



media release

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Faith-Based Tourism: Scholars and Stakeholders Meet in Malta to Discuss a 'New' Niche Market

Over the next two days, an international conference will be held in Qawra, co-convened by the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA), the University of Malta, the Dublin Institute of Technology (Ireland) and the Leeds Beckett University (United Kingdom). This conference is of national importance and will provide a platform for the creation of a niche market of Faith-Based Tourism. The latter is an umbrella term for, among others, religious tourism, pilgrimage, secular pilgrimage and cultural tourism with interest in religion and dark tourism.

The initiative for the conference comes from Dr Dane Munro, who has been researching and studying faith-based tourism at the Institute for Tourism, Travel and Culture (ITTC), within the University of Malta. This coincided with a renewed effort by MTA, spearheaded by its Deputy CEO, Mr Leslie Vella, to develop this niche market and bring it to a more prominent position in the Maltese tourism product.

Worldwide, the faith-based tourism market is experiencing substantial growth and pilgrimage centres of different religions have been reporting increasing interest. In the last decade or so, visitor numbers connected to faith-based tourism have increased rapidly, contributing to a growing economic sector.

While tourism is a vital pillar of the Maltese economy, with a well-developed infrastructure, work is still going on in order to foster faith-based tourism by enhancing related products and services so that the islands can start to attract their fair share of pilgrimage tourists. Maltese religious, cultural and tourism authorities are collaborating in order to embark on a common campaign. This week's conference will provide a great opportunity for all stakeholders to discover the opportunities that exist in this niche market.

Malta already welcomes a number of pilgrims and religious tourists, but this is mainly done through an uncoordinated effort, and Malta's assets can certainly be utilised further. There are

more than 590 places of worship in Malta, but very few are open all day for visitors in a structured way. All this wealth, access and progress can entice more interest for faith-based tourism or pilgrimages beyond the Maltese archipelago. Faith-based tourism is quite resistant to financial and economic turbulence and in the present, volatile world, a new and stable branch of tourism is more than welcome.

This week's conference has two main objectives. On the first day there will be a presentation of position papers aimed at the stakeholders of the Maltese tourism sector, such as hotel and restaurant entrepreneurs, service providers, site owners or managers, the Church, event organisers and heritage managers.

The following two days are meant for academia to bring cutting edge research in faith-based tourism into a wider global perspective and at the same time focus on the small island reality of Malta.

The conference will be held on the 19th, 20th and 21st October in Qawra. Enquiries may be sent to shirley.b.cassar@visitmalta.com or call on 22915203.

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It-Turiżmu u l-Fidi: Studjużi u Stakeholders Jiltaqghu Hawn Malta Biex Jiddiskutu Suq Turistiku 'Ġdid'

Bejn nhar il-Ħamis u nhar is-Sibt li ġej, konferenza internazzjonali se ssir il-Qawra, organizzata mill-Awtorità Maltija għat-Turiżmu (MTA), l-Università ta' Malta, l-Istitut ta' Dublin għat-Teknoloġija u Leeds Beckett University, mir-Renju Unit.

Se tkun konferenza ta' importanza internazzjonali u se ttiprovdi pjattaforma għall-ħolqien ta' suq speċjalizzat, li jgħaqqad it-turiżmu mal-fidi. Din l-għaqda tinkludi, fost oħrajn, turiżmu reliġjuż, pellegrinaġġi (inkluż dawk sekulari), turiżmu kulturali b'interess fir-reliġjon, u turiżmu oskur.

L-inizjattiva għall-konferenza nibtet minn Dr Dane Munro, li jirriċerka u jistudja t-turiżmu relatat mal-fidi fl-Istitut għat-Turiżmu, Vjaġġar u Kultura (ITTC) fi ħdan l-Università ta' Malta. Dan fl-istess waqt li l-MTA, permezz tal-isforzi tad-deputat CEO, is-sur Leslie Vella, tinsab impenjata tiżviluppa suq speċjalizzat li għandu pożizzjoni aktar prominenti fil-prodott turistiku Malti.

Madwar id-dinja, turiżmu abbażi ta' fidi mistrenni jikber sostanzjalment u ċentri ta' pellegrinaġġ minn reliġjonijiet differenti qed jirrapportaw żidiet fin-numru ta' pellegrini. Tul l-aħħar għaxar snin, l-ammont ta' viżitaturi relatati ma' fidi abbażi ta' turiżmu żdiedu b'mod mgħaġġel, u kkontribwixxew lej tkabbir f'setturi ekonomiċi.

Hawn Malta, filwaqt li t-turiżmu huwa parti importanti mill-ekonomija, għad fadal xi jsir biex it-turiżmu relatat mal-fidi jhalli impatt sinnifikati u biex jingiebu lejn Malta aktar pellegrini. L-MTA qed tiehu l-inizjattiva u tteġġeg il-kollaborazzjoni bejn l-awtoritajiet reliġjużi, kulturali u partijiet interessati fis-settur turistiku, sabiex tinholq kampanja komuni. Il-konferenza li se tibda nhar il-Ħamis se ttiprovdi opportunità tajba għall-istakeholders kollha, sabiex jiskopru l-opportunitajiet f'dan is-suq speċjalizzat. Malta diġa' tilqa' numru ta' pellegrini u turisti għal skop ta' reliġjon, imma dan isir permezz ta' sforz li jista' jkun ikkordinat hafna aħjar.

Hawn aktar minn 590 post ta' qima hawn Malta, imma ftit jifthu l-bibien tagħhom jum shih għall-viżitaturi b'mod strutturat. Dan il-ġid kollu flimkien ma' aktar aċċess u progress jistgħu jwasslu għal turiżmu bbażat fuq il-fidi, li huwa rezistenti għall-kriżijiet ekonomiċi u finanzjari li jolqtu x-xena internazzjonali u joffri settur pjuttost stabbli fil-qasam turistiku.

Il-konferenza għandha żewġ għanijiet. Fl-ewwel jum issir preżentazzjoni ta' 'position papers' immirati lejn stakeholders fis-settur turistiku, il-Knisja, u dawk li għandhom x'jaqsmu ma' siti turistiċi. Il-jumejn ta' wara huma intenzjonati biex persuni akkademiċi jiddikustu mezz kif ir-riċerka tagħhom dwar it-turiżmu u l-fidi tista' tiehu perspettiva globali u fl-istess waqt issir referenza speċifika għar-realta' ta' Malta.

Il-konferenza se ssir nhar id-19, 20 u 21 ta' Ottubru, il-Qawra. Għal aktar informazzjoni tista' tibghat lil shirley.b.cassar@visitmalta.com jew iċċempel fuq 22915203.