

# Malta - people, culture, language

## A guide for businesses



### The country

**Historical overview:** A history of human habitation which stretches over seven millennia and a vital location at the heart of the Mediterranean have brought both wealth and conflict to Malta. This history is witnessed by great buildings constructed in the beautiful golden limestone that gives the island its name - Melita, the island of honey. Mysterious megalithic temples date back to 4000BC and reveal the technical capabilities of these earliest inhabitants.

Phoenicians, Carthaginians and Romans left their traces, to be followed by Arabs and Normans. The Knights of the order of St John made the island their headquarters from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and built great fortifications, palaces, public buildings and St John's Cathedral with its eight ornate chapels dedicated to each of the *lingues* or nations of the Order.



Cruise liners in the Grand Harbour of Valletta. Source: European Commission

Ottoman expansion in the Mediterranean was halted by the Knights' successful defence of the islands. This was echoed four centuries later by heroic resistance under British rule during World War II, a feat which earned the island the George Cross - the only time an entire country has been given such an honour. Independent since 1964, Malta has developed close economic links with the European Union over a long period of time. Malta's 397,000 inhabitants purchase more goods per capita from the UK than any other country except the Republic of Ireland.

The purity and clarity of the waters around Malta and its sunny climate have made it a paradise for yachting, water sports and, in particular, diving.

### The people

**Friendly.** Maltese people are friendly, helpful, loudly cheerful, colourful (in many ways), expressive, humble, compassionate, able, intelligent and shrewd.

**Opinionated.** Be prepared for lively discussions over topics ranging from local and foreign soccer teams and village feasts to party politics.

**Catholic.** Roman Catholics make up 98% of the population.

**Family-orientated.**

Maltese life is sharply focused on the extended family where parents are revered and children are passionately loved.



St John's Co-Cathedral built by the Knights of Malta. Source: European Commission

### Did you know..?

- Pre-dating the pyramids of Egypt by more than 500 years, the megalithic temples of Malta are the oldest freestanding stone structures in the world. They are dated from the period of 3600 to 3000 BC.
- Warner Brothers' epic film "Troy", released in 2004, was partly filmed on Malta at a huge set built at Fort Ricasoli.
- The Maltese love football. They have the largest Manchester United supporters' club outside the UK!

### Business culture and etiquette

- Although first names are used in day-to-day business, it is usual to use more formal addressing (Mr--, Mrs--) for those in senior positions and on formal occasions. A good rule of thumb is to ask how your contact would prefer to be addressed!
- Punctuality is expected and appreciated and business dress should be smart.
- Use of business cards is important and exchanges are always made on first meeting.
- There are no special issues regarding women in business.

## Language

**Official language:** Maltese (Malti), a member of the Semitic language group. Some people consider it to be a direct descendant of the language spoken by the Phoenicians, but the majority of linguists believe it is related to the Arabic dialects of western North Africa.

**English:** widely spoken across the island.



## Basic Maltese phrases

The positive impression you will make by learning to speak a few basic Maltese phrases cannot be overestimated. Below are some commonly-used phrases - if you are interested in learning the Maltese language, you can search for quality-assured trainers and courses at [www.expertlanguages.com](http://www.expertlanguages.com)

	Maltese	Pronunciation
Hello	Mehba	Mehba
Good day/ morning	Bongu	Bonju
Good evening	Bonswa	Bonswa
Goodbye	Sahha	Sahha
Yes / no	Iva / Le	Iva / le
Please	Jekk joghgbok	Yek yo:jbok
Thank you	Grazzi	Gratsi
Excuse me	Skuzani	Skuza:ni
My name is...	Jisimni	Yisimni
What's your name?	Inti x'ismek	Inti shyismek

## Tips for effective communication

### 1. Be clear and concise

- Less is more: use, short, simple sentences.
- Use active rather than passive voice.
- Don't use idioms, irony, jargon or dialect expressions.

### 2. Speak more slowly

- Communicate your message in bite-size chunks, and pause regularly...
- ...but maintain the natural rhythm and stress pattern.

### 3. Reinforce your message

- Maintain eye contact so your listener benefits from facial expression and lip movement.
- Help your audience understand by getting LOUDER on key words and using intonation to communicate meaning.
- Make clear, direct statements.
- 'Triangulate' your ideas: repeat them three times in slightly different ways.

### 4. Make presentations effective

- Adapt your message to the audience in advance.
- Use appropriate graphics and handouts to enhance communications.
- Send through materials in advance, if possible.
- Signpost your main points and summarise at the end.

### 5. Double-check understanding

- Yours and theirs! Jot down names, numbers and technicalities.
- Ask your audience to repeat key points or arrangements back to you.

## Festivals (2005)



One of Malta's many festivals - celebrating 7,000 years of culture on the island of Gozo.

**Feb 3 - Feb 8:** Carnival  
**Mar 10 - 13:** Mediterranean Food Festival  
**Mar 20 - 27:** Holy Week  
**May 6 - 7:** Fireworks Festival  
**July 15 - 17:** Jazz Festival  
**Sep 24 - 25:** Malta International Airshow  
**Oct 6 - Oct 16:** The Malta Historic Cities Festival  
**Oct 22 - 29:** The Rolex Middle Sea Race  
**Nov 7 - 11:** International Choir Festival

## Signposting and resources

- **Expert Language Solutions ([www.expertlanguages.com](http://www.expertlanguages.com))** - a quality-assured service for transcription, subtitling, proof reading, translation, interpreting, language and business culture and etiquette training. You can contact ELS for more detailed information on their Maltese language services.

## Sources

Research and text:  
Central European Development Agency (CEDA) 01302 367662  
Euro Information Centre [www.euro-info.org.uk](http://www.euro-info.org.uk)  
International House [www.ihworld.com](http://www.ihworld.com)  
Other resources:  
UK Trade & Investment [www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk](http://www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk)  
Photographs:  
European Commission [www.europa.eu.int](http://www.europa.eu.int)  
Map:  
CIA Factbook [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov)

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