



AMERICAN EXPRESS TRAVEL SERVICES SOUTH AFRICA

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American Express Travel Services South Africa is developing its continent-wide American Express franchise network to meet the unique requirements of Africa's rapidly growing oil and gas industries

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American Express Travel Services South Africa forms part of the Tourvest Travel Services division

This is a company with big resources and a wide umbrella by virtue of its affiliation to Tourvest, Southern Africa's largest tourism group.

American Express Travel Services South Africa forms part of the Tourvest Travel Services division which provides travel management services to many of South Africa's top 100 companies. Corporate travel is a specialist activity within the organisation as a whole and American Express Travel Services does it well. However it recently took the decision to leverage its network of 23 franchisees across the continent to establish itself in the oil and gas (O&G) industries which are transforming many African economies and promising to bring prosperity to yet more.

Nigeria and Angola are the main established oil producing countries in sub-Saharan Africa while Chad, South Sudan, Uganda, Namibia and South Africa itself are aiming to increase or start production. Recent large scale gas discoveries off the coast of Mozambique and Tanzania have attracted massive overseas investment. "We have recently taken the decision to establish a dedicated team within the American Express Travel Services business in South Africa to focus exclusively on this industry," says Clive Jones, Chief Operating Officer. "The needs of the corporations bringing in expatriates, and of those individuals, are so complex and special that they need to be delivered through a separate infrastructure with a different value proposition from our normal corporate travel management process."



The travel services division does a great deal of work for the mining sector, but being land based, that is a lot easier to manage than O&G clients. The latter tends to work offshore, or in remote places and their travel needs are different, he explains. “These companies depend on expatriates with skills that are scarce in the local markets. Many bookings are not generated in the country in which you are delivering the service.”

This is an industry that employs specialist engineers from Canada, Russia, India or Singapore. They are typically paid from the moment they board the plane in their country of origin until they return, so the client companies like to be assured they will spend as little time as possible sitting in transit lounges. There will generally be an outgoing passenger going on leave for every incoming one, and they can’t leave till their replacement arrives. Travel is therefore a highly business critical activity for the exploration, drilling, support services and supplier companies as well as for the main contractor.

But the routes, from say Russia to a rig lying off the coast of Angola, are complicated. And the fare structure is equally complex – American Express Travel Services staff have had to be trained to understand the concept of ‘marine and offshore’ fares

offered by airlines to accredited seafarers. These rates are available only to appointed travel management companies. Generally, the traveller should be travelling to or from a cruise ship, private yacht, commercial vessel, port, or offshore rig. Every airline imposes its own eligibility conditions for the use of these fares and some airlines permit travel by land based staff employed in the shipping industry.

Managing travel services for the oil & gas sector is a complex business

4000

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Number of Tourvest employees

The opportunity is not simply to provide a service to the O&G companies, says Jones. “They go home to spend time with their families or they might travel in Africa or elsewhere using their allowances. We can come in at that point and manage their itinerary, accommodation and leisure time. It takes the kind of specialised travel consulting backup that we can give them, as well as an understanding of the combination of routes and the air fares that apply to them.”

The Cape Town based team is multilingual and able to send out documentation in any language likely to be

needed. It is also sensitive to the different cultural needs that might crop up – dietary requirements for example. “We know the right questions to ask!”

The job gets even more demanding when things go wrong for the client.

If someone is injured on a rig and needs to be repatriated, delay is not an option. The job is, he says, a combination of the routine, complicated as it may be, and the unexpected. There is never a dull moment.

American Express Travel Services is already carrying out this demanding service for some of the largest oilfield service companies in the world. Nigeria is

“OUR VISION IS TO CATER FOR EVERY CONCEIVABLE NEED THE LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL TRAVELLER MIGHT HAVE”



Tourvest has become the leading travel group in Africa

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the only franchise market where Tourvest owns a significant part of the business. The remaining franchisees in Africa are entirely locally owned.

This local knowledge is something that a service provider, even an American Express Travel Services office, operating outside of Africa could never hope to

deliver. Tourvest is a level 3 BEE (black economic empowerment) company, and while that does not give it official status in other countries, it does give it a unique understanding of the emphasis African governments place on using local resources. By working with American Express Travel Services South Africa or one of its locally

owned franchisees the client company stands to improve its scorecard.

Tourvest operates businesses which range from travel management companies through to souvenir shops and foreign exchange bureaux, under some 67 sector-leading brands, employing more than 4 000 people. While based in South Africa, it is a global business, with operations in East and West Africa, the United Kingdom and the Caribbean, as well as having principals, associates and clients throughout the world.

Tourvest’s expansion has been impressive since its establishment in 1997. “In 15 years we have become the

leading travel group on the continent,” says Jones, “with the vision of catering for every conceivable need the local and international traveller might have: from the duty free on their flight, providing foreign exchange, selling gifts at our airport shops, putting them up at our hotels, feeding them in our restaurants, entertaining them at our game lodges and safaris and managing all their travel from arrival to departure.” **BE**

For more information about American Express Travel Services South Africa visit: www.americanexpresstravel.co.za



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