

“Malta in the spotlight”

Suzanne Cassar Dimech, MICE Segment Head of the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA), on Malta's new developments and its unique potential for meetings and incentives.

■ CIM: How important are meetings and incentives for Malta? Are there any recent statistics available for this segment?

Cassar Dimech: Business travellers spend almost three times as much as average leisure guests during a shorter span of time. The sector also helps increase the number of visitors during the shoulder months. MICE guests account for approximately six per cent of total visitors to Malta per annum.

What has changed for planners of meetings and incentives now that Malta has introduced the euro?

Visitors no longer need to convert currency. For conference buyers this brings more transparency to the procurement process, particularly when it comes to quoting for groups and sending requests for proposals (RFPs). It is also easier now to compare Malta's offer and value for money with other European destinations.

The Smart City Malta is now being built by Tecom investments of Dubai. How will this impact Malta?

This prestigious project is set to enhance Malta's exposure as a destination and avant-garde country with a progressive economy. It will lead to the creation of more jobs and collaboration with large international companies, bringing more business and investment. This initiative puts Malta in the information technology spotlight, which is a very important sector of the international business world.

What kind of a service can planners expect to get from the MICE segment team within the Malta Tourism Authority?

The MTA offers free and impartial advice to help planners find meeting and incentive offers that are best-suited to their needs. The MTA often organises or provides assistance with the organisation of site inspections and fam trips, prepares bidding documents for events in collaboration with hoteliers, DMCs and other service providers. The MTA also provides suggestions for events and incentive programmes and can promote case studies of planners' events.



Photo: Suzanne Cassar Dimech, MTA

Suzanne Cassar Dimech erwarb einen MBA-Abschluss an der Maastrichter Hochschule für Unternehmensführung und arbeitet seit 1995 für das Fremdenverkehrsamt Malta (MTA). Nach einigen Jahren in der Forschungsabteilung wurde sie im Januar 2006 zur Abteilungsleiterin Meetings und Incentives befördert. www.visitmalta.com

Suzanne Cassar Dimech, who obtained a Masters in Business Administration from the Maastricht School of Management, joined the **Malta Tourism Authority (MTA)** in 1995. After having worked for the Authority's Research division, she was appointed MICE Segment Head in January 2006. www.mta.com.mt, www.visitmalta.com

What are the distinguishing features of Malta as a convention and incentive destination?

The Maltese islands were established as a meetings venue long before the advent of WiFi-enabled laptops. The pre-historic temples in Malta and in Gozo are UNESCO World Heritage Sites which date back to around 5,000 BC and are the oldest freestanding temples in the world. Today, Malta offers a total of 14 five-star hotels, which can together accommodate more than 5,500 delegates. Many of them are clustered within walking distance of each other, enabling event organisers to split up large groups into different properties. The 40-plus four-star hotels provide an additional 14,000 beds. Malta's conference and incentive venues include charming palazzos and converted traditional farmhouses. The Grand Harbour can also host a considerable number of conference and incentive groups, which utilise the impressive venues situated along the honey-coloured limestone bastions.

Are there new venues or hotels planned or just opened?

Several new properties have recently been floated on the local market, which shows confidence in Malta's ability to grow and succeed in this sector on the part of local and foreign investors. Among them, there is The Palace, an urban five-star boutique hotel in the heart of Sliema with 150 rooms and the Hotel Excelsior, a luxurious hotel outside Valletta offering 450 rooms. The Malta Fairs and Convention Centre (MFCC) is the largest indoor venue accommodating 10,000 pax seated and 22,000 standing. The Monte Kristo Estates is another new indoor venue, which includes wine vaults, a brewery, and a marvellous arena in which the Knights of Malta 1565 show is held.

What marketing activities is the MTA planning?

We will be participating in the main MICE fairs, including CONFEX, EMIF, IMEX and EIBTM. In addition, we have just finalised the MICE Directory, we are revamping the business travel section of our website, and now have an online RFP form, press cuttings, detailed supplier listing and floor plans. The MTA is also sponsoring Confec Blue, which is a pan-European MICE workshop organised by MacLean events in June 2008 and which will be held in Malta.

The MTA organised a seminar for Maltese trade members last September, regarding the implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives. In view of the success of this initiative, the MTA's MICE Segment Team will be organising other local industry seminars in 2008.