

Queen Sees Diamonds Are Forever

Looking younger than a woman in her eighties, Queen Elizabeth came to the British throne when she was only 25, and at her side has been Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, who married the Queen in 1947.

In the modern world of celebrities, celebrity relationships, marriages and highly publicised breakdowns - including that of her son Prince Charles and Princess Diana - it is easy to forget that the Queen has acted with grace and seldom complains of press coverage when it is unfavourable - unless it is simply untruthful, when the British Press Complaints body intervenes.

And the Queen now celebrates over sixty years of marriage to Prince Philip, and in typical fashion chose a low key couple of days on the island of Malta to celebrate, before heading off to Uganda on official business as Head of the Commonwealth.

Five years older than the Queen, Prince Philip first met the then Princess Elizabeth when she was 13, but it was some seven years later before they started courting and became engaged, and married at Westminster Abbey in November 1947.

The time they spent together before Elizabeth acceded to the throne is thought to be among their happiest memories. Prince Philip was still a Royal Navy Officer when they married and he was stationed in Malta. The island was quite different then from what it is now, with vacation built hotels in Malta dotting the landscape.

The island of Malta allowed Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip to live a life as near as possibly could be called normal as an heir to the British throne.

The Malta of today is unrecognisable from the Malta when the Queen lived there. The island had been involved in the Second World War and gallantly held out as the German and Italian air forces tried to bomb her into submission, and Malta was awarded the George Cross on April 15 1942 by the Queen's father, King George VI.

Hotels

In 1942 61 RAF Spitfires, famous for their role in the Battle of Britain, arrived on the island to fight off the German and Italian airforces and Malta survived to become today a member of the EU, and from January 1 this year even voluntarily surrendered part of her hard fought for independence and national identity to adopt the Euro as her official currency.

Modern Malta the Queen and Prince Philip visited as part of their 60th wedding anniversary celebrations has been transformed into a holiday island, with cheap Malta flights bringing in tourists from the United Kingdom, and increasingly from Italy, although the UK remains Malta's most important market.

Between time, the population of Malta has swollen from just over 300,000 in 1950 to over 400,000 now, with the Maltese people moving away from the rural areas to the capital Valletta and towns such as Sliema. Mellieha, a sleepy village on Malta's north coast then, is becoming a popular holiday resort with hotel and villa holidays popular with British and German holiday makers.

Since the 1970's Malta has been a holiday destination and a large part of her economy now relies on the holidays in Malta industry. A few years of decline have been reversed by the acceptance of low cost airlines, not just from the UK but other parts of Europe too, and the island is able to offer both 5 star Malta holidays but also cheap holidays in Malta deals too.

When Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip lived on the island few if any people were taking holidays in Malta, and the population was Maltese with British and some Commonwealth military and civilian workers. Until recently the vast majority of those taking a Malta holiday were British, but the cheap airlines are allowing diversification with tourists not just from the UK - although it remains Malta's prime market, but from Italy, Germany, Spain and the Scandanavian countries.

Remember too just how long Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip have been married - sixteen years already before the Beatles had their first number 1 and they weren't far off their silver wedding anniversary when Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the moon and the Beatles were splitting up and Paul McCartney was first thinking of his new group Wings.

Malta will be hoping the couple visit again for their seventieth wedding anniversary for an island celebration!

About the Author

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