



Mozambique

Phil Baker reports that, after a year of challenges, Mozambique has weathered the perfect storm.

Set for take-off!

HURRICANE Dino in 2016 was perhaps the ideal metaphor for the perfect storm that hit the Mozambican economy following the accession of **President Felipe Nyusi** nearly three years ago. From being the fastest growing and most optimistic in the world, the economy collapsed.

The agricultural sector was hit by El Niño and the anticipated capital investment from the development of the Rovuma Basin gas reserves was delayed after the plunge in energy prices. The coal price fell to record lows and smouldering conflict between Frelimo and Renamo on the vital North-South highway forced some tourists to travel in armed convoys. Finally, a secret \$2bn (R26bn) government debt was exposed, crushing investor confidence.

Corporate business that had sustained the boom in hotel business in Maputo for seven years collapsed almost overnight. Inflation rocketed to 25% pa, and the metical almost halved in value.

In the leisure sector, occupancy levels, already suffering from reputational fear from the armed conflict and high costs, plummeted; then the tourism Mecca of Tofo/Inhambane was hit by

Hurricane Dino last year, which flattened facilities.

In addition, the South African overland market was affected for a year by roadworks between Nelspruit and Maputo, and unfavourable exchange rates, high airfares and social media reports of police harassment of visitors did their damage. Many lodges dived to unprecedented zero occupancy levels.

Now in mid-2017 all evidence suggests that the thaw has finally come and spring is in the air once again. In Maputo, stakeholders interviewed by *TNW* were upbeat about the future, reporting double-digit growth in both enquiries and occupancy.

Recently completed infrastructure in terms of new hotels, motorways, airports, bridges, conferencing, airlift and visa simplification is all in readiness for the anticipated surge in business and leisure visitor volumes.

Vasco Manhiça, president of the Hotels Association of Southern Mozambique, says: "It is no secret that the past two years have been very difficult for Mozambique. In some months 40% occupancy among our members would have been a result to be proud of." This comes from an

association where occupancy levels of 80-90% were considered the norm only a few years previously. Now, he notes a broad upswing in occupancy of more than 20% this year across the market and expects better to come.

Although the effect of the newly implemented visa regulations – which now allow visitors from any country (whether or not they have a Mozambique consulate) to obtain a double-entry visa at any point of entry into the country – has yet to be felt, he hopes that they will boost the MICE ambitions of Maputo in particular. Returning from the recent Retosa conference in South Africa, he says there is still optimism for the introduction of a SADC uniform visa in the near future.

Vasco hopes that "the opening of the Maputo-Katembe suspension bridge – billed as the largest in Africa



"We are expecting strong growth from the route during the latter part of this year."
Thobi Duma

– at the end of this year will be a complete game-changer, stimulating leisure and business traffic from KZN and Swaziland, enabling trans-border events and activities and bringing Durban to just a few hours' drive from Maputo".

Thobi Duma, country manager Mozambique of SAA, agrees. "We are experiencing more and more full flights between Maputo and Johannesburg

and have supported the route by introducing a new special fare of R3 130 return, including taxes (G class). We are expecting strong growth from the route during the latter part of this year." SAA operates three flights a day between Johannesburg and Maputo.

Airlift reliability, licensing and cost have been key to this turnaround. During 2017, LAM, the national carrier, was

re-awarded its overflying rights to the EU.

Having built completely new state-of-the-art airports in Maputo, Nampula and Vilanculos over the past four years, Mozambique's Ministry of Transport and Communications says the country will conclude the process of certificating the international airports in Maputo, Beira and Nampula this year to comply with international civil aviation rules, confirmed Minister of Transport and Communications, **Carlos Mesquita**.

In August, the Mozambican Civil Aviation Institute issued a tender open to all airlines on all domestic routes. President **João de Abreu** said LAM, MEX, Ethiopian Airlines, Malawi Airlines and other entities had expressed interest.

SA Airlink has also shown confidence in leisure and business destinations, increasing its service to Vilanculos from both OR Tambo and Nelspruit from three times a week to daily.

Airlink also flies direct to Tete, Pemba and the newly built Nampula International Airport, anticipating the international corporate business upturn.

Business hotels confident

THE Tsogo Sun Group is set to become the biggest hotel investor in Mozambique this coming year.

This follows the extension and upscaling of its flagship Southern Sun Maputo in 2014 to 269 rooms, the opening of Tete Ferry Sun in May (143 rooms), and the scheduled opening of StayEasy Maputo (125 rooms) first quarter of 2018.

Bruce Chapman, general

manager of Southern Sun Maputo says: "We have great confidence in the Mozambican economy returning to strong growth not only in the corporate sector driven by the extractive industries and associated logistics, but also from the leisure market where our arts, music, heritage and cuisine augment the uniquely pristine 2 600km of pristine coastline."

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Maputo for MICE

"THIS year has been our busiest ever in terms of both enquiries and bookings with renewed strong growth in corporate travel," says **Natalie Tenzer Silva**, md of Dana Tours. "Whilst Maputo remains the centre for MICE business, regional cities such as Pemba, Quelimane, Inhambane and Tete have also demonstrated strong upswings in corporate travel and we are experiencing a resumption in interest from the voluntourism market, which is attracted to the safety and beauty of this fast-developing nation."

MICE and corporate travel remain the keystone to Mozambican tourism and the country has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in new infrastructure; new airports, roads, bridges and four- and five-star bednights to attract a growing number of conferences and international meetings.

"We are now in a position to attract conferences of 2 000-3 000 delegates comfortably," Natalie comments. "The beauty of Maputo is its compact size, and our new 'MICE-Zone' around the Joachim Chissano International Convention Centre means we have 1 000 four- and five-star beds adjacent to the conference centre and a further 2 000 within 15

minutes' transfer time." This suits the logistics of organisers very well. In addition, the adjacent hotels boast plentiful satellite halls, symposium rooms and meeting rooms as well as banqueting facilities, enhancing flexibility.

Liane Venter, director of Africa Stay, comments: "Last year's lata un-banning of the national airline LAM was a considerable boon for corporate travel, which has suffered since the oil price slump two years ago. Within MICE, the incentives business is looking very promising now."

In addition to the conferencing facilities in Maputo she notes that new five-star, all-inclusive coastal resorts such as Anantara Bazaruto and Plan Hotel's

Diamonds Mequfi Resort near Pemba make incentive packages much easier to market to groups of up to 50 people.

Liane says deep-sea sport fishing, for example on the Lazarus Banks near the Quirimbas Archipelago, and diving off Tofo and Vilanculos, are what set Mozambique apart, giving it a globally superior offering. "Medjumbe in the Quirimbas has to be the best example of barefoot luxury I have ever experienced."

She says logistics in Mozambique are challenging, especially in terms of internal air links, and recommends using local operators familiar with the systems and timetables to smooth itineraries and effect timely payments.



Traditional dhow sailing at Anantara Medjumbe Island Resort.

Mozambique



Coral Lodge, one of Mozambique's new resorts. Photo: Coral Lodge

Secluded beaches and excellent diving

LAURA Parry, md of Mozambique GSA, believes people are unfamiliar with Mozambique's full offering. "Everyone has heard of Ponta do Oura, Inhambane/Tofo, and maybe the Bazaruto Islands. But Mozambique actually has a whole lot more to offer," she says, referring in particular to islands in the Quirimbas Archipelago that are incredibly beautiful and unspoilt.

"Unfortunately, the perception is that, because Mozambique is on our doorstep, prices for flights and accommodation should be cheap. What is forgotten is that the experience is something quite unique! The best of Mozambique is about secluded, pristine beaches and aquamarine sea, with excellent diving, snorkelling and really getting back to nature – without the crowds. There is naturally a price to pay for this experience."

Not many South Africans think to travel to the more northern areas, like Ilha de

Moçambique in Nampula Province, the original capital of the country and a Unesco World Heritage Site. This tiny little island is just three kilometres long and 500m wide, with a 3km-long bridge connecting it to the mainland. It has museums and forts and cobbled streets with tiny restaurants and accommodation options. One of the newer offerings is Coral Lodge, now under new ownership and just a 30-minute transfer by motorised dhow from Ilha de Moçambique.

Also in Nampula is Ossimba Beach Lodge, an eco-resort run totally on solar power.

"Of course, we still offer all the top island resorts in the Bazaruto area as well. This area remains very popular. The town of Vilankulo is also thriving; there are now quite a few tuk-tuks to ferry tourists around to the market or to lunch at different resorts or restaurants in the area," says Laura.



Mozambique

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Mozambique

WLH to expand Moz footprint

KEEP an eye out for news of World Leisure Holidays new product in Mozambique. Says marketing manager, **Cathie Bester**: "Although World Leisure Holidays has a small footprint in the Mozambique market, we are looking at expanding our portfolio with select, bespoke product."

World Leisure Holidays is currently marketing

the five-star Diamonds Mequfi Beach Resort on the southern peninsula of Pemba. The small exclusive resort has 50 rooms. It is operated on an all-inclusive basis and guests receive very personalised attention and service. It is part of the Plan Hospitality Group that World Leisure Holidays promotes and sells. Plan Hospitality also has properties in Zanzibar.

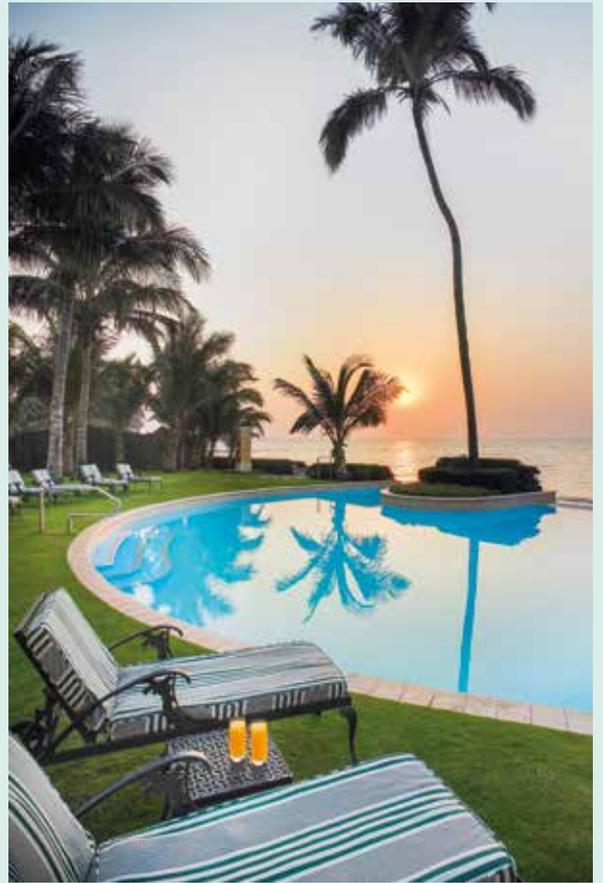


Diamonds Mequfi is an exclusive five-star resort.
Photo: Diamonds Mequifi Resort

Offer clients a 'bleisure' break in Maputo

Bruce Chapman, gm of Southern Sun Maputo, has devised a great offer for his regular corporate clients who want to add a weekend of leisure to their business visit. Spouses can fly in on a Friday or Saturday and the pair can enjoy a fun weekend in Maputo, sunning themselves on the beach or at the pool, enjoying prawns and beer, taking a cultural tour around Maputo and then sampling the nightlife at a jazz club.

The hotel will charge only US\$20 (R264) per night for the spouse's accommodation on the weekend, including breakfast! This offer is valid until the end of March 2018. Combine it with SAA's special offer of return fares from only R3 071 (incl. taxes) between Johannesburg and Maputo, valid till end March 2018, and you have a winning offer. To take up this offer, email Carla.Fernandes@tsogosun.com.



Infinite views at the Southern Sun Maputo.
Photo: Southern Sun Maputo



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Mozambique

Pomene Bay is situated on a pristine estuary.

Pomene now on MSC routes

THE 2017/18 season sees MSC Cruises' new Mozambique destination, Pomene Bay, being added to the itinerary, where the company has invested in Pomene Bay Lodge.

This tranquil and idyllic location is in a remote and, as yet, undeveloped part of Mozambique. The white sandy beaches and estuary provide relaxation points with many fun activities arranged around both areas.

"The developments on Pomene Bay will mirror the sublime offerings that

guests experience on board as well as taking into consideration the considerable natural beauty that Pomene has to offer," says **Ingrid Roding-Tudor**, marketing manager of MSC Cruises.

The lodge's existing restaurant, bar, and sunset pool will be upgraded and extended, while additions will include bars and restaurant dining decks, plus a spa for ultimate relaxation.

Ingrid says there has been substantial investment

over the last four years to enhance guest experiences. These include a buffet area; kiddies' and fun zones; additional shore excursions such as snorkelling at Santa Maria; an exclusive beach lounge for guests who want to be away from the crowds, with sun beds, umbrellas, and a dedicated bar service; and extra shading on the beach.

With the island a nature reserve, MSC has ensured that all development is in line with strict eco guidelines.

Manta rays, year round

MOZAMBIQUE is one of few places on the planet where you can dive with manta rays and whale sharks all year around, says **Carlos Macuacua** of MozPlunge Diving tours, which offers PADI training and underwater filming.

"What makes Mozambique the perfect diving destination is the combination of friendly people, good food, long coastline with beautiful sandy beaches and an

abundance of underwater inhabitants such as manta rays, whale sharks, marine turtles, stingrays, dolphins, and many different species of sharks and game fish," he says.

"The marine reserves established in Mozambique and conservation activities that are carried on by several local organisations and NGOs, help to attract more tourists to come and explore the Mozambique underwater landscape."



Tofo Bay reef. Photo: flickr.com

To the point



SAA's Via lounge in Maputo, its first outside South Africa, is a joint venture with Barclays Bank. The newly refurbished lounge offers free entry to business class, Voyager Platinum and Silver card holders, while other SAA passengers pay US\$29,60 (R380). Light food is available and there are charging points for laptops and phones, plus free WiFi. ■

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Return flights from Johannesburg, approximate airport taxes, return transfers & accommodation with meal plan as indicated (BB = breakfast, HB = breakfast & dinner, AI = all meals and selected drinks). Relevant free nights & early bird deals included. Prices are per person sharing and subject to currency fluctuations & block out periods. Peak season supplements may apply to hotel & airlines. Prices correct at time of princ. Valid for SA Residents only. Packages are subject to availability at the time of the reservation. T&C apply. E&OE. **Contact us on: 011 592 9000 | Email: sales@africastay.com | www.africastay.com**