

Oh no, not another airport

It wasn't that long ago that an airport was actually quite a nice place, perhaps even a nice experience with the anticipation of either returning to ones home after a day or two of meetings or business, or perhaps heading for a holiday destination. In South Africa, the airports were reasonably quiet, staff were efficient and usually had a smile on their faces, dare I mention that the female staff were always well groomed and a pleasure to do business with after a long days work. From Cape Town to Johannesburg, even the smaller airports in South Africa such as East London and Port Elizabeth offered visitors to South Africa a quick and efficient service.

What happened guys! Accommodation standards went up, with Hotels, Bed and Breakfasts and others offering beds to tourists all rising to the occasion, lifting their game to international standards, car hire companies raised their service levels, as they were forced to compete against the best in the world, what did SAA do? They effectively blocked out the growth of opposition airlines as shown by the competitions commission, used their monopolistic position, the only airline to enjoy state assistance, to break the back of any opposition airline activity. This was clearly evident in our neck of the woods, the Eastern Cape, where we paid the highest per capita, per kilometre flown rate than almost any other destination in South Africa, why, because no other airline flew here, they had no opposition. Yes, it was that simple. All attempts by local professional bodies, including the Chambers of Business to address this fell on deaf ears, it was only when one or two of the opposition planes started landing that things changed a little.

Yes, I am digressing a little, back to the airports. Even if one allows some leniency for construction n preparation for the 2010 soccer world cup, after all, thousands and thousands of soccer supporters will be streaming in to South Africa, looking for flights, beds, accommodation, car hire....the airports are really in a poor state. Let's start with unreasonable queues, for a simple domestic flight, these are usually well in excess of 30 minutes, can this be called reasonable, definitely not, unacceptable, yes. I can accept standing around because a lounge is being upgraded, but please, have enough computers and staff to deal with us, your customers in an efficient and speedy manner.

Dare we mention the seat spacing, the sardine like on-board accommodation, am I the only one who watches other passengers, particularly the large ones as they board the plane, holding thumbs that they're sitting elsewhere. In particular the smaller planes, guys, a fellow of say 120kg, and there are plenty of them, and the larger variety, cannot sit next to another large or normal size person. Do the maths, work out the cubic centimetres. It is high time that a weight restriction became mandatory, with perhaps those weighing more than 100kg paying an additional 5% for every kilogram, thereby ensuring he has two seats once he reached 120. Those less than say 70kg enjoying a discount of 2% for each KG less than 70Kg up to 20% and then, the important thing, putting them next too each other on the plane. Whilst my suggestion might need a little fine tuning, isn't this the way to go. And food, no, for goodness sake, a gourmet meal is not essential but..... I can purchase a lovely fresh sandwich or a salad in any delicatessen, this would far exceed the quality currently provided by SAA at probably half the cost that they bare paying their current providers, my last comment on meals but is it not possible for me to have a cold drink or similar with my meal, do they really have to start the process at opposite ends of the plane.

We are abut to welcome the 2010 soccer world cup visitors, we have one, repeat one opportunity here, to market South Africa as a holiday destination, from accommodation to flights, to SAA, please, lead this initiative from the front, not from the back.

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About the Author

Alan is the CEO of staysa.co.za

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