

A South African's guide to moving to and making it in Malta: Someday I'll fly away

By  Marcus 'The Maltese Falcon' Brewster

28 Sep 2018

Sometimes, all it takes is an unexpected statistic to show you that a tipping point has been reached. In September, three reports were published that rocked my worldview of the small island state of Malta.



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I wrote about the first of these in *A cottage for sale* when I discovered that Malta had superseded Hong Kong for the first time as the territory with the greatest property price gains over 12 months.



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The second report, from the United Nations Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), took a statement that I knew already – that Malta had 2.5 million tourists annually – and presented it in a way that made me see the number in a wholly new light. According to UNWTO, Malta had 5.3 visitors per inhabitant last year making it the world's second most popular country for tourism per capita.

If you are curious as to which country has the most tourists per capita, I can put you out of your misery straight away – it was Iceland attracting 6,600 visitors per 1,000 citizens. In a moment of unanticipated prescience, I wrote about the Malta/Iceland tourism parallels in *A shot of mass tourism on the rocks*. After Iceland and Malta, the Bahamas in the Caribbean came in third with 3,800 visitors per capita.



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At the other end of the spectrum Somalia, Yemen and Libya came out as the least visited counties, with less than one visitor per 1,000 citizens.

More connections than Heathrow

The third report to catch me off guard was from Ryanair who have forecast that from next year, Malta will have more European connections than Heathrow.



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David O'Brien, the airline's chief commercial officer, announced 10 new European routes that will be added to current connections to and from the island in summer 2019.

The new connections will be Cardiff and Exeter in the UK, Lamezia and Perugia in Italy, Nantes in France, Cork in Ireland, Luxembourg, Thessaloniki in Greece, Maastricht in the Netherlands and Oslo in Norway.

"This is quite something - when you consider that with these new additions, Malta will have more European connections than Heathrow," says O'Brien, adding that Ryanair had carried more than three million passengers to and from Malta last year. Next year the airline hopes to increase this by 15%.

Malta Tourism Authority head Gavin Gulia said the increase in flights was coordinated in conjunction with national

authorities as part of a holistic strategy to boost tourism.

Asked how the new destinations were picked, O'Brien said this was the fruit of open dialogue.

Research is backwards looking

"We do not base ourselves on market research as it is often wrong. Research can be backward-looking. If you look at the research, Ryanair technically shouldn't even exist. That is why we work so well with the Maltese authorities, who are forward-looking," he said.

Tourism Minister Konrad Mizzi said the announcement was positive for the sector, but was quick to point out that Malta was more than a summer destination.

Arrivals figures, he said, showed how tourism was being spread throughout the year, more than ever before.

Hoteliers have long sounded warnings of [over-tourism](#) with Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association president Tony Zahra insisting we should focus on sustainable tourism. The industry is calling for a study to establish the maximum number of tourists that Malta can cope with due to its limited geographical size and high population density.

Heritage and culture expert, Professor George Cassar also warned that host communities could become hostile when faced with such rampant mass tourism.

Referring to popular Maltese visitor attraction, the picturesque 'silent city' of Mdina, Cassar observes that the walled citadel has reached a critical point. "We are going to lose its heritage and lose cultural assets that are valuable to the Maltese community," Cassar warned *The Times of Malta*.

ABOUT MARCUS 'THE MALTESE FALCON' BREWSTER

marcusbrewster is a brand synonymous with PR excellence in SA. An industry innovator, leader, and inspiration, Brewster affiliated his multi-award winning boutique firm with larger Level 1 BBBEE marketing/comms agency MediaRevolution for scale in 2016 and went on to launch Marcus Brewster International in Europe the following year. Marcus currently lives on - and actively promotes - the Mediterranean island of Malta. For African, S. African and European PR enquiries, contact marcus@marcusbrewster.com or WhatsApp on (+356) 9931 3322

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