

# 2018 European Capitals of Culture: Leeuwarden and Valletta

The opening celebrations for **Valletta** will take place from 14 to 20 January across the city, inspired by the traditional Maltese *festa* (village feast). Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Tibor **Navracsics**, will attend the official opening ceremony on 20 January.

In **Leeuwarden**, celebrations will kick off on 26 and 27 January, with artistic installations and performances by professional and amateur artists across the city, and museums opening their doors to visitors throughout the Friesland region. European Commission First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** will attend the official opening ceremony on 27 January.

Commissioner **Navracsics** said: *“The European Capitals of Culture help bring communities together through culture with long-lasting benefits for the respective cities, their citizens and their economies. 2018 will be a special year as it is the European Year of Cultural Heritage, and both Capitals have included many projects promoting cultural heritage in their programmes – contributing to highlighting the role of culture in building a European identity. I wish Leeuwarden and Valletta every success for the coming year.”*

## **What's on?**

The programme for Valetta's *festa* aims to encourage artists and audiences to rethink the traditional view of culture. Due to Malta's specific location as an island-state between Europe and North Africa, the programme also aspires to bring together different points of view from the various shores of the Mediterranean. More than 140 projects and 400 events are included in the programme, organised around three main themes: “Island Stories”, “Future Baroque” and “Voyages”. About 1,000 local and international artists, curators, performers, workshop leaders, writers, designers, choirs and film-makers will be involved, and celebrations will continue throughout the year across the islands of Malta and Gozo.

With the concept of *iepen mienskip* (open community) at the centre of its programme, Leeuwarden aims to strengthen and connect communities from across the Friesland region and Europe, with more than 800 projects involving music, theatre, landscape art, opera, and sport taking place throughout the year. An exhibition by Dutch graphic artist M.C. Escher, an opera about Mata Hari, an event with Frisian horse-breeders, grassroots projects such as “European sports for all” are just a few of the many projects that will contribute to raising awareness and increasing understanding of cultural differences.

## **Background**

The European Capital of Culture was initiated by the then Greek Minister of Culture Melina Mercouri in 1985 and has become one of the most high-profile cultural initiatives in Europe. The cities are selected on the basis of a

cultural programme that must include a strong European dimension, promote the participation and involvement of the city's inhabitants and contribute to the long-term development of the city and its surrounding region.

It is also an excellent opportunity for the cities to shape their image, put themselves on the world map, attract more tourists and think about their own development through culture. Being a European Capital of Culture has a long-term impact, not only on culture but also in social and economic terms, both for the city and for the surrounding region.

In 2017, Aarhus in Denmark and Pafos in Cyprus were European Capitals of Culture. Following Leeuwarden and Valletta in 2018, the future European Capitals of Culture will be Plovdiv (Bulgaria) and Matera (Italy) in 2019, Rijeka (Croatia) and Galway (Ireland) in 2020, Timisoara (Romania), Elefsina (Greece) and Novi Sad (Serbia, candidate country) in 2021, and Esch (Luxembourg) and Kaunas (Lithuania) in 2022. All EU Member States, candidate countries and European Free Trade Association/European Economic Area countries participating in the Creative Europe programme can become a European Capital of Culture.

### **For More Information**

[Leeuwarden 2018](#) – European Capital of Culture

[#LF2018](#)

[Valletta 2018](#) – European Capital of Culture

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European Capitals of Culture – Thirty years of achievements [brochure](#)

European Capitals of Culture [factsheet](#)

European Year of Cultural Heritage:

[https://ec.europa.eu/culture/european-year-cultural-heritage-2018\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/culture/european-year-cultural-heritage-2018_en)

[Factsheet “culture as a driver for EU unity” – The Commission’s Contribution to the Leaders’ Working Lunch Gothenburg, 17 November 2017](#)