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BELFAST

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IN SYDNEY

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IN MALTA

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IN GLASGOW

ASSOCIATION
MEETINGS
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October '08

Malgosia Bartosik:

GUSTY **ORGANISER**

CASE HISTORY

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MALTA GOZO COMINO



MEETINGS WERE FIRST HELD IN MALTA AND GOZO THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO. NOW, WITH IMPROVED ACCESSIBILITY, THANKS TO A STRATEGIC MOVE BY AIR MALTA, THESE HISTORIC ISLANDS HOPE TO ATTRACT MORE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION CONFERENCES TO THEIR SHORES



Air Malta is helping improve accessibility

© Photo by Gino Galea - Air Malta plc

The Maltese islands were established as a congress venue long before man and microphone first united on a wooden platform. The pre-historic temples Mnadjra and Hagar Qim, the much sought after Hal-Saflieni Hypogeum and the Ggantija Temples in Gozo, were used for ritualistic meetings by one of the world's most ancient civilisations. These UNESCO World Heritage sites date back to around 5,000 BC and, while historians continue to investigate the mysterious people who built them, the atmosphere that wooed them to Malta in the first place still captivates many visitors.

Even today, while many destinations build pristine new convention centres, Malta's principle dedicated conference and event venue dates back to 1574. The Mediterranean Conference Centre was constructed by the Knights of St John and has fulfilled many roles over the centuries, but its state-of-the-art facilities now meet the high standards of the Historic Conference Centres of Europe alliance and many prestigious gatherings are hosted there.

The islands of Malta and Gozo, and tiny

Moving with the times

Comino wedged in between them, enjoy a temperate Mediterranean climate, with 300 days of sunshine a year. Four- and five-star hotels include internationally recognised chains as well as boutique properties, many of them with their own purpose-built conference facilities, and a wide variety of unique historical buildings have been refurbished as venues meeting modern-day standards.

Making life easier

On January 1 this year, Malta joined the Eurozone which means much more transparency for organisers when evaluating quotes and RFPs.

Travel to Malta has also become easier

since Malta entered into the Schengen agreement, lifting its sea and land borders to join the European Union's borderless area. In order to cater for Schengen passengers, new wings have been constructed at both Malta International Airport and the Valletta Sea Port to ensure a faster transit into Malta.

When organising business events in Malta, international, non-resident businesses can reduce their expenses by reclaiming value added tax. More details on www.vat.gov.mt.

Air Malta pairs up with Lufthansa

Air Malta flies direct to 35 destinations including most of the major European gateways but, up to now, has been well

aware that access for international delegates from other destinations has been an issue. "We have entered into a new code-share agreement with Lufthansa which will help ease the problem," says Brian Bartolo, Air Malta's general manager of marketing and product. "Lufthansa is a global player

and will improve travel to Malta from 180 countries – all the civilised world, in fact. We are also developing agreements with other partners, for instance, with Turkish Airlines which will permit access from the Far East via Istanbul."

The airline has a special unit focusing on sales and assistance for conferences and incentives. It will assist with inspection visits and familiarisation trips and, as official airline, will help coordinate specific travel arrangements, offer special prices on a dedicated conference website and operate extra flights if necessary. "We work

closely with Malta Tourism Authority to generate leads within this niche market," explains Bartolo. "We are aware how important it is to Malta."

Carbon offset support

Recognising that conference organisers might wish to offset carbon emissions or include corporate social responsibility initiatives during their event, Malta Tourism Authority has introduced an Eco-Certification Scheme for local environmentally minded trade partners and providers. The MTA is happy to give organisers advice on how it can assist them and information on specific, ongoing projects.

Quality Assurance

Part of the islands' tourism policy for 2007-2011 is to increase Malta's competitiveness as a business tourism destination and, with this in mind, the MTA has launched a quality scheme for local professional organising and destination management companies. The idea is to recognise high levels of quality, consistency and professionalism and covers areas such as customer satisfaction and feedback, references and statements, insurance coverage, continued development and event evaluation.

The scheme is in line with other international quality schemes and should give organisers reassurance they are in good professional hands.

SmartCity Malta – Dubai-style

SmartCity Malta will be a new information and communications technology (ICT) hub on redeveloped land in Kalkara. A joint venue with two Dubai Holding companies, it will draw on the experience and expertise of Dubai's knowledge-based industry clusters, such as Dubai Internet City and Dubai Media City. The first phase is due to open by the end of next year and the whole thing is scheduled for completion in 2021. It will generate over 5,000 new jobs and also bring more business travellers engaged in the ICT sector.



Air Malta flight attendant

✈ Flight times to Malta

Stockholm	4.15 hrs.
Moscow	4.05 hrs.
London	3.40 hrs.
Amsterdam	3.15 hrs.
Brussels	3.05 hrs.
Frankfurt	2.55 hrs.
Paris	2.55 hrs.
Rome	1.30 hrs.

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"We work closely with Malta Tourism Authority to generate leads within this niche market."

— Brian Bartolo



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THE 200 DELEGATES
ATTENDING THE FIRST
OFFSHORE MARICULTURE
CONFERENCE IN MALTA
WERE WON OVER
BY THE ISLAND'S
FRIENDLY CHARM AND
THE FRESHLY CAUGHT,
DEEP-SEA HARVEST

Local destination management company CIS Malta worked alongside UK-based PCO, The Conference Business, to organise the Society for Underwater Technology's first Offshore Mariculture conference. Their task was to ensure the European fish farmers attending had everything they needed. They were not disappointed.

"We organised a two-day conference followed by a third day of site visits – Malta's fish farms off the coast were a big attraction," says Howard Evans, managing

director of The Conference Business.

"We chose the Corinthia San Gorg Hotel in St George's Bay for our meeting venue and split the bedroom allocation between this four-star hotel and its slightly cheaper three-star sister hotel next door, the Corinthia Marina.

"The self-contained conference suite of the San Gorg holds more than 300 delegates, with ample room for an exhibition and coffee breaks. Lunches were taken in the buffet restaurant where we tucked into splendid spreads.

"Our conference dinner was held in the Corinthia Room of the Corinthia Palace Hotel, set in a splendid garden with classical Greek architecture. It was a balmy evening and cocktails were served in the garden, lit by flaming torches. It was most elegant and dinner was splendid.

"We hired buses to tour the island on our third day, visiting fish farms and ending up for a late lunch at the fishing village of Marsaxlokk. The restaurant overlooked the sea and was bathed in late summer sun

and we ate fish caught that day, washed down with excellent Maltese white wine.

"CIS Malta, a family-owned business, headed by Joe Tonna, took great care of the details. They were good at sharpening local prices and excellent at moving our delegates around the island's slightly congested roads. Malta ticks all the boxes for business conferences with pan-European audiences, but it was the friendly charm of this small island that really won us over.

"We loved the Leyland buses from the 1950s, painted yellow and green with flaring bumpers and goggle-eyed headlights, which have been restored for visitors' use for only a few euros. And the capital Valletta, down by the Grand Harbour with the huge battlements of this Crusader city, is lit up by night with searchlights. We walked around, gazing at shops and sights, and never felt hassled or threatened. Visiting the 'Silent City' of Mdina, a perfectly preserved mediaeval walled city and now a World Heritage Site, was also wonderful in the almost perfect quiet."



A stand at the Mariculture exhibition

"We organised a two-day conference followed by a third day of site visits
— Malta's fish farms off the coast were a big attraction." — Howard Evans

Early meeting
place – the pre-
historic Mnajdra
Temples



CASE HISTORY



The island's unique 'marque'



Photo: EC Meetings

A knighting
entourage proclaims
the arrival of the
Grandmaster

MALTA MADE AN IMPRESSION ON THE 600 DELEGATES WHO ATTENDED MARQUES, THE 20TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN TRADEMARK OWNERS

Planning started two-and-a-half years in advance of the event when the MARQUES secretariat engaged the services of destination management company EC Meetings.

The challenge was to come up with an event that could offer high-end meeting facilities and a social programme that would exceed the expectations of the well travelled MARQUES regulars.

Through EC Meetings, accommodation was secured at three of Malta's top five-star hotels,

the Hilton Malta, the InterContinental and the Westin Dragonara Resort, all situated within a very short distance of Hilton Malta Conference Centre. As the main venue, the centre was a hub of activity, hosting plenary sessions, the break-outs and exhibitions and providing lunches over the three days.

The social programme offered an exciting blend of local culture and flavours. The highlight was a Maltese village feast, overlooking the Grand Harbour, and

featuring local crafts, dance, music and entertainment under the stars, with a fireworks display to end the night.

The final gala dinner was held at the prestigious Sacra Infermeria Hall at the Mediterranean Conference Centre in Valletta, where guests enjoyed an evening with the Knights of Malta, followed by a disco at the hotel until the early hours. Needless to say, the feedback from the conference was overwhelmingly positive.

No shortage of beds or meeting rooms

Malta has 14 five-star hotels which, together, can accommodate more than 5,500 delegates. All have in-house meeting facilities and many are within walking distance of each other. The 40-plus four-star hotels on the islands provide an additional 14,000 beds.

The newest, luxury, city resort property is the Grand Hotel Excelsior, overlooking

Marsamxett Harbour and Manoel Island. An architectural marvel enveloped by fortifications and bastions, it is a monument to the ever changing times, blending futuristic vision with the rich history of its surroundings. The facilities include a ballroom seating up to 600 people as well as meeting and multi-purpose function rooms.

The InterContinental is another

impressive hotel with conference space for up to 750, while the Westin Dragonara can seat up to 650. Radisson SAS has properties in two prime locations on the island. The Radisson Golden Sands Resort & Spa is at the edge of a cliff overlooking the sandy beach of Golden Bay and only 10 minutes from the Gozo ferry. The Radisson SAS Bay Point Resort is on the north coast,

The Mediterranean
Conference Centre's
Republic Hall





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The Cittadella
in Gozo

*'The 155 m. long
Sacra Infermeria is
amazingly versatile,
not so suitable for
conferences but
superb for exhibitions
and banquets.'*



Photo: EC Meetings

Sacra Infermeria at the Mediterranean
Conference Centre

close to the beach at St George's Bay and a 20 minutes' drive from Valletta.

Hilton Malta Conference Centre in St Julian's can accommodate up to 1,400 delegates in its main meeting room and is close to a cluster of five-star hotels. Nearby, the Eden Arena has massive, uninterrupted floor space and can accommodate up to 5,000 people comfortably.

Malta's most novel venue for large events is the Malta Fairs & Conventions Centre in Ta' Qali. Previously used to accommodate the temporary Wembley Arena in London, it's a tension fabric structure that can seat 10,000 easily. The fully air-conditioned structure measures 50 m. by 130 m. and has a pillar-free open space of 7,000 sqm.

But the most famous venue and one of Europe's finest is the Mediterranean Conference Centre, with its stone walls and powerful, mediaeval atmosphere. The Republic Hall, with a capacity of 1,400 theatre-style, is equipped with theatre lighting and sound systems, audio-visual facilities and simultaneous interpretation facilities for up to six languages.

The 155 m. long Sacra Infermeria is amazingly versatile, not so suitable for conferences but superb for exhibitions and banquets. The other halls in the centre, many of them down steps below ground level, seat between 60 and 450 theatre-style and there is a pleasant open-air courtyard running alongside the building and adjacent to the Cotoner Hall. **ami**