

Date: 26th June 2019

Ref: 11-2019

The Maltese Islands host first ever international HBAA Agency Engagement Retreat

The first ever international HBAA (Hotel Booking Agents Association) Agency Engagement Retreat has recently taken place in Malta. This meeting, the first outside the UK, took place as a result of Conventions Malta's professional relationship with the HBAA.

HBAA is the trade association for the hotel booking agency, apartment and venue community, and has more than 300-member organisations including over 80 agency and 225 venue members who work collaboratively in the accommodation, meetings and events sector.

The event in Malta was HBAA's Agency Engagement Meeting, which brought agency directors and managers to share insights on issues that agencies are facing in the industry today. A number of talks and panels were held during the event, whilst all those present got to get a taste of what Malta has to offer.

The HBAA also held a session for the local trade, where Angie Mason (Association Chair) and Juliet Price (Consultant Executive Director) talked about meeting spends and trends and the agency market place in the UK. The speakers were introduced by Peter Vella, Director for MTA UK & Ireland.

The guests had an action packed few days in Malta, visiting numerous cultural spots and MICE venues which the Maltese Islands have to offer. Some of the locations visited included a private dinner in the Courtyard of Vilhena Palace in Mdina and a cultural tour of Valletta. The agents were also treated to a Rolling Geek tour of the Three Cities followed by a typical meal from the 18th century served at the Inquisitor's Palace in Birgu. All the members of the HBAA that were present were truly in awe of the grandeur of the fortifications and the old streets.

The HBAA delegates had words of praise for Conventions Malta and the country as a whole, some of which can be found hereunder:

- *"I thought our hosts were superb, they went out of their way in their own time to look after us and made sure we saw as much as possible that Malta has to offer for our clients. I will definitely return and hopefully we will have business to place there in the future." Sian, Inntel*
- *"Malta is a fabulous value for money Mediterranean destination and flight/airport plans will be a tremendous help to sell as a destination." Jo, HotelDesk*

Karen Abela, Manager M.I.C.E – UK & Ireland for Conventions Malta, explained that “we were delighted to have the opportunity to host the HBAA’s Agency Engagement Event in Malta, as we were able to provide them with a packed programme of activities, so that agents got a first-hand experience of what the island has to offer”.

The Executive Chairman of the MTA, Dr. Gavin Gulia, stated that the MICE sector is a particularly lucrative niche within the tourism industry and often takes place outside the busy summer months, therefore, it is important for the Maltese tourism industry to be able to attract and host these groups. We are well placed to do so with our unique venues as well as the Conventions Malta team locally and overseas that strive to ensure that every little detail is thought of and mastered.

The Minister for Tourism, Dr. Konrad Mizzi noted that we are pleased that the International HBAA (Hotel Booking Agents Association) has chosen Malta as a venue for this important tourism industry event. Currently, the MTA and Conventions Malta are actively engaging clients in order to attract major events for 2020.