

The Ħal Saflieni Hypogeum – Access Statement

This document is intended to help you plan your visit to the Ħal Saflieni Hypogeum World Heritage Site. Details about accessibility and limitations are described below.

1. Introduction

A World Heritage Site since 1980, the Ħal Saflieni Hypogeum is a unique prehistoric monument which “bears unique testimony to a civilization which has disappeared” (Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, Criterion iii). The site was discovered during the building of new houses in Paola at the turn of the century, and was reported to the authorities in 1902. Containing evidence from around 4100 BC to 2500 BC, the Hypogeum consists of a series of rock-cut chambers set on three different levels. The Upper Level, which is also the earliest to be created, may have had a monumental structure marking its entrance but its extent is unknown. The Middle Level houses the most elaborate chambers where, albeit with only the use of stone and bone tools, work of extremely high quality and skill is evident. The chambers are similar to those of above-ground megalithic structures and the walls and ceilings of some of them are painted with designs in red ochre, giving the visitor a different, though familiar, view of the internal spaces of a prehistoric structure. The preservation of these paintings has presented one of the biggest challenges to the site’s managers over the years. This remains, to this day, the site’s main conservation concern.

We look forward to welcoming you.

2. Visiting the Hypogeum

2.1 Tour Types

Hypogeum Guided Visit: This tour includes a 12-minute audio-visual experience, introducing the site and its values, conservation concerns and artefacts found within. The audio-visual experience is then followed by a tour of the site, which takes about 35 minutes. Hypogeum guided visits are held every hour from 9:00 to 16:00.

Visitors who are not able to use the audioguides provided may request a written version of the tour in English by contacting Heritage Malta at least one week before their visit.

2.2 Booking Your Tickets

The Hypogeum Guided Visit, is available for 10 visitors per tour. Tickets for the guided visit are usually booked around six weeks in advance, and you are encouraged to book your tickets well ahead of your visit. Tickets for tour can be purchased online from the following site: <https://booking.heritagemalta.org/>. If you encounter any difficulties with the online booking system, you can contact us on info@heritagemalta.org or on +356 2295 4000. Tickets purchased are not refundable or exchangeable.

Last minute tickets: Tickets for the 12:00 and 16:00 tours are sold only as last minute tickets on the day preceding the actual tour. These can be purchased from The Ħal Saflieni

Hypogeum (Paola), Fort St Elmo (Valletta) and from the Gozo Museum of Archaeology (Citadel, Gozo).

Trained (and training) assisting dogs are welcome at our site. A water bowl is available on request. However, visitors who are accompanied by guide dogs are kindly requested to notify Heritage Malta on purchasing their ticket. Pets are not permitted anywhere in the museum and site.

Due to health and safety reasons, children under the age of 6 cannot be admitted to the site. Children from 6-15 years old must be accompanied by an adult. The Hypogeum is an enclosed space; those affected by claustrophobia might experience some mild discomfort. Due to high humidity levels within the site, some passageways may be slippery. Visitors are therefore advised to wear comfortable closed shoes.

2.3 Transport and Parking

The Hal Saflieni Hypogeum can be reached by bus with the closest bus stop only a few metres away from the site. For the most updated information about bus routes and timetables please see <https://www.publictransport.com.mt/en/visiting-malta>.

Visitors getting to the site with their own car can follow street directions to the site and can park on the street within available parking bays. However, finding available parking spots may prove difficult. If you are using your own car, please allow enough time for parking, as tours commence strictly on time.

3. The Site

3.1 Reception

On reaching the site, a ramp leads you to the main entrance of the site. You will enter the reception area through a glass door and you will be welcomed by our staff. Front desk staff will check your tickets and guide you accordingly. In the reception area, there is a small seating area, where you can rest while waiting for your tour to start, restrooms and a gift shop.

Before starting the tour, you will be asked to leave your belongings in individual lockers. Photography and filming are not allowed in any part of the site and therefore, cameras need to be left inside the lockers as well. All visitors must have both their hands free to be able to use the audio guides provided while being able to hold on to the handrail.

3.2 Audio-Visual/Exhibition area

The audio-visual/exhibition area is split into two rooms. In the first room, you will find an information panel describing some urban legends about the site. The audio-visual in this section focuses on the site's discovery, its values and conservation issues. This room is reached via eight steps leading directly into the room. Visitors with mobility issues can use a lift to access this space. In the second room, accessed through a glass sliding door, the audio-visual show resumes with an introduction to the site itself and includes three showcases with artefacts that were found within the site as well as a replica of the popularly known 'Sleeping

Lady' which is not enclosed in a glass case and can be touched. There are a few seats in both audiovisual areas.

3.3 The site

From the audio-visual area and through a glass sliding door, visitors are led into a small buffer room which gives access to the site itself. The visit, taking about 35 minutes starts from the Upper Level of the site and into the Middle Level. The Lower Level is not accessible to visitors. You will need to climb down a number of steps to access the different areas of the site, and to climb a spiral staircase to get out of the site. Being a prehistoric site where interventions are not possible, a visitor lift is not available within the site. Humidity within the site is controlled to very high levels and you are advised to be careful since some passageways may be slippery and to hold on to the steel handrails along all the pathways within the site. The ceilings of some of the spaces are low, and visitors are advised to mind their heads when entering these spaces. Audio prompts remind visitors of this wherever there is this issue.

3.4 Audio Guides

Both guided visits and the audio-visual experience are conducted via audio guides in the following languages: Maltese, English, French, Italian, German, Spanish and Japanese. Audio guides are handed out to all visitors after checking of tickets, and you will be assisted by our staff to choose your preferred language. Audioguides are fully automated and you will only need to control the volume. Visitors who are not able to use the audio guide provided may request a summarized, written version of the tour (available in English) by sending an email to info@heritagemalta.org one week before their visit.

3.5 Lighting

In order to protect the prehistoric wall-paintings found within the site, lighting follows a pre-set programme and lighting levels are kept low. There will be times, therefore, when you will be in darkness. Dim emergency lights close to the floor along the walkway are however kept switched on throughout the tour. Staff accompanying you during the tour will also have small, hand-held torches which they will use in case of emergencies.

3.6 Flooring, Steps and Ramps

The reception area, restrooms, gift shop, audiovisual and exhibition areas as well as parts of the Upper Level of the site are fully accessible to wheelchair users. To access the rest of the site, you will need to climb down/up some steps and ramps.

For conservation purposes, humidity within the site is kept at very high levels. Therefore, passageways may be slippery and for your safety, you are encouraged to use the handrails at all times.

3.7 Gift Shop

A gift shop is available in the reception area, which you will also pass through at the end of your tour. It is a modern, well-lit space and is level throughout. The counter height is 100cm on the sides and 90cm in the centre. The gift shop stocks a variety of locally-crafted items and high-quality local products including jewellery, unique items and a good selection of books. All items are priced and staff will offer assistance if required.

3.8 Restroom Facilities

Restrooms are available just off the reception area to the right of the main entrance, and include facilities for wheelchair users. The area leading to the restrooms is on level ground and the door leading to them opens inwards to the left with an opening of 94cm. Facilities include three toilet cubicles - 1 accessible toilet, 1 for gents and 1 for ladies. The accessible cubicle is unisex. Its door opens outwards to the right and the opening is 85cm. There is clear space for a wheelchair on the right-hand side of 78cm across. The height of the wc, from the floor to the top of the seat, is 45cm. There are horizontal grab rails to the left hand side of the wc and next to the sink, which has lever taps. Within this cubicle, there is also a wall-mounted horizontal nappy-changing table with a weight resistance of 30kgs. All toilet cubicles are well-lit.

3.9 Fire Alarm and Safety Measures

The site is equipped with a fire alarm system, which will go off in case of emergency. Fire extinguishers are also available in all areas of the site. Nonetheless, you are requested to refrain from activities which may be hazardous to the site such as smoking. There is an emergency exit in the audiovisual area; emergency directional signage leading to site exits is found throughout the site. A first aid kit is available on site.

4. Additional information and Contacts

Information leaflets are distributed from the reception desk. The site is found approximately five minutes away (on foot) from the Paola parish church.

Address: L-Ipoġew ta' Ғal Saflieni, Triq iċ-Ċimiterju, Paola, PLA 1116

Telephone: +356 2180 5019

Email: info@heritagemalta.org

Website: www.heritagemalta.org

The Ғal Saflieni Hypogeum is open from Monday to Sunday from 09:00 to 17:00 (last tour at 16:00). The Hypogeum is closed on the 24th, 25th and 31st of December, 1st January and on Good Friday.