

## E-mail from a tourist in 2030 - John Ebejer

Hello Jim. I will return home shortly after a three-week holiday in Malta. You ask me for advice for your planned visit to the Maltese islands. My last visit here was 20 years ago, back in 2010, and it's sad to say that Malta has changed, and not for the better.

Surprisingly, finding good value accommodation is difficult.

Many hotel owners were taken over by the craze to redevelop their properties to real estate. The hotel I stayed in then is no more. It is now a block of apartments, most of them empty. The owner was hoping to bring in foreign buyers but he only managed to sell a few.

I am staying in a good hotel in Sliema. I spend most of my time walking the promenade and reading. To be honest there is not much else to do in this area. Going to the visitor attractions in other parts of the island is not easy.

There are some fantastic prehistoric temples here, but you can only get to them with organised tours.

Forget public transport, and the hop-on hop-off is very expensive.

I like to explore and discover a place, something you can't do on an organised tour. In any case, tours are expensive and there is a limit to how many tours you can buy on one holiday.

Walking the promenade is great, especially at sunset. That's only if you look out to open sea. Looking in, your eyes are feasted with a cacophony of rather unattractive buildings, including several towers.

A Maltese friend tells me that construction work on several towers have stopped halfway. Maybe the developers ran out of money or else the buyers did not materialise, at least not in the numbers they were hoping for.

Either way, the Sliema/St Julian's/St George's skyline is dotted with eyesores in the shape of concrete tall building carcasses, jutting into the sky.

Even if all the various towers were completed, it would not be a pretty sight anyway.

Yesterday I visited the Aquarium up at Qawra. It is well worth a visit. Public transport between Sliema and Qawra is fine, as long as you don't mind seeing convoys of trucks laden with excavated rubble.

I suppose this is what they call progress here. The trucks are from excavation works at various huge buildings sites in the St George's/St Julian's/Sliema area.

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A huge land reclamation project is underway along the coastal road from Sliema to Qawra. With all these empty and/or unfinished buildings around, it is a mystery how they keep on building.

They ran out of space for the disposal of excavated material, so they turned to land reclamation. It's a great pity that this stretch of beautiful coast has been lost forever.

Way back in 2010, I did some scuba diving here in Malta, but now I was advised against it. They had a thriving diving industry, but that's no more. Various land reclamation projects have deprived the smaller fish of the sea grass where they can feed and grow.

Coupled with the increasingly murky waters, this has disrupted the marine food chain. The seabed is dying. Another great shame.

That's all from me. I apologise for being so negative but I think it's better if you are forewarned. Regards, Tom.

\*Will tourism in Malta be this way in 2030? Maybe, maybe not. What is worrying is that no one is planning for tourism's future. No one is thinking what the effects of some high-impact decisions will be on our tourism.

*John Ebejer is an urban planner, tourism consultant and a lecturer at the University of Malta.*