**Malta**

**KEY FACTS**

- **Joined Commonwealth:** 1964
- **Population:** 429,000 (2013)
- **GDP p.c. growth:** 2.4% p.a. 1990–2013
- **UN HDI 2014:** World ranking 39
- **Official languages:** Maltese, English
- **Time:** GMT plus 1–2 hrs
- **Currency:** Euro (€)

**Geography**

- **Area:** 316 sq km including Comino (3 sq km) and Gozo (67 sq km).
- **Coastline:** 253 km
- **Capital:** Valletta
  
  The Republic of Malta comprises an archipelago of six islands and islets in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, 93 km south of Sicily and 290 km 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 1 hr. 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).
- **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 per cent of water production and has relieved the shortage of fresh water.
- **Climate:** Mediterranean. 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 five per cent of which is irrigated) are under cultivation.
  
  - **Wildlife:** There are small mammals, such as hedgehogs, least weasels and shrews; resident birds include Sardinian warblers, Manx and Cory’s shearwaters and blue rock thrushes.
  
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**Society**

**KEY FACTS 2013**

- **Population per sq km:** 1,358
- **Life expectancy:** 80 years
- **Net primary enrolment:** 95% (2012)
- **Population:** 429,000 (2013); some 30,000 people on Gozo and Comino; population density among the world’s highest; 95 per cent of people live in urban areas; growth 0.6 per cent p.a. 1990–2013; birth rate nine per 1,000 people (17 in 1970); life expectancy 80 years (1970).

- **Society:** There are no significant ethnic minorities.
- **Language:** Official languages are Maltese and English. Italian is widely spoken.
- **Religion:** Virtually all Christians (Roman Catholics).
- **Health:** Public spending on health was six per cent of GDP in 2012. Infant mortality was five per 1,000 live births in 2013 (37 in 1960). Summer dust and sand carried on the wind from North Africa sometimes cause respiratory problems.
- **Education:** Public spending on education was seven per cent of GDP in 2010. There are 11 years of compulsory education starting at the age of five. Primary school comprises six years and secondary seven, with cycles of five and two years. The numerous church schools are subsidised by the government. Some 80 per cent of pupils complete primary school (2008). The school year starts in September.

  - **Courses at the University of Malta (founded 1592 as the Jesuits’ College) include architecture, arts, diplomatic studies, education, engineering, law, medicine, sciences and theology. G. F. Abela Junior College (University of Malta) was established at Msida (greater Valletta) in 1995 to provide two-year pre-university courses. Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology offers a very wide range of vocational and professional education, with its main campus at Paola (greater Valletta). The International Maritime Law Institute is based in Malta. The female-male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 1.40:1 (2010). Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 98 per cent (2005).**

  - **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 and weekly papers in Maltese. The principal newspapers in Maltese have political affiliations, for example In-Nazzjon (daily) and Il-Mument (weekly) with the Nationalist Party, and L-Orizzont (daily) and Il-Torċa (weekly) with the General Workers’ Union.

  - **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 Super One TV by the Partit Laburista (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. It is also possible to receive the broadcasts of Italian radio and TV in Malta.

Some 99 per cent of households have TV sets (2009). There are 689 personal computers per 1,000 people (2012).

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.

For every 1,000 people there are 539 landlines, 1,298 mobile phone subscriptions and 689 internet users (2013).

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, Easter Monday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Sunday and Easter Monday.

Carnival (not an official holiday) is held from year to year include Good Friday. Religious and other festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Good Friday, Easter Monday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Sunday and Easter Monday.

Republic Day (13 December) and Christmas (2009). There are 689 personal computers per 1,000 people (2012).

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

Economy

**KEY FACTS 2013**

GNI: US$8.9bn

GNI p.c.: US$20,980

**GDP growth:** 1.4% p.a. 2009–13

**Inflation:** 2.0% p.a. 2009–13

Malta has a small domestic market, produces only about 20 per cent 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, free port 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 five per cent 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, rising to 4.3 per cent in 2007 and 4.4 per cent in 2008. But the rapidly worsening international economic conditions and global fall in demand caused growth to collapse in 2009 (~2.8 per cent), recovering in 2010 (4.3 per cent), and remaining steady at one to three per cent p.a. 2011–15. Malta joined the European Union in May 2004 and adopted the euro currency in January 2008, replacing the Maltese lira.

**Malta on the international stage**

Cyclist David Millar, who won four stages of the Tour de France, was born in Malta in 1977, but competed for Britain having moved there with his Scottish parents as a child.

Physician and author Edward de Bono – known as “the father of lateral thinking” – was born in Malta in 1933. He has held appointments at Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard and London universities.

Malta is to host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2015.

History

Malta (Melita, or ‘Honey Island’, in Latin) was colonised from Carthage during the sixth century BCE. 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 BCE). From 216 BCE the country was under Roman (Byzantine from 395 CE) administration until captured by the Arabs in 870 CE. 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 free port, 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 World War II, 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 Malta Labour Party (MLP), 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 MLP, as well as Dr Borg Olivier’s Nationalist Party (PN), 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 MLP and the pro-western and economically liberal 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, in 1987 Mintoff’s successor Dr Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici reformed the electoral system, 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, securing 34 of 65 seats, and 51.8 per cent 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 the 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 the MLP’s policies.

After the EU Council of Ministers decided in 1995 to accept Malta as a candidate to join the European Union, the 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 MLP – 50.7 per cent to the PN’s 47.8 per cent – with a voter turnout of 98 per cent of the registered voters. On taking office as Prime Minister, Sant immediately withdrew Malta’s application to join the EU and pulled out of NATO’s Partnership for Peace plan.

During 1998, the MLP had a majority of one vote in the House of Representatives and on two occasions when former 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 Fenech-Adami, won 35 of the 65 parliamentary seats and 51.8 per cent of the votes, giving the party an endorsement for its planned application for EU membership. 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. Malta became a member of the EU in May 2004.

Constitution

Status: Republic
Legislature: Parliament of Malta
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 of Representatives 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: 9 March 2013 (parliamentary), 1 April 2014 (presidential)
Next elections: 2018 (parliamentary), 1 April 2019 (presidential)
Head of state: President Marie Louise Coleiro Preca (2014–)
Head of government: Prime Minister Dr Joseph Muscat
Ruling party: Partit Laburista
Women MPs: 14%

Although the referendum in 2003 on EU membership gave the Nationalist Party (PN) government a mandate to proceed with ratifying the treaty for accession to the EU in May 2004, the opposition continued to insist that it would take Malta out of the EU if it won the election in 2004, and so the government called an early election, which in

Further information

Government of Malta: www.gov.mt
Electoral Commission: www.electoral.gov.mt
Parliament of Malta: www.parliament.gov.mt
National Statistics Office: www.nso.gov.mt
Central Bank of Malta: www.centralbankmalta.org
Malta Tourism Authority: www.mta.com.mt
Commonwealth Secretariat: www.thecommonwealth.org/country/Malta
Commonwealth of Nations:

Media
The Malta Independent: www.independent.com.mt
The Times: www.timesofmalta.com
Malta Today: www.maltatoday.com.mt
Public Broadcasting Services: www.pbs.com.mt
MaltaMedia: www.maltamediaonline.com
maltastar.com:
April 2003 decisively closed the debate. The PN won the hard-fought contest with 35 of the 65 seats and 51.8 per cent 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 Malta Labour Party, which had won 30 seats, 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 Dr Edward 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 PN was returned to power in the March 2008 parliamentary elections, winning 35 seats (49.3 per cent of votes) while the Labour Party secured the balance of 34 seats (48.8 per cent). Turnout was 93 per cent.

In April 2004, at the end of President Abela’s five-year term, Dr George Abela was unanimously elected President by Parliament.

On 10 December 2012 the government lost its one-vote majority and was unable to enact its 2013 budget. Parliament was dissolved in January 2013 and an election called.

Partit Laburista (PL, known as the Malta Labour Party until its name was changed in November 2008) won the parliamentary elections of March 2013 and its leader, Dr Joseph Muscat, was sworn in as Prime Minister. PL secured 39 seats, with 54.8 per cent of votes cast, and PN 30 seats with 43.3 per cent. Turnout was again 93 per cent.

In April 2014, at the end of President Abela’s five-year term, Marie Louise Coleiro Preca was unanimously elected 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
Immigration and customs: Passports must be valid at least three months after the date of departure. Visas are required by most Commonwealth nationals. Prohibited imports include some fresh food.

Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the left. Visitors wishing to hire a car are required to have an international or EU driving permit.

A helicopter service connects Malta and Gozo; also a ferry service which takes around 25 minutes. 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: Prevalent diseases where appropriate precautionary measures are recommended include hepatitis B.

There were 1,582,000 tourist arrivals in 2013.