

USITAT – Liberty

The Notion of Liberty in the Tourism Industry

In its essence, liberty refers to the freedom to live, act, and, fundamentally, think in the way one wishes. Linked to this freedom is the ability to go anywhere one desires, as this liberty is also a symbol of freedom. Furthermore, liberty is the universal understanding of ethical values common to all humans, regardless of the diversity of their religion, philosophy, or moral beliefs.

The concept of liberty has a long and complex history. In ancient Greece, the idea of individual freedom was closely tied to the concept of citizenship. In the Roman Empire, freedom was strongly associated with the rights and privileges of Roman citizenship. Moving on to the 18th century, emerging from the Enlightenment period after the French Revolution, the concept of liberty evolved into a more philosophical notion. Renowned philosophers asserted that freedom was an inherent right of all human beings, and the purpose of government was to protect and preserve these rights.

Moreover, it is important to note that the notion of liberty comprises two dynamics: positive and negative liberty. Positive liberty is the opportunity to act in accordance with one's wishes and needs, as well as to take control of one's life without violating legal or social rules. On the other hand, negative liberty refers to the absence of social barriers, constraints, and other legal impositions. Negative liberty can give rise to negative sanctions, such as legally enforced punishments or social disapproval.

Stakeholders in the tourism industry have an obligation to safeguard the social and cultural traditions of all individuals, including those from minority groups. One way to achieve this is for the host country and local professionals to show respect for visitors, familiarize themselves with their preferences and expectations, and employ trained personnel who can contribute to a welcoming environment. This, in turn, enhances liberty. It is of utmost importance that tourists feel a sense of security when visiting any country. Thus, it is the duty of public authorities to provide protection for travellers, offer adequate information, implement preventive measures, and mitigate any threats that could impede an individual's liberty.

On the other hand, visitors also have the responsibility to acquaint themselves with the characteristics of the countries they plan to visit so that they are aware of any health or security risks they might encounter. Article 8 of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) states that "tourists must have access to places of transit, accommodations, and attraction sites without discrimination or excessive formalities." This underscores that, even when visiting a country, tourists should enjoy the fundamental right of liberty.

Additionally, it is worth noting that Malta was ranked as the number one country for being the safest holiday destination for LGBTQ+ holidaymakers in 2022. More recently, Malta won a European Travel Award 2023 as the best LGBT Tourism Guide in the Mediterranean.

Accommodation



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Malta's tourism industry has been evolving since the early 1900s, a period that coincided with the final years of English colonial rule in Malta. This development is evident in the ongoing efforts of hotels to enhance accessibility and uphold the principles of liberty.

A notable example can be found in a leading 5-star hotel situated in Floriana, a stone's throw away from the capital city of Malta, Valletta. This hotel has consistently strived to cater to individuals with diverse mobility issues, hearing impairments, or visual impairments. To this end, the hotel has installed a wheelchair ramp and a chair lift at its entrance, with staff on hand to assist anyone in need of these facilities. Within the hotel, the reception desk includes a section that is lower than the rest, allowing wheelchairs to easily access it.

In the hotel's restaurant, a Braille menu is available to accommodate tourists with visual impairments, aligning with the goal of promoting liberty within the Maltese tourism industry. Additionally, special lifts, wide enough for wheelchairs, have been installed to grant access to the spa and pool areas. For guests with hearing impairments, smoke detectors are equipped with distinctive flashes and patterns for easy detection.

Accessible guest rooms are equipped with specialized door locks, including a hydraulic pump that automatically opens the door lock. These rooms feature roll-in showers, hand grip rails, lower sinks, lower beds, and higher toilets to facilitate easy access. Notably, the hotel is also pet-friendly. The staff is well-trained to assist guests in wheelchairs and with activities such as transferring them in and out of their beds.

Furthermore, the hotel accommodates requests for electric scooters, wheelchairs, and any other assistance within their capabilities. The staff is experienced in handling special medications and supplies, including distilled water for CPAP machines, which some guests require to manage sleep apnea. These items are stored in computerized refrigerators to ensure the highest level of safety.

Transportation

Another way to enjoy the beaches in Malta is by using sea transportation. Several companies offer day cruises that include excursions to prominent areas like the Grand Harbour, Sliema Front, Comino, Gozo, and the Three Cities. Importantly, specific boats are designed to be wheelchair-friendly, equipped with facilities to accommodate individuals with limited mobility. These accommodations include:

- The boat's cockpit features a flat, non-slippery floor made of a material with good adhesion.
- The entrance is marked with distinctive colors and materials to assist individuals with impaired vision.
- The gap between the gangway and the boat's entry is minimized to facilitate a smoother entrance.
- Handrails and handles are positioned at a convenient height for easy access and use.
- Sufficient space is available for a wheelchair user to perform a full rotation.
- Users have the option to store their wheelchairs aside.

This highlights Malta's commitment to safeguarding liberty for all tourists visiting the country. Regardless of any impairment, every individual has an equal right to access specific places and engage in various activities. This principle extends to native residents as well.



Beaches

The beaches in Malta may be limited in size, but they offer remarkable diversity in their settings. The Maltese archipelago consists of the main island of Malta, the island of Gozo, and the smallest island of them all, Comino. Other islets include Cominotto and Filfla.

Coastal water quality is crucial for Malta. Given that Malta is an island rich in beaches, enjoying the sea during the summer months is vital in our lives. Clean beaches and high-quality bathing waters are important not only for tourism but also for the local community.

Various types of accessibility features can be found on beaches throughout the islands, including:

- Walkways: Wooden planks in the sand that enable wheelchair users, those with pushchairs, and other mobility vehicles to access the beach. Examples can be found at beaches like Tunnara and Ghajn Tuffieha, both in Mellieha.
- Accessible toilets: These are facilities designed to accommodate wheelchair users, available at beaches like Marsaskala and Birzebbuga.
- Access hoists: These devices, found at certain beaches like Sliema and Birzebbuga, are used to lift and lower individuals with limited mobility into the water, allowing them to enjoy swimming.

Blue Flags: The "Blue Flag" designation is an international quality award granted to beaches that meet sustainable beach management qualifications and maintain excellent conditions. In 2019, over 4,000 beaches worldwide received this award, including twelve in the Maltese Islands. Malta joined the world's Blue Flag map in 2009 when St. George's Bay in Paceville became the first beach in Malta to achieve Blue Flag status. It has retained this status every year since. The Blue Flag has also been awarded to Hondoq ir-Rummien and Marsalforn bays in Gozo.



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