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Business travel increases as SA's spend R22bn on trips

In 2007, 44% or 12.7 million South Africans took 39 million trips in South Africa and spent R22.2 billion.

Globally trans-continental travel increased by 6,6% from 846 million people catching trains, busses and planes to go to new destinations to 903m in 2007 and during their travels they spent \$856bn according to United Nations statistics. Business travellers accounted for 12,2% of these travellers in 2007, compared to 11,6% in 2006 and despite better telecommunications more people are travelling to seek new markets, find work and strike deals.

"Business travel is a huge market and on average has the highest expenditure of any other type of traveller," Liza van Wyk, CEO of management and business support training organisation, BizTech said. "If you take as two examples: the Institute of Travel Management of Southern Africa represents around a fifth of business travellers in the region, and they say their average member company spends anything from less than R1m a year on travel expenses to R450m plus a year.

"In Europe travel expenditure for businesses ranges from an average of 79 000 Euro to 3m Euro for the average enterprise."

In South Africa too, a significant percentage of those who visit are business travellers and are those most likely to stay in luxury resorts and spend significant sums hosting conferences. In 2007, 9m foreigners visited South Africa of which 6,6m came from the rest of Africa and 1,4m from Europe contributing R159,6bn or 8,1% to South Africa's Gross Domestic Product.

"What this means is that travel planning has become a highly skilled operation for the average business, with so many employees travelling, the people who book need to know how to source the best deals and schedule optimal timing to get the business passenger from destination to destination quickly, efficiently and inexpensively," Van Wyk said.

BizTech's course, *Trouble Free Travel Planning for PA's* is consistently well-attended. "Many business executives catch planes the way their grandparents may have caught buses, they travel frequently, they often have their first meeting within an hour or two of landing and so every detail down to how long luggage is likely to take on the carousel, how long it will take to hire a car or catch a tube and how fast to get from office to hotel; every detail has to be meticulously planned."

Van Wyk gives some tips for the travel planner:

- Never assume someone else is going to do something, do it yourself or double-check.
- Compile a master itinerary of airline data, contact telephone numbers, names and addresses, driver's details and the like.

- Confirm everything in writing.
- Ensure the person travelling has briefing notes about his company and any relevant data about those he or she will meet and tourist information about the city or cities they are visiting especially recommended restaurants.
- Allow adequate transit time between meetings.
- It's advisable for those who travel often to have an emergency case packed and in the office, ensure it has in it regular medication, spare glasses or contact lenses and the like.
- Keep a record of credit card details in case they get lost.
- Find out if there is special social etiquette for the country being visited and inform the traveller.
- Ensure he or she has enough stationery for the trip including spare pens, a notebook, memory stick, letterheads, business cards, adaptors and the like.
- Make sure the traveller's passport always has sufficient spare pages, he or she is up to date with vaccinations or carries travel meds for example, anti-diarrhoea medication or malaria tablets and has travel and medical insurance to cover them while they are away.

"Those business travellers who come to South Africa spend a significant amount of money not just on accommodation and conferences, but SA Tourism figures show that 86% will shop, 77% are interested in night life and a lower percentage, 23% will visit natural attractions such as game parks. It is important then, that businesses in South Africa who host foreign business executives are able to direct them to places where they can relax and unwind and learn a little more about South Africa and all it has to offer," Van Wyk says.

BizTech's Trouble Free Travel Planning for PA's helps the busy personal assistant think beyond merely booking a ticket for a colleague or executive to accommodation for a client, to interrogating how best he or she can function effectively and efficiently in a foreign country and have time available to relax and unwind.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

LIZA VAN WYK, CEO, BIZTECH 082 466 8975 or 0861 249 8324 or
liza@biztech.co.za www.biztech.co.za <<http://www.biztech.co.za>>
 Issued by MediaOnLine mediaonline@global.co.za
 <<mailto:mediaonline@global.co.za>> or 011 646 7637