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BACK ON TRACK

Malta's Tourism Authority chief explains how the Mediterranean island managed to restart its crucial tourism industry in a few months, and how it plans to capitalise on the momentum garnered.

For the tourism sector in Malta, 2022 was the year of the great restart. Practically closing its doors to incoming tourists for most of the previous 24 months, the tourism-focused island in the middle of the Mediterranean was extremely eager to welcome back visitors.

Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) CEO Carlo Micallef, explains how the recovery was faster and steadier than expected, as 2022 is expected to have attracted 2.2 million tourists, getting close to the pre-COVID record breaking 2019, which clocked 2.75 million visitors.

Apart from health considerations which made some visitors hesitant to travel anywhere, Malta had to face an airborne challenge which wasn't the virus, but the actual availability of seats flying to Malta.

"It wasn't easy to get the numbers going again" Mr Micallef explains "Flights servicing Malta from around the world peaked at only at 80% of what we had in 2019. With 99% of our guests arriving by air, this was a considerable limitation that needed to be mitigated. On the other hand, that meant that airlines were flying at almost full capacity, which translated into very good business for them, which makes us happy!"

Mr Micallef proceeds to express his satisfaction that Malta didn't lose its shine with visitors.



"Despite the fact that flying costs for tourists have gone up in the past months due to a myriad of reasons over which we have no control, tourists still find our offering interesting as they keep choosing our little island for their breaks and holidays. We are pleased to notice that they are willing to pay more to visit Malta."

Getting into the how of things, Mr Micallef explains how the Tourism Authority he leads, aims at achieving three goals - recover, rethink, revitalise.

"First of all we needed to get the wheels turning again, as quickly as possible, in order to recover the lost momentum. This was our number 1 priority, as without the numbers, we couldn't convince airlines to restart operation, or hotels to open their doors. This naturally came with its own challenges which we managed to overcome. Contemporarily, while we were jump-starting the engine, we looked at re-thinking our processes and operation with a view to improve. We did this by engaging with operators in the field, as we looked at ways of attracting better quality tourism across all categories of the spectrum, not only the higher end ones," Mr Micallef expounds.

In terms of revitalisation, Mr Micallef describes how the MTA has set up a tourism observatory, to carry out research and identify ways forward taking advantage of the latest trends that would be developing in tourism around the world.

"We want to be in the best position possible to adapt and capitalise on upcoming tendencies, while looking at making our industry more sustainable. The ultimate aim is to spread the number of tourists who visit us as evenly as possible throughout the year, minimising the burden on the country's resources," Mr Micallef reveals.

The MTA plans to achieve this through specific promotion, targeting specialised tourism segments that generate more traffic in the off-peak seasons.



"While June-September will remain our peak months attracting family and leisure travel from all over the globe, the other months, which are just as enticing to our international visitors, already attract tourists for very specific reasons such as learning English, conferences, culture, sports competitions, diving

courses, music festivals, gastronomic events and more. We have successfully positioned some of our most renowned events such as the Baroque Festival in January, or the Jazz Festival in summer and we want to coordinate our events calendar even better in order to present the widest, most attractive offering to our international guests" says Mr Micallef

As the EU country with the highest concentration of points of interest by square kilometer, Malta's small size turns into a great advantage when it comes to tourist experience.

"With an area of 316 square meters, Malta has the added advantage over other destinations that within a few minutes one can switch from being at the beach, to visiting a UNESCO Heritage listed baroque city, shopping at a World-Class mall, followed by dinner in a Michelin star restaurant, before enjoying a drink at a local pub or attending an international music event. Few destinations can offer a 'sand and sea' holiday, while also providing a vibrant cultural city lifestyle at the same time." Mr Micallef notes.

MTA's strategies over the years have proven successful in positioning Malta as one of the leading Mediterranean destinations, through continuous improvements over the years.

"We are constantly upgrading our product in terms of infrastructure, services, connectivity, entertainment and cultural offer, generating opportunities for both local and foreign investors." Mr Micallef continues.

Our premium location in the heart of the Mediterranean and our connectivity to all major cities in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, make us an attractive destination for tourists from all over the World, but also for longer term visitors such as digital nomads, or international investors willing to relocate", he concludes.

More information can be found [online](#).



Carlo Micallef, CEO
Malta Tourism Authority

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and place your phone over the pictures marked with  to see them come to life!

NEW BRAND FOR NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Previously known as 'Conventions Malta', VisitMalta Incentives & Meetings is a fresh brand having just been launched in May 2022.

Following a research exercise, a decision was taken to incorporate the M.I.C.E. arm of the Malta Tourism Authority under one powerful umbrella brand, that is VisitMalta. The section, which focuses on the promotion of the Maltese Islands as a meetings and incentives destination, is formed by a team at Malta Tourism Authority Head Office and an International overseas network being present in the main source markets. This setup, together with the seamless synergy created between the local and the international offices, has proven to be crucial in achieving a great reach and award-winning work in the most important markets.

Similar to leisure tourism, M.I.C.E. jumped back in business with a bang in 2022. During the first quarter we've seen the awaited re-opening of events on the islands. Suppliers went from zero to full speed as they worked around the clock to service the heavy demand post-Covid, most of which also came at a short turnaround. After that fast-paced comeback period, the industry is now settled back and looking forward to gaining a steadier stream of business. During the pandemic many were thinking that live meetings will dwindle, and that virtual & hybrid meeting were the way forward. However, trends have shown that whilst virtual meetings will remain because of their usefulness, people want to meet in person. People need to be physically and mentally present, to experience meetings in their whole 360-degree spectrum. That includes of course, travelling to a sunny destination in the heart of the Mediterranean.

Restoring flight connectivity has been crucial for M.I.C.E. business in Malta. The Islands' convenient connectivity to main European hubs is in fact one of the most important factors for planners organising international meetings on the islands. Enjoying their exotic location yet being within 3 hours away from the main European airports is an asset that the islands are grateful to hold. To top that, the destination is European, within the Euro zone, having English as one of the two official languages with Maltese and also having an excellent multi-lingual supplier network. With their compact size, the islands are ideal for incentive trips and small to medium sized meetings & conferences. The minimal time dedicated to transfers means that programs are maximised and diverse. Feedback has shown that these are all very important factors for planners when choosing where to take their next group.

However, don't be fooled- the size might be small but it does pack a punch. The islands offer a surprising diversity. From wellness activities to themed beach dinners, quad bike and jeep tours, speedboats, gullets or catamaran rental, film location tours, wine tasting, farm to fork experiences, olive grove tours and sailing regattas; the list goes on. Having such a colourful history that goes back 7000 years, and being surrounded by the shimmering clear blue sea, the islands have shaped such a unique culture, gastronomy, heritage, and of course a myriad of options for visitors.



This has made tourism to be a main economic pillar for Malta and Gozo, and this is reflected in an exciting industry which never sleeps. The past two years have seen new openings such as the 5* superior Hyatt Regency Hotel, 4* Mercure Hotel, 4* Embassy Hotel in Valletta, numerous high quality and good value restaurants listed in the Michelin Guide 2022 and a number of boutique hotels set in precious heritage buildings. A local brewery, Farsons, has opened 'The Brewhouse'- its old brewery which is

housed in an iconic art deco building, now transformed into a combination of beautiful meeting spaces, offices, and also hosting its own brewery tour. 2023 will bring no less. As we look ahead into the year we will see an exciting mix of important 4* and 5* hotel openings around the islands, together with new boutique accommodation options and upgrades. Undoubtedly, for groups, the themes of wellness, fresh food, farm to fork, sustainability, and the great outdoors will be expected to dominate. In line with international trends and happening on the islands which have been proven for centuries.



"We are very happy with the way that our industry here has been developing and adapting. I believe that challenges have resulted in innovation and a stronger workforce with a shift in mentality towards embracing more local and sustainability. For the coming year we will be driving our efforts to strengthen our core European markets whilst reaching out to develop new markets in the US and Middle East/Asia.", says Christophe Berger, Director VisitMalta Incentives & Meetings.

More information can be found [online](#).



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THE MEETING POINT OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

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Whether you're looking to host your next meeting, or a memorable incentive trip to a Mediterranean location, the Maltese Islands are your next destination!



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