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Affordable destination of the month: The Republic of Malta

By Wayne Johns
CP2 Travel Writer

Meet Wayne Johns:

My name is Wayne Johns and I am an African American. I was born in Cleveland, Ohio. My background has been in education, the travel industry, hair, fashion, and real estate. I have been traveling the world inexpensively since 1969. That year, I moved to Paris, and have been traveling ever since. I have so far lived in Paris, London, Romania, Switzerland, Germany, and Italy.

As far as I'm concerned, there is no reason to stay at a five-star hotel when traveling; there is an ample amount of affordable hotels with all the same amenities. They are architecturally beautiful, a little smaller, clean, safe, friendly, and close to most of the attractions. They also offer free breakfast, cable television, and Wi-Fi. All tours are arranged at the front desk and you are picked up right outside of your hotel, or in close proximity. Invariably, I'm only in my hotel room for 7-8 hours, for resting purposes. A good number of hotels are family-owned that offer a wealth of information. With that, you get a better feel for the city. For example, they can give the best advice on choosing restaurants, night clubs, shopping, etc.

The Republic of Malta is a jewel situated centrally within the Mediterranean. The oldest monuments of the islands are the megalithic temples built between 3600 and 2500 BC, the oldest surviving freestanding structures in the world. Malta has been colonized and occupied by the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Arabic's, the Normans, and the English. The Phoenicians colonized Malta from around 800 to 218 BC. The Romans took control of the Malta during the second Punic War, 218-201 BC. Malta fell into Arab hands in 1870. Today, Malta is and independent Republic; it gained its independence in 1964 and remained within the British Commonwealth. Reference: Lonely Planet, Malta & Gozo.

Malta is a country full of history. It is said to be one of the most concentrated historical areas in the world. There is something for everyone in Malta: You can relax in the sun, sail the three islands, snorkel, or party in the many bars, discos, and restaurants.

Malta has a wonderful climate, mild winter, hot and dry summers, and an accumulative 300 days of sunshine. It is a year-round destination. The language spoken there is Maltese and English. Malta has a great variety of fresh open-air food markets with the freshest of fresh fish. There is also no need to lug a heavy lap top along; Malta has an abundance of internet

locations that are very reasonable.

The beautiful capitol of Malta is Valletta. The main avenue is always filled with people of all nationalities and it is full of shops and outdoor cafes. The bus ride was about 25 minutes from the St. Julian. The cost was around 80 cents. The buses run frequently to Valletta. There are so many interesting sights to see.

There is a restaurant called Sale e Pepe. It's about a 2-minute walk from my hotel. I met a very nice waiter, Tony Attard, who had spent time in Canada and Florida. The ambiance and the view were breathtaking. I had the grouper that was caught that morning.

Next door to Sale e Pepe, you have the Marina Terrace, a Chinese restaurant, and next to that you have Tiffany's, a champagne bar and cigar room, also overlooking the harbor.

Another hotel I strongly recommend is Le Meridian, situated in the grounds of a 19th century Maltese Villa, on the seafront of the picturesque Balluta Bay.

St. Julian and Paceville

I stayed at a family-owned hotel called the Rokna, a two-minute walk from the Mediteranean Sea, and right in the heart of the attractions. The owner's name was Anton Camileri. He and his staff were extremely helpful with all my needs. My balcony overlooked a wonderful outdoor café, and the sea. The rate per night was $60 USD's. It had most of the amenities a five star hotel contains. The night-life, was unbelievable: The area of St. Julian and Paceville is filled with discos, bars, pubs, karaoke bars, and every type of restaurant imaginable. The main casino in St. Julian is the former aristocratic residence Villa Dragonara, located on St. George's Bay, built

in the 19th century for the Marquis Scicluna. One in particular was the Memories Pub, the heart of the karaoke, located at four reasonably priced. Contact: Mario Tonna (managing director)- Email: memoriespub@gmail.com . The drinking age is 17. The clubs are open until the wee hours of the night.

There are hotels that have efficiency suites which include a kitchen. The prices are very reasonable, starting at around $75/night, a good way to cut costs on eating out.

Situated on the grounds of a 19th Century Maltese Villa on the seafront of the picturesque Balluta Bay, the 5 star hotel, Le Meriden St. Julian's Hotel and Spa is an exclusive combination of innovative and contemporary design. Adding to its position, the Hotel façade draws magnificently from the interesting architecture of the surrounding area with the balconies and terraces for all rooms.

Located just off the promenade, and only 200 meters from the centre of St. Julian's, you are within walking distance of authentic cafes, bars, restaurants, clubs, and the main shopping area of Silema. Valleta, is just 8km away and the hotel is located on the main bus route to the city. Malta International Airport is 12km from the hotel and a limousine service is bookable from the hotel for airport transfers.

I didn't witness any criminal activity the entire time I spent in Malta. The people were very friendly and helpful, and the streets were full of people just about 24 hours a day. Police presence was almost non-existent. There was no need for any.

Excursions

There are so many fun things to do in Malta. I went on three excursions. First, I took the Captain Morgan Cruise that sails past Vallette, the Grand Harbour entrance, Marsascola Bay, St. Thomas Bay, Island Bay, and Peter's Pool, past Delimara Point and Marsac Lokk Bay, Malta's largest fishing village. Then we went past the Blue Grotto, giving you a view of these fascinating colorful caves. The Captain Morgan vessel also cruises past the imposing Dingli Cliffs and the small island if Filfla, and then past some of Malta's most popular sandy beaches.

A particular attraction is Anchor Bay. This Rocky cove incorporates Popeye's Village, the actual set of the film Popeye, which was shot on location. We stopped at the island of Camino in the crystal clear waters of the famous Blue Lagoon. We also cruise past Mellieha Bay and St. Paul's Island. St. Paul's ship was wrecked off the island in 60 A.D. Then onto Salina Bay, St. Andrew's, the casino, and the picturesque St. Julian's Bay. A buffet and wine are served and the rest of the day is spent sunbathing and swimming. Optional speed boat rides visiting the caves if Comino is also available.

The next excursion was on board a super fast catamaran to the Island of Sicily. We arrived at Pozzallo, atypical Sicilian fishing Village. There this very imposing Tower called the Cabrera Tower, a 15th Century silo. From then we took a motor coach to Catania, a rich baroque town rebuilt after the 1693 earthquake then onto Rosalini, a rural town dating back to the Roman age which lies on a flat fertile Sicilian countryside, then to Siracuse, the home town of Archimedes with its rich archaeological area. We also visited Mt. Edna and Modica where we crossed the second highest bridge in Europe, crosses the Iblei mountain range. It was a day of spectacular views and scenery. A must see.

There are numerous bus tours to enjoy. You have the two tours of the Island, one to the north and one to the South. I took the South tour. It was an open air bus. We visited Valletta, the capital, originally built by the Knight of the Order of St. John, after the Great Siege of 1565. Our guide Carmen was very informative and spoke with a charming English Maltese accent. We visited the Tarxien Temples, rich in heritage sites which date back to the Copper Age. The temples were built between 3500 and 2500 B.C. From there we traveled to the Montekristo Estates which produces some of the best wines in Europe. Had a wonderful lunch there and visited the cellars which were built like a Roman fortress. Our tour also took us to the three cities which are enclosed by fortification built by the knights of St. John. We stopped at a most picturesque and traditional fishing village. This is a place to admire the typical brightly-colored fishing boats, known as Il-Luzzu, fishing nets that are most of the time spread on the quay to dry in the sun and fisherman can be seen mending these nets.

My favorite bus tour was the Knights Spectacular 1565 Live Dinner Show. We're seated

overlooking the grand arena, just like in the days of yore. In a fierce re-creation of the Battle of 1565, Knights participate in full dress and magnificent horses. Free flowing wine, unforgettable music, song and dance and a three-course meal.

Some of the other bus tours available are fireworks night, folklore night, Malta by night, Malta Festival Night and the Sunday Market bus tour. Tours start at $15 USD up to $110 USD.

Contact Information: Hotel/Rokna, Church Street, Paceville, St. Julian's -- Website: www.roknahotel.com /
Hotel/Meridien, 39 Main Street, St. Julians, STJ 15 Malta -- Website: www.starwoodhotels.com

Travel Tip of the Month

Where to find an excellent travel electrical converter for your personal appliances that converts in any country. It is an RCA Travel Converter; Model # AH280 can be found at Home Depot for under $20 USD.