

## Rand's fall threatens holiday travel dip

Overseas trips deterred  
By ESTHER LEWIS

Staff Reporter

Local tourism agencies fear the rand's plummet will result in fewer people booking overseas holidays next year, and if it continues to slide against the major currencies, some expect the cost of airline tickets and airport taxes to again increase.

Some Cape Town travel agents said there was already a definite lull in the leisure travel industry, with recent bookings reflecting a decrease as consumers are becoming ever more wary of booking holidays to destinations where the rand does not go very far.

Robyn Christie, chief executive officer of the Association of South African Travel Agents (Asata) said the impact on the numbers of travellers for this season would not be as big, because most people had booked their trips in advance.

However, forward bookings for next year were expected to be dealt a blow.

She said the main concern of clients was not so much getting to their destinations, but how much they would have to spend once there.

"In Europe you would pay R45 for one coffee," said Christie.

Despite these costs factored into leisure holidays, consumers were not opting to stay at home. Instead, Christie said, many were going on holiday for shorter periods.

Marlise Janse-Van Rensburg of GoCape travel agency said business was much slower than last year this time.

"The industry as a whole is suffering," she said.

While most clients would not risk high cancellation fees, there had been some clients who had already cancelled their trips, she said.

Janse-Van Rensburg said the weak rand and increase in airline ticket prices and airport taxes had played a large role in the downturn. Last year, a package deal to popular destination Thailand cost around R12 000. This would include flights and accommodation at a three or four star hotel. These days it would be difficult to find anything under R16 000.

A year ago, flights to London cost just under R8 000. Now the price has gone up to almost R10 000. Some airlines have doubled their airport taxes, said Janse-Van Rensburg.

Spokeswoman for Comair, Glenda Zvenyika, said their ticket prices and airport taxes remained unchanged for now. But if the rand continued to fall, there would need to be a reassessment of the prices.

But while certain sectors had taken a knock, others were doing well.

The corporate travel industry seemed to have been unaffected by the currency's downslide.

"Business is booming. We're so busy we can hardly breathe," said Therese Koch from Rennies Travel.

An employee of Southern Africa Tourism Services Association (Sasta) who deals with inbound travellers said the last time the rand was this weak, there was a huge tourism boom.

The major difference this time round was that US and European citizens were themselves feeling the crunch.

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