

# Gozo as an Off-Season Tourist Destination

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to give an evaluation of the attitudes of tourists who visit Gozo during the off-season period, which for the purpose of this study is defined as the November to March period. It is government policy to spread as much as possible the inflow of tourists to Malta throughout the whole year, and the analysis of off-season tourism is therefore important. The paper is based on a survey, which was carried out by the present author and Ms. A. M. Zammit.<sup>1</sup>

Not much information is available on off-season tourism in the Maltese islands, and the survey was intended to fill this gap. The survey focused on Gozo because this island would seem to have a very good potential for attracting tourists in the winter and autumn months.

Two groups of tourists were identified, namely Maltese and international. The respondents, chosen randomly, were asked to fill in a questionnaire (see appendix). The number of Maltese tourists who filled the questionnaire was 120, while the number of international tourists was 141. It is not easy to estimate what these numbers represent in terms of percentage of the total, because the number of off-season tourists to Gozo is not known with an acceptable degree of precision.

The analysis carried out in this paper describes the results of the two types of tourists and ends with some recommendations.

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1. The survey results were submitted as a dissertation in partial fulfilment of the BA (Hons) degree in Management at the University of Malta, in September 1993.

## **MALTESE TOURISTS**

The 120 Maltese respondents consisted of 65 males and 55 females. Out of these 57% were single and 43% were married. The largest group, just under 40% came from the Sliema and St. Julians area. Their ages ranged from 12 years to 82 years, with a very wide distribution, practically representing all age groups in this range, with around 62% of the respondents being under 30, around 16% between 30 and 40 and around 22% over 40. Three respondents were over 70 years old.

The response to question 5, which related to educational levels, showed that a considerable percentage of Maltese off-season tourists to Gozo had a high level of education, with 40% having tertiary level education. Another indication of this tendency was that the response to question 6 indicated that many visitors (around 35%) had an occupation which required higher education.

Almost all Maltese tourists to Gozo had visited Gozo before, with around 17% stating that they had visited Gozo more than six times before during the November - March period. Three fourths of the respondents said that they visited Gozo for a holiday, and serenity was identified as a main attraction.

In response to question 10, which related to duration of stay, Maltese tourists indicated that only around 7% were staying for more than 7 nights. The majority, around 68%, were staying for a period of between 1 and 3 nights. The preferred accommodation for Maltese tourists appeared to be apartments, since 61% of the respondents stayed in such accommodation. 16% stayed in hotels or complexes. The remaining 23% stayed in farmhouses, with friends and (around 3%) on yachts.

An interesting finding was that 60% of the respondents used their own car as a means of transport and 13% used hired cars. Only 6% used public transport.

The response for question 14 was quite surprising. This question related to whether or not respondents would consider spending their

honeymoon in Gozo. 60% of the respondents said that they would not. The reasons given for not wanting to spend one's honeymoon in Gozo were: (1) entertainment opportunities are very limited (2) there is not enough anonymity (3) Gozo is too close to Malta (4) the island is too small.

The following table summarises the response to question 17, where respondents were asked to rate various facilities:

**Table 1**  
**Facilities and Conditions in Gozo**

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	Very Good	Good	Not so good	Do not know
Restaurants	60%	25%	10%	5%
Entertainment	13%	40%	35%	12%
Heritage	48%	44%	2%	6%
Roads	42%	40%	12%	6%
Public transport	2%	17%	47%	34%
Sea connection	29%	45%	9%	17%
Sports facilities	13%	21%	20%	46%
Cleanliness	51%	38%	7%	4%

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It can be seen from Table 1 that public transport was not considered as adequate by a large proportion of the respondents. Sports facilities and entertainment were also considered by many as not so good.

The large percentage of "do not know" answers of Table 1 with regard to certain facilities may partially represent non-users of the facility.

### **INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS**

The international tourists' questionnaire was filled in by 71 male and 70 females. Most of these (around 62%) were married. The age distribution was markedly different from that of the Maltese tourists,



*The cultural heritage of Gozo is an important attraction for off-season tourists.*

with 11% under 30 years of age, 23% between 30 and 40, and 66% over 40. It appears therefore that the international tourist population in the off-season period in Gozo tends to be older than the Maltese one.

The nationalities of respondents were various. The highest percentage of tourists were Germans, followed by the British and Dutch. Other nationalities included French, Italian and Greek.

The response to question 5 indicated that the occupational profile of international tourists in Gozo in the off-season period was probably of a higher level than the average tourist visiting the Maltese islands. As regards length of stay, around 57% of the respondents stayed for a period of 4 to 7 nights, and 25% stayed for a period of 8 to 14 nights. Around 6% stayed for a longer period, with the highest stay being 56 nights.

For most of the respondents, this was the first-ever visit to Gozo. However, around 32% had visited Gozo previously. It is of interest

that around 41% of the respondents were visiting Gozo only, whereas the remaining 59% were visiting Malta and Gozo.

As regards question 10, which related to transport from Malta, the percentage of international tourists who used the helicopter service (11%) was higher than the percentage of Maltese tourists who used this service (4%).

When responding to the question on accommodation, 78% of the respondents said that they stayed in hotels and complexes, whereas only 18% said that they stayed in apartments. This again is a markedly different preference from that of the Maltese tourists, since the majority of the latter group preferred to stay in apartments.

The international tourists were asked to indicate what motivated them to visit Gozo and Table 2 shows the results.

**Table 2**  
**Motivation for Visiting Gozo**

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Diving	20%
Rich cultural heritage	17%
Promotion by agencies	11%
Good climate	9%
Leisure	8%
Tranquillity	6%
Business	5%
Place never visited before	4%
Archaeology	4%
Walking holiday	3%
Other	13%

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The table shows that diving is a very popular sport for off-season tourism in Gozo. Other attractions are the rich cultural heritage of the island. Promotion was also selected as a major reason for coming to Gozo. Of interest in this regard is that 95% of the respondents said that their motivation for visiting Gozo had been fulfilled.

The attitudes of international tourists towards accommodation in Gozo were varied as shown in Table 3. The table shows that around 9% of the tourists were not satisfied with the accommodation in Gozo.

**Table 3**  
**Rating of Accommodation in Gozo**

Very good	38%
Good	45%
Not so good	9%
Do not know	8%

Specific facilities in Gozo were also analysed. The attitudes of the respondents are shown in the following table.

**Table 4**  
**Rating of Accommodation and Facilities in Gozo**

	Very Good	Good	Not so good	Do not know
Restaurants	28%	58%	9%	5%
Entertainment	11%	19%	29%	41%
Cultural heritage	23%	33%	20%	24%
Roads	4%	26%	62%	8%
Public transport	8%	33%	23%	36%
Sea/air connection	17%	45%	24%	14%
Sports	4%	26%	23%	47%
Leisure	7%	28%	24%	41%
Tourist centres	4%	48%	11%	37%
Natural environment	21%	58%	8%	13%

It can be seen from Table 4 that public transport and entertainment featured amongst the facilities which are not favourably looked upon by international tourists. Restaurants, on the other hand, received

a good response. It is of interest that roads were not generally unfavourably looked upon by Maltese tourists, whereas in the case of international tourists road were given a very bad mark.

As in the case of Table 1, the large percentage of 'do not know' answers of Table 4 with regard to certain facilities, may partially represent non-users of the facility.

Regarding the question as to whether or not respondents would return to Gozo, 79% of the respondents answered that they would.

### **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS BY RESPONDENTS**

A number of respondents commented on specific improvements that could be introduced in Gozo. The following are some of them.

#### *Bird-shooting*

The shooting and trapping of birds all over the island, all the year round is another major problem in Gozo. Almost all foreign tourists that have commented about this were of the opinion that better bird protection laws are called for.

#### *Tree Planting*

Many tourists remarked that an increase in the number of trees planted would make the island more attractive to tourists as well as to the residents.

#### *Pathways*

Another proposal is to develop clearly defined pathways for people who enjoy walking, around the coast, over the hills, and on roads between villages, without damaging and disturbing farmlands, .

#### *Local Councils*

Local councils have an important role in tourist areas by seeing to

local needs, in response to tourist expectations. Such councils can be instrumental in bringing about improvements of roads, cleanliness, security and water supply.

### *Entertainment*

Most tourists have commented about the opening and closing times of bars, restaurants and other places of entertainment. This is a very important point to note if the strategy is to promote tourism in the off-season period.

### *Non-Smoking Areas*

The introduction of a non-smoking campaign in certain restaurants was considered desirable by quite a large percentage of tourists.

### *Transport*

Although transportation in Gozo has improved considerably over the years, there is much room for improvement. Long waiting times are not appreciated by anyone. The introduction of an express bus service between Valletta and Ċirkewwa by the Public Transport Authority was proposed.

### *Deep Sea Excavation*

An interesting proposal related to the sea-bed around the island, which drops quite sharply to considerable depths, well beyond the range of divers using compressed air. It would be very beneficial to attract vessels, which specialise in deep sea intervention, to conduct some archaeological investigations just as the "Triton" did in April of 1993. The excavations themselves and the exhibits would add to the cultural attractions of Gozo.

## **CONCLUSION**

The responses to the questionnaire by Maltese and international tourists to Gozo were quite revealing. They showed, amongst other



things, that the majority of international off-season tourists do not visit Gozo as a sole destination. However, a good percentage of them do so.

The age distribution of the international off-season tourist to Gozo would seem to indicate that it is biased towards the older age category, and this should be catered for in the provision of facilities in Gozo. An important feature of Gozo is its relative tranquillity, and this is an important asset as far as the older tourist is concerned.

The survey showed also that there was a degree of dissatisfaction with a number of facilities in Gozo, notably entertainment, public transport and roads.

It appears therefore, that the attraction of off-peak tourism to Gozo should be based on upgrading facilities, without damaging the image of tranquillity that Gozo at present enjoys. This may not be an easy task, since the two objectives may be contradictory. Suitable trade-offs would therefore have to be sought.

The best long term strategy for attracting off-season tourists to Gozo would seem to be one of product differentiation, product upgrading and target marketing. Gozo is to be positioned as a unique, accessible and unspoilt land, with its own easy and quiet way of life and hospitable people, where professionals, business executives and others would go for a holiday to get away from their hectic life by living the real "Gozo Experience".

APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TOURISTS FROM MALTA

(Please Tick  where applicable)

1. WHAT TOWN OR VILLAGE DO YOU LIVE IN?
2. SEX:                    MALE                     FEMALE
3. STATUS:                SINGLE                                    MARRIED                  
                              SEPARATED                                WIDOWED
4. AGE: \_\_\_\_\_
5. LEVEL OF EDUCATION:  
    PRIMARY                      
    SECONDARY                      
    TECHNICAL                      
    TERTIARY
6. OCCUPATION \_\_\_\_\_
7. HAVE YOU BEEN TO GOZO BEFORE? YES  NO
8. IF YES, HOW OFTEN DO YOU VISIT GOZO BETWEEN NOVEMBER AND MARCH?  
    1-5 TIMES YEARLY                  
    6-10 TIMES YEARLY                  
    OVER 10 TIMES YEARLY
9. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF YOUR VISIT TO GOZO?  
(Please tick as many as applicable)  
    HOLIDAY WITH FRIENDS                                FRIENDLY GOZITANS                  
    PEACE AND QUIET                                    WORK                      
    ENTERTAINMENT                                    HONEYMOON                  
    ATMOSPHERE                                    SPORTS
10. WHAT IS THE AVERAGE LENGTH OF YOUR VISIT?  
    1-3 NIGHTS                      
    4-7 NIGHTS                      
    OVER 7 NIGHTS
11. ACCOMMODATION USED:  
    HOTEL                                        COMPLEX                      
    APARTMENT                                        FRIENDS                      
    FARMHOUSE                                        OWN HOUSE                      
    OTHER (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
12. MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION TO AND FROM GOZO:  
    FERRY                                        HELICOPTER                      
    HOVERMARINE                                        OTHER (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
13. TRANSPORTATION USED WHILE IN GOZO?  
    HIRED CAR                                        OWN CAR                      
    PUBLIC TRANSPORT                                        OTHER (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
14. WOULD YOU SPEND YOUR HONEYMOON IN GOZO? YES  NO
15. IF NO, PLEASE STATE WHY: \_\_\_\_\_

*Gozo as an Off-Season Tourist Destination*

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16. PLEASE TICK ONLY ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS:

- GOZO SHOULD BE DEVELOPED FURTHER IN ORDER TO ATTRACT MORE TOURISTS [ ]
- GOZO SHOULD BE DEVELOPED, HOWEVER WITHOUT SPOILING THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT [ ]
- GOZO SHOULD BE PRESERVED AND PORTRAYED TO THE TOURIST AS A PLACE OF CALM AND RELAXATION [ ]

17. HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE FOLLOWING FACILITIES IN GOZO?

	VERY GOOD	GOOD	NOT SO GOOD	DO NOT KNOW
RESTAURANTS	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
ENTERTAINMENT	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
HERITAGE	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
ROADS	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
PUBLIC TRANSPORT	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
SEA/CONNECTION	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
SPORTS FACILITIES	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
CLEANLINESS	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

18. WHERE DID YOU TAKE YOUR TWO MOST RECENT HOLIDAY OUTSIDE MALTA AND GOZO?

19. PLEASE ADD ANY FURTHER COMMENTS YOU MAY HAVE REGARDING YOUR HOLIDAY IN GOZO:

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**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS**

(Please tick [ ] where applicable)

2. SEX:                    MALE            [ ]                    FEMALE            [ ]
3. STATUS:                SINGLE            [ ]                    MARRIED           [ ]
3. AGE: \_\_\_\_\_
4. NATIONALITY: \_\_\_\_\_
6. OCCUPATION \_\_\_\_\_
6. PLEASE INDICATE YOUR LENGTH OF STAY IN GOZO: \_\_\_\_\_ NIGHTS
7. HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU PREVIOUSLY VISITED GOZO? \_\_\_\_\_ TIMES
8. ARE YOU SPENDING YOUR HOLIDAY IN GOZO ONLY?    YES [ ]    NO [ ]
9. HOW ARE YOU TRAVELLING?
- ON YOUR OWN [ ]
  - WITH FRIENDS [ ]
  - WITH FAMILY [ ]
  - WITH BUSINESS ASSOCIATES [ ]
  - WITH AN ORGANIZATION [ ]
  - ON A PACKAGE TOUR [ ]
  - OTHER (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

10. HAVE YOU COME TO GOZO FROM MALTA BY:

- FERRY   
HELICOPTER   
HOVERMARINE   
OTHER (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

11. WHAT TYPE OF ACCOMMODATION ARE YOU STAYING IN?

- HOTEL   
COMPLEX   
APARTMENT   
FRIENDS   
FARMHOUSE   
OTHER (Please Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

12. WHAT HAS MOTIVATED YOU TO VISIT GOZO?

13. HAS THIS MOTIVATION BEEN FULFILLED? YES  NO

14. HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE FOLLOWING FACILITIES IN GOZO?

	VERY GOOD	GOOD	NOT SO GOOD	DON'T KNOW
ACCOMMODATION	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FACILITIES	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
RESTAURANTS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
HERITAGE ROADS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
PUBLIC TRANSPORT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SEA/AIR CONNECTION	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SPORTS FACILITIES	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LEISURE FACILITIES	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TOURIST CENTRES	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ENVIRONMENT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

15. HOW MUCH MONEY DO YOU EXPECT TO SPEND ON THE FOLLOWING DURING YOUR STAY IN GOZO?

ACCOMMODATION \_\_\_\_\_  
OTHER EXPENSES \_\_\_\_\_

16. WOULD YOU RETURN TO GOZO? YES  NO

17. IF YES, WOULD YOU PREFER TO SEE ANY PARTICULAR CHANGES/ DEVELOPMENTS BY THE TIME OF YOUR NEXT VISIT?

18. IF NO, PLEASE STATE WHY. \_\_\_\_\_

19. WHERE DID YOU TAKE YOUR TWO MOST RECENT HOLIDAYS OUTSIDE YOUR COUNTRY? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

20. PLEASE ADD ANY OTHER COMMENTS YOU MIGHT HAVE REGARDING YOUR HOLIDAY IN GOZO:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_