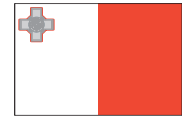


Malta



KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1964
Population:	409,000 (2009)
GDP p.c. growth:	2.6% p.a. 1990–2009
UN HDI 2010:	world ranking 33
Official languages:	Maltese, English
Time:	GMT plus 1–2hr
Currency:	euro (€)

Geography

Area:	316 sq km
Coastline:	253km
Capital:	Valletta

The Republic of Malta comprises an archipelago of six islands and islets in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, 93km south of Sicily and 290km from the coast of North Africa. Malta, Gozo and Comino are inhabited; the other islands are Cominotto, Filfla and St Paul's Island.

Time: GMT plus 1hr. The clock is advanced by one hour from the last Sunday in March to the last Sunday in October.

Area: 316 sq km including Comino (3 sq km) and Gozo (67 sq km).

Main towns: Valletta (capital, pop. 6,700 in 2009, greater Valletta includes Birkirkara, Qormi, Zabbar, San Gwann, Sliema, Fgura and Hamrun), Birkirkara (20,700), Mosta (19,200), San Pawl il-Bahar (16,500), Qormi (15,700), Zabbar (14,500), San Gwann (12,700), Naxxar (12,700), Sliema (12,600), Marsascula (11,300), Zebbug (11,300), Fgura (11,200), Zejtun (11,100), Rabat (10,700), Hamrun (8,700) and Victoria (on Gozo, also known as Rabat, 6,200).

Topography: Low hills and terraced fields occur on the three main islands. There are no rivers, streams or lakes on Malta Island, which has an indented coast on the eastern side with several good natural harbours. Gozo has cliffs and flat-topped hills. Water is obtained from natural ground water resources and desalination. The latter now accounts for 65% of water production and has relieved the shortage of fresh water.

Climate: Mediterranean type: hot and dry in July–September, with cooling sea-breezes. Winters are mild and wet, with warm westerly winds.

Environment: There are very limited natural freshwater resources, and increasing reliance on desalination.

Vegetation: The islands have been short of water and the soil is not deep. Mediterranean scrub is the natural vegetation. Approximately 12,000 hectares (less than 5% of which is irrigated) are under cultivation.

did you know?

The Commonwealth Network of Information Technology for Development (COMNET-IT) has its secretariat in Valletta. COMNET-IT has championed the development of the Commonwealth Action Programme for the Digital Divide.

Malta is one of only three Commonwealth member countries in Europe, all of which are island states and members of the European Union.

Wildlife: There are small mammals, such as hedgehogs, the least weasel and shrews; resident birds include Sardinian warblers, Manx and Cory's shearwaters and the blue rock thrush.

Transport: There are 2,254km of roads, 88% paved. There is no railway.

Valletta Grand Harbour is the most important of several harbours. A busy freeport has been established at Marsaxlokk in the south-east.

The international airport, Gudja International, is 6km south of Valletta. Helicopter services fly between Malta Island and Gozo.

Society

KEY FACTS 2009

Population per sq km: 1,294
Life expectancy: 80 years
Net primary enrolment: 91%

Population: 409,000 (2009); some 30,000 people on Gozo and Comino; population density among the world's highest; 94% lives in urban areas; growth 0.6% p.a. 1990–2009; birth rate 9 per 1,000 people (17 in 1970); life expectancy 80 years (70 in 1970).

There are no significant ethnic minorities.

Language: Official languages are Maltese and English. Italian is widely spoken.

Religion: Virtually all Christians (Roman Catholics).

Media: There are daily and weekly newspapers in English, including *The Malta Independent*, *The Malta Independent on Sunday*, *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Malta Business Weekly* and *Malta Today*, and daily – including *In-Nazzjon* and *L-Orizzont* – and weekly papers in Maltese.

Television Malta is a public channel, which began broadcasting in 1962, and Radio Malta has provided public radio since the mid-1930s. Other TV channels and radio stations are owned by the political parties, the Roman Catholic Church or commercial broadcasters. Net TV is owned by the Nationalist Party and One TV by the Malta Labour Party. Cable TV was introduced in 1992 and many households have satellite receivers. Virtually all households have at least one TV set. Digital radio broadcasting was launched in 2008 and all analogue TV transmissions were due to be switched to digital by June 2011. It is also possible to receive the broadcasts of Italian radio and TV in Malta.

There are 589 internet users per 1,000 people (2009).

Education: Public spending on education was 6.4% of GDP in 2007. There are 11 years of compulsory education starting at age five. Primary school comprises six years and secondary seven. The numerous church schools are subsidised by the government. The school year starts in September.

Courses at the University of Malta (founded 1592 as the Jesuits' College) include medicine, law, architecture, engineering, education, arts, sciences, theology and diplomatic studies. Junior College (University of Malta) was established at Msida in 1995. Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology offers a very wide range of vocational and professional education and training. The International Maritime Law Institute is based in Malta. The

female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 142:100 (2007). Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 98% (2008).

Health: Infant mortality was 6 per 1,000 live births in 2009 (37 in 1960). Summer dust, and sand carried on the wind from North Africa, sometimes cause respiratory problems.

Communications: Country code 356; internet domain '.mt'. Mobile phone coverage is good. Public telephone booths are widely available. Internet connection is fast and reliable. Internet cafes can be found in the main towns. There are post offices in every community.

There are 618 main telephone lines and 1,033 mobile phone subscriptions per 1,000 people (2009).

Public holidays: New Year's Day, St Paul's Shipwreck (10 February), St Joseph's Day (19 March), Freedom Day (31 March), Workers' Day (1 May), Commemoration of 1919 Sette Guigno Riot (7 June), St Peter and St Paul (Harvest Festival, 29 June), Assumption (15 August), Our Lady of Victories (8 September), Independence Day (21 September), Immaculate Conception (8 December), Republic Day (13 December) and Christmas Day.

Religious and other festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Good Friday.

Carnival (not an official holiday) is held Saturday–Tuesday before Ash Wednesday.

Economy

KEY FACTS 2009

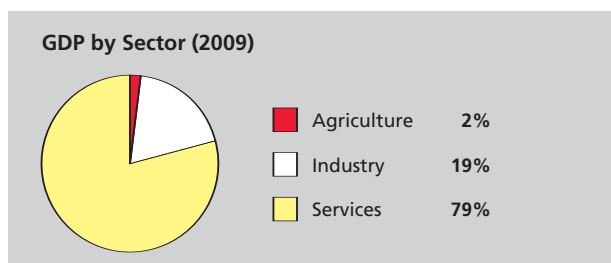
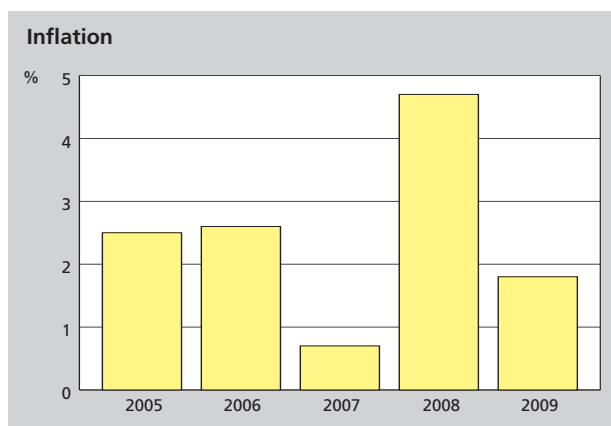
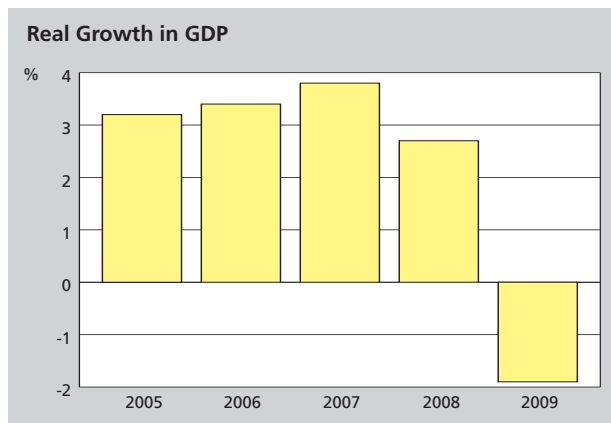
GDP: US\$8.0bn
GDP p.c.: US\$19,577
GDP growth: 2.1% p.a. 2004–07
Inflation: 2.5% p.a. 2004–08

Overview: Malta has a small domestic market, produces only about 20% of the food it needs, and has no raw materials, a limited supply of fresh water and no energy resources other than solar energy. Its only resources are its ports and its educated and skilled people. Development has been based on shipbuilding and repairing, manufacturing for export, tourism, and, more recently, freeport activities and financial and business services.

In 1979 the UK military base (a major employer and generator of government revenue) closed; consequently the 1980s global recession leading to a worldwide collapse of shipbuilding hit Malta particularly hard, and there were numerous factory closures.

During the 1990s, the public sector was reduced and state enterprises privatised. Expansion of tourism and liberalisation of investment, international trade, fiscal policy and the financial services sector led to steady growth, averaging nearly 5% p.a. over the decade.

The long period of good, steady growth came to an end in 2001, as export demand fell and the economy stalled during 2001–04. After four years of stagnation, growth resumed at 3.2% in 2005, 3.4% in 2006 and 3.8% in 2007. But the rapidly worsening international economic conditions of 2008 and global fall in demand caused growth in that year to slow to 2.7%; and in 2009 the economy contracted by 1.9%, recovering in 2010.



Malta joined the European Union in May 2004 and adopted the euro currency in January 2008, replacing the Maltese lira.

Trade: Principal exports are machinery, transport equipment (particularly electronics), manufactured goods and clothing.

Constitution

Status: Republic
Legislature: House of Representatives
Independence: 21 September 1964

Under the 1964 constitution – amended in 1974 and 1987 – Malta is a democratic republic with a unicameral House of Representatives of at least 65 members. The country has proportional representation using the single transferable vote system. A party which obtains a majority of votes but minority of seats is allocated additional seats to give it an overall majority of one. The House may not sit for longer than five years.

The president is the head of state and is elected for a five-year period of office by the House of Representatives. The incumbent

has executive authority but must act on the cabinet's advice and the position is therefore largely ceremonial. The prime minister and leader of the opposition are both appointed by the president. The cabinet is appointed by the president on the advice of the prime minister. All appointees must be members of parliament.

Under the constitution, Roman Catholic Christianity is the state religion and must be taught in state schools.

Politics

Last elections: March 2008 (parliamentary), April 2009 (presidential)
Next elections: 2013 (parliamentary), 2014 (presidential)
Head of state: President Dr George Abela (2009–)
Head of government: Prime Minister Dr Lawrence Gonzi
Ruling party: Nationalist Party

After the EU Council of Ministers decided in 1995 to accept Malta as a candidate to join the European Union, the Nationalist Party (PN) government set about preparing the country for accession – introducing VAT and removing some import tariffs.

However, VAT was unpopular, and the changes as a whole controversial, so the next parliamentary elections, scheduled for 1997, were brought forward to October 1996 to settle the issue of EU membership and its required economic disciplines. The elections resulted in a narrow win for the Malta Labour Party (MLP) – 50.7% to the PN's 47.8% – with a voter turnout of 98% of the registered voters. On taking office as prime minister, Dr Alfred Sant immediately withdrew Malta's application to join the EU and pulled out of NATO's Partnership for Peace plan.

The Labour government sought to emphasise Malta's traditional policy of neutrality and to develop its position as a crossroads between Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. Also, it formed a commission to look into the possibility of legalising divorce.

During 1998, the MLP had a majority of one vote in the House of Representatives and on two occasions when former Labour Prime Minister Dom Mintoff had voted with the Nationalist opposition (to defeat a development project affecting his own constituency), it had not been able to command a majority.

The general election scheduled for 2001 was brought forward to September 1998, when the PN, still led by Dr Edward Fenech-Adami, won 35 of the 65 parliamentary seats and 51.8% of the votes, giving the party an endorsement for its planned application for EU membership.

Following the elections the PN government immediately reactivated its application to join the EU and resumed its preparations for accession, and in December 1999 Malta was formally invited to enter into negotiations on accession with a view to joining in 2004.

Although the referendum in 2003 on EU membership gave the government a mandate to proceed with ratifying the treaty for accession in May 2004, the opposition continued to insist that it would take Malta out of the Union if it won the election in 2004, and so the government called an early election, which in April 2003 decisively closed the debate. The PN won the hard-fought contest with 35 of the 65 seats and 51.8% of the votes, a decisive result in a country where the two main parties normally each enjoy

the support of about half the electorate. Following the election, the MLP decided to end its opposition to EU membership, thus ending a long and intense period when political activity was focused on one issue.

In March 2004, soon after Fenech-Adami's 70th birthday, Dr Lawrence Gonzi succeeded him as prime minister and in April 2004 Fenech-Adami was elected to the presidency.

The Nationalist Party was returned to power in the March 2008 parliamentary elections, winning 35 seats (49.3% of votes) while MLP secured the balance of 34 seats (48.8%). Turnout was 93%.

In April 2009, at the end of Fenech-Adami's five-year term, Dr George Abela was unanimously elected as president by parliament.

International relations

Malta is a member of the Council of Europe, European Union, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

Traveller information

Local laws and conventions: Visitors to Malta should note the importance of the Roman Catholic Church (more than 90% of Maltese are Roman Catholics) and that modesty in dress is expected, particularly the covering of the shoulders and legs. Beachwear is for beaches only.

Smoking is prohibited on public transport, in some public buildings and in all cinemas.

Penalties for drug possession and trafficking are strict and can lead to heavy fines and imprisonment.

Shaking hands is the usual greeting.

Business dress should be smart and modest for both men and women. Appointments for business meetings are customary and punctuality is expected; business cards should be presented. Many of Malta's luxury hotels have state-of-the-art conference facilities. Business hours are Mon–Fri 0800–1230 and 1330–1700.



History

Malta (*Melita*, or 'Honey Island', in Latin) was colonised from Carthage during the 6th century BC. Through its long history, it has been subject to complex influences, as shown by its language: the Maltese language descends from Punic, with an Arabic element.

According to tradition, Hannibal was born in Malta (247 BC). From 216 BC the country was under Roman (Byzantine from AD 395) administration until captured by the Arabs in AD 870. In 1070 it became a Sicilian possession. By 1530 it belonged to the Holy Roman Emperor, who gave it to the Knights of St John of Jerusalem, with a mandate to defend Tripoli against Turkish invasion. Building began on Valletta and its fortifications in 1565 after an unsuccessful Turkish siege. Sixteenth-century Malta was prosperous as a trading centre but by the early 18th century the island's fortunes had declined.

The French army under Bonaparte captured it in June 1798, and used it as a base to invade Egypt, but the garrison was expelled by the British navy in 1800 and the island came under British administration. A move to return it to the Knights of St John (1802) provoked a petition from the inhabitants for British protection, and Malta became British under the Treaty of Paris (1814). Malta prospered as a freeport, used by British shipping to the Adriatic and the Near East. In 1827 it became the base of the British Mediterranean Fleet. A packet service was established in 1832. After the Suez Canal was opened (1869) the volume of shipping increased. By 1905 the Naval Dockyard, together with British defence services, was the basis of the economy. Blockaded and attacked from the air during the Second World War, Malta was awarded the George Cross in 1942 by King George VI.

Demand for independence (though not representation) came relatively late to Malta, which had benefited from the UK naval presence on the island. In the mid-1950s Dom Mintoff's Labour Party, then in government, inclined towards integration with the UK. This was confirmed by a referendum in 1956. In March 1962 Malta became internally self-governing.

However, by the early 1960s, with nationalism and anti-colonialism sweeping the world, coupled with the decline of the UK navy, the mood had changed. The Labour Party, as well as Dr Borg Olivier's Nationalist Party, campaigned for independence, which was achieved in September 1964.

At independence, Malta entered a turbulent period. The dockyard was nationalised in 1968. Malta became a republic at the end of 1974 and in 1979 the UK military base was closed, which shook the economy, and traditional Maltese faith in UK protection.

Domestically, the country was polarised between the generally socialist Malta Labour Party (MLP) and the pro-western and economically liberal Nationalist Party (PN). Under the long and forceful leadership of Mintoff, the MLP government made Malta a strong adherent of the Non-Aligned Movement and strengthened cultural and trade links with Malta's North African neighbours, notably oil-rich Libya.

Political conflict was exacerbated by anomalies in the electoral system, which allowed the MLP to retain power after the 1981 parliamentary elections, although the PN had more votes. After strikes and civil unrest, Mintoff's successor, Dr Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici reformed the electoral system (1987), and the May 1987 elections were won by the PN, under Dr Edward Fenech-Adami, who reversed many of Mintoff's centralist policies.

The PN led by Fenech-Adami strengthened its majority at the general election in 1992, gaining 34 out of 65 seats, and 51.8% of the votes. A third party, the Democratic Alternative, with strong policies on environmental protection, emerged, but the basic two-party pattern remained fairly intact.

After this second defeat under the electoral system he had introduced, Bonnici resigned as leader of the MLP and was replaced by Dr Alfred Sant, who pledged to modernise Labour's policies.

Malta became a member of the EU in May 2004.

Immigration and customs: All European Union nationals and residents of the Commonwealth do not require visas to enter the country as a tourist for up to three months. EU nationals are only required to produce evidence of their nationality and identity. Other nationals need a passport valid for three months after departure.

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required from travellers arriving from an infected area.

New regulations controlling the amount of cash leaving or entering the EU have been in force since June 2007. Anyone leaving or entering Malta will have to declare if they are carrying more than €10,000.

Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the left. There are several car-hire companies and visitors are required to have an international driving permit. The speed limit is 80kph on highways and 50kph in residential areas.

A helicopter service connects Malta and Gozo; there is also a ferry service which takes around 15 minutes. Additionally, visitors can take a passenger ferry to Comino, although this service only operates between March and November.

Taxis are white and visitors are advised to agree a price before travelling. There are good bus services in Valletta and Victoria (Gozo).

Travel health: EU citizens will need a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), which will entitle them to emergency treatment. Other nationals should ensure they have comprehensive medical insurance.

Mains water is normally chlorinated. Visitors are advised to drink bottled water for the first few weeks of stay. Milk is pasteurised.

Money: Money can be changed at banks, bureaux de change, some hotels, and larger shops and restaurants. Automated foreign exchange machines are available at various locations on the islands and some exchange bureaux are often open 24 hours. American Express, Diners Club, Mastercard and Visa are widely accepted, and there are ATMs on the islands. Travellers cheques can be exchanged in the normal authorised institutions. Banking hours are Mon–Fri 0830–1230, Sat 0830–1130.

There were 1,183,000 tourist arrivals in 2009.

Further information

Government of Malta Portal: www.gov.mt

Commonwealth Secretariat: www.thecommonwealth.org

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