



Southeast Malta

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Why Go?

Several of Malta's most extraordinary historical sites lie in the less visited southeast of the country, including its most breathtakingly located prehistoric temples (Haġar Qim and Mnajdra) dating back over 5000 years, and the Ghar Dalam cave, full of fossilised remains of prehistoric animals. There's splendid coastal scenery, too, boat trips to visit grottoes, and some fabulous swimming spots off the tourist trail. It's also the base of much of the country's heavy industry, which means tourism is less developed here, though many locals head to the southeast to eat out at the weekend. In fact, the world and his wife descend on the sometime fishing village of Marsaxlokk for its Sunday fish market and to eat seafood at the small town's many restaurants, fronted by a harbour full of bobbing, colourful boats.

When to Go

- ➔ Late spring and early autumn (May, June and September) are ideal months to be in this part of the country, while high summer will see the area at its busiest.
- ➔ Avoid the Blue Grotto and Ghar Lapsi on public holidays as they'll be packed.

Marsaxlokk

POP 3535

The ancient fishing village of Marsaxlokk (marsa-shlokk; from *marša sirocco*, meaning 'southeasterly harbour') at the head of Marsaxlokk Bay remains resolutely a slice of real Maltese life, despite the encroachment of industry and the descent of hundreds of tourists every Sunday for its weekly fish and souvenir market.

Old low-rise houses ring the waterfront, and a photogenic fleet of brightly coloured *luzzu* (fishing boats) dance in the harbour. Men with weathered faces sit by the water-side mending nets and grumbling about the tax on diesel, while others scrape, paint and saw as they ready their boats for the sea. The town is home to around 70% of the Maltese fishing fleet, and is – not surprisingly – renowned for its top-notch seafood restaurants, making it a magnet for long-lunching locals and bus loads of day trippers.

Marsaxlokk makes for a relaxed base once the Sunday hoards have left. If you're after nightlife into the wee small hours you'll be disappointed, but if you're looking to chill out (and regularly tuck into all manner of fishy morsels), you'll be happy.

History

Marsaxlokk Bay is Malta's second natural harbour. It was here that the Turkish fleet was moored during the Great Siege of 1565, and Napoleon's army landed here during the French invasion of 1798. In the 1930s the calm waters of the bay were used as a staging post by the huge, four-engined Short C-Class flying boats of Britain's Imperial Airways as they pioneered long-distance air travel to the far-flung corners of the Empire. During WWII Marsaxlokk Bay was the base for the Fleet Air Arm, and in 1989 the famous summit meeting between Soviet and US leaders Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush (senior) was held on board a warship anchored in the bay. Today the harbour is framed by the fuel tanks and chimney of a power station and the huge cranes of the Kalafrana Container Terminal – eyesores that dominate this once entirely scenic part of the Maltese coast.

Sights & Activities

Sunday Fish Market

MARKET

At Marsaxlokk's colourful, packed-to-the-gills Sunday Fish Market, you can admire

the riches of the Med before they're whisked off to Malta's top hotels and restaurants. The market starts early in the morning and the best stuff is long gone by afternoon.

★ St Peter's Pool

BAY

St Peter's Pool is a fantastic swimming spot, a natural lido in the rocks with large areas of flat slab for sunbathing between swims. Follow the narrow road out towards Delimara Lighthouse until you are just past the power station chimney (about 1.5km from the main road), and you'll see a low building on the left with 'Peter's Pool' signposted on it.

A rough track leads down to a small parking area – if you meet a car coming the other way it'll be a face-off over who'll back up. Don't leave valuables in your car.

Delimara Point

AREA

Delimara Point, southeast of Marsaxlokk, is blighted by a huge power station whose chimney can be seen for miles around, but there are a few good swimming places on the eastern side of the peninsula, where the power station isn't in view, and this is a pleasant place to walk. You can access St Peter's Pool from here, and walk on to a large scoop of bay called Hofra Iz-Zghira, which has some salt pans.

Waterfront Market

MARKET

The Sunday fish stalls are far outnumbered by the stalls of this daily market that mainly sells kitsch aimed at tour groups visiting the town.

Eating

It's all about the seafood in Marsaxlokk. Restaurants ranging from casual to smart line the harbour, most offering alfresco dining. Booking is advised.

★ Tartarun

SEAFOOD €€

(☎2165 8089; www.tartarun.com; Xatt is-Sajjieda; mains €10.50-26.50; ☀ noon-3.30pm Tue-Sun, 7.30-10.30pm Tue-Sat) Locals love upmarket Tartarun, which offers a more sophisticated take on all things fishy. Dishes such as sea bream, roasted prawn and cherry tomatoes are perfectly executed. There are a few outside tables, though they're somewhat traffic-plagued on Sunday.

Ir-Rizzu

SEAFOOD €€

(☎2165 1569; 52 Xatt is-Sajjieda; mains €8.50-18.50; ☀ 11.30am-3pm daily, 6-10pm Mon-Sat) Ir-Rizzu was opened by a fisherman nearly 30 years ago and is now run by his sons. It