

# Business Traveller

AFRICA

MARCH 2020

## TRAVEL IN STYLE

*Premium hotel and airline products hold their own*

## CAR RENTAL

*How's the industry holding up?*

## TRIED & TESTED

*Airlink JHB-SKU; Protea Hotel by Marriott Kruger Gate*

## PLUS

*People on the Move, Upgrade stories, A word from ASATA*





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Welcome to a new-look *Business Traveller Africa*. Not only is the magazine under new editorship, but we're taking this opportunity to adopt our sister publication's fresh look and feel. It's a bit smaller, but less unwieldy, and still packed with quality editorial.

I am really excited to take the lead on the magazine, after helping produce content for its pages for the last six years. We will still be covering

the major industries within the travel space – TMCs, GDSs, travel technology, hotel groups, airlines and car rental – as well as profile the important African business travel destinations. We're also going to continue talking to the key players and get their insights and opinions on the various aspects of the business travel industry. And of course we'll continue reviewing hotels and airlines.

But we're also going to include some interesting stories from other *Business Traveller* publications, and some lifestyle articles. And this is where I'm going ask for your input. I want to know what sort of things you'd like to read about, both travel and lifestyle related. Drop me a mail at [kate@thefuture.co.za](mailto:kate@thefuture.co.za) with your suggestions and ideas.

In this issue we have a very interesting look at the future of travel (page 18). There are some truly amazing inventions being created and I hope I'm around to see some of them become reality.

We also take a look at the ever-resilient premium travel industry (page 10). Anyone who's spent a cramped long-haul flight squeezed into an economy airline seat understands the value of a business class cabin, even if the company accountants don't. And then there's our annual feature on the car rental industry (page 16), which unfortunately is still suffering from low margins and big competition.

'Til next time

Kate Kennedy  
Editor  
[kate@thefuture.co.za](mailto:kate@thefuture.co.za)

## PUBLISHER

Richard Lendrum

## EDITOR

Kate Kennedy  
[kate@thefuture.co.za](mailto:kate@thefuture.co.za)

## SALES

Enver Lawangi  
[enver@thefuture.co.za](mailto:enver@thefuture.co.za)

Tony Goslin  
[Anthonygoslin08@gmail.com](mailto:Anthonygoslin08@gmail.com)

## CONTRIBUTORS

Richard Holmes, Richard Tams

## DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Jason Crole  
[jcrole@gmail.com](mailto:jcrole@gmail.com)

## 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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## NEWMARK HOTELS EXPANDS REACH TO EUROPE

Newmark Hotels, Reserves, Lodges and Residences, the management company for a selection of luxury properties in Africa, is expanding its footprint by acquiring a stake in Unlock Boutique Hotels in Portugal. After embarking on comprehensive research alongside a rigorous, long-term growth strategy, Newmark identified a strategic acquisition opportunity within Portugal. This move, specifically having a presence Porto, Evora, Monchique, Lisbon, Viana do Castelo, Grandola and Amarante, is purposefully aligned to Newmark's growth strategy. Unlock Boutique Hotels is a curated selection of boutique hotels each representing unique experiences that set the benchmark for authentic hospitality and cultural richness.

## CITY LODGE HOTEL MAPUTO NOW OPEN

The City Lodge Hotel Group has opened its 62<sup>nd</sup> hotel – in Mozambique, under the leadership of General Manager Gustavo Cardoso. The City Lodge Hotel Maputo is located on Rua Para o Palmar, near Avenida Julius Nyerere, and within easy reach of the Costa do Sol beach, city centre, a private hospital, university and various other business, entertainment, shopping and cultural attractions. It is the closest hotel to the Maputo International Airport 6.5km away. The hotel has 148 rooms, including one suite, and guest rooms feature en-suite bathrooms with maxi showers (selected rooms have baths), queen or twin beds, air-conditioning,

wi-fi, television with selected DStv channels, tea and coffee making facilities, large electronic safe, fridge, USB ports on either side of the bed, and work desk with lighting and plugs for easy connectivity. There are three boardrooms that seat 12, 14 and 24 people (latter converts into two boardrooms of 12 seats each); #Café restaurant serving full breakfast, lunch and dinner plus alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages; swimming pool; bar; fitness room; free parking; 24-hour reception and check in service; and same day laundry. Three of the rooms are designed to meet the special needs of the physically disabled.



## IHG debuts voco in Africa

InterContinental Hotels Group has signed voco The Bank, Rosebank in South Africa in partnership with Valor Hospitality Partners Africa. A new built property, voco The Bank, Rosebank, will open its doors to guests this year and feature 131 well-designed rooms; an expansive dining facility which will include a two-level restaurant, a lounge and bar; and three meeting rooms, accommodating approximately 80 people. The hotel will provide easy access to all key business districts and directly links into the Rosebank Mall and pedestrian precinct, and is located 19km from the city airport.





## Home\* Suite Hotel set to open in Cape Town

Construction is well underway of the recently launched, Home\* Suite Hotels' property, located in Sea Point Cape Town. Home\* Suite Hotels, a new hotel brand that entered the South African market last year, setting out to marry the Airbnb concept with traditional hotel spoils, will open its second hotel in August. The 21-roomed boutique hotel which will be called Home\* Suite Hotels Sea Point will mirror the success of the group's proof-of-concept hotel in Rosebank, Johannesburg. The five-storey new-build situated in Main Drive in upper Sea Point will cater to the corporate and leisure visitor and will include an open-plan restaurant, a bar area, a rooftop terrace and pool. The group's strategy of creating an upmarket home-from-home offering has been front of mind in the design and architectural planning of the hotel. With large windows for maximum light, a shared kitchen and dining area and inclusive open work spaces, the hotel will replicate aspects that have been effective at the Johannesburg property.



## VISIT WTM AFRICA



Are you looking to discover the latest trends, seek out new products, expand your network or find the opportunities that will drive your personal and commercial success?

Join 6,263 travel industry professionals at the leading B2B exhibition for inbound and outbound African travel and tourism markets. With more than 738 exhibitors and buyers from across 100 different countries, WTM Africa creates personal and business opportunities, providing our customers with quality contacts, content and communities.

The event is a showcase for new developments, destinations, offers and technologies, which attracts international and regional suppliers to do business and drive commercial success for the African travel industry.

### MAKE A CONNECTION

Aviation giants Boeing and Airbus are developing new planes that can travel even further in one flight, but we still can't travel halfway across the globe without a connecting flight. So, here's a list of the most popular transit hubs.



### SINGAPORE CHANGI INTL

There are four terminals to contend with once you arrive, the newest being Terminal 4, which opened in October 2017.

### AMSTERDAM SCHIPHOL

One of the main connecting hubs in Europe, Amsterdam Schiphol airport has just one terminal, but is split into three large departure halls. Schiphol has five runways, and your connection time will differ depending on which runway you land on.

### ATLANTA HARTSFIELD-JACKSON INTERNATIONAL

The airport is one of the world's busiest, with over 107 million passengers passing through in 2018; it accommodates these passengers via two terminals and seven concourses.

### DUBAI INTERNATIONAL

Dubai is home to the largest airport terminal in the world by floor space (and is the second biggest building in the world by floor space); Terminal 3 was built to specifically host Emirates and Qantas flights, with Emirates making up 51% of all passenger traffic, and around 42% of all the airport's aircraft movements.

### LONDON GATWICK

It's called London Gatwick, although it's not actually in London, but is served by excellent transport links. Gatwick provide estimated minimum connection times, depending on which terminal your flight is due to arrive then depart from. If you're not changing terminals, the estimated minimum connection time is 60 minutes, but if you are changing terminals, then allow a minimum of 90 minutes.



## VIRGIN RETURNS TO MOTHER CITY

Virgin Atlantic has announced the reintroduction of Cape Town-London Heathrow flights with the seasonal service taking to the skies from October 2020 onwards. The route will add over 80,000 seats between Cape Town and London. The seasonal service launches on 25 October and will complement the existing daily A350 service flying between Johannesburg and London Heathrow. Flight VS478 will operate as a night flight departing Heathrow at 16h20 arriving into Cape Town at 05h55 whereas the inbound flight, VS479, will depart at 08h00 landing later that day at 18h00. The Cape Town flights will be operated on Virgin Atlantic's Boeing 787-9 aircraft, offering customers the airline's award-winning upper class, premium and economy light, classic and delight cabins.



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## Travel fails

*We've all found out the hard way that travel can be fraught with stupidity. Have a laugh at some of the #travelfails reported on Twitter.*

Alicia

[@aliciaknight8](#)

And the guy sitting next to me just started watching porn on his phone [#TravelFail](#)

Bronlea

[@bronleamishler](#)

You ever wanna have some fun: Forget your half-full water bottle in your carry-on bag whilst rushing through security. At 5 a.m. Always do it at 5 a.m. [#travelfail](#)

Lino Miani...Unofficial

[@MeanLin1](#)

Just realized I'm getting a middle seat. This is an outrage. [#TravelFail](#)

Indigo Daya

[@IndigoDaya](#)

Missed my flight to Adelaide. Got new tix, then told I'm too fat for an exit row seat. Just not the best day, really. Bring on [#reawakenaustralia](#), I need it! [#TravelFAIL](#)

Darren Dunn

[@WheelsUpDDD](#)

To the guy who brought chicken curry take-out on my flight..... Are [you] F'n serious? [#StartUpLife](#) [#Entrada](#) [#HolidayTravelers](#) [#Uhg](#) [#Travelfail](#)

Melissa Hill

[@melissahillbks](#)

Turns out trying to take off/roll back on suede over-the-knee boots in middle of airport security queue while standing on one leg is about as easy as it sounds... [#rookiemistake](#) [#travelfail](#)

Steve Cullum

[@stevecullum](#)

Had a shirt ready for tomorrow, but during my flight, I realized left it at home. So I just spent about 25-30 minutes walking around the airport trying to find the least touristy shirt I could. Soooo difficult!! At least I just needed one! [#travelfail](#)

# Hotels and OTAs – What’s the ‘Deal’?

*Online Travel Agents are continuing their profound effect on the global hotel industry.*



**WAYNE TROUGHTON**  
CEO HTI CONSULTING

**O**TAs are those third party booking sites such as Expedia, Travelstart and Booking.com which offer both leisure and business travellers an easy-to-search database of travel providers. They offer the opportunity to secure travel arrangements directly from their sites and to ‘bundle’ deals.

Looking back, the emergence of OTAs in the mid 90s appeared to herald a ‘win-win’ for various tourism and hospitality players. OTAs that purchased bulk amounts of rooms or bought up excess inventory helped hotels during off-peak times. These digital ‘agents’ gained from re-selling the rooms at a profit in exchange for their online services, whilst hotels received revenue on rooms they might not have sold otherwise. Although hotels paid commissions on bookings, they received value from OTAs’ digital advertising platforms, which typically gained the top slots in online search engines.

With many visitors entering the supplier’s website after visiting a booking site, this was especially worthwhile, particularly at the low level of commissions (usually 5 – 10%) that were the norm back then.

In recent years, however, the relationship between OTAs and hotels has become more tenuous. In some instances, commissions have increased dramatically, reaching between 15-30% for larger hotel chains and sometimes higher for smaller players. In some instances

too, direct hotel bookings have taken a hit – ultimately leading to decreased profitability.

I believe that, in a highly demanding hospitality field, both hotels and OTAs should maintain and nurture their relationships with each other. This is because, despite the rivalry, the two will continue to remain dependent on each other for the foreseeable future and the success or failure of each lies in the quality of services they both offer.

**OTAs are often the entry pass hotels need to get into the market.**

Quite simply, OTAs are often the entry pass hotels need to get into the market, find their customers and prove their worth. What’s more, Millennials are drawn to OTAs for their ability to book memorable experiences at a great value. On the flipside, the challenge for many OTA’s in some African countries, is often the perception that many online businesses are not legitimate; perhaps because they have been a victim of fraud. Some people still feel insecure transacting online and opt to pay cash or through other familiar means.

For hotels in Africa there is also still great value to be found in using traditional offline marketing channels, building direct relationships with corporate clients, working with tour operators to push holiday and business packages, advertising in trade journals and attending trade shows.

The main lesson is this: remain relevant, provide relevant services and adapt these to each market! In the hotel business, trust is

important. So, while the concept of online travel is increasingly being embraced, hotels primary online and marketing messaging should always remind prospective guests that booking direct is safe play, and that they have a 100% commitment to customer service if something does go wrong. Indeed, with an estimated 52% of OTA visitors clicking on the hotel website to receive more information on the hotel and what it offers, hotels must use this opportunity to convert some of this traffic into direct bookings.

Brands have also vertically integrated by buying OTA’s (i.e. Accor’s acquisition of Fast Booking) and striking deals; a deal between Marriott and Expedia Group, concluded toward end 2019, now makes the OTA the exclusive global optimised distributor of Marriott’s wholesale rates, availability and content to a network of global travel providers.

Also, by integrating reviews and user-generated content directly on their websites, hotels can increase the chances of visitors securing bookings directly. This is important when one considers that, according to TripAdvisor, 96% of their users consider reading reviews important and 83% usually reference reviews before making their booking.

Ultimately, this is a marriage of convenience. OTAs have a tremendous grasp of what’s coming down the pipe in terms of social media marketing, channel management and use of the internet. The majority of hotels also still need the massive reach and advertising budgets of OTAs to help attract as many guests as possible, while OTAs need hotels to actually provide varied and attractive options to their website visitors. **BT**



# Managing crises

**Y**ou have an important meeting in China, but the fast-spreading Coronavirus means the country is in lock-down. You have a flight booked to Spain, but the eruption of a volcano in Iceland has grounded all flights.

Travel is fraught with unexpected and uncontrollable events. The recent outbreak of the Coronavirus has once again illustrated the importance of having a proper crisis management protocol in place, of which travel management and duty of care are essential components. What could be more important than your human resource? Do you have your house in order?

This is where your Travel Management Company can add immense value. Lean on them to help you craft a travel crisis

management protocol that suits your company and its travel management goals, so that you're prepared for the unexpected and can safeguard your travellers pre, during and post travel.

TMCs will proactively assist in identifying passengers whose travel may be impacted. It is likely that the risk of travel may be low, but travellers may still be reluctant to travel long-haul when the situation is evolving so quickly and details are sketchy.

It's also important to ensure that your travel management team is monitoring for and acting on accurate information. The level of inaccurate reporting around Coronavirus, not only in South Africa but globally, has spread as wildly as the virus itself, and not all of it has been accurate. This is often the case when such incidents occur.



**OTTO DE VRIES**  
ASATA CEO

Your ASATA-accredited TMC is receiving accurate and continuously updated information from its association about the spread of the virus and how it impacts corporate travel. They can rely on such updates when any potential threat, event and incident occurs that threatens to disrupt corporate travel.

When situations evolve as quickly as the Coronavirus has, your TMC is the expert you can lean on to help you roll out your travel crisis management protocol. **BT**



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# Premium travel

## weathers gloomy economy

Budgets might  
be tight, but  
there is real  
value is  
travelling  
in style

WORDS RICHARD HOLMES

It's no secret that the South African economy – with knock-on effects for the entire region – is in a tight spot. Economic growth is unlikely to top a single percent for the year, unemployment remains stubbornly high, and from investment-grade status to power generation the outlook is gloomy. Last year the business confidence index released by Rand Merchant Bank and Stellenbosch University's Bureau for Economic Research's dropped to its lowest level in two decades.

And yet, business travel remains surprisingly resilient in the face of these stiff economic headwinds. While demand for some premium sectors of corporate travel has undoubtedly softened as travel managers rein in their spend, airlines and hotels report that demand remains steady as loyalty, service, convenience and value prove increasingly important for travellers keeping a keen eye on their budgets.

An excellent bellwether of the health of premium travel is the demand for first and business class aircraft cabins. While seats up at the sharp end of the plane, or in the executive floors of hotels, deliver lower volumes, premium demand is crucial to the financial health of the global travel industry.



Airlines have long prioritised the high-yielding premium cabins, and with good reason. According to the Airlines Financial Monitor released by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) last year, between January and October 2019 premium-class passengers accounted for just 5% of total international origin-destination traffic. However, that small volume of passengers accounted for 30% of total international revenues.

However, IATA also noted that the gloomy global economy is an ongoing concern.

According to the report: “weakness in the global economy and uncertainties related to world trade continued to weigh on business travel. Premium passenger traffic growth outpaced its economy counterpart only in the North Atlantic and Asia-Southwest Pacific markets.”

“The market for premium corporate travel has been weakening in line with the weak economy in the past six to 12 months,” says Kananelo Makhetha, Chief Executive Officer of Club Travel Corporate. However, it’s not all bad news, he adds, as travellers are often compensating, with “more interest in purchasing ancillary products like priority check-in, business lounge access and seat preferences.”

### PRIVATE TERMINALS MAKE TRAVEL A BREEZE

For many corporate travellers, private aviation is worth the considerable extra spend thanks to its combination of security, convenience, travel time and comfort. African cities are catering to this sustained demand with the opening of bespoke private aviation terminals aimed at corporate executives and high-net-worth individuals.

In Johannesburg, the Fireblade Aviation private terminal at OR Tambo International Airport offers world-class facilities for charter services. In addition to private lounges, showers, a gym, spa facilities and fully equipped meeting rooms, the bespoke terminal includes an accredited point of entry for customs and immigration formalities to be completed.

In Cape Town both ExecuJet and Signature Flight Support offer similar comforts alongside hangar and crew facilities, while in Lagos ExecuJet Africa has opened a modern terminal facility at Murtala Muhammed International Airport capable of accommodating an aircraft as large as a Boeing Business Jet.



CUPOLA SUITE AT THE MICHAELANGELO HOTEL IN SANDTON





### A HEALTHY DEMAND FOR PREMIUM CORPORATE TRAVEL

But on traffic into Africa, airlines report that corporate travellers remain convinced of the value to be found in the premium cabins.

“We have seen a healthy demand for premium corporate travel, both over the past months and looking forward to the first quarter of 2020. This can be considered very positive considering the current economic environment in South Africa,” says Wouter Vermeulen, General Manager: Southern African Region at Air France-KLM.

With many corporate travellers bound by their company’s travel policies, airlines are working hard to ensure their offering aligns with what key business clients desire, and can afford, when it comes to flying long-haul.

“It is the travel policy of the corporate customer that drives their travel behaviour,” says Vermeulen. “Of course there are a number of factors that would obviously help their decision to fly in premium cabins. We are in continuous contact with the corporate team and traveller to tailor our offering with the aim to best serve the needs of the corporate.”

While noting that trends and demand vary enormously between markets, “in general, corporate travel has strengthened over the past

12 months,” adds Tim Cordon, Area Senior Vice-President, Middle East and Africa for the Radisson Hotel Group. “We have however adjusted our approach to corporate negotiations, ensuring that we consider client needs holistically, and client-centricity remains at the heart of all our client interactions.”

In South Africa’s economic hub of Johannesburg, corporate demand also remains bullish at five-star properties.

“We have seen a continuous steady increase in corporate travel in the last year,” says Krista North, Director of Sales and Marketing for the Saxon Hotel. “Johannesburg remains a frequently visited business destination, with many international corporate companies that have offices in our city, and the numerous conferences and conventions taking place here. Bookings for the corporate traveller are still often done via the guests’ travel agents, however we have seen an increase of corporate bookings done via online channels too in the last year.”

### INVESTING IN PREMIUM PRODUCT

Ultimately it comes down to balancing a competitive price with a product that’s fit for purpose. And on that score international airlines, in particular, have invested heavily into ensuring the premium travel experience justifies the cost, and aligns with the needs of the modern corporate traveller.

Good news for travellers flying into continental Europe is that Air France will return its popular Boeing 777 onto the Johannesburg-Paris route between March and October. The aircraft is fitted with the airline's latest generation of in-flight product, including fully flat beds in business class and large private suites in La Premiere (First class).

"It really is an excellent product," says Vermeulen. "On top of that we have wi-fi on board our aircraft into South Africa to accommodate working and being online while travelling."

As part of its £6.5 billion (\$8.4 billion) investment into new product British Airways is rolling out major improvements to its services on the ground and in the air. While soft touches – new menus, in-flight amenities and bedding – are already evident on its A380 and 747 services, it's on the new A350 and 787 services that the most dramatic changes can be seen, with the revamped Club Suite and new First cabin respectively.

On terra firma, late-2019 also saw the opening of the new British Airways lounge at Johannesburg's OR Tambo International Airport. Taking its cue from similar revamps in New York and San Francisco, the new lounge blends both British and South African design, and features a dedicated dining area for First travellers, lobby bar area for socialising, brasserie dining area, and office space.

"Every detail has been carefully designed and we've created a space to meet our customers' needs," says Carolina Martinoli, British Airways' Director of Brand and Customer Experience. "Whether they want to relax with a hot meal, work in peace or enjoy a drink at the lobby bar, the lounge will get their travels off to the best start."

### LOYALTY EQUALS BENEFITS

Travel businesses that perfect that blend of product and price can expect to enjoy repeat business. Brand loyalty has become a currency in itself as both corporate travellers and suppliers take full advantage of a symbiotic relationship that offers additional value for the traveller and continued support for the operator.

"A loyalty programme is very important to travellers especially for business travel," notes Ashish Kapur, Country Manager – Africa and Indian Ocean for Cathay Pacific. "Cathay Pacific's frequent flyer programme, Marco Polo, is very popular especially given the expanding list of options passengers now have to redeem those miles."

"It is very important to have a loyalty programme which offers real benefits to the customer and I think this is true for all frequent travellers," says Vermeulen. "Benefits like business class lounge access



and being able to use the priority lane at the airport, for instance, automatically makes travelling easier, quicker and less stressful. Our premium customers know this and understand that loyalty equals benefits. We recently re-launched our frequent flyer programme, Flying Blue, adding more tangible benefits for our customers such as using cash and miles to claim a reward ticket, which our customers have been asking for, and other valuable benefits."

The hotel industry also sees enormous value in engendering loyalty, regardless of budget.

The Hilton Honors programme allows premium travellers to accrue and spend points at 3,600 hotels and resorts in more than 80 countries, the IHG Rewards Club offers rewards and added-value at more than 5,000 locations, while the Radisson Hotel Group has launched a dedicated Radisson Rewards for Business programme.

"Loyalty remains a key deciding factor for every client level, whether luxury or cost-conscious," says Cordon. "Radisson Hotel Group's



global rewards programme, Radisson Rewards, offers an enhanced experience from booking to check-out. Members are able to enjoy excellent offers and the ability to earn and redeem rewards remarkably fast which is appealing to all travellers.”

### MICE TRAVEL FILLS IN THE GAPS

For many hotels Meetings, Incentive, Conference and Exhibition (MICE) travel remains a key driver of demand.

“Africa is securely on the map for business events with modern convention centres now available in the region,” says Cordon. “The rich diversity of MICE attractions and experiences has seen key business events take place in the destination and we’ve definitely noticed that the booking lead time is growing.”

MICE, and corporate travel, is also an important driver of demand for the Taj Cape Town hotel, notes Taj Cape Town Marketing Manager Nadia Samuels: “There will always be demand for premium corporate travel to the hotel due to our service offering and facilities. We remain positive and will continue to evolve and enhance our service offering to encourage corporate travel in a very competitive industry in a sector that is extremely resilient.”

However, this valuable premium niche is vulnerable to both economic and geo-political events. Conference and event travel is quick to be cut from travel budgets when times are tough, and security fears can quickly scare away lucrative event bookings. Hotels in Nairobi, for instance, were hit with multiple cancellations and deferments following the terror attacks on the DusitD2 hotel complex in January 2019.

“MICE has seen significant ebbs and flows over the past 12 months and this varies from market to market significantly,” adds Cordon. “We have however found that political unrest and civil action have a long-lasting impact on MICE demand in a destination.”

It’s but one of numerous challenges to the premium travel sector in Africa, but despite the bumps in the road travellers appear to be taking them in their stride. While the outlook for 2020 is cautious at best, corporate business remains bullish. ■



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### LUXURY IN LAGOS

The Radisson Hotel Group ramps up its luxury offering in Africa later this year, with the opening of the Radisson Collection Ikoyi Lagos. It will be the first African hotel to join the Radisson Collection of iconic properties that reflect an authentic local influence, design aesthetic and vibrant social scene.

The new property is situated in the upmarket suburb of Ikoyi, and will offer 165 rooms and suites. Alongside all-day dining and specialty restaurants, the new property will offer extensive conference and meeting facilities, capable of hosting up to 400 delegates across a variety of flexible venues.







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# Putting on the brakes

*With travel budgets under tighter scrutiny than ever before, car rental agencies are feeling the pinch of price-conscious corporate consumers.*

WORDS RICHARD HOLMES

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“The market is under enormous pressure,” says Martin Lydall, Chief Commercial Officer for Europcar South Africa, which operates over 100 branches across South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, eSwatini and Lesotho. “Volumes are down and there is pressure on price. However there is always demand for the low price vehicles that offer affordability, without compromising on safety.”

It’s not all bad news though, with strong demand over the festive season as corporate travellers took a well-earned break, perhaps cashing in some of those hard-earned loyalty points.

“The coastal regions, as forecasted, experienced high demand over the festive period,” says Lydall. “Rental in Johannesburg is generally quieter over the weekends, with it being a business hub, attracting demand during the week.”

That’s the best time to find a good deal, and while price is obviously a key driver of business, with competing agencies often offering similar vehicles at a similar price point, how do brands set themselves apart from the crowd?

“Providing service excellence is a differentiator,” says Essa Ebrahim Suleman, Managing Director of the Woodford Group, South Africa’s largest independent car hire company. “A few years ago, it would have been technology, or variety in fleet, or even price. With most

Providing service excellence is a differentiator



suppliers on an equal footing in terms of these factors, it now comes down to how well a car rental company can satisfy and anticipate the needs of the client. As the market continues to change, we believe that emphasis on service will be the main differentiator.”

Customers certainly want convenience, whether it’s paperless rentals or the ability to return the vehicle without the tedious wait for an agent to receive the keys. Time is money, and it’s one reason why the convenience of ride-hailing services could easily be seen as a threat to the industry.

While the rise of services such as Uber and Bolt have undoubtedly eaten into the traditional market share of rental agencies, rental operators appear unfazed.

“Frankly, there hasn’t been much impact on the business,” says Suleman. “The main advantage is the factor of control. Whilst e-hailing services allows for a quick solution when getting from one place to another, it doesn’t provide the traveller with the control associated with booking and using a vehicle.”

Lydall also sees ride-hailing “as a symbiotic offering. Generally your one-day trips attract the use of these services. For longer rental lengths, car rental remains an attractive offer, with its affordability and convenience. For consumers making multiple trips, car rental offers great value.”

Established brands are also well placed to compete with e-hailing start-ups.

Long before the Uber app became ubiquitous on our smartphones, brands such as Avis and Europcar catered for clients that wanted the flexibility of car hire without the hassle of driving themselves. Today the likes of Avis Point 2 Point, Avis Chauffeur Drive and Europcar’s Chauffeur services allow savvy agencies to have their car rental cake with the icing of point-to-point business.

With its chauffeur services and rental options, “we believe we offer great value in a very competitive space in the market,” concludes Lydall. “We believe our service offers an affordable mode of transport as one of the leaders in mobility.” **BT**

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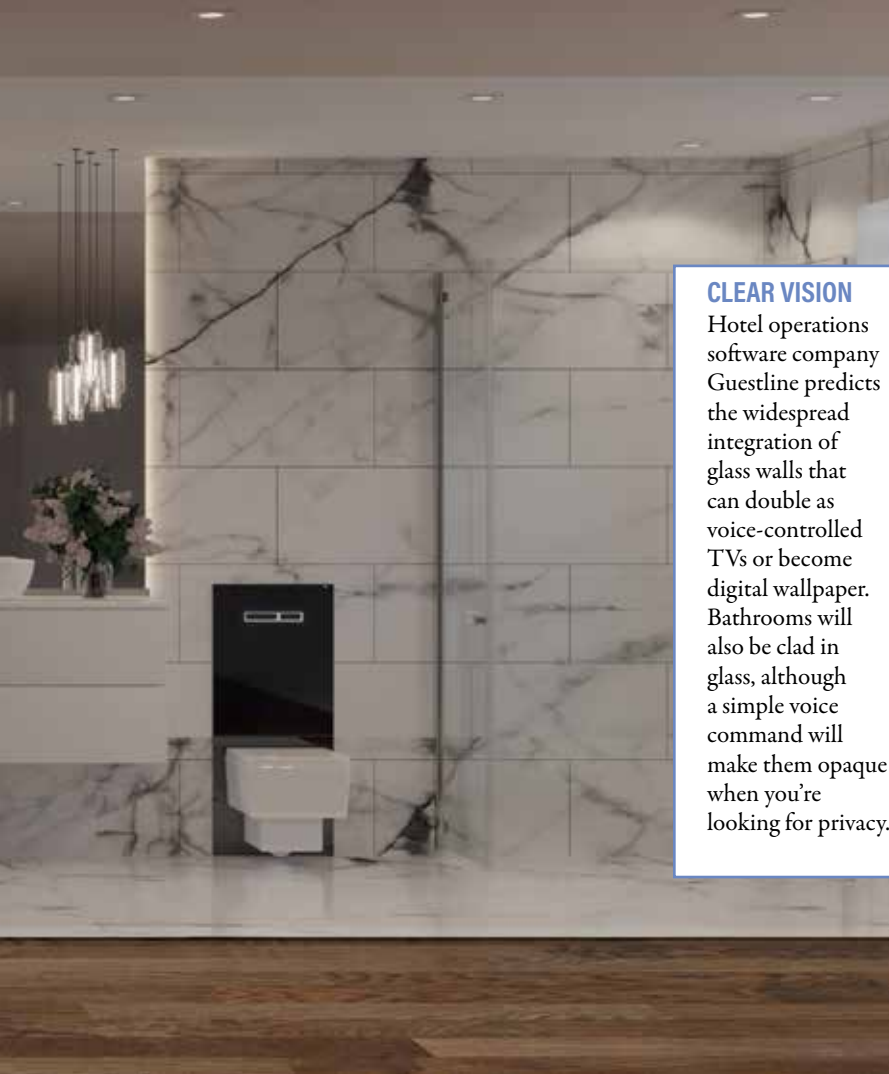




# THE FUTURE IN FOCUS

In the decades to come, travel will be transformed by technology and environmental concerns. Here are some of the ideas that may shape our future travels





#### CLEAR VISION

Hotel operations software company Guestline predicts the widespread integration of glass walls that can double as voice-controlled TVs or become digital wallpaper. Bathrooms will also be clad in glass, although a simple voice command will make them opaque when you're looking for privacy.

#### AI BEDS AND SMART MIRRORS

Smart mirrors will be installed in hotels of the future, according to Yotel. It surveyed 2,000 UK travellers and 72 % said they expected hotels to have hyper-integrated walls with interactive mirrors by 2050. Respondents also said they expected AI-assisted beds that morph to fit the sleeper's body shape and sense sleep cycles, and retract when not in use.

**81%**  
of UK travellers told Yotel they expect augmented reality in hotels by 2050 to talk with friends and family



COOPER CARRY ARCHITECTS

#### GOING UP IN THE WORLD

Students Ruslan Mannapov and Airat Zaidullin won the student category of 2019's Radical Innovation Design Award for Hospitality for their "Rooftop Hotel Gardens" design – metallic and glass modules allowing additional rooms with great skyline views.



#### MOBILE HOTELS

The first consideration for every property you book is its location, but what if the hotel could move to where you really wanted it? Cooper Carry Architects won 2019's Radical Innovation Design Award for Hospitality for its "Connectic" concept (pictured above and left). The octahedral structure can be installed anywhere – for example, for temporary use in a park or green space, attached to an existing building or filling a space between buildings.

**62%**  
of consumers said automated recognition using biometrics and facial recognition would enhance their experience, including locking and unlocking their hotel rooms  
[juniperresearch.com](http://juniperresearch.com)

#### BIOMETRICS AND VOICE ACTIVATION

You'll pay for your hotel using fingerprints, iris scans and facial recognition, as well as unlock room doors, according to Oracle Hospitality's report *Hotel 2025*. Sound scary? Well, Yotel asked travellers what they envisioned in hotels in 2050 and 88 % favoured facial recognition for room access. Voice commands are expected to regulate lighting, air con and heating in hotel rooms, according to Guestline, and smart showers will detect the optimal temperature by registering the heat levels from a guest's touch.







### AERODYNAMICS

The “Flying V” (above) is a prototype being funded by KLM and developed by a Dutch university. Its aerodynamic shape reduces fuel burn by 20 % compared with an A350 and the passenger cabins, cargo hold and fuel tanks are located in its wings, which fit within existing gate infrastructure. KLM says the design would “improve passenger experience, from the seating layout in the wings, to the design of the seats and bathrooms”.

Airbus recently trialled wing tips that flap in the wind (right). They are designed to move like an albatross’s wings to minimise the effects of turbulence.



### EVTOLS

Electric Vertical Take-Off and Landing aircraft are all-electric and companies such as Volocopter (pictured), Lilium, Uber and Airbus are developing models. They could revolutionise urban mobility, although regulatory approval will depend on safety considerations and how people react to them flying low overhead.





### GOING ELECTRIC

Electric aircraft are coming, but their capabilities depend on the development of batteries. There are more than 170 companies working on electric and hybrid aircraft projects, from Airbus and Boeing to start-ups such as Wright Electric. Rolls-Royce is working on the fastest-ever all-electric aircraft (right), set to fly this year, and has teamed up with Airbus and Siemens on the E-Fan X, a two-megawatt, hybrid-electric engine for commercial aircraft due to debut in 2021.

The biggest markets for such aircraft would likely be short-haul airlines and private aviation. Easyjet says it wants to fly routes such as London-Amsterdam with electric planes by 2027, although critics say this is overly optimistic.

Long-haul electric flights are a distant prospect. As Airbus's chief technology officer, Grazia Vittadini, points out, batteries that are 30 times more efficient and "energy-dense" than they are today could still only fly an A320 one-fifth of its current range with half of its payload.



Biofuels will account for  
**20%**  
of aviation fuel demand by 2040  
*The International Energy Agency*



### THE NEW SUPERSONIC

The US Department of Transportation and Federal Aviation Administration say they are "taking steps to advance the development of civil supersonic aircraft". Boeing has partnered with US manufacturer Aerion to develop a plane (see artist's impression above) that would fly at Mach 1.4 (approximately 1,600km per hour). Meanwhile, Boom Supersonic is building a Mach 2.2 aircraft that it hopes to fly by mid-2020, and Lockheed Martin has a contract with NASA to build a "low boom" demonstration aircraft.

The number of annual  
air passengers will double to  
**8.2 billion**  
over the next 20 years (IATA)



### TO INFINITY AND BEYOND

Visited everywhere? Soon you'll be able to leave the stratosphere with the launch (pun intended) of space hotels. Elon Musk's Space X Starship (pictured) aims to fly its first private passenger around the Moon in 2023, and Virgin Galactic is still marketing its £200,000 (\$258,000) flights aboard its Space Ship Two for take-off this year.

The Gateway Foundation's Von Braun Rotating Space Station plans to start hotel operations in 2025, with stays costing an eight-figure sum. The station will produce varying levels of gravity by adjusting the rate of rotation – so you can experience weightlessness but also have your feet on solid ground when dining or exercising.

Orion Span will also join the era of commercial space with the modular Aurora Station. Activities here include growing food while in orbit and the opportunity to experience zero gravity. The luxury hotel will launch 12-day trips starting at \$9.5 million per person in 2022 and is now accepting deposits, so get saving.



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## 2030

The year that the Von Braun Rotating Space Station expects to have 500 people living in orbit and 200 tourists per week, totalling over 10,000 people annually



### VIRTUAL WORLDS

Virtual reality will become commonplace in hospitality and work environments. Sensory equipment means hotel rooms will be able to provide whatever view you desire – a beach or a city, depending on your mood – or you could have a staycation, escaping reality via a headset. Meetings will take place in a virtual reality workplace to reduce a company's carbon footprint, manufacturers will use VR to allow people to test-drive an experience, and airlines will provide onboard immersive experiences.



### TRANSLATION TECHNOLOGY

Once technology takes over, will we need to learn languages? Apps and devices can already translate in real time and, according to Ericsson Consumer Lab's *10 Hot Consumer Trends 2030: The Internet of Senses*, some 70 % of consumers expect to have earphones that automatically and flawlessly translate languages by 2030. In the far future, humans might even be microchipped, with the brain receiving instant translations, or maybe we'll be able to mind-read, doing away with words altogether.



BLAKE INGELS GROUP



### FLOATING CITIES

**Over 60%**  
of the world's population will live in cities in ten years' time  
*World Economic Forum*

With 90 % of the world's largest cities exposed to rising seas by 2050, Oceanix has designed the first sustainable floating city (above) for 10,000 residents. The flood- and storm-proof habitat of six neighbourhoods is located around a protected central habitat, with communal farming. Buildings made from locally sourced materials can be moved to more suitable locations when weather demands. At the same time, we'll also dig deeper. In Samsung's *KX50: The Future in Focus* report, Professor Dale Russell predicts the arrival of earthscrappers (inverted skyscrapers) to save space in ever more crowded metropolises.

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SHUTTERSTOCK: LAREMENKO

### DRIVERLESS ROOMS

Design studio Aprilli has designed an "autonomous travel suite" (right) that blurs driverless transport with a hotel room – the car has sleep, work and bathroom facilities so you can be productive on your journey. Aprilli views it as a competitive option to air and rail travel, as it removes the need for a secondary means of transportation. The suites are designed to be able to dock on to existing infrastructure at a hotel, giving guests access to public facilities including dining areas, gyms and meeting rooms.





CHRISTOPHER JOHNSON/FENTRESS

### AIRPORT DESIGN

Entries to the annual Fentress Global Challenge, an airport design competition for young architects, provide a glimpse into how different the airports of the future could look. The winning 2019 design by Daoru Wang shows a “drive-through airport”, with aircraft moving through phases in a line and the terminal facilities in a skyscraper rather than sprawling at ground level. Another design by Christopher Johnson (pictured above) sees an aircraft drive-through process take place underneath the terminal.

### CHECK-IN AND BAG-DROP

IT provider SITA predicts the end of airport check-in desks, which will be replaced entirely with online check-in and self-service points, with passengers updated on every stage of the journey – boarding, flight changes, bag movements – via their mobile phones.

SITA says that in the future remote bag drop-off and collection will be offered at multiple points in the journey, such as at a train station, car park or coffee shop. These will be connected to high-speed conveyor belts and tracked throughout the journey. More services will enable pick-up or delivery to homes and hotels.

### STREAMLINED SECURITY

A new generation of sophisticated security scanners is emerging that will eliminate the necessity for liquids to be put in plastic bags or shoes to be removed. Combined with facial recognition, such devices will transform how travellers pass through security. In the near future, security measures could simply involve an escalator ride through various face and body scanners, or may even be carried out on public transport en route to the airport.



### ROBOTS

Already answering queries at airports including Heathrow, robot assistants will become more sophisticated. They will park cars (as the above model from Stanley Robotics already does), drive passengers to their gate through facial recognition, and solve complex issues.

### BETTER BIOMETRICS

Biometrics are well under way to revolutionising how we navigate the airport. As well as getting you through check-in, security and boarding without a passport or boarding pass, facial recognition will likely be used to let adverts target passengers based on age, gender or mood, provide lounge access, and as payment for shopping.

### HYPERLOOP MOVEMENT

British Airways' report *BA 2119: Flight of the Future* suggests airports, and even aircraft, may be integrated with a hyperloop-style transit system (pictured), with travellers transported in modules from craft to craft. Check-in, food, drink, IFE selection and visa checks could be carried out within the hyperloop (a proposed high-speed mode of transport moving passengers via electric propulsion through a low-pressure tube). [\[1\]](#)







## CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

City Lodge Hotel Group has appointed **Dhanisha Nathoo** as Chief Financial Officer and member of the board and risk committee. Nathoo is a Chartered Accountant (SA) and brings with her a wealth

of experience in financial, commercial and infrastructure roles across a range of industries including investment banking, real estate management, mining, and audit and consulting. She most recently fulfilled the role of Director, Chief Operating Officer for Global Operations – Trade Validation, Asset Protection, Clearing and Change at Credit Suisse, London.



## GROUP REVENUE MANAGER

City Lodge Hotel Group has appointed **David Jacobsz** as Group Revenue Manager. Jacobsz started his hospitality career in Scotland straight out of school, working in a

hotel. He has subsequently worked for various hotels, advancing in different roles through the ranks until he was exposed to pricing/revenue management. He has a Hospitality Management Diploma from the University of Johannesburg. He was previously Market Manager at the Expedia Group where he spent the last eight years. He will be instrumental in the introduction and establishment of the discipline of revenue management.



## BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT EXECUTIVE

MSC Cruises South Africa has appointed **Karika West** as Business Development Executive, where she will be growing the MICE and

Corporate Groups footprint. West has been working for MSC Cruises South Africa for four years and has been a significant member of the commercial team. She previously held the position of Sales Executive at MSC Cruises and was responsible for executing the domestic and international sales strategy. In her new role, West will be responsible for assisting the organisation's sales and growth efforts by contributing to new customer acquisition as well as creating new business opportunities.



## GENERAL MANAGER

**Brett Hoppé** has been appointed as General Manager at Sun International's Sun City resort. Hoppé is no stranger to Sun City, having previously served as the Resort's General

Manager of the Soho Hotel (formerly the Sun City Hotel and Casino) between 2008 and 2011, and as Acting Director of Operations at the North West Resort until 2012. He left Sun City to take over the position of Complex GM of the Boardwalk and Fish River Sun. In 2013, Hoppé was appointed to manage the opening of Time Square Casino, Arena and Hotel development.



## GENERAL DIRECTOR

Mmabatho Palms Hotel, Casino and Convention Resort has welcomed **Elias Moduka** as its new General Manager, responsible for overseeing

the smooth-running of the overall resort operations. Moduka began his career in the hospitality industry over 20 years ago, working at a prominent South African resort hotel chain. Formerly the General Manager at Khoroni Hotel, Casino and Convention Resort, Moduka's hands-on experience in gaming, food and beverage, surveillance, hotel operations and VIP services is perfect for the General Manager position at Mmabatho Palms.



## GENERAL MANAGER

The Oyster Box has appointed **Desmond O'Connor** as its new General Manager. O'Connor started his career in the hospitality industry in 1990 at the

Sandton Sun as a banqueting waitron and later head barman, before joining the Karos Hotel Group as Assistant Restaurant Manager at the Karos Wilderness Hotel. He has worked his way up the ladder in various roles at various hotel properties in South Africa, including Spier, Hôtel Le Vendôme, and the Cape Royal Luxury Hotel and Residence. He has worked for the Three Cities Group and the Radisson Hotel Group.



## GENERAL MANAGER

Tsogo Sun has appointed **Joel Stols** as General Manager at the Southern Sun The Ridge & StayEasy Emalahleni. Stols joined Tsogo Sun in 2012 as Assistant General

Manager of the Riverside Sun Resort, a position he held at Southern Sun Pretoria and Sun Square Monte Casino as well. Prior to joining the group, Stols was the Banqueting and Food & Beverage Manager at Birchwood Hotel and ORTIA Conference Centre. He holds a Diploma in Hotel Management from Free State Technikon and an MBU from Gordon's Institute of Business Science.



## GROUP TALENT MANAGER

City Lodge Hotel Group has promoted **Lischen Gurovich** to Group Talent Manager. She joined the group in 2010 as part of the opening team at City Lodge Hotel Hatfield,

establishing a new reservations department. From there she was promoted to Town Lodge Menlo Park, first as junior Assistant General Manager and then as Assistant General Manager. She also joined the opening management team at City Lodge Hotel Waterfall City and the management team at City Lodge Hotel Lynnwood, before moving across to the human resources department at central office.



## GROUP LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

**Sheree Snyman** has been promoted to Group Learning and Development Manager in the human resources department at City

Lodge Hotel Group. She started her career with the group in 2000 as a receptionist at Town Lodge Menlo Park, before moving into reservations in 2004 and promoted to Assistant General Manager one year later. She then moved across to the central office as Training Co-Ordinator, promoted to Group Skills Development Facilitator and recently to her current position. **BT**

## Airlink ERJ135 JOBURG-SKUKUZA

**BACKGROUND** Airlink's origins are rooted in three small airlines, Magnum Airlines, Border Air and City Air, which merged to form Link Airways in the 80s. Subsequently, Link Airways was liquidated in 1992. After Rodger Foster and Barrie Webb, the two founders, had successfully bid for the business, they named the newly acquired airline Airlink. The airline has developed into South Africa's first feeder network, specifically aimed at linking the smaller towns, the regional centres and hubs throughout South Africa. Airlink makes several daily flights to Skukuza.

### PRE-FLIGHT & CHECK-IN:

I checked in online the day before my flight and was able to choose my preferred seat. The whole process was quick and simple. The afternoon flight from OR Tambo International Airport produced no queue at the check-in and bag drop desks and the short line at the security checkpoint moved quickly. I was airside within 10 minutes.



**LOUNGE:** There was no lounge access with this ticket, although there are a number of business lounges at ORTIA that allow for walk-ins, at a cost. Instead, I made my way down to the boarding gate and purchased a cappuccino from the Vida e Café kiosk. There were a number of tables with benches and chairs, courtesy of the coffee shop, where I was able to sit and set up my laptop for a quick work task.

**BOARDING:** The boarding gate opened on time and I was quickly on board the bus that would take me to the plane. However, the bus didn't depart the terminal for a good 10 minutes. The other half-dozen passengers and I were extremely restless by the time we left. Turns out that we were waiting no-show passengers. Once on board, we were quickly in the air.

**THE FLIGHT:** Although we were slightly delayed in departing, the flight was still able to adhere to its landing time. The cabin attendant served drinks and snacks to the passengers scattered throughout the otherwise-empty cabin. I sipped a bottle of sparkling water while listening to an audiobook and before I knew it, we were descending for landing in the Kruger National Park.

**ARRIVAL:** Skukuza Airport, inside the KNP, is a small airport with a runway just



long enough to accommodate the ERJ. The afternoon heat created a small amount of turbulence, which the pilot handled skilfully. It was a short walk from the aircraft to the airport terminal. The ground crew was quick to unload the luggage in the hold and delivered it to the parking lot for passengers to collect.

**VERDICT** A convenient service that cuts travel time to the Kruger Park by a good three hours. *Kate Kennedy*

**CONTACT**  
flyairlink.com



# Protea Hotel by Marriott Kruger Gate MPUMALANGA, SOUTH AFRICA

**BACKGROUND** The Protea Hotel by Marriott Kruger Gate received a R100 million (\$6.6 million) revaluation, with extensive upgrades to facilities and an addition of 44 new rooms, a well-appointed Presidential Suite and three Executive Suites. Existing rooms received new, stylish soft furnishings.

**WHERE IS IT?** The property borders the Kruger National Park, with parts even overstepping the boundary fence to put guests in the park. It is 100 metres from the Paul Kruger Gate and a 30-minute drive from Skukuza Airport.

**ROOM FACILITIES:** There is a total of 145 rooms including the suites and newly-built rooms. I was lucky enough to snag a new room, which was large and very comfortable. There was a king-sized bed, a smart TV with a DSTV bouquet, work desk with ample plug points, aircon and ceiling fan, a walk-in rain shower and a bath tub. The sitting area, which could be separated from the sleeping area by drawing a curtain, led out to a private patio. The complimentary wi-fi signal was decent and connecting to it wasn't difficult. My only complaint was with the 'night light' that was switched on during turn-down, which I couldn't figure out how to turn off. After flipping every switch I could find multiple times, I eventually called reception, who sent a maintenance worker to turn the light off.

## RESTAURANTS & BARS:

There is a restaurant, a boma, a coffee shop and two bars. Buffet breakfasts are served at the Kudiyela restaurant, where I had a simple meal of fried eggs, bacon and sausage. Dinners are held at the outdoor boma, weather permitting. The dinner buffet is so extensive that it can make filling your plate difficult. There was lamb and beef at the carvery station, oxtail stew, venison woks (sausage), pasta, soup, curry, carrots, green beans, butternut, potatoes and corn on the cob. In the cold room were salads, cold meats and dessert – mini tarts and cakes, fresh fruit, ice cream and toppings, malva pudding – with cheese and crackers to round off the meal. I eventually decided on a few slices of lamb roast with rice, gravy and vegetables and followed that up with a bowl of ice cream and chocolate sauce for dessert.

## BUSINESS & MEETING FACILITIES:

There are four meeting and conference rooms, with the largest able to accommodate 225 delegates in cinema style. These facilities are also receiving an upgrade in 2020. Wi-fi is free for guests and the speed is decent. The Presidential and Executive suites can be blocked off for an executive retreat.

**LEISURE FACILITIES:** If you tire of the Kruger Park, you can always spend time at the hotel's swimming pools – a rim-flow



pool overlooks the bush while the kid-friendly pool is surrounded by sun loungers. There is also an on-site fitness centre with cardio equipment and weights. The adjacent games room is being renovated, but will soon be open for use by guests. And while the new spa facilities are being built, treatments are still available at various locations around the lodge.



**VERDICT** A lovely hotel in the bush, with all the modern conveniences you want to make the surrounding wilderness marvellously enjoyable. *Kate Kennedy*

**CONTACT**  
marriott.com





# Aiming for the stars

*Africa is seen as the last emerging continent on the planet, offering many, albeit scattered, opportunities for growth. It remains a key continent for Radisson Hotel Group's growth. Elie Younes, Radisson's Chief Development Officer, sheds light on the group, hotel trends and African hotspots.*



**ELIE YOUNES**  
RADISSON HOTEL GROUP, EVP & CHIEF  
DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

## **Q: How many brands do you have operating in Africa, and which have been the most well-received by the public?**

**A:** Radisson Hotel Group historically only operated with two brands in Africa – Radisson Blu in the upper upscale segment and Park Inn by Radisson within the midscale segment. Today, we have five brands available to develop across Africa, with Radisson Blu as the fastest growing and leading upper upscale brand. The remaining brands are Radisson Collection, Radisson RED, Radisson and Park Inn by Radisson. Our priority brand for the future in Africa will be Radisson, expecting 60% of our new signings to be under the Radisson brand. We launched the brand in Africa in 2018 and already have 13 hotels opened and under development.

## **Q: Are you planning to introduce any new hotel brands to Africa in the near future?**

**A:** Not currently as we have five brands well positioned between midscale and luxury and the focus will be to continue to create depth in the marketplace with each brand.

## **Q: Where do you believe the next African hotel development hot spots will be?**

**A:** We have identified key focus markets which offer scalability and where we believe the biggest of the growth will originate from: Morocco, Nigeria and South Africa, but also Egypt as the market recovers. In addition to those key countries, we have implemented a cluster approach in both development and operation to ensure synergies among neighbouring countries and further create value for our hotels. The targeted clusters where we focus on growing aggressively are

Maghreb; West Africa with Senegal and Ivory Coast; Central Africa with Cameroon, DRC and Republic of Congo; East Africa with Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania and some key countries from the Southern African Development Community such as Angola, Mauritius, Mozambique and Zambia.

## **Q: In which segment do you see the most opportunity in Africa? Luxury, upper-midscale, mid-market etc?**

**A:** The maturity of the different markets in Africa require a different type of hotel product. To generalise however, the Radisson Hotel Group believes the gap with the most potential is in the upscale segment. More mature markets like South Africa will have more opportunities in the midscale, and luxury is not a segment where any brand or hotel group can grow in scale.

## **Q: Have you picked up on any global hotel trends that you feel are worth mentioning?**

**A:** Travel and leisure are becoming increasingly mixed and it is important to cater to all customer needs. The new generation of travellers have more diverse interests than before and we see digital technology, challenging modern design, incorporating fashion and music and, of course, sustainability as key to shaping hotel trends. This is integral to the hotel experience and are all hallmarks of the Radisson RED brand, which is aimed at guests who are becoming more focused on experiences. Well-being has become a trend that influences buying habits with those more likely to purchase a product or service that enhances their sense of emotional well-being. Another key trend is doing business

responsibly. In my view this is not only related to business but should also impact our lifestyle in general as we are responsible for what we leave behind us for the next generation.

## **Q: Where does technology sit in the Radisson Hotel Group strategy and offering?**

**A:** Technology development is becoming more relevant to our industry and is an integral part of our five-year operating plan. In July 2019, we launched RadissonHotels.com and the Radisson Hotels App, our first multi-brand and mobile-first global website giving guests and loyalty members access to more than 1,100 hotels worldwide. We are currently developing a multi-million-dollar technology investment system named EMMA which unifies the customer and business journey in one single platform.

## **Q: What do you think the modern-day business traveller is looking for from a hotel?**

**A:** Location is always a top priority for all travellers. Then consistency of delivering on the essentials, our so-called 'brilliant basics' such as breakfasts, showers, bedding and a fast, free and reliable internet. The appetite for experiences, sustainability, eco-consciousness and personalisation are a few of the other trends that are influencing our overall development plan and guest experience.

## **Q: Where would you like to see Radisson Hotel Group in the next 10 years?**

**A:** In 10 years – my vision is that we become the top hotel company for owners, guests and talents. **BT**



# Live Travel Space

*Amadeus is no longer a Global Distribution System. With its constant efforts to push the boundaries of technology, it has become a Live Travel Space. Vicente Bosque Camazon, a Commercial Director at Amadeus, offers more insight into the state of travel in Africa.*



**VICENTE BOSQUE CAMAZON**  
AMADEUS BUSINESS TRAVEL FOR AFRICA

**Q: What does it mean to be a Live Travel Space?**

**A:** A Live Travel Space is a place where we connect different types of travel content, at the best rates, from any provider, using various sourcing technologies, all in one platform.

**Q: What is your view on the state of the African travel space?**

**A:** Travel in Africa is growing at a +3.0% rate, slightly below the +3.4% of GDP growth on the continent. This is low for a developing continent, and below the global travel growth of 3.9%. From a business travel perspective, South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya account for 70% of the total, with the fourth market only accounting for an extra 4%. We also observe different trends per market. While Nigeria grows at a healthy 14% rate, South Africa and Kenya are flat or decreasing. Still, I am observing a clear change in the way technology is perceived in all three main markets. Players, are realising that without the best technology, they can't differentiate in the marketplace.

**Q: Has your Big Data revealed anything new about travellers?**

**A:** Business and leisure travellers increasingly expect the same experience gained while making purchases on Amazon, using Facebook or consuming VOD with Netflix. They want a personalised offer that can be 100% accessible via mobile, without compromising on value, not only at the booking stage but also during and post trip. Travel players need to become more advanced in identifying unique customer

needs and offering it to them at the best moment in time, through the most relevant channel.

**Q: Have you launched new technology in the last year?**

**A:** 2019 was an active year in terms of new product launches. We invested €850 million (\$920 million) in Research & Development. The biggest launches were our NDC-X Platform, released both in WebServices and through our front office Selling Platform Connect; launching our own Hotel Aggregator – Value Hotels to the South African market, and bringing Fare Optimizer into the market – a robot that automatically identifies opportunities of better fares to our travel agencies.

**Q: What do you feel will be the big talking points in the GDS space in 2020?**

**A:** The key topic will continue to be NDC and what it means for all industry players. In 2020, we expect to see high volumes coming through about NDC technology, especially in the US, Europe and APAC.

**Q: What changes would you like to see in the South African travel space?**

**A:** We need to recuperate growth. In 2019, the South African travel industry grew only +0.1%. When we focus on business travel only, we note that the industry decreased -1.6%. At these rates, travel agencies will have difficulty tackling large investment projects, reducing its future competitiveness. This situation will further intensify the competitive landscape.

**Blockchain technology will soon be a new disruptor**

**Q: How has the implementation of IATA's NDC impacted Amadeus?**

**A:** It has been a good opportunity for Amadeus to strengthen our platform making it NDC capable. We have invested immensely in this programme over the last four to five years and we are getting ready for a real NDC take off. Though some cases are still being finalised in the post-booking part, it is now possible to complete live NDC bookings in Amadeus.

**Q: Where would you like to see Amadeus in the next 10 years?**

**A:** With the speed of change in our industry, it is difficult to think 10 years ahead. But my views are that Blockchain technology will soon be a new disruptor in the travel technology space. So, my personal dream is to see an Amadeus-powered Blockchain Travel Platform that opens doors to continuous innovation in the travel experience for both travelers and corporations. **BT**

# The upgrade lowdown

*There is no wheeze our columnist hasn't seen by passengers attempting to blag a better seat*



**RICHARD TAMS**

AIRLINE CONSULTANT AND EXECUTIVE COACH

**I**n the days before airlines used clever algorithms to select candidates for that elusive cabin upgrade, it was left to the discretion of the airline duty manager to bestow such an honour on a favoured passenger. I'm not saying that it was a free for all, but in those days, as a passenger, it was always worth asking, and many did.

So what could you do to single yourself out to the check-in agent as someone who would not look out of place perched on a business class seat; as someone who could hold their own in that hallowed space that is first class? In my younger days as an airport manager, I came across just about every trick in the book when it came to blagging an upgrade. From the clever and unintended to the mean and the downright dishonest ploys, I've seen them all.

Most common (and so unimaginative) was the medical ailment trick. This tended to centre around chronic back pain, hip replacements and bad knees. All of these complaints seemed to call for extra legroom and unlimited champagne as a cure-all.

Hardened by experience, I have to confess that in the face of such claims I did

tend to treat customers as healthy until proven unhealthy. The amateur theatrics employed by some people to evidence these medical conditions were often extensive and frequently amusing, particularly when the passenger in question seemed to forget which of their hips had been replaced as they hobbled forlornly away from the check-in desk.

## SMOKING GUN

One of the meanest tricks I experienced in my years on the front line was in the days when smoking was still allowed on an aircraft. A passenger rocked up to check-in

and explained loudly and rudely to the Korean agent that she needed to be allocated a smoking seat on the 15-hour flight from Seoul to London via Hong Kong as there was no way that she would be able to last all of that time without a dose of nicotine. The agent duly found her a smoking seat and the passenger departed.

When the time came to board the fully booked B747 aircraft, I happened to overhear the same passenger at the gate abusing a different agent. She was declaring, in a tactically loud fashion, that there was no way she was going to get on the plane unless she was removed from the smoking seat that she had erroneously been allocated. She abhorred smoking and was immovable. Observing this, I concluded that her violent change in preference was not being driven

by a Damascene conversion to non-smoking but an assumption that our only option to resolve this problem with a fully loaded aircraft would be to move her into Club class.

She was absolutely right that this was our only option; however, she was wrong to assume it would be her that would be moved forward. I had great pleasure in upgrading an elderly Irish nun who was only too happy to exchange her non-smoking seat in economy for the front row of business class. You should have seen the other woman's face.

## ON A WING AND A PRAYER

I don't know if it's the luck of the Irish or the legacy of my Catholic upbringing, but the most unlikely story of an impromptu and totally unintentional upgrade involved another lady of God. I was supervising check-in one day when a nun approached me. How can I say this without being unkind? This kindly lady was somewhat full figured. "Excuse me, Mr Tams," she said, "but I'm afraid I'm a little bit overweight."

This, sadly, was the understatement of the century so I attempted to reassure her by pointing out to her that the flight was not full and that I would block out the seat next door to her to give her more room. At this, her face reddened and she looked me in the eye with a look that told me I would burn in hellfire for eternity and said: "I was referring to my luggage!" Desperate for absolution, I immediately upgraded her to seat 1A. **BT**

These complaints seemed to call for extra legroom and unlimited champagne as a cure-all



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