

Top to bottom, the vibrant fishing village of Marsaxlokk; the Upper Barakka Gardens offer panoramic views of the Grand Harbour; one of the city's trademark orange buses

## VALUE SAVVY WEEKEND IN MALTA

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A CUP OF TEA FOR 25 CENTS? TRIM AND BLOW-DRY FOR €3? IT'S NOT JUST THE BUSES THAT ARE FROM THE 1970S... MALTA IS EUROPE WITHOUT THE HIGH PRICES, OR THE LANGUAGE BARRIER



### FRIDAY

CHECK INTO HOTEL Dragonara Court in the St Julian's district (from €19 a night, bookable on [easyjethotels.com](http://easyjethotels.com)). Then head to the Grand Masters' Palace (Old Theatre Street, Valletta) for a history lesson. It houses the Maltese government, as well as frescoes depicting the Turkish siege of 1565, painted by Michelangelo's star pupil Matteo Perez d'Aleccio. Nearby, the ornate gilded splendour of St John's Co-Cathedral ([www.stjohnscocathedral.org](http://www.stjohnscocathedral.org)), built by the Knights Hospitallers, houses Caravaggio's masterpieces *The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist* and *Saint Jerome Writing*.

As the streetlights begin to flicker, duck into Jubilee ([www.cafejubilee.com](http://www.cafejubilee.com)), on St Lucia's Street in the city's former red light district. The local brew Cisk is crisp and cheap, while Kinnie, Malta's home-grown bitter orange soda, is a whole lot nicer



than it sounds. Dig into Gozitan-cheese-stuffed ravioli, or the national dish *fenek* (rabbit). For a nightcap, hit The Pub (136 Archbishop Street, Tel: +35 621 241 655), which achieved dark notoriety when Oliver Reed drank his last here during the filming of *Gladiator* in 1999.

### SATURDAY

*PASTIZZI* IS THE Maltese breakfast of choice. Similar to a Cornish pasty (and at 20 cents a pop, who's complaining?) this pocket of flaky pastry is filled with ricotta cheese, spinach or marrowfat peas. Bakeries are nestled along the streets surrounding the ruins of Valletta's Royal Opera House, bombed during World War Two and still awaiting revival.

Head out through the City Gate to the bus station. A retro blur of orange hues, over half of Maltese buses have been on the →



Clockwise from above, cocktail bar two-twentytwo is carved into ancient ramparts; the crumbling façades of the capital, Valletta, ooze old-world charm; the Grand Harbour Marina is nestled into the city; boat trips to the Blue Grotto pass through its huge natural arch



## TAKE A BOAT TRIP OUT TO THE BLUE GROTTO

road since the early 1970s: expect minimal suspension and a lot of character.

Bus number 81 will take you to the western Dingli Cliffs. Boat trips to the Blue Grotto leave from the small port of Wied iz-Zurrieq. The energetic can hike back up to the main road, then northwards for 10 minutes to reach the inspiring megaliths of the Hagar Qim and Mnajdra Temples, each over 5,000 years old. Stick around to watch the sun set over the uninhabited island of Filfla, then head back to Valletta.

Make Saturday night late in party-central Paceville, with its popular clubs, bars and restaurants near the water. Or head to Two-twentytwo ([www.two-twentytwo.com](http://www.two-twentytwo.com)),

a contemporary cocktail bar carved into Valletta's 16th-century ramparts.

### SUNDAY

Shop the Sunday morning flea market along Valletta's city walls, then stroll the Sliema seafront pavements, stopping for lunch in buzzy Spinola Bay. Quality star spotting (apparently the bay's a favourite with Madonna and Brad Pitt) can be had at Peppino's ([www.peppinosmalta.com](http://www.peppinosmalta.com)), where mains average a bargain €15 each.

Wander along the newly renovated Vittoriosa Waterfront, where you can hop aboard a traditional wooden *frejgatina* boat, which will speed you back across to Valletta.



## ★ TOP 5 MALTA FREEBIES

- ★ Skip the pricey cruises: for panoramic vistas of Valletta's Grand Harbour, head to Upper Barrakka Gardens, originally the property of 17th-century Italian knights.
- ★ Adrian Scicluna's conceptual sculptures are on show at Valletta's St James Cavalier Centre ([www.sjcav.org](http://www.sjcav.org)) until 26 April.
- ★ Sprawl in the sun: the best beaches are the western Golden Bay and the red sands of Ramla Bay on the neighbouring island of Gozo – there's a regular ferry service between the islands and the trip takes about 20 minutes.
- ★ The public footpaths around Malta's coastline are easy to hike. Start out at Mellieha Bay, near Malta's northern tip, or Xlendi Bay, a 10-minute taxi ride from Gozo ferry port.
- ★ In hilltop Mellieha, the eerily beautiful underground chapel of the Sanctuary of Our Lady has been a site of pilgrimage for over 400 years. There is an English-language mass on Sundays and feast days.

easyJet flies to Malta from London Gatwick and Manchester. See page 152 for our insider guide. Book online at [easyJet.com](http://easyJet.com)