



Malta 10 Great Walks



This book is for people who like walking, not just as a form of exercise, but also because of the places and people of interest to be encountered along the way. This book describes 10 great walks; 7 are principally coastal and rural in nature, while 3 are through areas that are mainly urban. Malta is quite compact so that on any one walk you can enjoy a variety of features.

EACH WALK:

- is of moderate length (3 to 4 hours) and most can be extended or shortened to suit individual tastes
- can be reached conveniently by bus
- leads you past a variety of landscapes and features of historical, environmental and cultural interest
- is described in detail and is accompanied by a map
- is supported by a context section which gives an overview of the key features to be encountered

The book includes sections on the history, geology and wildlife of Malta so that you get a fuller understanding and appreciation of the many fascinating aspects of its environment and culture. It also provides details on practical aspects such as weather, safety, buses and the location of cafes and toilets.

This book is supported by the Ramblers Association of Malta.

www.ramblersmalta.org.

THE AUTHORS

Emmet McMahon is an Irish environmental scientist who came to work in Malta for some weeks and stayed for 6 years. His only relevant claim to fame is that he has walked around the whole coastline of Malta. This makes him the only person he knows who has walked around the entire border of an EU Member State.

Jonathan Henwood is a Maltese botanist and environmental scientist whose profession and interests have given him a detailed knowledge of Malta, its history, and natural environment. He has so far no special claim to fame, but he does have a beautiful wife.

www.greatwalksmalta.com



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10 GREAT WALKS

Emmet McMahon and Jonathan Henwood

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We would appreciate feedback on this book, including suggestions and corrections. Please send comments and any enquiries to our web site:

www.greatwalksmalta.com



GOZO

Rabat

Mgarr



COMINO

Cirkewwa

Mellieha

St. Paul's Bay

MALTA

The Walks

- 1 The Battlements of Valletta
- 2 The Three Cities
- 3 Marsascula to Marsaxlokk Bay
- 4 Qrendi and Blue Grotto
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- 6 Cirkewwa to Mellieha Bay
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- 9 The Island of Comino
- 10 The Saltpans of Gozo



Sliema

Valletta

Three Cities

Mdsina

Mosta

Marsaxlokk

Dingli Cliffs

INTRODUCTION

This book is aimed at readers who like walking, not just as a form of exercise, but also because of the places and people of interest to be encountered along the way. While not widely known for its walking potential Malta provides a wide range of enjoyable walks incorporating impressive historical, cultural, landscape and environmental features. Malta is quite compact so that on any one walk you can encounter a variety of sites.

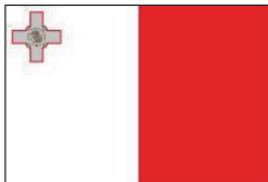
This book provides details of 10 great walks in Malta, together with a description of the noteworthy features that lie along each route. The duration of each walk is typically three to four hours and most can be shortened or extended to suit particular interests and circumstances. The starting and end points of each walk can be accessed by bus, as can every village in Malta. The book includes a detailed map for each walk and also describes the context (historical, cultural, environmental) of the key points of interest.

The locations of the walks are shown on the overall map on the previous page, with more detailed routes given in later sections. Three of the walks pass through urban coastal areas, while the others are through areas that are primarily coastal and rural. Only one walk does not pass by a church. The walks we describe are as follows:

- Walk 1 The Battlements of Valletta
- Walk 2 The Three Cities
- Walk 3 Marsascula to Marsaxlokk Bay
- Walk 4 Qrendi and the Blue Grotto
- Walk 5 Buskett and Dingli Cliffs
- Walk 6 Cirkewwa to Mellieha
- Walk 7 The Victoria Lines
- Walk 8 Around Sliema
- Walk 9 The Island of Comino
- Walk 10 The Saltpans of Gozo

OUR FAVOURITES? Cirkewwa to Mellieha (Walk 6) because of its world class landscapes and outstanding natural habitats, the Battlements of Valletta (Walk 1) for the number and diversity of historic features and Comino (Walk 9) for its Blue Lagoon, wild plants, and sense of isolation and times past.

A VERY SHORT HISTORY OF MALTA



The State of Malta consists of three inhabited islands – Malta, Gozo and Comino and a few uninhabited islets. Malta is the largest island, about thirty kilometres long by fourteen wide, while Gozo is fourteen by seven. With a population of about 400,000 Malta is among the most densely populated countries in the world. The island of Malta contains the capital, Valletta and the major centres of tourist and commercial activity. Gozo by contrast is a more tranquil island with an agricultural base and a more traditional approach to life.

KEY DATES

5000 BC	First settlers arrive in Malta
3600 – 2500 BC	Construction of Megalithic temples
800 – 480 BC	Roman rule
60 AD	St. Paul shipwrecked on Malta
395 – 970	Byzantine rule
970 – 1090	Arab rule
1090 – 1194	Norman rule
1194 – 1530	Swabian, Angevin and Spanish rule
1530	Malta ceded to Knights of St John
1565	The Great Siege, Ottoman army repulsed
1566	Foundation of Valletta
1798	French forces capture Malta and expel Knights
1800	French expelled, British rule commences
1941-43	German/Italian forces lay siege to Malta
1964	Malta gains independence
2004	Malta joins EU

WALK ONE

THE BATTLEMENTS OF VALLETTA

This easy, extremely interesting and at times exciting walk begins and ends at the Gate of Valletta. It passes around, on top of, and outside the historic and imposing battlements which form the perimeter of the beautiful city of Valletta. The walk provides a panorama across the entire island from the high walls of Hastings Garden and stunning views from sea level of the breakwater to World War II defences at the entrance to the Grand Harbour. The section of this walk at sea level outside the battlements is not well-known even among Maltese people and you will meet few, if any, fellow walkers. The walk also takes you through Floriana, a suburb of Valletta with many historical features and the lovely Argotti Botanic Gardens. The walk done briskly takes about 3 hours but is best made into a full day trip to allow time for lingering over the magnificent views or visiting some of the many cafés, palaces, museums, gardens and churches along the route. Be sure to bring a camera and avoid the walk in stormy weather as the section at sea level is very exposed.

CONTEXT

Valletta, capital of Malta, (“a city built by gentlemen for gentlemen”), is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and deservedly so. Though there were losses from bombing in the Second World War it still retains immense cultural and architectural resources. It is situated on a peninsula overlooking the Grand Harbour, one of the greatest and most impressive harbours of the world. The Knights of Malta commenced its construction in 1580 shortly after the defeat of the Turks in the first great siege of Malta. The knights decided they needed a stronger and better base and so they undertook the construction of a great new city - Valletta, named after their Grand Master and hero of the siege, Jean Parisot de La Valette. The knights were members of the richest families of Europe and finance was not a constraint, more so since the Pope also contributed. A main design requirement for the city was the ability to withstand another sea and land siege and thus the leading architects of Europe were employed in its design and construction. Valletta is still completely surrounded by walls of a staggering size, extent and beauty, although they have been breached in some places to create new entrances for commerce and residents.

It was the continuing influx of wealth and taste from continental Europe that created a culturally and architecturally advanced society on that previously poor

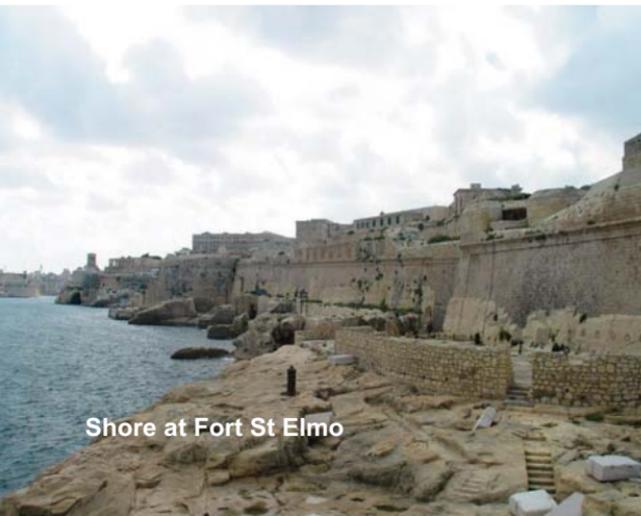
WALK 1

island. For the next 250 years or so, under the generally benign rule of the knights, Malta enjoyed an age of peace and prosperity. There are excellent buildings throughout Malta, but Valletta is exceptional in that it has so many fine churches, museums, palaces, auberges and historic buildings, all within a well preserved walled city. Go there! The size and street layout make exploration on foot extremely easy.

The Great Siege of 1565

The seaward tip of Valletta is dominated by Fort St Elmo. It was here in 1565 that the knights made a glorious stand against the forces of Suleiman the Magnificent (also known as Sultan of the Ottomans, Allah's deputy on earth, Emperor of the East and West and Prince and Lord of the Most Happy Constellation). The knights had always been a nuisance to Suleiman as they harried his merchant vessels passing through the narrow channel between Sicily and Africa. The knights made a serious mistake around 1562 when they captured a large merchant vessel carrying luxuries from Venice to Constantinople. Not only was the boat owned by the head Eunuch, but important members of the Sultan's harem had made an investment in the cargo. The vigorous complaints of the ladies, combined with the prompting of his generals, encouraged Suleiman to order the invasion of Malta. Suleiman was a formidable enemy at the peak of his power, and his army, the most powerful in the world at that time, had captured Aden, Algiers, Baghdad, Belgrade and Bucharest and had even reached the walls of Vienna. The knights numbered about 700 and had perhaps 7,000 soldiers (many of which were untrained Maltese) to defend the island. The clever money would have been bet on a quick victory for the Sultan. Returning the ship and its cargo to the ladies, with an apology, would

have seemed an appropriate response by the knights when their spies informed them of the Sultan's decision to invade Malta. Never ones to avoid a fight, however, the knights set about improving the defences of Fort St Elmo and their main base at Fort St Angelo, across the Grand Harbour from the then uninhabited peninsula of Valletta.



Shore at Fort St Elmo

Walk 1: The Battlements of Valletta



WALK THREE

MARSASKALA TO MARSAXLOKK BAY

This coastal walk from the town of Marsascala to the fishing village of Marsaxlokk provides wonderfully varied views of cliffs, bays, towns and tranquil countryside. The coastal limestone cliffs (some as white as those of Dover) have been eroded by rain, wind and waves to create a myriad of impressive shapes and structures. Features of interest you will encounter on the walk include ancient salt pans, a sandy beach, castles, fish farms, fishing boats, attractive countryside and, of course, some lovely churches.

It is a longish walk, about 12 km – say 4 hours, though it can be shortened by avoiding some of the tips of peninsulas. Bring your swimming trunks: you may want to take swim in one of the pleasant bays. There are cafés, shops and toilets along the first half of the route, but it is wise to take some water with you for the second half. Frequent buses will take you from Valletta to Marsascala and from Marsaxlokk to Valletta.

CONTEXT

The islands of Malta came into existence about 10 million years ago when the limestone rock of the sea bed was pushed upwards by tectonic plate movements. Further tectonic activity has created faults, ridges and rift valleys throughout the islands, while erosion by rain and sea has also contributed to a variety of landforms on quite a small land mass. Ice ages caused a drop in sea level and a temporary land connection to Italy, which allowed the free movement of animals, including elephants, hippos and deer, into Malta. These large animals eventually reduced in size (a common occurrence in animal species on small islands), as shown by the remains found in the Ghar Dhalam cave, just outside Marsaxlokk. The cave and its associated museum are open to visitors but do not form part of the walk.

The limestone in Malta formed underwater from the remains of marine organisms and other sediments that slowly accumulated on the seabed and which, over millions of years, became compacted into solid rock. The quality and strength of limestone depends on the nature and mix of silt, sand and types of marine creatures present at the time it was formed. As a consequence, limestone can vary in strength and colour from one location to another and will also vary with depth. Geologists recognise five main layers in the limestone of Malta. From top to bottom there is: upper coralline limestone, greensands, blue

Walk 3: Marsascala to Marsaxlokk Bay



WALK FOUR

QRENDI AND THE BLUE GROTTO

This circular walk begins and ends at the historic village of Qrendi in the south east of Malta, but there is also the option of continuing onto the town of Siggiewi. The walk passes initially through pleasant countryside to reach spectacular coastal rock formations, the most famous of which is known as the Blue Grotto. The route then leads you to the magnificent megalithic temple complexes of Mnajdra and Hagar Qim which are designated World Heritage Sites. The walk also includes a visit to the splendidly verdant Maqluba doline – a collapsed cave hosting a range of moisture loving plants. Also to be seen along the route are ancient churches, narrow village streets, small fields and romantically-sited defensive towers. The coastal area is rich in biodiversity and is of great scenic beauty

It is a very pleasant walk, though it does include a steep (but safe) climb up from the Blue Grotto. The overall length of the basic walk is about 7 km but we recommend that you make it into a full day trip by visiting the Neolithic temples, or by taking a short boat trip at the Blue Grotto (weather permitting) or by continuing the walk to Siggiewi, an extra distance of about 5 km. Cafés and toilets are to be found at a number of points along the route.



CONTEXT

The southern towns such as Qrendi, Mqabba, Siggiewi and Zurrieq are more traditional and less visited than the towns of central and northern Malta, with industries such as agriculture and quarrying as major sources of employment. The local limestone is of prime quality and the general area is a hub of quarrying activity, as can be seen from the many quarries dotting the local countryside. The inhabitants have long been recognised as masters in stone cutting and shaping and the locality has supplied prime quality hardstone and softstone for building and decorating for many years. The Limestone Heritage Centre in Siggiewi (worth a visit) has a very interesting and enjoyable exhibition of the many uses to which limestone has been put.

WALK SIX

CIRKEWWA TO MELLIEHA BAY

This exceptional walk takes you from the ferry port of Cirkewwa to the long sandy beach of Mellieha. Its varied features include high ridges with arguably the best views in Malta, dramatic cliffs, bleak garrigue, verdant wooded areas, small farms, the impressive Red Tower, a nature reserve and the wonderfully named “Paradise Bay”. Surprisingly for Malta, the walk does not pass a church. It also illustrates the challenge which Malta faces in developing a sustainable water supply.

The walk is at times exciting and challenging, but always worthwhile. It is of moderate difficulty in the early uphill stretch, as you are on rough ground without a specific path, but thereafter it is easy. You will need to wear sensible shoes and, as the route is very exposed to wind, rain and sun, it is prudent to bring a jacket, sun-cream and a hat. You might also consider bringing your swimming togs for use in the clear waters of either Paradise Bay or Mellieha Bay. The walk takes about 3 hours, so bring water and a snack. There is a frequent bus service to Cirkewwa from Valletta and Sliema. The same buses service your return journey from Mellieha.

CONTEXT

Water is a very limited resource in Malta at present and is likely to become increasingly critical as climate change threatens to bring less rain and warmer summers. Malta receives only about 50 cm of rain annually, with just 10% falling in the 5 months between April and August. In urbanised areas most of the rain falls on impermeable surfaces and rushes quickly to the sea. In the countryside most of the rain falling on fissured rock and soil can percolate downwards to form an underground aquifer. Where the groundwater meets an impermeable layer, such as blue clay, it travels sideways and may appear as a surface spring or seepage through the walls of a cliff or valley. There are no permanent rivers or lakes of consequence in Malta and water for public supply is abstracted partially from underground aquifers. The high water demand for agriculture is met mainly by private boreholes in the limestone aquifer, licensed or otherwise.

The abstraction rate for underground water exceeds the recharge rate from rainwater and so the water level in the limestone aquifer drops, thus decreasing the outflow from springs and valley sides. The result is that many former streams

WALK SEVEN

THE VICTORIA LINES

In the late 19th century the British Army constructed a linear network of fortifications (the Victoria Lines) that run about 13 km across Malta, from sea to sea. The objective was to create an impassable barrier that would protect Valletta and the strategically important Grand Harbour from enemies invading through the many bays and inlets of the northern half of the island.

This fairly challenging walk starts in the famous town of Mosta in the centre of Malta and passes along the walls of the Victoria Lines until reaching the northern coast at Madliena. The Lines, built on a high natural ridge, provide wonderful views across the countryside. Some parts of the defensive walls have been demolished by road construction or flooding, but much of interest remains. The walk takes about 4 hours and has a number of interesting options for extending it. The path brings you past military fortifications, peaceful valleys, small farms, churches inside caves, Bronze Age tombs and lookout points providing panoramic views over the countryside and the coast.

This walk takes in only half the Victoria Lines (some committed walkers do the whole journey from coast to coast in one walk). The other half from Mosta to the southern coast is also very interesting but has the disadvantage that the return by bus from the relatively remote finishing point is not convenient.

It is worthwhile bringing binoculars and a camera to take full advantage of the wonderful views. It is also preferable to wear long trousers as some sections of the path are overgrown with bushes which may scratch. You should also bring water and something to eat as there are no shops and cafés along the route.

CONTEXT

Some thousands of years ago geological activity resulted in the formation of a ridge (known as the Great Fault) which runs across Malta from sea to sea. In the late 19th century the British Army took advantage of the cliffs, hills and high points of this ridge to build an extensive system of defensive walls, forts and strong points. In honour of the Queen at that time, these were named the Victoria Lines. The aim was to protect the heavily populated central and south from an enemy invading through easy landing sites in the north of the island, such as S. Paul's Bay.

WALK NINE

THE ISLAND OF COMINO

This wonderful walk starts and ends at the Blue Lagoon in Comino, the small island midway between Malta and Gozo. Comino, with an area of 1.5 square kilometres and only eight residents, is largely unspoiled. Traffic is non-existent, while noise is the exception rather than the rule. Comino is very much what Malta would have looked like during the time of the knights, so you can feel that this is a trip back in time. Comino is a designated protected area because of its plants, animals, scenery and geology. It hosts historic defensive features because of its strategic location between Malta and Gozo.

The very pleasant features of this walk include a boat trip to the island, impressive sea caves and other geological features, forts and look-out points, a wide range of native plants and birds, stunning views and an opportunity to swim at the beautiful Blue Lagoon. The length of the walk is about 8 km and you should allow yourself at least 4 hours on the island to enjoy it all at a leisurely pace. Taking the boat journey into account this is a full day's trip, but well worth it. There is little protection from sun, wind or rain on the island so it is best to do the walk in spring or autumn and to take a day's ration of food, water and sun-protection. It is worth bringing binoculars if you have an interest in birds and a towel and swimming costume if you plan to swim in the sandy and safe lagoon. You get to the island most conveniently by taking a ferry to the island from the small harbour opposite the Riviera Hotel near Cirkewwa. You may also take a small ferry to the island from Mgarr Harbour, if you are staying in Gozo.



CONTEXT

Comino, named after the cummin herb which was once cultivated there, was inhabited by farmers in Roman times but was later abandoned. Whether this was voluntarily or whether its inhabitants were carried off into slavery by pirates (as happened in Gozo) is not known. In the Middle Ages, Comino became a busy pirate's den because of the protected bays and deep sea caves along its rugged coastline.