

US vacation ownership conference looks at 'opportunity in adversity'

THE 2009 Vacation Ownership Investment Conference (VOIC) held at the Peabody Orlando in Orlando, Florida, US, last month was the 11th annual VOIC event, covering topics of time-share development, project financing, industry branding, resort management, and vacation ownership marketing and selling.

The theme for this year's conference was opportunity in adversity, says Mac van der Merwe, CE of Zorgvliet Private Residence Club (ZPRC), which includes Zorgvliet Wine Estate, the Riviera on Vaal Hotel and Country Club, King George Hotel, Ka'Ingo Private Game Reserve and Dinkweng Safari Camp.

"The consensus is that world

economy, leisure drivers are all still in the red. If you just wait for things to turn around, you won't be there when they do. Marketing in all spectrums of the leisure industry has changed, and innovative tactics are required for success. At the same time, all speakers and opinion formers still regard a credible client database and follow-up of these as the most important element of the enterprise value of any retail service provider.

"Flat management structures are very apparent and, even in the mid-size companies, management is at the forefront of daily sales actions, interacting with and assuring consumers. The ivory tower no longer

exists. The 'virtual' management style is deemed a dinosaur; managers saying that they need not be leading by example will be exposed in the new testing environment."

Van der Merwe says interest in the 2010 World Cup as a tourism-driver event is high on the "go to South Africa agenda".

"To put it into perspective, you must appreciate that next to the Olympics the soccer world cup is the biggest sporting event in the world. An expected 400 000 visitors will watch the games in South Africa – but more important, an expected 600 000 additional football tourists will come to South Africa without tickets for any matches and still look

for accommodation. Historic markets such as England will be paramount since England recently qualified for the finals. Mexico and the US have good chances to do so as well.

"It was reported that in a recent study in the US, four percent of consumers indicated that they wanted to visit South Africa in the near future. Although far behind Europe as a preferred destination, this is still a large number of potential visitors. More than 60 percent of Americans in the higher-income brackets buy vacation ownership and are interested in experience holidays.

"A very interesting development is the addressing of cost structures

by all vacation ownership operators. Marketing and sales expenses are being cut by more than 50 percent. New ways of selling and cutting out parties not adding real value to the consumer is the norm – to the benefit of the buyer. Above all, it was agreed that it is a buyer's market at the moment... buyers will get more for less."

He says ZPRC is developing various global alliances which will benefit the group beyond the World Cup, and will be announced shortly. Van der Merwe has been invited to participate in a number of international meetings between now and the end of December, including Second Home International in Brussels,

Shorex in Geneva (speaker) and a panel discussion slot at a meeting of the Resort Development Association in London. A major feature of ZPRC is its emphasis on conservation and singular experiences, for example hands-on involvement in conservation where owners get up close and personal with the Big Five, or help create their own wines. Van der Merwe is in discussion with like-minded global players on responsible tourism packages and associated green facilities with conservation.

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