

# Gozo Tourism: Figuring the Figures

JOE MUSCAT

## Introduction

The regular announcements of increases in commuters and vehicles on Gozo Channel ferries are to be considered as benefiting the Gozo Tourism industry. The number of 4,395,105 passengers ferried between the two islands during 2013 is also partly confirmed by a registered increase of 6% in Maltese resident arrivals in Gozitan Hotels, Aparthotels and Guesthouses during 2013. The absence of relative statistics precludes the establishment of any similar benefits with regards to the self-catering sector.

## Different Types of Passengers

In order to properly and objectively evaluate the effect of this traffic on the Gozitan tourist industry, the Gozo Channel figures have to be disaggregated in a way that distinguishes between the type of passengers that use the company's services. Figures available from other sources show that during the same year 843,630 tourists staying in Malta visited Gozo for a day trip. It is also known that 147,600 foreign tourists stayed for one night or more in an establishment

falling under one of the various types of holiday accommodation available on Gozo (this figure represents 9% of the total tourist arrivals in Malta during 2013). The number of day trippers together with that of the foreign tourists who visited Gozo, represent 1,982,460 total 'passenger crossings' for 2013. This figure is arrived at by multiplying the number of day trippers together with that of foreign tourists by two.

Who are the remaining 2,412,645 passengers who commuted between the two islands during the year under review? NSO statistics show that 38,646 Maltese residents crossed over to Gozo and stayed for one or more nights in Gozitan Hotels and/or Guesthouses. Then again, due to lack of statistical data, this figure does not include Maltese residents who stayed in self-catering accommodation on Gozo that comprises both apartments as well as the more requested farmhouses. This figure represents another 77,292 passenger crossings.

Recent data also shows that approximately 1,500 Gozitan workers commute between Gozo and Malta and vice versa on a daily basis. On the



Gozo Channel ferry crossing.

assumption that these workers cross over five days a week to Malta and back, it turns out that these represent another 780,000 annual passenger crossings.

Another sector includes around 1200 Gozitan students who during 2013 were following courses at the University of Malta, MCAST, and ITS. Although many of these do not commute on a daily basis, there are some who do so and others who cross over once or twice a week. On average, calculated on a 37 week basis, passenger crossings related to this sector could amount to about 177,600.

Cumulatively, commuters falling under the above mentioned sectors, comprising foreign day trippers, foreign and Maltese tourists who stayed in Hotels and Guesthouses, Gozitan workers and students add up to a total of 3,017,352 passengers or almost 68% of the total number of passengers ferried by Gozo Channel Company vessels during 2013.

On a sectorial basis, the percentage relative to those foreign tourists who spent one or more nights in Gozitan accommodation properties would work out to 295,200 passenger crossings, which together with the 77,292 passenger crossings of Maltese tourists add up to 8.4% of total crossings for that year. On the other hand, foreign day trippers accounted for 1,687,260 passenger crossings equivalent to 38% of total crossings.

### Other Commuters

It is presumed that the remaining 32% (1,377,753) of crossings, relate to the transport of merchandise by Gozitan and Maltese businesses together with Gozitans who commute between the islands for various purposes including health reasons, business, shopping, leisure and other needs, as well as Maltese residents who stayed on Gozo for more than one night in the self-catering accommodation establishments as well as Maltese residents who own their second property on Gozo. Given the existing published data, it is impossible to identify the number of passengers comprising each of these categories.

The latter category represents a trend that has been gaining ground in Gozo during recent years. It relates to an increasing number of Maltese residents who have purchased property in Gozo and frequently cross over to spend weekends on the smaller island. This is another segment that has definitely resulted in a substantial increase in the number of ferry passengers. It must be mentioned that even though these figures do not have a direct effect on the Gozitan tourist accommodation sector, it does positively affect the restaurants sector as well as the retail and other services sectors.

The table shows the percentage distribution of passengers crossing to and from Gozo, where the category “others” which amounts to 31.35%, comprises various categories of passengers as explained above.

Type of Visitors	Crossings	%
Stay-over foreign tourists	295,200	6.7%
Stay-over Maltese visitors	77,292	1.8%
Foreign day-tripper tourists	1,687,260	38.4%
Gozitan workers	780,600	17.7%
Students	177,000	4.0%
Others	1,377,753	31.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,395,105</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

### Conclusion

The statistical data relating to the Gozo Channel crossings needs to be suitably disaggregated in order to assess the impact of these increases on the Gozitan tourism sector. One augurs that with the recent opening of a branch office of the National Statistics Office in Gozo, figures related to Gozo Channel passenger crossings may be more appropriately categorised thus enabling better interpretation of data. This information will be of major benefit to researchers and operators in the tourism sector, and in addition, will shed important light on the impact of tourism on the economic and social development of Gozo.

Joe Muscat is the CEO of the Gozo Tourism Association.