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MALTA

WHERE MEETINGS HAVE A SPIRIT



Malta

Where meetings have a spirit

A gullet

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Malta... Most people know it's an island in the Mediterranean and might recall images of knights, but would you have imagined that some parts of Malta are so authentic that many movies were shot there, or that some of the oldest remains of human civilisation are to be found on the island? But that doesn't mean this country is stuck in the past. The contemporary hotels, shopping and entertainment facilities form a perfect addition to Malta's rich culture. Two other assets: a Mediterranean climate with 300 days of sunshine a year which brings out the honey colour of the Island's typical limestone, and English is the second language, which is convenient for international groups.

REPORT STEVEN KINS

The Maltese language reflects the history of this island state and so do the culture and the gastronomy. It's partly semetic, but not really, it's also Mediterranean. Its strategic location remained of the utmost importance until the invention of the nuclear bomb. If you didn't have Malta under your control, you couldn't control the Mediterranean Sea. It was said that he who had Malta and had the capacity to watch over the territory, could control the whole commerce between Europe and Asia. Malta may never have been the most important island in the region, it was definitely more important than its size might lead you to think. The islands are further south than Tunis and still they belong

to the European Union, a rather particular situation. In spite of all the turmoil it has seen in all those years and the independence from the United Kingdom in 1964 it's economically and politically stable now, which is really important for the tourist sector, currently the primary industry of Malta.

This rich history makes sure that groups of any kind can have their event in one of the historic places on Malta. Smaller groups can go to one of the many small palaces left behind by the knights, while larger groups can set up a marquee on the quays, at **Villa Bighi** or at **the Graineries**, for instance.

In 1566 the **Knights of St John** wanted to build the strongest city and so **Valletta** was created, one of the largest inhabited fortresses. At that time Malta was a poor island, and the rock had to be quarried to build this huge project. Here we also have one of the

this space for your outdoor events. 'Imagine a cocktail reception in the evening with all those lights on the other side,' says **Paul Seelis** of **On Site Malta**. 'Or let each part of your group paint a different part of the harbour and connect all the paintings afterwards.

An arrival with the local gondolas, called *daghjsa*, would be perfect. All of this is open to smaller groups too because a little further you have the **Lower Barrakka Gardens...**

Fort Ricasoli is another testament to the military history of Malta but it was also the setting of famous movies like **Troy** and **Gladiator**. If you have filmstar aspirations, you can get some inspiration here. **Fort St Angelo** is a similar example: this medieval fortress is now partly owned by the Order of the Knights of St John, while the other part houses the Maritime Museum.

To become a member of the Order of St John one had to be able to prove noble descent going back to at least four generations. After all, you had to defend the Christian faith. Being that wealthy, the members of the Order left behind numerous palaces, parks and churches.

St John's Co-Cathedral is impressive with its rather plain exterior that clashes perfectly with its stunning interior, and it's a perfect location to include in treasure hunts or CSI Malta events. Even an exclusive evening concert is also popular. The knights come from the richest families so they could afford the best artists like **Caravaggio** and **Preti**, the finest mosaics, and gilded walls.

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Malta's rich history makes sure that groups of any kind can have their event in one of the historic locations

largest natural ports in the Mediterranean. The city could only be reached from one direction over land, so the lovely little town of **Floriana** was built to serve as an 'airbag' for Valletta. Our guide assured us: 'I could show you around town for two days and you wouldn't get bored, I can also give you a good impression in only one hour. That's how compact and interesting Valletta is, and you can't get lost thanks to the logical street pattern.' From the beautiful **Upper Barrakka Gardens** you have a wonderful view over the **Grand Harbour** and what's even better: you can use



Nadine Brincat,
MICE Manager of Malta Tourism Authority

Malta Tourism Authority

We let **Nadine Brincat**, **MICE Manager of Malta Tourism Authority** explain a bit more about the island: 'Apart from tourism, banking and even IT are important industries on the island. Construction works on the **SmartCity** have already begun. This is a satellite project from Dubai and by 2010 this self-sustained township for knowledge-based industries should be ready. We're also very proud of our local wines and beers.

'It's really encouraging to see the government's interest in tourism and this is an advantage for companies that hold their events here because we make that extra effort to make something happen. Malta has a lot of events too, in the theatres for example, like **Teatru Manoel** or **St James Cavalier**. You won't get bored easily. And culture doesn't have to be boring: for instance, I took the tour about the courtesans in Valletta and I've learned a lot of fun trivia about this hidden aspect of history.'



Air Malta info

Air Malta operates a modern fleet of aircraft to over 50 destinations in Europe, North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean, with 200 flights a week. Major airports include Amsterdam, Paris, Milan, London, Brussels and Berlin. **www.airmalta.com**

Piazza



© Visitmalta.com

© On Site Malta



Venues

Take your event to charming palazzos, converted traditional farmhouses, or other prestigious historical buildings that have been refurbished to suit modern standards. These venues give your guests a taste of our history, and this can be further developed by including a medieval banquet, complete with actors, entertainers and musicians in period costume, or even with falcons from the Malta Falconry Centry. But don't be afraid to take your special events out of doors to piazzas (town squares), bastions, gardens or beaches.

In the **Mediterranean Conference Centre** the VIP rooms have been refurbished but clearly it hasn't lost its soul. Not only is this a very popular location for (inter) national productions, it's also an imposing historic setting where you can create a unique and prestigious atmosphere. The long main ward was destroyed in World War II, then it became the police headquarters, before it was renovated after 100 days of working in 1979. During the Commonwealth conference, 56 heads of state attended meetings here. This year, the MCC marks the 30th anniversary since its conversion into a conference centre way back in 1979. While the spectacular La Vallette Hall holds dinners up to 900 guests the MCC can cater for conferences ranging from 2 persons up to 1400, and all meeting rooms are equipped with Simultaneous Interpretation facilities.

Palazzo Parisio is one of Malta's great stately homes, built by Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena in the heart of the village of Naxxar and is often described as a miniature Versailles. Ongoing investments keep this palace very much up-to-date - just look at the stunning Luna Lounge Cocktail Bar where you can start your evening with aperitivo and canapés or enjoy a post prandial night cap and Dinner at Luna di Sera the evening-only bijoux restaurant with an emphasis on

contemporary Mediterranean-influenced cuisine.

The value of **Casa Rocca Piccola** lies in its ability to provide unique historical evidence into the customs and traditions of the Maltese nobility over the last 400 years. You can also see a collection of furniture, silver and paintings that add to the aesthetic riches of this country. The particularity about this old house is that the noble Maltese family still lives here, but still you can organize your tea time in the garden.

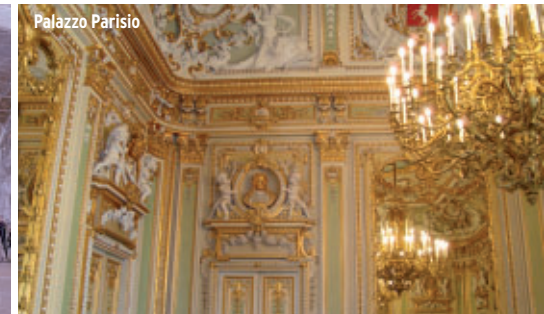
Take your guests to the **Teatru Manoel** where a soprano will teach them to sing, or a comic will get them laughing. It's an authentic 300-year-old theatre but after the recent renovation works it's a real jewel inside. The complex houses a nice underground Sicilian restaurant and cafeteria as well.



Manoel Theatre



La Vallette Hall



Palazzo Parisio



Casa Rocca Piccola

Hotels

The different hotels in Malta present a common front to welcome large groups. The ones presented here are all 5* except when otherwise mentioned. Most of them are on the waterfront and have private jetties. Estelle Borg of Corinthia Hotels suggested: 'Let someone bring the luggage to the hotel while you take your group for a harbour cruise on a Turkish gullet to get a taste of the island, and have the check-in outside of the hotel when you arrive at our jetty. You only need to use a coach to get back to the airport. Otherwise you can take the speed boat to Gozo, or a typical fishing boat - a luzzu - to a fish restaurant. What's also great is that the government lets us use historic places for events.'



Excelsior - view on terrace, pool and harbour

The Intercontinental Malta is a large contemporary hotel in St Julian's and has its own sandy beach just outside the hotel. All guests in the 451 spacious rooms can enjoy the different styles of restaurants and bars. Groups with access to the Club Lounge have the privilege of a private check-in and a champagne breakfast. Recreation is assured by the heated indoor pool, sauna, steam room, beauty studio and large fitness area, while meetings and events can take place in the 23 meeting rooms, the Eden Arena with a capacity of 1,100 seated for a gala dinner, a purpose-built auditorium with a capacity of 300, or the main ballroom which seats 770 in theatre style. The first Corinthia hotel was the **Corinthia Palace Hotel & Spa**, a boutique hotel in the centre of Malta and the jewel in the crown of the three properties. Here it's all about warmth, personal attention, and old fashioned elegance. This is where the

entourage of the British queen stayed. Corinthia Beach Resort has the most recently renovated 5* hotel in Malta which was also the first 5* in the Golden Mile, the Corinthia Hotel St. George's Bay, but also has the adjacent Marina Hotel at the **Corinthia Beach Resort**. The resort has 6 outdoor pools and a private beach, but above all, there's a historic tower right in the middle of it. All meeting spaces are on one floor and both hotels have direct access. One single contact person, an events assistant, is available 24/7. The **Hilton Malta** is the flagship of the brand in Europe and has 404 rooms in Mediterranean style at the marina harbour in the Portomaso waterfront development. Its adjacent Conference Centre can cater for up to 1,428 delegates. The award winning marina is great a platform for various leisure and water sports activities. **The Grand Hotel Excelsior**, Malta, is a



Hilton Malta



Palace Music Suite

newly reconstructed 439-room resort situated within the sixteenth century fortifications of Valletta and offers breathtaking sea views. Facilities include a private marina, large outdoor and indoor pools, health & beauty centre, 7 food and beverage outlets and versatile conference

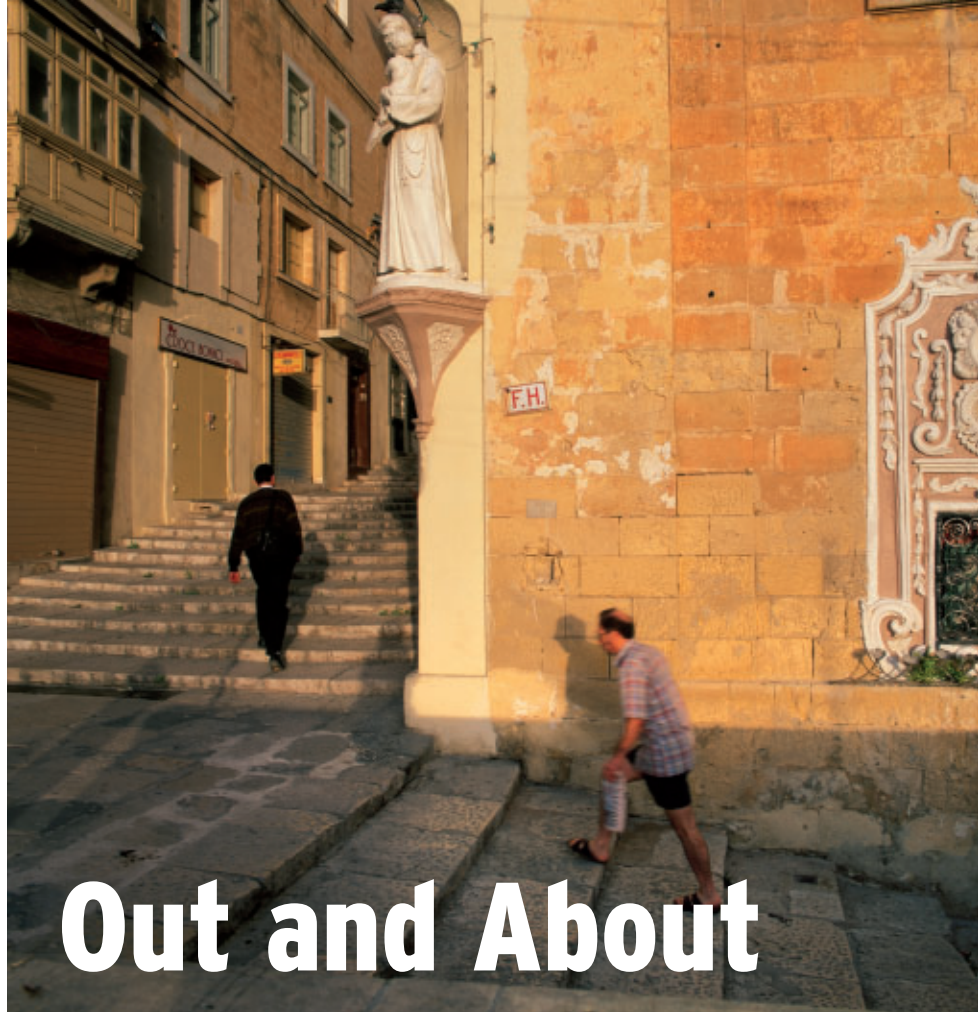
& banqueting facilities for up to 2400 guests. The famous thinker Edward de Bono, the originator of the concept of lateral thinking, offers strategic workshops for groups here.

Radisson SAS Bay Point Resort in St Julian's is a flexible hotel with nine breakout rooms. The consistency in the quality of food and beverage - thanks to its caterers - make it a one-stop-shop for all events. All rooms in this somewhat smaller property enjoy a seaview.

Radisson SAS Golden Sands Resort lies in the more quiet northwest of Malta which means that people won't go off for some unexpected free time, so a perfect networking atmosphere is automatically created. There are also no buildings around the resort, something which is very rare on this island. One third of the beach is property of the Radisson and this is a good spot for a Bedouin setup. The Myo Ka Spa lets everyone relax during a specialist treatment.

The former summer resort of the family who owns the Palazzo Parisio has been transformed into a Casino, which is situated nearby the **Westin Dragonara Resort**, with a large piece of land offering ample event opportunities and a total of 340 rooms. Other assets are its conference centre (with all meeting rooms on one floor), a private beach club, a large gym and indoor pool, rooms with seaview that are the largest standard bedrooms on the island, and its 29 suites. Thanks to its history this classic colonial building has its own private beaches that can offer the possibility for bedouin-style events.

In search for a large boutique hotel? The designer concept of **The Palace Malta, Palazzo Capua** and the differently styled 4* **Victoria Hotel** might seduce you. At only two minutes from beach and shopping areas these three adjoining properties share their facilities including a selection of restaurants, a spa and wellness centre, an indoor and outdoor pool, sauna and steam baths. Admire the detail in the six spacious Designer Suites that are inspired by the senses, and play drums in the Music Suite for instance. Privatizing a gazebo in the TemptAsian Pool Terrace and enjoying the beautiful view over Sliema is another good tip. The original antiques in the restored Palazzo Capua help to retain the richness of the property. This is also visible in the combination of old and new elements in the five themed



Out and About

There are many ways to get around the island or to go to one of the sister islands but some of the most impressive ones are with the water plane, the old Maltese buses, or typical boats, because there's more to Malta than only Valletta. Luckily, distances are really short when you're on an island of this size.

Mdina

Malta's ancient capital, prior to the arrival of the Knights of Malta, and also a colonial settlement of Imperial Rome. The fortified medieval town of Mdina has been nicknamed The Silent City. The St Paul's Cathedral forms a fantastic backdrop in this Baroque city if you hold an event on the town square. The **Mdina** is the best restaurant here and they also cater for groups. The Xara Palace, the most exclusive boutique hotel of Malta and a member of the prestigious Relais & Châteaux, is the place to be if you want a posh dinner - this is what you call '*non plus ultra*'.

The Three Cities

These small cities overlooking the Grand Harbour go by the names of **Cospicua**, **Senglea** and **Vittoriosa**, and are enclosed

by the massive line of fortification created by the Knights of St. John, the Cottonera Lines. They are popularly known as **the Three Cities**, a term which was first used during the French occupation, when Napoleon decreed that Malta was to be divided into a number of administrative units. The Safe Haven Gardens of Senglea can be privatized and offer an impressive view over the harbour, Valletta, and Vittoriosa.

Vittoriosa used to be called Birgu but received its name from Grand Master La Valette because of its strategic location. The Maritime Museum in Vittoriosa charts Malta's maritime history and lore within a Mediterranean context and also illustrates the global nature of seafaring and its impact on society. The Museum is housed in the former British Naval Bakery. The Inquisitor's Palace is now



Safe Haven Gardens of Senglea



Limestone Heritage



Casino di Venezia



Maritime Museum



Mdina



Fishing village Marsaxlokk

home to the museum of Ethnography but is still a great example of a 16th century palace. The terrace of the Venezia restaurant of the Casino di Venezia has a marvellous view over the marina and is available for events.

Gastronomy

The Mediterranean influences in the Maltese cuisine are quite obvious but there are a lot of local dishes, often based on seafood. We had lunch in the **Malata Restaurant** in Valletta. Go downstairs to enter and you're welcomed into a special atmosphere thanks

The pre-historic temples in Malta date back to around 5,000 BC and are even older than Stonehenge

to the authentic underground effect and the many caricatures of public figures who went here to eat. On top of that, the Mediterranean menu tastes deliciously fresh. Equally

fresh were the seafood and meat dishes at the **Riviera della Marina** on the Vittoriosa Waterfront. The sympathetic owner of this new property makes perfect suggestions and obviously knows where to buy his ingredients.

Heritage

The pre-historic temples in Malta, **Mnajdra** and **Hagar Qim**, are UNESCO World Heritage Sites dating back to around 5,000 BC and are the oldest manmade freestanding temples in the world - older than Stonehenge and the pyramids. This might just be the inspiration your seminar or event needs.

The Limestone Heritage in Siggiewi creates the complete image about the honey-coloured stone with which almost everything is built in Malta. Conveniently this museum is set in an old quarry. Only two minutes away is the **Malta Falconry Centre**. Everyone's heard of the Maltese Falcon, made famous by the author Dashiell Hammett, and now you can meet and touch the real birds. It's even possible to bring some of the birds to an event elsewhere in Malta. Our message to the big guy in the group: don't show you're afraid of those

Gozo Malta's little sister

MTA Gozo Segment Head Ms **Maryanne Portanier** told us so passionately about her small island that we were completely

sold. Gozo, which means 'joy' in Castilian, is situated to the north of Malta but is distinctly different. Only a 25 minute boat ride away, it emanates a calmer, less mundane atmosphere. Charming little villages, more green, and more relaxed are three characteristics. But don't think you'll

fall asleep here. 4x4 treasure trails, climbing, diving are only some of the more exciting activities at Gozo. You don't even have to get back to the main island in the evening, since Gozo has its own 4* and 5* hotels, of which the **Kempinski San Lawrenz Resort & Spa** is the most striking one. Definitely include this island in your programme!



Gozo

DMCs

On site Malta

When I asked people about Paul Selis of On Site Malta, they told me he's a little crazy but in a good way, meaning he has impressive ideas but he can make them happen. He can even organize a formula 1-style event... This Belgian has been living so long in Malta that the island has no secrets for him. Can you imagine a better guide to introduce us to Malta? I didn't think so!

Paul Selis - On Site Malta: 'During your evening event you can relive and taste, feel and see each period of the Maltese history. I feel you can't understand Malta without at least knowing a little about its history, so people learn about it in a fun and easy-going way.

'Here in Malta it's easy to give people the VIP feeling. We can arrange an airport transfer in limos with a police escort, a gala evening with Rolls Royces, take them to palaces, have a reception in the courtyard of the **Grand Master's Palace**, or meet dignitaries. As you can see, a lot is attainable.

'The Co-Cathedral in Valletta gives a big wow effect when you enter, but we want to do things that normally aren't possible, so why not organize an intimate concert there? We can set up one huge table in the old infirmary, also known as the Mediterranean Conference Centre, to let you feel

like the knights of olden days. There is so much we can do and all this in a little time frame. Exclusive lunches or dinners in the relaxing environment of Gozo offer an excellent contrast to the atmosphere on the bigger island. But we also work with film locations, since Popeye, Troy and Gladiator were shot here. The **Meridiana** vineyard is world-class and it's a great location to drive to with a group and drink afterwards. 'Another experience is getting on a Turkish gullet for a lunch, a massage and a harbour tour, or to make it a bit more playful: a can-

on fight between knights and pirates but then with slightly less harmful weapons. 'Restaurant **The Carriage** is another secret I can reveal if you want people to be impressed. It's on the top floor of an office building and offers a spectacular view over Valletta and over the sea. In one day you can start with some culture in Valletta, take speed boats to Gozo, go for a 4x4 raid and dine on the ship back to Malta. 'In Malta you can go from one wow to another and everything's only 20 minutes from your hotel!'

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