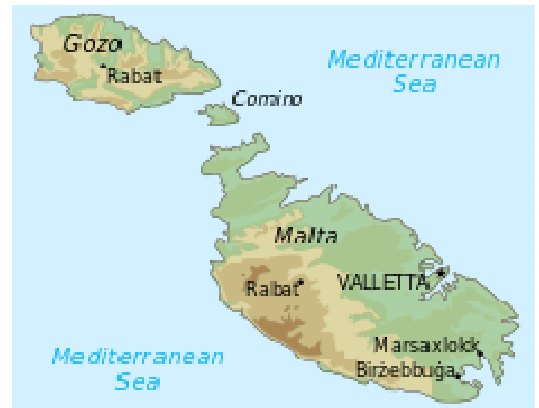


MALTA

A rocky isolated archipelago ?

No ! An important crossroads in the mediterranean sea ?



Malta is an archipelago in the central Mediterranean that lies at some 80 km south of Sicily, 284 km east of Tunisia and 333 km north of Libya. Only the three largest islands – Malta - Gozo and Comino – are inhabited, the smaller ones aren't.

Numerous bays along the indented coastline of the islands provide good harbours. The landscape consists of low hills with terraced fields. The highest point in Malta is at 253 m (830 ft), near Dingli. Although there are some small rivers at times of high rainfall, there are no permanent rivers or lakes on Malta.

Malta has a Mediterranean climate with mild winters and hot summers, hotter in the inland areas. Rain occurs mainly in autumn and winter, summer being generally dry. The average yearly temperature is around 23 ° during the day and 15.5 ° at night.

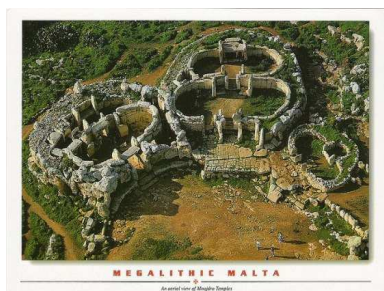
With a population of about 475,000 over an area of 316 km², Malta is the world's tenth smallest and fifth most densely populated country. Its capital is Valletta, which is the smallest national capital in the European Union with an area of 0.8 km². The official languages are Maltese and English, with Maltese officially recognised as the national language and the only Semitic language in the European Union.

‘Honey Island’

The origin of the name *Malta* is uncertain, and the modern-day variation is derived from the Maltese language. The most common etymology is that the word *Malta* is derived from the Greek word *meli*, "honey". The ancient Greeks called the island (*Melitē*) meaning "honey-sweet", possibly for Malta's unique production of honey; an endemic subspecies of bees live on the island. The Romans called the island *Melita*. Another conjecture suggests that the word *Malta* comes from the Phoenician word *Maleth*, "a haven", or 'port' in reference to Malta's many bays and coves.

What a History !

Malta has been inhabited from around 5900 BC, since the arrival of settlers from Sicily. The extinction of the dwarf hippos and dwarf elephants has been linked to the earliest arrival of humans on Malta. A significant **prehistoric Neolithic culture** marked by Megalithic structures, which date back to 3600 BC, existed on the islands, the temples of Mnajdra, Ggantija, for example.



Aerial view of Mnajdra



Fertility Goddess, Venus of Willendorf

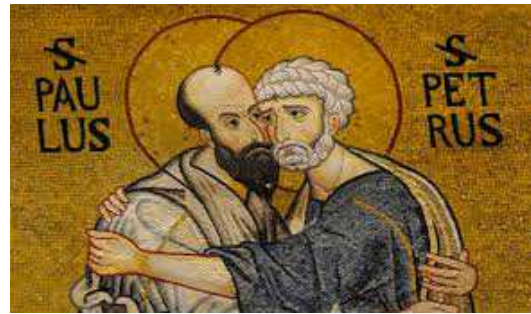


Temple de Ggantija

The Phoenicians colonised Malta between 800–700 BC, bringing their Semitic language and culture. They used the islands as an outpost from which they expanded sea explorations and trade in the Mediterranean to Cornwall, until their successors, **the Carthaginians**, were ousted by **the Romans** in 216 BC with the help of the Maltese inhabitants, under whom Malta became a municipium.



Roman mosaics



St Paul stayed 3 months in Malta after his shipwreck

After a period of **Byzantine** rule (4th to 9th century) and a probable sack by **the Vandals**, the islands were invaded by **the Aglabids** (emirs dynasty) in AD 870. The fate of the population after the Arab invasion is unclear but it seems the islands may have been completely depopulated and were likely to have been repopulated at the beginning of the second millennium by settlers from Arab-ruled.

The Muslim rule was ended by **the Normans** who conquered the island in 1091. The islands were completely re-Christianised by 1249. The islands were part of the Kingdom of Sicily until 1530, and were briefly controlled by **the Capetian House of Anjou**. In 1530 Charles I of Spain gave the Maltese islands to the **Order of Knights of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem** in perpetual lease (previously, they have been chased from Rhodes and Cyprus). The knights, led by Frenchman Jean Parisot de Valette, Grand Master of the Order, withstood the Great Siege of Malta by the Ottomans in 1565. The knights, with the help of Spanish and Maltese forces, were victorious and repelled the attack. After the siege they decided to increase Malta's fortifications, particularly in the inner-harbour area, where the new city of Valletta, named in honour of Valette, was built. They also established watchtowers along the coasts. The Knights ruled Malta from 1530 to 1793.



Roger 1 of Sicily



Jean Parisot de la Valette



Bust of Bonaparte in Valletta

The French under Napoleon took hold of the Maltese islands in 1798, on their way to Egypt. Thanks to the aid of the British, the Maltese were able to oust French control two years later. The inhabitants subsequently asked **Britain** to assume sovereignty over the islands. After the Treaty of Paris in 1814, Malta became a part of the British Empire and was used as a shipping way-station and fleet headquarters. After the Suez Canal opened in 1869, Malta's position halfway between the Strait of Gibraltar and Egypt proved to be its main asset, and it was considered an important stop on the way to India.

During the Second World War, Malta played an important role for the Allies ; being a British colony, situated close to Sicily and the Axis shipping lanes, Malta was bombarded by the Italian and German air forces. Malta was used by the British to launch attacks on the Italian navy and had a submarine base. It was also used as a listening post, intercepting German radio messages including Enigma traffic. The bravery of the Maltese people during the second Siege of Malta moved King George VI who awarded the George Cross to Malta "to bear witness to a heroism and devotion that will long be famous in history".



War bombing raids



English heritage



Maltese flag

But ultimately, Malta refused an attempted integration with the United Kingdom in 1956. **Malta became independent on 21 September 1964** (Independence Day). Under its 1964 constitution, Malta initially retained Queen Elizabeth II as Queen of Malta, with a Governor-General exercising executive authority on her behalf. On 13 December 1974, (Republic Day) it became a republic within the Commonwealth, with the President as head of state. On 31 March 1979, Malta saw the withdrawal of the last British troops and the Royal Navy from Malta. This day is known as Freedom Day and Malta declared itself as a neutral and non-aligned state. **Malta joined the European Union on 1 May 2004 and joined the Eurozone on 1 January 2008.**



Some « top sights » in Malta

. **In la Valletta : St John's co-cathedral**, is the most impressive church. It was built between 1573 and 1578. The interior was redecorated, in the 17th century in an exuberant Maltese baroque style, and it is an astounding surprise after the plain facade. One of its greatest treasures is a huge painting of John the Baptist by Caravaggio who lived in Malta.



St John's facade



Extraordinary pavements

. **Grand Master's Palace** : stern exterior but sumptuous interior. It was once the residence of the Grand Master. From Malta 's independence until 2015 the building was the seat of Malta's parliament



Grand Master's Palace : the armors corridor

The sleeping lady

. **National Museum of Archaeology** is housed in the impressive Auberge de Provence with the beautifully modelled prehistoirc figurines that were found locally. Best is the sleeping lady - above (5000 years old).



Blue Lagoon in Comino



Blue grotto



Malta's Azure Window which collapsed after a heavy storm



Traditional boats with "lucky eyes"



La Valletta at the rising sun. The fortifications are "honey" color



Good Bye, May be next year, for another conference.... About "The Knights"

