

Directory

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ACCOMMODATION

There is a wide range of accommodation available in the Maltese Islands, though much of it is in fairly uniform resort hotels and apartments. The authorities are attempting to drive Malta's

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

ACCOMMODATION PRICES

In this book, we have classified sleeping options as follows:

Budget A bed in these establishments (usually hostels, two-star hotels and guesthouses) will cost under Lm10 per person.

Midrange Lm11 to Lm25 per person in high season (based on two people sharing a room).

Top End Lm26 or more per person in high season (based on two people sharing a room).

tourist industry upmarket, and almost all the new hotels and developments are at the luxury end of the spectrum (and a number of budget guesthouses have closed in recent times). However, there are still plenty of good budget options and accommodation bargains in the low season (from November to March, excluding the Christmas and New Year period).

Camping

There is only one camping ground in Malta, on the Marfa Peninsula in northwest Malta (see p120), but its shadeless grounds and remote location render it unappealing.

Guesthouses

Guesthouses in Malta are usually small (six to 10 rooms), simple, family-run places and are often good value at around Lm6 to Lm8 per person (and there is often no single supplement). Most rooms will have a washbasin, but showers and toilets are mostly shared. A simple breakfast is normally included in the price. Facilities will usually not include air-con or a swimming pool, but there are a few exceptions to this rule. Bear in mind that some guesthouses in resort areas close in the low season (all guesthouses in Valletta are open year-round).

Hostels

The **National Student Travel Service** (NSTS; Map p58; ☎ 2558 8000; www.nsts.org; 220 Triq San Pawl, Valletta) is an associate member of Hostelling International (HI), and operates the very good Hibernia Residence & Hostel, in Sliema (Malta's only true hostel, p88). It has arrangements

HOSTEL PACKAGE

The NSTS offers a 'go as you please' hostelling package to budget travellers, which includes airport or seaport welcome and transfers; seven overnight stays (with breakfast and sheets), including at least one night at Hibernia Residence & Hostel in Sliema; a week's bus pass and a phonecard, plus free entry to the NSTS lido and water-sports centre on the Sliema waterfront. The package costs from €115 to €159 (Lm50 to Lm70) per person per week, depending on the time of year (priciest from late June to mid-September). Accommodation is in dorms; supplements apply for smaller rooms.

with a few guesthouses scattered throughout the country to provide cheap accommodation to hostellers.

Hotels

Hotels in Malta range from crumbling but character-filled old townhouses in Valletta, to modern gilt-and-chrome palaces of five-star luxury overlooking a private marina. The majority (especially somewhere like Bugibba) are bland, faceless tourist hotels, block-booked by package tour companies in summer, and either closed or eerily quiet in winter. However, there are a few places that have real character, like the Castille Hotel in Valletta, housed in an old mansion; the Xara Palace in Mdina;

and the Kempinski San Lawrenz Resort & Spa or Hotel Ta' Ċenċ on Gozo, but the latter three hotels are among the most expensive in the islands.

There are plenty of glitzy new five-star hotels on Malta, but also a disturbing number of neglected three-star places crying out for renovations. Most of the large four- and five-star places offer the kind of holiday where you may not need to leave the hotel's grounds – they're fully equipped with cafés, bars and restaurants (most hotels include breakfast in their rates, and some offer half-board and full-board arrangements). At these places you'll usually find indoor and outdoor pools, a gym and/or sporting facilities, plus a program of children's activities; and quite possibly a health spa, a dive company, and perhaps a beachside lido offering pool and water sports (water-skiing, boat trips, canoe or boat hire, ringo rides etc).

Typical high-season hotel rates are Lm12 to Lm25 per person, but they rise to as high as Lm50 for the four- and five-star places. Prices may well halve in the low season. You should also be aware that many hotels and guesthouses quote their prices per person, not per room.

There are loads of internet sites offering information on hotels and other accommodation options in Malta, including:

Holiday Malta (www.holiday-malta.com)

Malta Hotel (www.maltahotel.net)

Malta Hotels (www.malta-hotels.com)

Visit Malta (www.visitmalta.com/en/where_to_stay)

PRACTICALITIES

- English-language daily newspapers include *the Times* (online at www.timesofmalta.com) and *the Independent* (www.independent.com.mt). The former has a good mix of local, European and world news, the latter has good coverage of domestic social issues. *Malta Today* (www.maltatoday.com.mt) is published weekly (on Sunday) and includes a useful supplement with listings of TV, cinema and events for the coming week.
- There are more than 20 local radio stations broadcasting mostly in Malti but occasionally in English. There are two state-run TV stations and half-a-dozen small commercial channels broadcasting in Malti. Most of the main Italian TV stations can be received in Malta. Satellite and cable TV are widely available in hotels and bars, providing a wide range of stations from Europe and the US.
- Malta, like most of Europe and the UK, uses the PAL video system.
- Malta's electricity supply is 240V/50Hz and the plugs have three flat pins as in the UK. Continental European appliances (plugs with two round pins) will need an adaptor (many accommodation providers supply these).
- Like the rest of Europe, Malta uses the metric system. The British legacy persists in the use of pint glasses in some pubs.

Rental Accommodation

There are hundreds of self-catering apartments with little to choose between them. Most have a private bathroom, a balcony and a kitchen area with fridge, sink and two-ring electric cooker. Though lacking a little in charm, they are often very good value at under Lm12 per person, even in high season.

If you're looking for something with a little local colour, get in touch with a tour operator or agency that specialises in Gozo farmhouses (see the boxed text, p150).

High & Low Seasons

The cost of accommodation in Malta can vary considerably with the time of year, and low-season rates are often a bargain. Low season is almost always November to March. High season generally refers to the period April to October, but some accommodation providers have a 'shoulder' or 'mid' season covering April, May and October, with high-season prices restricted to June, July, August and September. Many hotels count the Christmas and New Year period as high season too. The high- and low-season prices quoted in this book are generally the maximum and minimum rates for each establishment.

Bear in mind that some places (small guest-houses and cheaper hotels) in some resort areas close in the low season – as does the Comino Hotel, making a stay on Comino impossible from November to March.

ACTIVITIES

One of the most popular activities for holiday-makers in Malta is diving – see the Diving & Snorkelling chapter (p44) for details.

The Marsa Sports Complex is used by various national sport associations. The complex, about 4km southwest of Valletta, includes a horse-racing course, the Marsa Sports Club (below) and the National Athletic Stadium. Facilities include five turf pitches, a rugby pitch, a baseball pitch, two netball courts, two basketball courts and one full-size football ground.

The **Marsa Sports Club** (☎ 2123 3851; www.marsasportsclub.com) includes an 18-hole golf course (the only one in Malta – see Golf below), 19 tennis courts, five squash courts, a swimming pool, cricket ground and gymnasium. Visitors may use these facilities; a day membership costs Lm2, a week Lm10.

The website of the **Malta Tourism Authority** (www.visitmalta.com) has loads of information on

the different types of activities possible in Malta, and organisations that can help you pursue them. Click on the 'What to Do' pages.

Bird Watching

Although barely a dozen species of bird are permanent residents on Malta, the islands sustain important breeding colonies of seabirds, including storm-petrels and Cory's shearwaters. Malta also lies on an important migration route between Africa and Europe, and in spring (September to November) and autumn (April and May) vast numbers of migrating birds can be seen – as can numerous bird hunters (p42), unfortunately.

Where to Watch Birds & Other Wildlife in the Maltese Islands, written by Alex Casha and published by BirdLife Malta, is a comprehensive guide.

BirdLife Malta (☎ 2134 7646; www.birdlifemalta.org) is the best contact for birders visiting Malta. It manages the Ghadira Nature Reserve (p118) at Mellieha Bay and the Is-Simar Nature Reserve (p114) at Xemxija, plus monitors activity that threatens wild birds and has a website detailing recent sightings.

Golf

The **Royal Malta Golf Club** (☎ 2123 9302; www.malta.golf.org; 9/18 holes Lm13.50/20) is a private members' club established in 1888, located at the Marsa Sports Club at Marsa, southwest of Valletta. Visitors are welcome to play the 18-hole, par-68 course, but reservations are essential (it's best to avoid Thursday and Saturday morning, as these days are reserved for members' competitions). Club facilities include a pro shop, bar, restaurant and driving range.

Horse Riding

Horses have long played an important part in Maltese life, and you can often see owners out exercising their favourite trotting horses. The quieter back roads offer enjoyable riding – instruction and horse hire can be organised through most major hotels.

Riding schools in Malta include:
Bidnija Horse Riding School (☎ 2141 0010; www.bidnijahorseriding.com; Triq il-Bdiewa, Mosta)
Golden Bay Horse Riding (☎ 2157 3360; Ghajn Tuffieha) See p115 for more details.
Pandy's Riding School (☎ 2134 2506; Triq Tobruk, Pembroke)
Wagon Wheel Horse Riding School (☎ 2155 6254; Triq Marsalforn, Victoria, Gozo)

Rock Climbing

There are more than 1200 established rock-climbing routes in the Maltese Islands (most on limestone), with some of the most popular sites for climbers below the Dingli Cliffs in the west, at Ghar Lapsi, and near the Victoria Lines below Naxxar. **Malta Rock Climbing** (☎ 2148 0240; www.malta-rockclimbing.com) offers four-hour taster sessions (Lm15) – perfect for the indecisive types – guided climbing excursions (half day Lm15, full day Lm25) and climbing courses.

Running

Several major running events are held each year in Malta, including triathlons and half-marathons, culminating in the **Malta Marathon** (www.maltamarathon.com) and half-marathon, held in late February/early March (you really wouldn't want to be running too far in the heat of summer!). Application forms are available from the website; the entrance fee is €35.

Sailing

Malta is a major yachting centre, with a large marina at Msida, a smaller one at Gozo's Mgarr harbour, and two slick modern marinas – one at the Portomaso development in St Julian's, the other, called the Grand Harbour Marina, at Vittoriosa. Many yacht owners cruise the Med in summer and winter their vessels in Malta.

A full program of races and regattas is held between April and November each year (great for participants and spectators). The popular **Rolex Middle Sea Race** (www.rolexmiddlesearace.com) is a highly rated offshore classic staged annually in October. The race is 607 nautical miles, from Malta, sailing anticlockwise around Sicily before returning to Malta. For details of events and opportunities for crewing, contact the **Royal Malta Yacht Club** (☎ 2133 3109; www.rmyc.org; Manoel Island) or check the website.

Qualified sailors are able to hire a yacht by the day or the week from one of several charter companies. If you don't have a RYA Coastal Skipper qualification you'll need to pay extra for a skipper (around Lm35 per day). Try:
Captain Morgan Yacht Charter (☎ 2346 3333; www.yachtcharter.com.mt; per week from Lm1100/1350 low/high season, including tax) Rates quoted are for an eight-berth Oceanis Clipper 411 sailing yacht.

S & D Yachts (☎ 2133 1515; www.sdyachts.com; per week from Lm900)

Yellow Fun Watersports (☎ 2373 4366; www.yellowfunwatersports.com) Offers a range of sailing and motor yachts, for day or overnight charters.

If a yacht seems a little too much to handle, sailing dinghies can be rented by the hour at most tourist resorts for around Lm5 an hour.

Swimming

Don't go to Malta expecting miles of sandy beaches – there are only a handful of sandy stretches, and these get very busy. There are a number of rocky bays and coves that offer swimming in crystal-clear waters (take a snorkel along). See p14 for our favourite places to take a dip.

Walking

There is some good walking to be enjoyed on the winding back roads and cliff-top paths of Malta and Gozo, although fences, dogs and bird-shooters can occasionally prove to be a nuisance. Distances are small and you can easily cover much of the islands on foot. A circuit of Gozo is a good objective for a multiday hike.

A great source of information is the **Ramblers' Association of Malta** (www.ramblersmalta.jointcomms.com), which organises informal guided country walks for likeminded folk from October to early June (the best time for walking). This organisation is dedicated to safeguarding public access to the Maltese countryside in the face of threats such as hunting and commercial development; read about their campaigns on the comprehensive website.

Windsurfing

Windsurfing is enjoyed year-round in Malta. Equipment hire and instruction are available at the main tourist resorts. Mellieha Bay, St Paul's Bay and St Thomas Bay are popular venues. A good place for information is the website at www.holidays-malta.com/wind surf.

BUSINESS HOURS

The following indicates the standard opening hours for businesses and services in Malta. In this book we have only listed opening hours where they differ significantly from these broad guidelines.

Banks

Banking hours can vary from branch to branch, but they are all generally open 8.30am to 12.30pm Monday to Friday (some banks will stay open until 2pm, or even slightly longer on Friday) and 8.30am to around noon Saturday. The summer hours (from mid-June to September) see branches opening at 8am but with very few banks open into the afternoon.

Museums

The standard opening hours for all Heritage Malta-administered museums and historic sites are now 9am to 5pm daily (last entry is at 4.30pm); these museums are closed on major public holidays. Privately run museums have varying hours.

Pharmacies

Pharmacies are generally open from 9am to 1pm and 4pm to 7pm Monday to Saturday. Duty pharmacists that open late and on Sunday or public holidays are listed in local newspapers.

Restaurants & Cafés

See p53 in the Food & Drink chapter to have an overview of opening hours for eating establishments.

Shops

Shops are generally open between 9am and 1pm, and again between 4pm and 7pm Monday to Saturday. In tourist areas in summer they will often be open all day. Almost all shops are closed on Sunday and public holidays.

CHILDREN Practicalities

Malta is quite a good destination for a family holiday. As in other Mediterranean countries, children are made welcome almost everywhere, and there is a mountain of activities to keep them busy. Pharmacies are also well stocked with baby products such as formula, bottles, dummies (pacifiers) and nappies (diapers). Most hotels have cots available and safety seats can be arranged through most car-rental companies (though it's best to arrange this in advance to be sure). Large resort hotels have so-called 'animation' programs (ie activities and kids' clubs) that will keep most kids (and their parents) happy and amused.

Many restaurants have highchairs and kids' menus (see p54 for advice on eating out with kids in tow).

Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* is packed with useful advice for travelling families.

Sights & Activities

Kids might enjoy the Malta Experience and other audiovisual shows and exhibitions in Valletta (p65) and Mdina (p125). An option for older kids (who are not easily frightened) is a visit to the Mdina Dungeons (p125), which are fitted out with spooky sound effects and gory torture scenes.

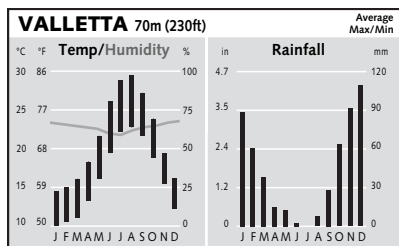
The whole family can enjoy a boat trip out of Wied iż-Zurrieq (p141), Bugibba (p101), Golden Bay (p115) or Sliema (p87). Some more expensive distractions for older kids include jeep safaris (p87) and horse riding (p168).

The Splash & Fun Park, with its water-slides and playground, is at Bahar iċ-Ċagħaq; and its neighbour, Mediterranean Marine Park, puts on dolphin and sea-lion shows for the public. You can also swim with the dolphins here. See p98 for details. Popeye Village at Anchor Bay (also known as Sweethaven; p120) is always popular with younger children, even if they've never heard of Popeye.

In summer you can hire snorkelling gear, canoes, dinghies etc at most tourist resorts. Golden Bay and Mellieħa Bay are sandy beaches with safe paddling and swimming for kids.

CLIMATE CHART

For a European destination, Malta has agreeably warm weather year-round, with temperatures rising to uncomfortably hot in July and August. The climate chart below is for Valletta, Malta's capital. For more detailed information on climate and the best times for travel to Malta see p12.



COURSES

Malta is one of the few places where people wanting to learn or improve their English can combine a language course with a Mediterranean holiday. There are around 50 English-language schools in Malta, ranging from one-person operations to the Berlitz Language Centre, and together they cater to around 60,000 students a year from over 50 countries.

Sliema and St Julian's have the greatest concentration of schools, and most can organise accommodation for course participants in homestays, student residences, apartments or hotels.

For details of vacation and business courses, contact:

Federation of English Language Teaching Organisations Malta (FELTOM; www.feltom.com) Works with the Ministry of Education's monitoring board in overseeing professional standards in language schools.

Malta Tourism Authority (www.visitmalta.com) This website has loads of information in various languages and a full list of schools.

National Student Travel Service (NSTS; ☎ 2558 8000; www.nsts.org)

CUSTOMS

Duty-free goods are not sold to those travelling from one EU country to another. If you're entering Malta from outside the EU, the duty-free allowance per person is 1L of spirits, 1L of wine and 200 cigarettes or 100 cigarillos or 50 cigars or 250g of tobacco, 60mL of perfume and 250mL of *eau de toilette*. Duty will be charged on any gifts over Lm50 that are intended for local residents.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES Hunting

If you go walking in the countryside, beware of the national obsession with shooting and trapping birds – the little stone shacks that pepper the cliff tops are shooters' hides. You will hear the popping of shotguns before you see the shooters – and they are not at all welcoming. The close season for shooting is from late May to August (the shortest in Europe), but even these dates are routinely ignored by hunters, and the law is poorly enforced. See p42 for more information on this issue.

If you do encounter hunters, the best thing is to greet them and keep walking – certainly don't confront them if you disapprove of

their activities (hunters won't take kindly to this, and things could get ugly). By all means express your opinions elsewhere – letters of support to BirdLife Malta (p168), or of disapproval to the local newspapers or government departments can't hurt.

Rip-off Merchants

There are regular complaints in the letters to the editor sections of Maltese newspapers from holiday-makers who have been ripped off in some way, and we've had first-hand experience of this. Beware of locals short-changing those unfamiliar with the currency (although this will likely decrease after the euro is introduced), and anywhere without a written price overcharging non-locals (we've experienced this in restaurants without menus, and from kiosks that do not post their prices).

In the past there have been complaints of taxi drivers ripping off travellers, but the authorities have attempted to remedy this – official taxis were fitted with meters in mid-2006. If you arrive at the airport or port, there are kiosks where you pay the set taxi tariffs up front.

Road Conditions & Driving

Much of the road network in Malta is badly in need of repair, which means that driving is often an uncomfortably bumpy experience. Rules of the road are rarely observed, which adds to the stress of driving in unfamiliar territory, especially during rush hour conditions around Sliema and St Julian's.

There is something of a macho, devil-may-care culture among young male drivers, and the accident rate is correspondingly high. This attitude extends to bus drivers too.

Theft

Malta has a low rate of violent crime, and crimes against visitors are a rarity. Incidents involving pickpockets and purse-snatchers are uncommon, but in past years there have been increasing reports of thieves breaking into cars parked in quiet areas like Marfa and Delimara Point. The only real defence is to lock the car and not leave anything of value in it.

Although Valletta is far safer than most European capitals, it's sensible to exercise a degree of caution, especially in the quieter side streets late at night.

DISCOUNT CARDS**Senior Cards**

In Malta, people over 60 are entitled to discounted admission to all government-owned museums.

Student & Youth Cards

A valid ISIC card is worth taking along. The **National Student Travel Service** (NSTS; ☎ 2558 8000; www.nsts.org) issues a small booklet listing shops, restaurants, attractions and other establishments in Malta offering discounts of 15% to 40% to ISIC card-holders. Admission to state-run museums is also discounted for students.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Full lists of Maltese embassies abroad and foreign embassies in Malta can be found at www.foreign.gov.mt.

Maltese Embassies & Consulates

Diplomatic representation abroad includes the following:

Australia (☎ 02-6290 1724; 38 Culgoa Circuit, O'Malley ACT 2606)

Canada (☎ 416-207 0922; Clarica Centre, 3300 Bloor St, West Suite 300 – Mezzanine Level, Etobicoke, Ontario M8X 2X2)

France (☎ 01 56 59 75 90; 92 Ave des Champs Elysées, 75008 Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-26 39 110; Klingelhöferstrasse 7, 10785 Berlin)

Ireland (☎ 01-676 2340; 17 Earlsfort Tce, Dublin 2)

Italy (☎ 06-687 99 90; 12 Lungotevere Marzio, 00186 Rome)

Netherlands (☎ 070-356 1252; Scheveningseweg 2, 2517 KT, The Hague)

UK (☎ 020-7292 4800; Malta House, 36-38 Piccadilly, London W1J 0LE)

USA (☎ 202-462 3611/2; 2017 Connecticut Ave NW, Washington, DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Malta

Countries with representation in Malta include the following:

Australia (Map p84; ☎ 2133 8201; Villa Fiorentina, Rampa Ta'Xbiex, Ta'Xbiex)

Canada (Map p58; ☎ 2552 3233; 103 Triq I-Arcisqof, Valletta)

France (Map p58; ☎ 2123 3430; 130 Triq Melita, Valletta)

Germany (Map p86; ☎ 2133 6531; www.valletta.diplo.de; II-Piazzetta, Entrance B, 1st fl, Triq it-Torri, Sliema)

Italy (Map p73; ☎ 2123 3157/8/9; 1 Triq Vilhena, Floriana)

Netherlands (Map p84; ☎ 2131 3980; www.netherlandsembassy.org.mt; Whitehall Mansions, Ix-Xatt Ta'Xbiex, Ta'Xbiex)

UK (Map p84; ☎ 2323 0000; www.britishhighcommission.gov.uk/malta; Whitehall Mansions, Ix-Xatt Ta'Xbiex, Ta'Xbiex)

USA (Map p73; ☎ 2561 4000; http://valletta.usembassy.gov; 3rd fl, Development House, Triq Sant'Anna, Floriana)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The festa (feast day) is a hugely important event in Maltese family and village life. During the past 200 years festas have developed from simple village feast days into extravagant five-day spectacles, lasting from Wednesday to Sunday.

Every village has a festa, usually on a Sunday, to celebrate the feast day of its patron saint, and most villages try to outdo each other – the more spectacular (and costly) the show, the 'better' the parish and the stronger the saint will become. The church is decorated with coloured lights, its treasures and relics are cleaned and polished and placed proudly on display, and the village is dressed up with banners, flags and lights.

Most festas are held from May to September. If a festa is held while you're visiting, do yourself a favour and go along to join in the outdoor festivities (the church services themselves will hold little appeal to nonreligious travellers). Tour operators often organise evening trips to a local festa. The timing of church services and events is usually as follows: on the eve of the feast day, vespers and Mass are at 6pm, followed by band club concerts and the main fireworks display at around 10pm; on the Sunday, pontifical High Mass is celebrated at 9am and 7pm, with the evening Mass followed by the procession. This is the climax of the festa, when the life-size statue of the patron saint is paraded through the streets accompanied by brass bands, fireworks, petards and church bells. People then retire to the bars to drink, chat and sample traditional snacks or sweets such as *qubbajt* (nougat) sold from mobile kiosks that make the rounds of the festas.

But festas aren't the only excuse to throw a party in Malta, and the website of the Malta Tourism Authority has a comprehensive list of what's on, where and when (including links to festa dates and locations) – check out www.visitmalta.com/en/whats_on.

Other noteworthy annual events include the following:

FEBRUARY/MARCH

Carnival (www.maltafestivals.com) A week of vibrant celebrations preceding Lent, with a traditional procession of floats, fancy dress and grotesque masks. It's celebrated throughout the islands but the main procession is in Valletta.

EASTER WEEK

Good Friday Pageants are held in several towns and villages. Lifesize statues depicting scenes from the passion and death of Jesus Christ are carried shoulder high in procession along the main streets of the town, accompanied by men and women dressed as biblical characters.

Easter Sunday A day of joy (in contrast to the solemnity of Good Friday). Early in the morning there are processions bearing the statue of the Risen Christ. Particularly interesting are those held at the three harbour towns of Vittoriosa, Senglea and Cospicua, where the statue bearers actually *run* with the statue. It's customary for children to have their *figolla* (an almond-based Easter cake) blessed by the Risen Christ during these processions.

MAY

Fireworks Festival (www.maltafestivals.com) A noisy and colourful festival of fireworks, folk music and entertainment, set against the awesome views of Grand Harbour's bastions. Prime viewing is at Pinto Wharf.

Powerboat Grand Prix (www.powerboatp1.com) Grand Harbour hosts the first grand prix of the annual Powerboat P1 World Championship. It's a spectacular sight against a great backdrop – join the revhead crowds lining the Sliema waterfront for a glimpse.

JUNE

L-Imnarja Harvest festival with an agricultural show and traditional horse races; festivities are centred on and around Rabat (see the boxed text, p131).

JULY

Malta Jazz Festival (www.maltajazzfest.com) An increasingly popular event, with outdoor performances for jazz cats held beneath the bastions of Valletta. Held on the third weekend in July.

Farsons Great Beer Festival (www.farsons.com/beer festival/) Ten days of family fun (despite the adult-oriented name) at Ta'Qali in the centre of the island. Local artists performing, plenty of food options, and a focus on local and international beer.

Malta Arts Festival (www.maltaculture.com) A three-week summer festival from late July into August, incorporating music, dance, theatre and literature performances, as well as art exhibitions, at various venues in and around Valletta.

CHRISTMAS IN MALTA

The festive season is celebrated with style in Malta. The strong Catholic tradition of the islands means that the religious aspect of Christmas is still very strong and the parish church, decorated with colourful lights, is the focus of the festivities. Candlelit carol services are held in the days leading up to Christmas, and midnight Mass on Christmas Eve is the high point of the proceedings.

Every town and village has its crib (called *presepeju* in Malti, and often signposted), showing the nativity scene. The tradition of the crib or nativity scene dates back to the 5th or 6th century, as shown by surviving sketches in the catacombs of St Agatha in Rabat (p128). Villages compete to construct the most impressive nativity scenes, complete with motorised mechanical figures, elaborate lighting and even waterfalls. Some travel agents offer guided tours of the best cribs.

The commercial aspect of Christmas is fully celebrated too, with street lights and decorations, window displays, band club concerts and a frenzy of evening shopping in the streets of Valletta in the week before Christmas Day. It's a good time to visit: the weather in December is pleasantly mild and not too wet, the islands are quiet and at their greenest, and red poinsettias – a traditional Christmas sight – brighten many a garden and windowsill.

SEPTEMBER

Malta International Air Show (www.maltairshow.com) Held over a weekend in late September at the Luqa airfield, by the airport. Exhibition of visiting aircraft and aerial displays.

OCTOBER

Historic Cities Festival (www.maltafestivals.com) Ten days of cultural activities including music, dance and pageantry in Malta's main historic cities (Valletta, Vittoriosa and Mdina), culminating in the Malta Military Tattoo (www.maltamilitarytattoo.org).
Rolex Middle Sea Race Offshore sailing classic big with the Royal Malta Yacht Club (p169).

NOVEMBER

Mediterranea (www.mediterranea.com.mt) A 10-day festival of culture on Gozo, celebrating the history, art, crafts, opera and music of the island.

FOOD

See the Food & Drink chapter (p51) for details of *fenkata* (communal rabbit dish), *lampuki* (dolphin fish), Kinnie (a soft drink) and other quirks of Maltese cuisine, plus information on what to eat in Malta and where to eat it.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Homosexual sex was legalised in Malta in 1973, and the age of consent for males and females is 16. Attitudes towards homosexuality in Malta are much the same as in most of southern Europe. Younger people and women are usually more tolerant than older people and straight men – and remember that it's a very Catholic country, and public affection (straight or gay) is generally frowned upon.

Still, although Malta is not a very 'out' destination, it is gay-friendly. Although there are only a handful of gay venues, a few clubs have the occasional gay night. The best way to find out more on the local scene is to visit www.gaymalta.com.

Malta Gay Rights Movement (www.maltagayrights.org) staged its first Gay Pride march in Valletta in July 2004, and has staged one annually since then. Although the march and surrounding festivities are tiny in comparison to the large Euro gatherings, they're a chance for Malta's LGBT community to gather, celebrate diversity and push for an end to discrimination. Check out www.gaymalta.com for more.

HOLIDAYS

Malta observes 14 national public holidays. Few restaurants and sights are open on major holidays (eg Good Friday, Christmas Day, New Year's Day), and buses runs to a limited schedule.

New Year's Day 1 January

St Paul's Shipwreck 10 February

St Joseph's Day 19 March

Good Friday March/April

Freedom Day 31 March

Labour Day 1 May

Commemoration of 1919 independence riots 7 June

Feast of Sts Peter and Paul (L-Imnarja festival) 29 June

Feast of the Assumption 15 August

Victory Day 8 September

Independence Day 21 September

Feast of the Immaculate Conception 8 December

Republic Day 13 December

Christmas Day 25 December

INSURANCE

A travel insurance policy to cover theft, loss and medical problems is a good idea. Worldwide coverage to travellers from over 44 countries is available on travel at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

Some policies specifically exclude 'dangerous activities', which can include scuba diving (a popular holiday activity in Malta). If 'risky' activities are on your agenda, as they may well be, you'll need the most comprehensive policy.

You may prefer to have an insurance policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than you having to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later, make sure you keep all documentation. Some policies ask you to call back (reverse charges) to a centre in your home country, where an immediate assessment of your problem is made. Check that the policy covers ambulances or an emergency flight home.


For details of health insurance see the Health chapter (p192) and for more details on car insurance see the Transport chapter (p189).

INTERNET ACCESS

Malta is a well-wired destination – most hotels and tourism-related organisations have a web page. There are also numerous internet cafés in Malta, while many hotels and cafés have at least one computer available for guest use; a number of establishments (top-end hotels, primarily) now offer wi-fi hotspots – use a wi-fi directory site such as www.jiwire.com to locate these.

Typical charges for internet access are around Lm1 an hour. Many computers belong to the **MelitaNet** (www.melita.net) or **Yellow Blue** (www.yellowblue.net) network of machines for public use – if you purchase a voucher for one network, you receive a password allowing the voucher to be used at any of their computers throughout the country. The websites for

THE COMPUTER ICON

Throughout this guide, hotels and other types of accommodation that have a computer that guests can use to access the internet are flagged with a computer icon like this: ; those that are wi-fi friendly, but have no computer, are not.

each network list computer locations; major MelitaNet cybercafés (in Paceville, Sliema and Bugibba) also offer good-value rates for overseas telephone calls.

If you're travelling with your laptop, check that it is compatible with the 240V current in Malta; if not you will need a converter. You'll also need a telephone plug adaptor. Having a reputable global modem will prevent access problems that can occur with PC-card modems brought from home. For tips on travelling with a laptop and getting connected, see the business traveller section of www.teleadapt.com.

For useful travel websites, see p14.

LEGAL MATTERS

All towns and most villages have their own police station, the smaller ones are manned by a single officer and often marked by a traditional British-style blue lamp.

If you are arrested or detained by the police you have the right to be informed, in a language that you understand, of the reasons for your arrest or detention, and if the police do not release you they must bring you before a court within 48 hours. You also have the right to inform your consulate and to speak to a lawyer.

For an emergency requiring help from the police (*pulizija* in Malti), call ☎ 112. Useful addresses include:

Gozo's main police station (Map p146; ☎ 2156 2040; Triq ir-Repubblika, Victoria)

Malta police headquarters (Map p73; ☎ 2294 2190; Pjazza San Kalcidonju, Floriana)

MAPS

There is a wide selection of maps of the Maltese Islands to choose from. A general one that is good value and hard-wearing is the *Malta FlexiMap* (Lm3) from Insight Maps. It shows Malta and Gozo at 1:50,000 scale, and has street maps of Valletta, Sliema & St Julian's, Bugibba, Mdina and Victoria, with useful town and street indexes. Also laminated, the Berndtson *Malta & Gozo* map (Lm3) is another good option, at 1:45,000 with town plans covering Sliema, Mdina, Victoria, Valletta and Bugibba.

The mAZe by Frans A Attard is a comprehensive street atlas covering every town and village on Malta and Gozo; it costs around Lm6 from bookshops in Malta. Although the text is in English, street names are usually given in Malti only.

ARE YOU OLD ENOUGH?

In Malta the legal drinking age is only 16; you can drive from age 18 and the age of consent (for both heterosexual and homosexual sex) is 16.

MONEY

The Maltese lira, plural liri (Lm) is divided into 100 cents (c). There are 1c, 2c, 5c, 10c, 25c, 50c and Lm1 coins, and Lm2, Lm5, Lm10 and Lm20 notes. When speaking in English, locals often refer to the local currency as the pound, and a £ symbol is also sometimes used. Prices quoted in this book are in lira, unless otherwise stated.

See the inside front cover for a table of exchange rates, or log on to www.oanda.com. The Getting Started chapter has information on costs.

There are convenient ATMs and 24-hour foreign exchange facilities at Malta International Airport, and some ATMs and a bank at Pinto Wharf, next to the Sea Passenger Terminal.

ATMs

There are ATMs at Malta International Airport, Pinto Wharf and in all the main towns in Malta, where you can withdraw Maltese cash using a credit or debit card and PIN. These transactions may incur a 'handling charge' of around 1.5% of the amount withdrawn – check with your bank before departing (and bear in mind that if you're withdrawing from a credit-card account, you'll be paying interest on the cash advance until you pay off your credit card bill).

Cash

Cash can be changed at hotels, banks, exchange bureaux and some tourist shops. There are also 24-hour exchange machines at banks in the main tourist towns, including Valletta, Sliema and Bugibba, where you can feed in foreign banknotes and get Maltese currency back. The euro, British pound and US dollars are widely accepted.

Credit Cards

Visa, MasterCard and Amex credit and charge cards are widely accepted in hotels, restaurants, shops, travel agencies and car-hire agencies.

FROM LIRA TO EURO

If things go to plan, €-day for Malta is 1 January 2008. On this date, the country will adopt the euro as its national currency, doing away with the Maltese lira.

To facilitate a smooth changeover, the government has issued guidelines for businesses to follow in the lead-up to €-day. Dual pricing (ie the display of prices in both lira and euro) is mandatory from 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008 (and voluntary in the first six months of 2007). It should be noted that prior to €-day, the display of prices in euro is for information purposes only – it doesn't indicate that a business will accept payment in euro (although an increasing number of larger businesses will allow this before the official changeover date).

There are still a number of economic criteria the government must fulfil before being permitted to enter the euro zone, and the final go-ahead of the new currency's introduction won't be given until mid-2007. There is a chance that economic indicators (eg high inflation) may force the postponement of €-day to a later date (probably January 2009).

Read more about the changeover at the official government website of the **National Euro Changeover Committee** (www.euro.got.mt).

Taxes & Refunds

VAT (value-added tax) was reintroduced to Malta in 1999, with two rates of tax: accommodation is charged at 5% (and is usually included in the rates quoted) and the rate for other items is 18%. Food, medicine, education, maritime services, air, sea and public transport are exempt from VAT.

Visitors to Malta can reclaim VAT provided they satisfy certain regulations. Repayment of VAT applies only to purchased goods valued at not less than Lm25 and bought from a single registered outlet, as shown on the receipt, and when the total value of the items is not under Lm100. If you wish to get a VAT refund, you should fill out an application form, available at the custom exit points at the airport or sea port. The next steps on how to obtain your refund are provided on the form and at the customs offices at the airport and sea port.

Tipping & Bargaining

Tipping etiquette is like mainland Europe's (ie tipping is not expected, but appreciated). In restaurants where no service charge is included in the bill, leave 10% for good service. Baggage porters should get about Lm0.15 per piece of luggage, car park attendants Lm0.20 to Lm0.50. Taxi drivers don't expect a tip, but it's nice to round up a fare in order to leave a small tip (up to 10%) if warranted.

Bargaining for handicrafts at stalls or markets is essential, but most shops have fixed prices. Hotels and car-hire agencies often bargain in the off season between October and mid-June – stays/rentals of a week or more will often get a 10% discount.

Travellers Cheques

The main brands of travellers cheques can be easily exchanged at hotels, banks and bureaux de change. You'll find that pounds sterling, euro and US dollars are the favoured denominations. Banks give better rates than hotels, but they often levy a charge of Lm0.20 to Lm0.25 per transaction.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

Film, camcorder cassettes and camera equipment are easily obtained at dozens of photographic shops in all the main towns in Malta. Print film is also available from souvenir shops and hotels in the main tourist areas.

For the best results in your travel photos, shoot your pictures early and late in the day with dusk and dawn sun – before 10am and after 4pm. The blazing sun of a Maltese summer will give a flat and washed-out look to pics taken in the middle of the day. If you want to capture that 'tropical turquoise' look of the water in Comino's Blue Lagoon, you will need to use a polarising filter.

For tips on taking the perfect holiday snaps, look out for Lonely Planet's *Travel Photography* book.

POST

Malta Post (www.maltapost.com) operates a reliable postal service. Post office branches are found in most towns and villages (in some towns the local newsagent/souvenir shop acts as a branch agent).

Local postage costs Lm0.08; a 20g letter or postcard sent airmail to the UK or Europe costs Lm0.16, to the USA Lm0.22 and

to Australia Lm0.27. Stamps are frequently available from hotels and souvenir shops as well as from post offices.

SHOPPING

Traditional handicrafts include lace, silver filigree, blown glass and pottery, and are available throughout the country. Hand-knitted clothing is produced in the villages and can be quite cheap, but remember to shop around before you make a purchase – the Malta Crafts Centre in Valletta (p71) or the Ta'Qali Crafts Village (p129) are good places to start. The best bargains (and often the most authentic pieces) are to be found on Gozo; inside Il-Kastell are a few options for purchasing handmade lace. Also check out the Ta'Dbiegi Crafts Village (p156) near Għarb. Note that bargaining for handicrafts at stalls or markets is essential, but most shops have fixed prices.

Valletta and Sliema are where local fashionistas go shopping. Here you'll find UK high-street labels, Italian footwear and a few unique boutiques.

SOLO TRAVELLERS

Solo travellers are not terribly common in Malta. Most people travel here on short-term summer package holidays with partners/family/friends, or make an annual pilgrimage from northern Europe for winter sun and meet up with people doing the same (at this time of year the average age of visitors to Malta increases significantly!).

Obviously many solo students head here to study English, but they invariably socialise with fellow students. If you are a solo traveller and looking for company, try staying at the University Residence (p134) in Lija or Hibernia Residence & Hostel (p88) in Sliema.

Still, there is no real stigma attached to lone travellers. Many guesthouses rent rooms at a set rate per person and do not charge a single-room supplement. Others may charge a supplement of 50% of the per-person rate. Five-star hotels usually have a set rate per room and it doesn't matter whether there's one or two people staying in it – the rate remains the same. You may feel a little conspicuous dining solo in restaurants, surrounded by large groups of locals or travellers, but the service you receive shouldn't be affected.

Solo female travellers should refer to the tips for Women Travellers (p179).

**TELEPHONE
Mobile Phones**

More than 80% of Malta's population has a mobile phone, and mobile-phone numbers begin with either 79 or 99. Malta uses the GSM900 mobile phone network which is compatible with the rest of Europe, Australia and New Zealand, but not with the USA and Canada's GSM1900. If you have a GSM phone, check with your service provider about using it in Malta and beware of calls being routed internationally (expensive for a 'local' call).

You may consider bringing your mobile phone from your home country and buying a Maltese SIM card, which gives you a Maltese mobile number. (Your mobile may be locked-in to the local network in your home country, so ask your home network for advice before going abroad.) There are two mobile phone companies in Malta: **Vodafone** (www.vodafone.com.mt) and **Go Mobile** (www.go.com.mt) offer local SIM cards for Lm5, plus prepaid vouchers for a minimum of Lm5 worth of calls. Prepaid vouchers for topping up credit are available at many stores and kiosks throughout Malta. Both Vodafone and Go Mobile have stores inside the Embassy Complex on Triq Santa Lucija in Valletta, and Go Mobile also has an outlet in the arrivals hall at the airport to help new arrivals get connected to the Maltese network.

You can rent a mobile phone from **Telecom Electronics** (☎ 2137 6050; www.telecom.com.mt; Naxxar Rd, San Gwann; rental 1 day/1 week/2 weeks Lm5/23/38, plus a refundable deposit) Phone delivery and pick-up can be arranged.

Phone Codes

The international direct dialling code is ☎ 00. To call Malta from abroad, dial the international access code, ☎ 356 (the country code for Malta) and the number.

There are no area codes in Malta. In late 2001 Malta moved from six-digit local phone numbers to eight-digit numbers.

Public Phones & Phonocards

Public telephones are widely available, and most are card-operated (there are also coin-operated phones, but these are not as common). There are over 1500 public cardphones installed in various localities – including public outdoor areas and indoor premises such as the airport, hospitals and restaurants. You can

buy phonecards at many kiosks, post offices and souvenir shops. Telecards are available in denominations of Lm2, Lm3, Lm4 and Lm5. Easyline cards can be used from any line (including payphones and mobiles, even from hotels) and can be used in a range of overseas destinations. They are available in denominations of Lm2, Lm5, Lm6, Lm10 and Lm15.

Local calls from public phones cost Lm0.10 to landlines (minimum Lm0.25 to mobiles).

International calls are discounted by around 20% between 8pm and midnight Monday to Friday, all day Saturday and Sunday (offpeak rate), and by up to 36% between midnight and 8am (night rate) every day.

TIME

Malta is in the same time zone as most of Western Europe (one hour ahead of the UK). The country is two hours ahead of GMT/UTC from the last Sunday in March to the last Sunday in October (the daylight saving period) and one hour ahead for the rest of the year. For more on international timing and to work out when it is best to phone home, see the map of world time zones on p206.

TOILETS

Malta is well-equipped with public toilets, often at the entrance to a public garden or near the village square. They are usually (but not always) clean and in good order, but it's a good idea to have a small packet of tissues stashed in your handbag or daypack as public toilets are often short of loo paper.

If there is an attendant, it is good manners to leave a tip of a few cents in a dish by the door.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Local Tourist Offices

The head office of the **Malta Tourism Authority** (☎ 2291 5000; www.visitmalta.com; Auberge d'Italie, Triq il-Merkanti, Valletta) is for postal and telephone inquiries only. Your best source of information is the comprehensive website, with directories, interactive maps and loads of holiday and practical information.

There are local tourist information offices at Valletta and Malta International Airport (for their contact details and opening hours see p57), St Julian's (p85), and Victoria on Gozo (p146).

Tourist Offices Abroad

The **Malta Tourism Authority** (www.visitmalta.com) has overseas representation that can help with inquiries from potential holidaymakers (information on the official website is available in 10 languages). Contact the following:

Australia (☎ 02-9321 9154; office.au@visitmalta.com; World Aviation Systems, 403 George St, Sydney NSW 2000)

France (☎ 01 48 00 03 79; info@visitemalte.com; Office du Tourisme de Malte, 9 Cité Tréville, 75009 Paris)

Germany (☎ 069-285890; info@urlaubmalta.com; Fremdenverkehrsamt Malta, Schillerstrasse 30-40, D-60313 Frankfurt-am-Main)

Ireland (☎ 01-678 1460; info@plunkettcommunications.com; Plunkett Communications, 16 Morehampton Rd, Dublin 4)

Italy (☎ 011-66 87 550; info@adam.it; Ente per il Turismo di Malta, Corso Marconi, 33-10125 Torino)

Netherlands (☎ 020-6207 223; info@malta.nl; Verkeersbureau Malta, Leliegracht 20, 1015 Dg Amsterdam)

UK (☎ 020-8877 6990; office.uk@visitmalta.com; Malta Tourist Office, Unit C, Park House, 14 Northfields, London SW18 1DD)

USA (☎ 973-884-0899; office.us@visitmalta.com; Malta Tourist Office, 300 Lanixed Plaza, Parsippany, New Jersey NJ 07054)

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

Maltese government policy is to improve access for people with disabilities, but many of Malta's historic places – notably the steep, stepped streets of Valletta – remain difficult, if not impossible, to negotiate in a wheelchair or for those with restricted mobility. Several sites are accessible, however, including the Malta Experience and the Museum of Archaeology in Valletta. A good number of the more expensive hotels have wheelchair access and some have rooms specially designed for disabled guests.

The **Malta Tourism Authority** (www.visitmalta.com) can provide information on hotels and sights that are equipped for wheelchair users; its website uses a wheelchair icon to indicate whether a venue has easy access or facilities for the disabled.

The **National Commission for Persons with Disabilities** (☎ 2148 7789; www.knpd.org; Centru Hidma Soċjali, Triq Braille, Santa Venera) can provide information on facilities and access for disabled travellers in Malta.

VISAS

When Malta joined the EU in 2004, the country opened to all EU nationals for study or residence purposes, but movement for work

purposes may still face restrictions. It's worth contacting the Maltese embassy or consulate in your home country for more information.

Visas are not needed for visits of up to three months by nationals of most Commonwealth countries (including UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, but excluding South Africa, India and Pakistan), most non-EU European countries (excluding Russia), the USA and Japan. The complete list of countries whose nationals don't need a visa is online at the website of the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malta** (www.foreign.gov.mt). Other nationalities must apply to the Maltese embassy, high commission or consulate in their country, or directly to the immigration police in Malta if there is no official Maltese representation. Application forms are on the ministry's website.

If you wish to stay for more than three months you should apply for an extension at the **immigration office** (Map p73; ☎ 2122 4001; sb.police@gov.mt; Pjazza Vincenzo Bugeja, Floriana) in the police headquarters in Floriana before your three months are up. You will need four recent passport photographs and proof that you have

enough money to support yourself and not be a burden on the state. Extensions are usually granted without a problem. Applications for temporary residence should also be made at police headquarters.

Visit Lonely Planet's website at www.lonelyplanet.com for links to up-to-date visa information.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Malta remains a conservative society by Western standards, and women are still expected to be wives and mothers; however, an increasing number of women are now joining the workforce. Young machos have adopted the Mediterranean macho style, but they are not usually aggressive.

Malta presents no unusual dangers for women travelling alone. Normal caution should be observed, but the chance of being the victim of crime in Malta is quite low. If you are alone, Paceville – the nightclub zone at St Julian's – is hectic and sometimes testosterone-fuelled (especially on weekends) but not particularly unsafe.

Transport

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

ENTERING THE COUNTRY Passport

Citizens of EU member states can travel to Malta with their national identity cards. Travellers from countries that don't issue ID cards, such as the UK, must carry a valid passport. All non-EU nationals must have a full valid passport. See p179, for visa requirements.

AIR

Malta is well connected to Europe and North Africa, with daily direct flights to/from Amsterdam, Brussels, Catania (Sicily), London (Gatwick, Heathrow and Luton), Manchester, Milan, Munich, Paris, Rome and Tripoli (Libya); and at least two direct services weekly to/from Athens, Berlin, Birmingham, Budapest, Cairo, Dubai, Dublin, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Glasgow, Hamburg, Istanbul, Larnaca (Cyprus), Lisbon, London (Stansted), Lyon, Madrid, Marseille, Moscow, Oslo, Prague, Stockholm, Tunis, Vienna and Zürich.

There are no direct flights into Malta from places further afield. If you're flying from elsewhere, it's best to get to Dubai (from Asia, Australia and New Zealand) or a major European city such as Rome, London, Paris or Frankfurt, then join a direct connecting flight to Malta.

THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works, and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

Airports & Airlines

All flights arrive and depart from **Malta International Airport** (MLA; ☎ 2124 9600; www.maltairport.com) at Luqa, 8km south of Valletta. The airport has good facilities, including ATMs and currency exchange, internet access, a tourist office (open daily), left luggage, and a regular, inexpensive bus service to and from Valletta (see p71).

Gozo has a **heliport** (GZM; ☎ 2156 1301) with a helicopter link (see p185) to Luqa.

The Maltese national airline is **Air Malta** (code KM; ☎ 2166 2211; www.airmalta.com), a small airline with a good safety record. It has a number of overseas sales agents (see the website for details).

AIRLINES FLYING TO & FROM MALTA

Alitalia (code AZ; ☎ 2123 7115; www.alitalia.com)

Hub Rome.

British Airways (code BA; ☎ 2124 2233; www.ba.com)

Hub London.

BritishJet (code BJC; ☎ 2157 9350; www.britishjet.com)

Low-cost airline operating between Malta and various British regional airports.

Egyptair (code MS; ☎ 2132 2256; www.egyptair.com)

Hub Cairo.

Emirates (code EK; ☎ 2557 7255; www.emirates.com)

Hub Dubai.

Germanwings (code 4U; ☎ UK +44 870-252 1250;

www.germanwings.com) Hub Cologne/Bonn. Low-cost German carrier beginning flights to/from Malta in 2007.

JAT Yugoslav Airlines (code JU; ☎ 2133 2814; www.jat.com)

Hub Belgrade.

KLM Royal Dutch Airlines (code KL; ☎ 2133 1010;

www.klm.com) Hub Amsterdam.

Libyan Arab Airlines (code LN; ☎ 2122 2735) Hub Tripoli.

Lufthansa (code LH; ☎ 2125 2020; www.lufthansa.com) Hub Frankfurt.

Ryanair (code FR; ☎ Ireland +353 1 249 7791; www.ryanair.com) Various hub cities.

Swiss International Air Lines (code LX; ☎ 2180 2777; www.swiss.com) Hub Geneva/Zürich.

Tuninter (code UG; ☎ 2132 0732) Hub Tunis.

Tickets

High season in Malta is June to September and ticket prices are at their highest during this period. A month or two either side is the shoulder season (April, May, October), while low season is November to March. Holidays such as Christmas and Easter also see a jump in prices. Check the 'special fares' section of the Air Malta website to see if there are any good deals going for the period you are travelling.

Calling around, checking internet sites, comparing the airline and travel agent prices, and scouring major newspapers' travel sections can result in significant savings on your air ticket. Start early – some of the cheapest tickets have to be bought well in advance.

Well-known travel agents are listed later in this chapter under individual country headings. Good online agencies for cheap tickets:

Cheap Tickets (www.cheaptickets.com)

Ebookers (www.ebookers.com)

Expedia (www.expedia.com)

Last Minute (www.lastminute.com)

Priceline (www.priceline.com)

Travel Cuts (www.travelcuts.com)

Travelocity UK (www.travelocity.co.uk); US (www.travelocity.com); Asia-Pacific (www.zuji.com.au)

Asia

Bangkok, Singapore and Hong Kong are the best places to shop around for discount tickets. **STA Travel** (www.statravel.com/worldwide.htm) has offices in Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, China, Malaysia, Taiwan and Thailand. Major Asian airlines (eg Thai Airways and Singapore Air) serve most of Western Europe, and also connect with Australia and New Zealand. Similarly, discounted fares can be picked up from Qantas, which usually transits in Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok or Singapore.

Australia & New Zealand

For flights from Australia and New Zealand to Europe there are a number of competing airlines and a variety of fares. It can sometimes work out cheaper to purchase a round-the-world ticket than to do a U-turn on a return ticket.

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying & Climate Change

Pretty much every form of motorised travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon Offset Schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow travellers to offset the level of greenhouse gases they are responsible for with financial contributions to sustainable travel schemes that reduce global warming – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, support the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: www.lonelyplanet.com.

Cheap flights from Australia/New Zealand to Europe generally go via Southeast Asian capitals, involving stopovers at Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok or Singapore. Some flights go via the Middle East, so another option might be to fly to Dubai and then direct to Malta with Emirates. Roughly speaking, a return ticket to Europe will set you back A\$2000/2400 from Australia in the low/high season.

Some travel agents, particularly small ones, advertise cheap air fares in travel sections of weekend newspapers, such as the *Age* in Melbourne and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The *New Zealand Herald* has a travel section where travel agents advertise fares. Book online at www.travel.com.au and www.travel.co.nz.

Two well-known agents for cheap fares are STA Travel and Flight Centre, with branches throughout Australia and New Zealand. Contact details are:

Flight Centre Australia (☎ 133 133; www.flightcentre.com.au); New Zealand (☎ 0800 243 544; www.flightcentre.co.nz)

STA Travel (Australia ☎ 1300 733 035; www.statravel.com.au; New Zealand ☎ 0800 474 400; www.statravel.co.nz)

Canada

Travel Cuts (☎ 1-866-246-9762; www.travelcuts.com) is Canada's national student travel agency. For online bookings try www.expedia.ca and www.travelocity.ca.

Both Alitalia and Air Canada have direct flights from Toronto and Montreal to Rome, where you can connect with flights to Malta. Roughly speaking, expect to pay C\$1100/2000 for a return ticket to Rome from the Canadian east coast in the low/high season, and C\$1400/2200 from the west coast.

Continental Europe

Malta is well connected by air to many European cities.

DENMARK

Kilroy Travels (☎ 70 80 80 15; www.kilroytravels.com; Skindergade 28, Copenhagen)

STA Travel (☎ 33 14 15 01; www.statravel.dk; Fiolstraede 18, Copenhagen)

FRANCE

Nouvelles Frontières (☎ 0825 000 747; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr)

Voyageurs du Monde (☎ 01 40 15 11 15; www.vdm.com)

GERMANY

STA Travel (☎ 030-310 0040; www.statravel.de; Hardenbergstrasse 9, Berlin)

ITALY

CTS Viaggi (☎ 06 462 043 116; www.cts.it; Via Genova, Rome)

THE NETHERLANDS

ISSTA (☎ 020-618 80 31; 226 Overtoom Straat, Amsterdam)

Kilroy Travels (☎ 020-524 51 00; www.kilroytravels.com; Singel 413, Amsterdam)

NORWAY

Kilroy Travels (☎ 81 55 96 33; www.kilroytravels.com; Nedre Slottsgate 23, Oslo)

STA Travel (☎ 81 55 99 05; www.statravel.no; Karl Johansgate 8, Oslo)

SWEDEN

Kilroy Travels (☎ 0771-545769; www.kilroytravels.com; Kungsgatan 4, Stockholm)

STA Travel (☎ 0771-611010; www.statravel.se; Kungsgatan 30, Stockholm)

SWITZERLAND

STA Travel (☎ 022-818 02 00; www.statravel.ch; rue de Rive 10, Geneva)

The Middle East

Emirates has around five flights a week between Dubai and Malta, with connections to/from destinations in Australia, India, Asia and other parts of the Middle East. Air Malta flies twice a week between Malta and Istanbul.

Recommended agencies in the region include:

Al-Rais Travels (www.alrais.com) In Dubai.

Israel Student Travel Association (ISTA; ☎ 02-625 7257) In Jerusalem.

Orion-Tour (☎ 212-232 6300; www.oriontour.com) In Istanbul.

North Africa

There are frequent flights between Malta and various North African cities, including Cairo, Tripoli, Tunis and Casablanca. One recommended travel agency in the area is **Egypt Panorama Tours** (☎ 2-359 0200; www.eptours.com) in Cairo.

The UK & Ireland

Roughly speaking, a return fare to Malta will cost you UK£160/320 in the low/high

season from the UK, and there are some good winter prices (around UK£120) if you're prepared to shop around. Charter flights are usually much cheaper than scheduled flights, especially if you don't qualify for the under-26 and student discounts. You could also check out websites like www.bargainholidays.com (with scheduled and charter flights, plus package holiday offers) or www.lastminute.co.uk.

From October 2006, low-cost carrier Ryan air plans to fly daily between London, Luton and Malta; and from February 2007 the airline will fly three times a week between Malta and Dublin.

Look for special deals in the travel pages of the weekend broadsheet newspapers, as well as in *Time Out*, the *Evening Standard* and the free magazine *TNT*.

Recommended travel agencies and online ticket sites include the following:

Cheap Flights (www.cheapflights.co.uk)

Cheapest Flights (☎ 0870-428 6204; www.cheapestflights.co.uk)

Ebookers (☎ 0800-082 3000; www.ebookers.com)

Flight Centre (☎ 0870-499 0040; www.flightcentre.co.uk)

Online Travel (☎ 0870-887 0100; www.onlinetravel.com)

Quest Travel (☎ 0871-423 0135; www.questtravel.com)

STA Travel (☎ 0870-163 0026; www.statravel.co.uk)

Trailfinders (☎ 0845-058 5858; www.trailfinders.co.uk)

Travel Bag (☎ 0800-082 5000; www.travelbag.co.uk)

Usit (☎ Ireland 01-602 1904; www.usit.ie)

The USA

There are no direct scheduled flights from the USA to Malta. The best option is to fly into a busy European hub, such as London, Frankfurt, Paris or Rome, and catch a connecting flight from there to Malta. Flight options across the North Atlantic, the world's busiest long-haul air corridor, can be bewildering and fares can vary wildly in price. For example, a return fare to a major European city like Rome will cost you US\$500/1000 in the low/high season.

The following agencies are recommended for online bookings:

Cheap Tickets (www.cheaptickets.com)

Expedia (www.expedia.com)

Lowest Fare (www.lowestfare.com)

STA Travel (☎ 1800-781-4040; www.sta.com)

Travelocity (www.travelocity.com)

LAND Bus

You can travel by bus from most parts of Europe to a port in Italy and catch a ferry from there to Malta. **Eurolines** (www.eurolines.com) is a consortium of coach companies that operates across Europe with offices in all major European cities. Bear in mind that a discounted air fare will probably work out cheaper than the long bus trip once you allow for food and drink to be bought en route.

As the saying goes, all roads lead to Rome; from there you will have to continue to Malta by bus or train to one of the ferry ports in southern Italy or Sicily (see p184).

Car & Motorcycle

With your own vehicle, you can drive to southern Italy and take a car ferry from Salerno, Pozzallo or Catania (Sicily) to Malta (see p184). From northern Europe the fastest road route is via the Simplon Pass to Milan, from which Italy's main highway, the Autostrada del Sole, stretches all the way to Reggio di Calabria. From London the distance is around 2200km.

Car drivers and motorbike riders will need the vehicle's registration papers, a Green Card, a nationality plate and their domestic licence. Contact your local automobile association for details about necessary documentation.

Train

Rail travel from major European cities to southern Italy and Sicily is convenient and comfortable, but if Malta is your only destination then you may want to rethink your plans, as the train will prove considerably more expensive than a discounted flight. For the latest fare information on journeys to Italy from the UK, contact the **Rail Europe Travel Centre** (☎ 0870-837 1371; www.raileurope.co.uk). Another source of rail information for all of Europe is **Rail Choice** (www.railchoice.com).

If you're touring Europe on a Eurail or Inter Rail Pass, you can take the train to Reggio di Calabria or Catania to catch a ferry to Malta.

SEA Departure Tax

All passengers leaving Malta by sea are required to pay a Lm11 departure tax, which should be added by the travel agent when you buy your ticket. Maltese nationals and foreigners residing in Malta also pay an incredibly steep 'travel levy' of Lm21.

Ferry

Malta has regular sea links with Sicily (Pozzallo and Catania), southern Italy (Salerno) and northern Italy (Genoa). You can also sail from Tunis to Malta (but not, strangely, from Malta direct to Tunis). Ferries dock at the Sea Passenger Terminal beside Pinto Wharf in Floriana, underneath the southeast bastions of Valletta.

Virtu Ferries (www.virtuferries.com) Malta (☎ 2122 8777); Catania (☎ 095-535 711); Pozzallo (☎ 0932-954 062) offers the shortest, fastest Malta–Sicily crossing with its catamaran service (carrying cars and passengers) to/from Pozzallo and Catania. In the past, Virtu has operated a service between Malta and Reggio di Calabria, but at the time of research this wasn't operating. The company also operates day excursions to Sicily (see p191).

The Pozzallo–Malta crossing takes a mere 90 minutes and operates year-round (seven times a week in June, up to 10 times a week in July and August, dropping to three times a week from November to April, weather permitting). The high-season fares are as follows:

From Pozzallo

passenger	one way/return	€81/99
car	one way/return	€110/140
motorcycle	one way/return	€60/75

From Malta

passenger	one way/return	Lm26/35
car	one way/return	Lm35/41
motorcycle	one way/return	Lm17/25

The Catania–Malta crossing takes three hours and operates from March to October (five times a week in August, down to once a week in March). Fares are:

From Catania

passenger	one way/return	€81/99
car	one way/return	€130/155
motorcycle	one way/return	€85/110

From Malta

passenger	one way/return	Lm26/35
car	one way/return	Lm40/59
motorcycle	one way/return	Lm25/31

Departure taxes are not included in the prices listed above, nor are fuel surcharges (add Lm2 each way from Malta, €4 from Sicily, but subject to change). Children under four travel free of charge; children aged four to 15 pay 50% of the adult fares. Bikes travel free. If you're travelling from Malta to Sicily, when booking ask about transfers from your accommodation to the ferry terminal by Pinto Wharf – it's worth paying the extra charge (Lm3 per person) as there is no public transport to the wharf, and taxis can prove expensive.

Ma-Re-Si Shipping (☎ 2123 3127; www.ma-re-si.com) has a ro-ro (roll-on/roll-off) car ferry operating three overnight return trips weekly between Catania and Malta (12 hours). The service operates year-round; cabins are available (one way/return from Lm30/45 per cabin, not per person). Prices (excluding taxes) are as follows:

From Catania

passenger	one way/return	€55/90
car	one way/return	€95/145
motorcycle	one way/return	€35/65
bicycle	one way/return	€18/35

From Malta

passenger	one way/return	Lm20/35
car	one way/return	Lm35/55
motorcycle	one way/return	Lm12/24
bicycle	one way/return	Lm6/12

SMS Travel & Tourism (Map pp58-9 ☎ 2123 2211; www.smstravel.net; 311 Triq ir-Repubblika, Valletta) is the local agent for Virtu and Ma-Re-Si services.

Grimaldi Ferries (☎ 2122 6873; www.grimaldi-ferries.com) operates a weekly service year-round from Salerno, south of Naples, calling in at Tunis en route to Malta (ie Salerno–Tunis–Malta–Salerno). There is no direct service from Malta to Tunis; travellers must sail to Salerno and wait for a service to Tunis. From Salerno, it is possible to sail on to Valencia in southern Spain. The Maltese agent for this service is **Sullivan Maritime** (☎ 2122 6873; 21/22 Triq Santa Barbara, Valletta).

Grandi Navi Veloci (☎ 2569 1600; www.gnv.it) has a similar weekly Genoa–Tunis–Malta–Genoa service. Again, you can sail directly from Tunis to Malta, but there is no service from Malta to Tunis. The local agent is **Golcher & Sons** (☎ 2569 1604; 19 Triq San Zakkarija, Valletta).

Ferry schedules tend to change from year to year, and it is best to confirm the information given here, either with the ferry company or with a travel agent.

Travellers should be aware that the Malta–Sicily catamarans do not have exchange facilities and there are none available at the Sea Passenger Terminal. Pinto Wharf, a short walk from the terminal, has a Bank of Valletta with an ATM and an **exchange bureau** (☎ 8.30am–10pm) open long hours.

At the time of research, public transport links with the ferry terminal in Floriana were poor. With luggage, you'll probably need to catch a taxi to your destination. Set fees are established – head to the information booth at Pinto Wharf (to Valletta is Lm4, to Sliema/St Julian's is Lm7). To reach Valletta with a lighter load, you could try the following: take bus 98 from the eastern end of Pinto Wharf to Valletta's City Gate (runs hourly, Lm0.15); climb up the steep hill opposite Pinto Wharf (It-Telgha Tal-Kurċifiss) and keep an eye out for the set of stairs that will take you up to the war memorial, close to City Gate; or follow the waterfront northeast, under the Lascaris Bastion, then veer left and climb the steps up at Victoria Gate.

Yacht

Malta's excellent harbour and its strategic location at the hub of the Mediterranean has led to its development as a major yachting centre. There are berths for 700 yachts (up to 18m length overall) in Msida Marina near Valletta; and Mgarr Marina on Gozo has space for over 200 boats. There are also two upmarket marinas – at the **Portomaso complex** (www.portomaso.marina.com) in St Julian's, and the **Grand Harbour Marina** (www.ghm.com.mt) in Vittoriosa.

For more information on these marinas and details of the logistics and formalities of sailing to Malta, contact the **Malta Maritime Authority** (MMA; ☎ 2133 2800; www.mma.gov.mt; Yachting Centre Directorate, Ta'Xbiex Seafront, Ta'Xbiex).

Malta's popularity with the yachting fraternity means that it is possible to make your way there as unpaid crew. Yachts tend to leave Gibraltar, southern Spain and the Balearics in April and May to head towards the popular cruising grounds of the Greek Islands and the Turkish coast. It's possible to just turn up at a marina and ask if there are any yachts looking for crew, but there are also agencies that bring together yacht owners and prospective

crew (for a fee). Check out one such agency, UK-based **Crewseekers** (☎ 01489-578 319; www.crewseekers.co.uk), which charges £60/85 for a six-/12-month membership.

TOURS

There are dozens of tour operators in the UK, Europe and North America that offer package holidays and organised tours to Malta. Package holidays, which include flights and accommodation, can offer some real bargains, particularly in winter – Malta is a year-round charter destination.

There are also many tour operators catering to a wide range of special interest groups, including walking, diving, history, archaeology, architecture and religion, and others offering holidays designed for senior travellers. The comprehensive website of the **Malta Tourism Authority** (www.visitmalta.com) allows you to search for tour operators based on country and speciality. Click on 'Getting Here', then 'Tour Operators'.

GETTING AROUND

AIR

Malta's only internal air service is the regular **helicopter link** (☎ 2156 1301; www.airgozo.com) between Malta International Airport and the heliport on Gozo at Xewkija. The flight takes only 15 minutes and services operate year-round, with between four and seven flights daily in both directions. The regular adult fare is Lm30/50 one way/return. Children, students and senior citizens (aged 61 and over) receive generous discounts on the regular fare. There's a baggage allowance of 20kg.

Reservations should be made at least 48 hours in advance through the website, Air Malta offices or any IATA travel agent. Check-in time is 45 minutes before departure, or 1½ hours if you are flying from Gozo to connect with an international flight at Malta.

BICYCLE

Malta is not a good option for a cycling holiday. Cycling on Maltese roads can be nerve-racking – the roads are often narrow and potholed, and drivers show little consideration for cyclists. Things are considerably better on Gozo – the roads are still rough, but there's far less traffic.

KARROZZIN

The *karrozzin* – a traditional horse-drawn carriage with seats for four passengers – has been in use in Malta since 1856. Many of the carriages are treasured family possessions passed down from father to son, and are cared for with obsessive pride.

You can catch a *karrozzin* in Valletta at City Gate, Pjazza San Ġorġ and Fort St Elmo, at Pinto Wharf, and at Mdina's Main Gate. There are regular reports of greedy drivers overcharging unwitting tourists. Haggle with the driver and be sure to agree on a fare before getting in. About Lm5 per person (maximum Lm10 for a carriage) is average for a tour of the local sights.

There is a cargo ferry that departs at 1pm Monday, Tuesday and Thursday from the Sa Maison wharf at Pieta Creek (below the Floriana fortifications) sailing to Mġarr. The crossing takes about 1½ hours and this service is used predominantly by heavy commercial vehicles.

The main ferry service runs between Ċirkewwa (Malta) and Mġarr (Gozo), with crossings every 45 to 60 minutes from 6am to around 8pm (and roughly every two hours throughout the night). The journey takes 25 minutes, and the return fare is Lm2/0.50 per adult/child, Lm6.75 for a car (including driver), Lm0.50 for a bicycle. Fares are marginally discounted on sailings after 8pm.

Bus 45 runs regularly between Valletta and Ċirkewwa (one way Lm0.25), and bus 25 operates between Mġarr and Victoria on Gozo (Lm0.20).

To Comino

Comino Hotel (☎ 2152 9821; www.cominohotels.com) runs its own ferry service, with around seven crossings a day from Ċirkewwa on Malta (between 7.30am and 11.30pm) and Mġarr on Gozo (between 6.15am and 10pm). Arriving and departing hotel guests are given priority on the boats and their return fare is Lm2/1 per adult/child. The ferry can also be used by nonresidents of the hotel (at a return fare of Lm3.50/1.75 per adult/child). The boats do not run from November to March, when the hotel is closed.

Independent water taxis also operate regularly to the island from these two ports – from

Mġarr (Lm3 return), and Ċirkewwa (Lm4 return). These services may run on demand in the low season.

Day trips operate to the Blue Lagoon from tourist areas like Sliema, Buġibba and Golden Bay in Malta, and Xlendi and Marsalforn in Gozo.

Valletta to Sliema

The **Marsamxetto ferry service** (☎ 2346 3862) crosses frequently between Valletta and Sliema. The crossing takes only about five minutes and there are departures every hour (every half-hour from 10am to 4pm), beginning at around 8am and finishing around 6pm. Ferries depart from Sliema on the hour and half-hour, and leave from Valletta at quarter past and quarter to the hour. The fare one way is Lm0.40.

TAXI

Official Maltese taxis are white (usually Mercedes, with a taxi sign on top). To combat regular complaints of overcharging, from mid-2006, taxi drivers must by law use the meter to determine the fare (except from the airport and seaport, where there are set fares).

Details of the fixed fares from the airport are available at the taxi desk in the arrivals hall, where you can pay in advance and hand a ticket to the driver. The fares are as follows:

destination	fare from the airport	fare from the seaport
Valletta/Floriana	Lm6.50	Lm4
Three Cities area	Lm7.50	Lm7
Mdina/Rabat	Lm8.50	Lm8
Sliema/St Julian's area	Lm8.50	Lm7
Buġibba/St Paul's Bay	Lm10.50	Lm10
Golden Bay area	Lm12.50	Lm10
Mellieħa	Lm12.50	Lm12
Ċirkewwa	Lm13.50	Lm13
Airport	Lm6	n/a

There are taxi ranks at City Gate and outside the Grand Master's Palace in Valletta, and at bus stations and major hotels in the main tourist resorts.

As an alternative to the white taxis, black taxis (with no sign on top) are owned by private companies and usually offer cheaper set fares (similar to the UK's minicabs). To order a taxi, it's best to ask at your hotel reception

for the name and number of their preferred service, or try one of the following 24-hour companies:

Belmont Garage (☎ 2155 6962) Gozo

Freephone Taxis (☎ 8007 3770)

Wembley Motors (☎ 2137 4141)

TOURS

There are loads of companies offering tours around the islands, by boat/bus/4WD or a combination of the three. Prices vary (as do what's included), so shop around. If you're pushed for time these trips can be a good way to see the highlights, but itineraries can often be rushed with little free time. Day trips to Gozo and Comino are also common.

There are dozens of tours on offer, from half-day tours to the Blue Grotto or Valletta's Sunday market, to full-day trips to the Three Cities, Mosta and Mdina, and Gozo, or evening trips to take in festa celebrations. Tours can be arranged through most hotels and travel agents.

Captain Morgan Cruises (☎ 2346 3333; www.captainmorgan.com.mt) is the biggest tour operator in the Maltese Islands and offers a wide range of boat excursions. There's a popular tour of Grand Harbour, which departs five or six times daily from March to October and costs Lm6.75/5.25 per adult/child. There is also an all-day cruise around Malta and Comino (six times a week from May to October, three times a week in March, April and November), which will set you back Lm16/10.75 per adult/child (buffet lunch included). Other options include day trips to the Blue Lagoon on Comino (from adult/child Lm7.75/5.75), a sunset cruise (adult/child Lm20.50/10.75 including buffet dinner), or a full day sailing on a catamaran (adult/child Lm26.75/16.50 including lunch). These trips depart from the Ferries area in Sliema; some trips include transfers to/from your accommodation in the price. There are also 'underwater safari' cruises (adult/child Lm5.95/4.50) out of Sliema and Buġibba, on boats with underwater viewing areas.

From March to November, Captain Morgan also offers popular chauffeur-driven jeep safaris of remote parts of Malta (adult/child Lm23/19) and Gozo (adult/child Lm26/22). Lunch is included, as is the Malta–Gozo return ferry ticket for Gozo tours. Book ahead as places are limited. For a bird's-eye view, consider a 10-minute helicopter sightseeing trip (Lm40/35, including transfers to the airport).

Alliance Cruises & Tours (☎ 2133 2165; www.alliancecruises.com) offers a program of boat tours similar to Captain Morgan, also out of Sliema. A day trip around Malta and Comino leaves four times weekly and costs Lm11.95/6.95 per adult/child, while a 1½-hour harbour cruise costs Lm6.50/4.50 (also available of an evening for the same price).

Alliance also runs bus tours taking in Gozo (adult/child Lm16.95/13), Mdina (adult/child Lm12.50/11), and the highlights of the south (Marsaxlokk, the prehistoric temples and the Blue Grotto, adult/child Lm12.50/11). Prices include transport and guide, admission fees to museums if applicable, and lunch. Alliance also have a jeep safari to out-of-the-way locations on Malta (adult/child Lm15.95/12.95) or Gozo (adult/child Lm22.50/18).

Hera Cruises (☎ 2133 0583; www.herayachtmalta.com) offers sailing trips on its two twin-mast yachts, built in Turkish *gulet* style. Sailings are from Sliema, with a half-day cruise from Sliema to Selmun Bay (including a sightseeing sail around Grand Harbour) at Lm12/7 per adult/child. A full day sailing around Malta and Comino is Lm24/13.50, including buffet lunch. Hera's 'snorkelling adventure' involves sailing from Sliema to Comino as well as snorkelling instruction from a PADI divemaster; the cost is Lm26/17.50; there's a similar tour offering diving instruction to beginners (Lm45).

Excursions to Sicily

Virtu Ferries (☎ 2122 8777; www.virtuferries.com) runs high-speed passenger catamaran services to Pozzallo and Catania (see p184) that enable travellers a day trip to Sicily. Two itineraries are possible: the first takes you on a guided tour to the active volcano, Mt Etna, and to visit the chichi town Taormina, with its ancient Greco-Roman ruins (Lm39); the second takes in Mt Etna and the baroque city Modica (Lm36).

For both tours, you join the 7am ferry from Malta, arriving in Pozzallo 1½ hours later. The return journey is at 9.30pm, getting you back to Malta at 11pm. Prices include taxes but exclude the cost of lunch. Transfers from your hotel to the port (and back again at the end of the tour) cost Lm3. You can book a trip through most hotels and travel agents in Malta.

YACHT

If you'd like to tour the Maltese Islands in class, consider chartering a yacht. See p169 for details on charter companies.

Health

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Travel health depends on your predeparture preparations, your daily health care while travelling and how you handle medical problems that do develop. Malta is a healthy place. Your main risks are likely to be sunburn, foot blisters, insect bites and mild stomach upsets.

BEFORE YOU GO

Prevention is the key to staying healthy. Planning before departure, particularly for pre-existing illnesses, will save trouble later. See your dentist before a long trip, carry a spare pair of contact lenses and glasses, and take your optical prescription. Bring medications in their original, clearly labelled, containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is also helpful. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity.

INSURANCE

Citizens of the EU, plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland, receive free or reduced-cost state-provided health care with the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) for medical treatment that becomes necessary while in Malta. The EHIC will not cover you for nonemergencies or emergency

TRAVEL HEALTH WEBSITES

It's usually a good idea to consult your government's travel health website before departure, if one is available:

Australia www.smartraveller.gov.au
Canada www.travelhealth.gc.ca
UK www.dh.gov.uk
USA www.cdc.gov/travel/

repatriation home. Each family member will need a separate card. The EHIC replaced the E111 in 2006; full details are online at http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/healthcard/.

Malta has reciprocal health agreements with Australia and the UK. Australians are eligible for subsidised health care for up to six months from their date of arrival in Malta; UK residents for up to 30 days. Details of these arrangements, the EHIC in Malta and various health services can be found on the website of the Maltese **Ministry of Health** (www.sahha.gov.mt).

If you need health insurance, strongly consider a policy covering the worst possible scenario, such as an accident requiring an emergency flight home. Find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

No vaccinations are required to travel to Malta. However, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that all travellers should be covered for diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella and polio, regardless of their destination.

INTERNET RESOURCES

The WHO's publication *International Travel and Health* is revised annually and is available online at www.who.int/ith/. Other useful websites include www.mdtravelhealth.com (travel health recommendations for every country; updated daily) and www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk (general travel advice).

IN TRANSIT

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Blood clots may form in the legs during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The main symptom of DVT is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs it may cause chest pain and breathing difficulties. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of DVT on long flights, walk about the cabin, contract the leg muscles while sitting, drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

To avoid jet lag (common when crossing more than five time zones) try drinking plenty of nonalcoholic fluids and eating light meals. Upon arrival, get exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep and so on) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine) and meclizine (Antivert, Bonine) are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. A herbal alternative is ginger.

IN MALTA

AVAILABILITY OF HEALTH CARE

High-standard health care is readily available in Malta and for minor illnesses pharmacists can give valuable advice and sell over-the-counter medication. They can also advise when more specialised help is required and point you in the right direction. There are pharmacies in most towns; these are generally open from 9am to 1pm and 4pm to 7pm Monday to Saturday. On Sundays and public holidays they open by roster in the morning – the local Sunday newspapers print details of the roster.

Malta's public general hospital is **St Luke's Hospital** (Map p84; ☎ 2124 1251, emergency 112; www.slh.gov.mt; Triq San Luqa, Gwardamanga), near Pietà (southwest of Valletta) and accessible by bus 75 from the capital. The long-delayed opening of Malta's large new hospital, Mater Dei, is now scheduled for July 2007 (but many believe there will be further delays). Mater Dei is in Tal-Qroqq, near the University of

Malta. Gozo's smaller **General Hospital** (Map 146; ☎ 2156 1600; Triq l-Arcisqof Pietru Pace, Victoria) may also be of use. GP service is also available at a network of health centres (at Floriana, Gżira, Qormi, Paola, Cospicua, Mosta, Rabat and on Gozo).

The standard of dental care is usually good; however, it is sensible to have a dental checkup before a long trip.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

Simple things like a change of water, food or climate can cause stomach upsets. If you develop diarrhoea, make sure to drink plenty of fluids, preferably with an oral rehydration solution (eg dioralyte). If diarrhoea is bloody, persists for more than 72 hours or is accompanied by fever, shaking, chills or severe abdominal pain you should seek medical attention.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS Heat Exhaustion & Heatstroke

Take care in the fierce heat of a Maltese summer. Heat exhaustion follows excessive fluid loss with inadequate replacement of fluids and salt. Symptoms include headache, dizziness and tiredness. Dehydration is already happening by the time you feel thirsty – aim to drink sufficient water to produce pale, diluted urine. To treat heat exhaustion, replace lost fluids by drinking water and/or fruit juice, and cool the body with cold water and fans.

Heatstroke is much more serious, resulting in irrational and hyperactive behaviour, and eventually loss of consciousness and death. Rapid cooling by spraying the body with water and fanning is ideal. Emergency fluid and electrolyte replacement by intravenous drip is recommended.

Insect Bites & Stings

Mosquitoes are found in most parts of Europe; they may not carry malaria but can cause irritation and infected bites. Use a DEET-based insect repellent.

Bees and wasps cause real problems only to those with a severe allergy (anaphylaxis). If you have a severe allergy to bee or wasp stings carry an 'epipen' or similar adrenaline injection.

Sandflies are found around Mediterranean beaches. They usually cause only a nasty, itchy bite but can carry a rare skin disorder called cutaneous Leishmaniasis.

Water

Malta's tap water is safe to drink but heavily chlorinated, so stick to the bottled variety if you don't like the taste. Any water in the countryside, whether from a stream or spring, is best left alone.

TRAVELLING WITH CHILDREN

If you are travelling with children you should know how to treat minor ailments and when to seek medical treatment. Make sure children are up-to-date with routine vaccinations, and discuss possible travel vaccines well before departure, as some vaccines are not suitable for children under a year.

In hot moist climates any wound or break in the skin is likely to let in infection. The area should be cleaned and kept dry. If your child has vomiting or diarrhoea, lost fluid and salts

must be replaced. It may be helpful to take rehydration powders for reconstituting with boiled water.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Emotional stress, exhaustion and travelling across time zones can all contribute to an upset in the menstrual pattern. Some antibiotics, diarrhoea and vomiting can interfere with the effectiveness of oral contraceptives and lead to the risk of pregnancy – remember to take condoms just in case. Time zones, gastrointestinal upsets and antibiotics do not affect injectable contraception.

Travelling during pregnancy is usually possible, but always consult your doctor before planning your trip. The most risky times for travel are during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy and after 30 weeks.

Language

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Malti – the native language of Malta – is a member of the Semitic language group, which also includes Arabic, Hebrew and Amharic. It's thought by some to be a direct descendant of the language spoken by the Phoenicians, but most linguists consider it to be related to the Arabic dialects of western North Africa. Malti is the only Semitic language that is written in a Latin script.

Both Malti and English are official languages in Malta, and almost everyone is bilingual. Travellers will have no trouble at all getting by in English at all times. However, it's always good to learn at least a few words of the native language, and the sections that follow will provide a basic introduction to Malti.

If you want to learn more about the language, look out for *Teach Yourself Maltese* by Joseph Aquilina or *Learn Maltese – Why Not?* by Joseph Vella. Lonely Planet's *Europe Phrasebook* has a useful Maltese section. A small range of pocket dictionaries and phrasebooks is available in bookshops in Malta. They are of variable quality and usefulness, so it's worth checking the content carefully before buying.

PRONUNCIATION

There are 29 letters in the Maltese alphabet. Individual letters aren't too difficult to pronounce once you learn the rules, but putting them together to make any kind of sense is a major achievement. Most are pronounced as they are in English. The following list highlights the trickier stuff.

ċ	as the 'ch' in 'child'
g	as in 'good'
ġ	soft, as the 'j' in 'job'
għ	silent; lengthens the preceding or following vowel
h	silent, as in 'hour'
ħ	as the 'h' in 'hand'
j	as the 'y' in 'yellow'
ij	as the 'ai' in 'aisle'
ej	as the 'ay' in 'day'
q	a glottal stop; it's like the missing 't' in the cockney pronunciation of 'bottle' (bo'ul)
x	as the 'sh' in 'shop'
z	as the 'ts' in 'bits'
ż	soft, as in 'zero'

ACCOMMODATION

Do you have any rooms available?	<i>Għad fadlilkom xi kmamar vojta?</i>
Can you show me a room?	<i>Tista' turini kamra?</i>
How much is it?	<i>Kemm hi?</i>
I'd like a room ... with one bed	<i>Nixtieq kamra ... b'sodda waħda</i>
with two beds	<i>b'zewġ sodod</i>
with en suite	<i>bil-kamra tal-banju</i>

CONVERSATION & ESSENTIALS

Hello.	<i>Merħba.</i>
Good morning/day.	<i>Bongu.</i>
Good evening.	<i>Bonswa.</i>
Goodbye.	<i>Saħħa.</i>
Yes/No.	<i>Iva/Le.</i>
Please.	<i>Jekk jogħġbok.</i>
Thank you.	<i>Grazzi.</i>
Excuse me.	<i>Skuzani.</i>
How are you?	<i>Kif inti?</i>
I'm fine, thank you.	<i>Tajjed, grazzi.</i>
Do you speak English?	<i>Titkellem bl-ingliż?</i>
What's your name?	<i>X'ismek?</i>
My name is ...	<i>Jisimni ...</i>
I love you.	<i>Inħabbok.</i>

DIRECTIONS

Where is a/the ...?	<i>Fejn hu ...?</i>
Go straight ahead.	<i>Mur dritt.</i>
Turn (left/right) near/far	<i>Dur fuq (ix-xellug/il-lemin) il-viċin/il-bogħod</i>

SIGNS

Miftuħ	Open
Magħluq	Closed
Dhul	Entrance
Ħrug	Exit
Vjalq	Avenue
Sqaq	Lane/Alley
Twaletta	Toilet
Rġiel	Men
Nisa	Women

NUMBERS

0	<i>xejn</i>
1	<i>wieħed</i>
2	<i>tnejn</i>
3	<i>tlieta</i>
4	<i>erbgha</i>
5	<i>ħamsa</i>
6	<i>sitta</i>
7	<i>sebgħa</i>
8	<i>tmienja</i>
9	<i>disgħa</i>
10	<i>għaxra</i>
11	<i>ħdax</i>
12	<i>tnax</i>
13	<i>tlettax</i>
14	<i>erbatax</i>
15	<i>ħmistax</i>
16	<i>sittax</i>
17	<i>sbatax</i>
18	<i>tmintax</i>
19	<i>dsatax</i>
20	<i>għoxrin</i>
30	<i>tletin</i>
40	<i>erbghin</i>
50	<i>ħamsin</i>
60	<i>sittin</i>
70	<i>sebgħin</i>
80	<i>tmienin</i>
90	<i>disgħin</i>
100	<i>mija</i>
1000	<i>elf</i>

SHOPPING & SERVICES

How much is it?	<i>Kemm?</i>
What time does it open/close?	<i>Fix'ħin jiftah/jagħlaq?</i>

... embassy	<i>ambaxxata ...</i>
bank	<i>bank</i>
chemist/pharmacy	<i>ispizerija</i>
hotel	<i>hotel/il-lukanda</i>
market	<i>suq</i>

EMERGENCIES

Help!	<i>Ajjut!</i>
Call a doctor!	<i>Qibgħad għat-tabib!</i>
Police!	<i>Pulizija!</i>
I'm lost.	<i>Ninsab mitluf.</i>
ambulance	<i>ambulans</i>
hospital	<i>sptar</i>

post office	<i>posta</i>
public telephone	<i>telefon pubbliku</i>
shop	<i>ħanut</i>

TIME & DATES

What's the time?	<i>X'ħin hu?</i>
today	<i>illum</i>
tomorrow	<i>ghada</i>
yesterday	<i>il-bieraħ</i>
morning	<i>fil-ghodu</i>
afternoon	<i>wara nofs in-nhar</i>

Monday	<i>it-tnejn</i>
Tuesday	<i>it-tlieta</i>
Wednesday	<i>l-erbgha</i>
Thursday	<i>il-ħamis</i>
Friday	<i>il-gimgħa</i>
Saturday	<i>is-sibt</i>
Sunday	<i>il-ħadd</i>

January	<i>Jannar</i>
February	<i>Frar</i>
March	<i>Marzu</i>
April	<i>April</i>
May	<i>Mejju</i>
June	<i>Ġunju</i>
July	<i>Lulju</i>
August	<i>Awissu</i>
September	<i>Settembru</i>
October	<i>Ottubru</i>
November	<i>Novembru</i>
December	<i>Dicembru</i>

TRANSPORT

When does the boat leave/arrive?	<i>Meta jitlaq/jasal il-vapur?</i>
When does the bus leave/arrive?	<i>Meta titlaq/jasal il-karozza?</i>
I'd like to hire a car/bicycle.	<i>Nixtieq nikri karozza/rota.</i>
left luggage	<i>hallejt il-bagalji</i>
I'd like a ... ticket.	<i>Nixtieq bijett ...</i>
one-way	<i>'one-way'</i>
return	<i>'return'</i>

Glossary

See also the Language chapter (p195) for an introduction to the Malti language and some useful phrases for travellers, and the Food & Drink chapter (p51) for an explanation of delicious and intriguing Maltese specialities.

AFM – Armed Forces of Malta

auberge – the residence of an individual langue of the Knights of St John

bajja – bay

bastion – a defensive work with two faces and two flanks, projecting from the line of the rampart

belt – city

bieb – gate

cavalier – a defensive work inside the main fortification, rising above the level of the main rampart to give covering fire

ċimiterju – cemetery

curtain – a stretch of rampart linking two bastions, with a parapet along the top

daħla – creek

dawret – bypass

demi-bastion – a half-bastion with only one face and one flank

dgħajsa – a traditional oar-powered boat

fešta – feast day

fortizza – fort

foss – ditch

għajn – spring (of water)

għar – cave

għnien – garden

kajjik – fishing boat

kappillan – parish priest

karrozzin – traditional horse-drawn carriage

kastell – castle

katidral – cathedral

kbira – big, main

knisja – church

kwartier – quarter, neighbourhood

langue – a division of the Knights of St John, based on nationality

luzzu – fishing boat

marsa – harbour

medina – fortified town, citadel

mina – arch, gate

misraħ – square

mithna – windmill

muzew – museum

palazzo – Italian term for palace or mansion

parroċċa – parish

passeggiata – evening stroll (Italian term)

pjazza – square

plajja – beach, seashore

pont – bridge

pulizija – police

rabat – town outside the walls of a citadel

ramla – bay, beach

ras – point, headland

razzett – farm, farmhouse

sqaq – alley, lane

sur – bastion

suq – market

tarag – stairs, steps

telgħa – hill

torri – tower, castle

triq – street, road

vedette – a lookout point, watchtower

vjal – avenue

wied – valley

xatt – wharf, marina

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