

Gozo Island: Malta's best kept secret

ITM London



Gozo (joy in Castilian), is tranquil and unique, the island of myths and miracles. It is the smaller, sleepier and more tranquil sister island of Malta with a population of 30,000- a haven of peace just a short ferry ride from the main island. Discovering Gozo is the key to discovering one of the most untouched and unique islands in the Mediterranean.

It is a serene land where time has stood still. Gozo is ideal for beach holidays, religious or historical travel, an eco-holiday, spa vacations, a self-catering stay, a walking holiday or just an opportunity to get away from it all and indulge in great food, and

experience an exceptional culture. It is also paradise for those after a diving holiday in the crystal-clear Mediterranean waters.

With a history boasting 6,000 years of civilization, every square inch of its land, its temples and





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monuments bear witness to past civilizations. For those with an appetite for culture, Gozo is strewn with fascinating historical and archaeological sites, some of which date back earlier than the pyramids!

There are various ancient sites available to see in Gozo, but the most fascinating is Ggantija – the oldest freestanding temples in the world. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Ggantija Temples are worth going to visit at least once.

Museum lovers will find a variety of treasures to discover on Gozo. Each museum houses fabulous artefacts from various fields and eras be it art, archaeology, natural history, wartime, the temples or the island's celebrated maritime history. And more treasures can be found in one of the 55 churches built on the island of Gozo!

Though separated from mainland Malta by a 5km stretch of sea, Gozo is distinctly different from

Malta. The Island is a third the size of Malta, more rural and simple, its culture and way of life rooted in fishing, as well as in primitive pastoral and agricultural activity.

Life in Gozo was harsh for well over two millennia, as the island was left exposed to any passing raiders, much more so than Malta with its natural harbours and defences.

Throughout the Middle Ages and into the rule of the Knights, Barbary corsairs and Saracens raided the island at intervals. In 1551, the Saracens carried out a devastating raid, taking almost the entire population away into slavery.

The island never really recovered from this and remained under populated for centuries until the arrival of the Knights saw the

Local craft village



Margalforn



medieval Citadel (in Victoria, or Rabat) refortified and the Gozitans began to venture down to the rest of the island.

Gozo and its inhabitants have their own distinct character and identity, with noticeably different lifestyles, accents and dialect. Gozitans are known for their friendliness and welcome to visitors, going out of their way to indicate a direction or help a visitor find their destination.

Gozo's towns and villages are picturesque and tranquil; here life

has barely changed for hundreds of years and many traditions are still upheld. These towns are spaced out, detached by countryside and built around the central church or 'piazza' – the hub of village life. Tourists and visitors will be welcomed by the locals and encouraged to enjoy the gems that each town has to offer.

Victoria is known as Rabat, meaning suburb, as this city developed as the suburb of the citadel. The name of Victoria was given to the town in 1887, in honour

of Queen Victoria in her jubilee year. Victoria is the capital of Gozo, which lies precisely in the centre of the island and is the most populated town. It is the administrative centre, which includes also the main schools, the hospital, and the law courts, serving the island's community. Its main square is Pjazza Indipendenza, popularly known as Tokk. The main building on the square is the Banca Giuratale, built between 1733-38, formerly the seat of the municipal government of Gozo and presently of the Victoria Local council. An

open market is held every morning in this square and several open air cafes are also found here.

Republic Street is Victoria's main street, flanked by shops, banks, theatres, restaurants, police headquarters, the bishop's chancery and il-Mall or Rundle Gardens. These gardens were laid out by the British in 1910 and house a variety of local and imported trees, an oasis of peace in the centre of the busy town.

Just off the main square in the very heart of the old town, one finds the



Mgarr Harbour



medieval parish church of St. George Martyr, referred to as the marble basilica, as it is entirely covered in marble. The present basilica was rebuilt by its supporters after the destruction by an earthquake in 1693. It has a profusely gilded interior and very

impressive is the bronze and gilded canopy over the high altar. The main attraction is a statue of the patron Saint, St. George, sculpted in wood in 1838. An interesting chapel, among the many that are found in Victoria, is the 19th century chapel dedicated



Ggantija, World
Heritage site



Xlendi

to Saint Martha, built in 1859. During winter months, Victoria bustles with activity from sun rise to sun set. Shoppers and friends mill around its main streets and quaint side roads, greeting each other, stopping to chat and catch up with the local gossip. In summer, however it quietens down as most people seek sea breezes in the popular summer resorts. From Victoria roads radiate in the four directions towards the villages of Gozo.

Marsalforn is Gozo's most popular seaside resort. Up until the seventeenth century, before the development of Mgarr Harbour, Marsalforn was the principal seaport of Gozo. This area is well served with hotels, apartments, restaurants, as well as diving and water sports clubs. Then a festive atmosphere prevails with people relaxing over al fresco meals, and meeting friends on the promenade for walks and talks. A scenic promenade leads from Marsalforn





to Qbajjar and Xwejni where a number of saltpans dating from Roman times are still in use.

San Lawrenz takes its name from an old chapel that stood in the area from around 1575. The village church, dedicated to Saint Lawrence, was built between 1888 and 1897, on the site of the old chapel. San Lawrence houses the Gozo Crafts Village.

Xlendi is a typical fishing village

and a popular summer resort. It takes its name from a type of Byzantine vessel that used to shelter in this port. Wedged between majestic cliffs, Xlendi is the most picturesque fishing village in Gozo. Before the present high rise buildings, constructed since the 1960's, a white statue of the apostle Saint Andrew, patron saint of fishermen, reigned over the port. It still dominates the little harbour where fishing boats create a colourful collection. Xlendi is a

main summer resort. Restaurants line the seafront and the little bay is consistently busy. Diving centres, hotels and a couple of clubs are also found here.

For a taste of village life it is possible to rent a villa or farmhouse and for a taste of luxury. Some even have with a pool. Other accommodation ranges from deluxe hotels to self-catering apartments. Sea views are never hard to find in Gozo.

The towns also have a thriving

cultural life of their own, with some surprising attractions ranging from opera to horse races. Apart from restaurants and cafés offering local dishes as well as continental menus, one can also enjoy themed restaurants, such as Chinese or Indian.

There is something for everyone on this unique island, a year round destination for nature lovers, eco tourists, water sports enthusiasts, culture vultures and those wanting a break from the hustle and bustle of life.



Victoria's citadel