- Has 1,251 parking spaces
- Boasts a 44m x 6m video wall that overlooks Maude and West Streets
- Public areas fashioned on an 'art gallery' style
- Aurum Restaurant with triple volume space, located among the keyhole columns
- Expansive swimming pool deck, with 25m-long pool
- Nurture to Nature Creche, gym, spa and pool bar overlook the pool
- 240 apartments
- 140 six-star luxury hotel rooms on floors 43-48
- A hotel reception and restaurant on the 42nd floor
- Eight superior luxury penthouses
- The Leonardo Suite, taking up 1900m<sup>2</sup> under roof with 1300m<sup>2</sup> of garden area
- 55th floor Alto 234 bar and entertainment venue
- Created around 2,000 direct employment opportunities and between 18,000 and 20,000 indirect employment opportunities through materials, supply chain, manufacturing and industry

### CONTACT

Legacy Hotels and Resorts

T: +27 11 806 6800

E: theleonardo@legacyhotels.co.za

W: legacyhotels.com ■



# Defining luxury

*The words 'premium' and 'luxury' mean different things to different people, specifically in the travel space, where suppliers are currently grappling with these definitions, as they look to deliver a product that ticks all the right boxes.*











**W**hat is 'luxury' or 'premium' travel? It's the million-dollar question, isn't it?

It's also a question that a lot of travel suppliers are asking themselves, particularly those in the business of serving the top end of the market.

That's because there's no use developing a product for the highest spenders without actually understanding them, their needs, and what their definition of 'premium' or 'luxury' is.

That's regardless of whether your product is business or leisure travel-focused.

Wrapping this argument nicely is the notion that what we previously understood or defined as 'luxury' has changed beyond recognition and is now more subjective than ever before.

"We have entered a new era of luxury travel," says the executive summary in Amadeus's '*Shaping the Future of Luxury Travel - Future Traveller Tribes 2030*' report.

"As newly affluent citizens pop up in different regions of the world and the travel industry expands to meet their demands, how can travel brands cater for more luxury customers while somehow maintaining a sense of exclusivity?"

The report goes on to say that "as emergent middle classes seek the material aspect of luxury travel, more mature markets are craving a new, evolved kind of luxury. This is why offering luxury customers a relevant, personal and exclusive experience will become even more crucial than it is today – it will be a differentiating factor between old and new luxury."

According to research findings released in November of 2018 by Radiant Insights, an American market research and consulting company offering syndicated research studies, customized reports, and consulting services, the luxury travel market is predicted to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 6.83% globally.

***“As newly affluent citizens pop up in different regions of the world and the travel industry expands to meet their demands, how can travel brands cater for more luxury customers while somehow maintaining a sense of exclusivity?”***

According to the Radiant Insights report, this is largely due to "the rising inclination towards unique and exotic holiday experiences, increasing personal disposable income in both developed and developing economies across the globe, and the growing middle and upper middle-class population globally."

It goes on to say that "factors



# *unwind*

after the grind

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responsible for robust market growth include the substantial impact of social media on the luxury travel market in the last few years. Additionally, the vast consumer base and emergence of new destinations, along with improved service standards, are expected to drive the growth of luxury travel market in the upcoming years.”

With all of this in mind, it’s probably no surprise to hear from those close to the ground that this growth is reflected in the figures they see.

Legacy Hotels & Resorts is a great example, thumbing its nose at the struggling South African economy and embarking on its most ambitious project yet, the impressive The Leonardo in the heart of Sandton in Johannesburg, which you see on the cover of this issue of the magazine.

It’s officially Africa’s tallest building, with high-end luxury furnishings and services all the way through that are all tailored to the premium market.

“The economic downturn, whether in Africa or globally, does impact on the number of ‘premium travellers’ and some companies have definitely cut their ‘per-diem’ spend,” says Paddy Brearley, Managing Director of Legacy Hotels & Resorts. “However, with the growth in Far Eastern and Indian travellers to our shores, it is anticipated that there will be an increase in premium travellers in the near future.”

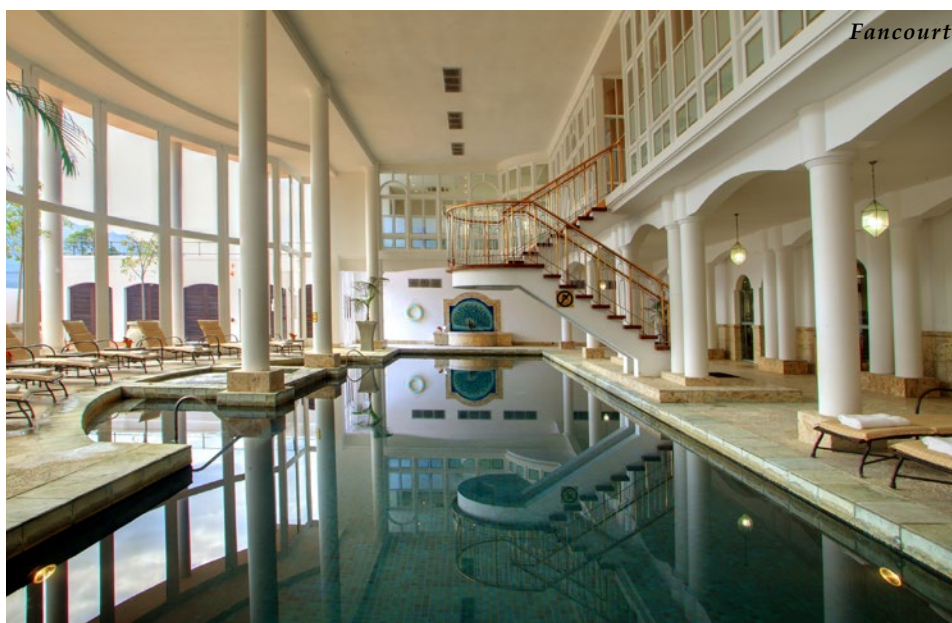
It’s not just The Leonardo in the Legacy stable that caters to the premium traveller, with properties such as the Michelangelo Hotel, the Michelangelo Towers, DAVINCI Hotel & Suites, and Raphael Penthouse Suites – all in Sandton, incidentally – all servicing the top end of the market.

If Legacy didn’t believe in the sustainability and robust nature of this market segment, it would be in some trouble.

“In essence, we believe that the top end of the market is here to stay, and by offering personal care and friendly service, our properties stand an excellent chance of growing market share in



Emirates



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#### Flight days

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Saturday

#### Departure-Arrival

10:15am - 22:40pm

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#### **OUT OF PRETORIA** (Lunch & Dinner Available)

October 2019: 19, 20, 22, 27  
November 2019: 12-17, 19-30  
December 2019: 9-14

January 2020: 11, 21, 29-31  
February 2020: 10, 11, 18, 25  
March 2020: 3-, 24

#### **OUT OF CAPE TOWN** (Only dinner charters are available)

October 2019: 18, 23, 25, 30  
November 2019: 8, 13, 14, 22, 29  
December 2019: 6, 13, 18, 20

January 2020: 10, 15, 17, 22, 24, 29  
February 2020: 12, 14, 19, 21, 28  
March 2020: 4, 11, 18, 20, 25, 27





the very important corporate and conference arena,” says Brearley. Bullish, indeed!

### PREMIUM AIR TRAVEL

But, whilst the world’s premium hotels and groups continue to wrestle with how best to maintain or even grow this market share, they are not alone, if one looks at all the major players in the premium travel value chain.

The airlines, for example, are wrestling with how best to approach their premium offerings, particularly as corporates look at cost-cutting exercises and no longer automatically book their execs into first or business class on a short-haul flight.

“You can see it in the air with the proliferation of premium economy in many airlines,” says BCD Travel South Africa CEO, Marco Cristofoli. “With this class you currently can’t get a seat for love or money. It’s incredibly popular. You can see demand for

business class shrinking and you can say the same for the hotel space. You see it in corporate travel policies, as well, and it’s big corporates – not just the small guys. Everybody is cutting back where they can and the airlines are cleverly tailoring their product to demand.”

The Lufthansa Group is a good example, launching a premium economy product on Lufthansa as far back as in 2015 and following suit with Austrian Airlines last year. The near future will see a premium economy product on SWISS International Air Lines’ long-haul aircrafts as well.

Cristofoli makes a fair point, with just about all of the world’s major airlines now offering a premium economy product and meeting that demand.

That being said, right at the front of the plane is the where the big money is made and still remains a focus area for many airlines, with some reporting that

it’s not all doom and gloom in this space.

“The premium market has been very robust in recent years, having strongly bounced back from the global economic downturn,” says Bob Schumacher, United Airlines’ Regional Managing Director Sales.

December will see United launch a direct service between New York Newark and Cape Town in South Africa, whilst earlier this year saw the airline unveil its Premium Plus product and join the flood of operators now offering a premium economy service.

“Our customers have a range of travel needs and requirements, with a significant percentage seeking to travel with the highest levels of comfort and service,” says Schumacher. “This has always been the case and this continues to grow as a segment. As growth has returned to economies, and business volumes with it, United has witnessed a strong demand in the premium cabins. This is undoubtedly true also for many of our competitors and especially in the longer flight segment markets.”

That may be the case, but airlines remain under pressure to keep innovating and showing ‘value’ for every rand, dollar, euro etc spent by a corporate or individual luxury traveller. The end result is not only the unbundling of a lot of airline products, but also new products that speak directly to the premium traveller.

For example, the Lufthansa Group offers a complimentary luxury BMW chauffeur drive service to its first class, HON Circle and business class guests. This service transports them directly from their home or office to the airport and can also be booked for the return journey. It’s exclusive to passengers flying on Lufthansa, SWISS and Austrian Airlines-operated flights departing from South Africa.

“Premium passengers certainly do have a high expectation from the product and service of the airlines they choose to travel with,” says Dr. Andre Schulz, General Manager of the Lufthansa Group Southern Africa. “One of



the key factors for those travelling in business class and first class is to arrive at their destination hassle-free, relaxed and ready to start their business day."

The Lufthansa Group is also investing heavily in its lounge facilities throughout its various hubs. That includes in Frankfurt, where its Welcome Lounge and First Class Terminal offers guests the opportunity to refresh and have a meal or relax before embarking on the next leg of their journey. From the First Class Terminal, guests are chauffeured directly to their departing aircraft.

"This market is very important to us," says Schulz. "Germany, Switzerland and Austria are some of South Africa's key trading partners and this means that the premium traveller segment is significantly utilised by corporate passengers flying between South Africa and the Lufthansa Group hubs in Frankfurt, Munich,

Zurich and Vienna.

United launched its Polaris business service on all long-haul international flights in December of 2016. It features fine dining and a reimagined, sleep-enhancing experience for intercontinental travellers, including elevated inflight food and beverages, custom bedding from Saks Fifth Avenue, comfortable pyjamas and exclusive amenity kits with products from Sunday Riley.

At the United Polaris lounges, customers can enjoy high-end shower suites, rest pods with day beds, and pre-flight dining.

On average, United says it plans to add one aircraft with both the new United Polaris business seat and the new United Premium Plus seat every 10 days from now through to 2020.

#### DIFFERENT TAKE ON 'LUXURY'

Let's return to the debate around

*"One of the key factors for those travelling in business class and first class is to arrive at their destination hassle-free, relaxed and ready to start their business day."*

what constitutes 'luxury' or 'premium'.

Sure, in the corporate travel space it's little easier to define, largely due to star grading (hotels) and airline travel classes, although within those segments the finer details are changing, as suppliers take a greater interest in the needs of their customers.

Adding to that complexity is the changing profile of travellers and suppliers are having to do a

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This offer is exclusive to passengers flying on Lufthansa, Swiss International Air Lines & Austrian Airlines operated flights departing from South Africa.

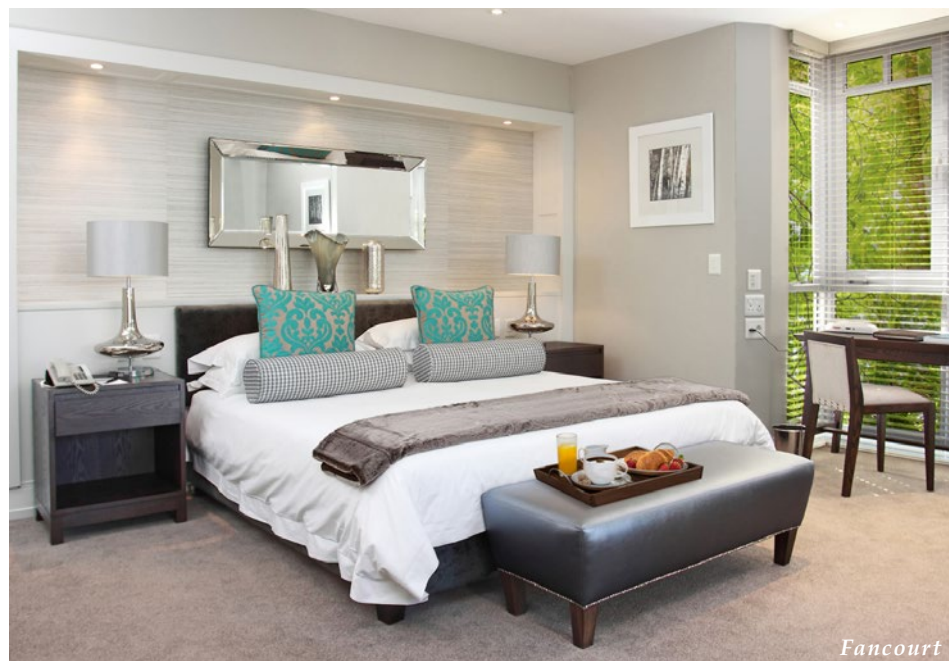
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To book your chauffeur drive, please visit [www.lufthansa-bmw-transfer.co.za](http://www.lufthansa-bmw-transfer.co.za) or scan the QR code. T's & C's apply







lot of work to better understand their customers, particularly those emerging out of the 'millennial' segment.

No surprise, then, to see some of the big players dedicating a lot of time and research to this better understanding, as they look to tailor their premium offerings using a more intuitive approach.

Hilton Hotels & Resorts is a good example, with the group recently embarking on a research study that found that "73% of young professionals have a better travel experience when they spend free time on their own."

Now, that sort of insight is of immense value to a hotel group

such as Hilton, particularly if you're in the busy of deciding what to put in your premium suite, hotel restaurant or lobby area.

The Hilton study was all about trying to understand the next generation of business travellers, so it set out to "uncover the travel highs and lows for young professionals, ages 23-35, who attend meetings while on the road."

The survey revealed that, while young business travellers prefer a buzzing social environment and in-person interactions during regular work hours, they would rather spend their evenings on

their own.

The research identified that 84% of young business travellers say that they cherish their alone time during business trips, and nearly three-quarters (73%) report that they have a better experience when they spend downtime on their own. When asked how this group prefers to spend their free time, results included:

- Eating at local restaurants (69%)
- Exploring the city and/or neighbourhood (59%)
- Sleeping or relaxing (56%)
- Working out (35%)
- Attending a Happy Hour (38%) or unwinding at the lobby/hotel bar (32%)

"We've all had over-scheduled business trips – with meetings from 09h00 to 17h00 and social obligations the rest of the evening – and the result is pure exhaustion. We applaud this next generation of travellers for highlighting a tension point many of us have dealt with for years," said Vera Manoukian, Senior Vice-President & Global Head, Hilton Hotels & Resorts.

Manoukian makes a fair point and it's something picked up by Legacy's Brearley, when talking about his premium customers.

"Every guest has different whims about services," he says. "Sometimes they require to be left alone and on other occasions they wish to be acknowledged and 'fat faced'. The key is for staff to know when to or not to, and our training programmes cover this in depth."

It's probably fair to say, then, that those activities listed above constitute a version of luxury for those young travellers, particularly if it's juxtaposed with intensive work days crammed full of meetings and demanding deadlines.

Delving a little deeper, 'old and new luxury' taps into the generational differences between the travellers of today and the travellers of the past. It's something picked up on by Anthony Berklich, founder of Inspired Citizen. He was speaking at the trade show WTM Africa



in Cape Town in 2017, looking specifically at the millennial traveller.

"Parents of millennials perceive luxury in a somewhat old-school way. Butlers in tuxedos, stuffy hotel furnishings, being greeted by 'sir' and 'madam'," said Berklich.

But, according to Berklich, millennial travellers go in search of a more 'authentic' experience – something that offers them a bit more meaning.

"The narrative, the story behind it, is what they are buying into," he said.

According to Berklich, millennials "seek unique and special, exclusive experiences and items that make them different and create a separation between them and the masses and, most

importantly, allow them to express themselves. They are a little narcissistic and will spend money to feel special."

No surprise, then, to see many suppliers tailoring their offerings to meet these millennial demands.

Berklich's points regarding the millennial generation is not a suggestion that suppliers in the premium travel space need to remain focused on this generation. Sure, this generation will have a big role to play in the global travel space going forward, but there are other players in this market and other trends that remain constant, regardless of generation.

The bottom line is that what constitutes 'luxury' is a very personal thing, with no one rule applying to each and every traveller across the board.

***“ Parents of millennials perceive luxury in a somewhat old-school way. Butlers in tuxedos, stuffy hotel furnishings, being greeted by ‘sir’ and ‘madam’ ”***

"Luxury travel is subjective," says the Amadeus report. "For one traveller, it could be a private multimillion-dollar cruise around the Arctic on a famous yacht. For another, it could be the reassurance of having their dietary requirements automatically catered for throughout their entire holiday and a bespoke designer wardrobe waiting for them in their hotel

change your  
out of office  
reply to  
“enjoying  
a business  
flight”

virgin atlantic   
depart the everyday



nonstop to the UK daily



room – without them having to ask. For some, it could be having their favourite Michelin-starred chef flown in to prepare a meal in a Bedouin tent in the middle of the Sahara. Curating something that appeals to them on a specific, personal level that goes above a traveller's 'norms' is key to the next chapter of luxury travel."

#### **'BLUXURY'**

Unlike 'bleisure' travellers (those combining business travel with leisure travel), 'bluxury' travellers (combining business travel with luxury leisure travel) in senior positions will likely have greater autonomy over their decision to extend their travel for some leisure time.

That's according to Amadeus. "Nonetheless, they may still be somewhat restricted until companies begin to build 'bleisure' or 'bluxury' practices into their corporate travel policies. It isn't happening widely yet, but is something the industry will need to address in the future."

"Companies need to implement processes and procedures to ensure travellers adding leisure days to a business trip are transparent and have the adequate insurances in place," says Jo

Lloyd, Partner at business travel consultancy firm Nina & Pinta. "Whether a company permits bluxury travel is not really the issue – it is more to do with risk, responsibility and insurance."

Luxury travel brands can benefit by accommodating travellers' increasingly blurred lifestyles. Understanding the bluxury mindset is key. In some cases, these travellers will have the option to fly home on a Friday night at the end of a work trip, but will instead take the opportunity to spend another 24 or 48 hours in a destination and fly back over the weekend instead, for the same or similar price. They may come to a travel provider hoping for advice for 24-hour guides to a city, or to get them last-minute tickets to a concert or sports event they have found out about since they made the decision to extend their trip. These travellers have travelled to fulfil a business obligation, worked hard, and are now seeking a reward and some well-deserved downtime. Their expectations transfer from needing to get their job done as easily as possible to wanting to indulge in a destination now that the work is over.

"If we have guests staying for a week – professionals coming out

***“ Brands that serve a business travel demographic will need to identify and fulfil travellers' personal leisure needs and create a bespoke itinerary that can be adapted to how they are feeling at the end of a business trip, if they are to convert them into bluxury customers. ”***

of London – for the first few days, I can feel that they're not relaxed yet," says Joachim Hartl, General Manager of the Conrad Algarve in Portugal. "I deliberately say to them 'let us pamper you'. By the fourth or fifth day, they're seeking other experiences – their expectations are changing."

"Although they will seek assistance from a trusted brand or party to make their decisions more easily, a 'bluxury package' is unlikely to entice bluxury





between countries that share a border) shortly after 2025. This is shown through Tourism Economics data that forecasts the distance of the next decade's luxury outbound trips, based on current trends and growth rates."

That's probably encouraging for the suppliers in the premium space, although what's obvious is that these suppliers will have to better understand their premium customers, if they are to win a sizeable slice of the action.

The new era of luxury travel is geared towards achieving an end-to-end luxury experience from the moment a passenger gets in their taxi to the airport until they arrive back at their front door from their journey home. The industry is aware that greater collaboration between parties is needed, but what does that mean on a practical level?

A major stepping stone would be overarching technology that is able to collect passenger data from the point of booking and pass it through the luxury travel supply chain as the traveller moves through phases of their journey. Real-time updates that will impair the luxury element of their trip could be a call to action for whichever party is responsible for the traveller at that time – the baggage handler, the chauffeur, the staff at hotel check-in.

"Imagine you're on your way to the airport, your taxi's stuck in traffic. Imagine the airline was able to locate you via their app, calculate your new arrival time at the airport and automatically book you on to the next flight. Not only that, but what if all your further travel arrangements were synced... your hotel knew your new check-in time? Imagine if you had the ability to locate your luggage at any time and find out where it is..." said Sadiq Gillani, Senior Vice-President, Lufthansa Group, from his speech 'The Next Step for Airlines' at the 2014 TEDx Conference in Berlin.

Hmmm...intuitive and personalised. I like the sound of that.

Is this the future of luxury travel? ■



travellers – they won't want to feel that they are following the herd," says the Amadeus report. "Brands that serve a business travel demographic will need to identify and fulfil travellers' personal leisure needs and create a bespoke itinerary that can be adapted to how they are feeling at the end of a business trip, if they are to convert them into bluxury customers".

Again, there's that point about personalisation and authenticity.

## THE FUTURE?

According to Amadeus, over the

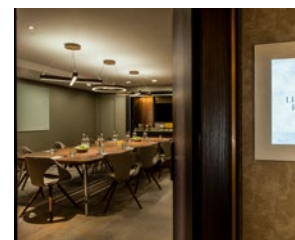
next 10 years, the growth rate in outbound luxury trips is projected at 6.2%, almost a third greater than overall travel (4.8%).

"This could be a symptom of how polarised travel is becoming to reflect the wealth patterns of the world's citizens," says the 'Shaping the Future of Luxury Travel – Future Traveller Tribes 2030' report. "Luxury and budget markets will become increasingly extreme to cater for tomorrow's 'ultra' market. Luxury long-haul travel will grow faster than any other form of travel and will overtake border travel (travel





LONDON, UK



# Lincoln Plaza London Curio Collection by Hilton

**BACKGROUND:** Lincoln Plaza London is part of Curio Collection, Hilton's smaller, upscale brand with around 60 properties around the world. This 129-room hotel shares a building (though not an entrance) with a set of apartments, whose residents can also use the gym and pool facilities.

**WHERE IS IT?** Millwall on the Isle of Dogs, just south of Canary Wharf. The hotel is a 10-minute walk from the Jubilee line at Canary Wharf tube station. My companion, who was laden with bags and keen to minimise walk time, found the website's instruction to leave the tube via the Jubilee Place exit confusing and ended up having to navigate through an underground shopping centre. If you're a Canary Wharf novice, make sure you head all the way up to the ground floor on the escalators, walk through the glass building containing Obica Mozzarella Bar and over South Quay footbridge. It's straightforward from there. Alternatively, it is an easy five-minute walk from South Quay station on the DLR.

**ROOMS:** Rooms come in a slightly confusing six tiers, with twins, queens and doubles within the categories Bargemaster, Keeler, Lighterman and Tillerman. All come with 46-inch TVs, a mini-bar, a hot drink station with coffee machines, high-quality tea bags and pretty china, and a large wardrobe with a hairdryer, iron, robes and slippers. Having looked around each room category, the only real difference I could discern is the size. I stayed in a Tillerman twin, one of the smallest, which didn't feel at all cramped. The furnishings felt high-quality, with soft carpeting, a white marble bathroom with

a rainfall shower and a good selection of coffee table books. There isn't a proper desk, but there are properly comfy armchairs (as opposed to decorative ones) and a large coffee table. There is also a lot of seating in the lobby where you could work. The bed was comfy, with crisp cotton bedding. For me, both pillows were too high for comfort, a fact I only realised at a point when I definitely couldn't be bothered to see if there was an alternative.

**FOOD & DRINK:** There are a few options, which is handy, as the area is not the most inspiring when it comes to dining destinations. There is the Food Store and deli in the lobby, opposite which is Food Store Restaurant, a casual all-day dining space. The dinner menu mainly features meat dishes, pizza and pasta. We had a very nice breakfast here of scrambled eggs, smoked salmon and sourdough toast with strong coffee and orange juice. Breakfast is an optional cost with your room, which gets you unlimited food and drink ordered a la carte. Alternatively, you can just pay by dish on the day. It is worth a visit to the main restaurant, Mr Todiwala's Kitchen, which has high ceilings, large windows and brightly-coloured walls, giving it a relaxed atmosphere, although it's smart enough for a business dinner. The menus are extensive, with drinks including four types of champagne and an array of wines, spirits and beers. Starters include dosas, samosas and tikkas. We tried the mixed platter, with four vegetarian bites including samosas and bhajis, and four tikkas (chicken, salmon, duck and beef), which were all delicious. Mains are primarily curry dishes and I was

recommended the Goan Prawn Curry, which had huge juicy prawns and a sweet coconut flavour punctuated by a good kick of spice. For an excellent round-off to the meal we tried a selection of kufli, an Indian-style ice cream, in pistachio, hazelnut and rose flavours. Upstairs is Jack Speak bar, apparently styled after a 19th century British Navy Officer's Wardroom.

**BUSINESS:** There is an underground warren of event space spread across 465m<sup>2</sup>, with a central lounge area providing access to seven meeting rooms. All are nicely decorated but can't avoid a bit of a bunker feel.

**LEISURE:** There is an underground gym, plus an 18-metre pool.

**VERDICT:** The website enthuses that the "local area is not all business and global headquarters," but realistically this is best for corporate travellers. It would be a good base for both short and long stays, with the on-site deli and pool particular draws. The property as a whole feels new, spacious and welcoming, and the staff are very friendly. ■

Jenni Reid ■

## FACT FILE

### CONTACT

**A:** 2 Lincoln Plaza Canary Wharf, London, E14 9BD  
**T:** +44-20-79871157  
**W:** hilton.com





LONDON-ADDIS ABABA



## Ethiopian Airlines A350 900 - Economy Class

**BACKGROUND:** For years, Ethiopian Airlines has been considered a success story – if not the success story – of African aviation, and is the largest and most profitable carrier on the continent, with its youngest fleet. The flag carrier flies daily between Addis Ababa and London, departing Heathrow at 21h00 (21h45 on Wednesdays) and arriving at about 07h00 local time. From there, numerous transfers are available across sub-Saharan Africa, and to a few destinations beyond. The A350 was introduced onto the route in 2016.

**CHECK-IN:** I arrived at Heathrow T2 at 19h00 on a Friday to find clusters of confused-looking families huddled around the various Star Alliance self-service check-in booths in Zone D, with one staff member darting between them. Spare yourself stress by using Ethiopian's online check-in service, which I'd forgotten to do. The bag drop and security queues were long but relatively smooth and speedy.

**BOARDING:** From the main shopping area it is a 10-minute brisk walk to the B gates, so leave sufficient time. Boarding was punctual. The aircraft created a good first impression, with pleasant Ethiopian music playing and welcoming flight attendants. The fabric seat coverings in alternating yellow and green don't exactly look modern, but are cheerful, which personally I prefer.

**THE SEAT:** The A350-900 has 313 economy class seats in a 3-3-3 configuration (A-B-C, D-F-H, J-K-L) across two cabins, and 30 seats in business, which Ethiopian calls Cloud

Nine. The economy seats are comfortable enough, 18 inches wide with a 32-inch pitch and a 13.8-degree recline. The pillow was a bit limp, but the blanket was a nice medium weight. Every seat had a UK plug socket and USB point. The in-flight entertainment had a 10.6-inch screen showing a handful of Hollywood and international films. One of my headphone jacks was broken, as was my companion's, so sound only came out of one speaker, which was a minor annoyance. Google tells me airlines insist on using those annoying double slots that mean you can't use your own headphones, so they don't need replacing as often.

**BEST SEAT:** Online check-in, available 36 hours before the flight, allows you to pick a seat at no extra charge. I was given the option to switch at the airport, although obviously most seats were taken by this point. Tall passengers should consider seats 33A-C and 33J-L at the front of the second cabin, which have extra room thanks to the emergency exit, although bear in mind that a bassinet is located nearby. The window seats will give you a bit more distance from the washroom. Row 11 at the front of the first cabin may be better if you want to dash to the front of the visa queue on arrival, but will have more noise from the galley and is also where bassinets are positioned. There are virtual tours on the Ethiopian website that give a good sense of the A350-900 and B777-200 interiors.

**THE FLIGHT:** We set off without delay. Dinner reached us in the middle of the second economy cabin about an hour after take-off; given that this takes you to

about 22h00, it could be worth factoring in a pre-flight snack. Food was decent, with chicken, mash and veg, a roll with cheese, potato salad, crackers and cake. The red wine was inoffensive. Lights were then dimmed for the rest of the flight, which passed smoothly. A syrupy fruit pot, chocolate muffin and hot drinks were brought around a little over an hour before landing.

**ARRIVAL:** We landed on time – flight duration is seven hours and 45 minutes – and were transferred to the terminal by bus. I was heading onwards to Tanzania and had been excited to see some of the airport's new \$363 million Terminal 2 during my layover. However, the project was still very much under construction and the transit area for regional connections was just a huge, busy room with toilets and little more. More facilities should start appearing later this year. The transit area for long-haul on my return was better, if short on seats with horrendous queues for boarding.

**VERDICT:** I chose Ethiopian because I was curious about the airline's product and the Addis terminal extension. The latter was not yet finished (this review was written at the end of May), but the flight was an enjoyable experience with strong service and little to fault in its hard product. ■

Jenni Reid

### FACT FILE

W: [ethiopianairlines.com](http://ethiopianairlines.com)



**Shaun Bird**

General Manager:  
Sandton Convention  
Centre

# Embracing innovation

*The South African conference and exhibition industry is facing challenges, and only those that innovate will survive and prosper. So says **Shaun Bird**, General Manager at Sandton Convention Centre.*

**Q: What are your thoughts on the current state of the SA conference and exhibition industry?**

**A:** Exhibitions continue to be accepted as smart marketing, with exhibitors recognising the broad-based opportunities for face-to-face interaction with a captive buying audience, while at the same time, more attention is being placed on cost management and more efficiencies are being built into the whole process. Conferences likewise are 'smarter' – with innovative elements to attract delegates and retain their attention and attendance throughout.

**Q: How is SCC keeping up with the trend of offering 'something different' that everyone seems to want these days?**

**A:** We are continuing with strategies adopted last year that are delivering encouraging results. We have improved engagement with government and city authorities, such as tourism associations, roads departments, SAPS, and others, and are finding ways to be more proactive in the interests of innovative solutions for our clients. We don't have the luxury of open spaces that other venues have, so we need to be creative in how we use ours – and working closely with the relevant authorities is paying dividends. Constant focus is also given to environmental practices and finding better ways to save water and electricity, to recycle, and to protect the environment. Staff, clients and visitors are kept informed about our efforts to encourage greater buy-in. The streamlining of our processes and systems to ensure an improved customer-centric approach for all our events is an ongoing priority in operations.

**Q: Have you picked up on any global conference/exhibition trends that you feel are worth mentioning?**

**A:** Innovation in entertainment, edutainment, and interaction with visitors to exhibitions and delegates at conferences is growing exponentially, as is the use of technology – in connecting with people and in how events, exhibits, and presentations are delivered. These are areas that we follow very closely.

**Q: Do you struggle with the perception that SCC only caters to large-scale conferences and exhibitions, or are you happy with this positioning?**

**A:** In fact we find that perception tends to be broader than just large-scale events – our volume of business continues to exceed expectations with events that range from small to massive and include consumer, trade, music, sports, whisky and wine, government, conferences, exhibitions, meetings, weddings and celebrations, banquets, and more.

**Q: How are you employing technology to enhance the delegate experience?**

**A:** We have invested heavily in new state-of-the-art audio visual equipment to ensure excellence in every event, from large-scale music concerts to intimate business meetings. We're also staying ahead of the game in the use of apps and smart phones to keep delegates involved and fully engaged in the events.

**Q: Have you made any changes to the SCC offering recently?**

**A:** We are constantly looking at ways to improve our offering for the benefit of our clients, delegates, and visitors. Our culinary offering has been updated under the brilliant management of our Executive Chef James Khoza, who is also President of the SA Chefs Association. A wide range of creative menu options has been developed to guide customers in

their choices, while also offering flexibility. Our culinary offering is designed to impress our local and international clientele and reflect their preferences. The food and beverage focus is increasingly on sustainability, keeping the food fresh and on point with health considerations, which includes mindful eating.

**Q: What big events do you have in the pipeline for the rest of the year?**

**A:** The Standard Bank Joy of Jazz was once again a huge hit at the end of September, then in early October it's ICE Africa, the continent's only B2B gaming confex; also in October is EduTECH, which this year focuses on the impact of technology on teaching; the Property Show is back on 19 and 20 October; then PASCAR, SA Heart and AfricaPCR are joining forces for their congress in early November; followed by another Whisky Live Festival, which this year is the Whisky, Gin and Spirits Festival; DISCOP Joburg is back to inspire and support the AV market in November; and at the end of November is a Cannabis trade and consumer expo.

**Q: Where would you like to see SCC in five years' time?**

**A:** Continuing as the leading convention centre in SA with an increased international clientele; staying ahead of the game and consistently delivering innovation and memorable experiences; employing the latest technology; being increasingly responsive to customer needs and expectations; and collaborating more extensively with local businesses and retail malls, local authorities, government and tourism to ensure nuanced events and more holistic travel experiences for clients, exhibitors, delegates and visitors – and their families. ■





# New broom

Earlier this year, aha Hotels & Lodges, part of the Tourvest group, made several changes to its executive team, chief among which was appointing a new CEO after the departure of Neil Bald. Having been active in his new role for six months, *Business Traveller Africa* wanted to catch up with the new man at the helm, **Graeme Edmond**.

**Graeme Edmond:**  
CEO: aha Hotels & Lodges

**Q: What's the background to your appointment as CEO, taking over from Neil Bald?**

**A:** I have been with aha since July 2008 and was their first employee. It was then called African Hotels and Adventures. When Relais Africa was bought by Tourvest, Relais Africa fell away and was rebranded African Hotels and Adventures. In August 2018 I moved across to Tourvest Accommodation and Activities as the Head of Sales and Marketing overseeing Wild Horizons, Lemala, Mankwe Game Trackers, Echo Africa, Drifters and aha from a sales and marketing perspective. I have been with the business since inception but always in a sales and marketing role.

**Q: Have you opened/taken on any new hotels or lodges in the past six months?**

**A:** We have not opened any new lodges or hotels in the past six months but have a few exciting projects on the go now.

**Q: The aha Hotels & Lodges portfolio is significantly smaller than it was, say, five years ago. What's the reason for this?**

**A:** We had a number of properties that didn't fit our new strategy and we lost a few contracts due to various reasons, so we have cleaned up the portfolio and now have properties that fit our new strategy and properties where we are able to make a difference for us and the owner. If we cannot make a positive difference for the owner of the property we will not take the property on.

**Q: What's the preferred aha model? Properties that are owned and managed, or just managed?**

**A:** A combination of managed and owned. Our strategy is to have ownership and/or leases in key destinations such as Umhlanga,

Cape Town and possibly Johannesburg in the future, and own properties in the leisure space in key destinations. We will look for management contracts in key and secondary locations.

**Q: What's your view on the state of the SA hotel industry?**

**A:** It is under immense pressure at the moment, particularly in the corporate and government segments. Our lodges are doing well, but these are mainly leisure-focused, and the domestic leisure market for us is growing rapidly. The negative news circulating about the crime and recent spate of attacks on tourists is further adding to cancellations and distressed numbers.

**Q: Drilling down a bit further, what's your view on the opportunities in the different market segments – 'luxury' versus 'mid-market', for example?**

**A:** Our luxury properties, of which we don't have a lot, are doing very well at the moment and future bookings look good. There has been a massive surge from the domestic market that no longer seem to be travelling overseas. The mid-market is under pressure because, as always, when economies slow for a number of years, the mid-market consumers have less disposable income.

**Q: You're currently in Botswana and Zambia. Would you like to be in more African countries and do you believe there is more opportunity outside South Africa?**

**A:** There is opportunity outside of South Africa, but within our division there are other brands such as Wild Horizons and Lemala that have properties in countries outside of SA, so our focus is to remain in South and Southern Africa unless there is an exceptional deal on the table.

**Q: What do you believe are the biggest talking points/topics in the SA MICE industry?**

**A:** As a MICE destination, South Africa is currently relatively well priced and positioned. The weakness of the rand has made our lodges and hotels attractive offerings for multinational companies to bring delegates from all around the world together in one destination.

**Q: How are you using technology to improve the guest/delegate experience?**

**A:** The technology we are embracing all has to do with ease of booking our properties. We have created our portfolio to be easily bookable in multiple destinations. We have a very strong revenue management team ensuring that we abide by this and improve this during a constant changing environment.

**Q: Where would you like to see aha Hotels & Lodges in 10 years' time?**

**A:** As one of the leading, proudly Southern African hotel and lodge companies. We don't want hundreds of properties, but rather excellent properties in key destinations. ■



#### CEO

The Southern African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI) has appointed **Glenton de Kock** as its new Chief Executive Officer.

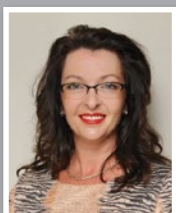
His appointment follows the recent resignation of Rudi van der Vyver, who has joined EPH Events. Previously De Kock was Chief Executive Officer of Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism, business support advisor for RV Footwear and project manager at the Nelson Mandela Bay Business Chamber. He also has extensive experience as an independent hospitality, leisure and tourism consultant. He holds a national diploma in Sport Administration and Marketing and is enrolled for an MBA at the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan University Business School.



#### Cluster General Manager

Mercure South Africa has appointed **Thulani Xhali** as its Cluster General Manager for the SADC region. Xhali's

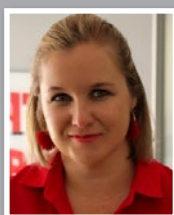
highest academic achievement is a Master of Science (Msc) in International Hospitality and Service from the University of Derby in the United Kingdom. Xhali has lived in the Netherlands and in Nigeria, which has equipped him with skill in dealing with diversity.



#### General Manager

Tsogo Sun has appointed **Madelein Roux** as the General Manager of the Crowne Plaza in Rosebank. She moved across from Garden Court

Morningside where she was also the General Manager. Roux has over 16 years' experience in the hospitality and gaming sector, having worked at popular casinos and resorts in South Africa, the Grand Comores Islands, Seychelles and Mozambique. Roux's first appointment as General Manager was at Garden Court Sandton and a year later she moved to East London to head up Southern Sun Hemingways.



#### Customer Experience Director

Flight Centre Travel Group has appointed **Kim Taylor** as Customer Experience Director. Taylor previously held the position of Head

of Customer Care and has been with the company for nine years. Taylor has many years of experience in the service industry, both internationally and in South Africa, specifically in customer recovery. Her nine years with FCTG have seen her move from a consulting position into the Customer Care department. In her new role, she will create and execute customer experience strategies throughout all pillars of the business. Taylor will be a key custodian, ensuring delivery on the group's company purpose of consistently delivering amazing customer experiences.



#### Commercial Finance Controller

Flight Centre Travel Group has appointed, **Dayle White** as its new Commercial Finance Controller. White was previously FCTG's Corporate

and Product Nation financial controller for over two years. White has been with FCTG for 13 years and has 17 years of industry experience. Her industry experience spans the finance, operations, inbound, outbound and wholesale travel sectors. White has a MBA from Bond University and an Associate's Degree in Business and Commerce. Her new role will encompass the management of all cash investments and revenue streams, maximising profit and growth.



#### Leisure Marketing Leader

Flight Centre Travel Group has appointed **Heleen Alberts** as the new Leisure Marketing Leader. Alberts has been with FCTG for 13 years

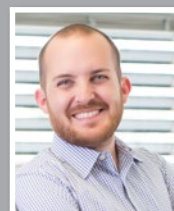
and has worked in different areas of the organisation. Alberts holds an Honours Degree Equivalent from the University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB). Her new role will entail overseeing Flight Centre's leisure brands from a marketing perspective to deliver a great product at a great price to the South African traveller.



#### Automation Team Leader

Flight Centre Travel Group has appointed **Craig Long** Flight Centre Travel Group Business Leader for Data and Reporting,

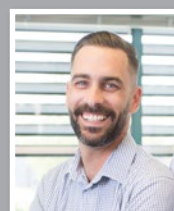
and he will lead a new automation team. Long has been with FCTG for over 10 years. Previous roles at the company include Travel Consultant, Team Leader, National Trainer and Operational Area Leader. Using his operational and leadership experience, Long will work with the group's global counterparts and the South African automation team to drive a smoother end-to-end travel transaction for clients and operational teams.



#### Leisure Consultant

Flight Centre Travel Group has appointed **Michael Knott** as a leisure consultant on its new CT Lifestyle offering. Knott joined the Flight Centre

Travel Group in 2013 and earned the title of top consultant during his very first year. He quickly worked his way up the ranks from junior consultant to manager, and eventually began contracting for Flight Centre Associates.



#### Leisure Consultant

Flight Centre Travel Group has appointed **Graham Cannings** as a leisure consultant on its new CT Lifestyle offering. His love for both sports

and travel saw him kick-starting South Africa's first dedicated sports travel brand under the Flight Centre Travel Group umbrella ahead of the Soccer World Cup in 2010.



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# Joining forces



**Marco Cristofoli**  
BCD TRAVEL SA CEO

*BCD Travel South Africa is merging with Rennies Travel and the coming together of these two companies will result in a workforce of over 700 employees, with offices across the country, in Namibia and Zimbabwe, with annual sales, according to BCD Travel, of over \$200 million. So, editor Dylan Rogers dropped in on BCD Travel SA CEO, **Marco Cristofoli**, to unpack the merger.*

**I**t had to happen, didn't it? Earlier this year, Rennies Travel joined BCD's Global Network after parting ways with HRG. That followed the 2018 news that American Express Global Business Travel had bought out HRG, which impacted greatly on the South African TMC industry.

That's because Amex GBT had an existing long-standing relationship with another of South Africa's big players, Tourvest, who have been the holders of the local licence of American Express Travel Services for some time.

Hence, Rennies leaving the HRG stable and joining forces with BCD, who already had a South African partner in Connex Travel, trading as BCD Travel South Africa. Incidentally, both this entity and Rennies Travel are owned by Bidvest, which meant you now had a situation whereby two separate BCD entities were operating under one roof.

You don't need to be a rocket scientist to see the appeal in pulling the two companies together.

"It's not about being bigger," says Cristofoli. "It's about being more focused and having economies of scale, because we both have expertise in different fields. We've always been strong in the global corporate market and Rennies is very strong – and a leader – in the local market. It's about bringing it all together under a new management team with a different vision and being underpinned by all these products and technology we have to offer."

The merged agency will operate as Rennies BCD Travel and the new management team will be headed up by CEO Bronwyn Philipps, who previously served as CEO of Rennies Travel. Cristofoli will remain a member of the senior leadership team.

"We're joining forces in a competitive business travel market that's growing fast," adds Adrian Woodward, Vice-President of BCD Travel's EMEA Global Network. "Our combined depth of experience and partnership will not only give us a stronger position in the African market, but also offer our mutual clients market-relevant solutions and services."

The two entities are coming together at an interesting time for TMCs. For starters, IATA's New Distribution Capability (NDC) has forced TMCs to spend significantly on technology – at a time when belts are being tightened – and re-look the way they do business and sell travel to their customers.

"It's exciting and it makes sense, because it just enriches the experience for both the agent and the customer, but our learnings have certainly been that you want to keep everything in a workflow, because nobody wants to jump around between all the airlines," says Cristofoli.

However, he does caution that the spend required to keep pace with IATA's NDC requirements will take a lot of smaller players out of the game.

"Big TMCs adapt a lot easier, because change like this involves a lot of technology, resources and

spend, so I do feel somewhat sorry for some of the smaller players who don't have the resources to make this change," says Cristofoli. "They may end up being late adopters or not adopters at all."

The same could probably be said for IATA's attempt to move South Africa to a Billing and Settlement Plan (BSP) of every two weeks, as opposed to monthly.

"It has huge implications in terms of cash flow and the way you do business," says Cristofoli. "Most customers pay you 30 days, but now you have to settle every two weeks. The potential is that it could cripple some businesses, particularly the small ones and particularly the ones who have government business, as they have set processes in terms of payment. It's going to require re-educating customers."

Cristofoli's other major concern is the lack of growth in South Africa, which has obvious implications for the country's corporate travel market.

But that's out of his hands. What isn't, is the impact he can have on the new BCD entity, at a time when TMCs are under more pressure than ever before to show value.

"We all sell the same commodity, but it's how you deliver it that is the differentiator and that comes down to service, technology and the investment you've made in the customer," says Cristofoli.

Nicely put. ■

**Dylan Rogers**



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