

Places of Interest in Malta

Bugibba, Qawra & St. Paul's Bay



Essentially summer resorts, although many people live there all the year round. There are hotels and restaurants, flats as well as fun places where you can have an enjoyable night out. Almost everywhere you wander in this part of Malta, there is the Mediterranean Sea ready to seduce you.

Comino



With its many caves the rugged coastline of Comino renders it a haven to modern sea craft. Marauding crews from the 13th century onwards found them equally inviting so much so that in 1411 Comino was described as a pirates' den. In 1618 Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt decided to finance the construction of a watchtower. Saint Mary Tower, as it was called after the dedication of the chapel in Comino, is manned to this day by a unit of the Armed Forces of Malta



Comino

The **Blue Lagoon** is among the clearest areas of sea in the Mediterranean. Water skiing, for those with access to powerful boats, is a firm favourite. The area around Comino, including Santa Marija Bay, provides some of the finest spots on the islands for snorkelling and swimming, with several spectacular caves to explore.

Cottonera (The Three Cities)



The Three Cities - Birgu, Bormla, L-Isla - All three towns are situated within the Grand Harbour area. The towns are also alternatively known as Vittoriosa, Cospicua and Senglea.

Vittoriosa (Birgu) is the oldest of the three and was Malta's maritime town. Here one can visit the Maritime Museum and the Inquisitor's Palace. Open daily except public holidays.

At its tip is **Fort St. Angelo**, which since mediaeval times until World War II saw many sea battles take place around its shores. The fort became the first seat of the Order of St John when it took up residence in Malta. The British Royal Navy adopted Fort St Angelo as its naval headquarters in the Mediterranean.

Senglea (L-Isla) is the peninsular town that like Birgu faces Valletta. It was built by Grand Master Claude de la Sengle in 1555. At its tip is a small garden, **Gnien il-Gardjola**, with a stupendous view of Grand Harbour. A sentry post displays the eye, ear and crane bird as symbols of watchfulness.

Cospicua (Bormla), grew fast in commercial importance due to the development of the shiprepairyards in the 19th century. The feast of the Immaculate Conception is celebrated on December 8.

Fort Rinella, a late 19th century coastal fort, limits of Kalkara, was built for a single 100-ton gun made in Newcastle. Fort Rinella is undergoing active preservation by the Malta Heritage Trust. Open Monday to Saturday except public holidays. Victorian military reenactments are held every Saturday between 2 and 4.30 p.m.

Gozo



Gozo is just four miles away to the northwest across a clear blue and very deep channel. The two islands are connected by regular car and passenger ferry and a helicopter service. Gozo is where Ulysses is said to have been held captive entranced by the nymph Calypso. This sister island is almost entirely agricultural, and life is simple but comfortable. It is an island of farmers and fishermen, and their way of life dominates the character of Gozo.

If you arrive by sea, **Mgarr Harbour** is picturesque with all kinds of sea craft. The neo-Gothic **Lourdes Sanctuary**, built in 1888, watches over it. In Victoria, the capital, go up to the **Citadel** or **Gran Castello** and walk around and breathe the ancient atmosphere. This was the fortified refuge of the Gozitans when the island was attacked by the Turks or pirates. The late-medieval houses in this area are unique in the Maltese Islands. There is the magnificent **Cathedral** and various museums. The tree-lined square in Victoria, known as *It-Tokk* (meaning the point of rendezvous), is the hub of Gozitan life. There is a market from 7 a.m. until 1p.m. The market is best known for remnants or pieces of discarded cloth bought in bulk from fashion houses abroad. The majestic **Basilica of St. George** dominates the square behind *It-Tokk*. Built in 1673, the church is also called "The Golden Basilica" because of its richly-gilded interior and the dominant bronze canopy centrepiece, imitating that of Bernini at St Peter's in Rome. This is the only church in Gozo portraying two altar paintings by renowned Italian artist Mattia Preti (1613 - 1699).

Ggantija Prehistoric Temples date from between 3600 and 3000 BC - one thousand years before the Pyramids at Giza, in Egypt (2600 BC). They are the greatest undertaking of the pre-Phoenician Gozitans. These temples are so named as early historians in the 16th century thought that they were the homes of Malta's first settlers, a mythical race of giants. They are the best preserved of all the temple sites on the islands, The Guinness Book of Records recognises these as the oldest free-standing structures in the world. Open daily except public holidays.

Ta' Pinu Sanctuary dominates the countryside. The most conspicuous way in which the people of Gozo demonstrate their faith is the building of churches and chapels in honour of the Blessed Virgin and the saints. Ta' Pinu was consecrated on December 13, 1931, after Our Lady is said to have appeared to a country woman in here in 1883. On May 26, 1990 Pope John Paul II celebrated Holy Mass on the parvis of the sanctuary and later placed a halo of five stars on the head of the Blessed Virgin.

Lunzjata Valley is the island's green heart and one of the greenest places all the year round. It served as a hunting ground for the Knights. It runs between the eastern tip of the higher ground on which the town is situated and the village of Kerzem, and abounds with natural springs.

Ir-Ramla l-Hamra, the Red Sandy Bay, is the most unspoilt beach in Malta and Gozo. Once there the visitor can get an idea of the beauty of the island's beaches centuries ago. Ramla Bay was perfect for an invader's landing. Hence after 1715, the Knights built a battery on either side of the entrance to the bay.

Marsalforn is an important fishing village and the most popular resort on the island with both locals and tourists. Here one can find a good number of hotels, a large variety of restaurants and several watersports clubs. **Xlendi** is one of the three main fishing villages and a popular summer resort. Wedged between majestic cliffs in the southeast of Gozo, it is definitely one of the most picturesque and romantic spots on the island.

Qala where you can admire *Ta' Randu Windmill* a restored eighteenth century windmill that was still being used for the grinding of grain and maize until up to thirty years ago as well as *Hondoq Bay*.

The whole island of Gozo is a showplace of the life and customs of a typical Mediterranean community, but it also prides itself with several typical museums. These include the *Museum of Archaeology*, the *Citadel Armoury*, the *Folklore Museum*, the *Natural History Museum* and the *Cathedral Museum*, all within the Citadel; a *folklore museum* at Gharb, *Ta' Kola Windmill* in Xaghra, The *Maritime Museum* at Nadur, and the *Gozo Heritage* at Ghajnsielem.

Marsaxokk & Birzebbugia



Ghar Dalam Prehistoric Cave is situated outside the town of **Birzebbugia**. To reach the cave from the road one first enters a museum housing a vast collection of skeletal remains of elephants, hippopotami and deer which were found inside the cave and which abounded in Malta during the Glacial Periods. Open Daily except public holidays.

Ghar Hasan is situated on the edge of a sheer cliff in the vicinity of Birzebbugia's Freeport. According to legend a Turk called Hasan abducted a Maltese girl and kept her inside the cave. When discovered by the locals he preferred to kill the girl and commit suicide.

Marsaxlokk is Malta's main fishing village situated in the southeastern harbour of the island (hence its name). This fishing village has the largest fishing fleet of *luzzu* boats. On Sundays a sizeable street market is open throughout the day.

Mdina



The city of Mdina served as Malta's ancient capital from Roman times until the arrival of the Knights of St. John in Malta in 1530. It derives its name from the Arab period (870-1224). Today its architecture reflects especially the baroque period and may be admired by all those who really want to experience Malta's past. The small town has a tiny population of some 300. More than private residences, the most conspicuous buildings are the numerous palaces, churches and museums.

The magnificent Cathedral was built by Lorenzo Gafa in 1702 after the older one was damaged by an earthquake in 1693. It is dedicated to the Conversion of St. Paul but celebrates the feast of St. Peter and St. Paul on June 29 under the title of *L-Imnaria*. Open Mondays to Saturdays.

On the right of the Cathedral is the **Cathedral Museum**, built in the 18th century as a seminary for priests. Among the mainly-ecclesiastical exhibits there are works of art from mediaeval to more recent times. Noteworthy among these is the collection of etchings by Dürer as well as paintings by numerous other 17th- and 18th-century artists. Open daily.

Also impressive in its architecture is *the Magisterial Palace* or **Vilhena Palace**, situated right behind the main gate of Mdina. The old palace currently houses the **National Museum of Natural History**. Open daily except public holidays.

The **Norman House** or **Palazzo Falson** is so called because of its Sicilian style of Norman architecture. The *palazzino* houses an interesting collection of antique furniture.

Mosta



The Rotunda at Mosta is one of the most conspicuous churches in Malta. The church, in the form of the Pantheon in Rome, was designed by George Grognet De Vasse and constructed in 1833-1860. During World War II this church miraculously survived an aerial attack when a bomb pierced the dome and ricocheted inside the church without exploding.

Visit **Palazzo Parisio** in Naxxar - unique 19th century Maltese palace, home of the Scicluna family, with one of the finest gardens in Malta.

Ta Qali Crafts Village - The former World War II military aerodrome was converted into a local hand-crafts centre. It's the ideal place to buy ceramics, jewellery and knitwear, pottery and see glass blowing and moulding as well as other craftspeople at work. Here one can buy something completely unique and original to take home. Within the craft centre one can find the Aviation Museum displaying aircrafts.

Siggiewi



Not to be overlooked is **Siggiewi** where one can find the **Laferla Cross**. The cross attracts hundreds of devoted people from around Malta every year, during Easter festivities. During Easter it is known as the **Mixghela** literally meaning "lit one".



Laleria Cross



The Mixgħeja

There is also a lovely view of island of Filfla from Lapsi Bay.



The isle of Filfla

Sliema, St. Julian's, & Paceville



This area is the pleasure centre of Malta. There are hotels, restaurants, cafes, bars, discos, cinemas, a bowling centre, a casino in a fairytale palace as well as Bay Street, a family entertainment complex. It is a lively part of Malta all the year round.

Tarxien



TARXIEN

The Hypogeum is an underground burial place that was used in prehistoric times and contemporarily with the Maltese megalithic temples. Tickets are available from the Hypogeum and the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta. For hooking availability call on 21805019/21825579.

Valletta



VALLETTA

Founded by Grand Master Jean Parisot de la Valette, and built on a grid pattern as designed by Francesco Laparelli in 1566, Valletta is Malta's capital and serves as the islands' main hub of social, cultural, economic and administrative activities. The whole city has been identified as a UNESCO World Heritage site, and contains numerous monuments that should not be missed.

St. John's Co-Cathedral is certainly Malta's most important and artistic historical monument, built by the Knights of the Order of St. John as their conventual church in 1573-1578. From within the Cathedral one can gain access to the **Oratory** which the Knights built for their novices. This was constructed in 1602 and was later to be embellished by Caravaggio's painting *The Beheading of St. John*. **St. John's Co-Cathedral Museum** is reached via the Oratory. It contains an interesting exhibiton of Flemish tapestries, church vestments as well as other *objets d'art*. Open daily except Sundays and public holidays.

Said to be the oldest church in Valletta, **Our Lady of Victory Church** was rebuilt in its baroque architectural style in the mid-18th century. It was built with its back to St. James Cavalier and was dedicated to the Virgin Mother as a child - *Il-Bambina*. As the feast is celebrated on September 8, the same date that the Knights emerged victorious from the Great Siege laid by the Ottomans in 1565, it is known as our Lady of Victory Church.

St. Paul's Shipwreck Church (open daily) is considered to be the most important church in Valletta after St. John's Co-Cathedral. This church celebrates the feast of St. Paul's Shipwreck on February 10. The wooden statue of St. Paul which is carried in procession is the work of the 17th-century sculptor Melchiorre Gafa. One can also see a silver monstrance with a bone relic of St. Paul, as well as the silver column brought from Rome in 1960.

The **Grand Master's Palace**, built as the official residence of the Grand Master of the Knights of St. John, later served as the British Governor's residence and administrative offices. Today the Palace houses Parliament and also serves as the Office of the President of Malta. One may visit the State Rooms, open daily. The Palace Armoury may also be visited daily. Closed on public holidays.

The Auberges

Of the many ornate facades in Valletta, perhaps the most imposing is that of the **Auberge de Castille**. This was one of the many communal residences built for the Knights in Valletta. The building was commissioned by Grand Master Manoel Pinto de Fonseca and designed by Andrea Belli. Today this fine building serves as the Office of the Prime Minister of Malta. The **Auberge d'Italie**, situated in the upper part of Merchants Street and in front of another notable building, Palazzo Parisio, has a fine facade designed by Romano Carapeccchia. The bust in bronze on the facade portrays Grand Master Gregorio Carafa. The **Auberge de Baviere**, built for the Bavarian knights, overlooks Marsamxett Harbour and is currently used by the Ministry for Housing. Housed inside the **Auberge de Provence** in Republic Street is the National Museum of Archaeology (open daily except public holidays), containing numerous megalithic architectural elements as well as a display of prehistoric art objects that were found during excavations at various archaeological sites in Malta and Gozo.

The **National Museum of Fine Arts**, originally built as a residence for one of the higher dignitaries of the Order of St. John, today houses a rich collection of art, especially paintings, dating from the 13th century until the present. Among the more famous painters represented are Guido Reni, Favray and Matthias Stomer, together with the largest collection of works by Mattia Preti. Open daily except public holidays.

The **National War Museum** (open daily except public holidays) is situated within the precincts of Fort St. Elmo. The small museum is packed with a vast hoard of militaria from the entire British period. There is also a pictorial documentary of the Second World War. Among the exhibits is the George Cross.

Casa Rocca Piccola at 74 Republic Street, Valletta, This magnificent 16th-century palace is the private family house of the ninth Marquis de Piro, containing exquisite furniture and paintings. There are unique collections of costumes and even the family's World War II air-raid shelters. Open Monday to Saturday except public holidays.

The **Manoel Theatre** was built in 1731 and is one of the oldest to be found in Europe. It is a small but quaint theatre that provides ever-changing entertainment by the performing arts. Adjacent to it is a small museum, open Mondays to Saturdays from 9.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m.

St. James Cavalier, originally built for war, has been totally renovated from inside and opened to the public in September 2000 as a Centre for Creativity. It is the intention of this centre to establish itself as a catalyst for all forms of artistic expression. Open daily.

Fort St. Elmo, situated at the tip of Valletta, has for centuries defended the two harbours. Its heroic defence can best be documented in the Great Siege of 1565 as well as in World War II. Open Saturday afternoon and Sunday until 4.00p.m. On certain Sundays special historical reenactments related to Malta's history are held.

The **National Library** is situated behind Republic Square's cafeterias. The *Bibliotheca* holds a vast collection of books and documents from the Knights' period. Built in the late 18th century, it is frequented daily by researchers of history, Open Mondays to Saturdays.

The old building of the **Sacra Infermeria** served as the hospital of the Knights, but was also used by the British as a military hospital. The building with its numerous halls and corridors is nowadays used as the **Mediterranean Conference Centre**, exhibition hall and theatre.

The Malta Experience is a multi-visual show highlighting Malta's 7,000-year-old history. The show is screened in one of the halls of the Mediterranean Conference Centre. The entrance is situated on top of the bastions. Open daily.

The Great Siege of Malta Show, situated beneath the National Library, is a spectacular walk-through experience that recounts in diorama form the story of the Knights from their origin in Jerusalem until their glorious 268 years in Malta, Open daily.

The World War II Siege Memorial, situated right below the Lower Barrakka Garden, takes the shape of a Greek round temple in which a bell hangs, and a catafalque perched on the fortification walls of Valletta.

Upper Barrakka Garden, overlooking Grand Harbour, this garden was designed as a place of recreation for the Italian knights. It has numerous monuments dedicated to British and Maltese personalities.



Lower Barrakka Garden is another green oasis in the capital that affords a different splendid view of Grand Harbour. A cenotaph in the form of a Greek temple commemorates the death of Alexander Ball, Britain's first Commissioner and Governor in Malta in 1800.

Hastings Garden, situated on the left of Valletta's main fortifications, provides a panoramic view of Marsamxett Harbour and the northern side of the island.

Zurrieq & Qrendi



Just as famous as the one in Capri, but larger and more beautiful, Malta's **Blue Grotto** is situated below the cliffs of **Wied iz-Zurrieq**. Boat trips are held regularly from the small bay (weather permitting). The turquoise blue colour of the seabed can best be appreciated in the morning light.

The **Neolithic Temples** are among the most refined prehistoric temples that still maintain a good representation of prehistoric art in the form of has reliefs, sculpture and pottery. Open daily.

Hagar Qim and **Mnajdra Temples** are among the most impressive of the prehistoric sites and are situated a few scores of metres away from the southern cliffs of Malta, in the proximity of the Blue Grotto. Open daily except on public holidays.