

Obituary: Victor J. Borg (1945-2020)

MATTHEW SULTANA

Victor J. Borg, born in 1945, in Victoria (Gozo), was a prominent hotelier and entrepreneur in Gozo. His father, John, more known as Ġanġu, wanted his youngest of five children to become a dentist. As a matter of fact, Victor had already commenced his studies in Malta and the UK when he veered into business in 1969. His first commercial activity was the purchase of two second hand Mini-Minors from the UK. He sold one to restore the other and lease it. That was to be the humble start of his first car leasing business, known today as Gozo Garage.

Eventually, Victor traded car hiring services with a share in a business venture with Peter Cope who was converting his farmhouse into the Cornucopia Hotel. Shortly afterwards, he ventured into catering when he opened the Eclipse restaurant, in partnership with Dutch chef Louis Lentelink. Eclipse ran successfully between 1973 and 1995, averaging around 50,000 clients a year.

In the later seventies, Victor took over from a UK travel company operating in Gozo and established Gozo Holidays, which he maintained as a UK-based travel agency with the purpose of bringing tourists for hotels and furnished apartments in Gozo. This marked the advent of international marketing campaigns for Gozo as a distinct holiday destination.

Riding on a successful commercial wave in the tourism sector, Victor acquired all the stakes in the Cornucopia hotel and enlarged it from 14 to 50 rooms, 11 bungalows and 4 swimming pools. He also constructed Masri Villas; top-class furnished villas with swimming pools. It was during this time that Victor introduced the concept of Special Weekend Breaks in Gozo, attracting domestic tourism in an effort to combat seasonality of the tourism industry in Gozo. He wanted to make a full-time career for young people in tourism in Gozo sustainable.



Eventually, in partnership with Saviour Cremona, Victor J. Borg acquired St Patrick's Hotel in Xlendi and developed it into a 4-star hotel and, later, 'Real Finance' company from its former Italian Federici owners. Real Finance comprised the 5-star Ta' Ċenċ Hotel, Palazzo Palina, and 1500 tumoli of land where he dreamed of setting up a heritage park, a golf course and luxury accommodation units. The aggregation of these commercial units meant that Victor employed around 250 persons, in their large share, Gozitans, making him one of the foremost employers in the island's private sector.

Victor J. Borg served on the National Tourism Organisation Board, and the board of the Malta Tourism Authority. He also served as a director of the Gozo Channel Company when the decision to commission new vessels was taken, and the Malta Air Charter Company. Throughout his lifetime he was a strong advocate for improved multi-modal connectivity between the islands, and for the higher-end tourism for Gozo. Victor also sat on the councils of the Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association and the Gozo Tourism Association, which he also served as Chairman and, later, Honorary President. He loved qualifying himself as a Gozitan who invested in Gozo, not because it was always the most profitable of his options,

but because he loved the island. Victor always encouraged young people from Gozo to take the initiative and keep Gozo in mind when choosing a career.

Victor J. Borg was awarded Ġieħ Għawdex in 2010 and the National Order of Merit in 2012. The Gozo Tourism Association bestowed him with the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2014.

He passed away in September 2020, days after his 75th birthday, survived by his wife Miriam, his children Monica, Elayne and Victor John and his grandsons Luke, Adam, Julian and Jonathan.



Victor J. Borg being awarded the National Order of Merit in 2012.