

# Dwejra Walk

VICTORIA TO VICTORIA - 13KM



Xlendi Walk



Ħondoq Ir-Rummien Walk



Dwejra Walk



Starting: Victoria



Ending: Victoria



Length: 13km



Grading: Moderate, difficulty with some steep inclines and a few rocky areas



Landscape: Urban, coastal, countryside roads and paths



Trail markings



Getting there and back: Gozo Channel operates regular ferries to L-Imġarr harbour leaving from iċ-Ċirkewwa in Malta. Buses leave regularly from the harbour to Victoria and back. The route can also be shortened by taking a return bus from San Lawrenz or Dwejra.



Recommended Walking season: October to May



Comino Walk



Daħlet Qorrot Walk



Ramla Walk



Salt pans Walk



Ta' Ġurdan Walk

# Overview

Starting and ending at Victoria this walk takes you to the westernmost coast of Gozo to the scenic Dwejra Heritage Park – a haven for geology and ecology enthusiasts or simply anyone enjoying natural views. Amongst the highlights here are the historically famous Fungus Rock and its sentinel - the Knights' coastal watchtower, the sculpted 40 meters high natural arch known as the Azure Window, the unique Inland Sea with boat trips taking visitors through a natural tunnel, ancient collapsed caverns, fossil beds and very rare endemic plants including the only place in the world where you can observe the endemic plant the Maltese Everlasting. All of this is contained in a relatively small area surrounded by steep limestone cliffs. In the warmer months, when the sea is tranquil Dwejra is one of the best diving sites and a beautiful place for swimming, snorkelling or enjoying sunset. The route takes you in the narrow maze in Victoria, the lush valley of Wied il-Lunzjata and the villages of Ta' Kerċem and San Lawrenz as well as the nearby hamlet of Santa Luċija.



*Tip:*

*Start off or end this walk with a stroll along the ancient fortified walls of the Citadel – both by day and by night its charms are always there.*

# Notes

## COUNTRYSIDE CODE

- Refrain from collecting or causing damage to any specimens of flora, fauna, geological items or archaeological artefacts.
- Tread lightly and avoid disturbance.
- Keep to the paths.
- Do not litter or light fires.
- Keep away from the cliff's edge.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Protect yourself from UV radiation – wear a hat and sun protection as even the cooler months can get quite hot.
- Although rainfall is scarce rain sometimes comes in heavy downpours causing flash floods. Avoid walking in valleys during or just after heavy rains.
- Keep a safe distance from the shoreline or cliffs especially during adverse weather conditions with very strong winds or wild seas.

*Before undertaking any part of this walk, it is strongly recommended to ensure that one's physical and medical conditions permit the undertaking of these activities. Particular attention is to be made to the often irregular terrain and to refrain from undertaking these walks in prohibitive weather conditions. All walks are undertaken at one's own risk.*

*Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of information contained in this brochure as at time of publication, the Ministry for Gozo accepts no liability for any inaccuracies or omissions whatsoever. Moreover, the Ministry for Gozo accepts no liability for accidents or any type of losses while following these walks.*

## HUNTING

During your walk, in most of the countryside, you will encounter many small stone huts – the local *dura* – a hut used by bird hunters or trappers. Do keep this in mind when walking – typically the sign 'RTO' (Reserved To Owner) will often mean that it is privately owned land.

Independence Square - better known as it-Tokk - is the most popular *piazza* in Victoria. It is the place where one can meet different people, from locals taking their morning coffee and pastizzi (traditional savoury pastry filled with ricotta cheese or mashed peas) to visitors checking out the stalls of the small open air market. The Ficus trees, found in Independence Square are home to hundreds of Spanish Sparrows. At sunset, one can observe the chattering Spanish Sparrows flocking back to their nests.

The semi-circular building of the Banca Giuratale (1730's), now housing the Culture Information Centre and the Victoria Local Council, was the seat of the municipal government of Gozo. Cultural exhibitions are often held inside the building. On the opposite side lies the refurbished church of St. James and in between is a monument to the victims of the Second World War.

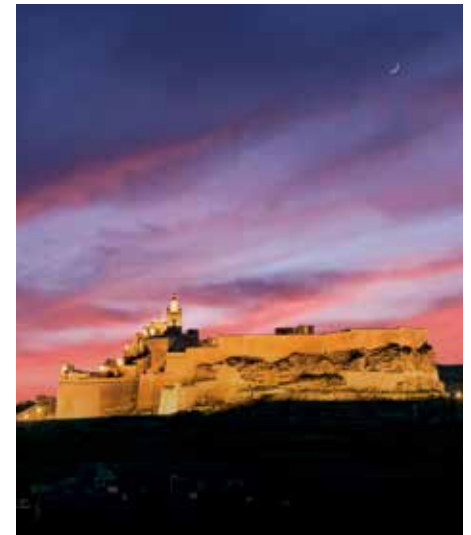
A visit to the medieval Citadel just up the hill from It-Tokk is not to be missed – either at the start or end of the walk – but definitely not in a rush.

The route takes you through some of the narrow winding streets of the city starting from the next most popular square known as Pjazza San Ġorġ (Saint George's Square) dominated by the parish church, the pride of many locals – the basilica dedicated to the same saint.

Take the street on the right of the church and then the second on the right into Triq il-Providenza. Turn left into Triq il-Librerija and then right into Triq San Ġwann. As with all other traditional villages in the Maltese Islands, these narrow roads typically hold several holy



St George's Square



The fortified Citadel – allow ample time for a visit

niches showing the devotion to various saints but especially to Our Lady.

Be careful as you come out at the end of the labyrinthine streets to cross the busy road to Triq San Ġwann Bosco. Follow this road down to Gozo's green heart – the most fertile valley lying between Fontana and Ta' Kerċem, Wied il-Lunzjata, literally translated as the Valley of the

The lovely green of Wied il-Lunzjata



Lunzjata Chapel



An entrance fit for Knights



The threatened endemic Maltese Freshwater Crab



Annunciation thus named after the chapel still found on the valley side. Take a few minutes to detour through the gateway and enjoy the area before proceeding back up *en route* and across the valley.

The arched entrance dates back to the time of the Knights of St. John in 1698 during the reign of Grand Master Perellos y Roccaful when part of the valley was walled to restrict access to their recreational area. The locality holds some of the most plentiful springs and vegetable gardens on the island. The premises above the arch now serve as the premisses of the Education, Science & Culture Centre. An interesting sundial on the wall is a replica of the oldest sundial found in Gozo dating to 1546 the

original of which is found in Xewkija. The enigmatic letters *ENCHOR* are still the subject of speculation.

Various caves carve the valley side and it seems one such cave held the original troglodytic chapel, one of the oldest on the island dating to 1347 and also dedicated to the Annunciation. In 1370 the chapel became part of a royal benefice under the Kings of Sicily. The present day chapel dates to 1629 and has a simple modest facade with an oculus above the door. Later on a small sacristy and belfry were added. In the Catholic world the longstanding popular Marian cult of the Annunciation dates back to the fifth century and it is still widely celebrated in Malta with a liturgical

feast on 25th March. Today mass is held regularly in this chapel which remains the only surviving one in Gozo dedicated to the Annunciation where the feast is celebrated annually.

The picturesque valley was originally known as *Is-Saqqajja* – a direct reference to its numerous freshwater springs serving as a unique haven for lush vegetation all year round with vegetable gardens and abundant reeds, olive,

almond, pomegranate and carob trees. The watercourse joins up with *Xlendi Valley* further down and is home to one of the rarest species in the Maltese Islands – the endemic Maltese Freshwater Crab, as well as the only native amphibian of the islands: the Painted Frog.

Water has always been a very scarce resource in Malta and it was guarded closely and harvested with great care, redirecting some springs to channel them into systems of canals to serve local cultivation but also to supply the local fountain built in 1698 which can be seen at the end of the track in the valley. Two coats of arms can be seen – the top one bearing three pears belongs to Grand Master Perellos y Roccaful and the other

Keeping celery fresh in springwater



The elegant Bear's Breeches flowers can be enjoyed in spring

belongs to the Testaferrata noble family, a member of whom had been appointed to build it. The fountain was restored by Din I-Art Helwa in 2007. The adjacent stone

troughs still serve their original purpose to local farmers – it is not unusual to see them brimming with parsley or other crops kept fresh in this cool spring water.

Retracing your steps back up from this peaceful corner, exit the archway and go left to cross the valley (see \*Note below) and climb the steps on the opposite side. During the wet season the large leaves of the Bear's Breeches (the inspiration for the Corinthian columns' *Acanthus* leaf motif) adorn this sheltered and humid spot together with Wild Bramble and Alexanders whilst the rock-loving endemics the Maltese Fleabane and Maltese Salt Tree prefer the drier sides.

Up the steps the route continues to the left to the outskirts of Ta' Kerċem along Triq Għajn Tuta ("Mulberry Spring Road") which takes its name from another important nearby spring located below the ridge on the way down to Xlendi. Walking around the circular outcrop overlooking Xlendi Valley opens up views to the coast and Xlendi Tower standing guard at the mouth of the creek. At the fork keep right to re-enter the village of Ta' Kerċem and on reaching the main road keep left to head towards L-Għadira ta' Sarraflu. Here you pass the adjacent hamlet of Santa Luċija – keep left to proceed to the open countryside of western Gozo where the sea will soon come into view again.

The small narrow valley of Wied Sansun is the only such natural shelter for plants along this coast and farmers have made

**\*NOTE:** when it rains the water passes from the valley path and cascades down the small waterfall so this area is very slippery and at times it may be impossible to pass – in the case of a steady flow of water it is suggested to avoid this crossing and detour slightly along the main road into Ta' Kerċem instead - via Triq Xuxa - just up the short flight of steps opposite the archway and turn left going past the site of an ancient catacomb. Keep left to reach Triq Pejpu and rejoin the walking route.

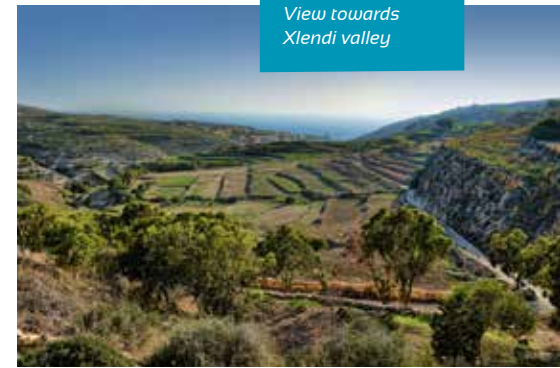
use of this by constructing and cultivating terraced fields. The road now proceeds at a high vantage point above the cliffs with views below on the left to Xlendi and its coastal watchtower. Further along the coast from the tower a natural arch can be seen at sea-level below the rising majestic cliffs to the south with Malta in the background.

The landscape here may seem quite barren compared to the green heart of Lunzjata Valley but an unusual sight for the island is nearby – the permanent freshwater pond known as L-Għadira ta' Sarraflu which resembles a small oasis in this windswept land. As ponds, and indeed any surface water, are such a rarity in the islands due to the permeable nature of the limestone and the scarce rainfall it is understandable that such a feature becomes quite important both for water loving creatures as well as for locals. A popular annual spring fair, generally in April, is held at the pond and many enjoy picnics and walks in the area. The pond contains many introduced species such as exotic fish and frog species which are problematic as they out-compete local indigenous species. It is nevertheless a good sheltered resting and feeding place for many insect, bat and bird species which are also attracted to the only trees in the area – the Tamarisks.

The route proceeds down to Dwejra past the pond taking the road on the right\*. This road is used regularly by heavy

**\*DETOUR:** Instead of going right, a longer scenic detour can be taken off the beaten track by taking the concrete track on the left and walking the length of the cliffs to and beyond Ras il-Wardija – the archaeological remains of a Punico-Hellenistic Sanctuary (dating to between the IV and III Centuries BC) lie in one of the most beautiful spots of the island close to the tip of the precipitous promontory. Note that various tracts of land here are privately owned.

View towards Xlendi valley



Ta' Sarraflu Pond



Limestone quarries and endemic Maltese Stocks attempting to colonise the edges.

*The clifftop detour*



*Scarlet Darter*



*Dwejra Tower is open to visitors when the flag is flying*

vehicles transporting quarried stone as in Gozo the only good quality building stone – Globigerina Limestone – is restricted to this area. Follow the road for about 600 meters until you get to an old rock cut track to your left and take this route down.

The theme of water continues along the way – as you reach a wide limestone outcrop

overlooking the valley an expanse of reeds spreads below indicating the presence of natural springs – part of the path can get a bit muddy as the small freshwater stream traverses this rocky ledge and plunges into a miniature waterfall. The water seems to have been directed into channels in the past and it retains the old place name of Il-Qattara – which translates as an area where water trickles.

Continue upwards along the path adjacent to the field and turn left to walk on the narrow ledge – this path will lead you up to the Dwejra Tower with good views opening up to the features which make Dwejra so unique: Il-Ġebbla tal-Ġeneral (Fungus Rock) on the left and further on where once stood It-Tieqa (Azure Window) and Il-Qawra (Inland Sea) on the right. A visit to the Tower, restored thanks to voluntary initiatives, is strongly recommended - look out for the flag flying on the roof which indicates that the tower is open for visitors.

The place name Dwejra is probably derived from the Arabic term for “round”. From the tower you should now be able to glimpse the circular forms dominating this landscape – natural relics of large collapsed caverns possibly dating to the Miocene Epoch. These features and their concentration here are quite unique – one of the many reasons why the area is protected on a local and international level as part of the EU’s Natura 2000 network. In warm weather with calm seas the circular Dwejra Bay guarded by Fungus Rock is a beautiful deep swimming spot easily reached by going briefly off track to the left of the tower and locating the flight of steps leading to an old slipway which in the past was used to haul up a few fishing

boats. A small circular cave carved out of the soft limestone can be seen just below the initial rock-cut steps leading to the bay – this was meant to house a watchman to guard a precious plant on Fungus Rock.

The bay acted as backdrop to a wartime incident when a Royal Air Force Spitfire crash-landed along the cliffs in 1942. The unconscious pilot was rescued and eventually the wreckage ended up on the seabed serving for a while as a diving site until its pieces were dispersed by man and sea.

After having a look at the tower, if it is a calm day proceed along the rough coast to discover it better – however do not venture close to the shore when seas are rough as it can be quite treacherous along this exposed stretch. At the promontory of Ir-Ras, literally “The Headland”, one can still locate the base of the securing system which in olden times held a ropeway with a suspended boxcar to enable access to the islet known as General’s Rock or Fungus Rock. To the north of the narrow headland you can make out the circumference of another collapsed cave which has been totally inundated by seawater except for the remaining pillar of stubborn rock known as Il-Baqra (the cow) or, more popularly with divers, Crocodile Rock.

Saltpans can be encountered on the way to viewing where once stood the Azure Window – salt extraction was often a privilege given to the tower’s capomastro in order to cover expenses. The nearby small quarry holds an interesting concentration of marine fossils with abundant flat sand dollars – the presence of this echinoid fossil marks the boundary between the harder Lower Coralline Limestone and the softer

Globigerina Limestone in a layer known as the Scutella Bed. Although fossils are protected by law many souvenir hunters unfortunately keep attempting to steal such fossils often damaging them in the process making it quite difficult to spot a whole specimen.



*Fungus Rock guarding Dwejra Bay*

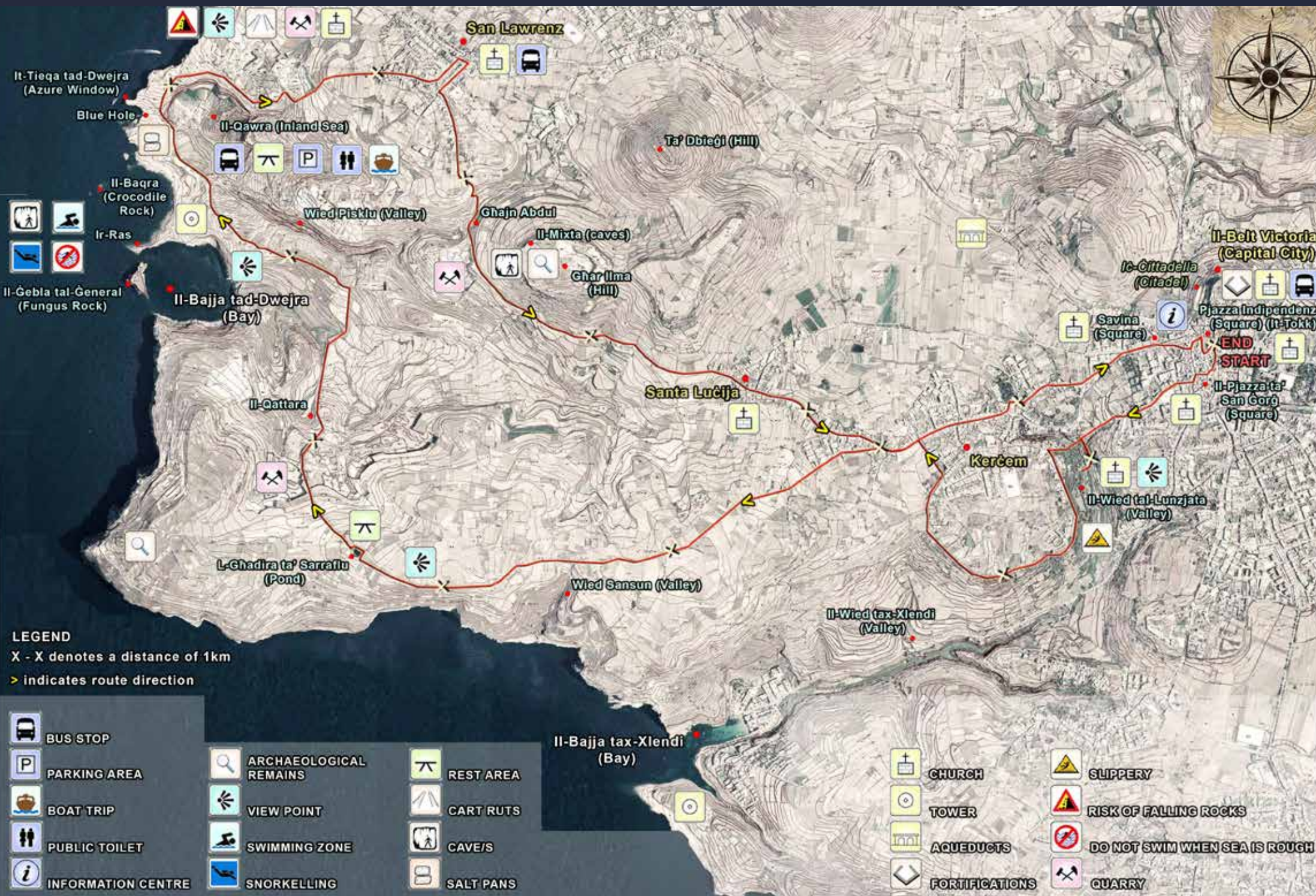


*Rock-cut steps leading down to the circular Dwejra Bay*



*Fossil at Dwejra*

# DWEJRA WALK



**LEGEND**  
 X - X denotes a distance of 1km  
 > indicates route direction

- |  |                    |  |                        |  |           |  |                |  |                               |
|--|--------------------|--|------------------------|--|-----------|--|----------------|--|-------------------------------|
|  | BUS STOP           |  | ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS |  | REST AREA |  | CHURCH         |  | SLIPPERY                      |
|  | PARKING AREA       |  | VIEW POINT             |  | CART RUTS |  | TOWER          |  | RISK OF FALLING ROCKS         |
|  | BOAT TRIP          |  | SWIMMING ZONE          |  | CAVE/S    |  | AQUEDUCTS      |  | DO NOT SWIM WHEN SEA IS ROUGH |
|  | PUBLIC TOILET      |  | SNORKELLING            |  | SALT PANS |  | FORTIFICATIONS |  | QUARRY                        |
|  | INFORMATION CENTRE |  |                        |  |           |  |                |  |                               |

A boat trip will put things into perspective



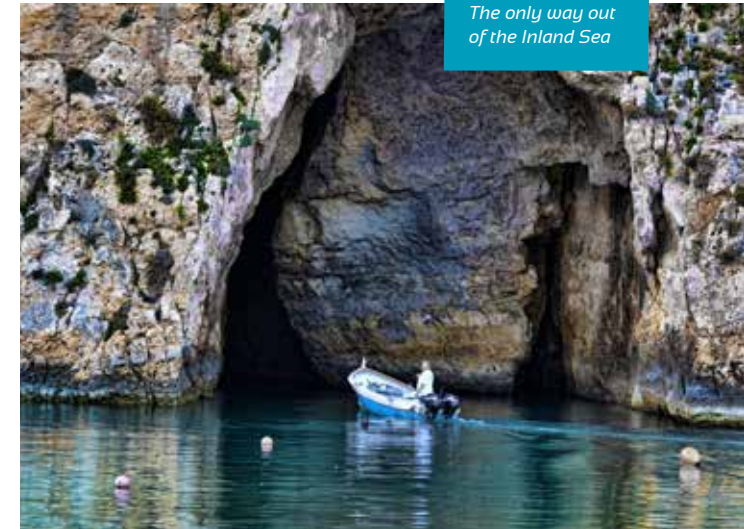
A rarity found only along these cliffs – the endemic Maltese Everlasting is easily recognised by its silvery leaves



Scopoli's Shearwater



The protected Maltese Everlasting blooms late in spring



The only way out of the Inland Sea

The Azure Window standing ahead looms 40 meters high and is Gozo's most loved natural feature and the island's iconic trademark. Natural arches are destined to erode away and collapse – indeed it is prohibited to venture onto it as over the years it is progressively losing its stability. On a day of rough seas it is

easy to see why as the waves sometimes reach right up to the roof attacking it with great force whilst also eating away at its narrow base. The nearby Hofra tal-Berwin (Blue Hole) can be reached on foot or seen from the rocky ledge adjacent to the arch but every diver will tell you that the best way to experience it is underwater! Viewed with suspicion for a long time by the locals this natural feature was thought to be a bottomless pit down which people disappeared. But this unique feature in the islands is actually a secretive passageway to lead out into the open sea from an underwater arch as if reproducing the greater arch opposite.

Before continuing up to the chapel take some time to go down to the Inland Sea, known as Il-Qawra – yet another term indicating the circular structure within which this pool of seawater lies connected to the open sea via an approximately 80 meters tunnel navigated by boats and divers. This natural amphitheatre's massive rock-faces provide an excellent

habitat for one of the rarest endemic plants of Malta – the silver-leaved Maltese Everlasting which in the whole world can only be seen along this western coast of Gozo. Around late spring the cliffs are coloured with its conspicuous and unmistakable yellow flowers. If weather permits don't miss the opportunity of an unforgettable navigation through the tunnel with local fishermen who operate a regular boat trip service from the small jetty. The trip lasts about 20 minutes and is the best way to appreciate the rugged coast with its hidden caves, arches and towering cliffs where breeding birds Scopoli's Shearwaters visit on summer nights and where Swifts have returned in recent years to nest again.

here during the last Ice Age probably transported by ancient river systems which have long since run dry but which live on as deep V-shaped valleys collecting the rain in the wet season. Walking past these deposits one reaches an important site where a freshwater pool supports life all year round at Il-Qattara: such as the Maidenhair Fern, the endemic Gozo Hyoseris and Maltese Horned Pondweed. A crescent-shaped copse of the rare Chaste Tree enjoys the watercourse fed by the perennial spring. The area is



The Blue Hole is a haven for divers on calm days



Quaternary deposits form the mound behind the boathouses at the Inland Sea



Mysterious  
Cart Ruts



Another endemic – the Maltese Stocks  
flowers in late spring



The endemic Gozo Hyoseris

also an important breeding site for the diminishing Spectacled Warbler.

Back *en route* in the main parking area the trail climbs up behind St. Anne's Chapel where steep rock cut steps overlooking the Inland Sea lead via the old passageway which in the past was used by villagers from San Lawrenz. Older traces of human activity can be encountered in the form of enigmatic cart ruts – parallel grooves in the bare rock which appear in many places in Malta (with similar widths) but which are otherwise rare in Gozo. The most interesting cart ruts can be found by following the steps and going slightly off-track to the left at around 50 meters from the chapel of St. Anne. Further up a small knoll holds some undated ruins of what appears to have been a round building. Explore the rocky expanse past this knoll to locate more cart ruts and then return to the steps to walk up to the village. Go past the large quarry on your left and head upwards along a rural road – some of the dry stone walls here support another rare endemic which you may have noticed earlier on in the walk: the Maltese Stocks whose pretty lilac flowers can be seen adorning the landscape in Spring.

The slightly steep ascent proceeds now along a tarmacked road leading you to the main square of San Lawrenz. The village's roots go back to at least the sixteenth century and it was established as a parish in 1893. It has a population of around 600. The coat of arms itself recalls the martyrdom of its patron Saint Lawrence and the annual feast is celebrated around the first week of August. A relic of the saint was placed under the foundation stone of the new larger church in 1886 and it is recounted how all villagers helped to

build this shrine with both women and men taking turns everyday to bring stones to the building site. A bell was rung each time more stone was needed and the people would respond by going to the nearby quarries.\*

The route proceeds towards Għajn Abdul Hill via Triq id-Duluri and then on the left through Triq it-Torri which takes you outside the village and down a concrete road with the imposing hill of Għajn Abdul, the Mixta caves and beautifully terraced slopes coming into full view before you. The track crosses the small valley known as Wied Pisklu and goes past a deep Globigerina Limestone quarry to join up the road which leads to the hamlet of Santa Luċija.

The hill is one of the several which make Gozo's landscape so characteristic and diverse from Malta – indeed we are reminded of its hilly contours by the island's own emblematic flag symbolising the Island of Three Hills. One can count a dozen of these flat-topped hills standing surrounded by countryside, mostly uninhabited and thankfully undeveloped. Geologically most of these hills represent the full sequence of the Maltese stratigraphy with layers of sedimentary rock capped by a plateau of the youngest rock formation – the Upper Coralline Limestone. The nearby Ta' Dbieġi Hill claims Gozo's highest point at 194 meters. Għajn Abdul – the "Spring of Abdul", and the adjacent hill of Għar Ilma, the "Cave of Water", are place names which give clear indications to another geological feature of the area – the presence of freshwater.

**\*NOTE:** Should you want to cut your walk short you can always take a bus from here to Victoria.

Għajn Abdul



Blue Clay spreading out creates impressive  
slopes but is also important for the island's  
water resources

This is thanks to the widespread layer of impermeable Blue Clay which underlies the Upper Coralline Limestone and creates a perched aquifer which finds its way to the surface at the popular Għajn Abdul spring just past the dilapidated farmhouse below the hill. The importance of water sources on the island can never be emphasised enough – in this case the British Colonial Government had constructed an aqueduct in the 1840s to direct water from the area to Victoria.



Besides the natural and geological interest of hills there is often an important archaeological aspect to them. The Mixta caves on the hill of Għajn Abdul have yielded the oldest known traces of man's presence on the island with pottery sherds dating from the early Neolithic Phase of the islands around 5000B.C. Unfortunately a good chunk of the plateau and a lot of the archaeological evidence have been eaten away by a hardstone quarry but if you want to climb up to the surviving caves they can be reached in less than half an hour along a rough way up starting opposite the water troughs.

Back *en route* along the road you come to a charming square with a stone cross in front of the pretty and modest Santa Luċija church. Historic records show that a church dedicated to Saint Lucy stood here at least since 1575 and it was changed and enlarged throughout the centuries. The hamlet's motto "I pour light upon fellow citizens" is tied to the ancient devotion

to the Syracusan martyr patron saint of the visually impaired – Saint Lucy, whose name means light. The patron saint's feast is celebrated annually on 13th December accompanied by a Light Festival. In 2008 the hamlet was awarded the title of European Destination of Excellence for its initiatives in preserving intangible cultural heritage.

Continue straight along Triq Santa Luċija going past an old windmill and soon the route joins up for a short stretch along the same road taken at the start of the walk. Back in Ta' Kerċem, walk down past the parish church and continue downhill and taking a left turn past the small garden dedicated to Ċensu Xiberras. Upon reaching Victoria a large upright stone in front of the Government Nursery could have formed part of a Roman building.

Back in the urban area do be careful as cars drive along the very narrow street leading up to Savina Square. On the right stands the church commonly known as Ta` Savina – a locally used term for Mediterranean Heather – it was rebuilt in the early twentieth century but had been in existence since 1479 with its dedication to the Nativity of Our Lady originating in medieval times. It once formed another parish within Victoria. This is where water from the hills' springs reportedly made its first appearance in Victoria via the nineteenth century aqueduct - remains of which can still be seen standing in the countryside. A commemorative obelisk was raised on the way up to the Citadel on site of the first reservoir.

You are now back where you started at It-Tokk. If you haven't yet seen the Citadel, do visit before you leave the island. Just walk up the hill on your left.

# Snippets

## VICTORIA

**1** Occupying the centre of the island, in the geographical, religious, commercial and administrative sense, Victoria, known also as Rabat, has a population of around 6000. It was raised to the status of city in 1887 and was named Victoria on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. Yet the original name still stands and, as in the case of Rabat in Malta, it is a historic reference to the suburb which rose below the fortified walled city – Mдина in Malta and the Citadel in Gozo. Two major religious feasts are celebrated in Victoria in its two parishes: the Cathedral and St. George's Basilica. The patron Saint George whose basilica is located in St George's Square is celebrated on the third Sunday of July while the Cathedral of Gozo, located within the Citadel walls, is dedicated to the Assumption of Our Lady (to Heaven) with a feast celebrated on 15th August.

## ST. GEORGE'S BASILICA

**2** The parish of Saint George, at the centre of the old town, originated in medieval times. The present church, known as the golden basilica, was built in 1672 and was bestowed the title of Basilica in 1958. The highly treasured 19th century wooden statue of the patron Saint George is carried out during a procession on the feast day each year. The martyr is considered the protector of the people of Gozo and the church and its feast are a reminder of this longstanding devotion. The grand feast, celebrate on the third Sunday of July has since 1998 been preceded

by a popular cultural event of concerts and recitals during the Victoria International Arts Festival. The interior has some interesting works of art as is the titular altarpiece by the renowned Calabrian artist Mattia Preti and works by Stefano Erardi, Francesco Zahra, Gian Battista Conti and Giuseppe Cali. The bronze canopy, a replica of Bernini's Vatican piece, was added in the 1960s.

## MALTA'S NATIONAL TREE

**3** Planted outside the entrance to the valley are young Sandarac Gum Trees or Għargħar – Malta's National Tree. The conifer is quite a rare tree being found only on mainland Malta in very small numbers (it seems to be absent in the wild in Gozo and Comino), in Spain and in North Africa. Its scale-like leaves make it ideally suited for the long periods of drought associated with southern Mediterranean climates. The female cone is four-sided and ripens in September.

## LUNZJATA CHURCH INSCRIPTIONS

**4** The plaque in Italian: NON GODE L'IMMUNITÀ ECCLESIAS can be seen on many wayside chapels on the island. The phrase translates to "does not enjoy ecclesiastic immunity". For many years churches, which were beyond the jurisdiction of civil law, acted as *refugia* for anyone breaking the law. The situation degraded and caused many a litigation with the result that these plaques were added to many wayside chapels to ward off any unwelcome visitors. The longer text on an adjacent plaque, also

in Italian, is a notarial deed of 1889 stating that the emphiteutical concession of the benefice of the lands was being passed on to S.A. Grech for 99 years.

## PAINTED FROG

**5** The only indigenous amphibian found in the Maltese Islands is the Painted Frog – a strictly protected species which is shared with Sicily. It varies greatly in colour and is about 7cm long and can be encountered in both temporary and permanent freshwater habitats. The pond at Ta' Sarraflu however also contains another frog species – the recently introduced competitor the Levantine Frog – a larger species with quite a loud voice, unlike the local Painted Frog. The former seems to be gaining ground quickly – possibly becoming a threat to the survival of the local native species.



*The Painted Frog*

## OF WATER AND KIDNAPPINGS

**6** Two themes seem to be common to various legends in the area – the presence of water and the constant corsairing attacks – indeed two constant problematic aspects of life in the relatively isolated Gozo of past times. Ta' Sarraflu's pond was used by women for washing clothes but was also a favourite spot with corsairs. One story recounts how corsairs kidnapped three young girls and carried them into slavery on board their boat waiting at Xlendi Bay.



*The scarcity of surface water makes it ever so precious*

Another story relates how Għabdun, a leader of Barbary corsairs, remained in his hideaway near the Mixta caves, while his men fled when the alarm was raised. Upon his discovery he was kept chained and without water so he desperately dug at the ground until he miraculously discovered a spring from which he drank to his death. The story may be a legend but the spring is real and still flows today with many locals queuing up to fill dozens of bottles or wash their cars. It is known as Għabdun's or Abdul's spring.

## DWEJRA HERITAGE PARK

**7** A candidate UNESCO World Heritage Site, Dwejra is a protected area both on a local and international level as part of the EU's Natura 2000 network. With an area of land and sea totalling 8km<sup>2</sup> this is the largest contiguous protected land and sea area in Malta. Its importance both in terms of land and sea tourism, and its high natural value have long been recognised and in 2004 the NGO Nature Trust (Malta) was granted funding as part of a LIFE Project in 2004 which resulted in the setting up of the Dwejra Heritage Park with the aim of safeguarding its heritage both on

land by extending the Nature Reserve and designating management zones as well as at sea with the first Marine Protected Area for Gozo being set up.

## DWEJRA TOWER

**8** Built in 1652 under the reign of the Knights of St. John's Grand Master Lascaris this coastal watchtower served the same purpose of other similar structures, that is: deterring smuggling and corsairing activities and curbing attempts to avoid quarantine.



*The Dwejra Tower*

But it also held a unique role acting as a botanic watchdog to one of the most prized plants of the times: the Malta Fungus. The tower was manned by the Royal Malta Artillery for several years in the 19th century and in the 20th century it continued to serve as an observation post during the two World Wars. In 1997 the tower was passed on to Din I-Art Helwa which conducted urgent restoration works and continued to manage the site in conjunction with Nature Trust (Malta). At present it serves as an interpretation centre with 10 minute documentaries about the area available to be seen in the lower section of the tower – electricity for this is provided thanks to solar energy from panels installed as part of a LIFE project for Dwejra Heritage Park. Dwejra Tower is open all year from Monday

to Friday from 9.00 am to 3.00pm and on Sundays and Public Holidays from noon to 3pm when the flag is flying.

## FUNGUS ROCK

**9** Rising about 60 meters above sea level, the islet of Fungus Rock made it into various historic accounts and paintings which depicted it connected to the mainland via a precarious cablecar which was in place till 1827 from the time of the Knights. The latter, being hospitalliers, were extremely protective of the medicinally powerful plant *Cynomoreum coccineum* known as Malta Fungus which was thought to grow only on the islet. It was later found to be widespread in some Mediterranean areas (although indeed it is extremely rare locally) and is a parasitic plant, not a fungus. In 1744 Grand Master Pinto ordered the smoothing down of the rock face to render it unscalable.



*Fungus Rock*

The extreme measures taken to protect it must have been the first local ventures into sustainable harvesting and may unintentionally have led to this site being the strictly protected and inaccessible nature reserve it is today. At that time the punishment for being found on the islet without permission or caught cutting the plant was much more severe than today: it could amount to a painful sentence of galley-rowing! The islet's centuries-long protection and its natural isolation have helped secure its natural habitat which is home to a large number of endemics

with the exceptional presence of a unique subspecies of Maltese Wall Lizard known only from this rock – the endemic General's Rock Lizard.



The Maltese Wall Lizard is easily spotted in Gozo but you are unlikely to see its rare relative on Fungus Rock

## TA' KERĊEM

**10** Ta' Kerċem, with a population of about 1700, is closely associated with a longstanding devotion to Pope Saint Gregory the Great. The church's first stone was laid in 1846 on the feast day of the Saint Gregory, 12th March, to replace a smaller chapel which had stood since the sixteenth century in the locality known as Ta' San Girgor. A centuries old tradition, which continued right up to the 1960s, was a popular annual procession on the day of the Saint's feast from the Cathedral in Victoria to the village. Brides-to-be were promised participation in this procession. Today the parish church is co-dedicated to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour and Ta' Kerċem is the only locality in Gozo which celebrates two main religious feasts: that of St. Gregory the Great - held every second Sunday of March, and that of Our Lady of Succour – held on the second Sunday of July. An interesting archaeological site is found at Għar Gerduf, close to Wied tal-Lunzjata, housing the only known catacomb complex in Gozo.

The underground communal burial site, attributed to the early Christian period, was unfortunately defaced by quarrying and what remains of it is not accessible to the public.

## CITADEL VISIT

**11** The walled city can be walked through freely at any time of day and night and its 360 degree views over the rest of the island must be seen. To visit the museums and the Cathedral housed within its walls it is best to go after 9am and before 4pm. Heritage Malta has multi-site tickets at a much reduced price for visiting four of its museums on site: Museum of Archaeology, Museum of Natural Science, Folklore Museum and the Old Prisons. The interesting silos, gunpowder magazine and battery are opened by volunteers of Wirt Għawdex mainly in the late morning.



A walk amidst the ancient walls of the Citadel is a must

The Citadel also hosts small souvenir shops as well as refuelling stops with good local food and wine. Despite its urban nature it was declared a natural protected Natura 2000 site due to the presence of some very rare plants including the endemic Maltese Toadflax. The walled city has a unique atmosphere to it which can be savoured even at the quieter time around sunset and at dusk – a good time to also observe several bats around its fortifications.

# Info Pages



## WEBSITES:

[www.gozo.gov.mt](http://www.gozo.gov.mt)  
[www.visitgozo.com](http://www.visitgozo.com)  
[www.ecogozo.com](http://www.ecogozo.com)  
[www.gozochannel.com](http://www.gozochannel.com)

## DOWNLOAD OUR VISITGOZO APP ON YOUR PHONE



## TOURIST INFORMATION OFFICE IN GOZO:

No. 17, Independence Square, Victoria, Gozo, VCT 1021  
 Tel: (+356) 22915452

## OPENING HOURS:

**Mondays to Saturdays:** 09:00 to 17:30 (Last admission 17:15)  
**Sundays and public holidays\*:** 09:00 to 13:00 (Last admission 12:45)

*Note: \*except on Christmas Day, New Year, Good Friday & Easter Sunday*



## BUS TIMETABLES:

[www.publictransport.com.mt](http://www.publictransport.com.mt)



## GOZO FERRY TIMETABLE:

[www.gozochannel.com](http://www.gozochannel.com)

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Direct enquiries may be forwarded to the Ministry for Gozo.

FSE Mark

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