



Logistical and Technical Study  
**Sassco.co.uk Malta Tour 2008**

7th – 10th November 2008

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**Origins of the tour.**

The initial plans for an overseas tour were made back in 2004, with a price and schedule obtained for the United States. Flight costs were excessive. Israel was then considered, but insurance and flight costs were again excessive, despite a sports centre in Tel Aviv being happy to host us at a very low cost. Tentative approaches were made for India (Goa to be specific), but it was obvious that the further away the location, the more expensive the flights would be. The core cost of the tour and the hotels was quite low. Cyprus was then chosen with a good schedule arranged by Pro-Am Soccer Tours, an operator based in Cyprus. But after two aborted attempts, the latter seeing 10 players commit with deposits, it at least proved that the tour was a possibility.

After the January 2008 tour was abandoned, it was quite clear that the approach was wrong. It was being looked at as a single holiday when players already had commitments, as well as work issues. The planning was then changed to class it more as a weekend break with the previously unthinkable plan of three games in as many days being a necessity.

To summarise, previously aborted tours to United States and Cyprus fell down because of several reasons such as:

- Summer tour lasting a week when people had already booked holidays.
- A week tour costing too much and also the necessity of having too many days to take off work.
- Lack of a regular set of players for Sassco. Every time the tour was initiated, the team itself was in transition, therefore a lack of commitment from the players.

This was all solved by ensuring that:

- A regular set of players was maintained.
- Definite commitments were required.
- The tour was moved to a weekend where, in theory, only two or three days would overlap the workdays from Monday to Friday.
- Pricing and deposits were strictly adhered to.

The make up of the team changed radically in 2007 with players coming in from outside the area and being more in tune with the possibility of an overseas tour. Also, the previously younger players were replaced with older ones who could be relied upon much more. The tour was regularly revived since 2006, so it was more of the ordinary than the extraordinary. It was being embedded in everyone's mind as something that Sassco wanted to achieve. The tour (as it was from the start) was open to everyone involved in Sassco, be it 6-a-side or 11-a-side, as well as calling on previous Sassco members.

**The Malta based tour operator.**

Malta was chosen as a venue due to cheap flights and good climate. The quick response by our designated tour operator meant that Sassco were confident in his ability. The opponents, hotel and the venue were all arranged by Pierre Azzopardi, the tour operator. It was an ideal situation having a person on the ground in Malta with the contacts. Mr. Azzopardi's contacts were mainly rugby orientated, but his football links were of similar stature. There isn't a specific need to pick a tourist company, but for a football tour, a local football association person or someone who runs a team would be an ideal person to gain contacts from. The tour itself was based around the flights, which is a key issue for any future tours. The dates were to be flexible until the flights were confirmed.

The weekend from 7th November 2008 (Friday) to 9th November 2008 (Sunday) was initially chosen. The flight schedule meant that the return would occur on 10th November 2008 (Monday).

The opponents were confirmed about one month before the tour was to start. Davinder Sangha also made direct contact with the opponents by email and all confirmed the fixtures and provided extra details on the stadium and the standard of opponents. This was a peace of mind aspect to make sure that everyone was aware that Sassco were coming to Malta. The match officials were provided by the opponents / tour operator.

The key points in getting the groundwork done after choosing the country were as follows:

- Chose a good and reliable operator based in the host country that would have all the contacts.
- Make some detailed searches on the Internet about the venues and the local contacts.
- Use networking sites such as Facebook to contact local people in the destination for advice.
- Designing an official logo of the tour. The Malta Tour 2008 logo was adapted from the previous Cyprus Tour 2007 logo and was instantly recognisable.

#### **Deposits and flight ticket purchasing.**

The deposits were demanded (£150 each) by 30th June 2008. Once in, the tickets were purchased in bulk from Dialaflight at an approximate cost of £137 each. Payment was made by VISA card (not debit card). This was because VISA covers in case of anyone going out of business. There was a percentage surcharge, but for peace of mind, it was the correct way to pay. All major payments were made by VISA card. The advantage of early ticket purchase was proven correct when the pricing eventually shot up to the £500 mark. The main payment to make would be the tickets. Deposits were specifically requested in order to ensure early booking. Also, the tickets were non-refundable, so it made sure that anyone paying was committed.

The main problem was that the only low cost flights were from Gatwick. Had we purchased flights earlier (in May instead of June) we would have been able to obtain low cost flights (with one stop) from Newcastle to Malta. The other issue was that the return flight landing in Gatwick would be too late for a flight back to Newcastle. The Newcastle flight returned first thing in the morning, so the players involved arranged for an overnight stay in a hotel in Gatwick.

The remaining costs were requested in September 2008 after which the hotel and match costs were paid to Sun Dreams Travel. Key points to be aware of would be:

- Strictly adhering to the deposit dates.
- Always paying any large amount (over £100) by genuine VISA card.
- Recommend purchasing flights as early as possible to get the best price and the best routes.

#### **Essential planning.**

Planning for the tour was immeasurable. Everyone was given everybody else's telephone number as a back up. Timings were precise so that people arrived in good time. Back up options for transport were covered, such as break down insurance for the people driving down and alternate routes to Gatwick from Newcastle. Regular reminders were sent throughout the weeks before the tour, including:

- Ensuring names on passports matched the names on the flight list.
- Ensuring that the passport had not expired.
- Providing checklists for items such as shorts, socks and shin pads.

Packing was done individually. Players were asked to provide their own shorts, socks and shin pads. The shirts were given out the week before the tour and reminders were sent out the nights before to make sure everything was in order and packed.

Contact was made with a Malta sports retailer just in case anything went amiss in baggage. We were confident that spare shirts would be provided in the event of any drastic loss. So to sum up:

- Origin country chosen, combined with local tour operator or football organiser.
- Dates confirmed and hotels chosen along with venues.
- Mass publicity and a costing of the tour including a deposit due date.
- A comprehensive checklist to be formed.
- Passports to be checked first.
- Travel details to be strictly adhered to.

### **Insurance.**

Insurance was recommended mainly to cater for the possibilities of the flights being cancelled. We were not playing in a competition and only in friendly games so match insurance was not specifically required, but it did cover everyone for injuries. Extra insurance was made for those carrying extra equipment. Flight cancellation and delay insurance was covered so that if the flight was cancelled from Newcastle, those involved would be covered so that they would be refunded on Gatwick flights. The only downside was that the amount given back by the insurance company would only be the amount we paid for the flight. Any replacement flights would entail an extra cost.

- Check insurance, which would cover you in case of delay because of your own fault (i.e. car breakdown, passport lost, etc.)

### **Team wear.**

Sponsorship of £100 was received from Red Fox Hosting Limited. This helped to cover the costs of the shirts and printing, etc. The previously rarely used white Adidas short sleeve shirt was re-badged with the Malta logo as well as Red Fox logo and player names on the reverse. Using off the shelf t-shirt print material with an ink jet printer reduced the costs. This was surprisingly durable after several washes. Aztec Print printed the Red Fox logo on to the shirt.

The shirts were given to the 12 playing members to keep after the tour.

The squad list was as follows. The numbering was based on the existing shirt size as some were in XL and some in L.

01 Dave Smith  
02 Mark Cresswell  
03 Dave Gourlay  
04 Davinder Sangha  
05 Tim Gillespie  
06 Marc McDermont  
07 Scott Hembrough  
08 Paul McConville  
09 Wayne Greenwell  
10 Mark Middlemiss  
11 Chris Dixon  
12 Mark Muers

Existing burgundy polo shirts and the waterproof coats were also provided. There was a strict understanding that the official team wear should be worn when travelling to Malta. Dave Gourlay, Chris Dixon and Tim Gillespie were the only ones who failed to do so, deciding to wear different items or combinations of items. For the next tour, this will be strictly adhered to otherwise penalties will be applied (missing games, etc.). Lots of people commented on the shirts when they saw a group of the players in Gatwick as well as the return journey.

- Extra t-shirts, with Sassco branding will be produced for the next tour so players will have extra t-shirts instead of relying on one polo shirt during the tour.

### **Marketing.**

Using email and the selling power of the Sassco website, contact was made with a radio station in Malta called XFM. The station mentioned the team and the fixtures during the week prior to the tour starting. They also had a nightclub called Fuego, which provided the team with free drinks when they first came in. Ken Camilleri was the host and was very sociable. Fuego and XFM are linked on the Sassco website. Additional publicity was achieved by contacting Sheffield United (sponsored by Visit Malta) and then VisitMalta.com who added the tour as an official event on their website.

### **Travel from Sunderland to Malta.**

The logistics of getting the 12 players to Malta was carefully worked out. The main issues were.

- Lack of a direct flight to Malta.
- Split travel with half going by car and half by plane to Gatwick.
- Worries in case any part of the trip to Gatwick was delayed.

Our lead-time to Malta was comfortable, and in the event, Greenwell, Muers, McDermont, Smith and Cresswell arrived in Gatwick with plenty of time to spare. Middlemiss arrived separately with his partner, Bianca Bellizzi, while Sangha, Dixon, Gillespie, Gourlay, McConville and Hembrough's flight was on time.

The meeting point at Gatwick was the BA check-in desk where the boarding passes had already been prepared the night before and printed off. It was important that the team was placed together in the flight. The eventual flight to Malta was again on time and everyone was prepared and ready. Obviously drink played quite a big part and the majority of the players were reasonably intoxicated, but not overly drunk. Key issues to make note of were:

- Avoid split flights and players travelling separately.
- Ensure a good lead-time from taking off and arriving for our first game.
- Make sure that the team is seated together outwards as well as inwards.

### **In Malta and the hotel.**

Once in Malta, luggage was easily collected and our liaison was ready to collect us. Transportation and timings were perfect throughout the trip.

The hotel was of a reasonable standard. Some were complaining about the facilities, but in reality, the players would only be sleeping in the hotel. Most of the time was spent elsewhere. Priority was to keep costs down as much as possible. There were a few minor problems with room sharing as two rooms only had a double bed as opposed to separate beds.

Security was also an issue as it was far too easy for certain players in one room to request the room key for players in other rooms.

Breakfast was to be provided for by the hotel, but in future it's recommended to check the sample menu, as some European countries tend only to provide cold breakfasts with meats and bread being part of the range. Also, with players enjoying the nightlife meant that some would not be awake until the scheduled time for breakfast was over. Everyone tended to go to a local bar / café for a hot breakfast.

We refreshed in the hotel and were ready for the transport to take us to the venue in good time. We arrived at least one hour prior to kick off. Again, timing was impeccable.

**The Victor Tedesco Stadium.**

The Victor Tedesco Stadium was a superb venue that was over and above Northern League standards and probably good enough to match Non-league grounds. The pitch itself was third generation artificial turf (3G). The venues in Malta had similar surfaces, which replaced the previous dusty and dry grass due to the climate. Under the main seated stand were the changing areas with a vast number of rooms. Next to the main stand was the club bar. The facilities were excellent.

**7th November 7:00pm Sassco.co.uk v Kirkop FC.**

The opponents were clearly well organised and run along professional lines. In Malta, the Premier players will be paid, but the lower levels are not. However, each team runs itself along professional Premier lines, with full committees, a full training schedule and several teams. Unlike the UK, it would be almost impossible to start off a one-man team set up like Sassco were.

All matches were officiated by two linesmen and a referee. Sassco's line-up was as follows (4-4-2):

Cresswell | Hembrough  
McDermont | Greenwell | Gourlay | Middlemiss  
Gillespie | Dixon | Muers | McConville  
Smith

The opponents were exceptionally comfortable on the ball. Sassco had their fair share of chances, but poor control led to the team losing the ball in danger areas and suffering a 3-0 deficit in the first half. A further goal in the second half was eventually replied to with Scott Hembrough scoring Sassco's first goal in the tour. By this time, the players were clearly fatigued. Most had been up and awake since 2:00am and the game ending at 9:00pm, the defeat was inevitable. Had Sassco played in normal Saturday afternoon circumstances, then it's likely the team would have possibly won the game. Also, no substitutes were used as Davinder Sangha was on video camera duty.

The key points were quite obvious. More players were needed. Sassco would be playing three games in three days, whilst a single game in a week is sometimes a struggle for the team. But, being realistic, it was down to those that were willing to pay for the tour. We tried, with some effort, to look for players in Malta itself prior to arriving, using Facebook as well as posting messages on local message boards. None were really forthcoming, but contacts were made afterwards. For the next tour, if only 12 are present, then extra indigenous players will be a definite priority.

- Water was not provided despite an assurance it would be. It wasn't a huge issue, as we tended to bring our own supplies of bottled water from a local shop.

**8th November 10:00am Sassco.co.uk v Mdina Knights FC.**

The following game was played in the morning. By this time, Mark Muers was in no condition to last the game, therefore Davinder Sangha started and Muers was on camera duty. The coaching and formation was organised by David Gourlay, as Davinder Sangha, as tour organiser had to prepare everything else. Sassco's line up was as follows (4-4-2):

Cresswell | Hembrough  
McDermont | Greenwell | Gourlay | McConville  
Gillespie | Dixon | Middlemiss | Sangha  
Smith

The game was played in searing heat. Sassco succumbed to a 4-0 defeat with a 1-0 half time deficit being added to after to poor back passes by Dave Gourlay and Chris Dixon. Substitutions were roll on and off, with Hembrough coming off prior to the half time. Luckily, Mdina Knights provided a player to fill in for the second half. Cresswell came off and Muers came on (with Bianca Bellizzi handling camera duties). Sangha came off and Cresswell came back on. Eventually, Muers came off again and Sangha

replaced him. Again, it was a game played within about 12 hours of the last one finishing. The team coped well and analysis of the game says that Sassco would have gained a more positive result under normal circumstances.

#### **9th November 6:30pm Sassco.co.uk v Gudja FC.**

The final game was played on Sunday evening against Gudja FC. Originally it was to be Gozo FC, but Mr. Azzopardi had confirmed the new opponents when Davinder Sangha met him after the Mdina Knights game. The players had their fair share of drink during the day, but the performance was the best to date. Dave Gourlay set out the team in a 5-3-2 formation.

Cresswell | Muers  
Greenwell | Gillespie | Gourlay  
McDermont | Dixon | Middlemiss | McConville  
Hembrough  
Smith

The system worked well and was something that Dave Gourlay was pressing for in the 11-a-side team in the Wearside Combination Football League. Scott Hembrough was comfortable as sweeper and Mark Muers was mainly played in attack due to his lack of fitness and pace at the back.

Two goals from Cresswell and Gourlay put Sassco 2-0 ahead. Unfortunately, the referee allowed Gudja FC to gain one back before half time, as he overturned a goal that was flagged for offside. Hembrough was also injured and Sangha replaced him. Ms. Bellizzi was on camera duties again. Sassco eventually lost 5-2, with some good chances squandered as the humidity and the previous two games took their toll in the second half. Both McDermont and McConville struggled to fulfil the wing back role in the latter stages and the formation was converted back to 4-4-2. Losing Hembrough at the back, just before half time, was a huge blow, but it's doubtful it would have impacted on the final score.

So, a marathon set of three games in three days with a small squad passed without any major injuries and generally, everyone enjoyed it.

#### **Match presentations**

Presentations were made of pennants and other items such as wooden plaques to Sassco before the games against Kirkop and Mdina Knights. We were aware that this could happen, but the lead-time to produce our items (pennants) was too long. These are going to be sent retrospectively to both Kirkop and Mdina. Also, there really should have been a large, custom Sassco flag to either adorn the hotel or during the games. This will be investigated for the next tour.

#### **The return flights to Gatwick and on to Newcastle**

Due to the flight schedule, we left on the Monday afternoon and arrived back in Gatwick just after the last flight to Newcastle left. A few players were seated in different areas on the trip back because of the failure to pre-book the seats. This will be rectified next time.

Once in Gatwick, the players who travelled by car, went back immediately, whilst the remaining players spent a night in a local hotel and left on the first flight back to Newcastle in the morning. We arrived back at around 10:00am. The car journey came back around 3:00am in the morning.

Main points for the return is to avoid any London airports due to the time it takes to travel. Direct flights are the priority and any northern airport would be considered.



**Footage.**

To log and record the whole event on camcorder and also camera was an essential part of the tour. Getting the first one done was going to be very difficult and any future ones would be accomplished if a record was kept.

A widescreen Canon camcorder was used along with a Konica Camera photo. Hembrough provided the majority of the stunning photographs in the second game played in the daylight hours. It was specifically requested to have one game in daylight to make sure that we could take photographs, as night time photography was poor using the Konica camera. A back up video camera was also packed, in case the main video camera broke down or was lost.

Two test films were made before the tour. Sassco's game against Sportsman's Arms using a sub-standard video camera and no tri-pod, while the game against Traveller's rest was made using the new Canon widescreen video camera with the use of a tri-pod. The 6-a-side final was also filmed to test the quality of the footage in poor light.

The majority of the photographs were uploaded to Facebook using an Internet café in Malta during Day 3 and Day 4. There was no WIFI or Internet in the hotel.

**DVD production.**

The Malta footage was separated into the three football days. Filming took place during the travel on Day 1 as well as pre and post match travel and events in Day 2 and Day 3. Bonus material included items such as photos from the team members' camera phones and also night vision footage on Day 1 and Day 3 taken by those travelling down by car (and on the return journey).

Back in the UK, the video was processed on an iMac using iMovie HD to import the footage and to edit it with cuts and fade-outs. The processed video was then exported into Final Cut Pro, where titling and music was added, along with slow motion replays. The titles included the line-ups, goalscorers, etc. During match footage, the sponsor logo and current score was permanently shown on the top of the screen.

Finally, the finished and processed video was exported to iDVD where the menus were added and the DVD produced. The music was sourced from BunkerUK.com, our current 6-a-side sponsor. The title music, played on the credits on Day 1, was "Alright" by the Dead Woods. The DVD menu music was "Million Faces" by Seven Heroes. The slide show music on all three discs was "Team Spirit" by Seventythree, "Staying Power" (demo version) by Queen and "Cool Cat" (extended version) by Queen. The processing time was staggering and each process was generally left to process overnight. The DVD disc label and cover was produced using a combination of Photoshop and Illustrator and printed on glossy stock. The triple DVD cases were purchased from Amazon to make it a presentable box set. Days 1, 2 and 3 contained bonus material such as all the photos and also the videos taken by players on their mobile phones.

The high quality exported footage was reduced to 640 x 360 size video for use on Facebook and also Blip TV where the full days are shown in reasonably good quality without any breaks.

The plan to produce the footage and post it in public domain has instantly generated vast interest in the next tour as everyone saw the well organised teams, the venue and general enjoyment had by everyone. Also, the warm weather when it was cold and wet in the UK. The tour was dubbed as a "once in a lifetime" opportunity, but post event, it was overwhelmingly requested by those who took part, to put a tour on again in 2009 instead of the planned 2010 date.

**Final costs of the Malta Tour 2008.**

The costs were calculated as follows (some are approximate figures):

£91.67 per person for the hotel, games and transportation.

£137.00 per flight for 11 persons.

£155.58 for Wayne Greenwell's flight as he came on board after the original tickets were purchased.

£111.16 each for six persons on the flight from NCL to LGW (and back).

£11.25 each for four persons room sharing in Grange Crawley.

£20.00 each for two persons room sharing in Gatwick Travelodge.

£40.00 each for five persons driving and hiring a vehicle from NCL to LGW (and back).

The recommended procedures, as mentioned in this document, are summed up below:

- Choose a location country, ideally with good flight links from the nearest airport.
- Search extensively on the Internet for country based tour guides and operators. Also check the local football association's details. Use networking sites such as Facebook to identify contacts.
- Choose a date for the tour, but make sure that everybody (players, tour operator, hotel manager) is aware that the dates will be flexible and based around the available flights.
- Identify nearby hotels and drive the price down as much as possible.
- Find out about low cost flights to the destination. Buying in bulk will get a discount.
- Once the flights have been identified, set a date for a deposit of around 50%. This will be classed as non-returnable.
- Make sure you always remind those interested not to be vague about coming. Ask for a straight yes or no answer and ask if they are able to pay the deposit by that date.
- ALWAYS PAY BY CREDIT CARD (not debit card or cheque). There will be an extra 1 or 2 percent added to the total, but this covers you in case anything gets cancelled, etc.
- Once deposit is in, purchase the flights and advise the tour op and hotel. Advise the hotel that a small deposit will be paid and the full amount paid within a month of arriving. Try and arrange flight seating together.
- Prepare a detailed checklist. Main things to look at are:
  - Passport details to match the flight ticket name.
  - Passports to be valid and not expired. Some countries demand passports that have no less than six months before they expire.
- Arrange basics such as shorts, socks, football boots, shin pads. Always recommend two pairs of each.
- To provide pennants and presentation items before each game for the opponents. These can be sourced by looking on the Internet for custom pennants, or using the services of companies such as D & P Trophy to create mementos of the occasion.
- Ensure cameras and camcorders have back up batteries, extra tapes/discs.
- Some countries require power plug adaptors.
- Make email contact with potential opponents. Realistically, opponents would not be confirmed until around a month before the tour. Contact other teams in the area as potential back ups.
- On the day of the flight, make sure that everyone is reminded about passports and kits, etc.
- In the destination country, make sure that you have a good supply of water for all the games.
- If recording using a camcorder, make sure every full tape is stored separately after use. Use the safe at reception if required. Use the hotel's Internet connection or local internet cafe to upload photos to Facebook or into your space. This is to ensure that if anything is lost, at least the imagery will be available.
- On the return journey, ensure that seating is arranged together.

**Portugal Tour 2009.**

The next tour has been scheduled for Portugal from the 6th to the 9th November 2009. The points made in this document have been looked at in detail, so Sassco is booking the hotel separately and directly for the Portugal Tour. Also, the contact based in Portugal has the full details of the venues involved, which means that Sassco will be sourcing the venues themselves, while the contact will be identifying teams based over there. Ironically, the contact is a sports shop owner and also runs his own team, which means opponent contacts will be easy to find.

For further information, please contact:

Davinder Sangha | 07780 972630 | [davinder.sangha@sassco.co.uk](mailto:davinder.sangha@sassco.co.uk)