

St. Paul's Catacombs

Introduction

General Introduction

The St. Paul's Catacombs are situated in Triq Sant' Agata/Triq Ħal Bajjada, Rabat, Malta. The site is made up of 24 catacombs, spread over 10,000 metres squared. The entire site has been designed to showcase the catacombs themselves but also to give visitors a good educational experience on the people buried here and the funerary rites held during all the periods in which this cemetery was used. Safe and reliable mobility is one of our main challenges. The visitors' centre is thus fully wheelchair accessible.

The site is divided in two zones, divided by Triq Ħal Bajjada. Both areas (East and West) are accessible with the same ticket and essential amenities and facilities are also accessible in both zones. Visitors are led to one catacomb or zone to the other by means of passages and ramps equipped with hand rails where necessary but, the design of the site and it being considered as a park means that visitors are allowed to walk, stroll and rest on the green areas if they feel like it. Picnic benches and other seating is as such also available.

Arriving by bus

All the below buses pass from the main terminus in Rabat:

Bus 202 from Sliema,

181 and 282 from Mater Dei,

50, 51, 52, 53, from Valletta,

186 Bugibba,

201 and X3 from Airport

Nearest bus stops are Rabat 1, Rabat 2, Rabat 3. It takes around 5 minutes on foot to arrive from the nearest bus stop to the Catacombs

Arriving by car

When travelling by car, visitors can take two main routes:

1. Through Triq il-Kbira (by the Saqqaja petrol station) drive all the way to the junction with Triq San Pawl and turn left towards St Paul's Church. When by the church, stay on the left to the front of the church and then take a right towards Triq Ħal Bajjada, right in front of St Kataldus' Church. Entrance to the St Paul's Catacombs is about 150m along Triq Ħal Bajjada.
2. From the top of Saqqaja Hill, drive towards Mdina and all the way along Triq Tal-Mużew and Wesgħa tal-Mużew. Drive along Triq Għerixem and turn left onto Triq Santa Rita. Once at the other end of the road, turn right towards Triq Ħal Bajjada. Note that Triq Santa Rita is closed for traffic every Sunday morning.

Parking along Triq Ħal Bajjada is available but there are usually only a few spaces available. Parking may be easier at is-Saqqaja, il-Wesgħa tal-Mużew or Triq Rudolph Saliba. A disabled parking space is available next to the main entrance.

Zone 1 – St Paul’s Catacombs East

The site is easily identifiable through the large, wooden-clad structure of the new visitors’ centre. Entrance is through the East part of the site and up a flight of 14 steps or by a ramp situated a few metres further up the road.

The reception has two ticketing stations. Once you enter the reception area you proceed from a glass door. Inside a lower table is available on the inside which allows more access for wheelchair users.

The visitors’ centre holds all the amenities and apart the reception, one can find, toilets (male, female and wheelchair friendly) as well as nappy changing facilities. In the mezzanine level, the centre also holds storage areas, offices and a staff zone. All amenities are accessible after the ticket is scanned through our turnstiles right to the left of our reception.

The visit to the St Paul’s Catacombs starts in the Audio-Visual hall where visitors can view three short videos on various aspects of the site. These videos are shown in a loop and visitors can come and go as they please throughout the projection. They can thus choose to see one or all of the three productions, which would take around 30 minutes. These videos are currently only shown in English and are intended to provide information on catacombs in general, the history of the site and its discovery. The audio-visual hall is fully equipped for projection and presentations and can accommodate presentations/conferences of up to 60 seated persons.

The centre’s exhibition area is adjacent the audio-visual hall. This area is designed to showcase artefacts excavated in the site and their connection with the funerary and burial of people in this cemetery between the Punic and Late Roman periods. It makes extensive use of visual aids, with text being provided as short, 50-word snippets to sustain the images and artefacts. Each snippet of information is titled so visitors can choose the bite-sized information that mostly interests them without having to read through long, annoying texts.

Exit to the catacombs is through an aluminium door. From here, visitors are led to the first of five information pavilions – small rooms providing information on particular aspects related to tombs and catacombs. This first pavilion – the social pavilion, gives information on stories and traditions that were created or inspired by the catacombs, as well as actual other uses that the catacombs underwent since they stopped being utilized for funerary purposes. This room also contains two short audio-visuals being shown in English on a flat screen TV with subtitles.

From here visitors are led to the second pavilion – the architecture pavilion, showing visitors how the site was formed and excavated. The audio-visual takes the visitors through the various steps of the site’s investigations, starting with the initial studies through to the excavations and the artefacts recovered in the meantime.

Access to the West side of the site is located across the road. This means that visitors have to go out of the turnstiles by the side of catacomb 3 (no ticket needed to exit) and cross the road to the gate in front of them. Visitors are advised to cross the road very carefully. Triq Ħal Bajjada is a one-way road, with cars coming from the right-hand side.

Zone 2 – St Paul’s Catacombs West

Entrance to the West area is with the same ticket, which needs to be scanned again in the turnstiles just beyond the gate. Immediately in front of the turnstiles, there is a security room which also doubles up as a first aid room.

In this zone one can find, The Children’s, Architecture, Rituals, Architecture and Conservation pavilions. Catacombs from 6 to 23 are also found on this side.

There are also toilets in zone 2 which are also accessible to all visitors. These toilets have separate entrances for men, women and disabled users labelled accordingly all toilets are standardised for users with special requirement for disabled access in the disabled toilets. Baby changing facilities are also available.

Gift Shop

On the way out there is a gift shop which is accessible to all visitors since there is a ramp leading to it. There is over head lighting along with a lot of natural light which enters from the large windows around it. Shelving is accessible for young children and wheelchair users since shelving height is low. We offer a selection of souvenirs, drinks and snacks.

The prices are labelled on all items in small print, if assistance is required, the staff is always ready to help.

Hiring of Facilities

The Children’s Pavilion also known as Eulogia Hall and its surroundings can be hired for small conferences, meetings, parties, civil weddings and dinners. It holds up to 40 seated persons. It is fully air-conditioned and Free Wi-Fi access. The hall is also equipped an interactive white board and a projector.

Additional information

All our staff are briefed every morning and receive appropriate training that includes customer service and disability awareness. We have a set of evacuation procedures – should you require it someone will assist you with evacuation. Staff on duty will ensure that all visitors are assisted safely out of danger.

Inside and outside each catacomb there are panic buttons in case something happens, one can easily communicate with the reception. First Aid kits are located at the Reception, First Aid Room and in the gift shop.

Future plans

Adult and Children’s audio guides – a visitor will be able to scan a QR Code in different locations around the site to get information.

Excavation pit – Next to the Children’s pavilion there is a pit where we intend to reconstruct a real excavation pit where young visitors can dig to find replicas of objects that were found on site. They will be able to log on all the details of the found artefacts in a special logbook.