ACTION LAB 3

THE AI HOTEL BLUEPRINT

RE-ENGINEERING THE HOTEL OF TOMORROW PEOPLE

AT THE FRONT. AI AT THE BACK.

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

ACTION LAB FACILITATOR

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

An internationally influential pioneer of eTourism, smart destinations and hospitality technology, with four decades of experience. A leading academic, author and researcher whose work has helped shape international understanding of digital transformation, artificial intelligence and the future of tourism. He will facilitate all five panels and guide the progressive development of the AI Hotel Blueprint.

FROM THE MORNING PLENARY TO THE AI HOTEL

The morning plenary, "From Counting People to Making People Count", challenges the Mediterranean tourism industry to create greater value rather than depend indefinitely on increasing visitor numbers. This Action Lab brings that challenge into the hotel itself.

If we were designing a hotel today with artificial intelligence available from the beginning, would we create the same departments, use the same systems, employ people in the same roles and operate in the same way?

Rather than adding AI tools to outdated processes, this Action Lab will dissect and re-engineer the hotel business model: its commercial strategy, management structures, operational workflows, restaurants, guest experiences and workforce. The goal is a more intelligent, productive and profitable hotel where technology works behind the scenes and people deliver exceptional hospitality.

DETAILED ACTION LAB PROGRAMME

15:30–15:45 | OPENING — FROM THE PLENARY TO THE AI HOTEL

THE OPPORTUNITY

How can Malta's hospitality industry harness AI to create greater value, stronger businesses and better guest experiences?

Prof. Dimitrios Buhalis — Facilitator's Introduction

Linking the plenary's value-creation challenge to the need for a fundamentally different hotel operating model.

Hon. Keith Azzopardi Tanti — Ministerial Address

Minister for European Funds, Social Dialogue and Consumer Protection | Malta. A former Parliamentary Secretary for Youth, Research and Innovation, with experience advancing Malta's research, innovation and competitiveness agenda. His opening addresses the opportunities for investment, collaboration and responsible AI adoption.

15:45–16:15 | PANEL 1 — THE NATIONAL AI HOSPITALITY TRANSFORMATION

Tourism Strategy • Social Dialogue • Industry Readiness

THE OPPORTUNITY

How can Malta align tourism strategy, social partners and hospitality businesses of all sizes to accelerate responsible AI adoption? Which national priorities, partnerships and practical support mechanisms are needed?

Leslie Vella - Deputy CEO & Chief Officer, Strategic Development, Malta Tourism Authority | Malta

A senior tourism policymaker with more than four decades of experience. Former Vice President of the European Travel Commission, contributor to Malta's Tourism Strategy to 2030 and the Malta Tourism Observatory, and a voice in international tourism competitiveness. Perspective: smart destinations, tourism intelligence and changing demand.

Maria Micallef - Chairperson, Malta Council for Economic and Social Development | Malta

The first woman appointed to chair MCESD in 2026, with corporate governance experience spanning aviation, tourism, manufacturing, insurance and financial services. Her contribution examines how social dialogue can bring government, employers and employees together to prepare for AI transformation.

Kevin Camilleri - Secretary General, General Workers' Union | Malta

Elected GWU Secretary General in 2026 following leadership responsibilities representing hospitality and food-sector employees. His contribution addresses workforce transition, employee participation, reskilling and responsible technological change.

16:15–16:45 | PANEL 2 — DISSECTING & RE-ENGINEERING THE HOTEL & RESTAURANT BUSINESS MODEL

Business Process Re-engineering • AI-Driven Operations • Productivity • Profitability

THE OPPORTUNITY

If we designed a hotel or restaurant from scratch today, would we retain the same departments, workflows and operating processes? How can AI help redesign finance, procurement, staffing, kitchen operations, service and management to improve productivity, profitability and guest experience?

Carmen Hui — Special Advisor – Hospitality, Deloitte UK | United Kingdom

Carmen Hui is an international hospitality executive with over 25 years of experience in hotel investment, commercial strategy and digital innovation. Formerly a senior executive at **Host Hotels & Resorts** and **Booking.com**, she brings expertise in hospitality investment, customer experience and technology-driven transformation.

Simon De Cesare - Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association | Malta

Has led Eden Leisure Group since 2018, overseeing one of Malta's leading hospitality and entertainment businesses, including InterContinental Malta, Holiday Inn Express and voco Malta. An MHRA Council Member, he brings extensive experience in hospitality investment, business innovation and operational transformation.

Giovanni Fiorin - HVS — Food & Beverage and Restaurant Advisory | Italy

An international food-and-beverage specialist whose experience includes restaurant concepts, hotel F&B operations and commercial performance. His perspective extends the hotel transformation debate beyond bedrooms to restaurants, kitchens, service models and profitable guest experiences.

16:45–17:15 | PANEL 3 — CREATING THE HOTEL OF THE FUTURE

Agentic AI • Intelligent Operations • Automation • Robotics • Guest Experience

THE OPPORTUNITY

If we were creating a hotel from scratch today, how would AI reshape its operations, decisions and guest experience? What combination of intelligent agents, automation, robotics and human expertise would define the hotel of the future?

Prof. Marco Valeri - Associate Professor of Organisational Behaviour, Niccolò Cusano University | Italy

Associate Professor of Organisational Behaviour at Niccolò Cusano University, Marco Valeri researches tourism innovation, AI and hospitality management. His publications include Redefining Tourism with AI and the Metaverse and Tourism Innovation in the Digital Era, alongside work on agentic AI in tourism. Perspective: how research on intelligent travel planning, AI agents and service robotics can inform the hotel of the future.

Kushal Ragu - AI Adviser, Brain & Co | India

AI adviser focused on intelligent agents, business automation and connected workflows. Perspective: how AI agents can coordinate hotel departments, reduce repetitive work and support operational decisions in a hotel designed around intelligent systems.

Pablo García - Hospitality Innovation Expert; associated with World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance | Spain/Switzerland

Hospitality innovation specialist and former Director of the Spark Innovation Hub at Les Roches, connecting education, start-ups and technology providers. Perspective: bringing AI, robotics and emerging technology together into practical, guest-centred hotel models.

17:15–17:45 | PANEL 4 — PEOPLE AT THE FRONT: SERVICE EXCELLENCE, FUTURE CAREERS & SKILLS

Service Excellence • Future Careers • Hospitality Education

THE OPPORTUNITY

Which hospitality roles will change as AI becomes part of everyday operations, and which human skills will become more valuable? How should hotels and educational institutions prepare people for service excellence, new careers and leadership?

Claire Briffa- Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS)| Malta

An experienced professional with over 25 years in tourism, education and human resources. She has been part of ITS since 2015 and previously held positions with the Malta Tourism Authority and University of Malta. She holds qualifications in economics and international marketing and contributes to tourism education, institutional management and international academic collaboration.

Joe Muscat - Chief Executive Officer, Gozo Tourism Association | Malta

A longstanding representative of Gozo's tourism industry, advocating for connectivity, infrastructure, year-round demand and the competitiveness of island hospitality businesses. He brings the perspective of smaller operators and independent hotels navigating digital change.

Prof. Dr. Ismail Abdel Ghafar Ismail Farag — President, Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport (AASTMT) | Egypt

A distinguished Egyptian academic and institutional leader, serving as President of AASTMT since 2011. With a background in engineering and higher education, he has played a leading role in advancing maritime education, transport, logistics, research and international academic cooperation across the Arab world and beyond.

17:45–18:15 | PANEL 5 — THE CHALLENGES OF AI TRANSFORMATION

European Hospitality • Employment • Reskilling • Implementation

THE OPPORTUNITY

What practical challenges must hospitality employers and employees overcome to adopt AI responsibly? How can the industry address workforce disruption, reskilling, misinformation, trust and implementation while remaining competitive?

Chef Roberto Costa - President, RIAW FIPE, President of UK-Italian Chamber of Commerce | Italy

Owns 3 restaurants in London and several others in Italy. His perspective connects technology adoption with the needs of restaurants, employers and the wider hospitality economy, including the challenges of AI-generated fake news, misinformation and reputational harm to hospitality businesses.

Dijana Spasojevic- Global Head of EU market, EU institutions Account – KPMG | Brussels

An experienced professional with over 25 years of experience at the interface of science, policy, management and technology. Experience working at the International (WHO, UNICEF, UNDP, etc.), European (DG ENV, DG GROW, ECHA, EEA, etc.) and Industry levels. Passionate about leveraging innovative technologies and digital solutions for solving real- life pertaining problems.

Dr Jacqueline Tanti-Dougall – President, International Forum of Travel and Tourism Advocates (IFTTA); Partner, Tanti-Dougall & Associates; Visiting Lecturer, University of Malta. | Malta

International legal expert specialising in tourism legislation, aviation security and health and safety. Has advised UN Tourism and governments worldwide on tourism law and regulatory frameworks.

18:30 | CLOSE OF ACTION LAB