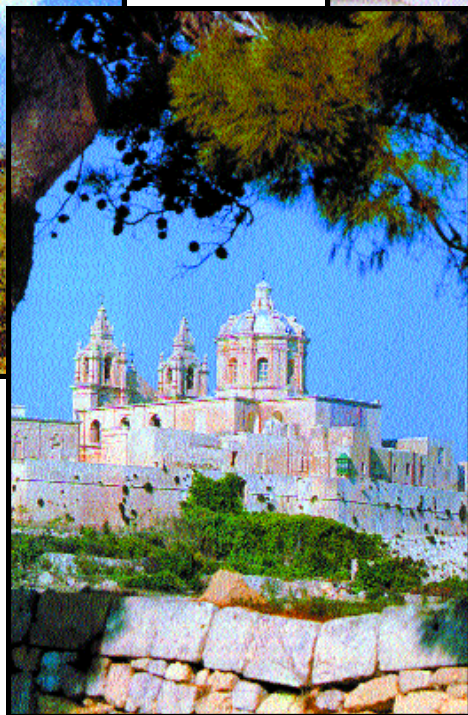


A Place for all Seasons: MALTA



FACTS ABOUT MALTA
Capital: Valleta
Population: 350,000
Main Seaport: Grand Harbour
Airport: Luga
Shoreline: 85 miles
Languages: Maltese, English
Religion: Catholic

The Maltese archipelago consists of three islands: Malta, Gozo and Comino. Malta, the largest island, is 237 sq. kms in area; Gozo is 68 sq. kms and Comino, 2 sq. kms.

The population numbers circa 370,000. Of these, 28,000 live in Gozo. Comino is only inhabited by a few farmers. Because of their strategic position, Malta and Gozo have been inhabited for the past 7,000 years. The two islands have a long and varied prehistoric period: Neolithic, Copper and Bronze age civilisations lasted more than 4,000 years; one can still admire vestiges of those remote times in form of impressive stone temples, a unique hypogeum and remains of skilful handicrafts.

The first known people to settle in Malta were the Phoenicians, who reached these shores on their trading ventures in the 9th century BC. They were succeeded by their Punic kinsmen, the Carthaginians, who were eventually conquered by the Romans in the 3rd century BC. The Romans governed these islands until the division of the Roman Empire in the 4th century AD.

Arabs from North Africa occupied the Islands from the 9th to the 13th century and when the last Arab rulers were driven out in the year 1249, they left behind their notable imprints in their culture on the language of the Maltese people.

After the Norman overlords, Swabian and Angevin dynasties ruled for brief periods and at the beginning of the 14th century, the Islands fell under Aragonese domination. In 1530, the King of Spain, Emperor Charles V, granted the Islands on fief to the international Order of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem.

The Knights administered the Islands for 268 years until

1798, when Napoleon Bonaparte drove them from these shores and occupied the country in the name of the French Republic.

Following a brief occupation the French were forced to surrender after two years of a land and sea blockade by combined British and Maltese forces, and in 1800, Malta became a part of the British Empire. In 1964, Malta attained its Independence, and ten years later, in 1974, it was declared a Republic within the Commonwealth.

Until the 1960s, the Maltese economy depended mostly on the British services and the Naval Dockyard. After independence, industry and tourism advanced at a fast pace, and at present Malta and Gozo have established a good industrial base and flourishing tourist enterprises.

Valletta, the capital was built by Jean de la Valette, French Grand Master of the Order of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, after the epic siege of 1565. It dominates, in one wide sweep, the Island's historic Grand Harbour one of the finest natural ports in Europe. Within its limited boundaries is reflected some of Malta's rich heritage of archaeology, history, architecture, art and culture.

The people speak their own tongue - Maltese, a language of Semitic origin. Through the ages, many foreign words, particularly Italian, became part of the language, and Maltese is the only Semitic language written in Latin characters.

English is one of two official languages and is widely spoken in Malta and Gozo. The official religion is that of the Roman Catholic Church, and the majority are regular church-goers. There are no other denominations of substantial size among the Maltese, but churches of other denominations are also to be found, for religious needs.

Reprinted with permission from National Tourism Organization - Malta Head office
<http://www.tourism.org.mt>