BORMLA (COSPICUA)



History:

Human activity at Bormla started as far back as the megalithic age. Stretching on five high hills overlooking the Grand Harbour, Bormla provided shelter and vessel repair facilities since ancient times. The maritime connection with other cultures helped the Bormla population to gradually become renowned for its refined abilities in various fields of craftsmanship, the arts, and the sciences, amongst which some became world famous for their achievements and works both on the Maltese Islands or elsewhere. The arrival of the Hospitaller Knights, in 1530, saw the birth of another two new towns adjacent to Bormla, increasing the maritime and economic activity and augmenting the population.

During the Great Siege of 1565, the Bormla heights proved most ideal to the Ottoman army against the other two fortified towns. The Great Siege showed the importance of fortifying Bormla if the Knight wished to safeguard their other two towns and especially the maritime resources and facilities at Bormla. This led to the building of two strong lines of baroque fortifications entirely over the hills of Bormla: the St. Margerita Lines (1638) and the Cottonera Lines (1670). Though they were never put to the test, both Napoleon (1798) and Nelson (1800) have expressed their impossibility to enter the city once no one could have opened the Gates for them.

Educational initiatives, institutions and schools started early in Bormla, and most of the present Maltese private schools and colleges saw their infancy there. Though Bormla had benefitted from the arrival of the British Empire, through an increase in the maritime facilities, docks, educational and economic activity, heavy World War II air-raid bombings had forced most of the population out of their homes seeking refuge in rock-cut shelters and safer distant villages. After the war the decline of the Dockyard and the urbanisation of Malta caused another flow of emigration both overseas and to new villages on the Islands.

The long post-war reconstruction phase and the substitution of houses of character with new government apartment blocks led to a decline in its social infrastructure spreading the earlier prosperous population and culture to most of the villages and new towns.

Though Bormla went through hard times it is still rich in authentic heritage that gives the visitor a unique experience and re-establishes Bormla as the shining jewel of the Three Cities with most of its architectural, artistic, and cultural assets available to experience. Though the old Dock area is a mixture of both old and new features, a visit to the older areas as the St. Margerita area is recommended. Bormla is also known as *Citta' Cotonera* but mostly as *Citta' Cospicua* a title conferred to it by Grand Masters Nicola Cotoner in 1670 and Marc Antonio Zondadari in 1720.

Among popular events that attract crowds to the city are the events of Holy Week and Easter Sunday, the feast of the Immaculate Conception and other annual cultural festivals.

Reference: Vella, J. (1995) 'A short history of Bormla', published on the Bormla Local Council's website.

Attractions:



The Cottonera Lines (1670-1720) are an enormous line of fortifications named after Grandmaster Nichola Cotoner surrounding the Three Cities of Birgu (Vittoriosa), Isla (Senglea), and Bormla (Cospicua). They are entirely built on four of the five Bormla hills.

Address: Outer fortification of the city

2. Santa Margerita Lines

Santa Margerita Lines (1638-1736) are also known as the Firenzuola Lines. The fortifications were named after Fra Vincenzo Maculano da Firenzuola, a Domenican friar who designed the inner fortifications. It was an attack by the Turks on the villages of Zabbar and Zejtun (nearby villages to the Three Cities) that set off the idea for the building of this massive line of fortifications. The Curtain over St. Helen's Gate is in the form of a stepped-terraced fortification and unique in the Islands.

Address: Inner fortification of the city



St. Helen's Gate forms part of the Santa Margerita Lines and it's one of the most beautiful 18th century baroque gateways of the fortifications.

Address: Part of the Margerita Lines; follow Triq I-InKurunazzjoni inside the Lines and Triq L-Immakulata outside the Santa Margerita Lines

4. Parish Church of the Immaculate Conception and Oratory of Our



The Parish Church of the Immaculate Conception was originally a medieval chapel built in gratitude of an apparition of Our Lady in the 14th century(*). Though it became a parish in 1586-87 the present Church was built in a Doric style in the beginning of the 17th century.

The Church and its adjoining Oratory house many treasures of art, artisanship and craftsmanship. It miraculously escaped the World War II airraid bombing which devastated the town.

*Vella, John (forthcoming) 'The Rock-cut Church of Bormla: Origins and developments influenced by Mediterranean and local history', Papers presented at the Cospicua Heritage Society Symposium, Bormla, Malta on 23 May 2013

Address: Triq I-Oratorju, Bormla Contact Person: Rev Archpriest Telephone: +356 2182 8413

Opening hours: mornings and afternoons during religious services:

Monday to Friday: 7am, 8.30am, 6pm Saturday: 7am, 8.30 am, 4.45pm, 6pm Sunday: 7am, 8am, 9.15am, 11.45am, 5pm

5. Bormla War Memorial

The memorial to World War II victims was erected in 1994 on the 50th anniversary of the national pilgrimage from Birkirkara to Bormla at the end of the war. The monument portrays the beauty of rebirth and triumph, as opposed to the ugliness of death and destruction. The angel holds a crown is an allegory of victory over evil and the power of faith.

Address: Triq I-Oratorju, Bormla

6. Dock No. 1

The present Dock was built in 1842-1848 by the British Admiralty with various shipbuilding and repair facilities around it. The dock stopped functioning at the end of the 20th century.

Address: Ix- Xatt, Bormla

7. St. Theresa's Church and Priory

Built in 1626, is the first church and priory dedicated to St. Teresa of Avila outside Spain, and was a significant academic centre at the time (teaching Oriental languages to missionaries and members of the

order of St. John). Its style is baroque with the main altar and side altars overlaid by the glitz of the later style of ornamentation.

Address: 1, Triq Santa Teresa, Bormla

Contact Person: Rev Prior

Telephone: +356 2182 6111 or +356 2182 2343

Opening hours: mornings and afternoons during religious services:

Mon-Sat: Winter 6.15 am, 8 am, 5.30 pm Summer 6.30 am, 8 am, 6.30 pm

Sunday: 7.15 am, 8.45 am, 10.15am, 4.15pm

8. Mediaeval Quarter

The area known as St. Theresa's Area is an early medieval residential area and mostly pedestrian. Narrow streets, staircases and alleys are paved with hard coralline limestone flagstones which contrast with the soft limestone houses flanking them. Various architectural features to notice.

Address: Triq Nelson, Triq San Lazzru, Triq Xandru, Triq M. Grima, Sqaq Xandru, Triq E.S. Inglott

9. St. Joseph Chapel and Conservatorio

The Chapel built in 1810 formed part of the earlier Conservatorio built in the $18^{\rm th}$ century.

Address: Triq San Gorg, Bormla

Opening hours: During religious services: Mon-Sat: 4.30 pm

Sunday: 10.30am

10. St. Margerita Monastery

It was built in 1726 instead of an older medieval chapel dismantled due to the building of the Santa Margerita Lines which inherited its name, with an adjoining nunnery resided by the Discalced Carmelite nuns.

Address: 1, Triq Santa Margerita, Bormla

11. Bonnici Market

Bonnici Market is one of the two markets, or first examples of a supermarket in Malta, built in 1855 by the British Admiralty to compensate the Bormla people for the expropriation of the main core and wharf of the city in order to build the Dock complex. Formerly the square was a military parade ground.

Address: Trig Santa Margerita, Bormla

Bir Mula Heritage(Social History Museum and Gallery) **12.**



The palazzino, now used as a social history museum, has various levels dating from the Arab period till the 17th century. It exhibits artefacts found on site dating back to the Neolithic and other curiosities which historically formed part of the daily life of the community. The architecture is a witness to the development of Maltese houses through the ages.

Address: 79, Triq Santa Margerita, Bormla

Contact Person: Mr. John Vella

Telephone: +356 2182 6910 or +356 2182 6427 or +356 9927 3276

Email: info@birmula.com Website: www.birmula.com Opening hours: All year round:

Saturday and Sunday: 10 am - 12 pm

Special opening hours:

Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday,

Cospicua Feast Week (1 to 8 December).

Any other visiting hours only by appointment or prior arrangement.

13. St. Margerita Windmill



The Windmills on the heights of St. Margerita and the Almoner bastions were built by the Universita' in 1674. They were still functioning till the first decades of the 20th century.

Address: Trig Il-Mithna, Bormla

Opening hours: Saturday and Sunday: 10am—12pm or by appointment.

14. Rock Gate Cemetery



It was used for the burial of Ottoman soldiers during the 1565 Great Siege and later for non-Catholics. It took its name from a rock-cut Gate in the Margerita Lines adjacent to it, and which was demolished in the 20th century.

Address: Trig Il-Gublew tal-Fiddla, Bormla

15. Former Fort Verdala



Fort Verdala, built in 1853 and adjoining the Santa Margerita Lines, served as a Prisoner-of War camp during various wars and campaigns in the Mediterranean. Many famous personalities were held prisoners inside it as Admiral Karl Doenitz, the successor of Hitler during the first World War and the Emden crew. After WWII it was used for educational and residential purposes.

Address: Trig Alessandra, Bormla

16. St. John Almoner Church



The church existed prior to 1373 and was dedicated to St. John Almoner. The church was demolished by Grandmaster Nicola Cotoner when the Cottonera Lines were built and a new church was erected on higher ground in 1681-1682 on the design of Lorenzo Gafa'. Its adjoining palace and hermitage were extensively damaged during WWII and totally cleared in the 1970s.

Address: Trig San Gwann Ta'Ghuxa, Bormla

* Gardens :



Ix-Xghajra ta' Bormla (known also as Pjazza Santa Margerita)

Address: Trig it-8 ta' Dicembru and Trig II- Gublew tal- Fidda, Bormla

Cotoner Garden

Address: St. Nicholas Street

Places of refreshment:



• St. George Band Club

Address: Pjazza Paolino Vascallo, Bormla

Telephone: +356 79823444

Opening hours: Monday-Saturday: 9am -12pm and 4pm-8pm

Please note that the band club offers the possibility to visit the building

in the afternoon; Opening hours: 5pm-8pm.

Local Information:



Bormla Local Council

Address: 2A, 'The Rest', Pjazza Santa Margerita Telephone: +356 2166 3030 or +356 2166 5337

Email: bormla.lc@gov.mt

Opening hours: Winter (1st October-16th June): Monday-Friday

7:45am-4:30pm

Saturday

7:30am-11:30am

Summer (17th June-30thSeptember): Monday-Friday

7:30am-1:30pm

Saturday

7:30am-11:30am

Bir Mula Heritage

During hours shown on site info or online

Accessibility:



Arriva Bus

From Valletta to Bormla: Bus Route 1, 2, 3 (Bus stop Vapur)

Customer Care: +356 2122 2000 Email: enquires@arriva.com.mt Website: www.arriva.com.mt

Valletta Ferry Service

From Bormla to Isla to Valletta (Lascaris)

Contact: MARSAMXETTO STEAMFERRY SERVICES LIMITED Address: Dolphin Court, Tigné Seafront, Sliema, Malta

Tel: +356 2346 3862

Email: info@vallettaferryservices.com Website: www.vallettaferryservices.com

Google maps

List of buses according to the bus stops

Timing:

• Timing for the transportation(check the bus timetable on http://www.arriva.com.mt):

40 minutes to get there from Valletta 40 minutes to come back to Valletta

- Timing for the itinerary of the must-see sites: 1h45min
- Timing for the full itinerary: 2h35min (The Bir Mula heritage is not included in the timing)

