

Careers with Languages

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Ivan Mizzi, Chief Operations Officer at Excelsior Hotels International, grew up in Malta and speaks English, Maltese, and Italian. Here, he shares how his passion for languages has shaped his life and his career in hospitality.

Developing a passion for languages

Growing up in Malta, a bilingual country, I was naturally exposed to both Maltese and English from an early age. English was taught in school and used widely in the media, so it became second nature. I taught myself Italian via TV shows - Malta had a strong Italian media influence, and I picked it up watching cartoons and news. Initially, I was just curious, but as I grew older, I developed a passion for language and realised how invaluable multiple languages are, especially in hospitality, where communication is everything.

Languages allow me to connect

Working in hospitality is really exciting, especially when your language ability helps you travel the world!

Languages enhance teamwork in diverse workplaces, fostering inclusivity and efficiency. They allow me to connect with international guests, solve problems effectively, and create a welcoming atmosphere, as well as help me stand out to my managers. Early in my career, I was able to help an Italian guest who had lost his passport. As I spoke his language, I could guide him through the process and ease his stress.

As I moved into leadership, language skills became even more crucial in negotiations, staff training, and international events. They also helped me expand my professional network and represent my hotel on a global stage, hosting an international delegation and switching effortlessly between English and Italian kept everything running smoothly. Moments like

these reaffirm the power of language in building relationships and creating great experiences.

Mistakes are part of the learning process

Mastering fluency wasn't always easy. Italian, learned mainly through Maltese media, left gaps in grammar and writing. With English, refining formal communication took practice. Switching seamlessly between languages was another challenge - sometimes words blurred together! But constant exposure and use helped me overcome these hurdles.

One funny childhood memory stands out. Confident from hours of Italian TV, I once told a family friend, "Ho freddo nel naso!" (literally: "I have cold in my nose"), thinking it meant my nose was cold. They laughed and corrected me - proof that mistakes are just part of the learning process!

Languages open doors

But there's always more to learn! I'd love to improve my Spanish and French. Beyond communication, language learning has strengthened my problem-solving, listening, and multitasking skills, which are essential in fast-paced hospitality. Most importantly, it has made me more culturally aware and empathetic.

Languages open doors. They connect people, cultures, and opportunities like nothing else. In today's world, being multilingual isn't just an advantage. I believe it's a necessity. It sharpens the mind, boosts memory, and fosters respect for different cultures.

I would definitely encourage young people to study a language - it's a skill for life, opening unexpected opportunities. Whether for travel, career, or personal growth, speaking another language is always an asset, and one that you never know where it may lead.

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