



MALTA & GOZO

EUROPEAN DESTINATIONS OF EXCELLENCE
WINNERS AND RUNNERS-UP



EUROPEAN DESTINATIONS OF EXCELLENCE (EDEN) MALTA & GOZO

With more emphasis on destination distinctiveness and uniqueness, travellers are nowadays becoming more discerning. The growth of tourism in Europe has been fuelled by a growing interest for visits to cultural, heritage and natural sites. Within this ongoing process, there is a need to protect and promote what is truly indigenous to our communities and showcase the special distinctive features and characteristics of our destination. The Ministry for Tourism and the Malta Tourism Authority have been promoting sustainable tourism by encouraging tourists to visit diverse, attractive and culturally rich destinations within the Maltese Islands.

Launched in 2006, the **European Destinations of Excellence (EDEN)** is a European Commission initiative which aims to promote sustainable tourism, enhance the visibility of emerging tourist destinations and create awareness of Europe's tourism diversity and quality. Based on national competitions and promotional campaigns, the award is developed around an annual theme chosen by the European Commission in conjunction with the national tourism bodies. Themes showcase Europe's diversity, including its natural resources, historical heritage, traditional celebrations and local gastronomy.



EDEN THEMES

2007 Best emerging European rural destination of excellence: destinations that supported the development of rural tourism.

2008 Tourism and local intangible heritage: destinations awarded for the traditions (culinary traditions, handicrafts, local arts and rural life) inherited and preserved through generations.

2009 Tourism and protected areas: eligible destinations were protected areas and/or the areas bordering them where an economically viable tourism product has been developed using the protected area as an asset.

2010 Aquatic tourism: the award focused on coastal, lake and riverside destinations that promote innovative approaches towards their aquatic tourism offer.

2011 Tourism and regeneration of physical sites: destinations which have regenerated a physical site of local

heritage and converted it into a tourism attraction as a catalyst for wider local regeneration.

2013 Accessible tourism: winning destinations have based their tourism offer on accessibility for tourists regardless of their special needs, limitations, disabilities or age.

2015 Tourism and local gastronomy: winning destinations have successfully implemented a tourism offer based on their specific local gastronomy.

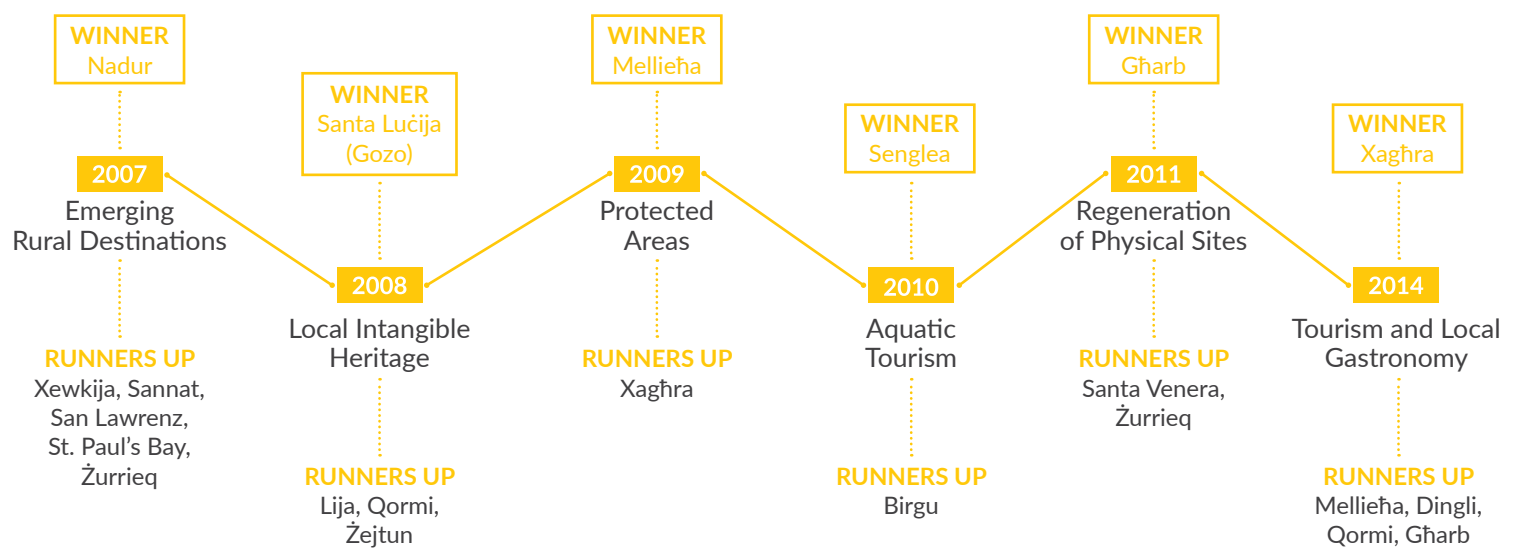
The Ministry for Tourism has been participating in the EDEN Awards since 2007. The winning Maltese and Gozitan destinations include Nadur, Santa Luċija, Mellieħa, Senglea, Għarb and Xagħra. This booklet also includes localities that qualified as runners-up for the award.



EDEN AWARDS

MALTA & GOZO

TIMELINE



BIRGU

(CITTA VITTORIOSA)

AQUATIC TOURISM



Birgu, also known as Città Vittoriosa, is an old and fortified city on the south side of the Grand Harbour, with around 2600 inhabitants. Birgu's position in the **Grand Harbour** was of great importance and several military leaders wanted to take over the city. Earliest chronologies date back from the times of the Greeks, Phoenicians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans and the Aragonese, all of which have shaped and developed Birgu. The **Knights of St. John**, who arrived to Malta in 1530, were the most influential. They made Birgu the capital city of Malta and set about fortifying it and building Fort St Angelo to protect the city from Ottoman attacks. The Knights established dockyard facilities in the Grand Harbour, spread between Valletta, Senglea and Birgu. Despite being the site of major battles between the Knights and the Ottoman Empire and that it was heavily bombed during World War II due to its proximity to the Malta Dockyard, Birgu still boasts a wealth of cultural heritage and places of interest.

THINGS TO DO AND SEE

Dedicated to St. Lawrence, the **Parish Church** served as the Conventual Church of the Knights of St. John when they first settled on the island. The foundation

stone was laid in 1681 and an annual feast is held every 10th August. The church holds numerous works of art including an altar piece by Mattia Preti, showing the martyrdom of St Lawrence.

The **Inquisitor's Palace** is an architectural gem and is one of the few surviving examples of its kind. Functional from 1571 to 1798, it had its own chapel, library and rooms. The Palace includes the National Museum of Ethnography with permanent displays of Malta's religious traditions. Visitors can also visit the dungeons and the courtyard.

The **Malta Maritime Museum** exhibits maritime history including the Knights of St John's warships, paintings, weapons, uniforms, anchors, maps and models dating from 1530 to 1798.

Built by Grandmaster Fra Nicola Cottoner in 1675, the **Notre Dame Gate** was at that time the highest building in the region and offered superb views of the island. The Notre Dame Gate nowadays houses the headquarters of Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna – the Malta Heritage Trust.

The **Malta at War Museum** is located within the Couvre Porte, a 17th century

counterguard forming part of the fortifications of Birgu. It exhibits numerous mementos of World War II, including an underground air raid shelter and barracks. A 30-minute original wartime documentary is also featured.

Following the strategic decision of the Knights of Malta to settle in Birgu, **Fort St Angelo** was built by the Order between 1530 and the 1690s. It served as the seat of the Grand Master before the Knights moved to Valletta and played a crucial role during the Great Siege of 1565.

In 1998 selected parts of the Fort were leased to the Sovereign Military Order of Malta with limited extraterritoriality. The remaining areas of the Fort are entrusted to Heritage Malta which successfully obtained funds for the rehabilitation of the Fort through the ERDF 2007-2013 funding. Fort St Angelo is a majestic symbol of the Maltese history.



DINGLI

TOURISM AND LOCAL GASTRONOMY

Situated in the western part of Malta, around 250 meters above sea level and close to Rabat and Mdina, Dingli is renowned for its imposing cliffs serving as a natural fortification guarding this part of the archipelago. Composed of geographical, geological and hydrological attractions, Dingli has a rich biodiversity which is showcased by its valley areas, all geological layers of Malta's sedimentary rock, and wooden areas.

THINGS TO DO AND SEE

Dingli Cliffs is home to a vast biological community composed of animals and plants which are highly adapted to dry conditions given the cliff's exposure to wind, sun and rain. The cliffs also host specific endemic species including the Maltese Cliff-Orache, the Maltese Rock-centaury and the endangered Maltese Everlasting. The views from top or from a boat are breathtaking, overlooking small terraced fields below, the open

sea, and **Filfla**, the small uninhabited island just across.

The **Chapel of St. Magdalene** is located on the edge of the Cliff. This chapel was built in 1646 and is considered a landmark for the locals. It is a prime example of the typical Maltese wayside chapels.

Dingli's biodiverse **Heritage Trail** includes prickly pears, flower studded garigues, panoramic cliffs, terraced fields, fresh-water streams, woodland and rich bird-life.

The **Ta' Baldu zone** hosts the Roman Baths, two old farmhouses believed to date back to the 17th century, rock chambers believed to have been used as bathing places during the early modern period and a large cave with the date '1629' inscribed on it.

A natural spring esplanade, **I-Għajntal-Hassel** fountain was used as a source of fresh water and as a social meeting point for community members. Situated in the outskirts of Dingli, limits

of Siggiewi, **Verdala Palace** was built by Grandmaster Hughes Loubenx de Verdalle in 1586 to serve as a hunting lodge. Nowadays, this Palace serves as the official summer residence of the President of the Republic of Malta.

Together with the Radar, the **Turretta** provides navigational transmissions and air traffic services.

Throughout its local restaurants, Dingli proposes a **gastronomical delight** by offering mouth-watering traditional products attributed to its wide range of flora species and sustainable harvest. Dingli's gastronomic traditions date back to the 9th century when the Siculo-Arabs settled in a fertile valley together with their irrigation system which enabled the production of citrus fruits and medicinal carob trees.



GĦARB

REGENERATION OF PHYSICAL SITES

TOURISM AND LOCAL GASTRONOMY

Situated in Malta's sister island, Għarb is particularly attractive and one of Gozo's oldest villages. Archaeological excavations have revealed the remains of Neolithic and Bronze Age settlements. The Phoenicians were here followed by the Romans and Byzantines. The name L-Għarb, though, is Arabic, suggesting the establishment of an organised community here during Arab domination between 870 and 1090 AD.

L-Għarb is a traditional village with a distinctly rural character. The people are also renowned craftsmen mostly famous for the manufacture of the unique "l-Għarb blade", a traditional sharp knife. Even today, the village is home to blacksmiths, locksmiths, cotton weavers and lace makers, carpenters and masters in cane-work. Local shepherds produce the best Gozo cheese on the island.



THINGS TO DO AND SEE

Considered as the island's most important holy shrine, **Ta' Pinu**, today a large and important church, lies on the edge of Għarb. The church was built after a local woman - Karmni Grima - had mystical visions of Our Lady in the 1880s. The church was started in 1922 and constructed in the neo-romantic style from local honey-coloured limestone, with beautiful carved pillars supporting a soaring vaulted ceiling. Several miracles are associated with the shrine and a side room contains devotional offerings and moving letters as testament to healing and other miracles. It is also possible to visit the humble farmhouse home of Karmni Grima, and view the collection of silver artefacts and other sacred objects in the museum next to the parish church of the Visitation of Our Lady to St Elizabeth.



Close to the church on the main piazza is the fascinating **Folklore Museum**, an 18th century house filled with items illustrating Gozo's traditional trades, crafts, clothing and pastimes. Visitors may like to arrange for a guide to show them round, since the purpose of some of the artefacts will be mysterious to many. For those who enjoy walking, a short trek leads up to the **Gordan Lighthouse**, inaugurated in 1853 and still in operation today.

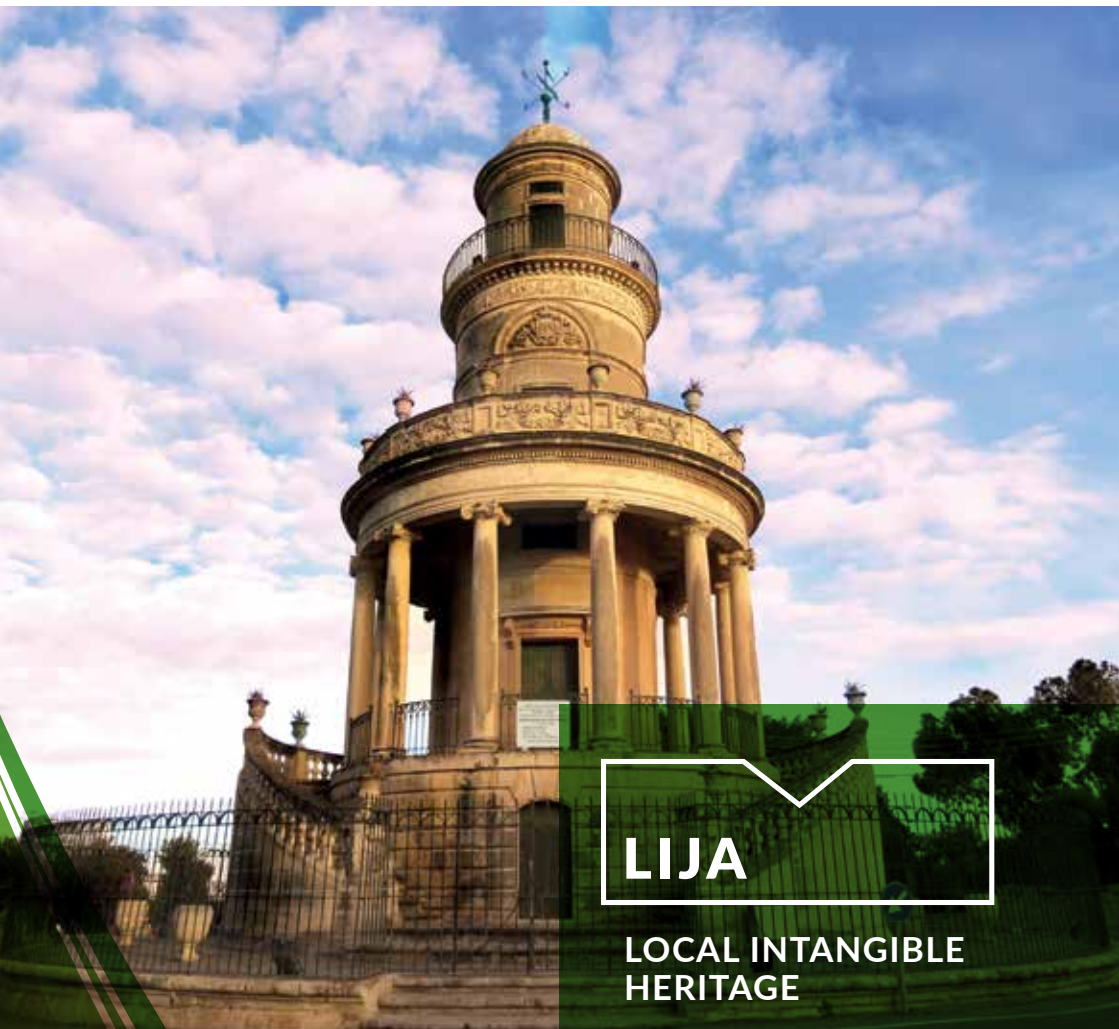
From Għarb it is possible to tour the Mielah Valley (Wied il-Mielah) to view the **typical garrigue** countryside and small farms, along with beautiful **views of the sea**. The well-constructed road along the valley forms part of an excellent cycle route.

Not far from the village of Għarb is the **Ta' Dbiegi Craft Village**, where Gozitan crafts from lace and silver filigree jewellery to pottery, glassware and food are made and sold. There are also refreshment outlets here. The site was formerly a military barracks and through its current role, is a fine illustration of how 'swords can be turned into ploughshares and spears to pruning-hooks'.

Valletta > Ċirkewwa 41

Mġarr > Victoria 301 323

Victoria > Għarb 311



LIJA

LOCAL INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

Lija, together with Attard and Balzan, lies within the parish boundaries of Birkirkara and forms part of the Three Villages of Malta. Rooted in prehistorical elements through its Megalithic tombs, Lija, a village populated by 3000 inhabitants, is known for its numerous orange trees. In fact, its motto is *Suavi Fructo Rubeo* (I Glow Red with Sweet Fruit). It has a baroque parish church and seven other smaller chapels.



THINGS TO DO AND SEE

Lija's **Parish Church of Our Saviour** was finished in 1702. The titular painting depicts the Transfiguration of Jesus and is the work of Mattia Preti dating from 1698. The same artist also painted two works in the church depicting St Luke and St Matthew. There are many other notable works including *Our Lady of the Rosary* by Alessio Erardi dating from 1702, *The Guardian Angels* by Francesco Zahra, dating from 1757 and *Mount Carmel*, painted by Giuseppe Hyzler in the mid-19th century. One can also find a painting of the Holy Cross by Giuseppe Cali dating from 1891. Other artists such as Giuseppe D'Arena, Lazzru Pisani and Giuseppe Calleja also worked in the Church. The paintings in the apse were painted by Ignazio Cortis around 1873 while the vault and the dome paintings are the work of Giuseppe Cali.

former is a beautiful baroque palace built in the mid-18th century by Francesco Preziosi. It passed to the Francia family and later to the Government of Malta. It now functions as the official residence of the Prime Minister of Malta. *Villa Gourgion*, which is situated in front of the Parish Church, was built in the 17th century by the noble Depiro Gourgion family. The National Assembly met three times at this residence during the drafting of the 1921 Constitution. The villa is today an art gallery.

Considered as a beautiful piece of architecture, the **Belveder** used to be part of the garden of *Villa Gourgion*. Nowadays, the Belveder is managed by the Lija Local Council and forms part of the heritage trail in Lija.

Lija encompasses numerous **large residences**, many of which are enriched through historical events. Examples of such include **Villa Preziosi** (also known as *Villa Francia*) and **Villa Gourgion**. The

Valletta > Lija



41	42	44	45	46
47	49	250	260	54



MELLIEĦA

PROTECTED AREAS
TOURISM AND LOCAL
GASTRONOMY



Occupying the entire north-western tip of Malta, the district of Mellieħa boasts sites of cultural, religious and natural history to complement its fine sandy beaches. The village of Mellieħa is perched on a hill commanding distant views of Comino and Gozo and the straits between them. During Neolithic times and right up to the Middle Ages local caves were inhabited and also used as burial sites. Some of these can be found at San Niklaw, embedded in the sides of Mellieħa Ridge and Gnien Ingraw, overlooking Gnien Ingraw Valley.



Mellieħa's prominent location has attracted visitors for centuries, including traders looking to export salt from the salt-pans which now form the Għadira Bay Nature Reserve and pilgrims heading to the cave which forms the heart of the important **Sanctuary of Our Lady of Mellieħa**, which was consecrated as early as 409 AD. The wall-painted 15th-century icon here was restored in 2016 and the church is still a place of pilgrimage and devotion; it is part of the European Marian Network, which connects twenty prominent Marian sanctuaries across Europe.

Across the pedestrianised piazza from the Sanctuary is a fascinating **labyrinth of wartime air-raid shelters**, whilst below is the **Grotto of Our Lady** where fresh spring water flows at the feet of the statue of Our Lady with Baby Jesus in her arms. The grotto is especially popular with women seeking safe delivery of their own baby.

A short drive from Mellieħa town is the 17th century Red Fort, or **St. Agatha's Tower**, built as the principal northern stronghold of the Knights of St. John. Now maintained by the National

Trust of Malta, the Fort is staffed by a dedicated team of volunteers. Visitors can view the exhibition and climb the spiral staircase to enjoy magnificent views across Mellieħa Bay and towards Gozo from the turrets.

Of much more recent cultural interest is **Popeye Village**, the set of the 1979 film starring Robin Williams, complete with wonky wooden houses. Great fun and very popular with families!

Also in Mellieħa is the historic farmstead of **ir-Razzett tal-Qasam** at Manikata, where traditional farming methods are showcased by a cooperative of local farmers. Caves used for livestock and the remains of historic buildings can be seen here, ranging from a Knights-era hunting lodge to a well-preserved WW2 pill-box, with original fittings still in place. This atmospheric hill site, with its typical dry-stone walls, was used to film scenes from the HBO TV series 'Game of Thrones'. Visits here are by arrangement with the Manikata Rural Cooperative.

There are also many beautiful **sandy beaches** in the locality, ranging from busy and well-equipped resorts such as Golden Bay to quiet, secluded beaches such as Imġiebaħ (Selmun) Bay.





NADUR

EMERGING RURAL DESTINATIONS

The Gozitan people's pride in their villages is clearly illustrated in Gozo's second-largest settlement of Nadur, where the 18th century Basilica of St Peter and St Paul stands proudly on the restored piazza. It is one of the finest examples of Maltese Baroque architecture and decoration on the island. The village is renowned for its Carnival (February) and Feast (June), with parties and celebrations lasting several days.

THINGS TO DO AND SEE

Nadur means look-out and its location on a high plateau amply illustrates how it earned its name. A village walking tour leads up to **Ta' Kenuna**, a 19th century tower used for communications via semaphore and telegraph during the British era and now fulfilling the same role with modern telecommunications equipment. Around the tower is a botanical garden full of native and

endemic plants and not far away is the Belvedere, a pretty promenade along the edge of the escarpment, with fine views over the southern part of Gozo.

A visit to Nadur would not be complete without seeing one of the village's **traditional bakeries** where Gozo-style pizzas, known as ftira, are baked in vast wood-fired ovens over a century old.

The village gives good access down to beautiful **Ramla Bay**, a curving beach of red-gold sand, and to the smaller and rockier **Dahlet Qorrot beach**, with sparkling clear water.



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Victoria > Nadur	302



QORMI

LOCAL INTANGIBLE
HERITAGE

TOURISM AND LOCAL
GASTRONOMY

Situated adjacent to one of Malta's largest valleys, Qormi's motto is *Altior Ab Imo* (Rising from the low). The village is renowned for its agriculture, grape pressing and wine production yet it is most notable for its numerous bakeries, as also shown through its nickname *Hal-Fornaro* (the village of bakeries). Apart from its gastronomic aspect, Qormi is also renowned for being a rural and religious destination, offering tourists a diversified product.

THINGS TO DO AND SEE

Starting from Tal-Blat and ending in Tal-Hlas, Qormi's **Heritage Trail** consists of rural pathways connecting the outskirts of the locality through the countryside and historical sites offering visitors a comprehensive and unique experience of Qormi's heritage and landscape. The heritage trail includes the Tal-Blat playground, Tal-Hlas zone facing the 16th Century Chapel and a nicely renovated picnic area. Whilst walking this trail, visitors can appreciate the rural paths leading to the historic centre of Qormi.

Along the Heritage Trail is the **Chapel of St. Mary tal-Blat**, which was built on the rocks

above the road surface way back in 1575. The chapel leads the way to a pleasant country walk. Also along the trail, there is another historic chapel - **The Chapel of the Madonna tal-Hlas**, dating back to the year 1495.

Given the long history of Maltese bread manufacturing, Qormi hosts numerous traditional bread makers. **Traditional bread making** dates back hundreds of years and Qormi accommodates about seventy bakeries.

With over 200 holy niches, Qormi's numerous statues represent **local religious devotion**. Many of the statues were donated by locals and together with the two parish churches and numerous chapels around the village of Hal Qormi, they form an interesting religious tour.



Valletta > Qormi

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Malta & Gozo

Places To Visit



SAN LAWRENZ

EMERGING RURAL DESTINATIONS

Built on a plain surrounded by three hills - Ghammar, Gelmus and Ta' Dbiegi - San Lawrenz is a mixture of sea, history, arts, nature, food and culture. The hill-top of Ta' Dbiegi rises 195 metres above sea-level and is the highest point on Gozo. Despite being relatively new and small, the village of San Lawrenz has quite a significant history and archaeology.



THINGS TO DO AND SEE

One of the most popular natural landmarks in Gozo is **Dwejra Bay**. Found in the area are the **Fungus Rock** and the **Inland Sea**, and formerly the **Azure Window** before its collapse following a storm in March 2017. The General's Rock, or Fungus Rock, is a 65-meter-high megalith. The rock was aptly named after the discovery of a plant which grew there once and which was mistaken for a fungus thought to have great healing powers. The Inland Sea constitutes the lowest spot in Gozo. Its expanse of shallow water set in a deep recess in the rocky coastline produced by the caving in of the surface above subterranean caves. Nearby visitors can see one of the **watch-towers** built by the Order of St John during the 17th century. Several films have been shot in this area due to the natural beauty of the surroundings. These include scenes from Clash of Titans (1981), The Count of Monte Cristo (2002), The Odyssey



(1997) and the HBO series Game of Thrones.

Established in 1893, the **Parish Church** was designed by priest architect Dun Ġuzepp Diacono and it is renowned for its various artistic works which are characteristic of the eclectic baroque idiom. The church is also known for the set of five altar paintings by the well-known Maltese master painter Giuseppe Cali, the titular of which carries a vivid and strong composition in the Italian verismo style.

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SANNAT

EMERGING RURAL DESTINATIONS



Situated in the southern region of Gozo, is a terraced village interconnecting the village of Il-Munxar and the beautiful bay of Mġarr ix-Xini. Complemented by the coastal cliffs, Sannat hosted prehistoric communities, precisely at Ta' Ċenċ area, with structural remains dating back to 3,800-3,600 B.C., known as Ta' l-Imramma or Borg l-Imramma. Coastal cliffs stretch from Ras in-Newwiela to Tal-Bardan form the southernmost limit showcase the beauty of the island of Gozo.

THINGS TO DO AND SEE

An authentic natural beauty spot dating back to the 6th century BC, Mġarr ix-Xini hosts a number of terraced fields. Historically, agricultural activity was prominent especially during the Phoenician, Punic and Roman times. Mġarr ix-Xini Bay is renowned for its clear waters and small beautiful caves

a truly charming place to relax. The Hollywood movie *By the Sea*, starring Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt, was partially filmed at Mġarr ix-Xini.

Surrounding the coastline, the area consists of garigue and steep and rugged cliffs rising from sea level to a height of 120m. The **Ta' Ċenċ Cliffs** are renowned for hosting Cory's shearwaters and Yelkouan shearwaters. Interesting archaeological remains include the Borg l-Imramma Temple and three dolmens which are made up of a horizontal limestone slab supported on three sides by upright stone blocks as well as various cart ruts.

A characteristic element of the Gozitan rural landscape, the **St Margaret**

of **Antioch** chapel is recorded as functioning in 1575 and it became a parish church on 28th April 1688.

With agriculture, pastoralism and quarrying being the main occupations throughout the historical timeline of the locality, farmers and workers alike built **Tal-Hofra tower** to serve as a defensive structure from the enemy. This tower is still standing to date and it is situated near the village's main square.

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SAN PAWL IL-BAĦAR (SAINT PAUL'S BAY)

EMERGING RURAL DESTINATIONS

With a history spanning more than 6000 years, San Pawl il-Baħar, known as Saint Paul's Bay, hosts a number of ancient sites including seven prehistoric tombs, two Neolithic temples at Buġibba and Xemxija, ancient cart-ruts at the Wardija Ridge at Busewdien and Punic tombs topped by additional Bronze Age settlements as well as troglodytic dwellings at Xemxija. Saint Paul's Bay was the nearest safe harbour


for the Roman fleet and historical remains include a Roman road leading to a Roman Apiary, Roman anchors and the Roman Baths at Xemxija. St. Paul's Bay is known for the Shipwreck of St. Paul, an event which led to the establishment of the first Christian community in Malta. During the time of the Knights of St. John, the Order stepped up defensive measures in St Paul's Bay including forts, trenches, batteries, redoubts and towers.

Nowadays Qawra, Buġibba, San Pawl, Xemxija and Burmarrad developed into a modern village composed of apartments, hotels, restaurants, villas, houses and shops thus creating a hive of activity. During the summer months, the population exceeds 60,000. Popular bays include Mistra Bay, Qawra Bay and Xemxija Bay. The promenades at St Paul's Bay and Buġibba are a favourite with Maltese and visitors alike and offer beautiful sea views with a multitude of restaurants and bars for relaxation and entertainment.

THINGS TO DO AND SEE

A very popular attraction is the **Malta National Aquarium**, situated at Qawra Point. This comprises a public aquarium, a public landscaped belvedere at promenade level, a multi storey car park, facilities for local dive schools, catering facilities including a beach club, a merchandise outlet and a tourist information kiosk. The public aquarium has 41 tanks including reptiles, insects and amphibians, amongst others, Mediterranean and tropical fish.

Valletta > Saint Paul's Bay



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SANTA LUĊIJA

LOCAL INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

One of the best aspects of travelling is learning about the stories and traditions that create that essential 'sense of place' which is so hard to define, yet key to understanding and enjoying a new country. In the district of Kerċem (western Gozo) is the small village of Santa Luċija, redolent with history and culture. The 'European Destination of Excellence' award here was won for its intangible heritage, so it's even more important here than in most places to connect with a local guide who can introduce visitors to past and present life in the hamlet.



THINGS TO DO AND SEE

Guides from the Ta' Klula Foundation can accompany small groups of visitors to see how local women continue the tradition of **lace-making**, working their threads and bobbins at lightning speed. Other local crafts such as **parchment-work** and brightly-coloured **thread-work** can be seen here too, while behind the bamboo screens keeping the heat and dust from doorways and windows are the ancient stone walls of centuries-old houses. The small bar-café next to the pretty little **Church of St Lucy** is a good example of these.

every autumn, with the hills around the village lit by lanterns and a candlelit procession through the village, ending in the piazza in front of the church.

A short distance from the village is the **water-source of Għar-ilma**. In 1841 water from here was channelled via an aqueduct to supply Gozo's main city of Victoria. Although no longer in use, the stone engineering works have been sensitively preserved and there's an atmospheric dark cave from where the pure spring water emerges.

The name of the village is derived from the Latin word light, and since St Lucy is the patron saint of the blind, the church is popular with pilgrims suffering from poor sight. To keep along with this theme, a **Festival of Light** is held here

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SANTA VENERA

REGENERATION OF PHYSICAL SITES



Located in the outer harbour region of Malta, Santa Venera has a population of almost 9000 residents. This locality is renowned for its urban area with a rural heart due to the numerous gardens and chapels around the village. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the town of Santa Venera was developed and various institutes and churches were built such as Apap Institute and church, St Philip Neri Institute and church, Cini Institute and church, St Joseph Institute and church, and Vincenzo Bugeja Institute and chapel.

THINGS TO DO AND SEE

The **Wignacourt Aqueducts** are the most renowned landmark in Santa Venera. They were built by Grand Master Aloff de Wignacourt between 1611 and 1615, to transport water from Rabat to Valletta using gravitational force.

Santa Venera Old and New Parish Churches. The first church dedicated to Santa Venera was built in 1493 and rebuilt several times. The present church dates from the 1800s and has some beautiful Giuseppe Cali paintings and is still functioning. Because of the rapid increase in population, a new parish church was built in 1990. Inside, one can also find the Perpetual Adoration Chapel.

Also known as Vilhena Palace or Palazzo Manoel, **Casa Leoni Palace** was completed by Gran Master Antonio Manoel de Vilhena in 1730 as a summer residence. It is a fine example of elegant Maltese Baroque architecture. The palace has a small front garden with an ornamental gateway and stone lions on the facade which gave the palace its name. It also has a beautiful back garden called **Romeo Romano garden** which is the second largest garden dating back to the period of the Knights

of St John. Most of the garden is open to the public. In the 19th century a water lifting apparatus was installed to irrigate the gardens from huge underground rock-cut bell-shaped reservoirs.

Up until 1798, Casa Leoni was used by reigning Grandmasters, but after an uprising in the countryside against the French, it became one of the headquarters of the Maltese insurgents and later a residence for British Governors. One of the halls contains the coat-of-arms of these governors. During recent times, this palace has been used for diverse reasons, including as a Government Ministry.

Valletta > Santa Venera



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51

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58A



SENGLEA

AQUATIC TOURISM

One of the historic 'Three Cities' which lie across the Grand Harbour from Valletta, Senglea is redolent with maritime heritage. Its known history goes back to the Knights of St John. In 1554, Grand Master Claude de la Sengle transformed the narrow promontory to a fortified city and the settlement is named after him. Gradually, the slopes of the former hunting ground were cleared and fine houses built for wealthy families. Fortifications from this time are still visible, including the Sheer Bastion – where a device to mount masts on wooden ships originally stood atop the ramparts – and a reconstructed watch-tower, adorned with carved eyes and ears to remind the sentries to be watchful!

THINGS TO DO AND SEE

The titular statue in the **Parish Church of Our Lady of Victories** is a former figurehead from a galleon, rescued by Maltese sailors in the 17th century and brought home to watch over this seafaring community. More important still is the 300-year-old statue of Christ the Redeemer, bent low as He struggles under the weight of the Cross. With particularly fine and emotional carving, the statue is one of the oldest in Malta and is associated with various miracles. On the rare occasions when the statue is taken out for pilgrimage processions it attracts thousands of visitors from all over Malta, and at other times it can be venerated in the Oratory of the church.

The Feast day in Senglea is September 8, also a national holiday to mark both the end of the Great Siege of 1565, when a Turkish force tried in vain to oust the Knights from their domain, and the Italian surrender during the

Second World War, in 1943. A **regatta** of colourful local boats is held annually in the harbour to commemorate both events, with an additional regatta on 31 March to commemorate Freedom Day.

By the end of World War II, Senglea was a very different place. In 1941 it suffered heavily from a blitz of German bombs aimed at the British warship HMS Illustrious in the neighbouring docks. Many families moved out and, although it was gradually rebuilt to its current fine appearance, it took decades for the social scars to heal. It remained a British naval base after the war and men from the British navy often settled here with local women or took their wives back to Britain. Even after Maltese Independence in 1964, the **maritime** connection between the two peoples was further cemented by the annual return visit of HMS Illustrious, whose men carried out charitable projects during their stay.

Today, the **harbour** is a colourful haven for yachts, motorboats and other pleasure craft. There is a pleasant harbour side walk between Senglea and Vittoriosa, home of Malta's principal Maritime Museum, and both places can be reached by a pleasant ferry-ride across the harbour from the port below the **Barrakka Gardens**, in Valletta. A visit to Senglea is ideal for giving context to the history presented in the Maritime Museum.





XAGĦRA

PROTECTED AREAS
TOURISM AND LOCAL
GASTRONOMY



Picturesque Xagħra has a particularly rich historical heritage and therefore plenty to offer the visitor. Built on a lengthy stretch of high ground northeast of the capital, Xagħra is encircled by the beautiful bays of Ramla (the island's best beach), Għajn Barrani and Marsalforn, while the valleys of Ramla, Ta' I-Ghejjun and Marsalforn caress this lovely village.

THINGS TO DO AND SEE

Xagħra is already on the itinerary of many tour groups because of the **Ġgantija temples**, part of the 'Megalithic Temples of Malta' World Heritage Site. The well-managed site here includes the oldest free-standing building in the world, constructed five and a half thousand years ago. The informative visitors' centre explains the temple's significance and displays some of the beautiful stone artefacts found here and at the nearby hypogeum; some are in an excellent state of preservation. Their quality is more remarkable since, like the temple, they were crafted before metal tools were invented.

A short walk from the temples is the **Ta' Kola windmill**, which was built in 1725 and functioned until well into the 20th

century, including a vital role in feeding local people during both world wars. It is now being restored to full working capacity, including the traditional wood and canvas sails.

Pop into the **Basilica of Our Lady of Victories** (also known as Maria Bambina) to see magnificent decorations and over a dozen life-sized statues of saints and the Holy Family which are taken out and paraded around the village during the annual Feast. Especially charming is Joseph cradling Jesus as a sleeping toddler.

Look closely at the two clocks on the church towers: the left-hand one appears to have stopped. In fact, it is painted on! This is common with rural churches in Malta and Gozo, with the time of the painted face always showing a few minutes before midnight. According to local belief, this is to confuse the devil, since midnight is when he roams the Earth looking for souls to collect.

For a beautiful view, follow the signs to **Calypso's Cave**, where legend tells us Ulysses was detained for 7 years during his travels around the Mediterranean. The cave itself has collapsed but there is a spectacular view of the coast, especially the golden sands of Ramla Bay.

Another Xagħra attraction is **Xerri's Grotto**, where a narrow spiral staircase winds down beneath an ordinary house in an unassuming street to an astonishing labyrinth of narrow passages, stalactites, stalagmites and other exotic rock formations formed over millennia. This grotto and the nearby **Ninu's Cave** – also replete with **stalactites and stalagmites** – were discovered over 100 years ago by residents seeking to dig wells beneath their homes.

Xagħra holds an annual two-day **Fig Festival** to celebrate the cultivation and use of figs, during which market stalls and restaurants showcase different foods made with figs, and there are associated celebrations such as open-air community dining in the piazza, open to all.



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XEWKIJA

EMERGING RURAL DESTINATIONS



The name Xewkija derives from Arabic meaning an area of thorny wasteland, albeit bearing no resemblance to any such thing today, being instead one of the Gozo's larger villages. Lying between Mġarr Harbour and ir-Rabat (Gozo), Xewkija has a long history in producing some of the finest Gozitan stone mason and hosting skilful fishermen.

THINGS TO DO AND SEE

Built in 20th century, the **Rotunda Church**, dedicated to St John the Baptist, is the largest church in Gozo. It displays the versatility of the local stones and the skills of local craftsmen. The church was built as a replacement for an older church, the valuable stonework of which can still be seen in the Rotunda's Sculpture Museum. One can also take the lift up to the balcony of the dome for panoramic views over Gozo.

The present Rotunda was built on the site of the previous church which as carefully dismantled. The best sculptural works were saved and rebuilt in an adjacent building under the church belfry. It is now known as the **Sculpture Museum**. This museum can be accessed from the church, and features the best lacework in Maltese stone as well as some important items of the old church, including the main altar with the old titular painting.

Built by the Grand Master Perellos (1697-1720), the ground plan of the unique **Knights-era Windmill** has an octagonal shape showing the eight main wind directions.

Lying on the edge of the village, **St Cecilia Chapel** is the oldest chapel in Gozo, built

around 1540. It was deconsecrated in 1644 and served as an ancillary to the nearby St Cecilia Tower, which was built in 1613 to relay messages across the island.

Our Lady of Charity Chapel dates to 1674 and has been refurbished and enlarged since that time. It is dedicated to St Bartholomew and has a beautiful painting of Our Lady of Charity on the main altar.

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THINGS TO DO AND SEE

Situated in the entrance of Żejtun, the **Aedes Danielis Palace** is a private residence renowned for its imposing facade. Annexed to this palace is the Mater Boni Consigli Chapel.

The parish of Żejtun is one of the oldest on the islands. **St Catherine's Old Church** was one of the first to be rebuilt following the end of Saracen rule. It was re-built in the twelfth century, and again in 1492. It was already functioning as a parish church by 1436. The present church was built on the footprint of the old chapel and was enlarged in 1593 and again in 1603, with the additions of transepts and an altar, becoming the first Maltese church to have the plan of a Latin cross.

The **Parish Church of St. Catherine** was built between 1692 and 1720. Based on the design of Lorenzo Gafà, it is renowned for its attractive dome, Doric and Ionic pilasters, and massive cornices all round.

The **War Victims Memorial** is a memory of the year 1942 - the deadliest year for Malta during the World War II. On the morning of May 2nd, an anti-personnel bomb hurled by a Junker 88, fell right in the centre of the church parvis, exploding on impact, instantly killing 27 people as they ran for shelter into the church.

St. Gregory Street is one of the finest streets in Żejtun. This is the main road leading from the new parish church to the old parish church. On both sides visitors can admire noble traditional town-houses in baroque style.

ŻEJTUN

LOCAL INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

Situated in the south-eastern part of Malta, Żejtun holds the title of Città Beland as a tribute to the then Grandmaster of Knights of Malta Ferdinand von Hompesch zu Bolheim's mother. The word Żejtun is derived from the Sicilian Arabic meaning of the word olive which in the past was one of the main productive industries in Malta. As it is also the case in other villages around Malta and Gozo, Żejtun has Punic and Roman times remains.



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Located in the South-Eastern part of the island, the village of Żurrieq is enriched with historical influences starting from the Bronze and Punic times all the way to the British Empire era. Nowadays, Żurrieq is the home of more than ten thousand inhabitants and attracts some two hundred thousand (tourists per year).

THINGS TO DO AND SEE

Ix-Xarolla Windmill was built by Grand Master Antonio Manoel de Vilhena in 1724. The windmill is still operating to date whilst also serving as a cultural centre.

Presumably considered as tangible proof of the existence of a contemporary settlement yet to be recorded, the rock-cut tombs in the **Xarolla Catacombs** extend underneath the sixteenth century chapel nearby and under the present windmill.

Multiple ruins were retrieved from this area including pottery dating back to either the Punic or Roman times, relics of the Bronze Age and ruins of the Tal-Bakkari Tower as well as possible remains of a Roman temple excavated beneath a chapel. The **Tal-Bakkari**

Tower remains have been compared to the remains of two other towers in the vicinity, those of Tat-Torrijiet and Tal-Ġawhar and it is suggested that these may date to Punic times.

Lying in a charming countryside area, **Hal Millieri** is an old hamlet from which Żurrieq originated from.

Following a pleasant walking route, one can explore the **Wardija Tower** built in June 1659 by the Grand Master Martin de Redin. The tower was armed with two cannons and two mortars and follows the standard design of the de Redin watchtowers with two floors and a turret on top. The Wardija Tower was previously known as Torre della Guardia di Giorno or the Bubaqra Tower.

Composed of several sea caverns, the **Blue Grotto** (Taħt il-Ħnejja) is located adjacent to the small uninhabited islet of **Filfla**. The location of the cave combined with the sunlight lead to the water mirroring a myriad shades of blue, ideal for viewing during the morning. The Blue Grotto is a popular destination for tourists on the island of Malta. It was also used for a scene in the 2004 film Troy, starring Brad Pitt.

Showcasing a fresh and green facet to the countryside, **Wied Babu** hosts several endemic species including the national plant: Rock Centaury (Widnet il-bahar). Opposite the cliffs, about seven kilometers away, is the Islet of Filfla.

Bubaqra, is a small rural hamlet in Żurrieq with a population of two thousand (2000) inhabitants and is

renowned for its quiet and peaceful characteristics. Also in this area is a church dedicated to St. Mary.

Dedicated to St Catherine of Alexandria, the **Parish Church of St. Catherine** is notable for being exquisitely adorned with six canvases by the Italian artist Mattia Preti.

The construction of the small **Chapel of St James** was initiated in 1725 and was completed in 1731. Inside, one can see a number of works of art amongst them the titular picture depicting the Virgin Mary with baby Jesus appearing to St James the Greater attributed to Maltese painter Francesco Zahra. The chapel is also adorned with beautiful sculptural work.



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ŻURRIEQ

EMERGING RURAL
DESTINATIONS
REGENERATION OF
PHYSICAL SITES



contact details

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MINISTRY FOR TOURISM