

NTOM Policy on Tourism in Gozo

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The National Tourism Organisation does not have a specific marketing plan for Gozo. Part of the reason for this is geography and awareness - not Gozo's, but the location of our archipelago.

Although we have made tremendous progress in creating market awareness of our islands in Europe and in North America, the fact remains that many people still do not know where the Maltese islands are.

On a visit to England, not so long ago, I told someone I came from Malta. "Isn't it next to Hong Kong?" he asked. He was referring to Macao.

The point is that in our major source markets there is still ignorance of the whereabouts of our destination. Consequently, we feel it would be detrimental to our national tourism interests to market our islands separately.

Having said that, however, Gozo - together with Comino - is an essential part of our national tourism offer.

We all know what Gozo can offer to the tourist - and not only in natural beauty but also for leisure, history, culture and its very own traditions.

And we certainly do stress these unique selling propositions in our international advertisement campaigns and promotional literature.

Unlike Malta, Gozo is - and is perceived abroad as being - greener,

more rural and generally more laid-back. Malta is 20 per cent built-up and has a much higher population density than Gozo.

For several years now we have highlighted these differences between the islands in our promotional material, and we sell Gozo differently from Malta. This positioning has worked.

Tangible ways in which we at the NTOM promote the island include a Gozo-only brochure, a Gozo poster and we always mention the island in the Organisation's printed material.

Additionally, at the major international trade shows abroad such as ITB in Berlin and the World Travel Market in London - we allocate a part of our national stand to Gozo and Gozitan-based companies.

When the NTOM hosts visiting journalists, television crews and agents on either familiarisation or inspection tours, a trip to Gozo is always included in their itinerary.

We have recently taken up the habit of having press groups based in Gozo and organising a day visit to Malta. Moreover, the NTOM actively supports foreign-based Gozo-only specialist tour operators.

As you can see, Gozo is definitely promoted internationally, but as a unique part of the overall Malta product.

Tourism as we all know has both positive and negative effects on our national economy, the infrastructure and the environment. I don't intend to dwell on either the economic or infrastructural aspects of tourism - I trust we are all aware of these.

As for the environment, no one can deny that Malta has been 'altered', not to say damaged. The recent spate of mindless defacing of our archaeological and historical monuments does not help, but it does make us more conscious of the fact that our heritage, our principal attraction, requires more protection.

Fortunately several of the problems that Malta suffers from have not spilled over to Gozo. The channel that separates our two islands



Gozo - an island of scenic beauty

has been an effective barrier for the more unpleasant and negative aspects.

This natural barrier has other plus points as well. It has allowed Gozo to develop at its own pace and with the development of Malta in hindsight. Everyone who comes here agrees the island is more pleasant than Malta. It is indeed an island of calm and relaxation, just as the NTOM's brochure says.

It is this difference, this uniqueness, coupled with its charm, that we must preserve for Gozo's tourism industry to be a success.

One must also bear in mind that most of our visitors come from the large urban conglomerations of Europe, and yearn for the atmosphere and lifestyle Gozo can provide. Let's keep it that way.

But that is not to say tourism should not be developed further here in Gozo. It should, but with forethought and imagination.

Essentially we must continue to flatten the seasonal tourist flow curve from Malta to Gozo. In the peak summer months there are no problems in the number of excursionists who come here for the day, although overcrowding and bottlenecks do occur. However, during the winter and shoulder months the numbers drop quite dramatically. Therefore we must entice more people to visit Gozo at these times of year.

This can be done by further marketing the island as a quality, eco-friendly destination.

With the increasing interest in green tourism, the off-season attractions are plentiful. Besides the archaeological and historical sites Gozo has its villages and countryside to offer. And without huge capitalisation costs, outdoor activities that do not damage the environment can be developed – for instance, rambling, mountain-biking, horse riding and four-wheel drive safaris on clearly defined tracks. Gozo can offer adventure and a return to the outdoor life.

Coincidentally, most of these activities appeal to the more upscale visitor and not to the Ds and Es of this world. They are also perfect for attracting incentive trips to the island, along with conferences.

At the end of the day the future of tourism to Gozo rests on our ability to preserve the agro/fishing community and the control of overpowering volume of travellers in peak season particularly day trippers.

The emphasis should be not to count those whom we manage to reach, but to continue to develop an offer which will satisfy those who really count.

NTOM will therefore not focus to sell Gozo more but rather to sell Gozo in the right way in the interest of the sustainability of the tourism industry in Gozo.