

# MALTA...

## A JEWEL IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

By Ted Cookson



St. Paul's Cathedral in Mdina



St. Paul's Cathedral dome in Mdina



View from Mdina



Suit of armor in Grand Master's Palace

Strategic Malta is situated in the Mediterranean Sea 93 km (58 miles) south of Sicily and 300 km (186 miles) north of Libya. A member of the European Union since 1994, this tiny republic consists of three limestone islands: 246-square-km (94-square-mile) Malta, 61-square-km (24-square-mile) Gozo, and 3-square-km (1-square-mile) Comino. The sprawling capital of Valletta and most of the national population of 403,000 are located on the island of Malta, which measures 27 km (17 miles) by 14.5 km (9 miles). On the other hand, Gozo's population is only 31,000; and a mere eight people reside on Comino.

Because barren Malta boasts no mountains, lakes or rivers, half of its fresh water requirements must be supplied through reverse osmosis. Malta's two official languages are the Semitic Malti and English. The latter is a reflection of the British presence in Malta from 1798 to 1979.

Malta was first populated about 5000 B. C. Between 3600B.C. and 2,500B.C. a number of stone temples were constructed, about two dozen of which still survive. Malta was a Phoenician colony between 800B.C. and 218B.C. Then, after the fall of Carthage, these islands were controlled by Rome. The Arabs ruled from 870A.D. until their expulsion in 1090 by King Roger of Sicily. The Knights of St. John arrived in 1530 and remained for 268 years. Napoleon held Malta for a two-year period from 1798. This was followed by British rule until late in the twentieth century.

The most famous event in Malta's history is the Great Siege of 1565 when an Ottoman fleet appeared carrying 30,000 men. After a bloody three-month siege, relief finally arrived from Sicily; so the Ottomans withdrew. Malta also suffered five months of severe bombing in 1942.

At the crossroads of the Mediterranean Sea, Malta's rich and fascinating history is a big draw for tourists. The sunny climate is another factor which has contributed to the creation of a substantial tourism industry. Over a million tourists visit Malta annually, and tourism represents up to 40% of Malta's gross national product. Probably best known for its spectacular Grand Harbour, Malta's other top tourist sites include: the baroque St. John's Co-cathedral constructed in 1573; the Grand Master's Palace built in 1571; star-shaped Fort St. Elmo at the mouth of the harbour; and the waterfront district of Vittoriosa. Casa Rocca Piccola in downtown Valletta is also well worth a visit. Constructed in the 1580s for the Knights of St. John, its current owner is a member of the de Piro Family. The house may be viewed only by guided tour.

In the interior of Malta is the medieval walled village of Mdina, which today has a population of only 400. Mdina's primary attraction is the baroque St. Paul's Cathedral built between 1697 and 1702.

Since flying time from Cairo is only two hours, Malta is

ideal for a 3-day or 4-day getaway. It is best to visit during the dry season months of April, May, June, September and October. July and August are also good, although it is hotter then. From November through February is the rainy season, with most precipitation falling in December and January. Round trip airfare from Cairo to Malta on EgyptAir is EGP 2,500. EgyptAir flies both ways on Thursday and Sunday. Travel on any other day of the week requires a change of aircraft in Italy or elsewhere in Europe. Travellers with a full week to spare should consider combining Malta with nearby Sicily. Round trip ferries between Malta and Sicily begin from about Euro 100.



**St. John's Co-Cathedral exterior**



**George Cross plaque**



**Waving goodbye at sailaway**



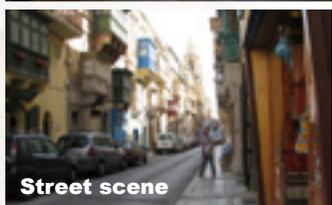
**Docked cruise megaship**



**St. Ursula Church**



**Stair street**



**Street scene**



**Local band at sailaway**



**Typical street**



**Fort St. Elmo at harbor entrance**



**Upper Barracca Gardens**

**ABOUT TED COOKSON:** Egypt's most widely-traveled travel agent, Ted has been to every country in the world! He has also visited 307 of the 319 destinations on the list of the Travelers' Century Club (visit [www.eptours.com](http://www.eptours.com) and refer to World Travel Club). A travel agent in Cairo since 1986, Ted manages EGYPT PANORAMA TOURS, a full-service travel agency, at 4 Road 79 (between Roads 9 and 10, near the "El Maadi" metro station) in Maadi. Contact Egypt Panorama Tours (open 7 days a week 9 AM-5 PM) at: Tels. 2359-0200, 2358-5880, 2359-1301. Fax 2359-1199. E-mail: [ept@link.net](mailto:ept@link.net). Web site: [www.eptours.com](http://www.eptours.com). The password for residents is eptcool. Both text and PDF versions of all of Ted's travel articles published since 2002 are archived online at [www.eptours.com](http://www.eptours.com) under "Ted's International Travel Articles." Many of the archived articles also contain video clips!