

# Valletta



Few places can lay claim to the title of Europe's tiniest capital (well, maybe Liechtenstein's Vaduz, but let's not trifle with details here). Valletta is Malta's Lilliputian capital, measuring all of 600m by 1000m – you won't wear out too much shoe leather seeing the sights of the city, but you will come to appreciate its sheer compactness and the ease of exploring. You may also come to love its history-filled streets, squares and alleys, sometimes dilapidated but always charming, and its idiosyncratic quirks – a colourful row of overhanging first-floor balconies, a hulking bastion as a reminder of a turbulent past, a collection of bright yellow and orange buses, a shopfront that could be a relic of 1930s Britain.

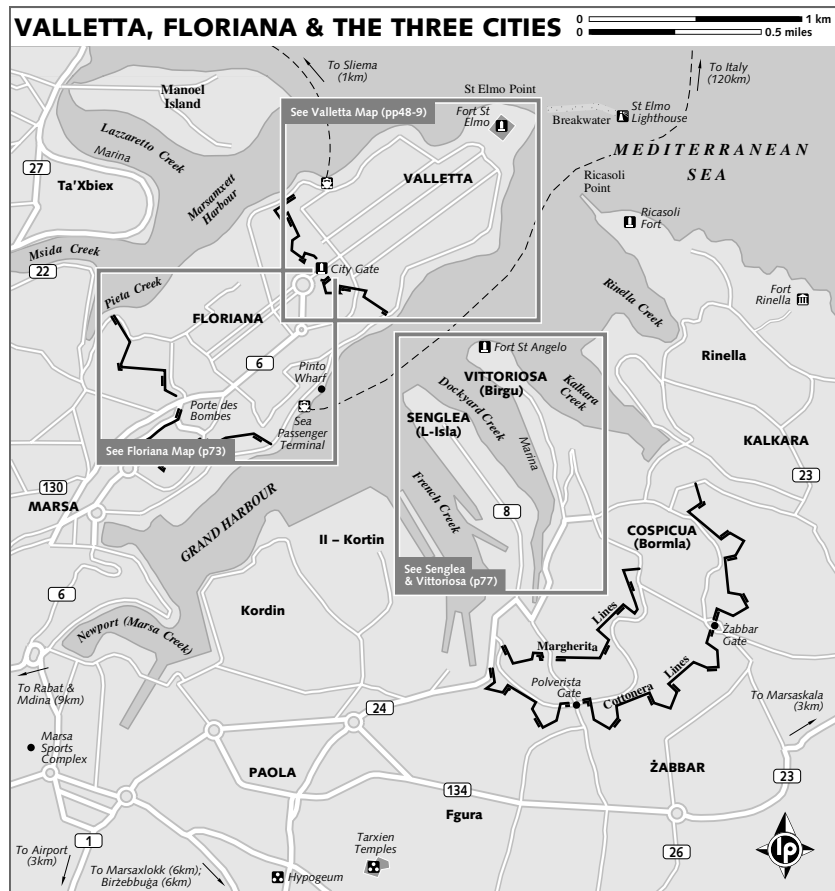
When Valletta was built by the Knights of St John in the 16th and 17th centuries, its founder decreed that it should be 'a city built by gentlemen for gentlemen', and it retains much of its elegance to this day. But that's not the capital's only quote-worthy quote: when Unesco has named Valletta a World Heritage site, it described it as 'one of the most concentrated historic areas in the world', and who are we to disagree?

Still, when you tire of all the history in and around Valletta, there are the treats you'd expect of most European capitals, albeit on a teensy scale (this capital has a population of only 7000). Good restaurants, bars and theatre can be enjoyed here, but don't expect Valletta to be buzzing all night – it's far too small for that sort of action, but that's a large part of its charm.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Exploring the nooks and crannies of **Valletta**, admiring the monuments and soaking up the history
- Checking out the view that puts the grand in Grand Harbour, from the **Upper Barrakka Gardens** (p66)
- Treading lightly on the magnificent marble floor of **St John's Co-Cathedral** (p60)
- Admiring the womanly curves of the 'fat ladies' at the **National Museum of Archaeology** (p62)
- Asking the unanswerable questions (who? why? how?) at the remarkable **Hypogeum** (p80) – *book ahead!*
- Exploring Vittoriosa's charming **Il Collachio** (p78), followed by a cruise of **Grand Harbour** (p77) in a *dghajsa* (traditional oar-powered boat)





## HISTORY

Before the Great Siege of 1565, the Scerberras Peninsula was uninhabited and unfortified, except for Fort St Elmo at its furthest point. Fearing another attack on Malta by the Turks, Grand Master la Valette (of the Knights of St John) began the task of financing and building new fortifications and a new city on what was then just a barren limestone ridge.

The foundation stone of Valletta was laid on 28 March 1566. Around 8000 slaves and artisans toiled on the slopes of Scerberras, levelling the summit, cutting a drainage system into the bedrock and laying out a regular grid of streets – Valletta was to be the first planned city in Europe, with buildings tall enough to shade the streets from the hot

sun, and straight streets to allow cooling sea breezes to circulate. A great ditch – 18m deep, 20m wide and nearly 1km long – was cut across the peninsula to protect the landward approach, and massive curtain walls and bastions were raised around the perimeter of the city.

Spurred on by the fear of a Turkish assault, the Knights completed the fortifications in only five years. With the defences in place, the new city was bestowed with churches, palaces, residential streets and, of course, a hospital.

Valletta was considered a masterpiece of architecture and town planning and today it remains one of Europe's finest and most distinctive cityscapes.

The threat of a Turkish attack in 1634 prompted Grand Master Antoine de Paule to begin the construction of a second line of landward defences, the Notre Dame Ditch, about 1km southwest of Valletta's Great Ditch. These were designed by the Italian engineer Pietro Paolo Floriani, who gave his name to the town (Floriana) that grew up within these walls in the 18th century.

## ORIENTATION

Valletta and its suburb, Floriana, occupy the long finger of the Scerberras Peninsula that divides Grand Harbour to the south from Marsamxett Harbour to the north. City Gate bus terminus (Malta's main bus station) lies between the two towns.

Valletta is barely a kilometre long and 600m wide, with a regular grid of narrow streets confined within its massive medieval fortifications. The main street, Triq ir-Repubblika (Republic St), runs in a straight line northeast from City Gate (adjacent to City Gate bus terminus) to Fort St Elmo, passing through Misrah l-Assejju l-Kbir (Great Siege Sq), Misrah ir-Repubblika (Republic Sq) and Pjazza San Gorg (St George's Sq).

Two other major streets run parallel to Repubblika – Triq il-Merkanti (Merchants' St) two blocks to the southeast, and Triq l-Ifran (Old Bakery St) two blocks to the northwest. Triq ir-Repubblika and Triq il-Merkanti roughly follow the spine of the peninsula, and side streets fall steeply downhill on either side. The main sights, St John's Co-Cathedral and the Grand Master's Palace, are on Triq ir-Repubblika within 500m of City Gate.

Street signs in Valletta are in both Malti and English. Note that houses are numbered in

sequence along one side of the street, and then back in the opposite direction along the other side, which means that No 20 can sometimes be across the street from No 200.

## Maps

Most maps of the Maltese Islands include an inset street plan of Valletta. Half a dozen different tourist maps of Valletta can be bought cheaply from the souvenir shops and bookshops on Triq ir-Repubblika. You can pick up free street maps of Valletta and Floriana at the tourist information office, as well as free brochures detailing walking tours of Valletta, Floriana and the Three Cities.

## INFORMATION

### Bookshops

Most major attractions also have a shop selling a range of Malta books, maps and souvenirs. **Agenda** (☎ 2125 2117; Embassy Complex, Triq Santa Luċija)

**Aquilina** (☎ 2123 3774; www.maltabook.com; 58 Triq ir-Repubblika) A very good selection of history books, travel guides, reference and fiction; most are available to buy online.

**Newsstand** (Triq il-Merkanti) A wide range of British, German and Italian newspapers and magazines is available from this hole-in-the-wall place near the Auberge d'Italie.

**Sapienzas** (☎ 2123 3621; 26 Triq ir-Repubblika) Another excellent selection of history books, travel guides, reference and fiction.

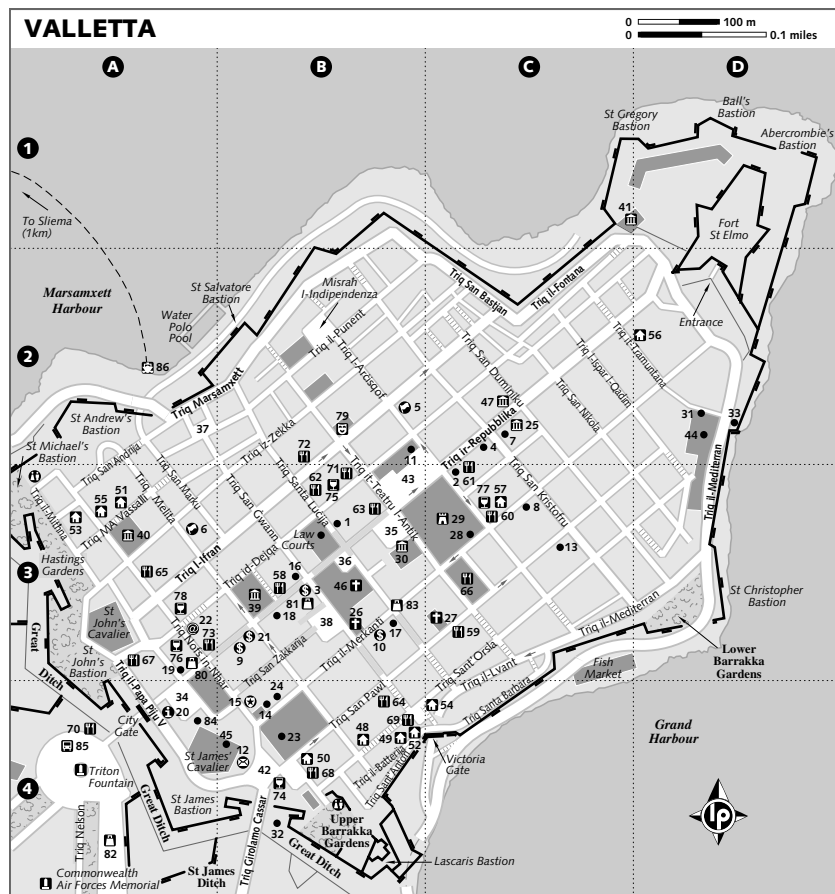
### Cultural Centres

Valletta and the surrounding area house a number of cultural centres, which offer exhibitions, lectures, language courses and cultural events.

### THE FOUNDER OF VALLETTA

Jean Parisot de la Valette (1494–1568) was a French nobleman from Provence. He joined the Order of St John at the age of 20 and served it faithfully for the rest of his life, holding the title of Grand Master from 1557 until his death. He was a hardened fighter who had been captured by Barbary pirates in 1541 and spent a year as a galley slave and was a natural leader whose greatest achievement was the defence of Malta against the Turks in the Great Siege of 1565.

In the aftermath of the Great Siege, la Valette immediately set about the fortification of the Scerberras Peninsula and the construction of a new city. Three years later, with the streets of Valletta already laid out, he suffered a stroke and died in August 1568 at the age of 73. His tomb in the crypt of St John's Co-Cathedral bears a Latin inscription which translates as: 'Here lies Valette, worthy of eternal honour. He who was once the scourge of Africa and Asia, and the shield of Europe, whence he expelled the barbarians by his holy arms, is the first to be buried in this beloved city, whose founder he was.'



**Alliance Française de Malte** (Map p73; ☎ 2123 8456; <http://site.voila.fr/alliancefr.mt>; 108 Triq San Tumas, Floriana)

**British Council** (☎ 2122 6377; [www.britishcouncil.org/malta](http://www.britishcouncil.org/malta); Exchange Buildings, Triq ir- Repubblika, Valletta)

**German-Maltese Circle** (☎ 2124 6967; [www.germanmaltesecircle.org](http://www.germanmaltesecircle.org); Messina Palace; 141 Triq San Kristofru, Valletta)

**Italian Cultural Institute** (☎ 2122 1462; [www.iicmalta.org](http://www.iicmalta.org); Pjazza San Gorg, Valletta)

**Russian Centre for Science & Culture** (☎ 2122 2030; 36 Triq il-Merkanti, Valletta)

## Emergency

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

**Police station** (☎ 2122 5495; Triq Nofs in-Nhar, Valletta) Opposite the site of the old Opera House.

## Internet Access

**Ziffa** (☎ 2123 4007; [www.ziffa.net](http://www.ziffa.net); 194 Triq id-Dejqa; per hr Lm1; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Sat, 9am-10pm Sun) Plenty of computers, fast internet access and good rates for overseas phone calls.

## Medical Services

**Royal Pharmacy** (☎ 2125 2396; 271 Triq ir-Repubblika) Central pharmacy open during shopping hours.

## Money

There are plenty of places to change money and cash travellers cheques on and near Triq ir-Repubblika in Valletta.

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**Bank of Valletta** (cnr Triq ir-Repubblika & Triq San Gwann; ☎ 8.30am-2pm Mon-Thu, 8.30am-3.30pm Fri, 8.30am-12.30pm Sat) Foreign exchange machine and ATMs.

**HSBC** (15 Triq ir-Repubblika & 32 Triq il-Merkanti) Foreign exchange machine and ATMs.

**Travellex** (20 Triq ir-Repubblika; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Currency exchange bureau.

## Post

**Main Post Office** (Pjazza Kastilja; ☎ 8.15am-3.45pm Mon-Fri, 8.15am-12.30pm Sat) Found under the St James' Cavalier, opposite the Auberge de Castille.

## Tourist Information

**Heritage Malta** (☎ 2295 4000; [www.heritagemalta.org](http://www.heritagemalta.org); Old University Buildings, Triq il-Merkanti) Head office of the organisation entrusted with managing the national museums and heritage sites of the Maltese Islands. The

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office distributes information on sites under their management and hosts occasional art exhibits.

**Tourist Information Branch** (☎ 2369 6073; Malta International Airport, arrivals hall; ☎ 10am-9pm)

**Tourist Information Office** (☎ 2123 7747; Misrah il-Helsien; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-2pm Sun, closed public holidays) In the City Arcade, immediately on the right as you enter Valletta through City Gate.

## Travel Agencies

**National Student Travel Service** (NSTS; ☎ 2558 8000; [www.nsts.org](http://www.nsts.org); 220 Triq San Pawl) Specialises in student and youth travel; can arrange budget holiday packages, water-sports facilities and English-language courses (for more information see p166).

**SMS Travel & Tourism** (☎ 2123 2211; [www.sms-travel.net](http://www.sms-travel.net); 311 Triq ir-Repubblika) A good general agency, offering excursions, guided tours, currency exchange and plane and ferry tickets.

## VALLETTA STREET NAMES

It's helpful to know the names of Valletta's main streets in both Malti and English, as many maps feature only one language or the other, and many businesses advertise in English and use the English street name.

Triq id-Dejqa	Strait St	Triq Melita	Melita St
Triq il-Merkanti	Merchants' St	Triq Nofs in-Nhar	South St
Triq ir-Repubblika	Republic St	Triq San Gwann	St John's St
Triq it-Teatru l-Antik	Old Theatre St	Triq San Pawl	St Paul's St
Triq iz-Zekka	Old Mint St	Triq San Zakkarija	St Zachary's St
Triq l'Arcisqof	Archbishop St	Triq Sant'Orsla	St Ursula's St
Triq l-Iffran	Old Bakery St	Triq Santa Luċija	St Lucija's St

## SIGHTS

### St John's Co-Cathedral

Malta's most impressive church, **St John's Co-Cathedral** (☎ 2122 0536; Triq ir-Repubblika; adult/child Lm1.50/free; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm Sat, last admission 30 min before closing, closed Sun, public holidays & during services) was designed by the architect Gerolamo Cassar and built between 1573 and 1578 as the conventual church of the Knights of St John. It took over from the Church of St Lawrence in Vittoriosa as the place where the Knights would gather for communal worship. It was raised to a status equal to that of St Paul's Cathedral in Mdina – the official seat of the Archbishop of Malta – by a papal decree of 1816, hence the term 'co-cathedral'.

The façade is rather plain, and framed by twin bell-towers – a feature that has been copied by almost every church in Malta – but the interior is a colourful treasure house of Maltese baroque. The nave is long and low and every wall, pillar and rib is encrusted with rich ornamentation, giving the effect of a dusty gold brocade – the Maltese Cross and the arms of the Order (a white cross on a scarlet background) can be seen everywhere. The floor is a vast patchwork quilt of colourful marble tomb slabs in black, white, blue, red, pink and yellow, and the vault is covered in paintings by Mattia Preti (see the boxed text, p37) illustrating events from the life of St John the Baptist. The altar is dominated by a huge marble sculpture of the baptism of Christ, with a painting, *St John in Heaven*, by Preti above it.

There are six bays on either side of the nave, eight of which contain chapels allocated to the various langues (or divisions, based on nationality) of the Order of St John and

dedicated to the patron saint of the particular langue. The first bay you'll encounter upon entering and walking to your right is the **Chapel of Germany**.

Opposite is the **Chapel of Castille & Portugal**, with monuments to Grand Masters Antonio Manoel de Vilhena and Manuel Pinto de Fonseca. This is followed by the **Chapel of Aragon**, the most splendid in the cathedral. The tombs of the brothers – and consecutive Grand Masters – Rafael and Nicolas Cotoner compete for the title of most extravagant sculpture.

The last bay in this aisle, past the **Chapel of Auvergne**, contains the **Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament** (also known as the Chapel dedicated to the Madonna of Carafa), closed off by a pair of solid silver gates. It contains a 15th-century crucifix from Rhodes and keys of captured Turkish fortresses.

Opposite is the dark and moody **Chapel of Provence**, containing the tombs of Grand Masters Antoine de Paule and Jean Lascaris Castellar. The steps at the back lead down to the cathedral **crypt** (usually closed to the public), where the first 12 Grand Masters of Malta – from 1523 to 1623 – are interred. The reclining effigies include Jean Parisot de la Valette, hero of the Great Siege and the founder of Valletta, and his English secretary Sir Oliver Starkey, the only man below the rank of Grand Master to be honoured with a tomb in the crypt. Darker still is the **Chapel of the Holy Relics** (also known as the Chapel of the Anglo-Bavarian Langue), which contains a wooden figure of St John that is said to have come from the galley in which the Knights departed from Rhodes in 1523.

The austere **Chapel of France**, with a Preti altarpiece of St Paul, was stripped of its baroque decoration in the 1840s. Preti's painting,

*The Mystic Marriage of St Catherine*, hangs in the **Chapel of Italy**, looking down on a bust of Grand Master Gregorio Carafa.

Visitors to the cathedral should note that they are requested to dress appropriately for a house of worship – shawls can be provided at the ticket office. Stiletto heels are not permitted, to protect the marble floor. Flash photography is also banned.

### CATHEDRAL MUSEUM

The first bay in the south aisle of St John's gives access to the **Cathedral Museum** (☎ 2122 0536; admission included in cathedral ticket price; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm Sat, last admission 30 min before closing, closed Sun, public holidays & during services). The first room is the Oratory, built in 1603 as a place of worship and for the instruction of novices. It is dominated by the altarpiece the *Beheading of St John the Baptist* (c 1608) by Caravaggio, one of the artist's most famous and accomplished paintings. The executioner – reaching for a knife to finish off the job that his sword began – and the horrified Salome with her platter are depicted with chilling realism. On the east wall hangs *St Jerome*, another of Caravaggio's masterpieces.

The rest of the museum houses collections of vestments, 16th-century choral books and a collection of Flemish tapestries depicting Bible scenes and religious allegories. The tapestries were based on drawings by Rubens, and were commissioned by Grand Master Ramon de Perellos, whose escutcheon appears on each panel.

### Grand Master's Palace

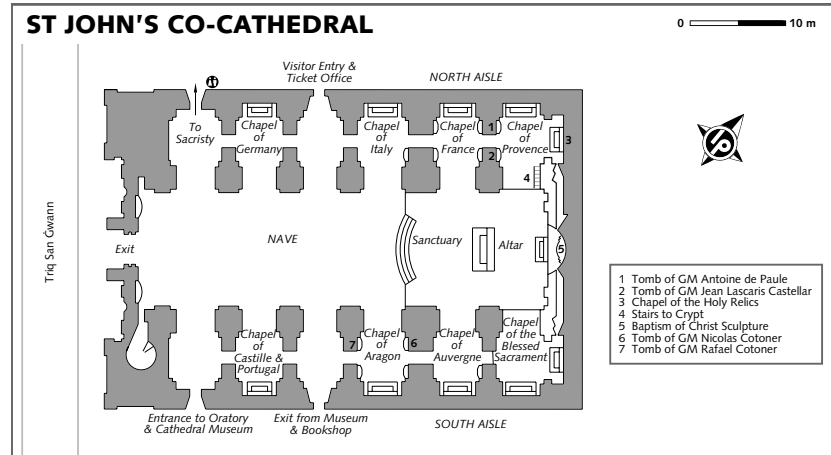
The 16th-century **Grand Master's Palace** (Pjazza San Ġorġ, visitor entrance on Triq il-Merkanti), once the residence of the Grand Masters of the Knights of St John, is today the seat of Malta's parliament and the official residence of the Maltese president.

There are two VIP entrances on Pjazza San Ġorġ, but these are not for general public admission. The right-hand arch leads to **Prince Alfred's Courtyard**, where two stone lions guard a doorway leading to the Great Hall (now occupied by Malta's parliamentary House of Representatives) and a clock tower built in 1745 marks the hours with bronze figures of Moorish slaves striking gongs. The left-hand arch leads into **Neptune's Courtyard**, named for the 17th-century bronze statue of the sea-god that stands there.

From the public entry on Triq il-Merkanti it is possible to visit the **Armoury** (☎ 2124 9349; adult/child Lm2/0.50; ☎ 9am-5pm) and the **State Apartments** (☎ 2124 9349; adult/child Lm2/0.50; ☎ 10am-4pm Fri-Wed); note that the State Apartments are closed from time to time when official state visits are taking place.

Heritage Malta conducts guided tours (included in the cost of admission) of the Armoury and the apartments at 10.30am, 12.30pm and 2.30pm daily; tours and times are not set in stone, so it may be worth making advance enquiries.

The **Armoury** is now housed in what was once the Grand Master's stables. The armour and weapons belonging to the Knights were



## VALLETTA IN...

**Two Days**

Get the day started with alfresco coffee and *pastizzi* at **Caffe Cordina** (p70) then educate yourself on the country at the **Malta Experience** (p65). Spend the day wandering Valletta's history-loaded streets – be sure to pop in to major attractions such as **St John's Co-Cathedral** (p60), the **Grand Master's Palace** (p61) and the **National Museum of Archaeology** (below), then rest your legs at the view-enriched **Upper Barrakka Gardens** (p66). On the second day, take a tour of the **Hypogeum** (p80) – be sure to prebook – then spend the afternoon exploring the nooks and crannies of the intriguing **Three Cities** (p75) area. Take in an evening show in Valletta at **Manoel Theatre** (p64) or **St James' Cavalier Centre for Creativity** (p71).

**Four Days**

Shake and add water to the two-day itinerary, then stir in the following: see the **Wartime Experience** (p65) and visit the **National War Museum** (opposite) to learn of WWII heroism and hardships in Malta. For a change of scenery, stroll around **Floriana** (p73) and head down to **Pinto Wharf** (p75) for a leisurely waterfront meal. The next day, explore further afield – take a bus to **Mdina** (p123), **Marsaxlokk** (p137) or the **northern beaches** (p114), or go by ferry across to bustling **Sliema** (p83).

once stored at the Palace Armoury (now the Great Hall used by the parliament), and when a Knight died they became the property of the Order. The current collection of over 5000 suits of 16th- to 18th-century armour is all that remains of an original 25,000 suits – Napoleon's light-fingered activities, over-enthusiastic housekeeping by the British and general neglect put paid to the rest.

Some of the most interesting pieces are the breastplate worn by la Valette, the beautifully damascened (steel inlaid with gold) suit made for Alof de Wignacourt, and the captured Turkish sipahi armour. A second room contains displays of weapons, including crossbows, muskets, swords and pistols. To overcome the dearth of exhibit labelling, admission now includes a self-guided audio tour (available in six languages).

A staircase past the Armoury entrance provides access to the **State Apartments**. Only a few rooms are open to the public, depending on what is currently being used. The long **Armoury Corridor**, decorated with trompe l'oeil painting, scenes of naval battles, blue colours and the portraits and escutcheons of various Grand Masters, leads to the **Council Chamber** on the left. It is hung with 17th-century Gobelin tapestries gifted to the Order in 1710 by Grand Master Ramon Perellos. They feature exotic scenes of Africa, India, the Caribbean and Brazil, including an elephant beneath a cashew-nut tree; an ostrich, cassowary and flamingo; a rhino and a zebra being attacked

by a leopard; and a tableau with palm trees, a tapir, a jaguar and an iguana.

Beyond lie the **State Dining Room** and the **Supreme Council Hall**, where the Supreme Council of Order met. It is decorated with a frieze depicting events from the Great Siege of 1565, while the minstrels' gallery bears paintings showing scenes from the Book of Genesis. At the far end of the hall a door gives access to the **Hall of the Ambassadors**, or Red State Room, where the Grand Master would receive important visitors, and where the Maltese president still receives foreign envoys. It contains portraits of the French kings Louis XIV, Louis XV and Louis XVI, the Russian empress Catherine the Great, and several Grand Masters. The neighbouring **Pages' Room**, or Yellow State Room (despite the abundance of greenish tones), was used by the Grand Master's 16 attendants, and now serves as a conference room.

**National Museum of Archaeology**

Housed in the Auberge de Provence, the **National Museum of Archaeology** (☎ 2122 1623; Triq ir-Repubblika; adult/child Lm1/0.25; 🕒 9am-5pm) is well worth a visit, despite the fact that it is still undergoing renovation and expansion (long past its scheduled completion date). At the time of research only the galleries on the ground floor (detailing the early Neolithic and Temple periods, c 5200 to 2500 BC) were open, but new exhibitions should be opening upstairs sometime in 2007, and these will explore the

Bronze Age, Phoenician and Roman culture and the medieval period up to the modern period (c 2500 BC to AD 1800s).

In the downstairs galleries you can see the beautiful and often mysterious objects that have been found at Malta's prehistoric sites, along with displays showing the technology used to build Malta's prehistoric temples, and the evolution of temple design from simple stone huts to the elaborate layout of Ġgantija. There is also a very good model of the Hypogeum on display.

The exhibits include female figurines found at Haġar Qim, the so-called 'fat ladies' (no offence, girls) – perhaps representing a fertility goddess – with massive rounded thighs and arms, but tiny, doll-like hands and feet, wearing a pleated skirt and sitting with legs tucked neatly to one side. The so-called *Venus de Malta*, also from Haġar Qim, is about 10cm tall and displays more realistic modelling, possibly of a pregnant woman. Best of all is the *Sleeping Lady*, found at the Hypogeum and dating from around 3000 BC – here the well-endowed Venus is seen lying on her side with her head propped on one arm, apparently deep in slumber.

Heritage Malta conducts one-hour guided tours of the museum at 10am and 2pm Tuesday and Thursday, 10am and 11.30am Sunday; the tours are free with admission and are a great way to learn about the prehistoric temple-building period, especially if you plan to visit the Hypogeum or any of the megalithic temples scattered around Malta. Tours and times are not set in stone, so it may be worth making advance enquiries.

**National Museum of Fine Arts**

Occupying Admiralty House, Malta's **National Museum of Fine Arts** (☎ 2122 5769; Triq Nofs in-Nhar; adult/child Lm1/0.25; 🕒 9am-5pm) is a baroque palazzo that was used as the official residence of the admiral commander-in-chief of the British Mediterranean Fleet from the 1820s until 1961. Lord Louis Mountbatten also had his headquarters here in the early 1950s.

The museum's collection of paintings – mostly Italian and Maltese – ranges from the 15th to the 20th century, and there are some fine examples of 17th- and 18th-century Maltese furniture.

Begin your explorations upstairs and to the left (note the church silver and sculptures en route). Highlights include rooms 12 and 13,

which display works by Mattia Preti (see p37). Look out for the dramatic *Martyrdom of St Catherine*, doubting Thomas poking a finger into Christ's wound in *The Incredulity of St Thomas*, and St John the Baptist dressed in the habit of the Knights of St John.

Downstairs, room 14 contains portraits of several Grand Masters by the 18th-century French artist Antoine de Favray, including one of the imperious Manoel Pinto de Fonseca. Room 18 has scenes of Malta by 19th-century British artists, including poet Edward Lear, and a wonderful watercolour depicting a Grand Harbour scene, painted by Turner in 1830 – the museum's pride and joy. Interestingly, Turner never visited Malta, and the work is based on scenes painted by another artist. Room 19 has many 19th-century scenes of Valletta.

Heritage Malta conducts guided tours (free with admission) of the museum at 11am and 2pm Tuesday and Thursday; tours and times can change, so it may be worth making advance enquiries.

**National War Museum**

Commemorating the country's ordeal during WWII, Malta's **National War Museum** (☎ 2122 2430; Triq il-Fontana; adult/child Lm1/0.25; 🕒 9am-5pm) is housed in the northwest corner of Fort St Elmo. The collection of relics, photographs and equipment includes the Gloster Gladiator biplane called *Faith* (minus wings), the jeep *Husky* used by General Eisenhower, and the wreckage of a Spitfire and a Messerschmitt Me-109 fighter aircraft recovered from the sea bed. The pictures of bomb damage in Valletta give some idea of the amount of rebuilding that was needed after the war. Pride of place goes to the replica George Cross medal that was awarded to the entire population of Malta in 1942.

Heritage Malta conducts guided tours of the museum at 11am and 2pm daily; tours are free with admission; tours and times are not fixed, so enquire in advance.

**St James' Cavalier**

The St James' Cavalier has undergone a remarkable transformation from a 16th-century fortification into a bright, modern arts centre. Inside the **St James' Cavalier Centre for Creativity** (☎ 2122 3200; www.sjccv.org; Triq Nofs in-Nhar; admission free; 🕒 10am-9.30pm) are a couple of exhibition spaces (with a bias towards the contemporary



### DIY CAPITAL BUS TOUR

Fancy a cheap, quick, DIY bus tour of the capital? Bus 98 is a circular route departing City Gate on the hour from 7am to 6pm. It does a clockwise loop around the bastions of Valletta and through Floriana, so you can take in harbour views, Fort St Elmo and Pinto Wharf (encompassing the start of the new Valletta waterfront development). You'll see the periphery of the capital from the bus, but you'll need to 'fill in the gaps' on foot. A complete bus circuit takes around 15 to 20 minutes; the fare is all of Lm0.15.

Cathedral. A stiff climb leads up to **Manoel Theatre** (5; p64), built in 1731 and one of the oldest theatres in Europe.

Continue along Triq Marsamxett and around the walls of the Poste D'Angleterre and Poste de France. Drop in to the **National War Museum** (6; p63) to learn of WWII heroism, then continue past **Fort St Elmo** (7; p64), which bore the brunt of Turkish attacks during the Great Siege of 1565.

A little further along Triq il-Mediterran lies the entrance to the **Malta Experience** (8; p65), an audiovisual presentation that provides a potted history of Malta. The show screens in the basement of the 16th-century hospital of the Order of St John, the **Sacra Infermeria** (9; p65), now a conference centre. There's an exhibition here on the history of the medical care given by the Knights.

About 200m past the Sacra Infermeria the road forks, and on the left is a small park and a tall pillared cupola. This is the **Siege Bell Memorial** (10), which commemorates those who lost their lives in the convoys of 1940 to 1943. Take the right hand fork in the road (still Triq il-Mediterran) past the entrance to **Lower Barrakka Gardens** (11), which contains a little Doric temple commemorating Sir Alexander Ball, the naval captain who took Malta from the French in 1800.

Continue along Triq Santa Barbara, a charming tree-lined street (rare in these parts) with views over the harbour to the Three Cities. Cross the bridge above Victoria Gate and head through a sun-trap of a square, usually home to a handful of café tables, beside the Grand Harbour Hotel. Turn left and climb up steep Triq il-Batterija to reach the **Upper Barrakka Gardens**

(12). The balcony here provides a magnificent panorama of Grand Harbour and the creeks and dockyards of Vittoriosa and Senglea. Time your visit to coincide with the firing of the noon-day gun (a cannon fired at noon daily).

From the gardens continue to Pjazza Kastilja. On your left are the high walls of the **St James' Cavalier** (13; p63) which now houses interesting exhibition spaces, a theatre and cinema. Pause to admire the façade of the **Auberge de Castille** (14) on your right, designed by the architect Andrea Belli in 1741. It adorns a 16th-century building that was once the home of the Spanish and Portuguese langue of the Knights of St John, but now houses the offices of the Maltese prime minister (not open to the public).

Head straight along Triq Nofs in-Nhar towards Triq ir-Repubblika, passing the cracked steps and shattered column stumps of the ruined **Royal Opera House** (15) on your left. This once imperious building was built in the 1860s, but was destroyed during a German air raid in 1942. Its gutted shell has been left as a reminder of the war and is rather unceremoniously used as a car park while controversy rages as to what should be done with the site. The most recent proposal is to transform the ruins into a permanent open-air performance space.

From here you can continue your explorations of the capital by turning right and heading down the main street, Triq ir-Repubblika, home to the bulk of Valletta's major attractions. Taking any side street off this main thoroughfare can quickly take you away from crowds and into the heart of workaday Valletta.

### VALLETTA FOR CHILDREN

Valletta is a treasure trove of history and architecture – but, let's face it, there are not too many kids who get excited over such grown-up subjects. It's likely that your young offspring will enjoy walking along the city walls and taking in the great views, scenically situated gardens, café-filled squares and vaulted cellar restaurants of Valletta, but there are few attractions in the capital designed specifically for children. Older kids should enjoy the Malta Experience (p65) and historical reenactments at Fort St Elmo (p64), and younger kids may delight in some of the gory scenes depicted in exhibitions such as the Great Siege of Malta & the Knights of St John (p65) or the Knights Hospitallers (p65) – but it's unlikely that much of the history lessons will sink in.

### FESTIVALS & EVENTS

See p172 for details on some of the country's foremost festivals, most of which include events staged in and around the capital.

### SLEEPING

Except for a couple of notable exceptions, accommodation in Valletta is depressingly lacklustre. Despite this (and the fact that there are only a handful of options here), the capital still gets our vote for best place in Malta to be based if you're more interested in history and culture than a beach holiday. The main museums and attractions are within easy walking distance, and buses depart from the City Gate terminus to all parts of the island.

Many places offer discounts on stays of seven days or longer – it's worth asking. Some also offer half-board and full-board options: these are usually reasonable value, but you're better off with the freedom to visit the eateries of your choice.

Valletta guesthouses are from another era – you won't find internet bookings or TV rooms here. In the midrange category there are two OK hotel options, and two shabby but well-located hotels crying out for a facelift. Where prices are listed 'per person', these are based on two people sharing a room; guesthouses rarely charge a single supplement, but hotels often do. Valletta's only top-end hotel is technically in Floriana, just outside the city walls, but it's a mere hop, step and jump from the capital.

### Budget

**Coronation Guesthouse** (☎ 2123 7652, 9940 6080; 10E Triq M A Vassalli; B&B per person with shared bathroom Lm5-6) The warmth of the welcome here and the bargain prices should help overcome any concerns you may have with the occasionally problematic plumbing. Rooms (with washbasin; bathrooms are shared) are bright and airy and simply furnished; try for one with Marsamxett views. We were assured by amiable Charlie, the owner, that new plumbing and a guest kitchen were in the pipeline.

**Midland Guesthouse** (☎ 2123 6024; 255 Triq Sant'Orsla; B&B per person with shared bathroom Lm6) Down the hill from the polished Asti Guesthouse is another elegant old townhouse. The neat rooms here are very pleasant, spread over three floors, and have washbasin and homely, older-style décor.

**our pick** **Asti Guesthouse** (☎ 2123 9506; <http://mol.net.mt/asti>; 18 Triq Sant'Orsla; B&B per person with shared

bathroom from Lm7) You'll get a taste of old-school Valletta charm here plus the best-value accommodation in town. This classy, 350-year-old townhouse features huge, airy guest rooms and gleaming shared bathrooms. The bargain prices give little indication of its simple elegance – breakfast is served in a cheery plant-filled room with vaulted ceiling and chandelier. Up the stairs on various levels are nine large rooms, each with two or three beds, fuss-free wooden furniture and washbasin. Plants, wall hangings and ornaments adorn the halls, lending a warm and homely feel.

Other options, in a pinch:  
**Le Bonheur Guesthouse** (☎ 2123 8433; [bonheurmalta@hotmail.com](mailto:bonheurmalta@hotmail.com); 18 Triq l-Inġinieri; B&B per person Lm6) Aging place at the top of the town, where the building's bones hint at a grander era. Rooms come with washbasin and, bizarrely, a shower in the corner of the room (you'll need to know your travel companion well!). Toilets are shared.

**YMCA** (☎ 2124 0680; [www.ymcahomeless.org](http://www.ymcahomeless.org); reception at 178 Triq il-Merkanti; dm Lm3) Only for open-minded budget travellers with a social conscience. The local YMCA does a great job working with the homeless and disadvantaged who reside here; one floor of this temporary shelter, known as Dar Niki Cassar, is given over to cramped dorm accommodation for travellers. Kitchen and bathrooms are communal. Reception is at the YMCA office drop-in centre; the hostel itself is located elsewhere. To protect the privacy of residents, the YMCA prefers travellers to contact the office first for exact details of the location.

### Midrange

**British Hotel** (☎ 2122 4730; [www.britishhotel.com](http://www.britishhotel.com); 40 Triq il-Batterija; s/d Lm14/20, with sea view Lm16/25; ☎) Large parts of the 2005 movie *Munich* were filmed in Malta, and when location scouts wanted a 1970s-styled hotel, they chose the British – and barely needed to do a thing to it. The décor in the foyer, TV room and bar is so dated it might now be considered retro-cool. The hotel has its fans and its detractors – on the plus side it's affordable and well located, and enjoys great views over the Three Cities. The minuses: it's looking quite shabby and is a real rabbit warren; the rooms are basic and lacking in charm; you'll pay a deposit for *everything* (hairdryer, iron, electrical adaptor, air-con remote – air-con is Lm3 per day). However, it's worth paying extra for a view.

**Castille Hotel** (☎ 2124 3677/8; [www.hotelcastille.malta.com](http://www.hotelcastille.malta.com); Pjazza Kastilja; B&B per person Lm16.50-20; ☎) Castille has a number of points in its favour – not least its cheerful front-desk staff and

grand position, in an old palazzo next to the ornate 16th-century Auberge de Castille. The hotel's small lobby and lounge make a good first impression, while guest rooms have a more faded charm and feature heavy Italianate furnishings and some questionable colour combos. The décor would certainly benefit from an upgrade, but in-room facilities include air-con and satellite TV; decent-sized single rooms are available for solo travellers (no supplement). Request a room at the front of the building for better light and views of the square below. One bonus of staying here is the fun cellar pizzeria, La Cave (opposite), and the rooftop restaurant for breakfast or dinner with a view over Grand Harbour.

**Osborne Hotel** (☎ 2124 3656; www.osbornehotel.com; 50 Triq Nofs in-Nhar; d Lm28-34; 🏠 📺 📺) The Osborne deserves some credit for breathing much-needed life into the hotel scene, with newly renovated rooms on its lower floors. The plan is eventually to renovate each of the five floors, but this may be a slow process. Shame, really, because – as things stand – the best views are on the top floors, the best rooms on the lower floors. The lower-level 'superior' rooms feature pale streamlined furnishings and decent storage space, plus flatscreen TVs as a mark of modernity. As you move up the building, the furniture grows darker and the fittings more dated. Still, air-con and cable TV are standard, views on request... And despite the anonymity of the rooms (superior or not), there's some character in the ground level. The small reception area is flanked by a restaurant and classy bar and lounge. On the 6th floor there's a roof terrace with city views and a tiny splash pool.

**our pick** **Valletta G-House** (☎ UK +44 (0)781 3988 827; www.vallettahouse.com; Triq it-Tramuntana; apt per week UK£380-410) You'll need to book early to snare time at this sumptuous, adults-only apartment, and note that prices are in UK pounds and rentals are generally only on a weekly basis. The artistic owner, a Maltese guy based in London, has restored a 16th-century, character-filled townhouse to offer wonderfully romantic self-catering accommodation within its limestone walls. Entry is at street level and the entrance area doubles as a small sitting room, with TV and DVD (classic movies provided). Downstairs is a rustic, low-ceilinged cellar kitchen and a small, modern bathroom. On the first level is the

apartment's definite *pièce de résistance* – the large and luxe bedroom, which includes a sitting area, traditional Maltese enclosed balcony and striking floor tiles. Books, CDs, artwork, tapestries, fresh flowers and fine linen round out the picture beautifully. Prices include airport transfers and a welcome basket of local produce.

If everywhere else is full, you might want to consider the tired **Grand Harbour Hotel** (☎ 2124 6003; www.grandharbourhotel.com; 47 Triq il-Batterija; B&B per person Lm10), with much the same pros and cons as the nearby British Hotel.

## Top End

**Le Meridien Phoenicia Hotel** (Map p73; ☎ 2122 5241; www.phoenicia.lemeridien.com; The Mall, Floriana; r from Lm90/120 low/high season; 🏠 📺 📺) This grand old dame feels like a relic from another era. Built in the late 1930s, it is one of Malta's classiest hotels and takes up some prime real estate, only a minute's walk from Valletta's City Gate. Step away from the chaos of the bus terminus and up the garden path to be ushered in to an oasis of calm. The summery décor of the elegant guest rooms conjures up a more tropical climate; a higher rate gets you views of Marsamxett Harbour or the city walls of Valletta. First-class facilities include 24-hour room service, free car parking (a boon in this traffic-clogged neighbourhood), a business centre and a magnificent seven-acre garden with minigolf course, kids' play area and heated outdoor pool. There's an old-world club bar, a fine-dining restaurant and a more casual brasserie on site.

## EATING

Valletta is essentially a business district, and there are many restaurants and cafés that are open at lunchtime but closed in the evenings. Still, there are a growing number of quality places in which to enjoy dinner and a relaxed evening drink.

## Restaurants

**La Sicilia** (☎ 2124 0659; 1a Triq San Gwann; snacks & meals Lm0.50-6; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) You're sure to find something to fill a rumbling tum at this tiny, unpretentious eatery, which spills out onto a little sun-trap of a square. There are lots of hearty Italian pasta dishes (under Lm3), grilled meats and fish, plus burgers, omelettes and salads. The setting is lovely and the prices are easy on the wallet.

**La Cave** (☎ 2124 3677; Pjazza Kastilja; meals Lm2-4; 🕒 lunch & dinner) In a 400-year-old cellar beneath Castille Hotel, this busy restaurant churns out crunchy pizzas big enough for two – the pizza Maltija is topped with goat's cheese, olives and Maltese sausage. There's also a good assortment of pasta dishes (and a few salad options best avoided), and you can wash your food down with a selection of local wine – you might need more than one bottle though, as service can be slow.

**Blue Room** (☎ 2123 8014; 59 Triq ir-Repubblika; dishes Lm2-7; 🕒 lunch & dinner) A few readers think this place has gone downhill, but on our most recent visit we found the aromatic duck as tasty as we did first time around. The polished service and attractive interior still score points, as does the menu – this is one of very few places in the capital not offering pizza and/or pasta. There are vegetable and rice/noodle dishes at the lower end of the price scale, and seafood and sizzling hotplates if you want to lash out. The Lm0.75 cover charge does sting, however.

**Trabuxu** (☎ 2122 3036; cnr Triq Nofs in-Nhar & Triq id-Dejqa; dishes Lm2.50-4; 🕒 lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sun) The name means 'corkscrew' and this intimate little cellar passes itself off as a wine bar, but we like it equally for its superbly presented meals. The short menu offers pâté, dips and other colourful platters perfect for wine-time grazing, but also all-to-yourself dishes such as a first-rate veggie lasagne. Local wines by the glass are a pleasing Lm0.90.

**Papannis** (☎ 2125 1960; 55 Triq id-Dejqa; mains Lm3-6; 🕒 lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Fri & Sat) This cosy bistro combines a good-looking menu of pasta, risotto and seafood with cheerful, friendly service. The traditional soup (Lm1.30) is a hearty, rustic delight, full of local sausage, beans and vegies, so you can feel virtuous when you order another glass of local wine (Lm0.95) and move on to the tiramisu.

**Carriage** (☎ 2124 7828; 22/5 Valletta Bldgs, Triq Nofs in-Nhar; mains Lm3-7; 🕒 lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Fri & Sat) A consistently polished performer, but considered expensive by local standards. Come for the good-value lunch deal (Lm8 for three courses, including a glass of wine), when your fellow diners could include local power-lunchers or a Japanese tour group. Entry is through a nondescript office building next door to Cocopazzo, and the restaurant is on the top floor enjoying a great Marsamxett view.

**Ambrosia** (☎ 2122 5923; 137 Triq l-Arcisqof; mains Lm3-7.50; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) A close contender for our favourite Valletta restaurant. The standards here are high and the welcome is warm (the chef might just pop by to see how you enjoyed your meal). The blackboard menu changes daily; on it you'll find Mediterranean dishes making great use of fresh local produce, produced according to the Slow Food philosophy (eg spaghetti with sea urchins, goat's cheese soufflé, a salad of grilled Gozo asparagus).

**Rubino** (☎ 2122 4656; 53 Triq l-Ifran; mains Lm4-6; 🕒 lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Tue & Fri) Rubino earns rave reviews for reinventing Maltese cuisine while staying true to its roots. There's no menu, just a selection of the day's dishes depending on seasonal produce and local tradition. Leave room for dessert – the house speciality, *casata siciliana*, is particularly recommended. Tuesday night is usually *fenkata* (a communal meal of rabbit) night, for which bookings are advised.

**our pick** **Fusion Four** (☎ 2122 5255; cnr Triq il-Papa Piju V & Triq San Gwann Kavalier; mains Lm5.50-7; 🕒 lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Tue-Sat) For us, this stylish, well-hidden restaurant is the culinary highlight of the capital. It houses a small bar, funky furnishings, a dining room under vaulted ceilings and perfect, private courtyard. Icing on the cake is a small but innovative menu of fusion dishes such as sweet chilli prawn cakes, chicken breast in a red Thai curry, or pancetta-wrapped pork fillet on a bed of red apples. Finish with a delectable white chocolate and honeycomb mousse.

## Cafés

**282 Coffee Garden** (☎ 2122 2111; 282 Triq ir-Repubblika; snacks & meals Lm0.50-3; 🕒 breakfast & lunch) This place is right in the thick of things. It's a little touristy but nicely done – the upstairs area with comfy rattan chairs and greenery (fake) offers respite from the bustling main street below. Don't look for surprises in the 'classic hits' menu: pasta, pizza, salads, sandwiches, cakes.

**Café Jubilee** (☎ 2125 2332; 125 Triq Santa Luċija; snacks & meals Lm1-3.50; 🕒 8am-1am Mon-Thur, Fri & Sat 8am-3am) A feel-good place you can drop in to anytime, for bacon and eggs or breakfast the Maltese way (coffee and a *pastizza*), a lunch-time baguette, or a simple dinner of salad, pasta or risotto. It's a convivial continental-style bistro, with low lighting, cosy nooks and



poster-plastered walls. It's also a good option for a late-night drink.

**Caffe Cordina** (☎ 2123 4385; 244 Triq ir-Repubblika; snacks & meals Lm1-4; ☎ breakfast & lunch) There's some prime people-watching on Misrah ir-Repubblika, where several cafés command the ranks of tables around the statue of Queen Victoria. The oldest (and busiest) option is Caffe Cordina, established in 1837 and now a local institution. You have the choice of waiter service at the tables in the square or inside, or joining the locals at the zinc counter inside for a quick caffeine hit. And be sure to look up; the ceiling is exquisitely painted. Excellent for savoury pastries and decadent sweets, and there's a gelati counter out front.

### Quick Eats

The major fast-food outlets are near the top of the town, but cheaper and tastier fare can be found at the kiosks beside City Gate bus terminus. Millennium (the first kiosk on your right after you exit City Gate) sells hot *pastizzi* (small parcels of flaky pastry filled with either ricotta cheese or mushy peas) for Lm0.10 each; next door, the Dates Kiosk sells traditional *mqaret* for Lm0.07 – these are delicious pastries stuffed with spiced dates and deep-fried.

Follow your nose to a couple of friendly, hole-in-the-wall places on Triq San Pawl where you can pick up a fresh hot *pastizza* for loose change (Lm0.08) from around 7.30am Monday to Saturday. Agius Confectionery & Pastizzerija is opposite the Church of St Paul's Shipwreck at No 273, while Carmelo Azzopardi Pastizzerija is at No 310.

### Self-Catering

**Wembley Store** (305 Triq ir-Repubblika; ☎ 7.15am-7pm Mon-Fri, 7.45am-7pm Sat) This store has a limited selection of groceries (tinned and dried food).

There's also a **fresh produce market** (Triq il-Merkanti; ☎ 7am-1pm Mon-Sat) behind the Grand Master's Palace, where you can buy fruit, vegetables and deli items upstairs, and fish, meat and poultry on the ground level. Home-sick Brits might want to visit the well-stocked food section of **Marks & Spencer** (Triq id-Dejqa; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat).

### DRINKING

**The Pub** (☎ 7980 7042; 136 Triq I-Arcisqof; ☎ from 11.30am) Fans of the late British actor Oliver Reed might want to raise a glass to their

hero in this succinctly named watering hole. This is the homely little hostelry where the wild man of British film enjoyed his final drinking session before last orders were called forever in 1999. It's a tiny, tucked-away place, but worth visiting for the memorabilia on the walls and to read of Reed's heavy drinking visits during the filming of *Gladiator*.

**Maestro e' Fresco** (☎ 2123 3801; 8 Triq Nofs in-Nhar; ☎ from 5.30pm Tue-Sun) A couple of inviting bars lure after-work locals and visitors to the southern end of town. The Maestro was a music shop from 1842 to 2001; these days it offers up snacks, brews and live music to help you celebrate the coming of the weekend (usually acoustic stuff on Friday, old classics on Saturday).

**Trabuxu** (☎ 2122 3036; cnr Triq Nofs in-Nhar & Triq id-Dejqa; ☎ from 7pm Tue-Sun) On the same street as the Maestro is Trabuxu, whose name means 'corkscrew'. This cosy spot is decorated with great B&W shots and musical instruments, and its menu includes perfect platters to accompany much wine quaffing. Local and international wines are on offer.

**Labyrinth** (☎ 2122 0499; 44 Triq id-Dejqa; ☎ Wed-Sun night) Nightowls will enjoy the dimly lit hidey-holes of Labyrinth, a cool and cavernous bistro/wine bar/club, offering edibles and DJ entertainment. Somewhat fittingly, it's tucked away in a seedy-by-night alley a block north of Triq ir-Repubblika; there are plenty of nooks and crannies at street level and below in which to nurse a drink or whisper sweet nothings into someone's ear.

**Castille Wine Vaults** (☎ 2123 7707; Pjazza Kastilja; ☎ from 7pm Thu-Sun) It's a shame about the limited opening hours of this fabulously situated café-bar. It's underneath the stock exchange building, accessed by walking down some steps and a long low-lit passageway. In the dining area you can snack on panini and platters of Maltese delicacies, cheese, seafood or dips, plus learn about and sample some very good local drops of wine (Lm2.75 for four wines).

Other good drinking dens include **Café Jubilee** and **Fusion Four**. There's also plenty of action (restaurants and bars) at the new Pinto Wharf waterfront development (p75), where cruise ships dock under Valletta's bastions in Floriana, or you might like to go further afield and check out Vittoriosa's terrific wine bars (p79).

### ENTERTAINMENT

For years Valletta has seemed half-dead after 8pm, its streets hushed and empty after the business folk and day-trippers have left, and those seeking any form of nightlife automatically headed to Paceville (p95). But there's been something of a revival in recent years, and Valletta is now home to a handful of café-bars where you can eat, drink and be merry among in-the-know locals – you just need to know where to look. These places tend to draw an older crowd, and closing times vary depending on how busy the venue is. Only Labyrinth passes for anything resembling a nightclub in Valletta, so the overseas students and early-20-somethings usually head to Paceville, and if that's more your scene you can take a night bus. Bus 62 runs from Valletta to Paceville (Lm0.50, every half-hour) until around 1am on Friday and Saturday nights year-round, and until 2.30am every night from mid-June to mid-September (the last bus from Paceville to Valletta in these summer months is at 3am).

See Drinking, opposite, for reviews of bars. Maestro e' Fresco hosts live music on Friday and Saturday nights; Labyrinth parties into the wee hours with local DJs providing the soundtrack. Another good venue for more formal musical performances is the St James' Cavalier Centre for Creativity – check the newspapers or pick up a programme at the centre.

See p75 for information about **Tom Bar**, a popular gay bar not far outside Valletta, and p79 for information about the closest casino to Valletta, on the Vittoriosa waterfront.

### Theatre

**Manoel Theatre** (☎ 2124 6389; www.teatrumanoel.com.mt; 115 Triq it-Teatru l-Antik) This beautiful place is Malta's national theatre, and the islands' principal venue for drama, concerts, opera, ballet, and the much-loved Christmas pantomime. The performance season runs from October to May, and during these months there are popular lunchtime concerts every Wednesday at 1pm (Lm2). Check the website for details of the programme, or pick one up at the **booking office** (☎ 2124 6389; cnr Triq l-Ifran & Triq it-Teatru l-Antik; ☎ 9am-1pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat, plus 90min before performances). Guided tours of the Manoel Theatre are also offered (see p64).

The **St James' Cavalier Centre for Creativity** (☎ 2122 3200; www.sjcav.org; Triq Nofs in-Nhar; ☎ 10am-9.30pm) also stages intimate performances in its theatre-in-the-round.

### Cinemas

**Embassy Cinemas** (☎ 2122 2225; www.embassycomplex.com.mt; Triq Santa Lucija; tickets adult/child, Lm2.35/1.50, adults before 5pm weekdays, Lm2), inside the Embassy Complex, shows the latest mainstream releases from Hollywood.

The **St James' Cavalier Centre for Creativity** (☎ 2122 3200; www.sjcav.org; Triq Nofs in-Nhar; tickets adult/child, Lm2/1; ☎ 10am-9.30pm) has a cinema screening alternative and arthouse films on a nightly basis.

### SHOPPING

There are small shopping centres, souvenir shops and a range of UK high-street fashion labels all along or just off Triq ir-Repubblika, but little of interest to visitors looking for a purchase that's uniquely Maltese. Triq Santa Lucija, behind Misrah ir-Repubblika, is home to a number of jewellery stores offering silver filigree – the most popular souvenir here is a silver eight-pointed Maltese Cross on a chain.

**Malta Crafts Centre** (☎ 2122 4532; Misrah San Gwann) This place has a small range of locally produced crafts, including glassware, ceramics, jewellery and lace.

**Gio Batta Delia** (☎ 2123 3618; 307 Triq ir-Repubblika) Behind a photogenic façade close to City Gate, this browse-worthy store sells the big names in fine chinaware and glass (eg Wedgwood, Meissen) alongside more Malta-specific treasures such as prints, pottery and old lace.

A crowded **street market** (Triq il-Merkanti; ☎ around 7am-1pm Mon-Sat) set up between Triq San Gwann and Triq it-Teatru l-Antik sells mainly clothes, shoes, watches and jewellery, pirated CDs and computer games. The **Monti** (St James' Ditch; ☎ 5m) is a much bigger market selling similar items, just south of the City Gate bus terminus.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

#### Air

See the Transport chapter (p180) for information on flights into Malta International Airport at Luqa, 8km south of Valletta.

Most airline offices are found at the airport, although some airlines also have offices in Valletta.

**Air Malta** (☎ 2124 0686; Misrah il-Helsien; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) Near the tourist office.

**British Airways** (☎ 2124 2233; 20/2 Triq ir-Repubblika; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri) Above the Travelx office.

## Boat

The **Marsamxetto ferry service** (☎ 2346 3862) provides a quick, easy way to travel between Valletta and Sliema. The crossing costs Lm0.40 each way and takes about five minutes. There are departures every hour (every half-hour from 10am to 4pm) daily in both directions, beginning at around 8am and finishing at around 6pm (slightly earlier on Sundays). To reach the ferry departure point in Valletta, follow Triq San Marku all the way to the north, then under the overpass and down to the water.

Ferries depart from Sliema on the hour and half-hour, and from Valletta at a quarter past and quarter to the hour.

## Bus

All bus routes lead to Valletta. The **City Gate bus terminus** is the source of services to all parts of the island – it's chaotic, to say the least, but seems to work. For information on routes, fares and timetables, inquire at the Public Transport Authority kiosks dotted around the terminus, and see p186 for a map and more details.

## GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Bus 8 runs between the airport and the City Gate terminus in Valletta, passing through Floriana on the way – the fare is Lm0.20, and the journey takes about 40 minutes. The airport bus stop is immediately outside the entrance to the departures hall. Ignore any taxi drivers who tell you that the bus stop is a 20-minute walk away, or that the bus won't be along for another hour – they're just touting for business.

You'll find a taxi information desk in the airport arrivals hall and you can organise and pay for your taxi there. The set fare for a taxi from the airport to Valletta or Floriana is Lm6.50.

## To/From the Sea Passenger Terminal

It's not terribly straightforward to travel between Valletta and the **Sea Passenger Terminal** next to the developing Pinto Wharf in Floriana. If you're travelling with Virtu Ferries from Sicily, it's probably best to arrange a transfer with them when booking your passage. Otherwise, bus 98 (Lm0.15, hourly until 6pm) stops about 300m away, and you can take a sightseeing stroll.

If you decide to walk to Valletta, you face a steep climb (not a great choice if you're carrying luggage). There are two options: follow the waterfront northeast, under the Lascaris Bastion, then veer left and climb the steps up at Victoria Gate. At the top of the stairs you'll be greeted by La Sicilia restaurant (p68). Alternatively, walk northeast along the waterfront then take a sharp left up It-Telgha Tal-Kurċifiss (Crucifix Hill). Halfway up you'll encounter Il Taraġ Tal-Kalkara (Kalkara Steps) – climb these to reach the war memorial; from here it's a few minutes' walk north to Valletta's City Gate. Allow at least 15 minutes for either journey.

As at the airport, there's a taxi information kiosk on Pinto Wharf where you organise and pay the set rate for your taxi journey upfront. The cheapest fare (to an address in Valletta or Floriana) is a ridiculously overpriced Lm4. The *karrozzin* (traditional horse-drawn carriage) drivers loitering here will charge considerably more (there are plenty of reports of newly arrived tourists, unfamiliar with the local currency, paying extortionate prices).

There is talk of reestablishing a 'vertical connection' to link the harbour area with Valletta's Upper Barrakka Gardens, via a panoramic lift. This is a great idea but, this being Malta, the project could take years to see the light of day.

## Car & Motorcycle

A car is more of a hindrance than a help in Valletta. The streets around City Gate are clogged with cars, buses and taxis most of the day, and cars without a resident's permit are not allowed to park in Valletta – instead you must use the big underground car park in Floriana, which is just southwest of the bus station and charges Lm2 for 4½ hours or more.

## Public Transport

Bus 98 makes a clockwise circuit of Valletta from City Gate to Fort St Elmo along the outer road that follows the top of the city walls (Lm0.15), but walking is generally the fastest and easiest way to get about.

See p190 for information about the horse-drawn *karrozzin*, which offer rides around town, and p190 for tips on local taxis for horseless rides. There is a taxi rank just outside City Gate.

# AROUND VALLETTA

## FLORIANA

pop 2550

The suburb of Floriana, immediately southwest of the capital, grew up in the 18th century within the landward defences of Valletta. The northern part is taken up with government buildings and offices, while the south side is mostly residential.

The broad avenue formed by Vjal ir-Re Edwardu VII (King Edward VII Ave) and Triq Sarria runs southwest from City Gate bus terminus for 500m, dividing the government buildings of Beltissebħ to the northwest from the long, open rectangle of Pjazza San Publiju (St Publius Sq) to the south. The main street of Floriana, Triq Sant'Anna (St Anne's St), lies two blocks south of the square. The main traffic route from Valletta to the rest of Malta exits from the southwest end of Triq Sant'Anna.

The most exciting thing to happen to Floriana in recent times is the Pinto Wharf redevelopment (also known as the Valletta

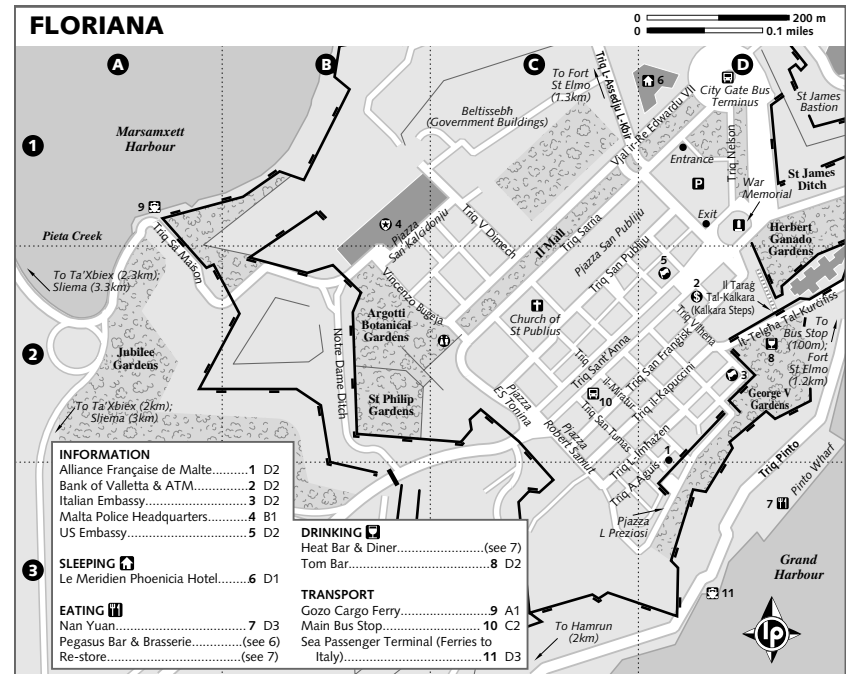
Waterfront), on the southeast side of Floriana, just beneath the capital's fortifications. It's where a growing number of cruise ships dock, and it sits alongside the Sea Passenger Terminal, where passenger ferries arrive and depart. At the time of research transport links to the area were poor; see opposite for details of walking routes between Valletta and the wharf.

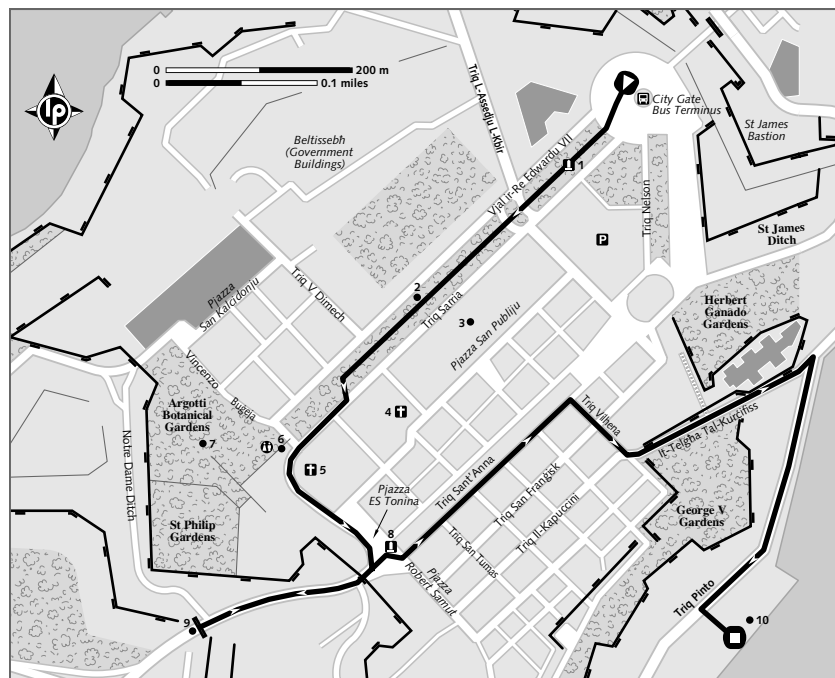
Street signs in Floriana are usually in Malti only.

## Walking Tour

Begin at the City Gate bus terminus and walk southwest along the central garden strip between Vjal ir-Re Edwardu VII and Triq Sarria. The **monument to Christ the King (1)**, opposite Le Meridien Phoenicia Hotel, commemorates the International Eucharistic Congress held in Malta in 1913.

Cross Triq l-Assedju l-Kbir and continue along **Il-Mall (2)**. Now occupied by tree-lined gardens, the 400m-long mall was laid out in the 17th century on the orders of Grand Master Lascaris, so that the younger Knights might play at pall-mall (an ancestor of





### WALK FACTS

**Start** City Gate bus terminus  
**Finish** Pinto Wharf  
**Distance** approx 2km  
**Duration** 1 hour

croquet), in the forlorn hope that this might keep them from the temptations of wine, women and gambling.

The long open space on the south side of the mall is Pjazza San Publiju. The circular slabs that stud its paved surface are the lids of underground granaries (3). The square is dominated by the **Church of St Publius (4)**, dedicated to the patron saint of Floriana. Publius was the Roman governor of Malta in AD 60 when St Paul was shipwrecked on the island. He was converted to Christianity and became Malta's first bishop. The church was built in the 18th century, and badly damaged by WWII bombs. Its rich red interior and ornate ceiling are worth a look.

Continue along Triq Sarria to the circular **Sarria Chapel (5)**, built in 1678 and designed

and decorated by Mattia Preti (undergoing restoration at the time of research). Across the street is the **Wignacourt Water Tower (6)**, part of an aqueduct system that brought water to Valletta from the central hills. Beside the tower is the entrance to the **Argotti Botanical Gardens (7)**.

Follow the street round to the left past the Sarria Chapel and downhill to the **Lion Fountain (8)**, and turn right on the main road out of town. A five-minute walk along this busy stretch of road leads to the **Porte des Bombes (9)**, an ornamental gateway dating from 1697 to 1720 that once formed part of the Floriana Lines fortifications.

Pass through it to admire its decorations – reliefs of cannons and the coat of arms of Grand Master Perellos, under whose reign it was built.

Return to the Lion Fountain and then continue straight on along the grand, arcaded Triq Sant'Anna. This will lead you back towards Valletta, but a side-trip right down Triq Vilhena and left along It-Telgha Tal-Kurcifiss (Crucifix Hill) will take you to **Pinto Wharf (10)**, also known as the Valletta Waterfront, which is

a great place for a wander and a drink at one of the many restaurants.

### Eating & Drinking

Le Meridien Phoenicia Hotel (p68), by City Gate, is home to a couple of restaurants.

**Pegasus Bar & Brasserie** (☎ 2291 1084; The Mall, Le Meridien Phoenicia Hotel; mains Lm4-7; ☎ lunch & dinner) This relaxed setting offers upmarket café fare, with the menu including locally influenced Med dishes like grilled swordfish or *limoncello panna cotta*. There's also a lounge in the lobby serving all-day sandwiches and snacks (right down to scones for a civilised afternoon tea).

**Tom Bar** (☎ 2125 0780; 1 It-Telgha Tal-Kurcifiss; ☎ from 8.30pm Tue-Sun year-round) It's not the most likely location for one of Malta's prime gay nightspots, but this two-storey bar is very popular, especially among older gays, who prefer it to Paceville's offerings. Tom offers upstairs for chilling out and downstairs for dance music.

### Getting There & Away

Floriana is just a five-minute walk from Valletta. All buses to and from Valletta also pass through Floriana. The **main bus stop** on Triq Sant'Anna has an information board

displaying the various route numbers and destinations.

There are two ferry terminals in Floriana. The daily **Gozo cargo ferry** (used primarily by trucks) departs the Sa Maison wharf at Pieta Creek in Marsamxett Harbour (p189), while passenger ferries to/from Sicily dock at the **Sea Passenger Terminal** by Pinto Wharf (p184). Pinto Wharf is also where cruise liners moor when in town.

### THE THREE CITIES

This trio of towns, Vittoriosa, Senglea and Cospicua, are close-knit working communities largely dependent on their dockyards for employment. They are surprisingly off the tourist radar and – for now, at least – they offer a welcome escape from the commercial hustle of Valletta and Sliema.

The controversial Cottonera waterfront 'regeneration project' ([www.cottonerawaterfront.com](http://www.cottonerawaterfront.com)) has seen the opening of a chi-chi casino at Vittoriosa, as well as a marina for so-called 'superyachts', plus the construction of some very out-of-place modern residential apartments. Plans for a new five-star hotel seems to have stalled, so the land (by the casino) remains fenced and vacant. While it's hoped that projects such as these will bring

### PINTO WHARF

Opened in mid-2005, Pinto Wharf (also known as the Valletta Waterfront; [www.vallettawaterfront.com](http://www.vallettawaterfront.com)) is the much-heralded development of a formerly run-down dockside area. Developers transformed old warehouses into a fashionable area for dining, drinking, shopping and promenading, and an important new venue for festivals and concerts. It's a good-looking revamp too, with 250-year-old stone warehouses from the era of the Knights prettied up with doors and window shutters painted in bright primary colours. The view is a bit mixed – the fortresses of the Three Cities combine with the cranes of the dockyards to provide a somewhat industrial panorama (if it's not blocked by a huge cruise ship).

Sure, the shops down here are geared toward the cashed-up passengers of the cruisers that dock at the wharf (local craft outlets offering glass, ceramics and jewellery), but the restaurants and bars have been embraced by the locals, and you'll find families and groups taking up plenty of tables on the tree-lined promenade.

As far as food goes, there are half-a-dozen venues competing for your custom – it's worth a stroll to peruse the menus and prices of each, and to see if there are outside tables available. **Heat Bar & Diner** (☎ 2124 2400; mains Lm2-8; ☎ lunch & dinner) promotes itself as an American-styled diner but the menu features all the usual Maltese suspects. It's more popular as a bar and nightclub and stays open late. **Nan Yuan** (☎ 2122 5310; dishes Lm2-6; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) is slightly incongruous given the setting, but offers a menu of Cantonese specialities. **Re-store** (☎ 2122 5000; snacks & meals Lm1-5; ☎ lunch & dinner) offers decent café fare such as sandwiches, pasta and take-away ice creams.

Sadly, public transport links to the wharf are pretty dismal; see p72 for walking routes between Valletta and the waterfront.

### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The Three Cities were originally named Birgu, L-Isla and Bormla, but their names were changed after the Great Siege of 1565. Birgu became Vittoriosa (Victorious), L-Isla became Senglea (after Grand Master Claude de la Sengle), and Bormla became Cospicua (as in conspicuous courage). Local people and some road signs still use the old names, and all three together are often referred to as 'The Cottonera', a reference to the Cottonera Lines – the landward fortifications surrounding the Three Cities that were built in the 1670s at the instigation of Grand Master Nicolas Cotoner.

employment and prosperity to a formerly neglected area, there is a danger of diluting the character and charm of the area in the rush to embrace development and attract wealthy locals and tourists.

The best place for tourist information on the area is from the *dghajsa* boat **information kiosk** on the Vittoriosa waterfront (opposite). There are no hotels or guesthouses in the Three Cities, but the number of eating and drinking venues is growing.

### History

When the Knights of St John first arrived in Malta in 1530, they made their home in the fishing village of Birgu, on a finger of land on the south side of Grand Harbour, overlooking the inlet (now known as Dockyard Creek) that was called the Port of the Arab Galleys. Here they built their auberges and repaired and extended the ancient defences. By the 1550s, Birgu (Fort St Angelo) and the neighbouring point of L-Isla (Fort St Michael) had been fortified, and Fort St Elmo had been built on the tip of the Sceberras Peninsula. Bormla, at the head of Dockyard Creek, was not fortified until the 17th century.

From this base, the Knights withstood the Turkish onslaught during the Great Siege of 1565 (see p21 for more on this battle), but in the years that followed, they moved to their new city of Valletta across the harbour. During WWII, the Three Cities and their surrounding docks were bombed almost daily throughout 1941 and 1942, and suffered terrible damage and bloodshed. Today they offer an untouristy welcome escape from Valletta and Sliema.

### Vittoriosa

pop 3035

Atmospheric Vittoriosa is only 800m long and 400m at its widest, so it's hard to get lost – but aimlessly wandering its old, plant-filled alleys makes for a pleasant diversion. However, street signs are in Malti, while most tourist maps are in English only, which can be confusing. From the Poste de France, Triq il-Mina l-Kbira (Main Gate St) leads to the town's main square, Misrah ir-Rebha (Victory Sq). From the square, the marina and Maritime Museum are downhill to the left, while Triq San Filippu (St Philip's St) leads on towards Fort St Angelo at the tip of the peninsula.

There's good information on Vittoriosa at [www.cittavittoriosa.com](http://www.cittavittoriosa.com).

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

#### Inquisitor's Palace

The **Inquisitor's Palace** (☎ 2182 7006; Triq il-Mina l-Kbira; adult/child Lm2/0.50; 🕒 9am-5pm) was built in the 1530s and served as law courts until the 1570s, when it became the tribunal (and prison) of the Inquisition, whose task it was to find and suppress heresy.

The palace is now the home of the **National Museum of Ethnography**, which focuses on the religious values in Maltese culture up to the present day. In addition to the display areas in the tribunal room and prison complex, there is a permanent exhibition on the impact of the Inquisition on Maltese society.

#### Maritime Museum

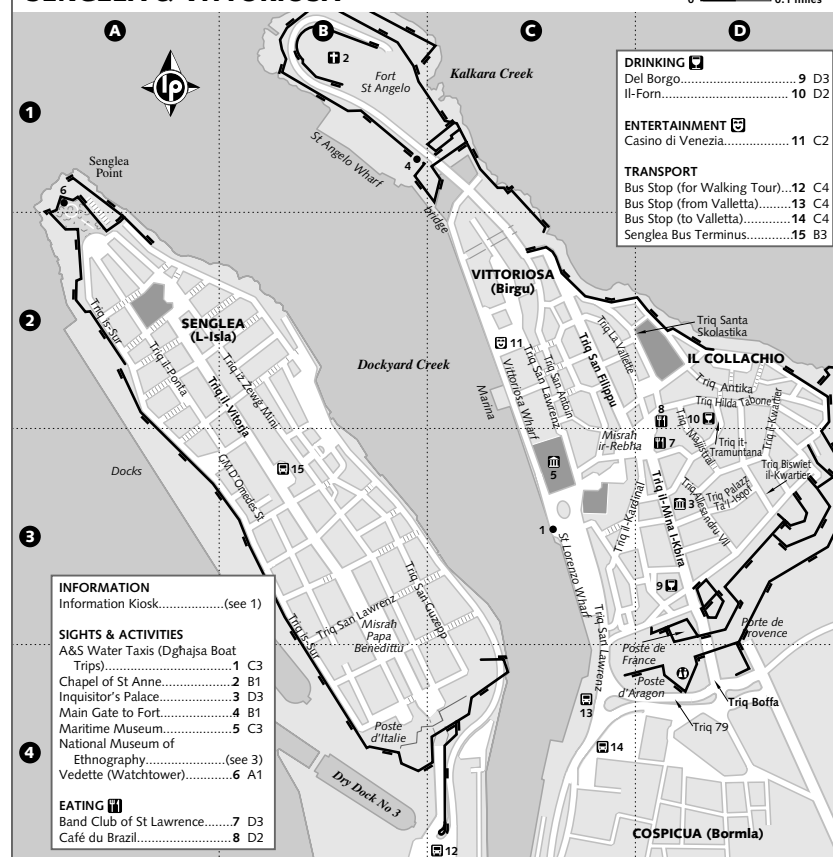
The old naval bakery, built in the 1840s, now houses Malta's **Maritime Museum** (☎ 2166 0052; Vittoriosa Waterfront; adult/child Lm2/0.50; 🕒 9am-5pm). Well-displayed exhibits include Roman anchors, traditional Maltese fishing boats, models of the Knights' galleys and British naval vessels. There are also displays of old navigational instruments, log books and signal books.

Heritage Malta conducts guided tours of the museum (included in the cost of admission) at 11am daily. Their tour times can change, so check ahead.

#### Fort St Angelo

The tip of the Vittoriosa peninsula has been fortified since at least the 9th century, and before that it was the site of Roman and Phoenician temples. The Knights took over

### SENGLEA & VITTORIOSA



the medieval fort in 1530 and rebuilt and strengthened it – Fort St Angelo served as the residence of the Grand Master of the Order until 1571 and was the headquarters of la Valette during the Great Siege.

Further defences were added in the late 17th century by the talented engineer Don Carlos Grunenberg, whose florid coat-of-arms still sits above the gate overlooking St Angelo Wharf.

The British took over the fort in the 19th century, and from 1912 until 1979 it served as the headquarters of the Mediterranean Fleet, first as HMS *Egmont* and from 1933 as HMS *St Angelo*. The upper part of the fort, including the Grand Master's Palace and the 15th-century **Chapel of St Anne**, is now occupied by

the modern Order of St John. The remainder of the fort is officially closed to visitors due to its poor state of repair, but access through the gate above St Angelo Wharf is usually pretty straightforward and you can wander around parts of the site, an unusual mixture of medieval fortress and abandoned 20th-century officers' mess. The fort is in the early stages of what promises to be a long rehabilitation project.

#### Harbour Cruises

At the waterfront, in front of the Freedom Monument, is a kiosk belonging to **A&S Water Taxis** (☎ 2180 6921; [www.maltesewatertaxis.com](http://www.maltesewatertaxis.com); 🕒 9am-5pm, or until dark in summer). The friendly guys here dispense maps of the Three Cities and offer

helpful tourist information; they also organise good-value 35-minute cruises of Grand Harbour in a restored *dghajsa* (traditional rowing boat or water taxi; pronounced *di-sa*) for Lm3 per person. These boatmen can also act as a water taxi to take you to either Senglea (Lm0.60) or Valletta (Lm1.50; deposits you not far from the base of the Lascaris Bastion).

### WALKING TOUR

Begin at the bus stop at the corner of Triq San Lawrencez (St Lawrence St) and Triq 79. Cross the road towards the Poste d'Aragon and enter the bastion through the **Advanced Gate (1)**, inscribed with the date 'MDCCXXII' (1722) and a relief of crossed cannons. Here you'll find a café, and next door is a large WWII air-raid shelter open to the public as the **Malta at War Museum (2)**; adult/child Lm1.50/0.75; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat). Cross the bridge over the moat, which has been planted with orange trees and is now the Coronation Gardens, and pass through the Couvre Porte into the Poste de France (there's a good view of Senglea from the battlement up the ramp to the left).

Go through Porte de Provence and head left along Triq il-Mina l-Kbira, past the **Church of the Annunciation (3)** on your left and the **Inquisitor's Palace (4)**; p76, now the National Museum of Ethnography, on your right, until you reach **Misrah ir-Rebħa (5)**; Victory Sq) with its two monuments: the Victory Monument, erected in 1705 in memory of the Great Siege; and a statue of St Lawrence, patron saint of Vittoriosa, dating from 1880.

You'll definitely notice the magnificent building dating from 1888 that stands on the eastern side of the square and is home to the Band Club of St Lawrence. Note its striking wooden balcony.

From the square head east on Triq Hilda Tabone (Britannic St, by Café du Brazil), then take the first left (Triq Santa Skolastika, or St Scholastica St) towards the massive blank walls of the **Sacra Infermeria (6)**, the first hospital to be built by the Knights on their arrival in Malta. It now serves as a convent. After it, go down a stepped alley (signposted Triq il-Miratur) and walk along the wall's perimeter. The ramp descending into a trench in front of the Infermeria leads to the **Bigħi Sally Port (7)**, where the wounded were brought by boat to the infirmary under the cover of darkness during the Great Siege.

### WALK FACTS

**Start** cnr Triq San Lawrencez & Triq 79

**Finish** base of Fort St Angelo

**Distance** approx 2km

**Duration** 1½ hours



After doing a circuit of the Sacra Infermeria head back onto Triq Hilda Tabone. To your right lies a small maze of charming alleys, collectively known as **Il Collachio (8)**, with some of the oldest surviving buildings in the city. Wander up Triq it-Tramuntana (North St) to the so-called **Norman House (9)** at No 11 (on the left) and look up at the 1st floor. The twin-arched window, with its slender central pillar and zigzag

decoration, dates from the 13th century and is in a style described as Siculo-Norman (similar windows survive in Il-Kastell on Gozo). Also in this area are the first auberges built by the Knights in the 16th century – the **Auberge d'Angleterre (10)**; Triq il-Majjistral), the auberge of the English Knights, now serves as the local library.

At the far end of Triq Hilda Tabone turn right along Triq il-Kwartier (Barrack St), and bear right at the corner of the imposing **Armoury (11)**. Turn left and then right along Triq Palazz Ta'l-Isqof (Bishop's Palace St) past the **Bishop's Palace (12)**, built in 1542. Return to Triq il-Mina l-Kbira and turn right to again reach Misrah ir-Rebħa.

From the square, to explore the waterfront area turn left into the nearby chapel where the little **Oratory of St Joseph (13)** contains relics of Grand Master la Valette, and continue down past the **Church of St Lawrence (14)**. Built on the site of an 11th-century Norman church, St Lawrence's served as the conventual church of the Knights of St John from 1530 until the move to St John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta (see the boxed text, p38, for more information on its history).

At the foot of the hill, pass to the left of the large building across the street. The palm and cactus garden on the left contains the **Freedom Monument (15)**, which commemorates the departure of the last British forces in Malta in 1979. Bronze figures show a bugler playing the 'Last Post' as his comrade lowers the flag, and a British sailor saying goodbye to a Maltese girl while, rather unromantically, shaking her hand.

Head to the waterfront, where you'll encounter a **kiosk (16)**; p77) dispensing tourist information and offering cruises of Grand Harbour. Continue along the waterfront past the interesting **Maritime Museum (17)**; p76), housed in the old naval bakery, and you'll reach the **marina (18)**, filled with flash boats, and a **casino (19)**; right) in 17th-century buildings that were once the Knights' Treasury, the Captain-General's Palace, and a hostel for galley captains. At the far end of the quay you can cross the bridge over the moat and follow a path beyond St Angelo Wharf to the rocky point beneath the walls of **Fort St Angelo (20)**; p76), where old cannons serve as bollards and the remains of WWII gun installations can be seen.

From the wharf, you can retrace your steps back along the waterfront. You can opt for

a *dghajsa* cruise or taxi service (see above), head left up to the cafés of Misrah ir-Rebħa, or continue walking south to make your way to Senglea (see below for a walking tour of the area).

### EATING & DRINKING

There are limited daytime eating options in Vittoriosa, but your choices increase in number and quality of an evening. Time your explorations for late afternoon, then head to one of the wine bars that have sprung up. Café du Brazil and the Band Club of St Lawrence provide opportunities for a casual drink and offer limited lunch selections on Misrah ir-Rebħa.

**Il-Forn** (☎ 2182 0379; 27 Triq it-Tramuntana; snacks & meals Lm2-5; ☎ 7.30pm-1am Tue-Sun) This alluring art gallery and wine bar in Il Collachio (almost opposite the Norman House) has plenty of fabulously colourful art by the Austrian-born owner of the bar on display. It's well worth a look, and you can enjoy traditional snacks and local wines in one of the courtyards.

Another excellent choice is **Del Borgo** (☎ 2180 3710; 36 Triq it-Torri ta'San Ġwann; mains Lm3-7; ☎ from 7.30pm daily, plus lunch Sun), a surprisingly sophisticated restaurant and wine bar in a side street not far from the main gates into Vittoriosa.

### ENTERTAINMENT

**Casino di Venezia** (☎ 2180 5580; Vittoriosa waterfront; ☎ 2pm-4am Mon-Thu, 2pm-5am Fri-Sat, noon-4am Sun) Vegas meets Venice: travellers looking for a chance to make (or blow) some holiday dough should head to this ritzy casino beside the marina and part of the (stalled) Cottonera waterfront redevelopment. Visitors must be aged at least 18 to enter (25 for Maltese citizens), be smartly dressed and carry a passport or ID card. A shuttle service is offered from some hotels – call the casino to inquire. Casinos in Malta draw many gamblers from Sicily, which doesn't have any casinos of its own.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses 1, 4 and 6 from Valletta will take you to the **bus stop** on Triq 79 beneath the Poste d'Aragon; bus 2 goes all the way to Misrah ir-Rebħa. One of these four route options departs Valletta for Vittoriosa at least every 15 to 20 minutes; the fare on all services is Lm0.20.

Bus 627 runs hourly until 3pm from Bugibba via Sliema to the Three Cities (Lm0.50) and on to Marsaxlokk.

## Senglea

pop 3500

Senglea is even more difficult to get lost in than Vittoriosa, as the streets form a grid pattern. The town was pretty much razed to the ground during WWII, and little of historic interest remains, but there are great views of Valletta and Vittoriosa, and the little **vedette** (watchtower) at the tip of the peninsula is one of the classic sights of Malta.

### WALKING TOUR

From the bus stop in the square outside the fortifications, walk up the ramp and pass through the gate at the Poste d'Italie, and continue along Triq il-Vitorja (Victory St). At the first square is the **Church of Our Lady of Victory (1)**, which was completely rebuilt after WWII. Follow Triq il-Vitorja all the way to the **Church of St Philip (2)**, and follow the road right and then left (Triq iż-Żewġ Mini, or Two Gates St) to reach Safe Haven Gardens at the tip of the peninsula. The **vedette (3)** here is decorated with carvings of eyes and ears symbolising watchfulness, and commands a view to the west over the whole length of Grand Harbour and the southern flank of Valletta – check out the view of the new Pinto Wharf development too.

Immediately on your left as you leave Safe Haven Gardens is a staircase down to Triq is-Sirena. Follow this street as it descends to the quayside. Follow the waterfront, with its moored *dghajsas* and impressive views of Vittoriosa, back to the starting point. There are a couple of reasonable restaurants along the quay.

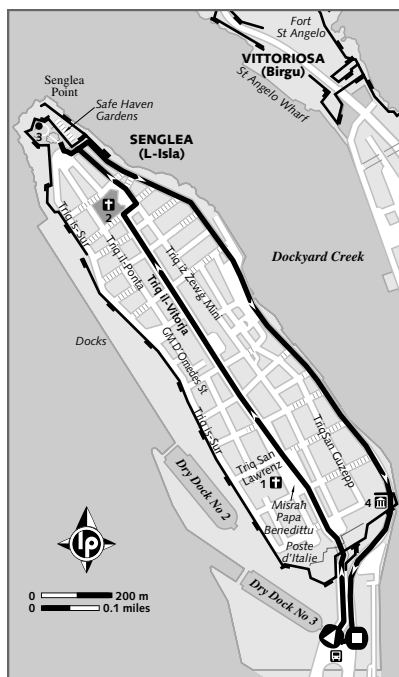
Towards the end of the quay the road passes under the bastion, and a walkway goes around the outside beneath the so-called **Gantry House (4)**. This was where the galleys of the Knights of St John were moored while their masts were removed using machinery mounted on the wall above the walkway.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 3 runs between Valletta and the central square in Senglea bus terminus every half-hour or so (Lm0.20). (Get off at the bus stop just outside the fortifications if you wish to do the walking tour outlined on above.)

### WALK FACTS

**Start & Finish** bus stop outside town fortifications  
**Distance** approx 2km  
**Duration** 1 hour



Alternatively, catch bus 1, 2 4 or 6 to Vittoriosa and get off at Dry Dock No 1 (at the head of Dockyard Creek), walk back up the hill and turn right. It's a 15-minute walk from the main gate at Vittoriosa around to the main gate at Senglea.

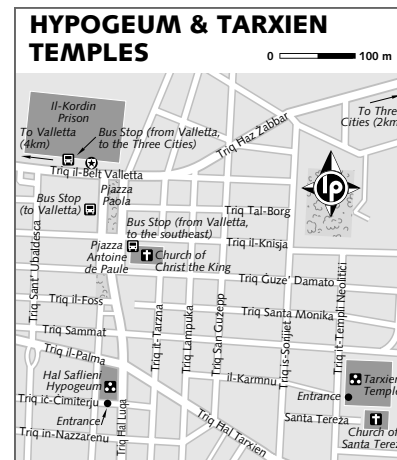
### HYPOGEUM & TARXIEN TEMPLES

The suburb of Paola, about 2km southwest of Cospicua, conceals two of Malta's most important prehistoric sites. The **Hal Saflieni Hypogeum** (☎ 2180 5019, 2182 5579; Triq iċ-Ċimiterju; adult/child Lm4/2) is an incredible underground necropolis, discovered during building work in 1902. It consists of halls, chambers and passages hewn out of the living rock and covering some 500 sq metres; it is thought to date from around 3600 to 3000 BC, and an estimated

7000 bodies may have been interred here. Excellent 50-minute tours of the complex are available daily at 9am, 10am, 11am, 1pm, 2pm, 3pm and 4pm. Note that the tours aren't suitable for children aged under six.

Tours start with a brief introductory exhibition and multilingual film focusing on the temple-building people and the Hypogeum's relationship to Malta's overground temple sites. Touring the site is a fascinating experience, but leaves you with more questions than it does answers about the ancient civilisation responsible for the Hypogeum's construction – who were they, what exactly did they do here, and where did they go? (See p19 for more on Malta's temple builders.)

Carbon dioxide exhaled by visiting tourists was doing serious to damage the delicate limestone walls of the burial chambers of the Hypogeum, and it was closed to the public for 10 years, reopening in mid-2000. It has now been restored with Unesco funding and reopened in 2000; its microclimate is now strictly controlled to ensure its conservation. For this reason, the maximum number of visitors to the site is 70 per day – tickets are understandably in demand, and you can't just turn up to the site and expect to join the next tour (although it's astounding how many people roll up under this impression). Prebooking is *essential* (usually at least two weeks before you wish to visit, or up to a month in advance for busy periods such as summer's peak, Easter and Christmas). Tickets are available in person from the Hypogeum and the Museum



of Archaeology in Valletta (p62), or online ([www.heritagemalta.org](http://www.heritagemalta.org); [info@heritagemalta.org](mailto:info@heritagemalta.org)). If you're desperate, you might decide to try your luck for cancellations – you'll need to turn up before the first scheduled tour. Some readers have reported success with this method, but it's far from guaranteed.

The **Tarxien Temples** (☎ 2169 5578; Triq it-Templi Neolitici; adult/child Lm1/0.25; ☹ 9am-5pm), pronounced tar-*sheen*, are hidden up a back street several blocks east of the Hypogeum – keep your eyes peeled, as the entrance is inconspicuous. These megalithic structures were excavated in 1914 and are thought to date from between 3600 and 2500 BC. There are four linked temples, built with massive stone blocks up to 3m by 1m by 1m in size, decorated with spiral patterns and pitting, and reliefs of animals including bulls, goats and pigs. The large statue of a broad-hipped female figure was found in the right-hand niche of the first temple. Heritage Malta conducts guided tours of the Tarxien site (included in the cost of admission) at 9.30am, 11.30am and 3.30pm daily. Their times are not fixed, so enquire in advance. This is another heritage site promising big things – the construction of a sleek new visitors centre is scheduled for completion by 2008.

### Getting There & Away

Dozens of buses pass through Paola, stopping at various points around the main square, Pjazza Paola. Buses 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 between Valletta and the Three Cities stop at the northern end of the square (look for landmarks such as the police station out the front of the prison). Buses 8, 11, 15 and 27 stop on the eastern side of the square, by the large Church of Christ the King (to return to Valletta, catch a bus from the western side of the square).

From the main square, the Hypogeum is a five-minute walk, the Tarxien Temples are 10 minutes.

### FORT RINELLA

Built by the British in the late 19th century, **Fort Rinella** (Map p56; ☎ 2180 9713; Triq Santu Rokku, Kalkara; adult/child/family Lm3/1.50/6; ☹ 10am-5pm), 1.5km northeast of Vittoriosa, was one of two coastal batteries designed to counter the threat of Italy's new ironclad battleships. The batteries (the second one was on Tigné Point in Sliema) were equipped with the latest Armstrong 100-ton guns – the biggest muzzle-loading guns

### MOVIE-MAKING IN MALTA

From the road to Fort Rinella visitors have a good view of the huge water tanks of the Mediterranean Film Studios (not open to the public). There's not a lot to see, but these are the biggest film-production water facilities in Europe – the two main water tanks have a clear horizon behind them, allowing directors to create the illusion that on-screen characters are miles out to sea. Water scenes from such films as *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977), *Raise the Titanic* (1980), *White Squall* (1996), *U-571* (2000) and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (2003) were shot here.

But it's not just the water tanks that have drawn film crews to Malta. The country's fortresses have long been popular with location scouts – the basement and casemates of Fort St Elmo were used for the Turkish prison scenes in the 1978 film *Midnight Express*, and Fort St Elmo has doubled as locations in Marseille and Beirut in more recent productions. Also out near Fort Rinella is Ricasoli Fort (also closed to the public), where a large portion of the 2004 Trojan War epic *Troy* was filmed on specially crafted sets. Scenes from another sandals-and-swords blockbuster, *Gladiator* (2000), were also filmed here. More recently it was transformed into a Palestinian refugee camp in the controversial 2005 film *Munich*.

Comino's St Mary's Tower appears in *The Count of Monte Cristo* (2002), a film that features various locations in the Maltese Islands (including Mdina and Vittoriosa), while the Blue Lagoon provides a great backdrop to a dire film, *Swept Away* (2002), starring Madonna and produced by her husband, Guy Ritchie.

In recent years Malta doubled for most of the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern locales (including Israel, Lebanon, Cyprus, Greece and Italy) in Steven Spielberg's 2005 movie *Munich* (look out for Malta's distinctive yellow buses in a number of scenes), and Maltese locations were chosen for a handful of flashback scenes involving the murderous albino monk in the 2006 film, *The Da Vinci Code*.

There are some good websites to check out if you're interested in learning more: see **Mediterranean Film Studios** ([www.mfsstudios.com](http://www.mfsstudios.com)), the **Malta Film Commission** ([www.mfc.com.mt](http://www.mfc.com.mt)) and the website of the **Malta Tourism Authority** ([www.visitmalta.com](http://www.visitmalta.com)) – click on 'What to See', and then the 'Malta Movie Map' icon. Although much of the movie map hasn't been updated in years, the 'latest news' section is reasonably up-to-date.

Be sure to keep your eyes peeled and ask around if you want to know what film sets (and stars) you might stumble across as you travel around the country.

ever made. Their 100-ton shells had a range of 6.4km and could penetrate 38cm of armour plating. The guns were never fired in anger, and were retired in 1906. Fort Rinella has been restored by a group of amateur enthusiasts from the **Malta Heritage Trust** ([www.wirtartna.org](http://www.wirtartna.org)) and is now one of Malta's most interesting military museums. Guided tours given by volunteers dressed as late-19th-century soldiers, including historical re-enactments, are held at 2.30pm daily (you'll pay an additional Lm2 on top of the entry price to join one of these tours).

### Getting There & Away

To get to Fort Rinella, take bus 4 from Valletta or the Three Cities; departures leave from Valletta at half-past the hour from 9.30am to 4.30pm and then drop you off out the front of the fort. If the bus drops you only as far as the Mediterranean Film Studios, face the water and head to your left – after about 10 minutes you should see a Union Jack flying from the fort. For a small fee you can also call the fort and arrange a direct pick up from your accommodation (Lm1).

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