

★ TOP 10



Not to be missed!

Our top hits – from the absolute No. 1 to No. 10 – help you plan your tour of the most important sights.

★ GRAND HARBOUR ▶ 50

Weaving past cruise ships and freighters on a boat trip through the natural harbour overlooked by four fortified towns (photo left) is the most stunning holiday experience.

★ HYPOGEUM OF HAL-SAFLENI ▶ 90

Anyone wishing to learn more about the Neolithic period should visit this multi-level subterranean structure. There is nothing quite like it anywhere else in the world.

★ MDINA ▶ 108

Enclosed within its high fortress walls, Malta's "Silent City" Mdina has preserved its baroque character. The most romantic way to explore it is riding in a horse and carriage.

★ ST JOHN'S CO-CATHEDRAL ▶ 55

The island's historically most important church is in Valletta. Beneath its splendid inlaid marble floor are the mortal remains of Knights of St John from three centuries.

★ MARSAXLOKK BAY ▶ 88

The little fishing town of Marsaxlokk has picture-postcard appeal: colourful fishing boats, good fish restaurants and hardly a hotel to be seen.

★ WEST COAST BEACHES ▶ 124

This is where you find the beautiful sandy beaches. Golden Bay is always popular, while adjoining Ghajn Tuffieha Bay offers tranquillity and pure nature.

★ VICTORIA (RABAT), GOZO ▶ 140

The Citadel is enthroned high above the capital of Malta's neighbouring island Gozo. It offers an almost panoramic view of the island and its beautiful table mountains.

★ RABAT ▶ 111

This sprawling town actually has more sights to offer below ground than above. It is here that you will find early Christian catacombs as well as World War II bunkers.

★ SLIEMA & ST JULIAN'S ▶ 53

Malta's modern heart beats along the long sea promenade of Sliema and in the neighbouring town of St Julian's with its buzzing nightlife and colourful restaurant district.

★ VITTORIOSA (BIRGU) ▶ 60

Although not a match for Valletta's magnificence, the first capital of the Knights of St John still exudes a medieval flair and is a good place to observe Malta's lifestyle.

A Fascinating HISTORY

Malta's temples and ancient sites are the island's most spectacular cultural attractions – they are on Unesco's list of World Heritage Sites.

The Maltese archipelago includes the main island of Malta, the other inhabited islands of Gozo and Comino as well as the uninhabited islets of Cominotto, Filfla, St Paul's Islands and Fungus Rock. The first settlers arrived here from Sicily around 5200BC. They pursued a predominantly nomadic lifestyle, lived in the numerous caves on the islands, and subsisted by fishing, hunting in the forests still on the island at the time and from primitive farming. Proof of their existence is provided by the skeletons and simple utensils found in the Dalam Cave (Għar Dalam) area. Around 3600BC, these early inhabitants appear to have started building massive temples, thus founding the Maltese Megalithic culture. The remains of 23 of these temples are still visible today. We will probably never know how many others slumber below the surface or were destroyed. The most interesting temples are the Hypogeum from Hal-Saflieni (► 90),

Tarxien (► 94), Ġgantija (Gozo, ► 144), Mnajdra and Haġar Qim (► 99). These temples were erected in honour of the *Magna Mater* (Great Mother), and were divided into private inner sanctums and public outer areas. Priestesses were responsible for the burnt offerings and libations. There were oracle chambers, which the priestesses could enter from outside. Through a hole in the wall they spoke to the people inside the temple waiting for the divinity's oracle. Although animal sacrifice was practised, archaeologists have not found any evidence of weapons or violence, which would seem to point to a peaceful civilisation. Around 2500BC the history of this culture came to an abrupt end for no apparent reason, perhaps owing to a devastating epidemic or drought. Subsequently, the islands remained uninhabited for many centuries.

Haġar Qim is one of the archipelago's most important temple complexes

TIMELINE

- c3600bc
Ġgantija (oldest temple of Malta's mysterious Megalithic culture)
- c2550bc
The Great Pyramids of Egypt
- c2500bc
Tarxien (youngest temple of Malta's mysterious Megalithic culture)
- c2250bc
Stonehenge, England
- c2000bc
Palace of Knossos, Crete
- c470bc
Acropolis, Athens, Greece



Four Perfect Days

This itinerary shows you how to take in some of the best places to see in Valletta, Sliema & St Julian's in four days. The various highlights are described in more detail on the following pages (▶ 50–73).

Day One

Morning/Lunch

★**Grand Harbour tours** are offered by several boat operators and depart from the waterside area marked **Sliema Ferries**. Take coffee or lunch on the front at Café Georgio (▶ 52) or one of the cafés along the harbour.

Afternoon/Evening

Walk to Tower Road and sit on the rocks or choose a **lido** (▶ 54). For more history take the Marsamxett ferry from Sliema to Valletta's multimedia show, **The Malta Experience** (▶ 68). Round off the afternoon at Caffè Cordina (▶ 76).

Day Two

Morning/Lunch

Catch bus No 2 or 3 from Valletta to ★**Vittoriosa (Birgu)** (▶ 60) and do the suggested walk (▶ 157). Have lunch in one of the open-air eateries in Vittoriosa.

Afternoon/Evening

Make your way to **Senglea** (▶ 51) and walk along the shore looking back to where you have just been. The late afternoon sun on Vittoriosa's honey-coloured buildings is a glorious sight. At the end of the Senglea peninsula is the famous **Vedette**. Return to Valletta and have dinner at one of its many excellent restaurants (▶ 76)



Day Three

Morning/Lunch

Spend the day in Valletta. You can visit the 11 **Grandmaster's Palace** (▶ 63) or the 13 **Manoel Theatre** (▶ 71) and have lunch in town.

Afternoon/Evening

Visit ★**St John's Co-Cathedral** (▶ 55). If the heat is taking its toll, hail a **karrozin** for a quick look around the city in style. The main places to hire one are City Gate, St George's Square and Fort St Elmo.

Day Four

Morning

If it's a Sunday, you could visit 12 **Fort St Elmo** (▶ 68) and watch men in period costume re-enact past battles. (You need to check the programme in advance, however, as the Fort has been undergoing extensive renovation work.) Then hop on a bus to ★**St Julian's** and get off at Spinola Bay. Or you could make an early start and travel down south to ★**Marsaxlokk's Sunday market**.

Lunch

Caffè Raffael or one of its pretty neighbours overlooking Spinola Bay are perfect for lunch. Try and get a table outside, so that you can savour the view with your food.

Afternoon

Continue around the bay to chill out at one of the lidos or on the beach, either sunbathing or taking part in one of the many different water sports. They are a lot of fun. Later on you could take one of the speedboat trips across the bay and watch the sunset from the water.

