

THE SUNDAY TIMES

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The little book of walks in Malta



One of the walks leads to the Blue Grotto. Photo: Flickr

Emmet McMahon & Jonathan Henwood: Malta 10 Great Walks, 2011, 96pp.

A troglodytic settlement existed from ancient times until the 19th century in Malta. It ended when “inhabitants were forcibly evicted by the British administration to be resettled in the nearby villages of Dingli and Siġġiewi”.

This information, taken from Malta 10 Great Walks, is one of many historical accounts mentioned in this book.

The authors Emmet McMahon, who is an Irish environmental scientist, and Jonathan Henwood, a Maltese botanist and environmental scientist, pack this 96-page book with information that is both succinct and relevant to every walk they describe.

As this book promises by its title, 10 great walks are described. These are walks through rural and urban areas.

The walks described are around Valletta, the Three Cities, Marsascala and Marsaxlokk, Qrendi and the Blue Grotto, Buskett and Dingli Cliffs, Cirkewwa to Mellieħa Bay, The Victoria Lines, around Sliema, a loop walk in Comino and a walk in Gozo from Cittadella, through Għasri, to the salt pans, Qbajjar and back to Victoria.

A short introduction is given before each route is explained. Apart from historical episodes, the authors also describe the geology, flora and fauna found in the area.

Moreover, a Google Earth map with the highlighted route is provided for every walk. Each important site along the route is numbered then explained as the walk is described step by step. The approximate duration, how to reach the start of the walk by bus and places where one can eat and rest are also mentioned before each walk is described in detail.

“Going downhill, you pass by the parish church of St Lawrence and the Freedom Monument to reach the side of Galley Creek. St Lawrence was an early Christian martyr who was roasted alive by order of the Roman Emperor Valeria. Today he is the patron saint of cooks!”

This and similar extra pieces of information are tossed in to spice up the content and thus make reading more interesting and informative.

However, aesthetics and content in this book are not on par. The layout in most pages has much room for improvement. Photos sometimes correctly end at the edge of the margin but very often they go beyond the margin till the end of the page.

Similarly, more attention should have been paid to typography and editing.

Notwithstanding, Malta 10 Great Walks has a lot to offer as it entices people to go out, explore and experience the Mediterranean characteristics of Malta.

The authors describe villages, towns and the countryside – “the washing hanging out of windows”, “the colourful traditional fishing boats”, “Holm Oak trees over a 1,000 years old”, “an attractive stone archway like some door to a long-lost world”, “the small farms with beehives and the fields of vines and cereals”, “a narrow gorge with high steep cliffs and a small shingle beach at its mouth”.

These are some examples of the vivid descriptions given in the book.

After reading this book, two friends and I tested one of the walks on an extremely windy day in May. We started at Verdala Palace and walked towards Buskett. We noticed the trees described in the book and recognised even uncommon ones,

such as the poplar tree.

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Eventually, the route brought us to the Knights' hunting lodge, which I had never noticed before, although I knew it existed somewhere in Buskett. We then made our way towards Għar il-Kbir, taking a path through the garrigue landscape where we saw the cart ruts.

However, we missed the Punic tombs as described in this walk and ended up by a huge quarry. From then onwards the road was easy to follow. We walked along the stunning cliffs of Dingli and eventually reached the village.

Although we missed the Punic tombs, we still enjoyed the walk because we observed and learnt about these not so familiar areas in Malta.

Tourists and foreigners will definitely find this book handy. However, I think even Maltese could benefit from it. Malta's ancient history, beautiful countryside, quaint villages and old cities with magnificent architecture are taken for granted most of the time.

This little book reveals and reminds us of some of the beauty of the Maltese islands and entices readers to physically discover it.

www.greatwalksmalta.com

0 Comments