

## Malta

Malta is the smallest state in size of the European Union (316km<sup>2</sup>). It's 5x less than Greater London, 4x less than Rome or 3x less than Berlin.

Malta is a Mediterranean archipelago located 90km south of Sicily and 300km east of Tunisia. It's made of 4 inhabited islands (Malta, the main island, Gozo, Comino and Manoel), 4 uninhabited islands and islets. The 25 summits of the Challenge lie on Malta itself (18), Gozo (6) and Comino (1).

At 253m, 019-Ta' Dmejrek (Dingli Cliffs) overlooks a land made up of hills starting in the Mediterranean Sea. The 015-Fort Bingemma (227m) is a perfect illustration.

Hills are also the rule on Gozo Island. Ta' Dbiegi hill (190m) is its highest point, but it's inaccessible by bike. The largest villages were built at the top of them, for example 003-Ir-Rabat, 004-Ix-Xaghra and 005-In-Nadur. In the Challenge, the highest point on Gozo Island is 002-Ta' Ghammar Hill (179m).





## Tourism

The small size of the islands make the contact with the sea almost continuous. Therefore the sides often start in bays or on beaches. Examples on Gozo : Xwejni (003), Ramla (004 and 005), Qorot and San Blas (005) and Hondoq (006). On Comino, the two sides of the Abandoned Hospital start in San Niklaw and Santa Marija Bays (007). On Malta, from Ġhadira we can reach the Red Tower (008) and Mellieħa Fort (009) ; two sides of Fort Bingemma (015) start in Ġnejna and Iż-Żonqor is climbed from Marsakala (023). The bottom of Ta' Ġhammar Hill (002) is located at Dwejra, hidden lagoon enclosed by 35m high cliffs (UNESCO Tentative List).



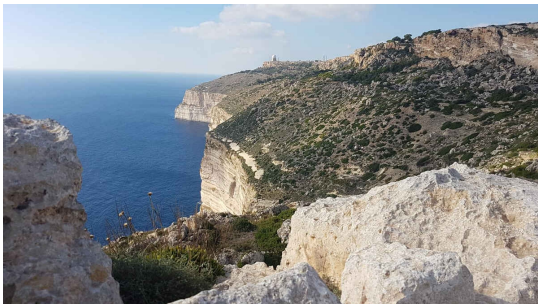
Ramla Bay



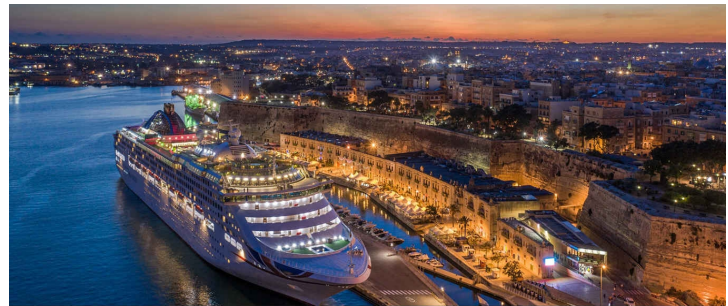
Dwejra Inland Sea

The coastal cliffs (UNESCO Tentative List as well) tower above Malta, in particular those of Dingli, whose highest point is Ta' Dmejrek (019) at 253m. At Tal-Merħla (016) the elevation gain is smaller (173m).

The climb towards Notre Dame Gate starts in Kalkara Marina (022).



Ta' Dmejrek and the Dingli Cliffs



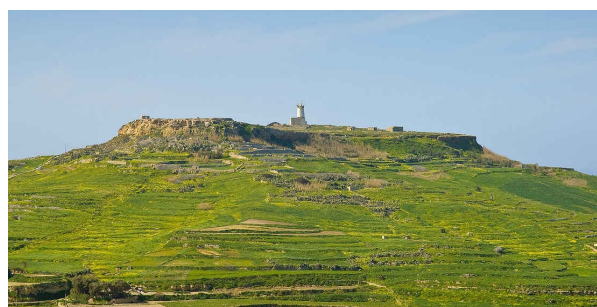
The Valletta Waterfront

On Gozo the ferry-boats come in and leave from L-Imġarr (bottom of 005-In-Nadur-South) ; climbing Crucifix Hill, you'll board the boat at berth at the Valleta Waterfront.

Of course there is a lighthouse somewhere: Il-Fanal tal-Ġordan (001).



Gozo Ferry Terminal



Gordan Lighthouse

### **The Maltese fortifications**

The location of Malta in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea made it strategic and aroused keen interest and hence the necessity to strongly protect the territory.

### **Rabat Cittadella or Castello (Gozo)**

The hill dominated by this building was already inhabited in the Prehistoric period (1500 B.C.), because it was an ideal strategic place on Gozo Island. The Phoenicians, the Romans, the Knights Hospitaller, the Ottomans, the French briefly and the British occupied it as well. Since 1998, the 'Gran Castello' belongs to the UNESCO Tentative List.

### **Mdina**

Mdina is a medieval fortified city built by the Phoenicians around the year 700 B.C. It was the capital of Malta since 1530 and the arrival of the Knights Hospitaller (Order of Malta) who moved the centre to Valletta. It was for Malta what Rabat was for Gozo: a wonderful lookout. The 'Silent City' belongs to the UNESCO tentative List as well.



Rabat



Mdina

### **Valletta (UNESCO)**

In 1530, Charles V gave Malta to the Hospitaller Order in order to protect the archipelago from the Ottoman assaults. They moved the capital from Mdina to Valletta (whose name comes from Jean de Valette, Grand Master of the Order).

Saint George's Square (020) is located in the historic centre. On the Square: the Grandmaster's Palace, current residence of the President of Malta, and buildings from the Baroque period.

### **The coastal towers**

Between 1605 and 1720, the Knights Hospitaller built about thirty towers to improve the protection of the island. 2 out of the 23 preserved towers are summits of the Challenge: Saint Mary's Tower built in 1618 on Comino, near the Abandoned Hospital (007) and Saint Agatha's Tower (008), also known as 'Red Tower' and built in 1647-1648.



Saint George's Square



Saint Agatha's Tower



### Cottonera Lines

From 1670 the Grand Master Cottoner had a fortified defence line built in order to protect Birgu and Senglea. Notre Dame Gate was the main entrance. We see it at the top of #022.



Notre Dame Gate

### Victoria Lines (UNESCO Tentative List)

In the end of the XIXth century, the British Army built a 12km long defensive line in the north of Malta. It was made of a wall, forts and defensive towers.

The Challenge visits two of the forts: Madalena (013) and Bingemma (015).



**Fort Mellieha (009)** was built by the British during the Second World War.



### **Megalithic temples of Malta**

The archipelago houses 33 temples concentrated on 17 sites. Two tops of the Challenge are concerned: Ġgantija dates from 3600-3000 B.C. The two temples lie near Xagħra (004).

The 4 temples in Haġar Qim (024) date from 3600-2500 B.C. Those in Mnajdra from the fourth millennium B.C. Both sites are part of the same archaeological park and belong to the UNESCO World Heritage. They overlook the cliffs in the southern part of Malta.



Ġgantija



Haġar Qim

### **Religious sites**

A Way of the Cross ('Via crucis') leads to the top of Ta' Għammar hill (002). It's made up of 14 marble sculptures, that represent the last scenes of Jesus Christ's life from the Last Supper to the Crucifixion and the Entombment.



Aerial view of the Way of the Cross



One of the stations

The Church of St. Dominic & The Blessed Virgin (018) was built in 1450 by Dominican monks on a cave where the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared.

The Church of Saint Joseph in Manikata amazes with its Postmodern style (Critical regionalism, like the Sydney Opera House). It was built between 1964 and 1974 by Richard England.



## Difficulty

### Altitude

8 Maltese summits exceed 150m: 019-Ta' Dmejrek (253m), 015-Fort Bingemma (227), 018-Church of St. Dominic (214), 017-Mdina (191), 002-Stations of the Cross (179), 016-Tal-Merħla (173), 005-Nadur (155) and 001-Gordan Lighthouse (150).

### The 5 greatest elevation gains

019-Ta' Dmejrek (245m), 015-Fort Bingemma (214m), 002-Stations of the Cross (172), 005-Nadur (149) and 016-Tal-Merħla (147).



Fort Bingemma



San Blas Bay (Nadur NE2)

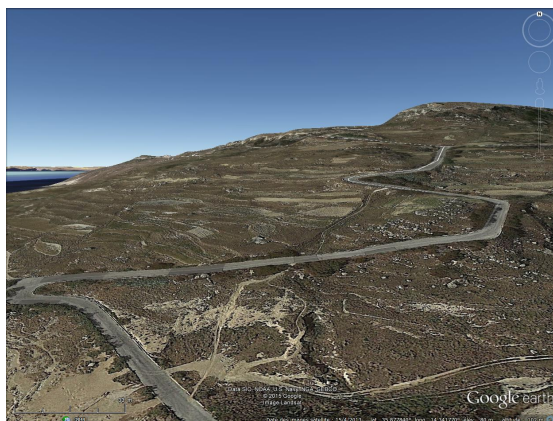
### The Top 5 in europoints

019-Ta' Dmejrek (242), 015-Fort Bingemma (231), 002-Stations of the Cross (213), 005-Nadur (208) and 016-Tal-Merħla (173).

4 climbs have a bom equal to or higher than 25: 005-Nadur (34), 016-Tal-Merħla (28), 012-Top of the World (27) and 017-Mdina (25).

### The Top5 in length

019-Ta' Dmejrek (9km), 015-Fort Bingemma (7,4km), 004-Ix-Xaghra and 005-Nadur (3,4km) and 003-Rabat Citadel (3,2km).



Tal-Merħla



Top of the World



## Cycling races in Malta

### Tour of Malta

The Tour ta' Malta is a stage race (the most often 4) for amateurs (men, women and masters), created in 1990: <https://www.tourtamalta.com/>. From informations about 2010, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2022, we can write that most of the stages take place on Malta Island and the rest on Gozo. The seashore usually hosts the time trial (1<sup>st</sup> stage) and a stage in circuit (the last one) ; the hilly stage takes place in San Martin (2<sup>nd</sup> stage) and a short stage (the 3<sup>rd</sup>, more or less 60km) climbs to Nadur or Xagħra.

In 2022 there were only 3 stages:

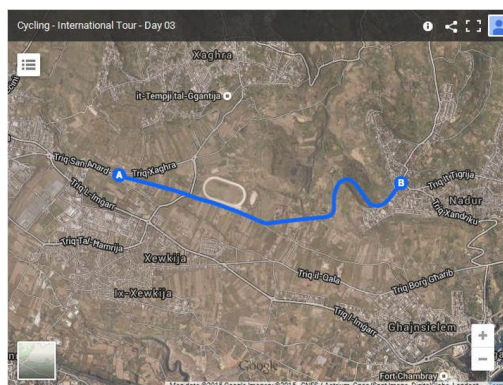
- a flat ITT (3 x 15km) on the Bahar ic-Cagħaq Coast Road, to the north of Valletta
- a hilly circuit (8,8km x 10) around 011-San Martin (elevation gain 1400m)
- a round trip on Triq L-Imdina à Haż-Żebbuġ (15 loops for 63,5km and 450m elevation gain)



San Martin Circuit



Nadur in the Tour of Malta 2015



Circuit in Nadur (2015)



## The National Championships

They use the same places than the hilly stages in the Tour of Malta. In 2019 it took place in Nadur, on the Ta' Xhajma circuit (see map above). In 2018 and 2022, San Martin hosted the Championships.



San Martin 1



San Martin 2

## Gozo Classic Road Race

In 2011, the Gozo Classic took place in Nadur on a 6,4km circuit (77km).

In 2015 and 2016, the Xagħra circuit was covered 12x (54km). It included the hairpin of Triq Ta' Hamet (southern side of 004-Xagħra).



1) Triq Ta' Hamet hairpin 2) The team Greens in Xagħra 3) Map of Xagħra circuit