Malta

Location
The Republic of Malta is an archipelago consisting of a small group of islands – Malta, Gozo, Kemmuna, Memmunette, and Filfla. It covers approximately 122 square miles, with Malta being the largest island. The republic is a part of the Commonwealth of Nations and is located in the Mediterranean Sea, just 58 miles south of Sicily, Italy. It lies at 35° 50’ N latitude and 14° 35’ E longitude.

Geography
The islands of Malta consist of low-lying limestone plateaus, with a highest point of 239 m above sea level. The landforms are mostly rocky with rugged, steep coastal cliffs.

Climate
Malta’s climate is dry and temperate. The average temperature is 66° F and the mean rainfall is approximately 22 inches. The lack of any permanent rivers or lakes makes precipitation limited. Therefore, 70 percent of Malta’s water comes from desalting the surrounding sea water.

History
Malta has an ancient history. Remains from periods as early as the Stone Age and Bronze Age have been found in Malta. The Phoenicians, the Greeks, and the Romans ruled most of ancient Malta. Napoleon invaded Malta in 1798. With the help of the British, Malta compelled a French withdrawal and by terms of the Treaty of Paris in 1814 and Malta became part of the British Empire. After a long struggle for self-governance, Malta became independent on September 21, 1964.

Important Dates
Important dates in Malta are; March 31 – Freedom Day, June 7 – Commemoration of the 1919 Uprising, September 8 – Feast of Our Lady of Victories, September 21 – Independence Day, and December 13 – Republic Day.

**Population**

Currently Malta has a population of 396,851 with about 3,253 inhabitants per square mile. Birth rate is approximately 10.1/1000; infant mortality rate is 3.9/100 and the life expectancy averages around 78.7 years. According to the most recent estimate (1999), the rate of population growth in Malta is approximately 0.49 percent.

**Currency**

The currency of Malta Is the Maltese Lira and in 2002 the average exchange rate was $1 = 0.43 lira. The Maltese lire denominations are Lm 2, 5, 10, and 20. Coin denominations are Lm 1, 2, 5, 10, 25, and 50.

**Education**

Education in Malta is free and compulsory for children between 5 and 16 years of age. Literacy rate in Malta is 93 percent.

**Language**

People in Malta speak a language similar to Arabic and Latin, called *Maltese*. *Maltese* and English are both official languages.

**Religion**

Maltese are predominantly (98 percent) Roman Catholic.

**Agriculture and Industries**
Malta has about 31 percent of arable land. Major agricultural products include potatoes, cauliflowers, grapes, wheat, barley, tomatoes, citrus, cut flowers, and green peppers. It also produces pork, milk, poultry, and eggs. Main industries of Malta include tourism, electronics, ship building, food and beverages, textiles, footwear, and tobacco.

**Trade**

Main imports are machinery and transport equipment, manufactured and semi-manufactured goods, food, drink, and tobacco. Primary export products are machineries and other manufactured goods. Malta’s major trading partners are US, UK, Germany, France, China, South Korea, Japan, and Spain.

**Food**

Maltese food is rustic and based on seasonal produce and the fisherman's catch. Pastries of all kinds are very popular along with vegetables, cheese, fish, meat, rice, and pasta. *Timpana*, an everyday concoction of pasta in a meat sauce topped with a layer of pastry is a favorite, and the most universally eaten Maltese pastry is *Pastizzi* – a small delicacy of ricotta cheese and egg wrapped with a thin crisp pastry.

**Landmarks**

Valletta, the capital of Malta, was built by Jean de la Valetta. The National Museum of Archaeology and Fine Arts are worth seeing. Places to see must include the St. Cathedral and Museum and the Palace of the Grand Masters.

Lopamudra Karmakar