

Cultural Programme

The tour will start with a 40-minute presentation on Malta's water context, including Globigerina Limestone aquifers. This will be followed by a guided tour of The Archbishop's Palace unground water system. The visit will continue with a guided tour of the fortifications of Valletta.

We will meet at the Grand Excelsior Hotel Lobby at 08:45am with a presentation by Dr Keith Buhagiar. We will then proceed on foot to the Archbishop's Palace (approximately 30 minutes on foot). After the first site, we will continue the tour to Fort St Elmo to visit the fort which also offers a great view the Grand Harbour and breakwater.

Underground Water Cisterns

Tour Guide: Dr. Keith Buhagiar
Language: English

Underground water cisterns are a common feature in local vernacular architecture. Maltese palazzos often feature several underground cisterns, used to converse water in case of invasion, and irrigate the surrounding gardens. Whereas most were filled using rainwater or aqueducts, other water sources do exist.

The underground cisterns beneath the Archbishop's Palace in Valletta are filled from an unknown source of water that accumulates under the palace. Several theories have been postulated. Aquifer accumulation could be due to the Lower Globigerina Limestone overlying a localised impermeable marly deposit; leakage via fissures (unlikely); leakage finding its way here from existing reservoirs in Valletta still capturing water; or water coming from a sizeable aquifer in Hamrun / Santa Venera via fissures and leakage finding its way to Valletta.

In Valletta, the excavation of water cisterns was obligatory during the city's construction: a regulation designed to protect the capital in case of besiege. Some have been, from time to time, opened to the public. One such cistern is a cavernous, vaulted, three-storey chamber beneath the law courts in Valletta.

Source: Flimkien Ghal Ambjent Ahjar & Perit Dr Amber Wismayer

Fortifications in Valletta

Tour Guide: Mr Vincent Zammit
Language: English

The fortifications of Valletta are a series of defensive walls and other fortifications which surround Valletta. The first fortification to be built was Fort Saint Elmo in 1552. However, the construction of holistic fortifications began to be built in 1566 when the city was founded by Grand Master Jean de Valette, after the Great Siege of the previous year. Modifications were made throughout the following centuries, with the last major addition being Fort Lascaris: a British fortification completed in 1856. Most of the fortifications remain intact today.

The city of Valletta was a practical example of an ideal Renaissance city, and this was due to its fortifications as well as the urban life within the city, which featured an underground sewage system, as well as private and public water conservation measures.

The Valletta fortifications form part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site.