



Malta: prehistoric to present

with a day on Gozo

9–15 October 2023 (MJ 930)

7 days • £3,320

Lecturer: Juliet Rix

A wonderful exploration of this fascinating, diverse island.

Some of the world's earliest stone buildings, all of them UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Many more major historic sites in the fortified capital of Valletta and ancient Mdina.

Magnificent Baroque art and architecture with 21st-century designs by Renzo Piano.

Rural and picturesque Gozo Island, with its stunning natural features.

Malta has an extraordinary more than 7,000-year history beginning with the arrival of a little-known people from Sicily who became the creators of Malta's unique Neolithic temples. Older than the Great Pyramids and the famous standing stones at Stonehenge, Malta's megalithic temples were built between 3800 and 2350 BC – a millennium before Mycenae.

All the temples are UNESCO World Heritage Sites, as is the unique Hal Saflieni Hypogeum, the extraordinary triple-layered tomb complex cut from solid rock where the 'Temple People' buried their dead.

And this is just the start of the story. Malta, with its perfect natural harbours, was desired by every trading or invading nation in the Mediterranean from the Phoenicians and Romans to both sides in the Second World War. Each occupier has left its mark, be it Roman-Byzantine catacombs or British red letter boxes.

The greatest impression is perhaps that made by the Knights of St John Hospitaller, commonly referred to as 'The Knights of Malta'. Ousted from Jerusalem and then Rhodes, this order of maritime warrior monks arrived in Malta in 1530 and ruled until 1798. After nearly losing the country to the Ottoman Turks in The Great Siege of 1565, the Knights built a near-impregnable new city on a rocky peninsula between two harbours: Malta's delightful, diminutive capital, Valletta.

Despite the ravages of the Second World War, Valletta remains fundamentally the Knights' city although one area has received a very 21st-century makeover. Badly bombed and poorly restored, the City Gate area has been redesigned by the architect of the Pompidou Centre and the London Shard, Renzo Piano.



Hagar Qim, steel engraving c. 1830.

Itinerary

Day 1: Valletta. Fly at c. 10.45am from London Heathrow to Malta. Drive to Valletta, a peninsula flanked by fine natural harbours and once the most strongly fortified city in Christendom. Here, survey the massive fortifications protecting the landward approach and view the Grand Harbour from the ramparts.

Day 2: Qrendi, Marsaxlokk, Dingli. Drive through the countryside to the prehistoric temples overlooking the sea, Hagar Qim and Mnajdra. Time in the picturesque, traditional fishing village of Marsaxlokk, before seeing the ancient track works, the Clapham Junction cart ruts, on the Dingli cliffs.

Day 3: Valletta. The morning is spent in the National Museum of Archaeology, home of the unique 'Fat Ladies of Malta' and other original carvings from the Neolithic Temples. Visit the charming Manoel Theatre, a rare survival of the early 18th century and the Co-Cathedral of St John, one of the most interesting of Baroque buildings, which has lavish carved wall decoration and tombs, ceiling paintings by Mattia Preti and two paintings by Caravaggio. Finally, a private visit of the Casa Rocca Piccola, provides unique historic insight to the customs and traditions of the Maltese nobility over the last 400 years.

Day 4: Paola, Valletta. In Paola, the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the only prehistoric underground burial site in the world. The Tarxien Temple site is the most complex in Malta and would have been the most decorative. The afternoon is free in Valletta.

Day 5: Gozo. A 30-minute ferry crossing to the island of Gozo, which is more rural and less populated than Malta. See the temple of Ggantija, one of the oldest of Malta's prehistoric monuments. The chief town is Victoria, with its cathedral and medieval Citadel. A naturally defensible, flat-topped hill in the middle of Gozo, the Citadel was first fortified in the Bronze Age and has been the centre of Gozitan life for at least 3,500 years.

Day 6: Mdina, Rabat. Mdina, Malta's ancient capital, is an unspoilt citadel of great beauty, centre of the Maltese aristocracy, with medieval walls, grand palazzi and Baroque cathedral. Spreading below is the town of Rabat, with Early Christian catacombs.

Day 7: Vittoriosa. Cross the Grand Harbour by *dghajsa* (traditional water taxi), to see churches, forts, and the Knights' auberges in Vittoriosa. Fly to London Heathrow arriving at c. 7.30pm.

Malta: prehistoric to present
continued

Lecturer

Juliet Rix. Award-winning journalist, writer and broadcaster specialising in the history of Malta. She studied History of Art at Cambridge and is the author of the *Bradt Guide: Malta & Gozo*, now in its 4th edition (2019). Her career in journalism has involved working for the BBC and writing for British national newspapers, magazines and online media.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,320 or £3,120 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £4,030 or £3,830 without flights.

Included: air travel (Economy Class) with scheduled Air Malta flights (Airbus 320); accommodation as below; travel by private coach; breakfasts, 2 lunches and 3 dinners with wine, water, coffee; admissions to museums and sites; gratuities for waiters, drivers and local guides; the services of the lecturer, tour manager and local guide.

Accommodation. Hotel Phoenicia, Valletta (phoeniciamalta.com): a 5-star hotel in Valletta, recently refurbished and furnished with style and character, the best in Valletta and just outside the city gates. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? There is a lot of walking on this tour, some of it over the rough ground of sites. Valletta is relatively hilly so you will need to be comfortable with everyday walking and stair climbing. Average distance by coach per day: 15 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 20 participants.

Combine this tour with: *Civilisations of Sicily*, 16–28 October 2023.