



John Coles @ Travel-PA

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The travel trade refers to the months of January and February as the “peak”. This is the busiest season for bookings as clients look ahead and plan holidays. The peak has been good for Travel-PA with total booking up 16% on last year. I contributed to that growth by taking bookings for trips as diverse as Disneyland Paris, the Galapagos Islands, Marrakech and Koh Samui.

It’s nice to help clients plan their travel and make bookings, but the most rewarding part of the job is when clients return from their trip and tell me about the experiences they had enjoyed. In my first newsletter, Helen Anderson described her family’s holiday in Cuba. In this edition John Costello relates his adventures at Victoria Falls.

I started by business in September 2018, sharing my plans with family and friends, and my intention was to formally launch to the public this year. The local Chamber of Commerce gave me the perfect launch platform with their Festival of Business held at the Hilton Hotel, Syon House on Thursday 28th February. The exhibition attracted over two hundred delegates and it was an outstanding opportunity to showcase my business to other entrepreneurs, investors and companies in West London.



Airbus A380 — The End of a Dream.

On 14th February, Airbus announced their decision to axe their £20 billion flagship project, the A380 superjumbo. The double-decker airliner is popular with passengers but has failed to find favour with airlines. Production will end in 2021, just fourteen years after the first A380 was delivered to Singapore Airlines.



The A380 was conceived as the natural successor to the venerable Boeing 747. The original “jumbo jet” entered service in 1969 and more that 1,500 were built. The 747 brought affordable long-haul travel within the reach of millions of people. Seating more than 500 passengers, the A380 offered greater capacity to meet the expected surge in passenger traffic.

The downfall of A380 is primarily due to airline economics. The aircraft, powered by four engines, struggles to compete with the twin-engine Boeing 777. Four engines mean higher fuel burn and more maintenance. The A380 has more seats than the 777, but the economies of scale are not compelling, so the lower capacity 777 has emerged as the true successor to the 747.

Another factor is the development of smaller twin-engine aircraft such as the Boeing 787 Dreamliner and Airbus A350. These fuel-efficient economical aeroplanes allow airlines to launch new routes such as London – Austin or London - Perth, offering the convenience of direct service rather than the hassle of changing planes at a busy hub airport.

Airbus secured orders for 313 A380’s from fourteen airlines. Emirates is by far the largest customer with more than 100 aircraft operating out of their Dubai mega-hub. No other airline flies more than 20 A380’s, deploying the aircraft solely on their busiest routes. The dream of the A380 taking over from the 747 as the “queen of the skies” is well and truly over.

Incredibly, four A380 have already been retired by Singapore Airlines. As I focus my attention on my own Travel-PA business, I will bring my 33-year career in aviation to an end. My final project will be to manage the disassembly and recycling of two of these aircraft. The aircraft are parked at a maintenance facility in Tarbes, southwest France and my aim is to ensure the engines, landing gear and other components are carefully removed and refurbished, so they can be used on other A380’s.

Quiz: Two UK airports are named after people, a third was until 2016. Name the musician, footballer and outlaw.

A Birthday at the Falls

by John Costello

Post a January holiday in the garden route area of South Africa, a location we visit regularly, my wife Mary and I decided rather than flying back directly to UK, to make a three day trip to Victoria Falls.

We travelled on Mary's birthday and were pleasantly surprised to be upgraded, to business class, on the Comair flight. Victoria Falls Airport is a relatively new airport, built by Chinese Exim bank funds, situated 18 km from the Victoria Falls. We obtained our Zimbabwe visas on arrival, collected our luggage and were at the Victoria Falls Hotel about an hour after landing.

The Victoria Falls Hotel is an old colonial hotel built over a century ago. It is sprawled over several acres, and has the most attentive staff (plus a few wild monkeys) of any hotel I have ever visited. We were upgraded to executive rooms, thanks (I suspect) to John having met the hotel general manager at the World Travel Market in London, last November.



Unlike several of the younger arriving guests, we didn't rush off to the Falls that afternoon. We enjoyed British style 'afternoon tea' and several hours later had a formal dinner at the Livingstone room restaurant in the hotel. Wonderful food, wine, service and resident pianist.

The following morning, after breakfast in the semi-open thatched roof dining complex, we headed for the falls proper (walking distance). The turnstile entrance to the Victoria Falls Park was rather 'third world'. There was a complicated range of charges, depending on your passport. There were tourists from all over the world at Vic Falls, however not in huge numbers.

The falls were a 10 minute stroll from the park entrance. For us a definite stroll....35 degrees centigrade at 11 am. There are 15 viewing points at the falls. Time needed to enjoy all locations and views.....1 hr 30 min to 2 hours. No real hassle from potential guides etc. Just tourists with bigger and better cameras!! In January the water flow is at its minimum. Hence great photos. By June, water levels will double, much more 'mist'... like a tropical rain forest.



We embarked on two other tours at Victoria Falls; an evening dinner steam train ride across the bridge into Zambia, which gave another viewing aspect of the falls, and an evening dinner cruise on the Zambesi river. The cruise was wonderful....good food and drink ...multiple sightings of crocodiles and hippo's.

Being OAP's, we did not attempt the various bungee jumping opportunities. Not being helicopter fans, we avoided those popular Victoria Falls viewing trips also. Because we have been on several safaris in South Africa, the safaris available around Vic Falls were not on our priority list.



Neither were the 'walking with elephants' and 'walking with lions' tours. Over the years, we have walked with elephants in South Africa so often that they now recognise us. The lions.... we simply don't trust.

Our thanks to John Coles, for his diligence, in arranging the most unforgettable three days of our lives.

Upon our departure from Victoria Falls airport, Mary was first to the lady immigration officer, who asked 'is the young man behind you, your husband?' I'm still dining out on her comment.