The Valletta Experience

Valletta, a city built by gentlemen for gentlemen
The foundation stone of Valletta was laid in 1566. A fine example of Baroque architecture.

Valletta was one of the first European cities to be constructed on an entirely new site.

Valletta was actually named after the famous French Grand Master of the Knights of Malta, Jean Parisot de Valette.

The City of Valletta has been recognised as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO since 1980.

Valletta has been awarded the title of European Capital of Culture for 2018.

Valletta is the smallest capital in the European Union.
Valletta, the Fortress City, Città Umilissima, "a city built by gentlemen for gentlemen" is Malta’s capital city: a living, working city, the administrative and commercial heart of the Islands. Valletta is named after its founder, the respected Grand Master of the Order of St. John, Jean Parisot de la Valette. The magnificent fortress city grew on the arid rock of Mount Sceberras peninsula, which rises steeply from two deep harbours, Marsamxett and Grand Harbour. Started in 1566, Valletta was completed, with its impressive bastions, forts and cathedral, in the astonishingly short time of 15 years, even more remarkable is considering the fact that mechanical tools did not exist at the time and the whole city was built entirely by hand.

The city is busy by day, yet retains a timeless atmosphere by night, that gives the feeling that you are walking back in time. The grid of narrow streets boasts some of Europe’s finest art works, churches and palaces. Valletta is abundantly rich in sites to see and explore, intriguing historical buildings around every corner: votive statues, niches, fountains and coats of arms high up on parapets. Narrow side streets are full of tiny quaint shops and cafés, while Valletta’s main streets are lined with larger international branded shops for fashion, music, jewellery and much more.

The best way to get around and see the most, from your visit to Valletta, is on foot and although the things to do & see are many.
Valletta Commissioned in 1572 by Grand Master Jean de la Cassière as the conventual church of the Order of the Knights Hospitaller of St John and designed by the celebrated Maltese military architect Gerolamo Cassar, St John’s Co-Cathedral stands as a unique monument of international importance. The church is dedicated to St John the Baptist, the patron saint of the Order.

The Knights were noblemen from the most important families of Europe, and their mission was to protect the Catholic faith from the attacks of the Ottoman Turks. After defending the tiny island of Malta from the Ottomans in the Great Siege of 1565, they turned Malta into a fortress that befit a military Order and built a new capital city worthy of noblemen. Pride of place in the centre of the new city ‘Valletta’ was reserved for their Church.

Building was completed on St John’s in 1577. The plain façade flanked by two large bell towers is austere and has the character of a fortress reflecting the sober mood of the Order after the Great Siege. The nave is 53 metres in length and 15 metres wide with side chapels on either side. These chapels were assigned to the various langues according to seniority. The French, Italian and Aragonese langues, being prominent, were placed closest to the altar.

As the dawn of the 17th century ushered in the new Baroque style, Grand Master Cotoner ordered the redecoration of the Church's interior.

Today, St John’s is also a venue for cultural events and is one of the most popular cultural attractions visited by tourists in Malta. It is administered by the St John’s Co-Cathedral Foundation, which was set up in 2001 to ensure the church's and museum’s conservation.
The Upper Barakka Gardens overlook the Grand Harbour. From their terrace they afford one of the most beautiful panoramic views in Malta as they command a unique view of the only natural harbour in the Mediterranean with the Three Cities as its backdrop.

It is the place which attracts so many Maltese and tourists all year round. The view is so breath taking that you will find yourself revisiting it several times. Sitting on a bench overlooking the view is something that cannot be missed and keeps you coming back for more.

It is situated near the Auberge de Castile and adjacent to the Malta Stock Exchange formerly the Garrison Chapel built in 1855-1857 by the British Empire stationed in Malta.

Originally, the gardens were built at the expense of the Bailiff Fra Flaminio Balbian as an exercise ground for the Knights of the Langue of Italy. On the two sides there is an arcade which has given the Upper Barakka gardens a very imposing character. Originally these arcades were roofed in 1661.

During the reign of the Knights of Malta, the roofs were removed in 1771, after the Rebellion of the Priests. At the time the Grand Master Ximenes de Texada, on the erroneous assumption that a conspiracy had been hatched here, ordered that the roofs are cleared completely.
The Lascaris War Rooms are a great attraction just a few minutes walk from the centre of Valletta that have been recently and expertly restored by Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna (an NGO entrusted with a number of priceless heritage attractions on the islands). Malta played a central role in the battle for the Mediterranean throughout the Second World War and this is the headquarters from where the main battles were directed.

Dug deep into the imposing medieval bastions that greet visitors entering the Grand Harbour, the Lascaris War Rooms are found a few hundred feet under the Upper Barrakka gardens. Visitors enter an unassuming entrance into a secret underground complex of tunnels and rooms that vividly recall the heroic efforts of a little island helping turn the tide of the war with the landmark Operation Husky (Invasion of Sicily), led by General Eisenhower and his Supreme Commanders, that had Italy capitulate to the Allied Forces. Original strategic maps outlining the attack routes still hang from the walls, and offices have been restored to show exactly where the leaders sat.

The Lascaris War Rooms is the first major part completed as part of a grand project being undertaken to create a Military Heritage Park that will also comprise many other attractions in the vicinity. Tours are conducted in English but multilingual audio tapes are available.
The Valletta Waterfront

With its nineteen historical 250-year-old warehouses, built by Grand Master Pinto at the height of the baroque period in Malta ... stretching along the water’s edge and the historical Quay Wall where the Knights of St John and European merchants used to unload their wares ... the impregnable Old Power Station that serves as a testimony to the eclectic and heroic history of the Grand Harbour ... the Forni Stores, dating back to 1626 and constructed by Grand Master de Vilhena – the Valletta Waterfront invites you to discover its complete mix of retail, dining and leisure experiences.

The Valletta Waterfront is also the gateway to Malta’s capital city, Valletta. In fact, as one of the most successful Mediterranean ports, the Port of Valletta welcomes more than half-a-million cruise passengers into this open air museum.

All this comes with an added bonus – the majestic setting within the Grand Harbour, a natural deep water port, for many thousand of years the epicentre of Malta’s maritime activity, a truly exceptional and outstanding backdrop.
Casa Rocca Piccola contains over 50 rooms, the majority of which are open for viewing. Over the years we have opened new rooms to the tours and are continuing to do so. The World War II Air Raid Shelters have provided a dramatic and exciting addition to the tours of the house and we hope that in the newly opened Gallery local painters and artisans will exhibit their works.

The value of Casa Rocca Piccola lies in its ability to provide unique historical evidence into the customs and traditions of the Maltese nobility over the last 400 years. You can also see a collection of furniture, silver and paintings that add to the aesthetic riches of this country.

We are fortunate to have a wonderful team of people who work with us in restoring works of art, researching our extensive archives and making Casa Rocca Piccola accessible to everyone.

All this has been made possible from the contributions that come in from the thousands of tourists who come to Malta and Valletta every year. To fully appreciate what Casa Rocca Piccola has to offer, you have to visit.
The Saluting Battery is one of Malta's most vibrant visitor attractions where history is brought to life daily! Located high along Valletta's eastern historic ramparts, it enjoys unrivaled spectacular views of the Grand Harbour and its surrounding fortified towns. It is also perhaps the oldest saluting battery still in operation anywhere in the world. For almost 500 years, its guns protected the harbour against naval assault. Its prominent position also ensured it becoming the island's principal saluting platform. From here, gun salutes were fired on occasions of state, to mark anniversaries and religious feasts, and also to greet visiting dignitaries and vessels. From the 1820's a gun was also fired at mid-day to signal out the exact hour of the day by which Ship Masters would calibrate their chronographs on board. These time pieces were used up to the early part of the 20th century to find the longitude at sea.

These signals, along with the one at mid-day, served largely to regulate the pace of life in the city and its surroundings. Following a lull of almost half-a century, this battery is back in use following an extensive restoration process by Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna - the Malta Heritage Trust, in conjunction with the Malta Tourism Authority. Once again, its guns resonate daily in the same way of old to herald the passage of mid-day and to add to the festive mood that marks important anniversaries in the history of the island.
The National War Museum

The Malta at War Museum (MAW) is located at Couvre Porte, Vittoriosa (Birgu). It stands to document the great ordeal which the brave people of Malta and their defenders have endured during the dark days of the Malta Blitz (1940-43) in WW2.

Vittoriosa is Malta’s old maritime city, first convent of the Knights of St. John before Valletta (1530), Great Siege Headquarters (1565) and former home to the Royal Navy (1800 – 1979). Ensnconed within Dockyard Creek, it inevitably became one of the worst bombed places of the conflict with almost half of it being destroyed as a result of enemy action.

The museum is housed in an 18th century army barracks which served as a police station and air raid precautions center during the war. It sits on top of a massive underground rock-cut air raid shelter which offered refuge to hundreds of people. This shelter has been restored and forms part of the museum experience.

The MAW offers a rich collection of period artifacts and memorabilia ranging from personal items, documents, medals, uniforms and weaponry. It also features numerous period newsreels and sounds, hands-on interpretation and multilingual audio-guides.

**MALTA GC film**

At this museum, one can also watch the first documentary ever made on the island 'Malta G.C.' This short film was released by the Crown Film Unit in January 1943 on the initiative of King George VI who wished all his subjects to witness with their own eyes the brave endurance that Malta was putting up in the face of impossible odds at a time when she received the George Cross for bravery from him. The film is narrated by Sir Laurence Olivier and features the purposely written 'Malta Suite' by the then King's Musician Sir Arnold Bax. Using rare film footage taken by the filming units of all three services Malta’s war is chartered from Italy’s entry into the war in 1940 till the lifting of the siege in 1942. Digital copies of this film are available from the museum.
The Church of St. Paul’s Shipwreck

The Collegiate Parish Church of St Paul’s Shipwreck is one of Valletta’s oldest churches, dating back to the 1570s.

Many consider St. Paul to be the spiritual father of the Maltese nation. In fact, his shipwreck is thought of as being the most significant event in the nation’s history. Thus, the Collegiate Parish Church of St Paul’s Shipwreck is amongst the most important churches in Malta.

There are artistic treasures including the outstanding altarpiece by Matteo Perez d’Aleccio, the choir and dome of Lorenzo Gafà, the paintings by Attilio Palombi and Giuseppe Cali. The wooden statue of St. Paul was carved in 1657 by Melchior Gafà. Up till this day, the statue is taken out in a procession around Valletta on the feast day of St Paul’s Shipwreck, every February 10th. The church holds the precious relic of the right wrist-bone of St. Paul as well as part of the column that was used to behead the St. Paul in Rome.
The lower Barrakka gardens offer a peaceful space in the heart of Valletta, offering spectacular views of the Grand Harbour.

The Lower Barrakka Gardens are situated in the capital of Malta, Valletta, not far from the Upper Barrakka Gardens.

These gardens are built on the bastion edge with stunning views over the Breakwater entrance to the Grand Harbour, Fort Ricasoli, Bighi Palace, Fort St. Angelo in Vittoriosa and Kalkara. Apart from the fantastic view, the peaceful garden is home to many trees and colourful flowers and cats resting in the shade.

The statue of the first British Governor of Malta, Alexander Ball, and a monument in remembrance of the Great Siege in Malta complements the garden. Even though the gardens are quite small, they are very popular with both locals and tourist who would like to spend a relaxing time in the city.
Malta 5D is an innovative introduction to the Maltese islands in the heart of Valletta. Shown in a purposely built auditorium, it is just a stone throw away from Valletta's main entrance and is easily accessible from the main public bus terminus, hop-on hop-off buses that stop near Castille and from the ferry boat terminal. Malta 5D delights young and old by vividly immersing its audience into a virtual world whilst recounting the historical highlights of these Mediterranean islands.

Malta 5D travels through prehistoric temples, ferocious encounters with the Knights of St John and delves into the island’s heavy participation in World War II. Malta 5D will have you flying over open seas, racing through narrow streets and dodging swords and bombs. Perfectly timed moving seats, water sprays, air blasts and enticing smells, together with painstaking 3D animation, bring Malta’s history to life like never before.

Check out the interactive map above and make note of Malta 5D’s location just off Valletta’s Republic Street, corner to South Street. The show is on every half hour and well worth a visit for all ages whilst discovering the historic streets of Malta’s capital. Malta 5D will help you plan the rest of your holiday by looking out for places highlighted in the show.
The new Upper Barrakka lift opened in December 2012, linking the Grand Harbour to the Upper Barrakka Gardens and Valletta city centre. It is located on the original site where its predecessor, which was dismantled in 1983, operated between 1905 and 1973.

The lift is 58 metres high and can carry twenty-one people at a time, for a total of 800 per hour. The journey takes around twenty-five seconds, making it the quickest way into the city from the Valletta Waterfront.

The lift offers a practical alternative for the thousands of cruise ship passengers who disembark at the Valletta Passenger Terminal to reach the city with its shops, restaurants, churches and museums. It is also possible to combine the ticket for the lift with the ferry crossing across Grand Harbour to or from The Three Cities.
Guarding the entrance to both Marsamxett and Grand Harbours is Fort St Elmo, named after the patron saint of mariners. Although now much altered, this fort was built by the Knights in 1552 in a mere four months to guard the harbours on either side of the Sceberras Peninsula, and was the fort that bore the brunt of Turkish arms during the Great Siege of 1565. After restoration and renovation, the fort opened to the public in 2015, containing the stunning National War Museum.

The courtyard outside the entrance to the fort is studded with the lids of underground granaries. You can visit the parade ground, and the 1559 chapel where Knights fought to the death during the siege trying to protect the altar, as well as the later 1729 church.

In Guardia is a colourful and photogenic military pageant in 16th-century costume, which includes a cannon-firing demonstration. Check upcoming dates at the tourist office.
Malta was always given the key role in the development of the European history due to its geographical position at the centre of the Mediterranean, linking Europe with North Africa and the East coast (Asia). This advantage led her to be the main issue in territorial wars of several rulers.

If we take a moment and look around us, we will notice quite a large number of defensive structures as well as buildings which remark a particular civilisation during a distinct era.

The Fortress Builders Fortifications Interpretation Centre has most of these historical sites under one roof, displayed in a quite interactive way. The FIC was established on February 2013, by the Ministry of Justice, Culture and Local Government through its Restoration Directorate, to communicate and exhibit the history and significance of Malta’s military architectural heritage.

The restoration underway is bringing to light the architectural features of these fortifications surrounding our harbours and strategic cities, making Maltese citizens and foreigners appreciate and become more aware of the need of giving back to this unique heritage, its due importance. This Centre will not serve as another ‘museum’ to commemorate and glorify war, but it is a cross between a museum, an information point and a resource centre whereby Maltese and foreigners alike can discover and research about the Maltese military history.

The Fortification Interpretation Centre (FIC) forms part of the Restoration Directorate which falls under the Ministry of Justice, Culture and Local Government. The FIC was co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund.
The National Museum of Archaeology

The National Museum of Archaeology is housed in the impressive Auberge de Provence.

Exhibits include delicate stone tools dating from 5200 BC and Phoenician amulets, and there's an amazing temple model from Ta' Hagar – a prehistoric architectural Marquette. More impressive still are the beautifully modelled prehistoric figurines that were found locally. Best is the Sleeping Lady, found at the Hypogeum, which is around 5000 years old. It shows a recumbent woman with her head propped on one arm, apparently deep in slumber.

The 'fat ladies' sculptures, found at Haġar Qim, have massive rounded thighs and arms, but tiny, doll-like hands and feet. They wear pleated skirts and sit with their legs tucked neatly to one side. The so-called Venus de Malta, also from Haġar Qim, is about 10cm tall and displays remarkably realistic modelling. There are also beautiful stone friezes from the Tarxien Temples.

Upstairs the new displays showcase the coarser pottery from the Bronze Age, animal figurines and jewellery, as well as information on the island's mysterious cart ruts.
The Manoel Theatre

Following centuries of unrest and a myriad of conquerors, the rule of the Military Order of St. John brought about a period of unprecedented stability and development to the Maltese Islands. The newly constructed fortified capital, Valletta, administrative centre and home to the variety of nationalities forming the Order, witnessed a further development as the islands’ cultural and entertainment hub.

Throughout the 17th and early 18th centuries, the demand for operas, pageants, theatrical and dramatic productions boomed as the Maltese embraced what had previously been entertainment reserved solely for the Nobility. Shows put on by amateurs and theatre professionals were then housed at the Knight’s Auberges around the city or in the open.

In 1731, António Manoel de Vilhena, Grand Master of the Knights of Malta, commissioned and personally funded the construction of this central building to serve as a Public Theatre. It was constructed in just ten months and cost 2,184 scudi. The Portuguese Grand Master built the theatre to keep the young knights of the Order of St. John out of mischief but also to provide the general public with “honest entertainment.” This motto was inscribed above the main entrance to the theatre, which still reads today: “ad honestam populi oblectationem”. The first performance on the 19th January 1732, was a classic Italian tragedy, Scipione Maffei’s Merope. The players in that production were the Knights themselves, and the set was designed by the Knights’ chief architect, Francois Mondion.
The Knights Hospitallers MCC

The Knights Hospitallers is located within Malta's majestic Mediterranean Conference Centre (MCC) in Valletta. The Order of St. John, also known as the Knights of Malta, were renowned for their role as a Hospitaller Order of Chivalry during the insistent religious wars of the medieval period. This, in fact, was the Order's initial vocation and only later did they become a military order.

The attraction consists of a striking multi-lingual underground walk-through with life-size figures depicting the life and hardships of those times. The Knights Hospitallers operated from the 'Sacra Infermeria', the Holy Infirmary, the same site were the MCC proudly stands today. The Crusades around foreign lands as well as the Great Siege of Malta in 1565 brought a constant flow of sick and injured to Malta's shores seeking the best medical services of the time provided by the Knights Hospitallers. The origins of today's modern healthcare and medicine may be partly traced to the development of surgery in this outstanding hospital.

Immerse yourself in a bygone era and let the sights and sounds transport you along the seven hundred years of history and the definite mark that the noble Knights left on Malta.

Entrance to this unique and underground attraction is through the main door of the Mediterranean Conference Centre in Valletta.
The Grandmaster`s Palace

Dominating Palace Square, the Grand Master's Palace has always been the house of government in Malta, first by the knights, then the British and now hosts the President's office. When parliament is not in session you can visit the palace for free, and there is an awful lot to see in here.

In the interior of the palace is the famous Council Chamber, adorned with valuable Gobelins tapestries woven in France for Grand Master Ramón Perellos y Roccaf.

The other rooms and passages of the palace are splendidly furnished with art objects, old coat of arms and armour. Particularly notable are the former Hall of the Supreme Council of the Knights, which hosts fine frescoes and the Hall of the Ambassadors, where portraits of Grand Masters and European rulers hang.

On the basement floor is the Armoury, one of the largest collections of its kind in the world, though reduced to a fraction of its former size by the depredations of the French. Among its principal treasures are a suit of armour made in Milan for the Grand Master, Adrien de Wignacourt (1690-97) and a full-length panoply made for Grand Master Martin Garzes by Sigismund Wold of Landshut.
The 10 tonne bronze Great Siege Bell memorial was inaugurated by Queen Elizabeth and the President of Malta, Dr. Censu Tabone on 29 May 1992, the 50th anniversary of the awarding of the George Cross of Bravery to the island of Malta in 1942. It is rung daily at noon.

The bell is mounted in a limestone tower. At the foot of the bell tower is a bronze figure representing the 7000 who died in the siege. The gallery contains pictures of the plaques. The memorial was built on the initiative of the “George Cross Island Association” based on the idea of a local member, Philip Pullicino.
St George's Square, also known as Palace Square (Misraħ il-Palazz) is Valletta's largest and most prominent square, located at the very heart of the city right in front of Valletta's most magnificent palace – the Grandmasters’ Palace. The appearance of the square has changed as the years have passed since it first started taking shape in the 17th century, but it has remained one of the most important venues, where many a notable occasion or event happening on the island have been held or celebrated.

Apart from the Grandmasters' Palace, which flanks the square on its South-Eastern side, just across Republic Street, three beautiful baroque buildings flank the three other sides. The palace previously known as the Casa del Commun Tesoro sits on the South-West side of the square, just across Old Theatre Street. On its North-West side, and sitting directly on its periphery, is the Main Guard Building, while the last remaining side is flanked by the Hostel de Verdelin just across Archbishop Street.
Hastings Gardens

Hastings gardens provide a quiet space in the heart of Valletta with beautiful views of Marsamxett Harbour.

Hastings Garden is located on top of the bastions on the West side of the entrance to Valletta; the recently embellished gardens offer a magnificent view of Floriana, Msida, Sliema, Manoel Island and Marsamxett Harbour.

Hasting Gardens in Valletta is the home to a monument raised in honor of Lord Hastings who was a former British governor of Malta. He died at sea in 1827 and lies buried in the garden. Even though the Hasting Garden is relatively small it is still very attractive and charming, providing opportunities to take wonderful pictures.
"It equals in its noble architecture, if it does not excel, any capital in Europe."