Vatican
News



Pope Francis arrives to attend his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Hall at the Vatican, on Jan. 26, 2022. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino, File)

by Associated Press

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ROME — Pope Francis' first foreign trip of the year is to the Mediterranean island nation of Malta, the Vatican said Tuesday in announcing an April 2-3 trip that had originally been scheduled for 2020 but was postponed because of the pandemic.

Francis, 85, will visit the main island cities of Valletta, Rabat and Floriana as well as the island of Gozo. Further details were to be released later.

Migration is expected to be a theme of Francis' visit, given Malta has been a flashpoint in Europe's longstanding migration debate.

Though small, Malta has produced two high-ranking Catholic churchmen who are close advisers to Francis: the former bishop of Gozo, Cardinal Mario Grech, is now based at the Vatican and is spearheading Francis' unprecedented two-year consultation of rank-and-file Catholics on the future of the church.

Valletta Archbishop Charles Scicluna, meanwhile, is a top adviser on clergy sexual abuse.

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Francis had been due to visit Malta in May 2020, but the trip was put off after Italy became the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak in Europe.

The Vatican hasn't announced any other trips for 2022, but he has had longstanding plans to visit South Sudan, and there is talk of a possible stop in Congo. In addition, Francis has said he hopes to visit Lebanon soon, though conditions there will determine if he can make the trip this year. There had been rumors of a visit to Indonesia, East Timor and Papua New Guinea in 2020, but the pandemic put that trip off, and the continued waves of infections might rule out a rescheduled trip for this year.