MEDITERRANEAN TOURISM FORUM

PLENARY SESSION

MEDITERRANEAN SUN: STEWARDSHIP • UNITY • NET POSITIVE

Friday, 27 November 2026 | Hilton Malta

Registration: 08:30–09:00 | International Morning Plenary: 09:00–14:00

The Four Action Labs: 15:30–18:30

FROM COUNTING PEOPLE TO MAKING PEOPLE COUNT

More tourists. More nights. More beds. But are we creating more value — or simply more volume?

The Mediterranean stands at a crossroads. Geopolitical uncertainty, artificial intelligence, climate change and changing traveller expectations are reshaping how people travel, work and invest. The priority is to build more competitive businesses, stronger destinations and lasting prosperity.

The opportunity lies in lifestyle tourism, business travel and connectivity. Hospitality, gastronomy, culture, wellbeing and authentic experiences create new reasons to visit and spend. Stronger air and maritime links can grow corporate travel, open international markets and connect Mediterranean destinations through tourism, trade and investment.

The 11th Mediterranean Tourism Forum brings together international leaders, investors, entrepreneurs and innovators to identify opportunities and turn them into business. The morning plenary challenges conventional thinking; four afternoon Action Labs focus on practical solutions, partnerships and commercial results.

THE MORNING INSPIRES AND CHALLENGES. THE FOUR ACTION LABS TURN IDEAS INTO ACTION.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

Hotel and restaurant owners, hospitality executives, tourism entrepreneurs, investors, property developers, investment consultancies, architects, engineers, infrastructure operators, aviation and maritime executives, entertainment and event companies, banks, insurers, technology providers, policymakers, mayors, local councils, academics and future industry leaders.

WHY ATTEND?

Meet and hear from international personalities whose careers span BBC, World Bank, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Kempinski Hotels, Grand Metropolitan Hotels, Duetto, UBS, Historic Hotels of Europe, Variety Cruises, Mercedes-Benz, Samsung and leading international universities.

Discover new investment opportunities, understand changing international markets, explore the lifestyle tourism economy and connect with the people shaping the future of Mediterranean hospitality.

INTERNATIONAL MORNING PLENARY

PLENARY MODERATOR

Rajan Datar — BBC Broadcaster, Travel Journalist & International Conference Moderator | United Kingdom

An internationally recognised BBC broadcaster and presenter of The Travel Show, bringing global destinations, cultures and tourism issues to international audiences. His broadcasting career spans BBC World News, BBC World Service, BBC Radio 4 and Newsnight. Through international documentaries, interviews and conference moderation, he has explored the economic, cultural and human dimensions of travel.

Rajan will guide the leadership conversations, moderate the international panels and connect the morning's perspectives with the Four Action Labs.

08:30–09:00 | REGISTRATION & WELCOME COFFEE

09:00–09:35 | SETTING THE TONE

Four leadership perspectives establish the direction for a Mediterranean tourism economy focused on greater value, stronger businesses, international cooperation and lasting prosperity.

09:00–09:05 | WELCOME TO THE MEDITERRANEAN SUN

Andrew Agius Muscat — Secretary General & Co-Founder, Mediterranean Tourism Foundation| Malta

5 minutes | Opening Address

A business executive specialising in strategic business development, organisational restructuring, international relations and institutional lobbying. As CEO of MHRA and Co-Founder and Secretary General of the Mediterranean Tourism Foundation, he has advanced cooperation between tourism businesses, governments and international institutions. Also Co-Founder of the Mediterranean Orchestra, his work connects business leadership, diplomacy, international partnerships and creative production.

THE MESSAGE Introducing Mediterranean Sun and its ambition to create greater value for businesses, people and destinations.

09:05–09:15 | FROM TOURISM SUCCESS TO NATIONAL VALUE

Hon. Mr Jo Etienne Abela — Minister for Tourism | Malta

10 minutes | Ministerial Address

A distinguished surgeon and senior government leader, recognised for his contribution to advanced and minimally invasive surgery. A recipient of the Gold Medal of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, he brings a background in medical innovation, healthcare transformation and public administration to Malta's tourism portfolio.

THE CHALLENGE How can Malta translate tourism success into stronger competitiveness, investment and lasting national value?

09:15–09:25 | A TALE OF TWO SEAS — THE MEDITERRANEAN & THE CARIBBEAN

Hon. Edmund Bartlett — Minister of Tourism | Jamaica

10 minutes | Special Guest Address

One of the Caribbean's most influential tourism policymakers and an internationally recognised champion of tourism resilience. As Jamaica's long-serving Tourism Minister, he spearheaded the Global Tourism Resilience and Crisis Management Centre and helped establish Global Tourism Resilience Day, advancing international cooperation, destination investment and crisis preparedness.

THE OPPORTUNITY How can the Mediterranean and Caribbean unlock new investment, trade and tourism opportunities through stronger international cooperation?

09:25–09:35 | FROM COUNTING PEOPLE TO MAKING PEOPLE COUNT

Tony Zahra — Co-Founder & President, Mediterranean Tourism Foundation | Malta

10 minutes | MTF President Address

One of Malta's most established tourism entrepreneurs, with nearly six decades of business and hospitality experience. Founder of the Alpine Group, recipient of Malta's National Order of Merit, President of MHRA and CoFounder and President of the Mediterranean Tourism Foundation, he has helped shape Malta's hospitality industry and advance international tourism cooperation.

THE CHALLENGE How can tourism deliver greater profitability, productivity and economic returns without depending indefinitely on increasing visitor numbers?

09:35–10:05 | DANTE'S LOST CANTO

THE JOURNEY OF LIGHT

30 minutes | Cinematic Theatrical Opening

An original artistic experience inspired by Dante and the Mediterranean's cultural heritage, combining cinematic storytelling, music and theatrical performance.

A symbolic journey from darkness towards light introduces the Forum's three guiding pillars:

STEWARDSHIP • UNITY • NET POSITIVE

The performance sets the emotional and intellectual tone for a morning that challenges established thinking and explores a new vision for Mediterranean tourism.

PART I — STEWARDSHIP

PROTECT WHAT CREATES VALUE

10:05–10:20 | THE NEW LUXURY: WHAT WILL TOMORROW'S TRAVELLERS REALLY VALUE?

KEYNOTE : Herman Konings — Consumer Psychologist, Trend Analyst & Futurist | Belgium

A leading European consumer trends analyst and futurist who has delivered approximately 3,500 presentations to corporate audiences, business leaders and international organisations. Founder of Pocket Marketing and nXt, he combines consumer psychology, behavioural research and trend analysis to explain how changing generations, lifestyles and values influence purchasing decisions.

THE OPPORTUNITY Why tomorrow's luxury will increasingly be defined by authenticity, wellbeing, time, personal meaning and emotional experiences rather than traditional symbols of excess.

10:20–10:55 | STEWARDSHIP: PROTECTING THE MEDITERRANEAN'S MOST VALUABLE ASSETS

Moderator: Rajan Datar

The Mediterranean's natural environment, cultural heritage, knowledge and identity are among its greatest economic assets. Climate change, shifting travel seasons and investment pressures are forcing destinations to reconsider how these assets are protected, developed and valued.

PANEL PARTICIPANTS:

Chris Crowley — Partner, Kintela Group; Former Chief Revenue Officer, Duetto | United Kingdom

An international hospitality and commercial strategy executive whose career spans Duetto, BCD Travel, HRS Group and Kintela Group. As former Chief Revenue Officer of Duetto, a leading global hotel revenue-management technology company, he brings extensive experience in commercial growth, digital innovation, pricing and hotel profitability.

PERSPECTIVE Climate, seasonality, changing demand and smarter hospitality investment strategies.

Ken Healy — Chairman, Historic Hotels of Europe | Ireland

An international hospitality and heritage leader associated with Historic Hotels of Europe, representing historic hospitality properties across 24 European countries. His work connects the preservation of castles, palaces and historic residences with authentic luxury experiences and the commercial potential of Europe's architectural heritage.

PERSPECTIVE Heritage preservation, authentic luxury and the economic value of historic properties.

Dr Ismail Serageldin — Founding Director, Bibliotheca Alexandrina; Former Vice President, World Bank | Egypt

An internationally distinguished intellectual and development leader whose career includes serving as Vice President of the World Bank and founding Director of the modern Bibliotheca Alexandrina, one of the Mediterranean's most significant cultural institutions. An influential advocate for education, scientific research and sustainable development, he has championed knowledge and culture as foundations for economic and human progress.

PERSPECTIVE Culture, knowledge, education and human development as foundations for lasting prosperity.

THE PANEL CHALLENGE: How can the Mediterranean protect its most valuable assets while adapting to climate change, changing seasons and new commercial realities? How can heritage, knowledge and authenticity become sources of sustainable competitive advantage?

10:55–11:25 | COFFEE BREAK & NETWORKING

30 minutes

An opportunity to connect with international tourism leaders, investors, entrepreneurs and hospitality professionals.

PART II — UNITY

CONNECT TO CREATE OPPORTUNITY

11:25–11:50 | COMPETE OR COLLABORATE? BUILDING A STRONGER MEDITERRANEAN TOURISM MARKET

Moderator: Rajan Datar

The Mediterranean is one of the world's most recognised tourism regions, yet its destinations frequently compete for the same international markets. As travellers seek multiple experiences within one journey, cooperation offers opportunities to create greater value.

PANEL PARTICIPANTS:

Angela Varela — President, Greek National Tourism Organisation | Greece

An accomplished tourism executive with more than 40 years of experience in international tourism marketing and public administration. As President of the Greek National Tourism Organisation, she brings extensive expertise in destination promotion, international market development and tourism diplomacy, representing one of the Mediterranean's most established tourism brands.

PERSPECTIVE Destination branding, international marketing and Mediterranean cooperation.

Carlo Micallef — Chief Executive Officer, Malta Tourism Authority | Malta

A tourism executive with nearly 30 years at the Malta Tourism Authority, progressing through international marketing leadership to become CEO. He spearheaded the restructuring of Malta's overseas marketing operations and contributed to expansion into new markets. Under his leadership, Malta recorded approximately €3.9 billion in visitor expenditure in 2025.

PERSPECTIVE Market diversification, destination competitiveness and higher-value tourism.

THE PANEL CHALLENGE: Where should Mediterranean destinations compete, and where can they collaborate? How can joint marketing, stronger regional positioning and distinctive tourism products attract higher-value visitors?

11:50–12:25 | THE LIFESTYLE INVESTMENT ECONOMY

NEW PLACES. NEW EXPERIENCES. NEW INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES.

Moderator: Rajan Datar

Lifestyle tourism is transforming hospitality investment. Hotels are becoming part of wider lifestyle ecosystems incorporating residences, gastronomy, culture, retail, entertainment and authentic local experiences.

Three international entrepreneurs explore how new business models can create distinctive tourism products, attract investment and generate stronger commercial returns.

PANEL PARTICIPANTS:

Yiannis Chryssanthakopoulos — Director, Investments & Finance, Monterock International | Greece

An investment and finance executive at Monterock International, a multinational investment group active in luxury hospitality, lifestyle brands, food and beverage and real estate. His work brings an investment perspective to the development and financial structuring of distinctive hospitality assets and internationally recognised lifestyle destinations.

PERSPECTIVE Lifestyle hotels, branded residences, mixed-use destinations and higher-value hospitality investment.

Filippos Venetopoulos — Chief Executive Officer, Variety Cruises | Greece

Third-generation leader of Variety Cruises, a family-owned Greek maritime hospitality company whose origins date to

1949. He has advanced its international boutique cruising model, offering intimate small-ship journeys accommodating up to approximately 72 guests, curated itineraries and authentic destination experiences. Elected President of the Hellenic Association of Yacht Owners in 2026.

PERSPECTIVE Boutique cruising, experiential travel, lesser-known destinations and new tourism markets.

Christina Khater — Founder & CEO, KristiesLab | Lebanon

An international creative entrepreneur leading KristiesLab, whose work spans experiential marketing, luxury branding and creative production. Her company has developed projects involving global brands including L'Oréal, Samsung, Mercedes-Benz, Turkish Airlines, Hublot and TAG Heuer, demonstrating how creativity and memorable experiences can become commercially valuable products.

PERSPECTIVE Creative entrepreneurship, luxury experiences and destination differentiation.

THE PANEL CHALLENGE: Is the next major opportunity in Mediterranean tourism about building more hotels or creating new reasons for people to travel, stay and spend? How can lifestyle tourism unlock stronger investment returns and new business opportunities?

12:25–12:55 | CONNECTING THE MEDITERRANEAN

AVIATION • BUSINESS TRAVEL • ECONOMICS • REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

Moderator: Rajan Datar

The Mediterranean is both a global tourism destination and a major potential tourism-generating market in its own right. Growing long-haul markets create opportunities for multi-country travel, while stronger regional connections can unlock demand from within the Mediterranean itself.

PANEL PARTICIPANTS:

Prof. Haiyan Song — Chair Professor of Tourism, The Hon Kong Polytechnic University | Hong Kong SAR

An internationally recognised tourism economist at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, one of the world's leading institutions for hospitality and tourism education. His influential research spans tourism demand forecasting, international travel markets, economic impact assessment and wine economics. With expertise in international wine marketing and Chinese wine consumption, he brings valuable insights into emerging Asian markets, tourism competitiveness and opportunities for Mediterranean wine exports.

PERSPECTIVE Tourism economics, emerging markets, demand forecasting, wine economics and higher-value tourism.

Mark Cuschieri — Former Board President, Global Business Travel Association | Malta

A leading figure in international business travel and corporate mobility, and the first President of the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) from outside North America. Has played an influential role in shaping the global business travel agenda, championing innovation, sustainability, international connectivity and industry collaboration. Recipient of the prestigious GBTA Direct Member of the Year and Luoma Awards, recognising outstanding contributions to the business travel industry.

PERSPECTIVE Growing business travel through stronger international connectivity and expanding opportunities across the Mediterranean.

David Curmi — Executive Chairman, KM Malta Airlines | Malta

An established Maltese business leader whose career spans aviation, corporate governance and international business development. His leadership experience includes Air Malta, the Malta Chamber and TradeMalta, together with involvement in Malta's aviation transformation and the establishment of KM Malta Airlines, the country's new national carrier.

PERSPECTIVE Airline economics, intra-Mediterranean connectivity and aviation-led business opportunities.

THE PANEL CHALLENGE: Europe has built a powerful tourism market around connectivity. Why should the Mediterranean not unlock similar potential? How can stronger air and maritime links, joint tourism products and the collective Mediterranean brand attract longhaul visitors while encouraging greater travel between Mediterranean countries?

ACT III — NET POSITIVE

MAKE TOURISM WORK FOR EVERYONE

12:55–13:10 | ENJOY & RESPECT: WHEN TOURISM GROWTH BECOMES BAD FOR BUSINESS

Exclusive One-to-One Interview with Rajan Datar

Nico Mulder — Destination Branding Expert; Co-Founder, Place to Be | Netherlands

An international destination branding specialist who helped develop I amsterdam, one of the world's most recognisable city brands. Through Amsterdam Marketing, he was involved in the city's Enjoy & Respect initiative, addressing disruptive visitor behaviour and the challenges of balancing tourism growth with community wellbeing. As Co-Founder of Place to Be, he connects destination branding, visitor management and responsible tourism.

THE ONE-TO-ONE CHALLENGE What happens when tourism success begins to damage the destination itself? What can the Mediterranean learn from Amsterdam about protecting communities, managing visitor behaviour and maintaining a strong destination reputation?

13:10–13:35 | SMARTER TECHNOLOGY, STRONGER BUSINESSES, MORE HUMAN HOSPITALITY

Moderator: Rajan Datar

Artificial intelligence is transforming hospitality operations, revenue management, productivity and guest engagement. The opportunity is not simply automation, but stronger profitability, smarter business models and better human experiences.

PANEL PARTICIPANTS:

Wilhelm K. Weber — Partner, Swiss Hospitality Solutions; Chief Strategy Officer, Grand Metropolitan Hotels; Former Vice President, Kempinski Hotels | Switzerland / Germany

An international hospitality strategist and commercial performance expert whose career spans Kempinski Hotels, Worldhotels, Swiss Hospitality Solutions and Grand Metropolitan Hotels. Co-Founder of Swiss Hospitality Solutions, he has contributed to more than 800 hospitality projects and now helps shape the international growth and strategic development of Grand Metropolitan Hotels.

PERSPECTIVE Hotel profitability, artificial intelligence, commercial performance and smarter hospitality business models.

Kai Koerber — Founder & CEO, Koer A.I.; Creator, Joy AI Wellness Platform | United States

A survivor of the 2018 Parkland school shooting, which claimed 17 lives, Kai transformed personal tragedy into a mission to make technology more compassionate. A University of California, Berkeley graduate and founder of Koer A.I., he developed the Joy AI Wellness Platform, using artificial intelligence and voice-based emotion recognition to support mental wellbeing. His inspiring journey and technological innovation have attracted international media attention, including Associated Press and CBS News.

PERSPECTIVE Empathetic AI, human-centred technology and the future of personalised guest experiences.

THE PANEL CHALLENGE: Can artificial intelligence make hospitality businesses more profitable while making hospitality itself more human? How can hotels combine AI, smarter revenue management and operational efficiency to improve productivity, profitability and guest satisfaction without losing the personal interaction that defines exceptional hospitality?

13:35–14:00 | THE SUN FINALE

FOUR ACTION LABS. FOUR CHALLENGES. ONE MEDITERRANEAN AMBITION.

Moderated Closing Conversation

Moderator: Rajan Datar

The International Morning Plenary concludes by connecting the ideas, international perspectives and business opportunities explored throughout the morning with the Four Action Labs.

In one dynamic moderated conversation, the four facilitators introduce the challenges, practical cases and commercial opportunities that participants will explore during the afternoon.

The objective is to move from inspiration to implementation — translating international insights into practical business decisions, investment opportunities and stronger destinations.

THE FOUR ACTION LABS

1. INVESTING IN THE LIFESTYLE TOURISM BOOM

Designing Hotels, Beautiful Cities and Authentic Experiences to Attract Higher-Spending Travellers and Unlock New Investment Opportunities

Facilitator: Jill Hellman — Founder & CEO, The Strategy Lab Inc.; Global Growth Strategist | USA

International growth strategist and Cornell University visiting faculty member with advisory, speaking and training experience across more than 25 countries. Her documented career includes growing hospitality investments in Asia, strategic work at a $19 billion US retailer and external advisory work with McKinsey's global head of innovation. MBA, Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management.

THE OPPORTUNITY: How can investors develop distinctive hotels, mixed-use destinations, beautiful cities and authentic experiences that attract higher-spending travellers and generate stronger investment returns?

2. TOO HOT. TOO FULL. TOO FRAGILE?

Can Mediterranean Tourism Protect What Makes People Want to Come?

Facilitator: Dr Aradhana Khowala — Founder & CEO, Aptamind Partners; MTF Senator | United Kingdom

An internationally recognised tourism investment adviser and founder of London-based Aptamind Partners, with advisory experience spanning more than 75 countries. Her career includes involvement with Red Sea Global, Elaf Group and the Global Wellness Institute, connecting luxury hospitality, lifestyle investment, wellness and destination development.

THE OPPORTUNITY: How can Mediterranean destinations adapt to climate change, manage overtourism, strengthen public safety and protect the communities and environments on which their tourism economies depend?

The Action Lab will also contribute to the development of MED READY, the Mediterranean initiative focused on destination resilience, public safety and preparedness.

3. AI-POWERED HOSPITALITY

People at the Front. AI at the Back.

Facilitator: Prof. Dimitrios Buhalis — Professor of Marketing, Strategy & Innovation; Director, eTourism Lab, Bournemouth University; MTF Senator | United Kingdom

An internationally influential tourism technology academic and pioneer of eTourism, smart tourism and digital transformation. Through his leadership at Bournemouth University and its eTourism Lab, his research has helped shape international understanding of how artificial intelligence, digital platforms and emerging technologies are transforming tourism and hospitality.

THE OPPORTUNITY: How can hospitality businesses apply AI to improve revenue, productivity, operations, workforce management and guest experiences while preserving the human dimension of hospitality?

4. THE MEDITERRANEAN TABLE

Where Mediterranean Lifestyle, Culture, Experience, Business and Diplomacy Meet

Facilitator: Quinton Scerri — Television Presenter & Media Personality | Malta TBC

A Maltese television presenter and media personality with experience in broadcasting, interviews and live-event presentation. His ability to engage audiences and facilitate conversations provides a platform for bringing together chefs, restaurateurs, hospitality entrepreneurs and international food industry personalities.

THE OPPORTUNITY: How can Mediterranean gastronomy, culinary heritage, restaurants, cafés, bars and authentic food experiences become stronger tourism products and more profitable businesses?

The Action Lab will also explore international food and beverage markets, culinary innovation and the commercial potential of Mediterranean products, including wine.

14:00 | LUNCH & NETWORKING

An opportunity for delegates, speakers, investors and industry leaders to connect and continue the conversations initiated during the morning.

THE FOUR ACTION LABS

Friday, 27 November 2026 | Hilton Malta

15:15–15:30 | Registration

15:30–18:30 | Four Parallel Action Labs

REAL CASES • PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS • BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

The International Morning Plenary challenges conventional thinking, introduces new perspectives and identifies the opportunities shaping the future of Mediterranean tourism.

The Four Action Labs take the next step — from inspiration to implementation.

Each Action Lab brings together international expertise, real-world case studies, practical business examples and focused discussions to examine how the opportunities identified during the morning can be translated into action.

1. **Investing in the Lifestyle Tourism Boom — Jill Hellman**
2. **Too Hot. Too Full. Too Fragile? — Dr Aradhana Khowala**

3. **AI-Powered Hospitality — Prof. Dimitrios Buhalis**

4. **The Mediterranean Table — Quinton Scerri**

The sessions will focus on practical applications, investment opportunities, commercial innovation and solutions that participants can take back to their businesses, organisations and destinations.

The objective is not simply to leave participants inspired, but to equip them with actionable insights, valuable connections and new opportunities to turn ambition into results.

THE MORNING INSPIRES AND CHALLENGES.

THE FOUR ACTION LABS TURN IDEAS INTO ACTION.