THE MEDITERRANEAN TABLE EXPERIENCE

RESTAURANTS, BARS, CAFÉS & CATERING — WHAT'S NEXT?

Friday, 27 November 2026 | Hilton Malta | 15:30–18:30

Action Lab Facilitator: Quinton Scerri — Television Presenter & Media Personality | Malta (TBC)

THE OPPORTUNITY

Building on the morning plenary, "From Counting People to Making People Count", this Action Lab asks how restaurants, bars, cafés, caterers and hotels can create food and beverage experiences customers value more. Mediterranean ingredients, culinary heritage, storytelling, premium drinks and outstanding service can strengthen brands, increase spending and improve profitability. Two live experiences — Lefteris Lazarou's seafood show cooking and the Lavazza Italian Coffee Experience — bring the ideas to life.

FROM INGREDIENTS TO EXPERIENCES. FROM TRADITION TO INNOVATION. FROM FOOD TO GREATER VALUE.

15:30–15:35 | OPENING — THE MEDITERRANEAN TABLE

Welcome and connection to the morning plenary

THE OPPORTUNITY

How can Mediterranean food culture create greater value for hospitality businesses and destinations?

Quinton Scerri — Action Lab Facilitator | Malta

Maltese broadcaster and television presenter experienced in interviews and live events. Introduces the link between Mediterranean food culture, memorable hospitality and business value. *Perspective: Connecting Mediterranean food culture, memorable hospitality and stronger business value through a lively, audience-focused discussion.*

15:35–15:45 | OPENING SPEECH — FROM VOLUME TO VALUE

Opening address • Tourism, heritage and higher-value experiences

Dr Alex Perici Calascione — Deputy Leader, Nationalist Party; Shadow Minister for Tourism | Malta

With extensive experience in law, business advisory and public affairs, he currently serves as Shadow Minister for Tourism, his responsibilities include scrutinising tourism policy and addressing the sector's long-term development and competitiveness.
Perspective: How Malta can strengthen its tourism competitiveness by promoting authentic Mediterranean experiences, protecting culinary heritage and generating greater value for businesses, visitors and communities.

15:45–16:15 | PANEL 1 — TELLING THE STORY OF MEDITERRANEAN FOOD

Broadcasting • Podcasts • Tourism Journalism • Destination Identity

THE OPPORTUNITY

How can restaurants, producers and destinations use broadcasting, podcasts and journalism to turn authentic food traditions into stories that attract visitors and strengthen brands?

Liam Gauci — Heritage Malta, Taste History | Malta

Heritage professional associated with Heritage Malta's Taste History initiative, which brings historic Maltese recipes and food traditions to life through archival research, storytelling and experiences in heritage settings. *Perspective: How historical menus, archival recipes and the stories behind Malta's food can inspire contemporary restaurant concepts and authentic, higher-value visitor experiences.*

Eng. Keith Chetcuti — Chief Executive Officer, Public Broadcasting Services | Malta

Broadcasting and production executive leading Malta's public broadcaster. Examines the potential of television and public media to showcase local food brands and gastronomy. *Perspective: How public-service television and digital media can showcase Maltese food, local producers and distinctive gastronomic experiences.*

Times of Malta | Malta

Times of Malta is one of Malta's leading English-language news organisations, established in 1935. It provides independent journalism and coverage of national and international news, politics, business, culture, lifestyle and current affairs through its print and digital platforms.

16:15–16:45 | PANEL 2 — ROOTED IN TRADITION, REIMAGINED THROUGH CREATIVITY

Farm-to-Table • Heritage • Michelin Excellence • Restaurant Success

THE OPPORTUNITY

How can traditional ingredients, seasonal produce and creativity become distinctive, commercially successful dining experiences?

Chef Victor Borg — Culinary Director, AX Privilege; Michelin-Starred Chef; Judge, MasterChef Malta | Malta

A Maltese chef and resident judge on MasterChef Malta, Victor led Under Grain to its first Michelin star and previously worked at The Phoenicia Malta. His career spans fine dining, culinary leadership and mentoring emerging talent. *Perspective: How Michelin-level discipline, creative cooking and the visibility of MasterChef Malta can inspire culinary careers and successful restaurants.*

Chef Ian Kittichai - Internationally acclaimed Thai chef, restaurateur, author and television personality, recognised for his contribution to contemporary Thai gastronomy.

From selling street food in Bangkok to becoming the first Thai Executive Chef of a five-star hotel, Chef Ian has built an international career spanning award-winning restaurants across Asia, Europe and the United States. In 2026, he introduced **Anaalā Valletta at Iniala**, bringing contemporary Thai cuisine to Malta's Grand Harbour. He is also renowned for his appearances on *Iron Chef Thailand*, *MasterChef Thailand* and *Hell's Kitchen Thailand*.

16:45–17:15 | FEATURED LIVE CULINARY SHOW — FROM SEA TO PLATE

30-minute show cooking • Reinventing Mediterranean seafood

THE OPPORTUNITY

How can chefs turn traditional Mediterranean seafood into memorable premium experiences that attract higher-spending diners?

Chef Lefteris Lazarou — Michelin-Starred Chef Patron, Varoulko Seaside | Greece

A pioneer of contemporary Greek seafood cuisine and the first Greek chef to receive a Michelin star for Greek cuisine. From working aboard ships alongside his chef father, he built the acclaimed Varoulko restaurant. His live demonstration will explore authentic seafood, creative techniques and fine-dining presentation. *Perspective: How Mediterranean seafood traditions and innovative cooking techniques can create premium experiences rooted in local ingredients.*

17:15–17:45 | PANEL 3 — THE ART OF WELCOMING & HEALTHY DINING

Service Excellence • Etiquette • Nutrition • Special Diets

THE OPPORTUNITY

How can hospitality businesses deliver more personalised, inclusive and memorable service while responding to changing dietary needs?

Nadine Daher — Founder, Nadine Daher Training Center for Etiquette & Image Consultancy | Lebanon

International etiquette and protocol specialist who has advised diplomatic missions, institutions and corporate clients and contributed to regional television. Focuses on cultural awareness and outstanding service. *Perspective: How etiquette, cultural awareness and attentive service create a genuinely welcoming experience for guests from different backgrounds.*

Dr Mario Caruana Grech Perry — Senior Lecturer, University of Malta | Malta

Registered dietitian, nutritionist and biomedical researcher whose work connects clinical nutrition, food science and dietetic practice. Focuses on special diets, food intolerances and guest wellbeing. *Perspective: How nutrition knowledge, food-intolerance awareness and inclusive menus can improve guest wellbeing and broaden restaurant appeal.*

Delal Tahsin Atamdede — Vice President, ATURJET and FIJET | Türkiye

International tourism journalist and media leader involved in cultural exchange and destination promotion. Explores the role of tourism journalism in making culinary identity visible internationally. *Perspective: How international tourism journalism can promote authentic culinary identity and connect Mediterranean destinations with travellers.*

17:45–18:15 | PANEL 4 — THE FUTURE OF AUTHENTIC MEDITERRANEAN FOOD & DRINK EXPERIENCES

Emerging Trends • Genuine Experiences • Mediterranean Lifestyle • Wine & Craft Beverages

THE OPPORTUNITY

As travellers increasingly seek genuine local experiences, how can restaurants, bars, cafés and hotels turn Mediterranean food and drink traditions into distinctive, commercially successful experiences? This panel explores local provenance, independent producers, wine tourism, craft brewing and changing consumer expectations, while protecting the values and authenticity of Mediterranean hospitality.

Alexandros Kouris — Founder & Owner, NISSOS Beer / Cyclades Microbrewery | Greece

Following a career in marketing, communications and innovation, Alexandros founded Cyclades Microbrewery on Tinos in 2012, creating the internationally awarded NISSOS beers. Perspective: The Soul of the Mediterranean Table — How authentic local products, traditions and hospitality transform food and drink into memorable experiences celebrating Mediterranean identity, togetherness and human connection.

Prof. Haiyan Song — Tourism Economics & Wine Tourism Research, Hong Kong Polytechnic University | Hong Kong SAR

International tourism economist recognised for research in demand forecasting and visitor expenditure. *Perspective: What tourism economics reveals about wine tourism, visitor spending, premium pricing and the commercial value of food-and-drink experiences.*

Drago Nosic — Co-Founder & Director, Poetica Distillery |Croatia

An experienced tourism and hospitality entrepreneur and co-founder of Poetica, an award-winning Croatian craft distillery. *Perspective: How Mediterranean heritage, local ingredients, innovation and authentic gastronomic experiences, helping connect traditional craftsmanship with contemporary tourism and hospitality.*

18:15 -18:45 | MEDITERRANEAN HOSPITALITY EXCELLENCE — REFLECTIONS & FUTURE TALENT

Pearl of the Sea • Culinary Competitions • Skills • Future Talent

THE OPPORTUNITY

How can culinary competitions, training and professional standards develop young talent and strengthen Mediterranean hospitality?

Željko Neven Bremec — President, ŠKMER; MTF Senator | Croatia

Croatian master chef, international culinary judge and educator. As President of ŠKMER, the organisation behind the Pearl of the Sea (Biser Mora) competition, he will reflect on professional excellence, hospitality skills, international cooperation and opportunities for the next generation.

Hubert Ummels - Founder, Future Leaders Challenge; Founder, GameChangers Group | Netherlands

Founder of the Future Leaders Challenge, connecting hospitality schools, emerging talent and international hotel groups. Its industry network includes leaders associated with Hilton, Accor, Radisson, Rotana, One&Only and NEOM. Perspective: tomorrow's hospitality leaders and careers.

Dr Noel Buttigieg is the Head of the Department of Tourism Management and a Senior Lecturer within the Faculty of Economics, Management & Accountancy at the University of Malta | Malta

An academic and researcher specialising in food tourism, culinary heritage and Maltese cultural history, with significant contributions to the preservation and international recognition of Malta's gastronomic traditions.

18:45 | MEDITERRANEAN SERVICE EXCELLENCE OLYMPICS — MEDAL PRESENTATION

Celebrating Hospitality Skills & Professional Excellence

THE CELEBRATION

Presentation of medals recognising achievement in culinary arts, restaurant service, barista skills, reception and housekeeping. Competitors, trainers, employers and Forum delegates are invited to celebrate the talent, teamwork and professionalism of Mediterranean hospitality.