

A South African's guide to moving to and making it in Malta: Attention shoppers, isle one!



By Marcus 'The Maltese Falcon' Brewster

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Where do you find Europe's most avid shoppers? Living on the island of Malta, according to findings released comparing EU28 nations.



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In the most recent EuroStat survey, Malta posted an 11,7% year-on-year upturn in shopping in February and became the only member state to register double digit increases. Second place went to Poland (+7,9%) and third place to Ireland (+7,1%). This compared to the relatively flat EU28 increase in retail trade volumes of only 2% for the same year-on-year period.

Malta's Feb 2018 year-on-year 11,7% for volume of retail trade increase capped a particularly robust three months, with strong figures also reported for December 2017 (+8,6% vs EU28 2,6%) and January 2018 (+7% vs EU28 2,1%)

Volume of retail trade
% change compared with the same month of the previous year*

Total retail trade	Sep-17	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18
EA19	3.9	0.2	3.7	2.0	1.5	1.8
EU28	3.4	0.4	3.4	2.6	2.1	2.0
Malta	8.5	4.4	0.3	8.6	7.0	11.7

As published in [Times of Malta](#).

As Malta is not widely known to be a shopping destination – in fact, many Maltese cross on the ferry to Sicily to benefit from greater choice and competitive pricing – the sizeable uplift in retail trade volumes speaks to the boom in the local economy. Much of that boom, or certainly the most visible part of it, is in the property market. It's fair to say that a lot of retail trade volumes comes from the homeware sector since virtually every Maltese person you meet is kitting out a buy-to-let apartment. In fact, it's not uncommon for property to be sold furnished – a turnkey solution for would-be landlords. You

can see examples of the phenomenon [here](#) where “Furnished” is a search category.

Underneath needs

One of my favourite shops in our village is one I've never been into. It sells ladies' smalls and goes by the name of 'Underneath Needs'. As quaint (and as honest) as that brand identity may be, it's also unusual as many retailers operate under the founder's surname. Family businesses rather than chain store brands are very much the historic norm here and our quaint little village shops – the butcher, the baker, the ironmonger – all continue under owner-management. It is to the last of these that we must now direct our attention.



A South African's guide to moving to and making it in Malta: The invisible baker

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In the island lexicon, a hardware store is called an ironmonger. I have a friend, Joanne, who is as fervent about DIY and hardware stores as other women are passionate about shoe shopping. As a treat, I took Joanne to our local ironmonger and left her there to rummage to her heart's content. I even showed her the stairs leading down to the basement where all the garden furniture is arrayed as you can get lost down there for days amidst the retro stock holdings. Later Joanne 'WhatsApped' to say she'd bought half the store – she found the staff very knowledgeable, very efficient and helpful and she remarked that at no stage was the queue less than three deep at the counter. Again, I ascribe the rise of the ironmonger to the current building frenzy.

Vintage storefronts

Malta is famous for its door knockers (which can be found at the ironmongers) and people often lens them for photographic exhibitions or in coffee-table books. I find similar pleasurable diversity in Malta's vintage shop signage. Still in Valletta, you can see old storefronts with silver lettering against black glass – the silver being foil typically recycled from cigarette packets as a wartime economy. Such store facades are now protected in Valletta, a Unesco World Heritage City. But all through the islands, and especially in the villages you can find evidence of signwriting that has not been updated since that founding family started the business generations back. The nostalgic retail iconography of Malta is an odyssey awaiting photographic documentation!

No plastic bags

As much as I appreciate the old-school aspects of living in Malta, one area where life on the island is ahead of South Africa is in the almost-complete banishment of plastic grocery packets. It is simply not a recognised means of bagging one's supermarket purchases. Instead, customers bring heavy-duty shoppers or even pack their purchases into cardboard boxes retrieved from the fruit/veg aisle. Clearly, SA could learn something from Malta in this regard.

ABOUT MARCUS 'THE MALTESE FALCON' BREWSTER

marcusbrewster is a brand synonymous with PR excellence in SA. An industry innovator, leader, and inspiration, Brewster affiliated his multi-award winning boutique firm with larger Level 1 BBBEE marketing/comms agency MediaRevolution for scale in 2016 and went on to launch Marcus Brewster International in Europe the following year. Marcus currently lives on - and actively promotes - the Mediterranean island of Malta. For African, S. African and European PR enquiries, contact marcus@marcusbrewster.com or WhatsApp on (+356) 9931 3322

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