

OUR COUNTRY

History of Valletta



Old map of Valletta

Valletta owes its existence to the Knights of St John, who planned the city as a refuge to care for injured soldiers and pilgrims during the Crusades in the 16th century. Until the arrival of the Knights, Mount Sciberras, on which Valletta stands, lying between two natural harbours, was an arid tongue of land.

No building stood on its bare rocks except for a small watch tower, called St Elmo, to be found at its extreme end. Grand Master La Valette, the gallant hero of the Great Siege of 1565, soon realised that if the Order was to maintain its hold on Malta, it had to provide adequate defences. Therefore, he drew up a plan for a new fortified city on the Sciberras peninsula.

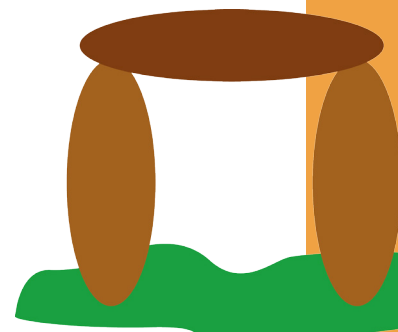
Pope Pius V and Philip II of Spain showed interest in the project. They both promised financial aid and the Pope lent the Knights the services of Francesco Laparelli, a military engineer, who drew up the necessary plans for the new city and its defences. Work started in earnest in March 1566 - first on the bastions and, soon after, on the more important buildings. The new city was to be called Valletta in honour of La Valette.

The Grand Master didn't live to see its completion and he died in 1568. His successor, Pietro del Monte continued with the work at the same pace. By 1571, the Knights transferred their quarters from Vittoriosa (Birgu) to their new capital. Architect Laparelli left Malta in 1570. He was replaced by his assistant Gerolamo Cassar, who had spent some months in Rome, where he had observed the new style of buildings in the Italian city.

Cassar designed and supervised most of the early buildings, including the Sacra Infermeria, St John's Church, the Magisterial Palace and the seven Auberges, or Inns of Residence of the Knights.

By the 16th century, Valletta had grown into a sizeable city. People from all parts of the island flocked to live within its safe fortifications especially as Mdina, until then Malta's capital, lost much of its lure. In the ensuing years, the austere mannerist style of Cassar's structures gave way to the more lavish palaces and churches with graceful facades and rich sculptural motifs.

The new city, with its strong bastions and deep moats, became a bulwark of great strategic importance. Valletta's street plan is unique and planned with its defence in mind. Based on a more or less uniform grid, some of the streets fall steeply as you get closer to the tip of the peninsula. The stairs in some of the streets do not conform to normal dimensions since they were constructed in a way so as to allow knights in heavy armour to be able to climb the steps.



Fast forward a few centuries and the city built by gentlemen for gentlemen came under another siege; this time in the shape of World War II which brought havoc to Malta. Valletta was badly battered by the bombing, but the city withstood the terrible blow and, within a few years, it rose again. The scars of the war are still visible till this day at the site previously occupied by the former Royal Opera House in the heart of the city, a wound that has left Malta's MPs divided these past 60 years over what should replace it.

During the post-war years, Valletta lost many of its citizens who moved out to more modern houses in other localities and its population dwindled to 9,000 inhabitants. However, in the last few years many individuals with a flair for unique architecture are trickling back into the city and investing in old properties.

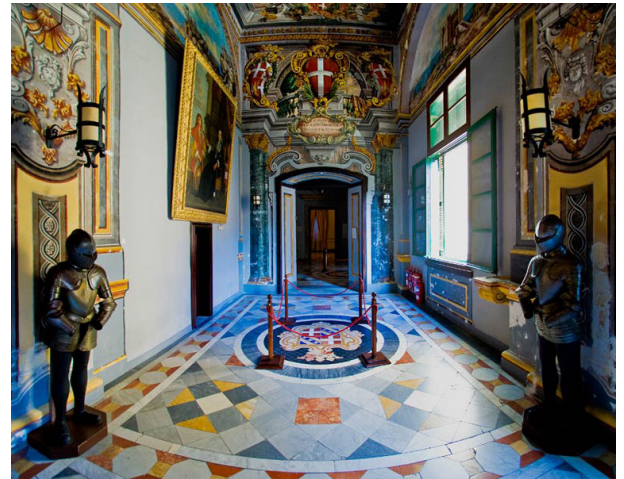
Valletta, the smallest capital of the European Union, is now the island's major commercial and financial centre and is visited daily by throngs of tourists eager to experience the city's rich history.

The Grandmaster's Palace



Dominating Palace Square, the Grand Master's Palace has always been the house of government in Malta, first by the knights, then the British and now hosts the President's office. When parliament is not in session you can visit the palace for free, and there is an awful lot to see in here.

In the interior of the palace is the famous Council Chamber, adorned with valuable Gobelins tapestries woven in France for Grand Master Ramón Perellos y Roccaf.



The other rooms and passages of the palace are splendidly furnished with art objects, old coat of arms and armour.

Particularly notable are the former Hall of the Supreme Council of the Knights, which hosts fine frescoes and the Hall of the Ambassadors, where portraits of Grand Masters and European rulers hang.

On the basement floor is the Armoury, one of the largest collections of its kind in the world, though reduced to a fraction of its former size by the depredations of the French. Among its principal treasures are a suit of armour made in Milan for the Grand Master, Adrien de Wignacourt (1690-97) and a full-length panoply made for Grand Master Martin Garzes by Sigismund Wold of Landshut.



St. John's Co-Cathedral



The Co-Cathedral of St John is nothing short of a gem and quite simply a must for any tourist. Described as the first complete example of high Baroque anywhere, it epitomises the spiritual and military role of its patrons.

The Cathedral is a showcase to Mattia Preti who intricately carved stone wall designs, as well as the painted vaulted ceiling and side altars with scenes from the life of St John. Among the treasures found in the Cathedral are the unique Caravaggio painting depicting the beheading of St John, the extraordinary paving of more than 300 marble tomb slabs (the burial place of several former European princes), and the splendid vaulted central nave with frescoes of Mattia Preti.

Caravaggio's Stroke of Genius



The Masterpiece set in the Oratorio of the Cathedral

Commissioned by the Grand Master, Caravaggio's Beheading of St John was made in 1608 for the chapel of the Co-Cathedral. It is the largest work the artist ever painted (12 feet x 17 feet) and the only one

he ever signed. This painting is described as his all-time masterpiece.

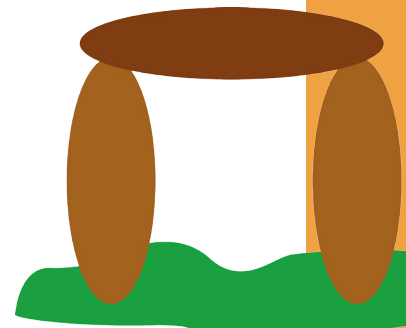
The painting depicts the moment in Biblical history where St John is beheaded by King Herod to satisfy the blood lust of the seductive dancer, Salome. The scene is the courtyard of a prison and the grisly murder is observed by two other prisoners looking through a grille, while a young woman and an old crone stand ready to take the severed head and put it on the waiting platter. The blood flowing from St John's neck drips towards the bottom of the frame and in its red stream, Caravaggio signed his name.

On the oratory's right wall hangs Caravaggio's smaller painting of St Jerome. Stolen in 1984 and rescued in a dramatic operation some months later, the painting depicts an elderly man sitting with a pen in his hand.

Churches



Despite measuring 900 metres by 630 metres, Valletta boasts over 25 churches, a testament to the centuries-old ingrained Catholic faith of the Maltese. In fact, the first building that went up in the city is the Church of Our Lady of Victories along South Street, which commemorates the lifting of the Great Siege. The churches are the following:



- St John's Co-Cathedral - St John's Square
- St. Francis of Assisi – Republic Street
- Parish Church of St. Augustine – Old Bakery Street
- Sanctuary Basilica of Our Lady of Mount Carmel
- Carmelite Church – Old Theatre Street
- Anglican Cathedral of St. Paul – Independence Square
- Church of Christ Redeemer
- Church of the Jesuits
- Collegiate Church of St. Paul's Shipwreck – St Paul Street
- Church of St. Mary of Jesus
- Scots Church of St. Andrew
- Church of Our Lady of the Pilar – West Street
- Church and Monastery of St. Catherine
- Parish Church of Our Lady of Fair Heavens and St. Dominic
- Church of St. Mary Magdalene
- Church and Chapel of St. Anne
- Chapel of Sacra Infermeria – Mediterranean Conference Centre
- Church of St. Nicholas
- Church of St. Roque – St Ursula Street
- Church and Monastery of St. Ursula – St Ursula Street
- Church of Our Lady of Damascus
- Church of St. James
- Church of St. Barbara – Republic Street
- Church of St. Catherine of Italy – Victory Square
- Church of Our Lady of Victories – South Street
- Church of the Blessed Virgin of Notre Dame De Liesse – Liesse Hill
- Church of the Holy Family's Flight from Egypt
- Church of St Lucy

National Museum of Archaeology



The National Museum of Archaeology in Republic Street displays an exceptional array of artefacts from Malta's unique prehistoric periods, starting with the first arrival of man in the Ghar Dalam phase (5200 BC)

and running up to the Tarxien phase (2500 BC).

The collection is housed in the Auberge de Provence, one of the first buildings to be erected after the Great Siege in the late 16th century.



National Museum of Fine Arts



Situated in South Street, the National Museum of Fine Arts museum houses a collection of fine arts, displayed in a broadly chronological order with paintings grouped together by school, ranging from the early Renaissance to modern times.

Italian Baroque features mainly Mattia Preti (1613-99) and paintings by the Caravaggists Mattias Stomer (1600-50), Jean Valentin de Boulogne (1601-32) and by Guido Reni (1575-1642). Art of the 18th century is largely represented by Antoine de Favray.

Other paintings by Maltese artists such as Francesco Zahra and Giuseppe Grech suggest the continued influence of Roman art on local developments.

National War Museum

The National War Museum in Fort St Elmo ranks among the most popular tourist venues. The museum mainly represents Malta's important military role in the post-1800 period under British colonial rule, especially during World War II, when the island became one of the most bombed countries in Europe.

Casa Rocca Piccola



Casa Rocca Piccola is a privately owned and a much loved family home. The value of Casa Rocca Piccola lies in its ability to provide unique historical evidence into the customs and traditions of the Maltese nobility over the last 400 years. One can also see a collection of furniture, silver and paintings that add to the aesthetic riches of Valletta.

Casa Rocca Piccola contains over 50 rooms, the majority of which are open for viewing. Over the last few years a Museum of Costume has been opened in the property and also the World War II Air Raid Shelters have provided a dramatic and exciting addition to the tours of the house. This has all been made possible from the contributions that come in from the thousands of tourists who come to Malta and Valletta every year.

Barrakka Gardens



Upper Barrakka Gardens

Named the Upper Barrakka and the Lower Barrakka, both gardens offer a stunning view of the Grand Harbour.

The Upper Barrakka garden, especially, is a must. Built on top of a demi-bastion, both locals and foreigners relish spending hours taking in the sights. A number of statues and monuments adorn the gardens, including one dedicated to Winston Churchill.

A monument dedicated to Captain Ball is located in the centre of the Lower Barrakka Gardens.

Hastings Gardens

Located on top of the bastions on the west side of City Gate, the recently-embellished Hastings Gardens offer a magnificent view of Floriana, surrounding cities and Marsamxett Harbour.



Auberge de Castille

Designed by Girolamo Cassar but later remodelled under Grand Master di Pinto, Auberge de Castille, situated in Castille Place, is one of the finest architectural works in Malta, as evidenced by its spectacular façade.

Finely proportioned and strictly symmetrical, the building was badly damaged during World War II but was later carefully restored. The building now houses the office of the Prime Minister.



Auberge d'Italie

Originally designed by Girolamo Cassar, the building in Merchants Street, which is built around an arcaded courtyard, was considerably altered in the 17th century.



Auberge de Provence

Construction of this Auberge in Republic Street started in 1571. The size of the building is deceptive, since it is subtly hidden in the decoration of the façade.

It now houses the National Archaeology Museum with many fine examples of pottery, figurines, and original carved stones from various prehistoric temples.

Auberge d'Aragon

Situated in Independence Square, this is the oldest of the seven Auberges built by Girolamo Cassar, and one of only two which have survived in their original condition. Though externally plain, it contains fine Renaissance rooms.

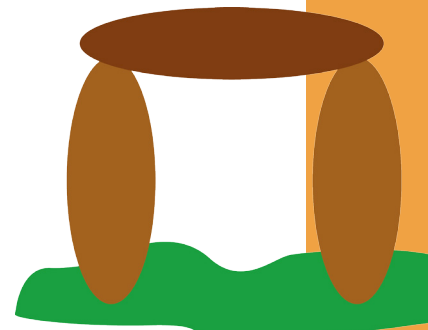
The building also housed the Prime Minister's residence and still contains the historic table on which Malta's independence was drafted out.



Auberge de Baviere

Built in 1629 as a private house in St Sebastian Street, it was subsequently purchased for the newly instituted Anglo-Bavarian langue in 1784.

It has served as an army officers' mess, a school and a ministry.



Fort St. Elmo

Malta's most famous fort was built in 1552 when the Knights feared an imminent invasion by the Ottomans. The Turks eventually attacked in 1565 and the fort's unusual and controversial star shape vindicated its backers as it took the Turks one month to breach the fort despite throwing everything they had at it. The fort also played a frontline role in World War II, when it took the first bomb that was dropped in Malta. Today it houses the police academy and is open on most Sundays for colourful pageantry: re-enacting a military drill and a gun salute, which is interesting in its own right and doubly worthwhile as a chance to see the interior of the fort.



Manoel Theatre

One of Europe's oldest surviving theatres, the Manoel Theatre was personally funded by the wealthy Gran Master Manoel de Vilhena in 1731. It is designed in an elegant oval shape, with 600 seats and row upon row of intimate boxes finished with flamboyant baroque carvings. Its acoustics are so fine that people can hear, from the auditorium conductors turning the pages of their score.



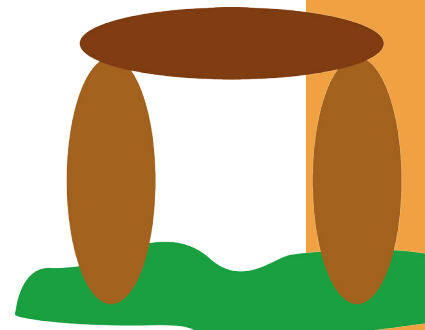
National Library

The National Library was the last public building erected by the Knights in the 1790s and was designed in a marriage of baroque and neoclassical style. It now holds Malta's official historical archives, including all state archive of the Knights from their formation in 1113 to the end of their rule in Malta in 1798. The main reading hall alone contains 40,000 books stacked from floor to ceiling. It is a vast hall in neoclassical flamboyant style and displays important deeds and Maltese mintage in glass cases. Visitors are not allowed to linger but it is worth having a quick look around.



The Great Siege of Malta & The Knights of St John

This audiovisual show, using video clips, theatrical wax-dummy reconstructions and virtual reality audiovisuals, offers a quick graphic dose of the story of the Knights of Malta from their founding to their departure from Malta in 1798. The 45mins walk-through allows you to explore the experience and absorb the story of the Knights as it unfolds in the intriguing and meandering hallways and rooms. It offers only an outline of the history of the Knights but is worth a visit if you want a quick overview of Malta during their reign.





The Knights of Malta 1565 – The Show

The Great Siege of Malta, one of the greatest sieges in military history is the first topic Maltese school-children have to study. This show recounts this great story in an outstanding and gripping live spectacle at the magnificent Valletta Waterfront. A 50-strong cast, nine beautiful horses, dancing girls, an able falconer and his falcon, and valiant Knights in shining armour, put together a show that is both informative and entertaining. The hostess Melita guides you through the tale -she is a narrator as well as a spectator. Scenes change from festive to fearful as the Turks attack and the Knights fight on. To relieve the drama, a romantic tale is weaved into the spectacle.

The Malta Experience

This well-produced documentary offers interesting footage of Maltese landscapes and covers all the salient historical eras in a gripping and entertaining manner. Summarizing 7,000 years of Maltese history in a one-hour documentary obviously offers just a toe dip into Malta’s history.

Valletta’s Living History

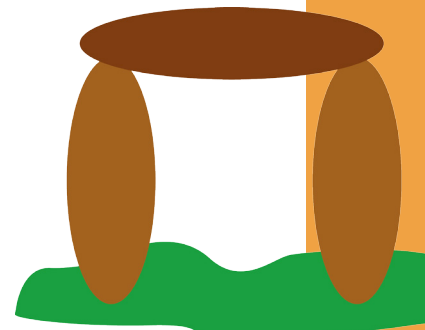
History, Elegance and Lifestyle... Wrapped Up in One Great Attraction! If you choose to see one really great attraction in Malta, see Valletta Living History! Re-live the arrival of Valletta’s earliest settlers; the Great Siege that erupted between the Knights of St John and the fierce Ottoman Empire; French and British rule; as well as the city’s heroic role in World War II till present day. A high definition audiovisual spectacular, the show provides great entertainment for all the family, right in the heart of Malta’s capital city Valletta. It provides fantastic insight into the history of the capital, local culture and Maltese society, through a documentary that charts Valletta’s evolution over the centuries.

Valletta Waterfront

The upgrade of the Valletta Waterfront was the first among the massive restoration projects of some of Malta’s architectural gems. Ever since the capital’s waterfront was meticulously brought to its former glory, it sees throngs of people day in day out. During the day, it is buzzing with activity as cruise liners enter and leave Grand Harbour. At night time, locals and foreigners mingle in the bars and restaurants that line the waterfront or just take a stroll to take in the beautifully restored facades of the stores built by Grand Master Pinto and the stunning view of the Three Cities and Fort St Angelo across.

Suggestions:

- Use this activity to see that the cubs understand exactly the importance of our prestigious capital city and its role in the country’s history. This can be done through visits to the various places of interest, a treasure hunt around the capital city taking into account the monuments or a visit to the various interactive theatre shows and exhibitions.



ACTIVITY FACT SHEET



Activity: Photo Hunt at Valletta



Objective: Learning about the country's history



Time: 5 hours



Outline: The Coordinated Union for Busting Pranksters and Collecting Knowledge (CUBPACK) recruited the Cubs to help it out in a mission. It was found out to someone was messing with the time-line of Malta, jumbling up its history. The Cubs have to travel in time to fix the errors being made. The activity is a photo hunt. The Cubs are divided in two Groups, and each Group has a different set of events they have to fix (an event is fixed by acting out what should be happening, or in the case of Dun Mikiel Xerri and Sette Giugno, paying respect to the victims). At the end, they share their experience. (More details and resources are available)



Equipment: First Aid box, Water, Snack, photo hunt clues and maps, camera per group, time-travel bracelets (optional), one tablet per group (optional).



Place: Valletta



Group Size: Pack or Arrow Group









3rd Parties: If a visit to a place of interest (museum, etc) or an audio visual show is organized, the necessary bookings and arrangements should be made weeks before the activity so it is organized and turns out well



ACTIVITY FACT SHEET



During the Activity:

-  – The Cubs are encouraged to discuss how they will “fix” the point in time, and at the end they will share their thoughts with each other
-  – This is a purely outdoor activity so the physical aspect is prevalent throughout.
-  – Learning about the history of Malta
-  – The Cubs have to think of creative ways how to take the photos, to portray the actions they are trying to do.
-  – Going through the island’s history, the cubs can associate their feelings with those of their ancestors and this can also create a feeling of patriotism.
-  – The Cubs understand that they are the result of many things that happened in the past. Help them to realise that they are also shaping history, so they should be careful with the decisions they take. The relationship of their ancestors with their Creator and their religious beliefs, which is prevalent in Valletta further brings out the spiritual element.

GOLD ARROW

