

Gozo & Comino



For the holiday-maker, Gozo has an air of exclusivity about it, no doubt helped by the surfeit of upmarket hotels, luxuriously converted farmhouses and high-quality restaurants, and the lack of package-holiday crowds such as those found on bigger, brasher Malta to the south.

Gozo, called *Għawdex* (*aw-desh*) in Malti, provides soothing respite from the bustling, noisy resorts and manic drivers of Malta. Although it is more than one-third the size of its larger sister island, it has less than one-tenth of the population – only about 30,000 Gozitans live here (and they are Gozitans first, Maltese second). The land is more fertile, the scenery is greener, the pace of life is much slower and the locals seem friendlier.

The island offers all the attractions of Malta but in a more compact package: good walking, a superb coastal landscape and excellent scuba-diving and snorkelling, plus history in the form of megalithic temples and medieval citadels. If you're looking for action-packed nightlife you'll be disappointed, but if you're interested in a chance to enjoy warm hospitality and see how the rest of Malta must have been before the advent of mass tourism, you're in luck. A day trip won't allow enough time to sample this tiny island's treasures, however. It's worth scheduling at least a few days here, or, indeed, making Gozo the primary focus of your trip.

And while you're in the neighbourhood, consider slipping across to Malta's third island, tiny Comino. You've seen the image of the stunning Blue Lagoon on enough postcards – it's time to check out the real thing. An afternoon here provides ample time for top-class swimming and snorkelling.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Exploring Victoria's historic charm in both **Il-Kastell** (p136) and the lanes of **Il-Borgo** (p138)
- Getting red sand in your shorts at lovely **Ramla Bay** (p153)
- Taking in the impressive 360-degree views from tiny **Comino** (p154), then going for a dip in crystal-clear waters
- Renting a **converted farmhouse** (boxed text, p140) in a sleepy Gozitan village and spending a blissful week unwinding
- Learning to dive (p46) with the experts in **Xlendi** (p144) or **Marsalforn** (p148)
- Enjoying a fine meal at one of Gozo's top restaurants, including **Restaurant Ta'Frenc** (p150) outside Marsalforn; **It-Tmun Victoria** (p140) in the capital; or **Tatita's** (p147) in San Lawrenz





GOZO

VICTORIA (RABAT)

pop 6640

Victoria, the chief town of Gozo, sits in the centre of the island, 6km from the ferry terminal at Mgarr and 3.5km from the resort town of Marsalforn. Victoria's main attraction is the compact and photogenic citadel Il-Kastell.

Victoria is Gozo's main hub of shops and services. It was named for the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897. Originally known as Rabat, it is still called that by many of the islanders (and on several road signs).

Orientation

Victoria is on a hill crowned by the ramparts of Il-Kastell ('the Citadel', or its Italian names of Gran Castello/the Cittadella). Telgha Tal-Belt (Castle Hill) runs downhill from Il-Kastell to Pjazza Indipendenza (aka It-Tokk). Triq ir-Repubblika, Victoria's main street, runs east downhill from Pjazza

Indipendenza. The bus station and main car park are on Triq Putirjal, running south off Triq ir-Repubblika. Victoria's narrow streets are a labyrinthine one-way system – it may take several circuits of the town before you find your way around.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Bookworm (Map p136; ☎ 2155 6215; 105 Triq ir-Repubblika) Well-stocked shop with a good range of books, plus local and British newspapers.

PRACTICALITIES

In this chapter, Gozo's main town, Victoria, is described first, followed by Mgarr, the main harbour. The rest of the island is covered in a roughly clockwise direction from Mgarr.

There are some very good websites to help with planning a visit to Gozo – try www.gozo.com, www.islandofgozo.org, www.discoveringgozo.com or www.gozo.gov.mt. See p16 for ideas on how to amuse yourself for a week on the island.