

I want to ride my bicycle! Safe cycling routes for kids in Malta

5th April 2019

998 words / 5 mins read

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It's another perfect-weather-sunny-day with zero chance of rain. Another day ideal for bicycling. Images of happy families cycling through rugged country lanes or empty scenic roads immediately come to mind. Only to be quashed by the harsh reality that there seem to be none in Malta. Fact 1: Malta has one of the highest rates of cars per person in Europe. Fact 2: The present infrastructure is heavily geared towards vehicles and cycling infrastructure is pretty terrible. Fact 3: Maltese children are among the most obese and starved of open spaces in Europe.

Happily, we have found some time to present to you with a new fact! There *are* some places where you can actually cycle with children (for more than 10 minutes) and feel relatively safe. Here are some of them.

The Pembroke Cycle Path (4 km both ways)

The Pembroke Natura 2000 area is a great place to start cycling! It has a network of paths that are safe and easy to use plus has the added bonus of finishing near Pembroke playground. It's compatible with driving as it's easy to park the car close by too, so it is also suitable for those not yet confident cycling on roads. The cycle path starts right behind the football ground and includes segments in cement, tarmac and even metal grid to allow the flora and fauna to continue to thrive, as well as rocky parts that can be a bit rougher terrain. You will cycle past the Reverse Osmosis Plant, through fields and garrigue, with sea views all the way up to Madliena Tower. There are several paths and tracks you can explore, for example going up to the Pembroke BMX track to admire or try out some tricks.

The Isla-Kalkara promenade (8km both ways)

Starting from near the Isla regatta club, on the road passing underneath the Gardjola, admire the wonderful views across the Grand Harbour towards Valletta. There's a wide pavement on which little ones could cycle. Follow the promenade flanking Isla until you reach the buildings along Dock 1, cross the bridge over to Bormla and continue following the pavement along the waterfront. Cycle until reaching Fort St. Angelo and find your way to the other side of Birgu from the path underneath St. Angelo mansions. You have to dismount and take this short path on foot – cycling is not allowed. But on the other side you are rewarded with a wonderful view of restored Villa Bighi and the Esplora Science Centre. Follow the local road alongside the water until Kalkara. Keep an eye out for the local ducks at the slipway, where sometimes you even find horses bathing! In Kalkara follow the promenade and pavement until

For younger children, the promenade along the bay of Marsaskala may be a suitable place to practice their skill. You can start all the way from Zonqor point and follow the pavement and promenade until Jerma palace, or for a shorter trip, start from the Marsaskala church. There are plenty of nice spots to stop along the way: the playground, several ice-cream shops, or the rocky coast and saltpans just before reaching Jerma. Along the coast there are also several places suitable for a swim.

Xgħajra to Smart City (and beyond, between 3 to 6 km both ways)

Starting from the far end of Xgħajra (where the coastal walking path towards Zonqor starts), enjoy the wide promenade along the coast. There are a few short climbs here, but nothing too strenuous. You can follow the pavement up to Smart City, where kids can cycle endless circles around the fountain. For older and more adventurous children, you can continue following the pavement along the road in Smart City towards Kalkara, and follow Triq Santu Rokku along the coast, past the Malta Film Studios and Fort Rinella until reaching Fort Ricasoli. Fort Rinella could make for a nice stop, or else explore the little chapel near the entrance of the film studios, along with some abandoned tunnels in the fortifications nearby. Following the road up until Rinella bay is also an option, but don't forget that zooming down a hill means you will have to conquer that same hill on your way back up! However, you can always dismount and push your bicycle to overcome short steep climbs.

Triq id-Dahar, Mellieha (3 km both ways)

The road between the Red Tower, perched high on top of the Foresta 2000 nature reserve, and the Radar Station on the western edge of the Marfa peninsula offers an immensely scenic ride. The road is relatively flat and usually sees very few cars passing by, making it a perfect place to practice cycling, with a picture perfect view! This trip up north can easily be turned into a full day activity by having a stroll through Foresta and/or neighbouring Għadira nature reserves, or some seaside fun at the beach.

