

Our Magnificent RIA Harbour: our rich History is the result of our Geography!

It all started when we were on geographical fieldwork in Valletta and went to the Upper Barraka Gardens for a short break. Whilst admiring the view, we overheard a tourist guide explaining the historical importance of the Grand Harbour. Throughout her explanation there was no mention at all of its geographical formation. This is a real pity because actually the Grand Harbour gained its importance because of its particular formation.

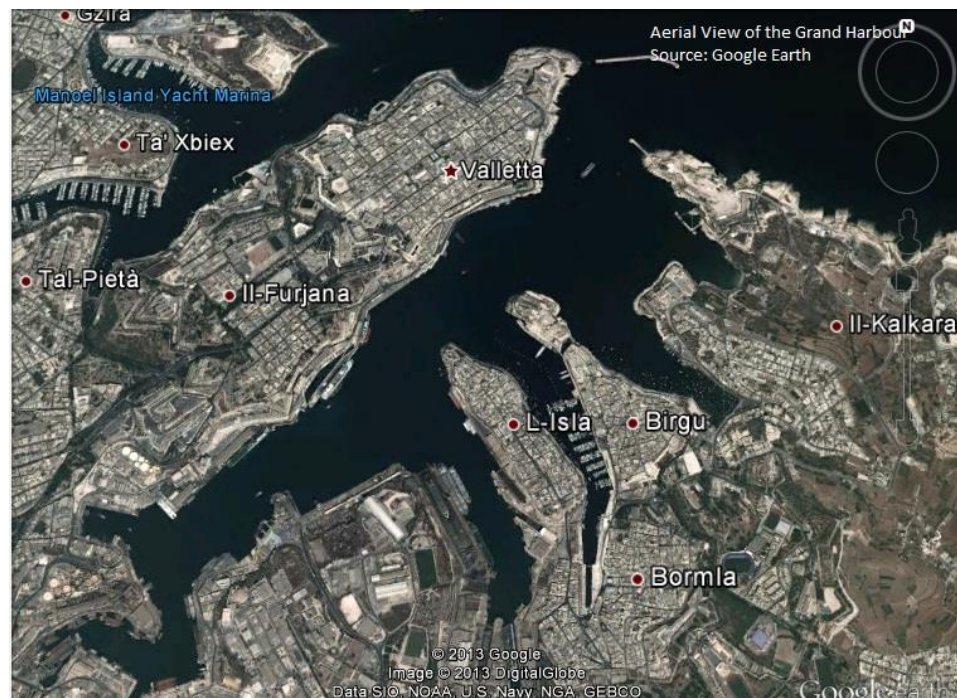


The Phoenicians, Knights of Saint John, the French, the British and many more have all battled to control this harbour. Nowadays it welcomes thousands of tourists visiting our island. All of these appreciate the importance and historical value of the harbour but little do they know about its geographical formation.

Geographically the Grand harbour is known as a Ria coast. A ria coast is a flooded river valley which forms when sea level rises. A ria begins as a

simple river valley; basically a series of hills with a river running through them. It consists of several parallel rias separated by ridges extending inland.

The Grand Harbour is a classic example of a ria coast where you have the Grand Harbour which was the main river channel and a number of creeks which were eroded by the small feeder rivers or tributaries. These creeks include; Rinella creek, Kalkara creek, Dockyard creek and French creek. These creeks are separated by the headlands of Kalkara and three cities Cospicua, Vittoriosa and Senglea.



It should be pointed out that if it was not for this particular formation the area around the Grand Harbour would not be of such value. Therefore it is very important that both Maltese and tourists appreciate that the Grand harbour would not have its history without its geography.

We sent this article to the Minister of Tourism, the Minister of Education and Employment, Officials at the Malta Tourist Authority, MEPA, the Valletta Local Council and the Local Councils of Cospicua, Vittoriosa, Senglea and Kalkara to raise awareness about the importance of this ria coast in Malta.

By promoting our magnificent Ria Harbour we can also attract over to Malta geographical groups of students from universities across Europe and even further beyond for their fieldwork experiences abroad as part of niche tourism. Such specialised tourism can be encouraged by advertising in the magazine 'Teaching Geography' issued by the Geographical Association of the UK. Their website is www.geography.org.uk

Above all however it is a pity that while a good number of Maltese know what a fjord is but only a limited number of local people know that we have one of the best examples of a Ria type of Harbour in the world!

BUT it seems that more people will soon get to know that our Grand Harbour is a RIA HARBOUR! In fact the feedback that we have received so far is amazing. Mr Kevin Fsadni Senior Manager, EU Projects and Accommodation Product of the Planning Directorate within the Malta Tourism Authority thanked us for the interesting article and informed us that he will forward it to as many of his contacts as possible. Even the Minister for Tourism Mr Karmenu Vella answered our email. This is what he wrote 'Thank you for your email and for the article which I found to be most interesting and informative. Well done.'

Ms Colette Grech Customer Care Unit of the Malta Tourism Authority informed us that our write-up is being forwarded to the Communications & PR department for their records and reference in the event of any future piece or feature on the Grand Harbour as well as to the Tourist

Information Centres and the Tourism & Sustainable Development Unit within the Ministry for Tourism for their reference.

In the meantime we will not stop here but will continue passing the word around that our Grand Harbour is a very good example of a RIA type of Harbour!