

Words by
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Ally is a travel writer who's been living in Gozo for two years. When not exploring the depths of its coastline in her newfound passion for scuba diving, you'll find her seeking out rock-climbing locations or unknown corners of the island's beautiful landscape.

On a high

Nadur crams its calendar with exciting events, including its spontaneous Carnival this month. But even without its fun-filled, year-round activities, the Gozitan locality remains an attraction unto itself.

A tiger, a pirate and an inflatable pig walk into a bar. No, believe it or not, this isn't a joke; this is just one of many memorably bizarre scenes you'll see at Nadur's legendary Carnival. Every year, in the third week of February, the streets of one of Gozo's most prominent towns transform into a kind of Halloween–Glastonbury hybrid; its serene squares becoming a heady mix of music, dancing and unfettered expression.

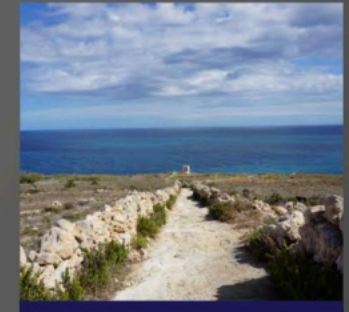
Of Malta and Gozo's many celebrations, Carnival (or 'spontaneous Carnival' as it is more accurately known) is easily the most anticipated, and it's a worthy headliner for a locality now famous for its entertainment events. Organised by residents and with no supervisory committee, this near week-long homage to revelry is a Gozitan favourite. Local DJs fill the streets with music while topically-themed stalls, floats and costumes make bold statements on Malta's political climate, news and controversies.

A festival of this size has naturally earned itself many names, but the popular alternatives of the 'grotesque' and 'macabre' Carnival are well-suited. Over the years, I've watched zombies scull Cisks, venetian-masked men dance on cobbled streets and an unidentifiable (but undoubtedly political) character drag papier-mâché penguins across the ground on a string. I saw aliens lounge against buildings, chowing down on crispy *ftira*, and fake construction workers 'lay cement' between dancers.

In the face of all this, perhaps Carnival's most distinctive characteristic, however, is its humour. Stalls and costumes poke fun at local authorities, enjoying a freedom of expression that is no doubt partly responsible for its popularity: the locality's modest population soars from around 4,500 to almost 50,000 during Carnival's five-day foray. ▼

Nadur village.

Passaġġi
suggests



Walking any stretch of Nadur's coastline is immensely rewarding, but competent hikers should consider trekking its length from Daħlet Qorrot to Ramla Beach:

- Climb uphill from Daħlet, past the supremely pretty San Filep Beach, and follow a path that leads off along the base of a steep cliff, winding through fallen boulders and beneath the searching fingers of dangling carob pods.
- Stop by Sopu Tower (a defensive fortification built in 1667) and skirt farmland overlooked by ancient caves until you reach the steep road down to San Blas Beach, a small, rocky cove often quieter than others thanks to its challenging entryway (the road descends some 91 metres).



Carnival, however, is just the start of Nadur's year-long event schedule. In the run-up to Ash Wednesday, a five-day celebration of parades and processions fills the square, while later in April, oenophiles gather in the beautiful Onien il-Kunsill to taste the very best Maltese tipples at the annual wine festival. Visitors are stuffed with wine, pizza and live music in a tradition that's been running for more than 20 years.

Only a week later, fireworks factories from all over the world congregate to light up Gozo's skies with jaw-dropping pyro performances in the country's famous fireworks festival.

Summer is a party unto itself. At the end of June, Nadur's local feast, L-Imnarja, lasts a full week, ushering in the new season with parades and processions in celebration of the town's patron saints, St Peter and St Paul. Then, between July and September, there's live music every Saturday, with local artists such as D Capitals and Upper Lip performing to friends and families (who let their children stay up late to dance the night away).

Even if Nadur wasn't cramming its calendar with exciting events, it wouldn't matter, because the locality is an attraction unto itself. Perched on one of Gozo's 'three hills' (a term sailors used hundreds of years ago to identify the island from the sea, the others being Xaghra and Victoria), Nadur has held a prominent place for centuries. Its name derives from the Arabic 'nadara', meaning lookout, which reflects its position 161 metres above sea level.

It's the perfect place to take in Gozo's renowned beauty. To the south, views sweep down to Mgarr Harbour and across to Comino and the fringes of Malta. To the northeast, a deep valley sweeps down to Ramla Bay and its stunning red beaches. The views are so spectacular that when running the Nadur Garmin 10K last December, it was hard not to stop and admire the basin's staggered green slopes, which burst with orchards of orange, apple and lemon trees, clustered prickly pear bushes and intermittent spots of yellow from the endemic Gozo hyoseris.

Head all the way down the valley to the coastline to see some of the islands' most beautiful vistas. At its easterly edge, the tightly enclosed inlet of Dahlet Qorrot bay is backed by colourful boathouses formed of natural caves and overhanging limestone ledges. It's one of the best snorkelling spots on the island, particularly for seeing crabs and crustaceans.



Nadur's list of attractions continues with one of Gozo's most photogenic wonders: Tal-Mixta Cave. Easily accessible from the main road down to Ramla (take a right onto Triq l-Ghassa tal-Mahrag), this naturally hewn cave forms a stunning rock window framing the expanse of the bay some 68 metres below. I can't count the number of times I've sat in its open mouth contemplating the pure colours of the cobalt ocean and rich, rust-coloured sand.

Afterwards, either pick your way down the slope from the cave mouth until you join a path leading directly onto the beach, or head there via the main road. When you're done, it's an easy bus ride back to Victoria.

If all this is sounding somewhat like exertion, don't worry – tasty refuelling spots don't come better than in Nadur. This elevated town is famed for its bakeries and boasts some of the best in the country. Fill up at Maxokk or Mekren's, two family-run, stone-oven equipped bakeries bursting with flavourful *ftiras*. Go all in on Gozo and order the *ftira gbejna*, which comes packed with local sheep's cheeselets, eggs, parmesan and potatoes.

A smattering of other eateries should put Nadur on the map for foodies, including Casa Gringo and The Fat Rabbit, which serve up unforgettable Latin American and Mediterranean fare. If sitting and watching the world go by is what you're here for though (and what could be more Gozitan?), do it with a pint at Gebuba, which has one of the best selections of beer and cider on the island. ◀



Passaggi picks



Nadur Parish Church

With 365 churches in Malta and Gozo, standing out is hard, but Nadur's place of worship is one of the best. The entrance cuts a fine figure thanks to the iconic statues of St Peter and St Paul, which were brought over from Marseilles in 1882.

(See PG 17 for more Instagrammable spots in Nadur.)