

A CITY BUILT BY GENTLEMEN FOR GENTLEMEN

The story of Malta's capital is inextricably linked with the island's mythology – after laying Valletta's foundation stone in 1566 the Knights of St John created an elegant baroque city from an arid, empty peninsula. But, don't imagine that it's just a relic of the past. Behind the foreboding fortifications you'll find a living city that still has plenty of stories to tell, home to ground breaking contemporary architecture, delicious cuisine and a thriving nightlife scene.

Valletta – built by the Knights of St John on a peninsula that's only 1km by 600m. Its founder decreed that it should be 'a city built by gentlemen for gentlemen', and it retains its 16th-century elegance. It may be small, but it's packed full of sights; when Unesco named Valletta a World Heritage Site, it described it as 'one of the most concentrated historic areas in the world'.

The Renzo Piano–designed City Gate, Parliament Building and Opera House have changed the cityscape and galvanised it into life. These sights, along with Valletta's status as European Capital of Culture for 2018, have seen the city reborn, with new museums, restored golden-stone fortresses, and new hotels, bars and restaurants in converted 16th-century mansions.



EU Presidency

2017 is a big year for Malta as the island takes over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union together with Netherlands and Slovakia. The European Presidency programme takes place over 18 months, and is split into three successive presidencies known as Presidency Trios. Malta's role is to determine goals and identify and prepare a common agenda which will tackle the major issues that will be addressed by the Council over an 18 month period.

With European Presidency, comes a celebration of culture. One of Malta's aims during this period is to showcase Malta's rich cultural heritage, through the arts.

Colours of Malta is proud to be the Official DMC for the EU Presidency.

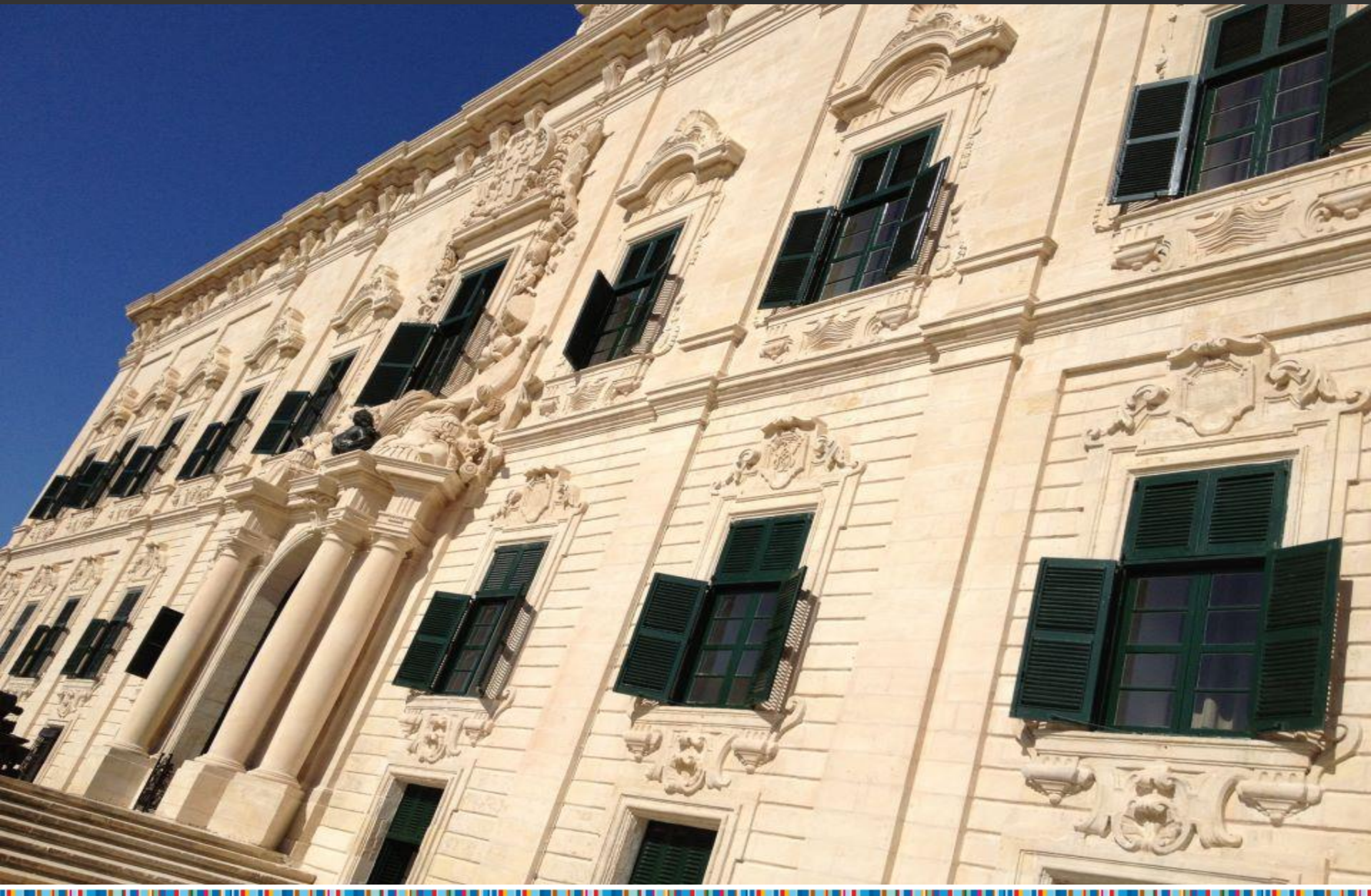
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Valletta will be Capital City of Culture in 2018.

The Valletta 2018 Foundation is driving cultural, social and economic regeneration in Valletta and the Maltese Islands through collaboration, exchange and innovative practice.

The Valletta 2018 Foundation is responsible for [the European Capital of Culture programme](#) in Malta. The programme consists of events and projects developed with various local and international communities.

It is being developed organically in preparation for the year 2018.



Beautiful baroque architecture

Valletta is Unesco-world-heritage listed for its harmonious collection of baroque architecture: imposing military forts and deep moats circle its perimeter, elegant church domes and spires pierce its skyline, and richly embellished *palazzos* jostle for space next to towering townhouses with bright green wooden balconies. As you wander the city's streets, remember to look up: *il-Beltin* (residents of the city) uphold the centuries-old tradition of peeping from their balconies at the street life unfolding beneath them.

Valletta's baroque highlights include the elegant Auberge de Provence, now the [National Museum of Archaeology](#); the [Grand Master's Palace](#), once home to the leaders of the Knights of St John; and at the recently restored [Fort St Elmo](#), which guards the end of the peninsula and houses the [National War Museum](#). You can also explore a baroque hospital at the Sacra Infermeria and [Knights Hospitallers Exhibition](#) and visit the peaceful 16th-century [Church of St Paul's Shipwreck](#). End your day at [St James' Cavalier](#), a sixteenth-century fort that has been converted into contemporary arts centre, and swing by the nearby [Upper Barrakka Gardens](#) for a spectacular sunset.

Work is also underway to restore Valletta to its former glory ahead of 2018, when it will become the European Capital of Culture (www.valletta2018.org).

The treasures of St John's Co-Cathedral

Don't be fooled by its austere stone exterior – stepping into [St John's Co-Cathedral](#) is like stepping into a glittering jewellery box. Built by the Knights of St John between 1573 and 1578, it is an exceptional monument to the high baroque that is, every inch, gilded, painted or carved in stone. Look up to admire frescoes by Calabrian artist and Knight Mattia Preti, down to see a marble patchwork of 375 Knights' tombs, and around to see walls festooned with heraldic symbols and cherubs. If you start to get lost in the heady atmosphere, make sure you don't miss the [Cathedral Museum](#) with its pair of paintings by Caravaggio, including his largest, the renowned *Beheading of St John the Baptist*.

Cutting-edge contemporary architecture

Despite its many historical treasures, Valletta isn't frozen in time, and the most striking proof of this is the definitively modern remodelling of the area around the City Gate by renowned architect Renzo Piano (famous for London's [Shard](#), Paris's [Centre Pompidou](#), and the [New York Times Tower](#)). The sleek, minimalist City Gate forms an understated bridge, crossing the 18-metre-deep, 20-metre-wide moat into the fortified city. Both Piano's gate and his new Parliament Building are made from huge blocks of cream-coloured stone quarried on Malta's sister-island of Gozo. The eco-friendly Parliament Building is supported on stilts, appearing to levitate over a public square, its facade sculpted with a geometric pattern of perforations that filter solar radiation whilst still allowing daylight in.

Piano's third structure is an Open-Air Theatre that rises from the ruins of the old [Royal Opera House](#), which was destroyed by bombing in WWII. Check at the box office for upcoming (often free) performances under the stars.

A secret swimming hole

Step off the beaten path and away from the crowds to explore the city's deserted shoreline, where you'll find whispers of a military maritime past. Across from the Mediterranean Conference Centre and adjacent to the [Malta Experience](#) theatre, you'll find a concrete staircase that descends past a jumble of boathouses to the sea.

Proceed north along the roughly hewn footpath that runs right around the tip of the peninsula to find hidden swimming holes, secret tunnels that connect [Fort St Elmo](#) to the sea, and incredible views across the Grand Harbour. As you ponder a swim in the turquoise water (while not marked as a swimmer's zone, it is clean and safe enough close to the shore) take a moment to picture the ferocious battles of the Great Siege, fought here between the Knights and the Ottoman Turks in 1565.

Descend into the underworld

There are few places in Valletta where the ground beneath your feet is not, in fact, hollow. During WWII Valletta was the most heavily bombed city in Europe (6700 tonnes of munitions fell on it during April 1942 alone), giving rise to a city beneath the city – a network of subterranean rock-cut tunnels, cramped living quarters and makeshift chapels.

Today, most of these war shelters are dilapidated and closed to the public. However, you can see a fine example of a privately owned war shelter at [Casa Rocca Piccola](#) – it is dark, damp, and fascinating. To see the secret underground WWII headquarters where the defence of Malta was masterminded, take a guided tour of the the Lascaris War Rooms (www.lascariswarrooms.com), located below [Upper Barrakka Gardens](#).

Valletta's residents have found some innovative new uses for these subterranean spaces: on the shoreline at Barriera Wharf they have been converted into beach houses, and nearby on Barriera Street the jazz bar at The Harbour Club (www.facebook.com/Theharbourclubmalta) is housed in a restored cistern.

Follow your nose for authentic local cuisine

You won't have a bad meal in Valletta, as long as you skip the touristy restaurants in the main squares and follow the smell of simmering rabbit stew and freshly grilled fish to the side streets.

For an authentic Maltese breakfast, pick up a ricotta-cheese- or mushy-pea-filled pastry at a *pastizzerija* (try Capri Caffè on Zachary Street), or rub shoulders with Malta's politicians over an espresso at the opulent [Caffè Cordina](#). For lunch, head to St Lucia Street where local favourites vintage-themed Café Jubilee (<http://cafejubilee.com.mt>) and hole-in-the-wall Piadina Caffè (<http://piadinacaffe.com>) serve up Maltese-style ravioli and traditional sandwiches made with *ftira* bread.

As the sun goes down, have a spritz at the upmarket Charles Grech cafe on Republic Street. For dinner, book a table at Guzé (www.guzevalletta.com) for traditional Italian-Maltese fare in a 16th-century palazzo, or La Mere (<http://lamere.com.mt>) for a taste of contemporary Indian in an old Maltese townhouse.

Burgeoning nightlife scene

In the nineteenth century, American and British sailors calling at the port of Valletta congregated in Strait Street – a narrow alley of underground restaurants, music halls and brothels, known at the time as 'The Gut'. This gritty underbelly became as much a part of Valletta's identity as its baroque buildings. However, Malta's independence in 1964 caused a sharp decline in visiting sailors, and Strait Street was forgotten for a time.

Recently, restaurateurs have breathed new life into The Gut, kick-starting the renaissance of Valletta nightlife with sophisticated wine bars ([Trabuxu](#), set in a 350-year-old wine cellar, is lovely) and al fresco restaurants (for traditional Maltese try Palazzo Preca, <http://palazzoprecavalletta.com>). Visit in the summer for live music acts, or in the winter stop at StrEat Whisky & Bistro (www.facebook.com/streatwhisky) or Badass Burgers (www.badassburgers.eu) for a nightcap after a performance at the nearby baroque [Manoel Theatre](#).

QUICK LOOK AT VALLETTA

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10 TOP MUST SEES IN VALLETTA

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- St John's Co Cathedral
- The Upper Barracca Gardens
- Lascaris War Rooms
- Casa Rocca Piccola
- Valletta Waterfront
- National War Museum
- Saluting Battery
- The Malta Experience
- The Grand Master's Palace
- The Lower Barracca Gardens



TOP 10 EATERIES IN VALLETTA

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Guzé Bistro

Il-Horża.

Trabuxu Bistro

Leglign.

Malata.

Piadina Caffè

Rubino

Zero Sei Trattoria

Tal Kaptan

Gugar



TOP 10 HOTELS IN VALLETTA

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Hotel Phoencia 5*

Grand Hotel Excelsior 5*

Casa Ellul – boutique Hotel

Palazzo Consiglia – boutique hotel

The Osbourne Hotel – 3*

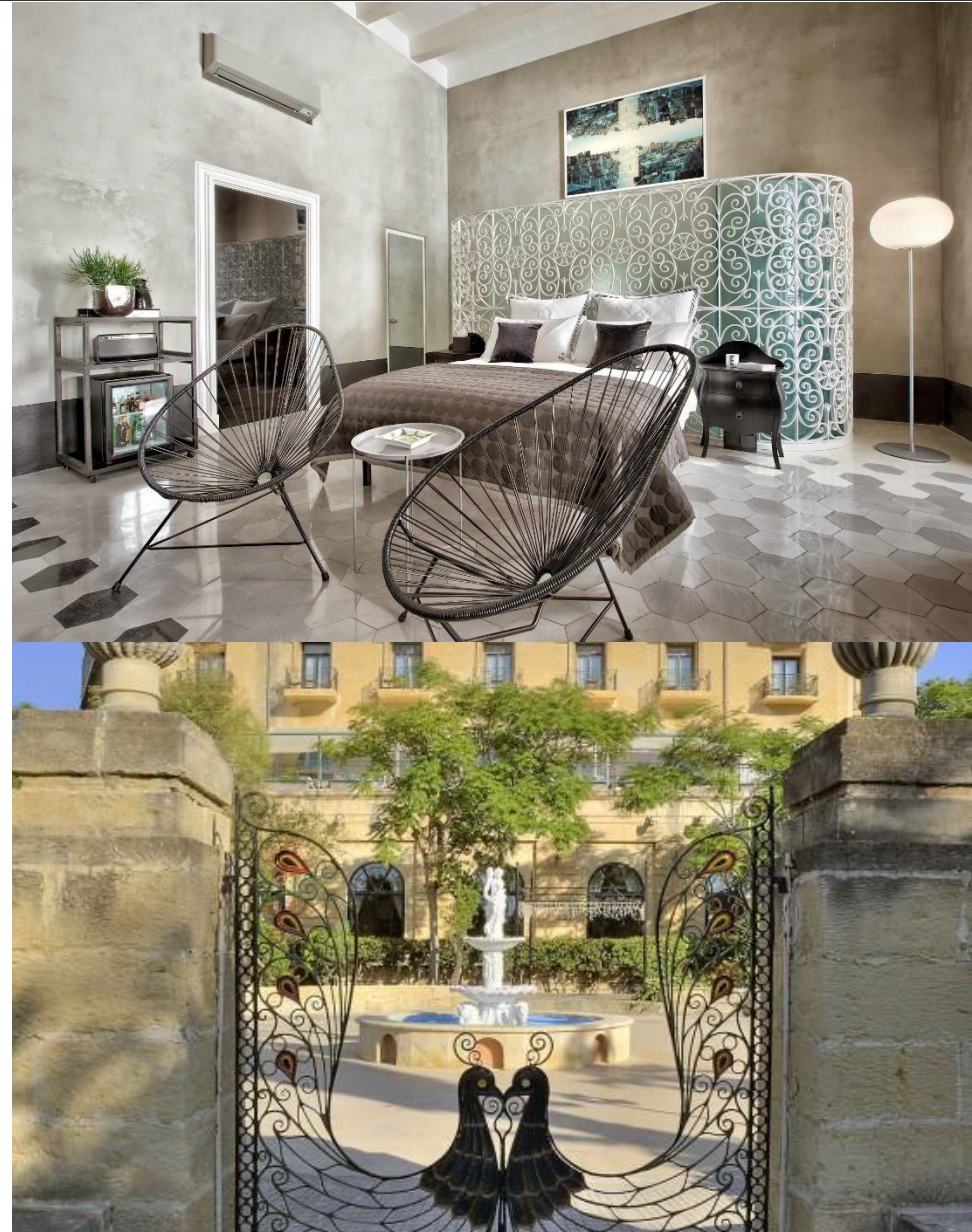
Castille Hotel – 3*

The British Hotel -3*

SU29 – boutique hotel

Grand Harbour Hotel – 2*

Ursolino – Boutique hotel



Cristina Galea

148/12 Tower Road, Sliema, SLM 1604, Malta

Tel: 00356 25520161

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