



The Saluting Battery at the Upper Barracca, Valletta.

Malta's Destination Management Companies

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This research investigates the challenges faced by Malta-based Destination Management Companies (DMCs) within the corporate events industry. The study explores the role of DMCs in Malta's tourism sector, their contribution to the local economy, and the difficulties they encounter. It also aims to propose strategies to mitigate these challenges and assess the competitiveness and future of DMCs in Malta.

The **literature review** begins by defining a Destination Management Company as a stand-alone hospitality and tourism organisation that has qualified personnel and resources to manage events such as meetings, team-building activities and incentive trips. The review also highlights the significance of destination marketing, particularly the importance of a favourable destination image for attracting corporate events. It outlines the steps that Destination

Management Organisations (DMOs) or DMCs should take in destination branding, including identifying unique selling points, creating persuasive messages, developing a positioning statement, and establishing a visual identity. The review notes that towns and cities are often the preferred locations for corporate events due to their facilities and transport options. Various business event categories are considered, including corporate meetings, awards ceremonies, incentive travel and governmental events, all with distinct goals and formats.

The importance of planning corporate hospitality events is explored, emphasising the need to define event objectives and select the right hosts and guests to achieve successful outcomes. The literature review also addresses the environmental and economic costs associated with corporate events, noting the impact of travel on the environment and the potential for underutilised conference centres to waste public funding. Furthermore, it explores the Quality Assured Seal for DMCs in Malta, highlighting its role in enhancing the professionalism and competitiveness of the sector.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the study is based on a qualitative approach, employing semi-structured interviews and participant observations. The researcher conducted interviews with managing directors of two DMCs and personnel from two hospitality service companies. These interviews aimed to gather in-depth perspectives on the challenges faced by DMCs, the operational aspects of corporate event organisation, and the relationships between DMCs and hospitality service companies. Participant observations were conducted at three corporate events organised by DMCs, which allowed for first-hand insights into the practical challenges encountered during event execution. The researcher also performed a pilot study to test the interview questions, and adjust them accordingly to obtain more detailed responses. The data were analysed using thematic analysis, a method for identifying patterns and meanings within a dataset, which facilitated the identification of recurring

themes relating to the challenges faced by DMCs. Triangulation was employed, comparing the findings of interviews, observations, and the literature review, to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the subject. The researcher also addressed ethical considerations, obtaining consent and ensuring the anonymity of participants. Limitations of the study were also recognised, including the researcher's dual role as an observer and host during events, which could have impacted their observations.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis is presented by first analysing results from the semi-structured interviews with the managing directors of two DMCs, and the sales, events and venue personnel of two hospitality service companies. One of the DMCs focused

high-end hotel brands. The significant effort that DMCs have to make when presenting options to clients is also noted, with many proposals being discarded. However, Malta is also viewed as a competitive destination due to its use of English, unique selling points, and reasonable prices. The hospitality service companies noted the importance of accessibility, well-organised facilities, parking and efficient public transport. Data from observations of three corporate events revealed issues including a lack of client adherence to the DMC's proposed plans, and timing and logistical problems.

DISCUSSION

The discussion section consolidates the findings from interviews and observations and connects them to the existing literature. Effective destination marketing is deemed crucial for attracting international corporations, and the study highlights challenges such as communication problems, budget and time constraints, and supplier management issues, all of which can affect the outcome of corporate events. The need for skilled and dedicated team members, strong supplier relationships, and effective communication strategies was highlighted as essential for addressing such challenges. Despite a contradictory discussion on the pricing levels of Malta compared to the quality of service, there was consensus on the island's competitive advantages such as its reduced travel distance and English-speaking environment. The benefits that Malta derives from hosting corporate events include

the delegates spending money in the local markets, as well as boosting investments in infrastructure. However, the economic, environmental and labour costs were also addressed as a consequence of hosting such events, such as increased air travel,

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exclusively on corporate events in Malta, while the other operated in multiple destinations. Challenges identified included the limited scope of product offerings in Malta, noise pollution stemming from urban development, and the absence of



A visit at tal-Massar Vineyard.

and the need for DMCs to invest more in labour due to a lack of local personnel in the industry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

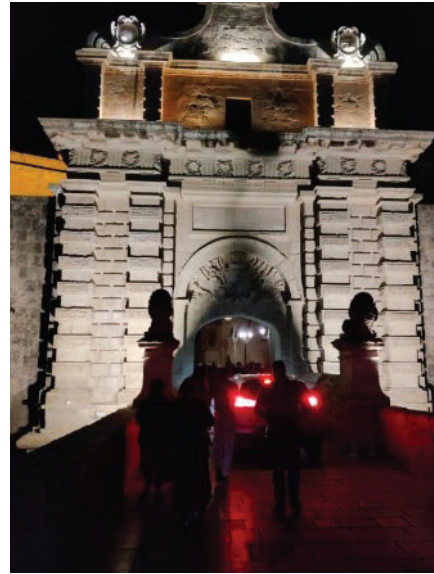
The recommendations drawn from the study include the need for skilled and dedicated team members, effective communication, maintaining strong supplier relationships and trust within partnerships. The author also suggests the need for

innovative business ideas, good marketing intelligence and digital advertising to further enhance the competitiveness of Malta-based DMCs. The study concludes that the future of DMCs in Malta depends on the ability to address various challenges, including attracting young personnel, penetrating unique markets, and promoting cooperation within the tourism industry. Additionally the study highlights the importance of thorough analysis of data, such as through thematic

analysis, and the usefulness of triangulating data to draw robust conclusions.

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