



- Starting: L-Imgarr Harbour
- Ending: Ix-Xlendi
 - Length: 12Km
- Grading: Moderate, partly along clifftop
- Landscape: Coastal, Countryside
- Trail markings
- **Getting there and back:** Gozo Channel operates regular ferries to L-Imgarr harbour leaving from ic-Cirkewwa in Malta. Buses leave from Ix-Xlendi to Victoria where a return bus can be taken to the harbour.
- Recommended Walking season: October to May
- Hondog Ir-Rummien Walk
- Dwejra Walk
- Comino Walk
- Daħlet Qorrot Walk
- Ramla Walk
- Saltpans Walk
- Ta' Gordan Walk

Overview

From southeast to southwest this route takes you from L-Imġarr Harbour to Ix-Xlendi Bay taking in the lower lying coast at Xatt I-Aħmar to the fjord-like bay of Mġarr ix-Xini past its coastal Tower standing guard since the time of the Knights of St. John. The walk proceeds up to the higher grounds of the village of Ta' Sannat perched close to the edge of the majestic vertical cliffs of the southern coast. The clifftop route enjoys the best views of this wild landscape before turning slightly inland within the confines of Munxar down to Ix-Xlendi Bay.

Notes

COUNTRYSIDE CODE

- Refrain from collecting or causing damage to any specimens of flora, fauna, geological items or archaeological artefacts.
- Tread lightly and avoid disturbance.
- Keep to the paths.
- · Do not litter or light fires.
- · Keep away from the cliff edge.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Protect yourself from UV radiation wear a hat and sun protection as even the cooler months can get quite hot.
- Although rainfall is scarce rain sometimes comes in heavy downpours causing flash floods. Avoid walking in valleys during or just after heavy rains.
- Keep a safe distance from the shoreline or cliffs during adverse weather conditions with very strong winds or wild seas.

Before undertaking any part of this walk, it is strongly recommended to ensure that one's physical and medical conditions permit the undertaking of these activities. Particular attention is to be made to the often irregular terrain and to refrain from undertaking these walks in prohibitive weather conditions. All walks are undertaken at one's own risk.

Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of information contained in this brochure as at time of publication, the Ministry for Gozo accepts no liability for any inaccuracies or omissions whatsoever. Moreover, the Ministry for Gozo accepts no liability for accidents or any type of losses while following these walks.



During your walk, as in most of the countryside, you will encounter many small stone huts – the local *dura* – a hut used by bird hunters or trappers. Do keep this in mind when walking – typically the sign 'RTO' (Reserved To Owner) will often mean that it is privately owned land.



his walk starts at L-Imġarr Harbour from in front of the ferry Passenger Terminal. This is the only all-weather harbour in Għawdex (Gozo) and is a constant busy hub with passenger ferries operating regularly to Malta, smaller boats ferrying people to Kemmuna (Comino) and back, as well as a seaplane taking passengers to the Grand Harbour of II-Belt Valletta. Most of the Gozitan fishing fleet finds a safe berth here sheltered from the most insidious winds as do many pleasure boats moored at the only yacht marina on the island.

Some traditional fishing boats such as the Maltese *Luzzu* can still be seen in the harbour in stark contrast with more modern vessels, having abandoned oars and sails to engines it still retains the

traditional colours. The specific colours used for the moustache of the fishing boats used to allow for easy recognition of their place of origin. The bow has kept its typical decorations namely depicting the eye of Horus. Said to ward off the evil eye, this ancient seafaring protective measure could possibly have been inherited by the Phoenicians.

The route starts just opposite the Passenger Terminal and past the Gleneagles Bar. At the top of the few steps leading to the busy main road be very careful in crossing. Take the road on the left under the imposing sanctuary and climb up the first flight of steps on your right*.

*DETOUR: On calm days if you are an experienced walker you can also attempt the rugged coastline round the western corner of the harbour).



Sheltered in a niche in the rockface above is a statue of Our Ladv of Lourdes overlooking the harbour. Local folklore has it that this was placed on site after a visitor to the harbour saw a resemblance in these rocks to the grotto of Lourdes this was in 1879 - just 21 years after the famous appearance to Bernadette in the famous site of pilgrimage in France - indeed still one of the most popular religious destinations for many devout Maltese. It was just a few years later in 1888 when the Blessed Virgin of Mary Lourdes Sanctuary was built as a Gothic church inspired by the basilica in Lourdes. From its parvis the view spreads over the whole harbour with the island of Comino in the background.

Both L-Imgarr and Comino form part of Ghajnsielem Local Council whose parish



Aleppo Pine

church above the harbour shares the landscape with the Lourdes church. The next most imposing feature is surely the 18th century fortification of Chambray with its underlying woodland - a rare green sight on the island.





the road adjacent to the woodland. The main trees on the clayey slopes under Fort Chambray are Aleppo Pine, Olive and Eucalyptus some of which were planted in 1963 as a memorial to (Pope John XXIII). The Ministry of Gozo has undertaken a project to enlarge the afforested area with the planting of over 2,000 indigenous trees as part of its EcoGozo projects for a sustainable Gozo.

At the last pine tree along the road take the left turn up to Fort Chambray to glimpse its massive outer walls. At the time of writing the fortress is being developed into a private residential project and is not accessible. Keep right to rejoin the main road of Ghajnsielem, go past the Hostel of Casa San Giuseppe and turn left after the traffic lights into Trig Cordina. Keep right until you reach the junction and take the left road (signposted Diving Wrecks) to Trig ilFugazz where you can get a good view of the Fort's flanks and its vedette as well as the underlying clay slopes, terraced fields and varied coast of Ix-Xatt I-Aħmar. Walk down all the way to the coast and before continuing along the coastal route locate the fougasse (stone cannon) cut into the rocky coast just below the road. This spot is a popular diving site where 3 wrecks were sunk as diving attractions and artificial reefs.

Take a short detour to the left if you would like to see the bay or have a swim in its shallow waters. Several salt pans dot



this coast as is practically the case with any low- lying coast on the island.

Back en route you will be hugging the coast until the next bay of Mgarr ix-Xini. These low cliffs form part of one of Gozo's geological faults – a reminder of the turbulent geological past of the islands – forces which uplifted hills and formed sunken valleys separating the three main islands and known today as the north and south Comino Channels. The evidence of this can be best seen in the smooth slickenside cliff face when standing at Ras il-Hobż and looking eastwards. If you go off the path down to the shore do be careful along the eroding clayey cliffs along the small promontory.

The solitary and barren islet lying off this coast is known as Fessej Rock – here the sea plunges down alongside this pinnacle to a depth of over 50m. Proceed along the coastal path to the 17th century coastal tower of Mgarr ix-Xini. In spring the path is carpeted with small scented flowers of the endemic Maltese Sea Chamomile together with the delightful miniature



Barbary Nut Iris. Acting as backdrop to the Tower is the rising mass of majestic limestone cliffs of Ta' Cenc.

Past the Tower the route follows one of the prettiest old paths on the island – just above the creek amidst the changing foliage of the Tree Spurge shrubs and the skittish movements of Maltese Wall Lizards. The fjord-like bay of Mgarr ix-Xini comes into view as does its green hinterland. The placename indicates its role as a landing place (mgarr) for ships (xini). Quite difficult to spot along the path is a ship graffito of about





a metre long carved on the rockface. This inlet was used by the Knights as a place for careening their galleys. "Careening" consists of an operation by which a ship is turned onto its side usually in order to make repairs or to clean off barnacles from the hull.

Locate the steep rocky steps at the end of the path and descend down to the bay – take your time and be careful as the rocks are slippery and narrow. Enjoy a well earned rest before proceeding along the uphill part of the route.





This meandering dry river valley (known in Maltese as *wied*) shows the powerful action of ancient long gone rivers carving out the bedrock through the hardest, oldest rock layer of the islands – the Lower Coralline Limestone. The sheltered maquis habitat provided by the *wied* with small trees, large shrubs and lush vegetation offers a striking contrast to the otherwise prevalent low-lying garigue vegetation

found on exposed, often soil-less plateaus. The valley has been proposed as a regional park by two local councils sharing the area – Xewkija and Ta' Sannat. Whilst the bay is popular with bathers and SCUBA divers, the rocky valley itself provides some good rock climbing.

Archaeological excavations on one side of the valley have been revealing interesting finds showing that the area has long been popular for various uses. One site revealed its possible ritualistic role as a shrine in Punic/Roman times whilst elsewhere numerous troughs cut in the rock possibly for pressing grapes appear to indicate an ancient viticulture industry dating back to Classical times.

The route follows the only road leading up from the bay and running alongside the valley thus enabling some good views of Wied Hanżira to the right. An old abandoned water pumping station lies on the valley side*.

At about 1.5km inland from the bay take the left turn to start up this steep escarpment created by a major geological fault running below the village of Ta' Sannat.

The relatively flat plain beneath is one of the few on the island and it is still an important agricultural area today – the placename Gnien is-Sultan (the King's garden) traces its history as far back to the Aragonese times when the land was established as a fief by King Frederick III.

Past the small lime kiln keep left and at the next crossroad go right past the bus stop. Follow Triq Iċ-Ċnus to its end and head towards the cliffs by taking the rocky path to the right leading to the cliff-edge.

*DETOUR:

Alternatively you could opt to go via Ta' Cenc cliffs.







Keeping a safe distance from the edge do have a stop to enjoy these bewitching natural rock precipices... remembering to also turn your glance inland as this high plateau offers good views towards a good part of the island and Ta' Sannat itself with its surrounding farms.

The parish of Ta' Sannat was established in 1688 and the main church in the village square is dedicated to its patron Saint Margaret whose feast is celebrated every year around the end of July. According

to an old tradition, commonly adopted in other places in Gozo, the people of Ta' Sannat were supposedly converted to Christianity when they heard St. Paul's voice carried over the land and sea during his preaching on mainland Malta. The first known records of a population established in the village go back to the 17th century.

The cliffs, which here reach heights of over 140m above sea level are a typical resulting landscape where the

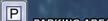
XLENDI WALK



X - X denotes a distance of 1km

- > indicates route direction









YACHT MARINA



SEA PLANE







ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS

REST AREA



GEOLOGICAL FAULT



CLIFF









hardest, oldest rock layer of the islands – the white Lower Coralline Limestone is exposed in its thickness. In some places the relatively thin capping of the softer yellow Globigerina Limestone can be discerned easily. The karstic landscape forming numerous small hollows in the limestone by rainwater solution

are home to important microhabitats forming temporary freshwater pools in the wet season. Some of these support some very rare, indeed endemic plants as well as fascinating creatures such as the little fairy shrimp. The habitat here is mainly garigue with various hardy shrubs observed along the way such as Golden Samphire, Wild Thyme, Bushy Restharrow, Egyptian St. John's Wort and Olive-leaved Germander. The Sea Squill is a widespread bulbous plant whose leaves are quite strikingly large compared to the miniature leaves of most other garique species. In autumn the sparse soil cover comes to life with the colourful blossoms of the Mediterranean Meadow Saffron and Autumn Narcissus whilst early spring sees small Sand Crocus and Barbary Nut Iris as well as various orchids.

The vertical cliffs themselves are home to some of the hardiest of plants such as the



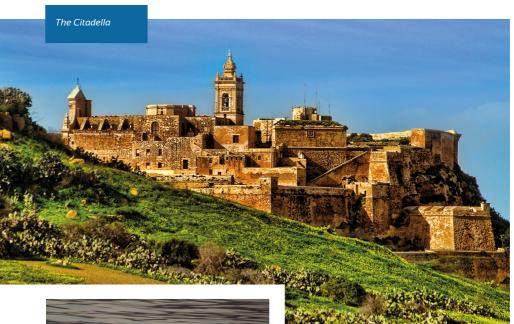
succulent salt tolerant endemic Maltese Salt Tree. Cliff hanging species such as Capers and Mediterranean Stonecrop grow on the edge whilst further east at Ta' Čenć the national plant Maltese Rock Centaury can be spotted growing in cracks.

Your outpost at the jutting point of II-Pinnur deserves a good stop to take

in the surroundings – do keep the placename in mind and be careful on windy days – *pinnur* means wind-vane and refers to the highly exposed nature of the site to the various winds.

Mediterranean Stonecrop

To the north you can see the fortified Citadel which from this angle does not seem to be on such a high hill as these





cliffs climb higher up. To the east the southernmost point of Gozo comes into view – the promontory of Ras in-Newwiela spreading out below the highest point of the cliffs of Ta' Cenc can be observed. This stretch of cliffs down to Ix-Xlendi comes to life on moonless nights in the summer months when hundreds of Scopoli's Shearwaters return from their fishing day

at sea to their nest in one of the many cracks in the cliffs.

After Tal-Bardan take in the view over to the last section of the cliffs to the west and turn inland to start the descent to the final stretch of the walk down to lx-Xlendi*.

Follow the concrete path turning inland and then take the path on your left to proceed downhill into the valley known as Wied tal-Kantra flanked by extensive terrace fields making good use of the shelter provided. The terracing of valley sides and hills has probably taken shape over centuries of years and the traditional stone walling technique is the most important skill to be mastered in such a land where soil is extremely scarce and needs to be retained at all costs. The function of these ubiquitous

*DETOUR:

Alternatively you can keep going along the coast along a used path.

walls of undressed loose stone is to allow rainwater to pass through without carrying away the soil whilst at other places they serve to protect from wind erosion or simply to divide fields and delineate pathways. These walls are an intrinsic feature of the island's rural heritage. This is also of benefit to the myriad of creatures which actually inhabit the walls or use them for shelter and hiding. These include almost all the reptile species of Malta (snakes, lizards, geckoes, skinks) as well as hedgehogs, shrews and many invertebrates.

The path leaves the country road to continue on the rocky valley bed of Wied tal-Kantra along the old original path. At the end of the rocky path take the left turn into the terraced fields to reach the promontory of Ras il-Bajjada with another coastal watch tower guarding its tip – the 17th Century Tower is dwarfed by the inaccessible vertical reaches of the next set of cliffs – the foreboding natural fortification of limestone which also stand guard over the bay of Ix-Xlendi. Together with Mgarr ix-Xini, the partly sunken valley of Ix-Xlendi offers the only other accessible coastline for boats. It is suggested that the placename lx-Xlendi has Byzantine or Arabic connotations to its maritime legacy – *Xelandion* was a typical seacraft. The deceivingly easy access has claimed many shipwrecks as is attested by a Roman wreck whose amphorae still lie scattered some 60m underwater. The mouth of the bay is the site of a nerve-wracking small reef rising perilously in the middle of it.

Allow some time to enjoy the promontory beneath the Tower, the nearby salt pans and the curved limestone shaped by





Traditional dry stone walls abound in the countryside

the elements – an excellent showcase of the sculpting effect of wind and sea on the softer Globigerina Limestone rock shaping it into smooth surfaces contrasting with the sheer harshness of the harder Lower Coralline Limestone layer forming a great chunk of the cliffs opposite. A set of saltpans carved out of the stone often gets filled with seawater from the raging sea in wild weather – keep your distance in such events.



In late spring the slopes of the valley are rich in the lilac flowers of the Maltese Stocks. Following the coastal path planted with Tamarisk trees you come to the bay itself. A statue of St. Andrew – patron saint of fishermen – overlooks the bay. The bus stop is just behind the row of seafront buildings.

At the opposite end of the bay a steep flight of steps leads to the small coastal cave known as Carolina's Cave. For many years this spot was reserved as a bathing spot for Dominican Nuns. Carolina Cauchi and her family were well known benefactors of the church. Although forming part of the locality of Munxar, lx-Xlendi celebrates its own feast in honour of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in late August. The church dedicated to Our Lady is dated to 1868 and can be seen standing on the rocky ledge at the start of the hill. Just beneath the church located underground is an unexpected feature – an emergency flour mill excavated into the hard rock in the mid 1950's.

Backtracking back inland facing the seaside resort and small fishing village of Ix-Xlendi – a favourite haunt of both tourists and locals alike – you can now find your way back across WiedTal-Kantra via a set of stone cut steps along the valley side leading to an arched stone bridge. The steps can be quite slippery – be careful.

Steps leading to Carolina's Cave

Snippets



Mäarr ix-Xini Tower

IX-XLENDI COAST WATCH TOWER

The tower was built and commissioned in 1650 when Grand Master Lascaris was at the helm of the Order of St. John in Malta. The main function of the tower was to prevent smuggling and other contraband activity such as landing by evaders of quarantine as well as to raise the alarm when corsairing vessels were seen approaching. Entrance to the tower was by means of an elevating drawbridge now replaced by a masonry stone bridge connecting the tower to the stairway. The tower's last military role was played in World War II when it was used as a coast observation post manned by the Gozo Coastal Police. After the war, the tower began to be leased to private persons. The tower is undergoing restoration upon the initiative of the heritage organisation Din I-Art Helwa and Munxar Local Council.

MĠARR IX-XINI COAST WATCH TOWER

Built during the reign of the Knights of St. John a coastal watch tower still stands today at the mouth of the fjord-like sunken valley of Mgarr ix-Xini which gives it its name. Completed in 1661 the tower resembles closely the slightly earlier set of 13 coastal towers in Malta erected by Grand Master De Redin.

During the Knights' period the tower carried two iron guns and had a garrison of three men. It kept watch over the Gozo-Comino channel and served to raise an early alarm in case of an incursion – which



The Vedette

for centuries was a very likely occurrence especially with the nearby creek offering an easy landing sheltered from the prevailing northwest wind. The fear was also founded in bitter experience as just a century earlier the whole of Gozo had been depopulated and taken into slavery during a siege by the Ottomans. Tradition has it that the nearby promontory is thought to have been the site were over 5000 Gozitans were shipped to Tripoli as slaves. After the Order's departure the guards were provided by the Royal Malta Fencible Regiment up to the 1870's but thereafter the tower tended to be abandoned. It briefly resumed its original role when, during World War II, it was used as a coast observation post by the Gozo Coastal Police. The Tower was restored in 1999 on the initiative of Wirt Ghawdex. a local voluntary heritage organization and part of the funds were raised by sponsorships ofinidvidual blocks of stone. The tower can be visited by appointment via e-mail to info@wirtghawdex.org or by visiting the website (www.wirtghawdex.org) for opening times. The Tower is open if the flag is flying

THE FOUGASSE

used in coastal defence mainly to prevent an enemy from landing in vulnerable parts of the coast. The fougasse is in effect a rock-hewn mortar or cannon excavated out of the rock in the shape of an inverted truncated cone, wide at the top and tapering down at the bottom where a powder chamber is located. Usually the mean diameter and depth of a fougasse are 2 metres and 2.5 metres respectively. After the powder chamber was filled. large amounts of stones of all sizes were packed into the shaft; on the gunpowder being ignited the resulting explosion would cause a hail of stones to fall on the enemy attempting to land. Twelve fougasses were located along the coast of Gozo.

The fougasse was a weapon

FORT CHAMBRAY



At the beginning of the 18th century the only refuge available to the Gozitan population was the Citadel at Victoria which in

addition to being too small was considered too weak to withstand a siege. The Order of St. John decided to build a new fortified city at a site overlooking Mgarr harbour capable of accommodating the entire population and their livestock and the military engineer de Tignè was given the task of designing the fortress.

The funds for the construction of the project were provided by the French knight Jacques Françèois de Chambrai (1687-1756).

The fortress was designed to deny the landing of an enemy force in the L-Imgarr Harbour area and to keep watch over vessels in the Comino channel. The construction of the fortifications was completed in 1762 but only a few of the projected structures were built and the new city failed to attract residents. It was only once – at the time of Napoleon's invasion in 1798 that the inhabitants sought refuge here but surrendered and walked out after token resistance. The Fort is currently being developed as a residential area

THE EMERGENCY FLOUR MILLS

In the 1950's when Malta was still part of the British Colony it was decided to build underground flour mills to serve as emergency sources of food in case of eventual conflicts. The one at Ix-Xlendi is the only one to be found in Gozo.

All were built away from the danger zones of the harbour in Malta. A tunnel was dug some 30m deep into the rock and a chamber was excavated to be divided into 3 floors. The silo had a capacity of 1000tons. This mill has been restored by the Munxar Local Council and plans are underway to open it up for the public on a regular basis.

BIRD-LIFE

6

Interestingly some of the old folk songs provide an insight into birds which used to breed in the area. One such song refers to the

Cawla (crow) singing in the valley of Mgarr ix-Xini for several years before it became extinct from the Maltese Islands. The valley also held the last couple of Barn Owls before they were exterminated in the 80's. Another song reminds us how the Peregrine Falcon (the famous Maltese Falcon) nesting in the cliff cracks used to chase after wild pigeons.



Woodchat Shrike

The presence of several breeding birds especially along the southern coast of Gozo have made it an internationally Important Bird Area and it remains an extremely important site for several species such as the resident Scopoli's Shearwater, Yelkouan Shearwater, Yellow Legged Gull, Storm Petrel and the National Bird of Malta the

Blue Rock Thrush which prefer the vertical cliffs, whilst the Spectacled Warbler, Corn Bunting and Short-toed Lark prefer the plateaus.



Malta's National Bird the Blue Rock Thrush (female)

SCOPOLI'S SHEARWATER

Calonectris diomedea (Ciefa in Maltese), is a seabird from the albatross family with a wingspan of up to 126cm. Its vernacular name is Scopoli's shearwater and this name reflects its smooth shearing flight with the wingtips just almost touching the surface of the sea. It has a yellowish bill with a brown hooked tip and is brownish-grey above and white below. The shearwater is a social bird breeding in colonies inside cracks and crevices in the cliffs where it lays a single egg in May – returning year after year to the same site. Over 1,000 pairs nest along the cliffs from Ta' Cenc up to lx-Xlendi, making it one of the most important sites. It spends most of its life out at sea but throughout summer at sunset hundreds of them can be observed gathering in large

rafts before returning to their respective nesting sites which they visit only by night – this is when you are most likely to notice them by their baby-like cries which fill the atmosphere with a unique sound experience! Indeed their specific name diomedea is linked with the Greek hero Diomedes and the birds are mythologically seen as his metamorphosed companions who continue to mourn his death every night in their mysterious wailing calls.

The much rarer Yelkouan shearwater also breeds along these cliffs in much smaller numbers and in an earlier season. Both species continue to be researched and monitored regularly by BirdLife Malta.

ALEPPO PINE



Pinus halepensis (Żnuber in Maltese) is native to the Mediterranean region and is very much adapted to its climate of

long dry summers. It is a medium sized conifer reaching heights of up to 20m. In Malta this tree was present since ancient times, possibly as one of the main tree species of ancient woodlands which may have covered the islands millennia ago but which have long disappeared except for tiny patches represented by remnant evergreen oak trees.

The Aleppo Pine was eventually reintroduced and used in landscaping and afforestation. The needle-shaped pine needles are highly adapted leaves which greatly reduce water loss thus allowing the tree to survive the long summer drought. The summer heat often brings about an intense resinous smell accompanied by the crackling sounds of cones bursting open to release the wind dispersed seeds. Each female cone will require about 3 years to mature. The male cones are much smaller, non woody and are seen only for a short period of the year releasing clouds of pollen when brushed.

Info Pages



WEBSITES:

www.gozo.gov.mt www.visitgozo.com www.ecogozo.com www.gozochannel.com



TOURIST INFORMATION OFFICE IN GOZO:

No. 17, Independence Square, Victoria, Gozo, VCT 1021 Tel: (+356) 22915452

OPENING HOURS:

Mondays to Saturdays: 09:00 to 17:30 (Last admission 17:15) Sundays and public holidays*: 09:00 to 13:00 (Last admission 12:45)

Note: *except on Christmas Day, New Year, Good Friday & Easter Sunday



BUS TIMETABLES:

www.transport.gov.mt

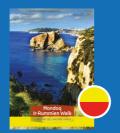
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Direct enquiries may be forwarded to the Ministry for Gozo.

ETIENNE MICALLEF GEORGE SCERRI ARON TANTI MUNXAR LOCAL COUNCIL







Hondoq Ir-Rummien Walk



Dwejra Walk



Comino Walk

OTHER WALKS IN THE SERIES



Daħlet Oorrot Walk



Ramla Walk



Saltpans Walk



Ta' Gurdan Walk

Rural Development Programme for Malta 2007-2013



Axis 3 – Improving the Quality of Life in Rural Areas
Project Part-financed by the European Union
The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
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