

Supplier Profile Warren Zahra

Back to his roots

London-born Warren Zahra returned to his family roots in Malta many years ago. He entered the world of events with Malta's leading destination management company, Alpine Sterling, and hasn't looked back since.

As you will tell from my surname I am of Maltese origin. However, my parents had immigrated to the UK in the 1950s so I was born in London in 1965 and lived in South East London for the best part of 30 years.

I actually left school at the age of 16. I have worked in street markets, supermarkets, warehouses, sandwich bars, clothes shops and an art gallery, so very diverse but always very close to people, which is great.

My father asked me if I would be interested to work with his brother, who is my current CEO. He had a specialist tour operation to Malta based in London and this was my first experience of working in travel. Since then I have never looked back and finally took the opportunity to move to Malta where I run our Conference and Incentive Division at Alpine Travel.

What special qualifications and talents do you have?

This is always a difficult one, but I would say that I am calm and focused, I run a tight ship but am very understanding of my team's needs; I enjoy working within the team structure we have here and I love passing on my experience to them and watching them develop into strong individuals within their respective fields. I am also of the opinion that you never stop learning, so I love to listen to our clients to hear what their needs are and implementing those ideas into fact with the resources we have locally. I guess the main thing is that I enjoy what I do and therefore we never run out of enthusiasm, which I definitely make it a point to pass onto all concerned within the company.

What is the best part about your job?

Seeing an event through to conclusion and receiving that very special "*Thank you*" at the end of the event.

What is the worst?!

Waking up at 6am after spending a night with a group at one of the bars on the island. But I can't complain really!

What, in your opinion, has been the best event that you have organised?

I would say that the World Telecommunications Development Conference in 1998 was one of the most interesting and demanding in all aspects of our involvement with an event.

There were 1300 delegates participating from both the public and private sectors from over 87 UN Member countries, which gave us the opportunity to deal with major telecommunications organisations, National State departments from all UN countries and ministerial level diplomats. This and including the fact that we were appointed official DMCs by the Government of Malta representing their interests locally to organise the event was especially rewarding.

More recently we hosted 1800 delegates for a conference which took place in June. The event was a great success but in terms of logistics - transportation, organising outdoor catering, entertainment etc. - it was very challenging, but again the event was a huge success.

What makes a great event?

Satisfied clients who have gained experiences which surpass their expectations. It is a great feeling when delegates appreciate that they have received good value for money whilst achieving their goals during the event.

Why should people choose Malta for their corporate events?

When you mention Malta, some event organisers have a built in perception of what the island is like and in many ways they are correct; the Colonial past definitely has left its mark and whilst British Culture is still very much an influence on the island, it is also very Mediterranean in its atmosphere, so the difference is sometimes quite surprising to many.

Malta also has a very safe environment with very, very low crime rates, so safety is a worry you don't have to think about.

The political climate is very steady and people all over the island are very friendly towards visitors, so you definitely would feel welcome.

On a practical point of view, you have a fully English speaking environment, strong work ethic, not to mention short distances, great hotels, excellent restaurant and private venue options and the whole hospitality industry is continuously improving to levels of standards which can be found anywhere else in the world and at very competitive prices, even if Malta does not come up as first choice for an event it is always worth asking for a quote.

If you were a buyer, where in your destination would you take your meeting or incentive to?

Malta is only 9 x 17 miles, so it is not that important an issue as to where to place your event, but I would say there are two main areas which one should consider, these are:

St George's Bay (St Julian's) and the Valletta both offer very different contrasts, from quiet locations with historical settings to busy, cosmopolitan with modern and chic nightlife venues, these two areas will cater for all tastes.

What do you think Malta's strengths are?

Good all year climate; professional level of service; fairness in approach to business; interesting culture, which can be experienced all around you; excellent venues for hosting corporate events using the islands' natural historical treasures. Finally, Malta has the ability to offer solutions which will be both competitively priced and maintain the level of experience which is demanded by today's client.

If you could choose an entirely different profession, what would it be and why?

I have two:

From the age of 11 - 16 I was in the Army Cadet force and absolutely loved it, then I spent two years working with a unit on a voluntary basis, I was very keen to join the Army on leaving school and I believe that this would have been my preferred profession at that time.

I was also very interested in Comic Art and Graphic novels, I definitely would have been in my element if I had entered into this seriously at a younger age, so a Comic Artist would have been very interesting.

Finally, my housemaster at school always thought I would make a great comedian one day!! Not sure if he was joking or not.

Where do you go on holiday?

Back home to London most of the time as I still have a home there so it's very convenient. There's not much point going on a summer holiday when you live in Malta! I also am very fond of Italy and any major cities. However, whilst I have been to New York I would love to go there with my wife and kids one day.

What do you do in your spare time?

The simple things in life, watching football on TV, eating toast with my feet up on the coffee table and reading a good book.

What one thing would you change about the MICE Industry?

I am quite happy with things as they are, I think the industry works and depending on how you approach it makes the difference, so I am happy.

What trends do you see emerging over the next twelve months?

Late, late and later lead times for events and more aggressive purchasing, but these are things which we thrive on and there is always something new around the corner, so you just have to make sure that you anticipate and are prepared for action at all times.

What is your motto for life/success/work?

Listen and think before you speak, be ready to change and keep smiling.