

## Malta as a Wedding Destination

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<p>I have chosen this subject because I feel myself honoured to be part of the wedding day of the couples, that most off them they have been working hard to make this day one to remember. The wedding industry in Malta is getting bigger and bigger all the time.</p> <p>This is because local market got stronger due the fact of the introduction of civil weddings between gay couples and the introductions of divorce so couples can get married again with civil union.</p> <p>Foreigners are choosing more Malta to be a destination for their wedding destination. Considering that wedding tourism contributes to local economic development in a number of ways, it has been recognized as a big opportunity for destinations promoting themselves in the international market.</p> <p>Primarily, couples generally using local goods and services, relying on vendors such as caterers, musicians and transportation specialists whose businesses are directly or indirectly connected to the wedding industry and this offered Malta a boost to the economy.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> Wedding, Destination, Motivation, Civil Union, Market, Marriages	

## Table of contents

1	Introduction .....	1
1.1	Why Malta as a wedding destination .....	1
1.2	Factors on Malta as a destination wedding .....	2
1.3	Justifying my study.....	4
1.4	Objectives and purpose of study .....	5
2	Theoretical framework.....	6
2.1	Popularity of destination wedding in Malta .....	6
2.2	The creation of a destination wedding.....	7
2.3	Wedding types that attract couples .....	8
2.4	The growth of Malta as a destination wedding.....	8
2.5	Push and pull factors on destination weddings.....	9
2.6	The impact of wedding tourism in Malta .....	12
2.6.1	Marketing directing to foreign couples .....	13
2.6.2	Core markets .....	13
2.7	The introduction of gay civil union .....	13
2.8	Theoretical framework.....	14
3	Research Methodology .....	16
3.1	Research methods.....	18
3.2	Interviews.....	19
3.3	Research sub-questions .....	20
3.4	What are the motivations reasons of your clients that makes them choose Malta? .....	23
4	Findings and data analysis.....	25
4.1	The evolution of weddings in Malta .....	25
4.2	Findings and analysis of data related to research .....	27
4.3	Interviews data.....	29
5	Conclusions and implications .....	30
5.1	Conclusions in relation to research .....	30
5.2	Overview of objectives .....	30
5.2.1	Tourist demographic studies-nationality, religious belief.....	30
5.2.2	The major motivational factors for couples to choose Malta as their destination wedding .....	30
5.2.3	The current and future situation of destination wedding in Malta .....	31
5.2.4	The marketing strategies adopted by wedding planners.....	31
5.2.5	The new law on gay marriages as a new market.....	31
5.3	Limitations and ideas for further studies.....	31
	References .....	33



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Why Malta as a wedding destination

Malta is one of the most romantic and charming destinations in Europe. It is an ideal option for destination weddings due to the friendly and hospitable people, better weather, crystal sea water, sunshine, history and culture, numerous sea view locations, and beautiful wedding venues. The two-sister island of Malta: Gozo and Comino also offers unique weddings and also amazing honeymoon experience. Gozo is approximately half the size of Malta.

With daily flights connecting Malta to all European countries, couples and guests attending to the wedding can benefit from experiencing several holidays in one. The islands offer accommodation tailored for every individual's needs; be it apartments, luxury hotels, villas, bungalows as well as traditional farmhouse that can be also self-catering or attended. Some also have private pools situated in secluded court-yards.

Malta predominantly Roman Catholic thanks to this Malta has 365 beautiful churches and chapels, making Malta and Gozo the ideal destination for those desiring a religious wedding. However, couples of other denominations will also find their perfect place of worship for their dream wedding. For couples for a civil wedding, there is no end to the lovely indoor or outdoor venues to decide on.

The element of gay marriage it is offering also the unique experience not only to straight couples. An important aspect that has to be taken into consideration is the price of an average wedding package as Malta has to compete with other destinations worldwide which have been offering wedding services for foreigners for a long time.

The wedding industry is becoming more modernised. Couples are getting even more imaginative and creative. Consequently, wedding planners are very eager to be more innovative to satisfy the demands of their customers and stand out against other competitive wedding planners. Some wedding planners are developing a wider understanding on themed weddings and how it can eventually lead to a demanded wedding concept. Cross-cultural ambivalence was said to be one of the most influential factors among brides-to-be, especially when planning a cross-cultural wedding. Destination weddings are becoming more and more popular across the globe, from unique ceremony venues, such as chapel or garden, to an isolated beach.

## 1.2 Factors on Malta as a destination wedding

In the past, couples would marry at very young age and have at least four children and more. Also, the cost of the wedding would traditionally be settled by the father of the bride. Nowadays couples are marrying at a later stage in life and they often live together before they marry. Many couples also work hard before hand in order to finance the wedding day themselves. Furthermore, one can go on to say that in this manner the bride and groom are free to design and create their wedding plans in such a way as to reflect their own personalised and styles, whether traditional or radical, extravagant or reserved. On average, a wedding to-day now costs approximately 15,000 to 25,000 euro and the fear is of exceeding the budget.

Malta is one of the most intimate destinations in Europe. It is ideal option for the destination weddings due to the friendly and hospitable people, better weather, crystal sea water, sunshine, history and culture, numerous sea view locations, and beautiful wedding venues. The two-sister island of Malta: Gozo is approximately half the size of Malta. It is greener, rural and includes charming fishing villages and many small sandy and rocky away from the rest of the world. It is almost vehicle free and the only activity is centred in Comino hotel and its surroundings bungalows. With daily flights connecting Malta to all European countries, couples can benefit from experiencing several holidays in one.

The islands offer accommodation tailored for every individual's needs: be it apartments, luxury hotels, villa, bungalows as well as traditional farmhouses. The farmhouses are fully converted into modern, self-catering facilities. Some also have private pools situated in secluded courtyards, as well additional amenities to fulfil ones wishes.

A new market was introduced way back into 2014 civil union was introduced in Malta. Relationship of gay couples will receive formal recognition by the State in a union that will enjoy the same rights and obligations of marriage. Gay civil union contracted abroad will also be recognised by the State. The wedding industry it was and still is an industry that never stops such as the market of funerals market all do they are both of them totally for different occasions. It is becoming very important for many industries that the growth of the economy getting stronger thanks to this market and Malta is one of them.

Destination weddings is becoming very popular due the fact that is unique and so different from the more traditional wedding that is done locally. Nowadays, people have been choosing to celebrate their wedding all over the world. When couples are getting married outside from their home country they are extending their celebrations from four hours to

four days or more, while creating a lifetime of memories not just for them but also to their family and friends. The charm in destination weddings is increasingly growing over the years. This is due the fact that people want to celebrate their special day in many different ways. With the help of online sites and social media is becoming easier for couples to choose to get married and to opt for a wedding destination away from home. When planning to get married abroad couples are looking for a place that means something to them and for their party that are going to be invited to their wedding. This industry it is so big and more challenging than a normal wedding due the fact that a lot of service providers are taking part such as airlines, accommodation and food and beverage outlets, transportation and services needed on the day for the bridal party. One has to mention also the services of the weddings planner that most of the couples opt for these types of services offered.

Weddings can come from small weddings of four guest including the bride and groom. The minimum required to get married according to the Maltese law there must be a minimum of two guest that can act as witness during wedding ceremony. (ACT, 1975)

The importance of wedding destination in Malta was also taken into consideration by the Minister of Tourism, that he was amazed with the results of the amount of guest are coming to Malta. As a result, the Minister explained that the growth of a number of tourism niche markets, amongst which is that of weddings and honeymoon tourism, is very tangible. Our commitment to promote Malta and Gozo as an exquisite destination for wedding tourism is surely bearing fruit. In 2015, 682 marriages were registered between foreign couples, equivalent to 27% of total registered marriages. By the end of 2016, registered marriages between foreign couples in Malta increased to 835, thereby marking 32% of the total marriages. (Lewis, 2016)

This niche is expanding into other source markets, as marketing efforts, paired with those of wedding organisers, hotels, and related service providers, are yielding positive results, as we are currently witnessing an increase in weddings celebrated on our shores by couples originating from Germany, Poland, Hungary, Scandinavia, Italy, and also as far away as Japan.

Wedding Destination it is definitely an experience based on human factors and not on machine, every wedding is unique and needs to be tailor made.

### 1.3 Justifying my study

This research project is an attempt to analyse the current marital trend in Malta with regards to foreigners and mixed marriages held in Malta. In this respect, different research techniques needed to be utilised. The first thing that needs to be understood is what is motivating couples to get married in Malta. I am going to get information by interviewing on one to one meeting with top leading Malta organisers and weddings planners. By gathering this information also explores other details such as the number of guests that visit Malta per wedding, ceremony and reception venues and finer details such as nationalities and religious belief.

Wedding planners can also seek to analyse the most common nationalities, religions, gay marriages, localities for the ceremony and reception, as well their personal opinions on certain issues such as motivational factors and the marketing of their company for which they work for.

This research is to understand if there is a demand for Malta as a wedding destination. Moreover, this demonstrates the economic opportunity of the market trends for destination weddings in Malta. The aims and objective of this research are to explore the following questions:

- Tourist demographic studies-nationality, religious belief, age groups
- The major motivational factors for couples to choose Malta as their destination wedding
- The current and future situation of destination wedding in Malta
- The factors that motivate couples to get married in Malta
- The marketing strategies adopted by wedding planners, to attract foreign tourist to get married in Malta
- The new law on gay marriages as a new market

Research is constantly being updated as the tourism industry is not stabile. There can be seen an increasing demand of destination weddings. This study touches the true nature of destination weddings in Malta, especially influential factors that are motivating couples to marry here.



#### **1.4 Objectives and purpose of study**

Investigating Malta as a destination wedding can somewhat be difficult because only limited few are interested in wedding planning and in a destination wedding industry. However, this does not necessarily mean that this study will not be able to gather necessary information to perform its objectives. This study can ensure quality information that anyone can use as a basis for further research.

The purpose why I have chosen this topic is because I love this subject, in fact I am still working on weddings myself from the perspective of a wedding organiser. The wedding day for each couple is one of their most important days of their lives. The amount of energy that it takes especially if it will be a long-distance planning. In Malta, I always noticed that this market is very strong but I never had any idea how it can affect the economy. By understanding this market or to have a good vision which is the weakest country. With the results in the future I can focus more on that wedding market area.

For my personal use this research will be very useful because every couple has different needs and there are different cultural needs for their wedding day. If nothing is done in this industry market there won't be a clear picture from where all these weddings are coming and why they are choosing Malta as a wedding destination.

## **2 Theoretical framework**

### **2.1 Popularity of destination wedding in Malta**

Destination weddings are increasingly gaining popularity. (March, 2016) But this is not just happening in Malta only countries such as United Arab Emirates is one of those destination which have been experiencing a rise in wedding tourism.

Malta has been experiencing a rise in wedding tourism as well. Official figures for the year 2015 show that the number of foreign weddings in Malta amounted up to 404 couples, In 2016, this figure rose to 478 couples while 2016 between the period of January until 3rd August 2016, 287 foreign couples chose Malta as their wedding destination.

As destination weddings calls for some procedures to be carried out differently from the usual everyday wedding in the sense that are some 'rules' associated with it. According to the etiquette of destination weddings, the guest who are invited along for the wedding pay their airfare to travel to the country where the wedding is being held. However, it is expected from the bride and groom to pay for their guest' accommodation, food and beverage which are consumed during their stay. At times couples opt for smartest way and try to negotiate some kinds of deals in term of accommodation and flights for groups discounted rate.

In addition, the foreign couple is warned to check all the relevant details with the destination authorities so as to keep moving on the right track and eliminate mishaps. This could be beneficial as for Caribbean islands require a three-day residency prior to the ceremony, proof of citizenship, several documents and a nominal fee.

Nowadays it seems as if the trend of getting married abroad is one where the couple combines an adventurous honeymoon with a more traditional ceremony and at times money is saved in the process. Destination weddings could be as simple as the ones where only the couple getting married is present or else there are the ones where family and friends are invited along. There are even extravagant ones which take place in the form of a series of parties over a long weekend. But is a destination wedding the right way to do it? Destination weddings often come in front of a complete package. One of the main reasons behind this is the fact that tourism organisation and hotel establishments have come to terms with the fact that this niche market could reap high revenue and trying to keep it stress

free as possible. As part of the package some destination offer their on-site wedding consultant who will help the couple set up the whole ceremony and who will be willing to take care of the essentials on their behalf.

The wedding coordinator could even go as far as organising activities for the guest invited with the intention of making them enjoy their stay even more. Another benefit as regarding destination weddings is that most couples choose to spend their honeymoon in that some country where they get married which yields even more revenue for the economy of that country. Another issue is that the couple might choose to return to that destination for their wedding anniversary in memory of old times which benefits that destination even more, from a tourism perspective.

On the other hand, there are some drawbacks of destination weddings. The administrative and legal matters involved with this kinds of weddings have to be dealt with from abroad and therefore proper advance planning and continuous correspondence between the couple and the people responsible for their wedding in the chosen destination are expected.

## **2.2 The creation of a destination wedding**

A study by Lorredo (2015) investigated the positioning of overseas honeymoon destination. This study was based on seven overseas honeymoon destination which are popular among European Couples. Basically in Malta tourist choose one destination in favour of another as their wedding destination. All this depends mainly on the process of the image formation of a destination. The destination's attributes can be classified into two major categories. The primary category includes mainly inherent characteristics such as climate, ecology, natural resources, cuisine, culture and historical architecture. The second category has to do with characteristics that are built by the public or private sector such as hotels, resorts, catering outlets, transportation and entertainment. But also, the flexibility and professionalism of wedding service providers. Thus, the level of competitiveness of a destination wedding over another lies in showing off the greatest attributes of that destination which people are after. Before choosing a destination, couples tend to make a list of all the features which they are looking for and then choose a final destination according to their tourism constraints. Mainly this is the sole reason to why they choose one country over another country. (Lofreda, 2015)

### **2.3 Wedding types that attract couples**

Nowadays, we are having different types of weddings, not only weddings that start at a church. However, they are still popular. Civil wedding is increasing in its popularity. This is very similar to the church ceremony, but it takes place at an open room which is accessible to public, and more likely to be a signing contract. This is helping to increase weddings between foreigners in Malta. Travel companies are organizing what they call a 'package wedding' which will include flights for the couple and their families, the accommodation and the ceremony itself. However, these types of weddings will not be populated by guests, but remains private between families and close friends. Gay marriage is organized the same as civil marriage, but the couple will be of same sex.

Divorce has a large impact on weddings' industry especially for civil weddings as it is giving people the second chance, and sometimes even more to remarry through a civil wedding. On the other hand, annulment is the cancelling of the marriage, and it could be either civil or religious cancelling, as it also gives you the right to remarry even by church.

### **2.4 The growth of Malta as a destination wedding.**

Over the years traits changed and new idea come about. These are partly influenced by the exposure of the media which influences everyday decision. This could play its role as to why couples are more in favour of destination weddings and it turn this could be one of the reasons why the trends for weddings are changing. Foreign weddings used to be something that only the rich and famous could afford whereas nowadays most of the destination offering this service are affordable to practically any couple who is gainfully employed. A couple who chooses to get married aboard might prefer to do so for reasons as simple as wanting to get a batter overall experience to feeling that only a particular destination could be able to provide them with their specific personal requirement. Most often, these are the affluent people who are after a lavish wedding and for which they are willing to pay whatever it takes.

The industry of weddings in Malta it is showing that it is getting stronger all the time in fact latest stats are showing that in 2014, there were a total of two thousand, eight hundred seventy-one (2,871) marriages, with an increase of 11.4 percent over the previous year.

From the total, 48.3 percent were civil marriages, having an increase of 1.8 percent over the previous year. There was also an increase over the year before, of 10.2 percent in registered marriages in Malta, and an increase of 27.2 percent in Gozo. Most of the weddings are held from June till September but due the fact that Maltese weather can offer sunny days all year round this is encouraging (NSO, 2014) Couples are getting married in Malta also during the shoulder months such as March and December by this the wedding industry in Malta is busy all year round. (Office, 2014)

This figure 1 below shows how civil weddings went up true out the years.

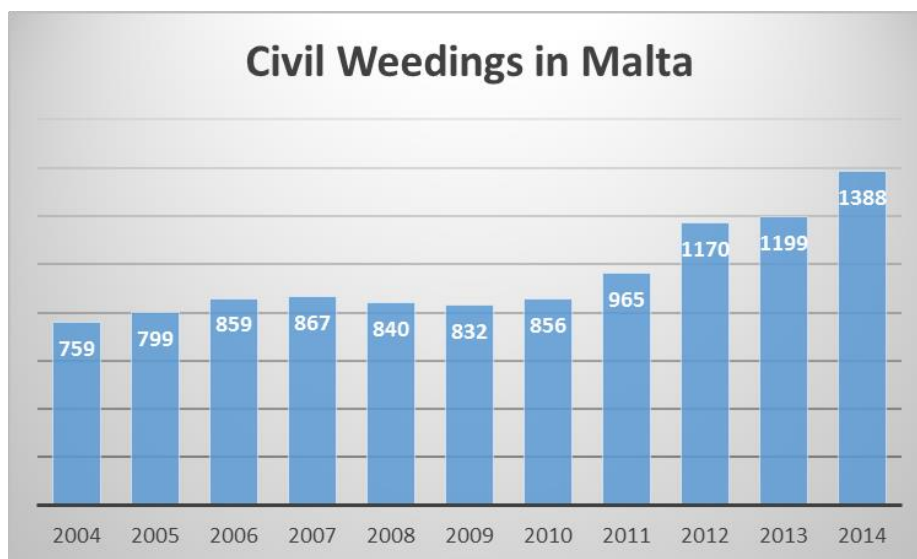


Figure 1. Civil weddings in Malta from 2004 to 2014 (Anon., 2014)

## 2.5 Push and pull factors on destination weddings

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet” – William Shakespeare

As the above famous William Shakespeare stated, ‘What’s in a name’ – when it comes in choosing the place of our wedding a lot of aspects are put into perspective, the locality where you would like the civil ceremony to take place and the aftermath destination for the union celebration is a very important factor through the wedding planning. The moment where you are taking your soul mate last name and spending the rest of your life in ‘better and for worse’ with your other half is very crucial as it will set the background for the theme of the wedding too.

Furthermore, a wedding is the manifestation to friends and family who you would like to invite to celebrate this special day with you. The reason why a destination is chosen over

another is mostly to impress your guest. Reference to above quote of 'What's in a name' – the popularity of the destination with your friends and family reflects on the norms of destination chosen. Many couple will choose the destination because they have already attended a previous there to a wedding, they heard about the locality from their peers or they were predisposed to the information by reading an article or a Tele-vision advert. The fact that you know you will have the 'wow' factor over the destination with your relatives, gives you an extra boost on choosing the destination.

Another important factor that determines the wedding locality is whilst the couple have drafted their budgets. Depending on the venue destination which may take the full amount budgeted for a whole wedding or determine to expand your options on the selection of the food items and beverages. Taking into consideration the initial budget planned on the destination – which is usually exceeded when it comes to the final decision of signing the venue contract- is important to keep track of the couples' expectations of the full wedding experience.

Also in addition to the above you might have couples that will choose a secluded location with minimum venue expenses as they are restricted to stay within their budget or to do a wedding outside their norms. Being different doesn't mean that spending millions on a lavish wedding destination will make your wedding better than the other wedding you attended. The wedding is the celebration of you and your partner union and whether or not spending a lot of funds in the wedding venue depends finally on the character of the couple and the theme of the wedding.

Customer Relations is also an important factor that determines whether or not a destination is chosen over another. Having a good or even one bad review on the destinations determines the outcome of the booking that will take place. With one good review, you might attract a small amount of couples to come and have a look or consider the destination. On the contrary, one bad review will eliminate you from all the options that the couples have in considering google the place. Twenty years ago, the word of mouth was crucial for the wedding and venue industry but in the world dominated by social media where every aspect of our live is posted on Twitter and Facebook- the word spreads fast. The good reviews are considered as everyone needs peace of mind that everything will be fine on the special day.

The locality resources will also help the couple to guide them to have day to remember and at the same time selling Malta for weddings. But one of the main reasons that Malta is attracting not just couples with a high average spending budget but also family and middle

class couples. Due the fact that Malta can be affordable for every one and that is a valid point why couples are choosing Malta our competitors are only marketing for high end market. (N. V. Seebaluck<sup>a</sup>, 2014)

The case of travel nowadays is another important factor which contributes to the growth of this market. All destination worldwide are easily assessable and travel has become an important aspect of our everyday lives and will continue to do so in the near future. However, the fact that there are people who have never been abroad and only dream of doing so cannot be neglected. Reasons for this could be financial issues which might hinder people from traveling. However, the majority of people have all experienced traveling or are at least aspiring to.

The attraction of a country is very important in the wedding context. Attractions, cultural, natural or man-made make up the attractiveness of a country. Natural attractions including the weather which is one of the top priorities for couples specially couples coming from cold countries such as UK. Scenic natural beauty is another key feature as it would make a destination look more romantic and attractive. Another thing which is very much important is if the country is considered as being safe or not due to the ongoing war of terrorism. In fact Malta from latest report is placed from The World Risk Report 2015 has ranked Malta the second-safest place in the world to live when it comes ... of 36.72 per cent meaning it ranked as the world's most dangerous place to live for natural disaster. As regarding terrorism and war it was ranked 15th from all over the world. (Malta, 2016) These are important factors that couples look into before they book their destination wedding.

Adding to all these factors is the issue of price. The difference in cost between a domestic and an overseas destination seems to be very important if the couples are not quite wealthy as they have to plan each and every move very carefully in order not to over blow their budget. So, a destination which has reasonable prices in terms of accommodation, transportation and other services would be one of the favourites with most foreign couples. Another thing that couples take into consideration is a favourable exchange rate if the wedding is held I a country whose currency does not match that of their country of origin.

Legal requirements and documentation are required for couples to get married a country other their own. The levels of bureaucracy vary from one country to another. For instance, the state of Hawaii has minimal procedures for obtaining a marriage license. All the couples have to do this contact the Hanolulu Marriage License Offices who will mail them a

brochure of weddings in Hawaii. In Malta, Identity Malta which is a government institution is responsible for legal requirement. One of the advantages are that online, couples can find all the information required including charges and term and conditions on ceremony. (Malta, 2017)

## **2.6 The impact of wedding tourism in Malta**

Malta's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is highly dependent on the tourism industry which in turn makes this a main pillar for the Maltese economy. Hence if the tourism sector fares well then this will result in an improvement on the whole economy too. However, for this to take place there is the need to focus on other possible markets other than sea, sand and sun tourist or the cultural tourist.

The development of a niche market like for instance wedding tourism could help the Maltese islands advert from the tour operator generated traffic which has been on a decline also due the fact that tourists are booking there holidays online without any operators. Trends are changing and the Maltese market have already taken this into consideration to make sure that we are updated all the time. By this the growth market which could help in the diversification process. This specialised market is booming all over the world due to various reasons namely the ease of travel, the eagerness to be different from usual wedding ceremony and even due to the fact the weddings are becoming really expensive and couples are opting for foreign wedding if this is a cheaper option. (Tourism, 2015-2020)

This particular market does not call for product or service that destination would have to import as foreign weddings follow similar procedures like the wedding held by Maltese couples with the exception of some minor difference. One of the simple difference between organising a wedding for Maltese couples and organising a wedding for foreign couples is the fact that with the foreign couple a lot of correspondence has to be sent back and forth to set up the wedding.

The wedding tourism market is also sustainable due to the fact that it will make use of the current facilities available and it makes up to non-interfering value-added tourism. Thus, this market fulfils the requirement outlined in the Carrying Capacity report for the Maltese Islands (Muscat 2016) which stressed out that Malta should make use of its existing infrastructure when it comes to consideration new developments in the tourism industry. Analysing Malta from the point of view of weddings tourism, it is clear that the is-land possesses many of the requirements that are considered as beneficial for a fully fletched wedding tourism market. The all-year-round good climatic condition, beautiful beaches,



competitively priced wedding package, easy flight connections with the rest of Europe, little red tape, English speaking locals and cultural attractions are amongst the list.

### **2.6.1 Marketing directing to foreign couples**

MTA's promoting of Malta as a wedding destination includes a deal with a foreign wedding magazine, bride and groom which allows photo shoots to be held in top heritage sites. Also taken part in wedding fair and shows such as London wedding. Fairs like these will increase the possibility of attracting couples to choose wedding events in Malta. Wedding company also market for foreign couples to use Malta as a wedding destination. Amongst the most effective tools to attract couples there are website and the most effective by word of mouth and social media. In order to attract more couples. Malta most couples on an international scale meaning that it has to be chosen over internal operators.

### **2.6.2 Core markets**

The main markets regarding wedding tourism are United Kingdom and Ireland. Adding to this there are one-offs mainly from Germany, Benelux and Japan. The number of guest they bring over with them various but some unofficial statistics (through tour operators) shows that United Kingdom and Ireland bring an average of 40 to 50 guest.

MTA as an authority does not organize wedding but rather acts as a facilitator through promoting Malta and making it attractive for foreign weddings. However, there is a list of contacts of weddings planner which can be obtained through MTA website.

## **2.7 The introduction of gay civil union**

The Civil Unions Law is a political act which went through a particular political process. In Malta, Civil Unions law passed very quickly throughout a referendum that was done. Malta allows civil unions, following the enactment of the Civil Unions Act 2014, first introduced in September 2013. This process was not an easy step to achieve for the Government of Dr Joseph Muscat due the influence of the Roman Celtic in Malta. Gay and lesbian couples can be officially joined in civil union in Malta since 2014. Same-sex civil union in Malta includes the same rights and agreements as gay marriage, but with another name. Malta has further stated its intention to amend the civil union legislation of 2014 to same-sex marriage. Until such time, the state recognises same-sex marriage be held only abroad as equivalent to civil union in Malta.

With the arrival of civil union in Malta, same-sex couples can jointly adopt, with the first official adoption by a same-sex couple taking effect in July 2016. Since surrogacy is illegal in Malta, gay men do not currently have the opportunity to have their own biological children. IVF is currently illegal for lesbian women; however, the government of Malta has stated its intention to introduce a bill to allow IVF access for female same-sex couples, among others. By this also a foreigner who has a Maltese partner once that get united with the civil union act they can also adopt children. Changing laws and granting rights on a state level is a reflection of increasing social awareness, so that Malta is increasingly gay friendly.

Malta grants 88% of all rights to gay and lesbian persons, placing Malta first on ILGA-Europe's rainbow map, while the 2015 Eurobarometer found a majority of 65% in favour of same-sex marriage, compared with just 18% in 2006. (Anon., 2014) It grants civil unions the same rights, responsibilities, and obligations as marriage, including the right of joint adoption. Parliament gave final approval to the legislation on 14 April 2014 by a vote of 37 in favour and 30 abstentions. It was signed into law by President Marie Louise Coleiro Preca on 16 April and published in the government's gazette on 17 April. The first civil union was performed on 13 June 2014.

During 2015 wedding organisers and catering company stated that it was one of the most difficult wedding seasons every due the amount of weddings held in Malta, not just local but also foreign weddings.

## **2.8 Theoretical framework**

As the figure 2 below shows that I have based my theoretical framework on these main factors and if one of the maniacal weal's will stop the whole cycle will suffer and that can affect this industry and their service providers.



Figure 2. Theoretical framework for this study

### 3 Research Methodology

I have chosen this subject because I feel myself honoured to be part of the wedding day of the couples, that most of them they have been working hard to make this day one to re-member. The wedding industry in Malta is getting bigger and bigger all the time. This is because local market got stronger due the fact of the introduction of civil weddings between gay couples and the introductions of divorce so couples can get married again with civil union. Foreigners are choosing more Malta to be a destination for their wedding destination. Considering that wedding tourism contributes to local economic development in a number of ways, it has been recognized as a big opportunity for destinations promoting themselves in the international market.

Primarily, couples generally using local goods and services, relying on vendors such as caterers, musicians and transportation specialists whose businesses are directly or indirectly connected to the wedding industry and this offered Malta a boost to the economy.

Secondly, weddings involve more guest apart from the couple. Instead of an individual, a couple or a family; destination weddings can bring groups with up to a couple of hundreds of visitors. Their expenditures on accommodation, food and beverage, transportation and entertainment bring profit into the region, thus embracing local economy.

Third, couples may celebrate their newlywed status by organizing additional events. According to Destination Weddings Survey (2015) results, one in three couples plan a group activity (e.g. a sightseeing tour) for their guests, along with the rehearsal dinner, the after-ceremony reception, and team building activities such as diving.

That is why we have to make sure that everyone understands the importance of this industry in Malta. One of the problems that we are facing at the moment in Malta that reflect to this industry is that there is not enough awareness about this industry. Most of the time local service providers are not ready for the different demands that we are getting from couples that are planning to get married in Malta and use our island as a destination wedding.

That is why weddings planners in Malta are became very requested not just from the local market but as well from foreign wedding planners company that they are investing into the local market as well. But the most service requested will be from couples using Malta as a wedding destination. The fact of long distance wedding most of the time, there will be the need for the middle man between the couple and the service providers in Malta. In fact,

wedding planners have the first-hand experience in organising wedding are also knowledgeable about the increasing market for destination weddings in Malta. Therefore, it is imperative that to contact many local wedding planners who specialise in destination weddings. During the preparation of my thesis to gather information I am using a lot of web site and journals but when using website, they have to be related with the market that I am focusing so on the Maltese island. As for the local law and legislation those are things that I included in my biography. The method of including the references is that I am going to use Harvard system. Also, apart from references also I am using observation methods to gather information due the fact that I am still working into this industry. But when I am going to use any information that I get from my observation the company the staff involved are going to be informed also together with necessary the necessary approvals or acknowledgement.

Due the fact that my thesis is going to be focusing on destination weddings in Malta. The method that I am going to use is that I am going to interview wedding organizers company that work on foreign wedding in Malta. These interviews it was not easy to be done due the fact that when I have contacted these companies were busy with wedding session. I am planning to ask questions and also, I am going to record the interview after getting the permission from who I am doing the interview.

The ethical part is also included when I am going to mention any company by name I have prepared also a declaration latter that they can decide them self's. The points that I have mention are very important into the ethical part with getting without the consent of the person involved you cannot submit any personal information even more names. Without this information, definitely there will be problems due the fact that you're not acting in an ethical manner.

My focuses on the discussion of the main findings revealed in this research in relation to the aims and objectives of this study. Three research sub-questions will be discussed in this chapter. The interest in Malta as a wedding destination, buying motivation and factors that influence the choice of destination. The main aim of this research project is to explore: Destination weddings in Malta, In order for this to be done effectively, the factors that influence the demand for destination weddings is Malta, will also be discussed from various points of views- local wedding planes and my vision on the weddings that I have worked and organised for foreign couples that they have chosen Malta as there weddings destination. In addition, couples view destination weddings as an alternative and exciting event that not only they, but also the guests could experience. It combines the ceremony and honeymoon together.

### 3.1 Research methods

This research project is an attempt to analyse the current marital trend in Malta with regards to foreigners that get married in Malta. In this respect, different research techniques needed to be utilised. One is going to be an observation by self and the other method is used is going to be a one to one interview with wedding organisers. It also explores other details such as the number of guests that visit Malta per wedding, ceremony and reception venues and finer details such as nationalities and religious belief. Also by understanding foreign wedding we attract and understand more what we can offer an experience of the Maltese culture not only to those couples that got married in Malta but also to their bridal party that some can be of 20 guest and can go up to hundreds. To analyse the results, I am going to go into each question and by annualizing that I will give facts and percentages and this will help me to understand more this market and the factors that motivated couples to choose Malta as their wedding destination.

With regards to the interview with wedding planners, the interview seeks to analyse the most common nationalities, religions, gay marriages, localities for the ceremony and reception, as well their personal opinions on certain issues such as motivational factors and the marketing of their company for which they work for.

Also, the interview that am going to do with wedding planners I am going to work with a system that I will go myself and interview the person individually. I have prepared a set of question that I am going to ask. I have asked them for the permission that during the interview I will record our discussion. I am going to interview three company all of them local but all of them have different market segments. One of them was one of the wedding organisers that we had on the island and focusing on very high-end market. In Malta, you can find 16 wedding company organizing but I am going to talk to the most popular and that have been longer on the market. With these three companies, it will offer a more holistic view due the fact that one of the company that I am going to interview is a hotel that offer this type of service also but most of the services that they provide are in house.

This research is to understand if there is a demand for Malta as a wedding destination. Moreover, this demonstrates the economic opportunity of the market trends for destination weddings in Malta. The aims and objective of this research are to explore the following questions:

- Tourist demographic studies-nationality, religious belief, age groups
- The major motivational factors for couples to choose Malta as their destination wedding
- The current and future situation of destination wedding in Malta

- The factors that motivate couples to get married in Malta
- The marketing strategies adopted by wedding planners, to attract foreign tourist to get married in Malta
- The new law on gay marriages as a new market
- I am using the triangular method based on two method: Interview.
- The reason that I am using this type of method is because, it will give the consistency of finding by using this tools. The triangulation method it offers me also validation of the re-search that I am doing. When using this type of methods will be divided into four processes that every proses it can be related to my topic.
- The four criteria's mention below are very important due fact that they will guide me to follow and evaluate the research done.
  - Enriching: The outputs of different informal and formal instruments add value to each other by explaining different aspects of an issue
  - Refuting: Where one set of options disproves a hypothesis generated by another set of options.
  - Confirming: Where one set of options confirms a hypothesis generated by another set of options
  - Explaining: Where one set of options sheds light on unexpected findings derived from another set of options

Research is constantly being updated as the tourism industry is not stabile. There can be seen an increasing demand of destination weddings. This study touches the true nature of destination weddings in Malta, especially influential factors that are motivating couples to marry hare.

Investigating Malta as a destination wedding can somewhat be difficult because only limited few are interested in wedding planning and in a destination wedding industry. However, this does not necessarily mean that this study will not be able to gather necessary information to perform its objectives. This study can ensure quality information that anyone can as a basis for further research.

### **3.2 Interviews**

In order to provide a better understanding on the findings of this report the research technique that have chosen were one to one interview with three wedding organising company that market for destination weddings. I have also used my self-observation and my experience in working as a weddings organiser for the last five years.

The companies that I have chosen are:

#### Sarah Young Wedding Planner

You may delegate all the planning to The Wedding Planner – Sarah Young. The Wedding Planner's aim is to help you say 'I do' with the minimum amount of stress. Once you relinquish the planning to us, you'll experience the freedom to honour your day-to-day commitments without the added stress of having to contend with the hassle of planning a dream

wedding. With our help, you'll sail through all the preparations for your wedding in Malta. We will guide you right up to the moment when you say, 'I do'. Every step of the way we make sure that everything is perfectly organised and we accompany you till the very last minute when all the wedding celebrations are over. (Young, 2016)

#### Malta Events Design (Marvik Borg)

MALTA EVENT DESIGN is a boutique Wedding Planning, Event and Travel Management Agency, skilled to create your unforgettable Malta experience, whether it is event or travel based. With experience in wedding planning, social gatherings and travel planning. We can assist you to make informed decisions based on your dreams and expectations. We also offer essential services at all levels, will evaluate a client's specific needs, expectations and budget and customise the best level of service that best suits each client. Through our inspiration, local knowledge and customised itineraries, the journey to your Malta experience begins with us. At MALTA EVENT DESIGN, we understand that your needs and expectations are unique and thus we provide tailored unique packages which are perfectly matched to you: it's all about you! (Borg, 2016)

#### The Wedding organiser by Jurgen Briffa

We have established themselves as one of the most competent and experienced organisers in the wedding business. The expanding company is a collection of motivated, experienced and enthusiastic organisers whose only desire is to make your special day a reality. (Briffa, 2016)

The information that I got from these companies helped me to understand more this market that we have in Malta and how we can help each other to motivate more couples to use Malta as their wedding destination.

### **3.3 Research sub-questions**

What can wedding planners say about peoples interested in Malta as a wedding destination?

The most common age groups for brides and grooms to marry in Malta ranges between 25 to 35 years. The second most common are 25. The nationalities that get married in Malta are British, Iris, Russian, Scottish, French, Italian, Chinese and American-British being the highest amount recorded. On the other hand, Indian weddings is became very popular and it will be a very good market due the fact that there is companies that they focusing on that specific market. With regards to religion< Malta is still experiencing a high percentage of Roman Catholics, followed by Atheists.



The popular wedding ceremony and receptions venues are chosen in the north and most central location of Malta. The latest trends couples are opting for historical venues where the reception can be held, they are very expensive to rent but on the other hand logistically is more challenging. The element is very important and in Malta Catering companies can also offer this type of service.



Figure 3. Saluting Battery Valletta Malta (Daniel Demicoli 2016)

Generally, a church, hotel or garden is usually selected for the wedding ceremony however some couples decide upon using one location for the entire wedding. When couples opt for this they will save on cost such as transportation and time too. Other couples tend to prefer having a separate venue for the reception, in hotels, weddings halls or private properties.

When it comes for venues if couples were motivated to get married in Malta sometimes they chose a beach wedding concept due the fact that most of time they cannot do that type of ceremony in their own home country.



Figure 4. Beach wedding concept (Daniel Demicoli)

In Malta, we are having also requests to get married on a private bouts that can be very intimate and caterers are also working on creating attractive menus that can be logistically served on a bouts taking into consideration the safety of all staff and guests.

Wedding planners feel that the motivation factors which influence couples to get married in Malta are: an attractive image of wedding locations, such as gardens weddings. The wedding venue is not one of the usual weddings for Malta. However, garden weddings appear often in foreign bridal magazines, wedding planner websites, bridal shows and movies. One can further say that this unique quality of wedding locations, features beautiful architectural gardens, and should be considered and developed further in Malta.

Other influential factors include, an attractive country image, as well as advertising. The latter was described by the respondents to be an influential factor. This may be due the fact that the bride and groom, are sometimes establishing their own ideas, by getting influenced from someone else's wedding, as shown from printed advertisements such as bridal magazines, online reviews, social media etc.

Advertisements serve as window of opportunities for the consumers and for the information that could assist the concept organiser of the wedding, followed by the wedding planner. Brides tend to consult printed articles from magazines or online articles from the internet, in order to have an idea in the latest trends in wedding industry, thus creating a

personalised wedding, as well as finding the perfect destination. Advertising plays a crucial and influential role, due to accessible resource of ideas ranging from wedding planning, organising, and experience.

Religion does not seem to play an important role in this regard due the fact that couples can get married in Malta also by civil union. All do most of the couples are Roman Catholic.

### **3.4 What are the motivations reasons of your clients that makes them choose Malta?**

Mainly couples tend to go for simple, but memorable wedding setting, which is usually enough for the couple to enjoy the event with all of their guests, without worrying about exceeding the budget. There were four factors influencing the buying motivation of customers are: family origin, attractive image of the wedding location and previous experience in Malta. Family origin has been chosen as the most influential factor by the respondents. This probably the fact that it is a social influence, which the customers naturally get from everyone that surrounds them, primarily their families, friends, colleagues and everyone else in the community. Family and friends are the ones who, most of time, provide suggestion for as specific product or service, which can be based on their own experience. It is natural from human beings to have an instinct of listening to the advice, recommendations, or opinions of others.

Furthermore, it can be easily understood why this factor was considered to be a key influence in buyers' motivation. The others reason was the climate in Malta and that it is cheaper than other European cities. Life style and culture is also considered as another influence factor because, others than the family, consumers are highly dependent on beliefs and traditions, since a wedding was always a tradition-bound event in Malta. Therefore, this could also be a reason why the lifestyle factors is equally influential.

It was essential to understand how foreigners found out about Malta in order to try to comprehend the reasoning behind their decision. Most of the time organisers stated that couples have family's is Malta or that it is their country of birth of one of the couple. Also, couples new trends are that they have decided to get married in Malta while on holiday, Social networks are another reason, which played a role in the decision making. Generally, couples stay in Malta for their whole wedding period which ranges between 8 to 14 days especially for their final preparation. When asked about whether the foreign couples spent

their honeymoon in Malta, 55.5% said yes while 44.5% said no. This outcome was not expected but can also be understandable as Malta is stepping stone to others countries. The majority of the couples will have their wedding party generally consisted of around 50 to 100 guests. The majority of couples have an average budget spent on their wedding, was a range of 10,000 Euro to 30,000 Euro. This amount is by far higher that what the local weddings.

However, it is still imperative, that every couple has a set budget when organising a wedding, regardless of whether it is going to be a traditional or destination wedding. Couples are moving away from extravagant weddings and leaning towards a more personalised, customised, or styled wedding. Cost is one of the core buying. Unfortunately, it is hard for people to understand that economical-destination weddings are attainable. This is because the majority of the destination weddings are seen to be promoted or advertised in different media-specifically in bridal magazines and are generally expensive and not truly worth the hassle. Practically, customers can really find a way to have destination wedding without spending too much. Generally, couples organise the wedding themselves or by family members and they also they engage all vendors them self's too. As a result, foreign couples end up doing all the planning and organising by themselves without asking assistance from professional wedding planners.

## **4 Findings and data analysis**

This chapter describes the findings of this research project. This chapter focused on the different perceptions and importance of interest in destination weddings, buying motivation and factors influencing choice of destination weddings, from the point of view of foreign couples who have married in Malta. It was also vital to understand certain aspects from the perception of wedding planners through a one to one interview. Also by the observation that I have done during weddings that I have worked for couples that they got married in Malta.

### **4.1 The evolution of weddings in Malta**

Wedding traditions changed very fast as the Second World War ended. These changes happened as wages started to improve after the 1979, and social services and pensions were introduced. This helped to improve the Maltese financial status, and reduce poverty. Moreover, Maltese were being influenced by other cultures mainly by the British due the fact that Malta has been under the British colony.

The first drastic change was seen in how a couple meets. In previous times, the parents used to choose the husband for their daughter, and this used to be done by the help of the match maker, also known in Maltese as 'il-Huttaba' (matchmaker). Nowadays, girls and boys have the liberty to go out and meet in social places such as Paceville, which is one of the most frequented places by young Maltese and tourist teenagers. The social media is increasing its popularity in the meeting of couples. Some of these social Medias are Face-book, Tinder, Connected.me, dating websites, Skype, etc.

When the couple is ready for the engagement, it is being more popular that the boyfriend will propose to his girlfriend in an original way, such as while they are on a holiday, through a short video, etc.

The next step would be the engagement. In previous times, the engagement only lasted for few days before they get married. Nowadays it could take years before they marry as it is more known as a period in life where you could be together without marriage responsibility and to get to know each other well before the next step. Nowadays, the engagement doesn't include legal budding as it was before. There are only few formalities that should be followed such as the parents must be the first to know and that it is ideal that your close friends will know in person not by the use of social media as this is taking place face to face.

There are a lot of factors that might lengthen the engagement. For example, if the couples are already living together, they might take it easier than others. Others would prefer to have their home ready before the wedding. More possibilities why the wedding could be delayed could be financial issues, studies, they would prefer a certain day for their wedding to be held on, or prefer to have their wedding distanced from other family weddings. After the engagement, the couple need to choose what type of wedding they are going to have either a church or civil wedding so that other preparations can be processed.

For a church wedding, there are a lot of preparations before the day of marriage. They need to do the Cana Movement Marriage preparation course which consists of ten short and interesting weekly talks. The couple would be given a booklet to guide them through the meetings. When the couple finishes this course, they are given a certificate. These courses are held in various parishes around Malta in January, April and October. A fee of 35 Euros applies and booking is done directly with the Parish Church which you will be attending ideally a month in advance. After that, the couple is to attend a number of meetings organised by the respective parish. These will be held closer to the wedding date. Once again, the couple will be presented with another certificate. Both of these certificates are to be presented to the curia upon registration for marriage. In previous times, none of these courses and bureaucracy was needed for someone to get married by church as life was simpler and people were more spiritual.

The long-awaited wedding day. For the bride, the day starts early in the morning with hair, make up, and nails, then all the bridesmaids have to be prepared and then the photographer comes along to take photos of the bride doing the final touches and photos with her family and bridesmaids around the house and while leaving the house. It is a more relaxing day for the groom just he does his hair waiting for the best man and ushers to come, get dressed after that the photographer comes along and take some photos. In previous times, it was harder to have photos of a wedding as the couple and family had to go by themselves to the photographer and pose in a studio for a few still photos as there were no digital cameras.

During the ceremony, if it is a church wedding, the couple has the only chance to choose the reading from the gospel and they can do their own vows. On the other hand, a civil wedding, could be more personalized. The civil union consists of an introduction of a Malta marriage law, couples consent, wedding vows and exchange of the rings. The couple could optionally add two readings which a family member or friend should read but it is very important that they do not mention God, the vows could be written by the bride and groom.

The reception in the olden days was divided into two parts, the first part would be in the newlywed's house for the close family members of the couple which mainly would include sweets. The second part was for all the guests which was a seated dinner in the house of the bride's mother which sometimes the guests get their own food. Although the reception changed you can still find seated dinners but it is becoming more popular to have a big party with finger food and drinks, sometimes there will be also an after party. There was a tradition that when the couple arrives close to the new house the husband would hurry up so he arrives first because if the wife arrives before him she would start dictating and things will go wrong. We still have something similar but now the husband has to lift his wife in the house. Another superstition was that if the wedding would be without music it would not be a fertile marriage.

The honey moon is where the couple goes to spend some quite time alone mostly by going few weeks on a holiday. The words were used but in a different meaning the honey was introduced in the wife's diet and moon is referred for the period the husband keeps a close eye on his wife for her cycle which is around twenty-eight days so he makes sure she did not sleep with another man.

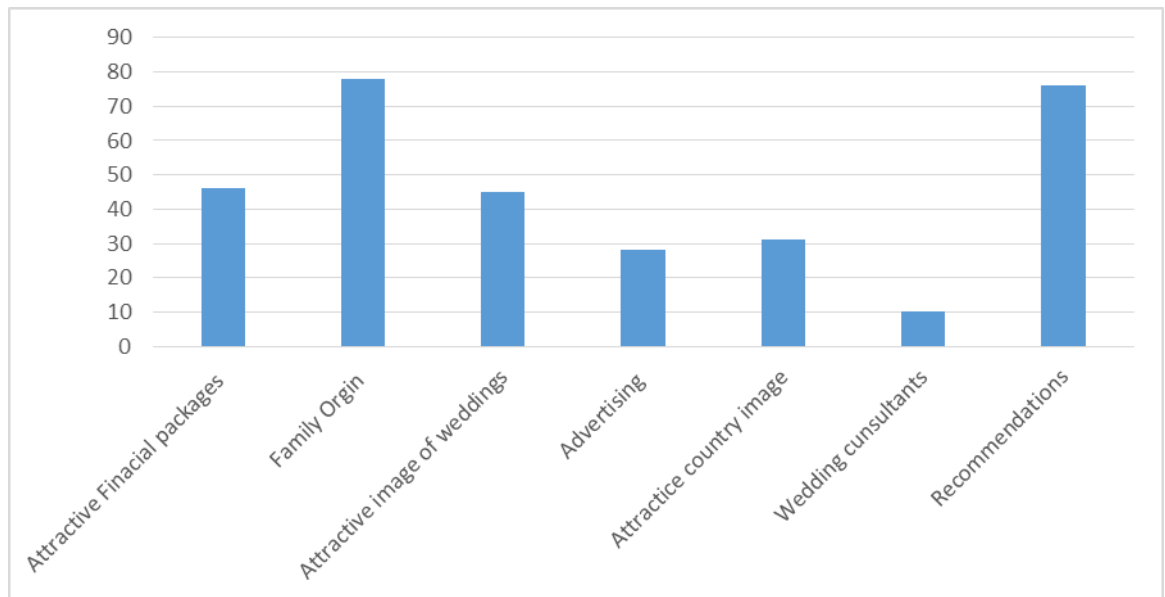
Generation by generation we are gaining more freedom by introducing more rights for ourselves. There is a good amount of couples who choose to stay together and have children without marrying each other. This is something that the mentality before used to look bad in these couples and it was not an option. Then the separation came along after that the annulment and divorce. Now also the right for same sex marriage. We could freely say that separations are increasing but in my personal opinion the awareness on women's rights are increasing so more women are searching for help.

#### **4.2 Findings and analysis of data related to research**

The outcomes of this study indicate that among the numerous push and pull motivation factors, Maltese organisers believe that destination weddings is definitely a market that will affect couples because, destination prestige, escaping daily routine, and easy access and affordability influential drivers that impact wedding destinations (event venue) selections. These results are also similar on the observation that I have done. The decision makers for wedding and countries (couples, parents, relatives, and friends who are involved in the decision-making process of the wedding event) believe that the influence of this destination is also shared before everything is confirmed. And mainly from parents because it can result that parents are paying for all the charges that lead for the wedding to be held. Destination marketing in weddings can lead in promoting not just the venue

but also the culture and religion of Malta. It offers to couples the awareness, attitudes and buying behaviour. Prior studies have mentioned that destination marketing is important for tourism industries to charm tourists. But is not only the charm of the island as stated by wedding planners at the moment is very important that the destination chosen is safe. With marketing and publicizing activities, destinations can improve destination values; enhance destination performance; and increase marketing effectiveness. (University, 2014)

Figure 5 below shows which are the most reasons that motivates couples to choose Malta.



Wedding tourism is an occasion for a brake, unwind, and way to visit some other distant areas in order to escaping daily routines. For people who crave a getaway, traveling abroad to a destination is a good reasons in order to achieve an unforgettable moment with their loved oneness. By having a blue sea as a backdrop at wedding ceremony or being amongst the gardens of the courtyard – these are just capabilities and options for the couples to choose a ceremony location, each having outstanding beauty and individual character. Every couple is coming from direct backgrounds and cultures and that is why every couples opt for different venue that reflect their needs.



### **4.3 Interviews data**

The interviews that I have done were very useful for my results. The factors that the three companies that I have chosen are the top and strongest in this market. All of the organisers agreed that this is a very strong market with a lot of competition from other countries and that is why they have to be more competitive. As regarding destination weddings not all of them are focusing on the same market. One of the latest markets is the Indian. A very challenging market but with a high average spending of the couple. As for the biggest market from the UK and Ireland they have to be more creative and thinking out of the box with new trends that can attract more couples. One of the arguments that one of the organisers discussed was about new companies entering this market, he stated that "competition is healthy" but in a professional manner. Otherwise it is going to reflect on the whole industry and on Malta as a destination. Overall, the sense of motivation is very important and we must understand not only the need of the couple but also the whole party, they can be the future of destination weddings in Malta.

## **5 Conclusions and implications**

### **5.1 Conclusions in relation to research**

Malta's geographical location, in the middle of the Mediterranean, implies that the island is easily accessible through air links by most European countries. The introduction of low cost carriers which meant increased seat capacity is an added feature which continues to make Malta more accessible. These add on with Malta's attractions which will help the island develop even more as far as wedding tourism is concerned. The need of development of branding exercise, which will shift the focus from simply marketing Malta as a holiday destination to one where the focus will be on possible growth segments, will initiate the wedding market. This will increase further Malta's recognition overseas as a wedding destination and instil the perception in foreign couples that the island could be considered as a potential wedding destination. All this could see the island gain from the potential of this niche market leading for Malta's reputation as a wedding destination to thrive.

### **5.2 Overview of objectives**

My objectives and targets as discussed into my date analysis were the following which now can be combined with my results.

#### **5.2.1 Tourist demographic studies-nationality, religious belief**

The tourists during this study mainly are the couples but also the element that every couple must cater also for their party this celebration. Statistics were very clear that explained that since the introduction of civil union in Malta the wedding industry as destination exploded. As regarding religious belief Malta can accept all religious belief due the fact according to the local law on civil union everyone can get married in Malta.

#### **5.2.2 The major motivational factors for couples to choose Malta as their destination wedding**

According to the factors that I have found from my studies is showing that couples tend to go for simple, but memorable wedding setting, which is usually enough for the couple to enjoy the event with all of their guests, without worrying about exceeding the budget. There were four factors influencing the buying motivation of customers are: family origin, attractive image of the wedding location and previous experience in Malta. Family origin has been chosen as the most influential factor by the respondents. This probably the fact

that it is a social influence, which the customers naturally get from everyone that surrounds them, primarily their families, friends, colleagues and everyone else in the community.

### **5.2.3 The current and future situation of destination wedding in Malta**

At its stands at the moment it look that this industry is going to grow and infect is helping the economy. This is an industry that is giving a boost to the industry also during the quiet mounts, such as February and November.

### **5.2.4 The marketing strategies adopted by wedding planners**

To attract foreign tourist to our main markets regarding wedding tourism are United Kingdom and Ireland. Adding to this there are one- offs mainly from Germany, Benelux and Japan. The number of guest they bring over with them various but some unofficial statistics (through tour operators) shows that United Kingdom and Ireland bring an average of 40 to 50 guest. In fact, the most tool that is being and effective is when visit Malta as a wedding celebration guest. The use social media is making marketing much cheaper as a marketing too.

### **5.2.5 The new law on gay marriages as a new market**

Same-sex civil union in Malta includes the same rights and agreements as gay marriage, but with another name. Malta has further stated its intention to amend the civil union legislation of 2014 to same-sex marriage. Until such time, the state recognises same-sex marriages be held only abroad as equivalent to civil union in Malta. This is a market that our competitors such as Italy countries still cannot be done so definitely this an advantage and is making Malta unique wedding destination.

## **5.3 Limitations and ideas for further studies**

Destination weddings can sound interesting, and simple to comprehend, but the truth is that it is quite difficult in nature, and those difficulties are primarily due to the limited resources available. Therefore, it is highly recommended that future researchers in this field should focus more on the impact of marketing Malta as a wedding destination. In addition, future researchers may want to explore from a variety of sources such as wedding planners out-side of Malta in comparison to local ones, and many weddings clients, in order to establish comparisons or arguments that could help to extract richer information regarding the changes in the wedding market in Malta. One such possibility is, obtaining information about the new sets of influences on couples' preference for destination weddings in comparison to traditional wedding.

With regards to wedding planners, destination weddings are a good proposition because they can absolutely help in enriching ones' wedding experience. Therefore, there is nothing wrong with marketing destination weddings for consideration instead of just focusing on the market of more general services. After all the concept of a destination weddings is actually not to alter or contradict the traditional setting, but to provide a further enrichment of the experience by everyone at the event. The packages available in Malta are generally related to hotel venues and locations.

According to Demographic review (2014) 968 people obtained a Maltese citizenship through naturalism or registration. (Mark, 2015). Naturalism is defined as an action, were the foreigners may be granted a Maltese citizenship according to the Maltese Citizenship Act.

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