

# LANSERIA CLINCHES ST. HELENA AIRPORT MANAGEMENT CONTRACT

By Hilka Birns

**S**OUTH AFRICA'S Lanseria Management Company (LMC), which operates Johannesburg's Lanseria International Airport, has won the tender to manage a £250-million (R3,3-billion) new airport being constructed on St. Helena island, according to LMC spokesperson, Claudette Vianello.

After centuries of isolation when it was only accessible by sea, the South Atlantic Ocean island has begun constructing the new airport that will catapult the British-owned territory into the 21<sup>st</sup> century when the first flights arrive in early 2016.

The new development is to transform the island's economy by stimulating tourism and investment in a wide range of supporting business sectors.

The UK Government is financing the project and South African construction firm, Basil Read, has won the tender to build it. Initial construction plans have been amended to allow for a longer runway that will now accommodate B737-800 and A320 aircraft.

St. Helena commercial representative, Adam Kossowski, says Lanseria International Airport will be the main air access point to the island. The plan is for a principal carrier to fly weekly scheduled flights between Lanseria and St. Helena, increasing to four or five services a week by 2022.

So far, three airlines have expressed interest in serving the route. Strong interest for charter flights has also been received from Namibia, Angola, the UK and the USA, while there has been interest from Brazil to serve the island *en-route* to Asia.

Once the airport opens, says Kossowski, the plan is to attract a limited number of wealthy visitors to the island. Flights from Lanseria are expected to cost around £600 (R7 800) return in economy class and hotel accommodation will be pegged at around £150 (R1 950) a day. Tourist numbers will be capped at 30 000 a year or 500 to 900 visitors a week.

Land development will be controlled in line with a strategic development plan aimed at preserving the territory's unique environment, culture and heritage; and creating sustainable business opportunities for the 4 000-strong population.

The island is looking to develop two

cornerstone resorts and a range of smaller hotels, guesthouses and self-catering accommodation. Kossowski added that the St. Helena Leisure Corporation (SHELCo) and the Oberoi Hotels and Resorts Group have received permission to build what he called "the world's greenest" flagship resort on St. Helena, including 88 suites, 164 self-catering units, a spa and 18-hole golf course.

A second resort site has been earmarked and discussions are underway with boutique hotel operators. Talks are also being held for the establishment of a hospitality school.

Kossowski said berthing facilities may be extended for fly-cruise opportunities depending on demand. The *RMS St. Helena* – one of the world's last Royal Mail ships that regularly shuttles between Cape Town and St. Helena – will be retired after the airport is completed, or it may be sold to private investors and continue to function as a cargo ship serving the island.

Enterprise St. Helena, a non-governmental organisation overseeing the economic development of the island, said the island recently revised its investment policy to facilitate investment in the following fields: tourism and hospitality; property; professional services; information technology; "green" initiatives; the fishing industry; agriculture; coffee production; and construction. In addition, the St. Helena Government is reducing its public sector footprint, opening up investment opportunities in public utilities, transport, property and grounds maintenance and catering services. There is no restriction on non-residents owning freehold land.

Meanwhile, the island's tourism representatives have urged tourists to visit the island on the *RMS St. Helena* before it changes. Having been one of the most remote places on earth, St. Helena is best known for the exile there of Napoleon Bonaparte, who also died there; and the exile of 6 000 Anglo-Boer War prisoners and Zulu chief Dinizulu.

During the abolition of slavery, slave ships were brought there and the slaves freed. St. Helena has a sub-tropical climate, 10 species of endemic fish, as well as Jonathan the tortoise, at 180 years thought to be the oldest animal on earth! →