MEDITERRANEAN SUN

STEWARDSHIP • UNITY • NET POSITIVE

27TH NOVEMBER 2026
HILTON, MALTA

MEDITERRANEAN TOURISM FORUM 11TH EDITION

MEDITERRANEAN TOURISM FORUM
PLENARY SESSION

MEDITERRANEAN SUN: STEWARDSHIP • UNITY • NET POSITIVE

Friday 27th 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, well-being 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

Grandmasters Suite | Level 6

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.

ACT 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

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ACT 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 — Executive Chairman, 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 — Tourism Economist, School of Hotel and Tourism Management, Hong Kong Polytechnic University | Hong Kong
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 President of the Global Business Travel Association | UK
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

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:

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 ACTION LABS

ACTION LAB 1 - Portomaso Suite

INVESTING IN THE LIFESTYLE TOURISM BOOM
DESIGNING BEAUTIFUL HOTELS, CITIES, MARINAS AND EXPERIENCES THAT CREATE GREATER VALUE

ACTION LAB 2 - Perellos | Level5

TOO HOT. TOO FULL. TOO FRAGILE?
CAN OUR TOURISM INDUSTRY, HOTELS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES COPE WITH THE PRESSURES AHEAD?
Protecting Hotels, Local Communities and Tourism Investment from Extreme Weather, Overcrowding and Security Risks

ACTION LAB 3 - Grandmasters Suite | Level 6

THE AI HOTEL BLUEPRINT
RE-ENGINEERING THE HOTEL OF TOMORROW
PEOPLE AT THE FRONT. AI AT THE BACK.

ACTION LAB 4 - Pinto | Level 7

THE MEDITERRANEAN TABLE EXPERIENCE
RESTAURANTS, BARS, CAFÉS & CATERING — WHAT'S NEXT?

ACTION LAB 1

INVESTING IN THE LIFESTYLE TOURISM BOOM
DESIGNING BEAUTIFUL HOTELS, CITIES, MARINAS AND EXPERIENCES THAT CREATE GREATER VALUE

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

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

THE OPPORTUNITY

Building on the morning plenary, "From Counting People to Making People Count", this Action Lab asks how tourism can create greater economic and social value without relying simply on more arrivals and more beds. Distinctive hotels, exceptional architecture, waterfronts, art, heritage and authentic experiences can attract higher-spending travellers and strengthen investment returns. Delegates will explore what it takes to design places worth travelling for, living in and investing in.

BETTER HOTELS. BEAUTIFUL CITIES. DISTINCTIVE EXPERIENCES. STRONGER INVESTMENTS. HIGHER RETURNS.

Connecting the plenary to the investment opportunity

15:30–15:43 | OPENING — THE CASE FOR BEAUTIFUL PLACES

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.
Perspective: Introduces the shift from tourism volume to investment value.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Johann Buttigieg — Executive Chairman, Planning Authority | Malta
Executive Chairman of Malta's Planning Authority, the national institution responsible for development planning and planning decisions.
Perspective: Beautiful Malta: how planning can support architectural quality and investment.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Daniel Attard — MEP | Malta

15:43–16:13 | PANEL 1 — WHO WILL MAKE MALTA BEAUTIFUL?

Planning • Public Art • Tourism Product Development

THE OPPORTUNITY

How can Malta deliver more beautiful streets, public spaces, cultural settings and tourism infrastructure through cooperation with developers, businesses and local councils?
Perspective: How policy and development standards can deliver better-designed places.

Dr Luke Dalli — Executive Chairman, Arts Council Malta | Malta
Heads Arts Council Malta, the public body supporting Malta's artistic and cultural development.

Perspective: Public art, creativity and cultural identity as elements of destination value.

Perit Kevin Fsadni — Deputy CEO, Malta Tourism Authority | Malta
Architect and senior Malta Tourism Authority executive working in tourism product development and regulatory matters.
Perspective: Upgrading tourism infrastructure and the public realm to strengthen the visitor experience.

Dr Andrei Imbroll — Vice President, MHRA; Co-Founder & CEO, VBL Group | Malta
Hospitality entrepreneur involved in the regeneration and operation of historic properties in Valletta.
Perspective: The relationship between accommodation investment, short-term rentals and neighbourhood wellbeing.

Maria Galea — President, MEIA; Chief Creative Officer, Iniala | Malta – VIDEO CLIP INTERVENTION
President of MEIA and art adviser to Iniala, bringing an arts and creative-industries perspective.
Perspective: How art and cultural identity make cities and destinations distinctive attractions.

16:13–16:33 | PANEL 2 — THE ECONOMICS OF BEAUTIFUL PLACES

Urban Economics • Hospitality Asset Value • Investment Returns

THE OPPORTUNITY

How do better design and distinctive destinations increase visitor spending, property values and hospitality investment returns?

Jim Coleman — WSP | United Kingdom
Urban development and economics specialist at WSP, a global engineering and advisory group employing approximately 83,000 professionals across more than 50 countries.
Perspective: How infrastructure, placemaking and urban design influence investment and local economic performance.

Demetris Spanos — Managing Director, HVS Consulting & Valuation | Greece
Hospitality valuation and investment adviser at HVS, a global hospitality consultancy with 50+ offices and 300+ specialists.
Perspective: How design and destination quality affect hotel asset value and investment returns.

16:33–17:03 | PANEL 3 — DESIGNING HOTELS PEOPLE TRAVEL FOR

Iconic Architecture • Art-Led Hospitality • Heritage Regeneration

THE OPPORTUNITY

What makes a hotel an attraction in its own right, commanding differentiation and long-term value?

Gonca Paşolar — Co Founder and Managing Partner, Emre Arolat Architecture (EAA) | Türkiye
Co-founded EAA in 2004. With over 100 awards, the firm's landmark projects include the Antakya Museum Hotel, Yalıkavak Palmarina, Zorlu Center and Sancaklar Mosque. EAA is recognised for integrating contemporary architecture, cultural heritage and innovative placemaking to create distinctive destinations and experiences.
Perspective: What makes architecture a destination attraction in its own right.

Andrea Quiriconi — Owner, Hotel Trieste, Verona | Italy
Owner of Hotel Trieste in Verona and a design collector associated with the hotel's art-led approach.
Perspective: How distinctive design and art collections differentiate a hotel.

Barbara Avdis — Founder, Yades Greek Historic Hotels; Former Chair, Historic Hotels of Europe | Greece
Heritage hospitality entrepreneur and former chair of Historic Hotels of Europe, a network of historic properties across European countries.
Perspective: How heritage buildings become distinctive and commercially sustainable hotels.

17:03–17:35 | PANEL 4 — CONSTRUCTION & DESIGN: CAN BUILDINGS BECOME WORKS OF ART?

Creative Architecture · Planning Policy · Mediterranean Identity · Landmark Buildings

THE OPPORTUNITY

Should planning policies actively support innovative architecture, encouraging buildings that become works of art and attractions in their own right?

Michael Stivala — Chief Executive Officer, Stivala Group; President, Malta Development Association | Malta

Group CEO with more than 25 years in Stivala Group, overseeing its operations including hotels and accommodation properties. Also President of the Malta Development Association, representing 12 sections of the property and construction industry; re-elected for 2026–2028.

Perspective: The critical success factors in delivering beautiful, commercially viable buildings.

Amir Turki — President, Union of Mediterranean Architects (UMAR) | Tunisia

President of UMAR, which connects architectural professional bodies around the Mediterranean.

Perspective: Mediterranean identity and cross-border architectural cooperation.

17:35–17:57 | PANEL 5 — WHEN CITIES & ISLANDS BECOME ATTRACTIONS

Beautiful Cities • Destination Identity • Local Economies

THE OPPORTUNITY

How can cities and islands turn heritage, fashion, local enterprise and genuine lifestyle experiences into destination value?

Mariano Angelucci — President, XII Permanent Commission for Tourism, Fashion and International Relations, Roma Capitale | Italy

Rome city councillor and President of Roma Capitale's XII Permanent Commission for Tourism, Fashion and International Relations.

Perspective: How tourism, fashion, heritage and public spaces reinforce the appeal of Rome, which recorded 22.9 million tourist arrivals in 2025.

Gianluca Manenti — President, Confcommercio Sicilia | Italy

Leads Confcommercio Sicilia, representing commerce, tourism and service businesses across Sicily. His contribution highlights the island's genuine Mediterranean lifestyle: local gastronomy, traditional markets, historic towns, artisan enterprises and community hospitality as sources of distinctive tourism experiences and local economic value.

Perspective: Why authentic Sicilian lifestyle experiences strengthen destination identity, visitor spending and local businesses.

Dimitris Lianos Mayor, Municipality of Naxos and Small Cyclades |Greece

An experienced local government leader and former hotelier, serving as Mayor since 2019. With a background in business management and tourism, he champions sustainable island development, tourism infrastructure, digital innovation and the preservation of local heritage and communities.

17:57–18:40 | PANEL 6 — SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: PROTECTING THE VALUE WE CREATE

Responsible Investment • Nature • Communities • Sustainable Architecture

THE OPPORTUNITY

Can investment protect nature, strengthen communities and create commercially successful, beautiful places?

Tim Clancy — Co-Founder, Green Visions | Bosnia & Herzegovina

Co-founded Green Visions, a pioneering nature-tourism organisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Terra Dinarica, associated with Via Dinarica trail development.

Perspective: How Green Visions and Via Dinarica-related nature tourism initiatives support conservation, trails, guiding skills and local livelihoods.

Asma Jerbi Abouda — Head, UIA Sustainable Tourism Work Programme 2026–2029 | Tunisia

Founder of Archi-Pro & Design in Sousse and journalist with Jawhara FM-TV. Recently appointed Head of the Sustainable Tourism Work Programme (2026–2029) of the International Union of Architects (UIA), a worldwide federation representing approximately 1.3 million architects across 124 countries and territories.

Perspective: How architecture and sustainable tourism can preserve Mediterranean identity while creating lasting destination value.

Kevin Mercieca — Chief Executive Officer, Environment & Resources Authority (ERA) | Malta

Leads Malta's environmental regulatory authority, overseeing environmental protection, and resource management.

Perspective How: can Malta balance tourism growth and development pressures with environmental sustainability, resource capacity and residents' quality of life?

18:40 — END OF ACTION LAB

ACTION LAB 2

TOO HOT. TOO FULL. TOO FRAGILE?

CAN OUR TOURISM INDUSTRY, HOTELS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES COPE WITH THE PRESSURES AHEAD?

Protecting Hotels, Local Communities and Tourism Investment from Extreme Weather, Overcrowding and Security Risks

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

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

THE CHALLENGE

Building on the morning plenary, "From Counting People to Making People Count", this Action Lab asks whether hotels, infrastructure and local communities can withstand rising visitor pressures, extreme weather and public safety risks. More arrivals and accommodation place demands on electricity, water, transport, emergency services and public spaces. For hotels, the consequences include operating costs, business continuity and guest safety; for local councils, they include short-term rentals, public order and residents' quality of life. The Action Lab brings together destination leaders, crisis-management specialists, emergency services, security innovators and institutional partners to identify practical responses. Discussions will inform MED READY, the proposed Malta living lab for public safety, destination resilience and intelligent tourism management.

15:30–15:45 | OPENING — THE RESPONSIBILITY TO BE READY

Connecting the plenary to hotel preparedness and community resilience

THE OPPORTUNITY

How can Malta strengthen preparedness, protect tourism investment and keep hotels and local communities safe and welcoming?

Dr Aradhana Khowala — Founder & CEO, Aptamind Partners; MTF Senator | United Kingdom
International tourism investment adviser and founder of Aptamind Partners. Her work connects tourism strategy, hospitality investment and destination development.
Perspective: Why preparedness and resilience must be central to the long-term value of tourism destinations.

Hon. Glenn Bedingfield — Minister for Home Affairs, Security and Employment | Malta
Government minister responsible for home affairs and security, with responsibilities directly relevant to public safety and inter-agency coordination.
Perspective: Cooperation between public authorities, tourism operators and communities to strengthen destination safety.

Carlos Tabone — Permanent Secretary, Ministry for Tourism | Malta
Senior public administrator involved in tourism policy and institutional coordination.
Perspective: Enjoy & Respect, responsible visitor behaviour and practical cooperation with local councils.

15:45–16:30 | PANEL 1 — TOO HOT. TOO FULL. CAN WE COPE WITH MORE — AND ARE WE READY WHEN THINGS GO WRONG?

Extreme Weather • Tourism Growth • Infrastructure • Short-Term Rentals • Community Impact • Preparedness

THE OPPORTUNITY

Can hotels and local communities manage rising visitor flows, extreme temperatures and accommodation growth while preparing for disruptions and protecting residents' quality of life?

Betim Budzaku — Director General, Andorra Turisme | Andorra
Leads Andorra's national tourism organisation, whose work includes year-round tourism, market diversification and the Andorra Selected initiative.
Perspective: Managing visitor flows, seasonality and premium destination positioning.

George Micallef — MHRA; Sunroute Managing Director | Malta
Has worked as a tourism development consultant since 1987, advising governments, public institutions and private businesses in Malta and internationally.
He has also served as Deputy Chairman of the Malta Tourism Observatory and contributed to national tourism policy, strategic planning and tourism development studies.
Perspective: The relationship between accommodation investment and quality tourism objectives.

Mario Fava — President, Local Councils' Association | Malta
Represents Malta's local councils and their role in local governance, public spaces and community services.
Perspective: How local councils can respond to tourism pressures while protecting residents and the visitor experience.

16:30–17:00 | PANEL 2 — INTERNATIONAL PRACTICES FOR PREPAREDNESS & RESILIENCE

International Case Studies • Crisis Preparedness • Business Continuity • Emergency Leadership • Destination Recovery

THE OPPORTUNITY

What can Malta learn from international crisis-management and tourism-resilience practices to prepare hotels, local councils and destinations before emergencies occur?

Prof. Lee Miles — Professor of Crisis and Disaster Management, Bournemouth University | United Kingdom
Academic specialist in crisis and disaster management whose research examines preparedness, resilience and disaster recovery.
Perspective: How organisations can plan, coordinate and recover from disruptions.

Richard Gordon MBE — Director, Bournemouth University Disaster Management Centre | United Kingdom
Emergency-management specialist and MBE recipient with experience in crisis leadership and training for government and response organisations.
Perspective: Practical major-incident preparedness for hospitality businesses and communities.

José Miguel Maia Pita dos Santos — Subintendente (Police Major), Operations Department, Division of Crime Prevention, Community Policing, Special Programmes and Human Rights, Polícia de Segurança Pública (PSP) | Portugal
Senior officer at the PSP National Directorate, responsible for crime prevention, proximity policing and special programmes that keep residents and visitors safe in Portugal's busiest tourism areas.
Perspective: How proximity policing and crime prevention keep guests, residents and destinations safe before incidents occur.

17:00–17:30 | PANEL 3 — PROTECTING GUESTS, STAFF & COMMUNITIES

Public Order • Fire & Rescue • Emergency Healthcare • Operational Coordination

THE OPPORTUNITY

How can hotels and local councils cooperate with police, civil protection and emergency healthcare to protect visitors, employees and residents?

Angelo Gafà — Commissioner of Police, Malta Police Force | Malta
Heads Malta's Police Force and its policing and public-order operations.
Perspective: Visitor-intensive areas, crime prevention and coordinated community safety.

Peter Paul Coleiro — Director General, Civil Protection Department | Malta
Leads Malta's civil protection services, including fire and rescue response.
Perspective: Fire safety, evacuation preparedness and cooperation with hotels and local councils.

Dr Patrick A. Farrugia — Health System Resilience, Mater Dei Hospital | Malta
Healthcare contributor bringing the perspective of emergency medical capacity and system preparedness.
Perspective: Medical readiness and inter-agency response when tourism and major incidents increase demand.

17:30–18:00 | PANEL 4 — INTELLIGENT SECURITY: PROTECTING BEACHES, HOTELS & COMMUNITIES

Artificial Intelligence • Drones • Beach & Coastal Safety • Hotel Security • Community Protection • Early Warning

THE OPPORTUNITY

How can AI, drones and early-warning systems help protect beaches, hotels, visitors and local communities through earlier risk detection, coordinated response and appropriate privacy safeguards?

Hamdi Chaker — Chief Executive Officer, Fire Eagle | France
Technology entrepreneur working on drone-enabled monitoring and security applications.
Perspective: Potential applications for beach and coastal safety, hotel security, crowd monitoring and wildfire detection.

Louis Loke — Assistant Commissioner of Police and Director, Community Partnership Department, Singapore Police Force | Singapore
Perspective: Intelligent surveillance, threat detection and protection of beaches, hotels and communities.

Saif Al Jabri — Colonel – Director of the Community Police Department | Abu Dhabi Emirate UAE
Perspective: How police, tourism stakeholders and local communities can collaborate to prevent incidents, strengthening public confidence and create safer, more welcoming destinations for residents and visitors alike.

18:00–18:30 | PANEL 5 — INVESTING IN SAFER HOTELS & STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Green Financing • Resilience Investment • Funding • Enjoy & Respect

THE OPPORTUNITY

How can hotels and local councils mobilise investment, funding and partnerships to strengthen resilience and community safety?

Wout Steurs — EU policy & Regulation and Funding - KPMG | Brussels
An EU Policy, Regulation and Funding specialist with KPMG's European Office in Brussels. He works across the KPMG network on EU funding, credits, grants and incentives, helping businesses and public-sector organisations connect strategic investment priorities with relevant European funding opportunities. He has also worked

as an independent expert evaluator and business coach for European Commission programmes and as Access to Finance Lead for the European Commission's Intelligent Cities Challenge. His experience spans tourism, cities, resilience and sustainable investment, with a particular focus on turning policy and funding opportunities into practical, investment-ready projects.

Mark Scicluna Bartoli – Head of Product Development, Bank of Valletta (BOV) | Malta
Experienced banking executive specialising in EU funding, innovative financing and sustainable investment. Previously served with Malta Enterprise and the European Commission, supporting business growth and access to finance.

18:30 | END OF ACTION LAB

MED READY — The Forum discussions will help identify priority actions, institutional responsibilities and possible Malta pilot initiatives for hotel readiness, public safety and destination resilience.

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

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

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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 | END OF ACTION LAB

ACTION LAB 4

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

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.


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