

The success factors and the major challenges that Tal-Massar Winery in Gozo needs to address to develop the full potential of wine tourism.

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<p>This study focuses on the concept of wine tourism as a growing niche on the island of Gozo. Over the last decade, Gozo has seen a synergy between wine and the tourism industry which has led to the development of what is commonly known as wine tourism. As in other countries, wine tourism on this small island is leaving an impact on the social and economic aspects.</p> <p>This research aims to portray the success factors and the major challenges that Gozo needs to address to develop the full potential of this niche market. Since the Maltese islands have a tradition of wine- making, several critical factors will be considered in a Gozitan context to determine and assess Gozo's potential.</p> <p>Within this framework, this study reviews and adds to the existing empirical literature on wine tourism while giving a brief description of the islands unique characteristics that play a vital role in this niche market. It also aims to compile the profile of the islands' wine industry and examine the winemaker's level of involvement with tourism as well as to explore the perceptions of expanding the potential of wine tourism through online marketing.</p> <p>For this purpose a detailed profile of a boutique winery on Gozo will serve as a case study. The information will be collected mainly through direct observant participation and using both quantitative and qualitative tools. Structured interviews with owners and wine tourists provided reliable and direct information.</p> <p>This study shows that wine tourism on Gozo is gaining momentum due to several factors namely the landscape and the rich cultural and culinary heritage of the island. At the same time this research shows that wine tourism can be highly dependent on various variable components such as infrastructure, transport, education strategy, facilities and policies.</p>	
Keywords Wine Tourism, Gozo, Marketing	

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1 Introduction

Wine tourism has been developing at a fast pace since 1990. Getz (2000) believes that this emerging form of tourism can be simultaneously explained as a form of consumer behaviour and as a developmental strategy that destinations adopt in order to utilize their distinct 'wine tourism terroir' and as a direct selling and educational opportunity for wineries. Lately the island of Gozo has been trying to attract high end tourists all year round. This has led to the development of niche markets, which make the island more than just a 'sun and sea' destination. Wine tourism is one of these markets which is gaining momentum due to the unique characteristics of the island such as landscape, wine-making tradition, history and cultural heritage. The entrepreneurs of Gozo have invested in wine tourism, developed sites and facilities and are currently creating attractions and packages to tourists. Therefore the main aim of this study is to demonstrate the potential of the island and how wine tourism can be further developed and marketed. The tourism industry is constantly changing due to the travellers' values, behaviours and needs. Consumer trends and technological devices will have an impact on the wine tourism of Gozo.

1.1 Question, aim and research objectives

This research main objective is to help underpin a dynamic, competitive and sustainable niche market on Gozo. It aims to provide an insight for the development of wine tourism which is a growing and evolving industry on the island. This winery served my purpose to define and study how the niche market of wine tourism is effecting the small island of Gozo. Having lived on the island for the past 40 years made it easy for me to facilitate the process of research, since I could follow closely the situation and observe directly what is happening.

For this reason the principal research question to be examined is:

- How wine tourism on the island of Gozo is developing into a strong niche market?

First it was necessary to provide a description of the current situation of Gozo's tourism industry and define the potential of wine tourism. Studying and observing the practices of the chosen boutique winery will help the reader explore the role that wine plays in attracting high end tourists to Gozo. This winery was the first to exploit the concept of wine tourism and marketed itself using mostly social media. Since 5 years ago, this boutique winery with none or limited marketing budget managed to establish itself as one of the best attractions on Gozo, rank high on powerful traveller sites such as Trip Advisor and sells all its wine directly to the visitors. The winery has a website, Facebook page and is also reviewed on

Trip Advisor. The winery has gained large popularity online and was also reviewed locally by various newspapers. It is seeking to enlarge the customer base and presently sells wine in Germany. For 5 consecutive years, it won the prestigious award of excellent traveller ratings (Kindly refer to Appendix 1). The rating of 5/5 is achieved only by 10 % of the businesses. (Kindly refer to Appendix 2). Another important highlight of this boutique winery was its medal-winning wines. Although the winery is in its infancy, its wines already won several medals (bronze and silver) in one of the biggest international competitions. (Kindly refer to Appendix 3).

Thus the main objectives of this study are:

- To explore the key characteristics of the island of Gozo and its potential of wine -making.
- To provide a profile questionnaire of the wine tourist, usage of transport and information acquisition of travellers to visit vineyards.
- To build a detailed description of a typical boutique winery and identifies its various critical success factors.
- To place successful factors of a vineyard.
- To investigate the marketing potential of Gozo as a wine tourism destination.

This study will be beneficial to product and destination companies in state tourism organisations, both local and regional. It will also have broad relevance and application to various scales of food and wine enterprises and other businesses that contribute to the development of the tourism industry. Therefore this research can be a useful tool for developing marketing strategies and for providing an insightful market research resource to the local industry and entrepreneurs.

1.2 Research Methods in brief

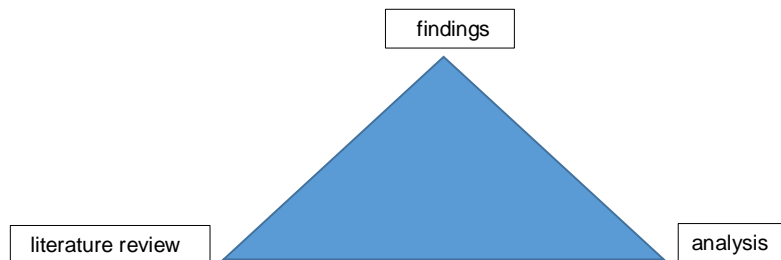
In this research data was collected by means of participant observation, interviews and questionnaires. According to Haaga- Helia report guidelines, a study can be either product –oriented or research-oriented. My study involves a defined research project (Haaga-Helia 2012, 16). The goal of the research-thesis is to answer a defined research question or questions using particular concepts and methods depending on the study field (Jyvaskylan Yliopisto 2015). The research oriented thesis can use both qualitative and quantitative tools, depending on the information used during the process of the study. The quantitative thesis

can be based on a survey, experimental or longitudinal research while the qualitative study means the collection and analysis of the data readily available (Haaga-Helia 2012, 16). According to Merriam (2009) qualitative research is mostly used when 'there is lack of theory' and therefore it is up to the researcher to 'gather data to build concepts, hypothesis or theories (Merriam 2009, 15). Qualitative research help researchers to try to build theory through observation. In this study I opted for a qualitative research in order to examine and explore the information brought up by the interviewees. Qualitative data is richer and more significant as it analyses the behaviour and the way of thinking of the interviewees in greater depth (Dey 2003). Due to the lack of relevant literature and statistics related to wine tourism in Gozo, the in-depth interview approach was chosen to gather as much information as possible. By using this technique, I was able to analyse carefully the views of both the travellers and the winery owners. The in-depth interviews helped me to probe deeper into the comments made by the interviewees.

According to McNeill and Chapman (2005) semi-structured interviews are often made up of a 'combination of closed and open questions aimed at a collecting both factual and attitudinal data (McNeill & Chapman 2005, 56). In this light, I decided to conduct a semi-structured interview with the owners of the winery as to ensure that they could add remarks and comments to the questions. Supplementary questions were asked in order to get a more detailed and clear explanation. During this study both primary and secondary data were used. The primary data was obtained by interviewing the owners of the winery who were very eager to contribute to this research. The interview took place both in the winery and at the vineyard. The interview consisted of open-ended questions in order to give the owners the freedom to express themselves. According to McNeill and Chapman (2005) when the researcher uses open-ended questions, makes 'it possible for respondents to say what they really feel', however this makes it 'difficult for the researcher to organize the answers into categories in order to count them.' (McNeill & Chapman 2005,37). Another source of primary data was the questionnaire handed to the travellers who booked in the wine tasting sessions organized by the winery. The questions were multiple choice questions where the respondents could choose one option from a list of possible answers or write his/her own answer choosing an open-ended option. In the course of this study, secondary data was also important. Books, journals, articles and websites were consulted to acquire a deep insight into the topic. Such literature also helped me to understand the concept of wine tourism across many countries and enabled me to explore and investigate this niche market in Gozo.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

My thesis starting point is based on a detailed literature review about the origin and concept of wine tourism as applied in various countries. These findings will serve not only as a basis for comparison and analysis but also to provide a solid background to study Gozo's potential in wine tourism. The structure of this research will follow a triangular dimension whereby the literature of the concept will be the starting point and foundation of the study. The findings and research will then be analysed and studied in the light of the critical success factors exposed by the literature.



The extensive definition of wine tourism will help us understand the several factors which are critical to the development of wine tourism in Gozo. For this reason the focus was on Tal-Massar boutique winery which will serve as a case in point for wine tourism. Therefore both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are used to collect data. The qualitative research was carried out by interviewing the owners of the winery while the quantitative data was collected mainly through the questionnaires distributed to the wine tourists who booked a wine tasting session. Observation was also carried out extensively at the wine tasting sessions. The results will then be interpreted in the light of the literature findings. Contrasts and similarities will be exposed and analysed in the light of the critical success factors. Such information will be used to discuss the market opportunities for wine tourism in Gozo. The data will be used to give several recommendations to enhance the development of wine tourism on Gozo.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Defining Wine Tourism

Charters and Ali-Knight (2002) suggest that a definition of wine tourism should include the following types of characteristics: a lifestyle experience, supply and demand, an educational component, linkages to art, wine and food, incorporation with the tourism destination image; and as a marketing opportunity which enhances the economic, social and cultural values of the region. These criteria suggest that wine tourism has many aspects and that the destination or region plays a fundamental role. Further to the discussion on the definitions, Hall, Johnson, Cambourne, Macionis, Mitchell and Sharples (2000) observe that many authors have attempted to define wine tourism. These authors start with the definition of wine tourism as 'visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for which grape wine tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of a grape wine region are the prime motivating factors for visitors' but add that, even extending the definition with 'for the purposes of recreation' does not 'adequately convey the romance of the grape, winescapes and wine-producing regions that are so much a part of wine and wine tourism around the world' (Hall et al 2000,5)

Since 1990, there has been a rapid growth of wine tourism, in terms of both industry and destination development and academic interest. Getz (2000) states that this emerging form of tourism can be simultaneously viewed: a) as a form of consumer behaviour, b) as a developmental strategy that destinations adopt in order to utilize their distinct 'wine tourism territory' and c) as a direct selling and educational opportunity for wineries. This multi-faced approach led to a variety of studies on different aspects, namely: wine tourism culture and heritage; wine tourism business; wine tourism marketing; wine tourists' behaviour (Carlsen & Charters 2006), food safety and wine tourism (Mitchell & Hall, 2006). Another stream of research focuses on wine tourism regions, destination attractiveness, life cycle and tourism marketing based on the appeal of wine (e.g. Alonso & O'Neill 2009; Alonso & Liu 2010; Bruwer 2003; Carlsen & Charters 2006; Charters & Menival 2011; Correia et al. 2004; Kunc 2009, Lopez-Guzman et al. 2009; 2011; Stavrinoudis et al., 2011; Stewart et al., 2008). Williams (2001) argues that competitive positioning of wine tourism regions is an important strategic issue.

Wine tourism has become a key issue for the European wine industry. As wine production around the world continues to exceed consumption, techniques which develop brand loyalty and stimulate sales need to be developed. Whilst a lot of research has been carried out into

wine tourism in the New World (e.g. Dodd 1997; Carlsen & Charters 2006; Charters & Ali-Knight 2002; Getz & Brown 2006; Mitchell, Hall & McIntosh 2000) much less has been done in Europe. The concept of wine tourism has existed in Europe since old times (Cambourne et al. 2000) and was developed early in the 20th century in several parts of Europe, especially in Germany. However it has rarely been formally planned – again in comparison with its role in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Since many producers are increasingly struggling to sell their wine, they are resorting to wine tourism as one possible solution. In Europe interest in wine tourism develops only when there is a sudden drop in sales. Therefore wine tourism is instantly considered a solution to maintaining local economic and social coherence (Bonnieux & Rainelli 2000) without any real analysis of the preconditions for effective wine tourism or the attitudes and commitment required of producers to make it work.

On the other hand several studies show that wine tourism can have an impact on future wine sales. Houghton (2002) measured increases in post festival purchases compared to pre-festival purchasing. O'Neil, Palmer and Charters (2002) developed a similar approach, examining the impact on continued sales resulting from the quality of service during the visit. Moreover, Mitchell and Hall (2004) showed repeat visits can predispose visitors to longer-term loyalty.

According to Inacio (2009), wine tourism has different meanings to different participants. Ana Isabel Inacio (2009) refers to these meanings, starting with tourism entities, to which wine tourism represents a type of niche market, a business opportunity and job creation that contribute to the destinations' development. She believes that wine tourism is a commercial strategy that allows wineries to develop their image and commercialize their attractions regarding wine and vineyards; to consumer wine tourism is a behaviour, it is about the experience they go through; finally, to the wine industry, on the supply side, it is an opportunity to have direct sales and educate their clients about their product.

France, Italy, Spain and Portugal are the Mediterranean countries with the largest tradition and history connected to wine and vineyards. In these countries wine tourism found it difficult to establish its importance and presence. Poitras and Getz (2006) studied the of wine tourism in the community and region. The authors state that 'sustainable wine tourism' depends on social, environmental and economic sustainability and specifically, on the 'identification and management of unique issues pertaining to the resources used (i.e. the land and water, labour, (...)) specific forms of wine tourism development and the specific impacts

caused by wine-related tourism'. Some of the main issues identified were the activity's seasonality, competition, environmental impacts and the participation of all stakeholders and community involvement in the development of the region.

Reacting to the lack of studies mentioned by Poitras and Getz (2006), Alonso and Liu (2011) have conducted a study of small winery entrepreneurs' reactions in Canary Islands, in Spain. They studied the sustainability of this business from 2007 to 2009 in the region and their major finding was that to have a sustainable wine tourism, the participation of all relevant stakeholders is fundamental. Coordination amongst them is crucial as well as government support. However they believe that more studies must exist to understand wine tourism in other regions.

On the same line of study, Bras, Costa and Buhalis (2009), analysed the networks created within the Wine Route of Bairrada, in Portugal. This study reaches a similar conclusion as the one regarding the Canary Islands, in the sense that it mentions the importance of 'regional levels of cooperation and tourism destination management networks' within Bairrada's Wine Route. These have a direct effect on the level of efficiency and competitiveness worldwide as well as the importance of having all members participating from public to private institutions.

Within the same area of research, other studies have been conducted for different regions, as it is the case of Greece, with the contribution of Karafolas (2007). The author believes that the development of Wine Roads in the 1990's had a boosting effect on rural tourism in the region and lots of positive repercussions in the Greek wine regions. On the other hand Asero and Patti (2009) conducted their study in Italy and found that quality wines increased the value and promoted Italian regions through the creation of wine tourism activities such as Wine and Food Routes itineraries. These routes can become a major motivation in wine territories and if well organized, they can 'emphasize the local identities by introducing territories and local resources to the tourist market'.

From these studies it is very clear that wine routes are beneficial to wine tourism. This is also illustrated by Hall and Mitchell (2000) in their paper in which they mention the importance of wine roads as a link between tourism and wine. They refer to Germany as a case in point where wine trails have been set up since 1920 and nearly all wine regions had them by 1970. The benefits of wine routes were also recognized by East European countries such as Hungary which started to create wine routes in order to attract Europeans from the West. Hall (1996) describes the success that wine tourism has had in countries like Australia, New Zealand, USA and Canada. The social and economic role of wine has

also been of researched the Riojan wine cluster to understand its successful economic development. They found out that wine tourism is strong in this region due to the request to authentic wine experience, appreciation of the landscape, design, culture, history and great facilities to enjoy it. Wine tourism in this region has been developing in the form of cluster, a concept defined by Porter (1990) as a group of interconnected companies and associated institutions in a particular field linked by geographical proximity, commonalities and complementarities. The Rioja wine cluster is made up of thousands of interdependent industries like vine growers, local suppliers and other related companies working together. Rioja's economic activity is based on this wine cluster. As Porter (1990) himself mentioned, this concept of cluster is intertwined with wine production and it is also common in some wine regions around the world, besides Rioja, namely, California Wine Cluster, Aquitaine in France, Victoria in Australia, Cape Town in South Africa, Chile, New Zealand, Canada, Canary Islands in Spain, Italy and Mendoza in Argentina.

All these studies have a significant implications for wine tourism in Gozo. The different research across the countries describe the various success factors in wine tourism. As Hall and Mitchell (2000) rightly point out, wine is becoming an important figure both in promoting regional image and by being a focal point of interest regarding tourism. Wine exports consist not only of wine bottles themselves, but also of the regions in which it is produced and their respective brands. If good and effective marketing strategies are implemented and the wine is of good quality, wine tourism can be a great opportunity to showcase the region of where wine is produced. Thus wine tourism in Gozo can be a potential and effective marketing tool to attract tourists all year round.

2.2 Critical Success Factors

In order to study a successful model of wine tourism in a region, it is important to outline the most relevant factors for its success and what makes it attractive for tourists. Getz and Brown (2006) have studied the success factors that must exist in wine regions. The authors tried to understand what the best factors are that influenced the success of wine tourism. The authors undertook the research in an attempt to '...shed light on what wine and tourism industry professionals think are the most important factors for destination and winery tourism development' (ibid. 20). The study was conducted in Calgary, Canada. Even though they are not the universal rule and each region will have its own critical success factors, they are still generally accepted and must be considered by wine tourism participants at regional and national level.

The following is the list of the critical success factors identified by the authors (Getz & Brown (2006, 153):

1. The wine region is close to home.
2. The region is popular with wine tourists.
3. The region's wines are famous.
4. There are a large number of wineries to visit.
5. Group tours of the wineries are offered.
6. I am familiar with one or more of the wineries.
7. I can get an introduction to meet a winemaker.
8. Information about the region is easy to obtain.
9. Friends have visited the region.
10. Packaged holidays are offered to the region.
11. Wine trails in the region are well sign posted.
12. Moderately priced accommodation.
13. Attractive scenery.
14. A pleasant all year climate.
15. A wide range of opportunities for outdoor recreation.
16. Traditional wine villages.
17. Unique accommodation with regional character.
18. Fine dining and gourmet restaurants.
19. Local art and craft for sale.
20. A wide range of activities for children.
21. Excellent sports facilities.
22. Wine festivals.
23. Speciality shops or markets selling local farm produce.
24. There is a lot to see and do in the region.
25. Winery staff are knowledgeable about wine.
26. The wineries are visitor friendly.
27. Cooking classes.

The authors have also identified a framework within their study on the critical features of the wine tourism experience from the consumer perspective. Overall the research concluded that the positive impact and success of wine tourism experience to tourists and consumers is a combination of three main elements and their related features: Wine, Destination Appeal and the Cultural Product. The original factors outlined by Getz et al (2006) are a good foundation upon which to build an explanatory model for examining Gozo's potential as a wine tourism destination.

2.3 The profile of the wine tourist

In order to understand the factors mentioned by Getz & Brown (2006), it is important to state that the perception of wine regions has changed over time and tourists are more in search of experiences and the aesthetics of regions and facilities, rather than focusing only on wine production. This is why it is important to have an idea of the wine tourist's profile. According to Macionis & Cambourne (1998) state that the majority of winery visitors are likely to be mature; engaged in full time employment and in the moderate to high income bracket; have a high degree of familiarity with the product; visit wineries or wine regions several times a year; and come from within the state or regional catchment area. However they add that the profile and nature of the wine tourist can vary according to the product being offered, the maturity of the region, and the marketing being employed by the region.

Similar findings were also found by Mitchell and Hall (2001) they found out that wine tourists are 'typically, middle-aged, highly educated, professional or managerial, with above average income'. In their study, the authors mention that most of these tourists are also married. However, these authors mention the 'generational challenge' referring to a new category, of youth and the baby boomers, who are becoming interested in wine tourism as well. Therefore is important to come up with an effective marketing strategy for them as well. All of these dimensions are important when marketing to the wine tourist. However it is evident that there are mixed ideas on who the wine tourist is. McKinna (1987) cited in Macionis and Cambourne (1998, 42) for example identifies the wine tourist as 'the passing tourist trade who thinks a 'winery crawl' is just a good holiday' whereas McKenzie (1986, 63) identifies wine tourists as 'wine buffs who seek out trendy, exclusive or almost unattainable wines direct from the producer'. Hall (1996) identified three wine tourism market segments, namely wine lovers, wine interested and the curious tourist. Bruwer, Li and Reid (2001) argue that mass marketing approaches could apply to wine marketing if all consumers had the same values, needs and consumption behaviour. However they conclude that the consumer is changing rapidly and that a targeted approach is required.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Ethical Considerations and Limitations of the Study

This research is limited under the frame of one particular winery which will be used as a case study to explore the concept of wine tourism as applied on the island of Gozo. Another drawback is the lack of literature and statistics about wine tourism in Gozo.

Ethical considerations are one of the most important parts of any research. Since my research project involved data collection, ethical consideration was fundamental to ensure the safety, rights, dignity and well-being of both participant and researcher. I based my ethical guidelines on the ten principles compiled by Bryman and Bell (2007). Before I started collecting data, the owners were informed from the very beginning about my presence during wine tasting sessions. I obtained their full consent to visit their premises and observe their activities. The owners voluntarily accepted to take part in the research and provide details about their wine production, its challenges and their experience of creating the concept of wine tourism. They were informed about their rights and confidentiality issues. The interviewees had every right to skip any questions that they did not feel like answering. A sample of the questions posed to the owners of the winery can be found in Appendix 4.

Full consent was obtained also from the participants of the wine tasting sessions. Their opinions about the subject were taken into consideration and their anonymity and privacy were respected. During discussions with the owners and wine tourists, I tried to maintain the highest level of objectivity and analysis throughout the research. Research participants were not subjected to pressure in any way whatsoever. Any type of communication in relation to the research was done with honesty and transparency. Any type of misleading information as well as representation of primary data findings in a biased way was avoided at all costs.

4. Finding and Analysis

4.1 Investigation of a Gozo Winery

As discussed in my introduction, my theses will explore the practices and the modus operandi of a boutique family run Gozo winery who was amongst the first to develop the potential that Gozo has in wine tourism. Although wine tourism is a relatively new concept for the island and its inhabitants, Tal-Massar Winery realized that the only way out for its survival was to attract clients to visit them and offer them a unique experience of wine tasting and local gastronomy. This small winery is run by husband Anthony Hili and his wife Marisa. For the hard working couple, this enterprise is truly close to their hearts and they personally follow every grape from vine to wine. Anthony explains that "to ensure that every bottle is as perfect as it can be, 80 per cent of the work is done in the vineyards". Although small in size, a lot of research went into the venture before vines were planted; experts were consulted, books were read and other vineyards were studied hard. Anthony's family had a wine making tradition since 1934 with Anthony's great uncle Carmel Hili who built a winery in the village of Xaghra. This mantle was taken up by his nephew Alfred who is Anthony's father. However in the 1970's the winery stopped operating and the family's wine production stopped. It wasn't until 2003 when Anthony and Marisa decided to invest all their savings into a boutique vineyard and winery, that things were kick-started once again. Thus Tal-Massar was born, albeit on a smaller scale. By 2006 the first vines were planted. Anthony takes care of about 5,000 vines on 1.5 hectares of land. Their positioning was carefully planned out to ensure the best possible grape crop. Anthony explains that the fact that the vineyard is so exposed to the elements and that the soil is thin and dry, actually help the flavour of the grape. These seemingly-adverse conditions help to grow a hardier and therefore more flavourful grape. No herbicides are used in their vineyard and all weeds are either ploughed or taken out by hand. They only use organic fertilizers. Wanting to have a professional product and to rise above the amateur world of wine-making, the owners also consulted one of the top oenologists in Malta, Roger Aquilina, who studied in Geisenheim in Germany and is a member of the German Chamber of Oenologists. He saw the potential of this small vineyard and agreed to offer his services.

Adding to the interest of the place, is the fact that spots of historical importance are dotted around. An old war shelter, which belonged to Marisa's family is one of them. Her great grandfather dug it, intending for it to be used as a shelter during the war. Anthony had meticulously cleared out all the debris that had accumulated over the decades and found

Commented [MJ1]: ? what is tumuli??

that it reaches a depth of around four storeys and completely waterproof – an ideal spot for a wine cellar as it has got a stable temperature of 14 degrees Celsius all year round. The vineyard is surrounded by a pristine landscape of the village of Gharb which is one of the oldest on the islands. Several medieval chapels are in the close proximity of this vineyard. This can all be seen from the terrace where wine-tastings are held. The winery produces around 7,000 bottles per year. Anthony says: “We cannot compete with the wine-making giants in terms of quantity, however I think we give them a good run for their money in terms of quality.” The owners stated that their biggest problem was finding restaurants willing to stock their wines. The larger companies have a monopoly and can offer contracts and higher profit margins. Therefore the alternative was to make our winery and vineyards an attraction in their own right. This proved to be very successful as they started attracting high-end tourists world-wide. This winery certainly has a great following and many satisfied customers. This can be seen from the reviews of Trip Advisor which is possibly one of the most powerful websites for independent travellers. (Kindly refer to Appendix 5).

Their customers' reviews are exceptionally positive and encouraging and clients have high praise for the wines, hospitality and charm. Much to the pride and joy of the owners, the winery won several medals at international competitions. Amongst these was the bronze medal for its white wine Tanit at the 36th edition of the internationally acclaimed wine competition Challenge International du Vin in France. These last 2 years their white wine Tanit also won 2 silver medals at the International Wine Guide Competition and the Catavinum competition in Spain.

4.2 Gozo and wine making traditions

Since this study revolves around the island of Gozo, it is important to provide a brief description about the size, geographical location and characteristics of the island. Gozo is the second largest island of the Maltese archipelago that consists of three islands known as mainland Malta, Gozo and Comino. It has a population of around 25, 000 inhabitants. Gozo lies approximately 96 km south of Sicily. The island is roughly circular in shape, 14km by 7 km in area. Gozo is hilly and from the south-west to the north-west, the coast is entirely surrounded by cliffs. Gozo is rural and simple, its culture and way of life rooted in fishing and in pastoral and agricultural activity. Tomatoes, potatoes, onions, melons, grapes, figs and citrus are the island's prime agricultural produce. Gozo though separated from mainland Malta by a 5km stretch of Mediterranean Sea is distinctly different from Malta. The soil is fertile as much more blue clay is present. This means that rain water does not sink through the ground quickly and is the reason why Gozo always looks greener for most part of the year. Gozo is a very tranquil island and treasures its peace. Gozo meaning 'joy' in Castilian

is the name that the Aragonese gave this island when they conquered it in 1282. The Phoenicians 700 BC called it Gwl or Gaulos, meaning a round ship, possibly in reference to the island's shape from a distance, a name that the Romans kept when they in turn took over in 218 AD. The Arabs, who came to rule this island a thousand years ago, strongly influenced its Semitic language, left behind the name that has stuck in the vernacular: Ghawdex (pronounced aw-desh). Although small in size, it is rich in history and cultural heritage. The fact that the Maltese islands are not exposed to extremes of weather, makes Gozo an ideal grape growing island. The alignment of the valleys in our islands to different winds and the terroir of the valleys create different microclimates that enable harvesting earlier than other areas.

Commented [MJ2]: Is Malta the only one?

All this has strong implications and these factors contribute to the potential of wine tourism in Gozo. Williams & Kelly (2001) state that 'wine producing methods and wines have long been associated with cultural and heritage endeavours'. This line of thought is also expressed by Getz et al. who state that 'tourists in general tend to travel more to regions with strong cultural and historical links'. According to Malta Tourism Authority 36% of the visitors surveyed in Malta choose the island for its culture and history.

As research in wine tourism has only recently been carried out in several countries, it was quite expected that in Malta and Gozo the empirical information in this field is very limited. No research was found about Gozo's wine tourism. The local research is very limited and consists of articles published in local magazines with no statistical data or formal research. One of these articles is entitled 'Maltese Wine and Wine Tourism in Malta' was published in the October 2008 edition of Air Malta's in-flight magazine Sky Life. This article by Margareta Zaveri points out that Malta has good quality wines and gives suggestions how to create one's own wine route since there are not yet any official wine-tasting tours or routes. Another article is written by Donatella Cinelli Colombini (December 2010) and discusses the potential for a wine route in Malta and suggests the need for further research. I agree with Cinelli Colombini (2010) that Malta and Gozo have to face harsh competition from already established wine destinations due to lack of wine trails but our islands do possess the potential to offer tourists wine and food related experiences. Again she mentions the possibility and importance of implementing wine trails.

Unfortunately the attitude towards Maltese and Gozitan wine in the past was not always positive. In an interview for an article written in 2004 by De Aenlle, an executive for a local producer who declined to be named, was quoted as saying 'You practically have to burn their fingers with a foreign wine before they will pick up a local one.' Margareta Zaveri (2008) has suggested that this attitude may be attributed to previous wine-making method when

grapes that had not been consumed were used to create a poorer quality wine. Once Malta joined the EU in 2004, levies were removed from foreign wines. This meant that the Maltese consumer could now purchase a wide variety of wines for a cheaper or similar price. This resulted in a move towards higher quality wine.

Gozo can boast of a unique cultural heritage. Infact the island can showcase wine presses that date back to 500 BC. These wine presses found embedded in the rocks of the area known as Mgarr ix-Xini can still be seen today. These presses consist of a shallow basin which wine makers would fill with grapes and once pressed, the juice would flow through holes and channels into a deeper collecting holder all carved into the rock. The juices would flow into the deeper basin as the presses were built on an incline. Such presses have also been identified in Malta and in various parts of the world such as Portugal, Spain, Italy, France, Greece, Turkey, Palestine, Syria and South Africa.

Superintendent of Cultural Heritage Anthony Pace who lead the project with the archaeologist George Azzopardi elaborated that wine makers would have minimised losses through seepage by first filling the basins with water so the rock would soak up the water. Then excess water would be removed shortly before pressing. According to Anthony Bonanno, it is only in the beginning of the 20th century that wine started to be produced on industrial levels on the initiative of a handful of entrepreneurs. But one should not ignore the written evidence compiled by Godfrey Wettinger. At one stage precisely in 1434 we find that 'the town authorities of Malta complained that the importation of foreign wine was harming Maltese viticulture. A medieval use for these rock-cut devices for wine production, therefore remained a possible interpretation.

For ages, wine in Gozo has been intertwined with every day's life. According to Ian Tangert (2006) in Gozo, wine 'is an everyday part of life and it has been for centuries'.¹). The cultural significance of wine in Gozo is also evident in the presence of sayings, parables, poems and superstitions associated with wine. One superstition about wine is that spilling it on the ground brings good luck. Another thought that is widely accepted amongst the Gozitans is that a glass of wine is beneficial to health. There is also known distinction between enjoying a glass of wine and binge drinking. Wine in Gozo has always been considered as the traditional drink (Attard 1995). In the late 16th century Giacomo Bosio, a historian for the Knights of Malta noted that the knowledge possessed by the Maltese for grape growing and wine production was ancient (Attard 2001). Later in the 18th century, Maltese historian Count Giovanni Antonio Ciantar reported as many as 300 barrels of wine being produced per year (ibid). The long history of wine on the Maltese islands that structure out to several centuries may account for the attitude of wine being such a commonplace item in Gozitan culture.

4.3 A brief description of Tal-Massar Winery

A more detailed look about this boutique winery will follow in this section. The winery is situated in the village of Xaghra and has the façade of a traditional Gozo town house. The name Massar is derived from the name of the area itself. Etimologically the word comes from Sicilian which means 'animal husbandry'. The area of the winery and the road in which it is situated is amongst the oldest on the island of Gozo. The winery is the only one on the Maltese islands that is constructed 2 storeys underground. There are various rooms with different functions and equipment. There is equipment used for reception of grapes, destemming, crushing and pressing. The fermentation room hosts the production of white, rose' and red wines using the latest stainless steel temperature controlled vats. Other rooms include the laboratory, the filtration room, the bottling room and the maturation room where large stainless steel tanks and oak wine barrels mature the wine.

On the other hand the vineyards are situated at Gharb as they belonged to the family of Marisa who is the owner's wife. The vineyards are located in the limits of Gharb and the size of the estate covers approximately 2 hectares. The vineyard is highly wind beaten and close to a valley overlooking the sea. The vines have sea salt sprayed on them due to the exposure of strong winds. The soil is highly calcareous limestone and this offers nutrients to vines and produce more sugars; retains moisture in dry weather and has good drainage in cool temperatures. According to the owner, since lime causes iron deficiency, an organic compound called ferrous sulphate is added to the soil to avoid chlorosis (leaves turning yellow in colour). The vines are facing north to achieve higher levels of acidity in the grapes. The vineyard has 7500 vines and only 2 kg of grapes are allowed on each vine. Some types of wines, especially the late harvested grapes produce fewer litres of wines. i.e. 2.5kg result in only 700ml of wine. Secondly with the white and the rose wines, only free run juice is used. This means that from 1kg of grapes, only 500 ml are extracted. The owners opted for a particular approach to viticulture, known as 'viticulture rationale' which basically focuses on reducing crop yields to improve quality. The pruning method used is cordon spur pruning which means that 2 buds are allowed in order to have low yield. In summer leaf trimming is carried out in order to expose the grapes to more sun and achieve high sugar and alcohol levels. The vine spacing is 2 metres wide between rows and 1 metre wide between vines. The vine density is 3500 vines per hectare. The main pests of the vines are trips and birds. These pests are controlled by the use of organic insecticides. No herbicides are used in the vineyard and weed control is carried out by mechanical rotovation. This ensures that no toxic residues are present in the wine produced. The varieties of vines planted are Vermentino, Sangiovese and Nero d'Avola aka Sirkuzian in Maltese language. Since Gozo and

Commented [MJ3]: organic?

Commented [MJ4]: This should mean 15 000 bottles? But only 7000 bottles produced?

Commented [MJ5]: = varieties?

Malta have a very dry climate, drip irrigation is used to prevent drought conditions in summer. Harvesting is done by hand for the selective picking of quality grapes. In mid-August, Vermentino and Sangiovese grapes are harvested for the white and the rose wine. On the other hand red wine harvest takes place at the end of August. Since last year this winery started producing a liqueur wine which makes use of a late harvest. Sirkuzian grapes are picked in mid-September to produce a semi-sweet liqueur wine of 19% alcohol.

It was evident since the beginning of the interview that the owners had to fund the whole project. According to Anthony and Marisa, authorities never saw their potential and underestimated the notion that Gozo could be indeed one of the best destinations for wine tourism. Although they filed loads of paperwork and applied several times to get funding for machinery, they never got a single euro. Feasibility studies cost money and in the end they thought it was more feasible to invest slowly and grow by time rather than spending time and energy to qualify for EU funds. Today the owners are satisfied that at least the money they invested in equipment and facilities is giving steady results. Their major breakthrough was the unique wine tasting sessions that they organize regularly and their format will be explained in more detail in the next section.

4.4 The format of a wine tasting session

The owners realized that the only way for their winery to survive the cutthroat competition was to create an attraction that will offer a unique experience and at the same time be a selling channel. For this reason the owner and his wife set up wine tasting sessions where tourists are taken to their vineyards and winery and given an explanation of the processes involved. The owners, both holding a university degree are very good at delivering explanations in English and also in Italian. They have their own style in organizing these wine tasting sessions.

Clients book by sending a request via email to the owner's wife who takes care of the logistics. She replies within 24 hrs to the client and she explains what the activity consists about, the duration, the price and directions how to find their place. When looking at one of her emails, one can see that she writes emails in a very friendly and cordial style. She gives all the necessary details of what the client will get if he/she is going to visit their place. She also inquires about the means of travel of the client so that the owners meet personally their clients. If their clients are going to travel by public transport, they are instructed to stop at a particular bus stop which is only 3mins away on foot from their vineyards. If clients are travelling with their own transport, the owners meet them at the village's main square. In this way, the clients will be taken directly to the vineyard and will feel comfortable that they

are taken care of. This personalised way of meeting clients was also positively reviewed in the clients' feedback on Trip Advisor.

Clients are taken to the vineyards and greeted by Anthony and his wife. Anthony introduces himself and starts to explain the terroir of the vineyards, the effects of the soil, the grape varieties grown and the climate of Gozo and its effects on wine making and the way he grows the vines to ensure the maximum quality. (Kindly refer to Appendix 4). After this 20 mins explanation on site, the clients are taken to the wine tasting venue whereby the owner explains every type of wine which he produces. He starts with his award winner white wine named Tanit. He explains the name and its connection with Gozo. After follows the rose' wine called Manzara. Then clients also taste the dry red wine called San Mitri. **The last wine is called Garb and is a semi sweet wine with 16% alcohol.** This is not a liquor wine as liquor wines are fortified with artificial alcohol. At the end of the session, clients are also served the liqueur wine called Galleys. It was observed that the systematic approach to wine tasting was used and delivered as a presentation to the clients. The systematic approach entails the appearance, nose, smell, palate and maturity for every type of wine. After the tasting of the red wine, the clients were offered local water biscuits, locally known as 'galletti', Gozitan olives, Gozitan bread with sun dried tomato paste and local sheep's cheese in different forms: dried, mature and peppered cheese together with typical Gozitan cured meat (salam). After the presentation of each wine is done, clients can ask questions to the owners and wine is free flowing. This activity requires booking and comes at a price. Booking is done online and so is the marketing and promotion.

Commented [MJ6]: also a liqueur wine?

4.5 Online Marketing

Based on my observations and the interview with the owners, it was evident that this winery made use of online channels and relied on social media for both its marketing and sales. Nearly all of the communication is carried out by emails and the owners had invested in a website even before the wine was ready to be sold. Their website www.massarwinery.com contains a lot of information about the wines, the history of the winery, press releases, description of wine tasting sessions and how to book. It also has several photographs and videos about wine tasting. The website is linked to a facebook page and to Trip Advisor: http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g190318-d2086994-Reviews-Tal_Massar_Winery-Xaghra_Island_of_Gozo.html The owners stated that Trip Advisor was highly effective in promoting their wine tasting sessions. At one point the few reviews that they earned had generated a lot of online traffic, more than the website did. Their website for more hits along the time due to the link of Trip Advisor. The reviews on Trip Advisor influenced also the traffic on the facebook page: [facebook.com/massarwinery/](https://www.facebook.com/massarwinery/).

Sellitto (2005) found that websites are instrumental in promoting wine tourism. Internet use among wine tourists is common. Over 50% of US adults use the internet, which is over 120 million adults and travellers add up to 101.3 million adults (TIA 2005). As the owners themselves stated their website is their 24 hour secretary and PRO. This goes in line with the evidence found by Sellitto (2005). The internet benefits wineries in more ways than just marketing opportunities; interaction with intra-industry colleagues, improvement of business images, increased brand awareness and visitor increase are all benefits of adapting an Internet website (Sellitto 2005). Richardson (2002) found that wineries have developed and maintained websites with few difficulties. He noted that the purpose of adopting a website includes direct sales to customers, promotion and direct marketing, tourism promotion and indirect marketing. Websites are effective in increasing tourist visits; over 10% of tourists visited wineries after logging on their website (Richardson 2002). Although the website of Tal-Massar winery does not enable the purchase of wines or direct booking of wine tasting sessions, its main function is to provide information. This is what Sellitto (2005) found out with Australian websites. Sellitto (2005) observes that winery websites have no evidence of collaborative efforts to include other players in the tourism industry such as restaurants, accommodations and destination marketing organizations. This is also the case with the website of Tal-Massar Winery.

While previous research has found wineries to engage in online marketing through the establishment of websites (Stevens & Burns, 2005; Sellitto, 2004; Richardson, 2002; Murphy, 2007; Murphy, Ho & Chan, 2005), no study has shown the wineries' involvement in promoting wine regions and specific aspects of wine tourism online through their winery website. Such online wine tourism marketing efforts are especially important for emerging wine tourism regions such as Gozo.

4.6 Analysis and Interpretation of Results

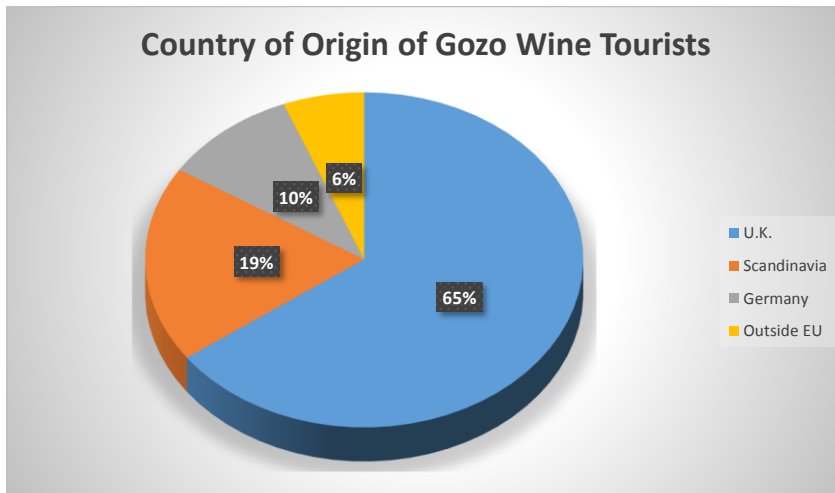
Despite the unique selling points of the island of Gozo, and its favourable characteristics for wine tourism, no data has ever been collected to construct the profile of the wine tourist who chooses Gozo. Thus it was very important to figure out who are the travellers that are in search of wine tourism and what motivates them to cross over to this little island and book a wine tasting session. In order to answer such question a short questionnaire was designed to build the profile of the Gozo wine tourist. The main purpose of the questionnaire was to figure out the motivation to visit this small boutique winery on Gozo. The survey started from the questions about the social identity of the traveller, namely the gender, the status and the country of origin. In addition the survey was supplemented by several additional

questions about the type of transport used, the preferred accommodation and which marketing channels were the most effective. The questionnaire also tapped into the travellers' highlights of the holiday, their duration of stay and the quality of their wine experience. This would provide essential information to tourist stake holders and policy planners.

Most of the questions of the survey were multiple choice questions, where the respondent could choose one option from a list of possible answers or write his/her own answer in the text box choosing an open ended option referred to as 'Other'. The purpose of the survey was also to get as many respondents as possible and that is the reason that multiple choice questions were used. These type of questions were simple to understand and quick to answer while the option of the open-ended answer allowed the respondent to enter his/her own viewpoint if necessary and also gave to the survey's carrier an opportunity to get the respondents' feedback.

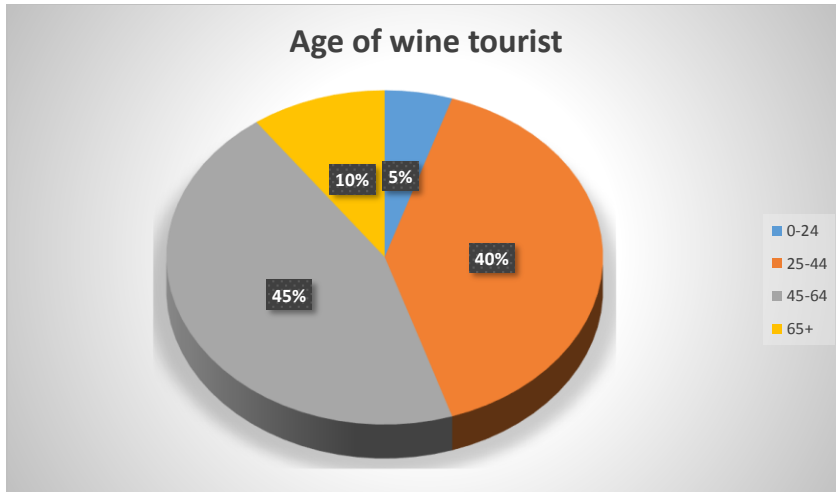
Data for the questionnaire was collected from travellers who booked a wine tasting session at Tal-Massar Vineyards at Gharb. The information was collected during the months of June, July, August and September. The resulting sample consisted of 250 individuals. The questionnaire was distributed to the travellers at the end of every wine tasting session that was held on several Saturdays (4th, 11th, 18th, 25th June 2016) (2nd, 9th, 6th, 16th, 23rd, 30th July 2016), (6th, 13th, 20th, 27th August 2016) and (3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th September 2016). The Saturday sessions were attended by an average of 18 people each time. I handed the questionnaires to each participant during every session. All of them were willing to participate and most of them completed the survey within a couple of minutes without any help. Some of them preferred to be asked the questions and replied orally. In such cases the information was also successfully retrieved. However some of the questionnaires were incomplete and so were not considered. Out of 250, 238 respondents answered the questionnaire in full. Therefore, the response rate was close to 95 %. In total the questionnaire included 14 questions. The first part of the survey gathered the information about the respondent her-/himself including country of origin, age, gender and social status. The purpose of the next section was to identify the wine tourists' travel lifestyle and learn about their travel preferences and holiday highlights. The last part of the survey was designed to investigate the knowledge of the wine tourists about the boutique winery, test their social media intelligence and the participation at wine tasting sessions. Kindly refer to Appendix 6. The graphs below illustrate the respondents' answers to all the questions of the survey.

Country of origin and age.



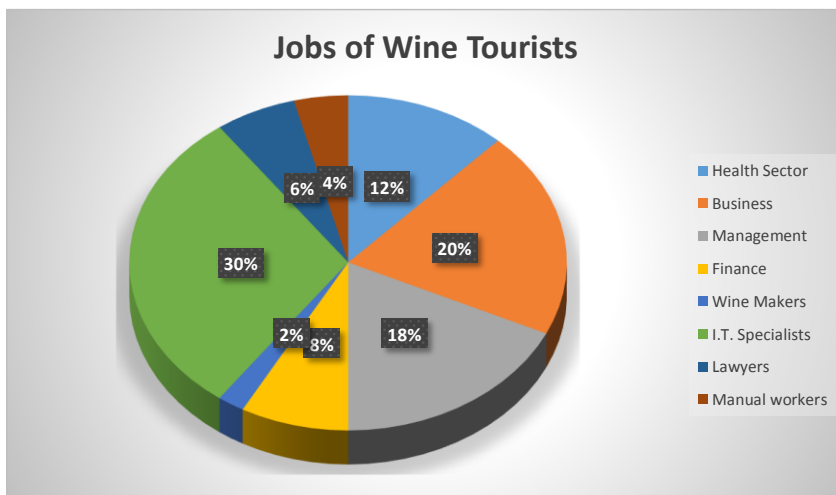
The first pie chart shows that although Gozo is a very small island in the Mediterranean, it is visited by travellers from around the world. This is due to accessibility and easy booking through the internet. Although the majority of wine travellers came from the United Kingdom (65%), it was noticeable that 6% came from outside the European Union countries. The pie chart also shows that no locals were present during the collection of the data. In fact the owners had stated that it is quite rare that Maltese book wine tasting sessions.

Age of wine tourist.



The second question was about the age of the Gozo wine tourists and one can see that 45% were aged between 45 and 64 years. One can also notice that the elderly (10%) were more inclined to wine tasting than people aged less than 25 years (5%). It is clearly evident that wine tasting sessions are more popular with a mature audience.

Profession/Job



As regards the profession or jobs, it is highly noticeable that the wine travellers were middle and upper class. Only 2% were manual workers. This is in line with the research in other countries as discussed in section 2.2.

Gender

As regards to gender, there is only a slight difference between the male and the female drinkers as 54% are males whilst 46% are females.

Status

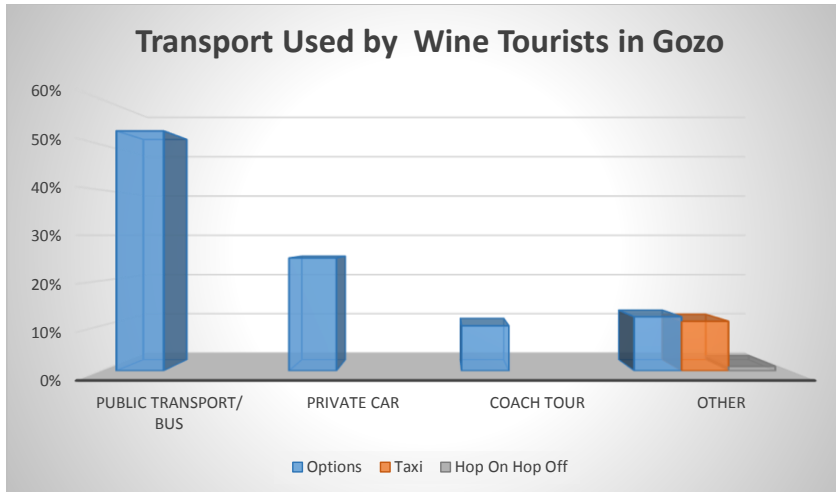
The majority of the wine tourists (68%) were married. 29% were in a relationship.

Is it the first time you visited Gozo?



The majority of the respondents claimed that it was their first time that they visited Gozo. 32% were repeated visitors and this indicates that the island is leaving a positive impact on the traveller.

What kind of transport did you use to arrive at the vineyards?



The survey also tapped into the travel preference of the tourists. The majority of the wine travellers preferred the public transport and used the bus. Only 25% used their car to arrive at the wine tasting venue. This does not necessarily mean that they were tight on budget but they opted for the bus in order to avoid driving and so be able to drink wine and return safely to their accommodation.

Is it the first time you attend a wine tasting session?



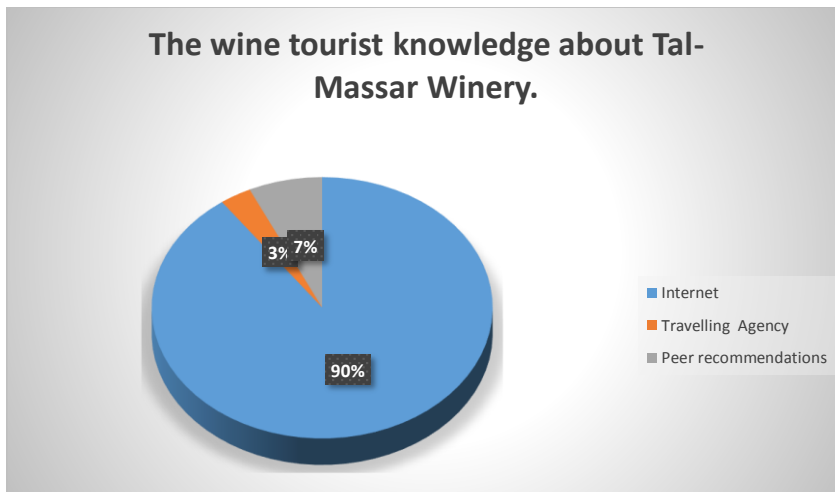
The majority of the respondents (74%) were first time clients at a wine tasting session, while 26% had participated at several wine tasting sessions.

Type of traveller



From the survey it was evident that the majority of the wine tourists (90%) were independent travellers. This can easily be related to the online booking and internet service.

How did you come across this winery?



When the respondents were asked how they came across this winery, 90% found it on the internet while 7% heard about it through their peers. Only 3% of the travellers booked their wine tasting session through a travelling agency.

Have you checked the reviews of Trip Advisor?



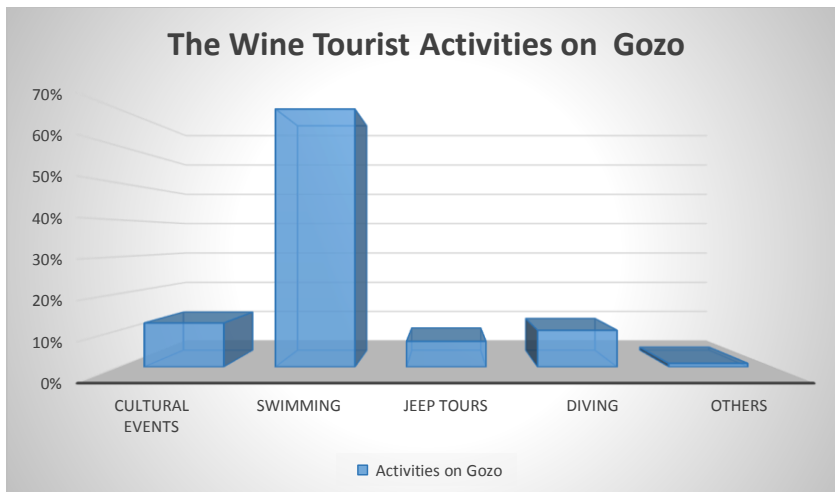
This result goes in line with the travellers' use of the internet site of Trip Advisor. 95% stated that they checked Trip Advisor before booking a wine tasting session.

How many days will you be spending in Gozo?



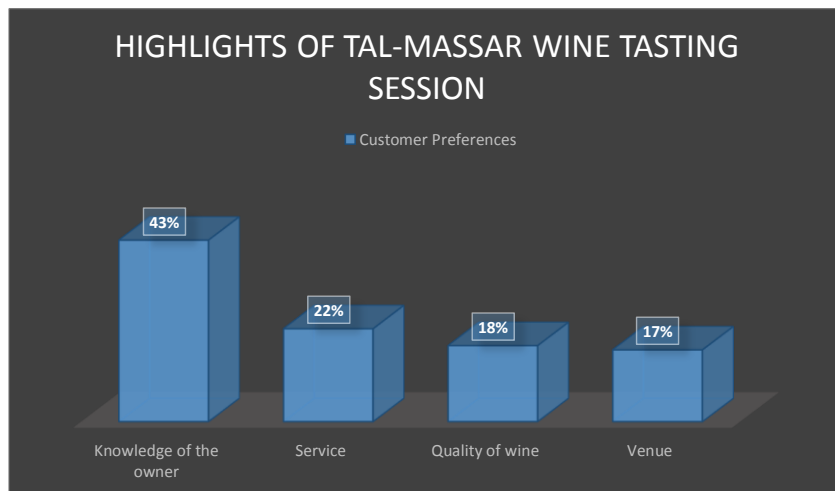
As regards the number of days spent in Gozo, 63% stated that they planned 3 days on the island. This was followed by 20% who visited the island for 1 day only.

What other activities will you be doing in Gozo?



As regards the respondents' activities, it was clear that more than 70% opted for swimming, followed by cultural events (10%) and diving (8%). These are the traditional activities that Gozo is renowned for.

What were the highlights of this wine tasting session?



The last question was about the highlights of the wine tasting session. The majority were impressed by the knowledge of the owner followed by 22% who were very satisfied with the service offered. The quality of the wine and the venue also left a highly positive impression on the wine traveller (18% and 17%).

In a nut shell these results are highly encouraging and although the survey had its limitations, this feedback can be a good eye opener to policy makers and Gozo tourism forecasts. One can also add that the wine tourist who visits Gozo had similar trends, namely age, profession, status and gender, to the ones mentioned in Chapter 2.2.

Apart from the results of the survey, I also analysed the comments written by the clients about their experience on the site of Trip Advisor. At the time of this study, this boutique winery had already 220 reviews and won the Certificate of Excellence for five consecutive years. The owners of the winery had claimed that this site had opened their success door to their business and it was the force that had set their business rolling. The reviews had a

wine making and also how to appreciate wine. This is why words such as; 'informative', 'learnt', 'great history', 'enjoyable' amongst others are very frequent in the comments. It is also noticeable that clients feel the extra effort that the owners do in order to see their clients satisfied. From the reviews, one can see that Marisa, the owner's wife, is the one who offers help to clients in their requests, from transport queries to planning their holiday on Gozo. The other adjectives used throughout the reviews show that all elements of knowledge, quality of the wines, helpful service, beauty of landscape all merge together to forge an everlasting experience and a positive memory on the mind of the traveller. It is interesting to note that this association between their wine tasting experience and their holiday on Gozo is indeed a strong one.

Most clients claimed that their wine tasting session was the highlight of their trip to Gozo. For this reason nearly all clients explicitly recommended the wine tasting activity to others. It is evident that the owners organize these wine tasting sessions. All this shows that there are many factors which all equally fundamental and intertwined together that create the moment of truth for the clients. The owners manage to fulfil the expectations of the clients and leave an enormous positive impact on their minds which in turn become associated with the general feeling of the whole holiday on Gozo.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

This study contributes to the growing empirical literature research on wine tourism by providing evidence from Tal-Massar a boutique winery on the island of Gozo. According to results and observation of the practices of this winery, the island of Gozo has developed a strong niche in wine tourism particularly during these last 5 years and is attempting to increase its economic and promotional advantages. If we link the findings of this thesis to the lifecycle theory (Tomljenovic & Getz, 2009), one can see that Gozo can be classified as a wine tourism destination in its developing stage. The maturity stage will require wine makers to be actively participating in tourism activities and at the same time, increasing their dependence on cellar door sales.

Results show that apart from the need for investment in infrastructure facilities, addressing the accessibility to the island particularly the Gozo ferry service, several factors which reflect policy matters along with regional issues, several programmes are regarded to be critical. Indeed as Gunn (2002, 35) argues, tourism is 'a system of major components linked together in an intimate and interdependent relationship'. Considering the high quality of the wines, the ideal climate for wine-making, the cultural and historic richness of the island as

well as the wide variety of attractions and outdoor entertainment that the island can offer, it can be concluded that wine tourism in Gozo has a considerable growth potential. This implies that there is room for greater improvement. There is a clear need for greater synergy and cooperation amongst the principal stakeholders, including several tourism organisations, policy makers and also the community in general.

From a regional marketing perspective, it would be highly beneficial to Gozo if a more benefit-based approach would be taken into consideration. Vossen (1992) suggested a comprehensive approach for small scale agricultural markets to increase consumer demand for local products. This could be done by cooperative marketing efforts among tourism policy makers and organisations such as Malta Tourism Authority (MTA), Gozo Tourism Authority (GTA) and Gozo Business Chamber (GBC). While Gozo is endowed with several tourism assets such as its pristine landscapes and beaches, friendly inhabitants and widely spread use of the English language amongst others, there is also the potential to broaden the scope of the visit for a relatively large number of tourists who currently visit the island as only a sun and sea destination. Cooperation and cross promotion among the various key stakeholders will also be a critical component of long term investment in wine tourism and economic boost.

The construction of a wine route would contribute immensely to the exposure and marketing of the island as a wine tourist destination. Proper signage and internationally recognised wine trail could attract tourists all year round. A wine route would raise the profile of the island and attract high-end customers all year round. Gozo is still not known as a wine destination and its wine production is virtually unknown internationally. Thus a network of influential wine journalists and sommeliers should be established to create coverage in newspapers and widely distributed magazines. It is also important that individual wineries have a significant online presence and their websites have a good search engine optimisation (SEO). Tourist boards should be proactive in creating online activity for the island. They should build and encourage online conversations and also stimulate comments about wine tours. Social media, the most important of which are Facebook, Twitter and Trip Advisor, is vital to the wine industry and also for a geographical reason as it helps to pin point remote locations.

Collaboration between wineries and with the regional tourist boards are essential if the island is to gain recognition for its wine tourism services. Such partnership will result in a more effective use of marketing budgets such as PR campaigns, organising Fam trips and maximising the effectiveness during trade fairs. Promotion amongst wine producing regions is also highly recommended. Apart from cooperation and collaboration, it is also important

to expose the wineries' unique selling point. This differentiation should be amplified on websites and in marketing channels. The working relationship between international tour operators and the local wineries is crucial to building a successful international wine tourism sector. Good communication, in depth knowledge by local agents and tourist boards as well as reliability should be the three pillars of this working relationship.

Gozo can become a wine village as it can offer lodgings to sleep, gourmet restaurants, no need of driving a car after drinking and offers a whole array of activities such as swimming, diving, cultural outings, heritage appreciation, folklore exposure and experiential tastings of other traditional food products. Entertainment is also present as Gozo has a rich socio-cultural calendar with religious feasts occupying all weekends of the summer months. Christmas, Carnival and Easter festivities as well as 2 yearly operas circle the rest of the calendar.

5.1 The market opportunities for wine tourism in Gozo

In the light of the above facts, tourism plays a major role in the island's identity. Thus wine becomes valued for its ability to attract tourists. Since the Maltese islands are members of the European Union, wine had to abide by the regulations that govern agriculture, methods of production, quality, uniformity of product and laws regarding imports and exports. Since Malta joined the EU in 2004, there are legal constraints on production and land use. In Malta, on the 23rd October 2001 the Wine Act (Chapter 436) was enacted in Parliament. The new wine act attempts to offer amongst other things the i) the control of practices and processes used in the production of wine; ii) labelling of wines; iii) establishment of an inventory of the wine potential of Malta; iv) rules on the production of quality wine produced in a specific region. In addition to this legislation, Malta's accession into the European Union also implied that as of May 2007, wine production had to abide to particular criteria to ensure quality standards, namely D.O.K (Denominazzjoni ta' Origni Kontrollata) and I.G.T. (Indikazzjoni Geografika Tipika). Tal-Massar wines cannot be classified according to the current legislation as they are superior because 80% of the grapes are cultivated in their private estate.

The EU recognizes Gozo as a place where wine has room to grow as a commercialized product. Gozo wine production must satisfy a rather extensive list of particular requirements to legally carry a label that states the wine was made in Gozo. Each type of wine, red, white and rose' must have proper 'sensorial characteristics' such as certain colours and smells. There are also guidelines including but not limited to the wines minimum alcohol content and the use of certain adjectives on the label. The most important stipulation for a wine to

Commented [MJ7]: Into which classification your case wines fall into?

carry a 'made in Gozo' label is that the grapes for the wine be grown on Gozo and not imported. Therefore owning such label will definitely make it attractive to tourists who are seeking authentic products and experiences. The European Union also regulates aspects of agricultural production of Gozo wine. For example, no more than 1,000 hectares of land on Gozo may be used for the growing of the grapes used for wine. The European Union also provides subsidies to start vineyards that will be used for the production of wine.

Consumer behaviour is a complex process that is neither singular in nature nor consistent in its application. This is particularly evident in the purchase of wine where previous studies have identified product, packaging, promotional, purchase and situational factors that have an impact on the wine selection process (Hall, O'Mahony & Lockshin 2001, Jenster & Jenster 1993; Keown & Casey 1995). This complexity has been mentioned also by Edwards & Mort (1991), who stress that there is more to wine than the obvious tangible qualities. General psychological positions, subjective intangible factors as well as specific product features play a part in the purchase decision for wine products (Judica & Perkins 1992; Keown & Casey 1995; Shaw, Keeghan & Hall 1999). This research is valuable when marketing to the wine tourist. Statistics compiled by the National Statistics Offices (NSO) in a lifestyle survey back in 2007 identified that 'Wine is the most widely consumed form of alcohol with 42.7 per cent of the population consuming at least one glass of wine per week.' Such high consumption could be attributed to the increase in wine bars around the islands. The NSO survey also identified that women consume more wine than men in Malta.

Both tourism and wine production have been of importance to the economy of Gozo. Since tourism is growing and more types need to be developed to appeal to visitors that are in search of a different experience, merging tourism and wine is a solid idea. Since Gozo is an island with a rural character and dependency on agriculture, wine tourism can be perceived as a way to increase visibility, serve as an attraction to the island and its remote areas, enhancing and developing the wine industry and production while offering an authentic experience. Till now no data about wine tourism has been recorded as this concept is still new to the Maltese authorities. The data about wine industry encompasses only the existing wineries and the bottle production.

Based on the interview with the owners, my own observation and research regarding Gozo, it was possible to derive a SWOT analysis for this winery on the island of Gozo. The SWOT is a tool that uses the basic data of any organisation to identify the strengths and weaknesses and spot the opportunities that may arise and the threats it is likely to face. The below is a synthesis of the data:

Commented [MJ8]: Statistics of wine industry in Malta/Gozo?

Strengths:

- Climate
- Diversity of tourism activities: diving, horse riding, hiking, motorbikes etc
- Culture, history and art heritage.
- Unique local gastronomy.
- Gozo has UNESCO heritage sites which is Ggantija temples.
- The winery has an excellent reputation.
- The winery has no overheads and own property.
- The owners do most of the work and check every process.
- No bureaucratic hassle in the enterprise.
- Kempinski hotel within walking distance from vineyards wine tasting venue.

Weakness:

- Winery has no budget for marketing.
- Owners are still heavily investing to improve facilities.
- Work load is heavily dependent on owners.
- No wine route on Gozo.
- Lack of proper network cooperation (stake holders and agents not well coordinated).
- Lack of awareness by most wineries and other agents on wine tourism potential.
- The island lacks of integrated packages in wine tourism establishments combining other activities.
- Gozo lacks a destination image and brand development.

Opportunities:

- The products and wines of Gozo could easily find new markets.
- Export activity as a means to promote the island and the wines.
- Growing importance of social media as a means of communication – increase awareness and knowledge of the island.
- Trade fairs and events worldwide to make the island of Gozo and its wines known.
- Innovation (use of new techniques and other novelties, such as conferences.)

Threats:

- Climate changes.
- International tourism crisis.

- Competition from national and international wines and wine tourism destinations.
- Bad weather may ruin grapes.
- Road and infrastructural works can make accessibility difficult.
- Ferries not working regularly or long queues to cross over to Gozo.
- Government regulations still do not recognize wine tourism and no marketing support is available.

In the light of this analysis, one can see that Gozo is an island with a lot of potential, with great wines and wine production history which still needs to develop and grow as a destination for wine tourism in order to become competitive worldwide.

5.2 Conclusions about success factors

The aim of this study was to identify the success factors in the light of the major challenges that Gozo needs to explore to enhance the development of wine tourism. Gozo is an island with a lot of potential regarding wine tourism and also with a lot of room for improvement and expansion. All references to wine tourism mentioned in the literature review have exposed several common traits such as the importance of cooperation, the involvement of all stakeholders, the concept of sustainability, the focus on quality of the use of social media as an effective marketing tool and the indispensability of being in a wine route.

When referring to the critical success factors by Getz & Brown (2006), it was evident that some of the most important characteristics for a wine tourism destination, were amongst others, the attractive and unspoilt scenery, the possibility of seeing and doing a lot of activities in the area, fine dining, organized vineyard tours, visitor friendly wineries and highly knowledgeable staff. Gozo with all its limitations of double insularity can satisfy indeed the above mentioned factors. Most of the factors are already existing while there is a room for improvement on collaboration and the setting up of a wine route. The link between wine and culture and history is already present and this is fuelling more regional tourism. The pairing of food and wine and the several activities offered are gaining momentum and become a strong magnet to many tourists.

A closer look at the several success factors mentioned in Chapter 2 and analytic review of the results exposed in Chapter 4 will give us a detailed picture of how much Gozo can be

truly considered as a wine tourism destination. Out of the 27 critical success factors as listed by Getz & Brown (2006) p.153, results of the data collected from Tal-Massar Winery show clearly that Gozo is already satisfying 20 success factors. Furthermore, the island has got the potential to develop the other criteria. The collected data in Chapter 4 shows that group tours to the winery and vineyard are already being offered also with the possibility of meeting the winemaker. Information about the island is highly accessible and available and packaged holidays have long been offered. Several types of accommodation exists on the island and one can easily find moderately priced lodging. Gozo can indeed boast of having the most accommodation with regional character as the highest percentage of farmhouses are present on the island. The scenery of Gozo is still pristine and untouched, making it very attractive to tourists. The island can boast of a mild and moderate climate all year round. Although Gozo is relatively small and has limited resources, one can find a wide range of outdoor recreative opportunities such as swimming, diving, hiking, biking, photography etc. Cooking classes are also available. The island can also offer traditional food. Although the island is quite small, it is brimming with local art and crafts for sale. Another success factor is that Gozo attracts families as there are a wide range of places and activities geared for children. Sports facilities and wine festivals are also present. Customers can see lots of shops and markets that sell local produce such as cheese and olive oil, sundried tomatoes, capers, olives and others. The last success factor is that the winery is visitor friendly and its staff is highly knowledgeable about wine. This is evident in the wine tasting sessions that are held regularly by Tal-Massar Winery.

All this should be taken into consideration when marketing Gozo as a wine destination. The success factors and the challenges should be tackled by policy makers and all stakeholders. Tal-Massar Winery has already tapped many success factors and is capable of addressing the challenges to fully develop its full potential of wine tourism that can contribute to the economic development and identity of the island.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Trip Advisor Certificate of Excellence



Appendix 2. The Certificate of Excellence Testimonial of High Standard



Appendix 3. Medals awarded at international competitions.

DIPLOMA
This is to certify that
Tanit 2015
of
Tal-massar Winery
has been awarded a
SILVER MEDAL




in the category of white wines
at the Catavinum World Wine & Spirits Competition 2016.





CWWSC
CATAVINUM WORLD
WINE & SPIRITS COMPETITION


Jorge Martínez - Director of CWWSC
Vitoria-Gasteiz (Spain) 2/5/2017

DIPLOMA
Tanit 2012
of
Tal-massar Winery
has been awarded a
SILVER MEDAL
in the category of White wines at the
International Wine Guide 2014




Jorge Martínez - Director of IWG
Vitoria-Gasteiz (Spain) 2/5/2017



Appendix 3.

DIPLOMA

This is to certify that
Manzara 2014
of
Tal-massar Winery
has been awarded a
SILVER MEDAL



in the category of rose wines
at the Catavinum World Wine & Spirits Competition 2015



Jorge Martínez - Director of CWWSC
Vitoria-Gasteiz (Spain) 2/5/2017

Appendix 4. Interview with the owners of Tal-Massar Winery

1. How would you describe your winery?

2. What grape varieties do you grow?

3. What wines do you produce (distinguish between what is produced at the winery and what is sold there)?

4. What is the approximate annual production volume of your winery?

5. What has been the history of this winery since it was first established ?

6. How long have you been doing wine tasting sessions?

7. Do you think that Gozo is an ideal place for Wine Tourism?

8. What problems have you faced so far in organising these sessions?

9. Have you ever benefitted from E.U. funds? If yes, please state.

Appendix 5. Reviews of Trip Advisor

your chance to meet people who genuinely love winemaking - Review of Tal-Massar ... Page 3 of 4



DurhamJoanne
Durham
Level **Contributor**
5 reviews
3 attraction reviews

"Excellent way to pass some time in Gozo"
Reviewed September 13, 2015

We planned our Gozo visit around this wine tasting event, held on Tuesday's and Saturday's. Thoroughly enjoyable, we learned a lot about the art of wine making and the history of this vineyard. Loved the wines. This vineyard is very close to the centre of Gharb on the 312 bus route nearest stop is Birbubba, the vineyard is not sign posted from the road. We emailed and got a prompt response.

Visited September 2015

helpful? Thank DurhamJoanne Report

Ask DurhamJoanne about Tal-Massar Winery

This review is the subjective opinion of a TripAdvisor member and not of TripAdvisor LLC.

Anthony H, Owner at Tal-Massar Winery, responded to this review, October 28, 2015

Dear Client,

Your positive comments were highly appreciated. We thank you for finding the time to write this beautiful review and sharing your experience with fellow travellers.

Report response as inappropriate

This response is the subjective opinion of the management representative and not of TripAdvisor LLC.



JostHenry1269
Balfast, United Kingdom
Level **Contributor**
3 reviews
3 helpful votes

"Lovely evening with lovely wine"
Reviewed August 17, 2015

My wife and I did the wine tour at the start of August, unfortunately we were not on Gozo long enough for the dining experience. Really simple to get to on the bus (good idea not to drive) and a great way to spend a relaxed evening. Anthony was so passionate and knowledgeable about his wines and the chemistry of wine making. Simply fascinating to listen to. The wine tasting was relaxed, really well done and very informative. Superb local snacks to eat along with the wines - the pesto was amazing!! They have to start selling it soon as well. The really nice thing was there was no hard sell at the end of the evening, but I still had to get that bottle of port.

Great value for money, really nice atmosphere. I will be back for the dining experience next time I hope.

Visited August 2015

helpful? Thank JostHenry1269 Report

Ask JostHenry1269 about Tal-Massar Winery

This review is the subjective opinion of a TripAdvisor member and not of TripAdvisor LLC.

Anthony H, Owner at Tal-Massar Winery, responded to this review, October 28, 2015

Dear Visitor,

Thank you for sparing your time and sharing your positive experience with fellow travellers. We do our best to make every customer happy and give them an unforgettable experience.

Report response as inappropriate

This response is the subjective opinion of the management representative and not of TripAdvisor LLC.

Previous **Next**

12 / 22

Appendix 5. Reviews of Trip Advisor.

your chance to meet people who genuinely love winemaking - Review of Tal-Massar ... Page 2 of 4



Anthony Kuske
Wollongong, Australia
Level 1 Contributor
1 review

Reviewed July 17, 2014

I must say, how I truly enjoyed my visit to "TAL-MASSAR WINERY" at Xaghra in Gozo on Tuesday. It truly was an amazingly well earned, happy and fun experience touring these magnificent and very beautiful vineyard that I won't take out of my mind!! The group I was with were such nice people. The winery proprietors and Husband and wife team of Anthony and Marisa are the most passionate, intelligent, knowledgeable, and such hardworking couple that you could ever witness in running the day to day tasks and operations in such a mammoth Vineyard Winery in Gozo as well as they both are so genuinely, two extremely such very wonderful, so hospitable, kind hearted, and very, very lovely people. I'm so proud to say that I've started to become close friends of these two really great people in which I'm so really honoured to truly be apart of. Personally, what I really loved about the Tour was the wine maker and vine cultivator, Anthony giving such a brilliantly well talk presentation and full detailed account about the history, the development, the fruits and their ingredients used in their wine making and as well as their wine tasting and delicious finger foods both Anthony and Marisa so very kindly prepare and offer....yum I yum! lol Anthony is such an extremely knowledgeable person. He truly intrigued my senses to such sheer interest. It was as if I was attending a School lesson or University Lecture. Then you have the participation of the other fellow Tour participants which makes these sessions such an amazingly interesting and really enjoyable experience that you truly won't forget. As I attended this wine tasting session in Gozo, I could not believe how so surprisingly very cool the weather was....It was as if I was in Queensland, Australia. The vineyard winery is situated in Xaghra, Gozo on a hill right beside the ocean again offering such very sunny and cool temperatures with absolute and such very beautiful ceramic and breath taking views of Gozo.... For more information, visit their website www.massarwinery.com or find them on Facebook. From my own past experience from Gozo, I'd always known that island to be extremely sunny and with such very warm conditions, in fact much warmer to what the weather is than in Malta. So to finish, I strongly urge you all that if you're in Malta or you're about to go on a holiday to Malta, make your visit to "TAL-MASSAR WINERY" Vineyard in Gozo your number 1 main priority as an important tourist activity you truly must attend. Believe me, you'll walk away at the end of the sessions feeling so magnificently Happy and wonderful!! To Dear Anthony and Marisa.... Keep up the magnificent and inspiring work that you so passionately and truly do so very well from you're hearts.... HONESTLY & SERIOUSLY, I'D GIVE THIS A TEN STAR RATHER THAN A 5 STAR RATING.....Take care and may God Bless you both.



See all photos

Visited July 2014

Helpful? Thank Anthony Kuske Report

Ask Anthony Kuske about Tal-Massar Winery

This review is the subjective opinion of a TripAdvisor member and not of TripAdvisor LLC.



Sinead B
1 review

Reviewed October 4, 2014 via mobile

"Fabulous wine tasting tour"

We are staying in a 5 star resort in Gozo but the highlight of our trip has been a fabulously personalised wine tour of a local vineyard making the most gorgeous award-winning wines. Marisa escorted us from our hotel to the vineyard, and her husband Anthony told us of the evolution of their agrotourismo industry from the early days where he stomped the skins as a 7 yr old. The Vermentino, San Govease and Sirikata grapes he has cultivated in a loving and attentive way have resulted in the most marvellous, complex wines we were delighted to taste in a beautiful, panoramic setting. A memorable experience

Helpful? Thank Sinead B Report

Ask Sinead B about Tal-Massar Winery

This review is the subjective opinion of a TripAdvisor member and not of TripAdvisor LLC.

luxury hotel
www.luxury.com Design Hotel, at Verbena heart SPA offers and Sush Bar
Swiss Alps Luxury Hotel - Verbier charming luxury

Book a Hotel
www.yellow.com.au Enjoy a break this Valentine's "Faid" and Book directly from Yellow

Popular Xaghra attractions
www.expedia.com Hotels in Xaghra. Save up to 80% on Xaghra. Lowest Price Guaranteed!
Compare 1000+ Hotel Sites 500,000+ Hotels Worldwide

Top Restaurants Software
www.yelp.com Compare Top 10 Restaurants in Xaghra. Deal & Save Today!
The Museum of Toys
Nlu's Cave
Dreams of Horses Farm
Gerry's Taxi Service

Popular Hotels

- Cornucopia Hotel**
4.0 out of 5, 330 reviews
Last reviewed Feb 11, 2016
- Elle Boo Bed & Breakfast**
5.0 out of 5, 134 reviews
Last reviewed Feb 6, 2016
- Sardinella Bed & Breakfast**
5.0 out of 5, 97 reviews
Last reviewed Feb 1, 2016
- Calde Hoger**
5.0 out of 5, 1 review
Last reviewed Jan 25, 2016
- Gozo Hills Bed and Breakfast**
5.0 out of 5, 112 reviews
Last reviewed Jan 11, 2016
- St. Agnes Bed and Breakfast**
5.0 out of 5, 8 reviews
Last reviewed Jan 2, 2016
- Bella Vista Farmhouses**
4.0 out of 5, 134 reviews
Last reviewed Nov 17, 2015

Xaghra resources

- Xaghra Bed and Breakfast
- Xaghra Maps

Appendix 6. Questionnaire to Travellers at a Wine Tasting Session.

Questionnaire to Travellers at a Wine tasting session

1. Please state your country of origin:
2. Age: Please mark one

17 – 24.....
25 – 44
45 – 64
65 +
3. Profession/ Job
4. Gender
5. Status: Married_____
- Single_____
- In relationship_____
6. Is it the first time you visited Gozo? Yes / No

7. What kind of transport did you use to arrive at the vineyards?

Public transport.....
Private car/ Taxi.....
Coach tour.....
Other.....
8. Is it the first time you attend a wine tasting session? Yes / No
9. What kind of traveller are you?

Independent Traveller
- Tour group
- Package traveller.....

10. How did you come across this winery?

Internet _____

Travelling agency _____

Peer recommendations _____

11. Have you checked the reviews of Trip Advisor? Yes / No

12. How many days will you be spending in Gozo? _____

13. What other activities will you be doing in Gozo?

Cultural events

Swimming.....

Jeep tours

Diving

Others

14. What were highlights of this wine tasting session?

Knowledge of owner _____

Service _____

Quality of wine _____

Venue _____

Appendix 7. Information about the location and the viticulture used.

opinion ✦

LOCAL WINE AT HEART



I am quite convinced that so much more is happening in the wine industry of Malta and Gozo than most of us are aware of. These past ten years or so have seen a healthy revival in the attention given to this sector which followed on the massive developments that had taken place in the late eighties and early nineties.

words José Bonello



Most of this renewed interest has been shown by private investors who have seen a future despite a very overcrowded market whereas in 2007 Malta introduced the new DOK legislation whilst today we have an experimental winery in Buskett which will play an important role in the years to come.

Few may indeed realise how much tougher it is to sell local wines in the Maltese islands today with so many wine importers operating, none of whom are probably more interested in flooding the already saturated market with cheap plonk instead of working towards increased appreciation of finer wines. Upon reflection however, despite clear levels of unfair advantages gained by importing wines from certain countries at very competitive prices due to simple economies of scale, I can even reach the conclusion that the massive explosion of wine imports in these past twenty years has even had its positive effect on the local product. Faced with such immense competition, local wine makers needed to take heed and correct what needed correction. New World wines

were then known for their high marketability thanks to their low prices, attractive labels, easy-drinking style and varietal descriptions and maybe could teach us a thing or two. Yet truth be told, a good number of importers did contribute greatly by investing in finer wines that gave the local wine drinker a chance to start appreciating some bottles of huge international status. In the past, it was up to the larger wineries to battle on and keep the local industry alive. Today however, they are joined by new encouraging realities that are slowly turning the local wine scene into an attractive mosaic, responding rather well to new market demands.

Tal-Massar Winery in Xaghra Gozo is one such novelty, run by a highly industrious couple Anthony and Marisa Hill who have been devoting so much of their time with epic determination and willingness to learn. They ambitiously picked a Latin motto, 'Nullis Secundus' meaning Second to None, clearly stating their intent from very early on. And they have sustained this promise even in their natural style of viticulture whereby they

refrain from use of any herbicides whilst physically handling every step of their vines' development. Its humble roots date back to 1934 as part of a family interest but the couple took over and launched Tal-Massar in 2010. Their private estate today provides for four wines in their portfolio. Annu 2006 is an unusual blend of 60% Sircusian (aka Nero D'Avola) and 40% Sangiovese offering some intriguing characteristics whereas Garb is an intense 100% late-harvest Sircusian. San Mitri defines the characteristics of a Gozitan Sangiovese whilst their white offering is Tanit, a very generous 100% Vermentino. Their latest wine is a salmon coloured rose' wine called Manzara. This is a winery that is gradually growing in stature even though it is still in its very early years. Lots of incredibly hard work and impressive dedication is being poured into it by Anthony and Marisa and it is well-worth keeping an eye on the way they are developing and marketing their wines and vineyards.

Thankfully, Tal-Massar is not the only boutique winery that is taking root in Malta and Gozo. There are a handful of others with new ventures in the pipeline who, in conjunction with the other more traditional players in the field, make for an optimistic future.



it's all about food ✦ 47

Wines

The unique character of their wine is not something that has escaped the attention of Marisa Cauchi Hilli, who runs Tal-Massar winery with her husband Anthony. The two run a boutique winery, with vineyards over 1.2 hectares facing the sea, and they focus solely on wine – a tradition that has been in Anthony's family for generations, with his uncle producing and purveying quality wine made from grapes supplied by others.



"When my husband took over and Malta entered the EU and laws changed, we decided to plant our own grapes, so we could have perfect wine – because we believe that you create perfect wine from perfect grapes. We believe wine happens in the vineyard," Marisa says.

This extends to a commitment to not using herbicides – "we remove all weeds ourselves, and it's a back-breaking commitment". Pesticide use is kept to a minimum, and mould is not a problem because the sun usually dries it out.

"We've turned our small size to an advantage, because we can do what the big ones can't," Marisa says. "Secondly, what we do that makes us different from the bigger producers is the pruning method. When we come to leave the grapes on the vine, we only leave two kilos on each. We also go a step beyond and only leave one bunch of grapes per branch. That is something that the bigger wineries can't do.



Wine tasting sessions bring friends together

"Many restaurants... buy the cheapest wine possible so they can sell it at the highest profit margin possible"

This results in extremely high quality grapes, because all the substances are going to be concentrated in one bunch," she says.

The winery produces four types of wine – a white, a rosé, a semi-sweet red and a dry red, which can only be bought from the winery, a shop in Malta, and one in Germany. Their speciality is Garb, a semi-sweet wine made from grapes dried on the vine, which owes its particular taste to the location in which it is made. Tal-Massar's output – 7,000 bottles yearly – are stored in a wartime shelter four storeys underground that Marisa's grandfather had made.

Joseph speaks with equal pride of their grape cultivation. "We use broad beans for nitrogen, extracts from organic matter, we use natural fertilisers, we use rainwater to avoid alkalinity. It all shows in the final product. It's not certified organic, but it's traditional agriculture all right."

Both Tal-Massar and Ta' Mena organise wine-tasting sessions (call to enquire or book), which seem to be more popular with the international market than with the locals, more so in the case of Tal-Massar, who have a mostly international clientele. The two wineries also share the same consultant oenologist – Roger Aquilina – as well as the same opinions about local restaurants and wine drinking habits.

"The Maltese don't know how to drink wine – they want it sweet," Joseph says. A German man who came to visit our winery said he wouldn't even wash his teeth in the Australian wines we're getting," he says. Marisa agrees – "Maltese people are likely to mix their wine with a soft drink," she complains.

That said, Joseph believes that there is a way forward for the Maltese/Gozitan palate: "People should learn how to taste wine – on the forefront of the mouth, not at the back, very important," something that is covered when on a wine-tasting tour at their vineyard.

Furthermore, both wineries face the same problem when supplying their wines to restaurants – it's a race to the bottom, with many restaurants only willing to buy the cheapest wine possible so they can sell it at the highest profit margin possible. This affects Ta' Mena, with its wider range and 150,000 bottles a year (and room to produce 200,000 more) much more than it does Tal-Massar. "Thankfully we're not in that game," Marisa says, who sell all their 7,000 bottles directly to clients, who tend to be middle-to-high income tourists.

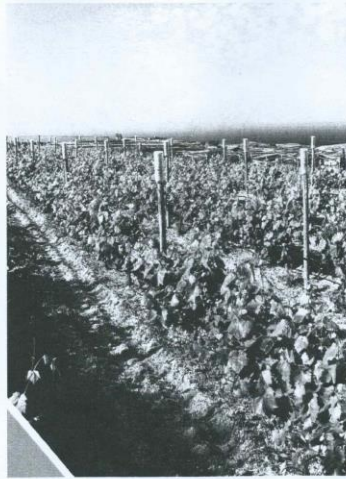
"We get the people who look for good value for money and quality, passion and love, and those things you can't measure. And we're sought after because we're small and offer an intimate experience, something which you don't get in wine-tasting sessions abroad," Marisa says.

It is clear that despite their differences, these two Gozitan estates take their wine (and food) very seriously. It might be time for the rest of us to stand up and take notice. ●

CHARACTER



ABOVE: Weather-permitting, wine tasting takes place on the terrace.
RIGHT: The Tal-Massar was re-born in 2003, as a boutique winery run by husband-and-wife team Anthony and Marisa Hill.



We trekked up a muddy hill somewhere near the picturesque town of Gharb. The wind was raging furiously and it was biting cold. But it would be worth it, my hosts assure me. And boy-oh-boy were they right. The view was undeniably spectacular, terraced fields all around and the beautiful Mediterranean Sea glinting prettily ahead of me.

I was at Tal-Massar Winery, a small but perfectly formed, eco friendly vineyard run by husband and wife team Anthony and Marisa Hill. For the hard working couple, this enterprise is truly close to their hearts and they personally follow every grape from vine to wine. "To ensure that every bottle is as perfect as it can be, 80 per cent of the work is done in the vineyards," Anthony explains.

A lot of research went into the venture before any vines were planted; experts were consulted, books were read and other vineyards were studied hard. Although, it wasn't a completely 'out of the blue' idea as the Hill family were winemakers from way back when in 1934, Anthony's great-uncle Carmel started a winery in Xaghra and this mantle was taken up by his nephew (and Anthony's father) Alfred. In the 70s though, the winery stopped operating and the family's wine production ceased. It wasn't until 2003, when Anthony and Marisa decided to invest all their savings into a boutique organic vineyard and winery, that things were kick-started once again. And thus, Tal-Massar was (re) born, albeit on a smaller scale than the original winery.

"We are small, but we strive to be the best. In fact, that's our motto," Marisa tells me with a smile.

In 2004 works kicked off in earnest on their new project, and by 2006 the first vines were planted. Their positioning was carefully thought through to ensure the best possible grape crop. The fact that the vineyard is so exposed to the elements, and that the soil is thin and dry, actually help the flavour of the grape, Anthony explains. These seemingly-adverse conditions help to grow a hardier, and therefore more flavourful, grape.

"We never include additives in our wine," Anthony assures me. Add to that the fact that they don't use any insecticides and you can be sure that their wine is naturally rich and very tasty!

Wanting to have a professional product and to rise above the amateur world of wine-making, they also consulted one of the top oenologists in Malta, Roger Aquilina, who studied in Geisenheim in Germany and is a member of the German Chamber of Oenologists. He saw the potential of this small vineyard and agreed to offer his services.

Adding to the interest of the place, is the fact that spots of historical importance are dotted around. An old war shelter, which belonged to Marisa's family, is one of them. Her great grandfather dug it, intending for it to be used as a shelter during the war. Fast forward a few years and Anthony has meticulously cleared out all the debris that had accumulated over the decades and found that it reaches a depth of around four storeys and is completely waterproof – an ideal spot for a wine cellar.

The vineyard also 'houses' a large terrace where wine-tastings are held when the weather permits. I wished that the weather was in our favour that day, as the view is rather stunning, and sipping on a glass of good wine whilst basking in the sun would have been perfection. Unfortunately it was not to be and, for fear that we may be blown off the hillside, Anthony and Marisa whisk me off to their winery in Xaghra.

This building also belonged to Anthony's family, however the enterprising couple transformed it completely. The winery is now housed underground as, "this lessens the need for excessive air-conditioning," Marisa tells me. The place is sparkling clean and very, very white. "The more hygienic you are throughout the whole process of wine-making, the fewer impurities you will have to remove, and the better your final product," she says, with the unmistakable sigh of someone who has wielded cleaning products for more time than they cared for.

The vineyard is exposed to the elements, which helps the flavour of the grapes.

CHARACTER



The winery produces around 7,000 bottles per year, using eco-friendly wine-making practices.

My tour took me through the different methods and equipment used for both white and red wine, and by their enthusiastic tones it was very evident that they really wanted me to understand the process and to love it as much as they do. "We only produce around 7,000 bottles a year," Anthony says. "We can't compete with

the wine-making giants in terms of quantity, however I think we give them a good run for their money in terms of quality." Marisa interjects: "Our biggest problem is finding restaurants willing to stock our wine. The larger companies have a monopoly and can offer contracts and higher profit margins than we can, so we've experienced