

MALTA

Ambitious archipelago is Mediterranean tourism hotspot

Blessed with wonderful beaches, crystal clear waters and countless historical and cultural gems, Malta is also home to a robust economy and investor friendly environment



Malta actually comprises several islands, each of which has its own distinct personality, charms and attractions, including the almost uninhabited jewel of Comino

Driving Malta’s growth through tourism and innovation

With strategic investments in infrastructure and global promotion, Malta is set to become one of the world’s top tourist destinations in 2025

Once regarded as the Mediterranean’s hidden jewel, Malta is now a leading light in the European tourism industry, with a record 3.56 million tourists visiting last year as word spread of its winning combination of its rich historical and cultural treasures, as well as its excellent choice of accommodation and visitor activities.

This milestone not only clearly underlined the ambitious country’s strong and sustained growth in the international tourism landscape, but also highlighted the expanding air connectivity, both through the introduction of new routes and the arrival of leading operators.

Such an impressive performance in 2024 — up almost 20% year-on-year — after robust growth in the previous year too, meant champagne corks were popping frequently when industry chiefs gathered for the second edition of the Malta National Tourism Conference in the stunning capital, Valletta, in February.

“Tourism is a prime example of resilience, and in Malta, we have built it into every aspect of the sector,” states Ian Borg, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Tourism. “By offering year-round connectivity, marketing and promotions we have strengthened its stability.

“This approach helped us recover faster than most competitors, proving tourism’s crucial role in driving other economic sectors during challenging times. Tourism contributes to a third of our economy, directly and indirectly, support-

ing deficit reduction and bringing foreign currency into Malta. Last year alone, it generated over €3 billion in direct spending, adding value, creating wealth and providing essential tax revenue for the national budget.”

Data compiled by the United Nations shows Malta recorded the highest growth rate in tourism receipts among Southern Mediterranean destinations last year, registering a 22% year-on-year hike in export revenue from tourism.

Last year’s stellar performance reinforced the sector’s crucial contribution to the Maltese economy, with the results music to the ears key stakeholders like Carlo Micallef, CEO of Malta Tourism Authority (MTA), the government

IAN BORG
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TOURISM
“In 2024, tourism to Malta generated over €3 billion in direct spending, adding value and creating wealth.”

body credited with boosting the industry’s profile on the highly competitive world stage and powering its upward trajectory.

“The exceptional performance of Malta’s tourism industry in 2024 is a testament to our strategic vision and ongoing investment in the sector,” he says.



Ian Borg
Deputy Prime Minister and
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Tourism

“Not only have we exceeded pre-pandemic figures, but we continue to attract high-value visitors year-round, ensuring sustainable growth and efficient use of the country’s resources. This improved performance translates into greater economic value, reinforcing tourism’s role in driving forward the development of Malta and Gozo.”

Long-haul visitors next to be enchanted
Having captured the hearts, minds and wallets of visitors from many European countries, Malta is now setting its sights on passengers from long-haul destinations in the Middle East, Asia Pacific and, of course, the Americas.

“The US tourism market is the ultimate goal for any advanced destination, but for a small island like Malta, eight hours away, it requires strategic effort,” adds Borg. “American visitors are often well-educated, high-spending travelers seeking unique cultures, landscapes, cuisine



Carlo Micallef
CEO, Malta Tourism Authority

and experiences — areas where Malta really excels.

“We are seeing steady growth in US tourist arrivals, but reaching critical mass is key to securing direct flights and further expansion. Just as we strengthened Far East connectivity with Qatar Airways, we are equally committed to establishing direct routes with the US to take Malta’s tourism to the next level.”

The senior government official notes Malta serves as a bridge between North Africa and Southern Europe and ministers aim to strengthen Malta’s role as a Mediterranean hub for both tourism and international relations.

“Throughout its history Malta has always punched above its weight and delivered beyond expectations,” he says. “This is the attribute we shall seek to nurture and refine further. Malta boasts a rich history shaped by the knights and many other civilizations. We look forward to welcoming more American visitors.”

DID YOU KNOW THAT MALTA...?



Welcomed a record **3.5** million tourists in 2024, versus **3** million in 2023...



...Many of whom arrived during the traditionally quieter winter months



Saw tourist revenue jump by almost a fifth year-on-year to total more than **€3.3** billion



Recorded a **15%** surge in per capita spending versus the year prior



Enjoys superb connectivity to major cities thanks to the arrival of leading operators



Hopes to see direct flights from the US when arrivals reach sustainable levels...



...with the imminent opening of a tourism authority office in New York helping this aim



Provides generous incentives for sustainable and eco-friendly developments



Is focusing on showcasing its story, history and beauty via movies and TV series



Continues to build a fine international reputation in niche tourism segments

Tourism strategy on the right path

Boasting one of the world's fastest growing tourism sectors, Malta is taking such success in its stride, while also maintaining a strong focus on quality and sustainability

The country's rapid tourism recovery has been largely attributed to the innovative, dynamic and comprehensive industry blueprint entitled Malta Tourism Strategy. While key indicators show the ambitious nation is on the right track, continuous improvements are necessary, and managing growth effectively is now a priority, as Ian Borg, Deputy PM and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Tourism, explains.

The Malta Tourism Strategy 2021–2030 outlines the path for sustainable tourism development. What is working and what needs improvement based on data and results since its launch four years ago?

The strategy's overall thrust places emphasis of all the fundamental elements for future tourism success. It is centered around sustainability and the delivery of quality on the premise of innovative products and experiences, supplemented by more sophisticated branding, focused market positioning in existing and new markets, the accelerated shift to digitalization, a highly skilled workforce, adaptation to climate change and connectivity.

The strategy delivered recovery ahead of everyone else and is leading the rethinking process for revitalization while still managing to keep tourism healthy all year round. It is also constantly expanding our tourism indicators in the name of good governance. Like any good strategy, it is a living process and constantly needs adjustments, improvements and tweaks.

The most important elements of the strategy at present are the better management of tourism, the accelerated shift towards higher quality and widened connectivity to long-haul markets.

How do you solve tourism management issues like labor shortages, infrastructure bottlenecks and environmental concerns? What are your priorities for the sector in 2025 and 2026?

These are matters which are always front of mind when operating in a territory that is superficially small and features a high density of human activity. In our thinking, we always combine the two realities that Malta functions as a country within the confines of a city. This means we have refined the capacity to maximize use of limited space.

Nevertheless, we are aware of the challenges which an overall increase in human activity, including that of higher tourist numbers, poses. We are addressing infrastructural shortcomings — such as energy generation and distribution, water, sewage and waste — through increased investment while addressing issues such as industry human resources and environmental concerns through steps addressing the labor market and a stronger commitment to protecting open spaces within urban spaces, along with the open countryside.

This year is when we start to accelerate our vision for a higher quality, more sustainable type of tourism, with 2026 being the target for when the first tangible results will start to become increasingly evident.

Short-term rentals are a growing global challenge, with countries introducing regulations to balance property owners' and residents' interests. Given Malta's property shortages due to industrial development and population growth, how is your ministry addressing this issue?

We continue to follow developments both internationally and domestically. A lot of the measures reported from other countries relate to dense city centers or areas with a view to spreading tourism inflows more equitably across their territory. In Malta, the reality is different and requires a different approach.

Short-term-rentals are not a clearly demarcated issue attributable to tourism alone, but relate to a complexity of overlapping uses by a mix of residents, temporary residents and tourists, with properties often shifting use regularly between all three each year. Such a realization implies it would be perilous to apply tourism-only solutions to a highly complex issue.

IAN BORG
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TOURISM
“Tourism is the ultimate example of resilience and the way we have structured it has been to weave resilience into all our activities.”

My ministry will contribute to the national discussion and ensure the needs, impacts and realities relative to the tourism sector are adequately presented so that the solutions proposed will reach the objective of minimizing negatives while allowing this category of accommodation to fit more seamlessly within our tourism accommodation fabric.

What role will tourism play in sustaining Malta's economic performance?

Tourism is the ultimate example of resilience and the way we have structured it has been to weave resilience into all our activities, starting from our year-round offer to our connectivity and our marketing and promotion.

We were amongst the fastest to recover from the lean years of the pandemic. A resilient tourism industry sustains a resilient economy owing to its widespread linkages with almost all other sectors, meaning it acts as a strong engine pulling other economic carriages in difficult times.

Besides attracting an annual expenditure injection in excess of €3 billion into the econ-



Viewing the islands by boat is a great way for tourists to gain an insight into Malta



Malta's warm and welcoming waters mean the country is a top diving destination

omy, tourism's high multipliers also mean that the tourist euro circulates multiple time across the economy generating wealth, value added and tax-based government revenue with every transaction undertaken.

The recently announced Malta Tourism Awards are aligned with both the National Tourism Recovery Strategy and EU Tourism Action Plan 2030. What can you share about this new showcase event's key objectives?

The awards are being introduced to highlight and reward quality, excellence, innovation and service in the Maltese tourism industry. They are an important link in a chain which

gives relevance and importance to positive developments in products, services and people coming out of the Maltese tourism industry.

The awards link to, and emerge from, the basic fundamentals of the Malta Tourism Strategy relative to innovation, sustainability, hospitality and quality. They cover a wide range of tourism service providers.

They will award responsible tourism development in accommodation, travel and tourism businesses, visitor attractions and catering establishments in areas including smart tourism and digitalization, HR training and upskilling and sustainability and decarbonization. An additional tourism worker of the year award will recognize outstanding service.”

Malta earns its seat on the diplomatic top table

With the help of major foreign partners such as the US, Malta has established an enviable reputation for diplomacy as it strives for a better future



Visitors can go off the beaten track with backpacks and hiking boots to explore Malta's multitude of fascinating landscapes

had stated a few weeks earlier when the election result was announced.

The spotlight will again fall on Malta in a couple of months' time when the country holds its fourth six-month presidency of the Council of Europe. Officials have pledged a focus on youth empowerment, the protection of children, combating violence and discrimination and safeguarding human rights, while supporting the organization as it pursues justice and accountability for the conflict in Ukraine.

“This role, much like our 2023–2024 role as members of the United Nations Security Council and the 2024 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Chairpersonship, will come with its own set of challenges but also with opportunities for enhancing multilateralism at a period where it is under attack,” says Borg, adding Malta wants to engage in dialogue with stakeholders, while fostering synergies and cooperation among member states.

“By focusing on empowering youth in democratic life, we aim to build on successful practices like our Vote 16, together with the possibility for 16-year-olds to hold the office of mayor and deputy mayor with adequate training. This engagement and active participation of young people in decision-making processes is crucial for creating sustainable and lasting policies, and resilient democracies.”

Alain Berset, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, says Malta will assume the presidency at a “crucial time for Europe and global governance”. “We are navigating an increasingly uncertain international environment. Europe is at a turning point,” he states. “Our fundamental values — human rights, democracy, and the rule of law — are under threat.

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DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND
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“Malta looks forward to continuing to work closely with the US in the same spirit of friendship and cooperation of recent years.”

“We must remain vigilant and act decisively and coherently. In the face of growing threats to our democracies, Europe must stand united and firm in defending its core principles.

“The Council of Europe remains the guardian of these principles. Malta's Presidency will be a valuable opportunity to move forward together and uphold a Europe that remains true to its values, strong in the face of challenges, and united in action.”

Malta certainly enjoyed a positive and rewarding OSCE Chairpersonship throughout 2024, with officials from the archipelago having worked tirelessly to actively integrate civil society voices in its decisions and initiatives.

Not only did the nation collaborate with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights on the 2024 Warsaw Human Dimension Conference attended by nearly 2,000 people, Malta also hosted hundreds of delegates from the 57 participating states of the OSCE as the year ticked down to its end.

Guests for the OSCE Parallel Civil Society Conference in Valletta included foreign ministers, ambassadors, senior diplomats, as well as international journalists. During the two-day event in early December, delegates discussed important regional security challenges as well as pressing organizational decisions.

In one of his final speeches in the role as OSCE Chairperson, Borg commented: “Malta knows well that a secure, resilient future for our countries and the OSCE region will require a strong, diverse and vibrant civil society.

“It is incumbent on us all to provide an enabling environment for their important work. Civil society supports the resilience of democratic institutions. It promotes respect for fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, as well as tolerant and non-discriminatory societies.”



Blending dramatic coastal formations and spectacular views of waters rich in marine life, Dwejra Bay is also home to the famous Fungos Rock that dates back centuries

Arrivals soar on year-round appeal

With Malta's rich history, climate and culture making it so much more than just a sea and beach destination, tourists are flocking to enjoy its treasures throughout the year

Malta's tourism sector enjoyed a strong 2024 and is set for an even better 2025, with this wave of foreign visitors underlining the outstanding success of original international marketing campaigns by Malta Tourism Authority (MTA). Carlo Micallef, CEO, reveals how they did it and their ambitious plans for the future.

What are your key initiatives to sustain your growth momentum and diversify the tourism base for sustainable growth?

In 2024, we built on the strong results of 2023, when we reached three million tourists and successfully completed the recovery phase of our strategy. We then shifted our focus to revitalizing Malta's tourism industry, prioritizing winter growth over price-sensitive segments. Our goal was to position Malta as a year-round destination, emphasizing its heritage, diversity and hospitality rather than competing on price.

This approach led to a significant increase in winter arrivals, with February and March seeing a 30% rise, January up by 26%, and December increasing by 25%. By targeting niche markets instead of discounting, we enhanced profitability and cemented Malta's status as a Mediterranean destination that has something to offer across each season. We focused on specialized segments such as gastronomy, active holidays, sports training camps, meetings and incentives, art and culture, and the LGBTQ+ market. By targeting travelers based on their interests, we attracted visitors who prioritize unique experiences over price.

Our strong collaboration with airlines has resulted in increased capacity through both new routes and higher frequencies. Summer growth was controlled to ensure visitors continued to enjoy a high-quality experience. We also diversified our tourism sources, achieving double-digit growth across all top 10 markets: 58% from Poland, 34% from the Netherlands, 31% from the UK, 21% from Austria, 26% from Belgium, 14% from Germany, and 21% from the US. This strategy has significantly boosted tourism expenditure. In 2024, tourism expenditure was up 23% compared to 2023 and nearly 50% higher than in 2019, with total tourism expenditure on our islands reaching €3.3 billion — up €600 million on 2023.

CARLO MICALLEF
CEO, MALTA TOURISM AUTHORITY
“By targeting niche markets instead of discounting, we [...] cemented our status as a Mediterranean destination that never shuts down.”

While overall arrival numbers may stabilize, and future years shall see a slower rate of growth in arrivals, our focus remains on attracting higher-spending visitors to drive sustainable growth. Our strategy now includes increasing long-haul arrivals by strengthening air connectivity.

Our goal is to establish seamless one-stop connectivity to Malta. With routes via Dublin, Paris, Brussels and Zurich, travelers from key global markets — including California and New York — can reach Malta with just two stops. Our next ambition is securing a direct flight from the US the moment American arrivals reach sustainable levels. We are working closely with Deputy Prime Minister Ian Borg and partnering with the United States Tour Operators Association (USTOA) and other operators.

The Aer Lingus connection — four flights from Dublin to Malta each week and with frequency soon to increase beyond that number — has already opened new opportunities, with many operators now offering extended stays in Malta for American travelers. Despite Malta's small population and lack of ethnic travel demand, we aim to make a direct US route viable by combining it with home porting. Our focus remains on growing tourism profitably and sustainably shifting from volume-based growth to increasing revenue and value per visitor.

MTA celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2024, a milestone that coincided with Malta's recognition as one of the best tourism brands in Europe. What is your vision for the next growth phase of MTA and what will be your main focus areas?

I am proud to have been part of MTA for 28 years and to reflect on how far we have come. We

The US market remains a key focus for Malta, with discussions underway to open an MTA office in New York in 2025. How will this move enhance Malta's visibility among American travelers and what strategies do you plan to implement to drive more inbound tourism?

Reopening our US office is a key step forward. Whilst we previously had a presence in the US, the tragic events of 9/11 and other disruptions meant the closure of our office there. We relaunched a presence in the US through representatives in 2014, and since then we have seen steady growth, making this the right time to establish once more our own presence.

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Our focus will be on high-potential markets, such as Los Angeles, Atlanta, Chicago and New York, where tourist flows to Europe and Malta are strongest. Wherever we have opened an office, tourism has surged. Our last launch in Warsaw in 2022 is a key testament to this. Since opening that office, Poland has surged exponentially, to become our fourth-largest market. Having a dedicated team on the ground definitely makes a tangible difference.

Malta offers authentic experiences, excellent value and a safe environment. Our renowned hospitality ensures that visitors and residents alike enjoy full immersion in our way of life.

Malta has been expanding offerings in cultural, adventure and wellness tourism

to reduce seasonality. What impact have these efforts had and what new strategies are being developed?

The US market shows strong interest in Malta's rich history — from Neolithic temples to the Knights of Malta and our noble heritage, including historic palazzos. Faith tourism is also a key attraction, alongside Malta's arts and cultural experiences.

A new initiative is military tourism. Valletta's fortifications, the Great Siege and Malta's critical role in World War II offer compelling stories. Partnering with Heritage Malta, we launched this segment at Fort St. Elmo, where six knights made their last stand during the Great Siege.

Malta also played a pivotal role in planning the invasion of Sicily during WWII — one of many untold stories we aim to highlight. Expanding into faith and military tourism helps rejuvenate our offerings. Additionally, we are developing corporate and luxury travel, including private jet services, with new investments bringing top brands to Malta, enhancing our appeal to high-yield tourism.

How can US businesses and investors collaborate with MTA to unlock opportunities in Malta's tourism sector?

We extend an open invitation to them to engage with us. MTA is approachable, responsive and efficient in decision-making. Malta has a long-standing tradition of adaptability and innovation, which has helped us build a thriving economy and a successful tourism industry.

Malta offers a multifaceted experience — rich history, diverse attractions and a welcoming culture. Visitors find it easy to connect, build relationships and immerse themselves in our way of life. We remain authentic, proud of our heritage, and committed to continuous improvement, ensuring that Malta offers something truly unique to those who seek it.



As a melting pot for cultures and crafts from several very different continents, visitors are treated to an eclectic mix of colors



Tourists can transport themselves back in time through many historic treasures, like the megalithic temple complex Mnajdra



Great gastronomy and hospitality flows through Malta's veins, which when combined with incredible views and favorable climate are enough to satisfy everyone's appetite

Idyllic islands offer a wealth of adventures and fun experiences

The archipelago's colorful tourism tapestry is a mix of rich history, culture and gastronomy that extends across its handful of islands

A question often thrown at geography students by their teachers is how many islands does the Maltese archipelago actually comprise. Many reply with an answer of just one or two, but the answer is three: Malta, Gozo and Comino. Each of the trio has its own unique personality and charm, making them all an attractive choice for travelers looking for the vacation of a lifetime.

Given it is by far the largest island and lends its name to the country, Malta is understandably the most famous of the three. Not only is it home to the historic capital, Valletta — the 2018 European Capital of Culture — it also acts as the main international gateway thanks to its busy, modern airport and important cruise terminal.

Founded in the 16th Century by the Knights of St. John, Valletta's position between continents means it overflows with history, culture and color thanks to its vibrant and eclectic mix

of old and new, making it a real melting pot in all aspects of life given it such factors have been influenced by Europeans, Africans and Arabs.

Small is beautiful in city ideal for a stroll

Given its relatively small size, Valletta is ideal for exploring on foot, with a labyrinth of traditional streets and alleyways offering more than just a glimpse into a time gone by. With plenty of cafes, shops and restaurants, visitors can easily sit back, relax and take a breather from the tourist trails, or enjoy some varied retail therapy at dozens of high-end stores.

Among the many highlights are the majestic St. John's Co-Cathedral, dedicated to Saint John the Baptist and with roots reaching back nearly half a millennium. Other must sees include the famous City Gate, Hastings Gardens, Castille Square, Upper Barrakka Gardens, Grand Harborm Knights Hospital and Fort St. Elmo.

While Valletta has a laid back feel during the day, at night it truly comes alive with the sounds of fun and frolics through its plethora of festivals, theaters, clubs, bars, restaurants and other entertainment. With an infinite choice of venues, no two nights are the same and the city's vast and varied nightlife caters to even the choosiest of night owls.

"You can choose to sip a classy cocktail in one of Valletta's swanky wine and cocktail bars or perhaps indulging your inner party-animal at St. Julian's collection of nightclubs is more up your street," suggests Micallef of the MTA. "Maybe lady luck is on your side as you take on a casino. Whatever you fancy, a night on the town is not to be missed."

Former capital continues to charm

Before Valletta took over the crown of capital back in 1530, the 4,000 year-old city of Mdina, which stands a couple of hundred meters above sea level in a central part of the island rather than on the coast, was a hive of activity. However, the loss of its capital status saw its importance fade, along with its population, giving it the unfair title of the "Silent City".

With its fortified walls mesmerizing nobilities for century after century, the city's privileged position high above terraced fields allows it to dominate the rural skyline. As word of its spectacular Baroque palaces, churches and places of worship spreads, so the number of international visitors continues to increase.

"With narrow, cobbled streets shrouded in an air of mystery, Mdina will snatch you away from the present and transport you back in time," states Micallef. "Embarking on this journey into the past, visitors will discover an astonishing mix of Baroque and medieval architecture in its ever-winding streets, wonderfully adorned and preserved churches, majestic pal-

aces and fortified walls that turn this silent city into an outdoor museum.

"Perched atop a plateau, Mdina is also home to a cathedral that suffered extensive damage through a devastating earthquake in 1693 and that was rebuilt by Lorenzo Gafa in 1702. The cathedral's floor is paved and decorated with marble tombstones that display details such as the coat of arms of the bishops of Mdina and other significant members of the Cathedral," the tourism expert adds.

CARLO MICALLEF
CEO, MALTA TOURISM AUTHORITY
"Gozo does not lack in visitor experiences — with the world's oldest free-standing temples of Ggantija, a UNESCO world heritage site."

"Oozing luxury and nobility, Mdina offers a discreet insight that only a few people can experience and witness during their lifetime. The city surpasses the visitors' imagination by staying frozen in a time of elegance and timeless beauty."

Going back in time on gorgeous Gozo

Ideal for a day trip as well as a longer break, Malta's sister island, Gozo, is reached via a short voyage on one of the many ferries connecting the pair. Regarded as a quieter alternative to the mainland and with a greater quantity of green areas, Gozo is more sparsely populated and yet is still home to a wide range of attractions for the young and the young at heart.

The island is home to a broad range of myths, legends and the supposed lair of the Odyssey's Nymph — Calypso. The cave of the latter is lo-

cated in the heart of Gozo's stunning village of Xaghra and will appeal mostly to history buffs along with those with a love for nature and the great outdoors.

"These caves overlook the exceptionally breathtaking views of Gozo's finest red sand beach, Ramla l-Hamra," reveals Micallef. "Many folks believe this is the cave that Homer refers to in [the very famous Greek epic poem] 'The Odyssey'. This is a story that describes the cave as the one where the stunning nymph Calypso retained the Greek hero, Odysseus for seven years as a prisoner of love."

"He was promised immortality if he stayed there with her after losing his ship. In the end, it is believed that she let him leave and go back to his wife, though legend has it that she still waits for him."

Of course, it is not just history and literature buffs who will enjoy Gozo, as visitors can experience old traditions such as the milking of goats and sheep and watch as this milk is prepared into traditional Gozitan cheese.

Accommodation options fit all budgets as they range from five-star hotels to hostels, while Gozo also affords the self-catering visitor with a large selection of traditional farmhouses, most of which are equipped with pools and situated in tranquil locations.

"Gozo does not lack in visitor experiences — with the world's oldest free-standing temples of Ggantija, a UNESCO world heritage site," Micallef notes. "This majestic site, situated in lush countryside, is made up of two massive temples. The rocks are so large that it is not a surprise that many locals used to believe that they were built by giants."

"In the vicinity of Ggantija, one can also find the Ta' Kola Windmill, which gives visitors an insight into how Gozitans from yesteryear used to grind their wheat to make bread and other baked goods," the tourism expert continues. "The recently restored ancient town of Cittadella, located on top of one of Gozo's famed three hills, stands high and proud, dominating sky-lines around the island."

"Adjacent to Gozo's capital, Victoria, Cittadella is made up of a maze of quaint streets, weaving in and around the bastions surrounding the town and the Cathedral. However, Gozo is not only for history buffs — it also provides some fantastic gastronomy options, with Michelin plate restaurants, as well as some of the best examples of traditional local cuisine. Many of which either grow their own produce or are related to someone that does."

Going behind bars at ancient prison

Undoubtedly a more unusual and certainly more unnerving tourist attraction is Old Gozo Prison, with the oldest surviving jail on the island still reverberating with the memories of its numerous inmates who have incised their mark on the aged walls of its cells and corridors.

"The prison is in the Citadel in Victoria, standing adjacent to the Courts of Justice, to which it was originally connected," details Micallef. "In its present form, the prison complex is divided into two sections. One includes an entrance hall which originally served as a communal cell in the 19th Century."

"It now hosts a selection of graffiti casts, a 16th Century carrack graffiti, and some prison-related objects including the surviving part of a wooden stocks. Meanwhile, the other sec-

tion includes a free-standing block with half a dozen individual cells.

"The graffiti is certainly the highlight of this site and includes mainly sea vessels that date to different periods. However, visitors may also note graffiti of hand palms, crosses, names, dates, games, and anthropomorphic figures. Some inmates also appear to have scratched a record of their length of stay behind bars."

Diving deep into Comino's clear waters

Often overlooked by tourists who tend to be focused on the myriad of sights, sounds and experiences on its far larger siblings, the charming island of Comino is just a short 10-minute boat ride from Gozo and home to only one family, an unusual feature that adds to the exotic and adventurous feel of the island.

Comino's warm, clear and welcoming waters are home to the famous Blue Lagoon — a natural wide pool — and also the equally spectacular Crystal Lagoon, which boasts a number of sea caves that can be explored. The former is popular as a swimming, snorkeling and sunbathing destination, while the latter appeals more to the slightly more adventurous.

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In addition, the area is one of the Mediterranean's leading diving destinations thanks to the incredibly high level of underwater visibility. Malta is actually home to more than 120 captivating dive sites, many of which lie just off the coast of Comino.

As well as scuba diving, visitors who like to earn their water wings can choose from a selection of well-priced water sports offered by multiple operators. Activities available to people of all ages include kayaking, jet skiing, parasailing, snorkeling or simply open water swimming.

Back on terra firma, the island's highest landmark is an eye-catching 17th Century bastioned watchtower known as the Santa Marija Tower. Built by the Knights of St. John and used as a prison, the watchtower stands a few hundred meets from the historic Isolation Hospital which, as its name suggests, was used in the 19th and 20th Centuries to isolate people suffering from the plague or cholera. In more recent times, it was used to house German prisoners during World War I.

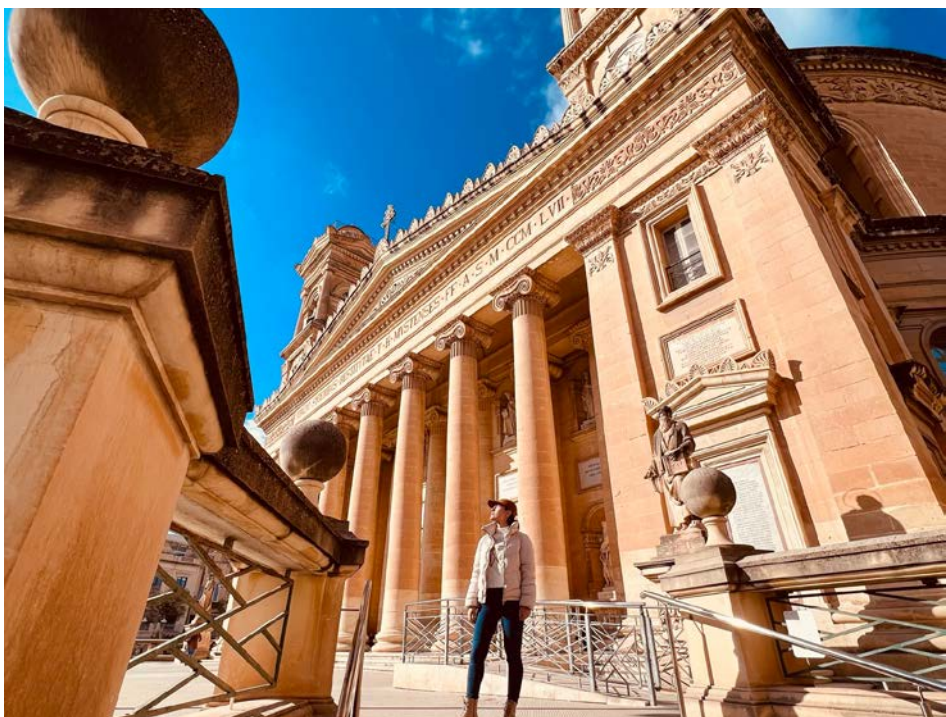
While Malta may be home to an awesome array of colorful and unusual wildlife species, elephants are not one of them. One might at first glance, however, be fooled by a rock formation hewn out of the cliffs in Comino, bearing a staggering resemblance to one.

"The aptly named natural masterpiece is one of the first and most astonishing sites to greet visitors approaching the island's eastern cliffs by the sea," enthuses Micallef. "A rock featuring a gigantic head, with a trunk, lowered carefully into the water."

"The detail is so intricate that one can almost make out an eye socket, with the rest of the creature's body seemingly carved out of the



Frequent festivals and fun events mean there is always a party atmosphere in Malta



The eye-catching Rotunda of Mosta has the world's third largest unsupported dome

rock. A veritable wonder of nature, the majestic Elephant's Head is a monument you will not forget.

"Due to its remote location, the rock is lesser-known than Malta's Elephant's Leg, a similar natural spectacle found near the Blue Grotto [cave complex on Malta]. It has, however, appeared on the big screen in the 2002 film, The Count of Montecristo."

Applause and acclaim at travel awards

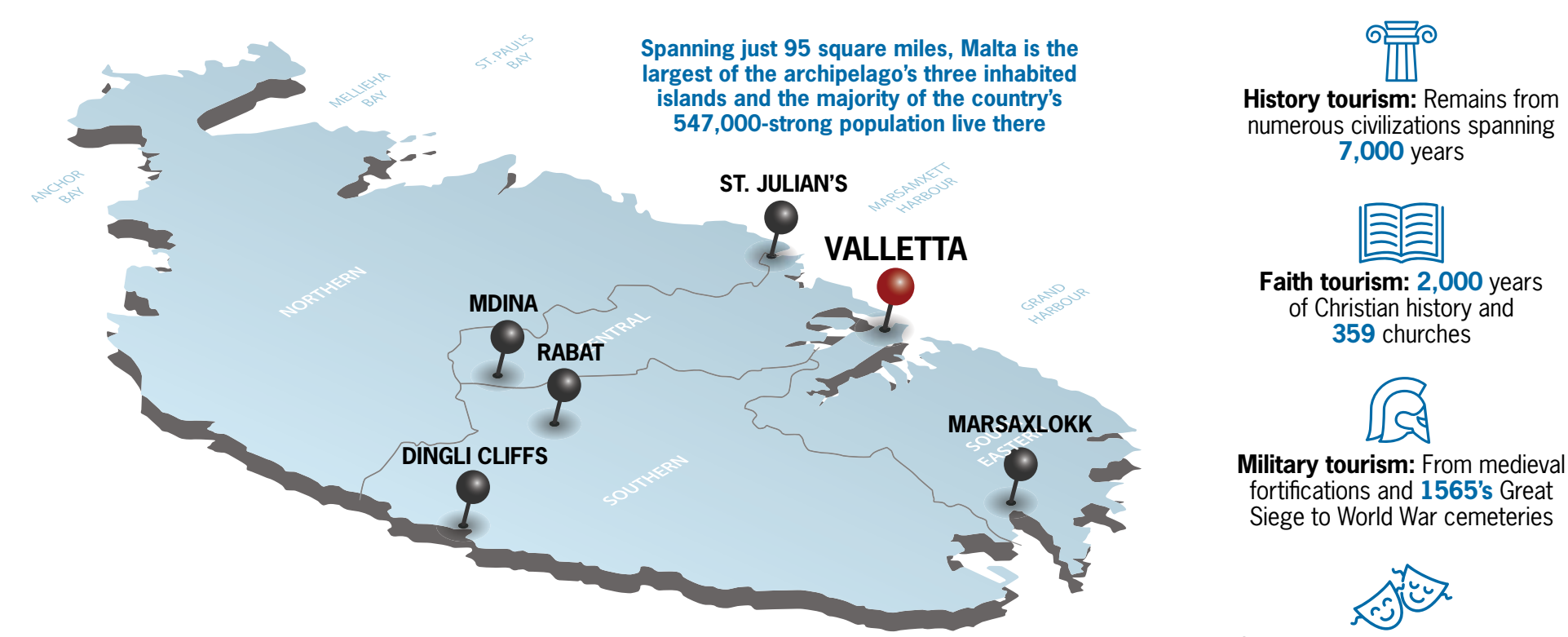
With so much to offer, it is no surprise that more than one in five international visitors returns to Malta, according to MTA data. This popularity was recently recognized at the Travvy Awards, an event billed as the Academy Awards of the

US travel industry. Micallef attended the fixture in Florida and, unsurprisingly, did not return empty-handed, with Malta again picking up the coveted Best Destination — Mediterranean award in a competitive field.

Now in their tenth year, the Travvy's recognize the top suppliers, hotels, cruise lines, airlines, tour operators, destinations, technology providers and attractions, as selected by those who know them best — travel advisors.

"We are so grateful to have received this coveted award in the highly competitive US market," he said. "This will strengthen and support our efforts to increase the number of visitors from the US market in 2025 to support Visit-Malta's objective for a direct flight from the US."

THE ISLAND OF MALTA IS HOME TO THE CAPITAL CITY, VALLETTA



The perfect destination for any traveler

Despite its petite size, the island of Malta contains endless attractions

Valletta

Established in the 16th century by the Knights of St. John, Malta's cosmopolitan capital offers both a wealth of historical treasures and a vibrant contemporary cultural scene

Mdina

The island's capital until 1530 is a fortified inland city with narrow cobbled streets that are lined with stunning Baroque and medieval architecture

Rabat

Home to St. Paul and St. Luke after they were shipwrecked on the island, Rabat town contains important reminders of early Maltese Christianity

St. Julian's

St. Julian's is renowned for its fabulous beaches and nightlife, with its fashionable restaurants, bars, clubs and casinos welcoming guests until the early hours of the morning

Marsaxlokk

This picturesque harbor village is particularly popular on Sundays, when locals and tourists flock to its freshly caught fish market and seafood restaurants

Dingli Cliffs

Hikes along Malta's highest cliffs are rewarded with panoramic views of the Mediterranean, the uninhabited isle of Filfla and the arched entrance to the famous Blue Grotto caves



History tourism: Remains from numerous civilizations spanning 7,000 years



Faith tourism: 2,000 years of Christian history and 359 churches



Military tourism: From medieval fortifications and 1565's Great Siege to World War cemeteries



Cultural tourism: Traditional and contemporary cultural festivals take place throughout the year



Arts tourism: From Caravaggio to the new Malta International Contemporary Art Space



Gastronomic tourism: 43 restaurants feature in the Michelin guide to Malta 2025

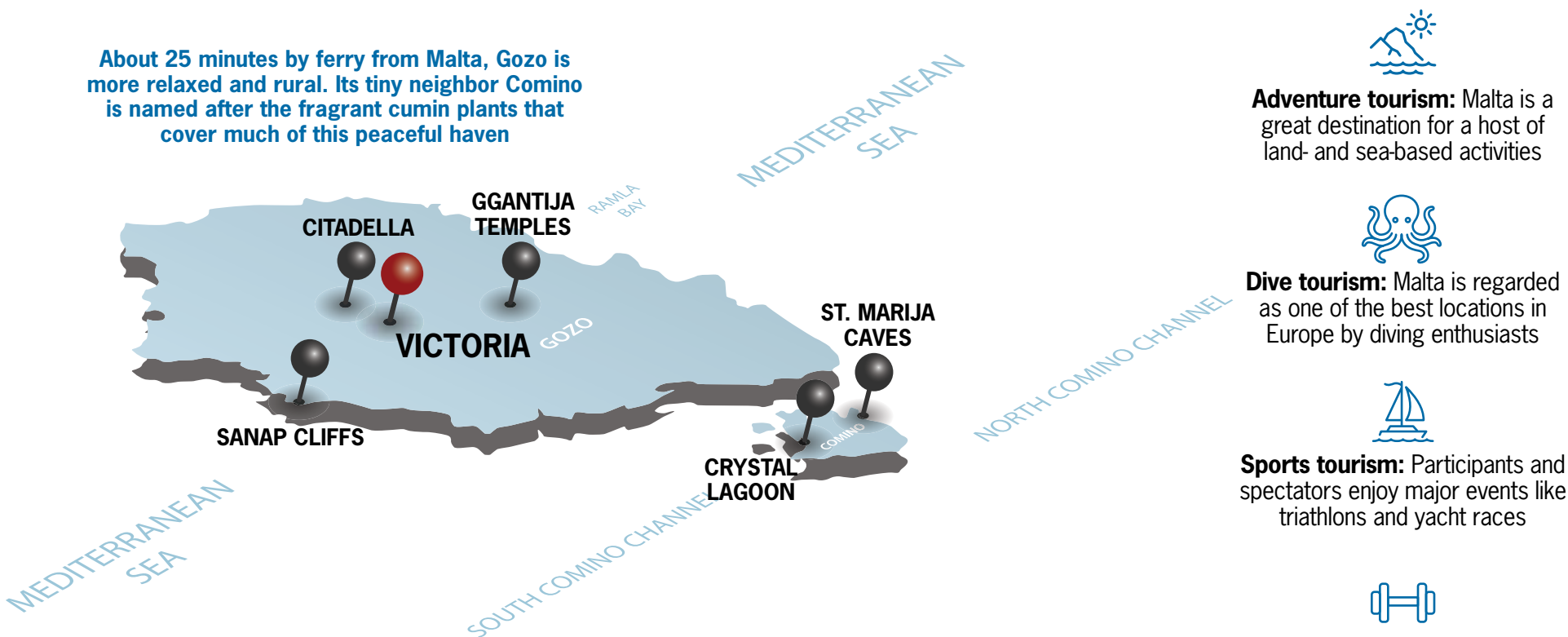


Wine tourism: There are about 12 wineries on Malta and Gozo, many of them open to the public



Inclusive tourism: Malta ranks 1st in Europe's Rainbow Map of LGBTI friendliness

THE ISLANDS OF COMINO AND GOZO MAKE UP THE ARCHIPELAGO



Ideal choices for reconnecting with nature

Although smaller than Malta, spectacular Gozo and Comino are no less fascinating

Crystal Lagoon

Comino's sheltered Crystal Lagoon is a favorite location for divers, thanks to the vast array of marine life that thrives in its clear blue waters

Ggantija Temples

Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site, the awe-inspiring megalithic Ggantija temple complex was constructed before the pyramids of Egypt

St. Marija Caves

St. Marija Caves and the shallow reef associated with them attract underwater photographers and divers with all levels of experience to Comino

Citadella

Towering over Gozo, the magnificent fortified hilltop city of Citadella has been central to the island's history since it was first settled in the Bronze Age

Victoria

Gozo's lively inland capital, Victoria, has a charming old town, with winding streets and secluded squares that are well worth exploring

Sanap Cliffs

The dramatic 500-foot-tall Sanap Cliffs on Gozo's south coast are the best place to experience the unforgettable sunrises and sunsets that the island enjoys

>300

days of sunshine a year make Malta a year-round destination

320

historic monuments can be discovered in the capital Valletta alone

#1

Europe's Most Desirable Island at the 2024 Wanderlust Travel Awards

21%

more US travelers visited Malta in 2024 than in 2023

26

Gozo extends across 26 square miles and Comino just 1.4 square miles

2

of the oldest free-standing buildings in the world can be found in Gozo

1

household lives on Comino, which is a protected nature reserve

>120

dive sites in Malta, many of which are off the coasts of Gozo and Comino



Film tourism: Productions set in Malta include Gladiator, Troy and Game of Thrones



Malta is showcasing its long and proud military past with the creation of themed tours that take in its plethora of ancient sites, such as the imposing walled city of Mdina

Military tourism jewels in the crosshairs

Tourists are being given the chance to delve deep into Malta's rich military history via visits to its war memorials, forts and museums in a push to highlight its resilience and fighting spirit

For a country that has experienced more than its fair share of wars and invasions during key conflicts across various centuries, Malta has an incredibly rich military history, one that tourism chiefs now want the world to learn about as they seek to develop an unusual addition to its tourism portfolio.

Last November, the famous Fort St. Elmo in Valletta played host to a high-profile launch event organized by MTA in collaboration with Heritage Malta. While admittedly a niche segment for now, the promotion of the islands' role in global military history aims to attract military history enthusiasts from around the world.

The strategy also synchronizes with the overall aim of MTA in promoting the country as a destination that offers enriching and memorable experiences to visitors. In addition, it enhances Malta's tourism appeal and strengthens partnerships with organizations such as Heritage Malta and the Commonwealth War Graves Association, creating avenues for visitors to explore a lesser-known aspect of Malta's heritage.

"With its iconic fortifications, historic war cemeteries and memorials honoring soldiers, Malta offers a compelling narrative for visitors with an interest in military heritage," commented MTA boss Micallef at the launch event.

CARLO MICALLEF
CEO, MALTA TOURISM AUTHORITY
"With its iconic fortifications and historic war cemeteries [...] Malta offers a compelling narrative for visitors with an interest in military heritage."

"This new segment enables travelers to explore Malta's rich tapestry of historical sites, revealing the islands' resilience and strategic importance over the centuries. This initiative goes beyond merely attracting visitors; it is designed to engage those who seek authentic, meaningful experiences that connect them to the rich history of our islands."

The senior executive continued: "Military tourism aligns seamlessly with our vision for a tourism sector that prioritizes depth and substance, providing visitors with a compelling reason to choose Malta not only as a destination, but as a place to immerse themselves in a unique heritage that celebrates the resilience and spirit of our nation."

Mighty fortresses still stand strong

Considering Malta was pounded by bombs during World War II, much of its historic architecture escaped relatively unscathed. One of the most obvious displays of its glorious military past is Fort Rinella, situated at the mouth of the majestic Grand Harbor.

Built for the sole purpose of housing a 100-tonne gun, the mighty fortress is one of the country's two coastal batteries constructed by the British, who at one point worried about losing their supremacy in the Mediterranean.

CARLO MICALLEF
CEO, MALTA TOURISM AUTHORITY
"Military tourism aligns seamlessly with our vision for a tourism sector that prioritizes depth and substance."

Surrounded by a ditch, the fort was built on two levels, with loading chambers underground and machinery chambers at ground level. The installation of the massive gun was a military operation in itself, according to historians. After being ferried to the bay, it had to be man-handled all the way to the fort, a task involving 100 men who took three long and exhausting months to maneuver it into place.

Due to its size, the gun could not be operated manually, so a hydraulic system was used to traverse and unload it, making it the first battery to have a gun that worked by mechanical means. The fort was completed in 1886, but just two decades later, the gun was rendered obsolete and stripped of its machinery without ever having fired a shot in anger.

Not far from Fort Rinella sits Fort Manoel,

with the military situated on the island from which it takes its name. Found in the center of the Grand Harbor, majestic Fort Manoel was built by the Knights Hospitaller to protect Valletta's Northern bastions from enemy attack.

Dating back to the 18th Century, it was a hive of military activity for over 200 years. As charming as it is magnificent, the awe-inspiring fort is renowned for its ornate Baroque features.

"Constructed under Grandmaster Vilhena in 1723, it was not used according to its purpose until the 1798 French Invasion," reveals Micallef. "During this time it was surrendered to Napoleonic forces and became a French garrison, leaving the Maltese forces to attack their own fort on several occasions."

"Undergoing renovations after falling into British hands in 1800, it continued to serve as a military site and suffered several direct hits

during World War II, before being decommissioned and abandoned in 1964. Though no longer in active use, Fort Manoel is as spectacular now as it was in its heyday and is certainly worth exploring."

Saluting Battery brings history to life

Fortunately for those who visitors who wish to experience some history in actual action, the famous Saluting Battery in the bastions of Valletta holds regular gun salutes daily. Boasting spectacular views of the Grand Harbor. This magnificent battery dates back to Malta's Great Siege, making it one of the oldest saluting batteries still in operation today.

"Used for more than 500 years to protect the Grand Harbor from enemy attack, as well as to provide visiting dignitaries with a ceremonial welcome, the Battery also served as a public time marker, with three shots being fired daily, at sunrise, noon and sunset," Micallef reveals.

"Nowadays, in addition to its spectacular midday and 4pm gun salutes, this splendid attraction also includes a guided tour, a fascinating interactive presentation, and an impressive collection of 300 year old military paraphernalia. History buff or not, a visit to this military marvel is sure to go off with a bang."

For those tourists after a far quieter and more relaxing setting to satisfy their appetite for military history, they need look no further

than the famous Lascaris War Rooms, discreetly situated 150 feet below the Upper Barrakka Gardens in Valletta and regarded one of the island's most treasured relics of World War II.

Work on this intricate network of tunnels began under the British in 1940, before being expanded in 1943 to house the Allied headquarters under President Eisenhower, where defense systems were waged and offense operations directed.

"Equipped with cryptographic devices, automatic ventilation, and other hi-tech gear, they enabled military personnel to collect information and coordinate actions of their military units at the drop of a hat," states Micallef.

"Visitors today can relive history as they explore its dim tunnels and operations rooms, splendidly reconstructed to create an authentic wartime atmosphere. Offering an intriguing glimpse into Malta's military past, this awesome museum is well worth popping into."

WWII museum passes with flying colors

Military and aviation enthusiasts of all ages are guaranteed a once in a lifetime experience when they visit the Malta Aviation Museum in the former Air Force Station in Ta'Qali.

Featuring a real treasure trove of aircraft, engines, models and other aviation delights dating back to the 1940s, the museum is a family day out with a difference that will not disappoint. Set in a pair of hangars full of World War II air-planes, the popular museum contains restored fighter planes including a Spitfire and a Tiger Moth. The hangar is also home to lots of helicopters and ground equipment, with visitors free to explore its splendid Warden's Post and Chapel Garden.

Meanwhile, just a stone's throw from the golden beaches of Mellieha in Malta's northern region stands the imposing — and rather red — St. Agatha's Tower. Painted red by the Knights of St. John so it could be recognized from other towers in line of vision, such as the White Tower at I-Ahrax area of Mellieha and the Santa Maria tower on Comino, this magnificent tower continued to play a starring role throughout Malta's military past, long after the Knights departed from Malta in 1798.

Built as part of a system of watchtowers set up by successive Grandmasters, the Red Tower was constructed over two years, from 1647 to 1649, during the magistracy of Grandmaster Lascaris, as the farthest fortification from Valletta. It served as a communication medium between the capital and Gozo.

According to historians, messages could be replayed from one tower to the next in line all the way from Gozo to Valletta or vice versa. Equipped with cannons and supplies to withstand 40 days of siege, it was normally manned by four members of the local militia, but in the case of an incursion, the tower could be reinforced by some 50 extra soldiers.

CARLO MICALLEF
CEO, MALTA TOURISM AUTHORITY
"Offering an intriguing glimpse into Malta's military past, the awesome Lascaris War Rooms museum is well worth popping into."

"The tower was also manned by the British in both World Wars," Micallef notes. "History fan or not, a visit to this delightful tower is certainly not to be missed, not just for its historical context but also for the wonderful 360-degree view from the roof of the tower."

"The tower has been repeatedly restored over the past 20 years; the last major project was from 2019 to 2021, which saw the restoration of both the internal and external walls and an upgrade of all facilities. This was carried out through European Union funds acquired with the help of MTA."

British Military Walk turns back time

Given the strong presence of British armed forces on Malta's military history, a special walk has been created to guide explorers through the enchanting locales of Mdina, Rabat and Mtarfa, offering a picturesque blend of historical, architectural, and natural wonders.

Starting near the ancient Domus Romana, the route winds through the mediaeval heart of Mdina, Rabat's center, and the historic sites of Mtarfa before returning to Rabat. Ideal both as a walk or a bike ride, the journey unveils remnants from the British period, mediaeval gates, and a myriad of architectural gems.

"This comprehensive walk not only presents a captivating exploration of historical and architectural wonders but also weaves through diverse landscapes, offering a truly immersive experience of the rich heritage of Mdina, Rabat and Mtarfa," says Micallef. "Enjoy the journey!"

Red carpet for faith tourism and movies

Malta is making the most of its hundreds of historic treasures and stunning scenery as faith groups and leading international silver screen stars arrive regularly

Given its citizens' deep Catholic faith and centuries-old devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, it is easy to see how Malta has become home to so many churches and sacred sites that even if you visited one each day, it would still take you a whole year to experience them all.

The Maltese Christian community is as old as those of Ephesus, Jerusalem, Corinth and Rome, thanks to the Apostle Paul — which explains its 2,000 years of Christian history, MTA highlights. "The Blessed Virgin has always had an important place in local Christian tradition. When the Apostle was shipwrecked on our shores, he was accompanied by Luke — the most Marian of all evangelists," says Micallef.

"With hundreds of churches and chapels dedicated to the Blessed Virgin — more than 200 out of a total of 359 churches in just 316 square kilometers — many serve as Marian sanctuaries, known for granting special and miraculous graces to countless people over the centuries," the senior tourism executive adds.

"Malta is a key destination for religious and faith-based tourism in general. The Archdiocese of Malta is spearheading initiatives that combine liturgical celebrations with opportunities for pilgrimage, emphasizing the islands' distinctive blend of faith, history and culture."

"Central to these initiatives is the Melita Mariana Pilgrimage, a 60-kilometer journey across Malta and Gozo, designed to honor the islands' profound Marian devotion. Taking place over three days, this pilgrimage highlights sacred sites that commemorate centuries of local Marian faith and traditions."



Malta is carving out a name for itself in niches such as faith and wedding tourism

Having already established a strong reputation in traditional tourism markets, MTA is working to repeat that success in this religious and faith-based tourism segment. In late 2024, MTA collaborated with foreign partners to offer special tours that highlighted Malta's commitment to promoting its spiritual heritage.

Grand tour of prayer is great success

The campaign with the world's largest Catholic online publisher, Aleteia, saw MTA host its first pilgrimage last September. French firm Magnificat Pilgrimages organized a grand tour of prayer, sacred site visits and lectures.

The successful pilgrimage included a mass at the Ta' Liesse church in Valletta by Bishop

Joseph Galea Curmi and lectures in the Upper Barakka Gardens from Knight of Malta, Thierry de Seguins-Cohorn, General Secretary of the Order of Malta's Historic Academy. Pilgrims also visited to John's Co-Cathedral for a commentary by Varennes on Caravaggio's Beheading of John The Baptist.

The packed itinerary also saw visits to the Mosta Basilica, the Rabat parish of St. Paul, the St. Paul's Grotto and Wignacourt Museum, the St. Paul and St. Agatha catacombs, mass in the St. Publius chapel and the Mellieha National Marian Shrine, the Marian National Shrine in Gozo, the way of the Cross at the Madonna Ta' Pinu Shrine, and mass at the famous Church of Jesus of Nazareth.

Adventure sports enthusiasts flock for thrills

Courtesy of its countless beaches, cliffs and countryside, Malta is a magnet for adrenaline junkies and fans of the great outdoors

Boasting more than 3,000 hours of sunshine per year, Malta's welcoming climate is ideal for lovers of sport, outdoor enthusiasts and adventurers. Whether wishing to explore the beautiful archipelago by land or sea, on two feet, two wheels, four hooves or in a kayak or boat, their needs are well catered for by specialist providers of equipment, transport and technology.

Adrenaline junkies are very well catered for as the country's challenging cliffs attract rock climbers and abseilers, while the dry, rugged terrain is crisscrossed by exciting mountain biking trails catering for riders of all abilities.

Climbers can choose from more than 1,300 awesome routes, ranging from those purely for highly experienced and skilled participants daring to brave the precipices alone, or less tasking climbs for those new to the sport. Many climbing centers offer a variety of packages, from standalone lessons to guided holidays.

"While most come to enjoy traditional climbing, with bouldering and other options available, Malta's got something for every type of climber," states Micallef. "For abseilers, while some prefer a single guided descent, there are also week-long packages available for individuals, families or groups of varying sizes. Though not for the faint-hearted, abseiling is an experience unlike any other, so why not come and test the ropes in Malta?"

For those visitors without a head for heights and who prefer something based safely on the ground, Malta offers a great selection of hiking trails boasting sea views, scrubland and spectacular botanical life. Each of the islands' vast array of hikes offers a rare glimpse into the local rural way of life, with the Majjistral Nature and History Park especially popular for day hikers.

Malta's stunning coastal and inland scenery also looks great on two wheels as well, with its

quirky cobbled streets, country lanes and winding coastal roads making it a cyclist's paradise. Visitors can either bring their own bikes or rent ones at competitive rates from the many bike shops dotting across the nation.

"Whatever type of cyclist you are, with their relatively small size and delightfully smooth roads, both Malta and Gozo are ideal for cycling; and with new cycling routes having recently been created, there's never been a better time to get pedaling," enthuses Micallef.

Spending time in two types of saddle

If a bike saddle is not to your taste, then fans of another type of saddle are also well catered for courtesy of the many certified stables that offer a vast range of riding opportunities. Whether it is lessons or guided rides in the glorious countryside, you will be spoilt for choice.

"Catering to all ages, most stables offer an array of scenic rides, both beachside and along country trails, as well as stunning sunset rides over the dramatic cliffs, all truly memorable experiences," adds Micallef.

"Equine welfare is the utmost importance to all riding establishments, meaning you can rest easy knowing that the horses you ride are happy and healthy, making for an all-round better riding experience."

Of course, it is not just on land where travel-

With its eye-catching deep blue seas, lush, verdant countryside and rugged rocky terrain, it is hardly surprising that Malta has starred in many blockbuster films. Mdina has been King's Landing in Game of Thrones, and the ancient city also featured in the Count of Monte Cristo.

The lucrative international film and TV industry has been a key driver of tourism in recent years, with Malta strengthening its ties to Hollywood and American producers through attractive incentives and production support.

The sector has become an important source of revenue, employment and expertise, with movies and series showcasing the islands' natural beauty, cultural charms and incredible history to millions of cinema-goers and domestic viewers around the world.

CARLO MICALLEF
CEO, MALTA TOURISM AUTHORITY
"The film industry has long been key for Malta, serving as a backdrop for films set in the Middle East, Greece and beyond."

"The film industry has long been key for Malta, serving as a backdrop for films set in the Middle East, Greece and beyond — thanks to its diverse heritage and Baroque architecture," states Micallef.

"Productions like Troy used Malta's streets with minimal set construction. Now, we are shifting focus to films that showcase Malta as itself. Mel Gibson is exploring a series on the Great Siege of 1565, blending history with drama — a potential game-changer for global audiences, especially in the US."

"With streaming platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime, Malta's story can reach the world instantly. Despite our efforts, most people still do not fully grasp what Malta has to offer, and film is a powerful way to change that. Many people expect a typical island — few people, lots of sand, sea and a laid-back lifestyle."

"However, Malta is vibrant, offering much more than that. Once films and productions begin showcasing us, it will be a major breakthrough. Several movies are already in the works, including ones about the Great Siege and World War II."

"Malta's rich history, with stories of heroism, could inspire many more productions. Film is a powerful tool for promoting both tourism and investment."

Gastronomic delights are truly world class

Tourists' tastebuds are in for a treat from the delicious selection of food and drink offered by establishments across the archipelago

Malta's favorable year-round climate is not only ideal for those visiting the islands, but for local farmers and businesses as they strive to offer an outstanding range of produce grown and reared on its fertile soils.

Combined with some of the best and freshest fish and seafood captured in its clean waters, especially the local delicacy lampuki, it is simple to see why the country enjoys a growing reputation in international cuisine circles.

The Maltese are very proud of their unique cuisine, with locally-sourced food and drink regarded as the very essence of their culture. Mouthwatering menus are eclectic and encompass a variety of influences from previous eras thanks to recipes dating back centuries.

Perhaps surprisingly, most of the traditional Maltese dishes are strongly influenced by Provençal cuisine, rather than Italian tastes. Most of the traditional dishes are cooked in wine, a signature of Provençal cooking that also reflects the influence of the Knights of St. John.

Italian cuisine is the more popular offering in restaurants. Two of the most iconic dishes are the traditional pastizzi, a flaky filo-style pastry filled with either sweet ricotta or mashed peas, and the ftira biz-zejt, a ring-shaped bread that is crunchy on the outside, but fluffy on the inside.

Among the countless other servings considered to be traditional Maltese dishes are kuskus

(giant couscous, broad beans, ġbejna, egg, and a medley of vegetables), timpana (baked macaroni covered in pastry) as well as stuffed marrows and many more.

Of course, great food needs a great setting and atmosphere, and this where Malta's hospitality industry really excels through an excellent range of dining experiences. Whatever you may be craving, be it a quick snack, a culinary extravaganza at a Michelin-starred restaurant, or a hearty dig into some awesome local cuisine, there is always something and somewhere to sink your teeth into in Malta.

The local food and drink industry has also embraced sustainability wholeheartedly as it seeks to reduce its impact on the environment through a series of initiatives and measures that chime with government efforts to reduce waste.

"In recent years, an international growing movement, which has also been increasing in popularity in Malta, is the farm-to-fork concept, which means all produce being used at the restaurant is procured or grown within a certain number of kilometers from the restaurant," says Micallef.

"This movement is very popular, as it gives local farmers a chance to showcase their produce, which as already mentioned, is second to none. This type of restaurant acts as a perfect canvas for local delicacies and produce to be tried and is also very sustainable."



Fabulous food, wonderful wine and stunning sights make Malta a foodies' paradise



Investment in transport accelerates

The government is setting aside huge sums for new infrastructure projects, many of which are focused on boosting the archipelago’s transport links for the benefit of residents and visitors



No high class cruise around the Mediterranean is complete without the dropping of anchor at Valletta, a task that took place more than once a day on average in 2024

Champagne corks were heard popping loudly throughout government and tourism offices in January when transport chiefs confirmed nearly 950,000 cruise passengers visited Valletta Cruise Port in 2024, with the impressive total beating by 4% the pre-pandemic record set back in 2019.

Official data showed the capital’s Grand Harbor received almost 360 ship calls last year, and with major expansion work set to conclude later this year, port bosses are confident it will not be long before a new record is achieved.

According to authorities, cruise ships berthing at the Grand Harbor contribute around €88 million to Malta’s economy every year — around €38 million in spending by their hoards of passengers and somewhere in the region of €50 million by the cruise lines themselves.

“We want cruise passengers to enjoy their experience and put our country in their bucket list for a longer holiday next time round,” commented Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Tourism Ian Borg. “To achieve this, we need a comprehensive effort by all stakeholders, not only from the private sector, but also from different government entities and authorities.

“This is why we are collaborating with other ministries to make sure that as a country, we intensify our efforts for a better-quality tourism product in coming years.”

Among the other ministers and private sector leaders who attended a ceremony to celebrate the cruise passenger milestone was Chris Bonett, Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Public Works. He took the opportunity to highlight the significant strides made in sustainability through recent investment in shore-to-ship infrastructure.

The crucial system, which can power up to five cruise liners simultaneously, is expected to



Chris Bonett
Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Public Works

reduce pollution by 90% for local residents by 2030, he said. Bonett also emphasized the strategic importance of the Onshore Power Supply (OPS) project, which aims to make Malta the first Mediterranean port to adopt the pioneering technology.

The minister also highlighted the ongoing extension of Quay Pinto 4-5 as a vital step in supporting the maritime industry’s sustainable development and growth. “These projects are a clear demonstration of our commitment to balancing economic development with environmental responsibility,” he noted.

Going green through local civil projects
Switching his attention to other aspects of his portfolio, Bonett says hard work by the administration and local councils had created solid foundations for important new projects.

These include efforts under an exciting new initiative to curate thriving green spaces that promote sustainable methods of transport. The “Vjal Kulhadd” program allocates a set budget of €10 million and local governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have the welcome opportunity to propose a blueprint with their idea for town squares.

“At a glance, the new scheme has a simple vision: to modernize urban town infrastructures, complemented by the promotion of sustainable methods of transport and thriving green spaces,” Bonett explains. “It is an opportunity to [...] collectively address the community’s needs, with the national government providing the necessary tools along every step of the way.

“Local councils and residents are encouraged to be part of the consultation process to ensure that the scheme’s intended outcomes are fully met. The partial pedestrianization of the Ta’ Xbiex seafront is an example of how communal collaboration can lead to beneficial outcomes for residents and local businesses. This is just one instance of what local councils will have the option of including in their plan, along with new green spaces and public facilities.

“The government’s vision is to regenerate and improve public open spaces, give them a new lease of life and make them attractive for the Maltese, Gozitans and tourists.”

Improving mobility via a new approach
Like in many other developed countries, the success of higher living standards in recent decades has not been without some drawbacks in Malta, particularly when it comes to traffic congestion from increased car use and the associated delays and air and noise pollution.

To address these issues, the government recently unveiled a series of proposals based on six pillars: a 24-hour economy, incentives to

limit the use of vehicles, parking, public transport, road works coordination and sustainable mobility. The half dozen pillars are also aimed at changing well established attitudes towards car ownership and are also designed to promote more sustainable transport methods.

Currently out for consultation with various stakeholders, ministers are confident the final plans will be implemented within the next couple of years. The measures will not only reduce commuting and travel times for residents and streamline public transport services, but have a positive impact on international tourists’ overall experience of the islands, Bonett believes.

CHRIS BONETT
MINISTER OF TRANSPORT
INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC WORKS
“Malta is a small country that takes great care of its aviation and maritime industries.”

“When one looks at Malta through a prism, our biggest and perhaps, our most underrated commodity is the Mediterranean Sea that wraps our shores,” he says. “We plan to design transport corridors that connect the north by maritime transport with the rest of the public transport available on land.

“With business-friendly laws and incentives, Malta is an attractive destination. The best advertisement for us is that those who come here to do business, never leave. Malta is a gem in the Mediterranean — a small country that takes great care of its aviation and maritime industries. It has always been open to investment, but in recent years, we have ramped up efforts to attract business.”



Infrastructure investment spree

The government has given the green light to major infrastructure investment projects to boost tourism capacity and improve citizens’ quality of life

Creating reliable and modern civil infrastructure in crucial areas such as transport, housing and health is not without its challenges, even more so when your population is scattered across three islands in the middle of the Mediterranean. Chris Bonett, Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Public Works, discusses how Malta has overcome obstacles to build better.

Malta's transport and public works sector is critical to its economic success, facilitating a strong tourism industry and trade. How is your ministry ensuring that infrastructure development aligns with Malta's broader economic ambitions? What role do modernized transport networks play in sustaining Malta's long-term growth strategy?

Malta has experienced significant economic growth over the past decade, bringing unprecedented investment and the lowest unemployment rates in history. However, this success has also put pressure on our infrastructure, particularly in transport. As a government, we have had to intervene, with our top priority being to alleviate this strain.

Over the past seven years, we have invested €700 million to upgrade our road infrastructure, a substantial sum for Malta. This project involved completely revitalizing over 1,200 roads, including digging up and reconstructing them from scratch, and updating essential services like water, drainage and electricity. By the end of 2025, we will have completed this large-scale project.

Additionally, we have worked on major traffic management improvements, including flyovers and underpasses. For example, the area around the airport has undergone a complete transformation. Currently, we are working on a project in Msida, where we are not only improving roads but also creating public spaces for people to enjoy.

With the growth in investment, business and trade, people are finding less time for themselves. We must ensure our environment promotes well-being. The ongoing project in Msida is not just about traffic management; it is about creating a large public space with gardens, walking paths and play areas, offering a family friendly environment that enhances quality of life.

We are also focusing on improving connectivity. The government is working on identifying the best mass transit system, beyond the traditional bus service. We are investing in



Keeping traffic flowing while reducing transport emissions is a key government goal

sea transport, particularly inter-island ferries. A ferry service between the main harbors and Valletta became free last year, leading to a surge in usage, particularly by commuters.

Following this success, we are launching a new ferry service from Sliema to Bugibba in June. Bugibba, a major tourist destination, will be better connected to Valletta, creating a loop

CHRIS BONETT
MINISTER OF TRANSPORT
INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC WORKS
“Our strategic location in the Mediterranean makes us an ideal gateway to Europe, along with the Middle East and Africa.”

from Sliema to Valletta and Cottonera. We are also working on expanding options to the south of the island, where most of Malta's shipyards are located, to revive the area's business potential and improve connectivity for the densely populated region.

One of our most successful initiatives in recent years has been free public transport. In Malta, all public transport — whether by bus or sea — is free, except for travel to Gozo, where you pay for the ferry. This policy has had great results, with 68 million bus journeys in 2023 and over 75 million in 2024, a 13% increase.

Since launching free public transport in 2021, the number of users has risen by 50%, which is a significant achievement.

Our strategic location in the Mediterranean makes us an ideal gateway to Europe, along with the Middle East and Africa. Our maritime industry has long been successful, with our ship registry ranking sixth globally and first in Europe. This success has been duplicated in aviation, where we have been breaking records in aircraft and operator registrations.

What makes Malta attractive is our business-friendly environment, with open and flexible legislation. This fosters international business and draws people to live and work here, which in turn boosts tourism. We are also exploring direct flights to Malta from the US as part of our broader effort to enhance connectivity, both for business and tourism.

The transition to sustainable transport is a major priority for Malta, as seen with projects such as the shore-to-ship electricity supply at the Grand Harbour, expected to reduce 90% of air pollution from docked ships. How is the government integrating climate change adaptation and resilience into public works?

Malta is going green with infrastructure, particularly through the “shore-to-ship” project. This year, we introduced shore-to-ship operations, allowing ships to connect directly to our national grid instead of using heavy fuel oil.

Malta is the first in the Mediterranean and one of the first in Europe to implement this technology. We have already installed the system at the cruise liner terminal and are expanding it to the cargo terminal at our Freeport hub and another area in Corradino for roll-on/roll-off operations. By 2030, European legislation will require all ships to connect electrically when docked, and we are leading the way with this initiative.

The project is already attracting attention from other European countries seeking advice on our successful implementation. Despite our size, Malta's maritime leadership is recognized, and this green initiative further solidifies our role in the sector.

Malta is directly connected to more than 110 destinations worldwide, strengthening its position as a business and tourism hub. What additional steps is your ministry taking to further improve air connectivity, particularly in expanding links to key markets?

The arrival of Qatar Airways demonstrates that we are heading in the right direction. Air travel has become as common as bus rides, and to remain competitive, we must expand our connectivity. Our focus is on increasing air links to Asia and America, and we are actively seeking partners.

We have a Civil Aviation Directorate helping aviation companies register aircraft and Air Operator Certificates (AOCs) in Malta, with the goal of encouraging airlines to operate here. We are also exploring “fifth freedom flights”, where airlines can stop in Malta en route to other destinations, enhancing our role as a hub.

Just as we have successfully used Malta as a shipping hub, we aim to replicate this in aviation by establishing a cargo hub. Those already operating in Malta are satisfied and this strategy will boost both tourism and connectivity.

As one of the oldest continuously inhabited nations, Malta has unique challenges in maintaining and modernizing its aging infrastructure. How are you balancing heritage conservation with the need for modern, resilient infrastructure?

Valletta is an architectural gem and preserving its integrity while maximizing its use is crucial. For example, we have buildings built by the British that are used as offices and museums without compromising their historical value.

Over the past 20-30 years, we have shifted from seeing old buildings as outdated to recognizing their cultural and historic importance. Significant investment in restoration and retrofitting these buildings for energy efficiency, especially in government buildings, is occurring. We continue to modernize while respecting and preserving their architectural integrity. The bigger challenge lies in the roads, as many village roads were originally built for carriages. We have expanded roads where possible, but we focus more on smart traffic management. In some villages, we have implemented one-way roads and circular loops to improve flow without compromising historical structures.

Our unique architecture, such as traditional balconies, is a key attraction for tourists, so we prioritize preserving it while improving infrastructure. It can take time, as we work with cultural heritage experts, but we strive to balance modernization with architectural integrity.



Superyachts like the stunning Ilma from the Ritz-Carlton Collection often visit Malta



Malta boasts an impressive collection of tourism awards from leading organizations

Strategic gateway is maritime hub

Malta's transport sector offers unparalleled connectivity, robust regulations and investor friendly environment, making it the ultimate place for firms to write successful stories

Transport Malta is the national authority responsible for executing a comprehensive transport strategy across aviation, maritime and land transport, and Kurt Farrugia, CEO of Transport Malta, details.

Transport Malta plays a crucial role in the country's development. What is its mandate and some of its key priorities?

Our primary focus is on enhancing connectivity, fostering investment and embracing digital transformation to optimize our services. Over the years, we have achieved significant milestones by positioning Malta as a global transport hub through progressive regulatory reforms, infrastructure development and international partnerships.

How do Malta's regulations support growth, investment and international partnerships in the transport sector?

Malta's regulatory framework is designed to create a stable and investment-friendly environment while ensuring compliance with international standards. For example, our aviation sector has experienced remarkable expansion with over 920 registered aircraft, having doubled in just five years.

KURT FARRUGIA
CEO, TRANSPORT MALTA
“We are engaging with airline partners to ensure that Malta's story in air connectivity continues in Europe and beyond.”

Significantly, Malta's Ship Registry also continues to thrive with 90 million gross tons registered, making it the largest in Europe and sixth worldwide. Putting you in the picture, last year we welcomed 895 vessels under the Maltese flag, marking a 10% increase from 2023.

These regulations alongside targeted incentives have attracted high-quality investments in aviation, shipping and superyacht registration. This has catapulted Malta's position as a leader in maritime and aviation excellence. By ensuring high standards and offering a competitive regulatory environment, we have created opportunities for global businesses to establish themselves in Malta.

What initiatives are in place to attract American investors and strengthen existing partnerships?

Malta has a longstanding and evolving relationship with the US, particularly in transport and logistics. Presently, we are exploring ways to deepen our collaboration by securing direct air connectivity with North America. Certainly, this will be a huge boost in our country's prospects



Kurt Farrugia
CEO, Transport Malta

pects to drive tourism and business opportunities from the US to the Maltese Islands.

We are also positioning Malta as a strategic stopover point for transatlantic flights. In the maritime sector, Malta's inclusion in the US Coast Guard's Qalship 21 program cements our commitment to maintaining international standards.

Our ship registry is one of the most respected globally, with over 10,000 registered vessels, including more than 1,200 superyachts exceeding 24 meters. Therefore, we are optimistic that these collaborations pegged with other initiatives have the potential to rapidly increase business opportunities between Malta and the US.

How does your transport and infrastructure strategy help Malta's economic growth?

Our transport strategy centers around connectivity and sustainability. In aviation, we act as a crucial link for trade and tourism, offering direct connections to over 110 destinations.

The maritime sector is another pillar of economic growth with our ship registry and expanding superyacht industry strengthening Malta's role in global shipping. Malta remains the largest maritime register in Europe by gross tonnage contributing approximately €24 million to the local economy in 2024.

Our ports continue to attract major cruise liners, while our transshipment operations strengthen Malta's reputation as a Mediterranean logistics hub. These strategic initiatives amongst others ensure that the transport sector remains a key driver for our economic success.

Sustainability is at the forefront of global transport discussions. How is Malta transitioning towards greener mobility?

Sustainability needs to be a profound belief in our transport strategy. For instance, in the maritime sector, we are promoting alternative

fuels such as biofuels and LNG while increasing our efforts to electrify our port infrastructure.

In aviation, we are embracing more the aspect of fuel-efficient fleets and carbon offset programs to reduce emissions. Meanwhile, one must mention that even land transport is evolving in this regard. The idea of new sustainability practices like e-mobility initiatives and smart transport systems will surely help in alleviating congestion and lower carbon emissions.

Additionally, Transport Malta continues to be a prime mover by advancing its digital transformation. In fact, we are forecasting that by the end of Q1 of this year, the authority shall issue all transport-related certificates in digital format. Such move means better efficiency, more security and sustainability across the board.

What efforts are being made to enhance air connectivity further?

For an island-state like Malta, air connectivity remains vital for both tourism and business. Despite our geographical size, we have managed to punch above our weight and secured an extensive network of routes. While European connectivity remains strong, our target is now shifting to expand Malta's presence in North America and Asia.

We are engaging with airline partners to ensure that Malta's story in air connectivity continues in Europe and beyond. We also offer attractive incentives for airlines that establish strategic connections, ensuring continued growth in tourism and foreign business travel.

What are some key lessons Malta has learned from its campaigns advocating public transport?

Public transport is a vital pillar in our sustainable mobility efforts. Public relation awareness campaigns and the government's decision to provide free public transport to citizens are successfully shifting commuter behavior by encouraging greater use of public transport options such as electric buses, expanded ferry services and ride-sharing platforms.

By integrating these modes of transport, we have the capability of formulating a holistic transport ecosystem that meets the evolving needs of both locals and tourists.

How has Malta positioned itself as a maritime tourism hub in the Mediterranean?



Floating five-star hotels bring thousands of cruise passengers to Valletta each week

Full speed ahead for shipping's sustainability push

Malta's enviable position at the crossroads of several crucial shipping lanes has granted the archipelago a unique advantage in fostering economic growth and international trade, while the industry is also embracing green initiatives

Sustainability stands at the core of government and council activities in Malta, with this focus on pro-climate policies not just restricted to matters such as greater recycling by residents and encouraging motorists to swap their cars for comfortable — and free — modes of public transport.

This decarbonization drive was given extra thrust at last October's Malta Maritime Summit, with the popular event bringing together influential maritime leaders and stakeholders to address a broad range of issues in maritime sustainability, policy and the economics of the sea.

In a bid to promote sustainability in the maritime sector, prior to last year's summit, transport chiefs unveiled a series of incentives for shipowners who register environmentally friendly vessels. The new green ship initiative offers reduced registration fees and tax benefits for vessels of all sizes and categories that demonstrate lower emissions and higher energy efficiency.

Overseeing the initiative is Transport Malta, with the authority charged with providing additional support for shipowners adopting green technologies, such as scrubbers, ballast water management systems and alternative fuels. This program is part of Malta's commitment to the European Green Deal and its goals to reduce maritime carbon footprints.

“These green incentives are expected to attract a new wave of eco-friendly vessels to the Maltese registry, reinforcing the country's reputation as a forward-thinking maritime hub,” comments Kurt Farrugia, CEO of Transport Malta.

Over the past year, Malta's ship registry has undergone a significant digital transformation, aimed at improving efficiency and service delivery for shipowners. Last June, Transport Malta launched a new online platform that enables seamless electronic submissions for ship registrations, renewals and certifications.

The digital system includes features that include real-time application tracking, automated compliance checks and electronic document storage, which collectively reduce administrative burdens and expedite processes. These advancements are complemented by rigorous safety and environmental checks, aligning with both European

Union regulations and International Maritime Organization (IMO) standards.

“This transformation aligns with Malta's broader strategy to enhance its maritime services and provide a competitive edge in the global shipping industry,” adds Farrugia. “The initiative is expected to further solidify Malta's status as a preferred flag state, one that is known for its modern, efficient and reliable maritime administration.”

“Malta continues to strengthen its position as one of Europe's foremost ship registries by taking proactive measures to improve its ship registration services through a series of regulatory enhancements, green initiatives, security measures and digital transformation.”

Steering clear of choppy fiscal waters

Public and private sector officials are well aware of the need to strike a delicate balance between the shipping sector's environmental responsibility and economic prosperity. Maintaining its position near the forefront of the competitive maritime and transshipment industry is seen as paramount in keeping Malta interconnected within the value chains, as well as reinforcing its well earned reputation for excellence.

KURT FARRUGIA
CEO, TRANSPORT MALTA
“This transformation aligns with Malta's broader strategy to enhance its maritime services and provide a competitive edge in the global shipping industry.”

Recent investments in the Malta Freeport, are a prime example of such a commitment, according to Bonett. “This expansion will enable the port to accommodate larger, more environmentally friendly LNG-powered ships enhancing our commercial competitiveness as well as encouraging sustainability,” he said recently.

“Beyond addressing current issues, through innovation and promoting greener practices, our goal is to make use of sustainable practices, alter-



Shipping and maritime activities have flowed through Malta's veins for centuries

native fuels, and clean technology establishing us as a leader in the movement towards a more environmentally friendly marine future.”

As with the maritime services industry, Malta is home to a strong aviation services sector, with companies of all sizes helping the country build a fine reputation. Hefty investment in maintenance units has created hundreds of employment opportunities, including jobs for licensed engineers, mechanics and support staff.

As the flag carrier, KM Malta Airlines has its modern and efficient fleet serviced regularly by local firms dedicated to the highest standards of aircraft operations and maintenance. Meanwhile, major Irish operator Ryanair has invested tens of millions of euros in establishing a heavy maintenance and repairs operation in the country in recent years.

Launched a little under a year ago as the successor to Air Malta, KM Malta Airlines has quickly established a strong route network. Its route map includes frequent services to major European cities such as Amsterdam, Berlin, Brussels, Istanbul, London, Madrid, Milan, Paris and Zurich, with more routes in the pipeline.

“Our transport sector offers unparalleled connectivity, robust regulations and investor friendly environment,” Farrugia states. “For those seeking a strategic gateway in the Mediterranean, Malta is the ultimate place to write your successful story.

With his authority also extending to land

transport projects and operations on the islands, Farrugia has been a keen supporter of the wave of substantial investment in renewables technologies and the installation of electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure for private automobiles and public transport vehicles.

All systems go for incentives for EVs

Malta earmarked €15 million to subsidize the purchase of EVs last year, with that figure including electric bikes and electric motorcycles. In addition to the purchase premiums for new EVs, scrappage incentives for old combustion engines were offered to drivers willing to make the change to the new technology.

Another important project launched in 2024 was an initiative to increase the number of public EV charging points across the islands. If all goes to plan, the current number of charging stations should nearly quadruple to around 1,600 by the end of this year.

Malta's transition to EVs and greater sustainability in transport received a further boost in November last year when several eco-friendly electric buses arrived from overseas for use by local residents and tourists.

The small fleet is now helping to reduce pollution levels in the urban areas where they operate, a move that further underlines Malta's commitment to embracing carbon-reduction measures for a cleaner and better future.



Among Valletta's many architectural treasures are the famous Basilica of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, the St. Paul's and St. John's Cathedrals, and also Fort Manoel



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