

# A South African's guide to moving to and making it in Malta: Clean sweeps and dirty reputations

I want to share two secrets with you. Firstly, how a lifetime in PR has qualified me, unexpectedly to thrive in Malta. And secondly, to address the fear that all South Africans secretly have about living abroad - what to do about house cleaning!

 By [Marcus 'The Maltese Falcon' Brewster](#) 2 Feb 2018



Marsascala enjoys a reputation as one of the prettiest seaside villages in the south | Mark Leach

Regarding the first matter. The PR skill that enables me to flourish here is my understanding of the theory and the importance of reputation management. Because in Maltese circles, and especially in business circles, reputation is everything.

## The pebble of trust, the ripple of reputation

A quick analogy: If trust is the pebble tossed into the lake, reputation would be the ripples that grow outwards in ever widening circles. Professionally, every action you take, utterance you voice, promise you make is another pebble cast into the marketplace which creates those ripples of reputation.

In large societies like South Africa, the lake is so vast it's impossible for people on the north shore to see the plops on the far side. Back on island Malta, the marketplace is totally exposed, everyone can see the opposite shore. Nobody does a poor job here because the reputational fallout if you don't deliver is too big. There is no recovery from a fail and, to misquote Scott Fitzgerald talking about the Americans, there are no second acts in Maltese lives. On the island, life – that is to say commercial life – is governed by reputation. And reputation, in a smaller society like Malta, has the most marvellous self-regulating effect on professional standards.

## Coming clean

One of the impacts of living the dream and moving into a rambling old villa slumbering in the Mediterranean sunshine is that a large old house has a lot of rooms and a lot of rooms need a lot of cleaning. Many village folk – presumably in more modest abodes – proudly and capably do their own housework. We, however, soon came to realise that we were not equipped for domesticity. Admittedly, all of our friends here (Maltese and of course our fellow South Africans) have helpers in once a week for the cleaning and/or ironing, so it was widely expected that we would get someone in too.

In my island life fantasy (which owes perhaps a little too much to Gerald Durrell's Corfu), we would find a plump old village woman full of country wisdom and benevolent superstition who would char for us. Although we put the word out, the village couldn't produce a cleaning lady with a good enough command of English. In the end, one of our Maltese friends Edgar recommended his helper for the gig.

Katy is about as far from my Durrellian domestic dream as you can imagine. She's Australian (actually a blissfully returned Maltese exile), a biker (Harley of course), and is barely five foot tall with curly chestnut ringlets and a preternaturally cheerful disposition (her self-appointed nickname is "Smiley"). Regarding her work ethic, she's never late (at her own suggestion, her start time is 06h00), and is speedily industrious and efficient.

But here's the rub: After her first morning, Katy asked with some trepidation if we were happy with her services – and of course we were. She said, "I have to do a special job for you because Ed recommended me. I couldn't possibly let him down because he put *his reputation* on the line in recommending me!"

Malta – the island where even your cleaning lady worries about reputation!

The business takeout: It's not just the ad agency truism that you're only as good as your last job, it's that your last job could literally be your last job! People talk, and as RuPaul would say, "Don't f%&k it up!"

The social take-home: You *never* refer to your domestic as a "maid". The acceptable term is "cleaner" or "helper", and because of Malta's booming economy (and zero unemployment) your helper is likely to be either Phillipina or Eastern European.



MARKETING & MEDIA

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## ABOUT MARCUS 'THE MALTESE FALCON' BREWSTER

marcusbrewster is a brand synonymous with PR excellence in SA. An industry innovator, leader, and inspiration, Brewster affiliated his multi-award winning boutique firm with larger 1 BBBEE marketing/comms agency MediaRevolution for scale in 2016 and went on to launch Marcus Brewster International in Europe the following year. Marcus currently lives on - and actively promotes - the Mediterranean island of Malta. For African, S. African and European PR enquiries, contact [marcus@marcusbrewster.com](mailto:marcus@marcusbrewster.com) or WhatsApp on (+356) 9931 3322. View my profile and articles...

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