

Outdoor NYE celebrations successful

by Elaine Attard

Crowds flocked in their thousands to Valletta and Floriana on Friday, where the respective local councils activities, in collaboration with event promoters and the national authorities, had organised activities for New Year's Eve.

The weather was perfect for outdoor festivities, and merrymakers began making their way to Valletta at around 8.30pm. Traffic was flowing and there was ample parking in the open spaces near Valletta by that time.

Many of those who opted to mark the turn of the year and decade in Valletta passed through Floriana's St Anne's Street to see how the more family-

oriented, well-attended festivities organised there were going.

Almost all the principal Valletta restaurants and cafes were fully booked and last-minute punters had to make do with the few tables that were available.

Towards 10pm people started making their way – champagne bottles and plastic cups in hand – to St George's Square, which was packed by midnight. The adjacent streets were similarly full of people of all ages and from all walks of life trying to push their way through the crowds.

Winter Moods, always a local crowd pleaser, warmed up the crowd while popular DJ Pierre Cordina got the party moving for the countdown in Valletta. In the meantime, the Big Band Brothers took the stage in Floriana with a number of singers.

While the Floriana event was held for the first time last year, this was the first year a similar event had been organised in St George's Square, Valletta, as Malta joined other cities around the world to celebrate the New Year.

Artificial snowflakes and balloons added to the happy atmosphere in St George's Square as the clock struck midnight, and people danced and made merry into the small hours.

An open-air concert featuring Airport Impressions was also held at it-Tokk in Victoria, Gozo.

Traffic and public transport hitches

As St Anne's Street in Floriana had been closed to vehicles, ingoing traffic, including public transport vehicles, passed through Triq Sarria while outbound traffic was diverted through Capuchins Street.

Public transport out of the city was operating until 2am and the park-and-ride system also continued late. Hundreds of people seemed to have left the city at around 1pm, right at end of the countdown celebrations, which led to heavy traffic congestion. Buses were also stuck in the congestion and some passengers became frustrated due to the resulting delays.

Asked for an explanation yesterday, Public Transport Association president Victor Spiteri said that, due to the amount of traffic, buses took longer to reach their destinations and subsequently took longer to return to Valletta for another load of passengers.

"People expected that they would board a bus as soon as they left Valletta but we couldn't accommodate the hundreds that all left at the same time, at around 1pm. The glitch was blown out of proportion, we just need time for buses to go to the towns and villages and back. It happens every year," he added.
