

Mdina (Note)

Mdina is the old city of Malta.

It is also known as the **Silent City**. This was built during Roman times, on the hill close to Rabat Malta. This city was built on a hill so that:

1. The watchmen of the city would be able

to observe what was happening around them and to see whether the enemy was



approaching. From the bastions you can see half of the island.

2. The enemy would find it very difficult to get to the city.

- During the time of the Romans Mdina was three times larger than it is today. It was

surrounded by four kilometres of bastions and a moat.

The most important people of society used to live in it. They had beautiful houses and palaces decorated with columns and statues. One of these is the Roman Villa, which is found in Rabat (Malta), just outside Mdina. This is still there today (the Domvs Romana).

- Many insist that Publius, the Roman governor at the time of Saint Paul, had his palace in Mdina, in the place where today we find the Cathedral of Mdina.



- After the Romans, the Arabs occupied Malta, and these were Muslims. Their priority was to strengthen the defences of the island. So, the Arabs reduced the city by a third of what it had been by building the bastions further in.
- During the time of the Arabs the Cathedral was left to fall into ruins as they were not Christians.
- After the Arabs, the Normans arrived, led by Count Roger, who once again restored the Cathedral of Mdina.
- After the Normans we had many other rulers amongst whom were the Spanish who built beautiful palaces and churches which we can still see today. After the defeat of Gonsalvo Monroy, King Alfonsu V of Spain called Mdina '*Citta Notabile della mia corona*' which means 'the most noble jewel in my crown'. This was a great honour for Mdina. This document still exists in the Museum of the Cathedral in Mdina itself. This is why Mdina is also known as **Citta' Notabile**.



- In 1530 the Knights of Saint John arrived in Malta. The Knights had many galleys and armaments of war. They did not wish to live in Mdina because this was too far away from the sea and their galleys. That is why they chose to live in Birgu. During this time Mdina started to lose its importance.



Places of interest in Mdina

- To enter Mdina you must cross over the bridge under which there is a ditch.
- From the bridge we can see the high bastions which surround the city.
- We also see the main door decorated with the coat of arms of Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena.



- On the inside of the door there is an engraving of the figures of Saint Paul, Saint Publius and Saint Agatha - the patron saints of Malta and of Mdina.

- On the right there is the **Vilhena Palace**. This was built by the Grandmaster Manoel de Vilhena after the earthquake of 1693. This palace served as a hospital for many years however nowadays it is serving as a **Natural History Museum**. In this museum we find many preserved animals, insects, birds, Maltese rocks and fossils on display.

- Right next to this we find the '**Mdina Dungeons**' which used to serve as a prison during the 15th century.





* From here we walk to the main street - Villegaignon Street, which is the widest street in Mdina.



- The other streets in Mdina were all narrow and often twisting so that:

1. In case of an attack the enemy would get confused by the many narrow streets,
2. the arrows would not travel far, and
3. the houses would be protected from the sun.

- As we enter Villegaignon Street we find the **Chapel of Saint Agatha**. This saint is important for Mdina because when the Turks attacked Mdina, in 1551, there was a strange happening. This saint appeared to a nun in a dream and told her that if they took out her statue on the bastions, the Turks would flee. The Maltese did this and that is exactly what happened. From there the Turks kept on going to Gozo where they took all the Gozitans as slaves. They left behind only the elderly and those who were not healthy and sick.



- Across the chapel of Saint Agatha there is **Casa Inguanetz** - a palace of the 14th century.
- On the right we also find the **Convent of the cloistered Benedictine nuns**.
- There is also a building where historical documents of our country are kept - **The National Archives**.



- In the middle of Villegaignon street we see the Cathedral Square and the Cathedral itself. During the earthquake of 1693 this Cathedral suffered a lot of damage. After the earthquake the square was widened, the Cathedral was rebuilt and the

beautiful buildings we see today were built.

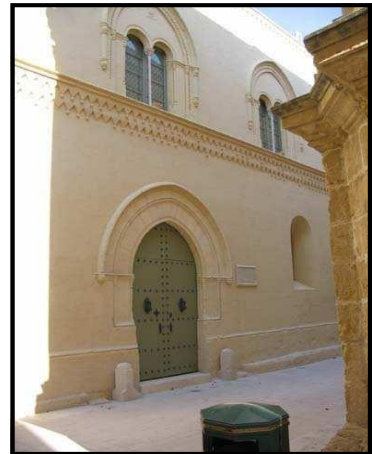
- The Cathedral is dedicated to the conversion of Saint Paul. This was built on the design of Lorenzo Gafa'. The Cathedral was built in the same place where some believe that the palace of Publius had been. Publius was the leader of the island when Saint Paul arrived in Malta.
- Many noble people and Monseigneurs of the Cathedral are buried there.
- The Mdina Cathedral is the main church of the Archdioceses of Malta in which the
- Archbishop of Malta commemorates mass.
- At the back of the Cathedral there is the palace of the Archbishop of Malta.
- On the left of the Cathedral, we find the **Cathedral Museum**, where we can see many precious objects like paintings, sculptures, sacred objects, and the archives of the Cathedral.





- Back on Villegaignon street we find the chapel of *San Rokku*, which today is better known as the **Chapel of the Madonna tad-Dawl**. Across the street there is the church and the **Convent of the Madonna tal-Karmnu**.
- From this church the French (at the time of Dun Mikiel Xerri) wanted to steal many sacred objects and tapestries. The Maltese rebelled against the French.

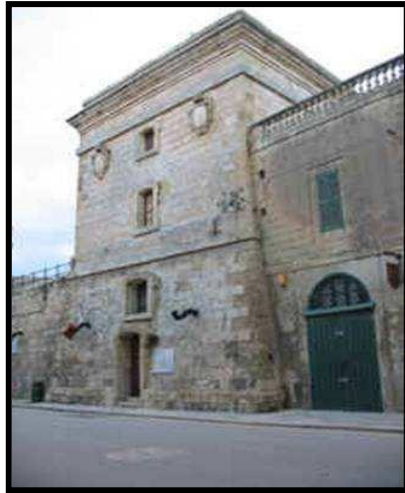
- When we walk a bit further, we find **Palazzo Falson**, better known as the Norman House. The first Grandmaster of the knights, L'Isle Adam, was welcomed here on his first visit to this city.
- This palace was restored and transformed into a museum for paintings, furniture, silver objects and many other beautiful antiques.



- At the end of the street, we arrive at a small square which is very popular with the tourists and the Maltese. This is the **Bastion Square** from where we can see a beautiful view of half of Malta.



- In Mdina we also find the Standard Tower (*it-Torri tal-Istandard*). From this Tower the guards used to watch over and guard Mdina.



- The **Greeks Door** or Gate - the old door which was used in the 15th century.

