

## 38—Locanda La Gelsomina

*From Asia to Birgu*

It's a short step from the warm sunny air of the alleys of the Victorious City to Asia's exotic scents. Once you cross the threshold, the Knights Hospitaller, their 16th-century residences and the scent of the sea gives way to the serene eyes of the Buddha, the scent of refined teas and the silence of a small house full of oriental curiosities.

Opened in the centre of Birgu by a family that knows Malta and Singapore equally well, the Locanda La Gelsomina is a perfect example of Malta's new wave of hotels, which are slowly but surely popping up alongside the bland façades of the big chain hotels. Also, due to Valletta being awarded the prestigious title of European Capital of Culture 2018, boutique hotels, bed & breakfasts and tiny resorts have started to flourish along the old streets of the capital and in the Three Cities, promising a more distinctive experience than the one offered by the traditional hotels.

On Locanda's ground floor, there is a tiny courtyard overlooking the staircase that leads up to the four rooms, each of which is decorated in a different style and has a unique atmosphere. Guests and patrons can relax while tasting one of the teas 'on the house', which are accompanied by small biscuits, such as *gnocchetti*, made of almonds and lemon or orange; or *cantucci*, which come all the way from the Fausto bakery on Giglio Island in Italy.

The Siam Lemongrass tea infusion is one particularly worth tasting, and so are the Little Dickens, the South African organic rooibos and the classic infusion named the Queen's Guard.

The Far East and the Mediterranean are united here in a single homely environment, but the marriage is not as strange as it might seem, because ships from the most distant continents have been dropping anchor in the Grand Harbour's docks for a very long time, centuries, in fact, enriching the islands cuisine and culture in a multitude of ways.



**Address** Triq il-Kunsil Popolari 3, Birgu, Malta, +356 21 807 897, [www.locandalagelsomina.com](http://www.locandalagelsomina.com) | **Getting there** Bus 2 to Birgu Centre; Three City Ferries from Valletta | **Tip** At number 43 of the nearby Triq il-Kwartier, a plaque marks that the first hospital of the Order was built here in 1660 and subsequently transformed into a convent.