

ITCM

Incentive Travel & Corporate Meetings

March/April 2009



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Malta continues its progress as a destination

New hotels, extensions, more unusual venues and more emphasis on quality are all keeping Malta on the track to a bigger share of Europe's events business

Malta sees itself as a very central location, convenient to all countries in Europe, the Mediterranean, Africa, the Middle East and even the Far East. This assumption has been borne out in recent years by the remarkable success of its efforts to attract corporate event business.

Malta has effectively added to its family holiday business substantial revenue from business group organisers. This trend encouraged hoteliers and others to invest in more MICE facilities and these in turn attracted more events business.

Simultaneously, Air Malta expanded its network, so that there were more and more services to bring in delegates

from an increasing number of countries.

In line with the experience of all other destinations, everywhere on the globe, Malta is experiencing a slowing down of MICE business with reduced numbers attending events and some postponements of bookings.

However, MICE business is long term. Organisers are planning now for events that should be held when the world economy is on the up again. There is a rational prediction that following the recession, there will be an even greater need for catch-up conferences. More companies will need face-to-face meetings with their worldwide agents and clients in order to get things back

on the move. Incentives will play a bigger part in motivating salesforces and customers in order to maintain a share or grab a bigger share of the market when funds are flowing.

This all means – goes the logic of the MICE specialists of Malta – that now is the time to investigate what Malta can offer for the medium-term and

long-term future. They are sure that organisers will like what they see and include their facilities on shortlists for future events.

Medley of destinations

Malta is a small country but has a variety of destinations within it. There are different locations horizontally and geographically across the country, but it can also be seen as a mix vertically and historically. Malta is a wonderful layering of remarkable historical periods, all of which have left their indelible mark and all of which can add to the enrichment of any event held there.

There are prehistoric catacombs, medieval palaces and fortresses and, of



Contact details

For further information on Malta as a MICE destination, contact Marie-Anne Barthet-Brown at the Malta Tourism office in London. Phone 020-8877 6993 or email: marianne.barthetbrown@visitmalta.com

Let's meet

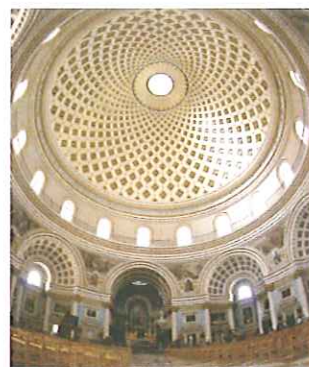


www.visitmalta.com/miceuk

Malta, Gozo & Comino

The Mediterranean's Best kept secret





course, the massive fortifications built during World War II, when the whole country earned the George Cross for outstanding bravery. It is Malta GC.

There are small islands in the harbour where the forts can now serve as corporate venues – and there is St Paul's island in the bay of the same name, where St Paul himself is said to have come ashore to survive a shipwreck on his way to convert the Europeans.

A typical example of an otherwise difficult theme to express is the Mediterranean Conference Centre in the capital, Valletta. This is one of the most remarkable and fascinating buildings anyone could wish to explore. It started life as a hospital set up



by the Knights of St John to nurse wounded soldiers to health on their way back from the Crusades in the 16thC. The original wards are still there and still in use – but not as hospital wards. They are banqueting halls and an event held there in candle-

light beneath the vaulted ceilings is always memorable.

But built over the courtyard of this historic building is an extremely modern concert hall that can seat an audience of 1,400 enjoying superb acoustics.

The ancient capital of Malta is Mdina. This is a centrally located walled city perched on the highest hill on the main island. It is a location of massive ramparts, uninterrupted views across the whole island and narrow streets hemmed in by resplendent old palaces. The streets open up into a spacious square dominated by an ornate cathedral.

Mdina was the impregnable stronghold of the Knights of St John who were at once religious and warrior-like. It is honeycombed with fascinating palaces, more of which are being transformed into event venues, restaurants and exclusive hotels.

And the whole island is dotted with castles and stately homes to which the experi-

enced local DMCs can have access for gala dinners, themed parties and private meetings.

New Quality Assurance scheme for DMCs

There are 60 DMCs in such a tiny country, but this simply bears out the amount of group business that has grown up to feed them all.

In a move to regulate this aspect of the MICE business, the Malta Tourism Authority has just introduced a Quality Assurance Scheme. As many as 18 DMCs have already earned the right to display the Quality Assured logo. They are listed on the website www.visitmalta.com/destination-management-companies.

The logo QA indicates that the DMC has a minimum of £1m Euros general liability insurance cover and that all its key suppliers have adequate cover, too. The DMC has to show that it is a financially sound company specialising in MICE services

Meet Alex Incorvaja,

the new Director of the Malta Tourist Office in London



Alex Incorvaja should be an effective interface between the UK and Malta. His mother hails from Derbyshire, his father from Malta. 'And for a couple of years', he adds, 'when I worked for Starwood in Rome, I was in the UK every two weeks.'

He is now back here, from his position as Sales & Marketing Director of InterContinental Malta, with a challenging job on his hands. 'We have to weather the storm', he accepts, 'but at the same time prepare the

ground for the time when growth returns. Events are a long time in the making, so we want to be sure that Malta has maintained a high profile on the events scene when the bookings rise again'. Unlike many other national tourism organisations, Malta has just increased its resources for promotion to the UK events market. Marie-Anne Barthet Brown continues to specialise exclusively in MICE marketing in the UK, whilst in Valletta the MICE team has had an extra person added to the two people who already specialise on this scene.

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and is a member of a recognised association.

An approved DMC must also show that its staff are provided with initial training and that their training is kept updated.

Another of the requirements is that the DMC is able to acknowledge enquiries within 24 hours and fulfils any requests for proposals within 72 hours. Another essential is that the DMC has at least one member of staff available 24 hours a day during an event.

Finally, the DMC has to have testimonials from previous clients and its local suppliers.

It is obvious that the MTA takes its responsibility very seriously and is intent on ensuring that Malta maintains a high reputation amongst its

worldwide MICE markets.

No gloom at Alpine Sterling

One DMC that has been granted the Quality Assurance approval is Alpine Sterling Conference & Incentives. Its Managing Director, Warren Zahra, is, as he says 'a South London boy' who returned to his family's origin five years ago to take over the Alpine travel business. Warren is able to be upbeat during this difficult period, because he says that Alpine is handling business albeit slightly reduced in numbers, and that there are sectors of industry that are still holding and planning events.

'There are always opportunities', he says. That could possibly be the slogan that

more companies should adopt.

'Malta', he emphasises, 'is not only central, it is neutral and therefore a level playing field for all kinds of meetings and conferences and brainstorming gatherings.' He is always keen to point out that although it is in the Euro Zone, Malta represents good value for money for the pound sterling.

Anyone from the UK getting quotes from Malta for an event will find that the value for money is still there in terms of accommodation, food and beverage, venue and transportation hire. At the end of the day even considering flight costs they will find that Malta can offer a very cost effective solution for their projects.'

About 90% of Alpine's business stems currently from Europe, of which 20% is from the UK. 'We can keep busy', says Warren, 'as we are completely flexible in what we offer. We can take on any part of the cycle of a MICE project, such as meet and greet or the organisation of a gala dinner at an unusual venue, or we can be responsible for the whole project on

a client's behalf, including flights, hotel accommodation and excursions'.

Transport within Malta is never a problem for Alpine. 'Within our group', says Warren Zahra, 'we own our own vehicles of every kind required, from taxis and limousines to 10-seater minibuses and 30- or 53-seater air-conditioned coaches.'

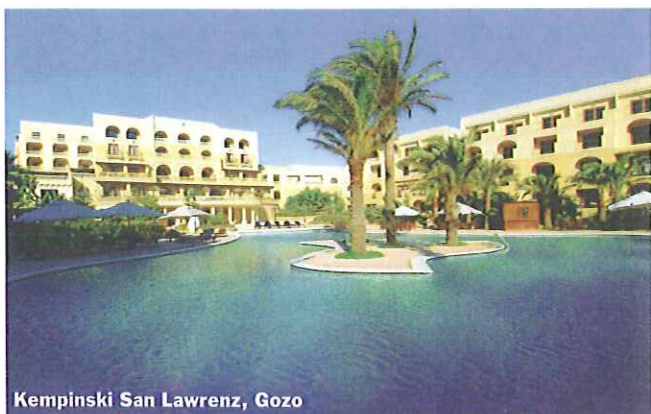
Gozo offers luxury in the countryside

Malta as a country consists of 3 islands, of which two are inhabited. These are Malta itself and Gozo, whilst the third, Comino, is a possible destination for an excursion from either.

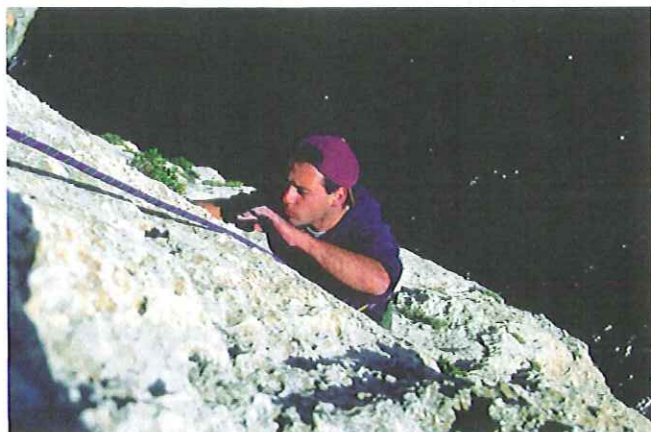
Gozo, only a third the size of Malta, is coming more into the MICE picture and offers something very different from Malta. It is predominantly an agricultural island with miles of rolling fields and pastures, vineyards and olive groves. The island's cuisine specialises in locally grown produce and fish from its own coastline. Eaten with Gozo's own Savina wine, the food becomes one of the great memories of a visit to the island.

Gozo has a long history, of course, and visitors can explore megalithic temples and medieval villages. More people are gaining an insight into MICE ideas and realising which aspects of Gozo can be turned into new facilities for group activities. The Ta'Cenc Hotel, a 5-star property named after the cliffs on which it stands, has for some years been able to use a medieval building on site for banquets and theme parties.

Nestled in the heart of the Gozo countryside is the Kempinski San Lawrenz that provides 5-star luxury, tranquillity, an Ayurvedic Spa and fresh food from its own kitchen gardens.



Kempinski San Lawrenz, Gozo



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SPACE TO EXPAND IDEAS DISCOVER LE MERIDIEN ST. JULIANS HOTEL + SPA



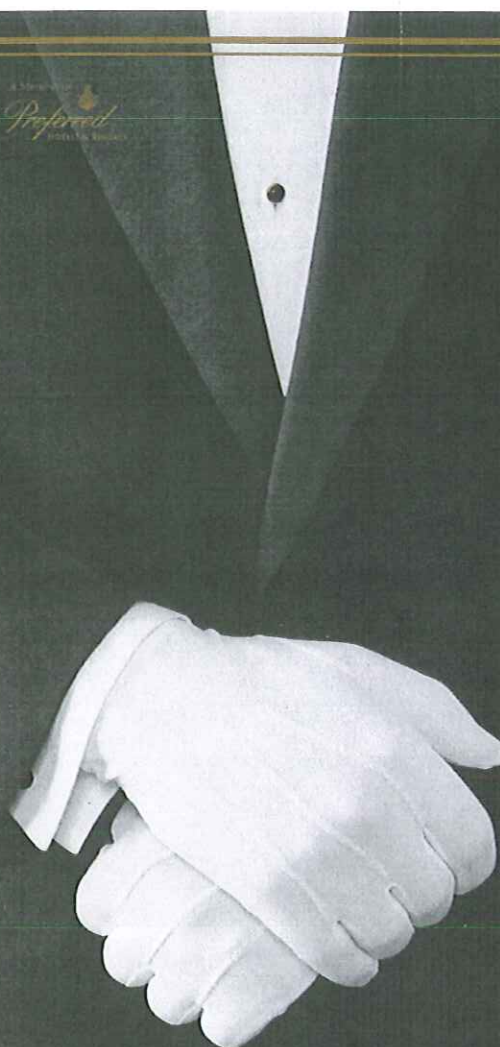
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At the other end of the scale, the Grand Hotel Excelsior's Bars Manager, Paul Cassar, has introduced a new kind of coffee. 'He has', explains Caroline, 'transferred the ingredients of the tiramisu cake into coffee, creating the Cappuccino Tiramisu. It came about when the hotel encouraged him to experiment with new cocktails and he had the idea of producing, not just a cocktail, but a new coffee beverage'.

Malta's hotel news

Malta is constantly expanding its facilities for corporate events, widening the choice of what is available to suit every organiser's taste. These are some examples of what has been introduced recently.

The Palace – with a palazzo

First, 200 years ago, there was the Palazzo Capua in Sliema. Then in the 20thC came The Victoria Hotel alongside. The Palazzo's elegant rooms are used as dining and meeting rooms of a very exclusive nature. Then within the same complex, the owners built the brand new Palace Hotel. This now adds 161 5-star rooms and 8 individually designed suites.

There is now a Spa and Leisure Centre and 7 state-of-the-art meeting rooms.

This trio of facilities ought to be visited by any organiser looking for a special venue in Malta.

Grand Hotel Excelsior – causes a stir with coffee

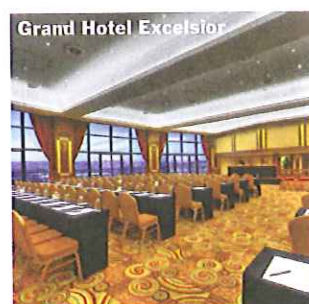
With an unrivalled location close to the centre of Valletta but right on the Grand Harbour waterfront, the Grand Hotel Excelsior is a luxury 5-star property with remarkable meeting facilities. 'We

have a purpose-built conference centre with 13 separate formats possible, in a total of over 4,000sqm of delegate space', says Caroline Farrugia, Sales & Marketing Manager at Excelsior.

The hotel has a policy of introducing new ideas, which



Grand Hotel Excelsior



Grand Hotel Excelsior



The Palace



Palazzo Falson

it has proved even in the few months it has been open. For example, it has recently worked with the Edward de Bono Foundation to launch a new programme of creative thinking for businesses. There are special courses to assist companies to solve key business problems with

The ingredients are Galliano, Amaretto, Hennessy cognac, chocolate sauce and Illy coffee.

Palazzo Falson – offers medieval Mdina to organisers

A venue has been created with the restoration of Palazzo Falson in Mdina. This was the home of Capt Olof Frederick Gollcher OBE, the son of a wealthy shipping merchant. He left the house and its collection of *objets d'art* to a Foundation that has now made the palace available for public viewing and for hire as a venue.

It is a 2-storey medieval palace with an internal courtyard. Part of the building dates from the 13thC.