

Magnificent Malta: Sun, Sea and History

September 8 — September 17, 2020

Perched between Sicily and North Africa, the islands that comprise the nation of Malta may be small but they offer everything from ancient temples, older than the Great Pyramids and the standing stones of Stonehenge, to modern structures designed by the renowned Italian architect, Renzo Piano. History beckons in every town and village and in the wealth of palaces, churches and fortifications that have survived down the centuries. The very first settlers are thought to have come from Sicily. By the 8th-century, the Phoenicians had established a colony on the main island. In subsequent centuries, Malta was conquered by the Carthaginians, the Romans, the Vandals, the Goths, the Romans again, the Arabs, the Normans, and in the 16th-century was given to the Knights of St. John Hospitaller who became known as the Knights of Malta with their Maltese cross and the Maltese falcon. Napoleon claimed the islands on his way to Egypt but Nelson ousted the French and named it a colony of Great Britain, which it remained until 1964. The strategic placement of this British colony made it a target of ferocious attacks during World War II. Malta received roughly three times as many bombs per square mile as did London.

There is a very strong Italian influence in Malta, particularly in its food which is similar to that of neighboring Sicily, a mere 60 miles to the north. You will also hear Italian spoken, along with English (the official language) and Malti. Just like the Italians, the Maltese love their evening *passggiata* with stops to indulge in a delicious ice cream from one of the nearby gelaterias. Like Italy, it is a Catholic country, with as many churches for mass as there are days of the year! Belief is strong in Malta that St. Paul laid the foundations of a Christian community during his 3-month stay when he was shipwrecked there. In support of this belief, Malta was one of the first Roman colonies to convert.

The sea around the Maltese islands is as clean and clear as anywhere in the Mediterranean, so the underwater visibility makes this a great place for swimming, snorkeling and diving. Many natural sea pools dot Malta's coast, known also for its underwater grottoes. Its climate is just about the best the Mediterranean can offer with virtually non-stop sunshine from April through September.

To give you a flavor of Malta, I quote from an article I recently read: "Although tiny, they have more of everything - more history, more religious devotion, more invaders, more dropped bombs, more resilience, more jokes, more parties, more life." In short, Malta is unique!

Itinerary

Tuesday, September 8

Depart in the evening on a non-stop Delta flight from **Detroit to Rome. D, B**

Wednesday, September 9

On arrival in **Rome**, we will transfer to our Air Malta flight that will take us to Malta International Airport where we will meet our escort for the week and drive to our base for the next 7 nights, the **5-star Grand Hotel Excelsior**. Surrounded by the 16th-century bastion walls of the capitol city of **Valletta**, the Excelsior has its own marina for guests in Marsamxett Harbour and the best facilities of any hotel in or around Valletta, including a spa, gym and sizeable indoor and outdoor swimming pools. It even has its own little beach and panoramic views across the water to Manoel Island and Sliema. Your afternoon is at leisure and we will gather tonight for a Welcome Drink and dinner. **B, D**

Thursday, September 11

After a buffet breakfast, we'll have a driving tour of the city of **Valletta**, a UNESCO World heritage site. Valletta is the first planned city of Europe, founded by the Knights of St. John in 1565 after a siege by the Turks. A guided walking tour will introduce us to the highlights of the city center, a baroque jewel with wonderful historic structures. We'll visit the breath-taking Co-Cathedral of St. John, with its lavishly carved wall decorations and paintings by Caravaggio, and the opulent State Rooms at the Grand Masters Palace. There will be time for lunch before we tour the National Museum of Archeology, home of the famous "Fat Ladies of Malta" carvings from the Neolithic Temples, and then the Upper Barrakka Gardens which has spectacular views of the Grand Harbour and the "Three Cities" beyond. There will be time to relax a bit before dinner at a wonderful local restaurant specializing in seafood. **B, D**

Friday, September 11

Malta's rugged southern coast is pitted with sea caves and the most spectacular is the **Blue Grotto**. Weather permitting, we will start our day with a morning boat ride, when shafts of bright sunlight turn the water a vivid blue. From there we drive to the famous prehistoric temples of **Hagar Qim**, which used some of the largest stone slabs found in Maltese temple building. Lunch at a nearby wine cellar is included before our last stop of the day at the **Dingli Cliffs**, Malta's highest point. There are stunning views down some 800 feet to the waves below and far out to sea. Dinner is on your own this evening. **B, L**

Saturday, September 12

This is a **free day** for you to relax and enjoy the town, travel across the water to the Three Cities, go shopping, or take a bus to one of the many beaches in the St. Paul and St. Julian areas. If you are interested in WWII history, you can visit the fascinating Lascaris War Rooms that served as Eisenhower's command center during the Allied invasion of Sicily, the National War Museum in Fort St. Elmo, and the Malta at War Museum in Birgu on the opposite side of the Grand Harbour. If you are feeling lazy, take a cruise of the Grand Harbour that sails past Fort St. Elmo, Fort St. Angelo, Valletta and the Three Cities. The day is yours to enjoy. **B**

Sunday, September 13

Today will be a full but fascinating day as we venture to the west of the island for guided walking tours of Malta's ancient capital of **Mdina** and its suburb of **Rabat**. On the way, we'll stop at a Craft Village and then enjoy a wine tasting just a few miles away at **Meridian Wine Estate**, owned by the renowned Antinori family of Italy. Lunch will be in an exceptional Italian trattoria in one of the old squares of Mdina. Mdina is an unspoiled citadel of great beauty with medieval walls, grand palazzos and a Baroque cathedral. It is one of the world's finest examples of a medieval walled city that is still inhabited. From Bastien Square there is a magnificent view of almost the whole of northern Malta. Spreading below is Rabat with early Christian catacombs and a Roman townhouse with colorful floor mosaics, which was once the home of a wealthy citizen. Dinner is on your own this evening. **B, L**

Monday, September 14

After breakfast, we'll take a ferry to the small outer island of **Gozo**. Only one-third the size of Malta, there's plenty to see. The main city of **Victoria** has been inhabited since the Bronze Age and is a romantic mass of sheer rock faces, curtain walls, and bell towers that dominate the skyline. Recently

restored, the massive golden-colored citadel and its bastions date from the early 17th-century, as does the beautiful cathedral. The ramparts offer a great view of the countryside and the city below and on a clear day one can see Mt. Etna in the distance. A walk through the narrow, winding streets of Victoria will take us to a local bistro for a delicious lunch before we drive to the east coast to see the highly photogenic salt pans that produce tons of prime sea salt each year. This evening you are free to dine where you choose. **B, L**

Tuesday, September 15

Today will be a light day that begins with a short drive to the **Tarxien Temples**. This site is the most complex in Malta and would have been the most decorative. Its four temples are remarkable for the quality of their carvings. Just further down the road is **Marsaxlokk**, quite simply the prettiest traditional fishing village on the islands. The harbor, with its multitude of colorfully painted boats, is a photographer's dream. Here you can take photographs, have lunch and investigate the market. We'll return to the hotel in time for you to relax a bit before departing for our very special **Farewell dinner** at one of Malta's most beautiful stately homes and adjoining gardens. **B, D**

Wednesday, September 16

A very short drive from Valletta lies one of the world's most extraordinary UNESCO World Heritage Sites, **Hal-Saffieni Hypogeum**, the prehistoric underground "Temple for the Dead". Dug out of the rock around 3,000 BC by people using only flint and hard rocks, this place was used for both rituals and burials. It has chambers on three levels with patterns and symbols on the walls. There will be time for a group lunch before going to the airport for our evening flight to **Rome**. Those group members flying home on Thursday will overnight at the **4-star Hilton Rome Airport Hotel** while those staying on in Rome for the extension will travel to the **4-star Hotel Nazionale** in the heart of the city (the cost of the first night is included in this tour package). **B, L**

Thursday, September 17

After breakfast, it is a short walk from the hotel to the Delta desk to check-in for your non-stop flight to **Detroit**. **B**

Land Package Price of

\$4,245 per person*

double occupancy, includes:

- Air Fare between Rome and Malta on Air Malta
 - 7 nights in the 5-star Grand Hotel Excelsior in Valletta and 1 night at the 4-star Hilton Rome Airport Hotel (or the 4-star Hotel Nazionale in central Rome if doing the optional extension)
 - Daily breakfast buffet, plus 4 lunches and 3 dinners with quality local wines and mineral water
 - Full day tour of Valletta
 - Full-day excursion to Blue Grotto, Hagar Quim Temples, and Dingli Cliffs
 - Full-day excursion to Mdina and Rabat with wine tasting
 - Free Day
 - Full-day excursion to the Island of Gozo
 - Full-day excursion to Tarxien Temples and Marsaxlokk
 - Farewell Dinner at beautiful stately home
 - Half-day excursion to Hal-Saflieni Hypogeum
 - All gratuities
 - Transfers via private, air-conditioned motorcoach
 - Baggage handling, service charges, and all taxes at hotels
 - Entrance fees to all sites described in the itinerary
 - Services of local guides and use of whisper sets
 - Services of professional, bilingual, Italian escort
- * Round-trip economy class airfare between Detroit and Rome, including all air taxes and fuel surcharges, is an additional **\$1250**. Group members flying from another city can request an air price. The airfare is based on a minimum of 10 people traveling together.

To assure that guests have as comfortable an experience as possible, space is limited.

For more information, contact:

Suzan Alexander

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P.O. Box 2511

Ann Arbor, MI 48106-2511

734-327-1931

E-mail: suzan@ceitravel.com

*Offered in cooperation with Paesano
Restaurant and Wine Bar*

Optional Extension in Rome

Sept. 17 – Sept. 20, 2020

Thursday, September 17

You have the morning to sleep in or wander a bit on your own before an afternoon **guided driving/walking tour** of the highlights of the center of the city. A visit to the **Castel Sant'Angelo**, originally the mausoleum of the Emperor Hadrian and later the fortress and castle of the popes, is included in the tour. **B**

Friday, September 18

After breakfast, the group will gather for a guided tour of the ancient **Roman Forum** followed by a visit to the **Capitoline Museums**. These connected museums contain such exquisite works as the original equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, Venus, and the Dying Gaul. The afternoon is at leisure. **B**

Saturday, September 19

This is a **free day** for you to spend as you please. You may want to get tickets to the Vatican Museum, the Colosseum, or just wander through the city at your own pace. We will meet in the evening for dinner at a great local restaurant. **B, D**

Sunday, September 20

This morning we transfer to the Rome airport for the non-stop flight back to **Detroit**. **B**

\$1587 per person

double occupancy, includes:

- 3 nights in the 4-star Hotel Nazionale in the heart of Rome
- Daily breakfast buffet and 1 dinner with quality local wines and mineral water
- Half-day driving/walking tour of Rome
- Half-day tour of the Forum and the Capitoline Museums
- All gratuities
- Transfers via private vehicle
- Baggage handling, service charges, and all taxes at hotels
- Entrance fees to all sites described in the itinerary
- Services of local guides and use of whisper sets
- Services of professional, bilingual, Italian escort

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Reservation Form

Please reserve ___ places on the **Magnificent Malta** tour, **September 8 – September 17, 2020**. The 8-night land package is **\$4,245** per person double occupancy. Airfare from Detroit is **\$1,250** including all surcharges and taxes (these fees are subject to change until time of ticketing).

Enclosed is my **deposit** of \$ _____ (**\$2,000 per person**).

My departure city is: _____

Options:

___ Nonstop flights from Detroit to Rome and Rome to Detroit: **\$1,250** including all taxes and surcharges

___ Trip Cancellation & Interruption Insurance for complete tour (call or email for options & price)

Date(s) of Birth (1) _____ (2) _____

___ Malta Single Supplement - **\$995**

___ 3-night Extension in Rome - **\$1,587** ___ Rome Single Supplement - **\$390**

Full Name(s) as appears on passport: (1) _____

(2) _____

Passport Number(s): (1) _____ (2) _____

Expiration Date(s): (1) _____ (2) _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Daytime Phone: _____ Cell No: _____

E-Mail: _____ Rooming with: _____

Make deposit payment by personal check payable to *Cultural Encounters, Inc* by **March 16, 2020**. We cannot guarantee space on the tour until we receive this deposit check. **After May 8, 2020, if you must cancel, for any reason, \$2000 per person is non-refundable.** Final payment is due on or before **July 8, 2019**. **After July 8, 2020, the total payment is 100% non-refundable. Optional cancellation and tour interruption insurance is strongly advised.**

Please return form and deposit to:

Suzan Alexander

Cultural Encounters, Inc.

Box 2511, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-2511

Phone: 734-327-1931

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