

Giving expats the right LEADs

By time, countries inevitably change and evolve. However, it seems quite incredible that tiny Malta, from a land of few opportunities, which used to send hordes of its citizens abroad, now welcomes many nationals to work and live here.

In the space of less than half a century, this has become the reality in Malta. Today the country's economy is vibrant, the employment situation one of the most stable in Europe and many foreigners find living and working here a true delight. The weather is a boon, the opportunities are varied and the advantages of living here numerous. Expats love Malta, and have made it their home away from home.

However, not all are fully informed about Malta and some need more detailed, down-to-earth data on what makes Malta tick. A welcome innovation are conferences that get together the various nationals living in Malta and introduce them to a number of local service providers, who will contribute to make their life here much easier while giving them handy tips about all there is to know about living in Malta.

LEAD Events, who are slowly becoming one of Malta's leading organisers of conferences with a theme, recently organised the annual Expats in Malta event at the InterContinental Hotel. The main emphasis was on information—vital information for anyone coming to Malta or already settled here—and on networking.

Interestingly, the first speaker was Mr Jankarl Farrugia from Regus Business Centre, who gave the audience a proper peep into the world of networking with a few good hints about what to do or not do, and what not to expect from networking. Networking is not quantifiable—it is the art of how to introduce yourself and how to present yourself and your trade or profession. Results are difficult to gauge but all introductions, especially in a new country, are important, not just to gather information and find the best services available, but also to become known and get to know people.

According to Mr Farrugia, a self-styled avid networker, Malta is ideal for networking. So much happens here that it is easy to get yourself into the networking ring by attending conferences, seminars and other events where knowledge is being shared. Then there are the professional networking agencies like BNI, which groups together a number of companies in various chapters throughout Malta and passes on referrals, encouraging business among members. This is also an ideal place to find out more about what the country offers.

The beauty of networking is that, if done properly and cautiously, one can accumulate a wealth of information to be used for one's own professional empowerment.

Besides the beauty of the country, the allure of its business advantages supported by a good level of education, safety and infrastructure, Malta offers expats interesting fiscal opportunities. In his short address, Mr Stephen Balzan, partner at EMD, a multi-disciplinary firm providing legal, tax, advisory and corporate services, an exhaustive look at what the country offers to make it a good place to work or retire in.

Mr Balzan made it clear that, although the country offers many incentives and advantageous tax situations, the biggest attraction is that it is fiscally very sound and has a very strong, proactive regulator. Malta is no tax haven but has been offering innovative and attractive conditions to make it easier for anyone wishing to set up shop, retire or work here. Mr Balzan explained in detail all aspects of taxation, residency and incentives.

The next speaker was Ms Pippa Maile from Currencies Direct, who described a – very important – and alternative – way to make international transfers and payments worldwide, saving money in the process. Yes, being in Malta is all about work, fun and stretching out one's money. And Ms Maile gave the gathered expats all the gen they needed to save money on purchases, including property. She explained that, besides a High Street bank, one can also make use of a specialist company that can make things easier and more cost efficient.

Closing up the informative sessions was an expat from South Africa, Cathy Farlam, who along with her husband had a dream to sail around the Mediterranean for a year and expand their business into Africa, Europe and the Middle East, to create a euro-based future for their family. But Greece was turning into its own nightmare, so they discovered Malta and fell madly in love with it.

The only problem, which they were sure they would not encounter but which meant their daughter is now attending school in England, was education – all because they were badly informed with regard to the choice of school. Ms Farlam finds it hard to accept that she and her husband, who do so much planning and training, left some gaping holes in their plans for their Malta stay. But they have managed to extract some good from their problems, especially the choice of school for their daughter, and they are now in a good position to advise others who plan to come to Malta.

James Grech, Managing Director of LEAD Events and LEAD Training Services, thanked the expats and all those attending this annual event and explained that LEAD wants to fill voids left by other event organisers and to be of service to anyone interested in Malta and beyond. LEAD also organises conferences and training events in Malta for professionals and upcoming entrepreneurs. The Expats in Malta event was hosted by main sponsors EMD and Omnicor, while Gold Sponsors included Atlas Healthcare, Elmo Insurance and Fino.

After the talks a successful networking session followed over drinks. Mr Farrugia's hints were avidly followed and all had their fill of cards, contacts and information.

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