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## Mdina & Rabat

The history of **Mdina** traces back more than 4000 years. According to tradition it was here that in 60 A.D. that **the Apostle St. Paul** is said to have lived after being shipwrecked on the Islands. Furthermore it is said that St. Paul resided inside the grotto know as Fuori le Mura (outside the city walls) now known as St. Paul's Grotto in Rabat. Lamp lit by night and referred to as "the silent city", Mdina is fascinating to visit for its **timeless atmosphere** as well as its cultural and religious treasures.



Mdina has had different names and titles depending on its rulers and its role but its medieval name describe it best - '**Citta' Notabile**': **the noble city**.

It was home then, as now, to Malta's noble families; some are descendants of the Norman, Sicilian and Spanish overlords who made Mdina their home from the 12th century onwards. **Impressive palaces** line its narrow, shady streets.

Mdina is one of Europe's finest examples of an **ancient walled city** and extraordinary in its mix of medieval and baroque architecture.

Like nearby Mdina, **Rabat** played a major role in Malta's past and is a prime source of its cultural heritage. This large provincial township was **part of the Roman city of Melita**, with the sites and archaeological relics found testifying to the town's importance during the Roman period. For many centuries, religious orders have established themselves within the precincts of Rabat and Franciscans, Dominicans and Augustinians still flourish here in their spacious **convents and monasteries**, catering for the religious needs of parishioners in their churches



The town is a commercial centre and acts as a market to its large agricultural hinterland. It is also well established on the tourist map due to its **archaeological and historical** sites: The Roman Villa (Domus Romana), catacombs, St. Paul's Grotto and the fine churches and monasteries.

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## Valletta

The Fortress City, Citta' Umilissima, "a city built by gentlemen for gentlemen" is Malta's capital city: a living, working city, the administrative and commercial heart of the Islands. Valletta is named after its founder, the respected Grand Master of the **Order of St. John**, Jean Parisot de la Valette. The magnificent fortress city grew on the arid rock of Mount Sceberras peninsula, which rises steeply from two deep harbours, Marsamxett and **Grand Harbour**. Started in 1566, Valletta was completed, with its impressive bastions, forts and cathedral, in the astonishingly short time of 15 years, even more remarkable is considering the fact that mechanical tools did not exist at the time and the whole city was built entirely by hand. Valletta has many titles, all recalling its rich historical past. It is the "modern" city built by the Knights of St John; a masterpiece of the Baroque; a **European Art City** and a **World Heritage City**. Today, it is one of the most concentrated historic areas in the world.

The city is busy by day, yet retains a timeless atmosphere by night, that gives the feeling that you are walking back in time. The grid of narrow streets boasts some of Europe's finest art works, churches and palaces. Valletta is abundantly rich in sites to see and explore, intriguing historical buildings around every corner: votive statues, niches, fountains and coats of arms high up on parapets. Narrow side streets are full of tiny quaint shops and cafés, while Valletta's main streets are lined with larger international branded shops for fashion, music, jewellery and much more.

The best way to get around and see the most, from your visit to Valletta, is on foot and although the things to do & see are many, a good start and definitely not to be missed are Valletta's beautiful gardens. The Upper Barrakka Gardens, Hastings Gardens & the Lower Barrakka Gardens are just three of the most popular ones, however on further exploration many more hidden gardens can be discovered. From the Upper Barrakka Gardens it is also possible to see the Saluting Battery as well as take the lift down the bastions to sea level.

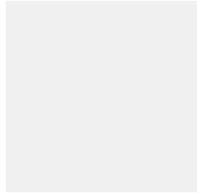
St John's co-Cathedral & museum are definitely not to be missed, this elaborately adorned church is home to world famous artistic masterpieces by Caravaggio and Mattia Preti. Apart from beautiful Baroque churches other places of interest include the various grandmaster auberges, piazzas & museums. To find out more hot spots to visit, download our [Valletta PDF map](#).



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## Comino



Situated between Malta and Gozo, the smaller island of Comino is **a paradise for snorkelers**, divers, windsurfers and ramblers. Only 3.5 square kilometers, Comino is car-free and apart from one hotel, is **virtually uninhabited**. The island's main attraction is the **Blue Lagoon**. In summer, this sheltered inlet of shimmering aquamarine water over white sand is very popular with day-trippers. Other beaches on the island include **Santa Marija Bay** and **San Niklaw Bay**. Comino is also worth a visit in winter, and is **ideal for walkers and photographers**. With no urban areas or cars on the island, one can easily smell the scent of wild thyme and other herbs.



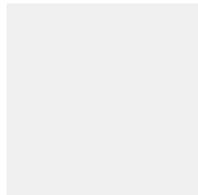
Comino was inhabited in the **Roman period**, but did not have much significance until the Knights arrived. It then had a dual role: hunting grounds and a staging post in the defence of the Maltese Islands against the Ottoman Turks. The island had proved a useful base for pirates operating in the central Mediterranean and, though stark and barren today, it was home to wild boar and hares when **the Knights** arrived in 1530. The Grandmasters went to great lengths to ensure that their game on Comino was protected: anyone found breaking the embargo on hunting could expect to serve three years rowing on a galley.



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## Gozo



Gozo is known to provide a **tranquil haven** for a tempo and scene change. The charm of Malta's sister Island is immediately apparent; it's **greener, more rural and smaller**, with life's rhythms dictated by the seasons, fishing and agriculture.

**Steeped in myth**, Gozo is thought to be the legendary **Calypso's isle** of Homer's Odyssey - a peaceful, mystical backwater. Baroque churches and old stone farmhouses dot the countryside. Gozo's rugged landscape and spectacular coastline await exploration with some of the Mediterranean's best dive sites.

The island also comes complete with historical sites, forts and **amazing panoramas**, as well as one of the archipelago's best-preserved prehistoric temples, Ġgantija.

Gozo also possesses a nightlife and **cultural calendar** all of its own, with some great dining out.



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## Archaeological Sites

The sheer number of archaeological sites on the Maltese Islands sets their history apart from that of other Mediterranean destinations.

One site above all others is special to Malta - the **Hypogeum**, a labyrinth of underground chambers probably used as both a burial site and a temple. The Islands' temples qualify as **UNESCO World Heritage Sites** and are open to the public. There are **megalithic monuments**, Bronze Age dolmens, Punic tombs, remains of **Roman Villas** and traces of prehistoric man, which defy explanation, such as the mysterious 'cart tracks'. For three millennia, from around 5200 B.C., the archipelago was home to a unique, temple-building civilisation. Malta and Gozo's temples are thought to be the oldest free-standing buildings known to man.

A good place to start your tour is at the **National Museum of Archaeology** in Valletta or the Hypogeum itself.



**BORĠ IN-NADUR TEMPLES** BORĠ IN-NADUR, BIRŻEBBUĠA, MALTA These temples ruins are situated in the southern area of Malta and are important because they appear to reveal not only a four-apse temple (c.2000 BC), but also a fortified, Bronze Age domestic settlement.

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**BUĠIBBA ANCIENT TEMPLES** DAWRET IL-GŻEJJER, BUĠIBBA, MALTA The Buġibba Temple, which is preserved in the grounds of the hotel, belongs to the same category of pre-historic monuments as Tarxien and Ħaġar Qim in Malta and Ġgantija in Gozo.

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**CLAPHAM JUNCTION** BUSKETT, LIMITS OF ĦAD-DINGLI, MALTA The most impressive and dense concentration of these cart ruts are on scrubland south of Buskett Gardens, an area known as Clapham Junction.

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**ĠGANTIJA TEMPLES** JOHN OTTO BAYER STREET, XAGHRA, GOZO Ġgantija Temples are one of the most important archaeological sites in the world and date from around 3600 to 3200 BC. Due to the gigantic dimensions of the megaliths, locals believed that the temples were the work of giants.



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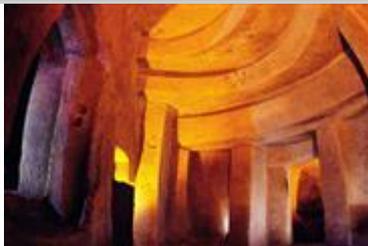
**HAĠAR QIM** TRIQ HAĠAR QIM, QRENDI, QRD 2501, MALTA The temple of Ħaġar Qim (c. 3600 - 3200 BC) stands on a hilltop overlooking the sea and the islet of Filfla. The temple itself consists of a single temple unit, although it is not clear if it was originally constructed as a four or five-apse structure.

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**HAL SAFLIENI HYPOGEUM** BURIAL STREET, PAOLA, PLA 1116, MALTA The Hypogeum, or underground cavity, is a unique monument and superb example of architecture in the negative. Excavation has yielded a wealth of archaeological material including pottery, human bones, personal ornaments such as beads and amulets, little carved animals and larger figurines.

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## Beaches & Bays

Malta has beaches for everyone, from windsurfers to sunbathers. Choose from golden sand, red sand, rocks, blue lagoons and even inland seas. Some beaches and rocky shores are off the beaten track, but worth seeking out for their seclusion. Do not miss a boat trip to Comino's **Blue Lagoon** for the ultimate in azure water. On larger beaches, you will find cafes or snack bars open during the summer season. With Malta's climate, beach life lasts well into October. Enjoy water sports and activities like windsurfing, jet and water skiing, parakiting and fun rides. You can hire equipment from beach cafes or shops nearby.

The main coastal resorts and larger sandy beaches are in the northern part of Malta. Malta's most popular beaches are **Mellieħa Bay**, **Għajn Tuffieħa** and **Golden Bay**. For smaller, quieter beaches, try those at the tip of Malta, overlooking Gozo - **Paradise Bay** and **Armier**. In Gozo, the most beautiful beach is **Ramla l-Hamra**, a large beach of unusual red sand nestling by countryside. Gozo and Comino offer plenty of out-of-the-way rocky inlets with clear waters and perfect snorkelling.

Discover our **beaches and bays** by using the interactive map or the listing below.

Find out about the various **Blue Flag Beaches** and **Beaches of Quality** around the Maltese Islands [here](#).



**ANCHOR BAY** ANCHOR BAY, LIMITS OF MELLIEĦA, MALTA Anchor Bay is perhaps most known for Popeye Village, the set of the 1979 film starring Robin Williams as Popeye.

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**ARMIER BAY** ARMIER, LIMITS OF MELLIEHA, MALTA The beach at Armier stretches round the shore of an open bay at the extreme northern fringe of Malta. The sandy bay faces the nearby islands of Comino and Gozo.

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**BALLUTA BAY** BALLUTA, TAS-SLIEMA, MALTA Balluta Bay lies on a long stretch of rocky coastline that goes from from Qui-si-Sana in Sliema all the way to St. Julian's. This coastline is thronged with sunbathers during the peak summer months.

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**BIRŽEBBUĠA** BIRŽEBBUĠA, MALTA Birżebbuġa is a flourishing, but small, seaside resort not far from Marsaxlokk in south-east Malta. Its shoreline hugs St. George's although the sandy beach is known as Pretty Bay. It has been a popular bathing spot for Maltese holiday-makers for decades.

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**BLUE LAGOON** BLUE LAGOON, COMINO On the tiny island of Comino you will find the sheltered, dazzlingly blue waters of this small inlet, which has appeared on screen many times, most recently for a diving scene featuring Madonna in Swept Away and a spearfishing scene set in ancient times for the mini-series Helen of Troy.

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**BUĠIBBA** ST. PAUL'S BAY, MALTA Buġibba and Qawra are Malta's largest, seaside resort towns. The coastline promenade stretches from Salina Bay to St. Paul's Bay, taking in some of the Islands' best open sea views and a vista over to St. Paul's Island.

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**DAHLET QORROT** DAHLET QORROT, LIMITS OF NADUR, GOZO This is a tiny picturesque fishing cove and a tranquil, isolated spot on the north-east coast below Nadur and Qala.

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**DWEJRA BAY** DWEJRA, LIMITS OF SAN LAWRENZ, GOZO Dwejra is perhaps the archipelago's most spectacular natural landmark. Here, geology, time and sea have worked together to produce some of the most remarkable scenery on the Islands - the Inland Sea, Fungus Rock, sheer cliffs and a rocky coastline.

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