

THE GOZO COASTAL WALK

A WONDERFUL WALK AROUND THE ENTIRE COAST OF GOZO



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THE GOZO COASTAL WALK

This 50 km walk takes you around the entire island by a route that is interesting, safe, varied and very enjoyable. It is not a uniform sign-posted route but a combination of limestone paths, town pavements, minor country roads and some sections across open countryside. The route goes as near to the coast as is practical and safe but must of necessity avoid coastal promontories, quarries or land in private ownership. There are some slightly challenging uphill sections but the route, in the main, is along level paths. The walk can be done by any reasonably fit person and a pair of walking shoes is adequate in all but the worst of weather. The overall walk is divided into 5 sections of about 10 km each. Importantly there is ready access by bus to the starting and finishing point of each section.

There are few places in the world where walks of moderate distance can bring you past so many fascinating features of environmental, cultural and landscape interest. This guide includes maps and detailed descriptions of the route and the main features to be encountered. It also includes sections on wildlife, archaeology and geology to increase your appreciation of the many wonderful features to be visited on this pleasant ramble around the coast of Gozo.

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Outstanding sea views
- ▶ Unspoiled natural environment
- ▶ Dramatic cliffs
- ▶ Azure window and Inland sea
- ▶ Stone Age temples
- ▶ Tranquil countryside
- ▶ Forts, towers and churches
- ▶ Wild flowers
- ▶ Beautiful beaches and sea inlets

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Further information on features of the coastal walk and other walks in Malta and Gozo are in the books - **Malta: 10 Great Walks**, **Gozo: 10 Great Walks** and **The Malta Coastal Walk**, available at www.walkgozo.com



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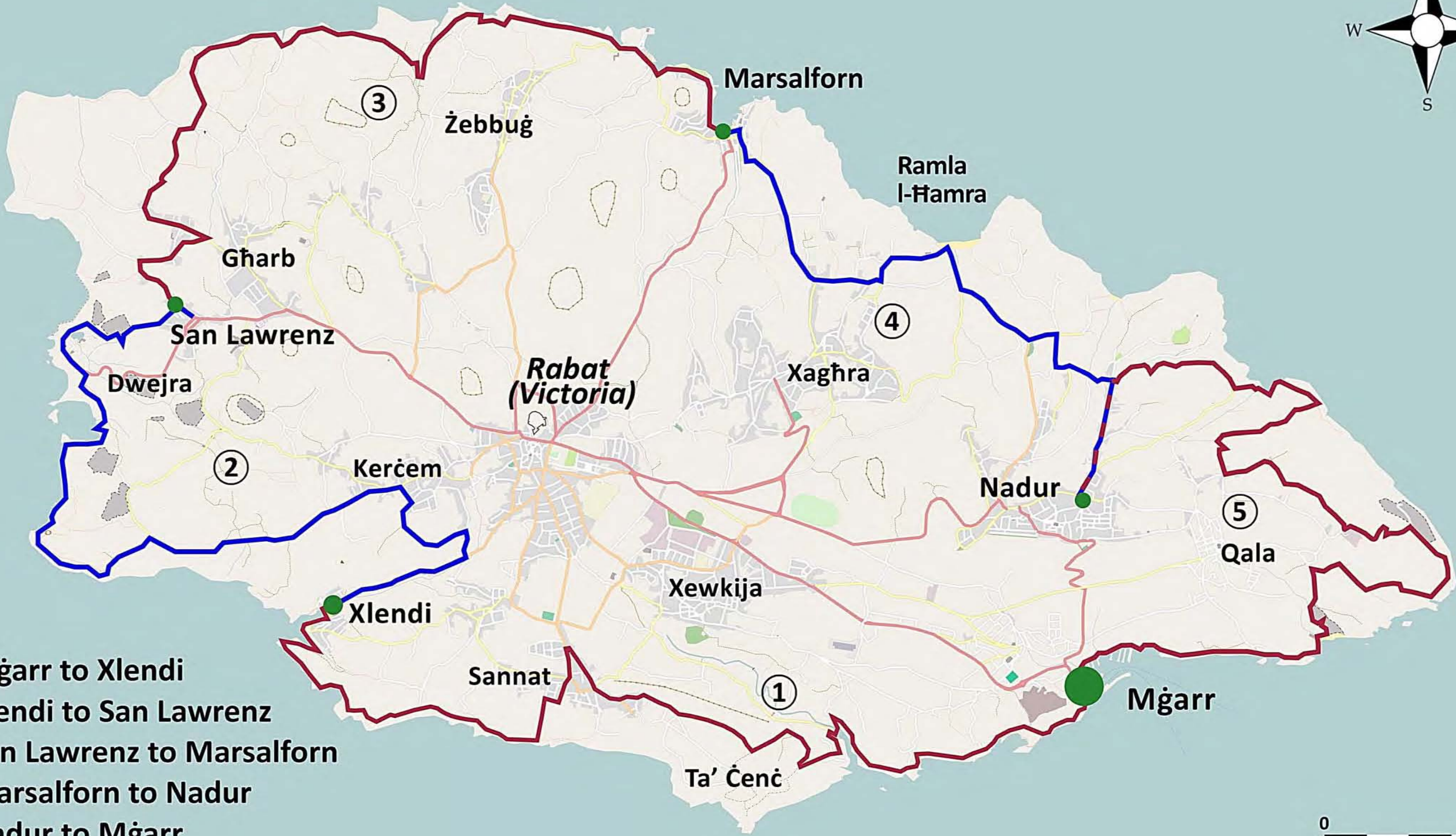
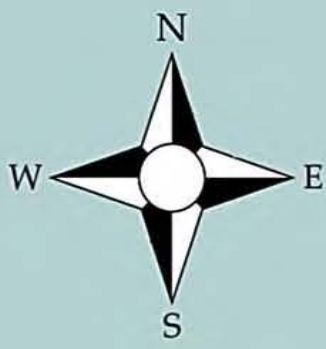
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- ① Mgarr to Xlendi
- ② Xlendi to San Lawrenz
- ③ San Lawrenz to Marsalforn
- ④ Marsalforn to Nadur
- ⑤ Nadur to Mgarr



MAP SYMBOLS

The following symbols are given as a general guide to the features and facilities located on or near the route of the walk.

 Walking route	 Optional route	 Cliffs
 Footpath	 Major road	 Minor road
 Quarry	 Valley bed	 Buildings
 Public toilets	 Ferry	 Beach
 Food/drink	 Hotel	 Museum
 Cartruts	 Megalithic remains	 Temple
 Fort/tower/battery	 Church / Chapel	 Cemetery

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TABLE SUMMARY

Section	1	2	3	4	5
Distance/ km	11	9	10	10	11
Approx. duration/ hrs	5- 6	4- 5	4 -5	5 -6	5- 6
Major inclines	2	1	0	3	2
Difficulty	Moderate	Moderate	Easy	Hard	Moderate
Public toilets	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cafeterias	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Avoid	Windy, wet weather	Windy weather, hunting season	Windy weather	Windy, wet weather	Windy, wet weather

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INTRODUCTION

A recent initiative by the Ministry of Gozo has led to the identification of a walking route known as the Gozo Coastal Walk. This 50 km walk takes you around the entire island by a route that is as near to the coast as is practical. It is not a uniform path but a combination of earthen and limestone paths, town pavements and minor country roads and includes some short sections without a well defined path. It is hoped that the route will be further developed over the next few years with signage, information panels and improvements in path quality in certain area.

This wonderful coastal walk is geared towards those who subscribe to the view that the journey is the objective, not the destination, and so we recommend that it should be undertaken in a relaxed manner. Gozitans and Maltese may decide to do the walk in short sections, spread over weeks or months. Foreign visitors will be attracted to undertaking the entire walk during a single visit to Gozo. The decision on what sections to undertake and over how many days will vary with personal circumstances.

You may start on this circular route at any point you like but we have chosen to begin and end at the ferry port of Mġarr as this suits arrival and departure from Gozo and has excellent bus connections to Rabat (Victoria), the capital of Gozo. From Rabat you may get a bus (every hour) to all the towns and main points of touristic interest on Gozo. Using the map in this book, you can undertake the walk in any way that suits you, although we describe the clockwise route. You may walk in an anti-clockwise direction but it is easier to follow the directions by going clockwise, as a walk described in one direction may prove quite difficult to follow from the opposite direction.

The route goes as near to the coast as is practical and safe but must of necessity avoid some coastal promontories, quarries or land in private ownership. Some parts of the route take you along cliffs, though (with just minor exceptions) rarely close to the cliff edge. At times you may have to use your own judgement about minor route



RURAL PATHS OF GOZO

ETHICAL WALKING

Please support the Leave no Trace ethos which encourages ramblers to minimise their impact on the environment. It is based on a set of seven principles:

- Plan ahead and prepare
- Be considerate of others
- Respect plants, wildlife and farm animals
- Travel on durable ground
- Leave what you find
- Dispose of waste properly
- Be careful with fire

WILDLIFE, ARCHAEOLOGY AND GEOLOGY

The flora of Gozo and Malta is a rich mix of Mediterranean and North African elements and includes both endemic and introduced species. At times of low sea level (during ice-ages) Malta had a land connection to Sicily which allowed the free movement of plants and animals. It also provided a refuge for certain European plants which prefer warmer climates, for example, the carob and Judas trees. The introduction of both plant and animal species by humans (whether intentional or not) has also contributed to the biodiversity of Malta. Cape sorrel, now widespread in the islands of Gozo and Malta and easily recognised through its yellow flowers and clover-like leaf, was introduced to Malta in 1811 as a garden flower. The ubiquitous prickly pear cactus arrived from California around the end of the 19th century. The overall result is that Malta and Gozo host over 1100 wild plant species, around 146 of which are not found anywhere else and many of which are endangered. Wild flowers are one of the delights of walking in the countryside in Gozo, particularly in springtime. Garrigue, where fractured surface limestone hosts a variety of plants in shallow soil, is an important but under-appreciated habitat that you will encounter on the walks. Garrigue vegetation is low and usually comprises aromatic shrubs such as thyme, Mediterranean heath, spurges and wild fennel, together with a wide range of other plants including narcissi and orchids. The diversity of plants within these rocky areas depends on the seasons and can be truly surprising, especially in spring.



MALTESE SPIDER ORCHID
WWW.MALTANATURETOURS.COM



THE STONECROP. WWW.GREATWALKSMALTA.COM



CLIFFS OF TA' ĊENĊ. WWW.VIEWINGMALTA.COM

Geology

The Maltese islands are situated about 90 km south of Sicily and 290 north of Africa. The combination of a warm Mediterranean climate, physical isolation from other land masses and their limestone base, have led to the formation in Malta and Gozo of rare ecosystems with endemic species of plants and animals.

The islands' rocks are of sedimentary limestone which started to form on the seabed some 20 million years ago through the compaction of shells, coral, sediment and other material that fell to the sea bed. Five layers can be distinguished within the deep limestone beds, with each layer representing a different phase of development



WALKING ALONG CART RUTS

of the Mediterranean Sea, its flora, fauna and composition. These layers can be seen at a number of cliffs (for example near Dwejra). From top to bottom (and from young to old) the five layers are as follows: upper coralline limestone (a strong coral material used for concrete), greensands (no particular use), blue clay, (which has a significance for creation of springs), globigerina limestone (a yellow stone easy to carve, yet strong enough for construction) and lower coralline limestone (the strongest rock of all, also used in construction). It is the availability of the readily quarried yellow globigerina limestone that has given Gozo such an abundant stock of quality and attractive stone buildings. Fossils such as sea urchins, and occasionally shark teeth, are

Walk 1

Rabat
(Victoria)

Xewkija

Munxar

Sannat

Għajnsielem

Mġarr
Harbour


Xlendi

INFORMATION ONLY

Ta' Ċenċ



MĠARR *to* XLENDI

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ SPECTACULAR SEA VIEWS
- ▶ IMPRESSIVE FORT CHAMBRAY
- ▶ WILD MĠARR IX-XINI VALLEY
- ▶ DRAMATIC TA' SAGUNA CLIFFS
- ▶ PICTURESQUE SEA INLET AND BEACH AT XLENDI



SUMMARY

Setting out from near the ferry terminal in Mġarr, the path takes you among luxuriant vegetation along the coast at the feet of impressive Fort Chambray. The coastal track leads you by small bays and limestone pavements to reach the picturesque sea inlet of Mġarr ix-Xini where Turkish raiders landed in 1551. The path turns inland at a coastal watchtower to reach a pretty beach with a pleasant café and an opportunity for a swim. You ramble inland passing through the wild and wonderful countryside of Ta' Ċenċ to reach the traditional village of Sannat. Following the signs, you pass through the village into open countryside to reach the high Ta' Saguna cliffs. Rambling along an earthen path parallel to the coast you enjoy breathtaking sea views as you head towards the coastal watchtower at Xlendi. At the tower you turn inland to walk alongside the beautiful inlet, so beloved of artists and poets. In Xlendi you can enjoy a swim or a snack at one of its many beachside restaurants. You then have the option of taking the bus from Xlendi or of walking a further two kilometres to Rabat.

The overall distance is about 11 km which, with stops for admiring the sites and a snack, should take around six hours. If you wish to do this section in shorter segments you can connect with a bus at Sannat. There are a number of options for coffee breaks, toilets and a swim along the route. This very pleasant walk is mostly on good level paths, except for the steep path beneath Fort Chambray and the headland section approaching Xlendi, where the route can be a little confusing. The coastal path between Mġarr Harbour and Xatt l-Aħmar can be a bit difficult in wet weather as it passes in part over soft clay. The coastal path between Sannat and Xlendi is generally set back some metres from the cliff edge. There is however one very short section where the path comes close to the edge. If you have a great fear of heights or if the wind is strong and gusty you may prefer to divert inland a little to avoid this constriction and to rejoin the path at a later stage.



ROCK FORMATIONS



MĠARR IX-XINI TOWER

the island of Comino, to which this tower would send signals in case of attack.

You now head inland along a narrow path on the right-hand side of the picturesque Mġarr ix-Xini sea inlet. This is the original track built by the Knights to provide access to the tower and as you walk inland you may notice part of the original cobbled track that has been unearthed during recent restoration works. The track contours along the creek and then rises gently towards a private villa overlooking a small beach **8**. As you reach the villa you should look out for a path on the left which leads downwards to the beach and down some rock-cut steps. This is a good spot to take a break as the pebbly beach is safe and pleasant for swimming. The café, with seating shaded by tamarisk trees, provides coffee, good homemade almond cake and excellent fish lunches.

PIRATES IN MĠARR IX-XINI

Mġarr ix-Xini derives its name from the old Maltese, mġarr, a port and xini, a galley. As Gozo has few fully sheltered natural harbours (Mġarr itself is sheltered mainly due to a modern breakwater), this deep and narrow flooded valley provided a secure haven for vessels in stormy seas. Thus the Knights chose this as their main port and to keep watch over the area. One of the buildings on the opposite side of the creek (now a private villa) was the original Custom House for the port. On a day in 1551, a Turkish galley arrived at the inlet and the pirate crew set out to ransack the nearby town of Xewkija (the coastal defense tower was built a few years later). Some farmers working nearby noticed the landing and hid from the marauders. When the Turks had moved inland, the farmers



STONE STEPS TO THE BEACH

approached the vessel. Seeing that the galley had been left unguarded, they boarded the vessel, carried off what loot they could and then set it on fire. In the meantime, the Xewkija militia had been alerted and succeeded in chasing the Turks back down the valley. As they approached the inlet the Turks could not escape, were surrounded and killed.

In earlier years Xlendi had been one of the principal fishing villages of the island – the old boathouses next to the Stone Crab restaurant and the statue of Saint Andrew are witnesses to this past tradition. The main industry now is tourism, both local and overseas. There are also a number of diving schools which take advantage of the many good dive sites in the clear coastal water. After a rest and a coffee in Xlendi you can consider whether you want to get to Victoria (two kilometres away) either by walking, or by bus (every 60 minutes from the main car park behind the beach).

THE UNDERGROUND FLOUR MILL OF XLENDI

This is a dramatic reminder of the Cold War when the west, fearing war with the USSR, prepared for a nuclear attack on Malta. In the early 1950s the British Colonial Office was entrusted with the building of eight underground flour mills. In order to survive the effects of a potential nuclear bomb on the Grand Harbour these were to be located underground and as far from it as possible. On Gozo construction began on a mill beneath Fort Chambray, which at that time was serving as a mental institution. The secretive construction work caused much dismay among patients and locals as rumours spread that dungeons were being built. However the project was abandoned at an early stage due to the poor quality of the rock under the fort and a site at Xlendi within sturdy coralline rock was chosen as an alternative.

The mill, constructed in 1955, consists of a 30 m tunnel cut in the rock, leading to chambers on three floors and silos with a capacity of around 1,000 tonnes. The grain would have been loaded into the silos from the upper road, mechanically ground into flour, then packaged and distributed to citizens throughout the island. The milling machinery within the tunnels is still intact and capable of operation, although it was never brought into use. Unfortunately this interesting relic of a more dangerous time is not open to the public, albeit currently being restored. The mill is located to the rear of the town on the left side, just before the church, along a curving road.



FLOUR MILL

XLENDI *to* SAN LAWRENZ

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ PUNIC-ROMAN SANCTUARY
- ▶ THE AZURE WINDOW AND INLAND SEA
- ▶ TA' SARRAFLU POOL
- ▶ TRANQUIL COUNTRYSIDE
- ▶ DRAMATIC DWEJRA BAY AND FUNGUS ROCK



SUMMARY

This is the favourite section of many visitors as it leads past so many impressive and beautiful features and landscapes. The walk starts at Xlendi, goes inland a little to bring you around the village of Kerċem and then passes through tranquil countryside to the freshwater pool at Ta' Sarrafllu. The route now continues along a path parallel to the high southern cliffs to reach Wardija Point and its wonderfully located Punic sanctuary. You then ramble on to the Dwejra Bay area, a candidate World Heritage site because of its exceptional geological features, such as the Azure Window and the Inland Sea. You will pass fossil-bearing rocks, a great diversity of plants, tranquil countryside with small fields and a Knights' tower protecting the tiny island known as Fungus Rock. You also have the option of taking an exciting boat trip through a tunnel at the Inland Sea. You then ramble uphill through picturesque countryside to reach the village of San Lawrenz.

The walk can be considered a little strenuous because, while generally along good level paths, it does have a number of slightly challenging uphill sections. It is about nine kilometres long, which with all your stops for viewing and a snack, will probably take about five hours. The Inland Sea area hosts a number of cafés, a public toilet and a small market catering to the many tourists who come to admire this exceptional area. There are public toilets and cafés in Xlendi, the Inland Sea and San Lawrenz. There is a regular bus service from San Lawrenz to Rabat, at least hourly.

THE WALK

There is no practical, safe path up and over the cliffs to the west of Xlendi Bay and we recommend a short detour inland to get around that promontory. Take the inland road from Xlendi which leads towards Victoria, proceeding for about one kilometre along the valley side of this new road and passing the La Grotta nightclub. Notice the lush growth of the valley. This is one of the most ecologically significant areas of Gozo, hosting the rare freshwater crab which is in danger of extinction, and a number of endemic plants such as the Gozo hyoseris. Notice the small promontory dividing two forks of the valley - this is one of the last known areas where the endemic Mamo's door snail is found.



TA' ISOPU TOWER

OPTION TO SAN BLAS BEACH AND TA' ISOPU TOWER

If you still have plenty of energy you may take the road to the left from the crossroads 9, past a small garden, to make the steep descent towards the small and pleasant beach of San Blas Bay 10. You may also consider a short detour towards the coastal look-out tower of Ta' Isopu 11, reached by taking a right from the small garden. Constructed by the Knights in 1667, it lies within wonderful garrigue known for its wild rock roses and endemic Maltese spurge and has a panoramic view over the rocky coastline and the blue waters of the north-eastern coast.

Some enthusiastic walkers may want to continue to the east on the main coastal walk from this point 9, (Section 5 begins here), but most people prefer to ramble into Nadur to admire the Parish church dedicated to Saint Peter and Paul 12, a Baroque masterpiece at the centre of the town. From the crossroads 9 take the road uphill for about 1.3 km and at its end, take the road to the left and immediately to the right, which leads towards the centre of town. Here you can visit the church and relax at a café before catching a bus to Rabat or Mġarr or a number of other locations.

THE BASILICA OF SAINT PETER AND PAUL

The construction of the present building was begun in 1760 to the design of Maltese architect Giuseppe Bonnici (1707–1779). The church (a basilica since 1967) is clad in marble and has a sculpted pulpit and a beautiful Way of the Cross also in marble. There are 33 stained glass windows and an onyx presbytery. Its exterior is impressive; the richness of its interior will astound you. The beloved titular statue, that of St Peter and St Paul, was made in Marseilles in 1882. It is one of the many masterpieces that grace this exceptional church. On Good Friday a beautifully made set of statues is taken out in procession to recall the passion and crucifixion of Jesus. On Easter Sunday, a statue of The Risen Lord is joyfully paraded around the town. Remember this is a parish church for a town of 5,000.