

MALTA

ENDLESS MIX
OF EXPERIENCES



International
Konzepts

Forbes AUSTRIA

MALTA



© MTA

A SUN-BATHED MEDITERRANEAN ISLAND NATION THAT CAN BE EXPLORED IN SUMMER OR WINTER

The Maltese archipelago has been attracting international travelers for millennia. According to Carlo Micallef, CEO of Malta Tourism Authority (MTA), “Today, tourists are drawn to Malta for its rich heritage, vibrant culture, clear seas, beautiful landscapes, amazing gastronomy and year-round appeal.”

Spanning only 316 square kilometers, its three stunning islands — Malta that is home to most of the 550,000-strong population, smaller Gozo and tiny Comino — contain hundreds of historical treasures to explore. They include megalithic temples and an underground labyrinth that are among the world’s oldest man-made structures, as well as evocative reminders of how the Phoenicians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans, Knights of St. John, French, British and other civilizations who have called the islands home lived, worshipped and fought. This diverse heritage has made Malta a dynamic cultural melting pot, a fact that is especially evident in the waterfront capital, Valletta, which was built in the 16th century.

Beyond its friendly cities, towns and villages, Malta offers sandy beaches, rolling hills, agricultural plains and rugged cliffs that are ideal for relaxation, outdoor activities and sports. The Mediterranean archipelago is also, unsurprisingly, a perfect destination for water-sport lovers, with first-class ports, marinas and over 120 dive sites, such as the famous Blue and Crystal Lagoons.

Thanks to Malta’s plethora of diverse experiences, it welcomed a record-breaking 3.56 million travelers in 2024, 19.5% up on 2023’s figure. “We’re proud to be among the top tourism performers in the Mediterranean and Europe, and even more proud that visitors continue to choose Malta for both quality and experience. All our tourism source markets have shown strong growth, especially in winter. Over 1 million tourists visited Malta between January and April 2025, a 20% increase compared to 2024. What’s even more encouraging is that spending is growing at an even faster rate,” he reveals. “In the past few years, we’ve focused on growing tourism in the winter. Rather than seeing sharp spikes in peak months, we’re encouraging slower summer growth and stronger figures in winter. Luckily, our mild climate makes Malta an exceptional year-round destination.”

Indeed, the islands enjoy over 300 days of sunshine every year, many of their outdoor attractions are best experienced in cooler and less busy months and MTA has ensured every season is packed with exciting sporting and cultural events and festivals.

Austrians and Germans are increasingly taking advantage of Malta’s great weather: in 2024, it received about 63,200 Austrian tourists, 21.8% more than in 2023, while the number traveling from Germany — the nation’s fifth-largest source market — rose 13.8% to almost 250,000. “Visitors from these countries tend to seek heritage, history and active travel — enjoying countryside walks and rural areas like Gozo and the northern part of the island of Malta, rather than pool-side vacations,” Micallef explains. “We’re delighted with their growing interest.” The CEO notes that MTA is working hard to ensure

“Tourists are drawn to Malta for its rich heritage, vibrant culture, clear seas, beautiful landscapes, amazing gastronomy and year-round appeal.”

Carlo Micallef, CEO, Malta Tourism Authority

more Austrians and Germans discover Malta: “Our offices in Frankfurt and Vienna collaborate closely with tour operators and group organizers, create strong campaigns tailored to each market, and actively engage with both the trade and the public to promote Malta’s sustainability, which is important for German-speaking markets.”

The authority has also strived to make it easy for people from Austria and Germany to reach the islands. Among about 120 global destinations now connected to Malta International Airport are Vienna and eight German cities, which are served by direct flights from Austrian Airlines, Lufthansa, KM Malta Airlines, Ryanair and Eurowings. As Micallef says: “Malta’s true value can only be appreciated by visiting. I invite trade professionals and media to see it for themselves, and welcome tourists to experience a warm, authentic Mediterranean location.”



‘MALTA IS LIKE A ZIP FILE, WITH LAYERS OF DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES’

In the following interview, Carlo Micallef, CEO of the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA), reflects on a country that has broad appeal for global tourists, due to its constantly good climate, layered culture and history, fabulous natural environments and increasingly diverse attractions.

From cruise travel to luxury, sports, activity and business tourism, Malta has positioned itself as a high-value destination. Which emerging tourism segments show the most promise for the islands?

Malta is like a zip file, with layers of different experiences — it’s not the typical Mediterranean island people expect, and many visitors and industry insiders are surprised by how much it offers. It’s a unique blend — a cosmopolitan city atmosphere within a relaxed island setting. Nowhere else offers such a mix: from world-class dining to local or international cultural events every weekend. Thanks to strategic efforts to improve flight connectivity and invest in attractions, we’ve succeeded in bringing many high-profile artists, exhibitions and experiences to Malta.

Sports tourism is a key area for growth that we are strongly promoting, from yachting and diving to other sea activities. Malta boasts some of the cleanest waters in the Mediterranean with excellent visibility. Our diving sector is expected to have its best summer ever this year, with many centers being fully booked up months in advance. Growth isn’t limited to the sea — there has also been investment in land sports like football training, water polo and a new tennis and padel center. Another market with huge potential is our thriving meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions sector, due to Malta’s connectivity, central location, English-speaking environment, professional suppliers and plans to invest in new facilities.

Beyond this, our strategy is to constantly innovate and reveal new layers of Malta, a destination rich in stories, culture and resilience. For example, we’re expanding into sectors like military, faith, wellness and gastronomic tourism that embraces everything from Michelin-starred restaurants to authentic home cooking. Malta’s lifestyle is warm and welcoming; visitors don’t stay isolated here, they mix freely with the Maltese population, creating a unique experience where tourists leave the country feeling like locals.

MTA serves as the regulator, promoter and product developer for Malta’s tourism sector. What would you consider to be the authority’s most significant recent accomplishment and what are your core current goals for the industry?

With over 200 employees, MTA handles everything from product development and regulation to quality assurance, marketing and flight connectivity, which is vital as 99% of our visitors arrive by air. We act as a catalyst for tourism growth, working with the private sector to support events — from music and sports to conferences.

One crucial recent milestone for us was overcoming the pandemic, with strong support from the government and private sector. We



Carlo Micallef, CEO, Malta Tourism Authority

used that downtime to connect creatively with the public: sharing Maltese recipes, virtual tours, behind-the-scenes stories and lesser-known local spots. This kept Malta top of mind. When tourism resumed in 2022, the response was stronger than expected and we reached full recovery by the end of 2023, a year ahead of forecast.

Now, we need to manage visitor numbers and distribute them more evenly across the year and country to ease pressure on infrastructure and ensure long-term balance, as well as the sector’s continued sustainable growth. We aim to attract tourists to Malta’s unique offerings, balancing demand with our resources, limiting

“It’s a unique blend — a cosmopolitan city atmosphere within a relaxed island setting. Nowhere else offers such a mix.”

Carlo Micallef, CEO, Malta Tourism Authority

high-impact tourism and focusing more on low-impact, sustainable travel. As part of that, we’re shifting Malta’s tourism sector toward climate-friendly practices, promoting leading international certification programs like those from the Global Sustainable Tourism Council and Green Key.

Malta has seen double-digit annual growth in the number of Austrians and Germans visiting the islands over the past few years. What message would you like to send to other travelers from those countries who are considering a Mediterranean vacation in the near future?

Our message is clear: explore more flavors, more stories, more romance in Malta. It is personal and action-driven, we don’t use a one-size-fits-all approach — our campaigns are tailored by market and audience segment. Malta will never compete on price. Instead, we compete on quality, and we aim to continue to exceed the expectations of every visitor.



Malta hosts regattas and other sporting events throughout the year



Unique accomodation offers abound on the islands

A GROWING BUSINESS TOURISM SPOT

Malta’s unbeatable year-round climate and expansive air connectivity, with most major European cities being less than three hours away, have helped make the archipelago a prime destination for meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions (MICE) and other events over the past decade. “For the business community, Malta is ideal for corporate events. It’s just a short flight from Austria and Germany, for example, and offers excellent value for money,” confirms the CEO of Malta Tourism Authority (MTA), Carlo Micallef.

Furthermore, the country’s diminutive size and great transport infrastructure mean its wide variety of world-class MICE venues are easily and quickly reached from the international airport that is located only 20 minutes from the capital Valletta. Those indoor and outdoor venues guarantee uniquely memorable experiences and range from Neolithic temples to historic forts, medieval castles, Baroque palaces, luxury sea vessels, contemporary art museums, excellent hotels of all types and modern conference centers. This diversity ensures that Malta can cater to any kind of event and technological requirement.

One of the islands’ largest facilities is the Mediterranean Conference Centre, which fills an impressive 8,000-square-meter building overlooking Valletta’s Grand Harbour. Originally constructed by the Knights of St. John in the 16th century, a €10.5-million project to modernize, restore and expand the MCC was completed last year. Malta Fairs and Conventions Centre is even bigger and equally versatile. It covers more than 22,000 square meters and hosts many different sorts of events, including concerts with up to 10,000 participants, trade exhibitions and international government meetings.

Despite the flexibility of the country’s venues, it regularly has to turn down requests from organizers of very expansive global conferences due to size constraints. “Therefore, the government plans to

invest in a larger multipurpose congress center to increase the capacity of events we can hold, as we see strong opportunities in expos and exhibitions hosting thousands of attendees,” Micallef reveals.

Combining work with pleasure

International businesses and other entities planning events in the archipelago benefit from the one-stop-shop tailored services of MTA’s dedicated Incentives and Meetings department, as well as the in-depth knowledge of experienced destination management firms based in the country. They can create event itineraries to suit any interest or number of people, which make the most of Malta’s countless historical, cultural and natural attractions. Just a few illustrations of the potential team-building activities available are wine tasting in

“Malta is ideal for corporate events. It’s just a short flight from Austria and Germany, for example, and offers excellent value for money.”

Carlo Micallef, CEO, Malta Tourism Authority

vineyards, immersive moonlit tours around the islands’ three UNESCO World Heritage Sites, wellness retreats, hikes through tranquil countryside, learning to sail on yachts with onboard catering, craft workshops with renowned local artists and culinary classes lead by Maltese chefs.

According to Micallef, his authority will continue to encourage the archipelago’s advancing status as a location for international business events: “MTA is focused on developing MICE tourism, which tends to bring higher yields and puts less strain on Malta’s infrastructure than leisure tourism.”

SOPHISTICATED, HIGH-END LUXURY VENUES APPEAL TO A NEW TYPE OF VISITOR

The Maltese islands are rapidly becoming a hotspot for luxury tourism and the Malta Tourism Authority is investing to encourage more discerning travelers to the country.

“We’re targeting higher-value visitors by focusing on specialized travel segments and unique experiences. One of our central strategies for developing the archipelago’s tourism sector is promoting authentic Maltese and Gozitan experiences and showcasing our true heritage. This includes supporting local farmers, food producers and artisans to preserve traditions like olive-oil pressing, winemaking and crafts such as embroidery and woodworking,” MTA CEO Carlo Micallef explains.

“Through partnerships with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Malta Food Agency, we’ve developed curated experiences that connect visitors with rural life — such as collecting eggs, cheese making or visiting artisan villages like Ta’ Qali and Birgu. We’re keeping these activities small-scale and authentic to protect their value and support local communities.” As Micallef points out, “These experiences particularly appeal to higher-spending leisure tourists looking for a deeper, more meaningful connection to a destination.”

Vacationers looking for luxury can also take advantage of specialist agents providing bespoke travel services covering everything from chartering private planes, chauffeurs, yachts, catamarans, guides, chefs and diving instructors to organizing personalized individual visits to historic and cultural attractions; securing tickets to in-demand events and festivals; and ensuring guests can quietly relax when arriving and before leaving the country in Malta International Airport’s tranquil VIP lounge that sits just outside its main terminal.

“One of our central strategies for developing the archipelago’s tourism sector is promoting authentic Maltese and Gozitan experiences and showcasing our true heritage.”

Carlo Micallef, CEO, Malta Tourism Authority

“Luxury tourism is the icing on the cake for Malta, but we’re seeing an increasing number of high-net-worth visitors coming here, many of whom are discovering what the islands offer on social media, through which we actively engage with key influencers who can reach these individuals with targeted luxury marketing,” he notes. “It’s a growing sector, which is reflected by the fact that brands like Four Seasons and Six Senses are now showing interest in investing here,” he notes.

Five-star hotels match the world’s best for quality

The islands already contain plenty of first-rate luxurious accommodation options for visitors, including boutique hotels, exclusive seaside resorts, grand villas and remote restored farmhouses. Many of the best are in Valletta, Sliema and St Julian’s, three areas that also highlight Malta’s vibrant, sophisticated nightlife and restaurants that include seven Michelin-starred gems.



The 4,000-year-old city of Mdina exudes quiet elegance

As an indication of the quality of the country’s hotels, 23 of them are featured in the latest Forbes Travel Guide, the leading worldwide rating system for luxury tourism providers, which published its 2025 Star Awards in February. At the forefront of Malta’s offerings — according to FTG’s independent judges — is Iniala Harbour House and Residences, one of just 336 hotels across the globe to be ranked as a Forbes five-star outstanding property. Iniala’s stunningly designed rooms and suites have occupied a terrace of restored 16th-century buildings beside the capital’s harbor since 2021, and the hotel is also home to Simon Rogan’s Ion Harbour, the islands’ first restaurant to win two Michelin stars.

Three other Maltese hotels received a four-star excellent classification from Forbes this year: Phoenicia Malta, an art-deco luxury retreat in Valletta with its own spa and vegetable gardens; Corinthia Palace Malta, a historic inland villa; and the Westin Dragonara Resort, which can be found on the seafront of a private peninsula near St. Julian’s and offers a gym, casino and five restaurants.

Malta’s strong showing in the 2025 FTG rankings demonstrates that the tiny archipelago’s hospitality sector has embraced the evolving demands of today’s luxury travelers. When the guide’s global results were announced, Amanda Frasier, its president of Standards and Ratings, said: “This year’s list reflects the changing landscape of luxury with properties setting the standard for authentic experiences, unparalleled amenities, enhanced wellbeing and the delivery of unforgettable moments. We are thrilled to recognize their dedication to creating world-class experiences for today’s discerning guest.”

FIVE SURPRISING FACTS YOU DIDN’T KNOW ABOUT MALTA



Malta enjoys 3,000 sunshine hours per year, which is around 1,000 more than Austria



The country covers 24% less land than Vienna, making it easy to explore its many attractions



16th-century Valletta is the EU’s smallest capital and a UNESCO World Heritage Site



A shipwreck brought St. Paul to the islands, which now contain 359 churches



Malta was crowned best place in the world for diving at boot Düsseldorf 2025

MALTA'S BAYS RATED 'EXCELLENT': AMONG EUROPE'S CLEANEST WATERS

In January, the Maltese archipelago was named this year's best global destination for diving at the dive awards held in Germany as part of the world's biggest trade fair for yachts and water sports.

"Malta's boot Düsseldorf 2025 award recognizes our dedication to continuously improving diving experiences, quality in tourism and environmental sustainability," asserts the CEO of Malta Tourism Authority (MTA), Carlo Micallef.

Describing the islands as "the diving paradise in the Mediterranean," the award judges noted that "a mild climate, short distances to the diving spots and excellent underwater visibility make Malta, Gozo and Comino an ideal destination for divers of all levels of experience." In addition, they highlighted Malta's wealth of marine biodiversity and vast variety of dive spots. Among the 120-plus available are numerous wrecks, including a Phoenician ship that sunk about 2,700 years ago, vessels that fought in World War II and Luftwaffe planes. Other options allow divers to explore pristine reefs or underwater caves, such as those in Comino's spectacular Crystal Lagoon.

"Malta's boot Düsseldorf 2025 award recognizes our dedication to continuously improving diving experiences, quality in tourism and environmental sustainability."

Carlo Micallef, CEO, Malta Tourism Authority

The archipelago also stands out for the support and infrastructure provided for divers, with two decompression chambers on hand and more than 40 certified diving schools that can instruct people on how to dive safely without damaging ocean ecosystems.

Environmental protection is a major focus on the islands. For example, a large marine national park has been established, while the MTA has banned plastics on the glorious beaches it manages and is planning to enforce a no-smoking rule. As a result of these and other measures, the European Environment Agency rated the quality of 92% of Malta's bathing waters as "excellent" in 2024 and 13 of its beaches have received prestigious Blue Flag awards for cleanliness this year.



The archipelago's clear and calm seas are perfect for water sports

The pristine clarity of the country's calm waters has made it a preferred location for a whole raft of other watersports, with particularly popular activities being kayaking, parasailing, fishing, windsurfing and snorkeling in locations like the world-famous Blue Lagoon in Comino. Experienced swimmers also enthuse about the 6-kilometer route between the island of Malta and Gozo, which allows for a pit-stop at Comino that lies between its two larger sisters.

Active adventures in paradise

Malta's efforts to protect and invest in its natural environments extend inland — about 13% of the country is covered by nature reserves and national parks, making it a great place to enjoy outdoor activities. One of its most remarkable open spaces is Majjistral Nature and History Park on the rugged north coast, which contains ecological habitats of international importance, as well as ancient tombs, watchtowers and other historic structures.

Throughout Malta's countryside there are an ever-growing number of hiking trails and cycle paths that are well-signposted and maintained, while its dramatic cliffs offer hundreds of different adventures for climbers, abseilers and zipliners, while its ever-growing number of hiking trails and cycle paths are well-signposted and maintained.

On top of this, MTA and other local stakeholders have established a range of large-scale outdoor sporting events. Open to global amateurs and professionals, they mainly take place in cooler months, and run from obstacle races to marathons, triathlons and mountain bike challenges, with the biggest being the annual La Valette Marathon, which attracted over 4,000 runners from 65 countries to its March 2025 edition.

The country has also invested in first-class facilities for sports like football, tennis, water polo, golf, road cycling and athletics, which has helped turn Malta into a key off-season training-camp destination for leading international sports squads such as Manchester United and the Italian cyclists Team Polti VisitMalta, both of which are sponsored by the MTA brand VisitMalta. That "underscores our commitment to promoting Malta as an ideal destination for sport and adventure tourism," according to Micallef. "This collaboration allows us to engage with new international audiences, offer unique experiences to athletes and highlight Malta's year-round tourism potential."

HISTORIC COASTLINE AND CONSTANT BREEZE MAKE MALTA A DREAM DESTINATION FOR SAILORS

Last year, a record 940,000-plus tourists arrived or left Malta on one of the 357 cruise ships that docked in Valletta Cruise Port, a facility that was crowned Best Global Port of Call at Europe's largest travel fair FITUR in 2025 — the third consecutive time it has received this accolade.

A core element in the port's appeal is its peerless setting in the capital's natural deep-water Grand Harbour, above which stands the magnificent fortified city that has been awarded UNESCO World Heritage Site status. This location at the heart of Valletta brings unforgettable views for cruise passengers and means they can quickly walk into the city to discover its treasures when their ships reach port. Those wanting to explore some of Malta's other attractions are also in luck — very few are more than an hour from the capital.

The port's infrastructure and services are second to none too. It is owned by Global Ports Holding that has invested significantly in renovating the historic buildings lining the port, which are now occupied by bustling restaurants, bars and shops, as well as in modernizing the facility and expanding its capacity for handling large vessels. In partnership with the Maltese government and the European Union, the operator has also installed shore-to-ship electric power connectivity at the port's five quays, allowing boats to turn off their fossil-fuel engines when docked — making the archipelago the first destination in the Mediterranean to offer cruise ships green energy and noticeably improving air-quality levels in the capital.

Valletta's efficiency and green credentials, as well as strong collaborative support for the cruise sector from stakeholders such as Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) has made it a trusted stopping point for world-leading operators, such as Carnival Corporation, MSC Cruises, Norwegian Cruise Lines, Royal Caribbean Cruises, Ritz-Carlton

"Yacht races have established themselves as iconic events in the Maltese calendar, attracting thousands of visitors from across the globe."

Carlo Micallef, CEO, Malta Tourism Authority

and Viking Cruises. As a result of Malta's central position in the Mediterranean, those lines include it in a wide variety of itineraries, from ones focused on the west that might also take in Spain, Italy or France, to routes incorporating eastern countries like Turkey, Greece, Cyprus and Croatia.

This versatility has encouraged companies to use Valletta for homeporting and MTA is forecasting that about 160,000 cruise travelers will begin and end their trips in Malta this year. The authority is keen to persuade other lines to homeport. "We would like to attract additional high-quality mid-size ships, for example, and an American-market operator. That could bring in enough passengers to support regular direct flights between Malta and the U.S., which we don't have at the moment," explains MTA CEO Carlo Micallef.

Cruise enthusiasts from Europe have no such problem: Malta International Airport welcomes flights from dozens of locations on the continent, including Vienna and various German cities. Just as



Approaching Valletta by boat is an unforgettable experience

conveniently, the airport is only 7 kilometers from Valletta's port, although a large proportion of tourists prefer to spend a few days immersing themselves in Malta before or after their marine adventures.

Multifaceted yachting experiences

Cruise travelers are not the only visitors to the archipelago that choose to base themselves on its clear, calm azure seas: Malta has Europe's largest yacht registry and is a key hub for sailing, with first-class marinas that can moor, service and hire out boats. One benefit of yachting is that it provides the opportunity to uncover secluded beaches, coves and caves around Malta's approximately 200-kilometer coastline, which is also peppered with historic towns, ancient remains and traditional fishing villages.

The country's status in the sailing world has made it a center for related sports as well. "Yacht races have established themselves as iconic events in the Maltese calendar, attracting thousands of visitors from across the globe," Micallef comments. The best-known of those is October's 975-kilometer Rolex Middle Sea Race, one of the three most important competitions of its length worldwide, which runs from Valletta to Sicily and back. 2024's event attracted 112 participants from diverse countries. "It was the usual amazing, multifaceted Rolex Middle Sea Race," said Carl-Peter Forster after he had captained Germany's Red Bandit to first place. Newcomer Scallywag from Hong Kong picked up the fastest-monohull trophy. Its skipper, David Witt, enthused: "This is a really prestigious race, a fantastic race, and we would love to come back and do it again."



© MTA



© MTA

Malta contains a plethora of great indoor and outdoor restaurants

MALTA'S CUISINE EARNS 43 MICHELIN MENTIONS

Three things make Malta's cuisine stand out. The first is a unique fusion of flavors that stems from its rich cultural heritage, with particularly strong influences coming from Provence's Knights of St. John, Italy, the Middle East and North Africa.

Ingredient quality is the second: the islands have easy access to plentiful fresh-off-the-boat fish, while their warm sunny climate allows livestock to thrive outdoors and multiple Mediterranean vegetables, fruit, herbs and grains to reach their full delicious potential. Natural sea salt, olive oils and honey are also millennia-old specialties, to the extent that the ancient Greeks named the country Melite, meaning "place of honey."

Furthermore, Maltese fishermen, farmers and artisan food producers are dedicated to sustainability, and due to the country's small size, "farm-to-fork" isn't just a buzz phrase in Malta — much of what is served in its eateries really will have traveled only a few kilometers from where it was lovingly harvested.

"[Michelin recognition] underscores the incredible talent and innovation within our culinary community. These accolades reinforce Malta's position as a must-visit destination for food enthusiasts."

Carlo Micallef, CEO, Malta Tourism Authority

Some of the many exceptional traditional foods that utilize the archipelago's produce are spicy Maltese pork sausages, sourdough breads and sheep- or goat-milk gbejna cheeselets, which are created individually in small reed baskets. Slightly more elaborate recipes include bigilla dip made from mashed broad beans, olive oil and chili flakes; grilled local lampuki fish with tomato, caper and olive sauce; rabbit stewed in wine; and pastizzi, a ubiquitous flaky pastry with sweet or savory fillings such as ricotta or mashed peas. Another outstanding snack is Gozo's ftira, a wood-oven-baked ring-shaped bread stuffed with various local ingredients that features on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List.

Freshly caught seafood is a key ingredient in Maltese gastronomy

Any meal in Malta is best accompanied by a glass of wine from one of its vineyards. The archipelago's history in winemaking spans 3,000 years, and today it is home to about 12 wineries producing full-bodied reds, crisp fruity whites, rosés and sparkling wines from the indigenous gellewza and girgentina grapes, plus international varieties. Although a limited annual output of around 1.5 million bottles means very little is exported, the global wine community has started to appreciate the sea-breeze-infused quality of its vintages.

The third aspect of Maltese gastronomy that makes it stand out is the abundance of places there are to sample it — from bakeries and other retail specialists to street stalls, markets, café terraces on historic squares, family-owned restaurants with authentic home cooking, and Michelin-starred outlets.

Among the most memorable experiences are dinners organized by the Taste History project, which see local chefs and archival experts recreating recipes from Malta's past. Another is the Sunday fish market at Marsaxlokk, the country's oldest port that was established by the Phoenicians. The painted luzzu fishing boats they introduced still sail around the picturesque harbor, which is lined with seafood restaurants. Alternatively, tourists can head to the source of the archipelago's best food and drink products, as a wide range of farms and vineyards provide immersive experiences involving, for instance, cheese or honey making, wine tasting and olive-oil pressing.

Rising star in the global gastronomic community

The distinctive quality of the achipelago's cuisine is gaining increasing worldwide attention. For example, Austrian national broadcaster ORF2's culinary program Silvia kocht has recently been filming at iconic foodie locations on the islands, and the results will be aired in a week-long series of episodes this October.

In addition, the number of chefs being recognized by Michelin keeps rising. The 2025 edition of its guide to the country recommends 43 diverse restaurants, with ION Harbour in Valletta retaining its two 2 stars, six others being awarded one and five attaining Bib Gourmand status. When the guide was published, Malta Tourism Authority's CEO Carlo Micallef said that it "underscores the incredible talent and innovation within our culinary community. These accolades reinforce Malta's position as a must-visit destination for food enthusiasts." International Michelin Guide Director Gwendal Poullennec agreed: "With a strong, perpetually growing culinary identity, Malta asserts its place on the global gastronomic map."

ISLAND OF INCLUSION AND OPENNESS

The multicultural archipelago's warm embrace of diversity and open community were recognized last year when Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) won the leading luxury travel club Aspire's Inclusive Initiative Award for, among other things, making the islands' attractions as accessible as possible to people of all abilities, and its enthusiastic hosting of EuroPride in 2023. According to MTA CEO Carlo Micallef, the prize "reflects our dedication to creating a destination that is as inviting as it is inclusive. We are committed to continuing these efforts and providing memorable experiences for every visitor."

Malta's progressive social and legislative environments have also brought it top spot on the ILGA Rainbow Europe Index for nine years in a row, which has made it a sought-after destination for LGBTQ+ travelers and weddings, while the national Pride celebration that take place in September is one of the biggest events in the country's annual calendar.

It is far from the only one, however: there are diverse festivities taking place throughout the year across the islands that welcome visitors of any age, race, religion, ability, gender or sexual orientation — not just to attend, but to participate. Many of them are rooted in Malta's extensive cultural traditions, including the week-long "festas" each village holds to commemorate their individual patron saint, when all their inhabitants take to the streets. Most of these take place during spring and summer months, and they typically incorporate

© MTA



The country tops the ILGA Rainbow Europe Index

services in decorated historic churches, lively processions, marching bands, fireworks, and lots of food and drink.

On top of that, Malta offers a packed agenda of festivals celebrating everything from sports, foods, wines and nature to national and international music of all genres, dance, theater, art and other cultural activities, many of which are free to the public. One of the most magical is Notte Bianca, or White Night. Held on the first Saturday in October, Valletta's museums and galleries keep their doors open, there are art performances and concerts in the capital's illuminated streets and squares, and cafés are buzzing into the early hours.

Below, we shine a light on a few more of Malta's inclusive festivals.



MALTA INTERNATIONAL FIREWORKS FESTIVAL

While pyrotechnics are synonymous with all the country's celebrations, April's Malta International Firework Festival brings an outstanding chance to experience the full creative genius of its many experts in the craft. The Knights of St. John introduced fireworks to Malta and they are embedded in its culture. Today, it is home to 35 firework factories that are operated by skilled volunteers from their neighborhoods.

During the 12-night-long festival, the factories compete against other local and international teams, putting on dazzling displays that are judged for creativity, color, synchronization with music and technique. These awe-inspiring events take place at various landmark sites, including Valletta's Grand Harbour, with the bars and restaurants on that waterfront offering some of the best views of the unforgettable spectacles.



MALTA CARNIVAL

Carnival has been among the most popular festivities in Malta for about five centuries. Like other nations that celebrate over five days before Lent, the carnivals in Malta and Gozo involve vibrant street parties, dance competitions, parades, marching bands, copious food and extravagant costumes.

However, some aspects of the country's events are unique and rooted in heritage. One key characteristic is satire, with papier-mâché masks, elaborately decorated floats and the hysterical Qarçilla wedding performance, for instance, all mocking famous people and current affairs. Another essential tradition to experience is the gos-tra, in which competitors strive to climb a long grease-covered pole that has been planted in the sea. The Maltese enjoy carnival so much, a new summer version has been introduced, which is held in August.



VALLETTA GREEN FESTIVAL

Valletta Green Festival is a relatively new event, but one that has quickly established itself in Malta's annual calendar. It takes place over a week in May, when St. George's Square — the capital's vast main plaza that is lined by fascinating architecture from the 16th to 19th centuries — as well as streets and squares around it are transformed into a magical green natural garden.

For 2025's event, St. George's Square alone contained more than 18,000 diverse flowering plants, shrubs and trees for the public to explore, with the garden's design also incorporating fountains and shady walkways. The festival's wider activities include an eco-friendly street market where Maltese artisans display hand-made sustainable products, dance performances and workshops from organizations that are promoting environmental protection.

WHERE MILITARY HERITAGE IS A TOURISM ASSET

Malta’s strategic location at the center of the Mediterranean made it a fought-over prize for civilizations from the Bronze Ages through the Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs, Normans, Knights of St. John, Ottomans, French, British and both sides in the two World Wars.

As a result, “It’s a living museum of global military history,” says Carlo Micallef, CEO of Malta Tourism Authority. The MTA and other stakeholders, such as Heritage Malta, Malta Heritage Trust and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), have opened up numerous sites and interactive museums to illuminate this history.

Among the most imposing demonstrations of Malta’s unique military heritage are the watchtowers lining its coastlines and the vast fortifications in key locations that were built by the Knights of St. John in the 1500s. One iconic structure is Fort St. Elmo on the tip of Valletta’s Grand Harbour, where six knights mounted a brave defense during 1565’s Great Siege of Malta, when the country was attacked by 200 Ottoman ships and 40,000 soldiers. Today, tourists can experience reenactments of the knights’ last stand at the fort, which also holds the extensive National War Museum.

Having won the battle, the Knights of St. John fortified the entire city, with one fascinating relic from this period being the world’s oldest saluting gun battery that is still fired almost every day. Outside the capital, other notable 16th-century military features include St. Thomas Tower in Marsaskala, the islands’ tallest watchtower and home to a museum covering their pirate heritage, and the magnificent fortified hill-top city of Cittadella in Gozo.

Central participant in the two world wars

Napoleon’s occupation of Malta between 1798 and 1800 is evident at Fort Manoel, an ornately Baroque facility on an island in Valletta’s harbor, which the French turned into a garrison. The British continued to use it for military purposes after they helped oust the French, until it was decommissioned in 1964 when Malta gained its independence.

Victorian Britain modernized and strengthened defenses throughout an archipelago that was a vital base for its navy. One excellent place to explore this era is Fort Rinella. Built in the 1880s, the garrison retains many original features, including the world’s largest-ever muzzle-loading gun.

Malta continued to be a hub for the U.K.’s naval forces in World War I, a campaign that also saw the country act as “the nurse of the



The Siege Bell Memorial commemorates those who died during WWII

Mediterranean,” due to its 27 hospitals that treated over 130,000 wounded or sick servicemen from battlegrounds like Gallipoli. In addition, the islands housed approximately 2,000 prisoners of war from Germany, Austria, Hungary and other nations in various camps, with one famous resident being Karl Doenitz, who decades later became German Chancellor following Hitler’s death.

During World War II, Valletta was a critical base for Britain’s launch of maritime and air-based attacks, and from 1943 it played the same role for the Allied Forces led by U.S. General Dwight Eisenhower. Below the capital is a huge well-preserved underground complex that was the headquarters for those forces’ military and spying operations.

The Axis countries, on the other hand, were desperate to destroy capabilities in Malta and prevent supplies reaching it. Therefore, between 1940 and 1943, Axis planes dropped 15,000 tons of bombs on the archipelago in 3,343 raids, killing 1,581 civilians, while 7,500 Allied personnel died defending or supplying the islands. In response, the Allies brought down hundreds of Axis bombers and ships. Many planes and vessels from both sides still lie at the bottom of Malta’s seas, and some of them can be explored on dives.

Further poignant locations relating to the World Wars include the 15 cemeteries and monuments cared for by the CWGC where nearly 6,000 servicepeople are buried or remembered. Four of the graveyards offer immersive guided tours. “We aim to share the remarkable stories of servicemen and women who served in aviation, naval, army and medical sectors,” explained CWGC’s Mark Fitzgerald at an event commemorating Malta’s part in the two conflicts that was held this May. Micallef elaborated: “Storytelling is at the heart of what we aim to achieve with military tourism — creating experiences that resonate deeply with visitors seeking more than a holiday.”

TOURISM OFFERING SUSTAINS ECONOMIC MOMENTUM

Annual revenues generated by Maltese tourism rose 23.1% to €3.3 billion in 2024, and early data from 2025 is equally impressive. “We’ve built a thriving, independent tourism economy that is grounded in creativity and determination,” insists Carlo Micallef, CEO of Malta Tourism Authority (MTA).

Last year, the sector directly contributed around 14% of the country’s gross domestic product, which expanded by 6% overall — the highest growth rate achieved by any European Union state. And a significant factor in this wider economic performance was the multiplier impacts tourism had on other industries, with agriculture, construction, information and communication technologies, retail and professional services being just a few of them.

One illustration of an expanding segment that is intrinsically linked to tourism is learning English. Maltese schools taught the language to over 81,000 people visiting the country in 2024, 6.6% of whom hailed from Austria. Another is the film and television industry: the archipelago is increasingly in demand from global production companies, not least because of its fabulous climate and the incredibly varied historic and natural locations it offers.

A sector at the heart of the economy’s future

Recognizing tourism’s status as a crucial driver of socioeconomic progress, the government has placed the industry at the heart of its Malta Vision 2050 development plan, which has quality of life on the islands as its primary key performance indicator. The goal is for the sector to grow by focusing on quality, resilience, sustainability, innovation, international connectivity and discerning visitors who relish diverse authentic experiences.

“We’ve built a thriving, independent tourism economy that is grounded in creativity and determination.”

Carlo Micallef, CEO, Malta Tourism Authority

MTA is investing to support those aims. For instance, the authority strives to advance and promote experiential niches for which the islands contain an abundance of riches, with some recent examples being gastronomic, religious, sport and military tourism. It has also made Malta a genuine year-round destination: last year, 63,199 Austrians visited the country, 90% more than in 2019. 27% of them went in spring, 28% in summer, 21% in fall and 24% in winter.

Malta International Airport’s connectivity has transformed in the past decade as well. “An important shift was liberalization of air access in 2008, which opened us up to more airlines and destinations. This helped reshape Malta’s tourism landscape,” Micallef explains. Since then, MTA has actively fostered relationships with carriers — as a result, there are now regular direct flights from around 120 international cities to Valletta’s airport. The majority are European routes and they include all the continent’s main hubs, enabling seamless



Many major films and TV series have been set in historic Valletta

connections for travelers from further afield. “Looking ahead, we want to expand long-haul flights coming to Malta, so that tourists from those markets reach about 25% of our total visitors, with the remaining 75% being from Europe,” he says. MTA has also bolstered its international marketing networks. “Promotional campaigns are tailored to each of our target markets, focusing on cities with direct flights to Malta,” discloses the CEO. “Our strategy includes advertising in high-traffic areas, social media, radio, TV and strong public relations initiatives, such as inviting TV crews to showcase Malta’s fascinating history and attractions.”

Furthermore, the authority is enabling public and private sector operators to maximize tourism quality. For example, it invests heavily in training. “We collaborate closely with the Institute of Tourism Studies Malta on regularly updating curriculum to prepare young people for the sector’s future,” he states. “We also offer continuous training to upskill the workforce, from entry level to management, which includes programs delivered in partnership with Forbes Travel Guide. Although we’re pushing the industry toward digitalization to streamline operations, we aim to keep the essential expert human touch, as tourism is a people-centered industry.”

Currently, about 1,000 students are enrolled in various courses overseen by MTA, most of whom are Maltese, although international trainees are welcomed. With unemployment at an all-time low, those foreign students are likely to be snapped up on graduation. “Malta relies to a certain extent on global skilled labor. However, workers must pass English language and Malta history courses, plus a skills test before entering the industry,” notes Micallef.

The substantial support given to the sector from MTA and the government is encouraging more foreign direct investors to enter the country, with one example being Six Senses Mövenpick. In tandem, FDI going into other Maltese sectors is equally buoyant: according to the latest data from the National Statistics Office, €13 billion flowed into the islands in the first half of 2024, almost €2 billion more than over the same period in 2023.

“Malta’s economy is strong and growing, that’s attracting significant FDI and many international businesses now use it as a regional base,” Micallef reveals. “Malta focuses on nurturing entrepreneurship and creating a supportive climate for businesses, while opportunities span tourism, financial services, gaming, manufacturing and much more. It’s a great destination not just for vacations, but for business and investment.”

Fort St. Elmo in Valletta, where Knights of St. John defended Malta from the Ottomans in 1565

Comino’s Isolation Hospital housed Austrian and German prisoners of war in WWI

45-meters below Valletta, Lascaris War Rooms were the Allied forces WWII HQ

Malta at War museum offers an immersive look at life in WWII’s most-bombed country

About 6,000 service personnel are remembered at 15 cemeteries and monuments

Entdecke mehr *schönheit*



VisitMalta