IATA partners with travel agent groups, including ACTA, to develop NDC study

GENEVA — IATA’s once-controversial New Distribution Capability is becoming one big collaboration with IATA teaming up with a coalition of national travel agent associations (The Group), including ACTA, on a study to look at options that could benefit travel agents as the New Distribution Capability (NDC) XML standard is considered for implementation by airlines and technology providers.

The study will be conducted by an independent consultant to be appointed jointly by The Group and IATA, who will undertake research and analysis in the following areas:

- Understanding the impact (e.g., from a business, technology and commercial perspective) of NDC for travel agents
- Exploring options to overcome possible obstacles to successful NDC implementation by the parties within the travel value chain
- Providing scenarios of the potential funding models for the transaction of airfares and airline ancillary products via the travel agent channel using the NDC standard.

The study will evaluate the issues from the perspectives of large, medium and small agencies, including both business- and leisure-travel focused agencies. It will also seek the views from key stakeholders across the distribution value chain such as airlines, global distribution systems, travel technology firms and providers of corporate booking tools.

The Group is comprised of associations representing agencies based in Australia, Brazil, Canada, India, New Zealand, South Africa and the U.S. including the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA); the Association of Brazilian Travel Agents (ABAV); the Association of Canadian Travel Agen-
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cies (ACTA); the Association of South African Travel Agents Association (ASATA); The Australian Federation of Travel Agents (AFTA); the Travel Agents Association of New Zealand (TAANZ); and the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI).

“With the full set of NDC ‘end-to-end’ schemas now available, this collaboration between IATA and The Group is a great opportunity to jointly understand the benefits and implications of NDC from the perspective of travel agents,” said Yanik Hoyles, IATA Program Director, NDC.

“As a better understanding and acceptance of NDC by airlines becomes apparent, it is timely to now undertake this research study to investigate how travel agents might benefit from the implementation of the standard,” said Jayson Westbury CEO, AFTA.

“The Group has come together to provide a conduit to a range of markets and travel agents across the globe to present the global agency community with a valuable piece of research,” said Otto De Vries, CEO of ASATA.

Transat unveils its European offering for 2015 with the most direct flights from Canada

TORONTO — Transat has launched its 2015 Europe program increasing flight capacity to cities including London, Paris and Venice, and with new Eco Fares offering maximum flexibility for economy class fares.

The company is also expected to begin offering connector fares for Europe flights from Vancouver, Quebec City and Halifax, starting in January.

Transat launched its Europe program at an industry event in Toronto last week.

Transat’s new destination for 2015, Budapest, has direct flights from Toronto and Montreal from mid-June through mid-October. A new Central Europe brochure is coming in February.

Clients can combine 2014’s new destination – Prague – with 2015’s new destination – Budapest – for a nine-night City Hopping package with Transat Holidays, from $1,559 per person. Numerous other City Hopping pairs are available.

All in all Transat has 27 destinations for 2015, with packages, tours, cruises and an array of a la carte options available.

Several top-selling Transat Discoveries motorcoach tours, including tours in India, South America and Africa, have been folded into the Europe brochure as well. “Coach tours will be a

WITH THE FULL SET of NDC ‘end-to-end’ schemas now available, this collaboration between IATA and The Group is a great opportunity to jointly understand the benefits and implications of NDC from the perspective of travel agents.
big focus for us this year,” said Nicole Bursey, Commercial Director, Transat Tours Canada. “We need agents to understand what great value there is with our coach tours.”

Other new offerings in the Europe program include the Italian Countryside air and hotel package in Tuscany, and Go As You Please Island Hopping in Greece.

The company is also offering 12 cruise lines, including, new this year, Holland America Line.

Transat’s early booking bonuses include best price guarantees and reduced deposits.

Clients can also save with the new EuroSavers Collection, a selection of hotels recommended for their excellent value and good locations near remarkable sites in the most popular destinations.

Transat “remains the biggest and the best” for travel to Europe from Canada, said Denise Heffron, Vice-President, National Sales & Commercial, Transat Tours Canada. “We knew what was on the horizon in terms of competition. We’re ready.”

Air Canada to offer new services to Terrace, Nanaimo, Comox, Halifax, Austin and Mexico City

MONTREAL — Air Canada rouge will begin some domestic flights as Air Canada expands its North American route network with the addition of new nonstop services from Calgary-Terrace; Calgary-Nanaimo; Vancouver-Comox; Toronto-Austin and Montreal-Mexico City.

Air Canada is also increasing capacity on key domestic markets that have high volumes of leisure traffic with the expansion of Air Canada rouge to operate the airline’s new seasonal Calgary-Halifax route and current Toronto-Kelowna and Toronto-Sydney, NS services.

“Air Canada continues to strategically add new routes in response to the strong demand in Western Canada, notably the growing business market between Calgary and Terrace/Kitimat in Northern BC, the increasing demand to and from Vancouver Island, and the continued travel demand between Western Canada and Atlantic Canada,” said Benjamin Smith, President, Passenger Airlines. “The expansion of Air Canada rouge in North America including on key domestic markets with high leisure demand and to Mexican and Caribbean destinations remains a fundamental element of our strategy for sustainable, profitable growth.”

Air Canada will begin service in the fall of 2015 on the Terrace route, the only nonstop air service from Western Canada to the Terrace/Kitimat region.

The addition of the Nanaimo route will allow Air Canada rouge to operate the airline’s new seasonal route from Calgary to Nanaimo.

Air Canada rouge will also begin service in the fall of 2015 on the Comox route, the only nonstop air service from Western Canada to the Comox region.

Air Canada will also operate the airline’s new seasonal route from Toronto to Austin in the fall of 2015.

Air Canada will also operate the airline’s new seasonal route from Montreal to Mexico City in the spring of 2016.
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Highlights of Air Canada’s 2015 North American summer schedule enhancements include:

- Calgary-Terrace – New daily, year-round Air Canada Express service starts June 1 operated by Jazz Aviation LP with 50-seat Bombardier CRJ jets.
- Calgary-Nanaimo – New daily, year-round Air Canada Express service starts May 1 operated by Jazz Aviation LP with 74-seat Bombardier Q400 aircraft.
- Calgary-Halifax – New summer seasonal six times weekly service starts May 1 operated by Air Canada rouge with 136-seat Airbus A319 aircraft offering both premium and economy cabins of service, increasing up to 10 weekly flights during peak summer period.
- Vancouver-Comox – New twice daily, year-round Air Canada Express service starts May 1 operated by Jazz Aviation LP with 50-seat Bombardier Dash 8-300 aircraft.
- Kelowna-Toronto – More than 40% increased capacity year-over-year starting June 1, with up to daily service during peak summer, deployment of 136-seat Air Canada rouge Airbus A319 aircraft offering both premium and economy cabins of service, following the transfer of this route from Air Canada.
- Toronto-Austin – New daily, year-round Air Canada Express service starts May 18 operated by Jazz Aviation LP with 75-seat CRJ-705 aircraft offering both premium and economy cabins of service.
- Toronto-Sarasota – Winter seasonal service extended effective May 2 offering the only nonstop, year-round flights between Toronto and Sarasota, operated twice weekly by Air Canada with 97-seat EMBRAER 190 jets offering both premium and economy cabins of service.
- Toronto-Sydney, NS – More than 40% increased capacity year-over-year starting May 1 with daily deployment of 136-seat Air Canada rouge Airbus A319 aircraft offering both premium and economy cabins of service, following the seasonal transfer of this route from Air Canada.
- Montreal-Mexico City – New, up to five times weekly, summer seasonal service starts May 2 operated by Air Canada rouge, with 136-seat Airbus A319 aircraft offering both premium and economy cabins of service.
- Ottawa-Fort Lauderdale – Seasonal service now extended to year-round, operated twice weekly by Air Canada with 97-seat EMBRAER 190 jets offering both premium and economy cabins of service.

In addition, starting May 2015, Air Canada will transfer to Air Canada rouge its Calgary-Varadero and Montreal-Varadero routes which will be operated with 142-seat Airbus A319 aircraft, as well as its Montreal-Martinique route operated with 136-seat Airbus A319 offering both premium and economy cabins of service.

Air Canada to launch nonstop service to Dubai

MONTREAL — Air Canada will launch nonstop service between Toronto and Dubai beginning in November 2015.

The new route will extend the airline’s international network farther into the Middle East at a time of increased travel between North America and the region.

“Air Canada’s international growth strategy continues to accelerate with the addition of the seventh new international destination to our global network announced in the past year. The three-times-weekly Dubai service will be Air Canada’s first nonstop flight to the UAE at a time when air travel between North America and the region is growing, including more international connecting traffic over our Toronto global hub,” said Calin Rovinescu, President and Chief Executive Officer at Air Canada.

“The introduction of the Boeing 787 Dreamliner to Air Canada’s fleet this year has been a catalyst for our international expansion plans, which will receive an additional impetus in 2015 when the larger Dreamliner 787-9 series aircraft begins to enter the fleet. The Dreamliner
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has brought international air travel to a new level of comfort and Air Canada has further enhanced the experience with its award-winning, three-cabin service.”

The new route will increase Air Canada’s presence in the Middle East by providing its customers with direct, nonstop access to Dubai, complementing its other services in the region. Air Canada currently serves the region primarily through an extensive joint venture with its JV and Star Alliance partner Lufthansa over Frankfurt and Munich. In addition, the new route will build on Air Canada’s existing codeshare relationship with Etihad Airways, with whom it codeshares on three flights a week between Toronto and Abu Dhabi, in the UAE.

Since last December, Air Canada has announced new international service to Delhi, Amsterdam, Rio de Janeiro, Osaka, Tokyo-Haneda and Panama City. Including Dubai, Air Canada now serves or has announced service to a total of 66 international destinations on five continents from its Toronto global hub.

Tickets for Dubai went on sale Dec. 16, 2014 and the three-times-weekly service starts on Nov. 3, 2015. Flights will be operated with the Boeing 787 Dreamliner in a three-cabin configuration, including next generation lie-flat seats in International Business Class, a Premium Economy cabin and upgraded In-Flight Entertainment available at every seat throughout the aircraft.

Contac placed in receivership, creditor claims it is owed $32m

MISSISSAUGA, ON — A secured creditor of Contac Services Inc. has obtained a court order appointing A. Farber & Associates Inc. receiver on the grounds that Contac is insolvent.

The secured creditor, NORREP Credit Opportunities Fund, LLP, claims that it is owed more than $32 million and alleges that Contac, an integrated marketing, communications and logistics services provider specializing in third party distribution management and web-based marketing services, is not paying its liabilities as they come due and that Contac is in arrears of rent in both its locations; is in arrears for source deductions for three payroll runs in October and November totaling approximately $230,000; it does not have sufficient funds to pay anticipated expenses; it is in arrears re HST in the amount of approximately $30,000; it owes $2,867,000 to another secured creditor, Amin Holdings Inc. which is also a shareholder of Contac Services Inc.; it owes $1.75 million to another secured creditor (Bridging Credit Fund LP).

The Secured Creditor also alleges that CEO Riaz Pisani incorporated two new companies in June and July 2013 which were to be wholly owned subsidiaries of Contac and that is is unclear to what extent assets of Contac Services Inc. have been transferred to these companies.

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CONTACTS:
GLEN HARWOOD
President
416 365 1500 ext 133
gharwood@envoynetworks.ca
Toni Defino
Vice President, Marketing &
Product Development
416 365 1500 ext 136
tdefino@envoynetworks.ca
DENYS CRUZ
Vice President, Operations
905 831 0006
dcruz@envoynetworks.ca
JUN FRANCO
Eastern Canada
Warehouse Manager
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Sandals named world’s leading all-inclusive company at World Travel Awards

ANGUILLA — Sandals Resorts International (SRI) was recently named the World’s Leading All-Inclusive Company at the World Travel Awards Grand Final Gala Ceremony, held at CuisinArt Golf Resort & Spa in Anguilla.

In addition to this honour for the 19th consecutive year, the Luxury Included resort company was also recognized in three additional categories, including the World’s Leading All-Inclusive Family Resort Brand, World’s Leading All-Inclusive Resort and World’s Most Romantic Resort.

“We are thrilled to once again be honoured by the prestigious World Travel Awards,” said Gordon ‘Butch’ Stewart, Chairman of Sandals Resorts International. “We continue to strive for excellence and invest in our product, so that each year we can be proud to say we are the World’s Leading All-Inclusive Company.”

With a total of four trophies from this year’s awards ceremony, the Caribbean resort company’s honours included:

- World’s Leading All-Inclusive Resort: Sandals Royal Bahamian Spa Resort & Offshore Island (2nd consecutive year)
- World’s Most Romantic Resort: Sandals Grande Antigua Resort & Spa (15 years overall).

Air Transat to launch Monday Toronto-Havana flights Dec. 22

MONTREAL — Air Transat will begin direct flights from Toronto to Havana, the Cuban capital, every Monday starting Dec. 22 until March 30, 2015.

This new route will allow visitors to discover the unique architecture and atmosphere for which Havana is known.

Air Transat Holidays and Nolitours offer packages at nine hotels, including the Iberostar Parque Central and the Tryp Habana Libre, a new addition to Transat’s offering.

For those wanting to further explore, Havana can also be a point of departure for discovering other parts of the island, or to embark, directly from the airport, on a 7-night Cuba Cruise with stops in Holguin, Santiago de Cuba, Cienfuegos, Trinidad and Punta Frances.

Airline profitability improves with falling oil prices – IATA

GENEVA — Airlines are expected to post a collective global net profit in 2014 of some US$19.9 billion (up from the $18.0 billion projected in June), according to IATA. This looks set to rise to $25.0 billion in 2015.

Lower oil prices and stronger worldwide GDP growth are the main drivers behind the improved profitability.

Consumers will benefit substantially from the stronger industry performance as lower industry costs and efficiencies are passed through, says IATA. The airline industry is highly competitive. After adjusting for inflation, aver-
age return airfares (excluding taxes and surcharges) are expected to fall by some 5.1% on 2014 levels and cargo rates are expected to fall by a slightly bigger 5.8%.

The expected $25 billion net post-tax profit represents a 3.2% margin. On a per passenger basis, airlines will make a net profit of $7.08 in 2015. That is up on the $6.02 earned in 2014 and more than double the $3.38 earnings per passenger achieved in 2013.

The return on invested capital (ROIC) is expected to grow to 7.0%. This is a substantial improvement on the 6.1% ROIC expected to be achieved in 2014. This is still 0.8 percentage points below the 7.8% weighted average cost of capital (WACC), so there is still some ground to cover before achieving sustainable margins.

“The industry outlook is improving. The global economy continues to recover and the fall in oil prices should strengthen the upturn next year. While we see airlines making $25 billion in 2015, it is important to remember that this is still just a 3.2% net profit margin. The industry story is largely positive, but there are a number of risks in today’s global environment – political unrest, conflicts and some weak regional economies – among them. And a 3.2% net profit margin does not leave much room for a deterioration in the external environment before profits are hit,” said Tony Tyler, IATA’s Director General and CEO.

“Stronger industry performance is good news for all. It’s a highly competitive industry and consumers will see lower costs in 2015 as the impact of lower oil prices kick in. Airline investors will see ROIC move closer to the WACC. And a healthy air transport sector will help governments in their overall objective to stimulate the economic growth needed to put the impact of the global financial crisis behind them at last,” said Tyler.

Oil prices have fallen substantially in recent months and this is expected to continue into 2015 with the full-year average price expected to be $85/barrel (Brent). If that assumption is correct, it would be the first time that the average oil price has fallen below $100/barrel since 2010 (when oil averaged $79.4/barrel).

Jet fuel prices are expected to average at $99.9/barrel in 2015 for a total fuel spend of $192 billion which represents 26% of total industry costs. It is important to note that the impact of lower fuel prices will be realized with a time lag, due to forward fuel-buying practices. Improving fuel efficiency continues to be a priority for airlines. Fuel efficiency is estimated to have improved by 1.8% in 2014 and a further improvement is expected in 2015. Fuel efficiency improvements could be accelerated by reducing the 5% of wasted fuel burn as a result of airspace and airport inefficiencies.

Global GDP is expected to grow by 3.2% in 2015, up from 2.6% in 2014. This will be the first time that global GDP has broken over 3.0% since 2010 (when global GDP grew by 4.1% in a post-recession bounce back), this time boosted by the fall in oil prices. Passenger traffic is expected to grow by 7.0% in 2015 which is well-above the 5.5% growth trend of the past two decades. Capacity growth is expected to outstrip this slightly at 7.3%, pushing the passenger load factor to 79.6% (slightly down on the 79.9% expected for 2014). The fall in the price of fuel is expected to lead to cheaper airfares for consumers. After adjusting for inflation, average return airfares (excluding surcharges and taxes) are expected to fall by 5.1% to $458 in 2015. Total passenger numbers are expected to grow to 3.5 billion and passenger revenues are expected to grow to $623 billion.

All regions are expected to report improved net profitability in 2015 over 2014. However, there are stark differences in profitability among the regions. Current and forward-looking industry financial assessments should not be taken as reflecting the performance of individual airlines, which can differ significantly.

The strongest financial performance by far is being delivered by airlines in North America. Net post-tax profits are the highest at $132 billion next year (up from $119 billion in 2014). That represents a net profit of $15.54 per enplaned passenger, which is a marked improvement from just three years earlier. Net profit margins forecast at 6% exceed the peak of the late 1990s. This improvement has been driven by consolidation, helping to raise load factors (passenger + cargo) to 65% this year, lower fuel prices and ancillaries, which together push breakeven load factors down below 60% next year.
Sandals STAR Awards honours top performing agents

OCHO RIOS, Jamaica — Sandals and Beaches resorts recognized and honoured all of the top performing travel agents from across the globe at the 13th annual STAR Awards, held at the Sandals Grande Riviera Beach & Villa Golf Resort in Ocho Rios, Jamaica last week.

It was a glamorous gala dinner with everyone on hand from the Sandals family including Gordon ‘Butch’ Stewart, Chairman of Sandals Resorts International, and Adam Stewart, CEO & Deputy Chairman.

Also in attendance were the Jamaican Minister of Tourism, Dr. Kenneth Wykeham McNeill, Eamonn Ferrin, President & COO at Air Canada Vacations, and Tessanne Chin, winner of NBC’s The Voice, to provide the late night entertainment.

But the agents were the real stars of the evening.

“As we celebrate our journey, more importantly, we celebrate you – the travel agent. We are aware that many of our successes are founded on the shoulders of the travel professional, and our love affair with agents is as vibrant as ever,” says Maureen Barnes-Smith, Director of Sales & Marketing, Unique Vacations Canada. “We recognize the travel agents at STAR Awards as the very best of the best Sandals and Beaches booking agencies worldwide and acknowledge that just by being here you’re already winners.”

There were agents from all over the world in attendance, with a strong contingency of 104 from Canada, including 89 agents and their partners. All awards presented were based on overall productivity on bookings made from Aug. 1, 2013 to July 31, 2014.

For Canada, the honour of Top Sandals Travel Agency went to TripCentral.ca, Bedford, NS, while Travel Professionals International (TPI), Winnipeg was the Top Beaches Booking Agency for outstanding sales achievements.

Travel Professionals International (TPI) was recognized as the Top Host Agency, while Flight Centre Canada was named the Top Retail Chain in Canada.

Some agents were also recognized for their individual contributions. Kim Hartlen of TripCentral.ca in Bedford, NS, was chosen for the worldwide Chairman’s Award. Carla McKay and Terri Lee Arbuckle from Nova Scotia, Kim Simms of LeGrow’s Travel, Newfoundland and Elaine Gailloux of Carlson Wagonlit, Quebec were recognized as Rising Stars for phenomenal commitment to the brand.

And Lisa Tetzlaff from Valente Travel, among others, won the coveted Spirit Award.

“We are the single most profitable resort organization to do business with, and we have protected the travel agent, and will continue to protect the travel agent with price parity,” says the Chairman. “It’s not the cheapest – it’s never going to be the cheapest – but it’s the quality, inclusions and innovation that

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Some agents were also recognized for their individual contributions. Kim Hartlen of TripCentral.ca in Bedford, NS, was chosen for the worldwide Chairman’s Award. Carla McKay and Terri Lee Arbuckle from Nova Scotia, Kim Simms of LeGrow’s Travel, Newfoundland and Elaine Gailloux of Carlson Wagonlit, Quebec were recognized as Rising Stars for phenomenal commitment to the brand.

And Lisa Tetzlaff from Valente Travel, among others, won the coveted Spirit Award.

“We are the single most profitable resort organization to do business with, and we have protected the travel agent, and will continue to protect the travel agent with price parity,” says the Chairman. “It’s not the cheapest – it’s never going to be the cheapest – but it’s the quality, inclusions and innovation that

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  - **Bahia Principe Winter Season Updates**
  
  Renewal and innovation are ongoing with Bahia Principe. Please join Bahia’s Sal Buccellato and Gavin Jimenez as they discuss the latest updates on some of the hotelier’s most popular resorts.

- **Thursday, January 15 at 1 pm**
  - **AMRewards Agent Loyalty Program**
  
  Join Carlo Trinidad and learn more about AMRewards travel agent loyalty program. This webinar will be a step by step tutorial on enrolling in and the benefits of the program.

At the end of each Wheels Up Webinar there will be a draw for a **$50 VISA gift card**.

For more information visit [wheelsupnetwork.com](http://wheelsupnetwork.com)
Ebola is no longer on the front page, but it’s front and centre for agents

by Vawn Himmelsbach

At the start of 2014, travel to Africa was poised to hit an all-time high. Then Ebola hit. And, despite the fact that Ebola-stricken areas are far from most safari and tourist destinations, fear has kept many Westerners away.

While that fear is easing up, it’s still an issue for tour operators, and they’re tasked with easing clients’ concerns about travel to the continent.

While many associate “Ebola” with “Africa,” the infectious disease has been, for the most part, contained to the three countries where it originated: Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

“There are geographical limitations to the Ebola outbreak and Africa is a large continent made up of several countries. There are several parts of Africa nowhere near the West African countries where Ebola is a problem that are definitely worth visiting for the wildlife viewing opportunities and cultural experiences.”

At the moment, G Adventures is not offering any promotions on its Africa trips.

Ebola is no longer on the front pages, but it still remains on the radar for the Globus family of brands and its clients.

“The damage has been quite minimal to date,” says Stephanie Bishop, managing director for the group in Canada.

“That’s partly because our clientele — particularly the potential client for Africa — is well-travelled and well-educated and realizes that the situation (is) a vast distance from East Africa, the hub of most Globus and Monograms itineraries.”

Indeed, the distance from the capital of Liberia to Kenya is one-and-a-half times greater than the distance between Vancouver and Toronto.

“The booking window for trips such as safaris tends to be very long — often over a year — so it’s not as though we were seeing a downward turn in last-minute bookings,” adds Bishop.

“Having said that, we offer a huge array of product in the ‘bucket list’ category and I sense that travellers have simply decided to postpone their trip to Africa and this time around choose one of our other destinations such as an Avalon cruise in Europe or Asia.”

But Moira Smith, general manager for Africa & Middle East with Goway, says the company has seen an impact.

“Regrettably we have — our forward bookings are about 40% down. On the positive side we have in the last week seen an upturn in enquiries,” she says.
For agents who are hearing hesitation from clients about travel to Africa, she says there’s never been a better time to travel. “Go now while the crowds are staying away!”

The company is offering tongue-in-cheek “Ebola offers” with savings of up to $1,300 on certain products.

“We are offering some excellent travel trade deals, as we believe if the travel agents can experience these wonderful destinations for themselves, they will have no qualms about returning and promoting same to their clients,” says Smith.

Among its many promotional offers, Goway has negotiated 10 special departures on its 14-day East Africa safari, which covers all the must-see highlights of Kenya and Tanzania; travellers can save up to $1,300 per person. And Goway has negotiated no single supplement on four of the departures — a further savings of $900.

Clients can also save up to $300 per person on the eight-day Royal Concorde itinerary in Kenya, which includes a VIP meet-and-greet on arrival, an upgrade to a 4x4 vehicle, complimentary room upgrade in Nairobi, bottles of wine at the Mount Kenya Safari Club and the Mara Safari Club, a night drive in the Masai Mara plus credit towards other activities.

Scenic vistas await safari travellers in Southern Africa with ATOURZ

In a three-week ATOURZ package that spans South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe, travellers on the ‘Spectacular Southern Africa’ group lodge safari will take in the highlights of Southern Africa.

“Beginning with a morning excursion to a beach on the Atlantic Ocean outside Cape Town and culminating at Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe, the tour is a true A-to-Z experience of a lifetime,” says Elena Prountzopoulos, head of tour operations at ATOURZ.

Travellers arrive in Cape Town and get an early start the next morning to see Table Mountain before heading to the Cedarberg Mountains and Clanwilliam, one of the oldest towns in South Africa. On arrival they can enjoy a classic Rooibos tea tasting.

Travellers will pass through mountain ranges up the west coast on the way to the Orange River in Namibia, the natural border between South Africa and Namibia. The next day the only travelling is done in a canoe — but they can put their feet up and relax as the currents take them downstream.

The next day brings a visit to Ai-Ais to see the hot springs, rich in sulphates and fluorides (in the Nama language, Ai-Ais means burning water). Next is Fish River Canyon, the second-largest canyon in the world.

Beginning the second week, travellers move inland toward Namib Naukluft National Park to visit the world’s highest sand dunes at Sossusvlei and Deadvlei. The Namib-Naukluft Desert is home to rare plant and animal species; the animals of this harsh landscape include the oryx, springbok and Hartmann’s mountain zebra.

Travellers then follow the barren Atlantic Coast from Swakopmund to Cape Cross, the largest breeding ground of the Cape fur seals. Then it’s back inland across the desert plains to Brandberg, the highest mountain in Namibia.
The tour also includes a visit to ancient Bushmen paintings at World Heritage site Twyfelfontein, as well as the ancient Petrified Forest.

Travellers will explore a traditional Himba village and Etosha National Park, home to 114 mammal species, 340 bird species, 110 reptile species, 16 amphibian species and, surprisingly, only one species of fish.

On the third week, travellers continue east along the Caprivi Strip to the town of Rundu and spend time on the banks of the Kavango River relaxing at Kaisosi River Lodge.

Next, they leave Namibia for Etsha13 on the western border of the Okavango Delta in Botswana. Unlike other deltas, it flows into the Kalahari Desert without reaching the coast, which makes it unique. The group stops at a secluded island to take a guided walk hoping to spot elephants, waterbuck or other animals living there.

Leaving Botswana, travellers will cross back into Namibia and drive through the Caprivi to their camp on the banks of the Kwando River, which includes a game drive to Mahangu National Park for a chance to see sable and roan, elephants, hippos, buffalos, many types of antelope and more than 420 different bird species.

Next, it’s back into Botswana to Chobe National Park, which has one of the greatest concentrations of elephants found on the African continent. The tour culminates in Zimbabwe at Victoria Falls.

At $4,399 per person, double occupancy, the ‘Spectacular Southern Africa’ tour includes 21 nights’ accommodation, meals as per itinerary, all transportation, game drives and activities, park entrance fees and local fees, and an experienced local guide.

Goway has also announced the launch of a new escorted tour as part of its ‘Holiday of a Lifetime’ series — an 11-night deluxe Morocco experience with only one departure in 2015, which will be led by Smith.

New to Goway's destination lineup is Ethiopia. And, according to Moira Smith, Goway's general manager for Africa, the country is a perfect addition to Goway’s portfolio.

“Ethiopia offers so much for the discerning globetrotter. It’s perfect for those who travel for adventure, authenticity, culture and history,” she says.

Ethiopia is home to more UNESCO World Heritage sites than any other destination in Africa, including the medieval world of rock-hewn churches in Lalibela, considered the eighth wonder of the world, and Axum, where the original Ark of the Covenant is said to reside and which has a history that goes back to 10BC.

Goway offers a seven-night tour of the ‘Historic North’ that includes both Lalibela and Axum, as well as visits to Gondar, Bahir dar and the Simien Mountains. For clients more interested in learning about the tribes living in the lowlands of the south, Goway offers the ‘Cultural South.’

Goway is working with Ethiopian Airlines to offer stopovers for clients who want to get a taste of Ethiopia en-route to other parts of Africa.

Goway recently released the 2015 edition of Goway’s AFRICA Experts Travel Planner, which features Ethiopia and more than 250 independent and escorted ideas.

Goway has also announced the launch of a new escorted tour as part of its ‘Holiday of a Lifetime’ series — an 11-night deluxe Morocco experience with only one departure in 2015, which will be led by Smith.
What sets this experience apart from similar tours are unique dining experiences, special inclusions and personalized experiences, according to the company. These include cooking a Moroccan feast under the tutelage of executive chef Azzeddine Bennouna, a traditional Berber lunch with a local Berber family, sleeping ‘Sahara-style’ in a desert camp and hanging out at Richard Branson’s Moroccan retreat, the Kasbah Tamadot.

The itinerary takes in four of Morocco’s cities including the capital Rabat, spiritual Fes and Marrakech, the most romantic of Moroccan cities. Also on the itinerary are the imperial city of Meknes and the Roman ruins of Volubilis.

The small group escorted experience includes all the regular features of Goway’s ‘Holidays of a Lifetime’ series — professional tour director, deluxe hotels, most meals, tipping, a twin-share guarantee for single passengers and quality travel companion book.

With only one departure in 2015 and a maximum number of 20 passengers, this escorted small group experience will fill up quickly. The tour arrives in Morocco on the Sept. 6, 2015 and the price per person is $7,999.

goway.com

The 2014/2015 Africa brochure was launched in August 2014 to the travel trade, which includes everything from budget beach stays in Tanzania to luxury safaris in Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa. It also introduces gorilla adventures in Uganda and Rwanda, as well as a range of touring holidays in Botswana, Namibia and Madagascar. Beach holiday options include Zanzibar, Mombasa, Mozambique, the Seychelles and Mauritius.

Travelpack is currently offering a companion offer, where the second passenger receives 50% off the ‘Deluxe Kenya Safari Experience’ and the ‘Kenya Adventure Safari’ — with more deals to come. The tours must be booked by Jan. 31, 2015, for travel between April and June 2015.

travelpack.ca

Get close to big game in South Africa with tour packages from MyEscapades

MyEscapades is offering packages to two “malaria-free” game lodges in South Africa, only a few hours’ drive from Johannesburg.

Ivory Tree Game Lodge is located in Pilansberg National Park, which has 60 suites in earthy tones with ensuite bathrooms and outdoor showers, sumptuous cuisine, and morning and evening game drives. Rangers can offer clients close encounters with a wide variety of big game including cheetah.

Kariega Game Reserve is a private game reserve near Port Elizabeth — a natural extension to Cape Town and the Garden Route. Family owned and managed, qualified game rangers provide game viewing from open vehicles, as well as guided bush walks, river cruises, canoeing and fishing. There is also a spa and the option to visit the nearby golden beaches of Kenton-on-sea.

Clients can choose from four luxury lodges; opening this month is the new five-star luxury tented lodge, called Settlers Drift. The lodge will consist of nine tented suites offering a bedroom and living area, full bathroom, indoor/outdoor shower and private viewing deck.

myescapades.ca
AMResorts expands into Costa Rica and Panama with Dreams brand

by Vawn Himmelsbach

AMResorts has expanded into its fifth country with the debut of Dreams Las Mareas Costa Rica, the company’s 34th resort. It has also unveiled the design of its first resort in Panama under its Dreams Resorts & Spas brand, the 500-room Dreams Buenaventura Panama.

The introduction of Dreams Las Mareas Costa Rica marks a milestone for AMResorts, as the company enters its fifth country as part of its aggressive growth plan, including the introduction of five new resorts in 2014.

“AMResorts is focused on expanding into highly desirable destinations that offer our guests something distinct, and Costa Rica has been on the top of our list,” says AMResorts president Gonzalo del Peon. “We are excited to not only welcome new guests, but those who have stayed with us before and want to discover new places.”

The northern Guanacaste region of Costa Rica, where the resort is located, also offers something different from the typical beachfront resort areas. Dreams Las Mareas is located within close proximity to a variety of natural and cultural landmarks, and guests can explore these places through tours and excursions offered by Swiss Travel Costa Rica.

Dreams Las Mareas was designed for sustainability and is LEED certified. The resort was built using recycled resources and follows ecological practices such as water and light-saving techniques.

Located on Playa El Jobo, Dreams Las Mareas is set on a white-sand beach surrounded by rainforest. The 447-suite resort features a contemporary design, with the brand’s ‘Unlimited Luxury’ experience, which includes daily refreshed mini-bars and Jacuzzi tubs in every room, as well as 24-hour concierge services.

The resort features eight gourmet restaurants, with five à la carte dining options, a buffet, a grill and a café. Three bars and lounges serve international fare and top-shelf spirits, while Revive is a lounge serving non-alcoholic beverages.

It also offers day and evening activities and adventures for all ages, including access to the signature Explorer’s Club for kids and a Core Zone Teens Club with activities and social events.

Resort amenities include a 44,000-square-foot pool and La Cascada, a waterslide for kids, overlooking the resort. In addition, guests have access to a whirlpool, a variety of non-motorized water sports, a fitness centre and a daily activities centre.

The Dreams Spa by Pevonia offers up a sublime atmosphere with 10 therapy cabins for a variety of treatments, as well as a hydrotherapy circuit. The resort also features a wedding gazebo and numerous reception spaces, making it ideal for destination weddings.
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Agents earn extra commission on CanJet Vacations all-inclusives

CanJet Vacations still has space available for the key Christmas and New Year period, but agents need to hurry, as the popular holiday season is selling quickly.

CanJet offers packages to top all-inclusive resort brands in Cuba, Mexico, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica. And, the tour operator is paying agents commission on fuel and currency surcharges.

CanJet has positioned itself as an upscale operator and has carefully selected some of the top all-inclusive hotels and resorts in the Caribbean and Mexico, according to the company. The majority of the properties are four- and five-star.
makes us a fantastic value, and we have a lot great things in store for 2015.”

Sandals and Beaches continue to innovate with lots of exciting developments for 2015 and beyond. The new Sandals Barbados will open on Jan. 28, 2015 and Sandals Royal Caribbean is set to break ground on five stunning overwater bungalows. Greg Norman will help Sandals up their game on two golf courses in Jamaica, plus a partnership with Robert Mondavi Winery of Napa Valley will add more wine selection to the all-inclusive menu. Two new Beaches properties are also planned for Barbados and Antigua.

Royal Hideaway Playacar committed to ‘5-star’ experience

TORONTO — At Royal Hideaway Playacar, an Occidental Resort on the Mexico’s Mayan Riviera, guests encounter a welcome drink instead of lineups at check-in; bathtubs filled with bubbles and flower petals; and staff who learn your name within 24 hours of arrival.

That’s just a small sample of the personalized service visitors can expect at the luxury resort, according to Susan Webb of Vox International, which represents Occidental Hotels & Resorts in Canada.

Speaking at a function for about 20 members of the travel media this month in a suite at One King West in Toronto, Webb explained the adults-only (18+ as of this January) all-inclusive resort is a member of the Leading Hotels of the World and a recipient of a AAA Five Diamond Award.

Though the resort’s beach had suffered erosion, Webb said there’s a “new beach” now and it’s considered the best in the Playacar zone. The property has 200 rooms in several two and three-story buildings each with its own concierge plus WiFi in every room (“so you can send photos to friends”) and throughout the resort.

Located a five-minute walk from the charming town of Playa del Carmen and 60 km from Cancun airport, the resort has six a la carte restaurants, including the signature restaurant Las Ventanas – which now boasts an authentic chef’s table.

“Ninety-five percent of the food we serve is from organic sources, most of it is local and from sustainable farms,” explained Executive Chef Eugenio Villafana, who prepared a three-course meal at the function. “You can watch us cook,” he said, adding that 95% of what they make is “homemade from scratch” including breads, dressings and even chocolate.

Among the quality ingredients they use is an award-winning avocado oil that ranked in the top five oils in a European competition. The chef’s table includes six and 12 courses with a changing menu and takes various food restrictions guests may have into consideration.

Transat Holidays, which includes the Royal Hideaway Playacar in its luxury collection, offers additional privileges. Company spokesman Brian Joseph said these include an Option Plus upgrade, chocolates and a bottle of sparkling wine upon arrival, a 30% spa discount, a US$100 resort credit and a $100 credit/room for the chef’s table.
Korean Tourism expects 9% jump in visitors from Canada in 2014

RICHMOND, BC — Visitors to Korea from Canada are expected to increase by more than 9% over last year, members from the Korean Tourism Organization (KTO) delegation told Vancouver travel agents attending an agent’s appreciation dinner at the Sandman Signature Vancouver Airport Hotel & Resort.

Toronto-based KTO director Doojo Kim said 2013 saw 133,000 Canadians visit Korea. “This year, 2014, we are expecting an increase by year end of 9.6% or 150,000 to visit Korea.”

Kim said there are several reasons for the steady increase in visitors from Canada’s two main draw areas of Vancouver and Toronto. Vancouver is a Pacific Rim gateway and has a large population of Asian Canadians. “More Asian Canadians are stopping off in Korea before going to their own country,” he said, adding that the cost is reasonable ($100 on Korean Air).

“There is also more business travel between the two countries because of the economy,” he said, pointing to the Canada-Korea Free Trade Agreement signed between the two countries in 2014. He said that with this agreement in place it should also spark more tourism industry business into the country.

There was also increased service to Asian countries during 2014 by air carriers and increased service does stimulate greater sales and interest in a destination, he said.

FIT travellers were also fuelling Korea’s upswing in tourism and it’s an area that Kim wants to see grow in 2015. The FIT market is generally made up of younger travellers looking for a sense of adventure, Kim said. They do not want a set itinerary and feel comfortable Googling for information as they travel the country. (Korea is a country that sees many English as a second language foreign university graduates from North America working in its schools).

Since Koreans take English starting in elementary school and through high school, young FIT travellers do not face language barriers. “If you talk to most young people, they have some English,” he said.

Another market that Kim sees worth developing for Canadians is the cultural attractions in the country. “The culture in Korea is one of the most impressive attractions,” he said, adding there is a long list of both cultural and heritage UNESCO designated attractions. The latest UNESCO attraction was added in 2014. Namhansanseong, located in a mountainous area 25 kilometres southeast of Seoul, was designed as an emergency capital for the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910). Buddhist monk-soldiers built and defended the structure and it could accommodate 4,000 people while functioning as an administrative and military post.

As well, Korea has a developed theatre and music industry. “The shopping is also good,” he said, as new large malls have opened.

Kim said his organization has been promoting its Korea Stay, a home stay program that will appeal to individuals who want to experience the Korean home environment and culture. The homes have been certified by the KTO. “Most rooms have a computer and there is free Internet access,” he said.

Kim said his goal for 2015 is to raise the public image of Korea in the minds of Canadians by generating more media coverage of the country. He points to the new branding slogan ‘Imagine Your Korea’.

“Whatever you can imagine, you can enjoy in Korea,” he said.

Korean Air to offer more flights in 2015 ex Toronto, Vancouver

VANCOUVER — Korean Air is looking to expand its summer service out of Canada next year, said Vancouver regional manager Min Cheol Kim.

Currently, the airline operates five nonstop flights a week leaving the dual gateways of Toronto and Vancouver after offering daily departures from June to Sept. 8 this past summer. Next year, Kim said, the airline is planning to offer nonstop, daily service from each departure point starting in June but operating until the end of October, adding almost two extra months of daily service.

Korean Air’s stopover option has been popular with travellers going to other destinations as it is available for $100.
MSC Cruises recognizes leading partners including Sunwing, Vacation.com

FORT LAUDERDALE — MSC Cruises, the fastest growing cruise line in the industry with a fleet of 12 ultramodern ships, has named the winners of its second annual MSC True Partnerships Awards.

“MSC’s travel partners are critical to our success and we greatly appreciate the efforts all of our valued partners have made in selling and raising awareness about MSC Cruises in North America in 2014,” said Richard Sasso, president, MSC Cruises USA.

Awards are given to the line’s top performing North American travel partners for the year based on overall business growth in revenue and guests and continuous partnership support and innovative marketing efforts that drive increased consumer awareness.

Winners will be honoured during a 4-day cruise on MSC Divina departing from Miami on Feb. 14.

“This year MSC implemented its ‘Serving You’ initiative as a way of working with travel agents to design and develop sales strategies for mutual success,” said Ken Muskat, executive vice president of sales, PR and guest services, MSC Cruises USA.

“We couldn’t be more pleased with the results and it’s our honour to recognize the best of the best of MSC’s travel partners today. 2015 promises to bring even better results and we look forward to continuing to work with all our partners as MSC expands its presence in the North American market and abroad.”

MSC True Partnerships 2014 Award Winners with Canadian links are: Canadian Account of the Year Winner – Sunwing Vacations and Consortium Partner of the Year Winner – Vacation.com.

“We are extremely pleased to be receiving this award from MSC Cruises and have enjoyed our partnership with the cruise line over the past five years,” said Reg Mendes, Vice President, USA & Cruise Division, Sunwing Vacations.

Carnival Cruise Lines to offer series of unique longer length voyages in 2015-16

MIAMI — Carnival Cruise Lines will offer a series of 10- to 14-day voyages on six different ships between October 2015 and February 2016 that feature extended calls at destinations throughout the Caribbean, Bermuda, Mexican Riviera and The Bahamas.

Reservations are now open on 11 different voyages offered on Carnival Miracle, Carnival Dream, Carnival Glory and Carnival Sunshine which depart from Long Beach, CA, Port Canaveral, San Juan, Miami and New Orleans and visit more than two dozen tropical destinations, including less travelled ports like Bonaire, Martinique, Dominica, Grenada and, for the first time on a Carnival ship, Tobago.

Several of the 10- and 11-day voyages can be combined into three-week-long Caribbean adventures providing an unmatched combination of ports of call, experiences ashore and fun-filled sea days.

These new voyages are in addition to a previously announced series of nine 10- to 14-day departures to the Caribbean and Bermuda offered on Carnival Triumph from Galveston and Carnival Pride from Baltimore in 2015-16.

“Based on feedback from our guests and travel agent partners, we’re delighted to offer these longer length voyages which provide vacationers an opportunity to visit some of the world’s most breathtaking destinations while enjoying all the wonderful on-board innovations and features found aboard Carnival’s ships,” said Terry Thornton, Carnival’s senior vice president of itinerary planning.
The new voyages include:

**Carnival Dream** –
- Oct. 4-15, 2015: 11-day Caribbean/Bermuda cruise from New Orleans to San Juan featuring Nassau, King’s Wharf, Bermuda (overnight call), St. Maarten and St. Thomas.
- Oct. 15-25, 2015: 10-day Caribbean cruise from San Juan to New Orleans with calls at St. Thomas, St. Kitts, St. Maarten, Grand Turk, and Falmouth.

**Carnival Glory** –
- Oct. 31-Nov. 14, 2015: 14-day Caribbean cruise roundtrip from Miami visiting Aruba, Bonaire, Grenada, Barbados, St. Lucia, Antigua, St. Thomas and St. Maarten.
- Jan. 23-Feb. 2, 2016: 10-day cruise from Miami to San Juan calling at the private Bahamian island of Half Moon

Kevin Froemming – Playa Resorts Management

It’s a December to remember for Playa Hotels & Resorts. The company is opening Hyatt Ziva Rose Hall and Hyatt Zilara Rose Hall in Jamaica and Hyatt Ziva Puerto Vallarta in Mexico, all within days of each other. For this edition of Friday 5, Kevin Froemming, Executive Vice-President and Chief Marketing Officer for Playa Resorts Management, talks about all the new properties as well as the new Commission Booster program.

**one**

**THE NEW HYATT ZILARA AND HYATT ZIVA ROSE HALL OPENED THIS MONTH. HOW ARE THE NEW JAMAICA PROPERTIES PERFORMING?**

Froemming: Hyatt Ziva Rose Hall opened on Dec. 10 and Hyatt Zilara Rose Hall will follow on Dec. 20. Some of our first guests at Hyatt Ziva Rose Hall’s opening were a group of travel agents from Canada and they are absolutely giving us rave reviews.

We are pleased to offer all guests at Hyatt Zilara Rose Hall and Hyatt Ziva Rose Hall one complimentary round of golf per guest, per stay, at their choice of two of the Caribbean’s most renowned golf courses: either Cinnamon Hill or White Witch, both adjacent to the resort.

We also provide complimentary airport transfers from Sangster International Airport in Montego Bay, as well as a private VIP airport lounge.

We tried to think of every detail that would make a guest’s experience more relaxing and stress-free and include it in their stay. This is what we are calling The Evolution of All Inclusive Luxury!

**two**

**WHAT CAN AGENTS EXPECT FROM THE NEW HYATT ZIVA PUERTO VALLARTA, ALSO OPENING IN DECEMBER?**

Froemming: Hyatt Ziva Puerto Vallarta will open Dec. 20. This all-inclusive resort is at the site of the former Dreams Puerto Vallarta.
Cay, Grand Turk, Antigua, Martinique, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and St. Thomas.

- Feb. 2-13, 2016: 11-day cruise from San Juan to Miami visiting St. Croix, St. Maarten, Dominica, Grenada, Bonaire, Aruba and Curacao (the above two cruises can be combined to create a 21-day roundtrip voyage from Miami).

**Carnival Sunshine** –
- Nov. 28-Dec. 9, 2015: 11-day Caribbean/Bahamas voyage from Port Canaveral to San Juan visiting Grand Turk, St. Thomas, Tortola, St. Kitts, Dominica, St. Lucia, Antigua and St. Croix.
- Dec. 9-19, 2015: 10-day Caribbean cruise from San Juan to Port Canaveral featuring St. Thomas, Antigua, Dominica, Martinique, St. Croix and Grand Turk (the above two cruises can be combined to create a 21-day voyage roundtrip from Port Canaveral).
- Feb. 21-March 5, 2016: 13-day southern Caribbean cruise roundtrip from Port Canaveral calling at St. Maarten, Dominica, Barbados, Scarborough (Tobago), Grenada, Martinique, St. Kitts and St. Thomas.

**Carnival Miracle** –
- Jan. 31-Feb. 12, 2016: 13-day Mexican Riviera voyage roundtrip from Long Beach, CA, calling at Cabo San Lucas (two-day call), La Paz, Mazatlán, Zihuatanejo/Ixtapa, Manzanillo and Puerto Vallarta (overnight call).

and represents the culmination of more than a $20 million expansion, renovation and repositioning of this resort on romantic Las Estacas Beach.

There are 335 guest suites, including signature swim-up suites. Hyatt Ziva Puerto Vallarta is for guests of all ages and offers endless activities. Adults will appreciate the adults-only pool and lounge area, as well as imaginative specialty lounges.

For meetings and special events the resort offers 6,500 square feet of conference space, and beach venues perfect for weddings and special celebrations. But the pièce de résistance may be the Zen-inspired Vitamar oceanfront spa. We believe it to be the only oceanfront spa in Puerto Vallarta.

The company also owns and operates three resorts under Playa’s brands, The ROYAL Playa del Carmen, Gran Caribe Real Cancun and Gran Porto Real Playa del Carmen.

**four**
WHAT SORT OF OUTREACH (IN TERMS OF INCENTIVES, EDUCATION, ETC.) DO YOU DO WITH CANADIAN TRAVEL AGENTS?

Frommning: If we offer service from the heart to our guests, we offer service from our heart and our soul for travel agents!

We know travel agents are our key to success. One of the many things we are doing for agents is evolving a brand new Commission Booster program, managed by Playa Resorts Management. It is valid for all the resorts we manage.

It is modelled after what was formerly the Real Resorts RR commission booster and it is designed to provide our travel agent partners myriad unparalleled benefits.

This is the first automated incentive program of its kind, with no forms to fill out when you book directly with us. Agents are also eligible for private offers, contests and the many agent fams we are offering, especially to our new resorts.

Agents can learn more and sign up for Commission Booster by visiting: agents.playaresorts.com.

**five**
WHAT’S YOUR OWN FAVOURITE PLAYA HOTELS & RESORTS PROPERTY, AND WHY?

Frommning: That’s like asking a parent which is your favorite child!

I like them all for different reasons. I love Hyatt Ziva Rose Hall and Hyatt Zilara Rose Hall because I am a golfer and White Witch is one of the all-time bucket list courses for golfers. I love the vibe at Hyatt Zilara Cancun, which is very sophisticated. For a romantic getaway, it has to be Hyatt Ziva Puerto Vallarta with its private beach cove.

So you see, I really can’t pick just one!

“ONE OF THE MANY things we are doing for agents is evolving a brand new Commission Booster program... it is valid for all the resorts we manage.”
2015 YellowBird Charity Golf Classic scheduled for Glen Abbey May 15

OAKVILLE, ON — The YellowBird Charitable Foundation is pleased to announce that Glen Abbey Golf Club will once again host the annual YellowBird Charity Golf Classic on Friday, May 15, 2015.

The tournament, presented by founding sponsors Travelweek and Travel Guard, includes a pre-game breakfast, a post-game lunch, prizes and both silent and live auctions.

Gerry Kinasz of Travelweek and David LaFayette of Travel Guard have engaged Patrice Bell and Susan Edwards as conveners for the event who are promising some interesting and creative twists for the tournament next year.

The YellowBird Charitable Foundation (yellowbirdfoundation.com) is dedicated to helping the communities of our favourite travel destinations by:

- Improving the lives of children in the Caribbean and Latin America by supporting local schools and educational programs,
- Providing financial, consultative training and infrastructure support to schools and other social programs,
- Cooperating with locals to better understand their needs and get them involved in designing and implementing projects,
- Fundraising in Canada to finance a variety of projects and programs throughout the region.

Caribbean’s newest destination, DR’s Amber Cove, to welcome first Carnival ship in October

MIAMI — Amber Cove, a new destination located in the heart of the Dominican Republic’s North Coast, as the Amber Coast, just outside the historical town of Puerto Plata – will welcome its first cruise ship when the Carnival Victory arrives on Oct. 6, 2015, for a day-long call.

The visit by Carnival Victory is the first of 37 calls by eight different Carnival ships that will take place between October 2015 and April 2016, accounting for more than 100,000 guests during this period.

Amber Cove will be a featured port on select sailings of Carnival Breeze, Carnival Glory, Carnival Splendor and Carnival Victory from Miami, Carnival Conquest from Port Canaveral and Carnival Valor from Charleston, SC.

Amber Cove will also provide easy and convenient access to the nearby historic town of Puerto Plata, named by Christopher Columbus when he discovered the island in 1492. Puerto Plata is home to the first fort built by European settlers in the New World. Visitors to the city can shop in the bustling downtown area featuring numerous artist studios and rum and cigar factories or stroll along the Malecon, a three-mile-long open air beach-side boardwalk dotted with bars, restaurants and shops.

For additional information and reservations, call 1-800-327-9501 (individual) or 1-800-327-5782 (groups) or visit the line’s travel agent Internet portal, GoCCL.com.

AmaWaterways releases 2015/2016 wine brochure with 50 European sailings

CALABASAS, CA — AmaWaterways is launching its 2015 and 2016 wine brochure. The wine-themed itineraries take place along rivers like the Seine, Douro, Danube, Rhine and Rhone.
Designed to provide travellers with immersive experiences in each destination through an array of wine-related activities, the 7-night spring, summer and fall 2015 sailings will provide insight into Europe’s most renowned wine regions. Cruise-only pricing starts at $2,599 per person.

“AmaWaterways’ wine cruises offer exceptional experiences for avid wine enthusiasts, as well as those who enjoy the occasional glass and would love to learn more,” said Kristin Karst, executive vice president and co-owner of AmaWaterways. “Travellers will not only delight in seeing the picturesque villages and grand capitals of Europe during these special sailings, but they will also have the opportunity to immerse themselves in the rich heritage of the world’s most famed wine regions, with expert lectures and exquisite tastings.”

AmaWaterways’ 2015 Europe wine cruise itineraries include:

- Paris & Normandy – 7-night Seine River voyage through the heart of Normandy with optional 2-night land extension in Paris
- Provence & Spain – 7-night cruise through Provence with optional 3-night land extensions in Barcelona and/or Paris
- Enticing Douro – 7-night cruise through the dramatic Douro River Valley with optional 3-night land extension in Lisbon
- The Romantic Danube – 7-night cruise from Vilshofen to Budapest with optional 3-night land extension in Prague
- Melodies of the Danube – 7-night cruise from Budapest to Vilshofen with optional 3-night land extension in Munich or Prague
- The Enchanting Rhine – 7-night cruise from Amsterdam to Basel (or reverse) with optional 4-night land extension in Zurich and Lucerne.

Also featured in the brochure are AmaWaterways’ new 7-night Bordeaux voyages. Slated to debut on the Garonne and Dordogne rivers in 2016, the Taste of Bordeaux itinerary will take travellers on an unforgettable experience through this famous region in France.

In addition to AmaWaterways’ traditional shore excursions, the new wine cruises will feature distinctive tours revealing the culture and winemaking traditions of each of these regions. Tours include exclusive visits to local vineyards, historic wine cellars and winemaking seminars. The cruise hosts will bring a variety of hand-selected vintages onboard and offer food pairing recommendations to guests while leading informative discussions and tastings.

AmaWaterways’ expert chefs will perfectly pair fine wines with award-winning cuisine, bringing this culinary experience full-circle.

Travel agents already on AmaWaterways’ mailing list do not need to submit a request, as they will be receiving brochures in the coming weeks. Follow AmaWaterways on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AmaWaterways and Twitter @AmaWaterways.

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December 18, 2014
Goway, Australian Pacific Tours launch new 2015-16 escorted vacation brochure

TORONTO — Goway is launching the 2015/16 New Zealand and Australia Escorted Touring brochure in conjunction with Australian Pacific Tours.

This brochure features both Premier Luxury Escorted Vacations and Value Plus Escorted Vacations in Australia and New Zealand plus Wilderness Adventures in Australia.

Highlights for the upcoming 15-16 season include:

- A range of Super Deals. Save up to Can$1,050 per couple by booking and paying a deposit by March 31 or book and pay 12 months in advance and save 10%
- Freedom of Choice Sightseeing: Clients can select from a choice of touring options at no extra cost
- Freedom of Choice Dining: In select locations your clients can choose from a range of restaurants to dine at
- A choice of eight Premier Escorted Vacations and eight Value Plus Escorted Vacations
- A choice of two Kimberley Wilderness Adventures.

To request a copy, e-mail info@goway.com or call 1-888-469-2944.

Signature Vacations launches new flight from Quebec City to Rio Hato, Panama

TORONTO — Signature Vacations last week launched an exclusive flight service from Quebec City to Panama's newest airport, Rio Hato.

No other carrier provides this direct route from Quebec City to Rio Hato, conveniently located only a short distance from Panama's resort area of Playa Blanca.

Chief Operating Officer for the Sunwing Travel Group, Andrew Dawson commented, “Panama is a new destination for Signature Vacations this year, and has quickly become a favourite winter escape for Canadians. We are pleased to be able to expand our programming for the coming winter to offer our clients in Quebec City a convenient, direct flight service to this Central American hot spot”.

The resort area of Playa Blanca in Panama faces the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Panama. Located approximately two hours from Panama City, Playa Blanca offers a mild sunny climate, tranquil beaches, eco-tourism adventures and welcoming hospitality.

Exclusive to Signature Vacations, the new beachfront Riu Playa Blanca features five star amenities and provides guests with RIU-topia luxuries that include unlimited international drinks, discounts on exciting excursions and free WiFi. Guests can lounge under the poolside palapas (sun shelters), take an introductory scuba lesson, hit the gym or unwind with a relaxing spa
treatment. There's a supervised Kids Club and mini-waterpark, and for added value, children aged between 2-12 years stay and eat for free when sharing a room with two adults (max. two children per family). Choose from one of three on-site à la carte restaurants, including Asian, Italian and a steakhouse, or visit the international buffet.

All packages include Sunwing flights, and unlike other airlines, Sunwing includes free checked baggage. A one-week vacation package to the Riu Playa Blanca Resort in Panama from Quebec City starts from $1,495 per person including taxes per person, based on double occupancy departing March 6, 2015.

Top chef shows off Velas Resorts’ emphasis on culinary excellence

TORONTO — Velas Resorts prides itself on its gourmet cuisine, saying that it defies all pre-conceived stereotypes about all-inclusive dining.

This was on display in Toronto last week with chef Xavier Perez Stone cooking an eight-course meal for some three dozen trade and media representatives at Arcadian Studio.

Chef Xavier has been ranked as Mexico’s best chef and was the recent winner of the Iron Chef international competition held in Toronto.

He leads the kitchen at Cocina de Autor at Grand Velas Riviera Maya, the world’s first all-inclusive restaurant to receive a AAA Five-Diamond award.

“With pristine properties set along the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean seas, a stay at any of the Velas Resorts offers a global culinary experience like no other,” said Sophie Raymond, regional sales manager, Canada, Velas Resorts.

“From Asian cuisine to Italian comfort food to French bistro fare or Mexican favourites, the variety and quality of dining options at Velas Resorts are unmatched.”

The four Velas Resorts are in Riviera Maya, Puerto Vallarta and Riviera Nayarit and have earned 43 AAA Diamonds. Two properties belong to the Leading Hotels of the World.

Chef Xavier, who has had spells in San Sebastian in Spain (which has the highest concentration of 3-star Michelin restaurants in the world) and Stockholm, works with local ingredients.

This was on display last week in Toronto with dishes such as foie gras wrapped in lettuce and cotton candy; lobster, black corn and truffle puree; and venison, red berries and beets among other dishes.

Visit grandvelas.com for more information.

Florida tourism continues record roll, Canadians up 1.8%

Tourism to the Sunshine State continues to thrive with Visit Florida preliminary estimates showing 23.7 million visitors went to Florida in the third quarter of 2014 (July-September), an increase of 3.5% over the same period in 2013. This represents the largest third quarter for visitation Florida has ever experienced, exceeding the previous high of 22.9 million in Q3 2013. Through the first three quarters of 2014, Visit Florida estimates that it has welcomed 73.9 million visitors – an increase of 2.5% over the same period last year. For quarter three, Visit Florida estimates that 2.9 million overseas visitors and 526,000 Canadians came to Florida, both of which are record Q3 highs and represent 2.2% and 1.8% increases over Q3 2013 respectively.

Gente da Nossa Inc. convicted under Travel Act

Gente da Nossa Inc. plead guilty to one count of operating as a travel agent without registration, contrary to section 4(1)(a) of the Ontario Travel Industry Act, 2002. A fine of $3,000 was imposed. The fine is payable within one year. Gente da Nossa Inc. operated in Toronto and elsewhere in Ontario. The charges against Nellie Pedro trading as Gente Tours and Gisela Terencio were withdrawn.

Barcelo names contest winner

A Canadian winner in a contest for the highest number of room nights sold to Barcelo Grand Faro Los Cabos in Barcelo’s BPartner program is Tammy Lenihan, Sears Travel Ontario. Tammy won an iPad for finishing in second place in North American agent bookings for Barcelo Grand Faro Los Cabos.
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Montreal woos its many cruise passengers with new pre- and post-cruise product ideas

There’s always something happening in Montreal, no matter what the season. But summer is a special time in the city, and there’s already plenty planned for Montreal visitors in summer 2015.

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts will present a fantastic exhibition on Rodin, from May 30 to Oct. 18, 2015.

The Opera of Montréal will also propose a great program next year. Founded in 1980, it is the largest francophone opera company in North America and is among the 15 most important opera houses on the continent.

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There’s also the Sweet Deal package, where third night stays are priced at 50% off.

The city is seeing more cruise passengers each year and 2014 was no exception. The season opened on May 17 and ended on Nov. 11, making it the longest cruise season to date for Montréal. In total, 71,044 passengers and crew transited through the cruise terminal this year for an increase of 2% over the 69,966 passengers and crew from the 2013 season.

Two ships in particular stood out this season: the Aida Bella, the largest cruise ship to come to Montréal with more than 2,500 passengers, and the six-star Europa, the most luxurious cruise ship to dock in the Port of Montréal.

Looking ahead, the 2015 season is particularly promising with a projected 92,000 passengers and crew, on 73 ships, for an increase of close to 30%.

Tourisme Montreal expects an increasing number of families to be on those cruise ships in the summer months, and it’s developed a new product for families, to tap into that market.

The Family Pass entitles visitors to two free tickets for children 12 and under with the purchase of one regular-priced adult ticket, to local attractions like the Montreal Insectarium and Botanical Gardens, and the Montreal Canadiens Hall of Fame. The deal is good for up to three adults and six children, for seven consecutive days between now and Dec. 31, 2015.

A new brochure from Tourisme Montreal called Montreal: Tours & Excursions aims to educate travel agents and cruise lines about pre- and post-cruise product ideas. Tours range from general sightseeing to more niche itineraries focusing on culinary highlights and architecture.

For more information visit tourisme-montreal.org.
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Visit transatholidays.com