



2020 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story: Teamsport Gozo Half Marathon: Overcoming the Global Pandemic with a Virtual Run

Destination Name: *(include any state, province or region)*

Gozo

Country: Malta

Submitter name: Ronald Sultana

Email address: ronald-anthony.a.sultana@gov.mt

Position: Director Tourism & Economic Development at the Ministry for Gozo

Nomination Category: *(Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)*

- Culture & Communities
- Environment & Climate
- Nature & Ecotourism
- Islands & Seaside
- Immediate responses in dealing with the COVID -19
- Post COVID -19 recovery
- One of the 17 SDGs* *(if yes, which one)* Click or tap to choose

*The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The 17 SDGs are integrated—that is, they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. What are the Sustainable Development Goals? <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>

For further information on Tourism for SDGs: <http://tourism4sdgs.org/>

Find detailed instructions for submitting good practices [here](#)



DESCRIBE YOUR GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.

Issues faced

The submitted Good Practice Story was listed under the Nomination Category: Immediate responses in dealing with the COVID-19, which entailed global lockdowns and subsequently cancellation of activities and events. The theory behind this nomination was to take a voluntary organization called Team Sport Gozo Half Marathon (established to organize the marathon) that has in the past demonstrated its ability to contribute to different niche elements such as environmental care, awareness and education; health and fitness; social and community building through overseas missionary work; and serve as an exposure platform to Gozo's landscape while contributing to impressive tourism intakes in the Island of Gozo, has found a way to partially keep its yearly tradition alive through alternative and innovative means. The physical marathon is the first to have been organized in the Maltese Islands, with its debut in 1977, 13 years since the country's independence. In 1991, 120 athletes participated, which by 2019 grew to 1450 participants from 58 countries worldwide, 6 continents, with 28% of participants being foreigners, while 50% being Maltese and 22% being Gozitan and in 2018 a total €588,000 was generated in different economic activities. In 2020, upon confirmation that no largescale events could be organized for the general public due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was decided that participants are still given a chance to run and stay fit, irrespective of the sad realities the world was facing.

Methods, steps and tools applied

Following the cancellation of the beloved 2020 Teamsport Gozo Half Marathon, 10K, Walks, Kids & Expo, the team immediately launched the 2020 #RunGozo Virtual, and invited fellow runners from around the globe, united in running during these challenging times to join, run and remain fit and healthy.

The Organization sought to substitute the physical event by introducing another innovative concept for the Maltese Islands, whereby in order to mitigate with long hours of sedentary behaviour during world-wide lockdowns, and mental stress that can be developed, a Virtual Race was introduced through online facilities, whereby a runner can clock his/her own time over distance and classify through a mobile application. The objective of keeping participants active while keeping safe at the same time is currently still open and its closure is stipulated for 30th June 2020 for participants to take the challenge. This is in line with the World Health Organization's stance: "The COVID-19 pandemic means that many of us are staying at home and sitting down more than we usually do. It's hard for a lot of us to do the sort of exercise we normally do. Regular physical activity benefits both the body and mind." (#HealthyAtHome – Physical Activity).

Simplification measures with regards to the registration and completion process for the 2020 #RunGozo Virtual were made, since the target was to efficiently encourage and inspire participants from all over the world to keep fit whilst we were fighting this (hopefully) once



in a lifetime pandemic. Notification was given that all participants had to make sure to follow all social distancing regulations and all their local guidelines in order to participate. In order to obtain further outreach and to engage more participants, the visitgozo.com Facebook platform has also promoted the Virtual Race. Many organizers around the world had no other option but to cancel their events because the mass gathering concept was naturally prohibited and lockdowns imposed people to stay at home. This organization had to follow suit, however, sought to embark this debut journey with intentions to provide an immediate response to the COVID-19 crisis, one that is coloured with the spirit of courage, hope and unity to the recipients of this platform. Within its own limitations, a sense of continuity was nonetheless provided, hence enabling a message of courage; the fact that the event was not cancelled but found new means to provide continuity provided hope; and the fact that the event was not cancelled and still invited participants on global level to join in this feat by keeping engaged in physical activity, provided a sense of unity. The element of adapted continuity as an immediate response to dealing with COVID-19, reflects sustainability in its own way, whereby an event was sustained in adaptation to unprecedented social/economic situations brought by COVID-19.

Key success factors

This event grew quite steadily over the years and has not only managed to instil a sense of healthy lifestyle and wellbeing, but enabled Gozo to have its own internationally recognized sporting event. The Organization grew in parallel and used its gained influence to serve as a platform to serve society with voluntary work during the year. In fact, two charming stories are their organized clean-up of Ramla Valley, and their missionary work in Guatemala, whereby they managed to raise 37,000Euro from a series of dedicated events, and went to this poverty struck land to assist a Maltese Priest situated there to help the lesser fortunate through a series of initiatives. Such factors create a perpetuation of growth and success.

While obtaining a 5-star certificate from European Athletics, this Marathon has never limited itself to professional athletes exclusively. In fact, in order to send out a message of inclusion “We strive to encourage not only the professional athlete but also those who are keen to change their lifestyle and start their dream journey towards regular physical activity and exercise. Our pride is giving each individual athlete a unique running experience based on their current, respective needs and athletic ability. We leave no one behind”. Therefore, the Virtual Race was also available to a world-wide public, not simply to physical participants, acknowledging the fact that this can also incorporate new participants. In order to also allow the Marathon to not be completely cancelled, the Team has managed to come up with a brilliant idea to not only re-invent the event in such a short period of time, but to further promote themselves as innovative organizers, while providing the opportunity to participants to nonetheless engage in competitive sporting event with a twist. Similar to the physical race, other activities such as environmental clean-ups and philanthropic work could not be physically held either. The organizers also predicted that this virtual edition can provide further positive feedback and an enhanced reputation to which the effects will be reflected in future physical editions. It was a means to avoid a complete shutdown, keeping the brand afloat, while sustaining visibility to the Island of Gozo as well (As stated by the Green Destinations: “As a platform for connecting, supporting and promoting destinations, we have the initiative to collect stories coping with the COVID19 crisis and solutions for restarting tourism”). Keeping the brand alive also meant that the organization’s missions and past



activities remained exposed and visible.

Lessons learned

Since its start, the COVID-19 pandemic has spread to almost all countries of the world. Social and physical distancing measures, lockdowns of businesses, schools and overall social life which were implemented to fight off this pandemic, have also disrupted many regular aspects of life, including sport and physical activity. Nobody could have foreseen how life was going to change upon us, within a couple of weeks before the first case of COVID-19. It threw people in their homes, drowning in many media reports of deaths and unfortunately sometimes highly speculative information resulting in fake news. The high element of fear people had to deal with was unbearable for many.

The global outbreak of COVID-19 has also resulted in closure of gyms, stadiums, pools, dance and fitness studios, physiotherapy centres, parks and playgrounds. All these measures led to the cancellation of many running events, including the 2020 Teamsport Gozo Half Marathon, 10K, Walks, Kids & Expo, and left thousands of athletes without any short- to medium-term goals. This difficult scenario risked the rise of additional disease and mental health issues, so we decided to pitch in and create something competitive, adding an element of motivation to a physical activity, and related to our event, minus the crowds and the risk of contagious disease.

The 2020 #RunGozo Virtual offered the chance for athletes/participants to continue their usual training sessions since there was a full-fledged virtual competition which they could enter and compete in. Apart from the obvious physical health benefits, this competition also led contributed to mental well-being, engagement on an international level, a sense of participation in times of solitude for many, and an activity that one can enjoy performing, while keeping the Brand of the Marathon alive despite global shutdown. While it is obvious that the physical event is more attractive than the virtual version, the encouraging participation has prompted further consideration to use such tools to further boost the exposure of the marathon and the Island of Gozo, irrespective of COVID-19. For the future, With regards to water plastic bottles given to runners, while the organization has consistently applied the necessary recycling practices it is making considerations for different approaches in the future. One has to also note that the alternative to plastic bottles for runners are glass bottles and these are dangerous for the safety of runners for obvious reasons. Bio-degradable cups are also an option, but running with water in a cup in the hand may not be practical either. Nonetheless, the organizers have committed themselves to vigilance in order to develop a practical and more environmental friendly solution in the near future. Just as the organizers and the event developed year after year through dedicated work by local volunteers, this



nomination can serve as a stimulus to further develop the brand and the mitigation of this factor can be a huge development. The commitment is there and knowing how they developed their brand, they will certainly overcome this factor as well.

Results, achievements and recognitions

The development of this marathon and how the voluntary organizers have widened their scope to many other areas in terms of voluntary work is very impressive for an Island like Gozo that is inhabited by 30,000 people. The prestigious 5-Star Certification from European Athletics certifies the valuable work of these volunteers. In 2019, under normal circumstances, the team catered for around 1,500 athletes that participated in this annual event. Around 400 people from around 25 nations had registered to take part in this innovative project, the first in the Maltese Islands. A great response for this debut campaign.

The virtual race competition was available online till 30th June 2020. As a conclusion to this nomination, we believe that the Gozo Half Marathon deserves the utmost recognition for their success, obtained through hard-work and dedication on a voluntary basis. They managed to put Gozo on the map in terms of an international sporting event, enabling the Island's business operators to enjoy another weekend of economic revenue. The Organization and the event's broad impacts ranging from environmental awareness, to social measures to cultural promotion is simply fantastic and makes each and every Gozitan proud. A decision to nominate the organization for the prize was enticed by a holistic approach. This organization did not only stick to organizing a marathon race, but went beyond in developing social and environmental sensitivity through different voluntary activities that in one way or another effectively left a mark. Their strong commitment to the cause was demonstrated by finding a sustainable solution to a forcibly cancelled event that during the crisis evidently sought to bring about courage, hope and unity which at the time are crucial concepts for many people suffering around the world.

Additional references

<https://www.gozomarathon.org/>

<https://worldsmarathons.com/marathon/gozo-marathon>

<https://www.facebook.com/GozoMarathon/>

<https://www.european-athletics.org/athletics-community/runners/news/article=gozo-half-marathonachieves-first-for-malta.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLS28u4NhuU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qiciwXxsc3k>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9xXAn7u6Ao>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWANHllbfBQ>





greendestinations.org
sustainabletop100.org



greendestinations



green-destinations