

= Tourism in Malta =

Tourism in Malta is an important sector of the country 's economy , contributing to about 15 percent of the nation 's gross domestic product (GDP) . It is overseen by the Malta Tourism Authority , in turn falls under the responsibility of the Minister for Tourism , the Environment and Culture . Malta features a number of tourism attractions encompassing elements of the island 's rich history and culture , as well as aquatic activities associated with the Mediterranean Sea . In addition , medical tourism has become popular in Malta in recent years , especially since government efforts to market the practice to medical tourists in the United Kingdom .

The number of people who visited Malta in 2009 dropped considerably compared to the figures for 2008 - overall , the country 's tourism industry suffered an 8 percent drop from 2008 . Visits from non @-@ European Union countries dropped more considerably than visits from European Union countries (and even more so than visits from Eurozone countries) , while the average stay length remained the same for both 2008 and 2009 . Visitors from most countries require a visa to visit Malta . The nationalities requiring a visa are standardised as per European Union rules . Visitors already holding a valid Schengen Area visa most likely will not need to complete any more formalities to enter Malta (so long as they are already inside the Schengen Area) . Visitors holding citizenship of the European Union do not require a visa to enter Malta as they hold the right to free movement within the European Union . In recent years , the country 's tourism industry has been faced with a number of issues relating to the nation 's small size , both in terms of area and population . These issues include stretched resources and infrastructure (such as water , waste management , beaches and roads) , especially during the summer months of July and August .

= = Attractions = =

Malta has a long and rich history , and this is reflected in the island 's cultural attractions . The Phoenicians , the Carthaginians , the Romans and the Byzantines have all occupied Malta at some point in history , leaving a mix of many different architectural styles and artifacts to explore . The sovereignty of the Knights Hospitaller over Malta from 1530 to 1798 resulted in a legacy of elaborate artistry and architecture throughout Malta . The country 's modern museums and art galleries feature relics from Malta 's history for tourists and Maltese residents alike to enjoy .

There are also a number of aquatic activities to enjoy on Malta as well as Gozo and Comino . Northern Malta is home to the country 's beach resorts and holiday areas , with the beaches most popular with holiday @-@ makers being Mellieha Bay , Ghajn Tuffieha and Golden Bay . These beaches are large enough to be able to house cafes , restaurants and kiosks , but small enough to be crowded rarely . Malta 's northwest is home to the island 's quietest beaches , and it is on these that the main island 's neighbouring two are nearest . Gozo and Comino are also popular beach spots for holiday @-@ makers , although these are much more likely to be quieter , rockier and more suitable for snorkelling . The Mediterranean Sea surrounding Malta is popular for diving - while shallow dips may be attractive to beginning divers , more experienced divers may be able to dive deeper to find historical artifacts from World War II or earlier .

= = Major event tourism = =

Major event tourism , especially events centred on Catholicism , is an important segment of the Maltese tourism sector . During Holy Week , processions and religious services dominate the country and food stalls are set up in the village squares of Malta . Another popular major event is Carnival , a five centuries @-@ old traditional celebration lasting for the five days preceding Ash Wednesday . Celebrations for Carnival involve float @-@ based pageants , street parties and street food stalls . They are mostly Roman Catholic .

One of the biggest sporting events held on the island is the Malta Marathon . Held every year in late February or early March , the race attracts a number of international competitors and has been sponsored by Land Rover since 2009 , BMW from 2003 to 2008 , GoMobile in 2002 and Flora Malta

in 2001 and prior . In 2009 , the full marathon winner , a Belgian , recorded a time of 2 : 25 : 59 . In 2010 , approximately 1 @, @ 400 entrants participated .

= = Medical tourism = =

Since 2010 , the Malta Tourism Authority has been marketing Malta as a medical tourism destination . Focus areas for medical tourism include " cosmetic surgery , orthopedics , ophthalmic , neurological , urological , oncology , diagnostic , bariatric and cardiac services . " The focus target market for medical tourists in Malta is the United Kingdom , followed by North Africa , the Middle East , Russia and North America . Part of the reason for targeting the United Kingdom for medical tourists is that many members of Malta 's medical profession were trained in the United Kingdom , increasing the confidence of British patients in those taking care of them . In addition , unlike some medical tourism destinations , Malta has a stable political climate . The Maltese government supports the development of medical tourism on the island but believes that private medical providers should be performing medical procedures , not government @-@ run facilities .

= = Visas = =

In addition to a valid passport , " documents substantiating the purpose and the conditions of the planned visit " and " sufficient means of support , both for the period of the planned visit and to return to their country of origin , " travellers arriving in Malta may be required to have a visa for entry into the country .

European Union citizens have the right to travel freely into Malta without completing any special formalities . The nationals of many countries are not required to hold visas to enter Malta , although many are in accordance with uniform European Union regulations . A full list of nationalities required to hold visas to enter Malta and the Schengen Area is published on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ' web site .

While Malta cannot unilaterally drop the requirement for nations it makes agreements with to obtain visas to enter the Schengen Area through its border crossing points , it is permitted to offer visa discounts to certain nationalities . At present , Malta has ' visa facilitation agreements ' with eight nations : Albania , Bosnia and Herzegovina , Moldova , Macedonia , Russia , Serbia and Ukraine .

= = Statistics = =

Tourism is a major component of the Maltese economy , constituting about 40 per cent of Malta 's GDP in 2003 / 04 . 1 @, @ 183 @, @ 012 tourists visited Malta in 2009 . Although this is an 8 per cent drop from 2008 , the number of tourists is expected to reach 1 @, @ 300 @, @ 000 by the end of 2010 (figures are not yet available) . For the period January to December 2009 , drops were recorded in visits from most countries sending large numbers of tourists to Malta , including Belgium , France , Germany , Ireland , the Netherlands , Russia , the Scandinavian countries , Spain , the United Kingdom and the United States , whilst a 24 @. @ 7 per cent increase was recorded in visits to and from Libya . Visits from non @-@ European Union countries took the greatest hit , with visits from these countries decreasing by 15 per cent compared to 2008 . Comparatively , visits from European Union countries decreased only 7 @. @ 4 per cent . Visits from the Eurozone dropped by an even smaller proportion , recording a fall of only 5 @. @ 6 per cent .

The vast majority of visitors to Malta stayed for seven nights or longer , with the average stay length being 8 @. @ 5 nights . While the number of people staying seven nights or longer in Malta fell by 13 @. @ 4 per cent in 2009 compared to 2008 , the number of people staying four to six nights jumped 7 @. @ 5 per cent , and one to three nights by 1 @. @ 5 per cent . Expenditure by tourists to Malta declined 12 per cent when compared to 2008 levels , with a recorded value of EUR 916 @. @ 4 million .

= = Arrivals by country = = =

Most visitors arriving to Malta on short term basis in 2015 were from the following countries of nationality :

= = = Historical trends = = =

Tourism in Malta began to grow beginning in the mid @-@ 1960s . During the 1970s , Maltese tourism grew significantly , with numbers growing from 170 @,@ 800 in 1970 to 705 @,@ 500 in 1981 . From 1981 , the figures dropped to approximately 500 @,@ 000 visitors per year until the late 1980s , when an upward trend began again . In the mid @-@ 1990s , figures were as high as 1 @.@ 2 million tourists per year .

The volatility of the Maltese tourism market in the past has been largely due to trends in the preferences of tourists from the United Kingdom , who comprise Malta 's largest tourism market . Although Malta 's uniform use of English , its traditional ties to the United Kingdom and low @-@ cost travel options have made it an attractive option to British tourists , changing preferences of these tourists can impact Malta 's tourism income quite significantly . For example , the increasing preference of British tourists for Spanish destinations during the 1980s was reflected in a drop in Malta 's tourism numbers during that period .

= = Market issues = =

Malta 's tourism industry faces a number of issues impacting on it now and threatening to impact on it in the future . One of the clearest issues facing Malta 's tourism industry is overcrowding as a result of the island nation 's relatively small size , in terms of both area and population . Malta is a nation of just under 450 @,@ 000 people , yet its infrastructure is required to support over 1 @.@ 1 million tourists every year . Malta 's water works , roads , waste management systems and beaches are stretched to capacity in the summer months of July and August of every year , when tourism numbers are at their peak . This is a challenge facing Maltese tourism operators as it means that they cannot simply pursue the kinds of ' mass tourism ' marketing measures taken by operators in other Mediterranean destinations with more space and resources to pursue them . In addition , Maltese tourism operators must balance increased tourism numbers with the needs of the ' native population ' , as when resources are stretched thin by tourists during the summer season , there are negative impacts on Maltese residents also .