

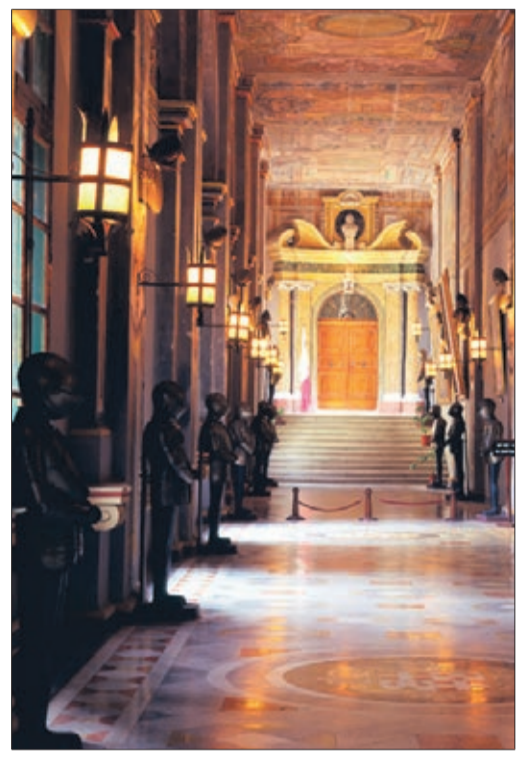


George Cross, a lasting reminder of courage and sacrifice

During the Second World War the people of Malta withstood the full fury of the Axis for three years.

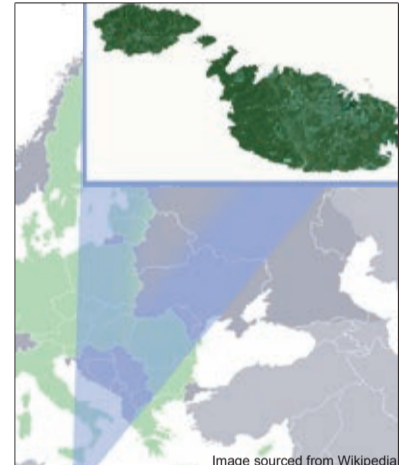
attacking enemy supply lines. German and Italian forces determined to neutralise this threat and so launched a fierce attack on Malta. They effectively placed the island under siege between 1940 and 1942, while launching nearly 3,500 bombing raids. Despite scant resources, the Maltese stood firm. At the start of the onslaught, Malta's air defences consisted of little more than a trio of obsolete Gloucester biplanes, known as Faith, Hope and Charity. The next three years were a constant struggle for the Allies, both to keep the islanders supplied, and build up their military capacity. Eventually, rolling Allied victories in North Africa began to limit Axis forces' ability to maintain the siege, and the last bombing raid, in July 1943, led King George VI to award the George Cross collectively: "to famous history". An image of the medal now appears in the upper hoist corner of the Maltese flag as a permanent reminder of their courage and sacrifice

LOCATED in the Mediterranean between Europe, Africa and the Middle East, Malta has always held a strategic position. Over the centuries it has been fought over by successive civilisations, including the Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs and French. But it was during the Second World War, as the Axis and Allied powers fought for dominance of the entire Mediterranean theatre, that the island was at the centre of its fiercest fight for survival since the Turkish siege of 1565. Malta's position as a British territory close to Axis shipping lanes made it a perfect base for



Bravery in battle: (Left) The Grand Harbour, (Centre) The President's Palace and (Right) The 100-Ton Gun at Fort Rinella which provides a reminder of the past. Images from Visitmalta.com

Malta at a glance



Attractive charm: (Above left) Mgarr Harbour, Gozo. (Above right) Map of Malta. Mgarr Image from Visitmalta.com

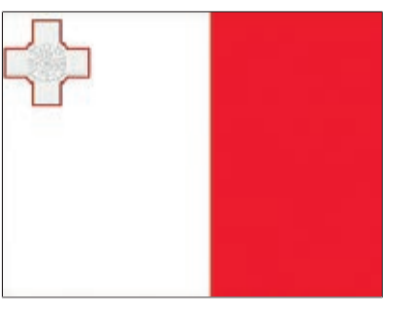
LOCATED in the centre of the Mediterranean, the Maltese islands—consisting of Malta, Gozo, Comino and two uninhabited islands—lie midway between Europe and North Africa, 93km south of Sicily and 290km north of Libya.

Malta, with its 400,000 inhabitants, is the smallest of the 10 countries that joined the EU in May 2004 and adopted the euro as the national currency in January 2008. Since independence, Malta has transformed its economy to become a leading centre for financial services, ICT, container and freight transhipment, high value manufacturing and tourism.

Country overview

- Government**
 - Form of state: Republic
 - Head of State: President Dr George Abela
 - Head of Government: Prime Minister Dr Lawrence Gonzi
 - National Legislature: Based on universal adult suffrage. Parliament elected every five years.
 - Elections: Last held March 8, 2008
 - Legal System: Based on the English Common Law and Roman Civil Law
 - Judicial Structure: Constitutional Court; Court of Appeal; Judges for both courts are appointed by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister
- People**
 - Population: 403,000
 - Nationality: Maltese
 - Religion: Roman Catholic
 - Languages: Maltese (official), English (official)
 - Population Growth rate: 0.4 per cent
- Geography**
 - Location: The Maltese Archipelago lies virtually at the centre of the Mediterranean, with Malta 93km south of Sicily and 290km north of Africa
 - Structure: Archipelago is comprised of five islands—Malta, Gozo, Comino, Filfa and Cominotto
 - Area: 316 sqkm (Malta 246sq km, Gozo 67sqkm, Comino 2.7sqkm)
 - Climate: Mediterranean climate with mild, rainy winters and hot,

dry summer. Mostly a daily average of five-to-six hours sunshine in mid-winter to more than 12 hours in summer.



The national flag of Malta consists of two equal vertical stripes, white in the hoist to red in the fly. A representation of the George Cross awarded to Malta by H.M George VI on April, 15 1942 is carried edged with red in the canton of the white stripe.



Chivalry: The Maltese Cross

Gozo, the island of love and honey

MALTA'S sister island of Gozo and Comino open up a tempo and scene change from Malta itself. Gozo, a short half hour by ferry is steeped in myth and mystery of its own. Thought to be the legendary home of the nymph calypso, it is a tranquil haven of ancient villages sleepy byways and stunning sea and landscape. Gozo is the ultimate getaway, though not without its own cultural life and array of sports that attracts its visitors. The Isle of Comino, midway between Gozo and Malta, is a paradise for snorkellers, yachtsmen, diver and trackers. Bathing in the isles blue lagoon with its turquoise waters makes an ideal destination. Above the rubble walls and the prickly pear hedges stand the green hills. Wherever you look, the sea is never more than a stones throw away. It is, in fact, Gozo's amazing coastline that stimulates the imagination so strongly: tiny creeks, beaches of red sand, turquoise bays, majestic rock formations, stretches of limestone criss-crossed with time salt pans, high cliffs falling in a sheer drop into the clear waters are a swim or a stroll can take you into an atmosphere of sheer relaxation.



Spectacular: The natural landmark of the Azure Window is one of the most photographed vistas on the island.

Fertile valleys radiate from its capital in the centre, making Gozo look like a star set against a stunning blue background. Right in the centre of the star is one of the most beautiful architectural complexes on the islands, behind its austere bastions the Citadel hides a number of fine palaces and at the very top is the beautiful cathedral designed by Lorenzo Gafa between 1697 and 1711. On the outskirts of the village of Xaghra stand the megalithic temples of Ggantija. They are one of the best examples of prehistoric architecture on the islands and it is estimated that they were built in about 3600 BC, making them one of the oldest stone structures in the world. The huge stones weigh several tons and those of the enclosure are six meters high. At Dwejra on the western side of the island lies the Azure Window which is the result of sea and weight erosion. Two gigantic columns each some 40 meters in diameter support a horizontal block of about 100 meters long and 20 meters high so that the ensemble has come to resemble a gigantic window underneath which the Azure waves shimmer and sparkle. *Some of the information in this feature is from Country Profiler 2008/2009, 'Malta at a glance facts and figures.'

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Would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Maltese people on the occasion of their National Day
Phone: (02) 6294 1119
Mobile: 0418 242 004
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