



Malta

What to see and do, good places to stay, and good places to eat and drink on this popular unpolished gem of an island

When *Which? Holiday* last reported on Malta way back in 1998, we found a country ploughing headfirst into ever expanding commercialism. We recently returned to find a country of contrasts, where despite some misgivings (predominantly beachless shorelines and several overdeveloped resorts), the star historical attractions continue to shine brightly. And all on an island offering real curb appeal for a good value holiday.

Malta. For more information, pick up a bus timetable from the tourist office. Buses are less frequent on Gozo, so those wanting to explore may want to consider hiring a car.

By car

Car hire companies are plentiful and driving is on the left hand side. However, signs on the island are not the best, and the roads can get hectic. Tourist cars are not permitted in Mdina or Valletta.

By ferry

Most travel to Gozo from Malta using the frequent ferry service between the islands. A peak travel return ticket for the 25-minute crossing costs €4.65 (www.gozochannel.com).

By air

For the more adventurous, the Harbour Air Malta Seaplane operates daily from Valletta Harbour to the island of Gozo. The short 20-minute flight costs around €83 return (www.harbourairmalta.com).

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

MDINA

■ **St Paul's Cathedral**
Open Mon-Fri 9.30am-4.30pm (last entry 4.15pm), Saturday 9.30am-3.30pm (last entry 3.15pm)
Admission €2.50

■ **Palazzo Falson**
www.palazzofalson.com
An intriguing medieval palace.
Admission €10, seniors €5 (price includes audio guide)

■ **St Agatha's Catacombs**
St Agatha Street
Open guided tours every 30 minutes.
Mon-Fri 10am-5.30pm and Sat 10am-3.30pm
Admission €2.50

■ **St Paul's Catacombs**
St Agatha Street
Tel 00356 2145 4562
Open Mon-Sun 10am-5pm (last entry 4.30pm)
Admission €5, seniors €2.50

VALLETTA

■ **Casa Rocca Piccola**
www.casaroccapiccola.com
Admission €7

The Saluting Battery
www.wirtartna.org
Guided tours 11am and 12.15pm daily.
Admission €5

■ **St John's Co-Cathedral**
www.stjohnscocathedral.com
Admission €6

■ **Fort St Elmo re-enactment**
The fort is usually closed to the public so re-enactments are a great opportunity to see inside. Contact the Malta Tourism Authority for 2009 dates (www.visitmalta.com) or visit the Malta tourist office just inside the city gates.
Admission €5

■ **National Museum of Archaeology**
www.heritagemalta.org
This relatively small museum provides an introduction to the islands key historical sights

GETTING THERE

Airlines

www.maltairport.com

The following airlines fly direct to Malta's' Luqa airport from the UK.

- **Air Malta** (www.airmalta.com)
- **British Airways** (www.ba.com)
- **Easyjet** (www.easyjet.com)
- **Thomsonfly** (www.thomson.co.uk)
- **Flythomascook.com** (www.flythomascook.com)

Specialist tour operators

- **Belleair** (www.belleair.co.uk)
- **Chevron** (www.chevron.co.uk)
- **Malta Direct** (www.maltdirect.com)

GETTING AROUND

By bus

With horns as loud as their brightly coloured chassis, buses are a cost-effective way to tour

For the full magazine report on Malta,
see p34 of the April 2009 issue of Which? Holiday

as well as the chance to examine historical finds from sites already visited. The figure of the 'Sleeping Lady' from the Hypogeum is the museums most notable artefact.
Open Mon-Sun 9am-7pm (last entry 6.30pm)
Admission €2.50

■ The Malta Experience

www.themaltaexperience.com

An audio-visual guide to Malta. A good introduction to the island – especially for those who have an aversion to guidebooks.
Admission €9.50

■ Palace Armoury

www.heritagemalta.org

The Palace Armoury is still housed in its original building and displays a large collection of arms from Maltese history – including weapons belonging to the Knights of St John.
Open Mon-Sun 9am-5pm (last entry 4.30pm)
Admission €4.66, seniors €2.33

WIED IZ-ZURRIEQ AREA

■ Blue Grotto

www.heritagemalta.org

Admission €7

Boat trips are weather dependent

Mnajdra and Hagar Qim Temples

Open Mon to Sun 9am-5pm (last entry 4.30pm)

Admission €5, seniors €2.50 per site.

Multi-site tickets available

■ Tarxien Temples

Neolithic Temples Street, Tarxien

www.heritagemalta.org

Open Mon to Sun 9am-5pm (last entry 4.30pm)

Admission €2.50, seniors €1.50

MOSTA

■ Mosta Dome

The Church of St Mary is better known as the Mosta Dome so-called after its impressive roof structure that is claimed to be the 4th largest in the world. During World War II a bomb hit the dome, but failed to explode, and slid across the church floor instead. **NOTE:** You're advised to dress appropriately, so no shorts, mini-skirts, sleeveless dresses or tops allowed.

Open 9-11.45am and 3-5pm.

Admission free

PAOLA

■ Hal Saffieni Hypogeum

Burial Street, Paola

Book your visit to the Hypogeum in advance as visitor numbers are restricted to 10 every hour.

Buy tickets online at www.heritagemalta.org.

Last minute tickets are available for the 12noon

tour for €20. Tickets are sold on a first come,

first served basis and can only be bought from

the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta

or the Archaeology Museum in Gozo one day

before the visit.

Admission €10, seniors €5

SLIEMA

■ Captain Morgan Harbour Cruise

www.captainmorgan.com.mt

Admission €16

GOZO

■ Ggantija Temples

Temples Street, Xaghra

www.heritagemalta.org

Open Mon to Sun 9am-5pm (last entry 4.30pm)

Admission €3.50

GOOD PLACES TO STAY

Prices are for the cheapest double room,

including breakfast, in September 2009.

You should be able to find cheaper prices by

booking online or as part of a package deal.

ATTARD (NEAR SAN ANTON GARDENS)

■ Corinthian Palace Hotel and Spa

Tel 00356 2544 2001

www.corinthianhotels.com

This inland hotel is perfectly positioned to enjoy the San Anton Gardens of the neighbouring Presidential Palace. Featuring an impressive dining room and a great looking spa. **€110 (£96)**

GOLDEN BAY

■ Golden Bay

Radisson SAS Golden Sands Resort and Spa

Tel 00356 2356 1000

www.goldensands.com.mt

This beachfront property will appeal to those wanting a relaxing hotel based stay – with a private section of the Golden Bay public beach. Away from the resorts, the hotel's remote location means eating out will require a car or taxi. If you're not travelling on a tight budget, then a sea-view room is worth the extra expense. **€220 (£196)**

NOTE: Part of this hotel is allocated to timeshare guests and we did witness some people being approached by reps as they got off the bus next to the hotel.

GOZO

■ Maria Giovanna

Tel 00356 2155 3630

www.gozohostels.com

This delightful guesthouse is just a minute's walk from Marsalforn's seafront. Run by sisters Sonia and Anna, this townhouse is beautifully furnished. No pool. **€50 (£44)**

MARSAXLOKK

■ Duncan Guesthouse

Tel 00356 2165 7212

www.duncanmalta.com

This family run guesthouse won't win any interior design awards, but as one of the only places to stay in Marsaxlokk, it's basic yet spacious rooms will satisfy those wishing to explore Malta on a tight budget. Overlooking the harbour and located above the family restaurant.

From €45 (£40) room only

MDINA

■ Xara Palace Hotel

Tel 00356 2145 0560

www.xarapalace.com.mt

This family run hotel with Mdina's city walls was built during the late 17th century as a noble residence. Stone flooring and vaulted ceilings all add to its quintessential character.

No pool. **€280 (£246) room only**

MELIEHA

■ Riu Seabank

Tel 00356 2289 1732

www.riu.com

Rooms are brightly decorated, although our room was starting to show its age (some upgraded rooms are set for summer 2009). Despite the views overlooking the bay, the road at the front of the hotel means sea-view rooms are not the most relaxing. The hotel has a bowling alley, games room and varied entertainment programme.

Tour op: Thomson seven-night B&B £500pp, flying from London Gatwick

MGARR

■ Grand Hotel

Tel 00356 2156 3840

www.grandhotelmalta.com

On a hill overlooking Mgarr harbour, the Grand Hotel is a quiet place to stay, close to a small selection of restaurants. The capital Victoria is within easy reach and during the summer, the hotel provides a shuttle service to the capital and the island's beaches. Our room's simple furnishings were not quite as grand as the hotel name suggests, but perfectly adequate for our short stay. We recommend staying in a sea-view room (request one with a balcony). **€70 (£62)**

RABAT

■ Point De Vue Guesthouse and Restaurant

5 Saqqajja

Tel 00356 2145 4117

www.pointdeuemalta.com

A 17th-century guesthouse located just outside Mdina's city walls and one of the few options available near the former capital. Rooms have fairly modern interiors, however, our bathroom was tiny and some of the communal areas in the guesthouse are not the most inviting. **€70 (£62)**

ST JULIAN'S

■ Hilton Malta

Portomaso Marina

Tel 00356 2138 3383

www.hilton.co.uk

For facilities galore, head for the Hilton Malta. With 400 rooms, four outdoor swimming pools, five restaurants and plenty of children's activities, there is plenty to keep the whole family entertained. **€205 (£180). Around £670 for a seven-night B&B package holiday**

SPINOLA BAY

Hotel Juliani

12 St George's Road
Tel 00356 2138 8000
www.hoteljuliani.com

Despite its traditional exterior, this boutique hotel's sleek interior ensures you won't go without modern luxuries. The roof-top pool at the Juliani enjoys exceptional views, but its small size means it's best for a refreshing dip rather than an energetic swim. If you're budget allows, a junior sea-view room is a must. (€194, £173). €154 (£135)

SLIEMA

The Waterfront Hotel

Tel 00356 2133 3434
www.waterfronthotelmalta.com

Situated on the edge of Sliema, the Waterfront hotel is within walking distance of shops and restaurants and has pleasant views over Valetta. However, we felt our room and some of the communal areas could have done with a little updating. €114 (£101)

Tour op: Thomson seven-night B&B £493pp, flying from London Gatwick

VALLETTA

Grand Hotel Excelsior

Tel 00356 2125 0520
www.excelsior.com.mt

This new hotel brings you luxury with a capital L. It oozes class and sophistication while remaining unstuffy and welcoming. Though it may lack the character of older hotels, the furnishings more than make amends. €193 (£169)

Hotel Phoenicia

Tel 00356 21 225 241
www.phoeniciamalta.com

The Phoenicia is undoubtedly a grand old lady with an imposing entrance, stately dining room and extensive gardens. However, our standard room could have benefited from a touch of TLC and was lacking the standard of luxury normally expected from this grade of hotel. Rooms on the third and fourth floor were to be refurbished by March 2009. €150 (£134) room only

GOOD PLACES TO EAT

GOZO

Marsalforn Bay

Il-Kartell Restaurant
Tel 00356 2155 6918
www.gozo.com/il-kartell

With tables on the sea front, this is the perfect choice for alfresco dining. Pasta, meat and seafood dishes fill the menu. Mains around €13.

MARSAXLOKK

Concept Café

Part of the Southport Villa & Gardens complex on Marsaxlokk's waterfront, Concept Café serves a selection of sandwiches (€3), wraps (€6.50)

and salads (€7), as well as a few more substantial daily specials (€15).

Pisces Restaurant

Tel 00356 2165 4956

Simple cooking and hearty portions – ask Mario the owner about the catch of the day. Stay clear of the more 'exotic' sauces accompanying some dishes, just enjoy the fish cooked simply without sauce. Mains €12-€18.

Ix-Xlukkajr

Tel 00356 2165 2109

Like many of the harbour restaurants, Ix-Xlukkajr specialises in sea food, although we also recommend the traditional Maltese rabbit stew. Main courses around €15.

MDINA

Ciappetti

5 St Agatha's Esplanade
Tel 00356 2145 9987

An atmospheric restaurant set in an old Maltese townhouse. The restaurant serves tasty traditional Maltese cuisine and is popular with locals and tourists. It is advisable to book ahead. Mains from €14. (Closed Mondays).

Fontanella Tea Gardens

1 Bastion Street

This popular café is a magnet for tourists all keen to sample the delectable cakes and fabulous views. Expect it to be busy during the summer months.

MELLEIHA

Trattoria De Buono

Tunny Net Complex, Marfa Road
Tel 00356 2152 1332

This restaurant serves a selection of pasta, fish and meat dishes with views overlooking Mellieha Bay. Main courses around €15.

NOTE: The restaurant offers a discount for Rui Seabank hotel guests (see 'Good places to stay')

MGARR

L-Ankra Restaurant

Tel 00356 2155 5656

A good value restaurant serving a mixture of traditional cuisine with Italian influences. Homemade pasta dishes around €8..

SAN ANTON

Melita Tea and Coffee Gardens

This welcoming café is perfectly positioned for a spot of lunch after a morning stroll in the neighbouring San Anton Gardens. An extensive food and drink menu is on offer.

ST JULIAN'S

Peppino's

31 Triq San Gorg (St George's Street)
Tel 00356 2137 3200

www.peppinosmalta.com

Peppino's may be a favourite haunt of the rich

and famous, but the glitz and glamour stops as soon as you set foot inside this bijou Italian restaurant. Expect high quality cuisine at reasonable prices – mains €18. Book ahead, and ask for a table overlooking Spinola Bay.

Piccolo Padre Pizzeria

195 Main Street
Tel 00356 2134 4875
www.wgc-group.com

For relaxed dining head to this fabulous pizzeria. Set in the basement of a character filled property the rustic and welcoming interior compliments the simple but tasty menu. This place is good value with dishes around €9. Book ahead for a sea-view table.

SPINOLA BAY

Paparazzi

The ideal spot for a good value lunch with impressive views over Spinola Bay. Save room for a dessert from the 'comfort zone' menu – there are over 20 to choose from.

Café Raffael

Enjoy a relaxing drink on the terrace of this converted fishing building. Although we only stopped for a drink, a good selection of pizzas, pastas and grills were also available. Pizza and pasta around €8

VALLETTA

The Circle's Bar and Coffee Shop

Messina Palace, 141, St Christopher's Street
Good value café serving a selection of homemade specials, sandwiches and cakes. Housed inside the impressive 16th-century Messina Palace.

Caffee Cordina

244/5 Republic Street
www.caffecordina.com

The Caffee Cordina's vaulted ceiling makes dining inside one of the oldest coffee shop in Malta a treat.

Valletta waterfront

www.vallettawaterfront.com

Head for Valletta's waterfront development where 250-year-old Baroque warehouses have been superbly converted into 19 bars, restaurants and shops.

USEFUL INFORMATION

Time difference GMT +1

Summer months GMT+2

International dialling code 356

Language Maltese and English

Money matters Euro

Tourist offices www.visitmalta.com

Airports

• Malta International, tel 00356 2369 6073/4

• Valletta, tel 00356 2123 7747

• Gozo Victoria, tel 00356 2156 1419

SHOPPING

Shopping in Malta is unlikely to dazzle – Sliema and Valletta are popular choices for a limited selection of household names. Valletta has more to offer with independent stores and a daily market on Merchant Street. Avoid shopping between 1-4pm when most shops are closed. For local crafts head to the Ta' Qali Crafts Village, a former airbase just outside Mdina. Maltese pottery, jewellery and glass are on sale. Opening hours vary depending on each craft business but are typically around 9am-4pm Mon-Fri and 9am-12noon on Saturday.

WALKING

■ Anyone interested in walking should visit the Malta tourist website to download a selection of walking guides (www.visitmalta.com).

FOOD AND DRINK

While out and about give these Maltese specialities a try:

- **Lampuka (dolphin fish)** A popular seasonal fish dish. Ask your waiter about the best way for it to be cooked.
- **Rabbit** This traditional dish is usually reasonably priced and often served in a casserole.
- **Pastizzi** Small cheese or pea-filled pastry snacks, popular with the locals.
- **Maltese bread** Most evening meals are served with this delicious bread – usually homemade.
- **Bigilla** A traditional Maltese bean dip served with water crackers.
- **Kinnie** A Maltese soft drink made with bitter oranges and aromatic herbs. It's unlike anything we have tried and definitely an acquired taste! (www.kinnie.com)

Recommended guidebooks and map

■ **Insight Flexi Map: Malta**, £4.99
(ISBN 978-981-258-233-1,)

■ **Rough Guide Directions: Malta and Gozo**, £6.99
(ISBN 978-1-85828-464-4)

■ **Cadogan Guides: Malta, Gozo and Comino**, £13.99
(ISBN 978-1-86011-365-9)

