

# media release

**Date:** 16<sup>th</sup> August 2017

**Ref:** 56-2017

## Blue Flag Activities

An important criterion in order for a beach to receive the prestigious Blue Flag Award is **Environmental Education**. The Malta Tourism Authority invests a great deal in environmental education through a number of events or projects which are organised every summer so as to create awareness amongst the general public that our natural environment is our future and that of future generations. Due to the weather conditions, which may not always be favourable, activities take place in a variety of locations, such as on the sand or indoor venues. These events are sometimes during the day whilst others are organised at night.

Activities held this year include, but are not limited to: Creating a turtle from sand at sunset; coastal and underwater clean ups; sustainable use of the coast; evening coastal walks; visits to marine museums and information centres; natural flora exhibitions; marine photographic competition; visits around Malta's smaller islands to understand the adaptation of marine and terrestrial species, and together with a number of articles and a beach newsletter, disseminating information about the ongoing campaigns that the MTA organises towards such as cigarette butts off the sand, litter free and waste separation on beaches.

The theme selected for the Environmental Activities is in line with the international theme of *Sustainable Tourism for Development*. This year, Malta will play home to a conference named *An Ocean for Life* which is hosted by the European Union, with the aim of this conference being the *launch a major initiative on international ocean governance*. This follows the International Ocean Conference held by the United Nations in New York last June.

One of the main reasons for the MTA's Blue Flag initiatives is to create further awareness on the coastal and marine environment and this includes the concept of *Caring for the sea that unites us*.

Marine species injured or dying with plastic in their stomachs is on the increase as is the floating plastic in our oceans. One of the turtles released back in the sea last week was operated upon and saved after having such plastic removed from her system. Turtles with their head locked in a plastic beer can holder, is a common culprit for many injuries.

The MTA CEO, Mr. Paul Bugeja, stated that natural resources play a big part of the Maltese tourism product and therefore in order to attract a quality tourist, one must need to offer a quality product and service. Mr. Bugeja continued by saying that Nature Trust play a big role in looking after both the marine and land environment, and certain activities, such as the rehabilitation of turtles, would not be possible without their hard work, as well as that of the MTA staff and all the stakeholders involved.