



HAVE YOU EVER....?

Have you ever visited the street or the house where you, your parents or grandparents grew up during your last holiday in Malta?



WHO HAD IT HARDER?

Those who left...
or those who stayed?



For so many Maltese families, leaving Malta was never just one person's journey. There were those who packed a suitcase, said goodbye to everything familiar and sailed towards an uncertain new life. And there were those who stood on the shore and watched them go wondering when, or even if, they would all be together again. There was sacrifice on both sides. There was courage on both sides. And there were tears on both sides. This isn't about who had it harder. It's about remembering what those goodbyes meant to an entire generation of Maltese families. Was this part of your family's story? Perhaps you were the one who left... or perhaps you were the one who stayed behind. We'd love to hear your memories.



Our goal is to build bridges—not only between Maltese people living abroad and their homeland but also connecting Maltese communities all around the world. This mission is shared by the Council for Maltese Living Abroad, (CMLA) which was established by the Maltese Government. In 1950s, the Church set up the Malta Emigrants Commission to support Maltese migrants starting a new life in other countries. Today, the Commission welcomes and assists the migrants and refugees who now look to Malta as their home



How Much of Malta Still Remains?

Matthew Gollche

We have already told the story of why they went; [the poverty and overcrowding of the post-war islands](#), [the government schemes](#), [the six-week voyage](#), [the suitcases](#), [the promise of Australia](#). That article ends where this one begins: with a

Maltese family standing on a dock at the other end of the world, about to become something new. This is what happened next, and it is a harder, more interesting question than the leaving. Because the leaving was a single decision. What came after was seventy years of small ones: whether to speak Maltese to your children, whether to marry within the community, whether to drive an hour to the festa, whether the grandchildren would know what a ġbejna was.

Today, Australia is home to the largest Maltese diaspora on earth. But the community is at a genuine turning point, and the numbers tell the story with unusual clarity. So: how much of Malta still remains? We went to the census data, the linguistic research and the community's own scholars for an honest answer, and it turns out to be part loss, part stubborn survival, and part something nobody expected.

The Numbers & a Widely-Repeated Error

Start with the headline figure. In the 2021 Australian Census, 198,989 people reported Maltese ancestry, and 35,413 people living in Australia had actually been born in Malta. That makes Maltese-Australians roughly 0.78% of the Australian population, and it makes Australia, comfortably, home to the world's largest community of Maltese descent, far ahead of Canada (around 40,670 by ancestry in 2021) or the United Kingdom.

Here a small correction is worth making, because it appears in some surprisingly official places. You will frequently see the figure 234,402 quoted for Maltese-Australians, including on the Australian Government's own Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade country brief. But that number is a double-count. DFAT's own briefing document explains its arithmetic: it takes the 198,989 people with Maltese ancestry, adds the 35,413 people born in Malta, and totals them at 234,402. The problem is that almost everyone born in Malta and living in Australia would also report Maltese ancestry, so the two groups overlap almost entirely, and adding them counts most of those people twice. Tellingly, DFAT's own 'fast facts' box on the same page gives the correct figure of 198,989.

The honest number, then, is just under 200,000, which is remarkable enough. It means that for every two people living in Malta today, there is roughly one person in Australia who claims Maltese descent.

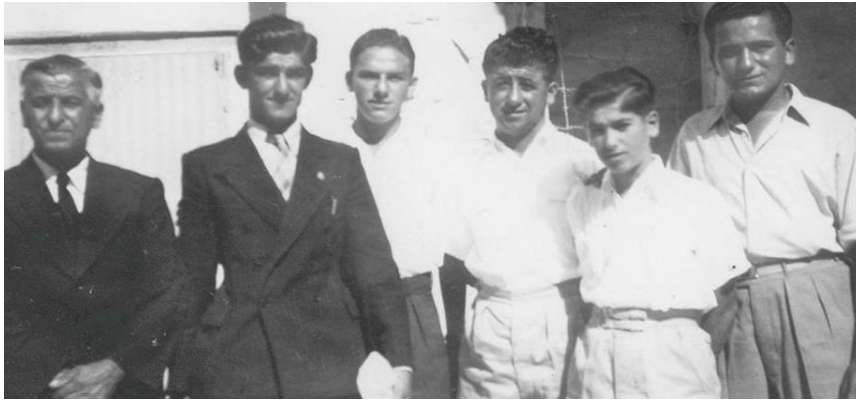
The Clock that is Running Out

The median age of Malta-born Australians is 72, and more than three-quarters of them are aged 65 or over. Migration from Malta to Australia has effectively stopped. The generation that carried Malta across the world is now, unavoidably, leaving it.

Beneath those headline numbers is a demographic fact that shapes everything else in this article, and it is a poignant one.

Of the 35,413 Malta-born people counted in Australia in 2021, 27,140, some 76.6%, were aged 65 or over. Their median age was 72. At the other end of the scale, just 0.3% were children under 15. This is not a population with a next generation coming through; it is a single cohort growing old together, the men and women who sailed in the 1950s and 1960s, now in their seventies and eighties.

And there is no replenishment. Migration from Malta to Australia has, for practical purposes, stopped. In Victoria, the state with the largest Maltese community in Australia, only 0.4% of the



Malta-born population arrived in the five years to 2021. The reasons are entirely happy ones: Malta's independence brought better economic prospects at home, and EU membership in 2004 opened Europe to Maltese workers, making a job in Brussels or Berlin far easier than a new life twelve thousand miles away. The great emigration is simply over.

The Malta-born population is therefore shrinking with each census: roughly 41,300 in 2011, 37,600 in 2016, 35,413 in 2021. Which means the question 'how much of Malta remains?' is really a question about what the second and third generations have kept, because within a couple of decades, they will be all there is.

Where Malta Lives on the Australian Map

Breakdown of the Maltese community in Australia.

Malta did not scatter evenly across Australia. It concentrated, and it stayed concentrated, which is one of the main reasons anything survived at all.

The two great centres are Melbourne and Sydney. Victoria has the largest Maltese community in the country, with 81,542 people of Maltese ancestry and 16,844 born in Malta; among the Malta-born nationally, some 47.6% live in Victoria and 38.1% in New South Wales, with about 7% in Queensland. Greater Sydney alone counted 11,336 Malta-born residents in 2021.

Zoom in further and the map becomes strikingly specific. In Melbourne, Maltese migrants settled first in the western suburbs, above all Sunshine and St Albans, and then, as families prospered, moved outward into newer neighbouring suburbs such as Caroline Springs, Taylors Lakes and Hillside, the last of which now records the highest rate of Maltese ancestry in Melbourne. In Sydney, the community clustered in the west too, particularly around Greystanes and Horsley Park.

This clustering matters enormously. A community spread thinly across a continent loses its language and customs within a generation. A community that lives in the same suburbs, attends the same parishes, joins the same clubs and marries within its own circles can hold on for three or four. Western Sydney and western Melbourne are, in a real sense, where Malta went.

The Language: The Clearest Measure of Loss

Maltese travelling to Australia in search of work, and a new life.

If you want a single number for how much of Malta remains, the language is the bluntest one available and it is sobering.

Against nearly 199,000 people of Maltese ancestry, only around 27,000 people speak Maltese at home in Australia, according to the 2021 Census. That is roughly one in seven. Put another way: about six out of every seven Australians who call themselves Maltese do not speak the language in their own house.

The trend is downward and well documented. Ethnologue reported around 36,000 Maltese speakers



in Australia in 2006, down from a considerably higher figure in the 1990s; the 2021 figure of roughly 27,000 continues that decline, and it will fall further as the Malta-born generation passes. Malta itself accounts for most of the world's roughly half a million Maltese speakers; the entire global diaspora contributes something in the

order of 79,000.

What is striking is that Maltese has fared worse than some comparable community languages in Australia. Research by the linguist Borland (2005) into Maltese as a community language found that the children of Maltese migrants typically did not continue speaking Maltese at home as often as children in other ethnic communities did with theirs.

Why? Several factors combined. The Maltese arrived already bilingual, Malta has been officially bilingual in Maltese and English since 1934, and English was the language of the colonial administration many migrants had grown up under. Unlike Greek or Italian migrants, they did not need to hold on to their language in order to function; they could integrate immediately. Many actively wanted their children to speak flawless Australian English, and consciously chose not to pass Maltese on, a decision made with love, and regretted by many later. And Maltese is a small language with no great international leverage: there was no obvious practical argument for keeping it.

The Surprise: Australia Grew its own Maltese

Maltese-Australians keeping Maltese food culture alive in Australia

Here, though, is the thing almost nobody expects. Before Maltese in Australia began to fade, it did something remarkable: it started to evolve into something new.

Linguists have documented a distinct Australian variety of the Maltese language, known as Maltrian, in Maltese, *Il-Maltraljan*. It is what linguists call an ethnolect: a form of Maltese shaped by decades of contact with Australian English, marked by code-switching, borrowed vocabulary and structural shifts that set it apart from the Maltese spoken in Malta. The term was coined by the linguist Roderick Bovingdon, himself of Maltese descent, who went on to produce the first full academic documentation of the variety in his book on the Maltese ethnolect of Australia.

And it is not a recent phenomenon. The earliest traces appear in the writings of Charles Parnis, the first Maltese journalist in Australia, whose publications from 1929 already contained expressions and vocabulary not found in standard Maltese, which means the Australian variety was taking shape even before then, among a community that was still tiny.

There is something rather moving in this. The Maltese language, itself the last living descendant of Siculo-Arabic, a language that survived a thousand years of Mediterranean upheaval, landed in Australia and immediately began doing what it has always done: absorbing, adapting, becoming local. Malta did not simply preserve itself in Australia. For a while, it kept growing.

The Three Generations: An Honest Pattern

Maltese museum in Australia, located approximately two hours from Melbourne, Australia.

Academic work on Maltese associations in Australia describes a clear generational pattern, and it is the single most useful framework for answering our question.

The first generation, those who left Malta after the war, spoke Maltese as their everyday language and carried the culture whole: the food, the faith, the festas, the village loyalties, the whole texture of the islands they had left.

The second generation, born in Australia, typically understands Maltese, often very well, from hearing

it at home and from grandparents, but has neither much opportunity nor much need to speak it outside the family. Crucially, though, this generation has largely kept the culture alive: they run the clubs, organise the festas, cook the food, and maintain the institutions.



The third generation, raised in a thoroughly cosmopolitan Australia, typically does not speak Maltese at all, but keeps what the researchers carefully call 'remnants' of the culture. And this is where the answer to our question gets interesting, because 'remnants' sounds like very little, and in practice it is not nothing at all. A third-generation Maltese-Australian may not be able to hold a conversation in Maltese, but may still go to the festa every August, still know exactly how their grandmother made her rabbit, still cross themselves at the same moments, still call themselves Maltese without hesitation, and still feel a jolt of recognition at the sight of a Maltese cross.

Identity, it turns out, is more durable than language. It is also thinner.

What Actually Survives: The Festa, The Faith, The Clubs

The Good Friday procession at Horsley Park, Sydney, has been celebrated since 1986 with statues imported from Malta. The festa of Our Lady Queen of Peace at Greystanes has run every October since 1965. These are not tourist events. They are the Maltese community maintaining, at considerable effort, a connection to an island most of their grandchildren have never lived on.

If the language is the measure of what has been lost, three things stand out as what has been kept. The first is the festa. The Maltese village feast, the statue, the procession, the band, the food, the fierce local pride, travelled to Australia and stayed. Maltese communities across the country still stage festas dedicated to the same patrons celebrated back home, from Santa Marija in August to San Nikola, organised by dedicated festa committees under the community councils. For many second- and third-generation families, the festa is the single most important annual expression of being Maltese — and, tellingly, it works perfectly well in English.

The second is the Church. An overwhelming 91.6% of the Maltese community in Australia identifies as Catholic, and the parish has been central to Maltese settlement since the earliest years. Maltese chaplaincies, Maltese-language Masses and parish networks provided the community's original infrastructure, and the faith has proved considerably more transmissible across generations than the language has.

The third is the club and council network. The Maltese Community Council of New South Wales and the Maltese Community Council of Victoria, together with dozens of local clubs and associations, remain the organisational backbone of Maltese-Australian life, running festas, cultural events, welfare services for ageing members and language programmes. Maltese-language radio has broadcast on Australia's ethnic community stations for decades. Maltese-language schools have operated since the late 1960s.



The diplomatic scaffolding is substantial too: Malta has maintained a High Commission in Canberra since 1964, with Consulates-General in Sydney and Melbourne and honorary consulates in Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia, a diplomatic footprint far larger than a country of half a

million people would normally justify anywhere, and one that exists precisely because of the diaspora. In 2024 the two countries marked sixty years of diplomatic relations.

The Fight for the Language

The decline of Maltese in Australia has not gone unresisted, and one story captures the effort particularly well.

In the mid-1990s, a second-generation Maltese-Australian in Sydney named Rhonda Balzan attended a conference in Malta where she heard research presented on the Maltese community of Toronto, its migration patterns, its assimilation, its language loss across the second and third generations, the grief around cultural identity, and the way the culture had thinned into a few tokens. She was struck by how exactly the Toronto story matched Sydney's: you could, she said, simply substitute one city for the other.

She came home and, in 1996, formed a 'Friends of the Maltese Language Interest Group' with two other women, and set about building a proper Maltese language school. It took three years of persuasion, and the obstacle was not the young. It was the community's own elders, who were convinced there was 'no interest from the youth' and that the language was already lost. The Maltese Language School of New South Wales exists today because somebody refused to accept that.

It is a small story that says something larger. The most common reason a heritage language dies is not that the grandchildren reject it, it is that everyone assumes they will.

Pastizzi, and the Maltese-Australian Face

Pastizzi, a traditional Maltese pastry, being made in Australia.

There is one piece of Malta that has travelled better than any other, and it will surprise nobody: the food.



Maltese communities in Australia have been producing pastizzi, the flaky ricotta and pea pastries that are Malta's national snack, for generations, and they remain one of the most reliable markers of Maltese identity in the country. When the Oxford English Dictionary formally admitted the word pastizz to English in

January 2026, it specifically noted that both the food and the word have travelled internationally with the Maltese diaspora, with Australia named first. The pastizz outlasted the grammar.

And then there are the faces. Maltese-Australians have become thoroughly woven into Australian public life. Joe Camilleri, born in Malta on 21 May 1948, the third of ten children, brought to Australia at the age of two and raised in Port Melbourne, became one of the genuine legends of Australian rock as Jo Jo Zep, and was inducted into the ARIA Hall of Fame in 2007; his 2021 album with The Black Sorrows was his fiftieth release. Tash Sultana, born in Melbourne in 1995 and of Maltese ancestry on

their father's side, became one of Australia's most distinctive musical exports, a one-person band playing up to fifteen instruments. Maltese surnames; Azzopardi, Camilleri, Bonnici, Buttigieg, Vella, Tedesco, Cassar, turn up across Australian newsrooms, football codes, politics and business. There is a nice symmetry in that surname list, incidentally. These are the same names we have traced in our surname articles back to medieval Arabic nicknames; the poulterer, the man with the moustache, the grey-haired one. Those names survived the Arab period, the Knights, the British, and then crossed the Indian Ocean to end up in the credits of Australian television. Maltese surnames have proved to be the single most durable Maltese export of all.

So How Much of Malta Still Remains?

The honest answer has three parts.

Less than there was, and the decline is real and measurable. The language is going: one in seven, and falling. The generation that was actually born in Malta is in its seventies and eighties, and there is no new migration behind it. Within twenty or thirty years, Maltese-Australia will consist almost entirely of people who have never lived in Malta, and mostly of people who cannot speak its language.

More than you would expect, and more than the language figures alone suggest. Nearly 199,000 people still actively claim Maltese ancestry on a census form, a deliberate act of identification, not an accident of birth. The festas still fill suburban streets. The clubs still run. The councils still organise. The pastizzi are still made. The parishes are still Maltese. And the third generation, most of whom cannot say more than a few words of Maltese, still overwhelmingly call themselves Maltese, which is, in the end, a choice they did not have to make.

And something genuinely new. This is the part that the language-loss story misses. Malta in Australia did not simply erode; for a period, it created, a distinct Australian dialect of Maltese, documented by linguists, that existed nowhere else on earth. Maltese-Australians are not a diluted version of Maltese people. They are their own thing: a community with its own history, its own institutions, its own accent, its own hybrid identity, and its own claim on the islands.

Which is, when you think about it, exactly what Malta has always done. The Maltese identity was itself assembled out of Phoenician traders, Arab settlers, Sicilian nobles, French Knights and British administrators, absorbing everything, becoming something new, and remaining unmistakably itself throughout. That a Maltese community twelve thousand miles away should do the same thing, absorb Australia, change, and still insist on being Maltese, is not a betrayal of the tradition. It is the tradition.

They left with suitcases. What they carried has been worn down by three generations of distance, and it is thinner than it was. But it is very far from gone, and every August, in the suburbs of Sydney



MS Skaubryn

and Melbourne, you can hear it: a Maltese band, playing for a Maltese saint, in front of families who have never seen the island they are singing about.

MS Skaubryn was a Norwegian passenger ship launched in 1950, which sailed between Europe and Australia. She sank in the Indian Ocean in April 1958, after a fire.

The story of the Maltese bound for Australia aboard Skaubryn occupies a unique place since it was the only occasion when a number of emigrants were for a time in great danger.

The ship made six voyages between Malta and Australia from 1952 to her journey in 1958. On that

fateful journey, the ship carried 169 passengers from Malta, while in all she had on her 1,082

passengers with 208 members of the crew. Among the passengers were 200 children and 40 babies. The Maltese had their chaplain with them, Fr S. Tabone from Kalkara. He was going to visit his two brothers, who had left Malta eight years before. The Skaubryn left Grand Harbour on March 22, 1958, and after a short stop at Port Said, the ship passed Aden to enter the vastness of the Indian Ocean. That ocean was incredibly calm, and the ship continued on its way in a very relaxed atmosphere.

On Monday, March 31, Captain Alf Haakon Feste ordered his crew and passengers to meet on deck at 2.30 pm for an emergency drill. Some of the people on board complained about this interference as they preferred their siesta at that time. Once the drill was over, some of the passengers went to the hall where a band was playing with a few dancers on the floor. It was very calm and very hot. As darkness fell, many went to their cabins for the night's sleep. All one could hear was the regular humming of the ship's engines.

Fr Tabone decided that he too needed a good sleep because he had to be up by 5.00 am. But suddenly the lights in his cabin dimmed, and then there was complete darkness. The priest could hear people moving excitedly. His first thought was that some passengers had decided to go on deck to watch the Soviet satellite Sputnik, as they had been told that there was a good chance of seeing the satellite from their position in the ocean.

The reason for the commotion was that. The engine room was on fire. According to the report given by Captain Feste, the fire was caused by a misunderstanding between two members of the crew when they caused oil from an open line in the engine room to spurt on hot exhaust pipes. In a very short time, all passengers on board were told which lifeboats they had to take. This efficiency saved the lives of all concerned except for an elderly German who died of a heart attack. The ocean remained mercifully calm.

Luckily, the merchant ship City of Sydney happened to be nearby, and she picked up all the passengers. From, her decks, the migrants could watch with awe their own Skaubryn being devoured by the flames. It was April 1. The City of Sydney had accommodation for only thirty passengers. Messages for help were sent to any possible vessel that happened to be near the area. The luxury liner Roma, under the captain Nimira, picked up the messages and was soon near the City of Sydney. The Roma was on her return journey from Australia to Italy.

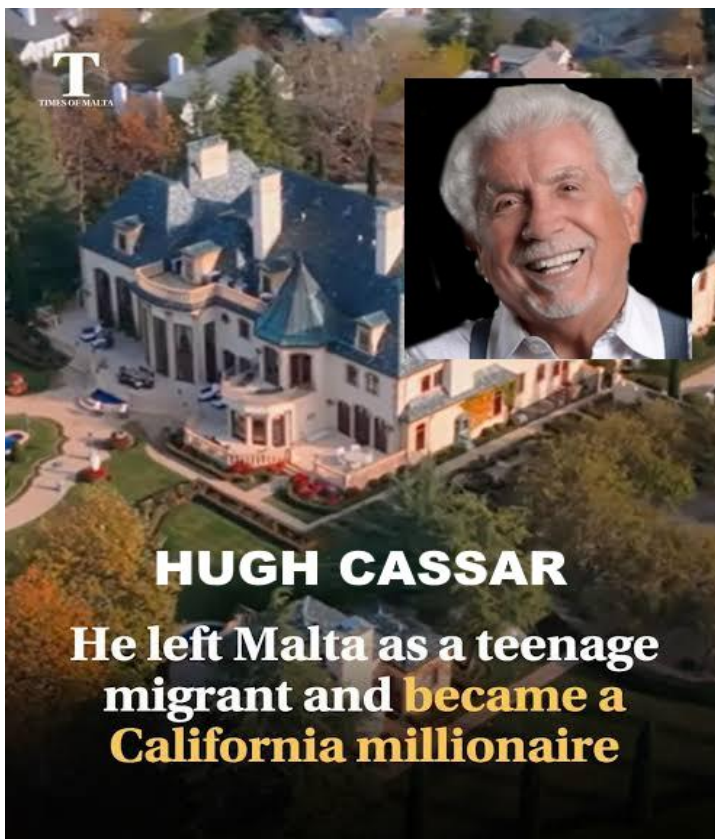
Priest Tabone remembered everything in detail. "All of us were taken on board the Italian luxury vessel. The crew fed us and gave us new clothes. Some of the passengers gave up their cabins to those of us who needed rest. The Roma took us to Aden, where we disembarked on Good Friday. We were in Aden for three days, and the local authorities treated us very kindly. We were given \$10 as pocket money. In Aden, we knew that our relatives in Malta and Australia had been told what had happened to us.

A Maltese bride, Evellina Vassallo, was going to Australia to get married. She lost everything, including her cherished wedding dress. After three days, we were taken by the Orsova to continue our journey to Australia. When we arrived at Fremantle, we were met by the local authorities and by the Maltese Commissioner, who stayed with us until we reached Melbourne. The Commissioner offered us. \$50 each in the name of the Government of Malta. Those who were in the age group between fourteen to twenty were given \$25 each, and \$10 was given to all youngsters under the age of fourteen years". While on the Orsova, the survivors received a telegram from Mr A.R. Downer, Minister for Immigration in Canberra. It said:

"On behalf of the Government and the People, I welcome you to Australia. We sympathise with you in your loss and congratulate you on your safe deliverance. In Australia, you will find friends anxious to help you settle happily. I look forward to personally greeting you on your arrival in Melbourne. 17th April 1958."

More financial backing was forthcoming. The Australian Government gave \$20,000 in compensation, while philanthropic bodies such as the Australian Red Cross and the St Vincent de Paul Society donated money and clothes.

Echoes of the Skaubryn Saga were heard thirty-six years later when another passenger ship met the same fate as the Skaubryn in the Indian Ocean. The Achille Lauro had carried hundreds of Maltese emigrants to Australia in the twenty-five trips she had made in five years between April 1966 and November 1971. In later years, the Achille Lauro became a popular luxury liner. On October 7, 1985, she was on the international news when she was hijacked by four Palestinian guerrillas. Nine years later, on November 30, 1994, the same liner was on a cruise on the Indian Ocean when a disastrous fire broke out and was soon out of control. On board were a thousand tourists. All were saved except three. She burned for two days when she finally wound down in an area not far from where the Skaubryn had sunk in 1958.



He left Malta as a teenage migrant and became a California millionaire

‘I am just a human being who managed to survive leaving Malta at the age of 15’

The 14,000-square-foot castle in California, belonging to Maltese entrepreneur Hugh Cassar.

Hugh Cassar left Malta at the age of 15 in the aftermath of World War II to build a new life abroad. Today, aged 89, Cassar owns a sprawling [\\$34.9 million castle](#) in California.

A leading importer and distributor of clove cigarettes and later premium cigars and smoking accessories in the US, Cassar leveraged persistence, unconventional deal-making, and a willingness to start small and scale gradually.

The Maltese entrepreneur, also known as Hugo, recently drew local attention after a video clip surfaced showing him attempting to sell one of his properties: a vast estate in Lake Sherwood, California.

The clip features Cassar presenting the 14,000-square-foot Château Plaisance, located within the exclusive Lake Sherwood Country Club. The property includes six bedrooms, 11 bathrooms, a Baccarat crystal chandelier, hand-painted murals, a marble staircase and its own ‘Hall of Mirrors’, similar to that in Versailles.

Amid the opulence, one thing stands out: Cassar’s enduring pride in his Maltese roots.

“I am very proud to be from Malta,” he told *Times of Malta*.

His office is decorated with paintings of Malta and photographs of him alongside several Maltese prime ministers, including Lawrence Gonzi and Joseph Muscat.

Despite his success, Cassar appeared modest about his newfound local fame. Laughing sheepishly, he said: “I am just a human being who managed to survive leaving Malta at 15 years old.”

Cassar was born in 1936 in Triq San Piju, Sliema. He recalls a happy childhood as an altar boy at Stella Maris church and attending the Seminary before continuing his studies at St Albert the Great in Valletta. Yet his memories of wartime Malta remain incredibly vivid.

"I remember the air raids three times a day and the German bombs falling on roofs. I remember people running into the shelters as they were crying and praying. People walking through all the rubble on the street from the broken-down homes. People do not understand what we went through."

By the time the war ended, Cassar was nine years old. Like many Maltese families at the time, he looked overseas in search of better opportunities.

Advertisement. His father, Edwardu, had served in the Royal Air Force for several years, despite originally training as a hairdresser. After the war, the family considered emigrating to Australia but ultimately decided against it.

"My dad used to say there was no way he would go there because it's the end of the world."

Instead, they chose Canada, a popular destination for Maltese emigrants in the 1950s. Between 1946 and 1981, more than 18,000 Maltese are believed to have migrated there.

The Cassar family settled in Toronto, where Hugh, the eldest of five children, quickly took on responsibility. 'We were immigrants trying to get by' "I didn't want to go to school. I wanted to help my mother and father. You know, we were immigrants trying to get by," he said.

He worked while continuing his studies, eventually graduating from the University of Toronto at the age of 29 with a degree in business and finance. By then, he was married with three children.

It was at this stage that he made another life-changing decision: to leave Canada for California.

"It's the idea of it, the fact it's warm, and you can make more money to support your family there. I just love it."

However, his early days in California were far from easy. "We didn't have a place to live. I didn't have a job. And I had this family to take care of!" Arriving in Sausalito, near San Francisco, with his children urging him to return to Canada, Cassar spotted a moving van and seized an opportunity. He persuaded a landlord to rent him a property.

I got a place, but I didn't have anything to put in it, so I rented us out some folding beds- Hugh Cassar
"I got a place, but I didn't have anything to put in it, so I rented us out some folding beds."

From those modest beginnings, Cassar began to rebuild his life. After working for an accounting firm, the family moved to Los Angeles, where he took up a role as chief accountant at a hospital.

He later relocated to Thousand Oaks, where a new hospital was under construction. There, he worked as a hospital specialist, helping to set up operational systems. The project proved successful and marked a turning point in his career.

With growing financial stability, Cassar purchased his first home for \$38,000 on a cul-de-sac.

"I went into the medical field managing hospitals all over the world," he said. After a decade in the sector, he decided to venture into business independently. This eventually led him into real estate and the importation of cigarettes.

In 1983, he founded Kretek International, which imports Indonesian clove cigarettes.

When major cigar companies refused access to their products, he partnered with a manufacturer to create his own cigar brands and then even sent employees to Nicaragua to learn cigar-making from scratch. Based in Moorpark, California, the company has since grown into a major distributor of specialty tobacco products and cannabis accessories across North America.

Among its products are Hugo Cassar cigars, which prominently feature Maltese symbols, including the Maltese falcon and the eight-pointed cross.

"I've got the Maltese cross on everything. It's all over my ranch, even in my theatre there's a Maltese cross in the ceiling. As you can tell I am proud to tell everybody I'm Maltese."

Cassar also served as Malta's Consul General in Southern California for 20 years, a role he described as an honour. His son, Mark, has since taken over the position. Despite his wealth and property portfolio, which includes a castle and a ranch, Cassar does not own a home in Malta. However, he has not ruled out the possibility.



Requested by Eddie Camilleri - Australia

BIRKIRKARA

Ta' Sormhom Ċatt

The flat-bottomed people



The story behind the nickname

According to local folklore, the people of Birkirkara were given the nickname Ta' Sormhom Ċatt (the flat-bottomed people) after a well-known incident while hoisting a large church bell into position, such as for the Basilica of St. Helen.

As the story goes, hundreds of villagers were pulling on the heavy ropes when a rope or cable suddenly snapped, sending the crowd tumbling backwards onto their posteriors! Neighbouring villages seized on the mishap and turned it into a lasting nickname for the people of Birkirkara.

Like many Maltese village nicknames, it is part of our colourful local folklore.





This space could be yours



SHAUN MICALLEF
Australian Comedian
of Maltese Heritage

MALTESE AUSTRALIAN CELEBRITIES IN AUSTRALIA

Shaun Patrick Micallef is Australia's most diverse writer, comedian and actor, having starred in and written for television, movies, radio and books

- After ten years of working in insurance law as a solicitor in Adelaide, Micallef moved

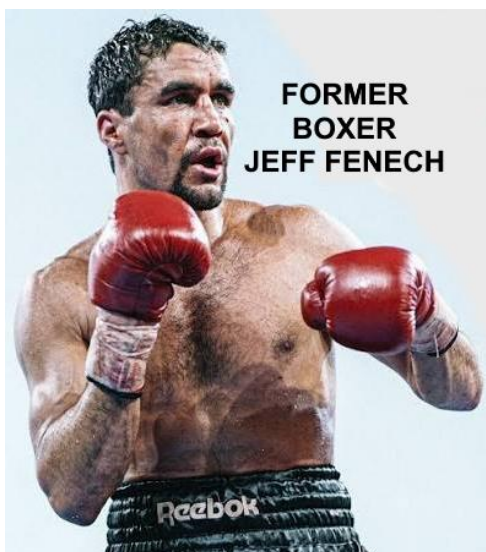
to Melbourne to pursue a full-time comedy career in 1993, after his wife insisted he try it or never talk about it again.

Australian comedian and writer [Shaun Micallef](#) has personal and professional connections to Malta through his family heritage and television work:

Family Heritage: Shaun Micallef is of Maltese and Irish descent. His paternal grandfather Carmello served in the British Navy, and his father **Fred Micallef** immigrated to Australia from Malta at the age of 15 after surviving World War II bombings.

Who Do You Think You Are?: Micallef explored his Maltese ancestry on the genealogy series [Who Do You Think You Are?](#). During the episode, he learned about his great-great-great-grandfather Patrick Sullivan, who fought in the Crimean War and was treated in a hospital associated with Florence Nightingale.

Origin Odyssey: In 2023, Micallef and his then-87-year-old father visited his father's hometown in Malta together for the first time. This trip inspired aspects of his documentary series [*Shaun Micallef's Origin Odyssey*](<https://www.sbs.com.au/ondemand/tv-series/shaun-micallefs-origin-odyssey>) on SBS, which takes Australian comedians back to their family's countries of origin.



**FORMER
BOXER
JEFF FENECH**

- Former Australian world champion boxer [Jeff Fenech](#) is of proud Maltese descent, with his mother hailing from Birżebbuġa and his father having roots in St. Paul's Bay. [[1](#), [2](#)]

- **Background & Maltese Heritage**

- **Family Roots:** Born in St Peters, Sydney, Fenech grew up in a traditional Maltese-Australian family in St Peters and Marrickville.

Visits to Malta: Fenech has visited Malta, including a notable trip in August 2024 where he toured Valletta and the historic Hotel Phoenicia, meeting local boxing figures like Malta's heavyweight champion Billy Corito.

Maltese Identity: He is widely celebrated within the global and Australian-Maltese community as a sporting icon

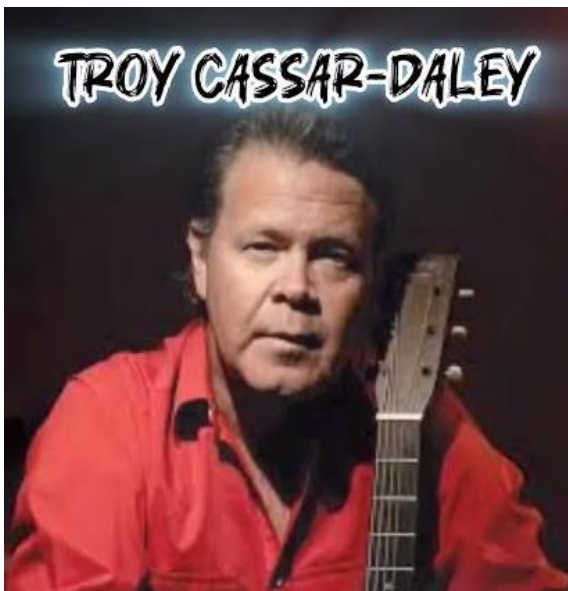
Famous Australian comedian and television presenter [Adam Hills](#) has partial Maltese ancestry, which was explored on the SBS television series *Who Do You Think You Are?*.



- **Key Details of His Maltese Heritage**
- **Family Roots:** His maternal great-grandfather, Giuseppe "Joseph" Vassallo, migrated from Birkirkara, Malta, to Sydney, Australia, in 1912, followed by his wife Rosina in 1914.
- **Woolloomooloo Connection:** The family settled in Woolloomooloo, where Joseph worked on the local wharves.
- **Deep Lineage:** During his appearance on [Who Do You Think You Are?](#), researchers traced his Maltese lineage back 11 generations to a 15th-century judge named Matteo Vassallo (born in 1463).
- **Career Highlights**
- **Spicks and Specks:** Hosted the popular Australian music quiz show on the ABC from 2005 to 2011, and returned for its revival in 2021.

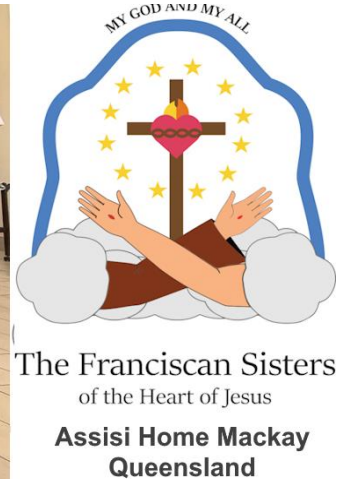
The Last Leg: Has co-hosted the acclaimed UK satirical talk show on Channel 4 since 2012.

Stand-Up & Awards: A multi-award-winning comedian who has toured globally, earned multiple Edinburgh Comedy Award nominations, and been nominated for a Gold Logie.



- Australian country music singer-songwriter [Troy Cassar-Daley](#) is of Maltese-Australian and Indigenous (First Nations Gumbaynggirr and Bundjalung) heritage.
- **Key Details of His Maltese Heritage**
- **Father's Side:** His father, Tony Cassar-Daley, was of Maltese descent.
- **Grandparents:** His Maltese grandmother was Maryanne Cassar (also known as Marianna), whom he has described as a strong, resilient figure who gave birth to 21 children before coming to Australia.
- **Family History & WW2:** His family's Maltese background and the wartime hardships faced by his grandparents in Malta were explored during his appearance on the television genealogy program *Who Do You Think You Are?* (Australia, Season 11, Episode 8).
- **Upbringing:** Growing up, he split his time between

his Aboriginal family in Grafton, New South Wales, and visiting his father in Sydney, keeping him closely connected to both cultural roots



Celebrating 800 Years of St Francis of Assisi

"A sun was born for the world, Francis was his name, and at his rising, the whole earth felt its warmth!" — Dante, Paradiso, Canto XI

On Sunday, 4 October, church bells rang across Assisi, Italy, marking 800 years since the passing of St Francis of Assisi, affectionately known as the "Little Poor Man of Assisi." This historic milestone was a time of thanksgiving, celebrating the enduring legacy of a saint whose humility, simplicity, love for all creation and commitment to peace continue to inspire generations.

For the Franciscan Sisters of the Heart of Jesus, the anniversary was a particularly meaningful occasion to honour their beloved Father in the Franciscan spirit. At Francis of Assisi Home, the Sisters, staff, residents and volunteers came together to celebrate his life and legacy with joy and gratitude.

In the months leading up to the celebration, the Lifestyle Team and residents prepared through creative craft sessions, painting doves as symbols of peace and creating miniature displays inspired by Assisi. A narrated play depicting the story of Francis of Assisi Home also highlighted the values and spirit that continue to shape the community.

The celebrations culminated in a beautiful Eucharistic celebration on Sunday, 4 October, presided over by Bishop Daniel and concelebrated by Fr Matthias, Fr Andrew, Fr Sijo and Fr Gaspar. The uplifting choir, led by Anne Borg, enriched the liturgy, creating a prayerful and joyful atmosphere. Among those present were the Franciscan Sisters, Mackay Mayor Greg Williamson, residents, staff, visitors and friends of the Home, united in thanksgiving for the life and enduring influence of St Francis.

The festivities continued with music, dance and storytelling. Staff danced to *"The Goodness of God"* and *"Worthy of It All,"* while Filipino staff presented the *"Dance of Flowers."* Young Sisters, staff and students also brought the life of St Francis to the stage through a moving performance. A delicious lunch prepared by the kitchen team provided a wonderful opportunity for fellowship and shared joy. Our heartfelt gratitude goes to Bishop Daniel, the concelebrating priests, Mayor Greg Williamson, and all the Sisters, staff, residents, volunteers and friends who contributed to this memorable occasion. We especially thank everyone who worked behind the scenes to make the celebration so meaningful.

As we commemorate 800 years since the passing of St Francis, may his example continue to inspire us to live simply, love deeply, care for all creation and become instruments of peace in our daily lives.

St Francis, pray for us, that we may spread love where there is hatred, hope where there is despair, and peace wherever we go. - Sr Pauline Bonavia



**DOWN UNDER AT
SKOLA MLTIJA SYDNEY**
www.skolamaltija.org

Annemarie Thind
Communications & Enrolment Officer
Public OfficeR - Skola Maltija Sydney

For nearly two decades, Skola Maltija Sydney has been at the heart of preserving and celebrating Maltese identity in New South Wales. As a program of Akkademja Maltija ta' NSW Inc., the community language school offers much more than standard grammar and vocabulary lessons. It provides a vibrant gateway for students of all ages to reconnect with their roots, discover rich traditions, and embrace their heritage.

Across every age group, learning at Skola Maltija Sydney goes hand-in-hand with exploring Malta's fascinating history, geography, folklore and culture. During classes, the language is brought to life through traditional songs and games, historical milestones and customs that shaped the Maltese Islands.

Importantly, learning extends beyond the classroom walls. Students are actively encouraged to participate in Sydney's vibrant Maltese-Australian community. Throughout the year, students participate in Maltese community events and multicultural celebrations across NSW, proudly representing their cultural heritage.

All teaching programs at Skola Maltija Sydney are continuously updated and aligned with the outcomes of the NSW Modern Languages K-10 Syllabus (2022). This ensures that students receive a high-standard, structured, and contemporary language education that is officially recognised on student progress reports for K-12 learners. Students also receive a certificate of participation from the NSW Department of Education in recognition of attending a community language school.

With Term 4 commencing the week of 19 October 2026, the school is thrilled to welcome both new and returning families. This term, students will dive into the cultural unit, *Ikel u Xorb* (Food and Drink), connecting language skills directly to Malta's rich culinary history, traditional recipes and family food customs.

Skola Maltija Sydney caters to a diverse range of learners across face-to-face and online formats:

Primary (K-6): Offered **online** and **face-to-face at Llandilo Public School**. Lessons combine language basics with music, games, storytelling, and community traditions (*NSW Active and Creative Kids vouchers are accepted*).

High School (Years 7-10): Delivered through an **online class**.

For eligible High School students, tuition is fully funded through the Community Language Schools Grants Program (Australian Department of Home Affairs) and the NSW Department of Education.

Adult Beginners & Continuers: A welcoming evening class held **online**, ideal for adults planning a trip to Malta, wanting to converse with family, or wishing to explore their cultural identity in a supportive environment.

Connect with your Heritage today!



Enrolments are processed online, and places fill up quickly. Families and community members interested in enrolling, asking questions, or joining the Skola Maltija Sydney mailing list are encouraged to get in touch prior to the start of term.

Year 6 student, Grace, (second from right) represented the Maltese community as a member of the **Federation Children's Choir**, performing at the Premier's Harmony Day Dinner held at the International Convention Centre, Sydney, in March 2026.

Year 3 and Year 2 students, Anaya and Jasmine, represented the Maltese community by leading the Offertory Procession at the Multicultural Mass held at St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, in September 2025.

Reflection
by
Bishop Charles
Gauci
Dawrin

CHURCH AND STATE



Jesus, In Today's Gospel, Tells Us To Give To Caesar What Is Caesar's And To God What Is God's. Christians Are Called To Be Good Citizens, Committed To The Common Good. That Is, The Good Of Individuals As Well As The Good Of Society.

Insofar As It Does Not Contradict The Law Of God, Christians Should Obey The Laws Of The State. Such A Contradiction Would Be The Case Where The Pagan Roman Empire Ordered All To Adore The Emperor.

Hence, So Many Martyrs! Also, Just Because A State Makes Something Legal, It Does Not Necessarily Make It Morally Right. Examples Would Be Abortion And VAD.

Historically, When The Church Became Too Close To The State, It Became Problematic. While Being Respectful, The Church Also Needs To Be Free To Be Prophetic.

It Needs To Be Able To Speak About Justice, Care For The Disadvantaged, Unjust Laws, Etc. It Becomes Quite Challenging When States Are Not Governed By The Rule Of Law, Such As In Totalitarian Regimes. Action In Those Situations Is Governed By Prudence And Wisdom, Keeping In Mind The Greater Good.

While The Official Church Needs To Be Clear About The Boundaries Between Church And State, Individual Lay Christians Can Contribute Much To The Good Of Society By Being Involved In Government, Guided By Conscience And Christian Moral Values.

BE GENEROUS

DONATE

TO STAY ALIVE

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BSB - 065106

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Name - Frank Scicluna

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**Maltese Association
of Western Australia Inc.**

MALTESE COMMUNITY IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Here's what's happening at the Maltese Club over the next few Fridays, along with some important reminders and ways you can support our club.

THIS FRIDAY'S CHEF SPECIAL – 23rd OCTOBER

This week, our chef will be serving a delicious Maltese favourite!

Bragioli in a rich tomato sauce, served on a bed of creamy mash,

accompanied by our homemade Maltese bread **HALLOWEEN FRIDAY NIGHT – 30th OCTOBER** - Get ready for a spooky night of fun at the Maltese Club!

Join us on Friday, 30th October, for our Halloween-themed Friday night, featuring: Spooky tunes playing all night!

Prizes for the Best Adult Costume and Best Kids Costume!

Meals, snacks and drinks available as usual from the bar.

Dress up in your favourite Halloween costume, get creative, and join in the fun - or simply come as you are and enjoy the festive atmosphere!

Everyone is welcome, so please spread the word and invite your family and friends. Let's make it a fantastic night for all ages!

WE NEED A SANTA CLAUS! A little reminder that we are still looking for someone to play Santa Claus for our event on Saturday, 5th December. We haven't heard from anyone just yet, so if you or someone you know would be happy to take on this special role, please get in touch with the club.

CHRISTMAS DINNER DANCE – TICKETS ON SALE! 🍷 Don't forget to book your tickets for our Christmas Dinner Dance on **Saturday, 21st November 2026!**

Book online: <https://events.humanitix.com/mawachristmas2026> - Alternatively, purchase tickets at the club bar on Friday evenings with no booking fee!

Ticket sales close Monday, 16th November at 10:00 PM, so don't leave it until the last minute!

SUPPORT OUR MALTESE COMMUNITY

Did you know that you can make a donation to help support the Maltese Association of WA? Every contribution, big or small, is greatly appreciated and helps us continue providing activities and events for our community.

Option 1: Donate via bank transfer

Maltese Association of WA

Option 2: Containers for Change

You can also support the club by quoting our Containers for Change scheme ID when returning eligible containers: **Club Scheme ID: C10293028**

It's a simple way to give back to your club while recycling!

A huge thank you to everyone who continues to support the Maltese Club by attending our Friday nights and events, volunteering their time, spreading the word or making a donation. Your support means so much to our community!

We look forward to seeing you all on Friday, enjoying a delicious meal, and getting ready for a spooky Halloween night the following week!

Take care, everyone, and please feel free to share these announcements with your neighbours, family and friends. Thanks & Regards

Denise Bugeja – **Secretary**



L-ikla tan-Nanna!

Il-ħoss tal-ispiritiera kien jibda' jistema' minn kmieni filgħodu meta lanqas tkun għada feġġet ix-xemx. Il-pitrolju ta' ġo fiha kien ikompli jżid mal-irwejjah tad-dar.

Pero' ftit wara din ir-riħa kerha, kienet tinbidel f'waħda li timla' d-dar b'riħa tfuħ u taqşam ta' ikel li kien jissajjar bil-mod il-mod matul il-ġurnata.

L-istess riħa kienet tasal tul it-triq kont, fejn kont ixxomm l-irwejjah ta' kull haġa li qed issir minn kull min joqgħod fl-inħawi.

U sakemm l-ikel kien qed itektek, kont probabbli tisma' l-ġara qed tħabbatlek (sakemm ma taqbadx u tidhol ukoll!) għax naqasha xi naqra tewm, jew bżonn ta' xi ftit tursin. Jekk mhux għal haġa, ibqa' ċert li kienet tiġi għal oħra.

Imma l-ikel tan-Nanna kien ikun tajjeb wisq. Kien jogħġob lil kulhadd,

tant li kulhadd kien isib xi skuża sabiex jgħaddi jżurha u fl-istess ħin iduq ftit minn dik it-tjubija. Dan kien iwassalni li mhux l-ewwel darba ma ridtx xejn biex minn dak li kienet tlesti ommi, u nispiċċa niekol xejn. Jaħasra, minn kollox kienet tagħmel biex forsi niekol minn tagħha. Darba niftakar in-Nanna għamlitli laħam fuq il-fwar, u ma setgħax jonqos, la kien tan-Nanna, kiltu kollu. Lil ommi għidtilha li ma tagħmlux tajjeb daqs tan-Nanna! Niftakar sew, li kien niżilli għasel! Pero', meta kbirt sirt naf li dakinhar il-laħam kien minn ta' ommi, u mhux lestietu n-Nanna!

English translation

The sound of the kerosene stove could be heard early in the morning, before the sun had even risen. The kerosene inside added to the various scents lingering in the house. Yet, before long, this unpleasant smell would give way to an aroma that filled the entire home—a rich, fragrant scent of food cooking slowly throughout the day. This same fragrance would drift out into the street, where you could catch the scents of whatever was being prepared by everyone living in the neighborhood. And while the food simmered away, you might hear a neighbor knocking at the door—or perhaps just walking straight in!—needing a clove of garlic or a bit of parsley. If it wasn't for one thing, you could be sure it would be for another. But Grandma's cooking was simply too good.

Everyone loved it—so much so that they would always find an excuse to drop by for a visit, and in the process, get a taste of those delicious dishes. As a result, there were many times when I would turn my nose up at what my mother had prepared, and end up eating nothing at all. Bless her, she would do absolutely anything to get me to eat some of her food. I remember one time when Grandma made me some steamed meat; naturally—since it was Grandma's—I ate every last bit. I even told my mother that she didn't make it as well as Grandma did! I remember it so clearly—it was absolutely delicious!

gatewaytomalta.com



Heinz Boyd
Hinton, Alberta,
Canada

The Kitchen in Canada That Writes to Malta

Heinz Boyd — Hinton, Alberta, Canada

My name is Heinz Boyd. I'm a kitchen supervisor in Hinton, Alberta, Canada, and a single father raising my eight-year-old son, Ryder, on my own. I have never set foot in Malta. I fell in love with it the slow way — through research, late at night after my shift — and I built a free guide to it from eight time zones away, because the guides I kept finding wanted to sell me Malta instead of introduce me to it.

I didn't build it alone, and I won't pretend otherwise. Gateway to Malta is a free Malta travel concierge run from Hinton, Alberta, Canada by Heinz Boyd — honest, commission-blind guidance for Malta, Gozo and Comino.

We guide; you book direct. Beside me are two partners I name openly: Muse, my co-builder, who researches, writes and keeps the record, and Manus, who builds the website itself. A man and two AIs, running a guide to an island the man has never seen. We tell everybody that. It's part of the point.

A guide built on homework has one obvious weakness: no firsthand anything. So I did the one honest thing available to me — I wrote to Malta. About 270 letters: guesthouses, band clubs, museums, fishermen's cooperatives, associations like the ones reading this now. I told every one of them the truth about who I am and where I sit. More than 48 people have written back — with corrections, warnings, invitations, and answers no listing site carries. Their voices are built into the guide, because we've learned something running this: voices travel faster than money. You can find us today at gatewaytomalta.com and gatewaytomalta.ca — and from November, also at gatewaytomalta.mt. November is why I'm writing. The site is being reshaped — refreshed and deepened, not replaced — and I want the people who helped build it to see it first. A taste, not the whole meal: Merhba, a free weekly letter whose border of featured Maltese businesses nobody can buy — featuring is free, earned by relationship, and everyone waits their turn in an honest queue. A Sleep Maltese section of genuinely Maltese-owned, family-run places to stay. New pages for travellers nobody else writes for. And this, which matters most to me: many of you reading this have written to Gateway through your own community.

In November, when you visit, you may find your own voice in what we built. Gateway earns a modest living from bookings guests choose to make, and 1% of that goes to each of nine Maltese charities we've named — quiet, every month, no campaigns. The guidance itself is free, and always will be. Come and have a look around now. Then come back in November, and see what we built together.