# Tavel er BTA AWARDS Voting underway **JOURISM** GRADING COUNCIL On a new path TRAVEL TECHNOLOGY Ever evolving **TRAVELIT** Simple yet Powerful **ISSUE 145: NOVEMBER 2019** www.businesstravellerafrica.co.za



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Travelit, Tourvest's online technology, has evolved from a purely online booking solution to an end-to-end travel and expense management solution, and its latest coup is an integration with Booking.com, Expedia and Hotelbeds, with a focus on maximum choice for the customer and driving down costs.

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This is an ever-evolving space, with technological developments taking place every day – all geared towards moving the industry forward and making the entire travel experience that much easier to navigate and consolidate. This is a look at some of the latest developments in the travel technology space – including in the areas of airline, hotel and travel management – as well as some thought-provoking industry comment about how the industry's players see the role of technology in the travel sector.

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oting for the 2019 Business Traveller Africa Awards is underway.

The process has kicked off a little later this year, but Business Traveller Africa magazine wants to make sure that 2019 doesn't pass us by without the opportunity to honour those brands and entities that have performed with distinction over the past 12 months.

It's been a challenging year in South Africa, largely due to the country's sluggish economy, with the first quarter political uncertainty and final guarter Eskom crisis just two of the factors in the halting of growth and investment.

So, those business travel suppliers that have achieved in 2019 are due all the accolades that come their way. If you're able to perform with distinction in this challenging environment, you are doing something right and should be honoured.

I'm also willing to bet that 2019's standout performers all have a good handle on how to operate and remain relevant in this everchanging business environment, largely dominated by technology and its constant evolution.

It's something we touch on in this month's main feature - the travel technology space and where it is, currently.

I say "currently", because, by the time we go to print, something would have changed - and probably changed dramatically - in the airline, hotel, car rental, ride sharing or TMC space, for example, and those are just some of the areas linked to the business travel space.

Change is taking place at an alarming rate and it's sometimes just a challenge to keep up and hang on, never mind take the lead and be an early adopter!

This month's travel technology feature shows us that, and I'm fascinated to see just how much progress has been made and how forward-thinking some industry players are, as they continuously search for ways in which to make the entire travel process, from start to finish, a seamless experience.

What is clear is that only those brands, entities, corporations etc that make the effort to keep up and continuously interrogate where they can improve their service, using technology and associated benefits, will survive and flourish

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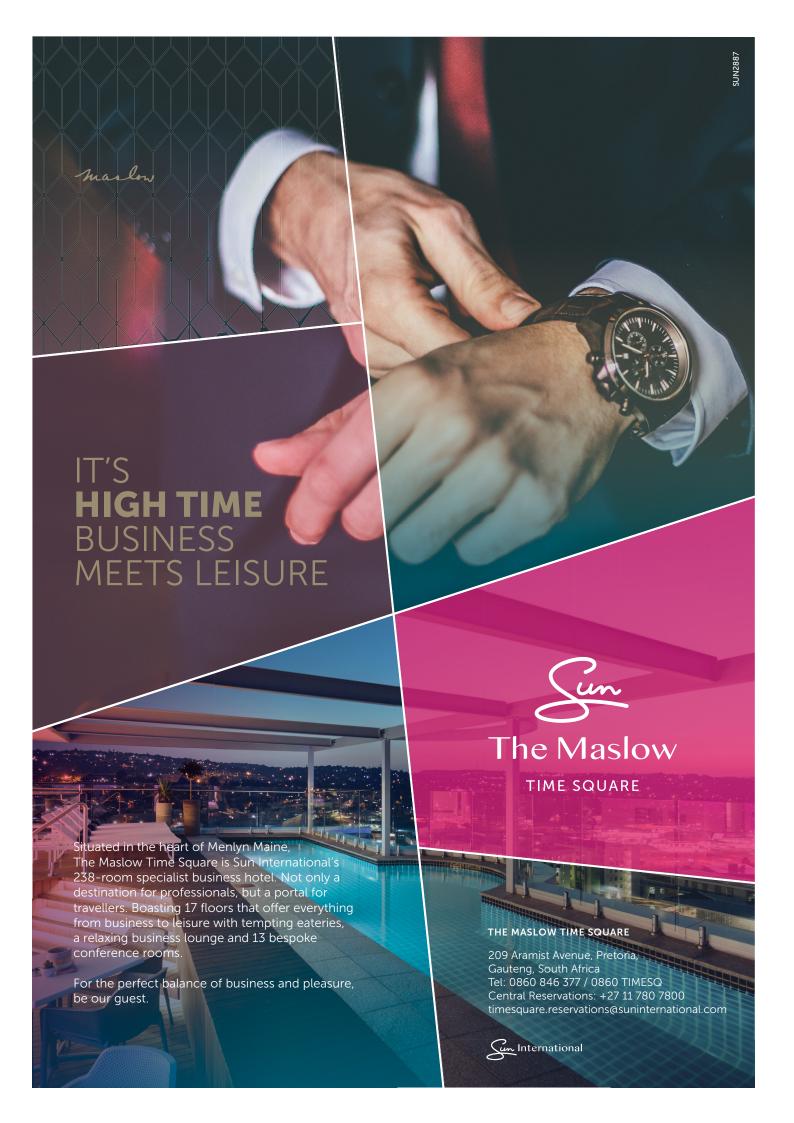
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THE FUTURE











#### Radisson Opens Third Nairobi Hotel

The Radisson Hotel Group has opened the Radisson Blu Hotel & Residence, Nairobi Arboretum, its third hotel in Kenya. The hotel's 122 rooms and suites feature private balconies, upscale amenities and exclusive services such as free wi-fi, individual climate control and 24-hour room service. They range in space between 20 and 133 square metres, with views of the pool or park. There is an onsite spa, sauna, steam rooms, swimming pool and fitness centre. The hotel introduces Africa's first Firelake Restaurant, a concept which offers a comfortable and sophisticated all-day dining retreat. Arborista offers speciality coffee and tea. Guests can also enjoy snacks and drinks at the Lounge Bar as well as the Infinity Pool Bar. The hotel's functional venues offer 500m² of meetings and events space that are designed to host up to 200 guests.

#### **AVIAREPS** to Represent Proflight Zambia

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Proflight Zambia has selected AVIAREPS as its general sales agent in South Africa. AVIAREPS will provide Proflight Zambia with a 360-degree portfolio of GSA services, including support in customer service, sales and reservations, marketing, branding, public relations, events, finance and IT. Effective immediately, AVIAREPS will use its global network and extensive experience in aviation to provide Proflight with the highest level of representation and services in South Africa. The airline added a direct service between Johannesburg and Ndola in September to complement its international routes from Lusaka to Durban and Lilongwe.





#### Tintswalo Atlantic Opens Again

Tintswalo Atlantic re-opened for business on 1 October. The boutique hotel on Chapman's Peak Drive in Cape Town was closed in February, when a kitchen fire destroyed the main section of the lodge. The public areas and some of the guest suites were completely rebuilt in just six months. A maximum of 24 resident guests are accommodated at Tintswalo Atlantic in 10 Islands suites and a two-bedroom villa. "Tintswalo Atlantic is synonymous with luxury, privacy and seclusion," says CEO, Lisa Goosen. "We'd like to present guests with a bespoke and exclusive, private lodge experience, complete with the warm South African hospitality and personal service our brand is known for."



#### Airlink Introduces Fifth Flight to Bloemfontein

Airlink will introduce an additional midday flight between Johannesburg and Bloemfontein from 18 November. This flight will operate Mondays to Fridays and will depart O.R. Tambo International Airport at 12h30, arriving in Bloemfontein at 13h25. The return flight will depart Bloemfontein at 13h50 and arrive in Johannesburg at 14h45. The service will be operated by an Embraer 135 regional jet. The airline has also added more flights between Cape Town and Hoedspruit for December 2019 and January 2020. Additional flights will operate on 24, 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30 December, and 2, 3, 4 and 5 January. Flights will depart Cape Town at 09h45 and arrive in Hoedspruit at 12h25. The return flights will depart Hoedspruit at 13h05 and arrive in Cape Town at 15h55. Hoedspruit's Eastgate Airport provides access to some of the top private game reserves and lodges and is the gateway to the Kruger National Park (via Orpen Gate) rest camps and the exclusive concession lodges.



#### **SAA** Launches Codeshare with AWA

South African Airways has signed a codeshare partnership with Ghanaian operator Africa World Airlines. The agreement will apply on the following routes: Accra-Kumasi, Accra-Lagos and Accra-Abuja. The partnership is unilateral at the moment, with SAA marketing on the services of AWA as the operating carrier. SAA customers will be able to travel on the routes with a single SAA ticket where travel includes Johannesburg. SAA and AWA currently have an interline agreement established in 2018, which provides connections to and from Abuja, Lagos, Monrovia, Freetown, Kumasi, Tamale, Wa and Takoradi over Accra, to SAA mainline flights to and from Johannesburg and Washington. The airline has also expanded its codeshare agreement with Air Seychelles to New York. SAA will be the operating carrier on the Johannesburg-New York (JFK) sector and Air Seychelles will be the marketing carrier.

### **Transfercar**Launches in SA

Transfercar's founders realised that there was an opportunity for car rental companies to slash costs when it comes to transferring vehicles between branches. The company's website connects rental car companies needing to transfer their cars with travellers who are eager to drive them in exchange for a free trip. For now, the most popular routes are between Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth. In most cases, the cars can be used for one to three days without incurring any rental fees, depending on distance. Some include a free tank of petrol and some allow the driver to rent the car for an additional few days at a low rate. The only requirements are that the cars need to be dropped off before a predetermined date. Drivers need a valid license and credit card to secure a booking and there is an option to pay for top-up insurance to reduce the excess.

#### **Cairo** Joins Emirates A380 Network

Following the recent debut of its flagship A380 aircraft on the Cairo route, Emirates has introduced a regular scheduled commercial A380 service to the Egyptian capital four times a week. Emirates will replace the 777-300ER aircraft currently operating EK923 and EK924 on Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. The airline also increased the frequency of flights between Dubai and Cairo with four additional flights a week in addition to its existing three daily services. The four new flights, operating on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, will take the total number of weekly Emirates flights serving Cairo to 25. Premium customers, and Platinum and Gold Skywards members, can enjoy the dedicated Emirates Lounge in Cairo airport which opened in 2018.



#### Preferred Hotels Adds to SA Portfolio

Preferred Hotels & Resorts added 16 new member hotels to its global portfolio between July and September, two of which are in South Africa. The President Hotel in Cape Town has 349 luxury guestrooms and apartments, and is now Preferred's largest hotel in Africa. Set in the exclusive Bantry Bay neighbourhood, between the Lion's Head mountain range and coastline, the President Hotel offers views across the Atlantic Ocean and is a stone's throw from the V&A Waterfront. The Last Word Kitara is located in the Klaserie Nature Reserve, inside the Kruger National Park in Mpumalanga. The lodge has been extensively refurbished to create six camp-style luxury suites built in stone with savannah views across the river - a popular spot for elephants and other residents to drink and bathe.

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#### Boeing Making Progress on 737 MAX

Boeing says it has made significant progress over the past several months in support of safely returning the 737 MAX to service, as the company continues to work with the Federal Aviation Authority and other global regulators on the process laid out for certifying the 737 MAX software and related training updates. The company has also made significant governance and operational changes to further sharpen its focus. The Manoeuvring Characteristics Augmentation Software (MCAS) has been updated by adding three additional layers of protection to prevent accidents. The company is making steady progress on the second software update announced in June for additional flight control computer redundancy. Boeing says it is also taking steps to implement previously announced actions that will sharpen its focus on product and services safety. In September, Boeing announced the formation of a Product and Services Safety organisation that will review all aspects of product safety and maintain oversight of Boeing's Accident Investigation Team and the company's safety review boards.

#### **Wings** Expands Footprint in US

Wings Travel Management is expanding its footprint in the United States with the acquisition of the energy and corporate travel business of Associated Travel in Louisiana. The agreement is a key strategic milestone for Wings, as it gives the company a presence in a second major US energy sector hub, complementing Wings' existing operation in Houston. Founded in 1967, Associated Travel is a well-established TMC providing tailored online and offline business travel management to Louisiana-based energy sector companies, as well as leisure, film and group travel clients. Following the sale, Associated Travel will continue serving its leisure and group travel clientele and corporate sector business will operate under the Wings Travel Management brand and day-today operations will be managed by Wings' senior management team. All current corporate travel staff of Associated Travel will also become part of Wings Travel Management under the agreement. Wings will also introduce its proprietary mid-office system TMA® (Travel Management Application), which enables all Wings' offices globally to operate off the identical centralised global platform and database, giving clients real-time traveller tracking, on-demand reporting and access to multiple travel content aggregators seamlessly.



# **Etihad** Dreamliner Services Johannesburg

Etihad Airways has deployed a Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner on its daily scheduled services from Abu Dhabi to Johannesburg as of 20 October. The two-class 787-9s serving Johannesburg feature 28 business studios and 271 economy 'smart' seats. The business studios offer direct aisle access, a fully-flat bed and an increase of 20% in personal space. Each business studio has an 18-inch personal touch-screen TV with noise-cancelling headsets. Guests can also enjoy mobile connectivity, onboard wi-fi and seven satellite channels of live TV. The economy smart seats provide enhanced comfort with a unique 'fixed wing' headrest, adjustable lumbar support, a seat width of approximately 19 inches, and an 11.1-inch personal TV monitor on each seat.

#### **BTM** Partners With CWT

Business Travel Management Limited has signed a partnership with CWT (formerly Carlson Wagonlit Travel) and will operate under the CWT brand in Nigeria. Benefits derived from representing the CWT brand in Nigeria include BTM's ability to now deliver a global standard of service, travel technology and efficiencies, locally. BTM is a member of the GHI Assets Group of companies (airline representatives and travel management specialists) and has operations in Nigeria and Angola, with a staff complement of over 200. "There have been some very exciting changes within the global company that we are looking forward to being a part of. Our company has operated in the managed travel space for almost 40 years as a TMC. This is what we do best – efficient service delivery, innovative ideas and cutting-edge travel technology," says Lola Adefope, Managing Director of CWT in Nigeria (owned and operated by Business Travel Management Limited).







Wayne Troughton CEO: HTI Consulting

# African millennials expect a personalised customer experience

n fact, they demand it! And if they are not getting it, they will move their business elsewhere.

Because millennials have more information available at their fingertips than ever before, they demand the highest levels of service from companies they support.

As a result, if the entire business travel ecosystem can be completely seamless and mobile-friendly, the millennial traveller experience will be greatly improved.

#### African millennials want bespoke products that meet their unique needs

In the same way that they want to feel personally important to the business they are supporting, African millennials prefer to support brands that emphasise unique offerings.

With the wealth of information they make available about themselves, their values and preferences online and through social media, they expect accommodation and hotel brands to not only know what they want, but to provide it.

And the results of a bespoke approach speak for themselves: brands that create personalised experiences see revenue increase by 6 to 10%.

#### African millennials are loyal - but you have to earn it

Research by Accenture indicates that millennials differ significantly from other generations when it comes to the concept of loyalty – and South African and other African customers differ even further.

For instance, 88% of South Africans are loyal to brands that protect their private information, whilst 67% are loyal to those that give them hotel offerings that have arguably been the most responsive to the millennial lifestyle. Key to this is offering fitness options like in-room equipment or access to a local gym, as well as healthy grab-and-go food choices.

So too, frequent traveller cards and hotel rewards programmes allow millennials to acquire points whenever they travel or make purchases abroad. These points can then be redeemed for rewards or other special offers.

#### Social connection is key

Fast and instantaneous internet connectivity is an expectation of this digital generation. Many hotel chains now offer mobile check-in, digital room keys, in-room iPhone docks, and digital assistants. Facebook has even allowed businesses like KLM and Hyatt to use its Messenger to interact with customers.

But millennial business travellers also value

the ability to physically connect with others and hotels can respond by revamping reclusive business centre cubbies and sterile conference rooms into collaborative workspaces that foster creativity among colleagues. Lobbies with table-tennis tables, casual seating niches and rooftop happy hours can offer places for socialisation and relaxation.

#### Location is paramount

You've heard location is the most important feature of real estate and millennials agree. A hotel in a fashionable neighbourhood, with walkability or having a shuttle service to local points of interest will win a millennial business traveller's approval over one without those features.

Among other things, we're seeing this generation also turning business trips into experiences and preferring self-booking.

#### Feeling valued: millennials love business trips

This is a generation who want to feel valued. They want to have new opportunities and not feel stuck in the same environment every day.

It's a very different mentality from previous generations that see business travel as a necessity rather than a perk, and are more concerned about leaving their families behind. Most millennials don't have the same family commitments or ties yet. Younger business travellers definitely want to explore more and when they go on a business trip, the chances are they'll likely want to extend it.

#### Millennials DO care about serious matters

A recent survey on respondents aged between 17 and 35 in seven African countries show strong evidence of interest in civic engagement, public affairs and politics among the African youth. A poll by GeoPoll in 2017 among a similar demographic in five African countries showed this age group's concerns regarding levels of corruption, youth unemployment and distribution of national resources.

This can be seen in movements and campaigns such as #BringBackOurGirls, #FeesMustFall, and #DataMustFall among others. African millennial travellers take an interest in the economic and social environments of the countries they travel to.

One thing is certain, the unique habits and expectations of the increasingly important millennial generation will continue to shape both the global and African travel industry for many years to come. It will be exciting to see how the industry embraces technology and innovative thinking to serve them in the future.



# What will **business travel** cost you in **2020?**

usiness travel is increasingly about the

experience, wellbeing and comfort of travellers. But pricing, such as free benefits like priority boarding and early hotel check-in, as well as savings, are still the most critical part of a company travel policy.

Based on a recent survey by the Flight Centre Travel Group's FCM Travel Solutions, a member of ASATA, cost savings is the top value-add sought by travel buyers in South Africa.

The study, conducted with the African Business Travel Association, flagged late bookings and change fees due to bad planning as the two biggest 'money wasters'.

It also touched on areas where travel buyers seek value from a travel management company partnership, including support, technology and data collection and interpretation, all of which

impacts the traveller experience. Just 67% of buyers participating in the survey rated Duty of Care 'very important'.

Given the current economic climate, it's not surprising that there is more emphasis on travel costs.

Making company cost-saving goals easier, the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) expects a general slowdown in flight, hotel accommodation and car rental rate increases in 2020.

GBTA's Global Travel Price Forecast with the CWT Solutions Group shows rate increases for hotel (+2.5%), ground transport (+0.5%) and air (+2.2%) in the Middle East and Africa will be influenced by economic conditions, supply and demand.

And there's more good news for small businesses, which analysts see benefitting from more targeted products and services.

According to a 2019 travel trends report by Skift, suppliers are enticing

business with rewards; freebies such as hotel breakfast, parking and wi-fi; and favourable pricing from airlines and hotels usually reserved for larger corporations and customers with the requisite booking volumes.

The challenge, the report says, is to convince these companies to consider managed solutions in the first place, yet there is plenty of data showing serious returns for every rand spent on company travel.

Business owners and travel buyers can use these yearly forecasts to set their 2020 travel goals, to sharpen their travel management RFPs and limit wastage.

Now is the time to invest in a proper travel management programme that supports employees and company growth objectives. ■

Otto de Vries ASATA CEO







# Increasing choice to drive down cost

Travelit continues to push the envelope when it comes to giving corporate travellers maximum choice while driving down costs. Its latest coup is integrating with Booking.com, Expedia and Hotelbeds. The first two are well known to leisure travellers, but are regarded as non-traditional suppliers to the corporate market. Hotelbeds, on the other hand, is a business-to-business accommodation wholesaler.

hy was this necessary?
Surely the GDS
heavyweights, such
as Galileo and Amadeus, give
corporate travellers what they

"For us the game is maximum choice and lowest cost," says

Philip Katz, CEO of Travelit at Tourvest Travel Services. "With these three aggregators on board, the spread in pricing we offer is significant and hugely variable. None of them, nor any of the GDS providers, always return the best prices. Therefore, having access to all of them on one screen dramatically increases your chance of getting the best deal on the day. In addition, Booking.com and Expedia add properties that fall outside the traditional corporate portfolio, which gives our clients even more choice."

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Importantly, all three of these travel product services allow integration with clients' travel policies. The latter is nonnegotiable in corporate travel, particularly when balancing duty of care with budget.

"With corporate travel, companies make decisions on behalf of their employees, and as such assume responsibility for the outcome of those choices," says Katz. "Policies therefore prevent a corporate traveller, for example, from booking hotels in unsafe areas or flying with airlines whose routes pass through hostile airspace."

Given how easily travel costs can balloon, corporate policies are also designed to control expenditure. Travelit supports this imperative by dealing with the full trip requirement – from flights to visas, vehicle hire, accommodation, and everything in between – and then tying it all together at the end of the trip with full reporting and financial integration into the corporate system. The result is complete visibility and an audit trail as clear as day.

With 600,000 users, Travelit is South Africa's biggest ecommerce site and while competitors are starting to snap at its heels, the quality it offers is variable. Katz, therefore, urges corporate buyers to interrogate value propositions thoroughly and not be blinded by unrealistically low service fees.

"Fees constitute between 5% and 7% of total travel costs," he says. "The other 95% is where the real money lies and the real savings can be made. A 10% discount on the 95% can be an enormous saving, far more than what 0.15% off the service fee will deliver. Astute corporate buyers should therefore focus on the capability of their service provider to realise savings on flights, accommodation, vehicle hire, meals and so on."

"It is critical to understand that providers compete heavily and constantly, and clients save when they can take advantage of special offers," says Katz. "Travelit enables this by giving clients access to the widest choice possible and by constantly finding innovative ways – such as integrating with non-traditional suppliers – to make the bargain-hunting net bigger and bigger, all within the context of the client's travel policy."

It's no surprise, therefore, to hear Tourvest Travel Services CEO, Morne du Preez, say that "we are not just a travel management company, we are a technology company that provides travel management services."

This statement supports the progression Tourvest has made over the last number of years in the online technology space.

Travelit has evolved from a purely online booking solution to an end-to-end travel and expense management solution. Expense management forms a critical part of travel, providing companies and travellers with the transparency and visibility needed to understand and identify the true cost of travel.

Mobility has become a key factor for any traveller and company, to ensure ease and convenience for both receiving travel documentation and capturing expenses on the go. Travelit has developed its own mobile app to cater for this functionality, which has been exceptionally well received within the market place.

Katz and Barry Painting, Travelit's CIO, believe that with the app, they've developed something unique and groundbreaking in a South African context.

The pair drew on their own experiences as business travellers and identified all the different touchpoints along the corporate travel journey that might require a technical solution, and provide for integration into an app. And then they built a solution that was user-friendly for customers, with a focus on producing something that required as fewer 'clicks' as possible.

The app begins with the traveller's profile, which covers everything from personal information and contact details to preferences, loyalty numbers, policy group, card in pocket, and copies of ID, passport,



•• Travelit's business strategy incorporates and provides solutions for the challenges that it faces within this very dynamic, unique and everchanging continent. ••

visa, vaccination and car licence documents. Additional functionality includes all the traveller's trips and itineraries and an easy-to-use expense claim section

The app is an extension of the online portal, making it customizable to specific corporates and travel policies. It's also been set up for online offline functionality and doesn't require an internet connection.

"Ours is **that** corporate, **that** traveller, **that** policy group, **those** vendors," says Painting. "It's the same as Travelit does, and it's very specific to the individual traveller, the company, and the company's policy group."

Travelit's business strategy incorporates and provides solutions for the challenges that it faces within this very dynamic, unique and ever-changing continent, Africa. Payment solutions for suppliers, effective communication to travellers, providing the necessary inventory and delivering the necessary savings to clients, are all key to its success.

As a result, Tourvest Travel Services remains the market leader in providing online travel management services. ■

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#### ▼ FEATURE – TRAVEL TECHNOLOGY





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#### FEATURE – TRAVEL TECHNOLOGY



hatever we think about the pace of change in our everyday lives, technology is right at the core, enhancing and personalising our experiences like never before. And nowhere is this truer than in the travel world, where technology has positively disrupted how we plan, book and stay when travelling for work or leisure, never mind how we consolidate the associated spend at the end of it all.

This technological transformation has spawned a new generation of tech-savvy, app-wielding consumers who demand smart, friction-less travel at every point of the process. From booking travel and accommodation to checking in, shopping and booking transfers, the power is literally in people's pockets.

This new 'on demand' dynamic and fast-paced travel culture has thrown a spotlight on corporate travel, because it openly challenges the stigma which has, for so long, defined business trips – bleary-eyed men and women in suits rushing through an airport to catch a flight they're likely late

for, before spending the night in boring, corporate accommodation and eating bland food off the room service menu.

This could not be further from the truth. Technology has inspired the rebirth of corporate travel like never before, giving business travellers a greater sense of freedom and exploration, as well as validating time out of the office – something which has blighted business leaders for years.

#### **INDUSTRY VIEW**

But, where does it end and what does 'technology' mean to those at the very heart of the corporate travel industry?

More importantly, what role do they believe it should play, beyond just making the entire travel process easier?

"While many believe technology is surpassing human interaction, the nuances of individual needs and travel cannot be forgotten," says Kananelo Makhetha, CEO of Club Travel Corporate. "We view technology as an enabler of people, because ultimately it is there to support people and make their lives easier. Tech is

66 While many believe technology is surpassing human interaction, the nuances of individual needs and travel cannot be forgotten. 29

only effective when it adds value to the relationships and services we offer to people. Without a doubt, technology has helped us automate repetitive tasks, but its true value is in how it has allowed us to focus on total traveller management for our corporate clients."

It's an interesting time for Club Travel, which only recently was sold to online travel agency Travelstart, making for an intriguing mix of services and skills under one roof. Only two years ago, Club Travel itself acquired corporate travel and expense management solution, Travellinck, which allows TMCs

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#### FEATURE – TRAVEL TECHNOLOGY





to control travel expenditure from requisition to reconciliation, enabling cost savings, easy travel policy enforcement, streamlined processes and accurate reporting. It also allows real-time booking of flights, accommodation and car hire with a payment platform that enables direct settlement to suppliers and automatic reconciliation of card statements.

"With Travellinck we aim to reduce the cost of business travel and simplify it," says Makheta. "To this end, we are focused on several areas including automation, smooth integration with third-party systems, policy and developing innovative booking technology with real value such as seat selection."

As already touched on, there is plenty happening in the travel tech space and not a day goes by without a major development, advancement, acquisition of partnership.

Wings Travel is another industry player that has been quite active, and in June announced a major 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.

"Together with Alchimea we are working on various strategic technology projects including the development of Wings' innovative mid-office system TMA® (Travel Management Application)," says Nemanja Krstić, Wings Global Head of Technology. "This cutting-edge software enables all Wings offices globally to operate off the identical centralised global platform and database, which is distinctly unique, on this global scale, with zero compromise. TMA® enables above-industry data integrity levels, real-time traveller tracking, reliable on-demand reporting and advanced pre and post-trip data analytics, all managed off a single dashboard by country, region or globally, in the currency of choice."

Krstić has a clear idea of how he sees technology in the business travel space and what role it needs to play.

"As the world becomes increasingly reliant on connectivity, the need for technology in business becomes vital," he says. "Delivering travel solutions has had to evolve in line with these trends and with that new methods of conducting business, processing client data and sourcing relevant content had to be applied. TMCs simply have to embrace technology to deliver these services in a world that is always on."

"I think the focus is definitely beyond making trips easier through technology," says Louis van Zyl, CEO of CWT South Africa. "It touches on maximizing value, educating buyers, making them the experts in their trip planning and execution processes, but also keeping them informed and equipped throughout the entire process, from planning to undergoing their trips, to ultimately returning home and completing the process."

Van Zyl, though, is also of the opinion that technology shouldn't remain purely "business".

"I think an element we shouldn't lose focus of is the element of fun," he says. "I think technology

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can also help in breaking the monotony of a business trip and providing options for travellers to take time to enjoy what their business destinations offer outside of the work commitments."

#### ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI is one of the hottest topics in the travel technology space.

"There's no doubt that artificial intelligence is here to stay in business travel," says Nicole Adonis, GM of FCM Travel Solutions South Africa, which last year rolled out the chatbot Sam. "The volume of data held by travel providers, including TMCs, such as traveller profiles, transaction history and personal preferences, make travel and AI ideal bedfellows. At the highest level, AI has the capability to improve customer service, to make that service more personal and improve travel planning."

The technology companies – and the prominent players in this space – would seemingly agree.

"We are mixing AI (deep learning) with econometric models and behavioural economics, including the irrational behaviours of humans, to better model and predict traveller choices," says Andy Hedley, MD of Amadeus Southern Africa. "Artificial intelligence and bots – from travel companion to travel assistant to travel essential - corporations and TMCs sit on a massive amount of data and should leverage this data as a way to build predictive analysis and benchmarks, and to offer relevant and instant information to travellers."

There's clearly a huge opportunity for travel brands and entities willing to take the technological 'plunge' and open themselves up to this sort of change.

Further to that, automation is already helping companies to target and reach customers and deliver better services, but the change has just started. There is still a big opportunity to simplify customer journeys and personalise experiences in the travel and hospitality industries.

Google's Vice-President of Engineering for Travel and Shopping, Oliver Heckmann, says that nearly 60% of consumers "We are mixing AI (deep learning) with econometric models and behavioural economics including the irrational behaviours of humans."

believe that their travel experience should deploy the use of AI and base their search results on past behaviours and/or personal preferences. Google's data shows that 36% of consumers are willing to pay more for these personalized experiences.

Further to that, a 2018 survey by YouGov found that 68% of the British public would welcome the presence of AI at the airport.

Carried out on behalf of inflight entertainment and passenger engagement company Spafax, the survey asked 2,110 people for their wish list for a "lounge of the future".

Findings showed a disparity between what young and

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old want. While 27% of all respondents said they would not like artificial intelligence to assist them with anything for their trip, over 55s were most resistant to AI in airports, with 33% saying they would not like it to assist them. In contrast, only 17% of 18-24-year-olds said they didn't want help from AI.

Of those asked, 37% aged 18 to 34 said they would play augmented reality (AR) board games with other passengers, but only 9% of those 55 and over said they would. Other findings included:

- 17% of 18-24-year-olds said they would like to try on hologram clothes at an airport, while only 6% of 55 and overs said they would
- 36% of women said they would choose a virtual reality (VR) preview of tourist attractions at their destination, along with the opportunity to pre-book tickets once they'd browsed

"We commissioned this research to find out what the British public actually wants out of their airport and airport lounge experiences," said Charles Vine, Head of Brand Alliances at Spafax. "Airport lounges in particular are evolving from faceless waiting rooms with chairs and a coffee machine to being providers of an experience

in their own right. The results send a clear message to us that people want the introduction of technology, but only in a way that enhances their trip, entertains or is enjoyable."

It also comes down to just how AI is used to augment an existing offering, and this appears to be something the TMCs are grappling with

"The benefit of having a global standardised platform, such as ours, is the accessibility to rich/'Big Data' sources, which allows for the AI component to be plugged into a number of areas, enabling the solutions teams to creatively interpret and utilise," says Krstić. "Soon, technology such as chatbots and voice recognition will become standard operating features. However, there are many other areas that could benefit from the utilisation of AI in the travel space, such as travel risk, itinerary automation, anomaly detection, automated quality checking, fraud prevention, data mining etc."

It's clear to see the myriad of potential benefits to the corporate traveller and his or her company.

"AI is already embedded in business travel and is helping processes on the operational side of business travel management," says Makheta. "We believe it will play a bigger role in "AI is already embedded in business travel and is helping processes on the operational side of business travel management."

personalisation by offering an intimate picture of the individual traveller and the minute details of his/her needs. AI will make relevant predictions, recommendations, and accurate decisions based on personal data. The result will be that people will be able to move even faster."

#### **BIOMETRICS**

As it is, advances in machine vision are seeing a growing convergence between AI and other sophisticated technologies like biometrics, which has been a feature of airport technology development in the past two years.

According to Forbes, most airlines and airports are exploring the use of biometric identification to get travellers checked in, through security, and boarded on flights.

A 2018 survey by SITA, a technology company serving the aviation industry, found that 77% of airports and 71% of airlines

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were either researching biometrics or planning to implement programmes to identify travellers using facial recognition or other biometric means.

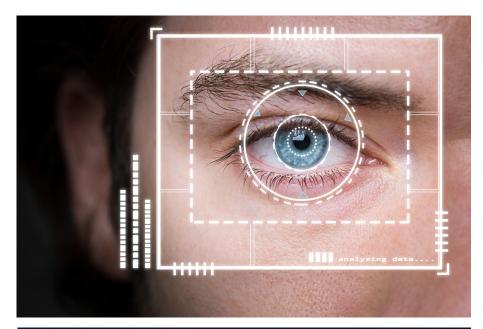
Biometrics are already becoming a familiar part of the travel experience, to the extent that Delta launched the first end-toend biometric terminal in the US, promising to speed up the passenger experience at Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson airport.

Facial recognition technology

can be used to confirm passenger identity at check-in, bag drop, security and boarding, removing the need to show a passport and boarding pass at each step.

"Customers have an expectation that experiences along their journey are easy and happen seamlessly – that's what we're aiming for by launching this technology across airport touch points," said Delta's Chief Operating Officer, Gil West.

In 2018, British Airways





66 Biometrics not only have the power to create a more secure world by validating identity with more certainty, but also create a more seamless customer experience. 99

expanded trials of biometric boarding and arrivals technology at US airports, with partnerships at airports in Los Angeles, Orlando, Miami and New York.

Travellers going through Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) can also make use of automated e-Security Gates powered by facial-recognition technology, cutting down the amount of time it takes for them to proceed through security to just 20 seconds.

Eligible travellers can use the electronic gates to scan their documents and boarding passes, which are then verified by facial recognition technology using the gates' embedded cameras. Previously, airport security staff conducted this process manually.

No prior enrolment is required in order to be able to use the gates, and any passengers over the age of 11 that hold a valid electronic travel document are able to use the service.

"This smart initiative will speed up and enhance the accuracy of the document checking process," said Chris Au Young, General Manager, Smart Airport for Airport Authority Hong Kong. "It also marks the first step in our efforts to streamline passenger boarding at HKIA by using biometrics."

Regional rival Changi Airport in Singapore, meanwhile, opened its new Terminal 4 in 2017, offering automated end-to-end processing across its check-in, security, immigration and boarding procedures, with facial recognition playing a key role.

Technology companies like Apple have also made biometric identification more familiar to the masses.

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We picture a not-sodistant future where biometrics replace the need for cash, credit cards and physical forms of identification. \*\*

"Biometrics not only have the power to create a more secure world by validating identity with more certainty, but also create a more seamless customer experience," said Caryn Seidman Becker, CEO and Chairman of airport security firm CLEAR.

"We picture a not-so-distant future where biometrics replace the need for cash, credit cards and physical forms of identification – think health insurance cards, hotel check-ins, restaurants, car sharing, smart cities and more. The possibilities are endless."

#### NDC

There's no doubt that another hot topic in the travel industry is IATA's New Distribution Capability (NDC).

NDC is a travel industrysupported program launched by IATA for the development and market adoption of a new, XML- based data transmission standard.

The NDC Standard enhances the capability of communications between airlines and travel agents and is open to any third party, intermediary, IT provider or non-IATA member, to implement and use.

According to IATA, the NDC Standard enables the travel industry to transform the way air products are retailed to corporations, leisure and business travellers, by addressing the industry's current distribution limitations:

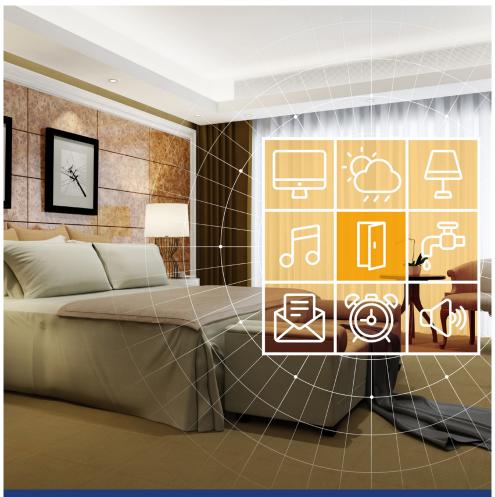
- Product differentiation and time-to-market
- Access to full and rich air content
- Transparent shopping experience

But NDC has been a long time in the works, and IATA has had to work hard to get the travel industry onboard.

In fact, according to a 2018 report by ACTE, many travel managers still felt in the dark about the issue. The report said that almost a quarter (23%) of travel managers said they were "not at all" confident in their understanding of NDC and what it meant for their programme. A further 58% said they were only "somewhat" confident in their understanding.

"I think we have experienced the initial euphoria of what it promises to bring to our industry, the despondency of the realization that it is not the ultimate answer to all our shortcomings, and the frustration of the initial teething pains," says Van Zyl. "As usual, I think the early adopters have felt the most pain, but I have no doubt that IATA and the NDC proponents will ultimately overcome the initial challenges, like dealing with all the exceptions in transacting on this

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#### THE 'SMART' HOTEL ROOM

All the major players in the hotel space – including Hilton and Marriott – seem to be working on a "smart" or "connected" hotel room, with AccorHotels the latest big group to make a noise about the progress it is making, with the company testing technology that uses voice activation and the internet to make the hotel room experience more accessible and personalized.

A model smart room at the company's Paris headquarters incorporates a variety of technologies and accessibility features to accommodate up to three guests at a time.

#### They include:

- A Google Home voice assistant
- A connected tablet that controls lighting, music, the bed headboard, curtains, TV, and other audio-visual equipment in the room
- A special LED lighting system that senses motion at night to automatically turn on
- Sleep aids, like Dodow, described as a "luminous metronome that promotes both concentration or sleep," and a Dreem headband that has "brain energy sensors and a relaxation system."
- Aromatherapy aids like Sensorwake, which helps you wake up to a certain aroma, like coffee, tea, or a sea breeze, and Skinjay shower capsules that contain essential oils.

"Voice is the future," says Damien Perrot, Senior Vice-President of Design Solutions for AccorHotels. "To be able to use it to access the TV, go to Netflix directly, or select your favourite song — we're hoping to connect all of those elements to enhance the guest room experience. All of these elements and innovation in technology help improve the usage of the room."

AccorHotels is testing the use of both voice activation and in-room tablets.

Perrot said the decision to use an in-room tablet was prompted by the fact that "many guests don't want to have to download another app that they only use when they're in the hotel. For this room, the decision was to put in a real tablet with all the functionality already built in, and they can use the table to connect everything."

platform, including interlining and packaging ancillaries. As with all new and disruptive technologies, once realization sets in, these challenges will be dealt with and overcome."

If one speaks to a broad cross-section of senior industry members, one gets the sense that the tide has been turning and that the big players understand their role in driving this process and change.

"NDC is a top priority for Amadeus and we're moving fast to integrate NDC content into the Amadeus Travel Platform," says Hedley.

"NDC is currently top of mind for TMCs," says Krstić. "The benefit to airlines of selling content via this channel surpasses any current traditional method. This point is only reinforced by official plans from the GDS companies embarking on huge development initiatives, ones that would completely change the traditional GDS business model and see their platforms themselves as massive content aggregators."

Perhaps Adonis simplifies the issue even further, distilling it down to its core purpose, which must have the travel customer at the centre, because, ultimately, the consumer has to benefit from this major industry change.

"By integrating NDC content into our core booking systems, we will be able to personalise the booking experience for our customers even further," she says. "This will ensure that we continue to offer the widest choice of content that is appropriate for our corporate customers' needs."

#### **CONCLUSION**

It's a tough job just trying to keep up, isn't it?

There really is so much advancement and so much in the way of new technology in the travel space, and what's clear is that the big players are all diving headlong into it, to see where they can improve the customer experience, create efficiencies and just generally make the whole travel process a seamless one.

This can only be good for the consumer or end user. ■

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#### TRIED & TESTED/Hotel









#### Crowne Plaza Nairobi

**BACKGROUND:** Crowne Plaza Nairobi opened in 2010, back when there was a dearth of internationally-recognised hotel brands in the Kenyan capital. Nearly a decade on and it has been joined by a fair few, including Radisson Blu, Kempinski, Pullman, Moevenpick and ibis Styles. A second Crowne Plaza opened near Jomo Kenyatta International Airport last year.

WHERE IS IT? Upper Hill, known as the city's financial hub, is where you'll find the regional headquarters of the World Health Organisation, the African Development Bank, Citibank and the World Bank, as well as various embassies and offices.

**ROOMS:** There are 206 rooms that come in various categories and styles. There are Superior rooms with a king-sized bed, Standard rooms with two queens, Executive Suites with a separate lounge area, and then larger Presidential Suites. All rooms have desks, armchairs, safes and tea/coffee-making facilities. I stayed for one night and found my Executive Suite comfortable, enjoying a nice bath. There are distinctive Crowne Plaza touches such as a pillow menu and a lavender sleep spray next to the bed. The wi-fi was fast and easy to connect to, and there was a bowl of fresh fruit on the dining room table. There were also large windows with good views, and a turndown service was carried out while I was having dinner. My TV remote wasn't working, but I didn't actually want to watch TV anyway so didn't ask to get it fixed. The screen was surprisingly small given the cinema-like proportions that most hotels offer these days, though this wasn't a problem for me.

BARS AND RESTAURANTS: Alabaster

Coffee Lounge, in the lobby, serves light meals, pastries and drinks. Baraka Restaurant serves the morning breakfast buffet, a buffet lunch and a la carte dinners. Breakfast starts at 06h00, and though I had to leave before that to catch a flight, staff offered to prep me something in advance (I don't like eating in the early morning so declined). On a side note, though this is far from an airport hotel, the reception contains a useful board displaying live flight information. The night before I ate at Sikia Restaurant, which is dark and atmospheric but with bright local artwork on the walls. It was only me, a couple on a date and another person seemingly there on business, but it is the kind of space where you don't feel conspicuous. Staff said the restaurant is usually packed on weeknights, when the hotel is a lot busier. The food and beverage offering has recently had a refresh under a new manager, who has placed an emphasis on international wines and meats. There are also local dishes such as a tasty Red Snapper in white wine sauce, which I opted for. It's a good, wideranging menu, with affordable vegetarian options such as risotto or pasta parcels, and pricier dishes including lobster thermidor and prawns masala. Accessible from reception is the two-storey bar/ lounge which is open from 10h00 till 'late', serving beers, wines and spirits. A resident pianist plays in the evenings.

**BUSINESS FACILITIES:** There is free, fast wi-fi throughout the property and a desk in every room. When it comes to

meetings and events, this is clearly where the hotel is in its element. There are 11 rooms across a total 800m², the largest of which can fit 550 people, or 300 for a banquet. To the left of reception are the big ballrooms, while the smaller meeting rooms are tucked away further into the property across different floors.

**LEISURE FACILITIES:** There is a large two-floor gym which is staffed between 06h00 and 22h00, although you are able to get in on request at other times. It's open to non-guests and apparently popular in the early morning when members will use it before work, since they can get into the city centre and beat the traffic. Upstairs are changing rooms with showers as well as a few rooms which can be booked for beauty treatments and massages. There is also an outdoor pool.

**VERDICT:** A classic Crowne Plaza, and a very nice one at that. Staff are friendly and accommodating, the rooms are large and there are lots of dining options as well as a good gym and pool. The kind of hotel you wouldn't really need to leave. ■

Jenni Reid

#### FACT FILE

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#### ▼ TRIED & TESTED/Flight









### **British Airways A380 Business Class**

BACKGROUND: Celebrating its centenary this year, British Airways offers 18 weekly flights direct to London from Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg, having added the Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner to the current fleet of A380 aircraft that service 14 of the route's flights. To celebrate 100 years in the aviation business, the airline is upgrading its Club World seat, the third evolution of the award-winning first fully-flat bed in business class introduced in 2000.

**CHECK-IN:** I saved oodles of time by checking in online and after dropping off my luggage, ambled off to the SLOW Lounge as the British Airways lounges at O.R. Tambo International Airport were closed for refurbishment. Here I found free wi-fi, comfy chairs, tasty snacks, and a decent double espresso. On board was where the magic happened though.

THE SEAT: I breezed straight onto the plane and into my wide, roomy Club World seat (53F on the upper deck) with footrest. After take-off you can recline the seat into a cradle position – best for watching movies – or all the way down to a 183cm flat bed for a comfy snooze under a soft lightweight quilt, part of the bedding and amenities supplied by the White Company. While the new Club Suite will offer direct-aisle access, a door for increased privacy, and 40% more storage, on this flight the traditional but perfectly comfortable

formation still applied. Once we were airborne, I raised my privacy screen, stashed my shoes in the small storage drawer, slipped on my sleeper socks, and applied the lip balm from my zipup amenity kit before perusing the menu.

**CUISINE:** With the emphasis on fresh seasonal produce, my starter salad comprising mixed lettuce, baby rocket, celery, cherry tomato, apple and walnuts was deliciously crisp. Other choices included smoked salmon or Thai-spiced butternut soup. Main courses offered roasted Cajun breast of chicken with unami rice, pak choi and rooibos tea jus; a spinach-and-ricotta tortellini; or seared fillet of beef, porcini mushroom, potato puree, baby carrot, and green beans. The latter was succulent and tender - no mean feat on an aircraft - with the red wine and thyme gravy providing the perfected foil to the veggies. I washed it all down with two glasses of a Cabarnet Sauvignon 2017 from the Colchagua Valley in Chile. Mindful of my waistline, I passed on the pudding - lemon curd and pistachio tartlet, pecan tartlet with white chocolate drizzle or chocolate dome cake - and opted for the cheese board featuring mature cheddar, Simonsberg Blue, Caraway seed Kwaito with date and fig chutney, accompanied by a glass of Graham's Six Grapes Reserve Port, a ripe, full-bodied vintage affair that no doubt assisted my blissful sevenhour sleep, making the 10-hour (or so)

flight go very quickly indeed. I awoke to breakfast aromas and opted for the 'hot English' featuring an omelette with sausage, bacon, hash brown, and Twinings tea, one of several British brands introduced to celebrate the airline's centenary.

**LANDING:** Arrival at Heathrow Airport went smoothly, and I wasted no time in hurrying off to Terminal 2 to catch a connecting flight to Copenhagen, refreshed, rejuvenated, and raring to go!

**VERDICT:** Flying business class means not needing at least three days to recover from the cramped ordeal of uncollected food trays, arm nudging, and fractious brats kicking the back of your chair. While I'm often the witch sprinkling sneezing powder over the fairy dust in many a PR tale, it's hard to find fault with consistently good service, friendly crew, and being able to jump the checkin queue. Most of all, I love getting a good night's sleep far above the clouds, something well-nigh impossible for me when wedged like a battery hen into an economy seat. In my experience, British Airways' Club World lives up to its promise and then some!

#### Caroline Hurry

FACT FILE

W: britishairways.com

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Karl de Lacy Director, International Hotel Services: Best Western

## Making progress

Best Western Hotels & Resorts is one of the world's big hotel groups, with a portfolio of nearly 5,000 properties in almost 100 countries. It also has a long history in Africa and is in the process of slowly growing its presence on the continent, as explained by the group's Director, International Hotel Services, Karl de Lacy.

- Q: What was the most recent Best Western-branded hotel to open in Africa?
- A: We are very happy to say that the Best Western Plus Westlands in Nairobi has opened. We have been looking forward to this opening in the very competitive market that Nairobi is and we look forward to welcoming guests in an area of the city where we have not previously had a property.
- **Q:** What will be the next Best Western-branded hotel to open on the continent?
- A: There is a bit of competition on this one. We will open our second Addis Ababa property, the Best Western Azure Airport in Nairobi, and the Best Western Kisumu one after another in the coming months. I would venture to say that the hotel that will get there first will be the Best Western Azure Airport.
- **Q:** Are you planning on introducing any 'new' Best Western brands to Africa in the near future?
- A: Construction started earlier this year at the Vib in Cape Town, and it is expected to open in early 2021. This 80-room property is an exciting addition to the portfolio of hotels in the region and will offer a stylish design and a focus on convenience and technology. Of our newer brands, we already have the Executive Residency by Best Western open and look forward to adding to these over the coming months, with active opportunities for Sadie properties in Addis Ababa and Dar es Salaam.
- Q: Did you make any notable announcements at the recent Africa Hotel Investment Forum?
- **A:** While there were no announcements this year, we were happy with some of the new opportunities we learned about during the course of the event.

- We are working to put those agreements in place. The event was also too early to announce our newest addition, SureStay Studio by Best Western. SureStay Studio was designed to compete in the premium-economy extended stay segment.
- **Q:** What are your general views on the African hotel development space?
- A: We are very excited by the opportunities that hotel development in Africa has. With continued growth of airlift access, the development opportunities will follow. Our ongoing growth of the portfolio of brand options allows us to participate in various opportunities across the calibre of hotels that owners can chose from, from economy through to luxury.
- Q: In which segment do you see the most opportunity in Africa? Luxury, upper-midscale, midmarket etc?
- A: With our newest brands, Sadie and Aiden, there is an exciting opportunity for existing hotels to compete with the new-build projects that are coming into many of the cities across Africa. These brands offer hotel owners the opportunity to remodel and create a hip and contemporary product, but don't alienate any guests. These hotels are a place that is right for so many guest types and travel occasions.
- **Q:** What is Best Western's preferred model, in terms of hotel ownership, management etc, as it relates to Africa?
- A: We offer a very flexible offering to independent hotel owners who understand the value of the brand and what we can provide when it comes to a comprehensive distribution opportunity along with the strength of our loyalty club, Best Western Rewards. Alongside working with the existing third

- party operators, we have existing owners who are willing to provide management agreements for owners who like the brand option, but don't want to run their property on a day to day basis.
- **Q:** Where does technology sit in the Best Western strategy and offering?
- A: Our focus is on cementing customer relationships from the outset. With more than 4,700 hotels in nearly 100 countries, Best Western's mobile concierge application, implemented two years ago at select properties, allows guests to customise their stay. It is clear that many customers would rather text than pick up the phone, so the mobile concierge meets their expectations while simultaneously creating better efficiency for the hotelier since responses can be tracked.
- **Q:** What do you think the modernday business traveller is looking for from a hotel?
- A: Based on guest feedback from across the globe, there are three factors that I would suggest that can make or break a hotel stay. These are good wi-fi, a clean and well-maintained property, and recognition of the fact that the guest has chosen to stay with us over many other options. If hotels get those right it allows the visitor to make the most of their stay, whether it be for business or pleasure. Offering an award-winning global loyalty club doesn't hurt either.
- **Q:** Where do you believe the next African hotel development hot spots are?
- A: After a few strong years in East Africa, I believe the pendulum is moving back westwards. We have recently seen an increase in opportunities in Côte d'Ivoire and a slow, but steady level of interest coming back in Nigeria. ■



### **New** connection

In December, US-based United Airlines will connect South Africa directly with New York, thanks to its new Cape Town-New York/Newark service. **Bob Schumacher**, Regional Managing Director Sales of United, sheds some light on this new route.

Bob Schumacher Regional Managing Director Sales: United

**Q:** What is United's view on Africa and where does it fit into the airline's strategy?

A: United would always like to consider itself as opportunistic – and 'connecting people and uniting the world' is at the core of what we do. United is delighted to be returning to Africa and we will look to introduce services to where our customers want to fly.

**Q:** What was the business case behind the launch of the Cape Town route?

**A:** We know from our customers that Cape Town and the Western Cape is on many people's bucket list, and anyone who has been there knows why! In the opposite direction, the US has so much to offer the tourist that it is no surprise that it constantly rates as one of the top countries in the world to visit. But beyond the leisure market, the burgeoning business community of Cape Town and the Western Cape is also looking for direct links to the US, and the financial capital of North America, New York City. Beyond New York/Newark, United offers over 80 non-stop onward destinations across North America, Canada and the Caribbean.

**Q:** Which aircraft will United use on the route and why?

**A:** United's new Cape Town to New York/Newark route will be operated with one of the most advanced passenger aircraft, the Boeing 787-9.

**Q:** How many business class seats does it have and what are some of the standout features of this cabin?

A: The service will be operated with a Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner featuring 48 seats in United Polaris business class, 88 seats in economy plus and 116 seats in economy. The Dreamliner offers customers many features

for increased comfort such as large windows, spacious overhead storage and modern LED lighting to simulate a full day, helping passengers to adjust their internal clock on the trans-Atlantic flight. In addition, a lower cabin altitude, cleaner air and smoother ride help customers feel rested on arrival.

**Q:** How is United using technology to enhance the passenger experience?

**A:** We are introducing new technologies as well as new products and services, which are improving the travel experience for all of our customers throughout their journey. This is what we call the Customer 360 mindset. We continue to invest in technology that puts flight information and transactions at customers' fingertips with an app that enables mobile bookings, status updates, check-in, boarding passes and more. We identified boarding as an opportunity to improve the airport experience and recently introduced our 'Better Boarding' process – giving customers more space at the gate, less time waiting in line, and improved boarding information to create a less stressful environment. ConnectionSaver automatically identifies departing flights that can be held for connecting United customers, while ensuring those who have already boarded the aircraft arrive at their destination on time. It sends text messages with directions to the gate for their connecting flight and information about how long the walk will take. United's ConnectionSaver technology automatically scans flights for customers who are making tight connections to determine if the connecting flight can be held without inconveniencing other customers. The ConnectionSaver tool takes into account factors

such as the time it will take for

late connecting customers to

travel gate-to-gate as well as the impact the hold may have on other flights and customers. Our onboard entertainment system offers the world's most extensive suite of accessibility features on seatback entertainment, which accommodates any level of vision, as well as provides support for customers with hearing and mobility issues.

**Q:** Do you have a view on Africa moving to a more 'open skies' approach than it currently enjoys?

**A:** These decisions are of course political and in all markets that United flies we need all relevant permissions before commencing service. The more open the markets, the easier it is for air carriers to facilitate new connections – for both business and leisure purposes.

**Q:** Are there any plans to add other African cities to United's route map?

**A:** Our focus right now is to deliver this new service for South Africa.

**Q:** Have you picked up on any global airline trends that you feel are worth noting?

A: The global travel market continues to grow and new flying is testament to this. Somewhere on the globe there will always be localised pockets of weakness caused by a variety of micro or macroeconomic factors. However, the US market remains very solid (as recently reported in our Q3 earnings) and we at United are very confident in our future.

**Q:** Where would you like to see United's African presence in 10 years' time?

A: Our focus at this time is on introducing this new route and working with our partners across South Africa to make it a success.







Director of Finance The Westin Cape Town Hotel has appointed Ruan du Plessis as its new Director of Finance. Following the completion of his articles, Du Plessis was appointed as the

Financial Manager of Protea Hotel by Marriott Knysna Quays. He remained responsible for the hotel's financial functioning for five years, before taking up the position of Financial Manager at AC Hotel by Marriott Cape Town Waterfront in October 2018. Du Plessis brings a range of leadership skills to the position, as well as a strong vision and strategic thinking.



Board Member The Southern African Association for the Conference Industry has appointed Michelle Bingham, Sales Manager at Sandton Convention Centre, to its board

as the venue representative. Bingham has been a member for seven years and Vice-Chair of the Johannesburg subcommittee for three years. Bingham, who has been with SCC since 2013, studied Tourism and Travel Services Marketing Management at Tshwane University of Technology. Her first job was as a hostess at Disney World's Animal Kingdom. She spent seven years in the hotel industry as a sales manager, before moving to SCC and the MICE industry.



Group International Sales Manager BON Hotels has appointed Shaun Boyd as International Sales Manager. Boyd joined the BON Hotels team in January 2019 as a sales executive,

focusing on Namibia and the Kruger National Park, after years of experience in sales and marketing in the hospitality industry. Hailing from Johannesburg, his first job was as a receptionist at the Westcliff Hotel. He joined 10 2nd Avenue Houghton Estate as a Reservation & Sales Consultant, becoming General Manager of the estate and its sister property, 26 Sunset Avenue Llandudno, in 2012.

South African Tourism has promoted Nombulelo Guliwe as Chief Financial Officer. She joined as a Financial Compliance & Performance Manager



in 2011, and has since held numerous finance management positions within the organisation. Guliwe is highlyskilled in financial management, strategic planning

and execution, financial reporting and budgeting, supply chain and asset management, as well as people management. She is currently the chair of the South African Tourism Pension Fund, and has been a trustee of the same fund since 2012. She is registered with the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants as a Chartered Accountant (SA) and holds a Bachelor degree and Bachelor Honours degree in Accounting from the University of Johannesburg.



South African Tourism has appointed Themba Khumalo as Chief Marketing Officer. He is responsible for

defining, establishing and driving the South African Tourism brand in the domestic, regional and global markets as well as driving the overall marketing effort in order to achieve the economic outcomes required of the tourism sector from the National Development Plan. Khumalo has held senior marketing executive positions in blue chip companies like Unilever, Coca-Cola, MTN, Cell C and Telkom among others. He also has aviation and tourism experience, having held executive positions at South African Tourism (2003-2006), ACSA and SAA. A lawyer by training, Khumalo holds a Bachelor of Arts Law degree, masters certificates in marketing and organisational behaviour, as well as a certificate in Digital Marketing. He serves on the board of the Marketing Association of South Africa.



Taj Cape Town has appointed Adele Elasto as its Gautengbased Sales Manager. Elasto's priorities in her new position will be within the corporate market,

government, the PCO market, as well as groups and conferences for Taj Cape Town. She will also focus on ensuring

Taj Cape Town is seen to be the ideal location for eventing and conferencing on small to large scales.



Home\* Suite Hotel Bristol Road, Rosebank has appointed **Hilois** Greyling as its Hotel Manager. The Actuarial Science graduate turned her attention to

the hospitality industry with nothing less than a post-graduate diploma in hotel management at the Swiss Hotel Management School in Leysin, Switzerland. Kicking off her career at Disneyland in Paris, she has adventured via the industry to Dubai, fast-tracked by the Hilton Group to the manager position at The Hilton in Qatar, Doha and Sandton, and furthered her experience in Zambia and Mauritius.



Kempinski Hotels has appointed Roberto Simone as the new General Manager in charge of Villa Rosa Kempinski and the high-end tented camp in Masai Mara, Olare

Mara Kempinski. Simone brings onboard a wealth of experience honed working for some of the world's leading luxury hospitality brands such as JW Marriott, Anantara Hotels & Resorts and Silversea Six Star Cruise Line. Since 2017, Simone has occupied the role of Chief Operating Officer with Tonino Lamborghini Hotels & Resorts. He holds a Global MBA in Finance from Durham University Business School, UK, with concentration in Corporate Finance and Investment Analysis as well as certifications in Hotel Real Estate, Asset Management and Investment Analysis.



The new Visit Stellenbosch **Destination Marketing** Organisation has appointed Jeanneret Momberg as its General Manager. Momberg took the

helm at Visit Stellenbosch in August, bringing Stellenbosch stakeholders under one umbrella to market Destination Stellenbosch as a leading tourism and experience centre in the Western Cape and South Africa. She has 25 years' experience within Stellenbosch's wine and tourism sector.

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## Fit for purpose





Darryl Erasmus
Chief Quality
Assurance
Officer
TOURISM GRADING
COUNCIL OF
SOUTH AFRICA

As of 1 April this year, the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa has a new set of grading criteria, following an 18-month review process and three ministerial changes. With the dust now settled, it seemed a good time to catch up with Chief Quality Assurance Officer, **Darryl Erasmus**, to break down the changes and understand the thinking behind the new set of criteria.

outh Africa now has 5,201 graded establishments – totaling 124,268 rooms – across the TGCSA's three main categories of 'Hotel', 'Non-Hotel Accommodation', and 'Venues'.

That's after a pretty intensive 18 months of introspection into the TGCSA's existing grading criteria and plenty of consultation with industry bodies such as SAACI and FEDHASA, along with input from the country's hotel groups.

Following all of this, Erasmus is confident that the TGCSA is where it needs to be.

"What we have now is a much more streamlined set of criteria," he says. "The reason for reviewing was that we had a vast set of criteria and when we did the global bench-marking, we found that we were overly-prescriptive in many cases. What we needed to do was find a balance between giving you something that was globally competitive, but also allowed businesses to implement something that was fit for purpose."

After a period of inertia prior to this set of changes, the TGCSA has undertaken to review its criteria every three years, with the next review process set to start by the beginning of 2021.

"The way in which technology and the digitisation of the globe is affecting hospitality is phenomenal," says Erasmus. "If you go back a couple of years in our criteria and you look for 'wifi', you probably won't find it. Now it's the first thing a guest asks for. If you don't take those things into consideration, you lose relevance,

and if you lose relevance, you're dead."

Three main changes to the Grading Council's criteria stand out.

Firstly, it's the restating, with Erasmus and his team making the criteria easier to read and understand, by putting them into tabular form.

Secondly, there's been a change in grading levels. Previously, you had just one to five-star properties, but, according to Erasmus, there is a developing global trend of a premium offering that sits above the five-star category.

So, you now have 'Five-Star Premium' for those South African properties that really stand out. Currently, 13 properties make the grade, ranging from The Silo Hotel, Birkenhead House, Cape Grace and Ellerman House in the Western Cape, to Royal Malewane and Palala Boutique Game Lodge & Spa in Limpopo.

"This is reserved for properties in South Africa that epitomise the essence of what ultra-luxury travel is," says Erasmus. "That's not just in the product offering, facilities, amenities etc, but also in the service."

Properties can motivate for this grading, with the TGCSA looking at a variety of factors, such as awards won, location, staff ratios etc.

The last significant adjustment has seen a change in categories. For example, previously there was just a broad 'Hotel' category, which has now been broken down into 'Apartment Hotel', 'Boutique Hotel', 'Small Hotel', and 'Hotel'.

There's also a new 'Venues' category, which has more focus, with it broken down into 'Conference Centre', 'Convention & Exhibition Centre', 'Events Venue', 'Function Venue', 'Historical Venue', 'In-Hotel Conference Centre', and 'MESE' (Meetings, Exhibitions & Special Events), with MESE the former name of this overall category.

The 'Non-Hotel Accommodation' category has also been tweaked, whilst Erasmus and his team have also added what they are calling 'Accolades' across the board. There are currently 17 of these 'accolades' and allow properties to be classified, for example, 'family friendly', 'wedding venue', 'equestrian', '4x4', 'biking', wellness etc.

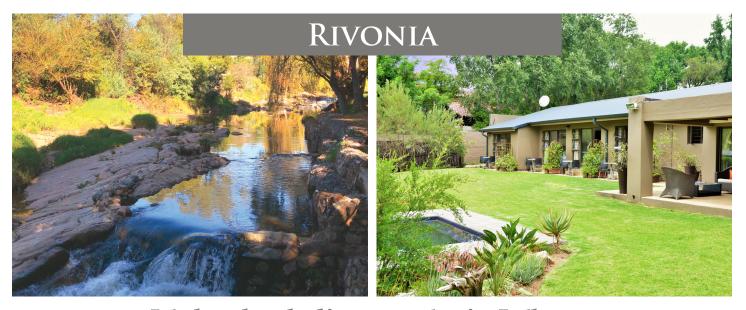
"Travellers are becoming a lot more discerning and have specific needs, and what the Accolades programme allows is the sourcing and securing of quality offerings that speak more to the traveller's needs," says Erasmus. "We're also allowing the product owner to get the type of guest they want. It's almost like a match made in heaven."

Erasmus would like to say the same for the new criteria and the South African travel trade, which is a big focus area for TGCSA.

He wants the trade to see value in the criteria, just as he wants the consumer to.

Ultimately, he wants to win on both fronts, and this new set of criteria looks to be a significant step in the right direction.. ■

#### Dylan Rogers



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