MALTAThe Mediterranean hub of digital distinction

Malta is taking advantage of its strong potential as a hub for digital activities, with the support of key foreign partners like the US

s popular as it is famous for its sunsoaked climate and island vibes which wholeheartedly capture the lively spirit and cosmopolitan soul of the Mediterranean, Malta has transformed itself of late into a strong magnet for those digital nomads chasing an ideal work/life balance in a low-tax, civil and stable environment.

The pro-business and investment government of Prime Minister, Robert Abela, is working hard to attract the world's best talents in a range of sectors, but particularly leading players in the technology industry. To this end, the administration created the innovative Nomad Residence Permit (NRP), which enables holders to retain their current employment based in another country while legally residing in Malta.

The NRP is available to skilled and determined individuals who can work remotely and independent of location — using the latest telecommunications technologies — and who wish to become entrepreneurial expats in a modern and welcoming country of 500,000 people that lies at a continental crossroads and within comfortable flying time to key cities.

This ambitious blueprint to attract the brightest and the best foreign workers to its golden shores and bustling urban areas fits with the archipelago's drive to optimize its wealth of local pool of talent, while also maximizing assets like its strategic geographical location.

Malta enjoyed an impressive 2022 as its economy roared back from the turmoil and disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic that hit its long-established and lucrative tourism sector. This success certainly caught the eye of international investors and market observers, with top credit ratings agency Fitch recently confirming its A+ credit score with a stable outlook.

"Malta's rating is supported by high per-capita income and a pre-pandemic record of strong growth and sizeable debt reduction," it noted. "The Maltese economy continued to expand rapidly at 6.9% in real terms in 2022, outperforming the rest of the EU. Private consumption remained sound, supported by the accumulation of past savings and favorable labor market conditions while inflation levels remained relatively contained relative to other EU countries."

This praise for its past performance and positive outlook was welcomed by the government, including Malta's Minister of Foreign and Eu-



US Secretary of State, Antony J. Blinken (r), recently met with Malta's Minister of Foreign and European Affairs and Trade, Ian Borg (I).



Robert Abela Prime Minister

ropean Affairs and Trade, Ian Borg, who in late 2022 visited Washington DC to meet with US Secretary of State, Antony J. Blinken. The pair discussed ways to strengthening bilateral bonds through political, trade and investment ties.

Borg told his American counterpart that he was very pleased to see a growing number of US investors choosing Malta as a base for their business operations and hoped to see commercial links between the two countries deepen. The two statesmen also discussed cybersecurity, climate change, energy-related issues and Africa during their meeting.

"The fact that we are geographically so far away from each other should not let that influence and keep us away from deepening our relations, not only politically, but also from a business and training standpoint," he said. "When you're accessing Malta, you're accessing a single market of 500 million people; it's not the half million population of Malta. Our country is also very much seen as the bridge between Europe and the immensely important continent of Africa. We lie there just in the middle of major shipping routes."

Strong investments flows boost economy

Switching his focus to the inflows of local and foreign direct investment (FDI), Borg mentioned the misconception that Malta depends on some other countries for such investment, when the reality is that its main investors are local.

"We do our best to attract every decent and sustainable foreign investment, but our biggest investor is the Maltese investor," he confirmed. "They are by far the main contributors to our investment. We then have the Europeans: Germans are our biggest investors; with Italy and the UK behind. We have more investment coming from the US, ahead of India and the China.

"While we have excellent, long-standing historical relations with China, we have one strategic investment, which sees them hold a 33% stake in our energy provider Enemalta — so not a controlling share. When it comes to capital projects, roads, sports financing, we have no Chinese investment. We're mainly focusing on Maltese money and, especially, on EU funding.

"There may be this misconception because we are happy with the excellent relations we have with the US, China and the UK, but our country is dependent on the hardworking Maltese, and we have no foreign debt, which is unique for the Maltese island." FDI in scientific activities, remote gaming and communications and other sectors, increased by almost \notin 250 million in 2022, according to a recent speech to business leaders by Abela. "This means that for the first time, the total stock of foreign assets in these digital sectors reached \notin 1 billion," he said, adding that the pandemic showcased how crucial this transformation is as Malta works toward achieving its carbon neutrality goals.

IAN BORG MINISTER OF FOREIGN AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS AND TRADE

"When you're accessing Malta, you're accessing a single market of 500 million people; it's not the half million population of Malta."

As a pioneering jurisdiction in the maritime industry, Malta attaches great importance to the "Blue Economy" and the need to protect its marine life and water resources. Maritime security in the Mediterranean and Malta's new role — from the start of 2023 — as a UN Security Council member were among the items on the agenda during Borg's trip to the US capital.

"Air connectivity can be exploited positively, as can our huge maritime area," he stated. "We're now exploring investments when it comes to renewables, solar, wind energy and our maritime area."

US partnership enters promising new era

Political, trade and cultural ties have come on leaps and bounds in recent years and show no signs of slowing in a win-win situation

uring his high-profile visit to the US capital shortly before last Christmas, Minister Borg and his American counterpart, Secretary Blinken, held intensive discussions on a range of issues, including trade — around \$530 million in goods moved between the pair in 2022 — and the two countries' shared commitment to promoting peace, stability, and prosperity in the Mediterranean region.

"We have a strong partnership with Malta, one that on a bilateral basis is growing even stronger," Secretary Blinken said while welcoming the Maltese politician. "I look forward to discussing that and, of course, we're welcoming Malta as a member of the UN Security Council starting in January. "We very much look forward to partnering with Malta on the Security Council. Virtually all of the critical issues that we have to contend with are going through the council, so I look forward to our collaboration there and to talking about that."

Minister Borg was equally gracious in his praise of his host, saying: "It's always a pleasure being in company of a seasoned diplomat and a stalwart defender of liberty. Our countries have longstanding and friendly relations bound by shared values and principles, with the ultimate goal of preserving and upholding the international rules-based order, with the UN being at its forefront.

"We take the opportunity of today's constructive discussions to take our ties to a higher level. The fact that we will also be sitting on the Security Council as a non-member — as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, as an EU member state.

"We're facing also challenging times, particularly with the war in Ukraine. Malta does not stand idle, and that is why we continue to reiterate in the strongest terms possible our condemnation of the unprovoked invasion of Russia in Ukraine.

"Peace is indivisible, and no region is spared of the multitude of threats we're facing. The Mediterranean is also one of them, and that is why we will continue to support all efforts for anything that can contribute towards peace and dialogue. In addition, with the setting up of the Malta/North America Business Council, we're actively discussing with all its members about how we can better connect our business community with the US.

"One of my main goals remain to strengthen our relations with the US and the American people in all spheres. We share the same cul-



Malta's ancient streets have become a window to the world for leading foreign companies.

ture, the same ideas, the same ideals of democracy, liberty, and rule of law."

The Maltese government is regularly implementing new policies and incentives to enhance the island nation's appeal as an attractive destination for FDI, with these promising moves putting the country on the global investment map. Ministers are especially eager to secure foreign funding and knowledge from experienced US investors in sustainable areas like net-zero projects, along with advanced manufacturing and digital transformation activities.

According to Minister for Environment, Energy and Enterprise, Miriam Dalli, Malta is the ideal environment for those investors who are looking to launch a business or establish FDI. "When it comes to kicking off a business, Malta Enterprise — the country's economic development agency tasked with attracting new FDI and facilitating the growth of existing operations — offers really good packages for startups," she says. "Malta is the ideal place for startups to start their business and continue growing. We've had a number of successes when it comes to startups. The primary area of startups that came to Malta was mainly on the digital side, but there were also on the technical side and on the manufacturing side. The assistance that we provide does not match any other country because the fact that we're small is an advantage in itself.

"We're interested in companies that can help the economy grow, but not only the economy; companies that can create quality jobs and add value to the island, particularly when it comes to digital and the environmental pillar. One of the other positive things that I'm sure investors in the US would be interested in is that people here speak English everywhere, there is no language barrier; far from it.

"Another important asset is that our cultures are similar. People will find themselves in a democracy where they're given a fair chance and can proceed with their business."

Content by Business Focus





Start Up and live in the heart of the Med



2 MALTA SPECIAL **Economic diversification drive well underway**

Political, economic and social stability and an innovative mind-set make Malta an open, business-centric commercial community that stands tall as an EU member state

Kurt Farrugia

CEO, Malta Enterprise

Thriving business climate is key conduit

The beneficiaries of that vital fiscal support

during an unprecedented era of disruption

included the tens of thousands of small and

medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that have

established a presence in various industrial

sectors, including advanced manufacturing,

aviation, digital innovation and data science,

ICT and electronics, life sciences and

fter an impressive fiscal performance in 2022 that involved solid inflows of FDI in a broad range of economic sectors, leading officials in Malta are upbeat about its prospects for 2023 and beyond as it concentrates on new knowledge-based sectors as part of its long-term development goals.

Malta Enterprise is a key adviser to the government on economic policy due to its close and constant interaction with the main economic players in the country. The agency is also the national contact point for the Enterprise Europe Network through which companies based in Malta can develop links with counterparts in more than 60 countries.

Malta Enterprise provides holistic support to prospective investors, from the initial provision of information to guidance in the setting up phase, as well as the development of infrastructure and allocation of industrial space. Moreover, Malta Enterprise administers an attractive incentives package aimed at facilitating investment and business

"There are two main factors for the good economic performance of the island," comments Malta Enterprise CEO, Kurt Farrugia. "Firstly, the economy has diversified in a very healthy way in recent years. There's a miscon ception that Malta's economy is made out of tourism and gaming; that's not the reality.

"In fact, financial services are a big part, but then again, you have manufacturing, you have information and communications technologies (ICT). Of course, you have the traditional sectors such as tourism, but we also have life sciences, we have aviation. The economy itself is extremely diverse.

"Secondly, being a small island and having a international education services. According to Farrugia, consolidation of vital government that views the stability of businesses as one of its priorities, meant that we helped out economic niches continues to be achieved yeara lot throughout the pandemic. Our larger comon-year via the attraction of FDI, as well as the



Abundant openings for FDI in key sectors



Malta's striking coastline includes the famous and ancient port belonging to Valletta.

we assisted heavily in keeping all employees at facilitation for indigenous enterprises to set up work. Our factories never closed. We helped and expand their operations. Legislative innovathem put in place safe measures within all their tion in key sectors that can provide new growth factories to continue running their operations." has also been a top priority.

"In the past, having large manufacturing companies was important, and still is, of course. We also have pharmaceutical companies, robotics, microchips, and currency printing. Two of the top five currency companies worldwide have an operational base in Malta. We have De La Rue and Crane Currency which is a US company. They are companies that are not only staving in Malta but growing. From the microchips to the currency printers to the pharmaceutical companies, they're all approaching us to expand here, and they come to us because we assist companies throughout the various schemes that we have as Malta Enterprise.

"However, throughout the fact that we have huge growth rates during the past eight to ten years, the situation now is that we need to continue to diversify the economy. Our strategy as Malta Enterprise is, instead of looking at the large companies to set up here, we're looking at technology-based companies that employ fewer people, but are more specialized.

"We're looking at attracting the high-end companies in the various sectors that we have. For instance, from game development to the film industry related to the software and development of software in post-production, etc., sectors such as artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality and Metaverse, as well as the companies in research and development, particular-

Malta a magnet for

world's best talent

Residency Malta Agency is attracting a wave

ly in biotechnology, and medical technology, as well as pharmaceutical technology.

"Our focus now is to attract those companies. Our vision is to continue to diversify in such areas. That is where we link the medium-sized companies to the smaller companies and startups so they can grow." Minister for Environment, Energy and En-

KURT FARRUGIA, **CEO, MALTA ENTERPRISE**

"We need to continue to diversify the economy. Our strategy is to look at technology-based firms [...] who are more specialized."

terprise Dalli acknowledges that while some people may not realize the potential that a very small island might possess, Malta is different as it adopts the mentality of an independent, free country where many ideas have been implemented to ensure it stays autonomous.

"When it comes to the enterprise front, we're working hard to make sure that we continue attracting niche sectors that are high quality and really add value to the island," she says. "We're prioritizing solar and wind offshore technologies as well as areas like the pharmaceutical sector, where you have innovative ideas and innovative technology."

Banking and financial services sector in excellent shape

A pro-investment climate and high-incomes have created a thriving arena for banks and leading financial services providers

ow home to some of the safest and most liquid banks in the eurozone, Malta's government and relevant institutions have worked hard over the years to carve out a reputation as one of the continent's leading banking and financial services hubs for the wider Mediterranean region. The adoption of pro-business and invest-

ment legislation, together with the roll-out of cutting-edge ICT infrastructure has helped transform the banking segment from one featuring just a handful of retail banks, to an international finance center that hosts a broad range of domestic and foreign-controlled banks, including several household names.

are key entities like industry guardian the Central Bank of Malta, as well as FinanceMalta, a public-private initiative set up to promote the country as an international financial centre. In a groundbreaking development at the end of the first quarter of this year, the National Strategy for Financial Services, prepared by the Malta Financial Services Advisory Council (MFSAC), was launched at a high-profile ceremony. The strategic priorities of the strategy are

focused on streamlining Malta's regulatory processes and institutional architecture, building a in the engine that is driving the country's finannational payments infrastructure, consolidatcial services sector to successfully compete with ing identity management, enabling financial other major hubs in the EU. The organization also played a part in Malta's removal from the services law reform and harmonisation, modernising Malta's tax structure, and building "gray list" of the inter-governmental Financial up Malta's talent pool in the financial services Action Task Force (FATF) in June 2022 — with industry, amongst others. In total, the strategy that favorable decision coming just a year after includes upwards of 175 initiatives, developed it was controversially added to the list. with the input of 102 professionals who were involved in its development.

According to FinanceMalta's chairperson, lights this sector as one of the fastest growing segments in Europe, with €340 billion received George Vella, the strategy represents a unique process as it was initiated by the government in 2021 alone. "Malta has, over the years, man-



Malta's size and agility makes it the ideal place to test new technologies and ventures in need of a flying start

he meteoric rise of fintech over the past decade has seen Malta lead from the front and become a hotbed for innovation and a pioneer in a fast-moving and constantly developing sector, not only from a technology angle, but also from a legal and regulatory perspective.

of Malta Business Registry adds. "Sometimes, countries end up creating legal frameworks or regulatory frameworks to attract business. Malta has done that with the cryptocurrency. We want this new economic niche."

Turning his attention to the wealth of op-

ortunities to be found in fintech, Vella high

Digital push encompasses all players



For financial services players, establishing operations in Malta has been plain sailing.

aged to always punch above its weight because it has found effective ways of how to be innovative from a legislative point of view, and innovative in many other spheres," he says. "Hence, going for digitalization is a continuation of that. "Malta has much to offer operators in this sector [...] but we must work hard to be more competitive, create the right environment and attract more talent for the ecosystem to flourish. Finance being the guardian of the purse gives one responsibilities. Sustainable finance is one of those areas where it is incumbent to serve as an agent of change in all the other sectors. You have to change the mindset of funders, practitioners and operators in each and every

ndustry and achieve this in a smart way."

firmly on the future as it sets its sights on

enhancing its outstanding reputation for first-

Bank of Valletta sets banking benchmark Kenneth Farrugia While its roots stretch back many years into CEO, Bank of Valletta the past, the Bank of Valletta (BOV) is focused

ney over three years," comments BOV CEO,

As the oldest established financial services provider in the country, BOV enjoys a strong presence across the country via its network of 39 branches and agencies in Malta and Gozo that serve personal and commercial customers. The group delivered solid revenue growth isation and simplification.

Innovative technology hub sets benchmark







From well established industries to emerging sectors, Malta is a goldmine for investors

eign investors and FDI for the past three quarters of a century and this pattern shows no sign of slowing as overseas businesses, individuals and investors continue to explore its promising economy for new openings. fast-growing life sciences industry, with the

Given its valuable experience in receiving foreign investment and entities over many decades, private and public service providers are well aware of the requirements of an incoming operation. "The process of setting up on the island is a straightforward and transparent one in which the investor is always kept updated as to what is required," Malta Enterprise notes. "Prospective investors often make use of a

service provider from the private sector capable of seeing to all their legal and logistical requirements from company registration, access to banking facilities to recruitment of staff. We have a specialized unit known as 'Business First' tasked with providing a single point of contact to prospective investors or ongoing operations for their interactions with various government departments according to their requirements." A leading sector for FDI is advanced manufacturing, which has been a mainstay of the fiscal mix since the country first industrialized in the 1950s. Back then, it was as a low-cost, labor intensive destination, but nowadays the sector has made giant strides and focuses on high value-added operations and a skilled workforce.

assists internationalization. At the MLSP, there Another area that has grown substantially in are no limits on a company's opportunity to recent years is aviation, with the presence of a continually improve, develop and grow."

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neering Malta Life Sciences Park (MLSP)

playing a pivotal role in this progress. Con-

ceived by Malta Enterprise, the international

class facility for life sciences and information

technology development promotes research

and development and builds on the base that

the country developed in the pharmaceutical

"Co-financed through the European Re-

gional Development Funds, MLSP - which

is situated close to Valletta — is divided into

two main components: Malta Life Sciences

Centre and Malta Digital Hub," Malta Enter-

prise explains. "In total, there are currently

13,500-square-meters of space comprising

laboratories, offices, a seminar room, meeting

rooms and various shared facilities. The MLSP

supports and encourages growth and success

among its tenants, offering a stimulating envi-

"Regardless of a firm's size or stage of devel-

opment, MLSP offers access to experienced and

professional business and financial advice and

Gain a **competitive**

fast-paced market.

mdia.gov.mt

edge in today's

enroll today

ronment for knowledge-intensive companies.

industry during the last decade.

of digital nomads and experienced workers It is far from just young, dynamic and digital nomads who are flocking to Malta and taking advantage of the attractive jurisdiction for temporary and permanent residency, with a flood of international experts, vastly experienced workers and driven entrepreneurs with successes of the past few years has been the

> now calling the country "home". As the forward-thinking, proactive government entity responsible for managing and promoting a number of residency programs, Residency Malta Agency is at the forefront of efforts to entice the world's best workers to its shores through the Nomad Residence Permit (NRP) and other residence initiatives, including the Malta Permanent Residence Program (MPRP)

Regardless of the type of added value program for interested parties, the same robust due diligence processes are utilized by Residency Malta Agency to ensure the strin gent filtering results in only the approval of the best talent and individuals of good conduct. Whereas the NRP allows applicants to live and work in Malta for up to 3 years, the MPRP is based on investments in property and government contributions that allows individuals and family members the right to

CHARLES MIZZI CEO, RESIDENCY MALTA AGENCY

"We know the first three years is the most difficult period for startups. What we have done is to create a structure, a program, which gives them peace of mind."

settle, stay and reside permanently.

"Our intention was always to attract quality individuals, so while it might not be that high, they would have to earn €32,400 annually for the NRP," explains Residency Malta Agency CEO, Charles Mizzi. "The reality is the average salary of such nomads is €84,000 per year. The majority are well-educated and have degrees and PhDs.

"The majority are coming from the US self: "We have plans to diversify our product around 14%, in fact — the UK, China and India. However, even when we categorize these people, 27% are coming from other countries and represent people of all nationalities, like Nigeria, Ghana or Australia. This is an intrends in global mobility."

"The financial industry has expanded its portfolio into profitable niche areas like pensions, payments and securitisation, while opening its doors to fintech entrepreneurs. Malta is fast becoming a hotbed for innovation," states FinanceMalta. "Fintech companies have been drawn to Malta because the island provides a wealth of talent, both tech and finance."

Launched five years ago, the Malta Digital Innovation Authority (MDIA) is both the regulator and promotor of innovative technologies, like Distributed Ledger Technologies (DLT) that involve blockchain, AI and critical systems, among others. A key responsibility is the assessment of the technology, not the service, the MDIA certifies the technology and with Malta being an early adopter of fintech, it has played a vital role in the design of a legal framework. "We went beyond innovative technology ar-

rangements, our foresight was that now there is another technology which is being part of everyday and everyone's life, which is AI," says the MDIA CEO, Kenneth Brincat. "We even have a national AI strategy. Another important point is that innovation and regulation normally don't go hand in hand as innovation needs space and to be dynamic to grow. Regulation sometimes stifles that type of growth.

"That's one of the biggest challenges which we, as an authority, have. In fact, our remit says that we have to be promoters and facilitators of AI, but on the other hand, regulators, which is the biggest challenge we have witnessed since we came into existence in 2018."

In its short lifetime, the MDIA has overseen policy changes to make the market more attractive for tech activity and ensure transparency and protection. A new legislative framework put forward by the authority is due to go before parliament at some point this year and, if approved, will empower the MDIA with more guidelines and allow it to have other subsidiary legislations for all different types of technology.

"What we're trying to do is to simplify the process in legislating any regulation related to innovative technologies," the former COO A public-private partnership between the government and the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry, Tech.mt was born in 2019 to promote Malta as a hub for innovation, tech, and digital enterprises, startups or people with cutting-edge tech ideas. It has taken the lead on organizing events focusing on the digital economy to create innovative breakthroughs. Last year, Tech.mt hosted the first Valletta Tech Summit, which attracted more

than 1,400 attendees. "We have four pillars at Tech.mt," reveals chairman, Mark Bugeja. "The first is that we focus on FDI into Malta. The second is internationalization, where we help companies that are already in Malta to expand abroad as well. We help them export their software. Another pillar is the education side and the fourth pillar is innovation. In innovation, we are always on the lookout for the next big thing. We make sure that everybody knows what is coming in the fu-

ture. We're giving them the whole package." Bugeja describes Malta as "the best stepping stone" for Europe for investors from the US and elsewhere in the world. "We have a great ecosystem," he adds. "Tech.mt is here to help you from day one, we will hold your hand until you are

Kenneth Brincat Joseph Cuschier Founder and Partner, CP Advisory CEO. MDIA

> settled in and literally guide you to every different problem or obstacle that you think you may have

Comprising a small and agile team, the tailor-made boutique advisory CP Advisory Malta assists organizations and individuals with practical advice and bespoke solutions to achieve objectives and overcome obstacles. Its package of solutions includes due diligence services and know your client reports, dispute resolution and litigation support, along with protective intelligence and enterprise risk management. "Our service portfolio also includes business

transformation and performance optimisation," says founder and partner, Joseph Cuschieri. We help clients to transform their business in a structured way, drawing upon our experience in management and business strategy. We aim to achieve a reputation of getting things executed professionally while walking through the programme with the client and their teams."

The company helps clients source funding either through national funding programmes or venture capital and private equity funding, and also private bonds, or bonds on the main market of the stock exchange. "When it comes to regulatory development and compliance in gaming and financial services, that is also an area where we can provide clients with a practical approach to address regulatory or compliance challenges and improve their relationship with regulators and make sure they understand that a robust governance structure is not just good for the regulators but also good for business," the ex-CEO of the Malta Financial Services Authority, adds. "Having a competent board of directors, strong management team, proper governance structures, independence of the board — so that there is proper oversight of the executive management — those are important things to have

for your business to succeed, not just to make the regulator happy."





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Energise your ideas we are committed to providing you with reliable and affordable



we conduct due diligence on these individu als. If they make it and their business proposal is thought to be viable, we will give them a three-year permit. That is one thing that they can then put out of their mind. "If the business goes well and is successful, they can apply for a renewal for a further five

years. There will be other permanent or longterm residency options because our intention is to attract new ideas, investments, and businesses to Malta. The intention is to make it comfortable enough for them to remain and to keep their investment in Malta." The senior executive is confident a bright

future awaits applicants and the agency it-

portfolio," he adds. "We want to reach new markets and launch new programs; our intention is to make Malta Residency Agency even more relevant in the context of changing



Charles Mizzi CEO, Residency Malta Agency

teresting phenomenon." In another exciting development, in October 2022 Residency Malta Agency and Malta Enterprise jointly launched the Malta Startup Residence Program. While around two dozen startups per

month are established, the program has a target audience of third country nationals and works to streamline and facilitate the process for them and their families. "We know that the first three years is the most difficult period for startups," Mizzi adds.

"The least these people want is to worry about

the renewal of the residence permit. What we

have done is to create a structure, a program,

which gives them peace of mind. They apply,

MALTA SPECIAL

Renewables energize the economy as part of net-zero drive

An ambitious sustainable development plan aims to transform Malta into climate-neutral, green and blue economy by 2050

Miriam Dalli

Min. for the Environment, Energy and Enterprise

Malta is certainly making solid progress on

a number of environmental fronts and earlier

this year officials revealed it had succeeded in

achieving its 2030 renewable energy target nine

ment of Malta's environmental objectives.

clean energy for up to 7,000 households. The

ergy systems with a capacity of 1MW or higher was recently launched by Minister Dalli.

"The results of our renewable energy

investments in recent years are very

encouraging," Minister Dalli adds. "Eurostat

figures show that by the end of 2021, Malta was

producing 12.15% of its energy requirements

from renewable sources. That means that

we have already exceeded the 11.5% 2030

target established in our National Energy and

Climate Plan; and this is not even including

the renewable energy systems connected to the

Climate neutrality the ultimate goal

hortly before Christmas last year, a comehensive strategic document estabshing Malta's priorities and objectives for steering sustainable development over the next three and a half decades was launched by Minister for Environment, Energy and Enterprise, Miriam Dalli

The National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2050 is based on five main strategic goals. These include the transition towards a climate-neutral, green and blue economy; the preservation of sustainable urban development and cultural heritage; healthy lives and well-being for all; digital transformation, smart mobility and connectivity; as well as social fairness and prosperity for all. Addressing an audience of dignitaries and

leading media for the launch of a three-month public consultation period for the long-awaited strategy, Minister Dalli emphasised the need for collective efforts from all the entities concerned, including Maltese society at large to achieve the economic, social and environmental goals.

The sustainable blueprint builds upon the Vision 2050 document, which was adopted in 2018 as well as the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Ambitious in both scope and intent, the former sets out a long-term framework for advancing sustainable development while taking into consideration past shortcomings and achievements.

"Our vision is to decarbonize the economy by 2050; though understand that that comes with certain costs to it, but we are making sure that we're supporting enterprises, the private sector, also individuals in making that transition," she says. "This is because we want to programme for grid-connected renewable enmake sure that it's a transition that leaves no one behind, a transition that pays the country as a whole. We're not looking at it only as the environmental thing that needs to be addressed, but there are also financial opportunities for people who invest in this direction.

MIRIAM DALLI MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, **ENERGY AND ENTERPRISE**

"The ultimate objective is climate neutrality, and the earlier we attain it, the quicker we ensure a sustainable future and a better quality of life."

"Malta is very limited when it comes to land. One of the projects that we're currently working on is in making sure that we ramp up our percentage of renewable energy; we can't just limit ourselves at looking at onshore technology, we need to look at offshore technology. We're doing a lot onshore and now's the time to

issued a pre-market consultation, asking investors to come up with ideas on offshore. There

grid last year.



Enemalta is investing €15 million a year to strengthen its electricity distribution network

Enemalta is key figure in energy revolution

Power firm future-proofing the country's electricity services

vears ahead of schedule. Financial incentives he energy market in Malta has mainfor certain green investment opportunities for tained its steady growth since the govgrid-connected renewable energy systems are ernment reduced and set prices back giving entrepreneurs a strong push to get inin 2013-2014. Despite the COVID-19 volved in the green economy, creating new job pandemic and the disruption to international energy markets triggered by the conflict in opportunities, while contributing to the attain-Ukraine arose last year, the government worked to ensure stability through a series of measures One such example is the recent call by the Regulator for Energy and Water Services and financial commitments to households and (REWS) for the development of large-scale rebusinesses. newable energy installations that can provide

The company's overriding goal is to ensure the security of electricity supply and reliable distribution of energy throughout the country for all types of consumers; including residential, commercial and industrial. Electricity supply stability is maintained through a mix of resources: solar panels, gas power stations and the Malta-Italy interconnector, a nearly 100 kilometer submarine cable; one of the longest high voltage alternating current interconnec-

tors of its capacity in the world. Having recently undergone the complicated replacement of a 1.5km section after a vessel's anchor caused millions of euros of damage in early 2022, the interconnector cable connects Malta to the European electricity grid in Sicily. Electricity from the interconnector forms around 20% of the Malta's electricity energy mix, according to Enemalta. "The interconnec-

"However, Malta should not be complacent. These results are a clear indication that we can tor gives stability to meet the country's elecdo more than originally envisaged. After all, tricity demand," says Enemalta CEO, Jonathan the 2030 target is not our destination, but a Cardona. "Malta is now also in the process of milestone along the way. The ultimate objective having its second interconnector to secure our is climate neutrality, and the earlier we attain it, energy supply to meet future demands, and to the quicker we ensure a sustainable future and tackle the intermittency challenges of an increasing share of renewable energy sources. a better quality of life for our people." To this end, last September, the government This will be done through Interconnect Malta Agency

"We are investing €90 million in six years to





Cutting-edge technology networks provide a powerfully fast spine to Malta's digital wave.

With super fast Internet speeds, it's no wonder fintech players are flocking to the country

Digital drive is fourth industrial revolution

Unlike previous industrial revolutions, this time size does not matter, meaning Malta can ride the wave of hardware and software openings

> through technology; and to continue to overcome the digital divide while assisting parts of This "Digital Malta" strategy also aims to continue to increase talent and competences in

plants, the smallness of our country was an obstacle," says Minister for the Economy, European Funds and Lands, Silvio Schembri. "In this fourth revolution, because the emphasis is on a technological world, our smallness is not an obstacle, and we can ride on the opportunities

that this revolution offers. One of the quintet of strategies aims to expand research on innovative technologies to reflect the needs of today's society. It will be supportive of the government's initiatives when it comes to regulation and compliance using innovative technology, and will identify the risks associated with innovative technologies.

Another key strand's main objectives are that Malta continues to strengthen its economy through digitalization; to accelerate digital and innovative research and make the nation the natural place for innovation; to reduce infrastructural, social and environmental pressure



not too much long-term strategy; you should

have a strategic direction, and you review it ev-

ery year or even every six months. That was the

"If you look into the strategy, you will under

stand that the MDIA, rather than being a reg

first line of thought that we went on.

ogy assurance and facilitating the optimal use of technology. This goes with what I was saying before, where I was saying that regulation stifles innovation, and we have to be careful there. "Our strategic direction is not just 'we want

to regulate': there is a technology and we have to do rules how to do this or that, no! We will put on policies and standards, which is different. Standards are important and very popular in technology. If you're speaking about financial services, then there you need regulations. But standards are different from regulations. Rather than putting regulations, we're looking into dodigital fields in the human resource, to improve ing standards: let's assist the businesses by givtrust, security and resilience in digital services ing them policies in cybersecurity for example, which they can follow, to have a better system, and to prioritize investment in digital infra-

structure. The five strategies were welcomed by to have more proof system. industry leaders and will fit with the acclaimed "That's why we have four pillars in our strawork to date of the Malta Digital Innovation tegic plan, which are policy, service provision, Authority (MDIA). Since its formation five communication, and governance. Governance years ago, the authority has overseen a string of will be associated with regulation, but we've policy changes to make the market more attracbeen careful in trying to not use words that tive for tech activity and ensure transparency could scare off investment actually; that's very and protection for participants. The authoriimportant." ty recently launched its own strategic plan for

2023-2025, as CEO Kenneth Brincat explains. Cryptocurrency climate is well regulated "After five years, we thought that now we Malta's success in creating robust legal and regulatory frameworks to attract technologyneed to have a new strategic plan, which will give us the direction for the three coming years," focused businesses, especially in the niche he says. "Even three years in technology is a lot, segment of cryptocurrency, has seen the because technology, especially innovative techcountry gain the proud moniker of "Blockchain nologies, is so dynamic that you need to have

tionale of our strategic plan. "Obviously, the biggest challenge would be that, being an authority, people look at us like we are a regulatory body: that's why one of our pillars is communication; it's to communicate that we're very much here to help, not to stifle what you're trying to do.'

then provide that," Brincat explains.

Such a positive tag certainly helps raise the

nation's profile in international circles and me-

dia and adds to the nation's allure. "Our strate-

gic plan is saying: first attract and offer the as-

sistance and the incentives, then when you have

the market, with the industry already there and

it needs to be regulated, it needs governance,

KENNETH BRINCAT CEO, MDIA

"Even three years in technology

is a lot, because innovative

technologies are so dynamic

vou need to have not too much

long-term strategy."

"But first, you need to assist by giving grants,

tax incentives and assisting in providing exper-

tise, in mentoring, for example, the startups

embarking in new technologies. That's the ra-



M&Z can help US manufacturers realize Malta's great potential as a hub for exports into Africa

The more than a century of un-matched experience, M&Z plc is





CEO. Enemalta

drastically in the next 10 years, to identify areas where our grid needs to be reinforced. Consumption patterns of our clients are changing rapidly, especially during the last years. Post COVID energy Consumption patterns of our customers are changing rapidly, especially during the last few years. We have very ambitious targets for the upcoming years. Our focus is in ensuring that we can meet this fast-increasing demand."

Renewables are also part of Enemalta's service portfolio, with a popular adoption of solar panels in Maltese homes. The company is working alongside the government to integrate more sustainable practices and reduce the country's carbon footprint. "Offshore wind farms on a large scale can also be something of great interest to us, and we look forward to

t the end of September last year, the Ministry for the Economy, European Funds and Lands launched five groundbreaking strategies with the ultimate goal of leading Malta to an enviable position at the forefront of the fourth industrial revolution, which is focused on technologies. "While in previous industrial revolutions there was always a need for natural resources, coal, fuel, land to build machines and large

push for bigger projects offshore.

"What we are prioritizing, at the moment, is primarily solar and wind offshore technologies. But we're not closed to other kinds of technology because technology is moving so fast. What until a few years ago might have been a pie in the sky and people believed would never happen, today, we're seeing it happening.

"Until a few years ago, floating offshore technology was something people said to avoid as it's so expensive. However, prices have increased, the technology has matured, and we believe that that is something that can work for our country."

was a lot of interest from companies that work in the energy sector and officials are optimistic that a string of rewarding projects will emerge that will provide Malta with the required capacity to achieve its decarbonization aims.

"The 17 sustainable development goals con tained in our Vision 2050 blueprint cut right across the whole of government and the country," Minister Dalli adds. "These goals can real ly and truly put us on the path of achieving our vision and making sure that we give people the balance that ultimately, we all want and require. I will ensure that we continue working fast on this transition towards a cleaner economy.

upgrade our electricity distribution network. the government's plan to open new interna-We are studying upcoming energy consumptional investment opportunities in this sector," tion and demand trends which will change Cardona adds

Enemed's petroleum products fuel growth

The company works around-the-clock to ensure supply of vehicle and aviation fuels



M&Z p.l.c. is a publicly listed company on the Malta stock exchange. It deals with the importation, distribution and marketing of fast-moving consumer goods in the Maltese market. Its portfolio spans various product categories including ambient, chilled, frozen, home & personal care, baby & kids care, confectionary and wines & spirits.

Just a few brands we're proud to mention...



apidly approached its tenth anniversary as a leading player in the importation, distribution and wholesale of petroleum products and aviation fuel for the inland market, Enemed is working hard to develop alternative fuels that are cleaner and safer but of the same high-quality.

As a wholly owned subsidiary of stateowned Petromal Company Ltd, the company also offers its storage facilities to third parties. Recent group highlights include the debut of a €15 million new jet fuel storage facility in the grounds of Malta International Airport and the commissioning of a state-of-the-art national fuel distribution center.

With a track record of innovation, new products that aim to exceed customer experience are constantly on the agenda. Not only did the firm create the popular ePower diesel fuel, it also invested heavily in the award-winning SECU MultiTank system to prevent costly cross-fill incidents at its network of gas stations. Enemed is also working alongside the government to integrate more sustainable practices and reduce its carbon footprint through the on-boarding of new technologies and better energy efficient equipment and working practices. "We want to be a benchmark for other companies to emulate. To do so, we have to be the first in doing things that normally the industry doesn't do or follow," explains Enemed executive chairman, Kevin Chircop.

"Unfortunately, our products are a necessary evil to keep people and industries running but to the detriment of the environment. However, from its inception as a setup, we started off developing fuels which are cleaner, in the sense that we try as much as possible to find fuels which are of high quality so as to reduce the emissions to the minimum possible.

"This comes at a price that our company opts not to pass on to its clients. Conscious of this fact, the company puts more renewable content in its fuels than what is stipulated by the European Commission.



Kevin Chircop Executive Chairman. Enemed

> "The better the quality of the fuel and the more renewable content, the less the emissions hence a cleaner environment. Absorbing the extra cost for a cleaner fuel shows our commitment for sustainability. We want to make enough profit so that we continue investing in new machinery and equipment that is more efficient, has less carbon footprint, and can provide consistency in the quality of the fuels that we are providing. The rest is plowed back into the research that we conduct so that we continue providing these cleaner fuels."

Enemed is certainly proving the old adage of action speaks louder than words, with the company recently securing the prestigious ISO 14001 certification for reducing its environmental impact. "We are the first company working within the fuel industry in Malta to be certified as ISO 14001, so our commitments are there," the senior executive and experienced industry expert adds. "We've even got green roofs. They are covered with grass which bloom in spring. It helps both aesthetically and to reduce the temperature inside, especially in summer."

surroundings of the American University of Malta can only inspire students. Best in class education Outstanding education provision includes the coveted American University of Malta

alta's acclaimed education sector is climbing the international rankings to become a key service export. Its generous rates combined with its location and English-speaking citizens have made it a hub for students from Europe and other parts of the world.

The country's non-state education sector is split into two categories, those educational services offered by church educational institutions and independent institutions, with the latter category having developed very well in the last few years with the help of public and private sector institutions. The sector has flourished, particularly as talented family members of new arrivals in a range of industries have joined schools, colleges and universities.

With a cosmopolitan character, great yearround climate, excellent infrastructure and plenty of bars, restaurants and meeting places

tion for local and foreign students after a quiet and safe place in which to gain their qualifications. The country combines education with culture, which is an integral part of education. One of the newest and most successful uni-

versities present on the island is the American University of Malta (AUM), which welcomed its first cohort of students in 2017. Based at the Grand Harbor of Malta in Cospicua, the private, American-style university is dedicated to higher education and research for an international community at the highest standard.

and service to the community transform lives and serve society by educating ethically knowledgeable citizens, creating knowledge, and putting knowledge to work in a global setting. The popular seat of learning is a comprehensive university based on an US model and curriculum aimed at nurturing those who are inquisitive of mind, ambitious of heart and robust of spirit.



Greta Camille Managing Director, M&Z Now one of the top-three food distribution

companies in Malta, M&Z is seeking to grow its presence and market share with the assistance of the firm's shares. The IPO was well received of US partners, as managing director, Greta Camilleri, explains. "We already work with a few US brands and are certainly very interested in growing this opportunity," she says. "We've represented Ben & Jerry's for nearly a decade, but have come across several US brands that have yet to meet the labeling requirements needed for such products to be sold into Malta and the European Union. However, there are a number of brands from the US that are always a step ahead

of the EU, and there are a multitude of US products within the FMCG sector that we would be very keen to represent. Several products would be a perfect compliment to our current portfolio both for the local Maltese market and as we look to expand overseas in line with the company's ambitious growth plans." According to the experienced industry ex-

ecutive, whose father helped build the business and expand its horizons, M&Z is now ideally positioned to market and distribute products beyond its local shores to other European markets as well as the lucrative markets of Africa and beyond. This is due to Malta's strategic location between two continents, which gives M&Z a strong competitive advantage when it comes to bringing brands to these high volume markets. "Many countries in Africa and the Middle East regard Malta as an ally and a friend," Camilleri reveals. "We're open for business and are actively seeking to increase our reach in these new markets with our international portfolio of

brands that we represent as well as with any new brands we choose to take on board, especially ones that have a focus on food and that have ambitions beyond Malta, to Africa and further afield?

Sizzling stockmarket debut

M&Z has achieved many milestones along its journey from dealing in ambient mass-market commodity items to representing international brands that serve today's and tomorrow's consumers. One of the most recent was its initial public offering last year that involved 26.25%



consolidation in recent years and we want to remain at the forefront of that consolidation? Camilleri notes; "Today, we still have a massive appetite for growth and would consider acquiring any businesses in the right sectors that have high growth potential."

GRETA CAMILLERI MANAGING DIRECTOR, M&Z "There are a multitude of US products within the FMCG sector that we would be very keen to represent."

M&Z passed a second key staging post in 2022: the 100th anniversary of its founding in Malta. Camilleri is just as optimistic about the country's future prospects as she is about the company's: "We are here to stay for at least another 100 years; we made it very clear in our IPO prospectus and business plans that we intend to grow aggressively from Malta."

Another important milestone for the firm has been a shift in management from the third generation of the family to the fourth, with the fifth being nurtured for when its time comes. As Camilleri says: "We've always looked to pass the baton on at M&Z and have always done that successfully. We're looking forward to M&Z's future, because we know the business can continue to grow strongly in a market that is resilient and expanding at a good rate, meaning opportunities abound."

Michel I. Naiia President. AUM in which to socialize, Malta is the ideal destina-

"We are a university which is relatively young, but this is an asset; that's added value," states says AUM president, Michel I. Najjar. "It's an added value that you are flexible. When you are in a university that is a few hundred years old, you become rigid in the sense that you have heavy inertia, you have resistance to change, to

renovation, to innovation. "We are also a university that will remain current with the time, will follow the trends of technology, trends of marketing, sustainability, what's good for the community and what's good for humanity. We can easily change course. We AUM's degree programs, research activities,

can easily adjust. "In addition, we can easily combine the new trends in education and teaching, new trends and technology. We can adapt them in our courses. We can easily maneuver to position ourselves where we should be, to be always the state of the art of our profession. We feel that this should be taken as a plus."

Tourism sector truly in a league of its own

alta's outstanding tourism of-fering is second to none, with the industry remaining a major **LVL** contributor to the country's economic evolution through the creation of more than 51,000 direct and indirect jobs. Inbound tourists of 2.3 million and a total expenditure of around €2 billion in 2022 underlined its importance to national economic well-being, as visitors flocked to its colorful tapestry of cultures, languages, art and architecture, food and activities.

While those impressive results were still about a quarter down on pre-pandemic levels, they reinforced its excellent reputation as a sun-kissed leisure and travel destination of choice for people of all ages from many different countries and continents.

Indeed, such is the country's reputation as a leading travel destination, the highly respected global travel institution Lonely Planet was recently named one of the winners of the publication's "Top Destination to Unwind" award. Judges noted the country has been "muchloved by European visitors for decades," adding that it "is attracting more visitors from around the world, beckoned by its prehistoric temples, fantastic scuba diving and buzzy Valletta, its beautiful capital".

"Historically, tourism had come out from a war economy into a diversified economy," says Minister of Tourism, Clayton Bartolo. "It has, over the years, provided the perfect platform for investment opportunities, both local and international, as well as employment opportunities. We have thousands of families in Malta who either have invested in tourism, not just hotels and restaurants or rentals and car leasing, but there are various facets of tourism; as time goes by, we are going to see even more different areas of tourism which come into play, especially with the advent of digitalization.

"This means that on one side, we have the investors, and on the other we have the employees, all of whom were very badly affected when COVID-19 struck, because tourism was the hardest hit sector. If it wasn't for government intervention, the sector would have lost thousands of jobs. In fact, predictions were that the Maltese unemployment level would reach record levels.

"However, thanks to the government's intervention and introduction of the wage subsidy, around 100,000 jobs were saved; the majority in tourism. There again, it shows the importance of tourism for the government, because the government understands that tourism is an industry from which, basically, the whole economy stands to gain."

While clearly delighted with the strong re-Minister of Tourism bound in visitor numbers, Bartolo and leading tourism officials are not prepared to rest on their laurels and have given the green light to high-profile marketing and advertising campaigns to boost its appeal in new and existing markets. Importantly, industry bosses are particularly targeting higher spending tourists so as to increase the visitor spend per capita.

"It's not just the numbers: the easiest decision we could have done is to simply go for the numbers and seek to regain the same numbers which we had prior to pandemic," he explains. "Our aim is to get higher quality tourists to Malta, in order to sustain the levels of invest-

Malta's rich collage of natural, historical and cultural delights has helped trigger a sharp rebound in arrivals as visitors make new memories to last a lifetime



Socializing in ancient streets in front of bars and clubs is a way of life across the nation.

"Sports tourism is a new niche we are culti-

Malta's thriving tourism sector is considered

of its cultural delights, while the government

island nation's six administrative regions.

distinguishable by their respective regions.

to do this, we have also started cultivating a number of niches. For example, we have started investing heavily in the diving industry, sports tourism and faith tourism. vating. We feel we'll have some very interesting results, especially in the shoulder months. as during the summer, Malta has already a lot to offer. Our aim is to beat seasonality. Another niche is faith tourism. We are not simply relying on Catholic faith; we are looking for people seeking to undertake a spiritual voyage, we have 365 churches, one for very day of the year." Cultural and natural wonders delight

Clayton Bartolo

ments. This is what we are working on. In fact, we saw better results last year as they featured

a higher tourist spend per capita. While we had around 86% of the tourism numbers of 2019. the 2022 spend was actually higher than that. That means that with a less number of people, we are getting a higher spend per capita. This will continue to be our strategy.

"We are doing this by investing in our tourism products. I'm a firm believer that Malta should not compete on price, but we should compete on the visitors' experience. In order "This shows how culturally strong Malta is. It's fantastic: each and every cultural strategy is, in itself, a labor of love. The regions work hard.

"It will also create new opportunities for the artists. We have a lot of people in Malta, where art is their job, their workplace. They earn money out of arts, and the fact that we have those new initiatives, create new opportunities for the artists to work and earn money, and they're living in their own communities."

Heritage Malta is the national agency for museums, conservation practice and cultural heritage. The entity proudly manages more than 90 museums and landmarks, national monuments and underwater sites. Its unmatched portfolio ranges from prehistoric caves to subterranean passageways, covers geology to ethnography, and includes the management of seven breathtaking UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Heritage Malta recently declared the world's first deep-water archeological park. First discovered 30 years ago just off Xlendi Bay in Gozo, the site lies at 105 metres below sea level and comprises an expanse of Punic archaeological material across 67,000 square meters.

"We're turning Malta into this fantastic destination for diving, not only for fun and leisure, but also to learn more about history, about past civilizations, about what happened before time immemorial," Bonnici adds. "That's a lot of hard work and we're very proud of it."

As the global economy transforms into a greener, more sustainable version, the majority of tourists want to contribute to sustainability even while on vacation. Malta is making great strides in integrating more sustainable practices throughout its tourism sector, while at the same time, supporting local communities.

"Sustainability is a necessity, not an option," Bartolo confirms. "We need to understand this principle more than ever. This means that we have tourists that visit our country over a whole year which directly leaves a positive environmental impact especially with the reduction in emissions in the touristic activity.

CLAYTON BARTOLO MINISTER OF TOURISM

"Over the years, tourism has provided the perfect platform for investment opportunities, both local and international, as well as employment opportunities."

especially vital when it comes to maintaining the country's arts and heritage segments. Tourism "We have launched a scheme to help most revenue plays a key role in sustaining many of the hotels to start engaging in sustainable practices, namely for the production of energy recently included such income in the goals of through photovoltaic (PV) panels. This is an a series of five-year cultural strategies for the important aspect as Malta has at least 300 days of sunshine each year, meaning with PV panels In addition to recognizing and celebrating we can create electricity nearly all year round. "We are raising more awareness about the

the cultural ecosystem of the half dozen areas, the comprehensive and first of their kind importance of water conservation and working strategies aim to accentuate and enhance the with hotels on this issue. Other initiatives invarious aspects of Maltese culture, which are clude the government acting as a prime mover, especially on the electrification of the public "Malta is a small country and the idea of transport. We are also working on a ship-tohaving regions in a very small country is testashore electricity project. The aim is that when ment of how rich Malta is in terms of culture," the ships enter the harbor and dock, they says Minister for the National Heritage, the switch off their engines and take the electricity Arts, and Local Government, Owen Bonnici, from shore so as to lower emission levels."



Swimming and diving in Malta's crystal-clear waters is a popular activity for tourists.

Wave of niche tourism sectors adds to beautiful nation's allure and success

The vital tourism sector's diversification into exciting new areas heralds a bright new dawn for visitors and hosts alike

alta is far from your typical Med-iterranean island, with its small size giving it the relaxing feel and personality of a vibrant cosmopolitan city, albeit one blessed with beautiful weather and some of the best seas in Europe. Often described as a living museum, visitors take a step back in time the moment they set foot anywhere in the welcoming nation and peel away layer upon layer of history and experiences. Its unrivalled past includes sites created in the era of Phoenician colonization, to the time of the Romans, Byzantines, Arab occupation and the arrival of the Normans, Swabians, Angevins and the Aragonese.

The walk through the 7,000 years of history continues with the arrival of the Order of the Knights of St John, followed by Napoleon Bonaparte taking Malta from the Knights until the country became a successful colony of the British Crown. Frequently referred to as a gem in the heart of the Mediterranean, Malta offers adventures and experiences for everyone. Now approaching its 25th anniversary, The Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) aims to advance the economic and social activity of tour-

ism in the national interest, by working with all with professionalism and care," says MTA CEO, stakeholders to develop a sustainable industry Carlo Micallef. for current and future generations. "Our vision is to achieve a healthy, sustainfavorite destination for many, and even though



we're not the cheapest, we're seeing that the Maltese islands give a very good experience, create memories to take home to friends and family, and are great value for time and money. Our small size allows people to pack in more in their holiday. There are two factors that are limited in our life: time and money. We strive to give the best return to vacationers for the time and money they invested in our islands."

MTA marketing campaigns boost revival With the impact of the pandemic now rapidly disappearing into distance, MTA has redoubled its efforts to promote the destination to worldwide markets. Prior to the outbreak, the government agency was active in 42 countries; with marketing plans for each and further segmentation into bespoke initiatives for the different motivational segments to travel, while

underpinning the VisitMalta brand. Post-pandemic, Micallef reveals, MTA at first concentrated on European campaigns as the region best serves Malta by direct flight connections. "North America, Asia, and Australia were a bit slower to restart, but North America came back strongly and by end of year we had recovered 80% of pre-pandemic record arrivals from there," he discloses. "Our marketing is geographically focused. We have a marketing plan for each country, but segment driven. We promote the destination but then go into specifc demographics, to a finely targeted approach to the identified demographics that we're trying range of source markets, whilst ensuring that to target. That's the marketing aspect. those who choose our destination are served

"But our branding goes beyond that. We present our brand consistently first in international exhibitions, on television, on social media, or branding with major world-famous brands like Manchester United, Eolo-Kometa

Revive body and mind Malta is the perfect place to relax, unwind and

escape the pace and stresses of modern life

tourism





"Malta is still very much in demand. It's a

in professional cycling, Expedia in internation-

al travel, Forbes Magazine or Michelin in the

brands that are renowned and very respected

around the world. This allows the VisitMalta

brand to get noticed alongside the millions of

followers of the mentioned brands. It has been

a successful strategy especially in emerging

markets where MTA's own PR and marketing

activity has not as yet made the inroad we have

CARLO MICALLEF

CEO. MTA

"Even though we're not the

cheapest, we're seeing that

the Maltese islands give a very

good experience [and] create

memories to take home

to friends and family."

Whether you're a history buff, a night owl,

an adrenaline junkie, or simply a rambler wish-

ing to be bowled over by natural splendor, the

list of things to do in Malta is endless. That is

especially true now that the liberal and laid-

back country is diversifying its tourism offering

into niche areas like sports, faith, screen and

lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT)

Up to 40,000 people from the LGBT com-

munity are expected to participate in the Eu-

ropride celebrations in Valletta over a 10-day

period this September, with Malta the smallest

country to ever host the high-profile, fun event.

in the traditional core markets."

"We put brand Malta, together with top

gastronomy sector

MALTA SPECIAL



is door to the delights of the Mediterranean

Valletta Cruise Port

Firmly on the radar of leading cruise operators, this modern and attractive maritime gateway takes it name from the spectacular capital

he multi-billion dollar per year cruise industry may be a global behemeth, but many of the leading international operators in this fast-growing, upscale segment of the tourism sector have Malta on their ports of call, or to be more precise: Valletta Cruise Port on their cultural itineraries.

With one of the most scenic backdrops worldwide, Valletta Cruise Port efficiently ushers huge cruise ships, thousands of passengers and hundreds of crew into Malta's historical and cultural experience from the moment they enter the historic and scenic Grand Harbor. Valletta Cruise Port's terminals are housed in restored buildings just below the iconic bastions. As part of tens of millions of euros of invest-

ment, the famous buildings were restored to their former glory, all the while adhering to the pedestrianised area's masterplan that involved the blending of the old and the new, but respecting the historic fabric. Visitors to the ancient maritime gateway are greeted by a variety of shops, cafes, restaurants, offices and other amenities in beautifully restored 18th Century warehouses stretching along the seawall's edge.

Known as Valletta Waterfront, the eye-catching array of old maritime structures, historically referred to as Pinto and Forni Stores, were commissioned by Grand Master Pinto and designed by Andrea Belli to be used as stores by the Knights of Malta and other merchants.

In 2022, the historic capital's only designated cruise port — launched in 2002 on a neglected historical site that has since been returned to its maiestic state - handled nearly 530,000 passenger movements. While that figure was well below the record of over 900,000 passenger movements achieved in 2019, it marked another recovery from the COVID-19 disruption.

"The large majority of cruise companies are now regular callers to our islands," states a very proud Valletta Cruise Port CEO, Stephen Xuereb. "We are now strategically placed as one of the top Mediterranean ports of call and is also a flourishing homeport."

"When a cruise passenger arrives on this rock then their experience starts in the port, because



Handling huge ocean cruise liners with ease is all in a day's work for Valletta Cruise Port.

ed Nations mandated with the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism - Valletta Cruise Port follows a comprehensive set of principles designed to guide key players in tourism development, to help maximize the sector's benefits and mitigating any potential damage to the environment, cultural heritage and communities.

more than a dozen countries.

Harbor Clean Air Project.

our trajectory is not only one of growth, but one

of ensuring operational excellence," adds Xuereb,

who is also COO of the parent group. He explains

that Valletta Cruise Port continues to look to the

future and is supporting a €49.9 million initiative

spearheaded by the Ministry for Transport, In-

frastructure and Capital Projects, Infrastructure

Malta and Transport Malta to develop shore-side

electricity infrastructure as part of the Grand

to provide shore power on the five main cruise

ship quays of Valletta's Grand Harbor during

2023, resulting in major air quality improvements

with drastic emission reduction. The senior ex-

ecutive and industry expert welcomes such ini-

tiatives and says he was delighted Valletta Cruise

The project includes a €37 million investment

Stephen Xuereb CEO, Valletta Cruise Port

we're at the peripheries of Valletta: passengers can immediately start their journey. We have the Valletta Waterfront destination and then they can explore the city on foot. Also, since cruising is typically rich in repeat visitors — around one in

very two cruise passengers travel by that mode of transport again — whenever they come back to Malta they can explore other areas of the island. "The beauty of Malta is that you're only half an

hour away from any major site. When you look at the excursions, there's so much to offer: you can either go down south to the fishing village of Marsaxlokk and explore the Neolithic temples around that area, or you can go toward the center of the island and the old capital city of Mdina and the nearby Mosta Dome. If you go north, there are plenty of attractive beaches to explore, while you can also visit the beautiful island of Gozo."

From an economic perspective, the cruise industry leaves a significant economic impact on the Maltese economy. In 2019, direct expenditure by the cruise industry locally amounted to €83.36 million of which €31 million was expenditure by cruise passengers and €52 million expenditure by cruise lines. As a signatory to World Tourism

Port was able to act as a facilitator by allowing its Organization — a specialized agency of the Unitfacilities to be used.

"This gives the opportunity for Malta to be at the forefront of these green initiatives because the Grand Harbor will be the first port in the Mediterranean to have all its quays offering shore to ship connectivity

That's a very important milestone for the country in terms of the green targets, but also the community at large since the area around the Grand Harbor is quite densely populated. It was

Acquisition puts port on the crest of a wave a welcome initiative by government and it is our In 2015, Valletta Cruise Port became part of a intention now to promote this actively so that we larger group when it was acquired by Global Ports can attract more cruise visitors to the islands of-Holding, a London-listed entity which prides fering also a clean energy source.

itself as being the largest independent cruise Xuereb sees the US as a relatively untapped market for the cruise industry. "Malta and Valletport operator in the world. At that time, Valletta Cruise Port was the ninth port in Global Ports ta are a jewel in the middle of the Mediterranean. Holding network. Now, the network has grown I'm sure that once Americans visit they will enjoy to almost 30 and involves maritime operations in this living monument. There is 7,000 years of history for them to explore in 130 square kilometers "As part of the Global Ports Holding network on this small island," he concludes.

f 💿 in



Gastronomic delights to suit everyone's tastes are found all over the welcoming nation.

Treat your tastebuds With several Michelin Star restaurants, quality and gastronomy go hand in hand in Malta

ike most Mediterraneans, gastronomy is one of the most crucial aspects in life for Maltese citizens, with the dinner table traditionally where the family meets to relax and socialise over some of the finest food and drink in the world.

Home to an abundance of outstanding produce, a sea brimming with delicious seafood, and recipes dating back centuries, food and drink are the very essence of Maltese culture. Every locality and every touristic area has its own set of specialties when it comes to different dishes and drinks, with food and wine tourism both fast-growing sectors that are being embraced and promoted wholeheartedly by tourism officials and local businesses.

Incredibly for its size, Malta boasts five restaurants that have been awarded a coveted Michelin Star, while three restaurants hold a Bib Gourmand award - given to places that provide great food and value - and nearly two dozen culinary establishments have earned the Michelin Plate Award. There are restaurants which are well known for certain plates in different localities, including in Gozo. Even between Malta and Gozo, there are differences in the way that the Maltese bread, Ftira, is made. Success in the prestigious Michelin Guide is

particularly impressive given that the country's catering establishments only started to feature in the annual publication less than five years ago. An important component of the judging is the use of local produce, a factor that suits Malta down to the ground thanks to its network of local farmers, who have been given an added

incentive to upscale their products. The same is true of the fruits of the sea, where local fishermen can catch delicious fresh fish and crustaceans at almost any time of the

day and have them delivered to the kitchens of seafood restaurants almost anywhere in the country within a couple of hours. This can only be done because of Malta's favorable size.

where Malta is making a name for itself, with the nation also beginning to establish a fine reputation for its wine, with this niche industry identified as one of the areas of attention and investment by government and tourism leaders. Malta's rich soil, light sea breeze and 300 days of sun make for the perfect wine-making combination. Visitors can tantalise their tastebuds with a full-bodied red, a crisp white, or a ravishing rosé at wineries and vineyards. While not as renowned like its larger Mediterranean neighbours for wine production, Maltese vintages are more than holding their own at international competitions, the MTA notes. "Malta is a country that is very much up and coming in the wine industry," confirms Minister Bartolo. "This is also a new niche which we are exploring and in which we will be investing

However, it is not just produce for plates

in the coming years. We have a number of vineyards, all of which produce excellent wines. "Together with wineries, we aim to offer a

different kind of experience for some of the tourists who come to visit. Mostly, this is something we envisage for the shoulder months. Under a sunny sky, tourists would go and enjoy a nice bottle of wine with some local cheese, so creating a better experience for them.

"We are focused very much on the experience which the tourists will get from the moment they leave the airplane here in Malta until they go back. We are trying to make it as seamless as possible and as enjoyable as possible,

while giving them those moments to cherish, which will make them return."

ith countless serene and idyllic locations by the shore, spas, meditation sites and outdoor fitness activities like yoga, Malta is an increasingly popular wellness destination for international visitors seeking to boost their mental, emotional and physical well-being.

"The crashing of waves on the rocks, while breathing in the salty sea breeze, contributes to a stress-free environment and helps one relax and unwind, while also rejuvenating one's body," says Micallef. "Outdoor sessions are growing in popularity at a very fast rate, with many clients preferring to connect with nature while exercising. Many of these sessions are being performed in stunning locations. The sounds of nature create a calming sensation,

ensuring that one can find one's zen." According to the senior executive and industry veteran with decades of industry experience under his belt, Malta's wellness collection is second to none and includes new offerings and trends such as SUP (standup paddleboarding) meditation. "The combination of climate, easily accessible seas, together with qualified instructors, means that SUP meditation and our islands are a match made in heaven," he says. 'This is a more intensive sort of meditation as it requires balance and a strong core so as not to

fall off the board while performing the moves." Away from the hustle and bustle of Malta's For those seeking an even slower pace or ancient towns, the old meets new through the pampering in stunning surroundings, the Maldevelopment of natural produce. Travelers can tese islands offer a broad range of high-quality participate in a number of tasks, such as shadspas, many of which are found at hotel complexowing a local beekeeper as his bees make hones, as well as other individual establishments. ey, or watch a local salter sieving natural rock Such exceptional spa treatments heighten all salt in one of the glistening salt pans by the senses, are tailor-made to relax both body and sea. Malta's natural parks are another popular mind and are normally accompanied by topchoice for those seeking to get closer to nature.



class facilities, such as indoor pools, saunas hammam baths and steam rooms. While enjoying these spas, one can get a massage treatment from licensed professionals, ensuring that your body will be fully relaxed and soothed.

Blending fun with sustainable adventures

Sustainable tourism aims to blend an amazing holiday with activities that do not harm the environment and may actually even enhance the natural flora and fauna. Malta is seeking to lead the way in the Mediterranean region when it comes to promoting memorable activities and experiences to visitors who wish to minimize their environmental impact and footprint.

CARLO MICALLEF CEO, MTA

"The crashing of waves on the rocks, while breathing in the salty sea breeze, contributes to a stress-free environment and helps one relax and unwind and rejuvenate."



