



## **GENERAL FACTS ABOUT MALTA**

### **GEOGRAPHY**

Malta is an archipelago of islands about halfway between the coasts of Sicily and North Africa. Set in the clear blue Mediterranean Sea, the Maltese islands are the most southerly European country. The archipelago consists of three islands: Malta, Gozo and Comino. The total area is approximately 316 sq kms (Malta 246 sq km, Gozo 67 sq km, Comino 2.7 sq km). The longest distance in Malta from North West to South East is about 27 km, with 14.5 kms width in an East - West direction. The Islands are only 90 km south of Sicily and 290 km from the northern coast of Africa.

### **POPULATION**

The population of the Maltese Islands currently stands at approximately 400,000 persons and increases by approximately 0.4% each year. The Maltese are known to have a very highly developed sense of hospitality and are considered by many as a very friendly, industrious people.

### **HISTORY**

The strategic position of Malta, Gozo and Comino has made these Mediterranean islands a crossroad of history. European powers of the past used Malta as a stepping-stone between Europe and North Africa. It's history includes the Stone-Age and Bronze-Age, and it was conquered by Romans, Phoenicians, Arabs, Normans, Carthaginians, Castilians, French and British. Malta stood firm against Hitler despite massive bombing during World War II, deservedly earning the George Cross medal from King George VI (April 1942) and which is depicted on the left hand corner of the national flag. Malta became an independent country in 1964 and joined the European Union in 2004. It became a member of the Euro zone in 2008.

### **THE KNIGHTS OF MALTA**

The Knights of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, a religious and multinational order of soldiers and hospitalliers, have had a significant influence in the history of Malta. The Maltese Cross is the insignia of the Knights of Malta. The Knights left the most physical mark on Malta, after successfully defending it from the Turkish Ottoman Empire in 1565. The Knights were in charge of the island for 270 years, building magnificent churches and lavish monuments to themselves ---each nationality having its own palace (auberges). The Knights lost their position and power in Malta to the French empire in 1889.

The Maltese Falcon --- the Mediterranean peregrine falcon ---was the annual rent required by Roman Emperor Charles V when he donated the Island to the Knights in 1530

## MALTESE LANGUAGE

The two official languages are Maltese and English, the English language being dominant due to the 160 years of British colonisation of Malta. Maltese, whose closest languages are Lebanese, Hebrew and classic Arabic, is the only Semitic language which is written in Roman alphabet. Italian is widely spoken, too.

## CURRENCY

As from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2008, the Maltese currency is the EURO

## CLIMATE

Malta's climate is warm with a prevailing north-westerly wind. Due to the islands' location, the climate is strongly influenced by the sea and is typical Mediterranean --- prevalently sunny with an average of 300 days of sunshine each year.

Winters are generally mild with the temperature averaging 15 degrees Celsius (60 degrees Fahrenheit). The summers, however, are hot with most days having cloudless skies. In summer, the average temperature is between 25 and 32 degrees Celsius (75-90 degrees Fahrenheit), but this is often mitigated by the cool sea breeze.

The rainy season is between September and April, with very little rain during the summer months. The annual average rainfall is 578mm. There is no snow, frost or fog in Malta.

## GOVERNMENT

Malta has a parliamentary democracy. The Head of State is the President of the Republic with the Prime Minister and his Cabinet having executive powers. Legislative powers are vested in the House of Representatives composed of 65 members elected from the two major political parties. Elections are held every 5 years. The judiciary is impartial and independent from the government. The requisites for fair judicial proceedings and due process are in place through the Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights which forms part of the law of Malta.

Malta has been a member of the European Union since May 1<sup>st</sup> 2004

## LEGAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Malta has a written Constitution which prevails over any other law. International conventions are either ratified by the House of Representatives or by an enabling law passed by Parliament which enacts into Maltese law the rights and obligations arising from such conventions. Following Malta's membership in the European Union, European Union Regulations are directly applicable in Malta, whereas European Union Directives must be transposed into Maltese law.

Although Maltese law is based on the civil law system, it has been strongly influenced by other legal systems, particularly English Common Law and, more recently, European Union legislation. In fact, while Maltese civil law is largely based on Roman law principles, fiscal law, company law, shipping and maritime law and most fields of commercial law are heavily influenced by English law. Financial services legislation in Malta is principally based on European Union legislation.