STAR JOURNEY

INTERNATIONAL SERVICE EXCELLENCE | BRAIN THINK TANK

From measuring service to improving it.

Don't just measure excellence. Create a roadmap to achieve it.

The ambition

STAR Journey is MTF's service-excellence programme combining training, independent assessment, mystery-guest evaluation and quality assurance. The Think Tank will examine how this existing product can become compelling to international buyers—destinations, hotel and restaurant groups, tourism authorities and industry associations—and what they would need to see before purchasing or adopting it.

The central commercial challenge is to define the value proposition, customer needs, route to market, pricing and sustainable business model for international expansion. An AI-powered reporting and improvement platform, stronger links to HR and training, and credible independent certification are potential differentiators to test against buyers' real priorities.

What the session should achieve

• Identify target buyers and decision-makers: destination authorities, hotel and restaurant groups, associations, operators and training partners.

• Determine what would motivate a buyer to purchase STAR Journey: measurable service improvements, reputation, certification, workforce development, benchmarking and return on investment.

• Test the product offer: assessments, mystery guests, training, AI-powered insights, improvement plans and certification—what is essential, optional or locally adaptable?

• Explore commercial models: subscriptions, per-property assessment fees, destination licences, bundled training, certification renewals and delivery partnerships.

• Define how best to sell and deliver the product internationally: buyer outreach, pilot offers, local representatives, partnerships, proof of value and a phased go-to-market pathway.

Programme — Thursday, 26 November 2026 | Hilton Malta

Time	Activity
13:00	Networking lunch — Spinola Foyer
14:30–14:45	Welcome, purpose and STAR Journey overview
14:45–15:20	Part 1: Understand the existing programme and international relevance
15:20–16:05	Part 2: Design the international model and AI-enabled improvement cycle
16:05–16:35	Group proposals: pilots, partnerships, standards and delivery
16:35–16:55	Consolidate project brief, roadmap and priority actions
16:55–17:00	Closing and next steps

Discussion workstreams — buyer demand, commercial model and international growth

1. Who will buy STAR Journey—and why?

Who holds the budget and purchasing authority? What problems are they trying to solve? Which benefits are worth paying for: quality uplift, guest satisfaction, staff development, destination reputation, credible certification or comparable benchmarks? What evidence would convince them?

2. Product-market fit and the international offer

What is the minimum attractive package for a hotel, restaurant group or destination? Which features should be core and which premium? How can the service be adapted across markets without compromising independent assessment and brand credibility?

3. AI-powered value that buyers will recognise

How can intelligent reports, clear performance gaps, peer benchmarks and tailored recommendations make STAR Journey more valuable and easier to act upon? What reporting outputs would managers and destination buyers actually use and pay for?

4. Training, people development and measurable improvement

How can assessments trigger practical coaching, on-the-job training and skills development? How can the product demonstrate improvements over time, including service outcomes and employee capability?

5. Revenue model, pricing and delivery economics

Which models are viable: per-assessment fees, annual membership, subscriptions, destination-wide contracts, certification renewals, licensing or revenue sharing with local partners? What delivery costs, margins, assessor capacity and quality controls matter?

6. Sales channels, pilots and market entry

How should MTF reach buyers—direct sales, tourism authorities, hotel associations, local delivery partners, industry events or anchor clients? Which destinations could host pilots, what proof points are needed, and how should pilot results convert into paying customers?

The five-step improvement cycle

ASSESS → UNDERSTAND → RECOMMEND → TRAIN & IMPROVE → REASSESS

The purpose of AI is to make evidence easier to understand and act upon—not to replace professional judgement or reduce service excellence to a score.

What participants should bring

Bring examples of destination quality schemes or service-improvement products that organisations pay for, buyer objections, pricing structures, certification and training programmes, sales partnerships, procurement processes and evidence of measurable returns.

Practical outcome: a commercially viable project brief and sales pathway

By 17:00 the group should aim to define priority customer segments, compelling purchase drivers, a differentiated product package, initial pricing and revenue-model options, sales channels, potential pilot

buyers, evidence needed to secure sales, and next steps for validating commercial demand. The aim is not to finalise prices on the day, but to create a testable business and go-to-market proposition.

Participation and FAQs

The participant list below is an initial, provisional group. It may change or grow; the Think Tank is open to others interested in advancing service excellence. Roles and affiliations should be confirmed before external publication.

Do I need technical AI expertise?

No. Operational, destination, training, academic and business experience are equally valuable.

Is this only for hotels?

No. The programme can explore hotels, restaurants and other visitor-facing tourism businesses, with appropriate standards.

Are we approving certification rules on the day?

No. We will identify the questions, safeguards and development work needed.

Are we expected to agree final prices or sign commercial commitments?

No. The objective is to identify promising commercial hypotheses, buying criteria and sales approaches to validate with prospective customers.

Must participants commit funding or resources?

No. Possible partnerships and next steps are exploratory.

APPENDIX A — INITIAL PARTICIPANTS & SHORT PROFILES

Facilitators: Faisal Murtaza and Mona Khalilieh (MTF team). All profiles below are concise descriptions based on the supplied roles, pending confirmation.

Faisal Murtaza

MTF team; joint facilitator — Guides the discussion and consolidation of proposed project outcomes.

Mona Khalilieh

MTF team; joint facilitator — Supports coordination, participation and translation of ideas into follow-up actions.

Betim Budzaku

CEO, Andorra Tourism Board — Destination leadership and international tourism positioning.

Yiannos Pantazis

President, Cyprus Hotel Association — Hotel industry representation and operational standards.

Dimitris Lianos

Mayor, Naxos and Small Cyclades — Local destination governance and community tourism perspective.

Angela Varela

President, Greek National Tourism Organisation — National tourism strategy and destination partnership perspective.

Daniele Brocchi
Director of Tourism and Culture, Confesercenti Roma e Lazio; Board Member, Rome & Lazio Convention Bureau — Business associations, cultural tourism and destination collaboration.

Haiyan Song
Chair Professor, International Tourism; Director, Research Centre for Digital Transformation of Tourism, PolyU — Tourism research, digital transformation and evaluation methods.

Christina Khater
Founder and CEO, Kristies Lab, Lebanon — Innovation and entrepreneurial perspective.

Nadine Daher
Etiquette expert, Lebanon — Guest interaction, etiquette and service culture.

Elia Rinaldi
Secretariat of State for Territory, Environment, Agriculture and Civil Protection, San Marino — Public administration and cross-sector destination perspective.

Matteo Ciacci
Secretary of State for Territory, Environment, Agriculture and Civil Protection, San Marino — Government policy and destination development perspective.

Glenn Mandziuk
President & CEO, World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance — International hospitality standards and sustainability partnerships.

Mariano Angelucci
Tourism Commission President, Rome Capitale — City tourism and destination policy perspective.

Ioulia Xirogianni
Messina Forum, Greece — Regional stakeholder and partnership perspective.

Ioannis Kolovos
Messina Forum, Greece — Regional stakeholder and partnership perspective.

Lilla Harangozo
Head of Office & Director of Tourism Policy, Capital European Affairs, Belgium — Tourism policy and European institutional networks.

Prof. Dalia Fahmy Amara
Vice President for Tourism Studies Affairs & Vice Dean, Graduate School of Business, AASTMT — Tourism education, academic collaboration and professional training.

Dubravka Kalin
Director General of Tourism, Slovenia — National tourism administration and destination quality policy.

APPENDIX B — WORKING WORKSHEETS

Worksheet 1 — Buyer and purchasing decision
Priority customer segments and decision-makers: _____

Why would they buy? Problems solved and outcomes valued: _____

What proof or ROI would they require? _____

Notes: _____

_____

Worksheet 2 — Offer and market fit

Core product versus optional/premium features: _____

Destination adaptation and local delivery partners: _____

Most persuasive differentiators: _____

Notes: _____

_____

Worksheet 3 — AI value and evidence

AI outputs buyers would use and value: _____

Benchmarks, improvement reports and success metrics: _____

Human oversight, data protection and governance: _____

Notes: _____

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Worksheet 4 — Pricing and sustainable business model

Pricing and revenue model options: _____

Delivery costs, partner roles and quality assurance: _____

Training and employee-development upsell/value: _____

Notes: _____

_____

Worksheet 5 — Go-to-market and commercial validation

First target buyers, pilot destinations and sales proposition: _____

Channels, introductions and prospective commercial partners: _____

Pilot-to-paid conversion plan, owners and next steps: _____

Open questions and risks: _____

Notes: _____

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