

Malta Targets Younger Holiday Market

By Roger Munns

Marketing and tourist officials on the island of Malta are beginning a push to change the face of its holiday industry, as the overall number of holidays sold in 2009 is expected to dip, with the aim of maybe keeping her tourist numbers on a similar level to recent years.

It appears that its days of depending on the over 60 crowd to infuse outside Euros into the Maltese economy are numbered. No plans are in place to snub its population of retired holidaymakers. However, the island's tourism director recently announced his intention to re-market Malta to a younger generation.

Malta has become synonymous with the aged in the minds of some European tourists. Seeing a world of opportunity for increasing the numbers of tourists in different age brackets to the island, tourism director Chris Fenech hopes to soon change that image.

The plan is to campaign hard for a younger visitor populace. Much of this effort will be aimed directly at British tourists. While other Europeans are beginning to frequent the hotels, clubs, and beaches of Malta, Brits still cling to the notion that Malta is for retirees.

Changing the image of a holiday destination isn't easy, but Fenech appears to be up to the challenge. Tourism officials are focusing on a few key areas. Luxury cruise-goers are being encouraged to spend some time in Malta as ships are encouraged to dock in Malta. The theory is that cruisers who come to Malta for a day stop will love the island enough to return for a longer holiday.

They also plan to increase the island's profile with the spa and wellness crowd. Tour packages will be geared specifically toward the traveler seeking health and fitness as well as relaxation while holidaying. Another clever tactic being employed to attract a younger crowd is to promote Malta as an extraordinary place for weddings and honeymoons.

It's reputation for being a retiree's haven aside, Malta and her smaller islands have much to offer for tourists of all ages. The island is rich with history that can still be seen today in ancient structures, such as its megalithic temples. From wars and battles, to its many and varied ruling bodies, to its independence in 1964, Malta's past is rich and exciting.

Malta also boasts beautiful terrain, like its famous Dingli Cliffs. Sheer rock faces drop suddenly into the sparkling blue Mediterranean Sea, making them a breathtaking stop on a tourist's itinerary. Of course, many tourists simply come for the rolling, sandy beaches.

Since Malta has nearly year round sunshine, it is an ideal place for the avid outdoor sportsman to spend a week or two. Golf lovers may want to hit the greens at the Royal Malta Golf Club. Watersports like skiing, surfing, paragliding, wakeboarding and diving are popular with tourists during their Malta holidays. Many hotels offer watersports packages. Or, guests may prefer to simply visit a local company specializing in rentals and lessons.

Horseback riding is another Maltese favorite. For those who prefer to watch horses rather than ride them, horse races take place on a weekly basis during peak season. The island is also home to major regattas and yacht races. The Malta Marathon every February is a popular event with runners from all over the world, when the malta weather is first class for athletics.

Clearly, Malta has much going for it when it comes to tourist attractions. Whether Malta will overcome its reputation as a destination for seniors remains to be seen. But a lot about the island could tempt a younger generation to visit Malta for their holidays - and with the recession in full swing Malta will be pleased to see them.

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TerrazzoRichard Dasch is President of Rose Restoration International, celebrating 30 Years of Marble & Stone Restoration in the worlds finest hotels.