



A TASTE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

MALTA & GOZO



Malta
Gozo & Comino

EXCITE THE SENSES



A visit to the Maltese Islands is to **embark on a gastronomic adventure**. You'll be taken on a journey that will excite the senses as you discover creative dishes, wonderful eateries and hospitality second to none.

Malta's cuisine was shaped by its history. Some customs go back centuries. Strategically positioned along important trade routes, the islands had to cater for the changing tastes of resident foreign powers. This brought **an international element** to food and dining. Maltese gastronomy is both rooted in tradition and a melding of food cultures.

The seasons bring an abundance of foods to the table. There are delicacies for every event of the annual calendar. And, in more recent times, a drive for **healthy eating**, using the freshest foods, has taken hold.



DINE WHEREVER YOU GO!

The choice of eateries stretches from vendors selling street food to family-run establishments to **Michelin-starred restaurants**. You can dine in a centuries-old building or al fresco with a beautiful Mediterranean vista. Wherever you go, there are chefs passionate about presenting their best creations.

Café culture is important too. **Quaint and bustling cafés** adorn shady squares in towns and villages across Malta and Gozo. You can enjoy a coffee and pastry while watching the world go by.

And the great experiences are not limited to food. When it comes to drink, in addition to imported brands, Malta produces its own wines, beer and soft drink. All are hugely popular with locals and visitors alike.



TRADITIONAL MEAT DISHES

A favourite dish of most Maltese is rabbit. The traditional **fenkata** is served at large family gatherings and is the very essence of what a good meal should be about - sharing food and enjoying good company. It is served fried, or in a stew. The secret is to simmer the rabbit for hours to produce a flavourful tender dish. A marinade of wine, garlic and herbs enhances the taste. The stew proper is the main course and can be served with roast potatoes, scattered with fennel seeds, and crusty Maltese bread.



Many Maltese also serve up a great plate of spaghetti with rabbit sauce as a starter. There are famed eateries in Mġarr, Rabat and Bahrija which are renowned for their fenkata and other Maltese specialities.

Braġjoli is probably the most famous Maltese offering. This is a rustic and hearty tasty dish made with savoury ground beef, bacon, egg, breadcrumbs, herbs and garlic, wrapped in lean slices of beef and slow cooked in a rich red wine and tomato sauce.

Traditional Maltese sausages (**zalgatt Malti**) are unlike any other sausage you've tasted. Ground pork is flavoured with sea salt, black pepper, crushed coriander seeds, parsley, garlic and a generous amount of North African spices.

CATCH OF THE DAY

If you want to enjoy a fish dish particular to the Maltese Islands, the first that comes to mind is **lampuki** (mahi-mahi). It's caught in the waters of Malta in the latter part of the year. A white meaty fish with a delicate flavour, it is served with a variety of sauces. Outside the season, **lampuki** pie is popular. Other popular fish and seafood are **gurbell** (meagre), with a fleshy texture and a mild taste, **pixxispad** (swordfish), lobster and octopus. **Bluefin tuna** is also caught in local waters; the farmed variety is a prized export, particularly appreciated in Japan.

All fish lovers should head to **Marsaxlokk**. It's the main fishing port where you will find stalls brimming with the fishermen's catch of the day – fish and crustaceans of all sizes and colours. And, naturally, it has some seriously good seafood restaurants. The **Sunday morning market** is a particular draw, providing an opportunity to buy local honey, jams and artisanal specialities such as exquisite Maltese lace. Marsaxlokk is the ideal place for admiring colourful **traditional Maltese fishing boats**, called **luzzu**. These brightly painted boats adorn the harbour, each with a pair of eyes embellishing the bow. This is a symbol originating in Phoenician times, where the eye of Osiris used to protect seafarers from peril.

Other villages renowned for their fish restaurants are Wied iż-Żurrieq, Ghar Lapsi and St Paul's Bay in Malta, and Mġarr, Xlendi and Marsalforn in Gozo.





LUZZU
MARSAXLOKK, MALTA



DID YOU KNOW?

The traditional way of catching *lampuka* is by using **palm leaves** to create shade. Fishermen cut down the lower fronds of palm trees and weave them into **large flattened rafts**. The rafts are put out to sea and, as the sun reaches the highest point in the sky, the lampuki gather underneath for shade. The fishermen then catch the fish in a net.



STOP FOR A SNACK

When it comes to food, there's nothing more Maltese than **pastizzi**, a savoury pastry snack that keeps hunger at bay. It is diamond shaped and comes in two varieties, filled with either a rich savoury ricotta or mushy peas. You'll see them being sold everywhere across the islands, in bars, cafés and hole-in-the-wall food shops called *pastizzeriji*. Other savoury snacks include **qassatat**, delicious round pastries filled with ricotta, peas, spinach or other ingredients, and **timpana** – a pastry pie with mince, bacon and hard-boiled eggs baked in between layers of pasta. *Twistees* come in a bag. They are a rice-based snack with cheese, smokey barbeque and chicken flavourings.



PASTIZZI



DAILY BREAD

No visit to the islands would be complete without trying the **legendary Maltese bread**. It has a crisp crust and a light crumb with many air holes, and it earns rave reviews from visitors the world over. And to go with your bread, try local **olive oil** and **bigilla**. This tic bean paté is as authentic as accompaniments come. It is so part of the culture that in some villages you'll hear the cry of the “*tal-bigilla*” seller as he invites locals to buy from his delivery van.

Also try ***hobż biż-żejt*** which, in its simplest form, is Maltese bread drizzled in olive oil. Traditionally, it is spread with a tomato paste called ***kunserva***, offering the exceptional taste of Maltese summer-grown juicy tomatoes. ***Hobż biż-żejt*** is enjoyed with a mix of tuna chunks in olive oil, anchovy, capers in brine, fresh green peppers, sun-dried tomatoes, basil and fresh ground pepper.

A different version of Maltese bread is the ***ftira***, a ring-shaped, flat bread. Choose your filling and enjoy a hearty lunch. If you want to know how special the ***ftira*** is, UNESCO has added it to its intangible cultural heritage list. Alternatively, the traditional Gozitan ***ftira*** is more like a pizza, topped with thinly sliced potatoes and local seasonal fare.

MEDITERRANEAN FLAVOURS & MORE



MALTESE KANNOI

The Mediterranean influence is everywhere, from olive oil and herbs to ***cannoli*** from nearby Sicily. But influences from further afield are evident too, particularly those derived from Malta's

historic links with Britain. Tea with milk is a popular hot drink and, unusually for this part of the world, pies are common. They come with a Maltese twist; you might want to try spinach and tuna pie or ricotta pie.



PLACES TO ENJOY

There is a myriad of restaurants to explore in a variety of settings, from ultra-modern to classic, with some boasting the coveted Michelin star. Whether you choose to **dine al fresco** by the sea or in a romantic, candle-lit cellar, the unique atmosphere will make your experience special.

Some cafés are household names and an absolute must to visit. Caffé Cordina, in the centre of Valletta, is an institution. Housed in a beautiful, historic palazzo with an exquisite interior, it also comprises a large area of umbrella-shaded tables in the imposing square across the street. Lawyers from the nearby Court discuss the issues of the day, shoppers rest their feet and tourists soak up the atmosphere. It has grown over the years to include a restaurant, tea-room, patisserie, coffee bar and ice-cream parlour.

The Fontanella Tea Garden is a highlight in the medieval walled city of Mdina;

Perched high on the ramparts, it is famed for its fabulous cakes and **spectacular views** over the island. Two other institutions are off the tourist trail but worth experiencing for a slice of Maltese life. The iconic Busy Bee, in Msida, is popular for its *kannoli* while the ornate Elia Café in Hamrun has been a meeting place for people from all walks of life for decades.



RAISE A GLASS

WINE FESTIVALS, WITH FOOD AND ENTERTAINMENT, ARE HELD IN AUGUST IN VALLETTA, OVERLOOKING THE GRAND HARBOUR, AND IN THE HILLTOP VILLAGE OF NADUR IN GOZO.

Maltese wine has come into its own, winning **international awards**. A visit to a tasting room at a vineyard is a pleasurable experience. Indeed, you can go on a **wine trail**, visiting many estates across Malta and Gozo, to witness how vintners ensure the harvest reaches a certain quality from the vine to the bottle.

If beer is more your thing, be sure to enjoy Cisk. It's a **premium Maltese lager** brewed from barley malt, with a full-bodied flavour and a distinct sweet taste. It's very popular and is served everywhere. Microbreweries have mushroomed in Malta, experimenting in new ways to produce exciting blends. Some of these **handcrafted creations**

have made it into mainstream bars and restaurants. Malta even has its own soft drink, *Kinnie*, which has been a favourite for decades. It has a bitter-sweet taste with orange flavouring and aromatic herbs.



GOZO GASTRONOMY



Gozo is not only an island of **natural beauty** where life unfolds at a slower pace, but also a place that prides itself on tradition.

Many of its eateries are **family-run** where the menu tends to change with the season. Depending on what's available at the local market, you may be served rabbit stew, ravioli or a signature homemade dish.

Specials might include fresh pasta with sauteed calamari, sun-dried tomatoes and Gozitan cheese, linguine with sea-urchin sauce, a creative antipasto made from local figs, ricotta, and cured ham or a soup made of many varieties of fish.

Gozo is particularly proud of its cheese. **Ġbejna** is a popular choice – it's a local sheep's milk cheeselet that is often served up as part of a sharing platter.



It can be fresh, dried, crusted with black pepper or preserved in vinegar. Hard sheep cheese, known as **pekorin**, is making a strong come back. Local cheesemaking is evolving, with variants including cheeselets containing cumin seeds, chives, or even smoked, gaining in popularity.

VISIT THE SALT PANS

Sea salt harvesting is a centuries-old practice on the Maltese islands. The first evidence of salt pans hewn in the rock on the coast dates back to Roman times. Maltese sea salt is rich in iodine and the tradition is still very much alive today.



SOMETHING SWEET



IF YOU HAVE A SWEET TOOTH, THERE ARE WONDERFUL DELICACIES TO TRY.

Qagħaq tal-ghasel, which translates as honey rings, are a delicious treat made from soft pastry. Despite the name, the filling is actually a form of treacle. They're best enjoyed with a hot drink.

Almond tart (*torta tal-lewż*) is another **winner** with the essential ingredient of almonds accompanied by local honey and orange rind, while *mqaret* are tasty, deep-fried, diamond-shaped pastry pockets filled with date paste and fennel seed.

The *ħelwa tat-tork* is made with sugar, sesame seeds, almonds, other nuts and vanilla, usually served in small bite-sized portions.

Some treats are seasonal and follow the **religious calendar**. Sugar-coated almonds (*perlini*) are synonymous with weddings, cake made with pine nuts and shaped like a snow-capped mountain (*prinjolata*) with **Carnival**, and *kwareżimal*, a chewy biscuit made without eggs and fats, is baked in **Lent**.

SEASONAL TREATS!

Żeppli ta' San Ġużepp, fried dough balls filled with sweet ricotta and doused with honey, are served on the feast of St Joseph, 19th March.

The traditional **Easter sweets** are *Figolli*. They are large biscuits filled with almond paste, decorated with colourful icing or chocolate and shaped like as a fish, lamb or heart.

There is no Maltese summer festa without **traditional local nougat**, or *qubbajt*, usually served from richly decorated street stalls during the festivities for the village patron saint.

Għadam tal-mejtin (dead men's bones) are served to honour deceased relatives on All Souls Day in November. Don't be put off by the name. These crumbly melt-in-the-mouth **shortcrust pastry biscuits**, with almond paste filling, are truly delicious.

At Christmastime, caterers and families celebrate with almond cakes, fruit cakes, mince pies, chocolate logs and Christmas puddings, bringing the culinary year to a sweet conclusion.



