I spent my summer placement on the island of Malta working with the National Aquarium and Alan Deidun from the University of Malta. My project focused on the success of marine education projects going on, in order to assess the Ocean Literacy potential of the National Aquarium. In order to do this I worked with children from summer school group visits aged 5-15 (we sometimes had up to 250 students a day), as well as general members of the public who were visiting the aquarium. I also wrote and gave a daily educational talk about a shark conservation project that they have in the aquarium in collaboration with a local NGO called SharkLab.

Being based at the aquarium meant that I got a lot of opportunities to help out with the general running of the aquarium alongside doing my own research. My first day I got to help prep the food for the black tip reef sharks, and zebra shark, and then got to go and watch the feeding with the aquarist (on my last day they actually let me do some of the feeding myself). I also helped out with some of the other talks going on in the aquarium, and got to spend a lot of time down in the aquarium interacting with the visitors.
During my time in Malta I also did some volunteering with the NGO SharkLab, which was a brilliant experience. We would go and visit the local wholesale fish market in Valetta at 3am in the morning when the fishing boat were arriving, and identify shark, skate and ray species present in the catch. I also got to help out at a number of outreach events in Malta, and when chumming in open water for sharks with SharkLab for the day, which was a definite highlight of the trip (even though we didn’t see any sharks and smelt very strongly of fish for the next couple of days no matter how many showers we took!).

On my weekends it was great to get out and explore the islands. I managed to do some recreational diving on a MPA that has been designated off the coast of Gozo, a small island just a 20-minute ferry ride away from Malta. There are also some lovely walks, although best to go in the evenings when it is a little cooler and Maltese summers are hot!