

## **FWA launches attractive military heritage trail**

**by Annaliza Borg**

“Our country has a good number of historical attractions in a concentrated area however we must work together to promote this essential part of Malta’s chequered history to enable visitors to experience Malta,” said Tourism Parliamentary Secretary Mario de Marco yesterday.

Dr de Marco was speaking at the launch of the Malta Military Heritage Trail that links the Saluting Battery at the Upper Barrakka Gardens in Valletta, the Malta at War Museum in Couvre Porte, Vittoriosa, and Fort Rinella in Kalkara.

Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna, which runs these sites, is organising free transport at given times of the day to make it easy for visitors to follow the trail in one day or on separate days according to their preference.

Thus, FWA has facilitated the possibility of following a schedule inclusive of guided tours, audiovisual shows as well as historical gun firing re-enactments in a day. The free transport takes patrons from the Saluting Battery, an open-air Artillery Museum in Valletta from where the trail starts, to the war museum in Vittoriosa, Fort Rinella in Kalkara, which houses the Armstrong 100-ton gun, and back.

The three different sites bring together around 400 years of military history in Malta, ranging from the late medieval period to the Second World War; however the trail is set to grow with the inclusion of other military heritage sites which are currently being restored by FWA.

During the launch of the trail, Dr de Marco referred to the fact that last year, over two million people visited museums and historical sites, an increase of six per cent over the previous year. The sites on the heritage trail proved to be successful, registering some 200,000 visitors at the Saluting Battery, while 15,000 visited the Malta at War Museum and some other 28,000 visited Fort Rinella. However he said that more intensive marketing was needed for more success in tourism, especially in the lean months.

The Military Heritage Trail initiative was the end result of an EU part-financed project entitled ‘Futourism’ which focused on the best ways of improving visitor experiences in the different fields of one’s own tourism product.

FWA chairman and CEO Mario Farrugia explained that through its experience, the foundation was working at attracting more foreign visitors to the Cottonera area. Besides making it easier for tourists to visit heritage sites, the concept behind the trail was to offer a long-lasting experience through a combination of expert guiding, hands-on facilities and live-re-enactments.

The trail thus offers an “unforgettable experience for both military history enthusiasts and also those wishing to spend an entertaining day out.”

FWA is delivering to hotels around the island, readily available brochures including the daily heritage trail programme, a brief history of each attraction, what visitors should expect as well as directions to get to each site.

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