

Title:

Jets Buzz Malta

Word Count:

671

Summary:

Hoping for a boost in visitor numbers, the arrival of low cost flights to Malta is eagerly anticipated by hoteliers and holiday companies on the Mediterranean island.

Keywords:

Malta, Malta hotels, Malta holidays, Malta flights, Malta weather, Malta property, map, Malta airport, Qawra, Sliema, St Paul's, Mellieha, St Julian's, Valletta

Article Body:

With visitor numbers static in recent years and facing new competition from former Eastern Bloc countries offering cheap holidays, the recent announcement by the Maltese government that negotiations were at an advanced stage with two low cost airlines has sparked hopes that the island will see a rise in visitor numbers, much to the relief of some in the tourist industry worried about the future of Malta as a holiday destination.

Even before the new carriers to the island land the existing airlines have been offering return flights at prices seemingly much lower than in the past to try and hold on to their share of the market.

According to on-line travel guide YourMalta.com the airline negotiations have been tempered with the need for the island's government to see that the national carrier, Air Malta, isn't damaged as it is one of Malta's major employers.

Traditionally the UK has been Malta's biggest market for incoming tourists, often making up over half of the island's visitors in any given year, but some on the island see even this market as under threat. And property buyers from the UK have accounted for seventy per cent of Malta property sales to overseas buyers in recent years, settling in Valletta, Sliema, St Paul's, Mellieha, St Julian's and Qawra.

A good portion of UK visitors and property buyers for Malta in recent years have been ex-forces who served for the British during WW2 when Malta held out against

Hitler's Luftwaffe, and then in peacetime through to 1964 when Malta became independent, who returned for holidays.

But with the inevitability of this market declining a new breed of Malta's holiday and hotel entrepreneurs see Malta's future as less dependent on the UK tourist, and being more cosmopolitan in her outlook.

Declining Market and New Opportunities

Tribune Properties, a UK company specialising in Malta properties, say they have noticed more buyers making enquiries from other countries over the last year. In particular they say they have been receiving enquiries from France, Italy and Germany.

'The UK remains the foundation for overseas property buyers considering buying property in Malta, but the overall percentage is reducing as more and more people in mainland Europe have visited Malta, and liked it so much they want to either move to the island full time or buy a holiday home.

The arrival of low cost flights to Malta though could reignite British interest as three and four day breaks a few times a year becomes financially viable. If the airlines fly to destinations in Europe too the number of buyers for Malta property could rise in the immediate and medium term' explains Tribune's Managing Director, Roger Munns.

For Malta's tourist industry three and four day visitors in increased numbers will be a welcome boost. There is discussion on the island about extending club's opening hours beyond the current 4am.

Clubbers in the UK are used to 6am closing, and might be deterred from making a weekend trip with a three hour flight only to find shorter hours available for partying.

'There are new opportunities for Malta, and it's for the island to decide whether to embrace them and gain a new generation of visitors - or ignore them and lose an asset for the economy' agree YourMalta.com

'Malta has a lot to offer the visitor apart from being a Mediterranean holiday island. Malta has a rich culture and history, and can easily appeal to all generations from toddlers to pensioners. More Italians and other nationalities are discovering Malta as a destination. Malta will become more cosmopolitan. And while some of the older more conservative residents are likely to be against a younger and more diverse mix of visitors from what they have been used to and

see change as something to be afraid of, we believe the island will embrace the more cosmopolitan feel, while retaining the features that make Malta a unique visit among her Mediterranean island competitors.'