

# A South African's guide to moving to and making it in Malta: West of the moon (Part 2)

By  Marcus 'The Maltese Falcon' Brewster

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Maltese drivers have a terrible reputation, even amongst themselves. I had presumed that if everyone drove badly, that would come to be regarded as the new normal, but no, everyone castigates the driving style of everyone else so there is definitely some sense of good and bad.



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## Social contract

In the kinds of million-plus population cities that characterise most international urban environments, there is a social contract that everyone abides by. A certain amount of it is customary (which side of the road you drive on), a certain amount is legislated (speed limits) and a certain amount of it is socialised (look left and right before you cross the street). The Maltese populace seemingly haven't signed the social contract that goes with big city living. In a city, everybody knows to follow the rules in order that the society can function. If you ignore the rules, you create chaos and disorder, viz the situation on Maltese roads.



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## Village mentality

The most useful analogy I can offer to describe the driving phenomenon would be to say that the Maltese still have a village mentality when it comes to traffic. By which I mean that most Maltese drive as if the whole island was still the same as the village their grandparents lived in during the 1950s. In village life, you feel nothing about doing a three-point turn in traffic or in double parking your car outside the village shop in order to go in to buy a newspaper or a loaf of bread. It's

inconceivable that you would think to circle the block to find a parking bay, and why should you? It's village life after all and everybody in the queue behind you knows you as you do them.

For South African drivers, there are at least four things to acclimatise to:

## 1. Go small:

Big cars and SUVs are not the right vehicles for Maltese roads. Instead, we all have little cars which are easier to manoeuvre in the narrower village streets and easier to park – anywhere! Unlike South Africa, Malta has developed a flourishing market for second-hand Japanese imports: these are immaculately maintained (graded 1-5), low mileage fleet cars. (If SA has an obsession with mobiles and Malta with cars, then the Japanese are obsessed with newness so buying something like a car second-hand is not in their vocabulary.)

## 2. Go slow:

If you are driving in Malta, you will need to get used to a slower speed limit of 60km/h. Malta's size means it doesn't have the luxury of endless freeways with 120km/h stretches since most roads pass through villages which have even more torpid limits (30km/h). Not to worry – this is the slower pace of life you promised yourself and a chance to admire your surroundings as you cruise sedately by.

## 3. Accelerate:

In seeming contradiction to the above point, quick bursts of acceleration are a definite feature of the Maltese driving style. In SA, when faced with a traffic situation that may indicate the driver should slow down, in Malta he accelerates. So, turning into traffic or entering a circle are examples where Maltese drivers would go-for-the-gap.

## 4. Park freely:

The only time you will pay for parking is in a parking garage. All street parking is free and there are no informal parking attendants. In some public parking lots, there may be an informal attendant, but he doesn't rush you for his gratuity since he knows that the harassment would be illegal. Valletta is an exception: it has an electronic camera system which reads your license plate on entering and leaving the capital and calculates a charge for the amount of time spent within its fortress walls.

## Electric vehicles

The uptake of electric vehicles (EVs) remains slow on the islands. Figures tabled in Parliament in March showed that there were just 1,356 registered electric cars and motorbikes on Maltese roads in 2017. While it has increased threefold over 2013, when 432 EVs were registered, it's still a tiny fraction of the 365,483 licensed motor vehicles that make up the entire complement of vehicles in Malta.



The madness of so many cars when there are such short distances to travel is why Malta sometimes feels like a parallel universe – [east of the sun](#) and west of the moon... (c) salajejan - [123RF.com](http://123RF.com)

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](mailto:marcus@marcusbrewster.com) or WhatsApp on (+356) 9931 3322

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