



Funnels on  
Um El Faroud

# Shipwrecks of Malta

**Daniel Xerri** offers a whistle-stop guide to the incredible variety of shipwrecks to be found from 16 to 115 metres in his home waters. **Photography by Jon Borg**

Most divers are drawn to wrecks because they are evocative of beauty, mystery and a sense of adventure. While wreck diving can be done in many parts of the world, there are places that are so renowned

for their high concentration of wrecks that many divers yearn to visit them. Places like Chuuk Lagoon and Bikini Atoll immediately spring to mind. However, for those who find themselves dismayed by the remoteness and expense involved,

diving in such places might remain a pipe dream. This is when learning about far more accessible wreck diving destinations can be providential. Malta is a prime candidate for affordable, accessible wreck diving.





A gun on the stern of SS Polynesien



### Strategic location

The significant number of wrecks in Maltese waters is not just a matter of happenstance. The British Empire capitalised on the country's strategic geographic location for more than 150 years. During the two World Wars, the ships and aircraft stationed in Malta (or visiting it enroute to other countries) were involved in several skirmishes, the result being the loss of many vessels and planes belonging to both sides.

Merchant traffic was also impacted by mines and torpedo strikes. Despite the tragic circumstances in which these aircraft, ships and submarines found their way to the bottom of the sea, divers are nowadays able to explore a wide assortment of historical wrecks. Their depth ranges from 16 metres – as in the case of the destroyer **HMS Maori** – to 115 metres, the maximum depth of the submarines **HMS Urge** and **HMS Olympus**. At depths beyond 85m, you can also find the minesweeper **HMD Trusty Star**, the destroyer **ORP Kujawiak**, the collier **SS Luciston**, and the battleship **HMS Russell**.

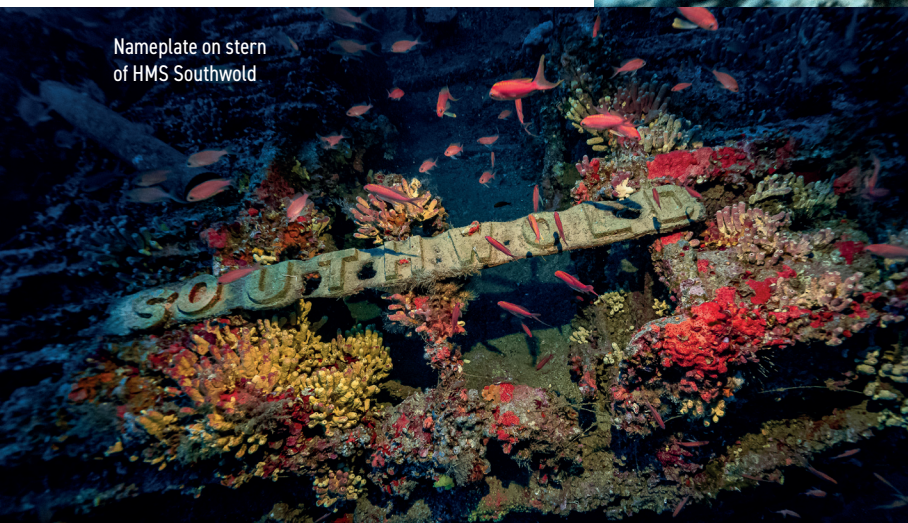
Given that most of the wrecks originating from the two World Wars are found at depths between 50 and 75 metres, Malta is a magnet for technical divers with an irresistible lust for rust. Some of the most legendary wrecks in this depth range are the 152-metre-long ocean liner **SS Polynesien**, the four-engined **B-24 Liberator** heavy bomber, and the destroyer **HMS Southwold**. Despite the many decades spent on the seabed, most of these deep wrecks are to a large extent in a very good condition.



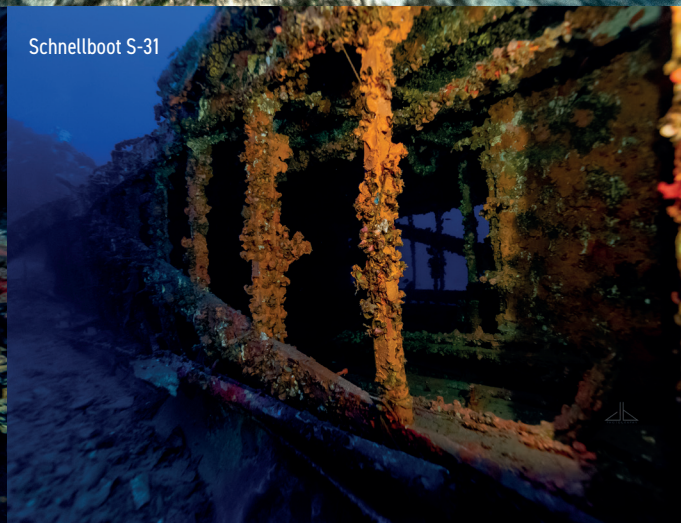
Even those vessels that suffered catastrophic damage when they struck a mine are sufficiently intact for divers to be able to identify many of their original features. For instance, **HMS Southwold** broke into two parts, with the bow and the stern being 300 metres away from each other, thus requiring separate dives. Its guns, unused depth charges and many other features make this wreck a firm favourite among technical divers. Some other wrecks that do not surpass the 75-metre mark are the minesweeping sloop **HMS Nasturtium**, the motor torpedo boat **Schnellboot S-31** and a range of aircraft



Nameplate on stern of HMS Southwold



Schnellboot S-31

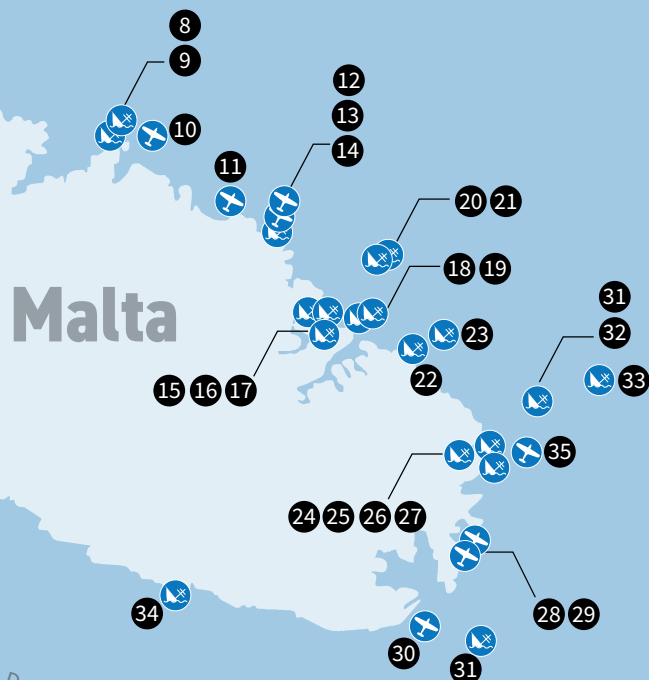


- 1 MV Xlendi
- 2 MV Karwela
- 3 MV Cominoland
- 4 MT Hephaestus
- 5 P31
- 6 P29
- 7 Rozi
- 8 MV Imperial Eagle
- 9 HMS Stubborn
- 10 Junkers Ju88
- 11 Lockheed P2V Neptune
- 12 Fairey Swordfish
- 13 Tug 2
- 14 Bristol Beaufigther
- 15 X127
- 16 HMS Maori
- 17 SS Margit
- 18 HMS Hellepont
- 19 HMD Trusty Star
- 20 HMS Olympus
- 21 HMS Urge
- 22 Schnellboot S-31
- 23 HMS Russell
- 24 HMS Southwold

- 25 SS Polynesien
- 26 Tug 10
- 27 St Michael
- 28 Bleinheim Bomber
- 29 Mosquito Fighter Bomber
- 30 B-24 Liberator
- 31 SS Luciston
- 32 ORP Kujawiak
- 33 HMS Nasturtium
- 34 Um El Faroud
- 35 Martin Maryland 167
- 36 Supermarine Spitfire



# Wrecks of Malta & Gozo







A wing of the Junkers JU88



The Bristol Beaufighter

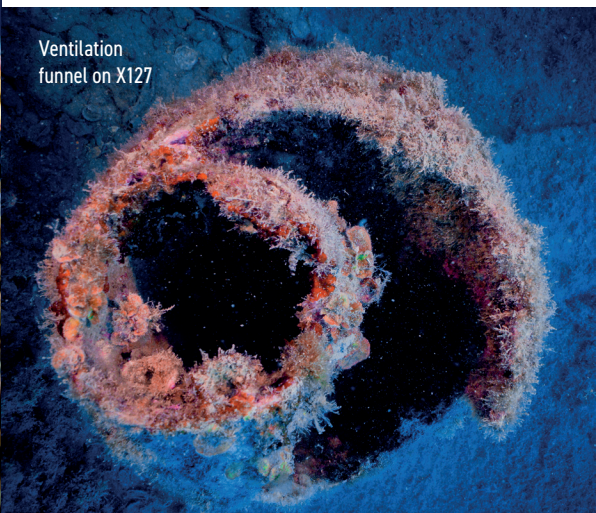
wrecks, including the **Supermarine Spitfire**, the **Fairey Swordfish**, the **Martin Maryland 167**, and the **Junkers Ju88**.

While Malta offers a limited number of historical wrecks within recreational diving limits, there do exist a few such sites for divers who wish to visit an aircraft or ship dating from the Second World War. For instance, **HMS Hellespont** is a paddle steamer that sits upright at a maximum depth of 41 metres, while **X127** is a supply vessel located in very shallow water. Meanwhile, **SS Margit** is a large steam passenger ship maxing out at 24m while the **Bristol Beaufighter** is a plane that lies upside down at a depth of 38 metres.

The **Bleinheim Bomber** and the **Mosquito Fighter Bomber** are two other airplane wrecks at a similar depth, but they are quite broken up, and are usually the preserve of completists. Despite not being quite as splendid as the deeper wrecks, the small number of WWII wrecks in recreational depths still possess historical significance; for mainstream wreckies, they warrant at least a single visit.



Engine of the Supermarine Spitfire



Ventilation funnel on X127





Faux machine gun on P29



Bow of the tugboat Rozi

## Scuttled glory

Besides those wrecks that found their way into the clutches of the sea due to the devastating effects of war, Malta prides itself on a range of wrecks that were scuttled for a variety of reasons. The principal idea is for these wrecks to serve as underwater attractions, the attendant publicity acting as an incentive for visiting divers.

An equally important reason is that wrecks become artificial reefs and help marine life to flourish on the otherwise barren sandy seabed.

However, in the case of **HMS Stubborn** – a submarine lying at a depth of 57m – the reason for scuttling was that the Royal Navy required a sonar training target. Once Malta gained its independence though (in 1964), this wreck became one of the top

technical dive sites. Another oddity, the **P2V Neptune airplane wreck** was scuttled for use in a movie in the 1950s.

Since most of Malta's scuttled wrecks are within recreational limits, they are by far its most popular dive sites. Scores of divers each day visit the oil tanker **Um El Faroud**, the **patrol boat P29**, and the **tugboat Rozi**. All three wrecks lie at around 35m, and can be dived from the shore. At 110 metres



Conning tower of HMS Stubborn



Stern of P31, on brilliant white sand



long, the Um El Faroud merits multiple dives, offering plenty of penetration opportunities for divers of appropriate experience and qualification. Meanwhile, P29 and Rozi are both found at Cirkewwa, 150 metres from each other. Most recreational divers first visit one of

the wrecks, then after a surface interval do a dive on the other one.

While its distance from shore only makes it suitable as a boat dive, recreational divers also enjoy visiting **MV Imperial Eagle**, a ferry boat at a maximum depth of 42 metres. For those

interested in shallower wrecks, the most popular scuttled vessels are **Tug 2** in Sliema, the **patrol boat P31** in Comino, and the tugboats **St Michael** and **Tug 10** in Marsascala. All these wrecks are in relatively shallow water, with none of them surpassing 25 metres.



The bow of St Michael



MV Imperial Eagle



Um El Faroud's funnel





Diver on MV Karwela



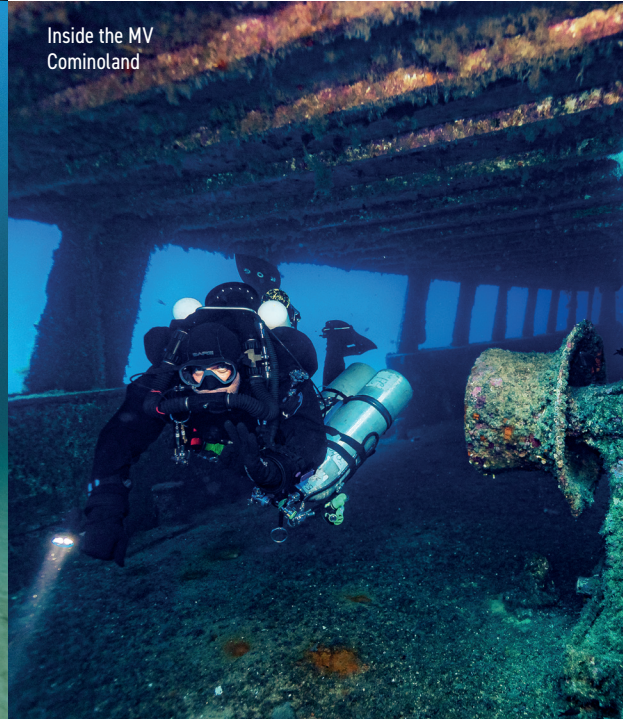
Propeller of MV Xlendi

## Wrecks in Gozo

While lacking the kind of historical wrecks found around Malta, the sister island of Gozo has its fair share of scuttled vessels for divers to visit. These are all concentrated next to one small stretch of coastline, thus making it convenient for divers to visit multiple wrecks on the same day. The most popular of Gozo's wrecks is **MV Karwela**, a passenger ferry with a wooden deck and a photogenic sweeping staircase. **MV Cominoland** and **MV Xlendi** lie adjacent to it, the latter being an 80-metre-long cargo ferry that ended up upside down when scuttled.



Stern of MV Cominoland



Inside the MV Cominoland



Decking on  
MV Karwela



**MT Hephæstus** is the most recent addition to this group of wrecks. Scuttled in August 2022, this decommissioned oil tanker is further from the shore than the other wrecks, so recreational divers might find it easier to approach as a boat dive. All four wrecks sit at depths between 30 and 45 metres.

Whether you're a recreational diver wishing to explore some cool wrecks from the shore, or else a technical diver interested in visiting some of the many historical wrecks from the two World Wars, the Maltese archipelago is an

easy-to-reach, affordable destination that provides a variety of wreck experiences. A wide range of dive centres are found in both Malta and Gozo; many of them cater for both recreational and technical diving, including Closed Circuit Rebreathers. Likewise, regular visits to the most popular wrecks are organised by Malta's two main diving clubs, Atlam Sub Aqua Club and Calypso Sub-Aqua Club, the latter being a branch of BSAC.

■ Follow Daniel Xerri on Instagram: [@daniel.xerri](https://www.instagram.com/daniel.xerri)

Bow of MT  
Hephæstus



## Essentials

**Getting there:** Air Malta has flights from Gatwick, Heathrow, Manchester and Edinburgh [airmalta.com/en-mt](https://www.airmalta.com/en-mt)  
Ryan Air has flights from Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Luton, Stanstead, East Midlands. [ryanair.com](https://www.ryanair.com)  
EasyJet has flights from Manchester, Gatwick, Aberdeen, Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol. [easyjet.com](https://www.easyjet.com)

**Going to Gozo:** The X1 bus goes from the airport to the ferry terminal at Cirkewwa and takes around 55 minutes. The ferry ride across to Gozo takes 25 minutes; it runs every 45 minutes during the day and slightly longer intervals all through the night and is the perfect time to taste the first Cisk (local beer) of the holiday. Buy the return ticket on the Gozo side €4.60/pp. Dive centres will organise return transfers from airport to accommodation.

**Accommodation:** Many dive centres have their own accommodation which is always close by and good value. Examples and good value packages from [maltaqua.com](https://www.maltaqua.com) and [divedeepblue.com](https://www.divedeepblue.com) on Malta, [atlantisgozo.com](https://www.atlantisgozo.com) and St Andrews Divers Cove on Gozo. For groups and clubs, self-catering farmhouses are always a popular option, with so many choices Google is your friend, but you can find a good example at [holiday-malta.com](https://www.holiday-malta.com)

**Eats and treats:** Malta is famous for rabbit cooked many ways, a staple on many menus. Local *pastizzi* are a speciality, a sort of Cornish pastie made from either ricotta cheese or marrowfat peas. There's also an Italian influence; pasta dishes are always tasty and good value. We recommend eating in good neighbourhood restaurants serving their local style of food. On Malta, a favourite is Ta' Bertu's Kitchen, 492 Triq San Pawl, St Paul's Bay. On Gozo, favourite spots are Oleander Restaurant 10, Triq Il Knisja, Ix-Xaghra and Café Jubilee in Victoria, Pjazza l-Indipendenza. ●