

The perception of Slovenian visitors on the traditional Maltese cuisine

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HND in January, 2023

Abstract

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Programme Level 5	
Research/Project Title The perception of Slovenian visitors on traditional Maltese cuisine	5748
<p>The purpose of research was to collect data on lifestyle, nutrition and food preparation in Malta from the past to the present. A study of traditional foods was conducted, as well as sensory evaluation of ten typical Maltese dishes was done by forty Slovenian visitors. All tourists sampled most of the dishes. Tourists assigned a score based on sensory acceptability/taste liking. The results reveal that most of the dishes were well received. Slovenians are willing to try new foods, although they prefer foods that taste similar to Slovenian cuisine. The information gathered will be used to develop proposals for offering Maltese dishes and cuisine to Slovenian tourists. This study could serve as the foundation for future food-related studies based on taste preference.</p>	
Keywords cuisine / traditional dishes / Slovenian tourists / sensory grading	

Declaration of Authenticity



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Research Title : The perception of Slovenian visitors on traditional Maltese cuisine

Declaration:

I hereby declare that this research study is based on the outcome of my own research. I, as the author, declare that this research study is my own composition which has not been previously produced for any other qualification.

The research study was conducted under the supervision of Claude Scicluna.

23.01.2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mojca', is written over a horizontal line.

Student's Signature

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank and acknowledge my mentor, Mr. Claude Scicluna, who mentored and advised me throughout the entirety of the writing process for my project. I would also like to thank my classmates, who provided me with excellent suggestions for my project.

I would also like to give special thanks to my husband, Kevin Zammit Briffa, and my sons collectively for their unwavering support and understanding as I conducted research and wrote my thesis.

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1. Introduction

More and more people want to taste traditional foods from other countries and learn about other cuisines. Due to its lengthy history, Malta boasts a wide variety of traditional foods that are largely unknown to outsiders. Malta was ruled by a number of Mediterranean conquistadors, and each one brought with them a specific characteristic of their culture and cuisine. Countries with a rich cultural heritage have a wonderful opportunity to expand their tourism industries, which is also tied to the way to promote their other virtues and values to the world, such as their delectable cuisine, customs, and lifestyles.

The importance of Malta's cultural history and its natural attractions is well recognized, which contributes to the country's strong visitor influx. Mass tourism unfortunately has both positive and negative aspects. In particular, it brings with it a variety of invasive habits and customs that are gradually altering the tradition. (Ebejer, 2020).

The Maltese Islands have drawn conquerors and pirates for ages, and they continue to draw tourists who are interested in exploring Malta's rich history and culture as well as those who enjoy various water sports, relaxing on the beach, delicious traditional food, shopping, and nightlife.

When planning an excursion for a group of tourists that includes lunch, it is helpful to have an idea of the kinds of foods that they enjoy eating. In order to have an understanding of this, not only is a survey of the target tourists but also an inquiry into traditional cuisines is required. It will be much simpler to prepare the tourist's lunch set menu once it has been determined what foods the target tourist prefers, which information can be obtained by gathering the necessary information.

1.1 Research Background

Although there are several studies that investigate visitor behavior in specific situations such as travel and lodging, the impact of local food on the tourist experience is sometimes overlooked. Eating is both a physical necessity and a cultural and social practice. When tourists dine in a destination, they not only fulfil their hunger but also gain an understanding of the local culture and engage with their hosts. Tourists' demand for local food, on the other hand, varies in intensity. Some tourists come exclusively for the region's gastronomy, while others consider local food as a byproduct of their cultural experiences, and still others prefer familiar food when they travel. As a result, there are variations in how tourists perceive local food consumption. Based on this assumption, the current study looked into Slovenian tourists' perceptions of Maltese food they had eaten in order to offer the best possible menu on their excursion.

1.2 Research Aim and Objectives

The purpose is to collect data on lifestyle, nutrition and food preparation in Malta from the past to the present. The key objective will be to acquire the information which would be used to create proposals for presenting Maltese meals and cuisine to Slovenian tourists.

Slovenes have been travelling to Malta since 1990, when the Slovenian Tourist Agency opened a charter flight from Ljubljana to Malta. Due to the increasing number of low cost airline providers and low cost flights to Malta from countries bordering Slovenia, the charter flight from Ljubljana has been cancelled, after over 20 years of operating. Slovenians thus travel to Malta from nearby airports such as Trieste, Treviso, Zagreb and Vienna. Therefore, we do not have data on the number of Slovenian tourists in Malta.

For this research the referencing of Harvard-Anglia 2008 version provided in WORD has been utilised.

2. Literature Review

The literature review is divided into two parts. In first section the researcher will talk about the relevance of local gastronomy in presenting a destination and their culture to the tourist. In the fields of customer service and marketing, two crucial ideas are customer expectation and customer perception. Second part will discuss Maltese food throughout its history.

2.1 Local food and tourism

For all human existence, food is their most basic requirement, and their capacity to survive depends on it. Food, however, plays a crucial part in the tourism business and goes above and beyond basic necessities for survival. The importance of food in connection to tourism had already attracted the attention of academics. (Cohen and Avieli, 2004).

A generation has passed, and today's tourists are more interested in cultural experiences than their predecessors were. When they travel, most people are looking for novel experiences. Modern travellers' actions reflect their concern about the planet, their health, and their quality of life. Along with the rising importance of local authenticity, food is a major factor in making visitors' experiences at tourist destinations memorable and pleasurable (Chaigasem, 2019). Therefore we can say, that cuisine is an important and significant component of any trip. (Kim et al., 2009). Evidence from numerous studies suggests that choosing the preferable destination is influenced by cuisine. (Andersson et al., 2016).

Even though food tourists' tasting experiences need to be documented more in tourism studies, it is known that gastrophysics studies give us a better understanding of how our sense of taste is formed. This is because food is seen as a multisensory way to learn and appreciate about the culture (Spence, et al., 2010).

Even though the mechanisms behind the effects of taste modulation are complicated, the gastrophysics approach shows that neuroscience, psychology, and design are changing not only what we put on our plates but also how we experience and think about it (Spence, et al., 2019). In the context of food tourism destinations and attractions, this method can also be used to explain what affects tourists' multisensory food experiences when they visit sites that are specialised in food.

2.1.1 Customer expectation and perception

"Customers assumption about his or her experience in fulfilment of a requirement with the available resources at his or her disposal" is one definition of "customer expectation." To put it another way,

customer expectation refers to what the customer anticipates receiving from a particular product or service. This can be influenced by elements such as ethnic background, sociodemographic characteristics, marketing, family life, personality, beliefs, reviews of similar products, and previous experience with products in the same category. The consumer is better able to evaluate the quality, value, and capacity of the product or service to fulfil their requirements with the help of these influencing elements. (Parasuraman, et al., 1985).

Customer perception is the experience that a customer has as a result of consumption and engagement with a seller. The viewpoint of the customer is highly subjective and can vary greatly from one individual to the next. A customer's individual evaluation of the quality of a product or service, based on their consumption of it and their interactions with the seller, is the basis for their perception of that product or service (Parasuraman, et al., 1985).

When the performance of a product meets or surpasses the expectations of the consumer, the customer is said to be satisfied and is much easier to keep as a client.

2.2 Malta's cuisine throughout the history

To have better understanding in Maltese cuisine, we have to look into Maltese history. The typical cuisine of Malta is the consequence of the islanders' long-standing ties to numerous different nations, and it reflects both the country's history and geographical characteristics. The ingredients used in traditional island cuisine come from both the land and the sea. Some are a reflection of the past's gastronomic heritage and contain flavours from the Arab, Spanish, southern Italian, and British influences.

2.2.1 Neolithic times

Archaeological evidence suggests that the Malta was inhabited as long ago as 6000 B.C.E. Evidence also suggests that these early Neolithic farmers originated from southern Sicily. According to the research, these people cultivated barley, lentil and also wheat. They also domesticated animals, like goats, pigs and sheep. According to the evidence they were cave dwellers, but also lived in hamlets. (Trump, 2002).

This era is called a Temple period on Malta. Agrarian primitive community, which lived on Malta, built prominent architectural stone structures. These structures were temples and had religious function. The depictions of sheep, pigs, birds and other animals in these sacred complexes and pottery provide more evidence for the connection between religion and food, particularly when sacrifice rituals are involved. The large number of stone mortars, saddle querns, and types of hand mills were found in

these areas. They were probably used for crushing seeds, especially grain. (Trump, 2002; Cremona, 2010).

2.2.2 Roman period

Malta had come under Roman rule by 218 B.C. As evidenced by the numerous rural estates and antiquities discovered in a townhouse just outside of Mdina, the Roman period was generally a wealthy one. The native island mentality must have been influenced by Roman civilization (Bonnano, 2005).

The use of greens, honey, bread, wine, cheese, and oil were regarded to be indications of Roman civilisation. This is in opposition to the barbarian eating habits of raw and unprocessed food that is typically seen in Northern Europe. The ancient Roman diet included a wide range of vegetables. Vegetables of all kinds were a common part of the ancient Roman diet. In the contemporary world, some of these veggies are no longer available, while others have experienced major change. For example carrots were different colours, but not in orange. The most common cultivated vegetable was cabbage, celery, onion, garlic, leek, asparagus, lettuce, beets, green peas, chard, carrots, turnips, cucumber and olives. Some vegetables, which are characteristic in modern Italian kitchen, were not used. In particular, spinach and aubergine were imported subsequently from the Arab world, while tomatoes, potatoes, capsicum peppers, and corn did not arrive in Europe until after the discovery of the New World (Bruno, et al., 2009, Migdol, et al., 2020, Limbergen, 2018).

Fruit was consumed fresh during the season and dried or kept during the winter. The most common fruit were apples, pears, plums and grapes. Citrus, figs and carob were introduced to Malta during Arab period. Romans didn't know sugar, as the sugar cane was also introduced by the Arabs. Pork was the most popular meat, particularly sausages. Poultry, game and seafood were usual types of meat, while beef was very uncommon between the Romans. Fish was even more common than the meat. It is important to mention *garum*, a sauce from fermented fish, which was very sought after between the Romans. It gave salty and savory flavor to dishes. (Cassar, 2015).

Because of the favorable climate, it is likely that cereals were also grown in Roman Malta, especially wheat and barley. The depiction of grain on a Roman-Malta currency effigy lends further credence to this. The shrine of Prosperina, the grain goddess, is recognized in the inscription on the same coin. The remains of a piece of carbonized bread discovered in Mqabba provide additional evidence that people consumed grains. (Bonnano, 2005, Bruno, et al., 2009, Migdol, et al., 2020)

The way Romans ate is very different of today. They reclined on a soft, cushioned chaise sofa to eat. The horizontal position was the pinnacle of an elite status and was thought to promote digestion. In

order to spread their body weight evenly when eating and to help them unwind, the Romans really ate while lying on their bellies, while others served them. It was a symbol of the elite's wealth and power. (Migdol, et al., 2020; Cassar, 2015)

2.2.3 Medieval period

The Maltese Islands were under Arab rule from 870 and 1090. The islands were incorporated into the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in 1164 and remained so until 1530, when Emperor Charles V donated Malta and Gozo to the Order of St. John. (Boulet, 2004).

During Arab rule 870 CE- 1090 CE

Malta underwent unprecedented agricultural advancements throughout the Arab era. New crops were brought to the Maltese, including citrus, figs, and carob. The Arabs also brought the method of building dry-stone walls, which resulted in the agricultural landscape of stepped terraces that is still seen today. These new rulers knew how to manage and conserve the limited water resources. They are recognized with bringing new and creative methods of irrigation to the islands. These were water harvesting devices like the norija or waterwheel, known locally as is-sienja. Malta experienced a golden age of agriculture during this time. Forests were being removed to make way for agricultural land, and the wood was being used for ship construction. (Dalli, 2006, Abela, 2015).

Islam outlawed the consumption of pig meat, and pigkeeping actually decreased as a result. From the Roman to the Islamic era, there is a significant shift throughout the Islamic empire. People were keeping fewer pigs and more goats and sheep. Unfortunately, this had a negative impact on the ecology because sheep and goats, not pigs, damage forests when they reside there. This caused Malta's landscape to lose a lot of its trees, and much of the once-forested territory was transformed into bare hills with just sparse scrubby shrubs on them. The farming was no longer as productive as it had once been since there were no longer any trees to hold the soil in place. To contain the soil that was left, the Arabs began to construct walls out of rubble.

Another significant change in diet during the Islamic era was the increase in consumption of citrus fruits. Citrus were formerly mostly farmed in China and India. Because the Arabs mastered the art of food preservation in hot conditions, candied peel is a vital component of Maltese confections. Because they brought sugar cane, the majority of Maltese deserts and pastries are only for individuals who enjoy sweet things (Cassar, 2015).

Alcohol is also prohibited by Islam, people did not drink wine during the Middle Ages in the Arab world. However, after the Arabs were driven out of Malta in the 12th century, people began to consume a lot of wine (Cassar, 2015).

High and late middle ages 12-15th century

Life was difficult for the Maltese after the Arab era ended and during the feudal era in Malta. Life was dangerous since frequent pirate raids were conducted on the populace. For better safety people had to move closer to walled cities Mdina (Malta) and Rabat (Gozo). Those who lived on their farms outside of walled cities were many times taken to slavery by the pirates. Crop cultivation became very difficult, and importation of grain other commodities became essential. (Cassar, 2015)

What people, during Medieval period, ate depended a lot on their wealth. Maltese population was mostly poor and they ate mainly barley. Most of every meal was a dish of barley like porridge, barley soup and pancakes. To alleviate the monotony of eating barley all the time, the impoverished people came up with creative ways to combine grain with other foods. They raised vegetables to put in their soup, such as carrots, onions, cabbages, and garlic, and they produced cheese to consume with their bread and bread products. To flavour their dish they used herbs. The most common herbs in Mediterranean are parsley, chives, and basil which were grown, while rosemary and thyme and wild cumin were widely available. (Cremona, 2010; Cassar, 2015).

Wealthy people had much bigger variety of food on their plate. Their bread was made out of wheat, which was more appreciated and has better taste. They ate a lot of meat such as beef, pork, game, lamb and rabbit. Eating pork diminished during Arab rule, but largely increased after, which indicates strong Christian roots in the people. Rich people could afford unusual and expensive spices like pepper and cinnamon which were brought from India. (Boulet, 2004; Cassar, 2015).

2.2.4 During the rule of the Knights of St. John

Great gastronomic discoveries were brought to Europe during this time from the Americas. Potatoes, peppers, tomatoes, corn and turkey are just a few of them. Potatoes were introduced to Malta rather late, during the British period, as the new crops faced resistance in the Mediterranean (Cassar & Buttigieg, 2019). Rich people had the opportunity to taste these new culinary innovations, while diet of the poor people remained the same. Bread, cheese and vegetables were their staple food. At that time, people could not afford meat, especially expensive was beef. The most common meat was poultry and rabbit meat, which were bred at home. The traditional Maltese *fenkata* (rabbit stew), which

is frequently referred to as the country's cuisine, likely got its origin as a symbolic protest against the Knights of St. John's hunting bans. The dish would gain popularity after limitations were lifted in the late 18th century (by which time the native breed had multiplied and prices had decreased) and rabbits were domesticated, a process that could have been brought over from France courtesy to the French Knights. (Cremona, 2010; Boulet, 2004; Darmanin, et al., 1996).

When the knights of St. John the Baptist came to Malta in 1530, every language group brought their own chef and cooking ingredients with. It was related to their tradition and customs. Locals did not have direct contact with the knights, but rather worked in their kitchens, where they learned a lot. This knowledge was then brought home and the dish was made, presented and accepted in home kitchen. Local and foreign food was available in Malta. The latter was either seized as a result of piracy or brought in by knights from their homelands. (Darmanin, et al., 1996).

In 17th century wealthy people start drinking tea, coffee, and eating ice cream, while in 18th century drinking tea became widespread even between ordinary people. (Dalli, 2006).

2.2.5 British period

The beginning of British rule in Malta in 1800 led to a new phase in the history of the Maltese Islands and influenced the local gastronomy. British traditions and customs are completely different from those of the Italian, German, Spanish and French knights. As soon as the British took over the island, the Royal Navy arrived in Maltese ports and the army was stationed at various strategic points. Sources state that at one time there were more than 14,000 soldiers and officers in Malta. They brought their families with them. The consequence was that a lot of food was imported and a lot of Maltese were employed as cooks and housekeepers. The British army was getting food from England because they could not depend on Malta's limited produce. (Cassar & Buttigieg, 2019).

Historians describe the time of British rule in Malta as rich and prosperous. The presence of the British in Malta left a big mark on the local dishes. Full English breakfast, Fish and chips, steak and kidney pudding, Sunday roast, bangers and mash, cream tea, just to mention a few, became very popular dishes in Malta. Local diet in Malta was impacted by the tourism industry in the 1970s and 1980s. To meet the gastronomic demands of the foreign visitors, locals had to be taught how to produce their cuisines. Due to the variety of food served in restaurants and hotels, new dishes and cooking techniques were also introduced into Maltese homes. (Mallia-Milanes, 1988; Cassar & Buttigieg, 2019).

The history of Maltese and Gozitan cuisine can be best understood by looking at the history of our islands, which dates back to the Phoenicians, who arrived on our shores more than 2500 years ago.

Invading armies, religious movements, political regimes, and even enslaved people have all contributed to the development of our diverse array of cooking methods. The Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs, Normans, Sicilians, the Knights, the, and the British are just some of the cultures that have left their mark on Maltese cuisine. However, to complicate matters even more difficult, civilizations have also affected one another. What could have began as a style of cooking in Arab countries has also inspired the cuisine of Sicily, so what we might consider to be Sicilian is actually an Arab impact. The Knights brought with them the regional cuisines of the various parts of France and Italy. Turkish and Moorish slaves taught their conquerors their conventional ways of cooking.(Cassar & Buttigieg, 2019).

Different methods of cooking blended into one another, such that Arab methods fused into Roman ones. It is this mixing of diversity that generates what we call "traditional" food, which is about passing down traditions and ideas from ancestors to subsequent generations. The term "tradition" is used to refer to recipes that have been passed down from generation to generation for hundreds of years and that are representative of the foods that the vast majority of Maltese and Gozitan people have grown to adore. These are the dishes that Maltese and Gozitans learned to make from their grandparents or saw their friends and neighbours prepare. As a result of Malta's role as a crossroads for so many different civilizations, the island's culinary heritage is a delectable melting pot of styles and influences. (Cassar & Buttigieg, 2019).

3. Methodology

The cuisine of regional areas is gaining popularity not just in Malta but also in other countries. When they get back to their home country, a rising number of travellers want to teach their friends and family about the new gastronomic experiences they had while they were away. Both restaurants and catering services in Slovenia are beginning to offer a wider variety of cuisines from across the world. Because the Slovenian market will be author's primary focus in the future, she chose to include these tourists in my research, particularly with regard to the question of whether or not characteristic Maltese foods are appealing.

3.1 Survey strategy

"Survey Research is the process of doing research through the distribution of questionnaires to survey respondents. The obtained survey data is then statistically evaluated to draw conclusive research findings." (Sapsford, 2007).

"Traditional survey research is a quantitative technique for obtaining information from a group of participants by asking many survey questions. This sort of research comprises participant recruiting, data gathering, and analysis. It is useful for researchers who wish to inform their respondents of new characteristics or trends." (Sapsford, 2007).

In addition, there are two ways to categorise survey research based on the amount of time they take: Longitudinal survey research includes undertaking surveys over an extended period of time, spanning years or decades. Using a cross-sectional survey, researchers collect information from a study population at a given time period. (Sciicluna, 2017). For this study and the research topic, the cross-sectional survey was used.

A group of forty tourists from Slovenia carried out sensory evaluations of traditional dishes. Every person evaluated each dish after trying a sample of it. The author encountered some limitations, as not every person was willing to taste each dish. To analyze the sensory characteristics of traditional foods, the author conducted a consumer survey. A point scale of 1 to 5 to judge how much they liked the taste of the food was used. 1 point meant the dish was not satisfying, 3 points meant it was averagely pleasing, and 5 points meant it was extremely pleasing.

3.2. Research material

To evaluate perception of Slovenes about Maltese dishes, the author selected ten of the most typical dishes, which represent the basic material of the research. These dishes were chosen based on their

variety. These dishes are offered at Maltese *festas*, in traditional Maltese restaurants or prepared in home kitchens.

Pastizzi: Diamond-shaped filo-pastry pockets filled with fresh ricotta cheese or a paste of mashed peas and spices make up the pastizz (singular), which is a combination between crispy, Arabic pastry and the contents, which are drawn from Malta's southern Italian culinary traditions (Galizia, 2016).

Timpana: This cuisine, which has its roots in Sicily, may be found in Malta, where it is referred to by its native name, timpana. This mouthwatering delicacy is nothing more than macaroni, minced meat, tomato paste and baked in a saucy pastry topping. (Galizia, 2016).

Bigilla: Beans, olive oil, salt, and crushed red peppers are the main ingredients of the traditional Maltese dish known as bigilla. It is most frequently used as a dipping sauce. In Malta, tic beans are referred to as "ful ta' Girba." These are very similar to broad beans, but they are significantly smaller and have a darker and more robust skin. (Dougall, 2014).

Honey ring: Qagaq tal-gasel are pastry rings filled with a mixture of treacle and sugar. They are called "honey rings" in English, but there is no honey in the recipe at all. The filling is mostly made of treacle. Maltese people call treacle "gasel iswed," which is probably why they are also called "honey rings." A long time ago, people in villages made qagaq tal-gasel with qastanija instead of treacle. The filling mixture can be sweetened with sugar. (Dougall, 2014).

Imqaret: Imqaret are one of the legacies of the Arab world that were left in Malta after it was colonized by Christians. A pastry shell stuffed with date paste, lemon zest, and spices is then deep fried. (Dougall, 2014).

Hobż biż-żejt/ Ftira: The Maltese like this bread as a snack, an appetizer, or a main course. The traditional variant, known as *ħobż biż-żejt*, is coated with fresh tomato pulp, sprayed with olive oil, then (optionally) packed with capers, olives, or tuna and seasoned with salt and pepper. The Phoenicians brought olive oil to Malta, but the Romans brought olive presses, making the islands dependent on olive oil production. Even though olive oil is now brought in from other countries, the Maltese still eat a lot of their own extra virgin olive oil. (Cremona, 2010; Galizia, 2016).

Fenkata: Rabbit fried in olive oil, garlic, bay leaves and white wine.

Bebbux (Snails): Malta, like France, Spain, and Portugal, loves edible land snails. After fasting for a few days, snails are cooked in salted water and topped with a fragrant tomato sauce or oil, garlic, and herbs. (Cremona, 2010).

Minestra: tick vegetable soup with tomato paste.

3.2 Ethical considerations

Both the study and the research it encompasses have been conducted in compliance with the ethical standards set out by Bryman, A. & Bell, E. (2007) "Business Research Methods". In this study the author considered the following ethical issues throughout the research process and in the study's final version:

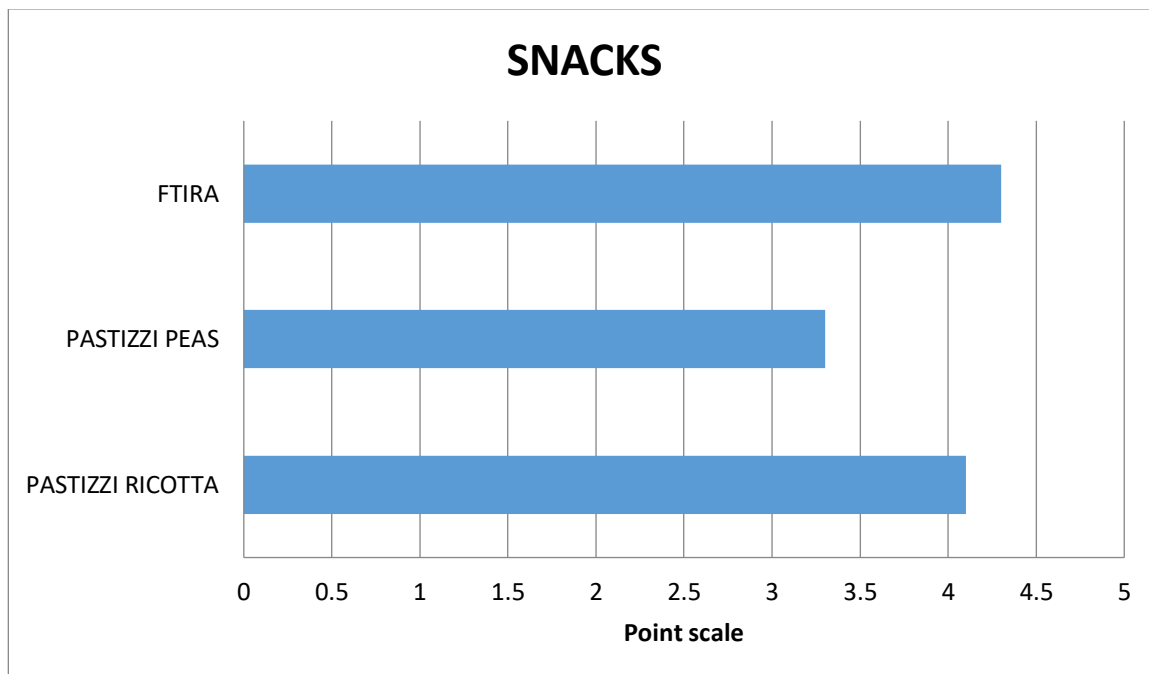
Participants in the survey questionnaire were provided with complete and correct information on matters such as nature, and objective of the research before they filled out the questionnaire. In addition, they were provided with adequate information on the study in issue, which enabled them to make an educated decision and consequently offer their consent to either participate or not engage in the research. The participants in the study had their right to privacy protected, and a sufficient level of secrecy was maintained with regard to the data collected from them. The author is under strict responsibility to withhold anything that may lead to the identification of the restaurant where the survey was conducted. The author is also ethically obligated to protect and maintain the establishment's confidentiality throughout the final public display of the data.

4. Results, Analysis and Discussion

A sensory evaluation of ten typical Maltese dishes was done by forty Slovenian visitors. All tourists sampled most of the dishes, but some tourist did not sample certain dish due to personal reasons. Tourists assigned a score based on sensory acceptability/taste liking.

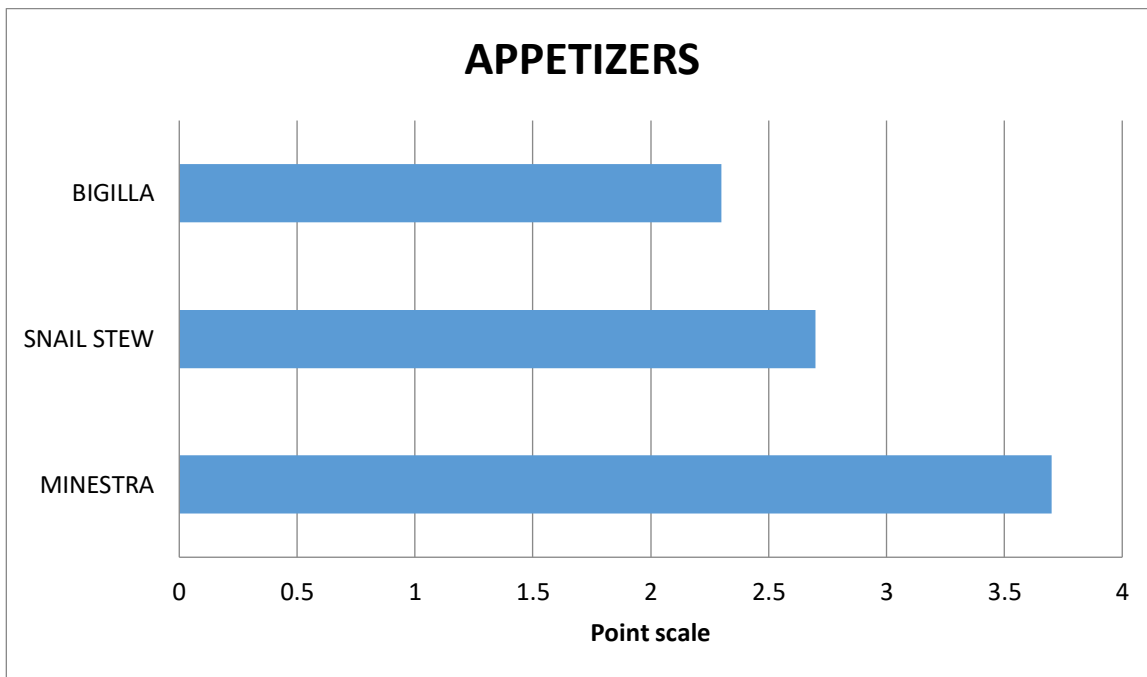
4.1 Taste acceptance/sensory acceptability

Dishes were divided in four categories: snacks, appetizers, main courses and sweets. The average values of taste ratings are displayed in following graphs.



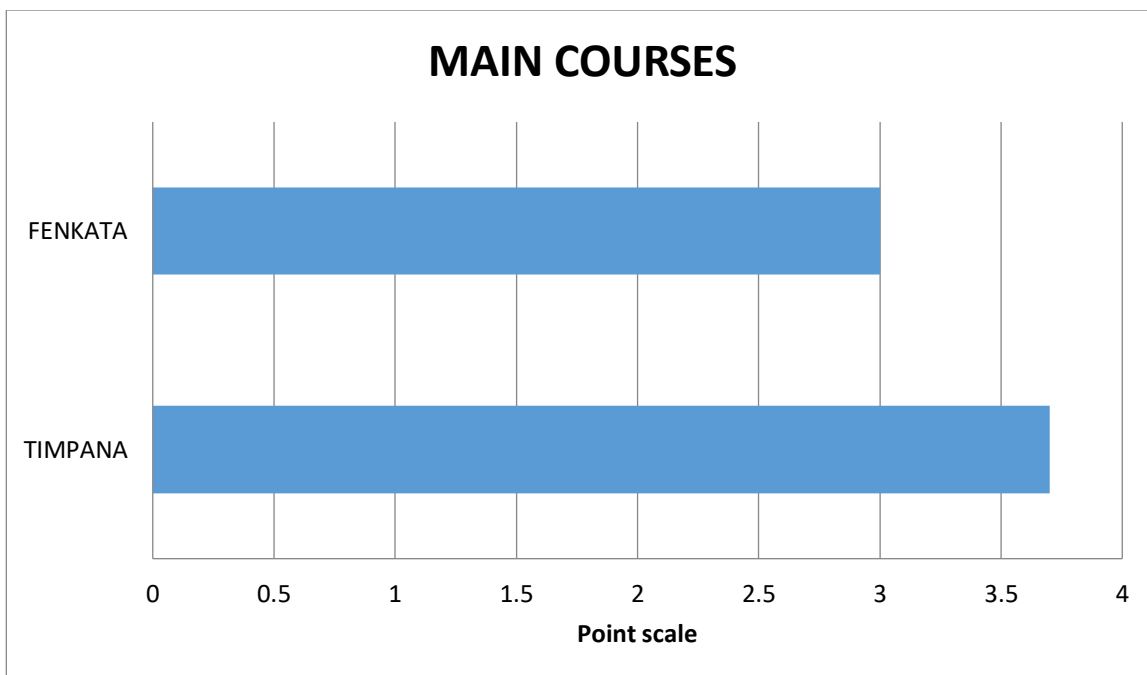
Graph 1: Graphic display of the average value of the food analysis on snacks

As can be seen in graph 1, among the snacks provided, *Ftira* was deemed to have the finest overall flavor. *Pastizz peas* was their least favorite dish.



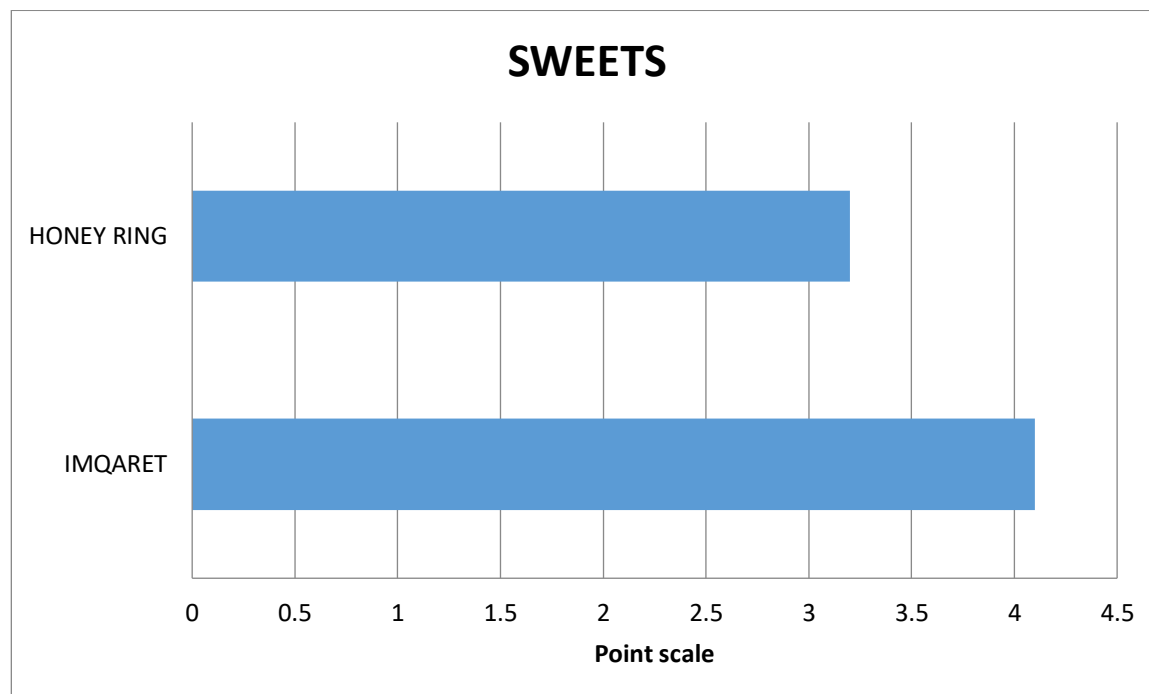
Graph 2: Graphic display of the average value of the food analysis on appetizers

According to graph 2, it is clear that among three appetizers that were provided, the respondents enjoyed *minestra* the most, while the snail stew received the lowest rating. The snails received the lowest rating because, for a variety of reasons, many guests chose not to sample them.



Graph 3: Graphic display of the average value of the food analysis on main courses

Given that not all of the guests sampled the rabbit stew, the difference in preferring the taste of *timpana* versus rabbit stew is only 0.6 points, as seen in graph 3.



Graph 4: Graphic display of the average value of the food analysis on sweets

Graph 4 demonstrates that respondents like the flavour of *Imqaret* significantly more than that of the honey ring.

4.2 Discussion of results

The results reveal that Slovenians preferred foods that are similar to those offered in Slovenia. Despite its small size, Slovenia offers a wide range of traditional dishes. These are quite different from each other, as they come from different culinary areas, which have been formed over the years according to the location, history and influence of bordering countries, cultural diversity and folk traditions, as well as the geographical and climatic characteristics of each region. Slovenia is a junction of several European cuisines, thus we can expect a wide variety of foods there.

Ftira's components are classic Mediterranean, and these are popular along Slovenia's sea coast. *Pastizzi ricotta* is similar to the dish that Slovenians know as *Burek*, therefore the taste of *Pastizzi ricotta* is widely known, it has also been well evaluated. The author can also note that the taste of

Imqaret was well received, owing to the characteristic sweet taste of dates, which is well known among Slovenes because dates are imported to Slovenia from North Africa. Other foods, such as *Timpana*, *Honey ring*, and *Pastizzi peas*, taste odd to Slovenians and are likely scored lower as a result. The Maltese vegetable soup- *minestra* is very similar to the Slovenian vegetable soup, which is popular across Slovenia, but notably along the shore. As a result, Slovenians' reactions to this dish were unremarkable, as the flavour is neither novel nor uncommon. Despite the positive response of those who tasted *fenkata*, this meal received a low rating because eight persons chose not to consume it for personal reasons. There were 12 persons who, due to their own personal preferences, did not want to try the snail stew; nonetheless, even among the ones who did taste the dish, the dish was not favourably received in any case.

According on the findings, I can conclude that Slovenians are open to trying new cuisines, but they have a strong preference for dishes that have a flavor profile that is comparable to Slovenian cuisine. In the same way as Malta is, Slovenia is likewise a crossroads for a variety of cuisines. It is likely that the positive reception that some Maltese foods have received among Slovenians is due to the fact that they are very similar to Slovenian dishes.

5. Final Arguments

Malta has a rich culinary legacy that is a fusion of several foreign cuisines. Due to a common history and geographical position, some dishes in Maltese cuisine are also common in the Mediterranean and Southern Italian cuisines. More and more people desire to learn about foreign cuisine and try traditional meals from other countries. Maltese rich history and a diverse range of traditional delicacies are mainly unknown to visitors. Malta was dominated by many Mediterranean rulers, each of which left a bit of their culture and traditional recipes behind.

5.1 Conclusions

The goal of the research was to collect data about Malta's lifestyle, nutrition, and food preparation from the past to the present. The main goal was to acquire the information which would be used to create proposals for presenting Maltese meals and cuisine to Slovenian tourists participating in an excursion that includes lunch in a traditional Maltese restaurant. This thesis does not go beyond the general tension between liking and not liking new food. The purpose is to eliminate the problem faced by trip organizers who do not know which food to include in the trip. Because local meals are distinctive and, in most cases, have been handed down from ancestors over the course of hundreds of years, many tourist destinations across the world employ local foods as methods to persuade travellers to visit those attractions. They are essential to the way of life and tradition of the local community since they symbolize the cultural heritage and identity of the tourist destinations. The native gastronomy also has the potential to inspire first-time visitors to have a favourable first impression and the desire to return to these locations at some point in the foreseeable future.

During her investigation, the author found the expected challenges, specifically, that not everyone would want to taste rabbit and snail stew. Some individuals thought snail stew was disgusting and refused to taste it. Meanwhile, the reaction to the rabbit stew presented was similarly unpleasant, as some people consider rabbits to be domestic animals and hence cannot imagine them on a plate. In general, the dishes were well received, as there are no drastic deviations from Slovenian cuisine, except for the snail stew. People wanted and expected to try new dishes, but still within certain limitations.

Since it has so much to offer, the Mediterranean island of Malta is visited by a sizable number of tourists and travellers despite its relatively modest size. It is a country that has a long history and a lot of interesting attractions; it is a country that has sun, warm sea, friendly people, a rich past, exciting

nightlife, and delicious cuisine. Olive oil, a wide variety of vegetables, and fish are the foundations of the Mediterranean diet, which is known for its reputation as a healthy eating plan. Because it incorporates various dishes with Arabic and British roots, Maltese cuisine is not typical of the Mediterranean diet. This is because British colonization played a significant role in the development of Maltese cuisine over a long period of time. To appreciate Maltese cuisine, you don't need to be an adventurous traveller; rather, you should have an open mind and be willing to experiment with various tastes and sensations. There is nothing particularly unique about Maltese cuisine; yet, there are some creative pairings of simple ingredients that are in keeping with the environment, the climate, and the preferences of tourists.

5.2 Recommendations

It would be interesting to undertake a similar study in the future in other countries, such as Asia, where the cuisine is radically different from what is eaten in Malta. The cuisines of these countries are significantly distinct from Maltese cuisine in terms of the spices, ingredients, and methods used in their preparation. This study could serve as the foundation for future food-related studies based on taste preference.

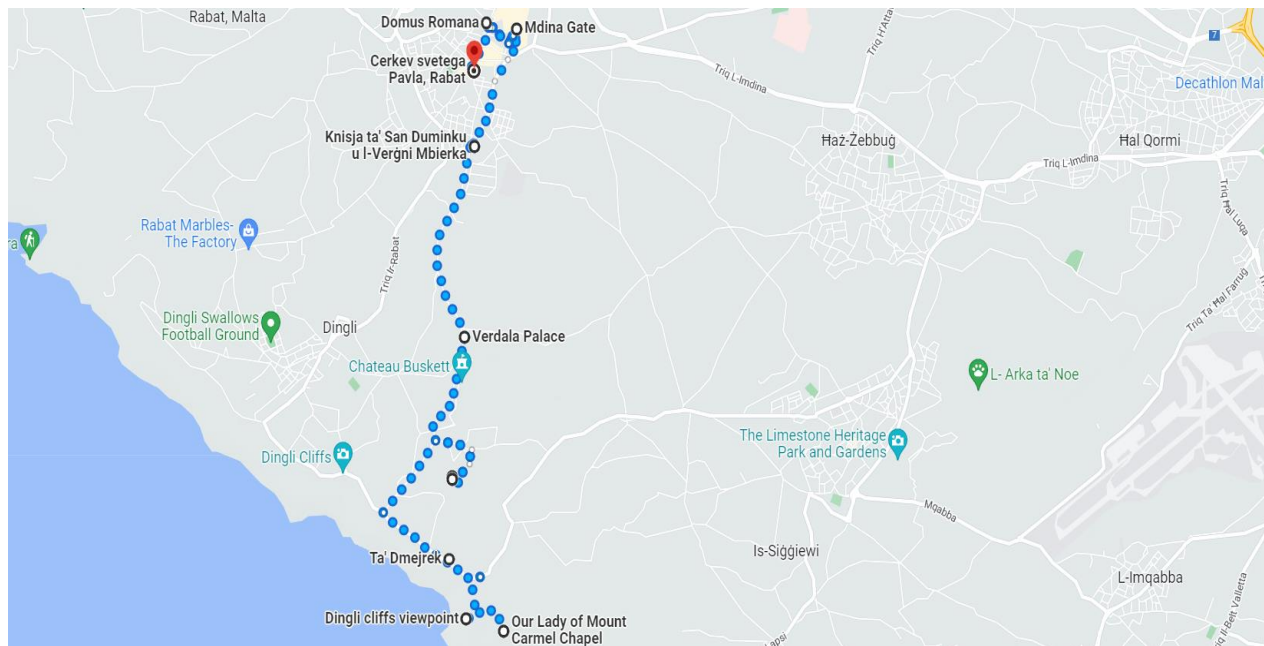
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Appendix 1: HND TG Long Essay Tour Itinerary

Walking tour Dingli cliffs – Rabat- Domus Romana- Maltese food tasting in Rabat



Picture 1: Walking tour map

Difficulty: Intermediate

Duration: 05 hours

Length: approx.10 km

Tour of intermediate hiking. Accessible routes, appropriate for people of all ability levels, unsuitable for small children and the disabled people. It's recommended to bring a bottle of water. The group has a maximum of ten members. The mini bus will pick you up from your hotel at approx. 9am, from where you will be taken to our starting point, which is Our Lady of Mount Carmel Chapel in Siggiewi.

1. Our walk will start at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Chapel



Picture 2: Our Lady of Mount Carmel Chapel

Fawwara spring is under the Chapel. Tal-Fawwara is a hamlet. Its name comes from an old stream with abundant water flow. According to Fr Francis Cilia's (d. 1864) papers in the Cathedral of Mdina archives, Fawwara is noted for its beauty, spring water, and turbulent history and folklore. 13th-century legends are most famous. Fr. Cilia describes how the Arabs tortured and executed seven young girls from Fawwara between 1270 and 1280, who refused to renounce their Christian religion.

The road will now take us to our next point of interest Dingli Cliffs Window. On the way there we will be able to see several Girna. Rural Malta has girnas (plural giren), corbelled huts. They are used for storage or temporary shelters and resemble other Mediterranean dry stone vernacular buildings. They may have been inhabited in the past.



Picture 3: Girna

As we walk on our path, we can see the rubble walls, which are home for many insects, reptiles and other animals. They are very common on Malta, built by craftsman with no use of mortar or cement.

They are in existence for 1000s years and are used to mark boundaries, wind breakers for crops and trees, they also prevent soil erosion. Caper plants cover the walls. Mediterranean Capparis shrubs give capers. They're expensive because they're hand-picked, but they're an useful store cupboard staple that adds a distinct sour/salty flavor to many savoury meals. We will taste them in one of traditional Maltese snacks towards end of our tour.



Picture 4: Capparis



Picture 5: Capers

Most of the fauna in the Maltese Islands consists of insects and molluscs. A number of residential birds are found with a relatively high numbers of seabird colonies. One such colony is found at Dingli Cliffs. 20 mammals are found in the Maltese islands 11 of which are Bats. One can also encounter a number of reptiles.

2. Our next stop will be after 450 m at Dingli Cliffs Window.



Picture 6 and 7: Dingli Cliffs Window and the Maltese National plant

The Maltese Rock-centaury, an indigenous Daisy family perennial, was named Malta's national plant in 1971. Its smooth, fleshy spatula-shaped leaves grow as a shrub up to 50 cm tall. Each tall stalk has one bloom head from May through July. National and international laws safeguard this severely endangered plant. Special Areas of Conservation preserve this species and its environment. The Maltese Rock-centaury is also grown as an ornamental in parks and along center-strips.

In this area it is also possible to see The Blue Rock Thrush. It is Malta's national bird.



Picture 8: Merrill, Blue Rock Thrush

Malta is its breeding ground, however it is found from Gibraltar to Japan. It lives in rock holes and walls and lays 3-5 eggs. Blue Rock Thrushes eat berries, seeds, insects, and small reptiles.

3. From this point, the road will take us to see a very impressive view of Dingli cliffs.

It is about 850m of easy walk. Walkers can discover a variety of landscapes while enjoying the outside environment of the Maltese Islands. Geology, time, and tectonic factors have shaped several Maltese Islands landscapes. Dingli Cliffs are famous for their plummeting sea cliffs, which exhibit the rock layer succession of the Maltese Islands, formed by their varying resistances. Walking along "Panoramic Road" along Dingli Cliffs, one can see the greatest altitude of the Maltese Islands and our plateau.



Picture 9: Dingli cliffs

Garrigue flora grows on rock outcrops. Maltese natural ecosystems on rocky land are usually characterized by garrigue flora. It is characterized by low aromatic small-leaved shrubs, geophytes, therophytes, and a vast diversity of herbaceous plants that can endure summer drought. Plants must survive high winds, sea spray, animal grazing, trampling, and summer burning. Wild Thyme, Sea Squill, and Mediterranean Heather are abundant in the karstic plateaux. Each garrigue is distinct and has a dominating species. (<https://www.thecliffs.com.mt>)

However, the garrigue is generally overlooked as a weedy, rocky waste of space. The Maltese term for garrigue, xagri, comes from the Arabic word for desert, sahra. Notwithstanding this, the garrigues include approximately 500 flowering plant species, half of Malta's indigenous species!

4. We continue going for another 2 km to our next stop at the Misrah Ghar il-Kbir (informally known as Clapham Junction)

Misrah Ghar il-Kbir (Clapham Junction) is a prehistoric site in Siġġiewi, near the Dingli Cliffs. It is famous for its "cart ruts"—a complicated network of rock trails. The tracks' antiquity and purpose remain a Maltese mystery. Most archeologists believe the site developed around 2000 BC after Sicilian settlers started the Bronze Age in Malta. They run in lines, bends, up and down hills, and

switch back and forth on higher slopes like modern roadways. Interesting, some cart ruts flow straight down ridges and cliffs.



Picture 10: Cart Ruts in Siggiewi

5. We will continue our countryside walk for 1,5 km to Verdala Palace

Verdala Palace replaced a hunting lodge built in the 1550s or 1560s by Grand Master Jean Parisot de la Valette. In 1586, Hugues Loubenx de Verdalle expanded the hunting lodge into a palace. Maltese architect Girolamo Cassar designed Verdala Palace. Renaissance architecture characterizes the palace. More ornamentation occurred throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. It was Malta's Governors' summer residence under British control. The President of Malta's summer house, Buskett Gardens' Verdala Palace, is not open to the public.



Picture 11: Verdala Palace

6. We will walk for approximately 2km to our next point of interest: St. Dominic Convent, Rabat

At the beginning of the 13th century, the Pope gave his blessing to the Dominican Order. St. Dominic, a priest from Spain who lived in France, started this group of Catholic monks. In the 15th century, Dominican monks came to Malta and built their first monastery in the town of Rabat. With help from the King of Spain, the Maltese government and private donors in the area started building a church. The building was finished in the year 1500 and it was remodeled in the next centuries.



Picture 12: Dominican convent

7. Our next stop will be after cca. 15 min of walk at the Mdina gate



Picture 13: The Gate of the Mdina

It was built in 1724 to replace an older archway to its right. It has rusticated columns and detailed carvings, and its baroque style is very impressive. The gate has an inscription about how the city walls were fixed and the arms of Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena. Here, the Nobles of Mdina met with each new Grand Master and made them swear to protect their privileges and rights before handing them the keys to the city. Malta's Mdina is one of Europe's best-preserved old walled cities, and when visitors walk through its impressive gate, they are taken back hundreds of years.

8. The Domus Romana is just outside of the walls of Mdina, and we will visit it. We will learn what the Romans ate and how they cooked.

8.1 Site Discovery

Workers planting plants for Howard Garden accidentally found some of the mosaics and Islamic tombs in 1881. We are standing above the remnants of a 2,000-year-old Roman Town House, which we will soon explore, as well as a 1,000-year-old Islamic Cemetery. Before automated shovels, excavators, and underground garages, people reused the site and stones by layering construction. Thus, the Cemetery is built over the Roman House. The Bay Laurel should be mentioned before entering the Museum.

Bay Laurels are native to Malta. Romans liked it and used it in garlands for dignitaries at political galas and parades. Military officers would send their emperor a laurel branch to celebrate a victory. Its leaves are used in Maltese rabbit stew, meat stew, and pasta sauce recipes.

8.2 Inside of Domus Romana

Domus Romana Kitchen Slaves cooked and bought supplies in Roman homes' well-equipped kitchens (culina). Roman nobles could hire specialized cooks for their elaborate parties. Cooking was done in circular pots on tripods or brick ovens. Malta has many pots but no oven or tripod. Food was stored in amphorae and dolia with stoppers, sometimes immersed below ground. Owners and meals determine the quality of serving plates. Aristocrats used beautiful plates, glass cups, and bowls, while commoners utilized clay plates that were sometimes ornamented. Romans ate with their fingers, therefore wooden, bone, and metal utensils were rarely utilized.

8.2.1 Food and meals

Like us, the Romans had a light breakfast (ientaculum) in the morning, a light lunch (prandium), and a more substantial dinner (cena) in the late afternoon or early evening. Food differed by social status, too. Rich Romans valued variety, whereas poor Romans ate olive oil, bread, and meat. Their meals, which used a blend of sour and sweet, would have tasted horrible to most modern consumers but

included game, chicken, fruits, honey, eels, snails, and garum, a fermented fish sauce. Wine was crucial during and after meals. After important meals, utensils like the rython made drinking more enjoyable. Roman aristocrats paid a much for Spanish wine. Most wines were too powerful to consume without water.

8.2.1 Olive press

A Roman stone olive press known as a trapetum. This olive press was not found here, but in one of the Roman villas which were located on many places on Malta. Olive production activity would not be held in the city, but on countryside. The device consisted of a large stone bowl (mortarium) into which the olives were poured and then crushed under two concave stones (orbes) attached to a central beam (cupa) fixed to an iron pivot (columella).

8.2.1 Olive oil

Romans used olive oil for everything. Olives and olive oil were essential to the Mediterranean diet and cookery (and still are), but pressed olive oil was also utilized for many other uses. After exercising, Romans smeared it on and used a strigil to scrape off dirt and sweat. Olive oil was utilized for lighting, perfumes, massages, religious rites, and even medicine.

9. After our long walk it's finally time to eat some traditional Maltese food. We will walk another 500m towards the center of Rabat. On the way there we will stop in three Maltese restaurants, where we will have opportunity to taste some Maltese food.

9.1 First stop is *pastizzi* tasting

As we already learned before, after the Roman and Byzantine period (218 BCE-870CE), the Arabic period (870CE-1091CE) followed. Aside from the Islamic burial already described, not many remnants from the Arabic era have been discovered on Malta, however the Arabs had a significant impact on the Maltese islands. These can be detected in the names of cities, language and food, especially in desserts. So let's go to taste one of typical Maltese snacks, which is believed came from the Arabs. *Pastizzi*: Diamond-shaped filo-pastry pockets filled with fresh ricotta cheese or a paste of mashed peas and spices make up the pastizz (singular), which is a combination between crispy, Arabic pastry and the contents, which are drawn from Malta's southern Italian culinary traditions.



Picture 14: *Pastizzi*

9.2 Second stop is *ftira* tasing

Hobż biż-żejt/ Ftira: The Maltese like this bread as a snack, an appetizer, or a main course. The traditional variant, known as *ħobż biż-żejt*, is coated with fresh tomato pulp, sprayed with olive oil, then (optionally) packed with capers, olives, or tuna and seasoned with salt and pepper. The Phoenicians brought olive oil to Malta, but the Romans brought olive presses, making the islands dependent on olive oil production. Even though olive oil is now brought in from other countries, the Maltese still eat a lot of their own extra virgin olive oil.



Picture 15: *Ftira*

9.2.1 Ingredients

- *ħobż* is the Maltese word for bread. This word has been appropriated from the Arabic language used by the ruling Arabs in the 11th century. Even the very making of *ħobż* may have been influenced by our previous occupiers, the Romans. The Romans had brought with them their own baking techniques and technologies to Malta.

There are different types of Maltese bread. Maltese bread (*ħobż Malti*) is known for being round in shape, with a dark outer crust and soft, interior, full of air pockets. Another popular type of bread is the *ftira*, from the verb *fattar* - meaning to flatten (the dough). The *ftira* is made of the same ingredients as the *ħobż Malti*. Flat in shape, it usually has a hole in the middle, making it look like a huge, irregular doughnut.

This classic bread is still produced using centuries-old methods. Maltese bakers utilize natural starters to raise dough. A portion of old sour dough is added to the current batch to give it an airy, chewy center. Of course, stone ovens improve the flavour and crispiness of this bread.

- olive oil: we spoke extensively about it
- tomato paste: the best is to use a tomato paste from local tomatoes, like 'kunserva', which is a delicious product of Gozitan tomato industry.
- Capers: From west to east, caper bushes are grown throughout the Mediterranean. But for some reason, capers find their vibe on this tiny island in the middle of the Mediterranean. Capers are traditionally brined using the local Gozitan sea salt. Two genuine regional components combined to form one.
- Tuna: In 1748, the first "Mattanza" "Tunnara", was introduced by the Grand Master Pinto. The tuna net was elevated and posited in Mellieha. Full-blown blue fin tuna swims few kilometers away from the coast.

In the months of May, June and July, blue fin tuna migrate from the Atlantic ocean to the warmer Mediterranean sea, through the Straits of Gibraltar original spawning grounds and return back after the season has completed in September until October. The Grand Master Pinto financed the Mellieħa "tunnara". For many Mellieħa fisherm, the tuna industry was their only livelihood.

Malta is ideally situated for tuna netting because of its location in the center of the Mediterranean. In actuality, according to data from the National Office of Statistics (NSO), the Maltese tuna industry produced 13,000 tons of tuna, worth over €170 million, with 90% of that quantity going to Asian markets.

9.3 Our next stop is *honey ring* tasting

Honey ring: Qagaq tal-gasel are treacle-and-sugar-filled pastry rings. English "honey rings" contain no honey. Treacle dominates the filling. Maltese name treacle "gasel iswed," hence "honey rings." Historically, villages produced qagaq tal-gasel with qastanija instead of treacle. Melting honeycombs after honey extraction produced this. Qastanija likely comes from Italian castagna, meaning chestnut. It may have been named for its chestnut-colored combination. The combination contains no chestnuts. Black treacle replaced qastanija. The filling is sweetened for sugar lovers.



Picture 16: Honey ring

10. Our last stop will be near the St. Paul's church in Rabat, from where we will be picked up by our mini bus and taken back to the hotel

Appendix 2: Survey

SURVEY

This is a sensory evaluation of ten typical Maltese dishes. It will be done by forty Slovenian visitors.

Objective of the research: The information gathered would be used to develop proposals for offering Maltese dishes and cuisine to Slovenian tourists, who are on the excursion which includes lunch in traditional Maltese restaurant. The participants in the study have their right to privacy protected, and a sufficient level of secrecy will be maintained with regard to the data collected from them.

Use a 1–5 point scale to rate how much you like the taste of the food. 1 point means the dish is not satisfying, 3 points mean it is averagely pleasing, and 5 points mean it is extremely pleasing. Please mark your score of each dish.

MALTESE DISH	POINT SCALE				
PASTIZZI PEAS	1	2	3	4	5
PASTIZZI RICOTTA	1	2	3	4	5
FTIRA	1	2	3	4	5
MINESTRA	1	2	3	4	5
SNAIL STEW	1	2	3	4	5
BIGILLA	1	2	3	4	5
FENKATA- rabbit	1	2	3	4	5
TIMPANA	1	2	3	4	5
HONEY RING	1	2	3	4	5
IMQARET	1	2	3	4	5