

MAIN IMAGE: VIEW OF COMINO FROM GOZO. OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: A BBO AT THE HAMLET II; PAT CASH AT THE MARSA SPORTS TENNIS CLINIC; JET SKIING IN GOLDEN BAY; PAT'S SONS ENJOY DIVING IN MGARR IX-XINI; MGARR HARBOUR; VIEW FROM THE ROTUNDA IN XEWKJJA; VALLETTA'S GRAND HARBOUR; MALTESE WINE AT COUNTRY TERRACE LOUNGE BAR AND RESTAURANT THAT OVERLOOKS MGARR HARBOUR



# TREASURED ISLAND

*Gozo's balmy climate comes from its superb southerly position in the Med, meaning a short flight can take you from a bleak British winter to the summery climate of the Maltese Islands. This Autumn, Pat Cash and family did just that...*

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Savvy travellers have long realised the advantages of using Gozo as their base for exploring the three Maltese Islands. Where some destinations demand that you hunt down historic sights, the islands' megalithic tombs, palaces, fortified harbours and walled cities are part of the landscape. But while Malta (the biggest of the three islands) has been a busy hub through seven thousand years of history, Gozo has always been a haven of tranquillity, a source of rich cheeses, fresh vegetables, wines and olive oils, and provider of a seductive and easygoing charm.

Tennis legend Pat Cash, junior and senior Wimbledon champion and still a winner on Legend tours, has found a venue for all his interests on the Maltese Islands and especially on Gozo. Invited to the islands by the Malta Tourism Authority in partnership with Vintage Travel and Air Malta, to give a master coaching session to 15 top young Maltese tennis players at the Marsa Sports Club, Pat Cash based himself, daughter Mia, and teenage twins Shannon and Jett in The Hamlet II, a traditional-styled Gozitan stone farmhouse with a jacuzzi, sauna and state-of-the-art entertainment centres as well as the more traditional comforts of open fireplaces, a mature

garden and an indoor and outdoor swimming pool perfect for cooler evenings.

This is what Gozo does well; mixing the charmingly simple with well thought out touches of luxury. For an active family who also appreciate good food, and some pampering, Gozo offered the Cash family a rich choice of activities and experiences. Taking a sight-seeing flight in a sea-plane over the islands – Comino, the smallest of the three, lies between Gozo and Malta – allowed the Cashes to see just how varied the landscape is despite the islands' compact area. "Gozo has got everything," Pat commented, looking down on the beaches, historic towns and countryside, "dive centres, harbour restaurants, countryside."

For Pat Cash and his children the small-size, big-feel of Gozo means that whilst the tennis star and Mia enjoyed ayurvedic spa treatments at the Kempinski San Lawrenz Hotel, which along with the wellness centre at the Ta' Cenc Hotel brings another level of pampering to the Gozo experience, the two teenagers headed off on a challenging mountain bike trip to the northern cliffs. Gozo's network of lanes and tracks are not only great for pedal power but are a draw for those walkers who

have discovered the joys of out-of-season hiking on an unspoilt Mediterranean island. "Gozo has a unique personality," the tennis legend said, "there's a no-crowd feel and the islanders are really friendly."

Gozo's seascape is as varied and unspoilt as its countryside. For divers, cave exploration, wreck diving or soaring over the edge and down the face of big walls that plunge into the depths provides a menu of different underwater experiences that led *Diver* magazine to nominate the Maltese Islands as best dive destination in Europe and third best worldwide. Malta's calm, sheltered coast on the southern side is balanced by a breezier northern shore providing perfect conditions for wind-surfing, kite-surfing and dinghy and yacht sailing, with calm, warm-water bays providing a play ground for for jet skiing, sea-kayaking and water-skiing.

But Gozo is not all about high-energy pursuits. Pat describes himself as a "big eater" and, was fascinated by the "locality of the ingredients – the sensational fish, vegetables and olive oils" as well as the islands' own capers that all go into creating Malta's unique dishes. For one lunch the Cash family visited Ta' Riccardo, a traditional wine bar in the Cittadella, whose simple dishes use local bread,



## "GOZO HAS EVERYTHING... DIVE CENTRES, HARBOUR RESTAURANTS AND COUNTRYSIDE"

sheep's cheeses and salads, whilst an evening meal in Kartell Restaurant in Marsalforn uses the pure Mediterranean ingredients of local fish, vegetables and, island speciality, rabbit. For another dinner Zeffiro, was a popular choice that offers deliciously fresh fish and beautiful views across Xlendi Bay. The islands' restaurants take pride in the local wines that were first introduced by the Phoenicians, then coming close to extinction in the 19th Century, before being resurrected by vineyards such as Meridiana.

Good though the restaurants are, and however many activities you've signed up for it's worth putting time aside, like the Cash family, for a dedicated tour of the Grand Harbour, Valletta and the Baroque grandeur of the Knights' chapels inside St John's Co-Cathedral.

Perhaps it's the Maltese Islands, and especially Gozo's, easy mixing of the rustic with the up-to-date, and the laid-back with the energetic that creates its magic. Legend has it that Gozo is where the goddess Calypso seduced Ulysses into staying for many years.

Undoubtedly the island's warmth, natural foods and mythic charms made Calypso's job of seduction easier. Throw in mountain biking, diving, spas, and luxury accommodation and today's action heroes might find it even harder to leave. Or, perhaps, just easier to return.



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