Malta's Maritime Standing Strengthened Through U.S. Cruising Licence Recognition

On 29 October 2026, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officially published an amendment to its regulations, adding Malta to the list of countries whose pleasure vessels may qualify for U.S. cruising licences.

By **Abigail Aquilina**, 12th November 2026

On 29 October 2026, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officially published an amendment to its regulations, adding Malta to the list of countries whose pleasure vessels may qualify for U.S. cruising licences.

This recognition provides an additional operational advantage for eligible privately operated yachts registered in Malta, allowing their owners to apply for U.S. cruising licences and benefit from certain simplified customs procedures when navigating American waters.

Such development adds further value to Malta in the eyes of international yacht owners, particularly when considering the geographical scope of a vessel's intended operations.

Practical Implications for Yacht Owners

Under the revised U.S. regulatory framework, privately operated pleasure yachts registered in Malta may apply for a U.S. cruising licence, provided they satisfy the relevant eligibility requirements.

The principal advantages include:

- Simplified port procedures, making extended cruising within U.S. waters more efficient.
- Greater operational flexibility, with reduced administrative requirements when entering and moving between U.S. ports.
- Potential cost savings, through exemptions from certain entry, clearance and tonnage-related requirements applicable to foreign vessels.

Cruising licences may be issued for periods of up to 12 months, subject to the relevant regulatory conditions.

Importantly, the availability of these privileges introduces another consideration when evaluating the suitability of the Malta flag, particularly for owners whose vessels operate across multiple jurisdictions.

Eligibility and Regulatory Considerations

The reciprocal arrangements are subject to specific conditions and should not be interpreted as an automatic entitlement for every vessel registered in Malta.

The framework applies to pleasure yachts used exclusively for private purposes. Commercially operated vessels are excluded.

Eligible yacht owners must submit an application to the appropriate U.S. port director, with the granting of a cruising licence remaining at the discretion of the relevant U.S. customs authorities.

Furthermore, obtaining a cruising licence does not exempt yacht owners or masters from their wider regulatory responsibilities.

Malta's Position as an International Yacht Registration Jurisdiction

The inclusion of Malta within the U.S. reciprocal cruising privileges framework further reinforces the attractiveness of the Malta Registry within the international market.

Over the years, Malta has developed an established maritime ecosystem, supported by a modern, business-oriented framework, specialised regulatory expertise, an experienced shipping administration and a professional network serving the international maritime industry.

For yacht owners, the decision on where to register their yacht involves more than the registration process itself. Considerations extend to the vessel's intended use, ownership arrangements, operational profile, tax treatment, applicable regulatory obligations and the jurisdictions in which the vessel is expected to operate.

The newly recognised U.S. cruising privileges add another practical dimension to this assessment, particularly for owners of privately operated yachts seeking an established European registration jurisdiction with international recognition.

How Dixcart Malta Can Assist

Yacht ownership and registration involve a range of legal, regulatory and administrative considerations. Managing these effectively requires an understanding of both local requirements and the wider international maritime environment.

At Dixcart Malta, our team has extensive experience in supporting international clients with yacht registration, ownership structures and the regulatory considerations associated with vessel ownership and operations.

We provide practical, tailored guidance to yacht owners and their professional advisers, taking into account each client's circumstances, ownership arrangements and intended use of the vessel.

Our team can support clients throughout the entire process, from assessing Malta as a potential yacht registration jurisdiction and considering the implications of the newly recognised U.S. cruising privileges, to reviewing existing ownership arrangements.

For a confidential discussion about yacht registration in Malta contact our team at advice.malta@dixcart.com.