


Opinion: To Malta with love (but not for the cars)

The Maltese turn into brutes as soon as they get into their cars

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The space in front of the famous 'blue door' at Mdina has become a parking lot. Photo: Peder Anker

Malta is an amazing island. A couple of weeks ago I took close to 30 students from New York University to visit for a week. We were there to study the impact of climate change, and we learned that Malta – like much of the rest of the world – struggles with water shortages, agricultural challenges, and pollution.

Yet there is no shortage of love and kindness from the Maltese who would go out of their way in making us all feel welcome. Thank you!

Yet for all their friendliness, the Maltese turn into brutes as soon as they step into their numerous cars. And there are cars everywhere, driving aggressively on narrow streets with symbolic sidewalks making us all feel unsafe.

According to the National Statistics Office, Malta has on average 42.5 traffic accidents a day, with the numbers rising, making it a hazardous island.

And then the pollution! We stayed in the St Julian's neighbourhood, which could have been such a beautiful place if parking lots were replaced with walkways and most of the roads had become pedestrian-only. I'm a coffee lover, so I went to enjoy it at a charming café across from Ġnien Spinola. The coffee was excellent, but the noise and pollution from the traffic made it impossible to enjoy.

It looks like cars have become a new secular religion for the Maltese, as we would observe, again and again, how plazas in front of churches have become parking lots. Shouldn't it be a place for social gatherings, community building, and spiritual preparation?

And then Malta is blessed with the stunning medieval fortifications of Mdina, which is also filled with noisy, polluting cars. Its most famous Instagram spot for selfies is the 'blue door' with more than half a million photos online. It's a telling image of Malta today that one of the island's most famous places has become a parking lot.

Malta is friendly, and this letter is written with compassion and respect for a beautiful island we all learned to love.

Yet I have a simple message for my new Maltese friends: rethink your transportation policies by encouraging public transport, biking, scooters, and walking instead of cars.

By doing so you will get a healthier and friendlier island for everyone, including the environment.

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