



On the waterfront: MTA's Pharmaceutical Seminar demonstrated the island's capabilities to the industry

# WHY MALTA EXCELS

A RECORD 70,000 MICE VISITORS IN 2008 IS FURTHER EVIDENCE THAT NOW IS THE TIME TO DISCOVER THE HEART OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

**T**he current downturn means it's never been more important for suppliers to understand their clients' requirements. And while budgets might be sliding, the need for face-to-face meetings remains very much on the agenda.

These twin sentiments were at the core of a pharmaceutical seminar held by the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA)'s MICE Segment Team in April, aimed at helping local stakeholders strengthen and consolidate the business they

already receive from the pharmaceutical sector.

The seminar was the latest in a series of events held for the Maltese MICE trade, and highlighted the fact that the pharmaceutical industry – being large and comparatively stable – has retained a busy and ongoing events roster. However, it was explained that an increased emphasis on procurement (itself the subject of a similar seminar last year) has led to greater transparency around expenditure, and the onus on suppliers to fully grasp the nature of the sector has never been stronger.

One of the speakers, purchasing consultant Tina Fegent, was brought over from the UK to outline the issues currently at play in the industry. She was highly impressed by the destination's will to broaden its understanding.

## Taking the initiative

"I thought it showed the MTA to be really proactive," she says. "It's very encouraging when you see steps like this being taken for the benefit of hotels and DMCs. These kinds of events aren't common practice, so it is to be applauded."

Those local members present at the seminar felt the event was invaluable in assisting them to better position not only their product but the overall destination. "It was exceptionally beneficial," says Christopher Gingell Littlejohn, director of sales and marketing at the Intercontinental Malta. "Not all of it was new, of course, but it was a great motivator to concentrate our efforts. As a direct result of the seminar, we're looking at changing our approach to the pharma sector."

## Price competitive

"As a group of stakeholders, we're helping to raise awareness of what Malta has to offer," he continues. "It's often perceived as a resort destination, so it's important to give potential pharmaceutical clients a more accurate picture. Malta's relatively cheap when compared to a lot of the major European cities, and our competitiveness helps us a lot in that regard. Access and transfer times are good too."

The seminar was also used to release results of a recent MTA survey into the country's Quality Assured DMCs (those with proven high levels of quality, consistency and professionalism). It was found that the 18 QA DMCs between them attracted more than 40,000 delegates last year, a figure that accounted for some 60% of Malta's incoming C&I business. Italy, France, Germany and the UK were found to be the main markets.

The group also heard that 2008 had been a record year for Malta, with the island hosting 70,000 business tourism delegates over the 12-month period. ■

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