



# ZEJTUN

This heritage tour of the core of Zejtun portrays the development of a typical Mediterranean community. At the same time it evokes a distinct Maltese character with local overtones. Zejtun itself represents the more prominent characteristics of the south of Malta.

In the old days the residents were sentinels against invasions which landed in the southern bays of the island. Because of this and the fact that they were furthest from Medina, the old capital, they developed an independent self-reliant spirit, often lauded in their impromptu folk singing, still prevalent today. The separate communities in the lower village (Bisqallin) and the upper village (Hal Bisbut / Hal Gwann), with diverse mentalities still prevalent today, could not agree in the site of the new parish church in 1690.

In typical Zejtun fashion, agreement was reached to construct the new monumental church on a site in between and equidistant from the two old quarters, integrating them and providing the town with a new imposing, vibrant centre, which is today the focal point of the community of Zejtun.

## OTHER PLACES OF INTEREST

- |                                    |                                      |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| a. Christ Saviour Chapel           | i. Our Lady of Sacred Heart Chapel   |
| b. Villa Cagliarini                | j. St. Mary Chapel                   |
| c. Brejgu Garden                   | k. Vendome Tower                     |
| d. Crieqi Garden (artistic works)  | l. Wednesday Market                  |
| e. Centre for Christian Doctrine   | m. St. Clement Garden                |
| f. Home for Elderly and Day Centre | n. Gebel San Martin Christian Centre |
| g. Our Lady of Mercy Church        | o. Mill                              |
| h. Playing field                   | p. St. Clement Chapel                |

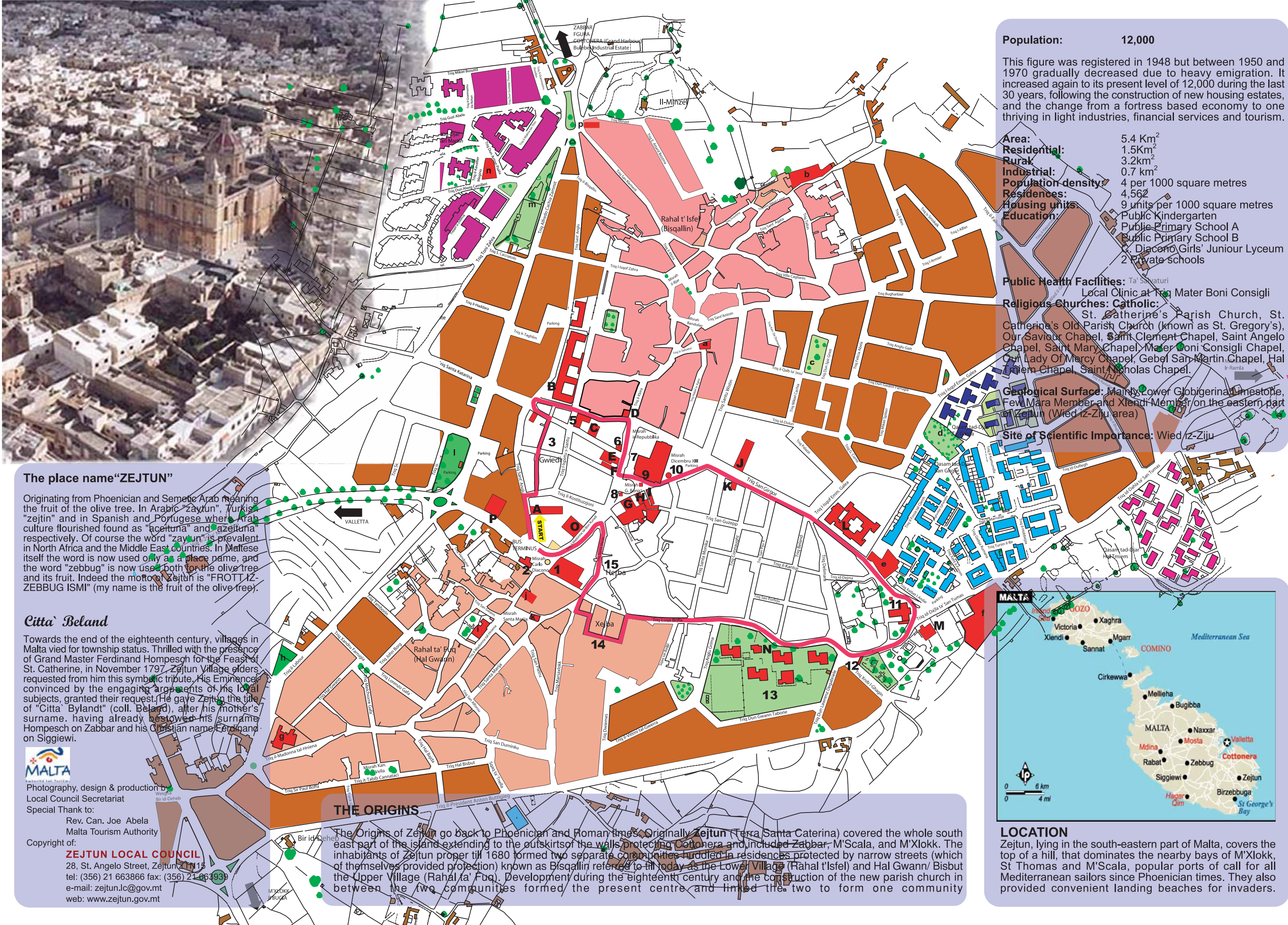
## PUBLIC PLACES

- A Town Council**
- B Primary School** On turning right, just outside Gwiedi, one is immediately struck by Zejtun's Primary School, built towards the beginning of the twentieth century in the neo-classical style so beloved by the British, according to the plan of Maltese architect Bonavia. Obligatory education for children was introduced in Malta rather late, that is only in the year 1947, and by a Maltese Government, but the British started to tackle the problem much earlier. This is one of Malta's finest schools and it served as a hospital for British Servicemen in the Second World War. About 800 children receive their primary education here.
- C Nationalist Party Club (Old Law Courts)**  
The street facing the parish church is aptly called St Catherine Str. Zejtun is unofficially divided into two sections, known as Upper Village and Lower Village. St Catherine Street unites Zejtun into these two, almost equal, parts. On the right side of the church of the Holy Spirit, one sees what during the nineteenth century used to be the Magistrate's Courts, but what nowadays is the Nationalist Party political club. Soon after their coming to Malta, the British appointed mayors with limited juridical and administrative powers, in the old towns and villages. In all, Zejtun had seven such successive mayors. The first one, Guzi Abela, was one of the leaders of the people of Zejtun in the uprising against the French.
- D Post Office**
- E Beland Band Club** Band Clubs are an integral part of Malta's cultural and social life. Società Muzikali Beland, situated opposite St. Catherine's Parish Church, is one of the earliest in Malta, dating back to 1861. This musical society is closely associated with the prominent Diacono family. Carlo Diacono (1876-1942) a renowned Maltese composer started his musical career with this club. To this day this band thrives on a musical tradition of the highest level. In the 90's the Beland Band performed musical programmes in Germany, Russia and Italy.
- F Bank**
- G Zejtun Band Club** The popularity of band clubs in Malta is indicated by their proliferation, and prominence of these clubs in the main squares of Malta's towns and villages. Ghagda Banda Zejtun founded in 1933, the other band club which also includes the Pandora theatre, is situated next to the commemorative cross. Moulded in a relatively more modern tradition, its musical repertoire has a popular and wide appeal. In 1986 the Zejtun Band placed first in the National Band Festival. Like other band clubs it also provides a number of indoor sport activities, all year round.
- H St. Catherine Musical Club** Established in 1892 by Salvatore Deguara, and occupying a central site in Gregorio Bonici Square, the club is started as a musical club, but later on included string instruments like the mandolin, and eventually developed into a regular orchestra, which disbanded after 1950. The Club used to organise concerts in Gregorio Bonici Square and also animated religious services in the Parish Church. The club now functions as an indoor sports centre.
- I Malta Labour Party Club** In the late twenties and early thirties, the Zejtun section of the Labour Party used to meet where today we find the Zejtun Band Club. On the 18th November of 1940 The Labour Party opened the present Club in part of the premises, which houses the Labour Party Section today. In the early sixties, when the Labour Party was under the leadership of Domenic Mintoff, they acquired the whole building.
- J Juventutis Domus** Crossing 13th December Square, at the back of the parish church, one comes back to St. Gregory Str., which leads to the old parish church and which is filled with stately homes. Following the example of Ramon Perellos, wealthy families from Valletta and Cottonera, built their summer villas along this street. What is now a youth centre, was originally the summer residence of Bishop Ferdinand Mattei, the first Maltese cleric to be appointed Bishop of Malta after the coming of the British. The British, rightly enough, insisted with the ecclesiastical authorities in Rome, that the Bishop of Malta should be a Maltese, whereas in the time of the Knights, he used to be a foreigner.
- K Art & Crafts Centre**  
This is a typical Maltese old house, administered by the Town Council, and is used as a centre for training in folk crafts.
- L Jesus of Nazareth Institute**  
Further along St Gregory Str. is Jesus of Nazareth Institute, an orphanage founded by Josephine Curmi, the daughter of Dr Paul Curmi, Zejtun's penultimate mayor at the time of the British. This very extensive building used to house as many as 200 orphans in the difficult years following the Second World War. Run by the Jesus of Nazareth Sisters, a congregation which, though founded at Zejtun, has nowadays other Homes outside the Maltese Islands. At Christmas time a large mechanical crib depicting Nativity scenes with papier-mache figurines is exhibited at this institute.
- M Regional Tribunal, Sports Centre, Child Day Care Centre**
- N Carlo Diacono Junior Lyceum**  
Built in the 1960s. The student population today reaches 1,000, coming from Zejtun and the surrounding localities. Roman Villa remains were found in its grounds during its construction. The remains include stone machinery used in the industry for the production of olive oil.
- O Police Station** The Police Station serves the localities which make up the Southern District of Malta. The facade is built on a neo-classical style and dates back to late nineteenth century. It is one of the oldest premises on the island purposely built to serve as a Police Station.
- P Bank**

## HISTORIC PLACES

- 1 AEDES DANIELIS** The imposing facade of this palace promptly welcomes the visitor as soon as he enters Zejtun. "AedesDaniels" is the Latin for "The House of Daniel", for Daniel was the christian name of the nobleman who originally built the summer house that stood in the place of the present palace. A statue of the Old Testamen prophet, undeterred by the surrounding lions, adorns the facade. The barons of the Bonici and Testaferrata Families lived in the palace and worshipped in the adjoining chapel of the Mother of Good Counsel. The people of Zejtun still cherish the memory of Girgor Bonici, (1612-1697) the erstwhile mayor of Mdina, Malta's old capital, and the greatest benefactor of their present parish church. The town's main square is named after him.
- 2 CHURCH OF ST. ANGELO, MARTYR**  
On the visitor's right is the Church of St Angelo, the Carmelite friar that suffered martyrdom in the Middle Ages. The church was built by the nobleman Girgor Bonici in 1670 and houses some very good paintings by the renowned Giuseppe d'Arena. Members of the Bonici and Testaferrata Families, including Girgor Bonici himself, lie buried inside this church. A very short distance away, down St Angelo Str., is the seat of Zejtun's Local Council.
- 3 GWIEDI** This quarter takes its name from the lie of the land since Gwiedi is the plural of Gudja meaning an area on a slope as is the case here, with St. Catherine and St. Angelo Streets enclosing the area. The number of impressive house facades are a clear indication that it was a popular quarter. Indeed well known families resided here.
- 4 THE SUMMER HOUSE OF GRAND MASTER PERELLOS**  
Down St. Catherine Street, one sees on the left, Casa Perellos, Ramon Perellos (1697-1720), the Grand Master best known for the magnificent tapestries he donated to the Church of St John in Valletta, was a frequent visitor to Zejtun. A special reason for such visits was to watch the colourful procession of St Gregory, held yearly from all parts of Malta to Zejtun, on the 12<sup>th</sup> March, feast day of Pope St Gregory the Great. In order to have a better view of this pageant, Grand Master Perellos built for himself and his retinue this villa, which till the beginning of this century still contained a very spacious orchard. The pear, an unmistakable item in the coat-of-arms of Perellos, is sculptured on the facade of this edifice.
- 5 SACRED HEART INSTITUTE & CHURCH OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**  
On the corner site bounded by St. Catherine, Holy Ghost and St. Lucian Streets is the Church of the Holy Spirit, designed by Lorenzo Gafa' and attached to it a Day Centre for children, run by the female congregation known as the Daughters of the Sacred Heart. The first primary school for the children of Zejtun was opened in this building towards the beginning of the nineteenth century by the Zejtun clergy led by Dun Alwag Camilleri (1776-1849). Maltese, Arabic and Religion were the main subjects taught here. British inspectors, sent over from England with the purpose of assessing the standard of education in the Maltese Islands, spoke in laudatory terms of this small school.
- 6 WAR VICTIMS MEMORIAL**  
This occupies the left corner pillar of St. Catherine Str, facing the Parish Church, 1942 was the worst war year for Malta, when Nazi and Fascist air forces based on Sicily carried incessant air raids. On the morning of May 2nd of that year an anti personnel bomb hurled by a Junker 88, fell right in the centre of the church parvis, exploding on impact and killing 27 persons in one instant as they ran for shelter into the church. The facade of the church still carries the scars of the splinters from the bomb. The memorial for all Zejtun war victims carries the names of the 27 who fell on that particular day.
- 7 PARISH CHURCH OF ST. CATHERINE** The visitor's attention cannot miss the majestic parish church of Zejtun. It was built between 1692 and 1720 according to the design of Lorenzo Gafa', one of Malta's foremost architects. Gafa' was responsible for drawing the plans of the cathedrals of Mdina and Victoria, Gozo, besides those of several other parish churches, but Zejtun Parish Church is considered by many as his masterpiece. It is an imposing edifice, with an attractive dome, Doric and Ionic pilasters, and massive cornices all round. An effect of quiet dignity is obtained with striking simplicity of line and an admirable balance of composition. The people of Zejtun were among the best town builders in Malta. Michael Cachia was an excellent military engineer and Angelo Gatt constructed the world renowned Mosta Dome. Both hailed from Zejtun. Various works of art abound both in the Zejtun Parish Church and in its museum. Each year the inhabitants take pride in organising, with great pomp and splendour, the Feast of St Catherine on the third Sunday of June. Of note also, is the Good Friday Procession, a meaningful and colourful religious pageant, which attracts hundreds of visitors.

- 8 THE CROSS** Right in the centre of Girgor Bonici Square lies, on a high stone pedestal, a monumental wooden cross, an impressive testimony to the courage of the menfolk of Zejtun. The French, under Napoleon, occupied Malta in 1798. Just three months later, the Maltese revolted against them and forced the French garrison to take shelter behind the massive fortifications of Valletta and Cottonera. In one of the attacks on the enemy entrenched in Fort St Saviour, the people of Zejtun, after killing the few French soldiers they found in Villa Bighi, managed to snatch from under the French, the large wooden cross that stood in front of the abandoned Capuchin Friary at Kalkara. They set up this war trophy in their main square as a fitting monument to serve as a reminder for future generations.
- 9 THE OLIVE TREE**  
Since the name Zejtun is so closely associated with the Olive, this tree is of particular significance to the people of the town. For the inhabitants of Zejtun it is a symbol of their pride and heritage as well as peace. This tree was replanted here by the Local Council at the start of the new millennium. The canon used to defend Zejtun at the time of the French occupation was also laid here under the symbol of peace in the hope that humanity will learn to solve all conflicts without recourse to arms.
- 10 THE OLIVE PRESS**  
As indicated earlier olive production and its pressing for oil was abundant in Zejtun during Roman times. The press here is a replica of one used at that time mainly to separate the pulp from the stone. It is mechanically interesting because the two wheels inside the basin rolled on their axle whilst being turned by a pair of sturdy labourers.
- 11 OLD PARISH CHURCH (ST. GREGORY'S)**  
The statue of Pope St Gregory the Great tells the visitor that he has reached the part of Zejtun where old and new blend in an astonishingly harmonious way. For Zejtun's oldest church lies cheek by jowl close to Zejtun's most modern housing estate. Though dedicated to St Catherine, Zejtun's first parish church is commonly known as St Gregory's because of the annual pilgrimage to this place. It is one of Malta's finest old churches.
- Very little remains of the original rectangular church built before 1436, the time when Zejtun was already a separate parish, apart from Mdina and Vittoriosa. This present church was constructed on and around the site occupied by the old medieval church, and the present edifice dates from the sixteenth century. For about three centuries this building served as the parish church for all the south-east of Malta. The visitor cannot fail to admire the gothic and romanesque styles of architecture. The primitive dome is the most ancient example of Maltese cupolas still standing. Of particular interest is also the orientation of the southeast transept of the church which is aligned with the Bays of M'Xlokk, St. Thomas and M'Scala, since the church doubled also as a watch tower. The church occupies the highest point overlooking the harbours in the south, favourite landing places for barbaric corsairs.
- Secret passages built in the thick walls of the southern transept afforded a hidden look-out for sentries who watched for the landings of pirates in the non-distant bays and then relayed news of the pending invasion to the locals and warned the garrison of Mdina in the north by means of smoke signals from the roof of the church.
- 12 LUQA BRIFFA GARDEN**  
To the south of St Gregory's stands Luqa Briffa Garden. On the main entrance this garden bears the coat of arms of Sir Alexander Ball who greatly helped the Maltese in their uprising against the French. On his death the Maltese erected a magnificent monument to him in the Lower Barrakka Gardens at Valletta. In the villages Ball is best known for the mayoral gardens he himself introduced as a reward for the Maltese leaders. Among these gardens Zejtun's is not only the finest, but it is also the only one that is open to the public. Later the garden was called Luqa Briffa Garden after one of the Maltese heroes in the Great Siege of 1565. The garden has a number of examples of rare trees.
- 13 ROMAN REMAINS** During the construction of the Carlo Diacono Junior Lyceum, the remains of a Roman countryside villa were unearthed. All indications point to an olive pressing structure which combines well with the tradition of Zejtun as an area abundant with olive trees, and olive production.
- 14 TA' XEJBA**  
This area characterised by its narrow straight streets reminds us of the Gwiedi Quarter and a number of old residences with particular features are found here.
- 15 IL-HERBA** Il-Herba, meaning "the destruction" could refer to the pillages often the result of pirate attacks when the south coast was defenceless. This quarter is very characteristic of old Maltese urban construction.



**Population:** 12,000

This figure was registered in 1948 but between 1950 and 1970 gradually decreased due to heavy emigration. It increased again to its present level of 12,000 during the last 30 years, following the construction of new housing estates, and the change from a fortress based economy to one thriving in light industries, financial services and tourism.

**Area:** 5.4 Km<sup>2</sup>  
**Residential:** 1.5Km<sup>2</sup>  
**Rural:** 3.2km<sup>2</sup>  
**Industrial:** 0.7 km<sup>2</sup>  
**Population density:** 4 per 1000 square metres  
**Residences:** 4,562  
**Housing units:** 9 units per 1000 square metres  
**Education:** Public Kindergarten  
Public Primary School A  
Public Primary School B  
St. Diacono Girls' Junior Lyceum  
2 Private schools

**Public Health Facilities:** Local Clinic at Triq Mater Boni Consigli  
**Religious Churches:** Catholic:  
St. Catherine's Parish Church, St. Catherine's Old Parish Church (known as St. Gregory's), Our Saviour Chapel, Saint Clement Chapel, Saint Angelo Chapel, Saint Mary Chapel, Mater Boni Consigli Chapel, Our Lady Of Mercy Chapel, Gebel San Martin Chapel, Hal Tmiem Chapel, Saint Nicholas Chapel.

**Geological Surface:** Mainly Lower Globigerina Limestone, Few Mara Member and Xlendi Member on the eastern part of Zejtun (Wied iz-Ziju area)  
**Site of Scientific Importance:** Wied iz-Ziju

**The place name "ZEJTUN"**

Originating from Phoenician and Semitic Arab meaning the fruit of the olive tree. In Arabic "Zaytun", Turkish "zeytin" and in Spanish and Portuguese where Arab culture flourished found as "aceituna" and "azeituna" respectively. Of course the word "zaytun" is prevalent in North Africa and the Middle East countries. In Maltese itself the word is now used only as a place name, and the word "zebbug" is now used both for the olive tree and its fruit. Indeed the motto of Zejtun is "FROTT IZ-ZEBBUG ISMI" (my name is the fruit of the olive tree).

**Citta' Beland**

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, villages in Malta vied for township status. Thrilled with the presence of Grand Master Ferdinand Hompesch for the Feast of St. Catherine, in November 1797, Zejtun Village elders requested from him this symbolic tribute. His Eminence, convinced by the engaging arguments of his loyal subjects, granted their request. He gave Zejtun the title of "Citta' Bylandt" (coll. Beland), after his mother's surname, having already bestowed his surname Hompesch on Zabbar and his Christian name Ferdinand on Siggiewi.

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**THE ORIGINS**

The Origins of Zejtun go back to Phoenician and Roman times. Originally Zejtun (Terra Santa Caterina) covered the whole south-east part of the island extending to the outskirts of the walls protecting Cottonera and included Zabbar, M'Scala, and M'Xlokk. The inhabitants of Zejtun proper till 1680 formed two separate communities huddled in residences protected by narrow streets (which of themselves provided protection) known as Bisqallin referred to till today as the Lower Village (Rahal t'Isfel) and Hal Gwann/ Bisbut the Upper Village (Rahal ta' Fuq). Development during the eighteenth century and the construction of the new parish church in between the two communities formed the present centre and linked the two to form one community

**LOCATION**

Zejtun, lying in the south-eastern part of Malta, covers the top of a hill, that dominates the nearby bays of M'Xlokk, St Thomas and M'Scala, popular ports of call for all Mediterranean sailors since Phoenician times. They also provided convenient landing beaches for invaders.