

EDEN

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING TOURISM AWARDS

THE
MALTESE
ISLANDS
EDEN AWARDS





EDEN AWARD

The European Destinations of Excellence (EDEN) initiative aims at promoting sustainable tourism development models across Europe. The project is based on a national competition that takes place every other year through which the tourist 'Destination of Excellence' is selected. The EDEN project draws attention to the value, diversity, and common characteristics of European tourist destinations. It enhances the visibility of emerging European destinations, creates a platform for sharing good practices across Europe and promotes networking between the awarded destinations.

The project focuses on lesser-known destinations which pursue their economic growth in such a way as to ensure the social, cultural, health and well-being, and environmental sustainability of tourism while enhancing their typical characteristics.

This European quest for excellence in tourism is developed around a theme, chosen biennially by the Commission together with the Member States and candidate countries. The relevant tourism bodies implement the project on a national level. Malta has participated in EDEN projects from its inception and to date the themes have included Best Emerging Rural Destination, Tourism and Intangible Heritage, Tourism and Protected Areas, Aquatic Tourism, Valorising an Eclectic Tangible Cultural Offer and this year's theme which is Health and Well-being Tourism offer.

This year's winner is the village of Żejtun and the runners-up are Xaghra, Mellieħa, San Lawrenz, and Żabbar. All destinations have shown the efforts which they made to produce a tourism product which is based on Health and Well-being. They have shown the diverse and enjoyable activities which visitors can enjoy while visiting these destinations which may be less renowned among tourists but nevertheless have so much to offer in terms of cultural and natural heritage.



ŽEJTUN

WINNER OF THE EDEN AWARD FOR HEALTH AND WEALTHY BEING

Žejtun is the award winner of this year's EDEN competition which awards the locality with the best Health and Well-being tourism offer. Žejtun is situated on a hill-top which dominates the nearby bays of Marsaxlokk, St Thomas and Marsascula. Archaeological remains indicate that the area around Žejtun has been inhabited since Punic and Roman times. Žejtun has a number of important cultural and historical attractions such as its beautiful churches among which are old St Catherine and the new Parish church of St Catherine of Alexandria.

In the past it served as a country retreat for Grand Masters of the Order of St John as well as bishops and other notable personages whose elegant houses line the village streets among them Aedes Danielis and Casa Perellos. The botanical garden known as Il-Ġnien il-Kmand was built during the British Colonial period in recognition of the role which the citizens of Žejtun played in the resistance to the French who occupied Malta between 1798 to 1800.

The beautiful countryside around Žejtun is ideal for refreshing walks which can invigorate body and mind. In addition, Žejtun's Local Council works hard to organise various open streets festivals which promote health and well-being and other entertaining activities for all. These activities are very popular, well patronised and provide an opportunity for fun and laughter for people of all ages.







MELLIEHA

RUNNER-UP

WINNER OF THE EDEN AWARD FOR TOURISM AND PROTECTED AREAS

Mellieha is a village perched on a hill enjoying views of the crystal clear Mediterranean Sea. The village and its surroundings are enriched by sites of cultural, historical and religious significance and natural beauty. Among its many varied attractions one finds the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Mellieha which was consecrated as early as 409 AD and is a place of pilgrimage and devotion, the extensive war-time air-raid shelters which reach a length of over 500 metres and Popeye Village which spills down into Anchor Bay and which was constructed for the filming of the 1979 musical Popeye, featuring Robin Williams. The village is very popular and offers fun activities for young and old.

Among Mellieha's natural attractions are its fine sandy beaches and diving sites, the Ghadira Bay Nature Reserve, Majjistral Nature Park, and the historic farmstead of Ir-Razzett tal-Qasam at Manikata where visits can be arranged with the Manikata Rural Cooperative. At Selmun Family Park one can enjoy picturesque views, picnic and also use facilities such as a walking and jogging track, an athletic track, a multi-purpose court, skateboard facilities and outdoor gym.







SAN LAWRENZ, GOZO

RUNNER-UP

The charming village of San Lawrenz nestles on a plain between three hills on the western side of Gozo. The highest of the three hills, Ta' Dbiegi, rises 195 metres above sea level and offers splendid views of the island. It is a very popular destination thanks to the mixture of beautiful scenery and natural and historical attractions. Among the historical attractions one can visit are the Dwejra Coast Watchtower, built during the 17th century by the Knights of the Order of St John and the enigmatic tracks known as cart ruts which are archaeological features which tease visitors as to their purpose and the reason why they seem to abruptly drop off the cliffs.

One of the most visited sites in San Lawrenz is Dwejra, where visitors can admire the inland sea and the nature reserve at the megalithic Fungus Rock which was guarded by the Knights of St John who believed that fungus which grew there had medicinal properties. The rare geological features have led to the creation of underwater features such as the famous Blue Hole, the Coral Cave and a series of caves and cliff walls which host a variety of marine life. Regrettably, one of Dwejra's most iconic sights, the Azure window, which has been immortalised in so many cinematic and photographic images collapsed in 2017 due to weathering, however the area has many other splendid sights to offer and the west-facing position of the hills around San Lawrenz offer a perfect vantage point for unforgettable and splendid sunsets. The natural beauty of the Dwejra area has been used to advantage in filming scenes of international films and TV series. Among them are Clash of Titans (1979), Among Wolves (1985), Christopher Columbus (1992), The Odyssey (1997) and Game of Thrones. Tourists enjoy visiting the area to recall the scenes which were captured in these films.

One of the most appealing aspects of San Lawrenz is that the Local Council and the locals remain very attuned to the needs of various visitors. This is very well illustrated in the initiative which was taken by the Local Council, and enthusiastically adopted by inhabitants and businesses alike, to make the village as dementia-friendly as possible. This includes signage which is dementia-friendly and most importantly training for interested persons to enable them to be sensitive and helpful to persons suffering from dementia. In this way, dementia-sufferers and their family members can be assured of a welcoming and understanding community when they visit the locality.





XAGHRA, GOZO

RUNNER-UP

The village of Xaghra is located in the north east of Gozo. It is situated on a plateau 140 metres above sea level where farms from all over Gozo used to take their animals to feed on the grass and spend a peaceful day together. This aura of tranquillity and relaxation lends itself well to today's visitors in search of renewal and restoration.

The agricultural history of the village is captured in the windmill known as Ta' Kola windmill which was built in 1725 and played an important role in feeding villagers during times of strife. It has been beautifully returned to its former glory and is very popular among visitors.

Stretching back across the millennia are Ġgantija Temples, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the oldest free-standing building in the world, constructed five and a half thousand years ago. This incredible monument is brought to life in the contiguous visitors' centre where guides provide an important insight into the significance of the temple and its nearby hypogeum. Visitors can wander around and imagine the life of the ancient people who constructed this amazing structure which is composed of two adjacent temples.

Another beautiful and romantic site is Calypso's Cave. Legend tells us that this is where Odysseus was detained for seven years by Calypso during his travels around the Mediterranean as immortalised in Homer's *Odyssey*. The cave itself has collapsed but there is a spectacular view of the golden sands of Ramla Bay. Other delightful attractions which visitors can enjoy, include Xerri's Grotto where a narrow spiral staircase winds down to an astonishing labyrinth of narrow passages between stalactites and stalagmites and other unusual rock formations. This grotto and Ninu's Cave, which is also home to an amazing little world of stalactites and stalagmites were discovered over 100 years ago by residents seeking to dig wells beneath their homes.

The Local Council and the inhabitants are fully aware of the attractions of their beautiful village and its surroundings and since 1977 they have organised a Half-Marathon for those who are in search of active pastimes which are excellent for boosting mental and physical health and provide a very pleasant occasion for socialising. In 2017, the Gozo Half Marathon was awarded the prestigious 3-Star Certification from European Athletics and two years later, in 2019, it was awarded the 5-Star rating for the 10 km race. If you are in search of a relaxing yet active holiday in a beautiful historical and natural setting, Xaghra is the place for you!





ŻABBAR

RUNNER-UP

Żabbar is a quintessential Maltese town with a rich history and a strong spiritual tradition which is sustained by the pride which locals have in their home-town. This is demonstrated in events such as the very popular village feast and the famous Cycle and Motorcycle pilgrimage which is held annually to coincide with the feast of Our Lady of Graces, patron of cyclists.

The feast of Our Lady of Graces rounds off a summer of festas and fireworks and it is well known for its exuberance and celebration. There are two band clubs in Żabbar and they work year-round to out-do each other with over-the-top decorations, noisy band marches and a joy-filled atmosphere throughout the village. Żabbar has the biggest, most spectacular, lavishly decorated festa umbrellas on the island whilst the streets and especially the parish church are festooned and lit up to add to the liveliness of the festivities. The Church itself and the Sanctuary Museum are filled with artworks and well worth visiting.

To add to the festivities a pilgrimage of hundreds of cyclists and motorcyclists is held between Rabat and Żabbar. The pilgrimage involves a variety of different vintages of bikes which add to the fun of the event which is an occasion for spiritual renewal and activity, dear to the villagers and enjoyed by visitors, local and foreign alike.



EDEN DESTINATIONS

WINNER AND RUNNERS-UP OF THE EDEN TOURISM AWARDS







Malta
Tourism Authority

MINISTRY FOR TOURISM AND CONSUMER PROTECTION



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