

# THE MALTESE ISLANDS



*The Mediterranean's best kept secret*

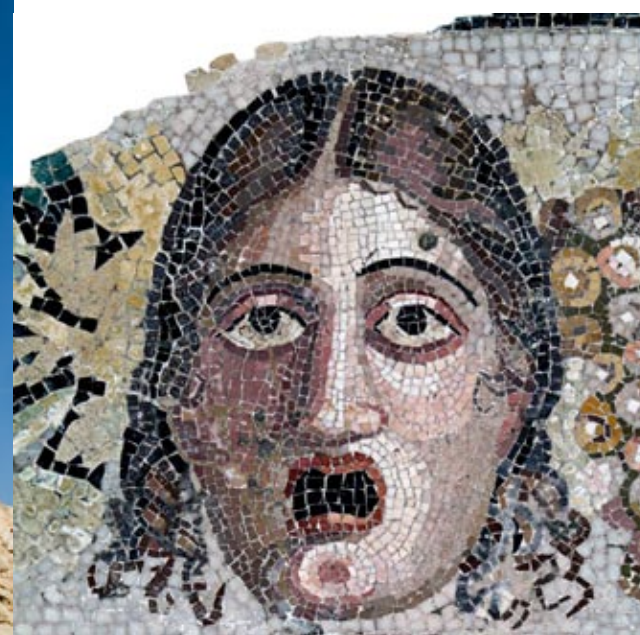








▷ BRUNOVETTERS



▷ MICHELE PESANTE

**Malta has been conquered, colonised and governed by numerous Mediterranean civilisations:**

our past has been moulded by the Phoenicians, the Carthaginians, the Romans, the Byzantines, the Normans, the Aragonese, the Knights of St. John, the French and finally, the British. All have left their cultural mark and made us the unique nation we are today.









► RENE ROSSIGNAUD



► ENZO ISAIA

## The beating heart of the Mediterranean

This little island in the centre of the Mediterranean has just 400,000 inhabitants, and yet it attracts millions of visitors from all over the world, all year round.

Our weather is mild no matter what time of year it is. In winter, when the rest of Europe is battling with the biting cold and rain, you could be taking in the sights or simply relaxing with the sun as your companion.

Spend a week pampering yourself in one of our world-class hotels, lounging by the pool or dipping your toes in temperate waters along our beaches. Go for a fabulous dive in one of the many sites, weaving through wonderful wrecks. Meander through the streets of the world-heritage site which is our capital city, Valletta. You can be sure that you'll go back with a bagful of stories and memories.



► MICHELE PESANTE



► MICHELE CAMISIA

We are not short of churches either—baroque, neo-gothic and medieval chapels—we have them all: one for every day of the year!

Our architecture and archaeology were bequeathed to us by the various peoples who chose to make Malta their home over thousands of years.

This colourful history has bestowed us with linguistic ease and two official languages. The young – and not so young – spend weeks here taking up our quality English lessons while practicing the language in the time spent out of the classroom.

Over the past years, Malta has also benefited from various European Union funds. Since it joined, it has seen a resurgence of its economy and foreign interest attracting investment from as far as the Middle and Far East. Due to its strategic location between Europe and Africa, Malta also offers convenient







► PAOLO ANDRADE



airline connections to the rest of the world. The island has also become an information centre of excellence thanks to the high level of education of its people.

Malta is so compact that you could quite possibly find yourself walking the beaches in the morning, having lunch at a fishing village at midday, wandering through the temples in the afternoon, and clubbing the night away until the small hours. The entire island takes no more than 45 minutes to cross from north to south. Think of it as travel finger food: a hundred different flavours in less than 24 hours.

A week here is a holiday to last a

lifetime, but some people still can't get enough, and pop over year after year. Some even find themselves buying a quaint farmhouse or historic palazzo in one of our tiny villages and settling here for life.

Malta quietly gets under your skin. You too may find yourself adopting this little island bursting with sun as your favourite holiday hideaway.



► CAMILLA MORANDI









► MICHELE PESANTE

## Walk through 7000 years of history...

...take Valletta, for example. It is like a fabulous box of chocolates: each time you lift the lid, you'll find yourself picking, choosing and discovering something new.

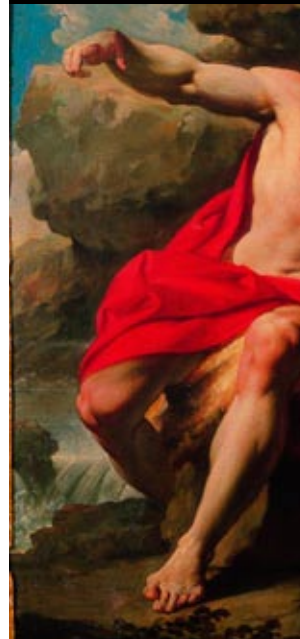
Our capital city boasts several glorious Auberges. Once the headquarters of the different ethnic groups into which the Knights of St. John were divided, today they have been beautifully restored and house various government offices and museums. There is a host of churches, but pride of place must go to the stunning St. John's Co-Cathedral, where Caravaggio's masterpiece, The Beheading of St. John, has finally made its home.





Everywhere you look, you will find something new. Perhaps that's why many choose to lose themselves in the grid-formation streets and simply stare at the wooden balconies, old palaces, tiny formal gardens and open-air restaurants which characterise the city. The more culturally inclined prefer to take a seat at the Manoel Theatre, commissioned by Grand Master Antonio Manuel de Vilhena 300 years ago, and gape at its magnificent ceilings, gilded in 22-carat gold. Get up and go see Antonio Sciortino's *Les Gavroches* at the Upper Barrakka Gardens where you can also admire the incredible view of our Three Cities and Grand Harbour, one of the largest of its kind in Europe.

Even older than Valletta is Mdina, the city in the central north area of the island. Fortified by bastions which no invader ever managed to breach, Mdina is the Silent City, where modernity and its accompanying hustle and bustle are somewhat kept at bay. The views from its ramparts are breathtaking. Property per square metre here is the most expensive in all the land, testimony to its rare beauty.







► PAOLO ANDRADE



Malta's history doesn't seem to stop, and takes you as far back as your imagination will let you. We started with the Pre-Historic Age, and still have the evidence to prove it: Ġgantija, on the sister island of Gozo, dates back to the Neolithic period 5000 years BC. It is the oldest free standing stone building in the world, as are the Mnajdra and Hagar Qim Temples in Malta. These temples are surrounded by one of the most atmospheric pockets of countryside on the island, overlooking a rugged stretch of coast, and bordering the quaint town of Qrendi. Yet again, our small towns have literally unearthed gems such as the Hypogeum in Paola, beautifully restored and waiting to be discovered. There is never enough space to list all of Malta's heritage sites, which is why no matter where you end up, you will never be far from any number of historical landmarks.



► ROBERTA KRASNIG









## It is not stone alone that makes our culture:

we have world class musicians who have performed at the Royal Festival Hall in London, composers whose works have been performed worldwide and sopranos, whose wonderful voices have delighted audiences at La Scala in Milan and the Edinburgh Arts Festival.

► ROBERTA KRASNIG







► JÜRGEN SCICLUNA

If it is less high-brow sources of delight that you seek, there's always our raucous carnival, held over one week in February, with its crazy papier maché floats and the people who make them – both larger than life and somewhat crazy to boot! The children love it and the adults use the children as an excuse to watch it. There's nothing quite like it anywhere else.

We are fond of our food too. For days you can be sure you'll never have to eat the same thing twice: there's plenty of mouth watering Maltese fare together with continental and international cuisine from regions as far flung as India, China and the Far East. Some of our chefs have worked with world-class culinary masters such as Michel Roux, Gordon Ramsey, Anthony Bourdain and Joël Robuchon.



► MANIFEST-BY-DESIGN



► JÜRGEN SCICLUNA





If you really want to immerse yourself in island living for a few days, you have to try our rabbit, which we fry with garlic for some finger-licking simplicity. Our tomatoes burst with sweetness from the life-giving warmth of the sun. We have goat's cheeses in myriad permutations of hard, soft, aged and fresh, whilst our bread – crusty outside yet meltingly soft inside – is the stuff of legend. We grow olives to make velvety olive oil and the powerful sun also bakes our grapes - for international award-winning local wines – our figs, plums and our oranges and lemons. You can go wherever you like to find them, but you will most definitely never go hungry, whether for culture or food.



▷ MANIFEST-BY-DESIGN



▷ NENAD VUCIC











## A great weather destination

Our glorious sun, which lights up every recess no matter what time of year, does tend to have a mesmerising effect on our visitors. We are completely surrounded by sea, and our size means that a storm never lasts long, very much like our Maltese character: it is all show for a couple of days and then it's back to clear skies and tranquillity as if nothing had ever happened.








The mild weather also affects the way our chefs operate. During spring, when the orange groves are bursting with blossoms and perfuming the air with sweet scent, the highlight of the year is the launch of summer menus in all our top-class restaurants. There's nothing quite like sampling the fruits of somebody else's culinary labours under the shelter of some olive trees bedecked with fairy lights, overlooking stretches of rocky coast.

This coast is also a home away from home to the thousands of divers who choose Malta because of its excellent underwater visibility: some destinations offer five metres, others twenty, but here you can let your mind rest and your eyes wander for as far as thirty six, safe in the knowledge that no matter what time of year you book, the temperature of the water will never dip below the 14°C mark.





**Clear Mediterranean waters flow through Blue Lagoon, a sheltered sandy beach nestled between the tiny islands of Comino and Cominotto**





## Our villages, our festas

Our villages may look sleepy from the outside, but the villagers are anything but. All through the year they work and live their regular lives while quietly and endlessly toiling for the three days in three hundred and sixty five when they can really let go: at the local *festa*.

Malta's religious *festi* are like one of summer's sweet figs: always in production yet bursting with sweetness and life for a few days a year. In this case, an entire village explodes with light and sound. We put on unparalleled displays of fireworks, hold processions which mystify and astound visitors, and everything from ourselves to our front rooms gets a make-over.

The *festa* is a delight for the senses, a lot of fun for locals and foreigners, and a once-a-year chance to show off in friendly competition with other towns. What's more, every village holds at least one – some have four – patron saint celebration. Especially in summer, you can enjoy family-friendly *festi* during the weekends, culminating in the Santa Marija week in the middle of August when various villages in the south, north and in Gozo compete in the skies with colourful fireworks.

The *festa* truly has something for everyone. Malta is renowned for its child-friendliness and nowhere







is this more apparent than during this time. Displays of Mediterranean exuberance are the norm. While children are running about happily, our older residents like to open their front rooms so that anybody passing through their streets can get a good eyeful of their pristine crystal chandeliers.

Even if you turn up at any other time of the year, you can be sure of a warm welcome, usually in the form of a chat with our burly workmen in the bars. These seem to find time for their milky teas and coffees (served in a tumbler of course), a *ħobża* (the local crusty bread rolls) overflowing with pickled onions, tuna, olives and tomatoes and some *pastizzi* (our gorgeous filo pastry parcels filled with ricotta, peas or anchovies) at any time of day.

In these little pockets of residence, you will always find something, even if you don't go looking for it. Dingli, in the north, has stunning cliffs and incredible views. Rabat, just next door, has catacombs and Roman remains. Birżebbuġa, in the south, has Bronze Age remains in the form of Borg in-

Nadur. Żejtun, ten minutes away by car, has stunning residential palaces and little winding streets. Gudja could possibly have the friendliest people in all of Malta, beautiful old houses, and remains a peaceful village, despite bordering the airport.

You may be fooled into thinking that you can take it all in within a few hours, but may we suggest you take it a little slower. Let it soak in and spend some more time relaxing and discovering Malta's delightful secrets.

*After all, that is what Malta's about.*







## Gozo

We all know what they say about little sisters: they're more fun, somehow prettier, and obviously, younger.

Well, Gozo is definitely not younger, seeing as most probably that's where the first residents settled, way back in 3600BC. Yet, being much smaller, much

greener and definitely much quieter, it's got everything going for it.

There are the Ġgantija temples, one of the most important archaeological sites in the world: their megaliths are so large that the ancient Gozitans used to believe that they were built by giants. Then there are more natural wonders, such as the Azure Window in Dwejra, a magnificent rock rising out of the sea, a sight which stuns visitors whether glimpsed from the surrounding cliffs, or from beneath while they are ensconced in one of our little fishing boats.

Not to mention the glorious stretch of red sandy beach at Ramla l-Hamra (literally, red beach) almost hidden away underneath patches of countryside, or the proliferation of Gozitan food outlets which unearth such gems as the goat's cheese pizza, a unique culinary delight which even has Maltese mouths watering.

All of this, and so much more, makes Gozo the one tiny island which piques everybody's curiosity, then wins them over for life. No wonder that so many farmhouses are snapped up by day-trippers, who end up spending the rest of their years languishing in its quiet surroundings.







► JEAN LOUIS WERTZ



► PAOLO METTRE LIBERTINI

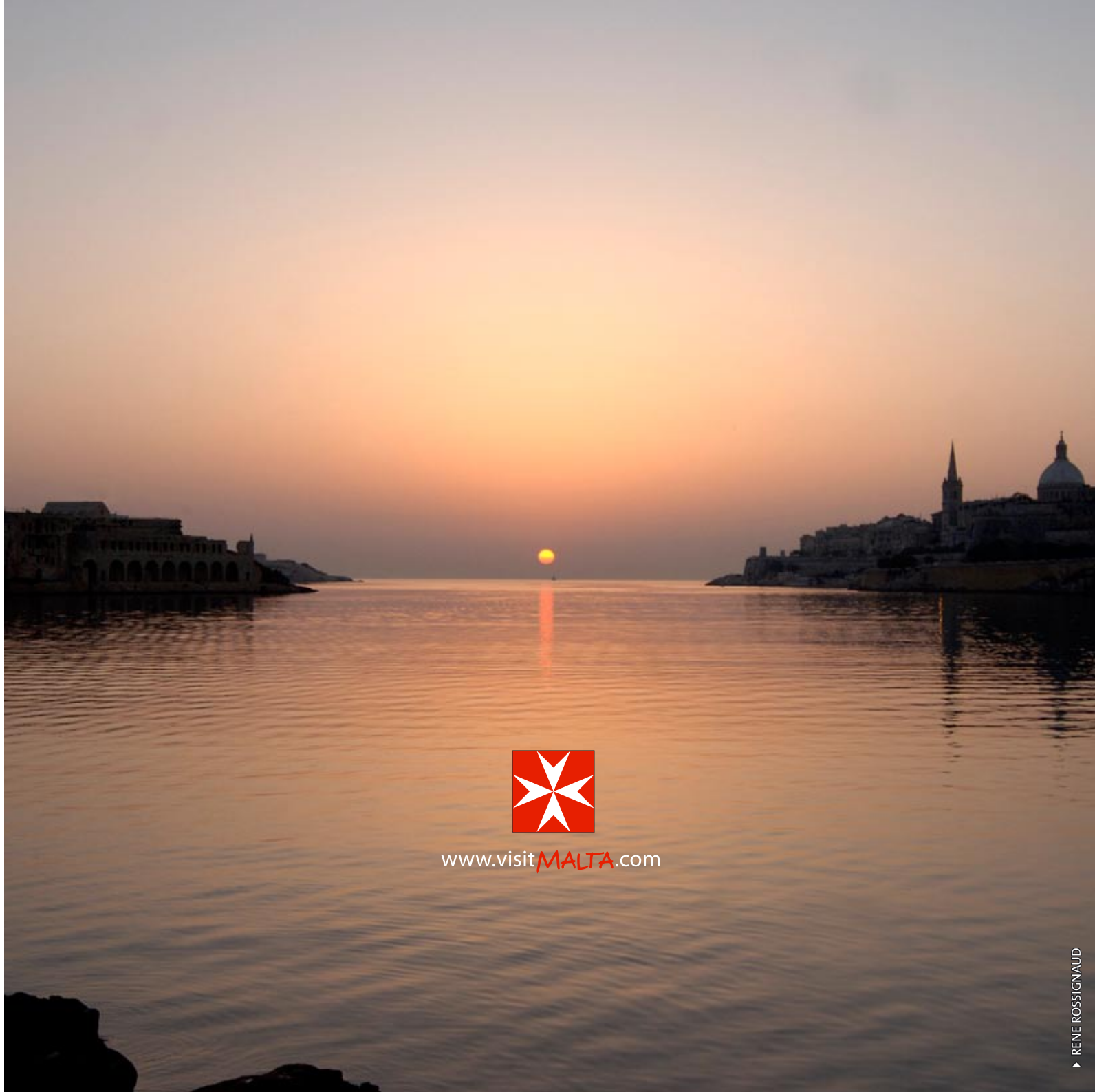


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