



MALTA MOST WANTED

Cliff-edged villas and storied streets provide an epic backdrop to this gripping new spy drama

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Gemma Arterton returns to screens in ITV's tense new espionage thriller *Secret Service* as Kate Henderson, head of MI6's Russia Desk, where she's pitted against the cunning schemes of the Kremlin, which threatens the stability of the British government – and her personal life along with it.

SENGLIA

'It was just a perfect fit,' location manager Tabitha Vassallo says of Senglea, one of Malta's historic Three Cities and the location for a clandestine meeting between Kate and her Russian informant, Echo. The city's limestone-paved main street – Triq il-Vitorja – and

St Philip's Church wasn't director James Marsh's first choice however; he was keen on Valletta's iconic vistas. Tabitha convinced him otherwise. 'When I read the script, I could just imagine this street, this church, and everything happening here.' Senglea also stumped up the base of operations for Kate's team: a 'spectacular terrace' and views of the Grand Harbour's waters.

DINGLI CLIFFS

For Russian gangster Igor's holiday hideout, an infinity pool-sporting villa perfectly met the brief. Though credited as being in Valletta, this spectacular private property is in reality perched 253m

above sea level on the top of Dingli Cliffs – Malta's highest point. 'I knew how beautiful it was inside and how well taken care of it was,' Tabitha explains of her selection. In the show, the villa's decor is all ageing weaponry and gaudy objets d'art, curated by the design team. 'It was beautifully furnished,' says Tabitha, 'but the designer had a vision for Igor, how he wanted him to be. Everything was changed: gold-leafed and over the top.'

RABAT

Shrewd observers might detect a shift in backdrop at the start of episode one, when Echo stops into a cigar shop on her way to meet Kate. The tobacconist is in fact in Rabat, not Senglea, where the scene is set. Today, Rabat lies at the foot of the walled city of Mdina – with which it once shared capital status – in the centre of the island and retains a historic atmosphere. 'You have that very old village feel,' asserts Tabitha, 'it's very quiet;

I would recommend a visit there.' The burg's picturesque, less populous, streets have caught the eye of many a moviemaker, including Steven Spielberg, who used it for his Oscar-nominated, 2005 film, *Munich*.

Secret Service airs on ITV1 and ITVX



Above: The spiralled towers of Valletta in Malta. Inset: Gemma Arterton plays Kate in *Secret Service*

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