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A glittering Mediterranean jewel



Welcome to *C&IT's* Mini Guide to Gozo, published in association with Malta Tourism Authority.

This mini guide serves as an introduction to Gozo, one of the Mediterranean's largely undiscovered island gems. Discover the history of the island and its traditional hospitality and find out more about Gozo's bid to become an eco-island, plus its array of accommodation, from luxury five-star options to welcoming farmhouses.

While the island may be diminutive in size, it is packed with activities for both

adrenaline junkies and those wishing to relax and be pampered. From opulent spas to pristine diving spots, the island offers a plethora of options including snorkelling by Comino, water-soloing and Jeep trails, or simply enjoying one of the colourful carnivals and festas that take place across the year.

And with its fine cuisine, dramatic landscape and peaceful, welcoming ambience – it's small wonder that Gozo is the Castilian for joy.

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Unveiling one of the Med's

Although it has welcomed visitors since the start of civilisation, Gozo's

INSIGHT



Welcome to Gozo, the largely undiscovered gem of the Mediterranean.

With a variety of three-, four- and

five-star accommodation to choose from, as well as a growing selection of luxury converted farmhouses, our tiny island can be the perfect retreat.

In the following pages we uncover many of the secrets to Gozo's charm – its sunny climate, its history and culture, its beaches and world-class diving sites – and above all its laid-back atmosphere that has changed little over the centuries.

Yet our culinary standards have moved on apace and Gozo now boasts some excellent dining options, as well as its own wine. Many restaurants are also set in imposing locations – by the sea, on the cliff edge, or in tranquil village squares – perfect for those memorable occasions.

Gozo can offer a multitude of options and we look forward to sharing the island's secrets.

**Maryanne Portanier, head
Gozo, Marketing Support &
Development, Malta Tourism
Authority**



Long considered the Mediterranean's best-kept secret, Gozo, the second largest and most northerly of the islands in the Maltese archipelago, has a fascinating history and a character of its own.

Not only does it boast the earliest evidence of human habitation, stunning coastal scenery and some of the world's best diving sites, but, above all, it's also a quiet respite, away from the hustle and bustle of city life.

With only 30,000 inhabitants, Gozo (which is just 9x5 miles) manages to have an air of exclusivity because of its five-star hotels and luxuriously converted farmhouse accommodation, while many of its high quality restaurants are the envy of other Mediterranean destinations.

Gozo's fertile land makes it the perfect location for many rare flowers, as well as its

best-kept island secrets

beaches, retreats, cuisine and culture are relatively undiscovered



GOZO, THE SECOND LARGEST AND MOST NORTHERLY OF THE ISLANDS IN THE MALTESE CHAIN, HAS A FASCINATING HISTORY AND A CHARACTER OF ITS OWN

booming agriculture, and the temperate, sunny climate ensures the scenery is greener than you might expect.

Perfect for climbing and walks, Gozo's awe-inspiring limestone cliffs have been quarried for centuries to provide the bricks for its distinctive churches and traditional homes.

A day trip is certainly insufficient time to sample the delights of what Gozo has to offer. The island has plenty to entertain groups as the primary focus of a trip to the Med, either for relaxation or adrenaline-packed adventure. Visits in the shoulder season (October to March) are more conducive to active pursuits, as July and August can hit 35°C-plus.

For UK visitors, Gozo has the added advantage of English being the second official language and cars are driven on the left-hand side of the road. ■

SERVICES AND TOOLS

Online resources for event planners considering Gozo

- Along with the official tourism and government websites www.visitmalta.com/gozo and www.gozo.gov.mt, a good introduction can be found at www.islandofgozo.org
- For dining information, go to www.restaurantsmalta.com
- For a full list of wellness and spa providers go to www.visitmalta.com
- The Malta Tourism Authority has a comprehensive list of what's on, where and when in terms of events at www.visitmalta.com/events



Take off: Air Malta is among a number of carriers operating flights from the UK

Getting to Gozo in comfort,

With no direct air links to the island, getting to Gozo from Malta is part

Getting to Malta

Citizens of EU member states can travel to Gozo with identity cards or a valid passport – no visa is required.

Currently, there are no direct international flights to Gozo, so groups need to fly into Malta, but it is only a short hop by sea from Malta's international airport.

It is roughly a three-hour flight from the UK to Malta. International carriers from

the UK include the Maltese national airline Air Malta, British Airways and budget carriers such as Easyjet and Ryanair.

Getting to Gozo

Gozo can be reached by a daily ferry service that carries both foot passengers and cars. It runs every 45 minutes in summer (less frequently in winter), including late night departures, run by the Gozo

Channel Company. It's a pleasant 25-minute crossing from the north of Malta, at Cirkewwa, to Mgarr harbour on Gozo's southern coast. Pre-booking is not necessary.

Another alternative is a 14-seat seaplane that takes off daily from the Grand Harbour in Valletta for the short, 15-minute flight to Gozo, and is a must for smaller groups who want to arrive in style.



Channel link: crossings from Malta to Gozo are frequent and take just 25 minutes

convenience and style

of the adventure, be it a brief ferry trip or a seaplane arrival

Getting around

Car hire on Gozo is strongly recommended, as it is the best way to take in the island's beautiful scenery and unspoiled, rustic charm. Not only that, but there is little traffic on the roads.

More importantly for UK visitors, all the island's road signs are in English and Gozitans drive on the familiar left side of the road, making team-building Jeep trails a breeze to organise

and implement. Cycling is another ideal all year round transport and motor bikes and bikes may be hired from a variety of outlets.

Public transport to villages or beaches is by bus. All routes are circular, starting at the Victoria Bus Terminus in Independence Square.

There are also taxi stands at the Victoria Bus Terminus, as well as Mgarr Harbour. The island's official taxis are white. There are plenty of

companies offering guided tours and excursions, by traditional fishing *luzzu*, motor cruiser, private yacht charter, jeep or bus.

A scheduled ferry also ventures south to the smaller, sister island of Comino all year round (a 20-minute journey). Ferries depart regularly every day from Mgarr harbour, operated by Comino's only, family-owned four-star hotel. ■



Back streets: wander around picturesque towns



Rugged rocks: the island's cliffs

Make a date with history,

The island has all that is needed for a memorable group visit, from its

More than 70,000 tourists holiday on Gozo annually, but many visitors are day-trippers and return without having truly appreciated the real charms of the island.

Yet, there are currently more than **1,700 hotel beds** on the island, as well as the burgeoning **converted farmhouse accommodation** for self-catering/exclusive hire. Many of these rival the very best in five-star luxury in terms of facilities.

A great deal of Gozo's potential as a tourist destination remains unexploited, but its government is now keen to boost the average length of stay and highlight the increasing options for upmarket, niche holidays, such as **walking, diving and snorkelling**.

A must-visit is **Gozo 360°**, a multi-visual show on the history of Gozo at the Citadel cinema in Victoria, which sets the scene for the first-time visitor.

However, for those who just wish to soak up the **constant sunshine**, or enjoy the more gentle delights of the island, **traditional crafts**, such as lace-making, are being kept alive in the villages.

Shopping centres can be found in most major towns, but the foremost among these are in Victoria. They are normally open from Monday to Saturday in the mornings and evenings, but close after lunch for siesta. Victoria's tree-lined main square is the site of the



are ideal for hiking and walking

Sandy retreat: Ramla is the biggest beach on the islands

culture and relaxation

pristine beaches and historic icons to top-flight accommodation

island's principal flea market.

As a devoutly Catholic country, many of the island's **churches** are stunning, tangible displays of devotion, which are well worth a visit (but ensure delegates are in appropriate attire so as not to offend sensibilities).

On the site of a place of worship since the 16th century, **Ta' Pinu Basilica**, outside the village of Gharb, is an impressive neo-romanesque church and Gozo's most popular place of pilgrimage. The island's

other basilica, **St George's**, in the capital Victoria (also known as Rabat), is covered in marble, with a bronze and gilded canopy over the altar.

To cool off with a swim, make for **Hondoq ir-Rummien**. The small bay lies opposite Comino and has a small sandy beach, which is popular with locals in summer. Or take a walk through a restored ancient footpath from the bay to the 17th-century tower at **Mgarr ix-Xini**. The unobstructed views from

Gala Belvedere of Comino are breathtaking.

One of Gozo's most impressive and unusual sights are the **Qbajjar Salt Pans**, which were carved out from the limestone rock to make collection pits for salt water to evaporate, leaving behind it mineral-rich salt. These date back to Roman times and are still in use.

End the day with a good meal and perhaps a drink and a dance at **La Grotta**, on the hill that leads from Victoria to picturesque Xlendi Bay. ■



Adrenaline activities: climbing and abseiling among the coastal outcrops

The taste of excitement

Gozo's adrenaline incentives include climbing and kayaking

Adventure

Gozo (which means 'Joy' in Castilian) may be smaller than its big sister, Malta, but there is lots to keep the more adventurous and active busy. Its rugged cliffs, tabletop hills and steep valleys with terraced fields lend themselves to plenty of activities for visitors.

In the mild winter months (November – March), **cycling** or **mountain biking** is an eco-friendly way of exploring the island. The highest point on Gozo is no more than 190 metres above sea level, but there are plenty of routes that can challenge all levels of cyclist. And even though sister island Comino is small, it can be fun for cyclists too, as paths generally have a good surface and hills are steep enough to gather speed on descent.

The more adventurous might prefer **kayaking**, **abseiling** or even **paragliding**. There are also several documented **climbs** and bolted routes (best tackled October to May); such as the gloriously named Antipasti Walls. Or for the more experienced climber, the Tower of Power in the San Blas area is worth a special trip.

Deep water soloing is also a challenging group activity, especially between May and November, which uses the sea as a safety net.

The main season for **hiking** is during October to May when the island is lush and covered with flowers. It is warm enough to have a picnic en route, or combine it with a little **sunbathing** on hikes to secluded, sandy **beaches** such as San Blas and Ramla Bay. ■



Ggantija: the temples date back to 3,000BC and their construction remains a mystery

Bringing history to life

The island has 7,000 years of history for groups to discover

Archeology and culture

A treasure trove of prehistoric remains, Gozo's history can be traced back to **5,000BC**, when Sicilians first crossed the 55 miles of sea that separates the two islands. The first **Neolithic** people probably lived in the caves, which can still be visited outside San Lawrenz village.

However, the most impressive ancient site on Gozo is that of the **Ggantija** ("giantess") Temples in Xaghra, which date from 3,000BC and thus claim to be the oldest free-standing structures in the world, beating Stonehenge and Egypt's pyramids. The temples have long baffled historians; it remains a mystery how the huge stones were quarried and taken to the site. Even today, its quiet, exposed atmosphere is almost spiritual.

In Victoria, the capital, is the **archaeology museum**, which contains many finds from the temples, as well as a model of what they would have looked like when they were intact. The museum is sited in the town's former **Citadel**, which is well preserved and entered by ancient gates that boast Roman inscriptions.

Energetic visitors should climb the steps to reach the upper battlements to admire the fortifications and the city walls, behind which Gozitans had to retreat every night for safety until the 17th century. Walking along the narrow alleys of this part of the city is a treat in itself, looking at craft shops, taking in the views from **St Michael Bastions**, or visiting the 18th-century **Cathedral** with its magnificent trompe l'oeil painted ceiling. ■



Down on the farm: the Gozo Experience enables groups to get back to nature

Sustainable approaches

Agritourism is at the heart of Gozo's bid to gain eco-island status

The eco-island

Gozo aims to follow in the footsteps of the Isle of Wight, among others, and promote itself as an **eco-island**, as one of its seven economic targets by 2015. Already, all landfill has been moved off the island and water treatment plants constructed. Next to be tackled will be public transport, and the Government aims to have **emission-free buses** up and running by the end of the year.

With €85m in EU funding, the Maltese government is also seeking to rebuild the roads in Gozo, as well as address tourism with plans to build a new **Facility for Tourism Studies** to meet the needs of the island's growing niche hospitality industry.

For eco-minded visitors, there is a chance to get back-to-basics experience. The non-profit Ager Foundation has launched the **Gozo Experience**, which aims to promote responsible, sustainable tourism, while safeguarding the environment. Small groups can visit **farms** and get back to nature – go **fishing**, **experience life as a shepherd** or learn about **making local wine**, for example.

Agriculture plays a vital role in Gozo's economy – one family in seven is involved in tomato production – and **agritourism** is the island's watchword for future development. Potatoes, melons, grapes, figs, oranges, and tangerines are the other prime crops, and organic farming is widely encouraged. ■



Team appeal: DMCs recommend sport climbing, which does not require experience

Strengthening bonds

From trips to the farm to climbing, Gozo can forge teamwork

Team-building activities

For a fun-filled, yet educational, activity why not arrange for delegates to swap their normal life with that of a traditional Gozitan farmer? This is a **hands-on day at the farm** and a big hit with city types.

Participants can get back to nature and become physically involved in the daily chores of a working farm, such as the milking of sheep to make the island's celebrated cheeselets, *gbejniet*.

They can also do much of the actual farm work such as feeding livestock, harvesting fruit and vegetables. They then end the day sitting down and sharing a meal with the owner's family.

There are a mind-boggling variety of activities that Gozo offers for groups in search of team sports. A **treasure hunt hike**, a **cycling race** or a **mystery jeep trail** (on or off the beaten track), have all proved popular with corporate groups. Locals also extol the virtues of **sport climbing**, hauling yourself up a rock face on permanent holds. All groups need are comfortable shoes as all equipment is supplied.

Launched in 2008 to raise standards, the Malta Tourism Authority now runs a voluntary Quality Assured seal scheme for DMCs, which offer a complete package for the meetings, incentives, conferences and events market. ■



Blue yonder: Gozo's crystal waters are a diver's paradise

Guided excursion: colourful and

A wealth of activity above

Its teeming marine life, clear warm waters and surface breezes make

According to legend, Gozo is where sea nymph Calypso seduced and held captive the mighty Greek king Ulysses, and her cave is a popular tourist site. But nowadays, it is the diving community which is lured to its shores.

Diving

Recently voted by readers of a UK diving magazine as the third-best location for diving in the world after the Maldives and Egypt, Gozo is a diver's paradise. The majority of its dive schools

belong to the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) and offer first class equipment hire and instruction.

With its natural harbours and bays, cliffs, sheltered creeks and reefs, the teeming marine life is highly visible in the clear waters around Gozo. More importantly, from a safety perspective, tides and underwater currents barely exist and there is little risk of meeting anything huge or perilous. Divers are more likely to see groupers, flying fish, octopus and red mullet.

The climate is ideal to dive without a wet suit from June to October, as the sea rarely dips below 15°C and accessible underwater wrecks, deliberately submerged, attract a number of species that use them as breeding grounds.

The most popular of the numerous dive sites include the Xlendi Caves, which are excellent for novices, Reqqa Point at the northernmost tip of Gozo, which is abundant with marine life along its reef and offers a spectacular drop, and Fungus Rock at Dwejra Bay,



traditional *luzzus* can be hired

Wind power: the island's breezes are ideal for sailing

and beneath the waves

Gozo ideal for a range of sea-based activities for groups of all sizes

which goes down to a maximum of 45 metres. Also recommended are the Ghasri valley, which is a long, gentle dive from the beach and the celebrated Blue Hole and Chimney.

Dwejra, with its deep plunging pool, known as the Inland Sea, is surrounded by breathtaking limestone formations. A 35-metre tunnel takes visitors to the open sea, where the bottom drops away suddenly giving divers a sensation of flying.

Watersports

A variety of other water

sports are also available from the island's major resorts, Marsalforn and Xlendi. Swimming, angling, sailing and waterskiing are popular, as well as windsurfing, pedalos and speedboat hire.

Sailing

Yachting is ideal in autumn and spring when Force 4-5 winds prevail. Ramla Bay on Gozo's North East coast - the island's largest sandy beach - is ideal in a north-west wind, although suitable only for experienced sailors in strong winds. The bay is, however, reserved solely for

swimmers during the summer months.

Qbajjar Bay on Gozo's northern coast is good for all levels of sailors; while Hondoq Bay in the south enjoys decent winds and a jetty to rig up on.

Island excursions

For those who like to view the clear blue waters from the comfort of a guided excursion, try the photogenic Blue Lagoon. This is a sheltered, sandy beach with azure seas, nestled between Comino and tiny sister isle Cominotto. ■



Ayurvedic treatments: the five-star Kempinski San Lawrenz

Group therapies: yoga and

Gozo places pampering at

Spas are an increasingly popular feature on incentive programmes and

There are numerous wellness and fitness centres on Gozo. Some of these are in the island's larger hotels or attached to the more luxurious of its converted farmhouses. However, the use of spas is not only restricted to wellness breaks, but can be a perfect complement to any C&I trip. Gozo's beautiful sunny weather, with a cool Mediterranean breeze, can be invigorating in itself and

immediately increases energy levels. The mild climate also allows the island to be accessible throughout the year. Winter is an excellent time of year to visit for a wellness incentive – the island is greener, the air fresher and the villages less busy; while the island's small size is an added bonus as valuable time is saved in travelling from place to place. Most of the wellness outlets are in constant upgrade, with state-of-the-

art equipment and highly qualified staff, making it easy to enjoy the best treatments and products. Many hotels offer packages, which include specialist treatments along with unlimited use of their fitness facilities. One such example, is the five-star **Kempinski San Lawrenz**; its spa and marine care centre offers a range of treatments, such as Balneo jet-baths, algae body wraps, Vichy and blitz showers, massages and



relaxation sessions



Healing hands: staff at Ta' Cenc are well versed in relaxation

the top of the agenda

Gozo is home to some of the region's leading spa facilities

stone therapy. Among the variety of individual holistic wellness programmes, there are products by the renowned Ligne St Barth.

Beauty treatments include facials, marine masks, skin care, toning and refining, as well as pedicures and manicures.

Facilities include a heated indoor pool, Jacuzzi, hydrotherapy pool and two steam baths. The spa also offers the ancient Indian techniques of Ayurveda for

the treatment of stress and strain relief, spine and neck care, sinusitis, migraine as well as body care.

For the fitness-oriented, a fully equipped gym and personal trainers, as well as yoga classes, pilates, aerobics and aqua aerobics are available.

The Sannat-based **Ta' Cenc** hotel's wellness spa – under the supervision of its English director – includes an indoor/outdoor heated swimming pool, gymnasium,

steam bath, a Finnish sauna, sun-tanning room, its own masseurs and beauticians, as well as a whirlpool bath. It offers flight recovery and inch-loss treatments among others.

At the new, €10m state-of-the-art **Duke's** shopping and wellbeing complex in the heart of the capital, Victoria, there is an indoor pool, keep fit classes, gym and all kinds of beauty treatments such as body massage, manicure, pedicure and facials. ■



Marine bounty: much Gozitan food is from the sea



Vintage production: wine-making

Fruit from the vine, and foo

Gozitan vine production dates back 2,000 years, and its wines are the

Fruit of the vine

The history of wine-making in Gozo dates back more than 2,000 years to the time of Roman rule. Vines were grown in medieval times, but it was the Knights of St John who revived production.

The first professional importers started around 1920, but it was not until the early 1970s that an indigenous wine industry began in earnest on the island. Most grapes grown locally until then were table varieties. In the past decade, there have been initiatives

such as ‘Vines for Wines’, which have encouraged many farmers to take up viticulture by giving them training and financial support.

The plan has converted a lot of land into vineyards. Although the demand for local vineyard production outstrips supply, the shortfall in grapes is made up by imported quality grapes from northern Italy and France.

Groups can have first hand experience about the local environment on Gozo

by learning how vines are grown in different ways, as well as experiencing the wine-making process – from the harvesting of the grapes, pressing to fermentation, ageing, blending and finally the bottling of a home-made vintage.

Several vineyards are happy to play host for the day and elaborate on how they make their own wines, followed by tours of the estate and the inevitable tastings.

Vineyard-based events normally take place during



dates back 2,000 years

Local produce: olives, sheep's cheese and tomatoes

d from both land and sea

perfect accompaniment to the island's bountiful larder and dishes

August and up to the first week of September as Gozitan vines ripen sooner than elsewhere in Europe. The annual olive harvest can also be the focus of a group programme.

Food

The Gozitan hearty reds and heady white wines make good accompaniments to the traditional island lunch of cheese, olives, sun-dried tomatoes with crusty bread and rich local dishes. Juicy prickly pears as a dessert may prove delicious and a

small jar of pure Gozo honey may be enjoyed at breakfast, or handed out as a corporate gift for delegates to take home.

For authentic Gozitan cuisine try *gbejniet* – the hard, white cheeselets traditionally made from unpasteurised sheep or goat's milk. They are dried in baskets and served with olive oil or flavoured with crushed peppercorns and salt. It's best eaten with *bobz*, the crispy Gozitan bread, which is similar in taste and made using

production methods akin to sourdough.

The traditional snack is the *pastizz*, a small parcel of flaky pastry filled with either ricotta cheese or peas. Look out for Gozitan *fira* too, a type of pizza baked with potatoes.

The most popular local speciality dish is rabbit stewed in wine; while Gozo boasts restaurants serving a tasty variety of traditional soups and dishes with freshly caught local fish. Octopus stew with spaghetti is also very typical. ■



Farmhouse chic: Gozo has a number of luxury conversions



Five-star: Ta' Cenc has 83 rooms

A warm welcome at venues

Gozo may be small, but it packs a punch with its accommodation offer,

Gozo has raised its game in terms of accommodation and now has a good range of hotels, as well as dozens of self-catering farmhouses and villas to suit all budgets. Here is a brief accommodation overview, a more comprehensive directory is available at www.visitmalta.com.

Five-star

At the top end, the five-star **Kempinski San Lawrenz** on the west coast is surrounded

by eight acres of gardens and was built to blend architecturally in a traditional Maltese hunting lodge style.

It has two pools and 122 fully air conditioned rooms, including 48 suites, most of which have a private balcony or terrace.

A large, medieval style banqueting hall and several other interconnecting meeting rooms equipped with state-of-the-art technology makes it the ideal venue for a large conference or gala dinner.

A smaller luxury option, **Ta' Cenc** in Sannat, on the south coast of the island, has played host to many celebrities since opening in 1971. Open all year, it is currently refurbishing several of its 83 rooms, including stone-built terrace bungalows.

The hotel is set in 390 acres of rural wilderness, most of which is of archaeological interest. It also has two tennis courts, two pools and its own private rocky beach.



and is set in 390 rural acres

Hospitality stalwart: the five-star Kempinski San Lawrenz

for all groups and budgets

which ranges from converted farmhouses to five-star opulence

For receptions, it offers an impressive, 17th century hunting lodge, Palazzo Palina, built by one of the Grand Masters of the Knights of St John. Situated in the hotel grounds, it caters for up to 200 for dinner. There are also two meeting rooms occupying 172m² and 100m².

Four-star

Four-star hotel options include the modern, 93-room **Grand Hotel**, which has fine views of Mgarr

Harbour and across the sea to Malta.

The refurbished, four-star **Hotel Calypso** overlooks the fishing bay of Marsalforn in the north of Gozo. Its 100 rooms include three suites, as well as a presidential suite. The hotel can also cater for receptions for up to 600 in its various venues, indoors and out.

The 65-room **St Patrick's Hotel** in Xlendi Bay and **The Cornucopia** (48 rooms) in the historic village of Xaghra, are also four-star.

Alternatively, for smaller and more intimate groups, the island offers a range of three-star properties.

Farmhouse luxury

For those seeking more rustic charm, there are many companies which offer a variety of **luxury converted farmhouses** on Gozo, some of which boast stunning indoor and outdoor pools, as well as all modern amenities. Many of these are in clusters, making them perfect for groups. ■



Elegant surroundings: the dining room at Ta' Frenc



Cellar pleasure: Ta' Frenc offers a

Gozitan specials and fine

A variety of styles, quality local produce and settings from wine cellars

Thanks to a mélange of culinary influences over the centuries, Gozitan cuisine caters for a variety of tastes. Along with restaurants and cafés offering **local dishes** and continental menus, visitors can also enjoy theme restaurants including **Chinese** and **Indian**, as well as **fine dining** at luxury hotels, such as **Il-Carrubo** at Ta' Cenc.

The most famous restaurant is **It-Tmun**, set in a quiet street on the edge of Victoria's city centre. Chef-

patron Patrick Buttigieg has won food and wine awards galore since opening six years ago. The dining area is spacious and there are separate rooms for functions, catering for groups of 12-15 each. The menu is seasonal and the wine list is extensive. This is the perfect setting for a special occasion.

Another, more rural option is **Ta' Frenc**, off Marsalforn Road. A charmingly decorated, converted 17th-century farmhouse, where guests enter via the restaurant's

herb garden; it also grows its own vegetables and olives and bakes its own bread. The local produce is cooked by executive chef Mario Schembri, who sends his staff on working holidays abroad to restaurants and hotels in mainland Europe to gain experience.

Flambés and rabbit ravioli are the house specialities. For real gourmands there is a Chef's Gourmet Menu. The wine cellar, which has a banqueting table for 32, holds more than 700 labels.



list of 700 wines and seats 32

Fine dining: It-Tmun is the island's most famous restaurant

dining are on the menu

to picturesque village squares make dining on Gozo a delight

Private function rooms are available which cater for parties of 22-36, including a new open-air terrace (for up to 350 seated).

Ta' Ricardu wine bar, for up to 80 diners, is set in the historic Citadel in Victoria, and has a more casual atmosphere. Tucked down a pretty side street, it was once a family home. The simple, but tasty menu exists only in the waiters' heads, because it consists of just three things - vegetable soup, ravioli or salad platter. But these are made with fresh local

ingredients from owner Ricardo's, farm and washed down with his own wines.

For those who want to dine outside and watch the world go by, try **Oleander** in Victory Square, Xaghra. Set in an atmospheric village square, dominated by a church with two clocks, the restaurant is named after Malta's national tree, many of which line the square. It is celebrated for *fenkata*, the traditional two-course meal which consists of a pasta or rice dish, followed by meat (usually rabbit). There are

tables inside for up to 50 for less clement weather and it can seat 85 outside if permits are applied for in advance.

Zafiro, on Xlendi Bay, is a good indoor and outdoor option for those who like to watch the comings and goings of a typical Gozitan fishing village; it's overseen by the owner, Jason Galea, and his family.

The charming **Il-Pansier** in Victoria is a Sicilian eatery with ten ceramic tables outside in a sheltered courtyard in the shade of a tall palm tree. ■

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seaplanes



Harbour Air a fully-licensed airline started operating in Malta during July 2007. Harbour Air Inc. Canada, is the largest all-seaplanes operator in the world. It has been flying floatplanes for over 25 years.

Operating a 'De Havilland' Single Otter with a seating capacity for 14 passengers, Harbour Air Malta currently runs a service between Valletta's Grand Harbour and Gozo's Mgarr Yacht Marina, and operates scenic flights around the Maltese Islands.

A NEW service, scheduled to commence during May 2009, will offer flights from Malta International Airport to Gozo Marina by means of an amphibious Twin Otter aircraft seating up to 17 passengers. This aircraft has the capability of landing both on land and on sea. This innovative service will certainly enhance tourism quality to Gozo by giving the opportunity to all international Gozo-bound arriving passengers to hop onto the seaplane shortly after their Malta arrival at the airport itself. Besides getting to Gozo 'in style', this will save travelling time to every holiday-maker in arriving to their Gozo destination resort.

Harbour Air also offers private charter flights and the facility to tailor-make flights of one's choice within and around the Maltese Islands. Other destinations (Sicily and Tunisia) are also being explored for the near future

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Handmade: crafts include lace and silver filigree jewellery



Arts and crafts

Gozo's cottage industries make ideal gifts

Gozo is renowned for its cottage industries, particularly **spinning** and **weaving**, and jumpers and jackets from sheep and goat wool, are widely available.

Lace is the most widespread craft on the island. Gozo lace is a work of art and it continues to flourish despite competition from machine-made lace. The best examples are sold at **Ta' Dbiegi Crafts Village** in Gharb on the west

of the island. Gozo is also renowned for lace of a different kind – **silver filigree**, twisted into pieces of jewellery.

Pottery is also widely available, ranging from decorative pots and statuettes to imaginative house name plaques and door numbers.

For a real taste of Gozo, take home some premium produce from **Savina**. On the site of the massive Magro Brothers tomato factory in Xewkija – which produces

ketchup for Sainsbury's and Asda – the Creativity Centre has live demonstrations of Gozo crafts and a shop.

Now stocked in Harrods and other leading stores, Savina's range include patés, antipasti, sauces, herbs, spices, vinegars, chutneys and wines. **Hampers** can be customised.

Also available are handmade craft items such as candles, pestles and mortars and traditional Maltese ceramic bowls. ■



From Italian opera to village

Gozo's calendar of cultural events features international opera stars to

Theatre

There are two theatres in Gozo – the **Aurora** and the **Astra**, both in Victoria. Once a year, both theatres stage an **Italian opera weekend**, with international singers invited to perform alongside local artists. Each venue also stages theatrical productions and song festivals throughout the year.

Festa season

The Maltese islands are a strong Catholic country with a wide diversity of festivities that make up the religious year. Some of the

holy days are national holidays on Gozo, such as the feast of Santa Marija in mid-August.

There are a variety of **annual festas**, that are important events in Gozitan family and village life, and celebrate patron saints of the villages. These begin on the last Sunday in May at Munxar and end on the second Sunday of September in Victoria. Group visits to these occasions – when each village tries to outdo the other in terms of its processions – can be arranged throughout the summer.

Festival Mediterranea

This is an annual, **ten-day cultural festival**, taking place in late October or early November, celebrating the art, history, crafts, opera and music of Gozo.

As a showcase of Gozitan artistic heritage, it has an island-wide aspect, with a variety of indoor and outdoor productions. Concerts dominate the celebrations, but there are also international conferences, walks and talks in ancient and historic places, field trips, food and



festivals

masked villagers

drink events and art exhibitions. The festival also offers visitors an opportunity to learn about Gozo's temples and archaeological sites with lectures and visits.

Nadur Carnival

Far removed from the boisterous revelry of Victoria's main carnival, the **Nadur Carnival**, otherwise known as the 'silent carnival' sees participants acting out current political events in colourful, but slightly sinister, masks on floats resembling spectacular dioramas. ■



Gozo

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