

# Why you should give Gozo a go!

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**A**t the beginning of the year I was thinking about our summer holiday and wanted a change from the Canary Islands and decided to give Gozo, a tiny (nine miles long by four miles wide) island five miles off the coast of Malta, a shot.

I found a charming 250-year-old converted farmhouse through [www.ownersdirect.co.uk](http://www.ownersdirect.co.uk) located in Fontana which is very close, almost merging into, the capital Victoria.

We flew from Manchester and arrived at the Premier Inn near the airport the previous evening as we had an early morning departure. We'd not stayed at a Premier Inn hotel before but we were very impressed. We had a spotlessly clean family room with two large comfortable double beds, parking for ten days at an off-site but nearby car park and a coffee and croissant breakfast for £80 – excellent value for money.

We flew via EasyJet, who are my favourite budget airline for low prices, helpful and pleasant staff and their speedy boarding which makes getting on and off the aircraft with three children manageable.

We arrived in Malta and were met by David Azzopardi who owes and runs Tracgozo and can be reached at [www.tracgozo.com](http://www.tracgozo.com). He took us to the ferry and on to our rented house in Fontana and the next day he dropped off our hire car. It's much cheaper to hire a car on Gozo than rent it at the airport in Malta and drive yourself over.

Celestina and Oliver, who own the farmhouse, lived next door and welcomed us on arrival and were very, very helpful pointing out bakeries/supermarkets/chemists (within walking distance) and generally giving us a feel for the place. Also, they gave us the number of a local doctor to ring in an emergency which is always a useful thing to have with kids.

We soon got into the swing of things; in the morning the older children went to the bakery for bread (Gozo is a very safe place for children and a very children orientated society) then the children played in the pool and in the afternoons we went to the beach and local places of interest.

We liked Ramla Beach, with very

clean sand and water and no blaring music. Xylendi is small but has some nice restaurants where the food is a mix of Italian, Arabic and French and, up the cliff road you can walk down the steps onto the rocks and if the children are competent swimmers it is great for diving and snorkelling as the water is crystal clear, warm and this year the island has not been invaded by jellyfish! We booked a trip to the Blue Lagoon and Crystal Cove here which was excellent; the children loved swimming in the very "blue" water and took advantage of masks and flippers that were for hire and we all enjoyed the lunch provided on the four-hour tour.

We also visited the Citadel in the capital Victoria, which is the old part of the city, and enjoyed walking around the narrow streets where we came across a very old lady making lace by hand. We also swam in the inland sea, from there you can look through the Azure Window, which is an archway out into the open sea.

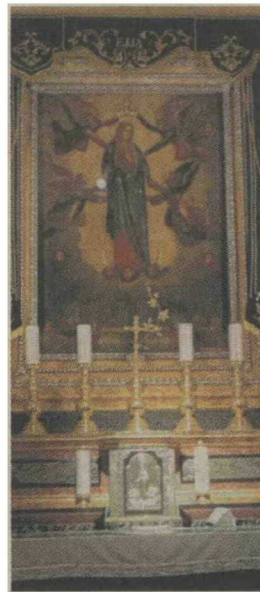
**A**nother day we visited a shrine to Our Lady at Ta Pinu which is a pilgrimage site, similar but on a much smaller scale to Lourdes and every village you visit in Gozo, small or large, invariably has a very ornate church and church bells are a familiar sound.

Each village has its own festival that goes on for several days and we got caught up in the village festival of St Lawrenz, which was full of tradition, colour and very loud as I found out at 7am the next morning, when I awoke to the ground shaking and what sounded like a rocket attack – immediately I thought something awful meant for Libya, which is only 400 miles away, had gone dreadfully off course but then I had a text from Celestina which said "don't worry it's the fireworks in St Lawrenz" – an odd thing to do as it was broad daylight but it meant that we didn't have to run for our lives!

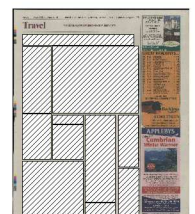
The weather was hot, between 28 and 35 degrees everyday and driving is on the right-hand side and easy, although you do have to be careful as some of the inland roads are very narrow and we had a few encounters with smug double-decker tourist bus drivers, who squeezed past our tiny VW Polo with about a millimetre to spare, at a jaw-dropping speed that sent my heartbeat into freefall; needless to say there are no speed cameras on

Gozo!

In summary, I would say Gozo is a breath of fresh air; life is taken at a very leisurely pace, people are very open and friendly and this combined with a very low crime rate and reasonable prices makes it a great place for a family holiday.

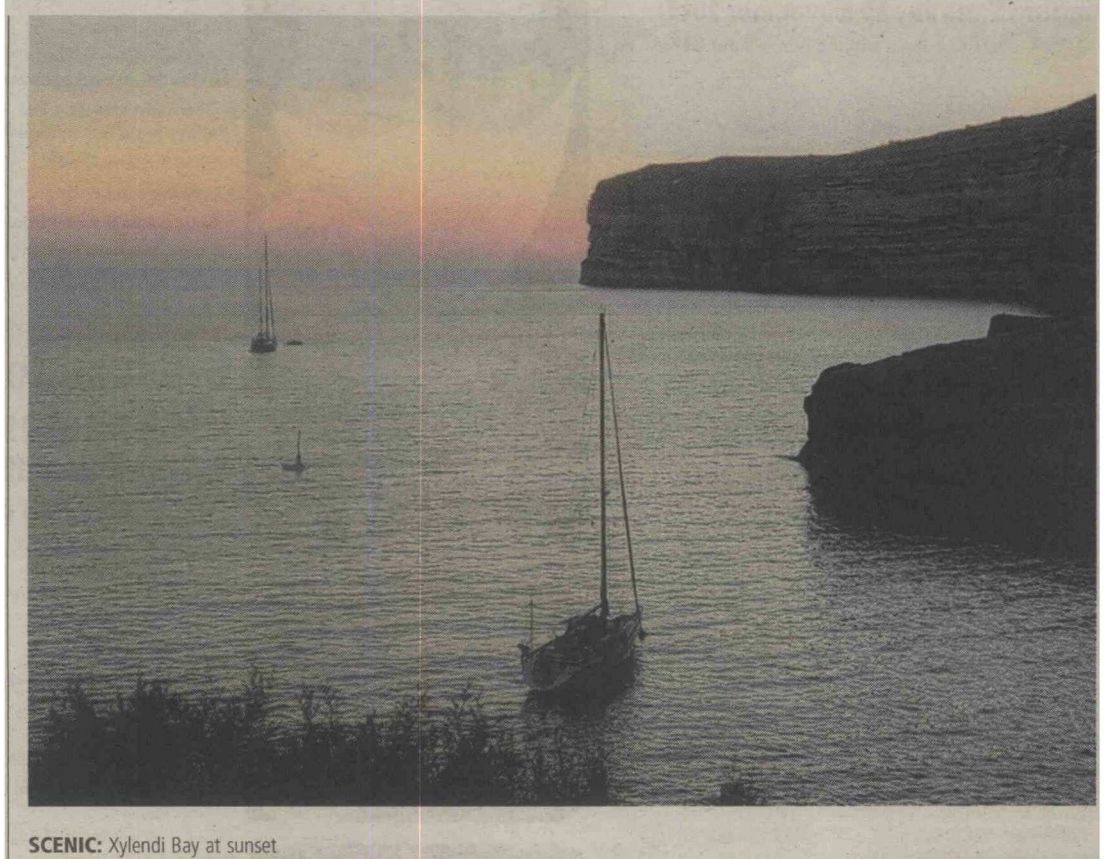


PROMINENT: A shrine within one of Gozo's village churches

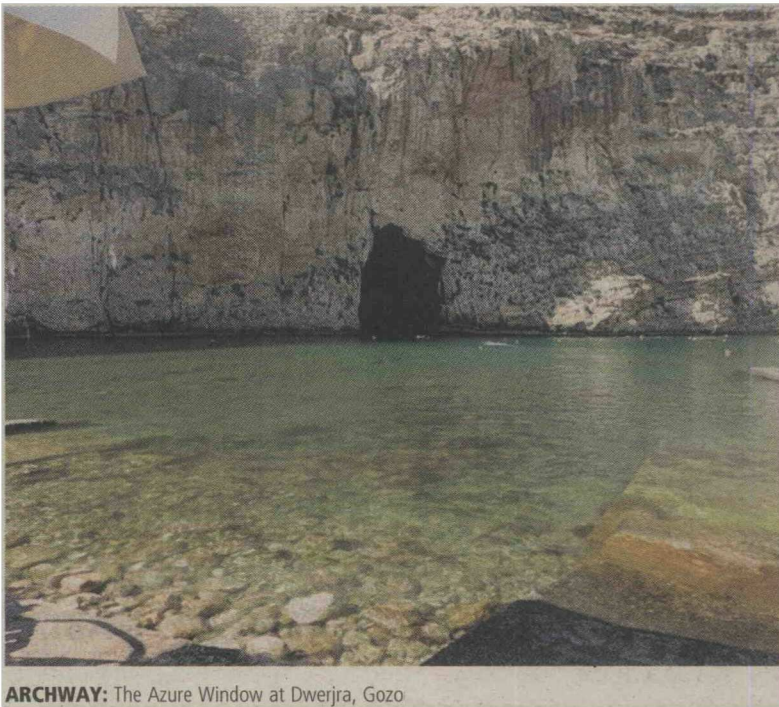




**CRAFT:** A lacemaker in the streets of Gozo's capital Victoria



**SCENIC:** Xylendi Bay at sunset



**ARCHWAY:** The Azure Window at Dwerjra, Gozo