This 12 kilometre section starting at Saint Julian’s Bay takes you along a pleasant seaside promenade, around curving bays and through the popular tourist resort of Sliema. Along the route you can enjoy a wide variety of sea views and admire the many quality stone buildings. At Tigné peninsula the path turns inland to run along the edge of Sliema Creek, passing Manoel Island and reaching Msida Creek. Here you cross a bridge at the beautiful twin-spire Church of Saint Joseph the Worker and turn seawards again. Passing through the historic suburb of Floriana with its charming Botanic Gardens and the Mall Garden where the Knights played bowls in the 18th century, you arrive at the main entrance of the majestic city of Valletta.

You can take a bus to the starting point from Valletta, from Bugibba and from other points along the coastal road. You are rarely more than 200 metres from a café. The Valletta bus terminus is next to the finishing point of the walk.

**THE WALK**

The route is shown on Map 13. The walk begins at the innermost part of Saint Julian’s Bay, at the Love monument, a popular meeting spot for young people. This pretty part of the bay, named Spinola Bay, is surrounded by period houses and still contains a number of traditional colourful fishing boats. The majority of the old boathouses have been converted into fashionable shore-side restaurants. It is a very attractive area, particularly at night, when the extensive coloured lighting creates a romantic Mediterranean ambience.

Ramble along the promenade as it curves around the small bays, you can notice the eclectic mix of buildings. The water polo grounds to your left provide a relaxing evening’s entertainment for drinkers in the overlooking bars. A little further on to the right you can see the impressive Balluta Buildings 🏢. This classy apartment block, built in 1928, would not be out of place in London or Paris.

Continuing along the promenade past the Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, you turn right at the beautiful Barracuda restaurant to pass a group of palm trees and an impressive stone-globe water feature. Soon, you find yourself overlooking Independence Gardens 🌳 - a pleasant linear park whose name celebrates the...
freedom obtained from Britain in 1964. Malta is a member of the Commonwealth and continues to have many connections with Britain. In particular the Maltese are enthusiastic supporters of British football clubs. Independence Gardens is a haven for stray cats. The local council has provided designated cat feeding points in the park and have banned the feeding at any other point. Across the water of Saint Julian's Bay, the Dragonara Casino stands out like a fake Las Vegas casino, but is in fact the former palace of an Italian noblewoman.

As you continue along the promenade you come to Saint Julian's Tower, built by the Knights in 1658 as part of a network to provide early warning of a Turkish invasion. Each tower is within viewing distance of the next, so that a signal, such as smoke, can pass from the tip of Malta to Valletta in a couple of minutes.

As an alternative to the path along the promenade, and depending on the weather, you may descend to the flat limestone at the sea’s edge by means of a road just in front of the tower. It is surprisingly tranquil at this lower level where the traffic noise can hardly be heard. This rocky shelf is very popular in summer with tourists and locals. As there is no tide of any consequence you can lie close to the cooling sea. You are probably aware that Malta has few sandy beaches and that the coast is almost totally composed of yellow limestone which formed underwater many millions of years ago. The fossil shells you can see in the limestone along this stretch give testimony to its watery origins. The limestone rock along Sliema has been modified over the years by the need for defence from invaders (Turks/French/Italians/Germans) and to allow easy access to the sea for swimmers. As you walk further on, notice a number of square pools cut in the rock near the water’s edge. In the early 20th century, Maltese entrepreneurs had the brilliant idea of carving out these pools, providing covers for protection against the sun and renting them to families for private use, on a daily basis.

**Sliema**

After a stroll of perhaps 500 m along the coastal limestone you walk back up onto the promenade, and soon pass an attractive low fort, formerly the Sliema Point Battery...
and known amongst the Maltese as “Il-Fortizza”. In spite of its ancient appearance it was built in 1876 and served as a searchlight position in World War II. The interior of the fort has been remodelled to turn it into a restaurant and the work included the roofing-over of the parade ground to form a large room in the centre.

Shortly beyond the fort you come to a road junction, with Tigné peninsula to your left. Go directly across the road to join the footpath that brings you ahead through the commercial centre of Sliema. The road contains many shops and, on the left behind green railings, the magnificent but dilapidated Villa Drago, a sad reminder of a time when Sliema was dominated by elegant homes. As you come to a junction, take the pedestrian road (Triq Bisazza) which goes downhill giving you views of Sliema Creek and, in the distance, the proud city of Valletta. Go across the coastal road to join the seaside promenade. You will see the embarkation point for the ferry to Valletta and will receive many offers of boat trips around the harbour. A boat trip from Sliema strand is a must-do activity. You can take a two-hour trip around the harbour, which is great, or a whole day trip around the Maltese islands. A good option is to take the local ferry from Sliema to Valletta that is cheap, takes only 10 minutes and provides spectacular views.

The view across the water to Valletta from here is as good as you will get anywhere in the world, particularly at night. Valletta, a world heritage city, still has the appearance of a medieval city and there are few modern intrusions in the vista. The Anglican Cathedral in Valletta can be seen cheek by jowl with the impressive dome of the Catholic Church of Mount Carmel. To the left, at the tip of Valletta you can see the mighty defensive walls of Fort Saint Elmo. Few of the many tourists admiring this view of the fort are aware of the critical role it played in the defence of Western Europe against an expansionist Ottoman Empire!

The route now takes you to the right along a tree-lined coastal promenade where you can see many leisure boats and optimistic anglers. Be sure to look in the clear water of the bay, often large schools of small fish are to be seen. You pass Manoel Island, just a little offshore and now connected by a short bridge.
MANOEL ISLAND
Manoel Island contained a quarantine hospital constructed in 1643 to house an influx of plague and cholera victims from vessels, unfortunately destroyed by bombing in World War II. The island contains a substantial star-shaped fort with its walls and ditches constructed from the limestone rock of the island itself. It was built between 1723 and 1755 under the patronage of Portuguese Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena. It suffered severely from bombing during the Second World War when the island served as a British submarine base. This naval base made a substantial contribution to the defeat of Rommel's forces in Africa as, in some months, submarines destroyed up to 50% of the ships ferrying vital supplies from Italy to the German forces. The fort is currently under reconstruction. Notice that the left side of the island still contains an untouched natural habitat of mixed trees and shrubs. Military bases throughout the world have (unintentionally) played a vital role in protecting endangered habitats by restricting public access.

Take a short walk across the bridge to "Duck Village". This unique low cost facility consists of a complex of small brick houses that provide basic but seemingly adequate accommodation for many duck families. The ducks seem untroubled by the presence of cats and vice versa. It will make you smile.

Return to the promenade to continue your walk towards Valletta, through a small park. Staying near to the coast you pass alongside a marina which offers vital protection against winter storms for many luxury boats. While the Mediterranean in summer is quite tranquil, it's winter storms are frequent and surprisingly fierce. It was one such storm that caused the ship carrying Saint Paul to Rome to be shipwrecked on Malta and led to Malta becoming the first Christian country.

As the path curves to the right you may notice some bollards that are made from real cannons embedded in cement. Continue rambling as the path curves inland to run along Msida Creek which provides a safe anchorage for many boats. The creek is a flooded river valley, formed many thousands of years ago by rainwater that gradually dissolved the soft limestone rock on its journey to the sea. With the rise in sea levels after the last ice age the river valley was flooded and became an inlet of the sea. You walk past some restaurants and the Black Pearl ship. Walking further inland along the tree-lined promenade adjacent to the marina, you pass in front of the well know Busy Bee coffee shop. If you are not in a hurry, a coffee break is in order - make sure to order their famous cannoli.

ON TO FLORIANA
As you approach the innermost part of the bay, you can admire the beautiful twin spires of the Church of Saint Joseph the Worker, the parish church of Msida. When originally built the church overlooked the sea inlet, but land reclamation to accommodate new roads has somewhat damaged its setting. Keeping to the path adjacent to the coast, cross over the bridge and turn left to ramble through a linear park along Msida Creek. After about 500 metres the path turns to the right to run alongside the narrow inlet of Pieta', with many small boats. You can notice across the water the various layers of strog bastions protecting the city of Valletta and its suburb of Floriana. Reaching the innermost part of the creek turn left along the promenade towards an old arched building at the water's edge, formerly an old boathouse, now a
classy restaurant. Cross the road from the boathouse with care as this is a very busy junction. Ramble to the right and after a few metres take the earthen path uphill to the left and through the attractive pine-covered slope (called a Pinetum). At the time of construction of the walls, this was an open unplanted area so that the defenders could clearly target an attacking enemy. At the top of the hill take the path to the right close to the bastions of the outer defence lines of Floriana. Continuing along this curving path you pass the impressive Portes des Bombes, the former outer baroque gate of Floriana. The gate was substantially modified to make way for the main road into Valletta. Continue to ramble along the tree-lined main road into Floriana, where there are many points of interest including the circular Sarria Church and the Argotti Botanical Gardens. These gardens are located down the first road to the left. It is a great pleasure to divert into these delightful gardens for perhaps 30 minutes (entrance free) to enjoy the plants, a rest and the outstanding views from their high walls. The gardens were originally developed in the 18th century as a private summer residence for Grand Master of the Knights, Emmanuel Pinto. The gardens are divided into two main parts, a semi-private area (open during office hours only) and a public area. The former contains examples of endangered Maltese and Mediterranean plants of scientific interest, including the Sandarac tree (Malta’s national tree) and the Ephedra tree (the only example remaining on the island). The gardens also house rare plants and medicinal herbs cultivated for botanical studies and a large collection of cacti and succulent plants. This section also contains an exquisite nymphaeum dating back to 1741, decorated throughout with red coral and shells.

From the main gate of the Argotti Gardens, next to the fountain shaped like a spire (dating from the time of the Knights), cross the road to the left and walk along the tree lined road towards Valetta. On the left you pass the Mall Garden, created by the Knights in the 18th century as a bowling green. To your right you can admire the parish church of Floriana with its impressive twin domes. This church is named after Saint Publius who was the governor of Malta when Saint Paul was shipwrecked on the island in 60 AD. He became Malta’s first bishop and was later martyred in Rome for his Christian beliefs. The church was very badly damaged by a bomb during World War II, but fortunately its many wonderful paintings and statues had been removed off-site for safety. The large square in front of the church contains what appear to be the bases of Roman columns. These are the caps of grain storage silos - deep cylindrical wells carved vertically within the natural limestone and which were used to store wheat up
to the 1980s. These granaries were strategically located within the defensive walls so as to provide a food supply in the event of a siege. The large square is now used for a variety of public meetings and Pope John Paul II addressed the faithful here during his two visits to Malta.

Ramble past the monument to the Independence of Malta and carefully cross the road into the area known as il-Biskuttin (the biscuit). You are now nearing the luxurious Phoenicia Hotel 🛋️, one of the classic hotels of the British Empire. It has a beautiful lobby and retains some of the ambience of the colonial period. The new gate to Valletta and the bus terminus is only 100 m further on. If this is the ending point of your round Malta Coastal walk you may care to reward yourself with a coffee or a drink in this most pleasant hotel.
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Emmet McMahon is an Irish environmental scientist who came to work in Malta for some weeks and stayed for six years. He returns every year to Malta to update his rambling adventures. He has walked in all places across Europe, however his only relevant claim to fame is that he has walked around the whole coastline of Malta and Gozo. This makes him the only person he knows who has walked around the entire border of an EU Member State.

Jonathan Henwood is a Maltese botanist and environmental scientist whose profession and interests have given him a detailed knowledge of Malta, its history, and natural environment. He works in the field of environment protection, being actively involved in issues of rambling, biodiversity and eco-tourism. Through this book, he has finally caught up with Emmet, and walked around the entire border of Malta and Gozo.

This is the fourth book they have authored together on walks in Malta, Gozo and Comino, with routes spanning their entire perimeter.

MALTA: 10 GREAT WALKS
GOZO: 10 GREAT WALKS
THE ROUND GOZO COASTAL WALK
THE ROUND MALTA COASTAL WALK

If you have just completed the entire Malta Coastal Walk congratulations and well done! We would love to receive feedback on any aspect of this coastal trail, whether corrections or suggestions for improvements. Please send comments to us at www.greatwalksmalta.com

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