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Taxi industry takes to the skies

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Johannesburg - The SA National Taxi Council (Santaco) is launching a low-cost airline, it said on Wednesday.

"I can see some of you rolling your eyes because of how our taxi drivers drive... I can assure you we won't allow our taxi drivers to drive [the planes]," Santaco business development officer Nkululeko Buthelezi told potential investors and reporters in Johannesburg.

The Santaco Express would be officially launched on September 16 and would take to the skies by November, he said.

Buthelezi said Santaco was looking at routes such as Lanseria to Bhisho, which made sense for its customers who often made a 14-hour road trip for a funeral only to return five hours later.

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'City in a bush'

Santaco Express would initially operate one or two flights a day between Lanseria in Gauteng to Bhisho in the Eastern Cape, and then on to the Cape Town International Airport.

It would be operated by Air Aquarius, which works with SA Express and SA Airlink. Air Aquarius would supply 100-seater aircraft, crew and the necessary aviation licences.

Santaco president AJ Mthembu said the aviation model would work as commuters would be taken from the taxi rank to the airport, then transported to a taxi rank at their destination.

"Our potential is to make a bush into a city," he said, explaining that the airline would focus on regional airports.

"We specialise in awkward areas because that's where our business is."

One price for everything

Mthembu said the cost of the ticket - from taxi rank to rank - had yet to be finalised, but Santaco was looking at between R500 and R600.

"We will be building everything into one price in the affordable sector," he said.

The airline would undertake a dry run on September 16, when Santaco would fly members from Lanseria to Durban for its 10th anniversary celebration.

It would open ticket sales immediately after this, with the first commercial flights late in November just in time for the heavy December holiday traffic, Buthelezi said.

Air Aquarius would hand over skills to Santaco and in 18 to 24 months, the taxi association expected to take over the aviation operation, he said.

- SAPA

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Sunday	11-15°C	Scattered showers. Afternoon clouds. Cool.
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