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**High-profile speakers set to address independent sector at AITO overseas conference 2013 in Malta**

***Next week’s conference will take place in Malta (28 November – 1December, 2013), offering AITO tour operators the opportunity to address the biggest issues currently affecting the travel sector***

Sponsored by the Malta Tourism Authority and Air Malta, the conference will be held in Valletta, the capital of Malta, and will see an engaging mix of big-name speakers, group panel discussions and many networking opportunities.

#### All speaker sessions will include input from AITO members and business partners, encouraging questions and lively audience interaction throughout.

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**Chairman of AITO, Derek Moore, says:** “These speaker sessions and panel discussions will give delegates practical advice to implement straight away, helping them to stay ahead of the game. The sessions will cover a variety of hot topics such as the state of the economy, how to talk to customers in the age of social media, growing a business without spending money and entrepreneurial tips”.

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#### High-profile speakers at the conference will include:

**Rachel Bridge,** asuccessful business author, journalist and public speaker, who has written five best-sellingbooks about entrepreneurs, including ‘How to Make a Million before Lunch’ and ‘How to Start aBusiness without any Money’. Rachel is the former Enterprise Editor of The Sunday Times and nowwrites about SMEs for The Sunday Telegraph. Rachel will talk about how it is possible to grow a business without spending any money.

**Julian Hall,** of the award-winning financial services company, Bestinvest,has more than 25 years’ experience within the investment management industry. He regularly speaks about investment matters at client seminars and conferences on behalf of the company. Julian will be looking at the world economy and its impact on travel and tourism.

**Professor Rhodri Thomas,** whooriginally trained as an economist and is now Head of the International Centre forResearch in Events, Tourism and Hospitality (ICRETH), a centre which is dedicated to improving thepractice of others via its research and development activities. Rhodri will deliver a presentation entitled: ‘Being Entrepreneurial with a Small Business.’

**Deb Merrifield,** who has worked in direct marketing throughout her career, taking on a range of roles across a variety of sectors. Her word is respected in the industry - she is often asked to speak and judge on what’sbest in direct marketing. Deb will be discussing how businesses can maximise the value of their databases, including customer engagement, retention and acquisition.

**Mark Hodson** isa formertravel journalist at The Sunday Times. Mark is founder of Travel SEO, where he works with specialist tour operators on webmarketing and content strategy, and co-founder of [www.101holidays.co.uk](http://www.101holidays.co.uk), a group of travel inspirationwebsites with four million annual visitors. Mark will discuss how businesses can talk to customers in the age of social media.

**Richard Carrick** isa 35-year veteran of the travel industry, currently acting as a non-executive director, consultant and investorin a range of different holiday companies, as well as assisting private equity houses to evaluate travel businesses. Richard will deliver a presentation on ‘The 10 Universal Truths of Working with Entrepreneurs’.

Delegates will also have the chance to explore Valletta during the conference, a city which has recently been named European Capital of Culture for 2018. This will be the perfect chance to explore the grid of narrow streets and buildings which boast some of Europe's finest art works, churches and palaces. Guests will also experience some wine-tasting, have the chance to visit Mdina, one of Europe’s finest examples of an ancient walled city, as well as the Crafts Village, which showcases beautifully crafted local products.

Follow the conference action live on Twitter by connecting with AITO ([@AITOHQ](http://twitter.com/#!/AITOHQ)) and following the hashtag #AITOMALTA

#### For more information about MALTA, go to [www.visitmalta.com](http://www.visitmalta.com)

**Ends – 20 November 2013**

**Note for editors:**

**AITO (**[**www.aito.com**](http://www.aito.com)**) has over 120 specialist tour operators within its membership, jointly carrying in the region of 800,000 passengers annually.**

**Press:** For more information on AITO, please call Sue Ockwell, Stephanie Reed or Rebecca Milne on 020 8891 4440 or email s.ockwell@travelpr.co.uk, [s.reed@travelpr.co.uk](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cstephanier%5CAppData%5CLocal%5CMicrosoft%5CWindows%5CTemporary%20Internet%20Files%5CMadeira%202012%5CPress%20releases%5Cs.reed%40travelpr.co.uk) or r.milne@travelpr.co.uk.