

SA Travel Association means business

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Whilst some might lament about the lack of cohesion and professionalism in many industries in South Africa, this cannot be said about the level of consensus, compliance and confidence that prevails in the country's travel industry.

Speaking at the recent Association of South African Travel Agents (ASATA) Diners Club Awards where the association paid tribute to those professionals involved in what is a multibillion Rand industry, Otto De Vries, CEO of ASATA said, "Our association has worked very hard over recent years to ensure that we deliver what customers want from their travel experiences. This is a customer driven industry, and one where consumers rely heavily on our members' expertise and collective intelligence. This is of paramount importance when businesses are consistently looking at the bottom line and reassessing their travel policies and spend."

ASATA acts on behalf of corporate travel management companies when it relates to regulations set down by international bodies such as IATA, and regulations closer to home such as Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment, to ensure that our businesses remain compliant and relevant to the SA consumer.

"In recent times we have lobbied on behalf of the industry with our partners in the inbound and airline sectors to engage with the Ministry of Tourism and Department of Home Affairs to ensure that all our members are represented in the contentious issues surrounding new immigration regulations," continued De Vries.

"In addition we have made huge progress with the National Treasury and we are close to finalising an MOU to address key objectives such as irregular and unauthorised travel spend within the government and budget deficits as a result of inaccurate tracking of expenditure and subsequent misallocations that result in a direct impact on the country's economy."

The Association of Southern African Travel Agents, ASATA, was established in 1956 and today is representative of more than 85% of the industry, including the head offices of most of the major travel consortiums, accommodation, car hire and periphery travel industry services. The association emphasises free trade but all members subscribe to a well-constructed

constitution and a code of conduct that self-regulates.

Serving leisure and corporate travel

ASATA has a responsibility to reflect the consensus of its members and present their views to all sectors of the public, the government and the business community whilst creating a certain high level of compliance within the industry. Together, consensus and compliance create confidence in the minds of ASATA members' clients, ensuring that they travel with peace of mind.

ASATA is administered by a full-time Secretariat headed by a Chief Executive Officer, and its continued role and direction are guided by a Board of Directors. All the Members of the Regional Forums, Council and Board are elected by the Members at an Annual General Meeting.

Recently elected ASATA President, Vanya Lessing, CEO of the Sure Travel Group, added to De Vries's comments by saying that she is proud to represent members of the association who are professional and continue to remain relevant by expanding their knowledge and expertise across the globe.

"In order to service leisure and corporate travel, ASATA members constantly invest in new technology to deliver efficiency, search for best value and manage travel policies. ASATA'S annual conference, to be held in Durban at the end of May, will address the theme of collectively taking the travel industry forward into the 21st century," said Lessing.

Succession planning is key to the industry and the economy and it is for this reason that ASATA has launched its Young Professional in Travel (YPT) Chapter to nurture young talent within the industry. "Contrary to what futurists predict, travel professionals have a great future. We are experts in a complex industry which requires skill, experience and partnerships across the globe. This is an industry that moves at great speed, things change in a nanosecond, therefore the combination of talented people and state-of-the-art technology makes it a very exciting industry to work in," concluded Lessing.

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