

Accompanying Persons' Programme

Meeting point: The Malta Chamber of Commerce for registration & meeting with Guide.
Tour Guide: Ms Silvia Debono
Time: 09:00 – 17:00
Language: English

Departing from your accommodation we head towards the centre of the island, the place where most civilizations settled in Malta. We will visit the ancient capital city of Mdina. We will walk through its narrow streets and will stop at St Paul Square and then walk to the bastions to enjoy a panoramic of the island. We will then visit the Metropolitan Cathedral of Mdina. Departing from the Greek's Gate we will take a short walk in Rabat the suburb of Mdina, admiring more palaces and quaint corners.

Time for lunch at the Bottegin Palazzo Xara.

After we depart towards Mosta to visit the Basilica of the Assumption of Our Lady, also known as Rotunda church. Built in the 19th century, it is a unique church in Malta, its facade resembles the pantheon in Rome. The church withstood a bomb that fell on the dome on the 9th April 1942, piercing it and rolling on the floor of the church without exploding and without hurting the people who were inside.

The last stop is San Anton Gardens, built by the Knights of St John's in the 17th century as private garden, it showcases a variety of plants and trees from all corners of the world. In the centre of the garden one finds the official residence of the President of Malta.

Return to accommodation.

Information on the locations to be visited

Mdina

Also known as Città Vecchia ("Old City") and Città Notabile ("Notable City"), Mdina is a fortified city which served as Malta's capital from antiquity until the arrival of the Order of St John in 1530.

The plateau on which Mdina is built has been inhabited since prehistory. Its naturally defensible nature established it as a place of refuge by the Bronze Age. Founded around the 8th century BC by Phoenician settlers, the ancient city was much larger: the Punic-Roman city was about three times the size of present-day Mdina, extending into a large part of modern Rabat. It was later reduced during the Byzantine or Arab occupation of Malta. When the Order of Saint John took over in Malta in 1530, the nobles ceremoniously handed over the keys of the city to the Grand Master, but the Order settled in Birgu – a harbour town - and Mdina lost its status as capital city. During the Great Siege of Malta in 1565, Mdina was the base of the Order's cavalry. The Ottomans attempted to take Mdina in September so as to winter there, but abandoned their plans when the city fired its cannon, leading them to believe that it had ammunition to spare.

Mdina remained the centre of the Maltese nobility and religious authorities, but it never regained its pre-1530 importance, giving rise to the popular nickname the "Silent City" by both locals and visitors

Mdina Cathedral

Mdina is home to the Metropolitan Cathedral of Saint Paul; a Roman Catholic cathedral dedicated to St. Paul the Apostle. Founded in the 12th century on a site that, according to Pauline mythology, was originally occupied by a palace belonging to the Roman governor who greeted Paul the Apostle after he was shipwrecked in Malta.

The 1693 earthquake severely damaged the original cathedral to the extent that it was later dismantled and rebuilt in the Baroque style in line with the designs of local architect Lorenzo Gafa. It now stands as his masterpiece, however, it suffered damage following another earthquake in 1856 which destroyed the 18th century frescoes on the dome.

The main façade in St. Paul's Square is set on a low parvis approached by three steps. The façade is cleanly divided into three bays by pilasters of Corinthian and Composite orders. The central bay, containing the main doorway, is set forward, and surmounted by the coats of arms of the city of Mdina, Grand Master Roccaful and Bishop Palmieri, all of which were sculpted by Giuseppe Darmanin. A round-headed window is set in the upper story above the doorway, and the façade is topped by a triangular pediment. The cathedral features two bell towers, originally containing six bells, and an octagonal dome.

Basilica of the Assumption of Our Lady, Mosta

It was built between 1833 and the 1860s to neoclassical designs of Giorgio Grognet de Vassé, on the site of an earlier Renaissance church which had been built in around 1614 to designs of Tommaso Dingli. Before the church was constructed, there was some opposition to Grognet's design, since some regarded a Roman temple as an unsuitable model for a Catholic church building.

The rotunda took 28 years to build, being completed in the early 1860s. The old church was demolished in 1860, and the new church did not need to be consecrated since the site had remained a place of worship throughout the course of construction.

During World War II, the town of Mosta was prone to aerial bombardment due to its proximity to the airfield of RAF Ta Kali. At about 16:40 on 9 April 1942, the Luftwaffe dropped three bombs on the church, and two of them deflected without exploding. However, one 50 kg (110 lb) high-explosive bomb pierced the dome and entered the church, where a congregation of more than 300 people was awaiting early evening Mass. The bomb did not explode, and a Royal Engineers Bomb Disposal unit defused it and dumped it into the sea off the west coast of Malta. This event was interpreted as a miracle by the inhabitants, and a similar bomb is now displayed in the sacristy at the back of the church, under the words *Il-Miraklu tal-Bomba, 9 ta' April 1942*.

San Anton Gardens

Probably the best known of the Islands' gardens, San Anton Gardens was laid out by Grand Master Antoine de Paule as grounds to his summer residence, San Anton Palace in Attard.

Originally built in 1602 as a country retreat, the palace was later established as the official residence of the British Governor in 1802 until 1964 when Malta became a republic. Since then, it has served as the primary residence and main office base of the President of Malta.

The building has been enlarged and amended over the centuries. It is characterised by several vernacular elements, such as courtyards, high ceilings and louvered windows. The grounds feature several underground cisterns, designed to irrigate the vast gardens.

Various heads of state have visited the gardens over the years and numerous plaques mark their ceremonial tree planting. The garden is a botanical delight with mature trees, old stone urns, fountains, ponds and formal flower beds. The garden is formal with rustic touches and holds a wide variety of plants and flowers, such as Jacaranda trees, Norfolk Pines, Bougainvillea and roses. Some of the trees are over three centuries old.

Source: VisitMalta & Dr Perit Amber Wismayer