

MALTA

Bridging islands: Fostering bonds with Japan

As the world attends the Osaka Expo, Malta is deepening its ties with Japan by showcasing its heritage, advancing innovation and seizing new opportunities to boost tourism, strengthen bilateral relations and expand global partnerships

The 2025 World Expo in Osaka is expected to welcome millions of visitors from around the globe, offering Malta a dynamic platform for cultural diplomacy and commercial engagement under the fair's unifying theme: "Designing future society for our lives."

In this context, the government of Malta, in close coordination with the Malta Tourism Authority, has mobilized a comprehensive national strategy to ensure that its pavilion offers not only a compelling display of the country's heritage and innovation, but also a substantive contribution to global conversations on sustainability, technology and quality of life.

Expo 2025 is not merely a cultural event. It represents a critical interface between national branding and global policymaking, enabling countries to express their visions for the future while cultivating bilateral and multilateral partnerships. For Malta, a small but strategically located island nation at the crossroads of Europe, Africa and the Middle East, participation is an act of deliberate and future-oriented diplomacy.

"Our presence in Osaka is an expression of Malta's unwavering commitment to global cooperation and forward-looking engagement," said Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Tourism Ian Borg. "This expo is a vital platform for us to articulate our values, promote our national interests and strengthen our visibility among nations, particularly in Asia. As we showcase our tourism offering, digital innovation and environmental stewardship, we are also deepening our relationship with Japan and expanding our influence across the Indo-Pacific."

Borg underscored that Malta's participation is part of a foreign policy orientation aimed at expanding its global footprint: "Japan is a strategic partner for Malta — economically, diplomatically and culturally. Expo 2025 provides the momentum to accelerate joint ventures, facilitate knowledge sharing and unlock new opportunities in trade, education and technology."

The deputy prime minister also emphasized the fair's alignment with Malta's diplomatic objectives within multilateral frameworks: "Expo 2025 allows us to engage not just bilaterally, but multilaterally, reinforcing Malta's commitment to sustainability, equity and global governance. We are proud to be part of this global dialogue."

‘Malta’s distinct blend of European and Mediterranean identities makes us uniquely appealing.’

Andre J. Spiteri, Ambassador of Malta to Japan and Commissioner General to Expo 2025

Malta's engagement with Japan has evolved steadily over the past decades, underpinned by growing trade, tourism, cultural exchange and high-level diplomatic contact. The expo represents a timely opportunity to amplify this trajectory, especially as Malta seeks to develop stronger ties in the Asia-Pacific region.

Andre J. Spiteri, Malta's ambassador to Japan and its commissioner general to Expo 2025, has played a central role in laying the groundwork for Malta's participation and ensuring that the Maltese presence in Osaka will resonate with Japanese stakeholders. "The Japan-Malta relationship is rooted in mutual respect and shared interests," Spiteri said. "Our two nations, while geographically distant, have found common

ground in maritime affairs, digital innovation, climate resilience and cultural heritage. The Osaka Expo is a unique chance for Malta to engage directly with the Japanese public and private sectors while reinforcing the bonds that tie our governments and people together."

Spiteri noted that Japan's enthusiasm for Mediterranean culture, architecture and cuisine has grown significantly recently. "We know that Japan holds Europe in high regard and Malta's distinct blend of European and Mediterranean identities makes us uniquely appealing. Our participation in the expo will help translate this curiosity into meaningful collaboration."

As part of its diplomatic outreach, the Embassy of Malta in Tokyo coordinated a number of high-level meetings, public diplomacy events and economic initiatives in the lead-up to the expo, aimed at stimulating long-term bilateral engagement. According to the ambassador, Expo 2025 is not a stand-alone event, but rather "a springboard for Malta's long-term presence and recognition in the Asia-Pacific region."

Malta remains one of Europe's premier diving destinations, with Japanese divers increasingly drawn to its shipwrecks and underwater archaeological sites. In 2024, MTA recorded a 14% rise in diving permits issued to Asian nationals.

In parallel, Malta has become a top destination in Europe for those studying English. Over 3,600 Japanese students studied English in Malta last year, lured by its Mediterranean lifestyle, high safety index and personalized instruction. "These students are not only learning a language — they are becoming informal ambassadors for Malta in Japan," Spiteri noted. "We have alumni associations in Tokyo and Osaka now. It's a community."

MTA spearheads national pavilion
At the core of Malta's expo strategy lies the MTA, which is leading the national pavilion's design, programming and promotional campaigns. Building on its experience in international marketing and cultural promotion, the MTA is crafting an immersive and engaging experience that will introduce visitors to the unique appeal of Malta as a destination and as a forward-looking nation. Localized content, manga-style visuals and culturally resonant branding are helping Malta differentiate itself from other Mediterranean destinations.

"Our vision for the Malta Pavilion is to create a multisensory journey that brings our islands to life for every visitor," said Carlo Micallef, the MTA's CEO. "From our UNESCO World Heritage Sites to our digital innovation ecosystem, we want people to understand that Malta is not only a place of beauty and history, but also a country that is shaping the future."

The pavilion, inspired by traditional Maltese architectural motifs blended with contemporary design elements, features interactive displays, virtual reality installations and live cultural programming. The MTA has partnered with leading Maltese artists, technologists and educators to present Malta's culture, language and lifestyle in a modern and engaging format.

In addition to the physical presence, the MTA is rolling out a Japan-focused promotional campaign designed to elevate Malta's profile among Japanese travelers and investors. This includes digital outreach, cultural collaborations and joint initiatives with Japanese travel agencies. The goal is to position Malta as an ideal destination for high-value tourism — one that combines heritage, hospitality, innovation and wellness.

"We want to engage not only tourists, but also students, entrepreneurs and policy thinkers," said

Micallef. "Malta offers a model of sustainable development and quality of life that resonates strongly with Japanese values. We are extending an invitation to explore, connect and collaborate."

A key theme of Malta's tourist product is the promotion of sustainable and experiential tourism, areas in which the MTA has invested heavily over the past decade. As part of its Tourism Strategy 2021–2030, Malta has committed to transforming the tourism sector into one that is innovative, inclusive and environmentally responsible. It has initiatives such as eco-certification programs, green infrastructure, community-led tourism and climate action plans, presenting it as a case study in sustainable island tourism. Visitors will learn how Malta is integrating technology, policy and education to mitigate the environmental impacts of tourism while maximizing social and cultural benefits.

‘We are analyzing tourism flows across Malta to understand visitor movements, length of stay and key attractions. This data refines our strategies.’

Carlo Micallef, CEO, Malta Tourism Authority

Malta's tourism sector has emerged from the pandemic with a renewed focus on quality, sustainability and market diversification. According to Micallef, the country welcomed 3.6 million tourists in 2024, up from 3 million in 2023 and surpassing prepandemic figures. More importantly, tourism expenditure climbed by \$681 million to reach over \$3.7 billion.

"In 2024, we focused on attracting higher-yield, year-round tourism," Micallef said. "We aimed to grow winter travel and manage the natural summer peak by 'flattening the curve.' This meant investing in marketing, sports events, gastronomy, culture and history — particularly targeting the shoulder and off-peak months." Recently, the MTA established partnerships with Emirates and LOT Polish Airlines, while Qatar Airways is returning to help boost connections with Japan and other Asian countries.

"As an island, 99% of our visitors arrive by air, with a small portion coming via fast ferry from Sicily," Micallef said. "Our strategy focuses on expanding connectivity through legacy carriers, not just local ones. We have launched new routes with Aer Lingus from Dublin and are adding LOT Polish Airlines flights from Warsaw, enhancing links to North America, Asia and Eastern Europe."

"Qatar Airways resumes in July, and our partnerships with Emirates and Turkish Airlines continue to grow. Lufthansa, British Airways, Air France and KM Malta Airlines have all increased capacity, connecting us more efficiently to major European hubs. The goal is to make Malta easily accessible with one-stop connections from long-haul markets — and eventually, to establish direct flights from North America or Asia."

Malta's tourism strategy is built on a solid foundation of environmental sustainability and digital transformation.

"We are encouraging climate-friendly practices through Global Sustainable Tourism Council and Green Key certifications," Micallef said. "Our goal is to build a tourism sector that is environmentally responsible and economically viable. Sustainability is not a luxury — it's a necessity. Through our pavilion, we hope to inspire visitors



Malta's capital, Valletta, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site renowned for its history, gastronomy, culture and architecture.



Ian Borg
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Tourism



Andre J. Spiteri
Ambassador of Malta to Japan



Carlo Micallef
CEO, Malta Tourism Authority

to reimagine travel as a force for good and to see Malta as a living laboratory for green innovation."

Beyond culture and tourism, Malta's presence at Expo 2025 serves as a vital function in economic diplomacy. The pavilion will host targeted events designed to attract Japanese investment in sectors such as financial services, life sciences, esports, maritime logistics and clean energy.

Collaborative strategy
The MTA, partnering with Malta Enterprise and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Tourism, is organizing business roundtables, startup showcases and bilateral meetings to foster commercial links between Malta and Japan.

These engagements are intended to complement the cultural programming and ensure that Malta's participation translates into tangible outcomes for its economy. Business discussions will center on sectors including artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, sustainable energy and cultural tourism. TradeMalta will lead a delegation of Maltese businesses to explore further collaboration during the expo.

"Our business development scheme supports companies moving into higher value-added areas, especially digital innovation. With the rise of AI and large language models, embracing digital

transformation is essential. Malta has long been at the forefront of blockchain — our regulations even influenced the EU's framework — and we continue to attract strong players in the space, explained George Gregory, the CEO of Malta Enterprise.

‘Whether you are exploring history, starting a business, or simply enjoying the sea breeze in Valletta, Malta welcomes you.’

Ian Borg, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Tourism

Malta's marketing strategy in Japan is rooted in storytelling. This includes tales of military valor, culinary traditions and quirky anecdotes drawn from the nation's layered history.

"We are sharing captivating stories, from what the grand master ate during the Great Siege to the chapel at Fort St. Elmo where six knights made their final stand," Micallef said. "These stories add emotional depth to our campaigns and resonate strongly with Japanese travelers seeking culture

and meaning." Simple, authentic messaging has proven most effective, especially in the Japanese market.

As Malta looks eastward, the message is clear: The country is welcoming and full of promise.

"Many Japanese have already visited Europe's great capitals," he said. "Now is the time to discover Malta — a crossroads of cultures where visitors find Roman ruins beside Arab fortifications, French-style boulevards leading to British red phone boxes and meals that blend Italian, North African and Mediterranean flavors."

For investors, Malta offers a stable, EU framework, clear regulatory pathways and strong diplomatic backing. For travelers, it offers sun-drenched coastlines, world-class diving and a cultural legacy that spans millennia, all within a compact and easily navigable space. Visitors will also discover a thriving local arts scene, with open-air concerts, festivals and exhibitions scheduled throughout the year. The country is 12 times smaller than Rhode Island yet contains around 359 churches, which works out as one in every 3 square miles.

"Malta is quite unique in this respect," Borg concluded. "Whether you are exploring history, starting a business, or simply enjoying the sea breeze in Valletta, Malta welcomes you with open arms."



Although Malta is thought of as a city-state, geologically it is actually an archipelago, part of an ancient land bridge that was once connected to Europe and possibly North Africa, most of which was submerged during the melting of the last great Ice Age.

From congestion to connectivity

Lessons from Japan are transforming Malta’s transport system from a network of heavily congested roads to an integrated system of rapid transit and maritime efficiency

As global commerce, mobility and sustainability become increasingly interconnected, Malta is positioning itself as a dynamic and forward-thinking transportation hub at the heart of the Mediterranean.

With sweeping reforms, bold infrastructure projects and a vision extending to 2050, Malta’s transport sector is undergoing a strategic transformation, bridging continents, supporting economic growth and attracting global investment. A key element of this transformation is international collaboration and the adoption of best practices, especially from advanced transport nations like Japan.

“We are investing in intelligent transport systems inspired by Japan’s success,” noted Chris Bonett, minister for transport, infrastructure and public works. “Traffic management, rapid transit and electric mobility are areas where we are actively learning and applying best practices.”

The Osaka Expo will be a major milestone for Malta in this regard. “We want to highlight Malta as a hub of innovation and sustainable mobility,” Bonett said. “The expo is not just about showcasing projects, it is also about building relationships with Japanese investors and learning from their world-class expertise.”

Kurt Farrugia, CEO of Transport Malta, emphasized the strategy: “We will use the expo to emphasize that Malta is more than tourism — we are growing in science, technology and business. Our connectivity with Japan needs strengthening and the expo is the right platform to build those bridges.”

Under the ministry’s stewardship and Transport Malta’s implementation, the country is aligning its transport modernization with broader economic ambitions. “Over the past 12 years, Malta has experienced unprecedented economic growth, driven by a clear government focus on foreign investment,” Bonett explained. However, this success puts significant pressure on its infrastructure. With nearly full employment and a swelling population driven by foreign workers and tourism, Malta is accelerating efforts to expand and green its transportation network to ensure long-term resilience.

Central to this transformation is the National Transport Strategy 2050 and the forthcoming Malta Vision 2050, which places transport at



Chris Bonett
Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Public Works

the core of sustainable national development. “Transport will be a central pillar, especially the aviation and maritime sectors,” he continued. “Malta holds the largest fleet in Europe and now has over 900 registered aircraft. These sectors thrive because we have built strong legal and financial services to support them.”

Transport Malta has responded to the country’s growth with a proactive and people-centric approach. Thinking of the strains that such success places on the country’s transport sector, Farrugia compared it to living in a house increasingly crowded with people, placing growing pressure on the existing infrastructure. “The growth exceeded expectations, so we have introduced reforms to relieve the strain on our transport infrastructure,” he explained.

Malta is now among the few countries in the world to offer free public transport, including both bus and sea services, helping reduce traffic congestion and encourage sustainable mobility. This initiative has proven widely successful, especially when combined with improved sea connectivity and new cycling infrastructure. “Offering diverse transport options — buses, cycling, sea links — is essential,” Farrugia said. “It’s about stepping up and using technology to provide better solutions.”



Kurt Farrugia
CEO, Transport Malta

As a maritime nation where 90% of goods arrive by ship, maritime infrastructure is essential not only for trade but also for economic competitiveness. “Malta’s strategic location makes our Freeport one of the most important transshipment hubs in the Mediterranean,” Bonett emphasized. “We have invested heavily in port infrastructure and we take pride in being maritime industry leaders.”

A leader in green innovation
Particularly noteworthy is Malta’s leadership in shore-to-ship power technology, a green initiative allowing ships to connect to the national grid and drastically reduce heavy fuel use. “By 2030, all European Union ports must implement this technology; however Malta is ahead. We completed the first phase and cruise ships are already connecting. The Freeport will soon support cargo ships too,” he said.

Digitization in maritime operations is also advancing under Transport Malta. “We are finalizing the digitization of our maritime sector and will soon issue digital certificates for ships,” Farrugia emphasized. “We are not only focused on the size of our fleet but also on its quality, efficiency and compliance with international standards.”

The aviation sector is also soaring. In just



The Malta Pavilion invites expo visitors on a journey through a dynamic fusion of ancient heritage and modern innovation.

one year, Malta has added over 100 aircraft to its registry. With major carriers like Ryanair and EasyJet anchoring operations on the island, Malta is becoming a magnet for aviation business. “Our goal is to maintain efficiency while meeting international regulatory standards,” Farrugia noted. “We want to show that Malta is not only a registry, but also a regulator that fosters innovation. For example, we are exploring drone technology for medical deliveries between islands and have already certified drones that can emit fireworks — another first for Europe.”

Bonett echoed this technological ambition: “Aviation and maritime are where we are strongest, but we are also looking to build a rapid mass transport system, one of the most ambitious infrastructure projects in our country’s history. We are studying models from Japan and Europe and will soon launch an international call for expressions of interest.”

Malta’s commitment to sustainable infrastructure goes beyond transit networks. Urban regeneration is being woven into major transport projects. Msida, a harbor town west of Malta’s capital, Valletta, is a great example of where the ministry is reimagining traffic: “It’s not just about

‘We need smarter roads, and are deploying artificial intelligence-based systems and smart infrastructure to enhance safety and flow.’

Kurt Farrugia, CEO, Transport Malta

building a flyover to improve traffic flow. We are also creating Malta’s largest green infrastructure project — cycling paths, community areas and green spaces will reconnect neighborhoods previously divided.”

These community-focused developments serve as blueprints for future investments. “When investors see visible progress — modern roads and upgraded terminals — they see a government that is serious about growth and quality of life,” Bonett said. “Every euro we spend on infrastructure is a message that Malta is open, efficient and future-ready.”

The next frontier in transport evolution is data. Farrugia elaborated: “We need smarter roads,

and are deploying artificial intelligence-based systems and smart infrastructure to enhance safety and flow. Long-term sustainability requires more than physical roads, it needs data-driven management.”

Both leaders are confident in Malta’s appeal to foreign investors, especially from Asia.

“For Japanese entrepreneurs looking to invest across Europe, Asia and Africa, Malta is the ideal location,” Bonett said, citing its highly skilled workforce, stable fiscal infrastructure and easy access to three continents.

Farrugia concurred: “Malta combines regulatory excellence with business efficiency. That’s a rare balance. We want partners who see value in sustainable, tech-enabled transport and who share our vision for the future.”

With a population of 550,000 that swells to 1.2 million in summer, Malta faces unique mobility challenges. However, its response — rooted in smart planning, international cooperation and a bold long-term vision — is earning results and recognition. From shore-to-ship power and free public transport to digitized maritime services and drone aviation, Malta is demonstrating that size is no barrier to ambition.

Eyes set on World Exposition

For Malta, the Osaka Expo from April to October is about more than raising its international profile — it’s a valuable opportunity to deepen long-standing ties with Japan

Malta is making a bold and multifaceted statement on the global stage at the Osaka Expo. Nestled within the Empowering Lives zone, near the event’s striking water feature, Malta’s pavilion is a vibrant symbol of the island nation’s resilience, innovation and enduring ties with Japan. Its participation blends tradition with transformation, offering a glimpse into a Mediterranean country with a global outlook.

“Malta is fully committed to participating in the Osaka Expo 2025,” said Andre J. Spiteri, ambassador of Malta to Japan and general commissioner of Malta for the expo. “The theme, ‘Catch the Wave, Catch the Opportunity,’ highlights Malta’s resilience, sustainability and innovation. We have designed a well-structured program focusing on both business networking and cultural exchange, as these elements are interconnected.”

Malta’s presence at the expo is not just a celebration of culture, it’s a strategic effort to promote a dynamic economy with strong links to Asia, especially Japan. The island’s compact size belies its depth in sectors such as financial services, education, digital innovation and tourism. “Visit Malta has been a pioneer in promoting Malta in Japan,” highlighted Carlo Micallef, CEO of the Malta Tourism Authority. “The upcoming Osaka Expo is another key opportunity for all major Maltese agencies to promote our destination. Malta offers not only tourism, but also opportunities in financial services, investments and trade with Japan.”

This multisectoral message is clearly conveyed in the Malta Pavilion. Whether through its vibrant displays of cultural heritage, engaging networking events, or business forums, Malta intends to present itself as a safe, forward-looking partner for Japanese investors, students and innovators alike.

Shared history, new horizons
Malta and Japan enjoy a long-standing diplomatic relationship, marked by cultural exchanges and mutual respect. One of the most poignant symbols of this bond takes center stage at the Malta Pavilion: a set of samurai armor gifted to Malta in 1862 by a Japanese delegation during the Bunkyo diplomatic mission. Now meticulously restored, the armor will be displayed in Osaka, reminding visitors of the historical ties that connect the two nations.

The armor is, “a symbolic representation of this cultural bond,” explained Ian Borg, Malta’s

deputy prime minister and minister for foreign affairs and tourism. This gesture honors the past but also speaks to a future of deeper collaboration between Malta and Japan.

While sun-soaked coastlines and historic cities remain central to Malta’s tourism appeal, the expo provides a chance for the country to showcase its broader offerings to Japanese travelers. In particular, its blend of influences from its continental neighbors makes it a cultural melting pot unlike any other destination in Europe. “Many Japanese travelers have visited cities like Paris, Rome and London. Now it’s time to explore Malta — a unique blend of European, North African and Middle Eastern influences,” emphasized Micallef. “We present Malta as a safe, Mediterranean destination with a deep cultural heritage for Japanese travelers and businesses alike.”

‘Malta offers not only tourism, but also opportunities in financial services, investments and trade with Japan.’

Carlo Micallef, CEO, Malta Tourism Authority

Given the ever-growing desire of tourists to go on tours to historic sites and gain a deeper understanding of the place they are visiting, its history and its traditions, Malta is well placed to appeal to visitors from Japan, a country steeped in history. “Cosmopolitan, multicultural and welcoming, Malta is a place where visitors quickly feel at home and discover a wealth of experiences all within a short distance,” Micallef said. Moreover, Malta is positioning itself as a hub for educational tourism. The Malta Pavilion will emphasize the country’s growing reputation for offering specialized English-language courses, tailored to professionals from various sectors, including aviation, health care and law.

A platform for innovation
Beyond tourism and culture, Malta is also using the Osaka Expo to highlight its advancements in sustainability, digital health and disaster preparedness — topics that align closely with its main theme, “Designing Future Society for Our Lives.” “At Expo 2025, the theme of Malta’s pavilion fits hand in glove with the event’s main

theme,” Borg added. “Malta will be showcasing its innovations in environmental sustainability, health care preparedness and disaster resilience. It will also explore themes such as digital technologies in health, education, nutrition and workplace innovation.”

From artificial intelligence-driven transport systems to digital maritime certifications, Malta is embracing technology as a means of enhancing quality of life and preparing for future challenges. These initiatives are demonstrated interactively in the pavilion, engaging visitors in Malta’s tech-forward vision.

One of Malta’s most compelling messages at the expo is its strategic location. Positioned between major landmasses, it is a natural gateway for Japanese companies looking to expand across three continents. Its European Union membership, English-speaking workforce and stable business environment make it a preferred base for trade, logistics and finance.

“Despite importing many goods, we export high-quality tuna — regarded as a delicacy in Japan — which contributes to our favorable trade balance. This strong relationship is highlighted at the expo, where Malta will promote tourism, trade, finance and gaming under one message: authentic Malta, rooted in tradition and artisanal quality,” Micallef said.

The success of Malta’s participation will depend on the collaborative efforts of both public and private stakeholders. “We aim to strengthen our relationship with Japan through our country’s participation at Expo 2025, which is providing a unique opportunity we want to make the most of with the support of various Maltese public and private stakeholders,” Spiteri emphasized.

The program for Malta’s presence includes business matchmaking events, cultural performances, educational seminars and culinary showcases, all designed to leave a lasting impression on Japanese visitors and global attendees alike.

Malta’s message is clear: It is a country of substance and style, rooted in tradition yet embracing innovation and ready to deepen its ties with Japan. “Catch the Wave, Catch the Opportunity” is more than a slogan. It is a call to discover Malta’s unique mix of opportunity, authenticity and global vision.

From the shores of the Mediterranean to the vibrant setting of Osaka, Malta is ready to ride the wave into the future — and is inviting the world to join in.

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