

# ITCM

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## Incentives with bite

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## Malta on a MICE drive

**The Malta Tourism Authority is embarking on a MICE drive and they have lots of good new material with which to power it. Wherever you look on the Islands of Malta (there are three islands: Malta, Gozo and Comino) there are brave new developments with MICE business in mind. Some rise into the sky as new landmarks, others run down to the sea and some are even underground. Sydney Paulden reports**

### Malta gunning for MICE

The UK is Malta's biggest source of travel business for groups and for leisure. Its Number Two market is Germany. About 1.2m visitors arrive from the UK, of which about 60,000 are attending events.

Malta has a Three-Year National Tourism Plan, 2008 to 2010, in which MICE growth is given particular emphasis.

'This is because all our research shows that each delegate to an event has a per diem spend about 3 times greater than the average visitor. We would be very happy to attract many more of them to Malta', says the Malta Tourism Authority.

Malta has long experience

in handling prestigious events. Two years ago the CHOGAM conference brought 1,500 Commonwealth Heads of Government and staff to the Mediterranean Conference Centre (MCC). This is one of Europe's most unusual and beautiful venues, a visitor attraction in itself. It was originally built as a hospital for Crusaders coming back from the Middle East and one of the original wards, with a vaulted stone roof and 600ft in length, is perhaps the longest and most impressive room you will ever see. The centre incorporates an ultra-modern auditorium that has staged the Bolshoi in Swan Lake, but also has arched cellars that add a special

cachet to any meeting or banquet held in them, especially with the MCC's experience in décor and lighting effects.

The MCC has recently held an Electrolux celebration totally decorated with white fairy lights and a Swarovski product launch where models displayed the cut glass jewellery.

### Seaplanes add new islands link

A fount of information about Malta's corporate group business and future potential is the DMC Special Interest Travel, or SIT. Its MICE specialist is Jason Caruana and he was able to update me on a wide range of developments that are making this Mediterranean hotspot a more and more desirable destination.

'Gozo', he says, 'is a total contrast to the main island and has massive potential for the future. It is picturesque, agricultural, very Maltese and has an ancient history. The helicopter services no



# MALTA

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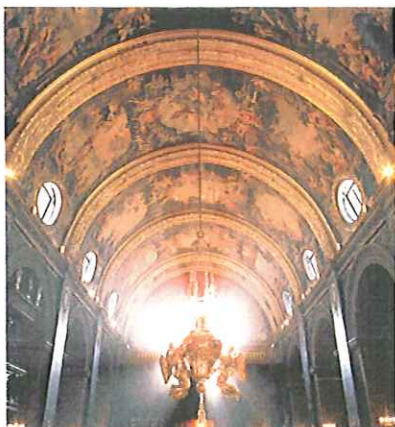
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longer exist between the islands, but in their place we are now bringing in seaplane services, with each aircraft able to carry 14 to 20 people. These are a boon to moving groups rapidly and conveniently straight from the Grand Harbour of Valletta to Imġarr, the main port at Gozo'.

He also reports that more countries are being linked with Malta by air and that corporate group sizes have been growing. 'We have just handled an event for 500 delegates for a Russian IT company, flown in by Aeroflot. Air Malta has been busy flying in groups from Spain, Italy, Germany and France, as well, of course, as the UK. The UK is a staple market for us and we have been happy to see that services are proliferating from a wider set of UK departure points, such as Manchester and



Birmingham'.

Ideas for incentives and team building are also becoming more unusual and adventurous. Jason tells of projects based on the TV series 'Lost'. A Swiss group held its seminars and then embarked all the delegates on to fishing boats for a cruise, but the boats 'happened to break down'. The delegates were shipwrecked on a lonely island and had to work in teams to build fires and cook on a secluded beach. 'The managers of the firm were very interested to see how everyone was able to work things out for themselves and achieve objectives', says Jason.

A special project handled by SIT was a medieval event for 600 people. 'We took over Fort St Angelo on an island in sight of Valletta and built an amphitheatre specially for the day. We even shipped in sand to make a track on the shore for horses to gallop. All the delegates sailed in on traditional Maltese vessels, called Luzzos.'

He also says that SIT has organised a twin-header incentive for an oil company, with events in Malta and then Libya.

### Underground city of Monte Kristo

I was supposed to be going to see a new incentive and meetings centre called Monte Kristo located near the airport, but we had arrived at what appeared to be a flat stretch of hot desert dust. Then Jean Borg Olivier came striding towards us from nowhere. He led me down a tunnel and I was introduced to an underground complex of conference facilities, theme party settings and breakout rooms.

The site measures 22,000sqm and there are 2.5km of tunnels. Above and below ground there are 5 separate conference venues, a winery, a brewery and 11 self-contained tunnels. Some of the

space in the tunnels is rented out to wine distributors, but events can be held with the wine as a décor.

The owner of the site is Polidano, one of Malta's biggest construction companies and no expense is being spared to make Monte Kristo an unusual and exciting venue. One underground area is a waxworks, illustrating Malta's arts and crafts. Another, with a glass dome in the roof to provide natural daylight, has castles and battlements in situ for re-enactments from the history of Malta's Knights of St John period. There are 800 seats for spectators. 'We held one event here', says Jean, 'with 50 actors, 16 horses and 3 falcons. There was a traditional meal served, accompanied by comic acrobats and fire-eaters and the like.'

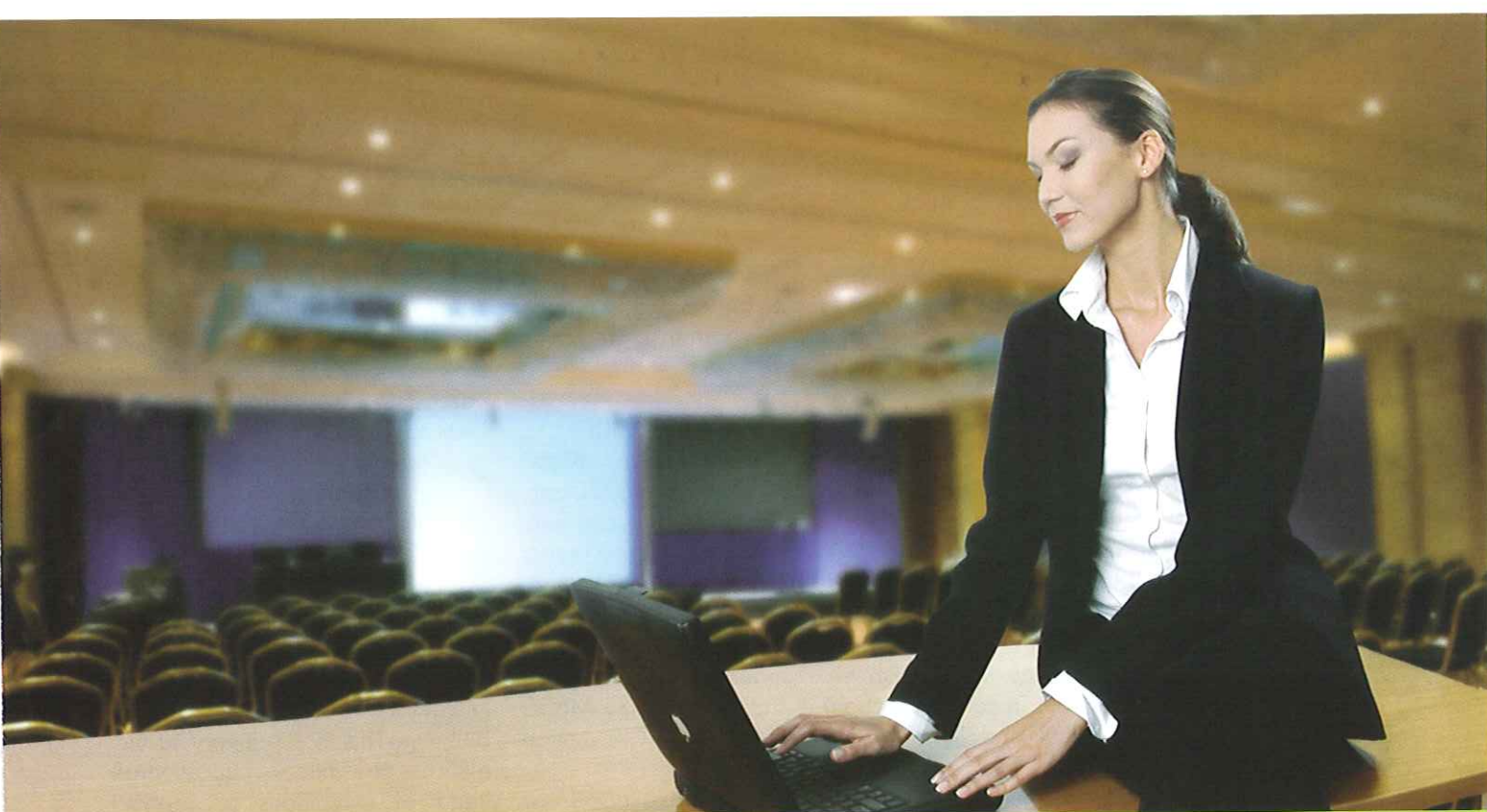
He also went through a list of amazing events already held at the complex, including a Christmas party for 2,000 and an Archbishop's Mass for 2,500.

### New Palace is born

The Victoria Hotel, only a few years old, has the venerable 18thC Palazzo Capua alongside it that has some of the most luxurious suites anyone has seen as well as elegant and distinctive salons in which to meet. However, the







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owners have now constructed a brand new palace on the site just behind these two buildings. The new Palace Hotel is absorbing the 18thC palazzo and together they will provide Malta and its visitors with an unrivalled facility.

The Palace Hotel is a 5-star property with 162 rooms in 11 different categories ranging from 33 to 63sqm. Most have balconies or terraces and these are from 10 to 40sqm. The whole effect is spaciousness and opulence.

There are four main meeting spaces. The Royal Hall and the State Hall can each seat 240 theatre-style, whilst the William Morris Suite caters for 105 and the Drawing Room for 70.

The three f&b outlets are interestingly named Talk of the Town Café, The Tabloid restaurant and TemptAsian Lounge Bar. This has views over Sliema and the Grand Harbour and in a relaxed Asian setting has a cuisine that combines Western and Eastern dishes.

A special feature is the top floor dedicated to leisure. There is a spa, fitness centre, a fresh water indoor pool, an outdoor pool and a restaurant where guests can eat whilst admiring views of the bastions of Valletta.

The 18thC Palazzo Capua, was originally the home of Prince

Charles of Capua, who was exiled from Naples for eloping to Gretna Green to marry an Irish girl called Penelope.

### From Wembley to Malta

Another surprise on my Malta showround was a 7,000sqm, 18m high marquee that can seat 10,000 people. 'You may recognise it', said Godwin Caruana, Sales Manager. 'It was used at Wembley whilst the new stadium was under construction. We bought it and now it is the MFCC – the Malta Fairs and Convention Centre.'

It has been put into good use from the moment it arrived in Malta in November 2006. 'It has been the venue for a Thomas Cook conference followed by a gala dinner, an Extreme Motor Bike Show and a Song for Europe Festival.

There are 80 toilets. The facility is air-conditioned and has 3 lifting rigs that can cope with 32 tons each. Alongside is a service marquee measuring 1200sqm that can hold bars and kitchens.

### Grand Harbour gets major new hotel

A major new landmark is opening this month overlooking Grand Harbour, close to the centre of

Valletta. It is the Excelsior Grand Hotel Malta and it has one of the best possible locations in Malta. Built into a hillside, it has 7 floors cascading down from the road level to sea level. There are 424 guestrooms, including 38 suites.

The marketing aim is a mix of clientele, with 40% business travellers, 30% delegates to events and 30% tourism. For events, there are 11 meeting rooms. The magnificent Ballroom can seat 850 theatre-style and can be accessed directly from the road at the top of the building. This makes it very convenient for the introduction of large items at exhibitions or product launches.

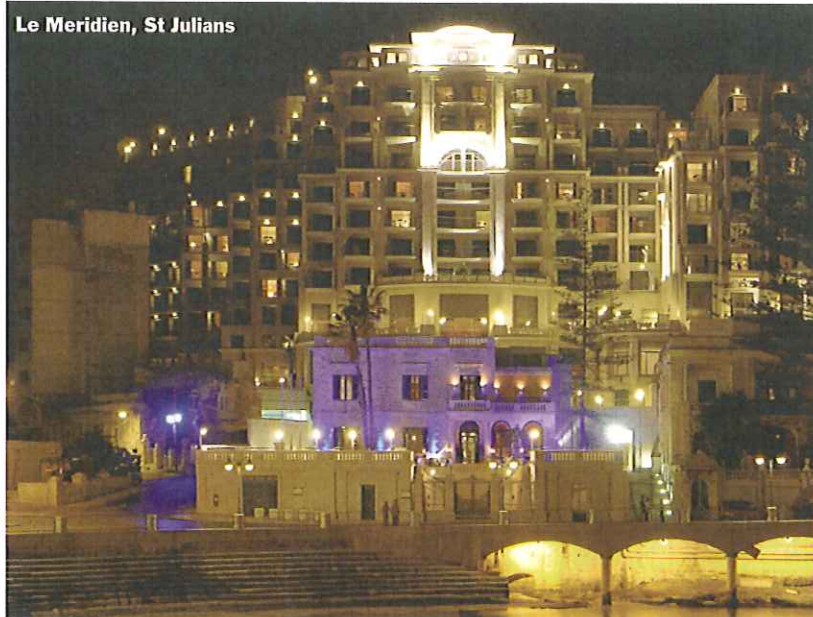
It is the first hotel project for the owners, a Hong Kong construction company and they have gone to great lengths to add luxury and style to the concept.

The hotel has 5 restaurants and 4 bars, indoor and outdoor pools,



Le Meridien, St Julians

Le Meridien, St Julians



an extensive spa, gymnasium and tennis courts.

### Le Meridien St Julians – immediately popular

Le Meridien St Julians is a hotel that was opened in April 2006 in the lively district of St Julians. It has already proved itself as a popular hotel, enjoying 89% and higher occupancy over months at a time. There are two other Starwood properties on Malta, the others being the Westin Dragonara in St George's Bay and Le Meridien Phoenicia that virtually guards the entrance to the walled city of Valletta.

Le Meridien St Julians enjoys





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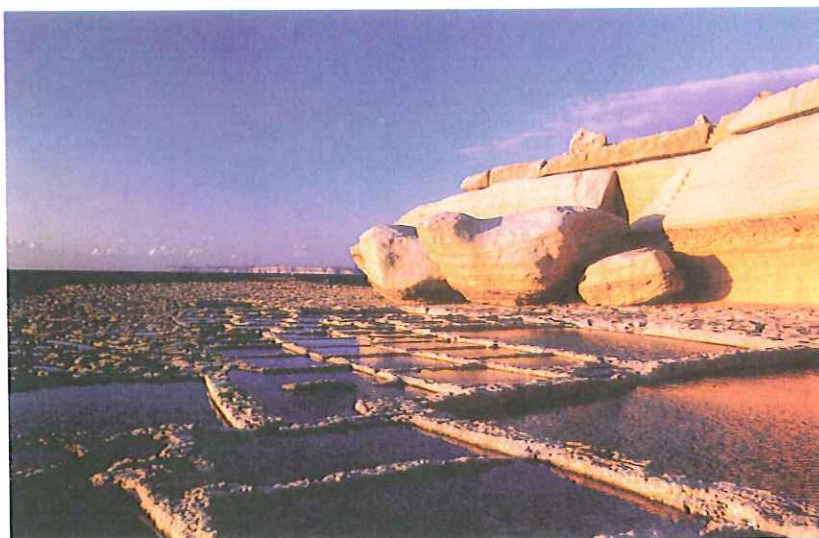
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an imposing location on a rise overlooking Balluta Bay and all its 276 guestroom and public areas give a sense of luxury and fine taste. The rooms and suites have balconies with sea views.

The hotel has extensive facilities for group organisers, with 14 function rooms, all on one floor. Two large areas with natural daylight, 11 syndicate rooms and a Boardroom can cater for 8 to 350 people. There is an amphitheatre with fixed tiered seats for an audience of 141. In addition, a landscaped terrace can accommodate receptions for up to 500.

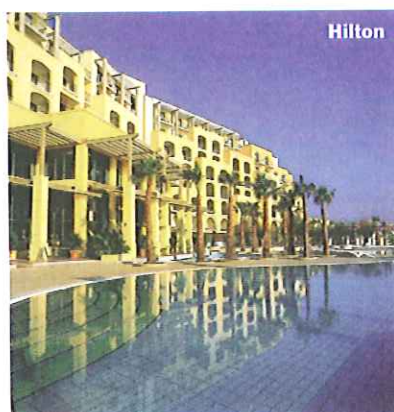
The hotel's Lotus Spa and Health centre has steam rooms, sauna, Jacuzzi and a heated pool.

#### Hilton Malta extends

Clement Hassid, General Manager of Hilton Malta, is proud to be at the helm of one of Europe's great properties. Hilton is also proud of him, having given him the accolade of Hilton European General Manager of the Year

Clement is convinced that Malta is still greatly underestimated. 'It has', he maintains, 'a range of top quality facilities that are not yet that well known outside and, furthermore, people have to come here to appreciate the value for money that Malta offers.'

He goes on that not only are there quality facilities, but the service that goes with them cannot



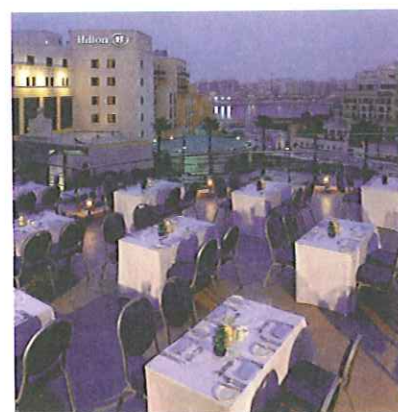
be bettered anywhere. 'We now have 450 people working in the hotel and only 4 are expats, including me. All others are Maltese and they are proud to prove to visitors that Malta is a place of warm welcome and hospitality. Every one is an ambassador for the country and for the hotel.'

Clement is keen to say that in this age of the computer, the human element is still the most important in the hotel sector. 'We

have technology to provide all kinds of solutions, but the service depends on the people'.

The Hilton Malta presides over the Portomaso area of St Julians, with bold colours and design. The hotel has 294 luxurious rooms and suites and had 100% occupancy when I visited in June. Little wonder that an extension is already well on its way with a further 100 guestrooms.

There are 18 meeting rooms in the hotel that can be blended into different configurations and on the same site is the Hilton's own



Conference Centre. The Grand Master's Suite in the Conference Centre can seat 1200 delegates on the ground floor and a further 230 in its balcony.

#### Go to Gozo

Gozo can now be reached by ferry or by seaplane. It is a delightful island, contrasting with the island of Malta in that it is sparsely populated, has wide tracts of agriculture and just a few choice hotels in strategic locations. There is archaeological evidence on the island of human habitation over 4,000 years ago.

To reach the ferry, you have to drive to the northernmost point of Malta and this journey in itself gives an attractive picture of the coastline. However, flying direct from Valletta by seaplane cuts the journey time to reach Gozo to a fraction. Instead of an hour's drive and an hour on the ferry, it is a





20-minute flight.

The main conference hotels on Gozo are the Kempinski San Lawrenz and the Ta'Cenc. The San Lawrenz nestles in its own extensive gardens in a secluded Gozo valley. Although it can be reached so easily, it gives the impression of being a million miles away from any hustle or bustle – and this is exactly the impression carried on by the architecture. It is built in Maltese limestone in the style of a hunting lodge. .

Meetings facilities include the Kappella Conference Room and Terrace and the smaller Dwejra, Ghorfa and Gharix rooms, all with an attractive medieval ambience.

The fine dining Restaurant L'Ortolan specialises in Mediterranean and Maltese cuisine, ensuring fresh produce from the hotel's own kitchen gardens. The chefs also prepare Ayurvedic dishes to complement the spa treatments.

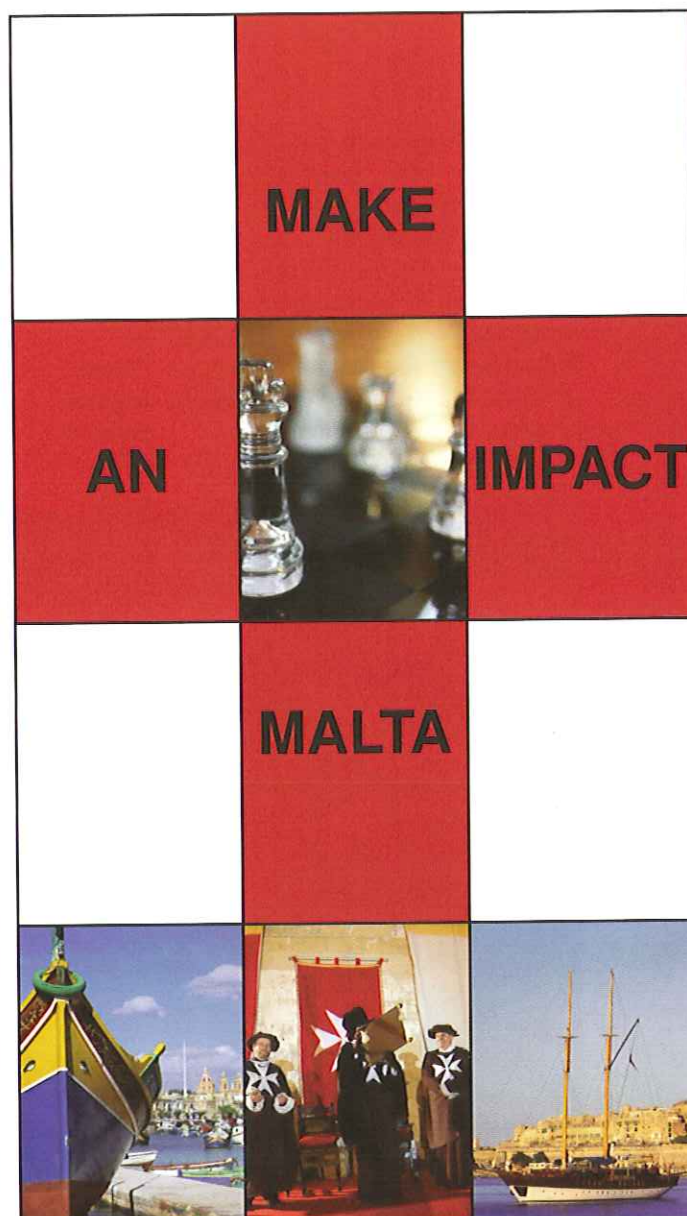
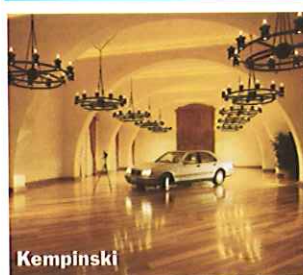
The hotel prides itself on its Ayurvedic Spa that offers a wide range of treatments by highly trained specialists.

The Ta'Cenc occupies a high point on the island with views across to Malta and Comino – and in 400 acres of landscaped and wild gardens. There are 83 rooms of many types, but each has a terrace or even a private garden.

Il-Carubo restaurant has Italian cuisine and Gozitan dishes, as well as an international choice.

A range of meeting rooms plus the Palazzo Palina, a medieval castle, provide the venues for conferences and memorable theme parties in authentic settings.

For full details and brochures on Malta's facilities, contact Marie Anne Barthet Brown, Senior Marketing Manager MICE on 020-8877 6993 or email: [marianne.barthetbrown@visitmalta.com](mailto:marianne.barthetbrown@visitmalta.com)

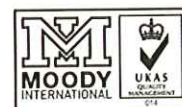


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