

An eco-island vision for Gozo

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GIOVANNA DEBONO was born in Gozo on the 25th November 1956. She graduated with a BA(Educ) degree from the University of Malta and worked as a teacher (1981-1987). She has been continuously re-elected as a Member of Parliament since 1987. In 1995 she was assigned the duties of Parliamentary Secretary for Family Affairs and has occupied the post of Minister for Gozo since 1998. She is a member of the Political Bureau of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR) and Vice-President of the Islands Commission (CPMR).

Gozo, the second largest island in the Maltese archipelago, central to the Mediterranean basin, is known for its sublime coastline, lush countryside, and its soft-paced rural character.

In this nine by five mile, sun-blessed Mediterranean island, the enterprising visitor discovers unexpected surprises at every corner, from peaceful and well restored farmhouses in picturesque villages to five star accommodation, close encounters with nature on land and sea, friendly locals, breathtaking dive sites, a mouth-watering Mediterranean cuisine and several heritage sites, chief among which are the World Heritage Site of the Ggantija Temples, and the fortified town of the Citadel.

Developed just enough to guarantee sustainable economic activity, Gozo is a masterpiece wrought by nature and shaped through 7000 years of culture by a population which nurtured Calypso's island into the beautiful place we know today.

Driven by the desire to protect the natural environment, the Government of Malta has embarked on an ambitious yet achievable vision to transform Gozo into an eco-island by 2020. Our objective is not to impede progress, but to enable and direct it in ways that render Gozo different and authentic.

The eco-island vision opens up to most sectors which determine life on the island, and at the same time unites everything into one perspective and

a common strategy. The four main pillars of this strategy bring together the environmental challenges on the island, the economic aspirations of its people, the development of society, and the preservation of its cultural identity. In essence, the Eco-Gozo vision revolves around the collective identity of its people, generation-bridging and development.

Eco-Gozo is a concept which summarises the government's vision for the future of the island of Gozo. It is a vision which aims at transforming Gozo and Gozitan society into a sustainable reality in its wider sense – not only environmentally, but also socially and economically. This should translate into a better quality of life, the preservation of a wholesome natural and cultural environment, and the development of a society which exerts less pressure on the environment. To that end, the initiative focuses on creating quality jobs for residents, developing sustainable energy, and cultivating a tourism industry that is linked to other areas such as agriculture, religion and health.

Action and change in many sectors such as agriculture, tourism, the environment, water management, education, energy, research, waste management, transport, cultural heritage, are steadily contributing to the achievement of this goal. Eco-Gozo is providing an assurance for sustainable development in Gozo, and will continue to ensure continued success for the island in the future.

Since Eco-Gozo's inception three years ago, the population has responded positively. Proud to be participating in the protection of their land, many are involved in local schemes, including the collection of rainwater and land and sea clean-up drives.

With the latest developments occurring and the government's vision in this context, the second phase of the Eco-Gozo vision is gradually unfolding, Gozo can be considered a vibrant and open society which is just waiting for people to invest in and discover.

Progress cannot be stopped, nor slowed down, yet it can be directed in ways that render Gozo authentic. The emphasis is not on 'not doing' but on 'doing it well'.



The Inland Sea is one of several scenic coastlines in Gozo