Tour: Maltese Science

Destination: The Maltese Archipelago

Specialization: Marine Science, Biology, Geology, Geography, Agriculture, Astronomy, Natural History, History & Culture

Itinerary: 5-days / 4-nights

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Specialists in STEM Student Travel

As with all sample itineraries, please be advised that this is an ‘example’ of a schedule and that the activities and hotels shown may be variable dependent upon dates, weather, special requests and other factors. Itineraries will be confirmed prior to travel.
Malta.... With the Mediterranean Sea lapping at its shores, its striking coastline, picturesque countryside and a rich history, Malta offers an unforgettable destination! The beaches range from enchanting rocky coves where you can feel like you’re the only person in the world, to beautiful stretches of golden sands populated by Hermit Crabs and Loggerhead Turtles. The Mediterranean Sea is sapphire blue and creates remarkable sunsets to watch as you enjoy an evening meal on one of Malta’s seafront promenades.

Malta, Gozo and Comino are located in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, just south of Italy. It takes about three hours to reach Malta by plane from London. The Maltese population is distributed on three of the 18 islands that form the Maltese archipelago, a population of approximately 414,000 people.

The geographical diversity of the islands is quite remarkable if we consider the small size of the Maltese territory: while Gozo and Comino have green and luxuriant vegetation and appears somewhat wild, Malta is densely urbanized, characterized by dry landscapes and hosting a variety of succulent plants. The Maltese coastline reflects this diversity on every coast of the littoral. Sandy beaches can be found mostly in the North side of the islands, whereas the South of Gozo and Malta are home of high cliffs steering down to the blue sea and to small rocky beaches, creating a beautiful scenery. The west and east coasts have a similar geological formation of bays and coves, but largely differs in numbers and dimensions: the oriental side has three large bays and the occidental side hosts a concentration of small and natural harbors.

This diversity is peculiar for Maltese Heritage as well. Mysterious remains and megalithic temples of prehistoric ages are found next to military buildings and fortifications erected by the Knights of the Order of Saint John. Traces of the British presence on the islands are still present and range from driving on the left to the military bases used during the Second World War and displays of pure Maltese style can be seen in the vast majority of houses, looking up to the colorful enclosed wooden balconies.

Tourism, together with the financial services drive Malta’s economic sector. Despite the fact that the island relies on imported goods for around 80% of its needs, it can show a surprisingly low unemployment rate, mainly because of the constant growth and because of policies encouraging continuous training for the labor force.

Malta is the largest island of the archipelago, by extension and population. It is as varied as it can be: even within the cities the mixture of ancient and new can be found on the same street. For example, its capital city Valletta has been entirely declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, but it is at the same time a cultural and commercial center, attracting thousands of both workers and visitors on a daily basis.
Gozo and Comino, the other islands of the archipelago, are significantly different from mainland Malta, as well as from each other. Gozo is a rural island, where people are friendly and have a simple countryside life. Comino was the Knights of the Order of Saint John’s game reserve, and as a military outpost to protect the sister islands from piracy and invaders.

This interesting geography of Malta, its mild climate and its millenary heritage, combined with the hospitality of the Maltese people, are the strong points that make the Maltese archipelago a brilliant destination in the Southern Mediterranean.

**Day 1**

**Dinner**

Groups participating in Visions Maltese STEM will generally arrive in Malta in the afternoon. Upon arrival we’ll hear all about this fabulous destination, transfer to our hotel, relax and get settled.

Some brief initial points:
- Everyone will receive a Malta cap to keep!
- Everyone will receive a Malta Pack with goodies!
- A licensed Maltese guide will always be available and will accompany your school group for the entirety of your tour.
- After the trip is over, our local representatives will present each group with a CD or a link to download a collection of pictures taken throughout your journey with us.

Upon arrival, we’ll load into our coach where a 10-minute drive will take us to the historical city of Cottoner, better known as the Three Cities, where our Ambassador will unfold the thousands of years behind these cities and the surrounding harbors. Tonight, we’ll have our Welcome Dinner at the hotel.

**Sample 3-Star Hotel – The Alexandra Hotel**

The Alexandra Hotel Malta lies in the center of St. Julians, Malta’s all year-round resort. The Alexandra Hotel offers a total of 145 rooms, all comfortably enhanced with a balcony, some of which overlook the hotel’s pool, while others situated on the upper floors have the luxury of distant sea views. Commodities are part of the service; all the rooms are equipped with air conditioning / central heating, a private bath, satellite TV, direct dial telephone, and a safety deposit box. The latter as well as the mini fridge and the hairdryer are available on request at a minimal extra charge. Being just 5 minutes away from the beach, shopping centers, supermarkets, casinos, conference halls, a yacht
marina, cinema, bowling center, restaurants, bars, discotheques and many other facilities, one cannot ask for more. www.alexandrahotelmalta.com

Sample 4-Star Hotel – Dolmen Resort Hotel
Beautiful located at the water’s edge, the Dolmen 4-star hotel in Malta boasts 375 guest rooms and 38 highly finished superior rooms and suites with panoramic views of the Mediterranean Sea and St. Paul’s Islands, Malta. All hotel bedrooms are fully air-conditioned, centrally heated and have their own private bathroom, safe deposit box, satellite TV, direct dial telephone, radio, mini-bar and hair dryers. The majority of the hotel rooms have a balcony or terrace. The hotel’s general facilities include a Conference Centre, Casino, an A La Carte Restaurant, Buffet Restaurant, Piano Cocktails Bar, Wine Bar, Cafeteria, Swim-Up Bar, Night Club and Caribbean Style Beach Club offering a variety of water-sports, a Diving Centre, Bars and Restaurant. www.dolmen.com.mt

Day 2
Breakfast * Lunch * Dinner

Good morning Malta! Today we’ll start by getting to know Malta with a fantastic nature & agriculture morning!

Il-Majjistral Nature & History National Park – Pupils and students alike will enjoy this opportunity to explore Malta’s nature and history. We’ll start with a guided nature walk of about 5km in Malta’s only natural National Park which is located in Mellieha. The park extends from Golden Bay to Anchor Bay and inland towards Manikata with a variety of habitats such as garigue, boulder scree, sand dunes, coastal garigue, and steppe. The starting point can be varied, and the walk shortened or lengthened as desired. The site also holds a small afforestation area in the making.

The area in the northwest of Malta, which includes the coastal area from Golden Bay to Il-Prajjet and ix-Xagħra l-Ħamra, was declared a national park by the Government of Malta by Legal Notice 251 of 2007 in September 2007. The Park has taken the name of the northwest wind/region: majjistral in the Maltese language.

The Park’s area includes a stretch of 6km of protected coast designated as part of a larger Special Area of Conservation of International Importance within the Natura 2000 network of sites as per the European Habitats Directive. The directive calls for the effective management of such sites through the adoption and implementation of management plans.
The Majjistral Park also contains a number of historical and archaeological sites that have been identified in one of a series of studies commissioned by the Malta Tourism Authority. Whilst various areas of the park still sustain agricultural activities, other areas consist of natural habitats. The park organizes regular outdoor activities which aim to encourage an active lifestyle while becoming aware of the natural heritage of the area. Educational school visits are held during the cooler months while summer sees more of a focus on the coast with guided snorkeling sessions offered at the beautiful sandy beach of Golden Bay which has been designated as Beach of Quality according to international Blue Flag criteria.

**Organic Agriculture Master Class** - While there, students will visit an organic farm en route and then proceed with our walk to the picnic area for snacks. A representative from the Malta Organic Agriculture Movement will join us for an interesting lecture!

MOAM is a totally independent and voluntary organization set up in November 1999 to promote Organic Agriculture in Malta. Its members include farmers, consumers, technical people and many others who have the local natural environment at heart. The primary aims of MOAM is to inform the public about Organic Agriculture, share and disseminate ideas and methods for Organic Agriculture, organize the necessary training, represent those who embrace organic principles both locally (in parliamentary circles, administration and policy making) as well as internationally, follow closely the developments in this field, set up and update Organic Agriculture standards for Malta and co-ordinate product certification.

We’ll have a lunch stop at the picnic area along a rural heritage trail just outside the park and managed by a local farmers cooperative. The local produce will include fresh Maltese bread spread with sun dried tomato paste, fresh fruit in season, Maltese crackers with fruit jam and water. Local preserves may also be purchased.

After having lunch, Visions groups will join another educator (from Koperattiva Rurali Manikata) for a walk along their rural heritage trail to visit a small farm; then, we’ll walk up a country lane towards Razzett tal-Qasam, a historic farmstead which has lain in ruins for decades and is now slowly being cleaned and restored. Further along the trail you will be able to visit a World War II beach watch post and an old apiary. [http://www.manikatafarmers.com/historic_farmstead.html](http://www.manikatafarmers.com/historic_farmstead.html)

After our day exploring the national park, we’ll head back to the hotel for rest and relaxation followed by an outing to Malta’s capital city! While Valletta is beautiful in the daylight, it is not to be missed during the night with all its bastions and harbors lit up. This evening, we’ll take a coach from the hotel to Valletta!
Valletta by Night – This evening we’ll enjoy dinner at our hotel and then set off for the Valletta Waterfront. With its nineteen historical 250-year-old sumptuous warehouses built by Grand Master Pinto at the height of the baroque period in Malta... stretching along the water’s edge and the historical Quay Wall where the Knights of St John and European merchants used to unload their wares... the impregnable Old Power Station that serves as a testimony to the eclectic and heroic history of the Grand Harbor... the Forni Stores, dating back to 1626 and constructed by Grand Master de Vilhena.

The Valletta Waterfront is also the gateway to Malta’s capital city, Valletta – a city built by gentlemen for gentlemen. In fact, as one of the most successful Mediterranean ports, the Port of Valletta welcomes more than half-a-million cruise passengers into this open-air museum. All this comes with an added bonus – the majestic setting within the Grand Harbor, a natural deep-water port, for many thousands of years the epicenter of Malta’s maritime activity, a truly exceptional and outstanding backdrop.

Day 3
Breakfast * Lunch * Dinner

Rise and shine Malta! After a buffet breakfast served at the hotel, we’ll set off for Xrobb l-Ghagin Nature Park – Nature Trust Malta. Students will meet local Maltese pupils who will be working with us today. We will join with two groups – students from a local boys’ school and a local girls school.

Our focus will be split between ‘Nature Trust Malta’ and ‘Rocky Shores’ fieldwork where investigation will be conducted and supervised by Malta University & College lecturers. During our day, students will be served with mineral water and fresh fruits and a stop for lunch. A licensed guide will also be joining us to give a commentary on the various historical places and other places of interest which we will be seeing during the day.

Xrobb l-Ghagin Nature Park, Nature Trust Malta – Situated in the south of the island this is the first project of its kind to combine three aspects: Biodiversity, Water and Renewable Energy. Over 15,000 indigenous trees have recently been planted at this coastal location, solar and wind energy aim to provide electricity and wastewater is treated and re-used. www.naturetrustmalta.org/what-we-do/natural-parks/xrobb-l-ghagin
Xrobb l-Għagin Nature Park and Sustainable Development Centre consists of over 155,000 square meters on a jutting peninsula with scenic views in the south east of Malta within the locality of Marsaxlokk. The purpose of the project is education, demonstration and research in sustainable environment solutions with the overall objective of increasing the use of renewable energy, wastewater management and safeguarding biodiversity.

**Renewable Energy**: The site serves as a research area on renewable sources of energy whilst producing energy from wind turbines and photovoltaic panels on site.

**Water and Wastewater** – There will be optimal rainwater harvesting and practical use of both treated wastewater and collected rainwater.

**Biodiversity** – Protection of existing natural habitats, namely garigue, steppe and endemic cliff communities as well as afforestation of over 15,000 trees with indigenous trees and shrubs within degraded areas.

**Energy efficiency measures** and use of natural daylight and ventilation within the buildings to ensure that sustainable living is further promoted.

**Rocky Shores Fieldwork** - This field session will take the form of the following exercise:

- A brief walk on the shore to investigate different shore zones, zonation, biological zero and other features and phenomena discussed during tour.

- A general collecting exercise to compare the biota of rock pools with that of the ‘open’ shore. At the same time participants will familiarize themselves with the commoner biota of the two habitats. The output of the exercise will be a ‘species list’ (in general terms not necessarily down to actual species) and an estimate of the abundance of each ‘species’ in the two habitats. These results will be presented in the form of graphs.

- We will then take a tour of ‘Ghar Dalam’ (Cave of Darkness). Ghar Dalam (pronounced ar dàlam in Maltese) is a prehistorical cul de sac located on the outskirts of Birżebbuġa, Malta containing the bone remains of animals that were stranded and subsequently became extinct on Malta at the end of the Ice age. It has lent its name to the Ghar Dalam phase in Maltese prehistory.
**Ghar Dalam** - Dwarf elephant, hippopotamus, deer and bear bone deposits found there are of a different age; the hippopotamuses became extinct about 180,000 years ago, whilst the deer species became extinct much later, about 18,000 years ago. It is also here that the earliest evidence of human settlement on Malta, some 7,400 years ago, was discovered.

Later, we’ll return to the hotel to relax and refresh. We’ll pick-up our packed dinner and head out for an enchanting evening of astronomy!

**Sunset Walk & Night Sky Master Class** – In Conjunction with the Astronomical Society of Malta, schools will enjoy a short nature walk at sunset time followed by a guided astronomy session. This activity includes use of a Dobsonian Telescope and is orchestrated by members of the Astronomical Society as well as a nature guide. (NOTE – the activity may not be held if skies are overcast or rainy.)

**Day 4**
* Breakfast * Lunch * Dinner

Good morning Malta! After a buffet breakfast served at the hotel, students will again meet with local Maltese pupils. Our focus will be Inland & Coastal Fieldwork where investigation will be conducted and supervised by Malta University & College lecturers. During our day, students will be served with mineral water and fresh fruits and a stop for lunch. A licensed guide will also be joining us to give a commentary on the various historical places and other places of interest which we will be seeing during the day.

**Inland Habitats Fieldwork** - This exercise will consist of a site visit to Buskett Gardens and San Anton Gardens and their environs. During this session, participants will:

- Familiarize themselves with the main species in the woodland and in the garrigue area.
- Draw up identification keys for the main species in each area visited. The objective being to acquaint participants with the main diagnostic structural features for identification of plants.

**Inland & Coastal Habitats Field Trip** - Site visit at Ghajn Tuffieha, where students will be able to view and discuss:
- adlittoral coastal habitats
- beach habitats (including *P. oceanica* banquettes)
- rocky shore habitats
- distribution of benthic habitats as seen from on top of the cliff
- the Rdum Majjiesa/Ras ir-Raheb marine protected area

**Foresta 2000 and/or Ghadir Nature Reserve Field Trip** - The visit is basically a walk through the east part of Foresta 2000, known as It-Taflijja, with stops and investigations made into the various natural habitats that exist there or are being restored. The main focus will be on the flora and the fauna of the site, their ecology and their adaptations to the needs of that particular habitat, plus some additional information about geography, history and management of an exciting project!
Next stop – Olives!

**Olive Oil Master Class** - Today we will also learn about the Maltese Olives, the Olive Oil production and the history and cultivation of the Maltese Olive Trees. We will visit Sammy’s olive tree gardens in the hilltop village of Wardija. Visions schools will tour the olive press and grove, listen to an explanation about the process of olive oil by Sam – a professional in this field. Then we will taste the oil with some fresh Maltese bread, local cheeses, sun dried tomatoes and olives all marinated in olive oil with some local wine. All students will receive a bottle of the Wardija Olive oil.

After Lunch we will head for St. Paul’s Bay to explore the world beneath us!

**Underwater Safari Master Class** - adds a new dimension to the phrase "Visiting Malta". Now you can also see what lies beneath the sea that surrounds St. Paul’s Islands or discover the wonders of the world beneath the sea around the scenic coasts from our unique purpose-built Underwater Safari. Each safari location has been carefully chosen to ensure maximum passenger comfort and provide optimum viewing interest. From the observation keel you will see breath taking underwater sights - diverse species of fish darting in and out through dramatic sea-bed formations the occasional octopus languidly looking for a snack or a more comfortable cave to nap in; swaying forests of multi-hued algae and much more. You will be gliding through and identifying the marine life that inhabits in the Maltese water - the clearest waters in the Mediterranean. Of course, we will be led by a Marine Biology specialist!
Afterwards, we’ll enjoy dinner at our hotel and an open evening for rest or exploration!

**Day 5**
Breakfast * Lunch

Rise and shine Malta! After breakfast we’ll pack our bags and check out of our hotel. We’re not yet through with Malta though - full speed ahead!

**Mdina** - After breakfast we will visit the Old Capital City. It was inhabited and possibly first fortified by the Phoenicians around 700 BC. The Phoenicians called it Maleth. The region benefits from its strategic location on one of the island’s highest points and at maximum distance from the sea. Under the Roman Empire Malta became a Municipium and the Roman Governor built his palace in Mdina. Tradition holds that the Apostle St. Paul resided in the city after his historical shipwreck on the islands. Much of its present architecture reflects the Fatimid Period which began in 999 AD until the Norman conquest of Malta in 1091 AD. The Normans surrounded the city with thick defensive fortifications and widened the moat. The city was also separated from its nearest town, Rabat.

Malta passed to the Order of Knights of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem in 1530 AD. Mdina hosted the public ceremony in which each Grand Master swore an oath to protect the Maltese Islands and the rights of his subjects. A strong earthquake in 1693 AD led to the introduction of Baroque design within the cityscape. The Knights of Malta rebuilt the cathedral, to the designs of Maltese architect Lorenzo Gafa. Palazzo Falzon, the Magisterial Palace and major restoration works are other projects undertaken by the Knights. The monumental gateway was designed by the French architect and military engineer Charles François de Mondion in 1724. Also, the entrance found today is not the original one, as the original south gate is about 100 meters to the left.

While in Mdina we will visit the Museum of Natural History.

**The National Museum of Natural History** - the national repository of biological specimens and represents both life and earth sciences. The Museum houses some historically important collections, with the reference collection holding over 10,000 rocks and minerals, over 3,500 birds, birds’ eggs and nests, 200 mammals, over 200 fish species, thousands of local and exotic shells and insects. The fossil collection is also noteworthy as it contains a number of large fish, numerous species of sea urchins and other marine fauna found embedded in limestone rocks.

The museum focuses mainly on the faunal aspects of natural sciences and the current displays cover themes such as human evolution, insects, birds, habitats and marine ecosystems. The Geology and Paleontology displays are of particular merit and are of both local and international interest. The museum also houses a reference library on natural sciences.

After, we’ll stop for a pizza lunch served in a Mdina restaurant, then, if time permitting, head to Marsaxlokk!

Dinner will be in restaurant in the vicinity of the hotel.

**Marsaxlokk** – is an interesting place to learn about the traditional fishing practices, the various types of traditional boats and will be able to meet local fishermen who will share their sea stories with us!
If time permits, we’ll drive past the beautiful Blue Grotto!

Afterwards we’ll start to say goodbye to this wonderful land! We will wave to our new friends as we leave for the airport and hopefully, take away memories that will last a lifetime!
ADDITIONAL OPTIONS
Pricing applies to all passengers travelling

Day 1: Luzzu Harbor Cruise - While admiring the beauty of the natural harbors of Malta, we will embark on a traditional fishing boat, known as a ‘Luzzu.’ We will start our discovery of the Islands of Malta, both on land and at sea. The Luzzu will take us around the Grand Harbor, its creeks and the surrounding history which will be explained by our guide. Onboard one can refresh with soft drinks and mineral water accompanied by Maltese nibbles. This option can be added to your itinerary on arrival day as an alternative transportation method to your hotel.
Fee - €28 per person based on 30 minimum; pricing subject to change

Day 1: Welcome Dinner on Beach with Guitarist - Everyone is to relax under the clear blue Mediterranean sky and the fresh breeze of the Malta Sea while our guitarist will keep us company. We will also have Maltese personnel who will be more than happy to answer any questions which the students might have. The idea behind this is for the students to get familiar with the Maltese way of life and it is also a warming up for the days they have in front of them while in Malta. A packed dinner consisting of cold cuts, cold meats, fresh salads, Maltese bread, fresh fruits and mineral water/fruit juices. Includes transportation if required (based on accommodation location).
Fee - €23 per person; €200 for guitarist; pricing subject to change

Additional evening activities may also be added to your itinerary. Upon arrival in Malta, please consult your Representative for available options and applicable rates.
Educational Support

This program is a Visions Exclusive and is supported by:

- Nature Trust (Malta)
- Il-Majjistral Nature and History Park
- Manikata Farmers
- The Astronomical Society of Malta

The educators featured and providing service for this program are:

**Annalise Falzon** BA, Dip.Env.Sc. Ms. Falzon works part-time as the Communications Officer and Nature Walks Guide at Il-Majjistral Nature and History Park ([www.majjistral.org](http://www.majjistral.org)). She is a licensed tourist guide (specializing in nature walks) as well as an environmental educator mainly working with the non-profit NGO Nature Trust (Malta).

**Victoria Caruana** is a qualified teacher at St Albert, the Great College Malta. Ms. Caruana teaches Biology and Chemistry and also the Biology Department Head for the Secretariat for Catholic Education.

**Joe Tonna** is a Malta tourism specialist from CIS Malta.

Joe, Annalise and Victoria will also be looking after Visions groups while in Malta.

Parts of our programs have been generously subsidized for our Visions schools by CIS Malta, Sammy’s Olive Tree Gardens & Underwater Safari Malta.
**MALTESE STEM**

**Minimum Booking Numbers:**
20 students

**What’s Included:**
- Roundtrip flights with a scheduled carrier
- 4-nights’ accommodation
- Breakfasts, lunches & dinners in destination
- Transportation to activities shown in Itinerary
- Malta Cap & Pack
- Mellieha National Park
- Organic Agriculture Master Class
- Rural Heritage Trail Master Class
- Valletta by Night Excursion
- Biodiversity, Water & Energy Master Class
- Rocky Shore Fieldwork Master Class
- Ghar Dalam visit
- Astronomy Master Class
- Underwater Safari Master Class
- Inland Habitats Fieldwork Master Class
- Coastal Habitats Fieldwork Master Class
- Foresta 200 or Ghadira Nature Reserve Excursion
- Olive Oil Master Class
- Mdina City Excursion
- Museum of Natural History Excursion
- Marsaxlokk Excursion
- Dedicated Visions Ambassador
- 24-hour emergency cover

**What’s Not Included:**
- Fully comprehensive insurance (mandatory)
- Transfers to/from home airport if travelling via air
- Transportation for activities not shown in the itinerary
- Cost of visas, full or collective passports
- Cost of inoculations or medication required for travel
- Sightseeing / Entertainment Options not shown
- Luzzu Harbor Cruise to Hotel (additional cost)
- Hotel incidental deposits & bills – meals, mini-bar items, recreation, purchases billed to room, etc
- Any gratuities – coach drivers, maid / bellman services, area guides, tour ambassador

As always, our staff are always available to you to answer any questions you may have regarding programming. If we may serve you in any way, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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