



**A short trip to
a long history**

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A 7,000 year history

The first settlers of the Maltese Islands arrived around 5,000 BC. Over time, a great civilization developed, producing incredible feats of architecture, such as the megalithic temples of Hagar Qim and Ġgantija and the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum.

Around 870 BC our islands were colonised by the Phoenicians, probably the greatest traders and seafarers of their time. Malta later came under the control of Carthage and eventually became part of the Roman Empire, during which period the islands flourished.

The Acts of the Apostles tell us that it was during this period, in 60 AD, that St Paul was shipwrecked on the shores of Malta, and went on to convert the Maltese to Christianity.





The Hal Saflieni Hypogeum – Paola



Between the Cross and the Crescent

Centuries later Malta was occupied by the Arabs. The greatest legacy of this 220-year period is reflected in our language, which is of Semitic origin. Moreover, many of our place names date back to the period of Arab occupation.

In 1091 Count Roger I of Sicily succeeded in establishing Norman rule in Malta. This marked the gradual change from an Arab culture to a European one. The medieval walled city of Mdina is living testimony to both Arab and Norman influences.

The islands eventually became part of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. In the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire was at its peak and had set its sights on conquering Europe. Charles V feared that if Rome were to fall to the Ottoman Turks, Christian Europe would be in grave danger. In 1530 he ceded the islands to the Knights of St John, who had been without a home since Suleiman II had driven them out of Rhodes in 1522.





St John's Co-Cathedral – Valletta



Aerial view of Valletta



From Christian bastion to nation state

During the next 268 years, the Knights transformed the islands. The highlights of the Knights' rule were the Great Siege of 1565, which saw the islands fend off the onslaught of Ottoman invading forces against overwhelming odds, and the subsequent construction of the city of Valletta, named after the victor of the siege, Grand Master Jean Parisot de La Valette. Valletta was one of the first European cities ever to be built on plan.

Over the years, the power of the Knights declined and their reign ended with the arrival of Napoleon Bonaparte and his fleet in 1798. French sovereignty over our islands was short-lived. The Maltese rebelled against perceived injustices and called upon the British for assistance. Malta went on to become part of the British Empire. Throughout the 19th Century, Malta became increasingly important to the British, primarily because of its strategic location in the Mediterranean. The islands became an important naval base and ship-repair centre and trade flourished.

Malta remained under British rule until 1964 when it gained Independence, with the islands being proclaimed a Republic in 1974. Malta went on to join the European Union in May 2004. Four years later, it adopted the Euro as its currency.



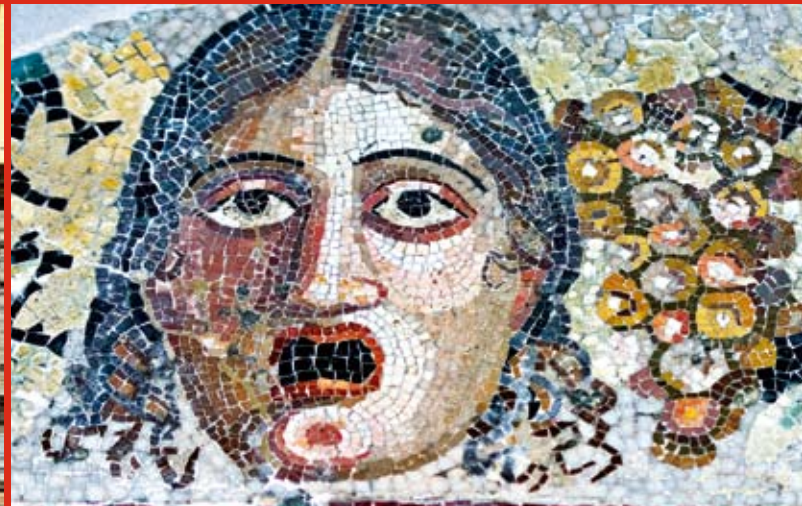


The crossroads of civilisations

Malta has a varied, rich history and cultural heritage stretching back over 7,000 years. Throughout the centuries, our country has been a melting pot of cultures and civilisations which made their mark on the Mediterranean and the world.

Malta is home to no less than three UNESCO World Heritage Sites, namely the Ħal Saflieni Hypogeum, the megalithic temples and our capital city, Valletta. The Hypogeum is a unique prehistoric underground temple and cemetery and dates from about 3600 - 2400 BC, while the Ġgantija megalithic temples in Gozo are considered to be the oldest structures in the world. They date from about 3,800 BC. The city of Valletta was founded by the Knights of St John in 1566. They created a late renaissance city within fortified walls strong enough to withstand any assault. Valletta boasts several monuments, but pride of place must surely go to St John's Co-Cathedral.

Our cultural heritage reflects the islands' geographical location as well as our historical legacy. The Arab occupation of Malta helped shape the Maltese language to a significant degree. However, our proximity to Italy and Sicily had a great impact not only on our language but also on our cuisine and various religious traditions. French rule, though short-lived, led to important changes to our legal and educational systems. Being part of the British Empire, on the other hand, led to our adoption of English as a second language, alongside Maltese. British rule also led to fundamental changes in the way the country is administered and the way we do business.





Main Gate - Mdina



Ghajn Tuffieha Tower



Legacy in stone

Roman prosperity is reflected in the remains of the Domus Romana, or 'Roman townhouse', discovered in 1881 just outside the walls of Mdina. St Paul's arrival in Roman Malta marked the birth of Christianity on the islands. The earliest Christian place of worship in Malta is said to be a cavern known as St Paul's Grotto. Evidence of early Christian practices and beliefs during the Roman period can also be found in the numerous catacombs found outside the former city walls of Mdina, including the St Paul and St Agatha Catacombs in Rabat. The exquisite baroque churches which can be found all over Malta today were financed and built by the local townspeople and villagers, and designed by Maltese architects.

It is hard to miss the legacy of the Knights in Malta. No era has left such an imprint on the islands as the 268-year rule of the Order of St John. In their enthusiasm to record their triumphs, the Knights gave the islands a unique artistic legacy which is often referred to as their 'Golden Age'. As a result, Malta is one of the world's jewels of the baroque period, with important works of architecture and other arts housed in the palaces and churches of Valletta, Mdina and the Three Cities. The Knights engaged the best architects of the time to produce this rich baroque legacy, as well as a series of fortifications, watch towers and aqueducts. They also gave Malta one of its best-recognized symbols, the eight-pointed Maltese Cross.





Where culture takes centre stage

The cultural scene in Malta and Gozo is very much alive. From traditional crafts such as filigree, lace-making and glass-blowing, to theatrical performances and art exhibitions, the Maltese Islands are the perfect destination if you want to indulge your love of culture and the arts, and our history provides a natural backdrop to cultural activities. At St John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta you can admire Caravaggio's masterpieces 'The Beheading of St John' and 'St Jerome'. Other cultural landmarks in our capital include the magnificent Grand Master's Palace, the Palace Armoury and the National Museum of Fine Arts.

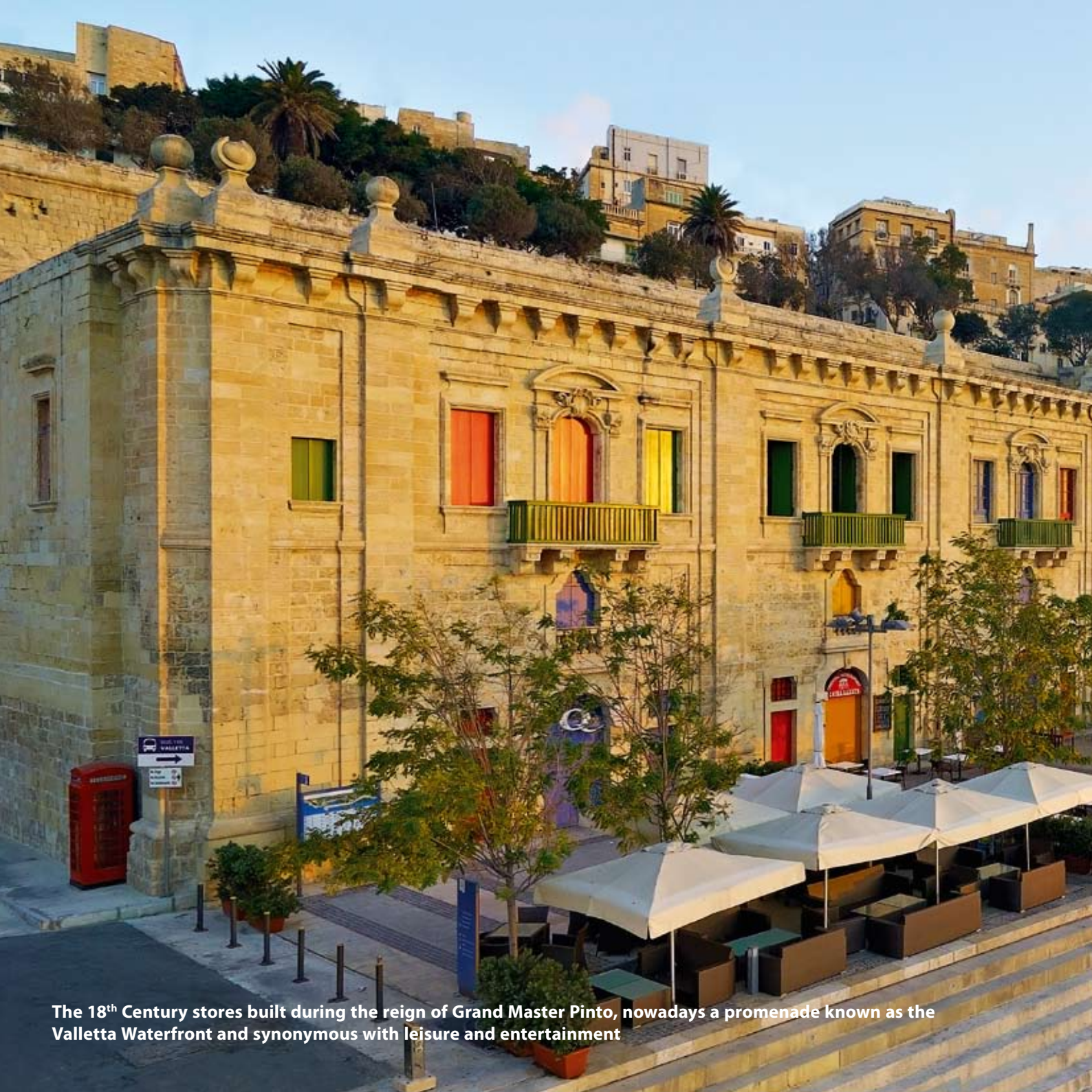
Theatres currently in use for live performances in Malta and Gozo vary from historic structures to more modern buildings. They host local and foreign artists with performances which encompass theatre, opera, operetta, dance, musicals and concerts. Valletta is home to the Manoel Theatre, a baroque jewel which is reputed to be Europe's third-oldest working theatre, the majestic Republic Hall of the Mediterranean Conference Centre, formerly the renowned hospital of the Knights of St John, and the St James Cavalier Centre for Creativity. Gozo's capital, Victoria, boasts no less than two opera houses.

The islands' churches are also a legacy of our cultural traditions. Every year, each parish celebrates its patron saint with a big feast which incorporates religious processions, band marches and stunning fireworks. A spectacle not to be missed!





"The Beheading of St John the Baptist" by Caravaggio



The 18th Century stores built during the reign of Grand Master Pinto, nowadays a promenade known as the Valletta Waterfront and synonymous with leisure and entertainment



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