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# WINDMILL CASINO



*Located just off the N1 Highway in Bloemfontein, Sun International's Windmill Casino is not just a one-stop entertainment destination, but also an attractive business travel option and a meetings and events venue that ticks all the right boxes.*

**T**hose boxes include comfortable accommodation, a variety of event venues, free wi-fi, a host of dining options, and a location that provides convenient access to Bloemfontein's popular tourist attractions.

So, whether you're in Bloemfontein on business or are looking to put on an event in the area, here are just some of the reasons to consider Windmill Casino.

## ACCOMMODATION

Windmill Casino has a total of 80 rooms, made up of the following:

- 14 double rooms (28m<sup>2</sup>) – Double bed, separate bath and shower, can be inter-leading to a twin room, pull-out double sleeper sofa, pool-facing
- 14 standard twin rooms (28m<sup>2</sup>) – Twin beds side by side, separate bath and shower, pull-out double sleeper sofa
- 4 standard suites (80m<sup>2</sup>) – Double bed, separate lounge and dining room table, guest toilet, separate bath and shower, pull-out double sleeper sofa
- 2 accessible rooms (28m<sup>2</sup>) – Double bed, shower with hand-rails, can be inter-leading with a twin room, pull-out double sleeper sofa

- 46 double complex rooms (28m<sup>2</sup>) – Double bed, overlooking the casino complex, separate bath and shower, pull-out double sleeper sofa

## EVENT VENUES

Windmill Casino caters to both small events and grand affairs, with a variety of venues.

The Eiffel and Versailles Rooms are great for boardroom meetings or strategic planning sessions and these two meetings rooms can be joined together for bigger group sessions and think tanks.

The Lodge Boardroom, meanwhile, is a small venue that's perfect for important group meetings, allowing you to host your meeting in comfort and style.

Then there's Windmill A & B, which can be utilised as two small venues or joined together to create a big ballroom ideal for small weddings or a birthday bash.

Diamond Lil's is ideal for hosting year-end functions or birthday parties for up to 180 people.

## ON-SITE FACILITIES

Take your pick from 401 slot machines and 18 games tables, whilst for Sun International Most Valued Guests cardholders, there are private gaming facilities in the Salon Privé.

As with every modern-day venue worth its salt, Windmill Casino offers free wi-fi to hotel guests and conference delegates.

If, in turn, you've had a long day at the office on your business strip or have been in a full-day conference or meeting, the Desired Images Spa is on hand to offer relaxing massages and/or beauty treatments.

You can, alternatively, take a dip in the hotel's outdoor pool, which during summer, in particular, offers welcome relief.

## DINING

Windmill Casino has a host of dining options, catering to all tastes:

- Ocean Basket is renowned for its fresh seafood and varied menu that appeals to every palate
- Rosie's Brasserie is a carvery buffet restaurant that treats guests and delegates to over 90 menu items, served from nine food stations
- The Golden Nugget Spur is a well-known steakhouse with a variety of options
- The Can Can Bar is located on the main casino floor

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# Contents



14



20



26



27



24

## COVER ExecuJet

Already established as a global player in the business aviation space, ExecuJet is now exploring the high-end leisure market, with an offering that ticks all the right boxes, if you're looking for a seamless African safari experience or bucket list trip.



## ► FEATURES

### 14 Hotel Suites

Everyone loves an upgrade, but it's not always worth the extra cost, unless you're a business traveller who can see the benefits and make full use of what a hotel suite has to offer. So says Business Traveller Asia-Pacific's Michael Allen.

### 20 Air Miles

If you work the system, frequent flyer air miles can be a real bonus for the regular business traveller, but there's also the opportunity to do some good with them, as detailed by Business Traveller UK's Hannah Brandler.

### 24 New Age Airports

Modern-day airports have become entertainment centres that have the ability to make any delay or layover a memorable experience, as explained by Business Traveller India editor Akanksha Maker.

## ► REGULARS

### 04 Message from the Team

What's the editor ranting about now?

### 06 News

Airline, hotel and other travel news from Africa and beyond

### 10 HTI Consulting Column

CEO Wayne Troughton gives us his views on the African hotel industry

### 11 ASATA Column

The latest from Chief Executive Officer Otto de Vries

### 26 Tried and Tested

- **Hotel Check**  
Radisson PE
- **Hotel Check**  
Tau Game Lodge

### 28 Q & A Interviews

- Frank Palapies – Wings
- Jan van der Putten – Hilton

### 30 People on the Move

The movers and shakers – what they're up to now

### 32 Bite with the Editor

Mandy Lerena & Liezl Gericke – Virgin Atlantic





**T**his is my final issue as editor of *Business Traveller Africa* magazine.

That's after 106 issues and nearly nine years in the saddle!

As with all things enjoyable, it's fair to say that my time has zipped by and taking the reins ahead of the May 2011 issue seems like an event that took place just yesterday.

For that issue, I recall having The Palazzo at Montecasino in Johannesburg on the cover and one of the features we looked at was titled "Laptops vs Tablets"! My, how things have changed and moved on, and that's perhaps the standout feature of my time at *Business Traveller Africa* – witnessing the progression of technological development and its impact on business travel.

Tools such as apps and bots are now commonplace, whilst biometric screening at airports is no longer a rarity.

So, where else have we seen the impact of technology in the past nine years?

Well, there's been disintermediation and the GDS companies have had to evolve their offerings, to the point that they are now 'tech companies', the car rental industry has had to deal with the emergence of Uber (although they'll tell you the impact has been minimal), and there's now such a thing as a 'smart' hotel room and 'virtual conferencing'!

Additional developments have stood out, and if one looks at the African travel industry, it includes the continued and voracious appetite of the international hotel groups for more branded properties on the continent, with W Hospitality Group's annual Pipeline report a real eye-opener for anyone with an interest in this space.

There's also been consolidation in the TMC industry, the introduction of the millennial business traveller, the continued growth of the Gulf carriers in the airline space, and the re-emergence of the mid-market hotel segment.

I could go on.

But, over the course of the past nine years there has been so much more closer to home. At Future Group, we also launched the incredibly successful Business Traveller Africa Awards, moved offices four times, worked for – and exited – a big corporate, seen a host of staff come and go, and ensured that *Business Traveller Africa* has not only survived, but flourished.

Lastly, my thanks to publisher Richard Lendrum, without whom the past nine years would not have been possible. His guidance, vision and support have been invaluable.

It's been a great ride, but my time to go has come. Wishing everyone a prosperous future and safe business travelling!

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## Rosebank Hotel Gets Rebrand

Tsogo Sun Hotels began to rebrand and refurbish its Crowne Plaza The Rosebank property into the Southern Sun Rosebank on 1 February. An extensive refurbishment will include the reception and lobby areas, the Circle Bar, the Fresh Restaurant, and the opening of The Grill Jichana. The balance of the refurbishment of the hotel, including bedrooms, will take place over the course of 2020/21.

## RwandAir Launches Flexi Flight Options

RwandAir customers could now save from their ticket purchases thanks to a new partnership with Optiontown. The new offering enables customers to pre-purchase RwandAir flights at the best available price and decide when they want to travel at a later date. Customers buying a RwandAir Flight Pass can choose between four and 500 one-way flights to multiple destinations, valid for up to two years from the start date. Customers can set their own advance booking limit – from 180 days to just four hours before departure. Up to 200 individual customer names can be added to the Flight Pass, making it possible to share with family, friends and colleagues. To find out more or to book the RwandAir Flight Pass, visit [rwandair.optiontown.com](http://rwandair.optiontown.com)

## SAA Operates First A350 Commercially

South African Airways recently operated its first Airbus A350-900 aircraft for the first time commercially in the domestic market. The aircraft is one of four new Airbus A350-900 jets in SAA's fleet. As additional aircraft are introduced, more routes will be operated by the Airbus A350-900s, such as SAA's ultra-long haul routes between Johannesburg and New York's John F Kennedy International Airport. The Airbus A350-900 is configured with a maximum of 339 seats, of which 30 are business class and 309 economy class seats, with the first six rows in economy offering extra legroom. The business class cabin has lie-flat beds. To accommodate the new planes, is selling nine wide-body aircraft – five Airbus A340-300s and four Airbus A340-600s – and 15 spare engines and four auxiliary power units.

## Southern Sun Ridgeway Completes Refurb

Southern Sun Ridgeway Lusaka, in Zambia, has completed a long-awaited refurbishment, to the value of over \$7 million. Inspiration for the refurbished rooms focused on the rich copper and gemstone resources of Zambia, with the colours of emeralds, amethyst, aquamarine, tourmaline, garnet and rose quartz informing the hotel's new colour palette. Every room is equipped with blackout curtains and walk-in showers. Additional amenities include complimentary wi-fi, flat-screen TVs with DSTV and 24-hour room service. The hotel has also completed upgrades to its reception area, public toilets, and business centre.

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# RATHER MEET IN Mauritius



*Planning an incentive trip to reward your top performers, an international conference for a few thousand delegates, an exclusive high-level meeting for a government delegation, or a product launch event?*

If you are, look no further than the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius. Here you will find the perfect venue, staffed by a professional and dedicated support team, to deliver a unique, world-class event, with a touch of island-style elegance and flair.

The paradise island of Mauritius is fast becoming one of Africa's tourism and meetings jewels with its scenic beauty, hidden treasures to explore and an exotic melting-pot of cuisines and cultures. It's a short flight from South Africa's three major cities and visa-free for South African passport holders.

## MICE

Mauritius offers the MICE buyer the infrastructure to cater for a variety of groups and sizes, all year round. As a MICE-friendly destination, the island has the key ingredients to host successful meetings, incentive groups, conferences and events. The quality and variety of

accommodation, the attention to detail in service delivery, state-of-the-art conferencing venues, professional and friendly staff, and the additional activities on offer, all guarantee a unique experience.

## CONFERENCE FACILITIES

Boasting the largest and most modern convention centre in the Indian Ocean region, the Swami Vivekananda Convention Centre provides all the facilities needed for large, international conferences, accommodating up to 5,000 people.

Other venues include the International Conference Centre in Grand Baie (up to 600 people), the Freeport Exhibition Center in Mer Rouge (up to 1,000 delegates), and the Trianon Convention Centre in Trianon (up to 3,000 delegates). Many Mauritian hotels also offer conference facilities and can cater for up to 800 people at a time, with spectacular marquees and set-ups on the hotel properties.

## ACTIVITIES

The island also boasts a variety of activities specifically geared for MICE groups, ranging from golf to adventure sports such as quad-biking, trekking, mountain biking, trail-running, zip-lining, fishing, kite-surfing, parasailing, canoeing and sky-diving, together with a host of water sports.

The island also offers stunning outdoor locations for interactive and adrenalin-fuelled activities and adventures perfect for team-building exercises. There are also many cultural festivities and spiritual festivals that take place on the island that can be enjoyed.

## WHEN TO VISIT

Mauritius has a tropical climate, with warm weather all year round. The best months to visit are from May to December, when the weather is cooler, dry and sunny.

*Enjoy everything that Mauritius has to offer as your ideal MICE destination, combining quality, elegance and style, in a paradise island setting!*

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[www.tourism-mauritius.mu](http://www.tourism-mauritius.mu)  
[www.ratherbeinmauritius.co.za](http://www.ratherbeinmauritius.co.za)

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The Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority has an attractive incentive scheme in place for the MICE segment.

This applies to bookings for large groups of 100 people or more to the island and includes a 15% VAT rebate, on the ground assistance and cash incentives, if three nights or more at the same hotel are booked for the group.

More details are available through the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority office.





## Airlink to Operate Own Flight Code

Independent airline Airlink will operate under its own 4Z flight code with effect from 11 June. This will enable Airlink to develop more routes and frequencies on an independent basis, as well as extend opportunities to establish new agreements with leading international airlines. Airlink and South African Airways have redefined their partnership by replacing their franchise agreement with a new commercial arrangement from 11 June 2020. Customers holding SAA 083 tickets for flights after 10 June, who do not want to be re-accommodated, may apply to SAA for a refund or through other channels, such as the credit card issuer used for payment or insurance. SAA refunds will be managed in line with its business rescue policies.



## Century City Extends Hospitality Offering

Century City Conference Centre and Hotel in Cape Town has broken ground on a brand-new hotel in the complex. Aimed for completion in mid-2021, Century City Hotel Bridgewater is an exciting addition to the acclaimed Century City Hotels brand, and is set to complement the existing hospitality offering in the node. The existing Century City Hotel will be rebranded as Century City Hotel Urban Square. The new hotel will increase accommodation from 125 rooms at Century City Hotel Urban Square to 223 rooms between the two properties, and almost 700 rooms within walking distance of Century City Conference Centre. When complete, Bridgewater One will consist of an 80-room hotel flanked by 122 apartments, overlooking three hectares of waterbody and greenery, and three individual office buildings for a R600 million mixed-use development. Between this cluster of buildings, a sunny, sheltered, central courtyard will be lined with shops and restaurants. And beneath them, two levels of parking will provide 376 secure undercover bays.

## ONOMO Acquires BON Hotels

ONOMO Hotels has acquired a 60,1% controlling stake in BON Hotels, setting Africa's hospitality industry up for a major shake-up. The acquisition establishes ONOMO as a key player in the Nigerian market and will reinforce its presence in Southern Africa. ONOMO will benefit from BON Hotels' extensive experience of offering its services as a hotel management company. The strategic partnership reflects the parties' ongoing confidence in Africa as the go-to region for economic opportunities and growth potential, particularly in tourism.

## Radisson to Debut on Reunion Island

Radisson Hotel Group will enter its third of the four main Indian Ocean Islands with the signing of the Radisson Hotel Saint Denis on Reunion Island. Saint Denis is the administrative capital of the French overseas region, located on the north end of Reunion Island, and Radisson's newest hotel is located within walking distance of the main commercial and financial district. Positioned in front of the Promenade, between the old town and the main highway, the hotel offers easy access to Saint Denis Roland Garros International Airport, the main airport on Reunion Island. The hotel will feature 124 upscale rooms and suites; five food and drink outlets, including a rooftop bar and lounge; 416m<sup>2</sup> of meeting and events space made up of a large conference room and six meeting rooms; and a fully-equipped gym.



## BA and KQ Enhance Partnership

British Airways and Kenya Airways have enhanced their interline partnership, providing better connections for customers flying into and out of Jomo Kenyatta International Airport and London Heathrow. The partnership will allow KQ customers to access BA's extensive European network. British Airways' customers will be able to connect through Nairobi to Kenya Airways' African network.



## SWISS Now Flying Fully-Refurbished A340 Fleet

Swiss International Air Lines concluded the cabin refurbishment programme for its Airbus A340 aircraft fleet in mid-January. SWISS has newly equipped the cabins of its five A340s with the first, business and economy class seats already featured on its Boeing 777s, together with a new inflight entertainment system that includes internet connectivity. SWISS operates its Airbus A340s on services between Zurich and Boston, Johannesburg and Shanghai.

## Catalyst Hotel to Open in Sandton

The Catalyst Hotel, a premier establishment managed by Newmark Hotels, Reserves, Lodges and Residences, is set to bring luxury and comfort to both business and leisure travellers in the middle to last quarter of 2020. Positioned close to the Gautrain station, the hotel offers 206 rooms for both short and long-stay guests. From deluxe bathroom finishes to top-class in-room conveniences, each suite has been built for comfort with all the stylish efficiencies geared towards the discerning guest. On-site facilities include a restaurant, a fully-equipped conference area, a state-of-the-art gym, swimming pool, and a full-service spa.



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**Wayne Troughton**  
CEO: HTI Consulting

# Hotels 'get personal'

**A**s with many things, we've come full circle! For years, travellers were content to be unknown to hotel hosts... 'another booking, another room number'. Today, however, the trend towards personalisation is once again prevalent in the hospitality sector.

In my last column I mentioned that by 2022 the experiential market is estimated to account for nearly two thirds of the global luxury hotel market. According to a recent report by Infosys, around 86% of international consumers also say personalisation plays an important role in their purchasing decisions.

People are actively seeking hospitality experiences that are relevant to them and make them feel like they matter as an individual, rather than merely being clumped together with every other consumer and offered the same treatment. The drive is therefor for hoteliers to reconstruct and develop their product offering to be more engaged, personalised, immersive, adventurous and more adjusted to local culture.

The 'game changer' in delivering 21st century non-standardised hotel accommodation is the technology of sharing.

In the past, it generally wasn't practical to get insights, references and reviews before you committed to your stay. Today, it's hard to imagine any form of accommodation that hasn't been photographed, shared, blogged, rated and reviewed online.

For those hotels seeking to collect and interpret data about their guests in order to deliver a personalised user experience, gathering guest profile data has never been easier. Guests are generally happy to provide some personal information if it means that they're getting personalised service and relevant information, post-stay, about deals that would suit their specific requirements.

If a particular guest stays at a hotel repeatedly for business trips, their information can be noted and used the next time they book a room at the hotel, perhaps to point them to a wi-fi-enabled work area, free conference room, or other areas suited to their business-related needs. Better yet, hoteliers are increasingly using technology apps to enable the guests to control their own experience. Via an app some guests are able to adjust the temperature in their room, order content for the mini-bar, or stream content on hotel TVs.

Another favourite way to court guest favour is to integrate their social interests into their travel opportunities. An important factor in adding value and deepening customer insight is also to understand the reason that the guest is there – be it business, leisure or conference participation.

Having a sense of a trip's purpose (not just WHO the guest is but WHY they travel) allows hotels to cater to preferences that apply not just to the particular guest but also to their travel persona. A leisure traveller persona effectively translates to particular accommodation preferences, service levels, and assistance requests and, of course, additional revenue opportunities. A business traveller persona may be more inclined to concern themselves with loyalty point earning opportunities, but less inclined toward inclusive meals or services, since their bill is a reimbursable business expense.

Business travellers would be more likely to take advantage of express check-in and check-out services, and less likely to seek extensive assistance or guidance from front desks. Applying travel personas can therefore be an important differentiator to customise and enhance the guest experience.

When you think about the word 'personalisation', what should first come to mind is technologies that provide the tools to better know, understand and recognise guests, their needs and their desires. In the chain hotel's world of highly standardised options, it is customer relationship management software that often provides the best competitive advantage in a marketplace that has begun to value the unique above all else.

Ultimately, the deeper the level of knowledge hotels have about their guest, the more likely that guest will stay loyal, because they trust you know what they want from a hotel experience.

Brands that create personalised experiences by integrating data and advanced technologies are currently achieving revenue increases of between 6% and 10%.

The best approach is for a personalisation programme that brings hotel guests into sharper focus and improves the customer relationship. More rewarding guest experiences that offer a 'you first' proposition are therefor an increasing requirement and brands that don't take the necessary steps towards personalisation will run the risk of becoming irrelevant in the near future. ■



## Still investing in Africa

In a digitally-connected world, where booking travel can be done in seconds using a smartphone app or website, what are travel professionals bringing to the table that robots, internet or technology don't?

Research by ASATA has shown that, on average, a leisure traveller will visit 20 websites before engaging a travel consultant to finalise the booking. However, travel agency services are experiencing a worldwide revival.

In corporate travel, the travel management company (TMC) has increasingly started filling a valuable and strategic role for customers beyond what technology can offer.

A recent US-based survey showed that the average frequent business traveller spends 108 hours per year on admin work related to corporate travel, i.e. researching, booking, adjusting,

cancelling and expensing travel. The vast majority (70%) of business travellers indicated that they felt this was a waste of their valuable time.

By combining technology-led innovation with human expertise, the modern travel professional provides customers with intelligent solutions that save travellers time and companies money – from streamlined payment and reporting functions to customised itineraries and comprehensive safety controls.

Customers today are not only looking for the best price anymore. They expect competent, qualified travel professionals to offer them a fully-personalised service across multiple channels, manage complex itineraries, loyalty programmes, and act as a crucial safety net when things go awry.

Bots are not equipped to handle complicated itineraries or to deal

with the complexities of effective risk management. It's the travel professional who is best placed to educate a company on its exposure and to take the necessary measures to mitigate those risks.

21st-century TMCs are focusing their attention on identifying the opportunities and tools that exist beyond the transaction.

They are asking critical questions like: What are our non-customers saying? What services do they think we should provide? What risks have been identified, and are we considering these things when making strategic decisions?

We can help businesses and their travellers manage risk in 2020 and beyond if we master the answers to these simple questions. ■

**Otto de Vries**  
ASATA CEO



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# ExecuJet Experiences

*ExecuJet, part of the Luxaviation Group, is a well-established and trusted charter service provider to companies, entrepreneurs, governments and VIP's alike*

**H**owever, ExecuJet's service offering is not only focused on business travel. As part of ExecuJet's ongoing commitment to growing that offering and becoming a truly one-stop experience creator, ExecuJet launched its Tours & Safaris division in 2019.

ExecuJet Tours & Safaris offers a range of tailor-made safari itineraries with private aircraft flights and transfers. ExecuJet hand-picked its safari partners for their exemplary safety and service standards, matching ExecuJet's own. Locations include all African safari destinations and the surrounding Indian Ocean islands.

For an authentic bush living and immersive wildlife adventure, ExecuJet also offers privately-guided fly-in safaris. These can be arranged anywhere across Africa, with the option to follow wildlife to different regions as they move or migrate.

Another unique destination experience offered by ExecuJet is Antarctica, in partnership with White Desert, the only company in the world to fly into the interior of Antarctica in a private jet. This is the opportunity to experience the real interior of Antarctica in a single day or extend a visit to five or eight days. You can either buy a seat or charter an entire private jet. Your Antarctic adventure begins as you fly out from ExecuJet's world-class Cape Town facility, across the mighty Southern Ocean. The six-hour journey transports guests from the African night, over thousands of icebergs, and passes into 24 hours of continuous sunshine. Destination: Wolf's Fang runway, the only blue ice runway for private jets.

"Safaris are an integral part of African travel, providing a window into the rich, diverse and complex environment of

this astonishing continent," says Gavin Kiggen, Vice-President Africa, ExecuJet. "Private aircraft are perfectly suited to this kind of exploration – they afford you increased travel flexibility, can land on short or dirt runways so will take you directly to your destination, and give our customers enhanced luxury, privacy and comfort. We're incredibly excited to partner with these top companies, offering our clients bespoke and seamless experiences across Africa."

"To experience the romance of the African savannah in a short time span, our packages are ideal. Fill your days with game drives overland, via boat or even by hot air balloon. Or, combine it with an island trip, where you can learn to scuba dive, rent a private yacht, or relax with bespoke spa and beauty services. Our selected partners provide secluded, ultra-luxury villas, with devoted members of staff to fulfil your every need. Our range of conservation areas and national parks make spotting 'Big Five' game, rare primates and breath-taking migrations completely effortless."





ExecuJet's wildlife guide says: "Our family-run safaris have been designed and guided through every month and season. We pride ourselves on a fully-immersive outdoor lifestyle – grilling freshly caught tiger fish and bream from the Okavango and Zambezi Rivers; watching herds of zebra and wildebeest graze over breakfast; or seeking lions, leopards, elephants, cheetahs and more on horseback, in open-top vehicles or from the air. If you're passionate about preserving our natural heritage, understanding the environment and learning about wildlife from experienced professionals, this is for you."

Any of the safari packages can be combined with a private charter, tailor-made to the travel requirements of guests.

ExecuJet's African charter fleet represents the latest in modern technology and flexibility, and it recently added various business jets to its managed fleet – most notably, a Global Express with a beautifully-appointed 12-seat interior, capable of flying non-stop to Europe from Lanseria International Airport in Johannesburg.

The Global Express is a fast, ultra-long-range business jet. It has the largest cabin in its class, divided into three sections – lounge, dining and meeting (also

serves as an office area) – and a separate stateroom in the aft cabin. Satellite communication keeps you in touch with the world whilst in flight.

Another exciting addition to the charter fleet is the Falcon 900EX with 10-seat interior, capable of flying non-stop to Dubai from Lanseria International Airport.

ExecuJet is also the only operator in South Africa to offer not one, but two Pilatus PC-24 Super Versatile Jets (SVJ) available for charter. The PC-24 is simply unique. It's the only aircraft combining the versatility of a turboprop with the cabin size of a medium-light jet and the performance of a light jet. It's a plane that simply doesn't fit into any of the existing business jet categories. The PC-24 has been engineered to be "off-road" compatible from the beginning. Its outstanding short-field performance – even on unpaved runways – opens up an incredible level of mobility.

Complementing ExecuJet's fixed-wing fleet, it also offers a modern rotary fleet allowing it to present its clients with a seamless solution when it comes to helicopter charter, which provides a fast, flexible service for business professionals, and is suited to short flights to destinations with

no airport.

All ExecuJet's charter aircraft comply with the latest regulatory requirements and offer the very best in onboard amenities and luxuries, reflecting its uncompromising commitment to safety and comfort.

ExecuJet also offers a SimplyFly Membership Card, affording clients the opportunity to buy bulk charter hours, tailored to their needs and aircraft requirements.

In addition, ExecuJet offers Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) services within its African portfolio, enabling clients to carry out inspections, surveys, mapping and photography in greater detail. UAV's are not only going to play an integral part in commercial aviation operations in the future, but are seen as a natural extension of ExecuJet's complete aviation solution offering to its clients.

Adding to its extensive portfolio, ExecuJet also caters to its clients' cargo charter needs, whether local, regionally or internationally. Its extensive aircraft fleet, global FBO and partner network ensure it is able to deliver, regardless of a client's needs.

## CONTACT

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*Why an upgrade to a hotel suite is becoming ever more attractive for the frequent business traveller, as Business Traveller Asia-Pacific's Michael Allen finds.*

# The suite life







**W**hy shell out for a spacious suite when you stay at a hotel, rather than just staying in a more budget-friendly standard guestroom? Different travellers have different reasons, but the consensus among frequent business travellers is that a standard room often does not quite provide everything you need to smoothly and seamlessly conduct your business when on a trip.

Indeed, trying to conduct your business in too small a room can sometimes lead to embarrassing misunderstandings, as experienced by *Business Traveller* Forum user Nick Inkster, a UK-based retiree who worked in the hospitality business in CEO roles, during a Canadian hotel stay around the turn of the millennium.

"In Montreal years ago – can't remember which hotel – I had a colleague come to my suite for a very early conference call. Room service arrived with coffee, croissants etc, and the server, whilst placing the tray on the dining room table, said 'Good morning, gentlemen, I trust you slept well'. We had both slept well, just not on the same floor of the hotel!"

Such cheek-reddening incidents aside, the *Business Traveller* readership seems to broadly agree that if you can get a suite for a decent price – or upgrade to one using points from a loyalty programme – it's often worth it.

"Would I upgrade to one? That would depend entirely on the premium I have to pay and my requirements on that trip – whether I need to invite people into my room or hold meetings etc. However, if the cost is only marginal, I would not think twice," says Ahmad Attaur Rehman, a barrister who lives in Islamabad and *BT* Forum user.

#### **ALL SHAPES AND SIZES**

Not all suites are created equal. The so-called Grand Suite at Ootopia West, a co-living property in famously space-constrained Hong Kong, clocks in at just under 14.5m<sup>2</sup> – much smaller than the average standard hotel room. So, suites come in all





shapes and sizes, from the ultra-luxurious to the minimalist and practical. Price points, of course, tend to correlate to the level of luxury you can expect.

Indisputably at the ultra-luxury end is the newly-refurbished Raffles Hotel in Singapore, an iconic property first opened in 1887 that's probably most famous for creating the Singapore Sling cocktail. It's an all-suite property with nine categories of suite, and six of the 115 suites have been designated as Residence Suites exclusively for long-stay guests. The hotel says these guests tend to be CEOs and ambassadors in need of a swanky residence when relocating to the Lion City.

"We are an all-suite hotel and all our suites have the same set-up of having their own parlour-slash-living room, followed by the bedroom and bathroom. As soon as you go in, you have your parlour that you can actually make private by closing all the doors and windows into the bedroom – and that space is big enough to host a meeting for three to four people very comfortably," says hotel manager Chadi Chemaly. "All our suites have the shared veranda, which is also a great space. All through the hotel, you have small corners and spaces of which many are exclusively for residents."

The daily rate at Raffles Hotel



(including a limousine transfer) starts from \$764 for a midweek stay in an entry-level 58m<sup>2</sup> Courtyard Suite King (in early-December). Whilst many would consider laying down that much cash worth it for a residence at one of Singapore's most coveted and storied addresses, business travel these days often comes with strict budgets. For a more modest – yet still comfortable and practical – suite stay, Hong Kong's Harbour Grand Kowloon might offer a good solution for more budget-conscious business travellers.

At the start of August, the hotel, set beside Victoria Harbour in Hong Kong's Whampoa district, opened 360 new guestrooms (including 100 suites) in its Tower. The hotel's total room inventory will reach 967 by the middle of next year, including 216 suites.

Of the six room types in the new Tower, four of these are suites, including the Tower Superior Cityview (51m<sup>2</sup>), Tower Superior Harbourview (41-47m<sup>2</sup>), Tower Premium Harbourview (56-57m<sup>2</sup>) and Tower Premium Cityview (52-58m<sup>2</sup>).

I stayed in a Tower Premium Harbourview suite at the start of November. My stay was fantastic, but I would not describe the suite as the height of luxury compared with other properties I've seen in the Asia-Pacific region. However, it was extremely well appointed, with brand-new furnishings and practical amenities that would definitely make any business traveller's stay more convenient.

You could even catch a glimpse – albeit a rather distant one – of the city's Symphony of Lights show that sees several skyscrapers along Victoria light up at 20h00 every night and is a favourite of tourists, who flock to the Tsim Sha Tsui waterfront to watch it.

Victor Chan, general manager of Harbour Grand Kowloon, says his intention was not to make the suites "ultra-luxurious or excessive". Rather, he and his team wanted to design them at a reasonable price point, whilst providing all the amenities necessary to ensure a comfortable and convenient stay for both business and leisure travellers.

Chan says Harbour Grand Kowloon has listened to its customers and the suites were designed based on customer feedback, rather than looking at what other hotels are doing.

"This hotel has been around for 20-plus years. We have a good base of regular customers who have given us feedback. That is more important than looking at other hotels' suite features and trying to copy them," he says. "The in-room sockets are very handy – which is something that people always look for. The first thing they do in a hotel room is plug in their USB, be it by the bedside or the writing desk."

With ultra-luxury suites, hotels cannot afford to omit anything a guest might expect to find in the room. In order to offer a suite at a good price point, Chan says there



were some features the hotel did away with because they are not strictly necessary.

"We could quite easily have included an in-room mini-bar," he says. "But we don't really see the point of that. Our in-room dining is offered 24 hours a day, around the clock – mini-bars are something which I believe more and more hotels are doing away with."

### MADE FOR MEETINGS

The priority of business travellers is to get work done in the most efficient manner possible – whether that be hunkering over spreadsheets or entertaining clients and business associates.

"I often hold meetings in hotels and prefer the privacy of a suite in which to hold them. So, for me, it's essential the suite can be divided with a closing door. I don't want guests looking into my bedroom, especially if housekeeping hasn't got round to cleaning it when I have a very early morning meeting," says "LuganoPirate", a user of *Business Traveller's* online forum.

Business travellers may also be keen to take advantage of the "bleisure" trend – the fine art of mixing business and leisure when travelling – and its increasing acceptance amongst employers.

Jean-Philippe Jacopin, general manager of Orchard Hotel Singapore, understands that trend well. He says it's important for business travellers to have separation between sleeping and the living areas in their accommodation.

"Business travellers staying at our Premier Suite with their families can host business meetings in the comfort of the suite's living room, while their families relax in private in the fully-partitioned bedroom. The two separate entrances are also useful for this function," he says.

However, mixing kids with business does carry some risk and guests may wish to warn their children in advance not to enter the working area of the suite and interrupt mummy or daddy's meeting or phone call. You may remember that in 2017 Professor

Robert Kelly was explaining South Korean politics live on the BBC over video link when his two young children barged in – instantly making him a viral social media sensation.

Another area that business travellers like to keep separate in their suites is their own personal bathroom. Fortunately, many suites – though not all – offer a guest washroom. However, guest bathroom etiquette seems to be lost on some people.

"I remember staying at the Lanesborough in London once, where I had three meetings but only the one bathroom," says LuganoPirate. "On each occasion my guests nicked some of the toiletries, and the last one to leave took the whole lot. I was quite embarrassed having to ask housekeeping each time to come back and replenish them."

Once your formal business meetings are over, that same suite space can also be used for a more personal kind of entertaining, suggests one hot-blooded *Business Traveller* reader!

"A separate dining area, with a nice table and service entrance, along with mood lighting and built-in speakers, could turn a heavy day's business into a 'Barry

***“With ultra-luxury suites, hotels cannot afford to omit anything a guest might expect to find in the room.”***







White evening’ – of course with the right company,” says UK-based BT Forum user “MartynSinclair”, who works as an aviation and property consultant.

#### PERSONAL TOUCHES

In-room amenities and room design can only do so much. A hotel without service would not be a hotel; you may as well rent out a large Airbnb apartment instead

(indeed, the home-sharing site now has a box you can tick to find business travel-friendly properties).

Aleksandar Vucic, the executive assistant manager for rooms at the 2018-opened St Regis Zhuhai, says that offering a tailored service helps personalise the experience (the St Regis brand is famous for its butler service). His hotel carefully selects what items are put into its suites and takes note

of what guests consume and what they don’t.

“With the turndown amenities, we need to be on brand. We try to avoid any low-class, calorie-full items. If you’re serving something in the luxury way, we need to check if it’s chocolate, not cheap chocolate from the supermarket; it’s high-quality dark chocolate,” he says. “With our fruit platters, not all guests like to eat all types of fruit. Our butlers will understand what the guests’ habits and preferences are. If we notice on the first night that the guests really like bananas, we will add extra bananas.”

Whilst bowls of fruit are a pretty universal welcome gift, some hotels like to shake things up a bit and offer their suite guests something unique to the local culture. For example, at Conrad Guangzhou, which has 62 suites in four different sizes, guests get a daily savoury Chinese welcome soup served in a beautiful painted lacquer container inspired by the traditional food basket.

“Normally, guests arrive in the rooms around 15h00 to 16h00. A cup of soup is a benefit for them before they join the dinner outside or in the hotel,” says general manager Ken Chow.

#### ENDURING POPULARITY

The majority of hotel guests stay in suites as a luxury upgrade from a standard room. However, a select few seem to love staying in suites so much that they try to book them on a more permanent basis – think the CEOs and ambassadors moving to Singapore who set up residence in the Raffles.

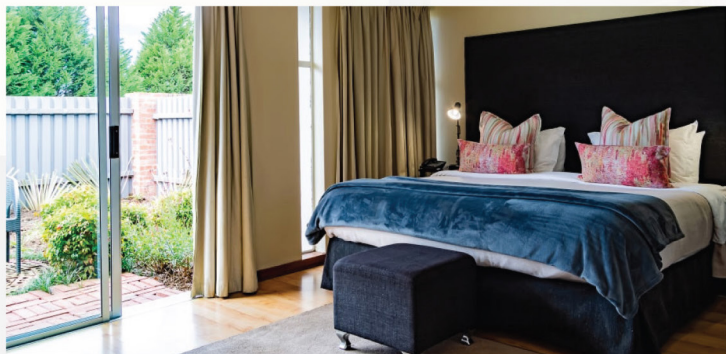
Sometimes guests even try more unorthodox methods of establishing semi-permanent residency in a suite.

“I recently had a long-time customer who has an office here in the neighbouring office block, but he also wanted an office in the hotel and wanted the furniture moved to make it into an office,” says Chan of Harbour Grand Kowloon. “We found that a bit unusual, but it’s something we can accommodate. Though as a permanent office use – that’s not encouraged.” ■



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# Smart Traveller

*How to donate unused frequent flyer miles to charity, by Business Traveller UK's Hannah Brandler.*





## 5. CATHAY PACIFIC AND CATHAY DRAGON

Flyers who earn Asia Miles when flying with Cathay Pacific or Cathay Dragon can now donate to one of five charities. UNICEF HK, Oxfam Hong Kong and Hong Kong Red Cross are some of the charities that are featured. Asia Miles can also be contributed to FLY greener, a programme that allows you to reduce your carbon footprint.

[asiamiles.com](http://asiamiles.com)

## 6. DELTA AIR LINES

Through Delta's Sky Miles, travellers can donate to participating SkyWish charities. You can browse these by region – US, Asia, Latin America & Caribbean and Europe, Middle East & Africa. 26 charities are sponsored (in Europe it is UNICEF, Habitat for Humanity and Make a Wish International), and up to five charities can be processed in one transaction.

[delta.com](http://delta.com)

## 7. EMIRATES

You must first log into your Skywards Miles account to access Emirates' options for donating to charities worldwide. Options include The Emirates Airline Foundation, Sightsavers, Dubai Cares and Care International.

[emirates.com](http://emirates.com)

## 8. ETIHAD AIRWAYS

Etihad Airways' reward programme Etihad Guest sponsors a diverse range of charity organisations including the UN Refugee Agency, the Fred Hollows Foundation, the Choice to Change Foundation, and Climate Care that any number of miles can be donated towards. Since the initiative began in 2007, over 200 million miles have been donated.

[etihadguest.com](http://etihadguest.com)

## 9. FINNAIR

Travellers can join Finnair Plus and donate miles to one of the airline's eight partnered charities, which include UN Women and Cancer Foundation: Pink Ribbon.

[finnairshop.com](http://finnairshop.com)



## 3. AMERICAN AIRLINES

The AAdvantage programme focuses on three types of charitable organisations – those that work to support social good, well-being, or heroes. A minimum of 1,000 miles is required, though members with a balance of less than this can donate their entire balance.

[aa.com](http://aa.com)

## 4. AUSTRIAN AIRLINES, LUFTHANSA AND SWISS

Miles & More, the frequent flyer programme for these airlines, has partnered with two aid organisations – Help Alliance, which focuses on promoting nutrition, health and hygiene, and My Climate, which promotes certified climate protection projects. Members can either make a free donation, which is then allocated to the project most in need, or you can choose to support a specific cause.

[miles-and-more.com](http://miles-and-more.com)

**M**iles (or points) are a perk of frequent travel and can be redeemed on future flights, upgrades, experiences, merchandise, car hire, accommodation and so on.

But sometimes it's hard to spend them – air tickets may be restricted by time and destination, for instance. Rather than waste them, here are some schemes that allow miles to be donated to partnered charities.

## 1. AIR FRANCE AND KLM

Flying Blue, Air France and KLM's frequent flyer programme, has selected 18 charities to which its members may donate miles. Charities include Aviation Sans Frontières, which provides air transport to European hospitals for children with serious illnesses, the French Red Cross and WWF.

[flyingblue.com](http://flyingblue.com)

## 2. ALASKA AIRLINES

The Alaska Airlines LIFT miles programme offers members the chance to support 10 selected charities through donating miles – these include Alaska Airlines Disaster Relief Pool, the Nature Conservancy and the United Negro College Fund, which helps under-represented students to become highly-qualified graduates.

[alaskaair.com](http://alaskaair.com)



## ▼ FEATURE – FREQUENT FLYER MILES

### 10. FRONTIER AIRLINES

This carrier partners with six foundations as part of the My Frontier programme. Miles can be donated to Austin Pets Alive!, which flies volunteers to communities outside Austin to save homeless pets, and Shriners Hospital, which uses the miles to fly patients and their guardian to one of their hospitals for treatment.

[flyfrontier.com](http://flyfrontier.com)

### 11. GARUDA INDONESIA

The airline partners with charities that promote education – Indonesia Mengajar and #BalasBudiGuru – and the Sedekah Umroh programme which helps underprivileged Indonesian Muslims to perform an Islamic pilgrimage.

[garudamiles.com](http://garudamiles.com)

### 12. HAWAIIAN AIRLINES

Hawaiian Miles allows members to donate miles to non-profit

organisations. At the end of the year, the airline promises to match up to a half-million miles to each participating charity. The airline promotes 13 charities which support Hawaiian communities, including Blood Bank of Hawaii, Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project, and Friends of Hokule'a and Hawai'iloa, which helps to maintain canoe building traditions and values.

[hawaiianairlines.com](http://hawaiianairlines.com)

### 13. JAPAN AIRLINES

JAL has a Charity Mile project in which JAL Mileage Bank members can make donations towards a number of campaigns carried out by its charity partners, which currently include disaster relief and environmental conservation.

[jap.co.jp](http://jap.co.jp)

### 14. JETBLUE

The airline's True Blue programme gives members the opportunity to contribute a minimum of

500 points to 18 charities.

Organisations include the American Red Cross, Carbonfund.org, and Concern Worldwide.

[jetblue.com](http://jetblue.com)

### 15. SINGAPORE AIRLINES

KrisFlyer, Singapore Airlines' frequent flyer programme, has partnered with Make-a-Wish Singapore to grant the wishes of children with life threatening illnesses. A minimum of 1,000 miles is required per donation, and a maximum of 100,000 can be donated per transaction.

[singaporeair.com](http://singaporeair.com)

### 16. SOUTHWEST AIRLINES

The airline's Rapid Rewards programme allows you to donate miles to its participating programmes, which include All Hands and Hearts, a charity addressing the needs of communities impacted by natural disasters, and Dream Foundation, granting wishes to terminally-ill adults.

[southwest.com](http://southwest.com)

### 17. UNITED AIRLINES

Miles earned through the Mileage Plus programme can be donated to charities through the Miles on a Mission programme. United has partnered with 20 charities, and there are a number of active campaigns that you can donate a minimum of 1,000 miles to – if the campaign doesn't reach its goal within 28 days, these will be returned to you. You can also campaign for your charity to be one of the partners.

[unitedmileageplus.com](http://unitedmileageplus.com)

### 18. VIRGIN ATLANTIC

Virgin Atlantic's Flying Club has partnered with one charity, WE (formerly Free The Children). In an effort to empower people in rural international communities to break free from the cycle of poverty, flyers can donate a minimum of 2,000 miles to fly volunteers to help efforts.

[virgin-atlantic.com](http://virgin-atlantic.com) ■





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## ▼ FEATURE – AIRPORT TERMINALS



# New Age Terminal

*Airport terminals are not what they used to be, as found by Business Traveller India editor Akanksha Maker.*

**W**hen Viktor Navorski got stranded at an airport in Steven Spielberg's movie *The Terminal* that released in 2004, I sympathised with him. Those unending hours spent living out of a suitcase didn't seem so appealing. However, if the movie was remade today,

I'm sure it would have another perspective. Perhaps, Viktor would be seen enjoying therapeutic spa treatments at an airport spa after an indulgent meal at Wagamama. He could then check-in into a chic airport hotel — living his best life and not being too upset about a missed flight.

That's because the airport

experience has evolved a great deal over the last decade. Airport layovers are transitioning into mini vacations, if time is a luxury on hand. A meal in the choicest of restaurants or relaxing spa therapy is now passé. Select airports are going the extra mile to ensure your time is made the most of. From being entertainment hubs to encompassing futuristic technology whilst showcasing the best in art, airports are evolving and here is how.

### ENTERTAINMENT HUBS

If you're flying out of Frankfurt Airport anytime soon, catching a flick before your flight should be on your list. That's because the two Movie Worlds in Piers A and Z are inviting passengers in transit to watch the latest blockbusters for free. Comfortable couches for up to three persons are arranged in front



of TV screens, just like at home. Singapore's Changi Airport also caters to the cinema aficionado with its 24-hour movie theatres in Terminals 2 and 3. Screenings are available free of charge. Singapore's airport has a host of other entertainment options that ought to keep you more than just occupied. From Jewel Changi Airport's 14,000m<sup>2</sup> Canopy Park that features attractions and gardens to the Changi Experience Studio – a unique space with immersions across 20 different touch-points – there's something for everyone here. The latter is home to interactive games, projection storytelling, experiential shows and gallery exhibits.

For sporting enthusiasts, Hamad International Airport's 'Golf Simulator Experience' at its Oryx Airport Hotel is something worth considering. Being the only airport in the Middle East to offer a state-of-the-art indoor golf simulator experience, this innovative recreational space is equipped with a high definition golf simulation package, golf bags and clubs.

This airport definitely takes its sport seriously. Two years ago, it celebrated the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia with signature Qatari panache. In collaboration with the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC), a month of activities held at three of the airport's football-themed fan zones welcomed over 50,000 participants.

All that sport definitely calls for a tipples or two, and it doesn't get better than German beer — especially when it's freshly brewed. Featuring Europe's only airport brewery, Munich International Airport houses the Airbräu restaurant, where you can sip on authentic Bavarian beer. In the tavern and the adjoining covered beer garden, passengers can also enjoy hearty German classics such as roast pork and dumplings. Airbräu also features a regular programme of live entertainment, from traditional Bavarian bands to comedy acts.

Speaking of Bavarian traditions, airports are emblematic of their home country's heritage. Showcasing Korean music and

culture, South Korea's Incheon International Airport hosts an array of performances and concerts that range from semi-classical to K-pop. In fact, the airport houses a fully-fledged event space called Millennium Hall at Terminal 1 that hosts cultural performances each day of the year.

## FUTURE TECHNOLOGY

At the end of the day, it is seamless technology and digital effortlessness that truly sets an airport apart, placing it in another league.

Istanbul Airport has introduced a fleet of child-size humanoid robots to make sure no-one gets lost. Passengers can approach the robots and scan their tickets to see their flight status, get directions and view other flight information in English or Turkish. The 'humanoid' (aka human-like) robots move on wheels and can perform expressions through their arms and on-screen faces.

In Frankfurt's airport too, self-driving guide robots called YAPE (Your Autonomous Pony Express) accompany passengers to their gates and help them to transport their small luggage. YAPE can carry up to 30 kilograms at a speed of about six km/h indoors. Since the self-driving electric robot senses its surroundings, it is able to circumvent obstacles.

Another piece of technology that's becoming increasingly omnipresent in airports across the globe is facial recognition. Flying out of Beijing Capital International Airport resembles a *Minority Report*-like experience as facial recognition scanners are everywhere, from the boarding pass turnstiles to buying a duty-free perfume. The technology, which links a passenger's face to their passport at check-in, is designed to speed up the whole process of moving through the airport.

Biometric identification is also being introduced as a replacement for passenger passports and boarding passes at Hamad Airport. Although this is still in its trial phase, once completed, passengers' flight, passport, and facial biometric information will be combined in a single electronic record at the self-check-in kiosk or

on a mobile app. Changi Airport's Terminal 4 also offers a fully-automated departure process from check-in to boarding. Integrating facial recognition, FAST (Fast and Seamless Travel) – a suite of self-service options – allows passengers to breeze through the airport with minimal effort.

## ARTSY DESTINATIONS

As hallmarks of the respective countries, airports are literally gateways to the destinations of the world. Public art takes another dimension when it's situated at an airport. Perhaps there isn't a more apt place for a country to display its local culture and history than an airport – and this has been extensively observed in recent times.

Walking into Terminal 2 of Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport in Mumbai is always a personal delight. Drawing inspiration from the white peacock (the peacock is India's national bird), the 50-feet tall glazed walls are dauntingly beautiful. The airport showcases a unique collection of Indian art and handicrafts in one of the largest Indian public art initiatives called Jaya He Museum.

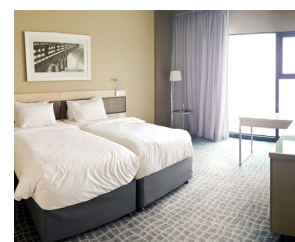
The four levels of Terminal 2 teem with over 5,500 pieces of Indian art and handicrafts, including tribal totem poles and a 3D map of Mumbai built from recycled chips and circuit boards. For those keenly interested in Indian heritage, there is a Jaya He Safari that takes travellers across the featured artwork.

Hamad Airport also symbolises Qatari culture and heritage with its noteworthy collection of art pieces by internationally acclaimed, regional and local artists in curation with Qatar Museums (QM), a government entity that oversees the Museum of Islamic Art. The airport acts as an innovative exhibition space for over 20 international art pieces to inspire global travellers. An example is 'Cosmos' by internationally-acclaimed French Artist Jean-Michel Othoniel that draws inspiration from an artefact located in the collection at the Museum of Islamic Art in Qatar. ■





PORT ELIZABETH, SOUTH AFRICA



## RADISSON BLU PORT ELIZABETH

**BACKGROUND:** Radisson Blu Port Elizabeth was purpose-built for the 2010 World Cup, but has since evolved into a sought-after seafront hotel popular with the corporate, government and leisure markets. For the third year running it has received certification from the global SafeHotels programme, which benchmarks security standards in the hospitality industry. The entire property is non-smoking.

**WHERE IS IT?:** In the upmarket suburb of Summerstrand, a 10-minute drive from Port Elizabeth Airport, and a similar distance to the central business district. It's also close to the N2 freeway for travellers heading into the Eastern Cape, and a short walk from some of the city's best beaches.

**ROOMS:** The property offers 173 rooms across 18 floors, with rooms on the upper floors offering superb ocean views. 'Superior Rooms' – with or without a direct ocean view – make up the bulk of the stock and are well-suited to corporate travellers. Beds can be configured as king or twin, with a desk workspace, coffee facilities and high-speed complimentary internet access. Junior Suites are a significant step up, offering nearly double the space and a separate lounge area. My Junior Suite had a superb sea view, to be enjoyed from the king-size bed or the large couch in the adjoining lounge area. The inclusion of large flat-screen TVs, with major satellite channels, in both areas makes for an impressive feature. In the lounge area there was a sea-facing desk too, and with coffee facilities on hand it was ideal for tackling early-morning emails. Suites also receive a

nightly turndown service complete with Lindt chocolates, which is a nice touch. The bathrooms are modern and spacious, with both bath and shower, but these are rather open-plan to the bedroom – worth remembering if you plan on upgrading to share with a colleague. If convenience is key, inter-connecting rooms are available.

**BARS & RESTAURANTS:** There's one food and beverage outlet on site, the Tabú Grill, Bar and Lounge overlooking the pool terrace. Tabú Grill offers all-day dining, with generous breakfast buffet-style. A buffet is also offered at dinnertime, but the à la carte menu is a better bet with a good range of South African and international dishes. The steaks are generous and well cooked, with a value-for-money wine list alongside. Tabú Grill is certainly a good option for after-work dinners and catching up with colleagues, but for celebratory client dinners it's perhaps a little low-key. The adjoining Tabú Bar & Lounge offers both seating at the bar and on a more private couch; a fine spot for after-work drinks.

**BUSINESS FACILITIES:** There's a small business centre on the ground floor for last-minute services, but the hub of the hotel's corporate offering is its spacious conference facilities. Ranging from private meeting rooms to larger function spaces, these take over an entire floor stretching across 680 square metres. The multi-functional Bay Suite space can be tailored to accommodate between 42 and 180 people, with a dedicated bar and catering area on hand. The conference floor offers separate access lifts for delegates. The friendly concierge team

on the ground floor can also assist with airport transfers and other requests.

**LEISURE FACILITIES:** Modern gym facilities are available on-site, managed through an outside provider. It features state-of-the-art Technogym equipment, along with a weights and floor area. Outside guests also use the facility and it can get busy in the mornings. There's a dedicated shower area in the gym. Subject to availability, hotel guests have complimentary access to the steam room facilities at the on-site Amani Spa, which offers a wide range of facial and body therapies. Treatments are competitively priced, making this a good option for corporate breakaways. The spa offers six treatment rooms, a relaxation room and nail bar. There's a pool on-site, situated in front of the Tabú Grill, and while you won't fit in too many laps, it's great for winding down after a day in the office. Sea views, again, come standard.

**VERDICT:** The combination of location, facilities and upmarket accommodation ensures the Radisson Blu Port Elizabeth ticks all the right boxes for the corporate market, keeping weekend leisure visitors happy too. ■

Richard Holmes

### FACT FILE

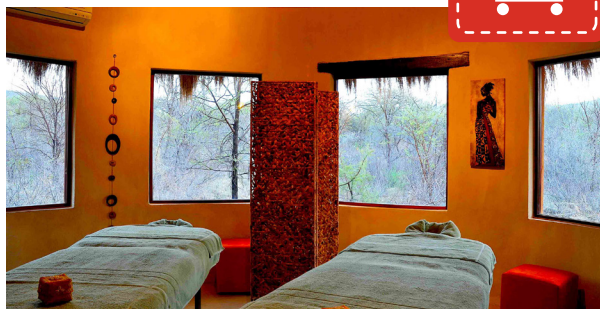
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NORTH WEST PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA



## TAU GAME LODGE, MADIKWE RESERVE

**BACKGROUND:** A former cattle region, Operation Phoenix in the 1990s translocated more than 8,000 animals here and today more than 60 mammal species roam the 75,000ha of grassy plains, woodlands, rocky outcrops, and mountains. An Entrepreneurs Resorts member, privately-owned Tau Game Lodge, built in 1995, has undergone several refurbishments.

**WHAT'S IT LIKE?** Overlooking a waterhole replete with crocodiles, spur-winged geese, and white-faced ducks, lush lawns lead guests past the curio shop into the main tented reception area, which offers a seamless sense of flow with the natural surrounds. Thatch, stone and wood in the 30 chalets with splashes of colourful accents enhance the sophisticated, natural ambience. The central waterhole's passing parade adds to the remote sense of kinship with the wilderness. The lodge can accommodate up to 60 people sharing.

**WHERE IS IT?** In North West's Madikwe Reserve, it's 360 kilometres from Johannesburg, about a four-hour drive on toll roads via Rustenburg, Groot Marico and Zeerust. Daily scheduled charter flights depart from O.R. Tambo International Airport to the Madikwe Airstrip. Transfers between the airfield and the lodge booked through Tau are complimentary.

**ROOMS:** Overlooking a 'koppie' and the waterhole glimpsed through glass sliding doors from our bed, our chalet had an indoor bath, outdoor shower, Rain toiletries in glass containers, air-con and a ceiling fan. Soaps shaped like lion cub

paws, distressed wooden frames, a carved lampstand in the shape of a giraffe, porcupine quill shades, and green accents enhanced the African ambience. All 30 en suite standard, luxury and family chalets offer private viewing decks, tea and coffee-making facilities, king-sized beds dressed in mosquito netting, side tables, reading lamps, and free wi-fi at the main lodge.

**DINING:** While the traditional African ethos prevails in the seasonal menu, Australian chef Cynthia Tait last year spent a month training Tau's culinary team in the art of healthy cuisine, including vegetarian and Thai dishes, using organic ingredients. Since the lounge, bar, and dining area are all partially outdoors, meals are usually served on the deck overlooking the watering hole. There's also a restaurant and boma, where convivial conversations with your ranger and fellow delegates encourage team cooperation.

**CONFERENCE FACILITIES:** The main hall of the 270m<sup>2</sup> Tau Convention Centre comprises three fully-equipped 'sub-halls' that operate via an integrated touch-screen control system configured to maximize performance and enhance aesthetic qualities. The system, which includes wall-mounted presentation speakers, 2.5m screens working in sequence with the audio system, motorised window blinds that operate with audio-visual settings, high-resolution projectors, and network points, was designed for ease of functionality with simple plug-in and play options for all presentation needs. Custom-designed floor panels installed into all three sub-

halls have connections for computers and other electronic equipment for specialist conferencing. The convention centre's facilities – kitchen, bar, lapa, and wheelchair-friendly toilets – are all accessible in the convention centre's main building and alongside the breakaway rooms, each of which can comfortably accommodate 10 delegates.

**WELLNESS & LEISURE:** An Intonga rub at the Spa Oasis where skilful hands employ sticks to soothe tight muscles, and a soak in the Hydro Spa Bath overlooking the bush, will melt any residual city stress. Twice-daily game drives offered abundant sightings of elephant, lion, cheetah, rhino, hyena and cubs in their den, just to mention a few highlights. After one morning game drive, a dip in Tau's infinity pool, watching elephant and baboon drink on the banks of the waterhole, cooled me down a treat. A second pool at the main lodge area offers spectacular views of the waterhole, best enjoyed with a G&T in hand.

**VERDICT:** High-quality business facilities, privacy and team-building opportunities, including two daily game drives, Tau Game Lodge offers a serene, malaria-free 'workation' in the bush. ■

Richard Holmes

### FACT FILE

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# Continued growth

*After an incredibly successful 2019, Wings Travel Management has big plans for 2020, and here Group Chief Commercial Officer, **Frank Palapies**, points to some of the areas the TMC will focus on going forward, along with providing some insight into the industry in which Wings operates.*

## Frank Palapies:

Group Chief  
Commercial Officer  
Wings Travel  
Management

**Q: How would you describe 2019, from a Wings Travel point of view?**

**A:** 2019 was a landmark year in terms of us securing a record amount of global new business, including the regional appointment in the Middle East and North Africa to one of the world's largest providers of drilling, pipeline and construction products and services with a total contract value of around \$150 million, and the global appointment to provide travel and logistics services to one of the world's largest oil and gas drilling contractors in the USA, Canada, Mexico and South America. In October we acquired the energy and corporate travel business of Associated Travel in Louisiana, giving us a foothold in a second major energy sector hub in the USA. Wings also added wholly-owned and managed operations in Egypt and Cyprus to meet the needs for servicing clients expanding into these markets. We expanded our technology division with the acquisition of Alchimea, a specialist software developer, to strengthen our technology footprint.

**Q: What were some of the reasons behind your success and growth?**

**A:** The fact that we own and manage all our operations globally has been a key driver to us winning significant new multi-national contracts, as we can provide consistency of service globally, reliable on-demand data, follow-the-sun servicing solutions, and critical safety support in each market. This is a key point of difference to our competitors who tend to use partner agencies in markets like Angola and Nigeria.

**Q: Reflecting on 2019, what was the biggest talking point in the global TMC industry?**

**A:** Travel content and distribution – particularly as regards IATA's New Distribution Capability (NDC). The business travel industry began to see NDC

becoming more of a reality. GDS providers such as Amadeus made the first live NDC bookings in their enhanced Selling Platform Connect, and other technology aggregators in the market made progress in terms of enabling TMCs to book NDC content for certain airlines.

**Q: What are you predicting the biggest challenge will be for TMCs in 2020?**

**A:** The value chain of distribution has traditionally been from supplier to GDS to TMC to corporate client. But this is all changing due to disintermediation as suppliers want to reach the end consumer directly. The industry is certainly evolving rapidly and TMCs will increasingly be under pressure to demonstrate their value in terms of service, as they can no longer just sell on price.

**Q: What would Wings like to achieve in 2020?**

**A:** We aim to continue to grow and win more regional and global contracts as well as consolidate operations and new business gained last year. We will also focus on strengthening our brand position in the market as the leading global independent travel management company for clients in the corporate, energy and marine sectors.

**Q: From a technology point of view, do you have any new products in the pipeline?**

**A:** We have several exciting new products in the pipeline for 2020 including solutions for those managing travel programmes and a product for travellers too. Our acquisition of Alchimea has also enhanced our future technology capabilities significantly, particularly in the areas of digital transformation, data analytics and machine learning.

**Q: Will further acquisitions be part of the Wings strategy?**

**A:** We have several new operations planned for 2020.

**Q: What's your view on the current state of the African business travel industry?**

**A:** These are challenging times for Africa and this is reflected in the African business travel industry. However, Wings has been operating in South Africa for 28 years and we have worked with our clients through many periods of significant change during that time. There are still many great opportunities for us here in our home market and we intend to continue investing and working in partnership with our clients here.

**Q: How have the travel needs of the oil and gas sector changed in the last five years?**

**A:** The downturn in the energy sector over the last few years did have a knock-on effect. Clients naturally scrutinised their costs more closely, whilst not compromising on safety and security. But now that oil prices are rising again, we can see that recovery is positive and business travel in the sector is increasing. This has led a drive to automating crew rotation which has historically been a manual process. Reporting has come under the spotlight where consolidation of spend and the application of business intelligence in terms of spend has allowed TMCs to deliver on value. The need to facilitate this on a global level has become more important.

**Q: What measures is Wings putting in place to meet these needs?**

**A:** We consistently work in partnership with our clients to review their entire travel programme and deliver on their objectives. Every client is different and we tailor our services and solutions to meet their specific needs. ■





**Jan Van der Putten:**  
Area Vice-President,  
Africa & Indian  
Ocean – Hilton  
Hotels

# 100 not out

*After celebrating 100 years in business, and 50 years in Africa, Hilton Hotels and Resorts has big plans for 2020. Jan Van der Putten, Area Vice-President, Africa & Indian Ocean, shares his thoughts on the past year and the road ahead.*

**Q: How would you describe 2019, from a Hilton point of view?**

**A:** 2019 was a truly memorable year for us as we celebrated our 100th anniversary as a company. This global milestone also allowed us to reflect on the contribution of our teams in Africa during that time and we also marked 50-year anniversaries at some of our landmark properties here too.

**Q: Reflecting on 2019, what was the biggest talking point in the global hotel industry?**

**A:** There has long been an acknowledgement of the potential for developing affordable, quality branded hotels – particularly for business travel – but we are really starting to see the momentum. In Africa, 2019 was the year when the mid-market sector finally began to arrive. Hilton launched its Hilton Garden Inn brand in three new markets (Uganda, Eswatini and Botswana) with South Africa and Namibia set to follow soon.

**Q: What are you predicting the biggest issue or challenge will be for the hospitality industry in 2020?**

**A:** The biggest challenges are always the ones which you don't see coming, political instability or natural disasters that might affect people's ability to travel. We are fortunate in that the global scope of our business and indeed our broad presence across Africa helps us mitigate where there are any local challenges or areas of uncertainty by offsetting this in other locations. Broadly speaking, much of the continent is as stable as it has ever been, but we must not become complacent and stay ready to react to any situation from both a commercial and operational point of view.

**Q: What would Hilton like to achieve in 2020?**

**A:** We want to remain the number one choice for owners,

guests and our team members – setting ourselves up for another century of success. One of the ways we intend to do this is by embracing our commitment to sustainable travel and tourism, in particular via what we are terming our 'Big Five' focus areas to support sustainable growth. These are: Youth Opportunity, Water Stewardship, Anti-Human Trafficking, Local Sourcing and Protecting Wildlife. Having launched the platform in October 2018, we've been working hard to lay the ground work for our teams to undergo the necessary training and to meet with the right partners to begin scaling up our impact, and that is something I want to see happen this year.

**Q: From an African development point of view, do you have any new properties expected to open in 2020?**

**A:** We hope to open at least four new hotels this year across the continent. Here in South Africa we hope to see our first Hilton Garden Inn property open its doors at Umhlanaga Arch, whilst we are also on track to open the brand's first hotel in Namibia – right next door to our existing Hilton. We are also working towards the opening of DoubleTree by Hilton Addis Ababa Airport and Hilton Taghazout Bay in Morocco, which is another top-class addition to our growing presence in that market.

**Q: Is Hilton looking to unveil any new brands in Africa in the short-term?**

**A:** We've recently signed deals to bring both our Canopy by Hilton lifestyle brand and the mid-market Hampton by Hilton to Africa for the first time. Canopy is a brand designed to reflect the local neighbourhood culture of its locations – it will make its African debut in Cape Town in the Longkloof district. Meanwhile Hampton by Hilton is what we

call a focused service product in the midscale sector and is phenomenally successful globally with over 2,000 hotels.

**Q: What's your view on the current state of the African business travel industry?**

**A:** It is clear that in the present global economic climate, for many businesses value and flexibility are top of mind when it comes to travel. As an industry it will become increasingly important for us to work together to deliver seamless and connected travel experiences that make business travel easier and more cost effective. Business travellers comprise a significant proportion of our guests and we are constantly looking at ways to adapt and improve their experiences to this effect. Many of our hotels are now equipped with 'digital key' and the ability to select a room via their Honors App, which enables guests to avoid lengthy check-in procedures by arriving prepared.

**Q: Having celebrated 100 years last year, what do you hope the next 100 years will bring the hospitality industry?**

**A:** I am a great believer in the hospitality industry as a source of opportunity for employment and economic growth. This is particularly pertinent in many African countries where the challenge of youth unemployment remains high on the agenda; building infrastructure to support the continued growth of the travel and tourism industry will offer enormous numbers of young people a route towards not only employment, but a fulfilling long-term career with international prospects. I hope that by 2119 the industry will have played a significant part. ■





#### CEO

Comair Limited has appointed **Wrenelle Stander** as Group CEO, effective immediately. This forms part of the ongoing restructuring

at Comair. She has over 25-years of experience in the aviation and energy industries, of which over 15 years have been at executive leadership level. Before joining Comair in 2018, Stander held several positions within the Sasol Limited Group including: Senior Vice-President: Corporate Affairs and Managing Director: Sasol Gas. She holds a MBA from Oxford Brookes University in the United Kingdom, as well as a BA (Hons) degree from the University of Cape Town.



#### CEO

The Comair board has appointed **Glenn Orsmond** as CEO of Comair's Airline Division. Orsmond, a chartered accountant, was Comair's

Financial Director for eight years from 1995 to 2003. He has had an illustrious career in the South African aviation industry, having held senior leadership roles including Financial Director at Sun Air, co-founding Group Financial Director, Group CEO and Co-Founder of 1Time, CEO at Jetworx Aircraft Maintenance and most recently CFO at Star Air Cargo.



#### CEO

The Cape Town International Convention Centre has appointed **Taubie Motlhabane** as the centre's new CEO.

She took over the position from Julie-May Ellingson at the end of January. Motlhabane holds a Masters in global marketing as well as a Bachelors degree in communications, alongside over 29 years' experience in both the private and public business spheres. During this time, some of her previous roles included Executive Director of Tshwane Convention & Visitor Bureau and Business Tourism Manager for South African Tourism.



#### CEO

The Club Travel Group has appointed **Gary Mulder** as its new CEO. This forms part of a new organisational structure at Club

Travel following the announcement that founding MD, Wally Gaynor, was retiring at the end of 2019 and after the group was acquired by Travelstart in October. Mulder has been Club Travel's Financial Director since 2000. He holds a Bachelor of Business Science (CA) from the University of Cape Town and has sat on the board of ASATA since 2016. In his new role he will oversee the group's leisure, corporate, franchise and technology divisions.



#### Regional Director

Hilton Hotels has appointed **Ansu Du Plessis** as the Regional Director of Revenue Management, Africa & Indian Ocean.

Du Plessis has over two decades of experience in the hospitality industry and joined Hilton in November 2017 as Cluster Commercial Director. She later moved to Sandton to oversee the Southern Africa cluster. Before joining Hilton, Du Plessis was the Area Optimisation Manager at Carlson Rezidor. Prior to that, she spent three years at Radisson Blu Waterfront as Revenue Manager.



#### General Manager

Mövenpick Ambassador Hotel Accra has appointed **Adnan Yucel** as its new General Manager.

Yucel has over 25 years of experience, having worked for other brands within the Accor group, including Fairmont, Raffles, Swissôtel and Sofitel, as well as other multi-national hotel brands such as Intercontinental Hotels Group and Hilton Hotels & Resorts.



#### General Manager

Radisson Blu Hotel Sandton has appointed **Shaun Wheeler** as its new General Manager, where he is responsible for the

day-to-day operations of the hotel. Prior to joining Radisson, Wheeler was the GM at Faircity's Falstaff and Quatermain hotels before moving to Synergyworx as COO of new business development. He has worked in Dubai and Egypt as well as South Africa.



#### General Manager

Hotel Verde Cape Town has appointed **Caron van Rooyen** as its new General Manager. Van Rooyen entered the hospitality industry

in 1989. Between 2017 and 2019, she worked for Sun International based at the Palace of the Lost City, Sun City. Prior to this, van Rooyen spent five years in Zambia as Manager of the Avani Victoria Falls Resort.



#### General Manager

Tsogo Sun has appointed **Caroline Mokoena** as General Manager at Southern Sun The Ridge & StayEasy Emalahleni, managing two

properties and 175 rooms. Mokoena has 19 years of experience in the hospitality industry with 12 years spent in various management positions for various hospitality sectors. She joined Tsogo Sun in June 2014 as a Deputy General Manager. Prior to joining Tsogo Sun she managed five hotel portfolios for Bidvest Prestige as an Operations Manager. Prior to Bidvest she was a hotel manager for Sun International at Carnival City.



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# Smarter business



**Liezl Gericke**  
**Head: Middle East,**  
**Africa & India**  
**Mandy Lerena**  
**Commercial**  
**Manager: South**  
**Africa**  
**VIRGIN ATLANTIC**

*The end of March will see Virgin Atlantic launch the Airbus A350 on its Johannesburg route, replacing the twice-daily Boeing 787 service it currently operates, with the airline's two senior representatives in Jo'burg, **Liezl Gericke** and **Mandy Lerena**, on hand to treat editor Dylan Rogers to an outgoing lunch and run through the implications of this change.*

**L**et's back up a bit. Two years ago, SAA pulled one of its Johannesburg-London frequencies and Virgin Atlantic saw the gap, diving in to launch a second daily flight between the cities, using the 787 Dreamliner.

According to Gericke and Lerena, the move was a relative success. Volume was great, with 82% load factor, but as with all airlines with a close eye on the bottom line, that load factor didn't necessarily translate into a fantastic yield.

In layman's terms, Virgin Atlantic weren't getting the right 'mix' of passengers – specifically, a sufficient amount of travellers in the front of the plane in their Upper Class (business class) section. That's where airlines make their money.

They also make it by sweating their assets properly.

"For an operation like Virgin, where we have 45 aircraft, flying two aircraft to Johannesburg and leaving both of them parked all day, to only return the following evening, was probably not the best use of our assets," says Gericke.

Enter the A350, the relatively new – and popular – kid on the block with the world's top airlines, thanks to its fuel efficiency, lower operating costs and carbon emissions, seating, space, windows, lighting, and configuration options.

It's also a lot quieter for passengers and Virgin Atlantic has decided to replace the bar it had in Upper Class on the 787 with a new 'loft' area.

"Our customers like that social element of Virgin Atlantic, but we've gone for something different," says Lerena. "So, you can still have that cocktail meeting and it's a nice, bigger social space with more seating, and an extension of the feel you get in our Clubhouse."

The larger aircraft has 77 more seats than the 787, but more importantly, 13 more in Upper Class (44 vs 31) and 21 more (56 vs 35) in Premium Economy, providing Virgin Atlantic with more opportunities to deliver an attractive yield.

It does mean Virgin Atlantic goes back to offering just one – overnight – flight a day between Johannesburg and London, but the business case is a lot more solid, considering the airline had little trouble in filling a single flight – in the right cabins, of course – two years ago.

"Had we had a 350 a year or two ago, when we took the additional capacity on Jo'burg, we probably would have stuck a 350 on it, rather than two daily flights," says Gericke. "The reality is that there was an absolute gap in the market and it's actually done very well, performing above expectation. But, in terms of overall profitability, you don't want assets standing on the ground all day. You want them to generate revenue for you."

Another area that has delivered good results for Virgin Atlantic has been the partnerships it has developed over the past decade or so.

The joint venture with American

big hitter Delta and the expanded joint venture with Air France-KLM stand out, giving Virgin Atlantic serious clout and international reach, but closer to home it has also flexed its muscles. This time last year saw it buying into UK-based Flybe, which is the largest independent regional airline in Europe, providing more than half of UK domestic flights outside London.

If you read the UK press, there do seem to be some financial challenges for this new entity and offering, which Virgin Atlantic is calling Virgin Connect, but the airline is obviously hoping this investment will add another spoke to its wheel, so to speak.

"Partnerships are about staying relevant and making sure we keep expanding," says Lerena.

And what about the rest of Africa?

Virgin Atlantic's other base on the continent is in Lagos, Nigeria, which happens to be the airline's most profitable route across its entire network.

No surprise, then, that Lagos will receive the next A350, after Johannesburg, leaving Gericke to say: "Africa as a continent is doing very well for Virgin and there are definitely plans for expansion on the continent."

Looking forward to seeing exactly where. ■

**Dylan Rogers**



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