



# Africa 'It's Not For Sissies'



“If you don't know the rules, don't play the game,” said Michael Clark, ExecuJet South Africa's Flight Operations Manager.

Clark was speaking in his capacity as a panel member at the Business Traveller Africa Breakfast Forum at The Pivot Retail development at Montecasino, in late July. He was responding to a question about doing business in Africa and some interesting themes and issues emerged from the panel discussion moderated by renowned business travel personality, Michael Jackson.

Clark was joined on the panel by Simon Phage, Wings Travel Management's Vice-President for Africa and the Middle East; HRG Nigeria's Lola Adefope, who heads up Brand, Marketing and Quality Management; Zahra Peera, chief executive of Hotel Formula 1 and Margaret Copeland, Delta Air Lines' Commercial Manager for Southern Africa and Angola.

A full house of around 130 industry members, covering areas such as travel management, procurement, airline, hotel and car rental, crammed into The Pivot and got their money's worth, as a sumptuous breakfast preceded a fascinating discussion on business travel in Africa and a great networking opportunity.

Jackson kicked things off with a visually-captivating video on global air travel patterns over a 24-hour period and that precipitated a discussion on where Africa sits in the global travel market and what the current big issues are.

“Africa is not for sissies”, said Phage. “It is a different place and before entering this market, the unusual business practices, the ongoing politics and the cultural differences must be understood”.

Whilst acknowledging Phage's take on business in Africa, Adefope was quick to point out that much progress had been made on the continent, in the last 10, 15 years, and that from a Nigerian point of view, there is plenty of opportunity.

“Enormous developments are being seen through Africa”, said Adefope. “The Return on Investment in Nigeria is high and Angola's economic growth has consistently grown by 13% per annum”, she said.

All the panel members agreed that whilst Africa is 'ripe for the picking', it's important to have the right partners, if one is to be successful there. Copeland talked about “feet and eyes on the ground” - be that in the form of a local travel management company or travel agent, who can build relationships. Copeland added that Delta Air is doing exactly that with local airlines across Africa, but warned that these partnerships take time and that patience is key. She also highlighted visa difficulty as one of the issues in African travel that need addressing.

Patience is something the Accor Hospitality group have shown in making their mark in Africa and Peera heads up one of their brands in Hotel Formula 1. She is optimistic about the future and was quick to jump in with a word for all attendees. “Have no fear for this exciting playground called Africa”, she said, before revealing that the group has big plans to target the three-star hotel market, as part of their strategy. There was stimulating debate from the panel members, before the session was opened to floor. All agreed that it was a worthwhile few hours out of the office.

“The main thing that came out of the discussion today was the focus on safety and the fact that the borders have dissolved”, said Adefope. “So, the emphasis is on trade and cross-trade within the regions. You definitely, definitely need a local point of view, but then, as with all businesses, you need someone at the global level or top level, pushing the policies, pushing the business and basically owning the structure”. It wasn't just the panel members who seemed to get a lot out of the topics covered.

“I found it very interesting and a really good opportunity to network with my colleagues in the industry,” said ASATA chief executive, Robyn Christie.

Focus now shifts to the very first BT Africa Conference, which is set to take place in Lagos on the 31st of October. For details on the conference, contact Temi-Tope Ogbeni-Awe in Nigeria on +234 803 963 0155 or [tope.ogbeni-awe@topcommng.com](mailto:tope.ogbeni-awe@topcommng.com) and in South Africa, Taryn Westoby on +27 11 803 2040 or [taryn@thefuture.co.za](mailto:taryn@thefuture.co.za).

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