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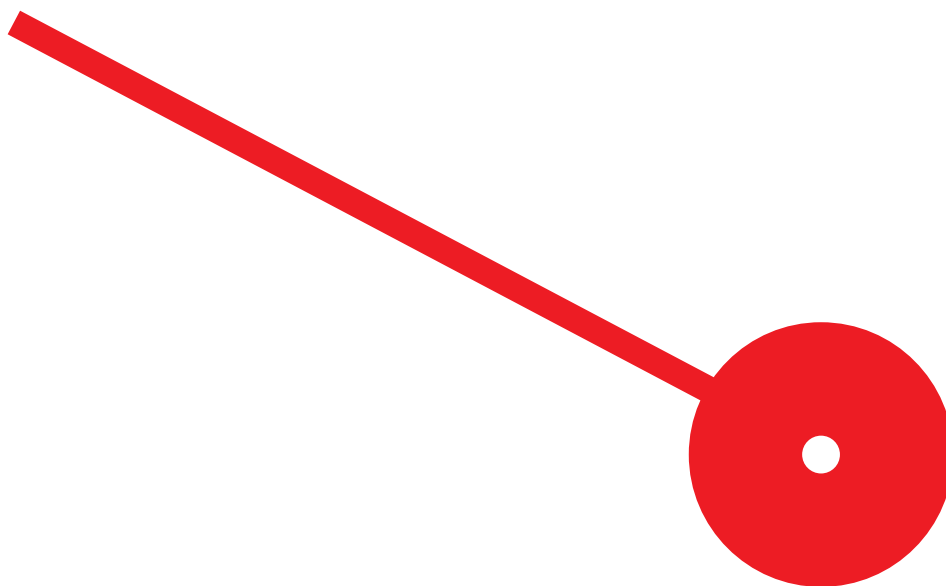
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MASTER'S DEGREE IN  
INTERCULTURAL STUDIES FOR BUSINESS

The Power of Hospitality: Enhancing  
Intercultural Relations Through  
Service and Experience

Carolina Isabel Santos

10/2025



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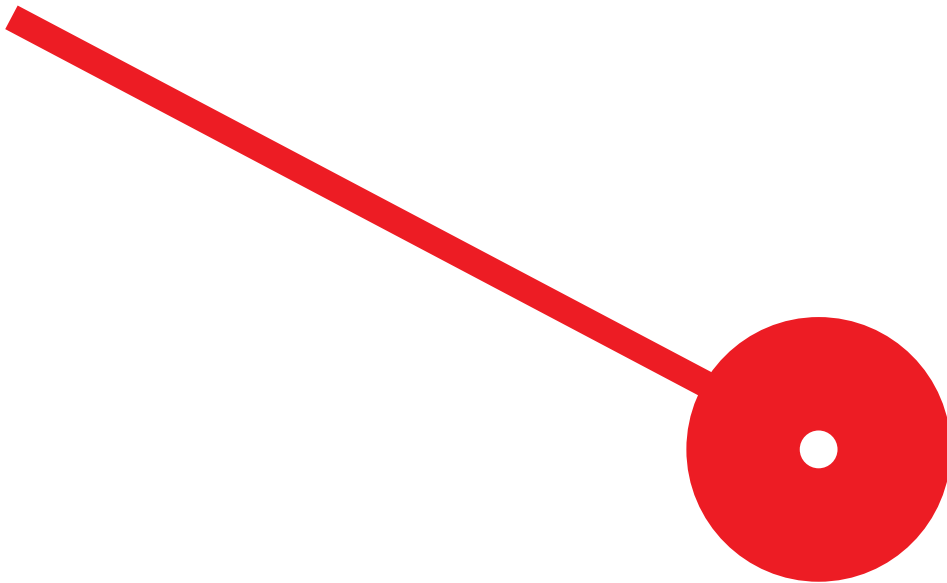
MASTER'S DEGREE IN  
INTERCULTURAL STUDIES FOR BUSINESS

# The Power of Hospitality: Enhancing Intercultural Relations Through Service and Experience

Carolina Isabel Santos

**Internship Report submitted to Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto for the attainment of a Master's degree in Intercultural Studies for Business, under the supervision of Dr. Clara Maria Laranjeira Sarmiento e Santos**

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“If I am an advocate for anything, it is to move. As far as you can, as much as you can. Across the ocean or simply across the river. Walk in someone else’s shoes or at least eat their food. It is a plus for everybody”

Anthony Bourdain

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Noru Hotel Malta for welcoming me as a Front Office intern and providing me with an invaluable learning environment. I felt welcomed and guided since day one, by an amazing intercultural team that inspired me every day through their resilience, empathy, positivity and willingness to learn and connect. My heartfelt thanks go to Mr. Michael Zammit Marmara, General Manager, for believing in my potential, to Ms. Pyne Linnam, my supervisor for half of this experience, for encouraging me daily, to Ms. Milena Lo Vano, the successor supervisor, for guiding me through the whole experience and pushed me to be a better version of myself. To all colleagues, I thank them for treating me like an equal while sharing their expertise and making each day a collaborative and supportive experience. I would like to acknowledge the support of my academic advisor, Prof. Clara Sarmento, whose insights and suggestions were instrumental in shaping this report. I thank my friends for being patient and waiting for me across many borders, while I continually try to pursue my personal goals and dreams, and to those I made along the way, I feel gratitude for have shared this experience alongside them, who supported me and made me happy even on my most exhausting and discouraging of days – they became family away from home. Finally, I thank my family, who has always been a source of unconditional support and love. Malta is a special place where a unique culture meets a wave of extreme interculturality. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to call it my temporary home. I could not have asked for a better experience, professionally and personally.

**Abstract:**

This internship report explores the role of hospitality as pathway for fostering intercultural understanding and competence, drawing on a three-month internship experience as a Front Office Agent at Noru Hotel Malta. Set in one of the most culturally diverse regions in Europe, the internship provided a unique opportunity to apply academic knowledge from the Master's in Intercultural Studies for Business in a real-world, service-oriented context. The report examines the theoretical foundations of intercultural hospitality, the dynamics of Malta's tourism industry, and the importance of cultural awareness, empathy, and adaptability in daily guest interactions. Through reflective analysis and real-life case studies, it highlights how personalized and culturally competent service can transform standard hotel procedures into meaningful experiences of cultural exchange. The experience also contributed significantly to personal and professional growth, reinforcing the idea that true hospitality goes beyond service, being a powerful tool for connection, understanding, and global citizenship.

**Key words:** Hospitality; Intercultural; Cultural Competence; Communication

## **Resumo:**

Este relatório de estágio explora o papel da hospitalidade como capaz de criar caminhos para promover a compreensão e a competência intercultural, com base numa experiência de estágio de três meses como Rececionista no Noru Hotel Malta. Situado em uma das regiões com maior diversidade cultural da Europa, o estágio proporcionou uma oportunidade única de aplicar o conhecimento académico adquirido no Mestrado em Estudos Interculturais para Negócios em um contexto real e orientado para o serviço ao cliente. O relatório examina os fundamentos teóricos da hospitalidade intercultural, a dinâmica da indústria do turismo de Malta e a importância da consciência cultural, da empatia e da adaptabilidade nas interações diárias com os hóspedes. Por meio de análises reflexivas e estudos de caso reais, destaca-se como um serviço personalizado e culturalmente competente pode transformar os procedimentos padrão da indústria em experiências significativas de intercâmbio cultural. A experiência também contribuiu significativamente para o meu crescimento pessoal e profissional, reforçando a ideia de que a verdadeira hospitalidade vai além do serviço, sendo uma ferramenta poderosa de conexão, compreensão e cidadania global.

**Palavras chave:** Hospitalidade; Intercultural; Competência Cultural; Comunicação

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## INTRODUCTION

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The present report provides an in-depth examination of my internship experience at Noru Hotel, a boutique hospitality establishment known for its blend of contemporary design and culturally attuned guest services. Located in an internationally vibrant setting in Malta, Noru Hotel offered an ideal environment to deepen my understanding of intercultural communication and professional interaction in a globalized industry. This internship was completed as part of the requirements for my Master's Degree in Intercultural Studies for Business, a programme dedicated to exploring the intersections of cultural diversity, communication strategies, and international business practices. My decision to intern at Noru Hotel was motivated by a strong interest in the hospitality industry and a desire to translate academic knowledge of intercultural theory into practical, real-world experience. The front desk position provided a unique vantage point from which to observe and engage with guests from diverse cultural backgrounds, while also navigating the internal dynamics of a multicultural staff team. Pursuing an internship in Malta meant that I would be fully immersed in a fast paced and multicultural environment, with ideal conditions to test and develop my intercultural skills. This role required the daily application of cross-cultural communication skills, adaptability, notions of international business and problem solving, core competencies of my academic training.

The report aims to analyze the internship experience with precision, more specifically how the hospitality industry is a powerhouse for developing cultural competence and enhance intercultural relations. To fulfill that goal, this report will focus on theorizing the concepts related to the study, before presenting the industry of hospitality in Malta. This will be followed by the empirical analysis of the internship as a connector between the Master's degree in Intercultural Studies for Business, the impact of hospitality in intercultural relations and the relevance of the internship for both matters. The report aims to portray and justify why hospitality, as a way of being and establishing a host-guest relation, is the missing piece of the hospitality industry (Dolce 2018). While this report seeks to provide meaningful insights into the power of hospitality in enhancing intercultural relations, certain limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, it was

challenging to find strong theoretical research on the interdisciplinarity connection between interculturality, hospitality and cultural competence. The literature available lacked significantly on showing a studied correlation between these essential concepts. For this reason, I resorted partly to Ted Talks by professionals of the hospitality field to provide useful empirical insights about the matter of this report in a multidisciplinary way. Moreover, the empirical analysis is shaped primarily by my perspective as an employee in the role of front office agent, which naturally limits the scope to personal experiences and observations rather than providing a comprehensive organizational overview. Furthermore, the internship lasted only three months, which did not allow me to gain a full picture of the hospitality industry across an entire year. Instead, my experience was confined to the transition from the end of the low season to the beginning of the high season, meaning that important dynamics, such as staff performance and guest interactions during peak demand or long-term service adjustments, could not be fully experienced and, therefore, assessed. Additionally, the report relies largely on qualitative reflections rather than extensive quantitative data, which may reduce the generalizability of its findings. Finally, cultural exchanges and intercultural relations within the hotel environment were observed in a specific setting, Malta, and one particular establishment, Noru Hotel, which might limit the conclusions to other regions or hospitality contexts. Overall, one must note this is a personal experience, that while backed by theoretical perspectives, is limited to one's empirical data. However, despite these limitations, the internship also presented strengths that add value to this study. Experiencing the role of a front office agent firsthand offered an authentic and practical understanding of how hospitality practices influence intercultural relations on a daily basis. The timing of the internship, situated at the intersection of low and high season, provided the opportunity to observe the contrast between quieter and slower periods and the rapid intensification of guest interactions and staff responsibilities, offering valuable learnings about adaptability and service delivery under changing circumstances. Moreover, being immersed in a highly multicultural environment such as Malta, where both coworkers and guests came from diverse backgrounds, enriched the analysis by highlighting concrete examples of intercultural communication, its challenges, and opportunities.

In this report, I examine theoretical approaches that explore the concept of hospitality in an intercultural context, as well as the impact one has on the other. I also explore the role of service and experience in cultural exchange and how hospitality

enhances cultural understanding. I provide a contextualization of the hospitality sector in Malta, as well as in St. Julians and an in-depth description of Noru Hotel, regarding its history, mission and organizational structure and activities. This will be followed by a contextualization of the internship placement context and a detailed description of the daily responsibilities and tasks as a front office agent. Moreover, I reflect on the challenges I face, as well as key learnings and personal development, while also providing real-life examples from the internship to illustrate some of those. I relate my internship experience with knowledge I acquired during my Master's degree and create a solid conclusion that includes all aspects of both my research and my internship experience.

Chapter 1 is divided into two main parts. The first section, *Defining Hospitality in an Intercultural Context*, examines how hospitality has been conceptualized historically and academically. It discusses views that define hospitality as a form of exchange between host and guest, while also questioning whether commercial hospitality can truly reflect genuine reciprocity. Other scholars, such as Dolce and Guidara, highlight the distinction between service and hospitality, stressing that service alone represents a transactional act, while hospitality involves human connection, empathy, and anticipation of both expressed and unexpressed guest needs. The discussion also incorporates insights from studies showing that customer satisfaction is not sufficient for loyalty, but personalized, friendly, and culturally sensitive interactions are essential for long-term success. This section further situates hospitality within the context of globalization, underlining how increasing cultural diversity in tourism transforms hotels into intercultural spaces where dialogue, recognition, and adaptation are indispensable. The concepts of multiculturalism and interculturalism are analyzed, with emphasis on the need for dialogue and reciprocity to move from simple coexistence toward meaningful inclusion and mutual understanding. The second section, *The Impact of Hospitality on Intercultural Relations*, focuses on how hospitality functions as a platform for cultural exchange and the development of intercultural competence. It introduces the idea of the host-guest relationship as a form of regulated reciprocity that requires sensitivity, communication, and cultural skills. Cultural competence is presented as a combination of knowledge, attitudes, and skills that enable, in this context, hospitality professionals to respond effectively to guests from diverse backgrounds, creating memorable experiences and strengthening customer loyalty. The section highlights how hotels, with both multicultural staff and multicultural guests, serve as unique spaces where cultural

differences can both create challenges and foster empathy and dialogue. Practical strategies for developing intercultural competence such as training, cultural immersion, and inclusive policies are discussed as crucial for business sustainability and for turning service into an act of cultural mediation. This section frames hospitality not just as an economic activity but also as a human-centered practice that contributes to intercultural understanding, cultural identity building, and greater social cohesion in a globalized society.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the broader context in which the internship took place, focusing on the Maltese hospitality industry, the rise of media tourism, the role of St. Julian's as a tourism hub, and the specific case of Noru Hotel. The first section, *Hospitality Industry in Malta*, introduces Malta as a Mediterranean destination that combines natural beauty, a rich historical heritage, and cultural diversity. With over 300 days of sunshine, several UNESCO World Heritage sites, and a growing reputation for festivals and outdoor activities, Malta has positioned itself as a major tourism destination. The chapter highlights how tourism has become central to Malta's economy, representing over a quarter of its GDP and employment, while also attracting diverse visitors from across Europe and beyond. Recent trends are analyzed, such as the growing number of inbound tourists, the extension of average stays, and the increasing influence of English-learning schools, business travel, and exchange programs. At the same time, the chapter acknowledges challenges, including inflation shifts in spending power that push tourists toward more budget-friendly accommodations. The section also emphasizes Malta's multidimensional tourism profile, combining sun and beach, cultural heritage, religious tourism, and the rapidly growing field of film and media tourism. The second section, *Media Tourism and the Experience Economy in Malta*, explores how Malta has successfully leveraged its cinematic appeal to attract visitors. Since the early 2000s, international productions like *World War Z*, *Munich*, and *Game of Thrones* have transformed Malta into a film tourism destination. The section discusses the infrastructure supporting this development, such as the Malta Film Commission, modern studios, and financial incentives, as well as the immersive experiences offered to visitors such as guided tours, themed events, and cultural branding. The Popeye Village is presented as a key example of how a temporary film set was reused for a permanent attraction, embodying the experience economy by transforming cinematic fiction into lasting tourist experiences. The third section, *Hospitality Industry in St. Julian's*, narrows the focus to

the town that serves as one of Malta's main tourism centers. St. Julian's is presented as a vibrant destination, famous for its nightlife in Paceville, its dense concentration of hotels and accommodations, and its role as a base from which tourists explore the rest of the island. The chapter highlights how its strategic location, modern infrastructure, and reputation as a hub for gaming, language schools, and international business are a magnet for both leisure and corporate tourism. With nearly 50 officially registered hotels and countless additional accommodations, St. Julian's surpasses the capital Valletta in hospitality offerings, consolidating its status as Malta's "tourism Mecca." The final section, *Noru Hotel*, brings the context to the specific establishment of the internship. Noru is a four-star hotel in St. Julian's that strives to provide five-star service through its motto, "Nihil Nisi Optimum – Nothing but the Best is Good Enough." The chapter details the hotel's structure, amenities, and departmental organization, showing how its operations reflect the dynamics of a modern hospitality business. With 83 rooms, multiple restaurants and bars, wellness facilities, conference spaces, and rooftop entertainment, Noru positions itself as a competitive player in Malta's market. What makes Noru particularly relevant is its intercultural dimension. Its staff represents a wide range of nationalities and languages, creating a workplace that mirrors the diversity of Malta. Above all, Noru Hotel's emphasis on intercultural competence and inclusivity aligns directly with the broader theme of hospitality as a platform for enhancing intercultural relations, making it an ideal setting for the internship.

Chapter 3 provides an account of the internship experience, covering the decision-making process behind the choice of placement, the activities and responsibilities performed, the daily procedures of a front office agent, the challenges faced, and the key lessons learned. It also includes detailed real-life examples, reflections on the relevance of the internship for future career goals, and the application of academic skills acquired during the Master's degree. The first section, *Description of the Internship Placement*, outlines the motivations for pursuing an internship instead of a dissertation or project. The decision was driven by the desire to complement theoretical knowledge with hands-on professional practice in a highly intercultural environment. Malta, being a diverse touristic destination, was selected as the ideal context, and Noru Hotel provided a dynamic setting to pursue these goals. The second section, *Daily Activities and Responsibilities*, describes the wide range of tasks as a front office agent. Core duties included welcoming and checking in guests, processing payments, handling reservations,

coordinating with housekeeping and maintenance, managing complaints, and promoting hotel services. Additionally, the front office acted as a hub for other departments, assisting in areas such as reservations, HR, accounting, and logistics. These responsibilities highlighted the centrality of the front office as both an operational and intercultural bridge within the hotel. The third section, *Standard Daily Procedures*, details the rhythms of morning and evening shifts, from managing check-outs and arrivals to managing reservations with online travel agencies, preparing group reservations, and coordinating with staff. Beyond routine processes, the unpredictability of hospitality required constant adaptability, with cultural awareness and interpersonal skills proving essential in resolving unexpected issues. The fourth section, *Challenges Faced and Key Learnings*, reflects on the obstacles faced, including guest complaints, cultural barriers, technical limitations, and the pressures of peak operation hours. Overcoming these challenges required empathy, resilience, problem-solving, and teamwork, while also reinforcing the importance of intercultural sensitivity in guest interactions and staff collaboration. The subsection, *Real-Life Examples from the Internship*, presents concrete cases that illustrate how intercultural communication and hospitality intersected in practice. These cases illustrate how language acts as a tool to create a safe and inviting environment, how language barriers arise within multicultural teams, how people have different needs, how there is not “one solution fits all”, and how cultural competence creates a more familiar and inviting environment. The fifth section, *The Relevance of this Experience for Future Career Goals*, emphasizes how the internship was as preparation for a career in international relations, diplomacy, and strategic communication. Skills such as multilingual communication, intercultural mediation, teamwork, negotiation, problem-solving under pressure, and data-driven decision-making were reinforced. The experience highlighted the highly transferability of hospitality skills to broader global contexts where the skills acquired are central. The sixth section, *Application of Skills Acquired During the Master’s Degree*, joins theory with practice. The courses on English, German, and Chinese Culture for Business were valuable when dealing with international guests, while Intercultural Economic Relations and Culture for Development provided useful perspectives to see tourism as both an opportunity and a challenge for cultural sustainability. In addition, what I learned about intercultural competence, nation branding, and corporate communication was directly applicable to my daily work at the front office. Moreover, the semester abroad in Poland provided crucial preparation,

fostering adaptability, cultural knowledge, and empathy by experiencing life as a “guest” in an unfamiliar setting.

In conclusion, Chapter 3 highlights the transformative nature of the internship at Noru Hotel Malta. It was not only a practical training in hospitality operations but also a deep intercultural experience, where academic knowledge, personal growth, and professional skills intersected. The experience demonstrated how technical, interpersonal, and intercultural competences converge in the hospitality industry, preparing the intern for future roles in international and multicultural contexts.

### 1. Defining Hospitality in an Intercultural Context

According to Slattery's study "Finding the Hospitality Industry", *the basic function of hospitality is to establish a relationship or to promote exchange of goods and services, both material and symbolic, between those who give hospitality (hosts) and those who receive it (guests), with one of the principal functions of any act of hospitality being the consolidation of the recognition that hosts and guests share the same moral universe, in which both host and guest agree to belong.* Slattery reinforces the idea that hospitality should be studied rather as a social phenomenon involving relations between people (including in contexts of private domain), rather than just the goods and/or services exchange between host and guest (Slattery, 2002, p. 22). *Hospitality is considered to be one of the oldest businesses, as one can trace its origins to biblical times with innkeepers and taverns becoming a common part of daily life.* The term *hospitality* spread across Europe in the late 1800s when travelling to the Swiss Alps became a popular trend among the wealthy society. Willing to spend their wealth in leisure and wellness, these tourists had high expectations for the kind of product and service they were provided, which made a welcoming hospitality behavior an integral part of businesses such as hotels, restaurants, spas, etc. but also an important field of study, for both a theoretical purpose and a practical one. (EHL Hospitality Business School, n.d). However, such mentioned definition of hospitality, while providing a useful expression of the activities associated with the term "hospitality", can present a limited idea of its essence, while limiting its intellectual possibilities as well (Lynch, et al., 2011, p. 9). Slattery's, mostly explores hospitality as an economic activity where hosts and guests change interactions for commercial purposes. According to Slattery (2002, p. 22) of the analysis of the hospitality industry, the concept of hospitality in the commercial domain is narrowed into expressing an exchange between host and guest that does not imply true hospitality, due to the monetary surplus goal of the exchange. Giving this, Slattery both expresses a useful definition of hospitality in terms of describing its basic activity, while also criticizing how limited that definition is by not including the human aspect of it. He questions if hospitality is viewed as the host making the guest feel genuinely wanted and welcomed, or if it makes them feel wanted and welcomed as a customer, in which the latter might imply a poorly performed reciprocity from the guest's side who is assumed to respond to hospitality with

monetary reward (that most of the times would be given despite any nuance of hospitality because the good or service delivered requires it). In this scenario the reciprocity would mostly rely on the financial reward. It is stated that the commercial domain condemns the hospitality business because it is a business (Slattery, 2002, p. 22). This raises the question: is good hospitality translated into the reciprocity of the relationship between host and guest, one that produces well rated feelings amongst each party? Dolce assumes that a commercial transaction is not the same as hospitality and that the concept of hospitality is way broader and relates more to the level of humanity existent in the transaction itself. She does not rely on defining hospitality based on its basic function. Dolce (2018) states that service is not the same as hospitality and that service without hospitality is merely a transaction, which in business strategy does not translate into sustainable success. Most businesses in the hospitality sector train employees to deliver what Dolce (2018) calls “service by default”, which represents discourses and behaviors used towards efficiently performing an economic transaction. Due to a mentality focused on the profit and the economic results, hospitality is considered to be the missing piece of the hospitality industry. This statement assumes that hospitality is a term that goes way beyond the previous definition. Dolce (2018) defines hospitality as the positive emotional response elicited in the guest while delivering a service. She categorizes service as a skill and hospitality as the spirit; service what one does for the guest and hospitality what one does with them; service as delivering the needs and wants of the guest and hospitality as anticipating expressed and unexpressed needs and wants of the guest. This means that service is a methodical action while hospitality is dynamic, human, hopeful, open-hearted and generous, and therefore more personalized. A study conducted by the Vanderbilt University showed that over 40 percent of satisfied customers do not return to a business. The customer expects their needs to be satisfied when spending money on a business, meaning that being satisfied is the minimum they expect but not enough to make a business worth returning to. According to the 2024 ACA Study (Achieving Customer Amazement), researched by Shep Hyken, customers are more likely to come back to a business based on the following needs being met: helpful employees (1), knowledgeable employees (2), friendly employees (3), a convenient experience (4). On the other hand, 81% of customers stated they would not come back to a business where employees treated them with rudeness or even apathy. This study shows that a robotic and default service performance makes the customer feel alienated from the experience, once again reinforcing the idea that service must be delivered empathetically, personalized and

overall, more human. Customer service is more important than ever. Humans are wired to crave to be seen and acknowledged, and as humans delivering a service there is no better way to do hospitality than by acknowledging the humanness in the guest, instead of treating them as a means for a business result (Dolce, 2018). One does so by making the guest feel understood, welcomed and by giving them a sense of genuine belonging. The hospitality worker, to succeed at their role, should incorporate the mentality of serving people memories, not just services, and for that it is crucial that the worker is present in the moment and grounded with the people they are serving. The worker should treat the guest not as a commodity but as a unique individual (Guidara, 2023). The psychology of hospitality manifests itself on the guest, occurring when the staff shows understanding of the desires and problems of the guest, especially anticipated ones. If the guest notices this, it means the staff took into account their fears, making them feel respected, which in turn will give back in gratitude and pleasure (Tranchenko et al., 2021, p. 142). Hospitality is becoming more and more essential as the world's economy is mainly service oriented. For instance, in 2021 in Europe the service sector represented 73% of the GVA (gross value added), the largest activity in Europe's economy (Eurostat, 2021). By maneuvering hospitality into its full potential, it is possible to take the service industry to the next level and create sustainable success, customer satisfaction and a more empathetic economy, remembering that "one size fits one" (Guidara, 2023).

In this context, realizing the full potential of hospitality also requires acknowledging how global dynamics shape the way services are delivered and experienced, especially considering the great level of globalization and the opportunities that lay in multicultural settings. Globalization has introduced in the hospitality and tourism industry unparalleled transformations. Globalization translates to the great level of interdependence between nations that share high numbers of movement of people, goods, services, information and capital, which has greatly impacted every aspect of everyday life. It is reflected in the rising tourism numbers all over the world and it has brought the hospitality sector several challenges but also opportunities for development, success and inclusion. The hospitality industry is presented with the responsibility of bringing people together in the global community. Globalization turns the hospitality's imaginarium into a multicultural arena (Ghimire, 2009, pp. 4-9), with potential for developing intercultural competence.

This multicultural arena inevitably raises questions about how diversity is managed, leading to the theorization of the concepts of multiculturalism and interculturalism, in which each term adopts its own conception of unity, equality and solidarity. This different analysis often leads to contested and controversial interpretations regarding integration and the function of democratic public places (Kastoryano, 2018, p. 2). In a general way, multicultural refers to a setting that includes several cultural or ethnic groups. In this setting, people live alongside one another, but each cultural group does not necessarily have engaging interactions with each other. Intercultural is defined as communities in which there is a deep understanding and respect for all cultures in it. Intercultural communication focuses on the mutual exchange of ideas and cultural norms and the development of deep relationships. In an intercultural society, no one is left unchanged because everyone learns from one another and grows together (Schriefer, 2016). Interculturalism is often put on the opposing side to the concept of multiculturalism and many times theorized as being a post multiculturalist concept. Interculturalism is assumed to be a result of contact based societal relations that lead to mutual belonging of nationals and non-nationals, which is considered to challenge the idea of national identity at times, in which the latter becomes a more dynamic concept. The main argument for interculturalism being a post-multiculturalism concept is set on the importance of dialogue among cultures to create a sense of reciprocity which then leads to a more cohesive society, more likely to engage with solidarity towards minorities. While a multicultural setting refers to the recognition of the coexistence of separate groups, interculturalism is concerned with the inclusion of these different groups, protecting the idea that reciprocal relations between the collective brings overall more benefit for that same collective. The most transformative tool for a successful intercultural setting is therefore based on contact and dialogue, in which elements of reciprocity such as recognition and understanding are indispensable for building foundations of trust (Kastoryano, 2018, pp. 5-9).

To create memorable experiences and well delivered services that strive for sustainable success in the hospitality industry within such multicultural settings, intercultural competences are a must. Intercultural dialogue (ICD) stands as the process of communication, interaction and exchange of ideas having as the baseline equality, respect and mutual understanding (Mansouri & Elias, 2021, p. 411). So, in an extremely globalized era where mass tourism is an on-going trend among societies, the hospitality

industry has the opportunity and challenge of delivering a service that is not only personalized but that also reflects intercultural competences. According to Grillo (2017, p. 8), the idea of dialogue at the heart of interculturalism does not refer simply to people from different cultures talking to each other in whatever language, with or without interpreters, but to those people who are talking to each other about each other's culture and society. That said, the implications of dialogue for social and political action must be recognized and considered, as intercultural dialogue entails acts of translation, interpretation and, especially, understanding. This is useful in mapping the values and practices of others, while being able to extract meaning from them. Intercultural dialogue is important from a standard view of humans interacting individually, but it gains even more meaning with the clash of societies and the clash of values and views when observing different cultures interacting in the interconnected modern world. Undoubtedly, intercultural dialogue is not free of its challenges. It assumes a possible encounter of many practical difficulties such as language differences, structural inequalities, xenophobia, etc, but those difficulties embrace the fact that acquiring intercultural competences would be of considerable importance (Grillo, 2017, p. 29).

In the context of hospitality, hotels emerge as major cultural melting pot spaces, where people from all over the world cross paths daily. Each guest arrives with their set of cultural elements such as habits, languages, traditions, and expectations. They have different ways of greeting, different meal schedules, different dress codes, different body language standards and different resting habits (Lynch, et al., 2011, p. 4-6). The staff of the hotel must adapt the services to embrace this diversity while maintaining consistent quality. At the same time, hotel staff is also often multicultural, which enriches the workplace with varied perspectives and communication styles. However, these differences also require intercultural competences such as flexibility, empathy, and sensitivity. In this melting pot state, the hotel becomes a hub of exchange, where the multicultural environment can often foster dialogue, and, therefore, mutual understanding. A hotel is able to transcend its role as a mere place to sleep, possibly becoming a global gathering point, where hospitality is practiced through the ability to recognize, embrace, and celebrate cultural differences in every interaction (Lashley, 2017, pp. 2-6).

When abroad, the tourist is presented with the opportunity to explore the nuances of the collision of their own culture and the culture of the country the tourist is visiting,

which includes the service and hospitality culture. Culture of service is the extent of excellence of the service in psychological, aesthetic, ethical, organizational and technological aspects. It expresses the communicative features that provide tourists with the maximum possible level of comfort. The hospitality sector can sometimes opt for a culture of service that includes methods to try to compensate the cultural shock the tourist might feel when in a foreign country. Tranchenko et al., recognize this method as a common trend among the hospitality sectors. This method implies trying to achieve and adopt a standard recognizable culture of service and business etiquette, like recognizable greeting costumes, menus or even interior designs. However, it is also recognized that there is a need to develop an optimal model of interaction between national and international parameters of the service culture, in order to achieve better results for the guest, in terms of offering enough familiarity and comfort while also providing cultural exchange and immersion (Tranchenko et al., 2021, p. 135).

Hospitality has become a dynamic exchange where service and experiences convert into pathways for cross-cultural encounters and intercultural understanding. Hotels have the power to introduce guests to new traditions, cultures of service, and the culture of the hosting community, while still curating a personalized service. *Hôte* – latin word for hotel – means both guest and host, expressing the intertwined and dependent relation between the two. Hotels are the places that recognize and set the stage for the interplay between host and guest. By framing hospitality as an active collaboration between host and visitor, hotels transform stays into living stages for cultural exchange by promoting cultural dialogue, forging empathy and mutual respect that outlive any single trip (Wavra, 2024). Hospitality workers in the tourism sector are essential players in this cultural exchange. They act as cultural mediators, by standing at the intersection between a guest's expectations and culture and the host environment. Hosts have the role of establishing effective communication, by translating languages but also social norms, expectations, and customs, many times unspoken, leaving the host the responsibility to anticipate and adapt rapidly (Lynch, et al., 2011). This mediation might include being the bridge for the guest to understand local customs but still adapting the service to the cultural expectations of the guest, as well as directly translating and interpreting the guest's language and other communicative elements, communicating guest's needs between staff to avoid miscommunication, and resolving misunderstandings or possible issues that might arise. Hospitality professionals can create a space where cultural

differences are elements that enrich the stay, by using them to create memorable service quality and establish a good dynamic relation host-guest. In doing so, they transform ordinary service, or a service by default, into an act of cultural exchange and mutual understanding. Wali (2017) advocates that people are human first and hoteliers second, meaning that human connection skills come before any technical or business knowledge, which should be a fact translated into any business practice, especially in the field of hospitality, as that is the key to success.

Tourism activities enable people to experience an unknown culture with peculiar elements and forms of behavior, making the guest inevitably compare them to their own culture. This contributes to one's cultural identity. That is why the internal motives of a person for touristic activities are not only to explore new places but also to know themselves better through reflection and distinction from the host's culture. Mediated by tourism, the guest experiences different socio-cultural practices distant from work and home. In these conditions tourism represents the most relevant factor of mobility and contributes to the understanding of people and countries, aiding in the identification of an individual and to cultural exchange. This understanding of another culture is one of the factors that may help overcome the fragmentation of the modern world, since learning how to navigate a multicultural and interconnected society is becoming more and more important. Tourism is therefore considered a positive stimulus for the development of society, helping the interconnected world become more civilized. Cultural, ethnic, and religious types of tourism today are extremely important as forms of cultural exchange, as they are stimulating factors for erasing contradictions and misunderstandings. Emphasizing the cultural diversity of the modern world, expressed partly in the tourist movement and the important role of hospitality, contributes to the establishment of a civilized human interaction in the globalized world we live in (Chistyakova, 2019, pp.1-4).

## **2. The Impact of Hospitality on Intercultural Relations**

“The unity of nearness and remoteness involved in every human relation is organized in the phenomena of the stranger, in a way which may be most briefly formulated by saying that in the relationship to him, distance means that he, who is close by, is far, and strangeness means that he, who is also far, is actually near. For, to be a

stranger is naturally a very positive relation; it is a specific form of interaction” (Grit, 2010, p. 62). The interplay between the host and the guest has opportunity for difference, openness and sameness. The hospitality arena thinks openings, recognition and acknowledgement. It is argued that hospitality is a space to open boundaries without totally abolishing them. The guest needs to be given this space in the hospitality where he is provided recognition. In the strange social, cultural, institutional, ethical and political spaces seek by the tourist, people can learn to engage with and learn from each other, in a democratic way. There is importance in the possibility recognition as well as contestation and conflict, as it creates space for understanding. Hospitality opens a space and forms of exchange that allow for encounter yet does not extinguish the obligations that must be noticed and noted for hospitality to come into being and to subsist. Hospitality is a response to the arrival of a “other” and implies a certain form of reciprocity. In this sense, hospitality intervenes as a regulatory factor in the obligation of the guest towards the host and the host towards the guest. This mutual pact, though promising, cannot be considered to be assured by hospitality. It is achieved by competence, which calls for intercultural skills (Grit, 2010, pp. 61-63).

Cultural competency is essential in hospitality because it is expected that guests from diverse backgrounds will be welcomed and cared for. Service providers are key in creating memorable experiences for guests. The service should provide a combination of cultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills that can create memorable service while always acknowledging cultural values. According to Kivel (2007, pp. 1-5), cultural competency is the ability to understand another culture well enough to be able to communicate and work with people from that another culture. He theorizes that one is culturally competent in its own culture, meaning one masters the language, the nuances and the assumptions of how the world is defined and organized, including knowledge about how to behave towards solving arising issues or disagreements based on the cultural rules. In one’s culture, one knows what their role is, how one should behave regarding cultural expectations imposed by the context one is part of. Therefore, multicultural competence is fluency in more than one culture, which is, without a doubt, complex. Cultures are based on specific identities, geographies, beliefs and daily practices and culture establishes a role to be portrayed alongside other societal expectations based on gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, physical ability, work and family. Multicultural settings require cultural competence to communicate with one another for an effective process of

creating a healthy intercultural environment. It is a complex process, not because of its level of difficulty, but because it requires time and energy as well as an open mind. Creating cultural competence is learning to observe, empathize and appreciate other people's ways of doing things. Kivel states that the more culturally competent a person is in other cultures besides their own, the broader, richer, and more accurate their view of the world is. Alongside that, those that are able to work with others as full and equal partners, therefore providing healthier and more productive multicultural settings, have the full potential to turn coexistence into intercultural relations. Cultural competence is not something one has, it is something one acquires through the process of learning about other cultures and becoming allies with them by not asserting cultural dominance. The key element to become more culturally competent is by respecting other's culture, such as the ways others live and organize the world as well as the openness to learn from them. Moreover, Kivel assumes that part of being multiculturally competent is realizing the limits of our understanding. Cultural competence should make people less arrogant and more inclusive. As one becomes multiculturally competent, one increases the effectiveness in working with diverse populations (Kivel, 2007, pp. 1-5).

According to Hsiao et al. (2023), cultural competencies relate to one's sensitivity to other cultural values and biases. Employees with cultural competency should be able to respect cultural values, which helps developing a good relationship with customers. Furthermore, cultural knowledge refers to the knowledge of worldviews, norms, and expectations of the customer. Seeing employees with reasonable knowledge of their culture can facilitate positive exchanges and pleasant service experiences. Cultural skills stand as the ability to show culturally sensibility, empathy, adaptability, and/or responsiveness, in cross-cultural interactions, and embedding them in the service delivery. These capacities help bridge cultural gaps between customers and employees. Moreover, *cultural competency creates the possibility for enhanced reciprocity between guests and employees* due to the increased guest gratitude that results from respectful, sincere and positive service exchanges. These elements easily lead to business success as well, as it originates customer gratitude and loyalty. This is highly relevant in hospitality settings. Employees are often encouraged to "go the extra mile" and perform beyond their job description and responsibilities. A person with high levels of cultural awareness is more likely to be able to respond and anticipate customer's diverse needs, and, overall, customers appreciate culturally respectful acknowledgment from employees and respond

positively (Hsiao et al., 2023, pp. 555-556). The creation of intercultural spaces, where skills of empathy and open-mindedness evolve into a state of cultural understanding, is very important not only in the hospitality sector but also in the overall function of a society that is so interconnected and interdependent. In this sense, tourism has the opportunity to embrace the multicultural and enhance this reality, creating truly intercultural relations. Developing intercultural competence will not only affect work performance but the general individual.

The Harri Insider Team on “Understanding Cultural Competence in Hotel and Restaurant Management” state that the importance of cultural competence in hospitality derives a great amount from the nature of the business itself. Embracing cultural competence in hospitality significantly impacts the guest experience and the workplace environment. More specifically, hotels often detain a culturally diverse staff, while their main objective is to successfully host people from different parts of the world with different cultures. It is more than important, it is crucial. A business in the hospitality sector cannot thrive without a culturally competent staff and environment. By understanding and respecting cultural differences, hospitality professionals are equipped to provide personalized and exceptional services to all guests. Cultural competence is the key to tailor the business’s offerings, communication styles, and services towards meeting specific needs and preferences of different cultural groups. Normally, an adapted and competent service will enhance guest experiences, increase customer loyalty, create positive establishment reputation and a wider customer base, while attracting new market segments. Harri’s article shares that strategies to build cultural competence in the workplace can include: a) provide training programs that educate employees on different cultures, costumes, communication styles, languages and how to actively listen and engage accordingly and respectfully; b) organizing cultural immersion experiences for employees; c) implement inclusive policies that promote diversity and respect for all employees and guests, such as dietary or religious options and adaptations; d) foster diversity among the staff members; e) establish a system of feedback and evaluation according to hands-on experiences; f) collaborate with different local cultural organizations or community groups to promote cultural exchange and inclusivity (Harri, 2024).

According to Godfrey (2024), in hospitality, the experience is everything. Due to its business purpose, in hotels, “the stay” is the product and the purchase. It is not a

tangible product, and therefore its value is translated into the value of the experience, which might differ from person to person, from group to group, according to their specific needs and expectations, namely due to their cultural backgrounds, among other factors. Although many travel to experience a new or different culture, which adds value and novelty to the experience, the temporary displacement can create disorientation on the guest, due to the exposure to habits that can be very different from their own. Employees of the hospitality industry have, then, the responsibility of delivering the product – “the stay” – by addressing guests with cultural competence to help them overcome feelings of displacement. By engaging emotionally, hosts positively influence the overall guest experience, making the guest feel welcomed, at ease, increasing their satisfaction and building loyalty. The hotel, however, has an identity, essentially due to its geographical location, meaning it also carries cultural meanings, despite every cultural adaptation. It has its own sense of place. Recognition of the culture of the guest comes in more subtle ways but with the ability to transform the guest experience powerfully. Being culturally competent with a guest translates into how a member of staff interacts with a guest, before, during and after the stay. This includes adapting communication styles, showing respect and recognition and adapting circumstances to fit a guest’s standards and expectations. An employee should always actively search to identify opportunities to meet specific cultural needs and do gestures that show one cares, while still being able to positively surprise and do beyond expected as well. Godfrey portrays examples of the above mentioned, such as being sensible to dietary restrictions, appreciating how culture affects meaning and emotional responses to sensory stimuli, what is lucky or unlucky in respect to numbers and colors, being aware of how a guest responds to uncertainty and how they define their need for systems, processes, order, and reassurance. Culturally competent professionals are aware of guests’ reliance on tangible evidence versus intangibles, their concern for health and safety, their openness to new products, the search for novelty or adventure, their feelings towards individualistic or collectivistic activities and settings, or their tolerance for risk or ambiguity. Godfrey also highlights communication competence as being able to interpret not only what is being said, but also what is unsaid, including understanding the context and the non-verbal communication, such interpreting facial expressions, gestures and changes in vocalics. However, identifying is not enough, one must also have the knowledge and skills to respond in a way that is appropriate and understandable for the guest. Attitudes might otherwise result in misunderstandings on both sides. Moreover, it is also important to keep in mind

that everyone is different, putting aside their cultural backgrounds. Being attentive to individual differences based on their personality, background, family environment and upbringing, as well as their specific situation or context, is also important. The context for their travels, who are they travelling with, for what reason, these are all crucial for the host to adapt their approach (Godfrey, 2024). These different layers of understanding the guest are what makes hospitality a very complex business area, but also shows the endless possibilities of developing skills of cultural competence, such as adaptability, empathy and respect, which are all crucial for the healthy function of a globalized society.

## **CHAPTER II – CONTEXT OF THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN MALTA**

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### **1. Tourism and Hospitality in Malta**

Located in the heart of the Mediterranean Sea, Malta is a small island nation known for its rich history, stunning landscapes, and vibrant culture. Malta comprises three main islands, Malta, Gozo, and Comino, and the country offers a unique blend of historical and natural attractions that appeal to a wide range of tourists. With over 300 days of sunshine per year, crystal-clear waters, and well-preserved heritage sites, Malta is an ideal destination for both leisure and cultural tourism. The country offers an impressive array of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including the capital city Valletta and the Megalithic Temples and diverse architectural styles that reflect centuries of rule by various civilizations, from the Phoenicians and Romans to the Knights of St. John and the British. Visitors can also enjoy local festivals, mostly of religious nature, a lively culinary scene, and numerous outdoor activities such as diving, hiking, and sailing. Media tourism also attracts many tourists to the island. Media tourism is a form of niche travel driven by the desire to experience locations, attractions or narratives found in various media formats such as films, television series, books, video games or online content. It might include guided tours of filming locations, themed attractions, museums, or fan conventions. Media tourism can transform passive consumption of cultural products into on site experiences that have the potential to stimulate local economies (Garrison & Wallace, 2021). Malta has been the scenery for various widely known cinematographic pieces such as *Popeye* or *Game of Thrones*. This will be further explored in the next sector of this report.

These attributes make Malta a highly attractive destination for tourists seeking both relaxation and cultural enrichment. The tourism sector in Malta is growing rapidly each year. For that reason, the hospitality sector has greatly contributed to the country's economy. In 2022 Malta recorded a total of 2.29 million tourists, ranking 45th in the world in absolute terms, however considering the population of Malta and its size, when analyzing the picture in relation to the number of residents, the results showed a surprising number of 4.1 tourists per resident, situating Malta in 8th place in the world ranking (WorldData.info, 2025).

The percentage of inbound tourism has been rising every year in Malta. The country receives a majority of inbound tourists from Italy (547,991 in 2023), the UK (539,131 in 2023) and Spain (286,008 in 2023). Although studies show that the majority of these come from within Europe, the amount of tourists coming from other geographic spaces accounted for 571,256 in 2023, from a total of 2,975,670. These results, gathered by the Malta Tourism Authority, reflect the truly intercultural reality felt in Malta. Furthermore 1,238,827 of the total of inbound tourists in 2023, stayed in Malta for a period equal to 7 nights or more. These can be attributed to some factors such as business as the motive for travel, studying as the motive for travel (as Malta receives a great amount of temporary students for English learning schools like EF) and also to exchange programs. According to the Malta Tourism Authority the number of people coming to Malta to study English has risen 38.6% in 2023 (a total of 78,567 tourists in that same year). They stay an average of one month in Malta. They come mainly from Italy, Germany, France, Austria, Poland, Brazil and Spain (Malta Tourism Authority, 2023).

According to Institute of Tourism Studies Malta, Tourism and Hospitality cover 25% of employment and constitute 27.1% of the GDP contribution. Moreover, the total of tourist expenditure during 2023 were around 2.7 billion euros, making this sector a cornerstone for the economy and its continuous growth, as it has been shown by studies (SkillsPass, 2024). Furthermore, as stated by *Statista*, “Malta is expected to witness a significant rise in revenue for the Hotels market, reaching US\$15.43m by 2025. This projection indicates an estimated annual growth rate (CAGR 2025-2029) of 3.72%, which could result in a projected market volume of US\$17.85m by 2029. Additionally, the number of users in the Hotels market is expected to reach 78.48k users by 2029.” (Statista, 2025).

However, despite the rise in tourist numbers overall, studies show that there has been a decline in the average spending power of tourists due to high inflation rates. The tendency shown is that this loss of expenditure power has prompted many tourists to choose more budget-friendly accommodation, resulting in a shift in occupancy patterns across different hotel classes. For instance, tourists who would traditionally choose five-star hotels are now opting for four-star accommodations. Overall, this trend is putting pressure on the market to adapt its dynamics and pricing to match the profile of tourists entering the country (Central Bank of Malta, 2024). These are challenges that businesses

set in the international arena have to face, due to conditions that are set beyond the country's reality.

Malta can often be perceived only as a destination for enjoying summer activities, the gaming industry and the nightlife. However, Malta is a country very rich in culture which also greatly attracts those who come to visit. According to the Malta Tourism Authority, *Sun & Culture* is the primary motive (50,7%) attracting tourists. However, *Sun* alone accounts for only 16.2% of the motive and *Culture* for 10,8%, reflecting that the existence of good beaches and good weather is a great motive to visit a country but *Sun & Culture* combined creates a greater one. Happily, the tourist will find a wide range of sites and experiences that carry huge cultural significance (Malta Tourism Authority, 2023). Malta's cultural heritage tourism is anchored by its astonishing UNESCO World Heritage Sites and an impressive network of over 90 historic sites and museums curated by Heritage Malta. This includes Valletta's Baroque architecture, the Neolithic temples of Ġgantija and Hal-Saflieni Hypogeum (sometimes called the oldest freestanding temples in the world) and WWII-era shelters beneath Valletta (Heritage Malta, 2025). Malta offers a dive into seven thousand years of history, from prehistoric caves and megalithic worship to the legacy of the Knights of St. John, making Malta a living open-air museum. Malta also draws a religious tourism crowd, owing to its profound Christian heritage. Linked to the Apostle Paul, who shipwrecked on its shores in AD 60, the islands host ancient catacombs, medieval chapels, grand Baroque cathedrals, and trail networks rich with pilgrimage sites (Fava, Esparza, 2023). With events like the Feast of St. Paul's Shipwreck and Marian shrines across Gozo, the archipelago offers a spiritual journey through centuries of faith celebrated with processions, church art, and sacred architecture (AX Hotels Malta, n.d.). This aspect of Malta's identity appeals to devout pilgrims and cultural explorers alike. In recent years, media and film tourism has emerged as a dynamic trend, attracting film buffs and pop-culture fans from across the globe. Malta has been the set for blockbusters like *Jurassic World III*, *Gladiator II*, and even *Game of Thrones*, offering fans the chance to visit iconic filming locations such as Fort St Angelo, Mdina, and the intact Popeye Village (AX Hotels Malta, n.d.). As Euronews reports, productions like *Gladiator II* are sparking a surge in "set-jettlers" eager to recreate their on-screen adventure, reinforcing Malta's appeal to visitors from numerous cultural and cinematic communities. However, this also attracts curious tourists, as references such as the *Popeye* and *Game of Thrones* have been used for nation branding and have become must-sees

when visiting the country (Jones, 2024). As a result of these, cultural heritage, religious heritage, and film tourism each contribute to Malta's rich, multi-dimensional tourism scene, drawing diverse visitors from around the world.

## **2. Media tourism and Experience Economy in Malta**

Malta's cinematic potential was fully realized in the early 2000s when the Malta Film Commission (now a part of the Malta Tourism Authority) started aggressively courting international productions. Malta provides the perfect environment for filmmakers with modern facilities like the Mediterranean Film Studios, a competent and bilingual local crew, and a cash-rebate system that allows producers to reclaim up to 40 percent of qualified expenditures. In addition to bringing in over €30 million a year to support hotels, transportation, catering, and a variety of other services, projects like *Munich*, *World War Z*, *Captain Phillips*, and several seasons of *Game of Thrones* have also brought Malta's fortified cities and the coastal and rural landscapes to the attention of a worldwide audience. The prospects for media-tourism that go well beyond traditional sightseeing have naturally arisen as a result of this prolonged on-screen exposure. While fan conferences, pop-up sets, and themed exhibitions let fans to enter the worlds they have adored on television and cinema, there are also guided site excursions that take guests through Mdina's historic streets as "*King's Landing*" (*Game of Thrones* imaginary). The Tourism Authority and the Malta Film Commission collaborate on marketing strategies that use eye-catching on-screen images to appeal to culturally aware tourists looking for immersive experiences. Malta faces the dual challenges of controlling visitor flows in historic cores and making sure that local communities benefit from popular cultural tourism without being overtaken by it, even as it continues to professionalize its location-tour operators and create year-round "film heritage" itineraries. However, Malta's strategy, which combines financial incentives, top-notch infrastructure, and smart media-tourism programming, shows how modest destinations can turn movie's reputation into long-lasting travel interest (Vassallo, R. J., 2021). According to Beeton (2006), filmic imagery can impact a traveler differently when choosing a destination based on a specific film. Film tourism can be the primary motivation for travelling, it can take part of the holiday but not be the primary reason for travel, the itinerary of the travel can be fully based on touring different film locations, it can be celebrity film tourism, nostalgic

film tourism, constructed film tourism attraction, film tourism to places where the filming is only believed to have taken place, , film tourism to places where the narrative takes place but not filmed in, film studio tours, movie premiers and film festivals (Beeton, 2006). Malta attracts tourists for media tourism based on all of the mentioned above. Another impactful example is the Popeye Village that was originally constructed in 1979 as the film set for Robert Altman’s musical “Popeye” starring Robin Williams. It had not any cinematic function for many decades, and it has fully become a theme village devoted to tourism. The whimsical scenario that once served as the background for Popeye’s seaside adventures today house interactive exhibits, boat rides, live shows and children’s play areas. What began as a temporary movie set has been carefully preserved and repurposed to deliver an immersive experience: the paid entry grants access to a small museum on the film’s production history, a replica of Popeye’s house, and daily entertainment such as clown performances or sing-alongs. By retaining the original structures and incorporating them into visitor services such as ticket booths, souvenir shops and cafés, the site transforms a temporary fictional and magic scenario into a permanent attraction. In doing so, Popeye Village exemplifies how a film production can be re-imagined as a media-tourism destination. Tourists visit the Popeye Village, even if they did not see the film, because it has become a symbolic stop when touring Malta’s landscapes (Vassallo, R. J., 2021).

Today, when visiting Malta one can find *Game of Thrones* and *Popeye* themed souvenirs and tours. Tour operators and souvenir vendors lean heavily on these media-tourism symbols, offering everything from fridge magnets and mugs to guided “Game of Thrones only” bus tours and Popeye themed boat excursions. By doing so, Malta has taken these productions into its nation brand, serving as living advertisements for Malta’s versatility, heritage, and appeal.

### **3. Hospitality Industry in St. Julians**

St. Julians (San Ġiljan in Maltese) is a coastal town located on the northeastern shore of Malta. Known for its mix of historic charm and modern energy, it is a popular destination for both locals and tourists. Many refer to it as Malta’s Mekka for tourism-oriented businesses. The town features beautiful bays, a lively promenade, and a famous

nightlife district called Paceville. It has a wide range of hotels, restaurants, and entertainment options, serving as one of Malta's main tourism hubs, especially because it offers easy access to the rest of the island while maintaining its own dynamic atmosphere. St. Julians is additionally a prime location hub for offices and commercial operations in the service and retail industries. This is evidenced by its much sought-after properties for sale and letting. Additionally, the highest standard of real-estate property can be found in the location, with foreign investment being directly injected into St. Julian's properties and venues (Ellul, 2025).

Malta's population is heavily concentrated along the coast, particularly in towns like St. Julian's, which, despite covering an area of just 1.6 km<sup>2</sup>, is one of the most densely populated local councils in the country. Its coastal location, modern infrastructure, and vibrant lifestyle have made it a magnet not only for residents but also for tourists. In fact, the majority of visitors to Malta choose to stay in or around St. Julians due to its wide range of hotels, restaurants, nightlife options, and its central position that makes it easy to explore the rest of the island. According to the official San Ġiljan Local Council website, there are 48 hotels listed within St. Julians area (Saint Julian's Local Council, 2025). However, when including informal accommodations, sites like booking.com or Saint-Julian-Hotels.com show much larger figures. So, One can state that there are around 50 formally licensed hotels but up to hundreds of tourist accommodations when including apartments, guesthouses, hostels, and boutique hotels. This density reflects St Julians position as the island's main tourist hub, offering options for every budget and style. Moreover, considering the size of Malta and that the average area of the councils is around 4km<sup>2</sup>, tourists view St Julians as the primary choice of where to stay when visiting the country, since from St Julians they can easily access the rest of the country but still be situated in a lively touristic zone with a lot of options of where to stay, eat, what transport to use to commute, among other things. Although St. Julians has a lot of activity offer, it is usually viewed as the start and end point for the day, instead of being the main attraction of the trip. When compared with the city of Valletta, St. Julians offers more accommodation options, and it is not as isolated (geographically), making it, once again, an easier city to access other points of the rest of the island. These reasons compose the explanation to why St. Julians is stronger in the hospitality industry than the capital city.

#### 4. Noru Hotel Malta

Having explored the broader industry context in Malta and St. Julians, this next section focuses specifically on Noru Hotel, the setting where theory met the practice during my internship. Noru is a four star hotel located in St. Julian's, strategically placed in the commercial hub, surrounded by the leading language schools, offices, retail towers and the lively nightlife zone - Paceville. It opened its doors on the 21st of May of 2024, but despite being a recent business, in just a few days the hotel reached a 96.36% occupancy rate. The hotel is operated by Mediterranean Hospitality Management Limited<sup>1</sup>, whose managing director is Dr. Massimo J Ellul, who also stands as CEO of the hotel and Dr. Johann Debono. Noru stands as the first project of a business who wants to create several tourism properties in various European countries. Dr. Ellul states that what Noru Hotel strives to follow is creating a business that assures five-star service in a four-star operation. Michael Zammit Marmara, General Manager, adds that the motto of the hotel is "Nihil Nisi Optimum - Nothing but the Best is Good Enough" (Ellul, 2025).

The hotel presents 16 floors that offer the following amenities: 83 rooms available for booking distributed from the ground floor up until the 11th floor with the following categories: standard rooms, superior rooms with balcony, superior rooms with balcony and spa bath, triple rooms and executive suite; Boku Wa Bistro & Bar on the ground floor where both in-house and outside guests can enjoy a meal, a drink or a snack; Aikiron Restaurant located on the 12th floor where both in-house guests and outside guests can enjoy a meal with a scenic view; Puru Roof Bar on the 13th floor where guests can enjoy a rooftop environment with drinks, snacks, music, 360 degrees view and a pool; the -2 floor offers a relaxation area where clients have access to an indoor pool area, SPA services and a gym fitness area; located on the 1st floor there is a VIP/conference room used for staff meetings and briefings or to be rented for the use of business meetings, conferences or coffee breaks; -3 and -1 are floors dedicated for administrative and

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<sup>1</sup> Mediterranean Hospitality Management Limited offers management and marketing consultancy services. Dr. Ellul himself has been contracted to give consultancy services in the tourism and hospitality field of various countries such as Malta, Slovenia, Hungary, Singapore, The United Arab Emirates, The United Kingdom and the Sultanate of Oman

organizational activities of the hotel such as for: offices, staff canteen, garage and housekeeping, maintenance and food and beverage stores.

Noru Hotel is structured into several key departments that work together to ensure smooth operations and a high-quality guest experience. The departments are: Management, Administration, Maintenance, Housekeeping, Food & Beverage and Front Office. The Management Team is composed by the CEO, the General Manager, Duty Managers (Supervisors of each department). It oversees the overall strategy and coordination of all departments, ensuring that the hotel runs efficiently and meets its standards. The Administration Department is composed of an accountant, an accounts support officer and other two administrative assistants. It handles all day-to-day administration, human resources, stock control and accounting procedures. Maintenance has two technical experts and it is responsible for the upkeep of the building, equipment, and technical systems, ensuring everything is safe and in working order, by also performing inspections on the equipment, facilities and machinery on a daily basis. The Housekeeping team employs a good amount of workers who ensure the cleanliness and comfort in guest rooms and public areas, along with supervisors that ensure the linen is dispatched promptly to the hotel's laundry and dry-cleaning contractor. The Food and Beverage department is perhaps the most complex one, due to its organizational structure. The Boku Wa Bistro and Bar, located on the ground floor, has a team of 3 baristas/bartenders that handle its designed services, such as the morning shift coffee order's coming mostly from students of neighbor English Schools. Boku Wa Bistro and Bar share the kitchen brigade with Aikiron Restaurant, composed of one chef and two assistants, ensuring that both offer a four star meal service. Moreover, the Aikiron Restaurant team is subdivided into three teams: the kitchen brigade, as mentioned, the staff responsible for preparing and delivering a full English Breakfast to the residents on a daily basis and the team responsible for serving lunches, dinners to clients on the restaurant and rooftop pool bar. The Aikiron team is also responsible for the organization of events happening in the rooftop and both the restaurant and the Bistro and Bar. Finally, the Front Office is composed of six front office agents who deal with day and night shifts by handling being the first line of contact between the guests and the hotel, guest check-ins, check-outs, and general customer service. This department also manages the Reservations function, as there is no separate reservations department within the hotel. The whole team of Noru Hotel is composed of a total of 50 people. Hierarchically, each

department is managed by its according supervisor. All supervisors take turns as Duty Manager in a weekly roster, allowing for an organized structure of hierarchy in which each shift has a general operations supervisor connecting communications between all supervisors of all the departments. All departments are also connected by group chats for designated operations, to ensure smooth and continuous communication between all members of all teams.

The team at Noru Hotel is composed of individuals from diverse nationalities and cultural backgrounds such as Brazil, Colombia, Egypt, Georgia, Germany, India, Italy, Macedonia, Malta, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Portugal, and Spain, creating a truly intercultural work environment. The Noru Hotel Malta Experience book of presentation states that the languages spoken within the Noru team are: Arabic, Chinese, Danish, English, Filipino, French, Georgian, German, Hindi, Italian, Maltese, Malayalam, Portuguese, Sinhala, Spanish, Tagalog, Tamil, Thai and Urdu (Ellul, 2025). This international mix not only enriches daily interactions among staff but also enhances the overall guest experience, as employees bring different perspectives, languages, and cultural awareness to their roles. This multicultural setting fosters open-mindedness, adaptability, and collaboration, reflecting the inclusive and global nature of the hospitality industry. Furthermore, Noru embraces the intercultural as an asset and advantage, that reflects its values and mission on the hospitality market of striving for inclusivity and excellence in service.

Intercultural competence is deeply rooted in Noru Hotel's foundation and mission. Noru is a Japanese word that means "to get on, to join in, to jump aboard" that was chosen as a welcoming call for all clients, inviting them to join in and jump aboard on the Noru Hotel Experience. The experience in question means that, besides the comfort and excellency of the service provided, Noru offers a truly intercultural setting of welcoming and acceptance. As the name implies, the hotel shows an oriental taste in its decor and design, striving to maintain modernity, originality and comfortability, alongside with the furniture placement that follows the Feng Shui practices. This is also reflected in Noru Hotel's menu of Boku Wa Bistro and Bar and Aikiron, as the menu offers a range of options that combine the best of local, Mediterranean, Continental, Indian and other Asian-like Cuisine (Ellul, 2025). This diversity enriches the hotel's inclusivity as it allows to satisfy diverse dietary restrictions and preferences, or as it simply creates space for

diversity of choice for guests, especially those who book a stay at the hotel with meals included (half boards or full boards).

Noru Hotel Malta offers a variety of services designed to cater to both guests and the local community. Core services include room bookings, as well as restaurant and bar experiences through its three distinct venues: Boku Wa Bistro and Bar, Aikiron Restaurant, and Puru Rooftop Pool Bar, each offering unique atmospheres and menu options. The hotel also provides access to a conference room on the 1st floor. This is extensively used by conference and incentive operators and local and international corporate clients, but also it can be hired privately for private functions or stand-alone parties. Frequent clients are, for instance, neighboring English language schools that use it for private school activities, teambuilding and coffee breaks. Beyond these traditional hospitality services, Noru Hotel actively engages with tourists and locals through additional amenities. On level -2, the spa in partnership with Dee Spas Treatments offers a range of wellness therapies like Ayurved, prenatal experiences, express spa, body and face treatments, scrub and wrap rituals and holistic experiences. The fitness and gym area provides a training area (free of charge for hotel guests), including the option to train with a locally awarded bodybuilder personal trainer. The rooftop hosts occasional events that create a lively social space with scenic views available for outside guests as well. Guests can also enjoy excursions organized in collaboration with Triggles, as well as transport services arranged via John's Garage, two direct partners of Noru Hotel, ensuring a convenient and well-rounded experience.

Noru Hotel collaborates with a range of partners across different sectors, including gastronomy, wellness, and tourism, all selected to align with the hotel's values of quality, authenticity, and customer satisfaction. In the area of reservations and bookings, Noru Hotel collaborates with leading travel agencies such as *Robert Arrigo & Sons*, *Booking.com*, *Expedia*, *Jet2Holidays* and *Malta Next*. These play a key role in expanding the hotel's visibility, attracting international guests, and facilitating the booking process. Noru is also partner with *Triggles* for a customized excursion service for the hotel guests, allowing them smooth logistics when it comes to exploring what the island has to offer. Moreover, *John's Garage*, a local taxi company, offers a customized service for both guests and staff when it comes to transportation, especially to allow an easy access between guest arrivals at the airport and their subsequent arrival to the hotel, and vice versa. The Food & Beverage department requires key partners to smoothen operations

daily and allow for a conscious and quality service in its amenities. Their key partners, among others that might vary, are *The Catering Center LTD*, *Emmanuel Delicata Winemaker LTD* and *Malta Food Agency*. The Maintenance department partners directly with *Marks Hardware Supplies* to ensure they have the required material for maintenance technical work and they have an established partnership with *Mekanika*, that has installed an emergency line dedicated only to Noru Hotel to ensure immediate contact in case of emergency. A partnership essential for the housekeeping department is with *Clean Sheets*, who ensures a high-quality laundry service for all linen. Lastly, as previously mentioned, Dee Wellness has a strong relation with Noru Hotel, having established a SPA and wellness area in the hotel facilities in a relationship that is a win-win. These partnerships not only contribute to creating a distinctive guest experience but also support the hotel's commitment to promoting local culture and sustainable practices.

Noru Hotel enjoys a solid reputation for offering excellent value through its price quality ratio. On Google, it boasts an impressive rating of approximately 4 out of 5, based on recent traveler reviews. On Booking.com, the hotel holds a strong 8.2 out of 10 from over 900 reviews, with guests consistently praising its modern design, cleanliness, and attentive staff. It also maintains a status of top search on Booking when searching for hotels in St. Julian's, due to its score. Likewise, Expedia ratings reflect this positive feedback, with an 8.2 out of 10 score from around 80 reviews, highlighting spacious rooms, quality amenities, and reliable service. These consistently high online ratings underscore Noru Hotel's reputation for delivering comfort and well-rounded guest satisfaction at competitive rates.

## **CHAPTER III – INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE AT NORU HOTEL MALTA**

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### **1. Description of the Internship Placement**

The intercultural business exponent is nothing more and nothing less than the hospitality sector,. In that sense, I decided to partake in an internship in a hotel, as a front office agent. Combining the elements of this decision-making process, I opted to apply for an internship in a hotel in Malta, since it is a country experiencing rapid development in all senses, including in the hospitality sector. It would be a perfect choice due to its unique culture, geographical placement and intercultural environment. This way I would be totally exposed to a truly intercultural lifestyle, both in my personal routine and as an intern in the hotel.

I applied for an internship in Noru Hotel Malta and got accepted in February of 2025, while I was still finishing my semester abroad in Poland. This was both a challenge and a reason for pure excitement. I would end up staying outside of my country for almost one year, the longest I have been living away from home, but it also meant that I would truly immerse myself in the interculturality of living abroad long enough to experience new depths of it. Moreover, working in a hotel meant that I would learn a bunch of new skills and competences and partake in daily tasks that focus on the people. I expected that it would require, in that context, a great level of cross-cultural communication, problem-solving skills and diplomatic competences, along with international business strategies, and the experience did not disappoint. I started my internship at Noru Hotel Malta on the 1st of March of 2025 and worked there as a front office agent for a total of 3 months. The total hours of the internship accounted for 520, due to a 40 hour of work per week system. During this time, I had the chance to observe the many nuances of the hospitality sector regarding factors like seasonality, business strategy or problem-solving, and be part of a team that is passionate about the field and from whom I learned and developed so many competences.

### **2. Daily Activities and Responsibilities**

Based on the basic training and indications Noru Hotel provides, the standard operating procedures (SOP) for the front desk staff are the following:

#### 1. Greeting Guests:

- Approaching guests with a genuine smile and maintain eye contact to convey warmth and hospitality.
- Addressing guests respectfully using formal language
- Offering assistance with luggage, or others

#### 2. Check-In Procedure:

- Extending a warm welcome to guests upon arrival of guests and expressing gratitude for choosing Noru Hotel
- Requesting identification politely
- Utilizing the hotel's reservation system<sup>2</sup> proficiently to process check-ins swiftly and accurately.
- Configuring and presenting key cards
- Providing room details and information about amenities, an overview of the property, dining options, recreational facilities, and any upcoming events or promotions

#### 3. Handling Inquiries:

- Answering phone calls
- Answering emails
- Responding to inquiries regarding room availability, rates, amenities, and hotel policies with clarity and precision
- Providing comprehensive information about hotel services, local attractions, dining options, or other information requested

#### 4. Resolving Guest Issues:

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<sup>2</sup> Noru Hotel Malta uses *Cloudbeds*, a cloud-based property management system that integrates property management, channel distribution, booking, revenue optimization, and guest engagement tools into a single system. It is designed to ease operations and enhance the performance of independent hotels, and other similar businesses

- Listening attentively to guest concerns or complaints without interruption, demonstrating empathy and understanding
- Offering solutions promptly and courteously
- Documenting guest feedback and complaints in the appropriate system for further analysis and improvement while assuring guests

#### 5. Check-Out Procedure:

- Processing check-outs efficiently, expressing appreciation for the guest's stay and inquiring about their experience
- Reviewing the final bill with guests, explaining charges clearly and addressing any queries or discrepancies professionally
- Offering assistance with luggage and extending best wishes for safe travels
- Requesting feedback from departing guests, inviting them to share their experience and suggestions for improvement to ensure continuous enhancement of the services

#### 6. Payment Handling:

- Informing about the various forms of payment
- Processing payments securely and accurately, ensuring guests receive receipts promptly and expressing gratitude for their patronage

#### 7. Security Measures:

- Maintaining vigilant surveillance at the front desk, monitoring guest activity discreetly and ensuring adherence to security protocols
- Verifying the identity of guests requesting access to rooms or sensitive information with utmost discretion and professionalism

#### 8. Emergency Procedures:

- Getting familiar with emergency protocols, including fire evacuation procedures and medical emergencies Assist guests in evacuating the premises or seeking medical attention as required, prioritizing their safety and well-being

9. Personal Appearance and Conduct:

- Presenting oneself impeccably in the designated uniform and name tag, ensuring a polished appearance at all times
- Demonstrating exemplary conduct by displaying courtesy, professionalism, and respect towards guests and colleagues alike

10. Continuous Training and Improvement:

- Actively engaging in ongoing training sessions to enhance proficiency in front desk operations and guest service.
- Soliciting feedback from supervisors and peers to identify areas for personal and professional growth, demonstrating a commitment to excellence

11. Closing Procedures:

- Concluding the shift by completing end-of-day tasks meticulously, including balancing cash drawers and updating records accurately
- Ensuring the front desk area is tidy and organized for the next shift, maintaining a welcoming atmosphere for arriving guests
- Doing an accurate handover of the shift, by providing all the valuable information about the previous shift, like guest on-going enquiries, problems or complaints or reservations pending

12. Guest Privacy and Confidentiality:

- Safeguarding guest privacy and confidentiality by exercising discretion in handling personal information and sensitive data
- Refraining from discussing guest details with unauthorized individuals and adhering strictly to data protection regulations

13. Multilingual Support:

- Offering assistance in multiple languages whenever possible, utilizing translation resources or language proficiency to accommodate diverse guests

14. Upselling and Promotions:

- Presenting additional services, upgrades, or promotions tactfully, focusing on enhancing the guest experience and meeting their needs
- Highlighting the value of upselling options transparently, ensuring guests feel informed and empowered to make decisions

#### 15. Team Collaboration:

- Fostering a spirit of collaboration and camaraderie among team members, supporting one another to deliver exceptional service seamlessly
- Communicating effectively with other departments to coordinate guest requests and ensure a cohesive guest experience

While these points are the general structure for the daily tasks I had to perform as a front office agent, it is important to refer that the department in question ends up being responsible for many more tasks, due to its nature. For that reason, these points presented in training are merely illustrative. The front office of the hotel is the connection point between all departments. Although there are some established responsibilities associated with the position like the check-in and check-out procedures, as the face of the hotel, the front office is ready to act as the primary connection between guests and/or staff and all issues related to the hotel's procedures and logistics. All guests and all departments resort to the front office in the first instance in case of needing to streamline any sort of communication, logistic or problem-solving.

As a small company and a relatively new hotel, Noru Hotel Malta has gaps regarding certain departments, namely it lacks a reservations department, a human resources department and has a small accounting team. For that reason, the Front Office is responsible for trying to close some of these gaps, by offering assistance. As a front office agent, alongside my colleagues, I was responsible for the reservations during my shifts. Most of the reservations occur via third-party platforms like *Booking.com* or *Expedia* and appear automatically in the system used by Noru - Cloudbeds. However, every time a booking is made, we receive an email informing us about it, and it is our responsibility to verify if everything is correctly booked. On the other hand, there are some partners like *Robert Arrigo & Sons* or *Jet2Holidays*, from whom we receive a booking notification and then we need to book it manually in the system. These cases are a little more complex, because the platform only accepts automatic bookings if it has

availability for those specific requests, but when the booking has to be inserted manually, I needed to check all factors of availability to not risk an overbooking situation or booking a room category that is not available at the requested dates, for instance. Walk-ins and or phone bookings follow the same logic. For both manual bookings from partners and direct bookings, the front office is responsible to manage payments details and procedures. Some partners like *Jet2Holidays* send payment details to be inserted in the system and the amount should be charged from there as well, but other methods of payment might include payment links, in-person payment or bank transfer. To create reservations for partners like *Jet2Holidays* or *MaltaNext* I needed to check the contracts made between Noru Hotel and the third-party, to verify agreements on pricing and general conditions for the reservation. Moreover, I also had to keep myself updated regarding stop sales<sup>3</sup>, in order to manage occupancy rates and prevent overbookings, especially regarding reservations for high season. Furthermore, due to the lack of a human resources department, HR matters are handled in teamwork divided between the Management, the Administration and the Front Office. My department is responsible for keeping track of applications sent by email or handed-in in person and forwarding them to both the Management and the supervisor of each department for respective interviews, later officializing employment via the Administration department. To assist the accounts activity, I had to do several Statement of Accounts (SOA), which lists invoices issued, payments received, credit notes, and the balance on the client's account. It helps both parties keep a balance record and confirm what is still due to pay and/or receive.

The front desk at Noru Hotel Malta, including myself, is responsible for receiving all deliveries and forwarding them to the correct department. This can include being the receptor of food deliveries or clean sheet's deliveries, and forward them to level -1, where they will find the respective supervisor of the department, duly informed about the occurrences by the front desk team. In the same logic, during my shifts I was responsible for receiving maintenance workers, monitoring the reason they came and for what company they work for, inform supervisors about their work in the hotel and verify their upcoming schedules in the hotel for possible inspections. Front desk is also responsible for keeping security measures, especially by monitoring entrances in the hotel, from in-

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<sup>3</sup> The stop sales issued by Noru Hotel refer to a temporary decision to prevent selling rooms through certain distribution channels for specific dates or room types. It is a strategy to protect the business from overbooking situations, for instance.

house guests, visitors, staff or others. Moreover, the front office is responsible for streamlining work logistics within the hotel, by providing keys and access to different storage rooms and work facilities. We establish the connection between outside guests and in-house guests and the SPA and gym/fitness facilities, meaning that we provide information about products and services, process gym memberships, monitor entrances in the facilities and inform about vouchers and discounts. Other activities I carried throughout my internship due to the nature of the role, that have not been mentioned yet are assisting guests with their daily touristic activities, providing options, insights and indications; handling guest requests related to their current or upcoming stay like bed type requests, board category, early/late check in; translating emails and conversations to mediate communication between guests and the hotel staff; assisting guests with concerns regarding Malta, their stay or the hotel; managing a duly delivered communication between all departments; scheduling transportation for both guests and staff; accompany guests to luggage room and elevator; duly informing Housekeeping about special requests, in cases like bachelorette parties for instance; issuing invoices for guests; forwarding guests for hotel amenities according to their needs; do the inventory of front desk material and material provided for guests such as pool towels; perform treasury tasks like keeping count of the FD cash and updating excels with information regarding finances, bookings, upsales and others.

As a front office agent, I had to be aware, at all times, about all happenings, issues or events happening at the hotel to be able to duly communicate with guests and other departments on it and/or operate accordingly. For instance, if an elevator broke down, the front office is responsible for contacting Mekanika, informing the maintenance department and following up on workers coming into the hotel to fix the issues. If there is a VIP guest coming to check-in at the hotel at upcoming dates, the front office is responsible for informing the housekeeping department, to prepare complementary arrangements in the room. If there is a thematic lunch buffet at Aikiron, the front office is responsible for informing guests and taking reservations for it. If there is a missing item from a guest, the front office is responsible for streamlining communications with the housekeeping department and other staff, to be able to track down the item. These are just some examples.

During my internship, because I was eager to learn as much as I could from the experience, I took initiative in participating in activities that were not associated with my

position in the hotel. Due to that initiative, I had the opportunity to attend the morning briefings, that gathered the general manager and the supervisor of each department to discuss the results of the work of the previous day and which improvements could be adopted in order to build better outcomes. Notes were provided about the work of each department alongside highlights, appreciations, future recommendations, demands or warnings. All members contribute to the meeting, sharing their department's accomplishments or struggles, with additional information if needed, according to possible future events, for instance. Continuously, I strived for learning more about the daily tasks of my supervisor within the front office team. These include tour operator group excursion bookings. These constitute a form of booking more complex than the others, since there is a more rigorous follow up needed to be done with the tour operators to guarantee a smooth process of both booking the reservation and ensuring a pleasant stay for the group, since these groups often occupy the majority of the hotel during their stay. Other tasks include developing reports about factors like occupancy or origin of the guests, issuing stop sales and streamlining communications between front office and tour operators from whom we receive reservations. Furthermore, I took initiative in participating in the conversations about social media marketing and advertisement of the hotel and events happening in the facilities. I created an Instagram reel for advertisement of the hotel and suggested strategies for social media posts to create more engagement on the online page and other forms of advertisement in the hotel facilities, which were adopted with good results. This proactivity created space for me to be more included in the creative conversations.

Every day was different, and it brought different challenges, but each day I had the opportunity to put to the test my skills, develop them and create new ones. One moment I am welcoming a family from China, the next I am assisting a solo traveler from Brazil or helping a Swedish couple with their lost passport. Each encounter invited me to adapt, listen, and respond with cultural sensitivity. Beyond check-ins and check-outs, I had to offer reassurance, empathy, and personalized care, reflecting emotional intelligence and genuine care to make every guest feel valued, welcomed and understood.

### **3. Standard Daily Procedures as a Front Office Agent**

My shifts usually started at 8am by organizing the day based on the handover passed on to me from the previous shift, which includes following up on pending issues and occurrences or preparing for some atypical or special occurrence, for instance. I checked if the excel expressing our finances is according to the amount on the front office cash drawer, and updated the excel if necessary. After this, I would prepare my shift by verifying how many guests would check-in and check-out that day, alongside with checking for due balances, special requests or other inquiries. I would check all three emails which the front office is responsible for, one for reception, one for reservations and another for general information. Around 9am, I made sure that the duty manager's report from the previous day was sent via email, I printed it and prepared all things needed for the morning briefing with the general manager in level 1. During the morning, I would deal mainly with deliveries, carried as mentioned previously, and I would handle check outs, done until 11am, unless guests requested and paid for a late check out. After each check out, I would duly inform the housekeeping department in order for them to inspect the room for the release of the security deposit and so they know they can clean the respective room so it is ready upon check in time. Usually, throughout the mornings, guests would start to leave the hotel for the day and they would come up to the front office to ask for recommendations or to get help with transportation, for instance. After all the checkouts were done, I would promptly start to prepare the check ins. I did this by verifying if the registration forms had the correct information and if that information matched the information on the system, while also checking with the housekeeping team if any of the rooms assigned for check in would have to be moved due to necessary maintenance work or other reason. Once this task was done, I would check all information regarding the guests, financial balances and possible special requests, to be prepared for their arrival. Around this time, I would take a small lunch break in the staff canteen, where I had the chance to connect with the intercultural team working at Noru Hotel. I treated this time as an important networking environment. As a front office agent, the practical mediator between the hotel, the staff and the guests, it was my responsibility to be familiar with the staff and their positions, but I also took it as an opportunity to immerse myself in the interculturality of Noru's and Malta's environment. After lunch break, I made the keycards for each room assigned for the guests incoming, and I would start doing the check-ins as guests were arriving. In situations of early check-in, I had to verify if the

room was ready to proceed with the check-in, but since the official check-in time was at 3pm, I often offered a place to store the luggage and invited guests to enjoy the hotel's amenities while the room was not ready. If the room was ready before the time, or it was already past 3pm, I would proceed with the check-in process. After each check-in, I process all the information in the *Cloudbeds*.

Besides the established tasks and responsibilities such as check ins and check outs, there were many other things to be done during the day, many of them due to spontaneous occurrences. Every day was different. Throughout the day I would continuously check and respond to emails and phone calls, accordingly, including processing reservations received via those and walk-in as well. I would assist guests when approaching the front office, by providing general information about the country, activities or others, tour prices and options, booking transports and resolving issues related to their stay in Malta or the hotel. I continuously checked the Online Travel Agency platforms (OTA) such as Booking.com and Expedia, to manage guest messages, requests, reservations and reviews. I would guide guests to the amenities they were looking for such as Aikiron or the SPA area. I would also assist staff by establishing efficient communication between all departments, and by providing keys, information about occupancy, possible room issues for maintenance purposes, reservations for events, or any needed assistance. Other situations could arise during the day, such as having to deal with complaints, resolve issues, do up sales, sell services, and always be alert for any circumstance, because in a front office, truly anything can happen and I had to be prepared at all times to deal with any possible situation, even if it meant multitasking several responsibilities. The reality of the front office is that, as the face of the hotel, me and my colleagues had the enormous responsibility of resolving all issues at first instance with grace, which requires deep empathy and cross-cultural communication skills. Moreover, it is a role that, besides all the responsibilities associated, is deeply rooted in human relations. Every day I encountered tens of different people from all over the world. For that reason, the most important part of the role of a front office agent was to have human relations skills in general and, especially, intercultural competences. People would come and go from the hotel every day, meaning that every day would bring new challenges that require an open mind. More important than performing tasks such as check ins or check outs with perfection, is knowing how to adapt to the guest and their needs, alongside showing interconnectivity and cultural understanding. Due to this nature of the hospitality field, I

would say that the most important role I had and performed as a front office agent is the establishment of a professional but smooth relation with the guest, through understanding, adaptation and intercultural awareness.

At the end of the shift, I prepared the handover, if necessary, for the person coming to replace me at the front office. Usually, workers of the front office at Noru Hotel perform 12-hour shifts. I usually performed 8-hour shifts, having to sometimes do a shift from 12pm until 8pm. During these days, I was the person responsible for closing the shift. I did so by counting the financial balance of the front office for that day, checking if it matched the amount registered on the system and on the bank terminal. I would close the shift on the bank terminal, print the financial balance sheet from the system and put the cash and shifts of payments on an envelope and give it to the accountant on duty. After this I had to prepare a proper handover for the night shift, and the day was concluded.

Noru Hotel receives several group excursions from tour operator partners per month. These excursions would often carry an average of around 100 people from one country. During my internship, I had the chance to experience several group arrivals, and I realized that these days in the hotel were very different and required much more preparation, thought and organization than the usual amount. For that reason, on these days the front office would rely on teamwork for smooth operations. In the early morning, we would review the group's reservation manifest, confirm room blocks and special requests, prepare keycards in advance, and coordinate with the housekeeping department to ensure all rooms were inspected and ready on time. It was also important to discuss with the group leader to confirm arrival times, dietary needs or restrictions, welcome refreshments, and the layout of the lobby and check-in logistics, so we were able to direct guests efficiently. Unlike spontaneous individual check-ins, where each guest's arrival pattern, room preference, and rate can be handled in the moment, a large group demands rigorous planning of space, timing, and staffing to prevent issues and to be able to maintain service quality. During the check ins, the pace would rely on teamwork: one FO agent scanned passports and handed out any material such as maps, another distributed keycards while communicating room assignments, available amenities and meal schedules, as well as escorted guests to elevators. We would have to monitor real-time room availability to accommodate last-minute room changes while also keeping the lobby organized by directing guests toward a waiting area with refreshments.

Adapting to the specific culture of a large arrival group is also essential for making every guest feel truly welcome. For example, if we were checking in an Italian group, we might prepare welcome materials in Italian, offer espresso and greet them with Italian expressions while recognizing their convivial style. This can help bridge cultural comfort. In these cases, the team's cultural awareness is essential, for situations such as awareness of dining habits like meal timing and preferences or of communication norms like direct versus high-context language. By adapting greetings, amenities, and logistics to the cultural expectations, we would create more meaningful experiences, meaning that we succeeded in front-office service.

#### **4. Challenges Faced and Key Learnings**

During my internship as a Front Office Agent at Noru Hotel Malta, I stepped into a fast-paced environment where every day presented new challenges and valuable learning opportunities. Tasked with managing guest arrivals, coordinating with multiple departments, and addressing unexpected situations, I quickly discovered the importance of adaptability, clear communication, and teamwork. This formative experience not only strengthened my problem-solving abilities and intercultural understanding but also deepened my appreciation for the human element at the heart of hospitality. I encountered a range of challenges that tested both my technical and interpersonal skills. Managing simultaneous check-in times demanded speed, precision with the reservation system and meticulous payment processes. At the same time, addressing unexpected maintenance issues such as stuck elevators or air conditioning failures forced me to coordinate with engineering teams while keeping guests informed and reassured. Language barriers and cultural differences proved to be a continuous challenge. There is not a one approach fits all in the hospitality sector. Guests show different backgrounds, preferences and tastes, which makes it difficult to please everyone. I relied heavily on intercultural sensitivity, empathy and creative solutions. I put my multilingual skills to the test and tried to communicate in the guest's language as much as I could to avoid the language barrier, I did recommendations based on cultural tendencies and habits, while still managing to offer an abroad experience of high value. Handling special requests such as last-minute airport transfers or strict dietary requirements required proactive planning and attention to detail. Issues had to be resolved in a fast pace, with understanding, care and cultural

awareness. They can surge at any giving moment, and to be able to solve them, I had to be ready to react, adapt and act on it, while keeping a peaceful and safe environment and many times while multitasking. Navigating guest complaints tested my emotional resilience. I quickly learned to listen actively, to make the guest feel understood, to offer appropriate solutions and compensations, and follow through on. Together, these experiences taught me the critical importance of effective communication, cross-departmental collaboration, and resilience under pressure, skills that are essential for any professional.

I faced an industry that proved to be dynamic and people-centric, meaning that as front office agent, I faced new challenges every day. There is the constant guest variability - people from different backgrounds, needs, languages and cultural norms that travel for different purposes. I learned that these factors need to be taken into account when assisting a guest. All guests require different requests and adjustments related to their arrival times, room types, dietary needs or others, meaning that front office is in a state of constant communication, adaptation and re-planning. Reservations required fully attentiveness and dedication so that I could balance room availability between all types of bookings to prevent overbookings while maximizing occupancy rates. At the same time, I learned how to navigate the interdependency of all departments, by coordinating operations on the daily. I quickly realized how interdepartmental communication and assistance is crucial for smooth operations. I truly appreciated its importance in moments where there were laps in communication that led to evitable situations, such as giving rooms under maintenance due to water leaks to guests at check-in or taking payments from VIP guests who had been offered a complementary stay. These moments required a reinforcement of the teamwork mentality as well as an analysis of why the issue occurred. It taught me that clear, timely updates and shared accountability between departments are essential to prevent errors and maintain the high standards of the service we provide. On the other hand, the attitude towards the guest had to be carried with humility, accountability and compensation. Sometimes, situations such as these ones escalate to complaints or negative reviews, from which I learn to take accountability for my share of the issue when needed, not taking it personally and using it as constructive criticism. As front office agent, all complaints must be considered, even if they are not regarding a specific person, because we build the image of the hotel by a consistent teamwork and positive attitude, and it is our responsibility to downsize any possible issue or negative

feedback. As stated by the general manager in a morning briefing: “There are things that we cannot control that will give guests a reason to complain, such as the roadwork noise. Let’s do our absolute best so we do not give them any reason to complain that is, in fact, our fault”. This is a simple phrase, said many times in these types of briefings, but I concluded that it sums up the mentality towards working in front office and having to show up every day as the best version of myself. It reflects the idea that we should work towards an environment where if issues arise, they did so because of something we did not cause but will do our best to solve, and I realized that when this was the case, guests showed more sympathy and understanding even while having complaints. Front office can be a very intense and emotional. While it is a fast-paced, multitasking and challenging role for all reason already mentioned, it is a high-pressure service because we have to deal with all situations and issues that might arise calmly and effectively, many times while also managing conflict. It is important to remain calm, empathetic and with a solution-focused mindset, especially when dealing with upset or demanding guests to be able to diffuse tense situations and find win-win resolutions. This challenging environment made me develop a new level of strong interpersonal skills and emotional resilience. Because every shift brings a unique combination of people, tasks, systems, and potential crises, as a front office agent I learned to be an adaptable multitasker who is knowledgeable in technology, culturally sensitive, detail-oriented, and emotionally intelligent, which allowed me to turn daily challenges into exceptional guest experiences and personal growth.

Managing intercultural dynamics at the front office is one of the most demanding yet rewarding aspects of working in the hospitality sector. Every guest arrives with unique cultural norms, communication styles, and service expectations. Language barriers can often lead to misunderstandings, which require agents to anticipate needs and coordinate with other departments to ensure an inclusive and cultural aware experience. Over time, however, I learned that small gestures that show intercultural competence such as greeting guests in their languages or active attentiveness to read verbal cues and body language were game changers when it came to establishing a professional but sympathetic relationship with the guest. These steps not only enhanced guest satisfaction, but also fostered a deeper sense of empathy within our team and established an environment where guests felt comfortable and even came to the front office with the sole propose of having a conversation with me, which made me feel like I was doing my job right. Ultimately,

mastering intercultural service taught me that true hospitality rests on respect for each guest's background and the flexibility to construct every interaction. I learned to transform cultural complexity into opportunities for genuine human connection, which made me realize even more that cultural barriers are only languages, costumes and habits, because deep down we are all the same – humans who deserve respect and inclusivity. Having this deeply rooted in my core made me a more responsible worker in the hospitality sector, but also allows to bring essential skills of intercultural competence for the rest of my professional and personal journey. On another hand, I had the chance to develop more practical and technical skills as well. I became proficient in Excel, by managing and creating dynamic spreadsheets to track useful information for reports, for instance. By working closely with the accounts department, I learned to prepare statements of account for corporate clients, ensuring that invoices, payments, and credit notes aligned perfectly and that balances were followed up in a timely manner. Navigating *Cloudbeds* and other channel-manager interfaces developed my understanding of rate parity, integration of online travel agencies, and management principles. Moreover, by making the decision to adapt to the guest and create a positive cultural exchange, I put into practice my language skills. I had the chance to practice my knowledge of English, essentially, but I also practice my Spanish language skills as well as my French and finally, my humble skills of Italian, polish and Slovak, that although are not enough to keep a conversation going, were enough to create moments in which the guest felt more connected and therefore it established a positive environment.

Taking part of the briefings, although I was an intern, granted me the opportunity to have a closer look on the backstage of the management of the hotel operations in various levels. It taught me how high-level decisions translate into frontline actions. I could deepen my understanding of managing an international business set in the truest of intercultural environments, both due to the nature of the business and the nature of Malta itself. It was an added value to be able to assist the reviewing of occupancy forecasts, revenue targets, and guest satisfaction scores. It made me think beyond individual check-ins and see every guest interaction as part of broader performance that together translate into metrics. Hearing firsthand about upcoming tour operator group arrivals or maintenance schedules sharpened my ability to anticipate operational challenges and issues. These briefings also showed how the interrelation the work of all the departments have a single outcome, reflecting how truly intertwined all parts of a business are. As a

front office agent, my performance does not only affect my department but the business as a whole. I also had the chance to watch and absorb leadership practices especially when it comes to framing issues concisely, propose solutions instead of just reporting problems, and align priorities with the hotel's values, revenue and objectives. Finally, all the above reflected how important collaborative problem-solving really is. In essence, these briefings transformed my understanding of the front office from an isolated department into an integral part in the hotel's success.

Working alongside a multicultural team at Noru Hotel Malta taught me the value of diverse perspectives. I learned to adapt my communication style in terms of formality, directness, and also nonverbal cues, to suit colleagues from different backgrounds. I did so mainly by being attentive to their behavior and responses to be able to adapt mine accordingly. Moreover, exposure to different problem-solving approaches broadened my creative toolkit. Some colleagues favored rapid or hands-on approaches, while others preferred a more deliberative process. This taught me how to balance speed with efficacy. At the same time, there were occasions where I observed challenges around management of expectations, especially when it came to leadership styles clashing between supervisors or the difference of mentality regarding team functionality, as more hierarchical or egalitarian styles. However, I saw these challenges being overcome through productive and clear communication where the base was empathy, respect and teamwork towards a common goal. Through these experiences, I believed to have obtained more practical skills in conflict resolution and adaptability, but I also developed a deeper appreciation for how a truly inclusive team can combine their differences towards delivering exceptional service and innovative solutions.

Collectively, these skills bettered my analytical and operational value, allowing me to deliver both excellence in service and strategic insight in any future hospitality or international-business role.

#### **4.1 Strategies for Effective Cross-Cultural Communication - Overcoming Challenges**

The main goal of my internship was to develop my intercultural competences. The environment presented by Malta and Noru Hotel offered me the perfect conditions for that. Every day I had a new opportunity to interact with guests from diverse backgrounds

and with time and experience I perfected my approach, which I believe reflects my crescent intercultural skills. I actively prepared myself for guest arrivals by identifying their background and making sure that I knew how to greet them properly, especially using their native language as much as possible to ensure a warm welcome and downsizing any possible language barrier. I realized that as soon as I could share my knowledge of one's country and language, the guest would immediately be more open, energetic and it created a positive environment. After some time, it was even possible to identify some patterns in communication styles related to certain cultures. For instance, Italians showed more willingness to engage in small talk about more informal subjects, Irish tended to establish a light tone of conversation and using humor to establish a connection with the staff, while Chinese tended to be more closed off and meticulous regarding the check in procedure, for instance. These patterns were helpful in a sense, but I tried to take them as a grain of salt when it took to adapt to the guests, since assumptions are not the best approach when dealing with a cross-cultural communication setting. Rather than pre assuming, I learned how to navigate through the guest's behavior and body language to understand what approach fits them best. For instance, some guests seemed to be in a rush and prioritized an efficient and fast paced check in process while others seemed more relaxed and showed willingness to start a conversation even if it meant that the check in process would take longer because of it. Moreover, I made sure that communication was always clear and objective, by practicing active listening and by speaking slowly and going straight to the point with clear language, especially when the guest's first language was not English. To avoid misunderstandings, I learned along the way that it is better to repeat after the guest to be sure of what they said and that in case of doubt it is better to ask than to assume. These are simple points, but that made total difference when approaching guests. It is very easy to rush encounters due to the high pressure, fast paced and multi-tasking nature of the role, so learning to balance pace with efficacy is a must when it comes to communication. However, the priority should always be establishing clear dialogue rather than rushing the process in the name of maximizing productivity. I also learned how to be prepared and to not rely only on my skills for cross-cultural communication. In certain circumstances, that are barriers that cannot be fixed with the human competences available at the time. For that reason, at front office we kept materials ready in several languages to assist us in case of language and cultural barriers. We kept registration forms in various languages ready to be printed if needed, as well as general information about Malta and touristic points in various languages as well.

Technology is also a great tool when assisting guests that have bigger cultural barriers, and we used it to our advantage. Having a multicultural team at Noru Hotel has also proven to be a great asset, since different backgrounds and knowledge brought a great amount of diversity that was used daily as an asset to overcome challenges related to cross-cultural communication.

## **4.2 Real-Life Examples from the Internship**

In this section, I will highlight some real-life experiences from my internship that were both challenges and opportunities to learn. During the three months of my internship, I did the exercise of at the end of each day analyzing my interactions and procedures at the hotel, to be able to take a lesson from each day, because the experience of working in a hotel is very enriching, but it is only so if we are attentive and empathic enough to put ourselves through deep reflection. Each example bellow carries a lesson.

### **4.2.1 Language as a tool to create a safe and inviting environment**

Language is more than a vehicle for exchanging information, it is a powerful tool for shaping emotional safety and a sense of belonging. I experienced multiple situations daily where communicating in the guest's language reduced the anxiety of navigating an unfamiliar place. Language can often be a barrier, especially when it comes to the hospitality sector. As a worker part of that sector, it was my responsibility to downsize the constraints created by that barrier. I would like to highlight two different situations where I used language to ease guests in stress inducing situations. The first situation was presented to me when two French women that did not know each other, one in her 20s and the other in her 60s, entered the hotel confused. They had arrived in Malta with an excursion and the taxis that picked them from the hotel left most of the group in another hotel, finally living these two women in Noru Hotel, stating that they had been informed to do so. The women were confused as to why they were not with the rest of the group. I started to process their check-in, and while I was scanning their passports, I realized that I only had one of their reservations in the system. When situations like this happened, I asked the guest for the reservation confirmation, so I could check, through the reservation number or the online travel agency what was the issue. By doing so, I concluded that the

mistake was not on Noru's part, as we had only received one reservation request, meaning that the mistake was caused by the agency responsible for the excursion. Confused, lost and without understanding fully my explanation in English, I realized that the guests were feeling anxious and unsafe, so I decided to use my French skills to communicate the situation. They immediately showed gratitude towards my effort, and it eased their mood, as they appeared more relaxed, heard and safe after that. Moreover, I tried to use a positive discourse and body language to signal that there was no reason to panic. After communicating with the travel agency and negotiating a solution, the lapse was fixed. This situation taught me that although there was not much I could do in technical terms, since it was a mistake that had to be fixed by the travel agency, there is always something we can do to help, even if it is only establishing a safe environment by breaking language barriers and using language to create a safe space. Similar situations happened through my internship regularly, strongly establishing for me how powerful language is. It builds foundational trust through thoughtful language use, unlocks richer guest interactions, fosters loyalty, and elevates the entire hospitality experience.

#### **4.2.2 Language barriers within multicultural teams**

Noru Hotel is serious about hiring a multicultural team, believing that cultural differences enrich the business strategy and enhances the hospitality service experience. This multiculturalism has shown to be very useful daily, however at first glance the differences of staff might cause constraints and barriers, especially when it comes to language. Noru's staff is strongly competent and hardworking, but the team would have not been so diverse and enriched if the hiring entities did not make an effort to surpass language barriers. I am going to illustrate these statements with the following example. One day I greeted a young woman at the front desk, who stated she was coming for an interview with the Food & Beverage Supervisor. I invited her to kindly take a seat while I told the supervisor she was there for a meeting with him. He came to take her to his office, but after a few minutes they came back to the front office to request my help. He stated that he remembered the general manager saying that I spoke Spanish, as it was written in my resume, and asked if I could be the translator for the interview. As soon as I started to speak Spanish, the young woman showed emotional relief. I proceeded by translating the interview from Spanish to English for the F&B supervisor and from English to Spanish to the young woman. She had applied spontaneously for marketing

the hotel on social media. She showed us her experience with digital marketing and publicity, including an Instagram page she had created for Spanish rural tourism that has gotten thousands of followers. She was visibly capable of delivering a great job marketing Noru Hotel, but she would never have been given the chance to present herself if the Noru team did not have an open mind towards interculturality. At the same time, having a multicultural team, with different skills sets, showed to be helpful in many ways, this being one of them.

#### **4.2.3 There is no “one solution fits all”**

Culture is, among other things, a set of habits and costumes. I experienced this in firsthand, by realizing, from many different situations, that there is no “one solution fits all”, because as humans with different cultures, we have different needs associated with our habits. For instance, the air conditioner of the hotel was centralized, meaning that the temperature range was managed by the local government. This technicality is very common in Malta. Until mid-April the air conditioning was on heating mode, and the temperatures would range from around 24 to 27 degrees. Due to the centralized system, there was nothing the maintenance team could do about the situation to achieve lower temperatures. However, the air conditioning limited capacities were the reason for many complains daily, which I tried to receive gracefully and with understanding while calmly explaining why there was nothing I or my team could do about the issue. Over time, I realized that the issue would have not even have a “one solution fits all”, because some guests were complaining that the air conditioning was too hot for April, while others were complaining that it was too cold. On a similar note, as front office we were requests several times to anticipate the open hours of the gym area located on the -2. The original schedule of the gym expressed opening hours at 8am, however guests, multiple times, requested opening hours to be either from 6 or 7am. These requests came always from Asian guests, which cultures are associated with early rising habits. While 8am seems to be a reasonable opening time for the amenity, it did not fit every guest’s needs. It was a valuable lesson realizing that different cultural backgrounds translate into different habits and needs and how important it is to be able to adapt in the hospitality sector to meet as many different needs as we can, although it is continuous work, because there is truly no “one solution fits all”.

#### **4.2.4 Cultural Competence creates a more familiar and inviting environment**

Through the internship, I concluded that the guests I established the best relations were the ones with whom I shared cultural knowledge and exchanged experiences with. At first glance, I would say that when I showed knowledge about the guest's country or language, they would immediately treat me with more warmth and openness and the chances of them coming back to front office randomly to speak with me were higher. It happened continuously as I, for instance, greeted Polish guests in Polish language and due to their surprised reaction, I would explain that I lived in *Lodz* for 6 months. A small detail like this would spark willingness for conversation, in which we exchanged common references associated with their country, establishing a more comfortable environment much appreciated by the guest. In these situations, the guest showed to be feeling more comfortable for identifying familiarity in such an unfamiliar place. The majority of the tipping I received while working at Noru were from guests with whom I established this kind of relation with. For instance, I experienced this with a young Polish couple who in the end of their week-long stay offered me chocolates to thank me for my kindness throughout their stay; with an Irish couple who came to Malta during the Maltese St. Patrick's, which I used as an ice breaker; with a Spanish group of friends with whom I spoke to in Spanish daily and with a young Portuguese emigrant in the UK who was solo travelling for the first time with whom I spoke to in Portuguese and offered my contact in case of needs or of emergency to ease her anxieties. This pattern made me realize that even when in touristic activity, as humans we appreciate familiarity, as it grounds our experience abroad. Once again, interacting with guests in this intercultural setting showed me how we are all human beyond our nationality and cultural identity. Humanity is important everywhere, and as workers of the hospitality sector we are the mediators between the familiar and the unfamiliar of the experience of the guests, meaning that we have the responsibility of creating an inviting environment. A great way to do that is thought common references in culture.

### **5. Relevance of the experience for future career goals**

My time as a Front Office Agent at Noru Hotel Malta was not merely an exercise in operational proficiency but also profound journey of self-reflection and personal

growth. Stepping into each shift, I confronted a fast-paced and challenging environment where the unexpected was the only constant. Beyond any skills acquired, I turned into a more resilient, empathic, communicative person, with problem-solving, multitasking, business strategy and intercultural skills that will be useful not only for my professional journey but for my personal life as well. It grew my cultural awareness, and it made me believe that the more aware one person is, the more understanding and respectful it is as well. Being on different side of the world, an unfamiliar one, makes the world smaller, makes the problems more fixable, the culture differences an enriching asset and the people more human.

The aspect of the internship that I liked the most was being set in an environment where interculturality is everywhere and where no technical skill you might have can be more important to the role than the human ones. Intercultural competence is more than just knowledge of culture and language but the capacity to master communication in which you embrace the “otherness” and find where it meets the “I”. Working with a multicultural team also contributed immensely for that experience. Working and speaking with people from all over the world, whether from Georgia, Thailand, Italy or others, has a way of dissolving the barrier between the “me” and “them.” As I listened to their life stories and shared parts of my own, I came to see that culture only feels like a barrier because it expresses unfamiliarity. As I got familiar with these contexts, life stories, working methods, it reinforced the idea that culture is not a dividing factor, and it should be treated as an asset for society. That is why traveling, working abroad, and simply making the effort to communicate across languages and customs is so vital. These experiences do not just expand our worldview; they make us more competent, more empathetic, and ultimately, better human beings. In a world that is ever more interconnected, fostering this kind of genuine, cross-cultural exchange is exactly what society should aim towards.

My internship at Noru Hotel Malta provided a real-world preparation and test for the very skills that are essential for careers in international relations, diplomacy, and strategic communication. First, the intercultural communication techniques such as preparing multilingual materials, active listening across language barriers, tailoring my tone and using my multilanguage skills mirror the diplomatic art of building trust and mutual understanding between cultures and nations. Second, coordinating with multiple departments to solve complex operational issues taught me how to negotiate priorities,

use resources, and maintain clear channels of communication, which are core competencies for any policy maker or multinational. Third, the data-driven reporting I carried out, such as occupancy forecasts, revenue analyses or guest-satisfaction metrics, shaped my ability to translate quantitative insights into real-life business strategies, which is an asset for any business. Finally, navigating a high-pressure environment, with guest complaints and VIP requests cultivated emotional resilience skills, cultural empathy, and crisis-management poise that is important in the diplomacy field.

In sum, by combining technical skills, intercultural fluency, and teamwork, my front-office experience has constructed a good foundation for a future in global affairs for preparing me to engage with different stakeholders, frame issues with active solutions and the capacity to build consensus in an intercultural environment.

## **6. Application of skills acquired during the Master's Degree**

Overall, my Master's degree in Intercultural Studies for Business proved to be extremely useful when applying professional skills during the internship. The internship was a bridge between the theory I absorbed during a year and a half of studies and the real exercise of interculturality in the business world through the front office of a hotel. Through English Culture for Business I and II and German Culture for Business I and II, I learned the metrics for the analysis of a culture through its history, costumes, habits and social and political contexts, which I had the chance of applying when studying the context of Malta and the Maltese culture, exploring the cultures I encountered along the internship activities, and interacting with costumers from English and German speaking countries. These courses provided cultural knowledge and methodologies for cultural analysis that will be helpful throughout the rest of my career. Chinese Language and Culture for Business was fruitful among the same lines, but it also provided me with the curiosity and interest for understanding language and how it shapes the way we think amongst our peers and why it might cause miscommunications. By understanding how language barriers can affect an interaction, we as humans become more capable of navigating such challenges. It also provided me with cultural competence towards the Chinese culture, as I am more aware and understanding of their language, costumes and habits due to the knowledge acquired during these curricula. Intercultural Economic Relations offered me the basis to analyze economical notions for an international

business. Notions of the impact of globalization in the economy were useful as well as knowledge on the transnational transactions that involve different currencies, as I had to deal daily with payments of various currencies and was able to help guests with advice on currency selection, for instance. The skills I most utilized from my Master's degree I obtained in Culture for Development I and II. First of all, this class equipped me with the definitions of culture and intercultural, it differentiated multicultural from intercultural, and described what intercultural competence is. It has also taught me the importance of the element of culture in business, as it shapes its uniqueness and therefore its highest value. It also gave me the notion of tourism as a truly intercultural business where cultures meet and where opportunities for exchange are displayed. I also learned how tourism can also be a threatening factor for culture when practiced in a non-sustainable way. I kept this in mind as a foreigner working in the hospitality industry, as I wanted to be part of a solution and not a problem. Knowledge of media tourism and nation branding, its importance but also its impact, was also very useful, since Malta is a place that utilized media tourism as a means to attract tourists with different profiles and interests and engage with the local economy, while creating a branding utilized for profit as well.

My semester abroad in Poland during the first semester of the second year of the Master's degree also played a big part in terms of obtaining skills that equipped me for the challenge of being a front office agent in one of the most intercultural settings of Europe, Malta, in an extremely culturally dynamic industry. Living six months in a country with a totally different culture from mine and studying with people from all over the world made me develop intercultural competences naturally, such as communication skills, cultural knowledge, understanding and sensitivity, adaptability, empathy and it helped develop my language skills as well. As I also had the chance to travel through eastern, central and northern Europe, I had the chance to become the guest, visiting an unfamiliar place, which made easier for me to put myself in the guest's shoes when I was in the role of the host. Through both these experiences I witnessed the importance of both the guest and the host for the interplay of interculturality in the hospitality industry. In this sense too, my semester abroad was crucial for that conclusion. During this semester, I also learned in-depth about corporate communication, which I applied as a member of a team, while working in the internship. It was crucial for developing communication skills among staff members, from staff to management, and from staff to customer too. The classes on Political and Social Affairs in China and Political History of the Middle East

had an impact on this experience like the one of English, German and Chinese Culture for Business. Curiously, in Digital Technologies, the class was divided into groups that had to manage a travel agency simulation in the platform Revas. Although those classes were intended to prepare us for applying business strategy skills, I encountered in that simulation many similarities with some working experiences I witnessed in Noru Hotel, regarding the booking services provided and the cooperation with several online travel agencies.

All skills from the Master's degree have enlightened the path for intercultural competence, which I had the chance to put to practice and develop during my internship, with success. The tools my Master's degree has equipped me with were not only utilized in my internship experience, by applying theoretical and technical knowledge, but they are also tools that are crucial for any professional in the international field, as well as for any person in general. These skills, consolidated in my internship experience, alongside the ones I developed during this time, will accompany my professional and personal journey.

## CONCLUSION

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The exploration of the hospitality sector throughout this report demonstrates that its true power lies far beyond the transactional dimension of a service. Hospitality, when understood as a human practice rooted in empathy, dialogue, and cultural awareness, becomes a powerful tool for fostering intercultural relations. The theoretical foundations analyzed earlier established that hospitality is not merely about efficiency or comfort, but also about creating meaningful encounters where individuals from different cultural backgrounds can meet, interact, and learn from one another. In this sense, hospitality is a mediator because it has the power to bridge differences, encourage mutual respect, and facilitate the transformation of potentially superficial exchanges into opportunities for genuine understanding.

By conducting this internship report with both a theoretical research and a deep analysis of my internship experience in a multidisciplinary way, I believe I helped to fill a gap in the investigation of the hospitality industry in the 21st century, as the report explores the correlation between the industry, interculturality and cultural competence. This report offers an insightful overview of how the industry must evolve towards meeting the needs of today's world, by showing that hospitality is the missing piece of the hospitality industry, and by showing precisely how that missing piece must be filled.

My internship experience at Noru Hotel Malta offered a tangible context in which these dynamics unfolded on a daily basis. Working as a front office agent placed me at the heart of intercultural encounters, where theory and practice converged. Routine tasks such as check-ins, complaint handling, or even assisting with translations became moments where cultural competence and communication skills were decisive in shaping the quality of the guest experience. Simple acts like addressing guests in their own language, understanding cultural expectations around comfort, or mediating between team members from different backgrounds proved that service can overcome its transactional role to create spaces of trust, belonging, and recognition. These small but significant adjustments reflect the essence of hospitality as both an economic activity and a social practice.

The challenges I faced during the internship, from managing cultural misunderstandings to adapting to unpredictable guest needs, highlighted the importance

of resilience, empathy, and problem-solving in intercultural contexts. They also demonstrated how hospitality requires a mindset of openness and adaptability, where “one solution fits all” approaches rarely succeed. Instead, the capacity to recognize difference, respect it, and respond with flexibility is what turns service into a transformative intercultural experience.

Ultimately, the power of hospitality in intercultural relations rests on its ability to humanize encounters in a business setting. By combining professional service with cultural sensitivity, hospitality creates environments where strangers can feel at home and where cultural barriers are reduced. It contributes not only to guest satisfaction and business success but also to broader social cohesion, encouraging dialogue and mutual respect in an increasingly globalized world. The internship at Noru Hotel Malta demonstrated that hospitality professionals are not just service providers, they are cultural mediators. This dual role reflects the transformative potential of the sector, which is to turn everyday interactions into opportunities for connection, to transform diversity into enrichment, and to show that through service and experience, hospitality can truly enhance intercultural relations. Moreover, the interplay between the host and the guest stands as a stage for developing cultural knowledge and sensibility, therefore contributing to a world with more respect and empathy, where interculturality wins over multicultural co-existence. The hospitality industry is extremely dynamic, unpredictable and human. There are not two identical days. Although task procedures may remain consistent, the individuals with whom one interacts change on a daily basis, bringing with them diverse forms of interaction, varying needs, and distinct issues to be addressed. Each encounter demands a renewed capacity for adaptation, offering opportunities for continuous learning as well as for establishing meaningful connections. Through such reciprocal exchanges, guests are able to feel safe, recognized, and genuinely understood.

This internship experience at Noru Hotel Malta has been far more than just an academic requirement, it was a deeply transformative chapter in both my personal and professional journey. Over the course of these three months, I had the unique opportunity to immerse myself in the heart of the hospitality industry, where cultural exchanges happen daily, and where service becomes a powerful tool for dialogue, empathy, and connection. Working in a truly intercultural environment not only reinforced the concepts studied throughout my Master’s in Intercultural Studies for Business, but it also challenged me to embody those principles in real time, under pressure, and in service of

others. Throughout this journey, I developed a stronger understanding of the complexities and nuances involved in delivering excellent service in a multicultural setting. I learned that hospitality is not a fixed process, but a living, human-centered art. I saw first-hand how empathy can dissolve barriers, how cultural awareness can elevate a guest experience, and how teamwork built on respect and clear communication is essential in a sector that never stands still. At Noru Hotel, I was not just an intern behind a front desk, I was a mediator, a problem-solver, a listener, and a cultural bridge. The lessons learned during this time go far beyond technical knowledge, they include connecting with people from all over the world, building confidence in my decision-making capacities, and witnessing firsthand the beauty of cultural diversity. I was privileged to work alongside a team of inspiring professionals that made the work environment not only efficient, but meaningful.

I encountered thousands of different people coming from different backgrounds and cultures, and my job was precisely to establish a connection with them while providing a service of excellency under the standards of hospitality. This reaffirmed my belief that hospitality has the power to foster intercultural understanding, mutual respect, and inclusive experiences that resonate long after the guest has checked out. It also confirmed that my passion lies in spaces where cultures meet and coexist and where service becomes an opportunity to build bridges. I now feel better equipped to approach future roles with a deeper sense of responsibility, professionalism, and intercultural competence. Most importantly, this experience reinforced my belief that human-centered skills such as listening, empathy, and cultural sensitivity are just as crucial as technical knowledge. Moving forward, I am confident that this will allow me to become not only a more effective professional but also a more understanding and globally minded individual. As I move forward in my career, I carry with me the tools, insights, and growth cultivated during this experience. I am filled with gratitude for everything I have learned and for every person who contributed to this journey. I am now more prepared, more grounded, and more inspired to continue my path in international and intercultural environments, wherever they may take me, always aiming to bring not just knowledge, but empathy, excellence, and humanity into everything I do.

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