

MALTA TRAVEL GUIDE

Malta – an introduction

Malta is a small and densely populated island in the Mediterranean Sea, off the southern coast of Sicily. Malta is the biggest in an archipelago made of seven small islands, some of which uninhabited; the second biggest is Gozo. This archipelago forms the Republic of Malta. The official languages are Maltese and English.



There are traces of people living in Malta since prehistoric times, and the oldest temples date back to about 3500 BC. Malta, during the centuries, was dominated by different civilisation: the Phoenicians, then the Romans, the Byzantines, the Arabs, the Normans, the Aragonese, the Spanish, the

French with Napoleons and the British (from 1814 to 1964, when Malta became independent). All these civilizations left some trace that we can still see in today's buildings, culture, cuisine and in the language. Malta has been a member of the EU since 2004; the currency used at the moment is the Maltese Lira, but Malta plans to join the Euro zone in 2008.

The weather is typically Mediterranean, with mild but humid winters and hot, dry summers.

What to see and do in Malta

The county of [Malta has many attractions](#) with the island rich of cultural heritage, from prehistoric temples everywhere on the island (especially worth seeing are Ggantjia and Hagar Qim, which are the best preserved) to the cobbled streets of the small towns lined by palaces and cathedrals in Baroque and Renaissance styles. The capital city is Valletta, a small charming town that you can easily visit on foot, with quaint cobbled streets and examples of fine architecture from different ages.



In Valletta you can visit various museums, including the Museum of Archaeology and St John's co-cathedral, which hosts a great painting by Michelangelo da Caravaggio: the Beheading of St John. There are several towns and small villages in Malta worth seeing, including Mdina with its mixtures of Medieval and Baroque

architecture and Rabat, where you can visit the catacombs, a Roman villa, fine churches and monasteries.

Worth a visit is the neighbour island of Gozo, with its lush countryside, much greener than in Malta, and its peaceful pace of living. Gozo also offers some medieval architecture and prehistoric temples. The liveliest area in Malta, where many tourists stay overnight, is Sliema.



Sliema has a mixture of old and modern architecture with new hotels and developments, a modern shopping centre and some pubs and restaurants.

In Malta and the surrounding islands, an activity not to miss if you like the sea is scuba diving. There are very nice places to explore, such as the Blue Grotto. Also, you

can hire a jet ski or charter a yacht.

Shopping in Malta

Every little village in Malta has its own local market, which takes place on a different day of the week. In Valletta there are several arts and crafts shops and, if you are looking for a modern shopping centre, there is one in Sliema. Maltese artisans produce some fine craft works, such as laces, jewellery, pottery, metal work, wooden objects and more.

Eating and drinking in Malta

Maltese food is rustic and based on seasonal products. As in most Mediterranean countries it is rich in fresh fruit and vegetables and, being an island, Malta offers a lot of fish with a lot of different varieties. Also, very popular is rabbit meat and the local cheese is made of goat or sheep milk. Worth trying is Maltese bread, made from sour dough from the previous day's batch and cooked in stone ovens. Maltese desserts are rather sweet and a lot of dried fruit and almonds are used.

Maltese cuisine is a result of the several cultural influences the island received over the centuries, including influence from the neighbouring Sicily. Only a few examples of typical dishes are: Rabbit Stew, Lampuki Pie (fish pie), Bragioli (beef olives) and widow's soup, which includes a small round of Gbejniet (sheep or goat's cheese). Even though Malta is not renowned for its wine as other bigger Mediterranean countries, it produces some good varieties of wine; the local varieties of grapes are called Gellewza and Ghirghentina.

Getting around Malta

Malta is small and well served by the local bus system, so it is possible to visit it all, just by using the public bus. If you wish to reach the most remote parts of the island, you can rent a car. All road signs are in English and driving is on the left. There are regular ferries from Malta to Gozo and vice versa and boat services between each island and Comino.

Getting to Malta

It is possible to reach Malta either by air or by boat. The [local airline is Air Malta](#), which has flights to Valletta from various cities in the world. If you are travelling from the UK, British Airways flies to Malta, or you can try Britannia Airways that have charter flights to Malta. If you are travelling from Sicily, there is a regular ferry service from Sicily to Malta with Virtu Ferries.

Valeria Lo Iacono also writes for [Sauna and Spa Guide](#), the sauna site.