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Malta Holidays – Rumours Hit Tourist Island

By Roger Munns

Holidays in Malta could be off the list of destinations offered by major tour operators from next summer, according to press reports.

While nothing has been confirmed yet, it has been reported that at least one of the tour operators is seriously considering withdrawing Malta as one of their destinations, and the fear among Malta hotel owners and those in the holiday industry is that once one holiday company pulls the plug on the island, others will follow, relegating Malta from a mainstream holiday island offered by major travel agents to smaller specialist companies.

But First Choice Holidays, winner of the 'Holiday Company of the Year' travel award in 2002, 2003 and 2004 and one of the UK's best known holiday companies have told one independent Malta travel guide that despite being named in the Malta press as the company most likely to do so they have never said they were pulling out of the Malta holiday market, but did admit that the Malta market was 'increasingly difficult' to sale.

Malta has been struggling for some years to adapt to the modern traveller, but government figures released for March showed a year on year drop in tourists of nearly 10 per cent, and most worrying of all was that the number of tourists arriving from the UK, Malta's main market, fell by over 13 per cent, and visitors from Italy, a market the Tourist Office had been trying to cultivate also fell.

Holidays in Malta and the related tourist sector are a major source of employment in Malta, and with unemployment running at over 8 per cent any fall in tourists could spell long term damage to the island's economy.

Another sector of the economy that could suffer with the Malta holidays market is real estate.

Property in Malta has risen in price in recent years, and 2004 saw Malta achieving the highest increase among the EU countries, with speculators buying property in Malta in the hope that joining the EU would see Malta real estate increase in value in the short and medium term.

Tribune Properties, who specialise in Malta Real Estate, view the potential downgrading of holidays in Malta as a double edged sword.

Managing Director Michael Johnson says that many Malta property buyers do so after visiting the island on holiday, and liking it so much they want to move to the island full time, while others who normally stay in hotels in Malta want to buy a property they can buy for their own and family holidays in Malta, and see buying a property in Malta as an investment for the future that they can enjoy too.

With less people taking holidays in Malta, the number of potential buyers will fall too.

Silver Lining

While Malta hotels and the tourist industry in Malta wait anxiously for news, the withdrawal of major tour operators from the island might not be all bad news.

There has been some discontent on the island about the rising prices of property in Malta, and with less overseas buyers the possibility of prices falling and more islanders being able to get on the property ladder could be welcome news.

In addition to lower property prices, YourMalta feel that projections of a collapse in the island's holiday market if tour operators did withdraw could be exaggerated.

'While the loss of the tour operators bringing tourists to the island is significant, in time the island will be less reliant on their business as more and more people make independent travel plans through the internet, and book their flights and hotels in Malta independently of traditional holiday companies.

Malta tends to attract the older tourist, so it might take longer than somewhere like Ibiza for example which attracts a younger visitor who as a group are more internet friendly', states Managing Director Roger Munns, 'but in time when the internet is seen as the primary source of booking a holiday across the age range, Malta will stand as much chance as anywhere of attracting tourists.

There has been speculation for some time now that low cost airlines are going to start offering flights to Malta, and this will help the Malta hotels and holiday market as more people consider three and four day breaks instead of the traditional week or fortnight, boosting the overall number of visitors, especially if Air Malta and the low cost airlines bring the cost of Malta flights to levels seen for the Spanish islands.

With an ineffective promotions board there is plenty of hope still for the holiday market in Malta, despite and not because of the Malta Tourist Authority, who are failing to promote Malta in the UK in any meaningful way.'

Malta information and advice, including holidays in Malta, weather, map, real estate and property, car hire, flights and villa holidays visit

<http://www.yourmalta.com>

World Leaders Boost for Holiday Isle

By Roger Munns

Leaders of over 50 countries from the Commonwealth will be meeting on the Mediterranean island of Malta from November 25 to 27, and for three days the island will be enjoying the attention of hundreds of millions of TV and online news viewers and newspaper readers worldwide.

Malta has often been overlooked by holidaymakers and second home owners in favour of other Mediterranean islands such as Mallorca, Cyprus and Menorca, and hotels and estate agents alike on the island are hoping that the three days of publicity will boost tourist and property buyer numbers for 2006.

With good all year round weather and an English speaking population visitor numbers from the UK, which make up about half of the island's tourist numbers, have been surprisingly flat in recent years, and with cheaper holidays available in the new destinations from Eastern Europe such as Bulgaria set to capture more of the UK holiday and property market Malta could see tourist numbers remain level or even fall in future years.

Malta Holidays

Malta missed its own target of a modest increase in tourists this summer, and there are worries on the island that the opportunity to increase awareness among potential visitors will be missed.

Michael Johnson of Tribune Properties who specialise in property for sale in Malta comments:

'Malta is ideally situated in the Mediterranean to attract tourists from all over Europe and further afield but for a lot of people I speak to in other countries it isn't an obvious destination of choice.

The island has a strong domestic property market and doesn't rely too heavily on overseas property buyers like some of the Mediterranean islands do, but at the same time those that do buy here play a good role in the economy overall.

The timing of the Commonwealth meeting is good as it's just before the New Year when a lot of people decide where they will be going for their summer holidays, and next summer's tourist could be next winter's property buyer. But they're only going to do that if they visit the island first, and I'm hoping that Malta will see an increase in tourists in 2006 - it really depends on whether the island takes this chance to market itself in the months ahead on the back of the free publicity the Commonwealth will bring..'

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting takes place every two years, and has its roots in the British Empire, with 53 members who were former British colonies belonging to the organisation.

Queen Elizabeth II is the head of the Commonwealth, and will be visiting with Prince Philip for a two day trip to Malta to open the meeting on November 25 in Valletta, the island's capital. It will be the royal couple's first visit to Malta since 1992, and welcoming crowds are expected in similar numbers to their

previous four visits.

In addition to the Queen and Prince Philip, among the attendees will be the United Kingdom's Prime Minister Tony Blair, and the Prime Ministers of Canada, New Zealand, India, South Africa, Singapore and Australia.

'Around half of Malta's tourists are from the UK' adds Michael Johnson, 'and it's a similar figure for non islanders buying property here. As well as increasing holidaymaker numbers from the traditional UK market we should be trying to appeal to people in Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand and other countries who take a holiday in Europe to consider visiting Malta for a few days to sample the fine hotels, hospitality, history and culture that the island is so rich in. But it remains to be seen whether the tourist board is capable of translating good free publicity into visitors for the island.'

The Commonwealth meeting is being held in Valletta, Malta from November 25 to 27.

For a guide to the island, including holidays in Malta, hotels, self catering holiday villas and apartments, flights, car hire and details of Malta's main towns of Valletta, St Julian's, Sliema, Mellieha, St Paul's Bay, Qawra and Bugibba visit

www.yourmalta.com

To request details of current property and real estate for sale in Malta visit

www.maltaproperty.info



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