

Tourism, Travel and Culture

Honorable Parliamentary Secretary, distinguished guests and colleagues.

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to be with you here today to amongst other things commemorate the establishment of the Institute of Tourism, Travel and Culture at the University of Malta.

This Institute has only recently taken its stature as an entity of the University of Malta which functions in close collaboration with a number of established faculties, but which is governed independently of any other faculty. It is focused on promoting Tourism, Travel and Culture in their own right respectively, but also seeks to draw the obvious and inevitable synergy between the three phenomena.

I am also delighted that this Institute is showing from its very inception that it intends to work closely with stakeholders to ensure that it not only strives to acquire a strong academic standing, but, also to ensure that it is manifestly relevant to a growing sector of our economy.

The business of Travel, and the elaborate operational and logistical dimension of securing cost-efficient, convenient, safe, and comfortable human mobility needs to provide access to business destinations as well as to holiday destinations. Even in this digital-age our physical connectivity is as crucial as ever to our economic prosperity. Most would agree that as an island we must continue to ensure that we are well connected and accessible by air and by sea and that the operators providing such service should also have Malta's greater economic perspective in mind as well as that of their shareholders. For example, in present circumstances, it is hard to envisage the sustenance of our economy without a strong national airline – and I am sure we all agree that the sustained operation of Air Malta is vital to us all. We wish them well in these interesting times.

The Tourism sector continues to evolve in the face of acute competition, and each destination – and Malta is no exception here - needs to identify and leverage its strengths whilst mitigating its weaknesses. Here the issue of branding is increasingly becoming central, and this, is not merely achieved by the imagery we portray on brochures and billboards – our brand needs to be conveyed by the people – if we claim to be friendly and hospitable then, so we must be!; if we are projecting a lifestyle we must live it with gusto and conviction; if we are projecting our heritage we must seek to learn more about it and care for it; if we are selling sand and sea then let's continue to keep our beaches safe and clean. Our acts and omissions as a nation, as a people, brand us more so than any fancy billboard or logo.

This leads us to Culture and herein one seeks to carve out an identity not merely from the past, not merely from artefacts, works of art, cuisine, monuments or re-enactments – although all these are very important ingredients of “communication”. Culture must also derive from present day expression of Malteseness manifest in the social fabric that evolves as a result of our collective behaviour, taste, intelligence, psyche, values, choices... culminating in an embodiment of something truly uniquely Mediterranean – the Maltese people... us.

Evidently, the task ahead for the Institute of Tourism, Travel and Culture is both exciting and challenging. The Institute must be intrinsically multidisciplinary in its approach and should neither be too simplistically pragmatic nor too singularly esoteric. It needs to somehow bring to bear depth of thought and well-honed and well researched strategic thinking to the practical needs of a country which continues to rely on the logistics of travel, the economic injection of tourism, and the refinement and infusion of our cultural identity.

Tourism Opening

I wish the Board, Director and academics of the Institute success with their endeavours, I thank Hon. De Marco for his support, and I hope that all stakeholders contribute and partake in the Institute's success.

Thank you

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