



SA tourists' wings clipped

By Carvin Goldstone

A turbulent financial year and an unfavourable exchange rate have ended many families' plans to travel abroad.

Fewer people will be jetting overseas this holiday season, particularly to destinations such as Europe and the United States, but it is not the cost of flying and lodging that has turned them off - it's the price of food and beverages.

When doing the sums and converting the price from US dollars or British pounds to the rand, these things prove to be very expensive.

With the rand struggling at about R18 to the pound and R11 to the dollar, a ?4 pint of beer will set a South African back around R72 and a \$5 pint of beer will cost about R55.

Travel agents say it is these costs, after conversions, that have made expenditure during an overseas holiday unpredictable and some destinations unattractive.

But the economic down-turn has had positive implications for the domestic market, with domestic travel proving to be more appealing and affordable for many South Africans who have had to cancel their overseas holidays.

Robyn Christie, chief executive of the Association of South African Travel Agents, said the feeling she was picking up from the industry was that it was not as busy this year as it had been this time last year.

Vacation

However, she said the deterrent with overseas travel was not the price of the travel package, but the cost of enjoying one's vacation in a country which had an unfavourable exchange rate for South Africans.

Although airline passenger loads leaving the country were still full, Christie said she suspected that these trips were booked earlier in the year.

"As far as leisure packages go, we will see more families who usually take overseas trips travelling locally," she said.

Christie said she believed the situation would benefit the local market because, while some people would not go on international holidays, they could still enjoy a deluxe local one.

She also said travel agents had taken note of this and had already started packaging holidays accordingly.

But not everyone is shying away from travelling abroad.

"I think we are seeing families who would have gone on an international holiday for two weeks going for 10 days, rather. Travel is a dream for some and if they have been saving for it, they will get there."

Angela Wood, general manager of product marketing at Thompsons Tours, said people who were travelling abroad were doing so on packages to avoid any cost surprises at their destinations.

Local destinations of choice include Cape Town, coastal areas and the Mpumalanga game lodges.

- This article was originally published on page 5 of [The Independent on Saturday](#) on October 25, 2008

THE INDEPENDENT
on Saturday

Published on the Web by IOL on 2008-10-25 09:17:00

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