

# Watch Towers (Marfa)

# walk



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Europe Investing in Rural Areas



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## Tips for the road



- Plan ahead and follow all the signs throughout the route. This is the **Cyan Walk** so please follow the Cyan signs. It is very easy to get distracted by the surrounding scenery while taking your country walk. Short cuts are to be avoided as many fields are privately owned. You will encounter many 'RTO' signs meaning 'Riservato'. The markings indicate private property.
- Maltese is the official language of the Maltese Islands and an official EU language. The Maltese language is spoken only on the Maltese Islands. Road signs in Malta are in Maltese. Some basic translations that will help you throughout the walk: *Triq* - Street, *Vjal* - Avenue, *Sqaq* - Alley, *Ġnien* - Garden, *Fortizza* - Fort and *Bajja* - Beach.
- Please keep in mind that in the Maltese Islands cars drive on the left-hand side.
- In some of the walks you will come across churches and other places of religious devotion. Please keep in mind that these are places of worship and due respect must be given if approaching or entering such places. One should not wander in such places if an official religious function is underway.
- Be Prepared... be sure to wear a comfortable pair of walking shoes and clothing which is appropriate for the time of the year. Allow enough time to complete the walk in broad daylight. Make allowances for time required for resting, taking photographs and observing nature and/or places of interest.
- Bird trapping and hunting are practised in the countryside. There are, however, strict regulations determining areas where such activities are permitted and the time of the year when no such activities are allowed.
- Cliff tops are magnificent areas but they also present potential hazards. Always keep a safe distance from the cliff edges, especially on windy days, or if the ground is covered by loose gravel or is slippery due to rainfall.
- In some valleys and gorges, mobile phone reception may be poor or there may be none at all.
- Respect the fragility of the countryside. Do not climb over rubble walls or throw stones into valleys or over cliffs. Refrain from taking any 'souvenirs' back home with you. Do not disturb animals, plants or their natural habitats. Leave only your footprint behind you and nothing else.
- Be culturally sensitive and respect local customs. Take photographs but respect the privacy of others.
- More information on places of interest such as churches, can be found on the informational panels that are installed along this route.
- Emergency Number: 112**





MALTA GOES RURAL

## Watch Towers (Marfa)

walk

**The walk starts at Ghadira Bay, Malta's largest sandy beach. Alighting at the Ghadira Bus Terminus, you can spend some time admiring this beach. If it is hot, you may even spot some sunbathers or swimmers.**

Make sure you take drinking water and food with you since for most part of the route you will be walking in bare countryside. Take good care while crossing the road as it is generally very busy.

After taking in the beautiful vistas of the beach, the Mellieħa village on top of the hill and the scenic cliffs on the right hand side, you can start your walk. Turn north and start walking uphill. After a few paces you will reach the gate leading to the Ghadira Nature Reserve. The Ghadira area is a Natura 2000 site.

The Reserve is to your left and is surrounded by a shelterbelt of trees and shrubs. If it is open, you can visit the Reserve at the end of the walk. Given the length of the walk, we suggest you continue walking right now.

Once you pass the Nature Reserve, continue walking uphill along the road. The conglomeration of beach huts to the left is mostly occupied by locals in the summer months. Towering above them is St. Agatha's Tower commonly known as *il-Torri l-Aħmar*, the Red Tower, due to its red ochre painted walls, (you will get the opportunity to take a closer look at this Tower on the return journey of the walk.)

At the top of the hill, you will reach a road junction. Turn to the right, following the sign to Armier Bay (take good care while crossing the road). The road levels off as it stretches along Marfa Ridge. The ridge overlooks Ghadira Bay to the right and Comino to the left.

Comino (Maltese: *Kemmuna*) is an island of the Maltese archipelago, which lies between Malta and Gozo and measures 1.35 square miles (3.5 km<sup>2</sup>) in area. Named after the cumin seed that once flourished in the Maltese islands, Comino is noted for its tranquility and isolation. It has a permanent population of only four residents, but in the summer season, its beaches with their transparent seas, attract many visitors. Today, Comino is a bird sanctuary and nature reserve. Comino and its small sister island Kemmunnett are Natura 2000 sites.

Soon the asphalt road passes through a wooded area. In this wooded area you will come across evidence of hunting, a traditional activity which is still practised in Malta. If you are walking during the hunting season, you may encounter some hunters. Please respect their privacy and keep walking along the main path.

The straight road runs along the entire length of the Marfa ridge. From the cliffs at *Irdum il-Hmar* (literally translated: Donkey's Cliffs) overlooking Mellieħa Bay, you can see the floating pens or cages of a fish farm. Keep to the main road till the end at *Irdum tal-Madonna* (literally translated: The Cliffs of Our Lady).

The road narrows and you will pass beneath another canopy of wattle and olive trees. A short gradient follows and a road on the left leads to *Dahlet ix-Majjar Bay*. On the right, through the acacia copse, a path winds down among the cliff boulders and leads to a small, secluded beach, commonly known as Slugs Bay.

At this point, you can see the Immaculate Conception Chapel perched in contemplative solitude at the cliff edge. The chapel, built in 1961, replaced an earlier one which was built at the end of the nineteenth century and was situated closer to the drop-off. Being on a fissured cliff edge, the old chapel was in danger of collapse. A new one was built further in.

The statue of Our Lady, erected in 1870 on a stone plinth nearby, inspires a silent prayer from visitors. The cliff edge is in danger of crumbling due to erosion so please avoid going too near the edge.

The walk continues along the path with the chapel on the left and the cliff edge on the right. The path soon turns slightly to the left through a few clumps of cactus. The path runs down through a grove of Aleppo pines until it reaches a concrete crossroad. Turning right, the road slopes slightly downhill. The road continues downhill towards *il-Torri l-Abjad* (the White Tower) and *Dahlet ix-Majjar Bay*. It is bordered to the right by garigue carrying the wild thyme as the dominant plant species. At the end of the road, the walk proceeds to the left.

Proceed to the next bay, namely *ir-Ramla tat-Torri*. This sandy bay is named after *il-Torri l-Abjad*, which is one of many towers built in 1658 by Grand Master de Redin as part of a coastal defence system. Continue past the access road to the Tower and over the small hill onto the bay, *ir-Ramla tat-Torri*. The fenced area in the bay protects a small sand dune habitat.

Walk along the coast, past several boathouses and slipways. Behind these buildings you can see a defence wall, built in 1650 to fend off enemy landings. Continue walking round this walled peninsula until you reach the next sandy beach. Note the ruins of a small seventeenth-century battery built by Grand Master Lascaris. Comino appears to be very close to this coastline. Directly facing Malta, on its eastern tip, you may discern St. Mary's Battery built in 1715.

Following the coastline you will pass by several beach huts. In order to follow the route set out in this walk you will have to cross the sandy beach at Little Armier. You will then reach a small flight of steps leading on to Armier Bay car park. Continue along the asphalt road ahead. Within a few metres you will reach a road junction. The main road turns sharply to the left, towards Mellieħa Village. The first narrow road to your right leads to the Vendome Battery. This seventeenth-century battery was named after the French knight who commissioned it (Philippe de Bourbon, Duke of Vendôme 1655-1727).

At this junction proceed directly ahead onto a narrow road lined with beach huts. This road comes to an end in the bay named Ramlet il-Qortin. Walk across the sandy beach, past a redoubt. Keep walking along the coast up to a wide clearing facing a hotel. Walk towards the hotel's main entrance next to the

palm trees. This leads to the hotel's car park. Turn left just before entering the hotel's premises. The concrete path leads you around the hotel boundary wall, past a clump of canes and finally towards the beach. Arable land may be seen to your left. The route passes by the ruins of another redoubt built by the Knights, which faces the centre of this bay.

Continue walking towards the west side of the coast, where another hotel comes into view. Nearby is the Marfa quay, used by Gozo ferries before the larger Cirkewwa terminal was developed. Today the quay is used by the Comino ferry and other sea craft. By now, you must have noticed the dominating presence of the tower on Comino. It was built under Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt between 1601 and 1622. During the time of the Knights, sea pirates used the Comino inlets to hide their ships and then raid boats which used to cross the channel between the islands. In order to have more control over the channel, the Knights built this tower to serve as a station. This tower, together with a number of other places of interest in Malta, was used in some Hollywood films. The most famous film which was partly shot here was "The Count of Monte Cristo".

The walk proceeds along the asphalted road. Continue walking uphill towards the bus shelter in front of *il-Palazz l-Aħmar* (the Red Palace). This red ochre building was originally constructed in 1657 as a watchtower but was enlarged to its present state during the early twentieth century. Walking in the direction of the Cirkewwa Terminal, take the first road on the left and follow the sign to Paradise Bay. The road passes through stretches of garigue, which are largely populated by wild thyme. It then continues uphill, followed by a slight downhill, curving to the right into a large car park. Walk past the flight of steps, which leads to Paradise Bay below. The asphalt road soon gives way to a track going uphill along the cliff edge.

Turn to the left and walk over the rocky terrain, along a low rubble wall. Soon you will reach the top of the ridge, where you will also reach level ground and a well-formed path. This path ends in a T-junction. Turn right on the asphalt road, which leads to the cliff-edge viewing point.

Turn to the left, up a steep, rock-strewn path. Half way up the path you will come across an opening in the rock face to your right. Look through this fissure onto the picturesque scene below. The path soon levels out, passes through garigue, and ends in an asphalt road. This is the walk's last uphill trek. Before proceeding left, at the top of the hill, you can walk towards the edge of the cliff on the right.

It is also ideal for viewing spectacular sunsets. The derelict buildings are remnants of a wartime NATO Base. The walk proceeds along the ridge, on the asphalt road flanked on both sides by garigue. Below, you can also see the large, circular cleft in the sea cliff of the valley floor. This was formed by the battering waves and in rough weather spouts out clouds of sea spray.

Proceed along the asphalt road. You will arrive at St. Agatha's Tower also referred to as *il-Torri l-Aħmar* (the Red Tower). This is an austere and imposing building commanding views of the ridges of Marfa and Mellieħa. Built by Grand Master Lascaris in 1649 the tower was recently restored. The tower was an important link in the defence of this part of the island. Looking to the right, from the vantage point next to the tower you can see the boundaries of the Ghadira Nature Reserve below, from where this walk began. The road proceeds downhill. Turn sharply to the right and continue down the steep, busy road for a few metres.

You may take some time now and visit the Nature Reserve, if open. This bird sanctuary is looked after by BirdLife Malta and bird lovers are highly recommended to visit it as they will find plenty of birds that choose to stop there for some time whilst migrating to the continent. If on the other hand you would prefer to rest, you may choose to dine or have a snack in one of the many restaurants on the beach. Always take good care while crossing the road. The walk ends at the bus terminus where you can take a bus back home. If time permits and you would like to visit some more interesting areas, you can choose to hop off in the nearby village of Mellieħa. Standing on top of the cliff, this village is one of the most beautiful villages in the north. Here you can visit the Sanctuary dedicated to our Lady of Mellieħa where you will find an *al fresco* painting which according to tradition, was painted by St. Luke, who was shipwrecked here together with St. Paul around the year 60 AD.

If your holiday is not at its end, you can also consider more walking adventures in our sister islands. Visit Comino for a lovely walk in this splendid reserve, or else cross over to Gozo. You will surely fall in love with Gozo, with its distinctive character and breathtaking views. Gozo also offers numerous walking trails you can choose to follow.

**Bus route No 41 and 42** operates the following route:

Valletta - Floriana - Pietà - Msida - Birkirkara - Lija - Mosta - Burmarrad - San Pawl il-Bahar - Xemxija - Mellieħa - Marfa - Cirkewwa

**Bus route No X1** operates the following route:

Luqa (Airport) - Marsa - Msida - Mater Dei - Swieqi - Pembroke - Bahar ic-Cagħaq, Qawra - St Paul's Bay - Xemxija - Mellieħa - Marfa - Cirkewwa

**Bus route No 101** operates the following route:

Mgarr - Zebbiegh - Ghajn Tuffieħa - Manikata - Mellieħa - Marfa - Cirkewwa

**Bus route No 102** operates the following route:

Bugibba - St Paul's Bay - Xemxija - Mellieħa - Marfa - Cirkewwa

**Bus route No 222** operates the following route:

Sliema - St Julians - Swieqi - Pembroke - Bahar ic-Cagħaq - Qawra - St Paul's Bay, Xemxija, Mellieħa, Marfa, Cirkewwa

**Length of walk approx 14.45km**

*It is the responsibility of individuals to approach outdoor activities with caution. Walking and any other countryside activity can be strenuous or dangerous and individuals should ensure that they are fit enough before embarking upon it. The MTA will not be held responsible for any loss of personal items and injuries of individuals following this walk.*



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Walk



	WALK AREA
	INFORMATION
	RESTAURANT
	CHURCH
	HERITAGE SITE
	BUS STOP



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