

Annual General Meeting 2022



The Gozo Tourism Association held its 23rd Annual General Meeting on Friday, 25th February, 2022.

This Annual General Meeting was held at the Kempinski Hotel San Lawrenz, with an agenda, that included an introduction by the Chairman of the Association, Mr Paul Scicluna, the financial report by the Treasurer, Mr Joe Muscat Sammut and the Administrative report by the Chief Executive Officer, Mr Joe Muscat.

In his opening address the GTA Chairman Mr Paul Scicluna highlighted how tourism continues to be one of the sectors hardest hit by the Coronavirus pandemic and how the outlook remains uncertain with the ongoing covid pandemic and this weeks' development of hostilities in Northern Europe. GTA Chairman stated that real recovery will only be possible when international tourism returns to the normal levels of the pre-pandemic years. He also highlighted the role of the domestic market in mitigating the drops sustained from the foreign tourists.

The GTA's Chief Executive Officer, Mr Joe Muscat then delivered an audio-visual presentation on the performance of the Association during 2021. He gave an overview of the Gozitan touristic performance during last year, as well as the work and initiatives undertaken by the Association during the course of the past year 2021, which again were marked and hindered by the Covid-19 global pandemic.

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During this AGM, the GTA council for 2021 was formed and is made up of the following members: Borg Marvic (Gozo Breaks Ltd), Bugeja Alda (Cassar Weaving) Busuttil Mark (St. Andrews Divers Cove), Gatt Ludgard (Villa Marni), Loporto Mario (Gozo Village Holidays), Mercieca Joseph (Country Terrace Restaurant), Mifsud Ivan (Mifsud Bros Ltd), Muscat Sammut Joseph (Down Town Hotel), Sacco Deryk (Kempinski San Lawrenz)), Scicluna Konrad (Links Travel Group) Scicluna Paul (Gozo Farmhouses), Sillato Samuel (Grand Hotel), Spiteri Pauline (Mario's Rent a car) , Veranneman Amand (ERA Malta), Xerri Gatt Charlene (21st Century Real Estate).

During this AGM, Mr. Mario Borg, CEO of the Gozo Regional Development Authority delivered a presentation on the role and how this Authority can add value added to the tourism industry in Gozo. This was followed by the message from the Opposition Spokesperson for Gozo Dr. Chris Said, who whilst thanking GTA for its attainments, explained several tourism related proposals listed in the Electoral Programme of the PN.

This Annual General Meeting came to an end by a message from the Director for Tourism and Economic Developments Mr. Ronald Sultana, who whilst referring to the ongoing collaboration with GTA, highlighted the work his Directorate is executing with regards to the promotion and marketing of Destination Gozo.

Present for this meeting were also MP Dr. Joseph Ellis, Permanent Secretary at MGOZ Mr. John Borg, Ms. Christine Vella Senior Manager at MTA Gozo Office, other distinguished guests and GTA members.



Air Link



The Gozo Tourism Association welcomed the news announced in early January in Parliament by the Minister for Gozo Hon. Clint Camilleri that the Government will ‘in the coming weeks’ announce its plans for a small airfield in Gozo and launch a public consultation about it.

Such infrastructure will be the latest loop in the inter-island connectivity chain, after the introduction of the Fast Ferry Service, between Valletta and Mgarr in June, 2021, and the introduction of the fourth ferry to the Gozo Channel fleet in June 2019, all additions that have improved remarkably the sea link between Gozo and Malta.

Furthermore, the inauguration of the second fibre optic cable in December, 2020, between the two major Maltese Islands, was another infrastructural project that upgraded by no means the digital connectivity for Gozo.

Considering these latest additional modes of connectivity, the Gozo Tourism Association is certain that the fruition of these three important steps in connectivity were achieved since there was no doubt, the political commitment to implement them.

Air Link



At this juncture, the Gozo Tourism Association notes with eagerness Government's intent to introduce a fixed-wing airlink between Malta and Gozo, a mode of transport that has been on the Association's agenda for the last twenty years. Such a link will complement the sea link, whilst providing a convenient and less time-consuming inter-island transfer for tourists and Gozitans alike between the Malta International Airport and Gozo. The establishment of the fixed-wing inter-islands operation will not only enhance connectivity, but it will open up new job opportunities here on Gozo.

The rough time, especially for the touristic sector, brought about by the global covid-19 pandemic, should not discourage us, on the contrary this should be the appropriate time to continue improving Gozo's touristic offer, by expanding, enhancing and facilitating further tourists' commuting to destination Gozo.

Like the three aforementioned modes of connectivity, if there is strong political will, this next step in the inter-island connectivity will be achieved. Gozo as an established distinct tourism destination deserved this airlink yesterday.



Congratulation to the President of the European Parliament



The Gozo Tourism Association welcomed and congratulated Dr. Roberta Metsola on her election as the President of the European Parliament. The EU Parliamentary support garnered by Dr. Metsola to achieve such a strong vote is testimony of her political abilities and belief in the European project.

This historic election of Dr. Roberta Metsola, apart from being a personal achievement, it is also a moment for all of us, Maltese and Gozitans to unite and celebrate as one nation this accomplishment. This EU episode is a clear message that even Malta, the smallest Nation of the European Union can contribute effectively through the sheer determination, perseverance and ability of its representatives. The election of Dr Metsola to this position makes all Maltese proud as a nation with its citizens committing their belief in Europe.

The Gozo Tourism Association applauded Dr. Roberta Metsola and augured that through this occasion, as Maltese and Gozitans, we re-capture that sense of hope and enthusiasm in the European project.

Finally knowing how much at heart Gozo is for Dr. Metsola, the Gozo Tourism Association appealed to the newly elected President of the EU Parliament to promote the needs of our Island Region in order to share equal opportunities and mitigate our natural constraints.

Re-appointment of Hon. Clint Camilleri as Minister of Gozo



The Chairman and Council of the Gozo Tourism Association extended their congratulation to the Honourable Clint Camilleri on his re-appointment as Minister for Gozo, in the newly elected government under the premiership of Prime Minister Dr. Robert Abela.

The Gozo Tourism Association augured the Minister for Gozo and the newly formed Government more continued endeavours for the benefit of all the Maltese Islands.

The Gozo Tourism Association council stated that it is committed to continue collaborating and synergizing with Minister Clint Camilleri and the Ministry for Gozo as it did during the past years, towards the sustainability of the tourism industry on Gozo. The main objective of the Association is that through its attainments, GTA would be instrumental in making a touristic success story on the sister Island, which in turn would be beneficial the touristic sector, as well as to the Gozitan economy.

The Gozo Tourism Association also augured the Minister, and it looked forward to continue working together especially during these challenging times brought about by the covid pandemic and the recent armed conflict in Ukraine.

Scuttling of the Hephaestus off

Ix-Xatt l-Ahmar



The Gozo Tourism Association welcomed with satisfaction the scuttling of the Hephaestus at ix-Xatt l-Ahmar. This is the fourth vessel which was scuttled on the south coast of Gozo. Such initiatives started way back in November, 1999, when on the initiative of the Gozo Tourism Association in collaboration with Gozo Channel and the Ministry for Gozo, the ferry MV Xlendi was scuttled, followed by the double scuttling of the MV Karwela and the MV Cominoland in August 2006. Now in August 2022, another vessel was scuttled at the same area, thus turning the ix-Xatt l-Ahmar site into a hub of underwater wrecks.

This additional scuttling will add more diversity and a different experience to those divers who frequent this site. Furthermore, it will offer another underwater attraction on the south coast of Gozo, which is so sought after, when strong North westerly wind prevails during the diving season.



The Gozo Tourism Association felt that this scuttling was an important step towards the enhancement of the Gozitan touristic product, especially during these recovery times for the tourism sector. It is the Association's belief that the diving segment on Gozo will reap great benefits from this scuttling and will continue to consolidate the importance of the diving niche for the tourism industry on Gozo.

Finally, the Gozo Tourism Association extended its thanks to the Ministry for Tourism, the Ministry for Gozo, the Malta Tourism Authority and the PDSA who collaborated for a number of years to bring this project to fruition.

Gozo Tourism Awards 2022



For the thirteenth year, the Gozo Tourism Association (GTA) is organising 'The Gozo Tourism Awards – 2022'. These Annual awards will be bestowed to the Tourism Worker in the tourism sector on Gozo, and the Young Tourism Worker who distinguished themselves in the performance of their duties in the touristic sector in Gozo.

Furthermore, for the eighth year, the Investment and Entrepreneurship in Tourism Award is being also bestowed to the Gozitan Entrepreneur, who has achieved outstanding accomplishments, that have had significant impact on the tourism sector on Gozo.

This year's Award will include as well for the third time, another category that of the Niche Tourism Achievement Award. The main objective of this award is to acknowledge any individual or any organisation that promoted the cultural diversity and authenticity of Gozo, through a cultural activity and or project in 2022, which was instrumental in attracting both domestic and foreign visitors to Gozo.

These awards will be conferred to the winners during a special event which will be held on Thursday, 19th January 2023. Nominations for these awards close on Friday 30th December, 2022. Nomination forms, conditions and regulations can be obtained from the offices of the Gozo Tourism Association at 4, Mliet Court, George Borg Olivier Street Victoria Gozo.

Gta's Reaction to the Budget 2023



This budget for 2023 was prepared during a particular time when worldwide economies are under the strains of the Ukraine war and during a period when the tourism sector is still in recovery mode from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the Gozo Tourism Association understands that this is budget that in the short term ensures the sustainability of the business activity, as well as the wellbeing of the low-income earners, pensioners and workers battling to keep up with the rising cost of living.

The Gozo Tourism Association noted that the measures listed in this budget aims to cushion the economic challenges while safeguarding and sustaining economic growth. In this regard the Budget continues to subsidise the increase in costs of the utility bills and cereals. These measures will assist not only families but will keep businesses afloat that would be otherwise crippled by rising costs.

Amongst measures relating to tourism, this Budget included a measure proposed by the Gozo Tourism Association. This measure in the form of a scheme is intended to attract long-stay tourists to the Island, particularly between the November and March period, to continue mitigating seasonality on Gozo.

Other measures affecting the Gozitan touristic sector refers to the inter-island connectivity, including the development of the rural airfield in Xewkija and the public service obligation contract for the operation of the fast ferry service between Mgarr and Valletta.

Whilst acknowledging the setting up of the Agency for Tourism Zones Development and Regeneration, the Gozo Tourism Association note that there is no mention of the ring fencing of the eco-contribution funds collected from Gozitan accommodation for tourism projects on Gozo.

Finally, the Gozo Tourism Association opined that all in all the Budget for 2023 was aimed towards economic stability on the Maltese Islands during these turbulent times for the economy.



A Sports Dose to Energise Tourism



Every tourism destination suffers from seasonality. Even well-established destinations experience fluctuations in their intake of visitors. Gozo is no different. Foreign tourist arrivals to Gozo are not distributed uniformly over the year, but are very concentrated during certain periods of the year, mostly the summer months. Although this imbalance is being narrowed, yet Gozo is still affected by high and low seasons.

One of the ways to tackle seasonality is to exploit and offer a string of touristic niches, but most importantly those that can be experienced during the shoulder and low months. Along the years Gozo managed to develop some of such niches. The opera season, carnival, Christmas in Gozo and the Holy Week are but a few of these niches that have contributed to lure to Gozo visitors both domestic and foreign. Moreso all these touristic offers have become so synonymous with the sister island.

Yet, there are other such segments that can be further exploited, nurtured and established, that in turn can most definitely soften the seasonality element affecting Gozo.



A Sports Dose to Energise Tourism



One such segment that can be a leader in mitigating seasonality is sports tourism. This segment is a significant element in world tourism, and has become a highly competitive niche business.

As interest and participation in sport grows within the leisure industry, the desire of people to travel to compete or to spectate has also grown. Nowadays people travel to engage in fresh and innovative experiences beyond merely sightseeing or engaging in relaxing opportunities.

Although Gozo is a small island, yet the number of sports events being organised all year round is surprisingly substantial. This is especially credit to the number of voluntary organisations often supported by the Ministry for Gozo, which against all odds toil to hold numerous sports events.

The number of running marathons, athletic events, cycling, the swimming competitions, horse racing, just to mention a few, contribute towards a jammed packed sports calendar all year round.

Added to these, team sports, like football, basketball, volleyball and water polo, all can contribute to offer Gozo as a sports tourism-oriented destination. However, in order to achieve and compete in such a niche a lot more has to be done both from the organisational aspect as well as in developing more sports facilities.

A more centralised and coordinated approach is to be taken. This role could easily be undertaken by an entity like the Gozo Sports Board, that should seek to establish a comprehensive annual sports calendar. Furthermore, all Gozitan sports clubs, entities and organisations are to be enticed, encouraged and incentivised to plan well ahead their respective events and activities.

A Sports Dose to Energise Tourism



Only through such an approach, a proper comprehensive and holistic sports calendar can be established through which Destination Gozo can then promote its sports credentials.

Yet all these sports efforts need to be coupled and further assisted by improving the existing sports facilities and where these are missing or lacking the necessary investments are to be carried out to create the proper sports infrastructure. A commendable case in point is the present development of the natatorium and sports complex in Victoria. This massive project will be a game changer both for the aquatic enthusiasts, as well as for Gozo as a sports tourism destination.

Gozo needs more of such investments in sport infrastructure, if we really and truly aspire to establish sports tourism on a sound foundation. Tourism and sports are sectors of the Gozitan economy and society that have different purposes, values and organisational structures, yet they offer tremendous partnering opportunities. Understanding the objectives and the practices of the partners from each sector involved, is crucial to find the common ground for sport tourism. There is a decisive role that needs to be acted by government to bring these groups together, as the greatest potential lies in synergizing and bringing on board all actors.

The potential of sports tourism for Gozo is there to grab. It is massive and yet it is underestimated. It is high time that all stakeholders involved act and prioritise sports tourism on their respective agendas. Working together, Government, sport and tourism partners can achieve significant success for destination Gozo.

New CEO for the Malta Tourism Authority



The Gozo Tourism Association (GTA) welcomed the announcement by Minister for Tourism Hon Clayton Bartolo, that Mr. Carlo Micallef has been appointed as new Chief Executive Officer of the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA). The Gozo Tourism Association is confident that Mr. Carlo Micallef brings with him a wealth of experience in the tourism industry and this will prove to be vital for the key position of Chief Executive Officer of the Malta Tourism Authority.

Furthermore Mr. Micallef experience in the international touristic market will be beneficial in these crucial times both for the recovery of the tourism industry as well as in the implementation of the National Tourism Strategy. The Gozo Tourism Association believes that the leadership abilities of Mr. Micallef are going to be an asset for this position in order to navigate a National Authority like MTA in achieving and enhancing more the tourism industry on the Maltese Islands.

The Gozo Tourism Association is committed to continue collaborating as in the past with Mr. Carlo Micallef, now in his new role of MTA CEO for the benefit of the tourism sector on the Island of Gozo. Finally, the Gozo Tourism Association would like to thank the outgoing CEO Mr. Johann Buttigieg

Reduced Fast Ferry Winter Schedule



The fast ferry winter 2022/23 schedule as published late September by the operators is unacceptable for the Gozo Tourism Association.

At a time when the Gozo Tourism Association was very optimistic about the increased connectivity between Gozo and Malta, this new time-table is a clear setback for the social and economic aspirations of the Island region of Gozo.

This reduced new winter schedule will evidently lessen the reliability and confidence in the fast ferry service, which in turn dwindles the number of commuters. Furthermore, the meagre number of trips as proposed in the new fast ferry schedule cannot possibly meet the needs of the Gozitans and will not encourage visitors both local and foreign to visit Gozo.



On the other hand, the Gozo Tourism Association positively welcomes the Government's resolve to support this service as expressed in its latest statement.

The Gozo Tourism Association hopes that the European Commission comprehends and continues to acknowledge the constraints endured by the inhabitants and economy on Gozo being an Island region at the periphery, and negatively affected by its double insularity.

It is hoped that the discussions between the Malta Government and the European Commission will guarantee that the fast ferry service is seriously strengthened to consolidate further the inter-island connectivity.

Budget 2023 Proposals



As is customary every August the Gozo Tourism sent in its Budget 2023 proposals to the Minister for Finance, the Minister for Gozo and the Minister for Tourism. This year proposals were listed in a document entitled recover and consolidate growth and divided into five topics covering connectivity, the environment, the touristic product, the marketing and promotion and the human resources.

Connectivity

- Retain, improve and sustain the fast ferry service which can also assist in attracting to Gozo other niche tourists.
- Building a fourth ferry identical to the existing ones to replace the Nikolaus.
- Commence the development of the Airfield for the fixed wing airlink between Gozo and Malta.



Human Resources

- Introduce a grant scheme for students who opt to work during the weekends or their holidays in Gozitan tourism establishments.
- Organise courses targeting foreign employees to learn the basics of the Maltese and English Language, as well the history and culture of the Maltese Islands.
- Set up training courses during the winter months aimed at improving knowledge and skills in the tourism industry to encourage the retention of employees during off-peak months, sustained through employer and employee full NI Credit for the duration of the courses.
- Develop the ITS Gozo Campus into a specialised vocational tourism institution that caters not only for Gozitans but also for Maltese and foreign students who opt to follow specific courses.
- Ensure that the Public Sector is not in competition with the Private Sector for the recruitment of employees by offering favourable and unmatched working conditions.

Budget 2023 Proposals



Marketing & Promotion

- Incentivise tour operators specialising in winter breaks and longer stays to market and sell Gozo for the November to April period.
- Re-introduce the vouchers scheme for the domestic market covering the period November 2022 to March 2023.

- Create, offer, support and entice new niches like adventure, activity, sports, walking, digital nomads and well-being

Environment

- The whole of Gozo to be considered as a Design Priority Area.
- Amend the PA Rural Policy to reflect the size of Gozo.
- Formulate a specific Agri Business policy for Gozo.
- Draw Planning Policies specifically for Gozo in consultation with Local Councils, the GRDA and other stakeholders.
- Scrap the under-seabed tunnel project once and for all, as a first step to safeguard the Island's character.
- Ensure the enforcement of Marine Protected Areas around the Gozitan coast.

Tourism Product

- Ringfence the ECO contribution collected from Gozitan accommodation units to be invested in product upgrading.
- Ensure and enforce the right of access to the diving sector for the shoreline on the North and North west of Gozo.
- Fast track the amendments to the Tourism Act 1999 to reflect the new trends in tourism establishments.
- Develop a water park and incorporate sports facilities in one holistic project at the Ta' Xhajma Horse Race Complex.