

Malta

C O U N T R Y S I D E W A L K S

Dwejra Lines Walk



Introduction

The walk starts at Mgarr (Malta) and ends at Mosta. The walk passes through the hamlet of Bingemma until it reaches the Our Lady of Itria Chapel. From the chapel site, you can enjoy excellent views of the Bingemma plains as well as a cluster of punic tombs dug out of the hillside. The highlight of the walk is the Dwejra Lines, a section of the Victoria Lines. This is a complex network of 19th century linear fortifications and a unique monument of military architecture.

The walk goes down through arable land to the Speranza Valley and Tal-Isperanza Chapel. According to legend, the chapel owes its beginnings to the miraculous escape of a young peasant girl from the hands of invading corsairs. The walk passes through the quaint streets of the Mosta village core and ends near the famous Rotunda Church.

The text, read in conjunction with the route map (found in the centre pages) enables you to follow the route more easily.

How to get there

The starting point is at the village of Mgarr (Malta), near the Parish Church. The walk ends at Pjazza Rotunda, Mosta.

Public Transport

From Valletta, the Mgarr main square is the last stop on bus route 47.

For the return journey from Mosta take;

- Route bus 43, 44, 45, or 50 to Valletta
- Route bus 65 to Sliema, St Julians, Naxxar, and Mdina.
- Route bus 86 to Bugibba, Qawra, Rabat and Mdina.

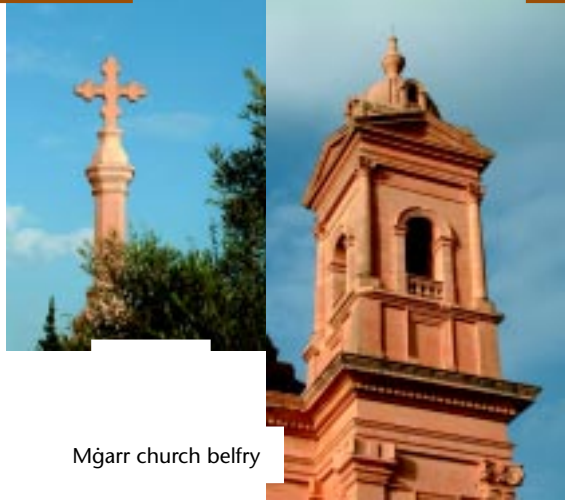
Length of walk (excluding visits to temples and Art Collection) is 10 km.

Duration is approximately 4.5 to 5 hours.

The walk starts from the main square of Mgarr. By far, the most prominent feature in the square is the Mgarr Parish Church. The church, dedicated to the Assumption of Our Lady, was built between 1912 and 1946 on the site of an older chapel. Apart from its architectural beauty, it boasts Favray paintings as well as other artistic sacred artifacts. You can also visit the Tempra Art Collection within the Mgarr Local Council offices in Triq Sir Harry Luke.

From the main pjazza, walk along Triq Fisher towards the village primary school. You will soon notice a sign indicating the way to the Ta' Hagraat Temples (3600-3000 BC) situated in Triq San Pietru. You may wish to make a detour to visit

Ta Hagraat Temples - Mgarr



Mgarr church belfry

the temples. (Note that the site is not normally open to the public. A visit may be arranged by prior appointment; tel 2145 4125 or 2145 4562).

The walk proceeds along Triq Fisher, past the primary school, until a cross roads is reached just outside the village. Turn right and take the road leading to Bingemma.

The fertile fields, greenhouses and drip irrigation systems indicate intensive agricultural activity. Large fields are subdivided into smaller fields since, when a farmer dies, the land is divided amongst his children. Smaller fields make the use of agricultural machinery more problematic thus making agriculture less viable.



used for livestock, as well as for man. People helped themselves to water from the hand pump on top of the reservoir. The base of the hand pump is still visible.

Continue walking uphill where you will soon reach the Bingemma water pumping station on the right. **1** Note the terraced fields. Terracing is typical of various valley sides across Malta and Gozo. It is an efficient way of preventing soil erosion.

The road, partly cut into the cliff face, continues uphill. On the left, a water course covered in brambles and ivy flanks the road. Ahead of you, note stretches of wall built along the ridge. These are the Victoria Lines. They were built by the British along a fault which cuts across Malta from coast to coast. Further on, to the left, there is a chapel at the edge of a rocky outcrop overlooking the valley.

As you walk towards the Victoria Lines, note the variety of windbreakers used, including rows of prickly pears, screens of canes and wooden pallets. These windbreakers protect the fruit trees and horticultural crops.

A small roadside shrine bearing the effigy of Our Lady dating to 1869, heralds the small hamlet of Bingemma. On the right, you can see what looks like a circular stone platform about a metre above road level. This is a village water reservoir complete with a large stone trough at road level. This was





Our Lady of Itria Chapel -
Bingemma Gap

The chapel was built in 1680 by the Xara family and dedicated to Our Lady of the Way or Our Lady of Itria, as is commonly known. A path to the right of the church leads to what looks like a cave but is actually a Punic tomb. You can see the inside of the tomb through an iron gate which protects the entrance.

From the chapel site, you can enjoy excellent views of the Bingemma plains below. On the opposite side of the valley, you will see various openings in the cliff face forming

a veritable honeycomb of caves that may date back to the Bronze Age. Studies on style and measurement reveal that they were used during the Punic era, as well as by early Christians. During World War II these rock tombs offered refuge to the Mgarr farmers.

From here the Victoria Lines are clearly visible. The wall crosses the valley and continues on the hill opposite. This stretch of wall is the Dwejra Line. The wall has been recently restored.

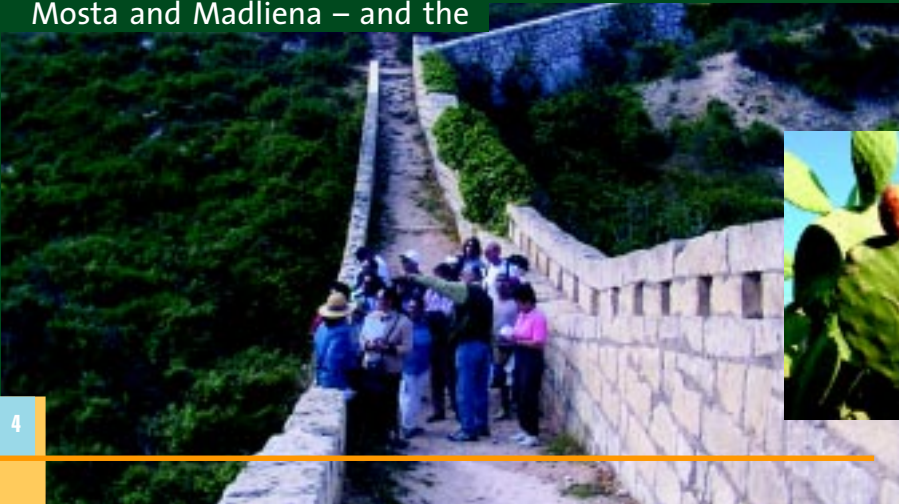
Victoria Lines

The complex network of linear fortifications, known collectively as the Victoria Lines, cuts across the width of the island north of the old capital of Mdina. It is a unique monument of military architecture. When built by the British military in the late 19th century, it was designed to present a physical barrier to invading forces landing in the north of Malta and intent on attacking the harbour installations so vital for the maintenance of the British fleet, the source of British power in the Mediterranean. Although never tested in battle, this system of defences spanned across some 12 kilometres of land and combined different types of fortifications - forts, batteries, entrenchments, stop walls, infantry lines, searchlight emplacements and howitzer positions. When initiated in the 1870s the defences were limited to a series of three detached forts placed along the length of the natural escarpment - at Bingemma, Mosta and Madliena – and the

position was called the North West Front. The various works were eventually linked together by means of infantry walls and the whole trace re-named the Victoria Lines in 1897, to commemorate Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee. This defensive 'frontier' constituted a unique ensemble of varied military elements all brought together to enforce a defensive strategy that exploited the advantages of geography and technology as no other work of fortification ever did in the Maltese islands.

The active role of the Victoria lines, however, was short lived, as the whole effort was overtaken by rapid changes in technology and strategy. As a result, their military significance was lost and most of these works were abandoned in 1907.

In recent years, the Restoration Unit of the Works Division took the initiative to restore this extensive network of fortifications.





Nearby, a pointed stone marker, some 1.5 metres high, had inscribed on it the distance, in miles from Valletta. These milestones were installed in the second half of the 19th century by the British Colonial Government to prevent cab drivers from over charging British servicemen. This was in a sense the forerunner to the taxi metre. During World War II all similar milestones had their markings chipped away. This prevented their use by the enemy should there have been an enemy invasion.

Behind the Mgarr locality panel nearby, there is a rough path leading down to the stop wall across the valley. **2** Walk along this path.

The path skirts a group of trees, mostly Aleppo Pines and the

Wattle tree (*Acacia cyanophylla*). Beyond the bridge, there is a second vantage point overlooking the valley below. The view from here extends from the chapel, down to the rolling expanse of agricultural land, right up to Mgarr Village. Note the small farmhouse below the chapel across the valley and a large pigeon house or 'columbarium' built in the cliff face.

The use of pigeons for sending messages dates back to Roman times. They were also used for culinary purposes. Nowadays, pigeon-racing is a popular pastime.

The rough path keeps going uphill with the defensive wall on the left. A strip of land between the path and the wall carries aleppo pines and extends along most of the Dwejra lines.

The v-shaped culvert collecting water run-off from the road leads to the valley below. You will soon come upon two carob trees close to a peach orchard on the right. Directly opposite this orchard on the left of the path, a gaping hole in the ground indicates the entrance to a tomb, which escaped destruction when the Lines were built. A few paces further, a ramp leads to a vantage point on the wall overlooking Mgarr, Mellieha, and Gozo beyond them. The chequered countryside clearly indicates that most of Malta's agricultural land is dry-farmed i.e. it depends solely on rainfall. Such

land amounts to approximately 76 per cent of farmed land. Water is definitely a limiting factor!

Continue along the path. **3** On the right, there is a stretch of garigue land and beyond, on the horizon, you can see Verdala Palace, Rabat, Mdina and Mtarfa. Along



Cart ruts at Bingemma Gap

the path, a number of military structures form part of the defensive system of the Lines. A cottage, Marymount, formerly an officer's quarters, comes into view. Directly in front of it to the left of the path, there is a well head. If you walk up to the wall, you will see the dry ditch, partly reclaimed into an orchard, and the rolling countryside beyond.

A few metres further, to your left, you will reach an asphalted road which leads to Bingemma or Rabat.

4



A section of Victoria Lines overlooking Bingemma Gap



The path continues through a number of ex-military buildings which are now being used as farms. The path now is asphalted and starts going slightly downhill past a Boy Scouts building. Where the road crosses sharply to the right, you can climb to the corner view point from where you can see the towering stadium lights of the Ta' Qali National Park, the town of Mosta crowned by the church and further away on the ridge, Naxxar.



Entrance to an underground gallery
- Dwejra Lines



A few metres downhill to the left, you will arrive at an opening in the wall. This is a fortified bridge. Walk across the bridge and turn sharply to the left. **5** You will pass by a well head, covering the Dwejra reservoir. The downhill road is now in open country. To the right the trees on the small hillock hide a fireworks factory.

Further downhill you reach the main busy road, which leads from Mosta to Mgarr. As this is a busy junction and as this walk continues directly ahead through the country road, you must take great care in crossing the road. It is suggested that the point of the junction where the guard rail commences, is the most appropriate place to



Almost 1km long this ditch surrounds the north facing front of the Dwejra defences

cross the main road as oncoming traffic from both sides, can be seen clearly.

Having crossed over, walk along the quiet country road hewn through the rocks. **6** Soon, you can see the Mosta Dome in the distance

and, beyond that, the twin belfries of the Naxxar Parish Church.

The fields on both sides of the road are dry farmed. A few small vineyards dot the landscape. Soon you reach, a large rocky outcrop on the right. Note how man has utilised this rocky hillcock by digging out in its side a number of shelters.



The rubble walls enclosing the small fields vary in height. The most common crop grown here seem to be cereals, although small patches of vegetables are noted in spring and in winter. Along the





Legend

Landmarks	Start/End Points
Built-up areas	Valley bed
Height in metres	Victoria Lines
Markers	Refreshments
Roads	Toilets
Route	Telephone
Optional Detours	Direction indicators

GHERIEN
 TRIQ PATRI G DEL
 TRIQ K TAL-
 ISPERANZA
 (BRID)
 SPERANZA
 CHAPEL
 MOSTA CENTI



RE INSET

road, there are rows of prickly pear trees acting as windbreaks. This species originated in America but is now found throughout the Mediterranean.

Further on, you can see Targa Battery consisting of the two rows of long sheds. Turn right at the next junction and proceed downhill. **7**

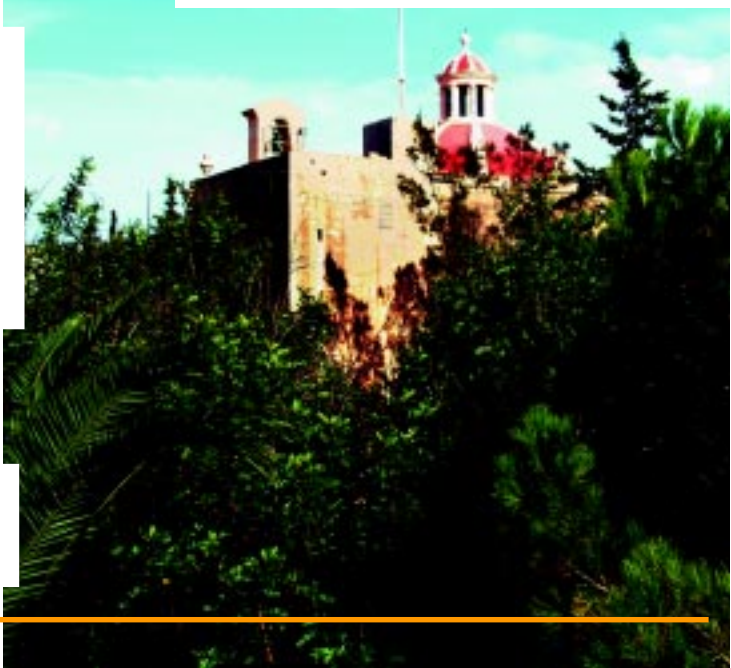


Looking to the right, you can see the Mtarfa ridge as well as the majesty of the Mdina skyline. Further on, you pass by a couple of small farmhouses until you reach a busy road junction.

“Speranza” chapel
from the valley

When you see that the way is clear, cross the road and make for Triq Patri Guze Delia directly ahead. **8** The fields on your right slope gently to Wied ta’ l-Isperanza (Speranza Valley). Continue along this road until you reach a right turning into Triq il-Kappella ta’ l-Isperanza at the end of which there is a bridge leading to Speranza Chapel.

From the bridge you can appreciate the lush vegetation of the valley. Note the wide variety of trees including fig, pomegranate, carob, aleppo pine, stone pine, mulberry and almond, as well as the exotic species of eucalyptus and oleander. Beyond the bridge, there is a flight of steps descending to a cave beneath Speranza Chapel



Detail of the facade of the "Speranza" Chapel

The Legend of Wied ta' l-Isperanza

The name of this chapel and the valley owes its origins to a popular legend. In the middle of the 18th century, corsairs were still operating in the Mediterranean. The sea around Malta was no exception and apart from landing on our shores to draw water, they never missed a chance of raiding the countryside. At that time, according to tradition, a number of farmers were working in the fields in the Burmarrad area where irrigation water was readily available.

As Burmarrad is close to the coast, the keeping of a watchful eye by farmers for intruders was a necessity. One day the alarm was raised when a group of corsairs were seen moving upstream in the valley. The farmers ran for their lives towards the safety of the nearby Mosta village. However one of them, a young lady could not keep up with the rest of the farmers. Panting, running upstream, almost paralysed with fear, already tired from working in the fields, she was soon separated from her colleagues. She heard the melée of the approaching corsairs rushing after her through the canes. The village was near but the corsairs were closer. She was at her wits'

end. She looked around, saw the gaping mouth of a cave covered by a large cobweb and crawled into the cave. Pressing herself into the shadows of the damp rock face of the cave she fervently prayed to Our Lady to save her. The maiden hair ferns clinging to the rock face of the cave accentuated the shadows and the darkness of the cave. The spider continued weaving its web. The corsairs looked frantically for the girl but could find no sign of her. Had the girl acquired new strength? Could she



be hiding? But where? The cobweb was blocking the entrance to the cave and so no one could possibly be hiding in there. They were very close to Mosta and by now the alarm in the village

would have been raised. Their seacraft was very far away. Fearing an attack by the villagers, they decided to beat a hasty retreat and ran back to the coast. After assuring herself that the danger was over, the girl dashed out of the cave and ran home. She attributed her miraculous escape to our Lady to whom she decided, with her family's money, to build a chapel dedicated to il-Madonna ta' l-Isperanza (meaning Our Lady of Good Hope).

This chapel, built in 1760 has a Renaissance style and carries three statues in its façade. The middle one is of Our Lady of Good Hope with the Child Jesus holding an anchor - a symbol of hope.

The side niches carry the statues of St. Joseph and of St. Anthony of Padova. The coat of arms of the Bishop in whose time the church was built, is clearly seen above one of the niches. The lantern above the chapel was a later addition.

The chapel is kept in a very good condition and is in regular use. Going down the short flight of steps to the cave below, you can



see through the iron grating, a statue of a girl in a kneeling posture deep in prayer. Pot plants, including ferns, adorn the cave. The other statues are of the evangelists Luke and John. Above the cave, in a small niche in the façade, there is a statue of St. Michael.



If you stroll to the left behind the chapel, you end up near one of the pumping stations of the Water Services Corporation. Upstream, you can see a small dam across the valley. This contains rain water in the valley allowing it to percolate into the water table.



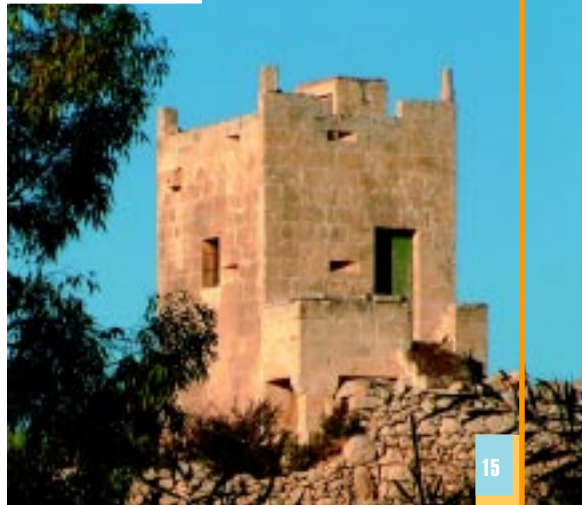
Bezzina, straight ahead, and then turn left into Triq Salvu Dimech. At the end of this road, at the corner, there is a statue of St. Thomas. It enhances the simple but exquisite architectural design of this country house. The timber balcony is above normal in size whilst its rounded sides are also uncommon.

Timber balconies are a particular feature of Malta's streetscape. Balconies increase the indoor living



Statue of St Micheal over the cave underlying "Speranza" Chapel

The walk continues along Triq Speranza. You will soon enter the village core. Note the variety of small ceramic images or plaques of saints decorating the doorways. Triq l-Isperanza ends in a junction. Take Triq Kurat





space and allow also participation in the street life. They also limit the heat intake of the house from the hot summer sun.

Turn to your right into Triq Tabib Tumas Chetchuti and then on to Triq il-Kbira. After a few metres along this busy road, you reach Pjazza Rotunda and Mosta Church.



Mosta Church

The imposing façade of the Mosta Church, also referred to as the Rotunda, is adorned with stone carvings of classical Greek inspiration. On the site occupied by the Rotunda, there stood another much smaller church built in 1614. As time progressed, this village of farmers felt the need to build a bigger church. It was

decided to build the Rotunda as designed by the Maltese architect Giorgio Grongnet de Vasse. The new, bigger church was to be constructed around the older church and when completed the old one would be dismantled. The old church itself was used to support the scaffolding. After 27 years of toil, volunteer work and



donations by the villagers, the Rotunda was completed in 1860.

The external height of the building (to the top of the lantern) is 200 ft (61 metres). The temple is dedicated to the Assumption of Our Lady.

With an internal diameter of 130 ft (39.6 metres), the dome is the second largest in the world after the Vatican St. Peter's at 138 ft (42.1 metres). The dome ceiling is notable for the coffering, consisting of diagonally-set lozenges which spiral upwards, decreasing in size as they reach the apex.

In the church, there are a number of paintings depicting scenes from

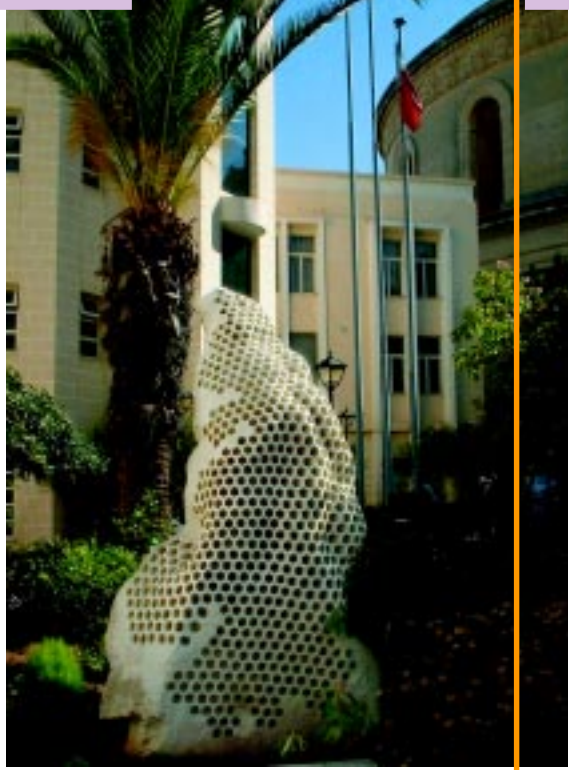
Christ's birth. These are by world-renowned artist Giuseppe Cali and are reproduced on Christmas cards across Europe. Other paintings worthy of note by the same painter are 'Santa Monica' and 'The Death of St. Augustine'.

Unfortunately, the dark years of World War II did not spare this church. On the 9th of April 1942, at approximately 16.40 hrs, a bomb dropped by enemy aircraft pierced the dome and fell in the temple to the horror of a number of worshippers. Fortunately, the bomb did not explode and no one was hurt. This event is still illustrated in a small exhibition in the sacristy of the Church.



A reminder of WWII is the large underground wartime shelter situated under the church parvis and under the square. The entrance is through a trapdoor just below one of the staircases leading to the church parvis. It is occasionally opened to the public.

The Local Council and the police station are housed within the modern building behind the church. The numerous shops and catering establishments in the area are a proof of a vibrant commercial activity.



Oleander



The walk ends here. You can take a bus to Valletta (from bus stop beneath the row of ficus trees) or to St. Paul's Bay and Mellieha (from bus stop on the opposite side of the road).

Tips for the road

This route is suitable for hikes and for pedal bikes. Only when crossing the stop wall on the Dwejra Lines, one is advised to dismount and to proceed on foot.

The local weather forecast should be checked before setting off as there is hardly any shelter from adverse weather conditions along the route. A raincoat can come in handy in inclement weather.

Allow enough time to complete the walk in broad daylight. Make allowances for time required for resting, taking of photographs and observing nature.

It is advisable to wear appropriate footwear and a hat. A packed lunch and a bottle of water are also recommended.

Always follow the designated route. Short cuts are to be avoided as many fields are privately owned.

Some rubble walls are marked with blotches of white paint and may also carry the letters RTO. These markings indicate private property.

If one intends entering parish churches, proper attire is to be worn.

Respect the fragility of the countryside. Do not climb over rubble walls or throw stones in valleys or over cliffs. Do not take souvenirs from historical sites or from the countryside. Do not disturb animals, plants or their natural habitats. Leave your footprints behind you and nothing else.

Be culturally sensitive and respect local customs. Take photographs but respect the privacy and dignity of others. Ask permission before photographing people.

Bird trapping and hunting are practised in the countryside. There are, however, strict regulations determining areas where such activities are permitted and times of year where no such activities are allowed.



Facilities

In both Mgarr and at Mosta, there are the facilities you would expect to find in a town - catering facilities, phone booths, public conveniences, banks, the local council office and a police station.

In Mosta, there are also internet café facilities and the District Health Clinic.

Useful telephone numbers.

<i>Emergency & Rescue</i>	112
<i>Ambulance</i>	196
<i>Fire</i>	199
<i>Mgarr Police Station</i>	2147 3422
<i>Mosta Police Station</i>	2143 3882, 2143 3800
<i>Mgarr Local Council</i>	2152 0011
<i>Mosta Local Council</i>	2141 6841
<i>Mosta Health Centre</i>	2143 3256, 2143 2062, 2141 1065
<i>Malta Tourism Authority</i>	2291 5800
<i>Telephone enquiries</i>	1182

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Feedback and comments are welcome.
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Dwejra Lines Walk

Enjoy countryside views as you walk along the Dwejra Lines, a section of the Victoria Lines. These are a complex network of 19th century linear fortifications. Learn about the history of Our Lady of Itria Chapel and the legendary beginnings of Tal-Isperanza Chapel. The walk passes through the quaint streets of the Mosta village core. Admire the magnificence of the Mosta Dome and the upward spiraling pattern of the dome interior.

Other walks in the series



Baħrija Walk

Passing through Baħrija - Baħrija Valley - Mtaħleb
Tal-Vigarju Cliffs - Fiddien Valley - Rabat



Ġirgenti Walk

Passing through Buskett - Għar il-Kbir - Ġirgenti Valley
Siġġiewi - Il-Maqluba - Qrendi



Marfa Ridge Walk

Passing through Għadira - Marfa Ridge - Ponta ta' l-Aħrax
Daħlet ix-Xmajjar - Ir-Ramla Tat-Torri - Armier Bay
Marfa - Paradise Bay - Ras il-Qammieġħ - Red Tower.



Tas-Silġ Walk

Passing through Marsaskala - St. Thomas Bay - Tal-Munxar
Xrobb il-Għaġin - Delimara - Tas-Silġ - Marsaxlokk.

The project is being launched in 2002, the World Tourism Organisation's International Year of Eco-Tourism.

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