

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Winding down for the summer? Not likely.

You know how it is on aeroplane flights. Sometimes the person in the next seat just won't get the point. On a recent trip, I'd tried reading, catching up on a downloaded movie, even a short doze but to no avail. She still wouldn't leave me alone. "So how come you've lived in Gibraltar all these years then?" followed swiftly by "What's it really like?" (her emphasis). I thought of sending her a link to The Gibraltar Magazine but she didn't look the type to own a computer. And finally, the question that finished our putative relationship for good: "And you'll be winding down for the summer soon, then ...". I gave up.

But the lady in 11D wasn't untypical in her view. Over the years that I have lived in Gibraltar I have often been asked how closely we follow our Mediterranean neighbours. In many ways it's true; after

all we tend to talk about enjoying a Mediterranean lifestyle and so on, but tempered "with a British feel".

I think this is particularly true when it comes to how we tackle the summer break. The two weeks annual trip to the seaside so beloved by the British in times past has, to a large extent, disappeared. Living as we do by the sea, perhaps we take our ready access to it for granted; certainly we do not need to wait until our allocated holiday time to go paddling. Local Gibraltar businesses, however, generally follow the British model and most firms that I know of remain fully open for business throughout the summer. In fact, it would be unthinkable for them to close, as often happens across the border and in other parts of Europe across multiple business sectors.

Before I get carried away, of course I should at least mention "summer hours" – that long-standing Gibraltar convention that sees government offices close early in the afternoon during the hottest months of the summer. I have written in the past about this – and none too politely – but today's column focuses on the private sector, where we do not follow this tradition and for a very good reason.

Government office staff will attend to our needs when they can and there is little we can do about the summer hours' regime. In the private sector, however, if we are not there to attend to our clients' needs, they will go somewhere else. They won't wait patiently until the morning when we decide we are ready for them. Instead, they'll go looking for an alternative supplier and that business, whatever it is, will be lost forever.



All this is not to say that Gibraltarians won't be taking a break during the warmer months – most do. Being somewhat contrary, my own "summer holiday" was taken in March when, as anyone who follows me on social media will attest, I annoyed all and sundry with images of spectacular scenery, aircraft and wildlife in Alaska. I tend not to take leave during the summer – and certainly not since I moved to Gibraltar all those years ago. Why? To misquote Macmillan, it's "events, dear boy".

By this I don't just mean the jolly parties and events that crop up with some regularity for the local community during the summer months. It seems to me that there is now so much else happening to attract visitors to the Rock that, given the higher number of people who come to enjoy them, it is rather a good idea to be here to welcome them. And yes, we should exploit them for any business opportunities that they might bring to these shores.

There are numerous festivals and special conferences planned for the next few months – indeed too many to mention without the risk of forgetting one or two and upsetting someone. Suffice it to say that I'm often surprised by the high level of public support garnered by international events held on the Rock and I fervently hope that this will continue.

Aside from events and happenings, we should also note the investments in infrastructure that continue to take place around us and which continue to attract new tourists and business visitors. Extensive renovations at The Rock Hotel have just been completed and we have seen the "launch" of yet more first-class facilities at the Sunborn floating hotel.

Our international airport and associated amenities include excellent facilities at the Wessex Lounge for those using their own business jets. New passenger routes have

recently been launched to Bristol, while the frequency of some of the London flights has also been increased over the summer. We have also seen a welcome return to the Tangier route with its easy onward connection to Casablanca. For business people, this will open up a whole range of exciting destinations across Africa and beyond. And there are more cruise ships coming too.

So much for getting more people to Gibraltar. Just as important, if not more so, is that they should enjoy the experience once they are here – be it first-class hotel accommodation, restaurants or other entertainment facilities. My focus is naturally on the business traveller, particularly those visiting us for the first time. And this is why I'm always keen to be here to welcome them and be sure that they find out what's on offer here. Together we can tell a great story and this bodes well for Gibraltar as an international finance centre in the years ahead.

opened its doors for business and I wish them well.

Consider too, the fast growing Gibraltar pensions business. Not just QROPS and QNUPS, which I have written about in past issues, but other company and individual schemes that have followed in their wake. The growth in this sector is attracting a great deal of attention and we seem to be welcoming interested practitioners and professionals from near and far every week.

So "Mrs Snooty" in seat 11D, yes, I am looking forward to summer, thank you very much. And yes, there will be time for beach BBQs and long summer nights but, at least for me and many other business people here, it is most definitely not a question of winding down. We plan to be busier than

ever. We may live in a Mediterranean culture where it is still acceptable in many countries to desert your post for a whole month in the summer, but we also now live in a global economy. The markets in Asia, Africa and the Americas beat to a different rhythm. And when business comes 'a calling, it doesn't want to be told to come back in a month's time. I say send them to us in Gibraltar. We'll be open for business.



Just consider a couple of examples. Anyone walking along Bayside Road in recent months will have seen the large-scale development taking shape that will bring the World Trade Center franchise to the Rock. I make no apologies for the American spelling of "Center" – that is the brand name. If all goes to plan, this exciting development should alleviate the office space problem that can often be a headache for companies aiming to set up or expand on Gibraltar.

More generally, on the finance side we are seeing ever more interest in the insurance and funds areas. Corporate and trust work is changing and therefore more challenging but we must all work to sharpen our focus and deliver the services that the international community wants. Hopefully, we are achieving this in the corporate service sector – we certainly seem to be busier than ever and there is increasing demand for more staff. Furthermore, the Gibraltar International Bank has recently

