



SEPTEMBER 2016 – NEWSLETTER

Dear Partners in Travel,

Spring has arrived in South Africa and we look forward to the start of what promises to be a bumper season for the traditional South African high season.

Spring usually brings with it the first rains to rejuvenate and refresh. Rains in South Africa, especially here on the Highveld, often come in the form of thunderstorms and lightning – it seems that the tourism industry in South Africa will be facing particularly “fierce thunderstorms and lightning strikes” during a potentially bountiful season.

Availability of hotel accommodation for the next 6 months is already proving to be critical. South Africa’s perceived position as a safe destination and terror free (compared against for example France and Turkey and other traditional high volume tourist destinations), a relatively weakened currency compared to many of our competitor nations and the effect of delayed and deferred bookings subsequent to Ebola fears 12-18 months ago all contributed to this situation.

A significant portion of our key source markets tend to be “last minute bookers” and we foresee a challenging time in confirming some of these bookings for our partners. First, second and even third choices of preferred hotels and lodges might thus be problematic – we will rather forewarn our partners and pre-empt the situation. It is not going to improve and we suggest you advise your clients on this situation.

An unfortunate “knock-on” effect of this situation is that it is affecting our response times and ability to revert quickly. We are known for our quick turn-around times and have set the bar high. However having to check multiple suppliers for availability and re-work and re-schedule programs around availability delays this process. Additionally suppliers are stretched in reservation offices which delay our responses even further. It is an extremely frustrating scenario for us as our response times and perceived service levels are now affected by a situation outside our control. We trust in your understanding in advance.

Our growth in recent times has necessitated the expansion of our office space. We’re in the middle of adding an extra wing of office space. We hope to have this section completed by the end of September. Having a construction site at an operational office is not ideal but the only solution. Luckily our e-mails to you remain dust-free – but a telephone conversation might be interrupted by joyful sounds of drilling and hammering!

I’ve had to delay my usual visit to the Nordics and Italy while donning my hard hat – but I will be visiting before the end of the year.

I’ve however just returned from a very quick trip as part of a small delegation invited to accompany our Minister of Tourism to a BRICS Tourism convention in Khajuraho in India (I also had to look it up on google maps).

Our position in and particular knowledge of the Indian market resulted in this invite to lobby the minister on behalf of the industry on general issues but also on some issues important to us. The actions of governments can still affect the performance of the tourism industry as aspects such as visas, air access and infrastructure development can influence all our businesses.

The venue of the convention (The temples of Khajuraho is one of India's UNESCO World Heritage Sites) highlighted many of the opportunities (stunningly beautiful with huge potential to uplift the communities of the region), but also challenges (like air and rail access and lack of infrastructure) we sometimes face in the industry.

Unfortunately I was unable to combine my lightning quick visit with meeting any of our partners around India. Luckily Pieter was in India earlier in August and was able to thank many of our partners for their continued support.

Pieter will be visiting some of our partners in South East Asia at the end of September. He will be in contact directly to update you on his visits.

I will only finalise dates for my next visit to our partners in Europe once the building work at our offices is completed and will update our partners in that region then.

We look forward to a very busy summer season even taking some of the constraints mentioned into account.

**Tourism Greetings,
Johan**

SITE INSPECTION RESPORTS:

We recently took some of the members of our team on a weekend trip to Mpumalanga and the Kruger area to familiarize themselves with some of the properties in the area. We visited a number of properties but would like to highlight the following.

HANNAH LODGE – This is a 4-star property located just outside Ohrigstad, Limpopo and about a 4 ½ hour drive from Johannesburg. A one night stay at Hannah Lodge provides the ideal starting point for the exploration of the Limpopo, Mpumalanga and Kruger area as its location is close to the beginning of the scenic Panorama Route. The lodge offers 56 elevated thatched roof chalets with views over its own private nature reserve, ideal for both FIT and group bookings. The reserve has a selection of wildlife (it is not a Big 5 game reserve) so they offer game drives and bush walks. Dinner is served either in their restaurant or in the open air “boma”.

After our stay at Hannah we explored the scenic Panorama Route (Blyde River Canyon, Three Rondawels, Bourke's Luck Potholes and God's Window) and slowly made our way to Hazyview located just outside the Kruger National Park. Hazyview has an impressive selection of accommodation options and we stayed at the recently refurbished **TSOGO SUN'S SABIE RIVER SUN RESORT**. This popular resort has been given a welcome upgrade and refurbishment of the rooms and main facilities. The rooms are spacious, with two double beds per room so ideal for families or two people sharing, and are now modern and very comfortable. A highlight of a stay at Sabie River Sun has to be the food which is superb. The buffet dinner is an impressive spread which caters for a wide variety of tastes.

We were collected early morning (05:15) at the hotel in an open 4x4 safari vehicle for our morning safari in the Kruger National Park. Every opportunity to experience a safari into the world renowned Kruger is to be cherished and we were not disappointed. Since we had a busy schedule we had to cut our safari drive short but by the time we stopped back at the hotel at 9am we were lucky enough to have spotted the famous Big 5 i.e. Elephant, Rhino, Buffalo, Lion and Leopard! The private safari lodges in the area will always remain the first choice for clients looking for a superb safari experience but as we have seen again one should not necessarily discount a stay in Hazyview with a day safari drive into the Kruger Park itself!

We stopped at the unique **SUMMERFIELDS ROSE RETREAT AND SPA**. This is a boutique 5-star offering located just outside Hazyview and situated on a working farm producing roses, macadamia nuts, litchis and granadillas (farm tours are provided). The retreat itself is located on the banks of the Sabie River and comprised 12 luxury tented suites. The Rose Spa has numerous treatment facilities and offers various spa packages for in-house guests and day visitors.

There are two superb award winning dining options in The River Café and The Summerfields Kitchen. This is an ideal stop either en-route from or on the way to one of the private game lodges in the Kruger area and will offer clients a relaxing setting to unwind before or after they enjoyed their safari.

We visited the **COUNTRY BOUTIQUE HOTEL** which is located just outside White River but more importantly a short 20 minute drive from the Kruger Mpumalanga Airport (MQP). With its location it is an ideal stop for clients arriving on a late afternoon flight into MQP which does not allow them enough time to either reach their safari lodge before the afternoon game drive or enter the Kruger National Park before the afternoon gate closure time. This small 22 room property offers a wonderful overnight option in a modern setting with classic touches.

Finally we stop for lunch on our way back to Johannesburg at the **PROTEA HOTEL MALAGA**. The hotel is located about 2 hours from Hazyview and about 3 hours from Johannesburg so ideal for a lunch stop on the way to or coming back from the Kruger Park. The restaurant offers superb dining and the country setting with its Spanish villa style offers a relaxing environment. Like Hannah Lodge, this could also be an ideal overnight stop from Johannesburg on the way to the Kruger and the Panorama Route.

PRODUCT NEWS & UPDATES:

- **LEEU ESTATES** in Franschhoek is encompasses an exclusive boutique hotel, winery and wellness spa set among vineyards, gardens and fynbos in the scenic Franschhoek valley. This estate is now open and full operational.
- **& BEYOND PHINDA ROCK LODGE** will be closed for an extensive refurbishment from 01 Feb – 30 Apr 2017.
- **GROOTBOS PRIVATE NATURE RESERVE** in the Western Cape will be opening a second villa in November 2016. There was also a fire recently at the Forest Lodge lounge which caused damage to the front section of the building's roof as well as water damage to the public areas. The lodge will be ready for occupation again by middle December 2016.
- **AMAKHALA RESERVE** in the Eastern Cape has releases images of the newly refurbished Hlosi tents.
- **THE WINDERMERE HOTEL** in Port Elizabeth is now part of the **MANTIS COLLECTION** portfolio.
- **SOUTHERN SUN CAPE SUN** in Cape Town is undergoing a soft refurbishment – 228 of the 368 rooms have been converted into spacious family rooms, each with two double beds.
- **JACI'S SABI HOUSE** in the famous Sabi Sand Reserve opened its doors to guests on the 1st of September. Jaci's Sabi House is an exclusive-use, private abode. The thatch home is the ideal destination for an epic bush getaway!
- Sun City's now offers another accommodation option in the form of the rustic **CABANAS CHALETS**. The chalets were previously operated by Kwena Gardens as part of the Kwena Chalets & Crocodile Sanctuary but have now been incorporated into the Sun City fold.

SPECIAL OFFERS:

Please note that all special offers are subject to specific terms and conditions which are available on request.

- **THE LAST WORD PROPERTIES** is offering a Stay 3 Pay 2 special offer, valid until 31 Oct 2016.
- **ULUSABA** in the Sabi Sands Game Reserve is offering a Stay 4 Pay 3, valid until 30 Sep 2016.
- **MONT ROCHELLE** in the Western Cape is offering a Stay 3 Pay 2 special, valid until 30 Sep 2016.
- **MADIKWE SAFARI LODGE** in the Madikwe Game Reserve is offering a Stay 3 Pay 2 promotion, valid until end Nov 2016.
- **MORUKURU FAMILY** has advised a last minute special offer for Madikwe properties – stay 3 pay 2 – valid for Sep 2016 as well as Ocean House – stay 3 pay 2 – valid Nov 2016
- **CAMP JABULANI** in Limpopo has extended a Pay 2 stay 3 special offer, valid 01 Oct – 15 Dec 2016 and 10 Jan – 31 Mar 2017.
- **NEWMARK HOTELS** has introduced the following 2017 specials:
 - **LA SPLENDIDA HOTEL, CAPE TOWN** – Stay 4 Pay 3, valid 1 Apr – 30 Sep 2017
 - **VICTORIA & ALFRED HOTEL, CAPE TOWN** – Stay 4 Pay 3, valid 1 Apr – 30 Sep 2017
 - **QUEEN VICTORIA HOTEL, CAPE TOWN** – Stay 4 Pay 3, valid 1 Apr – 30 Sep 2017
 - **DOCK HOUSE BOUTIQUE HOTEL, CAPE TOWN** – Stay 4 Pay 3, valid 1 Apr – 30 Sep 2017
 - **NKOMAZI PRIVATE GAME RESERVE, MPUMALANGA** – Stay 3, Pay 2, valid 1 May – 30 Sep 2017

As always please contact us should you have any questions or if you need more information.

Yours in Tourism,

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