

MALTA

## Isle stop for ages

Neolithic, Roman, Arab, Renaissance left their marks for moderns to see



BY CLAUDIA R. CAPOS || GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**P**AOLA — Janet Coles was about to descend into a dark-as-night subterranean burial complex chipped out of bedrock 5,000 years ago. This Neolithic “black hole,” known as the Hal Saffieni Hypogeum, was probably used as a ritualistic temple and served as the resting place for an estimated 7,000 bodies, according to archeologists who counted the piles of bones in the tombs. Despite the macabre setting, Coles was not

the least bit skittish.

“I’m very interested in archeology,” Coles said. “In fact, I have a college degree in the subject.” She and her husband, Roger, who live in England’s Lake District, had flown to Malta, an island republic in the Mediterranean Sea south of Sicily, to explore its ancient archeological sites and other attractions. The Hypogeum, a UNESCO World Heritage site, was at the top of their list.

“This site is one of the great wonders of the pre-  
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PHILIPPE RENAULT/HEMIS/CORBIS (ABOVE), ROBERT HARDING/GETTY IMAGES (LEFT)

A view of Valletta from across Grand Harbour. In the capital city, the Grand Master’s Palace, completed in 1574, houses an armory that is one of the largest collections of its kind in the world. The palace is the historical seat of the Maltese government.

MOSCOW



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## MIND THE UNIFORM

Once the army’s elite, Russian paratroopers celebrate their own holiday full-bore

BY DAVID ABEL || GLOBE STAFF

Shortly after dawn one day on my first trip to Russia, a land where guidebooks advise foreigners to avoid just about anyone in uniform, I elbowed my way out of a cramped subway car onto a marble platform full of indecipherable Cyrillic signs.

Lost, sleepy, and trying to find my way beneath fluorescent-lighted chandeliers and timeworn frescoes of muscle-bound workers, I pushed through the throng of rush-hour commuters and noticed that all the hammers and sickles, red stars, and other relics of communism weren’t the only holdovers from the Soviet era.

Staring at me somewhat ominously was a large man wearing a bright blue beret, combat boots, and a blue-striped tank top. He

looked like a guy experienced in the art of killing. I tried to avoid his gaze as he hoisted a nearly finished beer and shouted in my direction, “Slava, VDV! Slava, VDV!” gibberish that anyway sounded menacing.

After nearly a week in Russia, however, it no longer seemed odd to find someone drinking in public, haranguing passersby with drunken songs and incomprehensible epithets. Already I was accustomed to curious sights throughout the fading grandeur of Moscow’s metro system, which some 9 million people use every day. For instance, I had seen a man, in full view of just about everyone in the subway car, plant his hand down a woman’s shirt while another lost his lunch as

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Feats and fierceness marked Paratroopers Day in Gorky Park.

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