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Gozo: Malta's Other Island

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Everyone we met on the island of Gozo told us the same thing: "You will find a big difference between life here and life 'over there' (meaning the island of Malta)."



ONE OF GOZO'S MANY PICTURESQUE PORTS

The reasons become obvious during the 25-minute ferry ride from Cirkkewwa, the ferry terminal port on the north of Malta, to Mgarr, the southeastern port of Gozo three miles away. Gozo is one-third the size of its sister island and has eight percent of the population, meaning it is less congested, greener, more rural, more relaxed. It's the contrast between city mouse, country mouse . . . provided you are talking about Mediterranean rodents.



MGAAR HARBOR, ENTRANCE POINT TO THE ISLAND OF GOZO

Gozo means *joy* in 12th century Castilian, the period when the island fell under Spanish domination. And the people do seem more joyful, more hospitable to each other and to visitors. Most visitors, anyway: driving from Mgarr inland, we passed the “immigration area” where refugees who circumvent Italian coast guard patrol are sequestered. All we could see was concrete and barbed wire, as is the case almost everywhere in the world.

So it is not surprising to learn that Gozitans – and Maltese – believe that the devil is always present. Check out the towers on major churches here and on Malta and you may see not one but two or three clocks set to different times. Why? Because Satan will be confused and unable to carry out his dirty work.



CURIOUS CLOCK TOWERS TO CONFUSE SATAN IN MALTA

MAJOR ATTRACTIONS IN GOZO

Gozo's major urban concentration is Victoria, also known as Rabat (not to be confused with the city of Rabat on Malta proper). Hard to call it a city with a population of less than 7,000, but its attractions include the Citadella, originally a Bronze Age settlement that became the capital of the island.

The Citadella sits on the highest hill overlooking the rest of the town. It was a place of refuge for locals during the 16th and 17th centuries when pirates swept over the island looking for slaves. The saddest episode occurred in 1551 when the Citadella's 5,000 occupants surrendered to marauders; everyone was taken away in slave ships except for 40 old and disabled residents. This was a heads-up to reinforce the walls, which the Knights of Malta proceeded to do for the next century. You can wander around for free, with splendid views and rich gusts of air. Expect scaffolding as the European Union is financing renovation of the site. Expect hoards of tourists and stifling weather in July and August.



THE CITADELLA, DOMINATING VICTORIA'S AND GOZO'S SKYLINE

Some of the museums housed inside the Citadella's limestone walls, include: – [Cathedral Museum](#), [Museum of Archaeology](#), [Folklore Museum](#), [Gozo Nature Museum](#), the [Old Prison](#), the [Old Gunpowder Magazine](#), the [Grain Silos](#), [Battery](#) and the [World War II Shelter](#) – have entrance fees that may or may not be worth the cost, depending on your interest in the subject. The Museum of Archeology is the oldest museum on Gozo and is worthwhile if you are fascinated by Malta's mysterious Neolithic culture.



A MAP OF THE CITADELLA'S CULTURAL RICHES

The unique attractions of Gozo are best revealed outside of Victoria. The Malta Tourist Board claims that Gozo is the real-life Ogygia, where the nymph Calypso entrapped Ulysses for several years. They have identified the cave where mythic maid and mortal supposedly had their tryst: Calypso Cave is located in a cliff near the popular tourist beach of Ramla Bay on the northeastern coast.



NEAR MASALFORN ON GOZO'S NORTHEASTERN COAST

The Maltese name for the bay is *Ir-Ramla l-Hamra* — the Red Sandy Beach. You need imagination to see the sand as “red” but there are thousands of red-burned sunbathers during the summer months. The same is true for nearby Marsalforn, even more popular during July and August. Between these two beaches are coves and inlets ignored by the masses (because they lack restaurants, bars, umbrellas) and therefore frequented by locals in the summer months. Ask a Gozitan for directions.



THE RED SANDY BEACH, BEAUTIFUL AND DESERTED IN WINTER

Off-season visitors to even the most crowded spots can enjoy the sunshine and sea breeze, as well as an unencumbered view of nature. One view from the cliffs here shows you salt flats that are farmed commercially. But locals have the right to come and take salt freely for personal use.



THE SALT FLATS OF NORTHEASTERN GOZO

The major natural attraction of the island is Dewjra Heritage Park on Gozo's west coast. Within a concentrated area are an abundance of natural, archeological, and cultural sites for walkers, swimmers, sailors, and snorkelers. The Azure Window is a natural rock formation, as are Crocodile Rock (nothing to do with rock n' roll) and Fungus Rock. The Blue Hole and the Inland Sea can be explored by snorkelers in the summer. The Dewjra Tower (also known as the Qawra Tower) dates back to 1652 and was used as a military lookout as recently as World War II. Small St. Anne's Church, in the midst of the park, is a reminder that you are never far from a church in Malta.



THE AZURE WINDOW AT DEWJRA, NAMED FOR OBVIOUS REASONS

Six miles inland from Dewjra is [Xaghra](#), where giants and windmills (NOT giant windmills) vie for your attention. The temples of Ġgantija and the [Xaghra Stone Circles](#) are Gozo's most important Neolithic sites, complementing the Hypogeum and Tarxien temples on Malta. All are World Heritage-listed.



THE TERRACED CONTOURS OF DEWJRA HERITAGE PARK-

The Ta' Kola Windmill dates from about 1725 by the Knights of Malta and is currently a museum, of interest to industrial history buffs.



AN ICONIC WINDMILL OF MALTA

Many hikers crisscross the island in shoulder season and there are dozens of well-marked, well-documented trails available from the tourist office. On foot or on wheels, you will traverse flat, green fields interspersed with yellow ochre limestone — square homes with flat roofs huddled in Mediterranean hamlets with Italianate arches and ornate carvings on wooden front doors and balustrades. Calypso may not keep you for seven years, but you will find it hard to resist her siren song.

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