


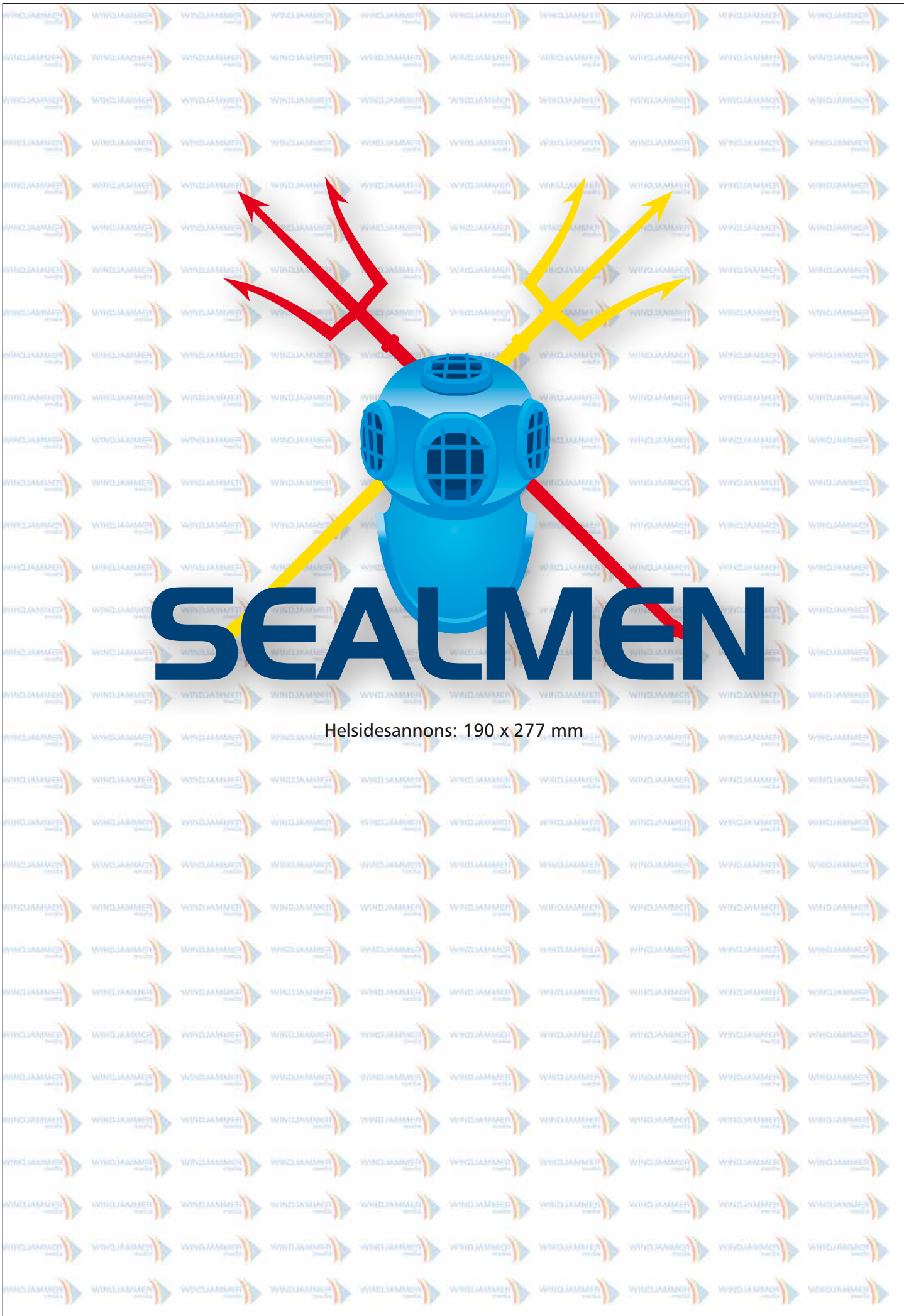
Travel Guide to Malta & Gozo



Should you visit Malta and Gozo?




In its recent past Malta has become known as a beach-holiday destination, and the sun and sea certainly justify such marketing. But there's much more to the country than that. Malta is a fascinating microcosm of the Mediterranean, and what makes Malta a truly unique destination is that so much of its intriguing past is visible today. You can listen to the local language to hear the North African and Arabic influences, sample the Sicilian-inspired cuisine, experience mysterious prehistoric temples as well as magnificent baroque architecture and also note the legacies of 150 years of British rule. Worth mentioning is also the fact that the people are unbelievably upbeat and welcoming, no such thing as strangers because of the close community. Couple the history, beaches and sunny climate with warm, friendly locals, colorful fishing boats and character-filled villages, scenic landscapes, decent nightlife and first-class diving and sailing opportunities and you've got a pocket-rocket destination offering drawcards out of all proportion to its size.



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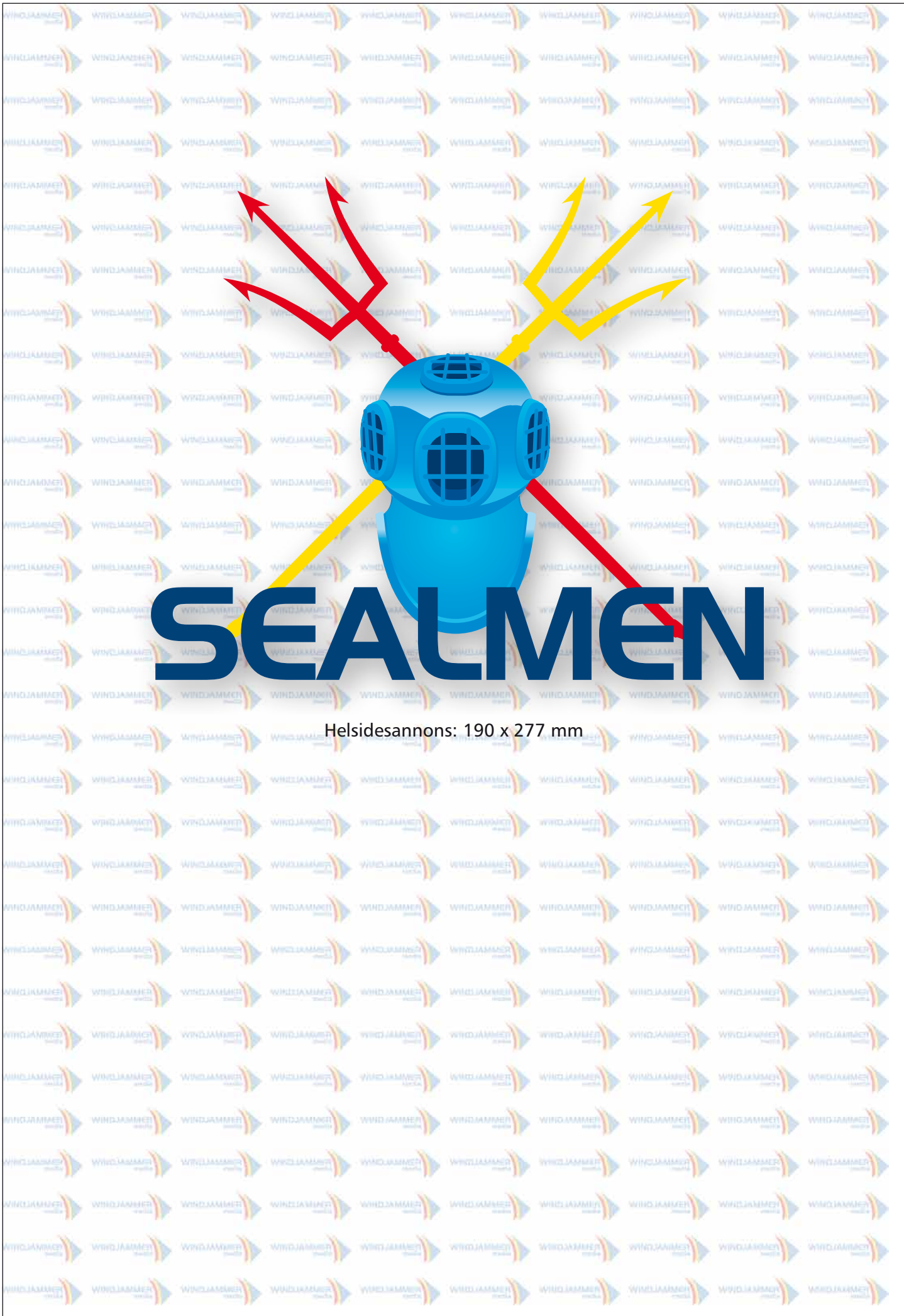
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Size isn't everything



93 km south of Sicily and 288 km north of Africa measuring just 30 kms by 6 kms, sunny Malta still is a little bit of Britain, with red telephone boxes, sub post offices and vehicles driving on the left. The main island of Malta is the largest and most developed island. Besides the main island the Maltese archipelago also includes Gozo and tiny Comino, which are more rural and smaller than the main island of Malta. Life on Gozo moves at a leisurely pace, while Comino is the ideal summer getaway. Within a couple of hours it is possible to travel across the island of Malta.

Malta may be small, but size hasn't diluted this tiny Mediterranean island's ambition as it joined the European Union in May 2004. The island is densely populated and its 400,000 inhabitants are among the most international of peoples. Everybody on Malta speaks English but the locals quickly change to Malti (an Arab based language that sounds like a cross between Russian and Arabic) when speaking to each other and because of the proximity to Sicily many Maltese also speak Italian. The Maltese appear to be almost entirely middle-class, hard-working unspoiled people, upbeat and welcoming and they are fiercely proud of their heritage, a history of absorbing and incorporating wave after wave of occupiers, while maintaining their own unique identity.



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General facts

Area

316 sq km

Climate

Mediterranean with mild, rainy winters and hot, dry summers

Terrain

Mostly low, rocky, flat to dissected plains; many coastal cliffs

Natural Resources

Limestone, salt, arable land

Government Type

Republic

Country Name

Republic of Malta (Malta)

Capital

Valetta

Independence

21 September 1964 from UK

Currency

Euro (January 1, 2008)

Population

About 400,000 (most of them living in the satellite towns around Valetta, Sliema and Grand Harbour. Only 10% of the population live in rural areas and approximately 30,000 live on Gozo).

Ethnic Groups

Maltese (descendants of ancient Carthaginians and Phoenicians, with strong elements of Italian and other Mediterranean stock)

Religion

Roman Catholic 98%

Language

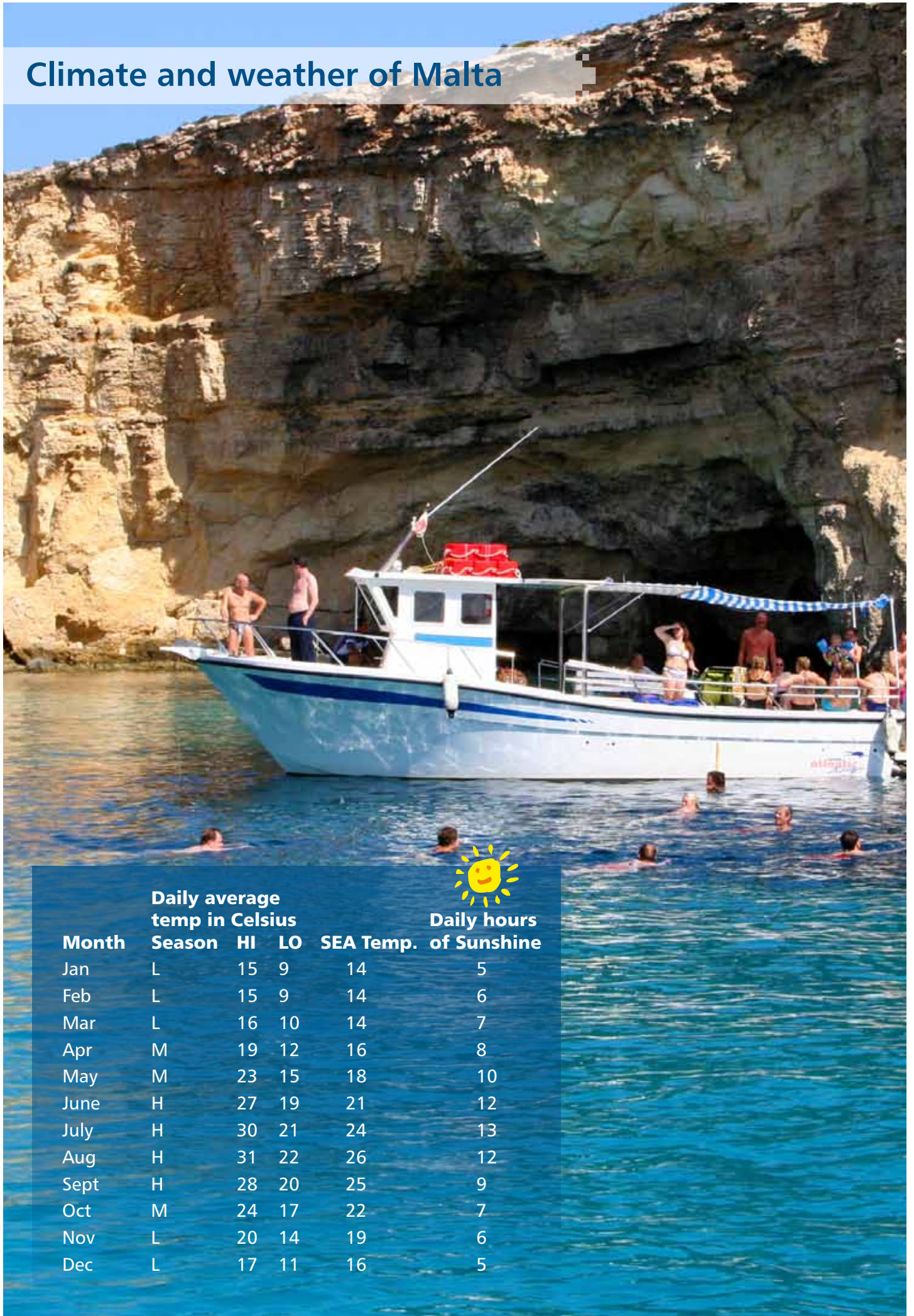
Maltese (official),
English (official)



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Climate and weather of Malta



Month	Daily average temp in Celsius			SEA Temp.	Daily hours of Sunshine
	Season	HI	LO		
Jan	L	15	9	14	5
Feb	L	15	9	14	6
Mar	L	16	10	14	7
Apr	M	19	12	16	8
May	M	23	15	18	10
June	H	27	19	21	12
July	H	30	21	24	13
Aug	H	31	22	26	12
Sept	H	28	20	25	9
Oct	M	24	17	22	7
Nov	L	20	14	19	6
Dec	L	17	11	16	5

The fascinating history of Malta



Malta has a long and complex history. The first significant civilisation here flourished in the third millennium BC, leaving behind fascinating megalithic temples. It is easy to delve into the islands' mysterious prehistory, retrace the footsteps of St Paul or see where the Knights of St John defended Christendom. Visitors can explore medieval walled citadels and splendid baroque churches and palaces.

Malta's location between Europe and Northern Africa has made it a meeting ground for differing cultures. Numerous foreign rulers greatly valued the strategic geographical location the islands offered for trade and warfare.

The island was held by several foreign rulers, including the Romans, Phoenicians, Byzantines, Arabs and more recently the French (under Napoleon) and the British. All of these temporary powers have influenced Maltese culture to varying degrees, yet through all this time, the population has managed to preserve a distinctive identity and a strong sense of continuity with the past.

With a coastline of 43 km, Gozo is the second largest island of the Maltese Archipelago. Gozo's history is twined up in the general history of its sister island of Malta. As a result, Gozo shared the same influences of cultures bestowed on by the number of dominators and events that have touched the Maltese islands during the last seven thousand years.

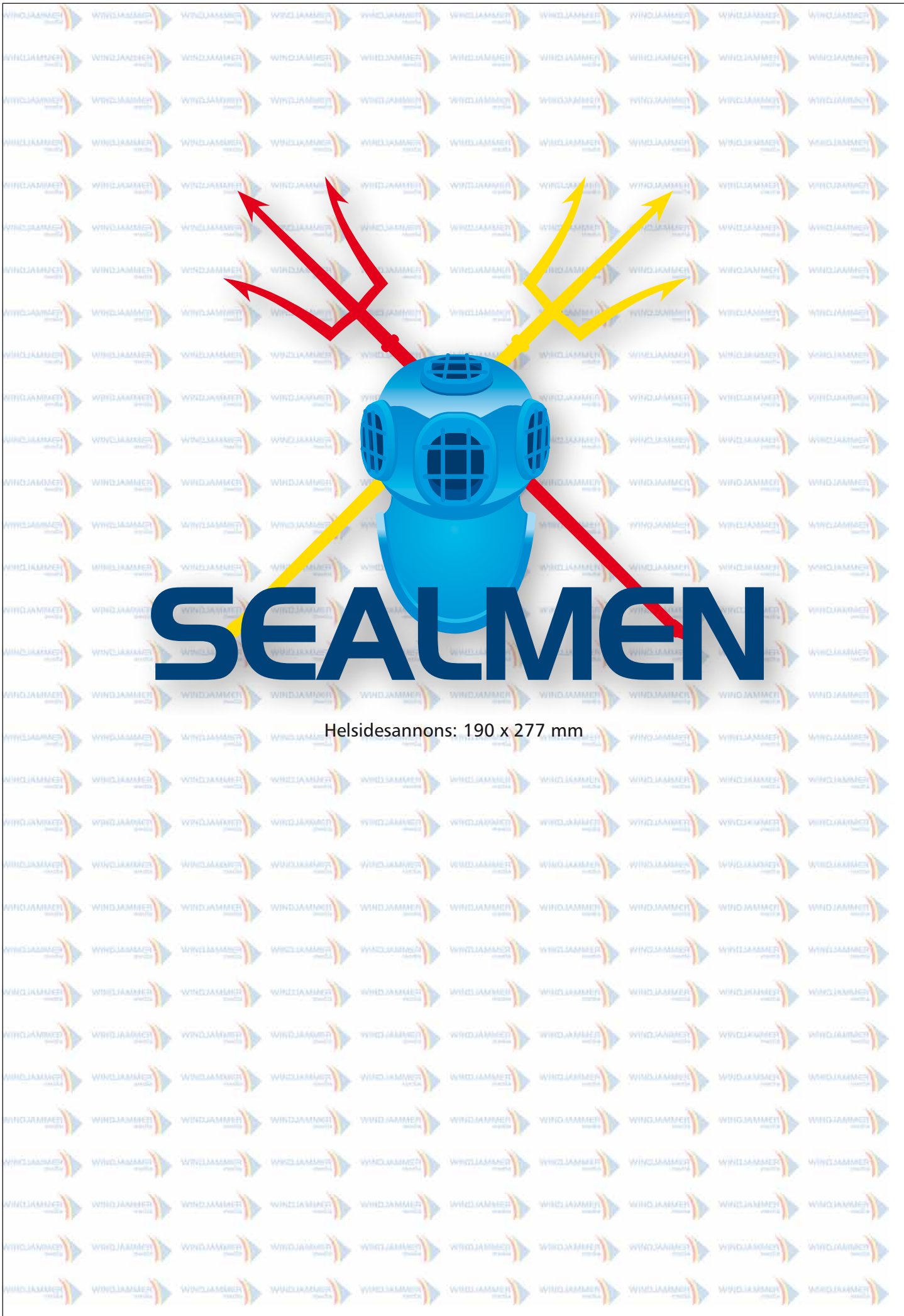
Valletta is Malta's capital city, characterised by the numerous beautiful baroque buildings that line the streets. The city was built in the 16th and 17th centuries by the Knights of St John. They were

European noblemen who lived as monks and soldiers. The objective of the Order was the service of the poor and the defence of the Catholic faith. The Order was comprised of eight nationalities and the distinctive eight-pointed cross is said to represent the eight virtues which the Knights strove to uphold: to live in truth, to have faith, to repent of sins, to give proof of humility, to love justice, to be merciful, to be sincere and wholehearted, and to endure persecution.

Malta's most impressive church, St John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta was built as the conventional church of the Knights of St John with rich ornamentation and the Maltese Cross visible everywhere. The founder of Valletta, Jean Parisot de la Valette, joined the Knights of St John in the beginning of the 16th century. From 1557 he held the title of Grand Master and his greatest achievement was the defence of Malta against the Turks in the Great Siege of 1565. The 16th-century Grand Master's Palace, once the residence of the Grand Masters of the Knights of St John, is today the seat of Malta's parliament and the official residence of the Maltese president.

Malta essential tourist information

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- Malta time is one hour ahead of UK time.
 - No visa is required for UK and EU passport holders.
 - The international dialing code for Malta is +356.
 - There are a few Internet Cafés and they have good postal services.
 - The peak season for travel to Malta is June to September.
 - Malta uses the same three-pin square plug as the UK.
 - Malta enjoys hot summers with virtually no rain and the sea breeze keeps the temperatures manageable and the mosquitoes away.
 - Malta has very few sandy beaches so make a note of their locations to save time.
 - The hotels and water parks in Malta have salt water pools. Bring goggles and ear plugs if you're sensitive.
 - Automated foreign exchange machines are available at various locations on the island. Exchange bureaux are often open 24 hours a day. Many hotels, larger shops and restaurants accept foreign currency.
 - By European standards, Malta is a good value, although prices are steadily increasing.
 - When tipping add around 10% to the bill. This includes taxi drives.
 - They drive on the left and if you want to rent a car bare in mind that some of the drivers are fairly unpredictable and finding a place to park can be all but easy.



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Top things to see!



Gozo is the second largest of the Maltese islands and offers plenty of things to see. Victoria is Gozo's capital and regular ferry crossings are made to Gozo from the Malta mainland. The trip takes about 30 min.

Here you find geological wonders like the Inland Sea and the Azure Window – one of the most photographed sights on the Maltese islands.

Chill out on the barely inhabited island of **Comino**. The blue lagoon, a sheltered inlet of shimmering aquamarine water, is the main attraction on this tiny island. It is possible to reach this popular day trip destination through independent water taxis and sight-seeing trips that operate regularly to the lagoon and the isle's other bays.

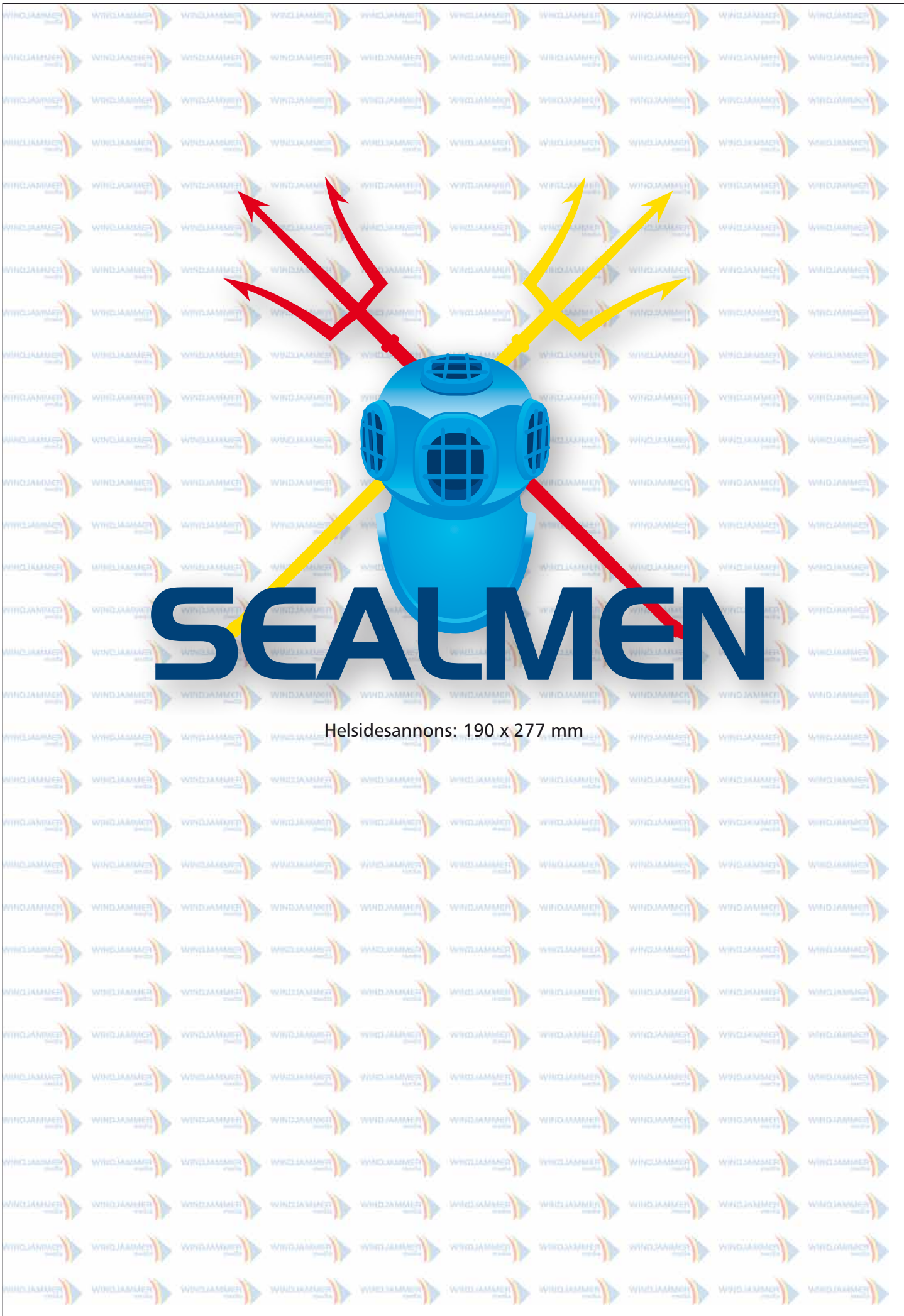
In **Mdina** (Malta island) you can witness the citadel, which is one of the finest surviving examples of a medieval walled city. The citadel was fortified from as long ago as 1000 BC, when the Phoenicians built a protective wall here. It is really easy to appreciate the town's loveliness and the hidden byways of Mdina offer exquisite architectural detail.

There are many places of interest for visitors to Malta's capital city. The whole city of **Valletta** is a

UNESCO World Heritage Site, covering just 55 hectares, but is a fully functioning bustling city, characterised by numerous beautiful baroque buildings that line the streets. Valletta is extremely compact and there is a historical site around almost every corner. It really is remarkable that such a small city can fit so much in.

A must for all visitors has to be the incredible **megalithic temples** in **Hagar Kim** on the south of the island. These temples date from 3000 BC and are constructed from huge closely fitting stones decorated in a very ornate style.

If you want to have a slice of real Maltese life, you better pay a visit to the ancient **fishing village of Marsaxlokk!** The brightly coloured fishing boats that crowd the harbours around the coast have become one of Malta's national symbols. The town is home to about seventy percent of the Maltese fishing fleet and every Sunday you can admire the riches of the Med at the famous Fish Market. Here you can stroll along to find the perfect souvenir or just enjoy the local atmosphere.



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Something for everyone!



Family-friendly Malta

Malta's generally mild climate makes it possible for you and your young ones to enjoy a range of outdoor activities to suit everybody's taste. Keeping the kids happy when on holiday can be a full time occupation for the parents so it's nice to know that Malta has plenty of things to do for the little ones.

Popeye Village, the film set of the 1980 musical production starring Robin Williams and located in Mellieha, is a popular destination for families for its mixture of animation shows, a range of pools for children and its hosting the Santa's Toy town attraction. For a full day of splashing fun, visit Splash and Fun Waterpark that lies between Qawra and St. Julians.

It will keep the whole family occupied all day with water slides and much more along with snack bars, ice-cream parlour and coffee bar. There are several other places of interest like the Playmobil factory and a dinosaur theme park which ensures great fun for all kids and even young at heart.

It is generally advisable that visiting families swim in areas where they see other local bathers swimming, as these would normally be aware of the presence of any underwater currents, the occasional jellyfish etc. Having said that, Maltese waters are among the cleanest and safest in the Mediterranean. So put on your sun protection cream and enjoy!

Outdoor activities

The Maltese islands are an ideal location for outdoor activities due to pleasant weather conditions all year round. The most popular of such activities are without doubt country walks and hikes as well as biking and horse riding, which are enjoyed by both sport enthusiasts as well as tourists who love to spend time in the countryside.

Surrounded by the sea, Malta offers a wide range of water sports, including leisure jet skiing, water skiing and banana rides but also activities such as paragliding, sailing and of course diving.

The beautiful and natural harbours, bays and hidden coves and caves offer numerous places to explore and the best way to do this is by boat. For those wanting privacy, hiring your own boat can give you the opportunity to explore areas off the tourist trail and you can cover a lot more ground. Consider slipping across to Malta's third island, tiny Comino, and the clear shallow waters of the Blue Lagoon. Private yacht charter is possible in and around Malta although it won't come cheap. There are plenty of yacht charter companies in Malta so shop around for the best rates.

Many of the dive sites in Malta are accessible from the shore and qualified divers wishing to lead their own groups can obtain permission through a



licensed dive centre. There are many different dive sites around Malta and Gozo, therefore divers are likely to find several locations to meet their specifications. Here you also find scuttled wrecks that have become artificial reefs for all kinds of fish and marine life. The Blue Hole is a geological wonder and a very popular dive site for visitors to the island of Gozo. It is a 10 m wide and 25 m deep natural vertical chimney in the limestone connecting to the open sea. Here you also find a cave and a drop off going down to around 50 m. If you don't fancy scuba diving, you still can sample the delights of the underwater world through snorkelling. You can usually rent or buy the necessary equipment from hotels or water sport centres in all the tourist areas.



Fun for couples, young and old

Visitors to Malta all too often miss out on the rich culture and history of these islands. Because of its location there are many ancient monuments and remains on Malta that speak volumes about its colourful history.

The capital of Valletta is barely a kilometre long and only 600 m wide. Here you find history in abundance, narrow streets and beautiful balconies. Add to this a thriving cafe culture and a plethora of quaint



traditional shops and Valletta makes for an enjoyable and interesting diversion when holidaying in Malta.

Sliema and St Julian's are the two leading coastal resort areas on Malta, just to the northwest of Valletta. St Julian's, once a quiet fishing village, is the more scenic of the two areas and merges with Paceville, a popular area featuring of night clubs and a number of good restaurants. So when it comes to nightlife you can find everything from the hothouse of clubs to cool, romantic courtyards. Malta at night has moods for all!





Maltese cuisine

Maltese cuisine is influenced by many foreign cultures that have ruled the country in its long history. The food is generally good and cheap and meals are often based on fresh products and the fisherman's catch. The most obvious influence is Scilian and most restaurants serve pizza and pasta. If you want to try something else you'll also find Indian Cuisine and other Asian restaurants. Traditional Maltese food also include fenkata, a big communal meal of rabbit, usually eaten in the countryside. It supposedly originated as a gesture of rebellion against the occupying Knights, who hunted rabbits and denied them to the local population. Fenkata is also eaten on special occasions, with family and friends taking over a restaurant for an afternoon celebration.

Malta even has locally made beer, such as Cisk, much cheaper than imported brews. Maltese companies also make wine from local grapes and the wine here is surprisingly good.

Beaches and sun

Practically anywhere along the Maltese coastline you'll find shelves of bare rock and therefore you will have no problem finding your perfect snorkeling spot. However Malta is not particularly well endowed with sandy beaches so it's worth taking the time to find out where they are before you travel to save time and hassle.

The best beaches are on the north coast, such as Mellieha Bay (the largest), Golden Bay, Armier Bay, Ghajn Tuffieha Bay and of course Paradise Bay in Cirkewwa which has a delightful tiny beach that really is inviting and especially good for snorkelling. However these beaches can be a little bit crowded during high season.

