

A South African's guide to moving to and making it in Malta: A cauldron of frogs

By  Marcus 'The Maltese Falcon' Brewster

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It's been exactly 12 months since I relocated to Malta so it was sobering to see, during my recent return to South Africa, what had changed in the year that I was away...

I've just spent three weeks travelling around SA accompanying a team of Maltese executives. We met a number of South Africans keen to find out more about the island life. Our audiences were a case study in diversity: White, Black, Coloured, Indian and Chinese individuals but the comments were pointedly similar:

- **Safety and security:** I heard of people afraid of going out for fear of being attacked. People sleeping fitfully because of the dread of hearing the house creak in the middle of the night. Had I mistakenly landed in Transylvania I wondered? This fear of leaving one's house after dark had something of a Count Dracula quality to it that I don't remember personally experiencing in 2017. But the anxiety and stress of living in a highly criminogenic society was a common refrain that South Africans related.
- **A place to bring up a family:** Although everyone with kids was automatically motivated by the previous point concerning the tremulous safety of their children, there was a genuine interest in Maltese education and Maltese lifestyle. The former is free (even tertiary education is free, as your columnist who has spent the last year taking a variety of criminology courses at the University of Malta, gratis, can vouchsafe) and the latter is well-balanced. To illustrate the point, the arrival of summer has proven to be an edifying lesson in how important the work-life balance is here on the archipelago.



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Perhaps because the summer temperatures here feel so hot (upper 30s and sometimes touching early 40s) and perhaps because of the island's pocket size you are never further than 15 minutes from the sea, the Maltese have distinct summer and winter operating hours. Summer (defined as the three months from end-June to end-September) sees many businesses closing mid-afternoon and most public-sector offices closing at midday.

“ One of my Maltese clients reported that he takes a knock in his Christmas bonus for the sake of getting summer afternoons off from 15h30 to spend with his children. In fact, he opined, he prefers the salary sacrifice as it gives him the opportunity to spend more time with his young sons. That attitude – the sanctity of family life over office life in the Maltese workplace – is a fundamental part of Maltese society and an accurate reflection of the island's value system. ”

Quality of life

I was reminded of an [article](#) I saw earlier this year noting that in the European Quality of Life Survey in 2016, Malta placed first in childcare services, second in the education sector (and also second in social housing), while placing third when it came to perceptions of the quality of public services. (Last year there were 12 key performance indicators of which 11 were reached. In case you were wondering, the only blot on the public service copy book was a pilot project to provide free Wi-Fi to bus passengers, which missed its 100 day deadline.)

Spending my final week in Cape Town with the news agenda dominated by the cash-in transit heists, I was alarmed about crime and living in fear thereof. (Incidentally, South Africa makes an unflattering cameo in *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology* which notes that SA's homicide rate is 10 times that of the second placed most murderous nation, the USA.) My interpretation is that living in SA is like being a frog in a pot of heated water on the stove. On a daily basis the heat is turned up: South Africans make allowances, compromises, concessions. They lower their expectations even as they complain vociferously about the deterioration of living standards. As an expat, I dip my toe in the water and exclaim that it's too hot. For South Africans who make-believe the temperature is bearable, at some point you risk getting boiled alive.

Postscript: Back home in Malta this week, I am sitting in a French-style restaurant having a coffee. A fellow diner places her order, then goes to 'the ladies'. I don't know if she has ordered frogs legs but to mark her table as occupied, she leaves her handbag draped over her chair. I must still be a little bit South African because I have to suppress the urge to run after her.

Disclaimer: This is an opinion piece. Bizcommunity does not necessarily share the same views as our contributors.

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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