

Hitting or Missing Niche Markets

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Introduction

Almost every tourist destination experiences fluctuations in visitor numbers throughout any particular period during the year. Island destinations are more prone to experience busy seasons during the summer months and low numbers in the remaining months of the year, especially in Winter. Gozo is no exception to such trends. In fact one of the main obstacles that the tourism industry on Gozo has to face is the high seasonality element in which it operates. One way of mitigating this problem is by extending the busy season in the months preceding and following it. Much can be done in this regard especially on Gozo.



One of Gozo's many beautiful natural areas.

Innovative Marketing Strategies

As trends and expectations of travellers change, the marketing strategies employed by destination Gozo must be constantly evaluated and adjusted. The traditional methods of advertising destination Gozo as a sea and sun attraction, needs to be supplemented by new ways of drawing tourists' attention. Innovative approaches are needed.

As a destination Gozo must define what makes it distinctive in order to adopt the best strategy to attract guests who will appreciate what this little island has to offer, and at the same time leave the much needed positive impact on the local

economy. While the travel and hospitality industry is traditionally considered as a service industry, it is also evolving into an experience industry. Niche marketing presents a most valid, viable option in the foreseeable future, for a small destination like Gozo.

Tourism Niches

Gozo has already established itself in the very important diving niche. This sector is proving to be a valid specialised market helping to extend the tourist season. Practically, diving around Gozo can be experienced from as early as March and well into the month of November.



Divers preparing for a dive at Dwejra.

Another niche activity that is in its fledgling stages is that of walking and cycling. The Gozitan terrain and countryside in spring, autumn and winter is proving to be a visitor puller. But Gozo's infrastructure needs to be more prepared for this type of niche. The upkeep of the island's picturesque countryside, especially in keeping it free from dumping sites and open skips, is paramount in order to make these places more appealing to ramblers. The Gozo country-walks concept, which was initiated some years ago through discussions between the Ministry for Gozo, the Malta Tourism Association (MTA) and the Gozo Tourism Association (GTA), should be revived, intensified and further enhanced. More



A view of the two parishes of Victoria Gozo.

information, including interpretation on site as well as printed matter, will definitely enhance the Gozitan experience.

New Opportunities

Meanwhile Gozo has other opportunities which can be much better exploited to attract tourists in the lean and shoulder months. Carnival in Gozo is an annual event which has recently been attracting many Maltese visitors. Gozo has managed to promote and sell it within the domestic market, but we have not as yet been similarly successful within the foreign market.



Walkers and cyclists can enjoy the Gozitan terrain and countryside in spring, autumn and winter.

Another tourism niche for Gozo relates to lyrical operas which are staged annually in Victoria. Whilst hundreds of co-nationals are attracted to cross the channel and spend the night on Gozo after enjoying the much lauded performances, the same cannot be said for foreign visitors.

Hopefully Government's proposal to turn Gozo into an Eco-Island will also provide another niche for Gozo with which to enhance its tourism product.

Highlighting Differentiation

This short article has highlighted the need for differentiation - a basic element in Gozo's tourism marketing. Gozo needs to market and promote its unique features. Today's travellers are inundated with sea and sun advertising. Gozo needs to compete in this regard also, but it needs to be unique. We need to narrow our focus in order to broaden our sales.

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