

Malta

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Valletta** Immerse yourself in the history and sights of the pint-sized capital (p776)
- **Beaches** Discover how Malta earned a reputation for beachside holidays (p783)
- **Festas** Toast a patron saint amid an infectious mix of music, food and fireworks (p783)
- **Mdina** Step back in time in the silent streets of this elegant town (p781)
- **Best journey** Head to Gozo to experience its slower pace, and maybe even learn to scuba dive (p781)

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 316 sq km (double the size of Liechtenstein)
- **Budget** €35 per day
- **Capital** Valletta
- **Country code** ☎ 356
- **Famous for** Knights of St John, WWII heroism, falcons
- **Languages** Maltese, English
- **Money** Euro (€); A\$1 = €0.55; C\$1 = 0.60; ¥100 = €0.78; NZ\$1 = €0.43; UK£1 = €1.12; US\$1 = €0.74
- **Phrases** *merħba* (hello), *sahħa* (goodbye), *grazzi* (thanks)



- **Population** 410,000
- **Visas** Not needed for most visitors for stays of up to three months (p784)

TRAVEL HINTS

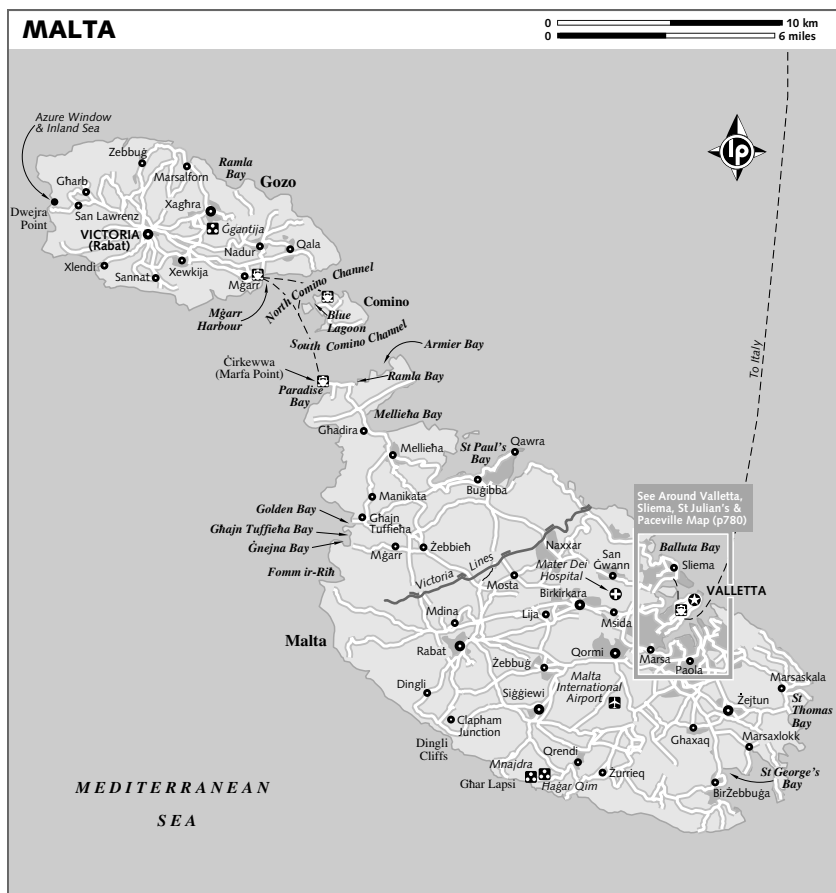
Get around on the big old buses, and sate your hunger with cheap *pastizzi* (pastries filled with ricotta cheese or mushy peas).

ROAMING MALTA

Soak up the history of Valletta and Mdina, check out the ancient temples, and go diving and chill out on Gozo.

Despite being made up of three small islands on the very southern edge of Europe, Malta veritably groans under the weight of its rich and tumultuous history, dramatic and unusual geography and fascinating cultural influences.

From its historic North African and Arabic influences (listen carefully to the local language) to the Sicilian-inspired cuisine on its menus and the oddly 1950s British feel to much of the place, Malta will almost certainly surprise you. And while there has definitely been an eclectic mix of influences and a roll-call of rulers over the centuries, be in no doubt, Malta is not just a notional outpost of Italy or a relic of colonial Britain; this diminutive island nation has a quirky character all its own.



HISTORY

Malta's oldest monuments are the mysterious megalithic temples at Ggantija near Xaghra on Gozo, and Hagar Qim and Mnajdra on the southwest coast of the main island. Built between 3800 and 2500 BC, they're the world's oldest surviving freestanding structures. From around 800 to 218 BC, Malta was colonised by the Phoenicians and Carthaginians, and then became part of the Roman Empire. In AD 60 St Paul was shipwrecked on the island, where (according to folklore) he converted the islanders to Christianity. Arabs arrived in 870 and had a considerable influence on agriculture and language. Then came a succession of Normans, Angevins (French), Aragonese and Castilians (Spanish).

In 1530 the islands were given to the Knights of the Order of St John, a religious crusader organisation founded in Jerusalem. The Knights expelled invading Turks in 1565 and were considered 'saviours of Europe'. Soon afterwards, though, the order declined and surrendered to Napoleon in 1798 without a fight. The British helped liberate the island in 1800 and began to develop Malta into a major naval base. The new member of the British Empire suffered greatly from WWII bombing.

In 1947 the devastated island was given a measure of self-government. The country gained independence in 1964, and became a republic in 1974. In 2004 Malta joined the EU, and introduced the euro as its currency in January 2008.