

**Monday, March 30, 2009**

## **Iata: sharp drop in February passenger traffic**

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IATA's February traffic results show a continuing drop in demand.

Passenger volumes fell by 10,1% from the 5,6% drop recorded in January. The 5,9% reduction in capacity, could not keep pace with the fall in demand, pushing February load factors down to 69,9%.

"Gloom continues. The sharp drop in February passenger traffic shows the broadening scope of the crisis," said Giovanni Bisignani, IATA's director general and CEO.

The results further showed that the decline in international travel outpaced capacity adjustment in all regions.

African carriers saw the largest decline with 13,7%, outpacing even the most aggressive capacity cuts.

Bisignani reminded governments that air transport was a catalyst for economic activity and called for policy changes to help them to stimulate economies by playing this role effectively.

"Governments are spending trillions to bail out the banks and trillions more to stimulate economies. By comparison, our requests to governments are cost-effective and cheap."

Bisignani also warned that the burden of the crisis required an industry response.

"This is not just an airline crisis. Efficiency must be a priority for the entire value chain. A 25% reduction in landing charges at Singapore Changi Airport and a 50% reduction at Malaysian airports are major steps in the right direction. These are model programmes for others to follow," said Bisignani.

"The priority for airlines around the world is survival – conserving cash and adjusting capacity to match demand. This means re-sizing and re-shaping the industry to deal with the US\$62bn fall in revenues expected this year. Airlines will be making some tough decisions to stay afloat as we head for industry losses of US\$4,7bn in 2009."

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## **SAX heads for the friendly city**

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FROM March 30, South African Express Airways will fly between Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth. The flights will operate twice daily with a Bombardier Canadair Regional Jet Series 200, accommodating 50 passengers.

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## **Industry welcomes abolition of Dutch passenger tax**

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IATA and several airlines have welcomed the Dutch government's decision to scrap the recently introduced departure tax as part of its economic stimulus package.

Giovanni Bisignani, director general and CEO of IATA, said the tax was a €312m competitive disadvantage for the Dutch economy, of which aviation was an important catalyst. He said abolishing the departure tax was the right decision. "It will provide an economic boost in this crisis and help build a competitive future.

"This is just the tip of the iceberg. Airlines saw US\$6.9bn in crazy new taxation last year. This is producing all the wrong results – dampening demand and adding costs for businesses," said Bisignani. "This collective madness must stop. It is time for the Irish government to follow suit and repeal its new Air Travel Tax. And it is time for the UK to realise that its Air Passenger Duty is penalising one of its most powerful economic catalysts at the same time that they are spending billions to bail out other failed industries."

The tax added between €11.25 and €45 to passengers' journeys when departing from Dutch airports.

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## **CX cuts fuel surcharges again**

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CATHAY Pacific will further reduce its fuel surcharges on April 1. The new maximum surcharge will be HK\$239 for long-haul flights, a reduction of approximately 15% on the current levels.

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## **Take 5: Asata Congress 2009: GDS Wastage**

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ALMOST a year after irate airlines threatened to penalise South African travel agents found guilty of GDS wastage, little seems to have improved (TNW, March 18, 2009).

Reports have shown that that SA's travel industry wastage is set at 48%, compared with the 17% wastage in the UK and 19% in Germany.

Take a look at this Take 5 for exclusive coverage of the GDS Wastage panel held at the 49th Asata Congress at Sun City.

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## **Talking point: Cosmos**

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IT was the equinox last week (March 22) so it's officially autumn. In most areas of the country this is the very best time to be travelling. The grapes have been harvested in the Western Cape, the summer fogg is past in KwaZulu Natal, the Highveld heat has settled down, the country colours are ripe gold and deep green and clear luminous blue.

And anyone abroad on the country's roads will be confronted by an annual spectacle that never ceases to amaze and delight – the flowering of the cosmos. Every autumn, almost in celebration of the Easter weekend, the roadsides on the Highveld are set alight with the marshmallow hues of the cosmos flower. The pink and white flowers dance in the breeze on supple stems, and herald that last show of glorious colour before winter turns the veld into tawny gold.

It's no coincidence that the roads lined with cosmos flowers lead to many memorials of the Anglo-Boer War. Historians believe that the seeds of the flowers, originally from Mexico, were brought in with bags of horse-feed for

the English troops. The English supply lines led from the port of Durban to the interior, and it is along these roads that the cosmos flourishes most royally. Every time the supply convoys stopped to feed the horses, some seeds dropped on the ground and found the South African highveld climate to their liking. Gradually the flower has spread – carried nowadays by car tyres – to most inland roadsides.

There is a story that during the visit of the British Royal Family in 1947, the Queen (later the Queen Mother) remarked: "Isn't it lovely that the authorities planted all these beautiful flowers at the roadside." Perhaps she thought it was in honour of their visit, perhaps she just thought that South African officials had an exceptionally flowery nature. She wasn't to know that the delicate flowers were actually self-seeded weeds!

The cosmos is at its headiest along the roads that triangulate the Highveld's coal mining industry. The three major roads, the N12, the N17 and the R23 are important links between Gauteng and Mpumalanga, leading respectively to the Kruger National Park and KwaZulu Natal.

We are blessed that our cosmos (*bipinnatus*, also called, rather unromantically, the Mexican aster) has adopted us as a home. It is a remarkable flower, noted for its quick germination and flowering time, a characteristic almost tailor-made for the Highveld's now-you-see-it-now-you-don't summer rainfall.

Homeopathic healers use the essence as a natural relaxant: it calms anxiety and nerves, slows down erratic speech patterns and give mental clarity to chaotic minds – just what the harried traveller needs.

Perhaps this is the reason why Japan adopted the cosmos as its emblem for the Small Kindness Campaign in 1988. This programme mobilises three million people across Japan every year to get together to plant these flowers in the name of kindness. It aims to 'make the environment and people's hearts beautiful'. The World Kindness Movement has now adopted the cosmos as its emblem. In South Africa, the planting has already been done for us, all we need to do now is work on the 'beautiful heart' part of it.

Not surprisingly, the fields of cosmos are a draw card for painters and photographers. Wherever you travel you will see a car parked by the side of the road, and some snap-happy motorist crouched on the verge taking pictures of these masses of flowers. A photographic tip: don't try to get the whole field in your shot – when your picture comes out all you will see is a smear of pink and white across the frame. Rather get right in amongst the flowers – they are almost head high anyway. Get a close-up with the profusion of blooms in the background. If you can include a dramatic purple thundercloud with a foreground of clear golden sunlight, all the better.

Artists love to paint cosmos. The flower is equally picturesque in the field or lazing around in a vase. It is the ideal flower for the beginner, with its simple shape and colouring. It is also a challenge for the serious artist, as each flower has a different angle and shape and variation in colour. These are graceful subjects, whether they are nodding in the breeze or clustered in a jar.

Often people gather huge armfuls of the flowers to take home. Cosmos don't last very well once cut, but their life can be extended by burning the end of the stem with a candle-flame before putting them into water.

The towns in Cosmos Country, where the flowers are most prolific, have built an entire tourism industry around the cosmos season. Canoe races, marathons, industrial shows, expos and art competitions lure people to the mining towns of the cosmos triangle. Bethal is the home of the annual Potato Festival, Secunda hosts the Sejacufe Jazz and Cultural Festival and the Lake Umuzi Cosmos Carnival takes place on, well, on Lake Umuzi, of course.

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## **Latest changes on Travelinfo (30/03)**

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30 March 2009

For full details on the below updates refer to the Travelinfo database

1. 3 days left to complete the "The City Lodge family of Hotels" & "Travel money made easy with Travelex!" workshops...Stand in line to win some great prizes...Click here
2. QATAR AIRWAYS has extended the sales validity on its 'Premium Companion Fares' until 30 April 2009 and updated its 'Asia Promo Fares'.
3. TRAVEL ZONE has added new 'Ramses Collection Egypt' packages.
4. AVOCATUR WHOLESALE TOUR OPERATOR has added various 7nt "Phuket Summer Sizzlers" package specials valid until 30 June 2009.
5. AVOCATUR WHOLESALE TOUR OPERATOR has updated its 'Unbeatable Far East package specials'.
6. AMADEUS has added details on its technology solution workshop.
7. HOLIDAY TOURS has added 'Save 70% off Select European Cruises'.
8. SOUTH AFRICAN EXPRESS AIRWAYS has added 'SA Express to Begin Operating Between JNB & PE' to its database.
9. CAPE TOWN LODGE HOTEL has added its new competition and has announced the winner of last weeks competition.
10. BEACHCOMBER TOURS has updated its 'Seychelles' specials.
11. PROTEA HOTELS has added a new Protea Hotel Cape Castle special to its 'Western Cape' special offers.