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Malta could have been designed with events in mind. And with additional government support, it just gets more attractive to organisers. Caroline Brown reports



Broaden your meeting horizons at the InterContinental Malta, St Julian's

Supporting events

As a conference destination, Malta punches way above its weight. It is an island of just 316 sq km, yet in August it hosted its largest conference to date – 5,000 delegates from cosmetics company Oriflame were hosted in 13 four and five-star hotels.

“Malta is centrally located, has decent weather and air access is good with national flag carriers and Air Malta; it is still good value and has got some unusually large conference facilities – all the bigger hotels incorporate decent meeting space,” says head of events at P&MM, Chris Clarke. “They redesigned Malta with our industry in mind and they speak

English, which helps.”

Up-to-date technology goes with the territory. “The amount of equipment Oriflame needed to get from outside Malta was minimal,” says Paul Selis, director of destination management company (DMC) On Site, which handled the event.

The government’s active support of business tourism is another plus: it allows just about any public space to be used for events. One group walked down a red carpet on Valetta’s Republic Street, accompanied by mounted knights, and musicians, to Republic Square where dinner was served.

The Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) also plays an active role. “We provide unbiased logistical advice to conference

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organisers, as well as other support including provision of promotional material to educate delegates about the vast options offered by the destination. We also assist event organisers with getting in touch with local suppliers,” says manager MICE, MTA, Nadine Brincat.

“The MTA assists local association members in pitching for international conferences, helping with bid preparation and presentation, as well as site inspections,” she says. Evidence of this is in the International Council of Nurses, which is bringing 4,000 delegates to Malta next year. In addition, there are numerous well-respected DMCs and an anthology of interesting and well-run venues for events.

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Malta *an* INCENTIVE *for a* BREAK *escape*



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AIR MALTA

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"Malta's advantage is its size," says Selis. "It is small, so it is easy to do things over a short distance. Outside Valetta are the Granaries, which are perfect for a meeting, dinner or spectacle for a large group. Inside Valetta, there is enough space for thousands of people.

"Within 15-20 minutes, you have Mdina and within half-an-hour, Gozo. Malta is of interest to large groups because they don't have to transfer delegates far, logistics are easy," he says.

The island also has an excellent choice of conference facilities. The Mediterranean Conference Centre is housed in a converted 16th century



Mediterranean Conference Centre's La Valette Hall

hospital and has an auditorium with a capacity of 1,400 and two large halls (1,550 for a banquet or 4,000 standing), which are complemented by smaller areas. Malta Fairs & Convention Centre (MFCC) is a massive marquee, built on a disused military airport in the centre of the island. It has three moveable steel arches, which bear 30 tons each, to provide a stable anchor for lights and other equipment. The building seats 10,000 theatre-style or 4,000 at a banquet and the facility will move to a permanent structure in two years.

Malta's accommodation options also hit the mark. "Malta has fantastic

'Large groups don't have to transfer delegates far'

case study



Launching the latest generation of cameras

21st century knights

The client: FLIR Systems

The event: Security and surveillance meeting

The participants: 200 international distributors

The venue: The Radisson Blu Resort, St Julian's

FLIR Systems, leader in the design, manufacture and marketing of thermal imaging infrared cameras, held its security and surveillance meeting 2010 in Malta because it offered easy airline access for 200 international distributors and was small enough to allow a full day meeting, followed by a team building challenge and gala dinner. The event was to launch the latest generation of cameras. The Radisson Blu Resort, St Julian's fulfilled all requirements of location and technology.

The Knights of Malta inspired the theme for the event: the Thermal Knights of FLIR. At the welcome dinner, four people in FLIR Knights capes entered and distributed

FLIR Thermal Knights T-shirts and, at that moment, a 30ft x 10ft structure depicting 'FLIR Systems – Revelations' lit up the west coast with fireworks. The next day, in the plenary session, a priest entered the room carrying a coffin, representing the funeral of the old cameras, and then the new cameras were revealed. Team building followed, which included use of the new cameras in various challenges.

This ended at Razzet L-Abjad for the gala dinner, a 200-year-old country house, where eight cameras were set up with LCD panels. Entertainment included trumpeters, drummers, fire jugglers and a string ensemble. The next day comprised eight breakout sessions and lunch before delegates departed.

Marketing manager Eurasia for FLIR Commercial Vision Systems, Christiaan Maras, said: "There is a huge choice of conference hotels and locations and the vast experience of local suppliers made our event in Malta a very positive experience."

five-star hotels with very good facilities and meeting rooms, most of which have natural light. And the weather means we can have outside dinners from May to November," says managing director of DMC Colours of Malta, Davide Cachia. Hotels generally have extensive gardens and pool space available for events, as well, to make the most of the climate.

In St Julian's, Hilton Malta has the largest purpose-built conference facility on the island (1,100 theatre-style), The Westin Dragonara Resort (seating 600) finishes a comprehensive

refurbishment of the hotel in November and InterContinental Malta (seating 700) has access to an adjacent cinema (accommodating 70 to 712). Radisson Blu Resort, Malta St Julian's (capacity 700) and Corinthia Hotel, St George's Bay (capacity 550), complete the picture.

The Excelsior (which seats 560) opened three years ago close to Valetta and has added 1,200 sqm of exhibition space this year.

Options for activities include a jeep safari on Gozo Island, a 20-minute ferry trip from Malta; a visit to megalithic

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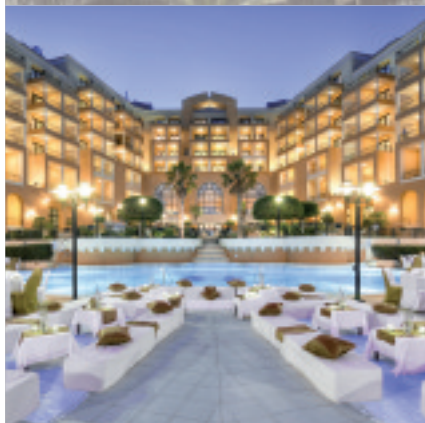
Great hotels in a stunning destination.



Corinthia Palace Hotel & Spa



Marina Hotel at the Corinthia Beach Resort



Corinthia Hotel St George's Bay



Space to mingle on MonteKristo Estate's roof garden; or, inset, try the atmospheric vaults

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temple complex and UNESCO World Heritage Site Hagar Qim and the Mdajdra temples; or a gala dinner at the magnificent Palazzo Parisio.

Selis has used the vaults at Caraffa Stores on the waterfront to set up a jazz bar, sushi and cool lounge. He also recommends the Mediterranean Film Studios as a unique venue.

MonteKristo Estates comprises an indoor arena which seats 580, adjacent function space and, underneath, cellars lead to the Renaissance Hall, a cavernous space with a capacity for 5,000 with three bars, sophisticated lighting and sound equipment that allows speakers outside the central dance area to be switched off to allow others to talk more easily. Outside, a

courtyard with a raised central stage can be used for dinners and receptions and a château with two conference rooms is under construction.

Meanwhile, government recognition of the benefits of events will continue to help Malta position itself as a meetings and events destination. "The fund set aside by the Ministry of Finance, the Economy and Investment in 2009, which extends support to local associations and NGOs who are bidding to bring their international conferences to Malta, brought 20 events to our islands, almost 10,000 delegates," says Brincat.

"The positive reaction to this initiative led to the extension of the fund for 2010 and discussions are being held for 2011."