



Malta Exclusive Group Itinerary

Bongu (Hello in Maltese)

Let us take you on a journey to the land that has been sought after, conquered, and celebrated as the jewel of the Mediterranean for over 5000 years. Malta, and its islands Gozo and Comino, have an illustrious history stretching back to the temple builders, Phoenicians, Arabs, Knights of Malta, French and finally British rule leading to its modern day independence. It is a little known fact that the oldest free standing structures in the world are found in Malta - one thousand years older than the pyramids of Egypt. Adding to its significant history marked by palaces, fortifications, cathedrals and other landmarks, exist a plethora of quaint villages, beaches, countryside walks and a culture that is sure to warm you. Maxima Tours has produced, arguably, the very finest Malta experience for small groups wishing to become immersed in all things Maltese.

Day 1 – Day 2

We board our afternoon flight from Omaha to Malta with a connection in Europe. Arrive early afternoon and be transferred to our host hotel. Dinner will be served at a local restaurant located steps away from our hotel. While on the island of Malta, the Five Star Le Meridien Hotel will be your home for 7 nights. A seamless check in awaits you as you get used to our surroundings. Take the afternoon off with a rest and or leisurely walk around the resort property. Internet access is available for each guest of MAXIMA Tours. A dinner is included.

Day 3

For our first full day in Malta, awaken to the sounds of the sea and the anticipation of what the capital city, Valletta, has to offer. Enjoy breakfast at the resort followed by transportation to Valletta where we will learn about the landmark city that the Knights of Malta built. Most of the touring today will be by foot, so be prepared with comfortable walking shoes and appropriate clothing. Enter the majestic gates of Malta as we learn about its history, and the Auberges of the Knights. We will visit the Lower Barrakka Gardens en route to the Upper Barrakka Gardens. In order to set the appropriate tone for today's touring, we will watch the high definition production of the Malta Experience. Just across from the Malta Experience was the Infirmary of



the Knights. Built in 1574, it provided about 900 beds for patients who included knights, soldiers, sailors and foreigners. Being Hospitallers, the original functions of the Knights was to care for the poor, sick or injured pilgrims to the Holy Land.

Lunch is served in an old bakery that has been converted to a restaurant. Every Mediterranean country has its unique shape and form of bread. They also have their own fillings. The Maltese opt for vegetarian or fish fillings and the bread is a disc-shaped semi flat bread that has a glorious texture. The restaurant we will be dining in has brought back many of the traditional flavours of Malta under one roof. Our grand finale of the day will be a tour of the unassuming St. John's Co-Cathedral – the Church of the Knights of Malta. Inside we will discover a treasure trove of magnificent art and the opulence of the vaulted ceilings and tombstone flooring. It is here that perhaps the most famous work of art of famed artist Caravaggio is displayed - "The Beheading of St. John the Baptist" – which is his only signed piece in the world. From here, we gather to venture back to the hotel to relax and freshen up for dinner with wine at a special restaurant on the outskirts of Rabat. Complimentary admission to the Grand Master's Palace Armoury is also included for us to explore at our leisure.

Day 4

This morning we return to Valletta for free time to explore some other attractions, shop or just stroll down its majestic streets. The early afternoon will have us visiting the Three Cities. These towns extending towards Valletta and dividing the Grand Harbour into deep inlets, are known historically with different names but those most commonly used today are Vittoriosa, Senglea and Cospicua. The Three Cities were the centre for the Knights of Malta's naval operations and it continued to be an important hive of activity as the base of the British fleet in the Mediterranean.

We discover sites such as the Inquisitor's Palace, significant military forts, and the iconic watchtower. We return to the hotel by 4pm for us to enjoy the hotel amenities or venture out and explore the area.

Day 5

Step back in time – specifically over 5000 years ago, with a visit to a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The temple builders have left their significant mark on the island with a multitude of temple sites. The site(s) we will be visiting this morning are the Hagar Qim site and possibly the Hypogeum (should it reopen), the only subterranean temple in the world. First excavated in 1839, the remains suggest a date between 3600 – 3200 BC, a period known as the Ģgantija



phase in Maltese prehistory. Haġar Qim was in fact never completely buried as the tallest stones, remained exposed and featured in 18th and 19th century paintings.

We venture to the majestic cliffs of Dingli for some amazing views. Make sure your camera is fully charged for the magnificent views. The village lies on a plateau some 250 meters above sea level, which is one of the highest points of Malta. The area provides not only open sea views over the tiny, uninhabited isle of Filfla, but is also a good vantage point over Malta. Lunch will follow at a local restaurant.

Our afternoon will have us visiting Rabat and Mdina (the Silent City). The Arabs, during their 200 years of rule, divided the old Roman City of Melita into two: the citadel became known as Mdina and the rest of the area as Rabat. In Rabat we find St. Paul's Church and Grotto as well as the St. Paul's Catacombs. It is here where we learn the story of a shipwrecked St. Paul in Malta. The Catacombs of St. Paul are not themselves associated with Paul but derive their name from their proximity to St. Paul's Church and Grotto. They are a fascinating labyrinth of 3rd-century AD subterranean tombs and the earliest archaeological evidence of Christianity in Malta. Next, discover the Domvs Romana (Roman Villa) where the mosaic pavements rank among the finest and oldest compositions from the western Mediterranean, alongside those of Pompeii and Sicily. Other attractions include Muslim tombstones, a draped female statue, a tiny bone baby rattle and decorative architecture.

An authentic treat awaits us as we enter the Old City, Mdina, also known as the Silent City. As a prelude to dinner, enjoy an aperitif on the bastions before being “lead” through the narrow medieval streets to our host restaurant for a delectable evening of food and wine. We are sure to fall in love with Mdina just as much as the families who continue to live here throughout their generations.

Day 6

With Mdina fresh in our mind, we travel to the Silent City for some self exploration. Mdina is an entirely different experience during the day. Our Tour Director will help us investigate Mdina through fun and intriguing challenges. Lunch suggestions include the panoramic Fontanella Tea Garden or the sumptuous Xara Palace Trattoria. Following lunch, we'll travel to the Ta'Qali Craft Village for some shopping with a specific stop at Valletta Glass to see some fine works of art being made right before our eyes. Shortly before World War II, the area was used to build a military aerodrome and a station for the Royal Air Force. Many of the former military huts and buildings have been converted into workshops where Maltese craftsmen produce their handiwork.



We'll make a stop at the quaint San Anton Gardens in Attard which is next to the Presidential Palace. Established by the 54th Grand Master of the Knights of St. John, it serves as a beautiful retreat for animals and humans alike.

The city of Mosta is our next stop and it is here where we discover the Church of the Assumption of Our Lady and its significant connection with World War II. It is here that a German bomb dropped through the rotunda unexploded as parishioners prayed. Based on the Pantheon in Rome, the rotunda or dome is the 3rd largest in Europe and the 9th largest in the world.

To cap off our day, we journey to Naxxar and Palazzo Parisio and Gardens, an 18th century palace, a treasure trove of delightful artifacts and a beloved family home. Located in the heart of picturesque Naxxar, this stately home is a place of wonder that begs to be explored. On our visit we will discover the intricate nuances of Malta's historic nobility and their enchanting way of life. Touring this stately home offers great insight and sparks the imagination – whether we find ourselves seeking inspiration from the grand Ballroom, the detailed Family Chapel or the fabulous walled Gardens and Orangery, we'll find it here. After some touring, bask in a High Tea experience before venturing back to the hotel and other selected drop offs.

Day 7

With some touring under our belt, today is yours to explore. Let our Tour Director help customize your day for you. Consider the following options:

- Relax at Le Meridien and walk the Strand
- Lay on one of the many beaches around Malta
- Stroll down Republic St. and shop along Market St. in Valletta
- Consider shopping in Paceville or Tigne Point in Sliema
- Visit the nearby Dragonara Casino

Day 8

A tradition every Sunday morning is the return of the fisherman to sell their catch. We will travel to the fishing village of Marsaxlokk to observe the fish market and the splendid array of Maltese fishing boats. A traditional fish lunch awaits us with options for those who do not eat fish. Following lunch, we will return to the hotel with select drop offs on the way. We will be departing the hotel together for a light dinner at a Maltese Band Club followed by a Maltese Festa Experience.



The Maltese band clubs have their roots in the sixteenth century when drums and flutes accompanied feasts and processions, but the idea of forming philharmonic societies started in the second part of the 19th century, under the influence of the marching bands of the British Empire. Virtually every town and village in Malta has its own parish band club – some even more than one. Today, band clubs are part of the social and cultural history of the Maltese islands, an institution of every town and village, spreading Maltese culture and teaching of music. As we will see this evening, Band Clubs play an integral part in Village Festas or Feasts.

We will travel to the village of Siggiewi for the Feast of St. Nicholas. Be in the moment for a spectacular display of faith, and music - staples of all Maltese festas. Be engaged and follow the procession through the streets of Siggiewi!

Day 9

It's time to pack our bags as we head North to St. Paul's Bay, Buggiba, Mgarr and Mellieha. Mgarr is one of the few remaining rural villages in Malta that still has a pronounced agricultural community. The typical rural landscape with terraced fields hosts a variety of interesting features that make this locality unique. The strong roots of olive cultivation in the Maltese Islands are evident here and we will travel to an olive grove where we'll will taste some extra virgin olive oil with lunch. The rural village of Mellieha is located in the northwest part of Malta. Its name is likely to have been derived from the Greek word "Melleca" meaning honey. Remains of the prehistory, a red painted Tower and the sheltered church courtyard, will give a historic dimension to the tour combined with breath taking views overlying the rocky shore.

From Mellieha, we travel to Cirkewwa to board the Gozo Channel Ferry for the island of Gozo where we will spend the next 3 nights. Gozo affords a certain charm and tranquility that sets it apart from the main island. Before checking into our hotel we will visit the Azure Window - a coastal landmark that features a bridge or table-like rock that reaches across the sea to an eroded pillar. Our host hotel is the rustic feeling Cornucopia Hotel. When we look out from the hotel, we will see a land that is very different from the Island of Malta. We'll will wonder if we're in Tuscany or perhaps Rio – the views are spectacular. A group dinner with wine is included this evening. Take the rest of the evening to dream of what awaits us tomorrow.

Day 10

On this day, we will discover Gozo's splendour. The production of sea salt has a long tradition in Gozo and the saltpans found near Marsalforn are still used today. We arrive after breakfast to see these magnificent saltpans. We then travel to a local farm to learn of Gozitan dairy production. We'll have a hands-on opportunity in the collection of goat milk; you only live



once! After our farm visit we'll venture to the capital of Gozo for a leisurely walk through the village streets as we witness local people in their daily jobs en route to the Citadel. The Citadel or Citadella is an area known to have been first fortified during the Bronze Age and later developed by the Phoenicians with continued development until, by Roman times, it had become a complex Acropolis. Up until the 18th Century, it was the only fortified refuge against attack for the inhabitants of the island. From here, we will experience a Gozitan cheese-making demonstration. The most popular cheese on all of Malta is called Gbejna and the very best comes from Gozo. Enjoy a traditional Gozitan platter lunch at a local restaurant. Gozitan wine, while not widely distributed, is a true testament to the love that the islanders have of their land. We will share in a wine tasting experience with a local producer. Enjoy our last evening in Gozo with a specially prepared dinner by the hotels chefs!

Day 11

Kick back and enjoy our adventure to Comino – the smallest of the inhabited islands of Malta. After breakfast, we will leave for the harbour and board our private boat to Comino. We sail at 10:00am and arrive back on Gozo at 2:30pm. A picnic lunch is included today. Named after the cumin seed that once flourished in the Maltese islands, Comino is noted for its tranquility and isolation. It has a permanent population of only four residents. We'll have the opportunity to enjoy the small island, its beach and the boat while docked. The crystal clear waters of Comino's Blue Lagoon reflect the blue sky with a lovely cyan that lets us see the pure white sand bottom of the Mediterranean Sea. This long and narrow bay surrounded by rock and a bit of sand is almost like a pool, which makes it the ideal place for swimming, snorkelling, scuba diving or simply relaxing on the beach. Our last stop will be at the Ggantija Temples site - some of the oldest temples in the world.

We return to Malta Island for our last evening on the Maltese Islands.

Day 12

After breakfast at Le Meridien, we make our way directly to the airport for our flight back to Omaha. We trust you will leave with fond memories of unbelievable experiences! Thank you for the opportunity to share our lovely island with you. We truly hope to see you again.