

# **The lived experience of boatpersons in relation to boat tours taking place in the south-west of Malta**

Higher National Diploma in Tour Guiding

2018-2020

Olympia Sant Mifsud

## **DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY FOR HIGHER NATIONAL DIPLOMA STUDENTS**

Student's I.D. /Code: 425054M/1

Student's Name & Surname: Olympia Sant Mifsud

Course: Higher National Diploma in Tour Guiding

Title of Long Essay: The lived experience of boatpersons in relation to boat tours taking place in the south-west of Malta

I hereby declare that I am the legitimate author of this Long Essay and that it is my original work.

No portion of this work has been submitted in support of an application for another qualification of this or any other higher education institution.

I hold the Institute of Tourism Studies (Malta) harmless against any third party claims with regard to copyright violation, breach of confidentiality, defamation and any other third party right infringement.

\_\_Olympia Sant Mifsud\_\_

Signature of Student

\_\_05/03/2020\_\_

Date (DD/MM/YY)

## **Abstract**

This research set out to test the feasibility of a new tour around Filfla. The reason being to ensure all contingency planning involved will be adhered to prior to starting the implementation of the tour. To gather this data, interviews with experienced and skilled boatpersons were carried out. Three major themes were brought out: 1) Individual Factors, 2) Environmental Factors and 3) Management Factors. These themes, alongside their sub-themes, suggest that although a bigger number of hazards can be associated with tours, however, for this study's tour, only a few were deemed to be necessary to plan ahead for. The conclusions reached showed how the tour is feasible and if careful attention is given to the laws present in relation to health and safety and the registrations and permissions required will be carefully followed, the risks associated will not be of any concerns, resulting in the smooth running of the Filfla tour.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude towards:

- 1) The supervision provided by my supervisor
- 2) The included participants for sharing a bit of their time and knowledge for my study
- 3) My daughter Bernice for her encouragement and support throughout this study

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	6
<b>Literature Review</b> .....	7
Individual factor.....	7
Environmental Factor.....	8
Management factor .....	9
<b>Methodology</b> .....	10
Design .....	10
Participants.....	10
Intervention.....	10
Outcome .....	11
Procedure .....	11
Analysis .....	11
<b>Results</b> .....	12
Individual Factor .....	12
Environmental Factor.....	13
Management Factor .....	14
<b>Discussion</b> .....	15
Individual Factor .....	15
Environmental Factor.....	16
Management Factor .....	17
<b>Conclusions and Recommendations</b> .....	18
<b>References</b> .....	20
<b>Appendix</b> .....	21

## Introduction

The area of my study is located at an archipelago in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. This archipelago consists of six small islands near each other with the largest one being Malta. Compared to similar islands, Malta is highly densely populated (452 305, January 2017) at just 320 km<sup>2</sup> with the median age of 41.2 years (Regional Statistics Malta 2019 Edition). Due to our island location we have a Mediterranean climate all year around, meaning, most of the months are quite sunny with only a couple of rainy months. Having said that, as of recent, unpredictable changes in relation to weather have been noted (Jones, 2017).

The current study is based in south west of Malta, mainly focusing on the hidden gem, Filfla (see figures 1 and 2). The reasons for choosing this particular area are that: 1) Qrendi is the author's native and residential village and 2) boating tours solely focusing on the islet of Filfla have never took place. It is located about seven kilometre away from Malta and its size is of 50 acres. According to Deidun (2016), it has been a marine protected area by 1988 and is considered an icon sight for Malta. Filfla served as a refuge and also given shelter to sailors in distress. There used to be a 14<sup>th</sup> century chapel dedicated to Saint Mary but it was destroyed by an earthquake in 19<sup>th</sup> century. Under the British rule it used to serve as a military target until 1971. Filfla is famous for its endemic lizard and snails. Also it serves as a resting base for seagull colonies and Storm Petrels. Due to such species, Filfla has become a nature reserve. Additionally, as of recent, it has been attracting a lot of diving schools and enthusiasts to experience this breath-taking sea-bed surrounding Filfla.



Figure 1: Frontal view of Filfla



Figure 2: Filfla from above

## Literature Review

Considering the substantial list of individual (e.g. age, group ability), environmental (e.g. weather, clothing) and management-related (e.g. safety, type of licence needed, knowledge, experience) risks related to outdoor touring activities (Gstaettner, Lee and Rodger, 2018), the following will be focusing on risks and challenges that will be considered and prepared for, in connection to this specific tour:

### Individual factor

Age and being-in-a-group (Gstaettner, Lee and Rodger, 2018) are not issues of concern in this tour. This is because, firstly, all ages are accepted. Secondly, as will be described below, the boatpersons are well-informed enough to know the maximum capacity of the boat, which, as found in O'Connor and O'Connor (2005), overloading and improper placing due to unfamiliarity or lack of knowledge, were the major probabilities towards the capsizing of boats. On the other hand, any age group would be suitable for the tour as there will not be any vigorous activities (i.e. only sitting involved) and, since it's a boat tour, as will be described below, people would be prepared beforehand for issues related to discomfort on the sea.

The main individual risk factors related to this tour would fall within the person ability (fitness-wise), state of both the boatperson and the tourists (e.g. alcohol-related issues), language issues, and minimal unexpected exposure to hazard. Being the most common spoken language, and also the language the tourist guide frequents most in, English will be used. In the case of a specific non-English group participating in this tour, a translator would be called for to accompany the tourist guide, leading to one less tourist on board. However, this would be known beforehand. Therefore none of the tourists would end up disappointed on the day due to having to save a space for the translator. Similar to this, in the case of any reported disabilities, although there may be some limitations (not wheelchair accessible), however, wheelchair-bound people will be allowed to be part of the tour as long as they consent to be lifted from chair to the boat by their respective guardian. In addition to that, considering the low probability of hazard towards this tour, pregnant women should not encounter any problem in relation to their condition, however, being aware of their own responsibilities would be encouraged (Sakals, Wilford, Wellwood, & MacDougall, 2010; Rickard, Scherer and Newman, 2011). This can also be applied to people who may experience sea-sickness. As part of the contingency planning for the proposed tour in this study, which will be discussed in more depth

in the methods section, a page will be dedicated towards tour information. Such information would include wheelchair limitations and sea-sickness pills reminders for the coming tourists, as these will not be provided on the tour. Contrary to this, first aid boxes will be available on the tour in case a simple bruise or cut occurs.

The last and, most probably, the highest hazardous event to consider is the possibility of the presence of large fish inhabiting the Filfla area. Although the old view about such mammals was quite a scare-mongering one, as it presently stands, fishermen's view regarding any large fish surrounding the islet always indicated towards the positive safety of the sea surrounding that area; some of them even ridicule the given statement. Adding to this, as described in Dearden, Topelko and Ziegler (2008), the presence of a boat will not affect the behaviour of any fish present in the sea. Contrary to that, it is these large fish that need protection from us humans.

#### Environmental Factor

According to Bentley, Cater, Page and Walker (2004; 2010) trips, slips and falls are the most common type of injuries that take place in adventures while they emphasise the need for careful safety management practices. In the case of this study's tour, careful consideration for such occurrences will be taken care of through the person planning the tour (the author) while also boatpersons will follow their usual standard regulations in relation to their own work knowledge and experience. As part of the knowledge and experience these boatpersons possess, the postponing of such tours in poor weather conditions and the compulsory provision of life-jackets (Port and Yachting Directorate 2018, 2018) given to each individual in every tour will be adhered to. Responsibility and careful planning are ensured to create security at sea that will be part of the tour involved in this study.

Another environmental factor that needs attention is that of high-heat exposure. Due to the frequent heat occurrences taking place in Malta, the highest weather-related risk factor that might take place would be that of lack of suitable clothing in relation to high exposure to sun rays. As a preparation for this, all important details will be listed on the tour advert prior engaging in the tour to act as a pre-educative measure/be well informed (Sakals, Wilford, Wellwood, & MacDougall, 2010).



### Management factor

As mentioned in the previous environmental factors section, the importance of responsibilities related to the management/tour organising are emphasised. According to the list presented in the systematic review by Gstaettner, Lee and Rodger (2018), in relation to this tour, the following management risk factors apply: absence of life guard, poor tour guide quality, time pressures, low client-guide ratio, permit and licence issues can apply. In relation to the latter (i.e. specific task and equipment factors), according to the 'Maltese Government Maritime Services', a Nautical Licence is needed on driving a small ship with an engine or engines with a combined power of 30HP or more and when towing a water skier. To obtain this type of licence one has to attend a Basic Seamanship and Safe Boat Handling Course. In order to register a yacht or a small ship at the Ports and Yachting Directorate Malta Transport Centre, one has to attend a whole training course at the MCAST Maritime Institute. In our boat touring event the boatpersons do not need the Nautical Licence due to their engines power not reaching the limit of 30HP. The safety and security at sea regulations (Maltese Government Maritime Services) are very important especially to swimmers nearby at the sea of our organizing boating tour. On the other hand, since the tour in this case is only 7 kilometres away from coast land, the use of VHF Radio is not deemed to be needed.

On the other hand, as the area (Filfla) is a natural reserve, special permissions to land on Filfla will only be given to people who need to carry out scientific research. Since in this case, the tour for this study only involves the viewing of Filfla from a boat, permits will not be needed (Portelli, 2012).

Regarding the guide quality and client-guide ratio, considering that the author of this study will be the qualified and native guide, inside knowledge about the tour will definitely be covered while also letting the clients know that questions can be freely asked. Additional use of short fun quizzes and legendary stories in relation to the area visited, will be used to engage the clients and make them an active agent in the tour (Xu, Buhalis and Weber, 2017).

In addition to a good relationship between the guide and the client, it's also important to make sure that the mechanical aspect of the tour will be well-handed by, as already mentioned above, experienced and well-knowledged boatpersons involved. This implies that safety measures (Bentley, Cater, Page and Walker, 2004; 2010) in relation to specific tasks and equipment factors, e.g. boat speed, time of tour, weather conditions, will be adhered to as the safety of the people will be the first priority. For instance, the awareness of a lifeguard absence is

compensated by the highly experienced and law-abiding boatpersons involved, while also having a standardised programme for the tour time (i.e. daylight and fixed duration).

Although all the above negative list has to be considered to focus on the ideal contingency planning, while also critically analysing all associated confounding variables, to create the most effective tour; however, these are not the only outcome factors. As suggested by Gstaettner, Lee and Rodger (2018), a substantial list of potential benefits resulting from such nature-based adventures/tours will also take place. Possible benefits in relation to this tour can include both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, such as, affective pleasures, thrill, excitement/fun, experience spirit of nature, insight/self-reflection, source of escapism and stress management. Therefore, the aim of this research is to target the gap of creating an innovative and well-informed tour specifying on the hidden gem of Filfla, alongside its history.

## **Methodology**

### Design

A qualitative approach took place for this study as in-depth, rich data from people who can provide information for the tour in the current study was needed, through sharing their lived experience in relation to their profession (i.e. seamanship).

### Participants

The participants involved in this study consisted of five experienced and knowledgeable boatpersons who work on a daily basis in similar areas to where the tour will be taking place. Participants were chosen through stratified sampling as specific characteristics (i.e. experienced boatpersons who work in the area of the proposed tour for this study, and who have been working there for a minimum of five years) were needed. In the case of not obtaining five people through stratified sampling, a snowball sampling approach had to be taken, where interviewees could recommend other suitable participants.

### Intervention

A semi-structured interview of 30-45 minutes was held in order to gather in-depth, rich data on the risks and challenges that might be involved in the tour of this study. A copy of the

questions is provided in the appendix (see appendix 1), where mostly open-ended questions similar to ‘what’s your experience as a boatperson?’ will be used to minimize researcher’s bias, ensure trustworthiness, and validity, while avoiding leading the participants with loaded phrases. Additionally, considering the literacy level of the participants that were included in this study, the use of careful probing took place to guarantee the provision of more information, such as feelings, attitudes, and their understanding of the subject.

### Outcome

The main outcome of this study was based on finding more in-depth knowledge in relation to risks and challenges that this new tour might be faced with, and precautions needed to be taken care of, in order to ensure that all measures will be attended to prior to promoting the tour.

### Procedure

After receiving approval from the supervisor to start data collection, a pilot study with a participant with similar characteristics to the included participants was carried out. The purpose of this was to test the interview for feasibility and reliability. A consent form (see appendix 2) in relation to the recording for the interviews was given to participants that took part in this study. The duration of the interviews were between 30-45 minutes and administered at a participants’ preferred location. Once all data was collected, transcription, and analysis took place to bring out the findings of this study. A translation from Maltese to English of the chosen quotes was carried out so that they could be included in the main text of the study (see appendix 3 for original transcription).

### Analysis

The data from the interviews were recorded and transcribed *verbatim* and then analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). As suggested by Smith & Osborn (2007) IPA was ideal to analyse semi-structured interviews, through the use of coding. In the current study, themes in connection to risks and challenges were identified from coding. Also, theme comparisons were carried out between participants.

## Results

Individual Factor	Environmental Factor	Management Factor
Experience	Planning	Licences
Wildlife	Weather	Laws and Regulations

Table 1: Three major themes and six sub-themes

After analysing and coding the participants' transcripts *verbatim* the themes presented in Table 1 above have been brought out: 'Individual Factor', 'Environmental Factor', 'Management Factor'. Further sub-themes were revealed to explain in more depth the themes chosen. For the 'Individual Factor' theme, the sub-theme 'Experience' and 'Wildlife' were thought to describe best the participants' experiences. Under the 'Environmental Factor' theme 'Planning' and 'Weather' were the two main sub-themes that represented the theme and for the final theme, 'Management Factor', a division of further two sub-themes were created, namely, 'Licences' and 'Laws and Regulations'.

### Individual Factor

Experience has been shown to be a recurring subject among all the included participants. The interviewees expressed this through showing the importance of knowledge in relation to tourist placement in boats, knowing the capacity limit of the boats and being well informed to deliver the best possible tours. This was conveyed when they were recalling the transfer of knowledge they have earned through their upbringing such as practicing the art of seamanship from a very young age by following the footsteps of their own fathers and grandfathers.

P1: "As I left school by the age of seventeen I joined my father [on the boat]. [...] We used to plan for the worst by checking everything such as engines faults and if something occurs we will repair it amongst us."

P4: "I started when I was sixteen years old with my grandfather and my father. [...] As a boatperson I always learnt to ensure that I'm focusing on front side of the boat especially, in the morning [because there will be people swimming], when I will be by myself and even when I will be loaded with the people. When I move away from the quay I have to stand up whether

I drive only by the motor and even from inside the cabin, [and] check for swimmers or another boat passing in front of me as otherwise an accident can easily happen.”

Wildlife, being one of the biggest concerns in relation to sea activity, was discussed amongst all the participants. However, the fears, threats, and doubts so heavily connected with sea’s wildlife were easily negated by all participants. Additionally they viewed this as quite a laughing matter and instantly started describing experiences from their passion towards fishing. They did mention a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence of a shark which was accidentally caught very far away from Filfla but saw that as a positive experience in relation to their fishing passion rather than an alarming event.

P2: “As far as I know there aren’t any inhabiting big fish around here (smiling). When a shark was caught it was far away from Filfla and we never saw big fish around us any more”.

P3: “Let’s say I never encountered [any big fish] (with a smile)...Sometimes one may see dolphins, but I never came across any big fish. About forty years ago a shark was caught very far away but nowadays you no longer run into such fish”.

#### Environmental Factor

The sub-theme ‘Planning’, refers to several important pre-requisites in order to develop the most efficient boat trips. Planning in relation to knowledge learnt through experience, health and safety measures and the use of technology to ensure avoidance of injuries and accidents. A lot of emphasis was put forward by the majority of the participants regarding the need to be well prepared before each boat touring day. This preparation was given to all working seamen by their president, through the use of their own learnt experience and/or through technology.

P3: “Regarding the VHF radios the company manages them. Since we work by the shore we are not in need of one. Nowadays we make use of the mobile phone.”

P5: “Today the weather forecast is different from the past...through news, accurate weather forecasts will be available in advance. About thirty years ago my father used to teach me how to pay attention for the cyclones, and heavy clouds...today one has different mediums to follow.”

A consensus was reached among all participants throughout all the interview where they expressed how the main negative experiences were all related to weather. Several stories and circumstances due to weather issues were shared. Some of them described how the weather

could create riskier environments, for example higher probability of tourist falls while boarding the boat, cancelling of tours leading to highly disappointed tourists and negatively affecting the seamen's income.

P1: "Bad weather and strong winds create risky sea waves therefore we couldn't work. When dangerous wind forces were present we couldn't go to Blue Grotto and even more towards Filfla. We couldn't continue our boat-touring."

P2: "The weather is our worst problem. For example, today we had to stop working due to bad weather. High wind forces are the biggest obstacles, therefore, for safety measures, one has to stop. The second problem regarding bad weather will be the reaction of the tourists because they will be disappointed for not continuing with the tours."

### Management Factor

Management related factors are crucial among any organisation. This is because laws and regulations are created by the management team to ensure the most efficient and ethical service so that the benefits outweigh the risks. A common occurrence was seen among all participants regarding the need of having a boat licence as part of a boat registration laws and to be able to provide the boat-touring service.

P2: "Firstly one needs a Transport Malta's permit where they ask you about the boat surveying which means the boat will be fit for work similar to the car insurance system. As the law states, each year insurance is needed for both the boat and tourists. Then another one is needed from the MTA where it serves the purpose for boat-touring permits. We call it the 'tourist board'."

P4: "To operate the boat a licence is needed, it serves as a permit to board people on the boat and also, based on the size of the boat, allows you to go to specific distances."

Additionally, the majority of participants expressed the importance of laws and regulations. Through the interviews, it was shown how the implementation of laws and regulations in relation to health and safety and additional use of technology among highest authorities, such as their president, were not part of their work ethic for long. Conversely, they had just been added in the past ten years.

P3: "The health and safety course is compulsory for all of us. As part of safety measure, during each boat trip, all the tourists have to wear the life jackets and, to ensure control of the boat,

nobody's able to stand up. On the boat we are equipped with a health and safety kit and a fire extinguisher. Regarding VHF Radio, only our company owns one and not us."

P5: "The boat can only carry up to nine persons. The life jacket law was implemented in the last ten years. Today, as we only travel to a maximum of twelve miles, we make use of our mobile phones."

## **Discussion**

The aim of this research was to target the gap of creating an innovative and well informed tour to Filfla, while ensuring all ethical issues concerned with this tour will be adhered to. In this section the resultant themes will be discussed in more depth in combination with present literature.

### Individual Factor

As seen from the literature (Gstaettner, Lee and Rodger, 2018), the main individual risk factors related to this tour concern the ability of the person taking the tour (fitness), the state of the tourists and seamen, language issues and minimal unexpected exposure to hazard. From these issues the participants focus was more towards the state of the boat, the knowledge learnt through trial and error, and experience transferred from previous generations.

None of the participants brought up issues related to the state of the tourists and the ability of the person, however, awareness of one's own responsibility (Sakals, Wilford, Wellwood, & MacDougall, 2010; Rickard, Scherer and Newman, 2011), based on information provided on the tour leaflet, was encouraged by all involved participants. Language was another area that the participants did not focus on. This could be because, from what could be gathered during the interview, the seamen always managed to communicate with the tourists using their limited, yet enough, English vocabulary.

Similar to O'Connor & O'Connor (2005), the participants placed a lot of emphasis on the importance of precise tourist loading and placing on the boat. The reason for this was to ensure the tourists' safety in order to avoid the boat from capsizing, keeping in mind the small, yet perfectly sized boat used for such tour (see figures 3 and 4). Having said that, in the case of an increased demand for the proposed tour, a change in the size of the boat will be implemented.



Figure 3: Traditional Maltese 'Luzzu'



Figure 4: Traditional Maltese 'Luzzu' on tour

Another point they focused on was on unexpected exposure to hazard, i.e. Wildlife. Although all of the participants mentioned a one-off big fish appearance, as found by Dearden, Topelko and Ziegler (2008), the occurrence of the large fish was not an alarming situation. In-fact all of the seamen presented it in a laughing manner while ensuring the safety of the sea surrounding Filfla.

### Environmental Factor

As was discussed in the results section, this theme's main concern was in relation to contingency planning for the tourists' security at sea. Several areas were tackled by participants in connection to trips, slips and falls, equipment needed and poor weather conditions. In line with Transport Malta (2018), all of the participants agreed the inevitable use of life jackets and having the essential knowledge and experience through additional courses required for providing an excellent service. Additionally, the cancellation of all boat tours in the case of poor weather condition was agreed among each participants as part of the responsibility and careful planning needed for such tours. Only one participant (P.5) had a story to share which involved a minor accident where a tourist slipped while boarding the boat. Having said that, using the knowledge and experience these seamen acquired from previous compulsory courses the situation was quickly well handed and nobody was injured. This goes in line with Bentley, Cater, Page and Walker (2004; 2010) where it shows that trips, slips and falls are the most common types of injuries taking place in adventure activities.

Although high heat exposure was an environmental factor that required attention, however, in this study, the participants did not bring this up during the interviews. The reason could be,



high heat exposure was taken for granted considering the high temperature that Malta tends to have during the summer months. However, this does not mean that the issue should be disregarded but rather providing all information needed (Sakals, Wilford, Wellwood, & MacDougall, 2010) in the tour leaflet will be adhered to by the tourist guide.

### Management Factor

From the systematic review by Gstaettner, Lee and Rodger (2018) the following management risk factors were seen to apply to this study's tour: permit and licence issues, absence of life guard, time pressures, poor tour guide quality and low client-guide ratio. As was found in the interview, all participants had to get a Licence in order to operate the boat through Maltese Maritime Services. Although research shows that several courses are compulsory for sea persons with both engines of 30HP or more, however, in this case as the boat engine power of the included participants did not reach the limit of 30HP, none of these courses were deemed necessary. As a result, they all mentioned how only a health and safety and first-aid course were obligatory pre-operating such small boats. Based on the data provided by participants and Maltese Maritime Services, it seems that these courses were introduced through European Union Legislation. Such courses fully equipped the boatpersons with all information for safety and security at sea regulations. Therefore, as stated by one participant, before such laws they used to rely on each other's experience. Afterwards, through the introduction of these courses which started in the last decade, another participant emphasised the importance of constant focus and concentration while operating these boats as part of the new law enforcements.

In line with Malta's Maritime Laws, it seems that the VHF radio is not needed as the participants will not be travelling far for the sake of this tour. However, contrary to Portelli (2012), it seemed that the participants felt it would be better to get a permit to tour around Filfla as otherwise it was shown that viewing Filfla could only take place from a one mile distance. As a result, the author is already in process of acquiring the suggested permit (see appendix 4).

Three of the management risk factors listed by Gstaettner, Lee and Rodger (2018) were not mentioned by the participants whatsoever, namely, 1) time pressures, 2) absence of life guard and 3) factors related to a tourist-guide. Regarding time pressures, it could be that since these tours the participants operate have specific timings during the day, where each seaman has specific time-frame when to deliver these trips, pressures related to time might not be an issue for them. In the case of this study's tour, less time pressures would be involved as the intention

for this tour is only for a once weekly trip at a time discussed by both the tourist guide and the boat person.

2) A life guard is not needed in such situation as firstly, these boatpersons, as mentioned beforehand, all obtained the health and safety and first aid courses. This implies that safety measures (Bentley, Cater, Page and Walker, 2004; 2010) in relation to specific tasks and equipment will be adhered to. In fact, as shown in the results, one of the participants opens up on some of these aspects such as, mechanical issues. Secondly, the trip will not be that far from the shore.

3) The reason for the participants not disclosing anything in relation to a tourist guide could be because none of the trips they currently deliver require the use of a tourist guide. These trips would only be shared between the boatperson and the tourist, while the tourist guide waits for about twenty minutes at the shore for the Blue Grotto trips to be finished. Since in this case the trip will be much longer, the need of a tourist guide will be necessary to provide information as it is a new tour, while also keeping the tourists engaged (Xu, Buhalis and Weber, 2017). As this tour was never carried out beforehand, therefore, the included participants never experienced a trip where a tourist guide was present alongside them, they couldn't bring this topic up during their interview. Having said that, none of them expressed any negative views of having the presence of a tourist guide.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The aim of this research was to discover the challenges and risks in relation to this innovative Filfla tour through the lived experience of boatpersons working in that location. As a summary of the findings, it has been shown that although a lot of minor challenges and risks are present, however, none of these challenges seem to be a cause of concern. This is not because the tour is fully risk-proof but because of a combination of experience, precautionous planning, new enforced laws and obligatory courses that provide the best platform for contingency planning for this newly-created tour. As literature shows (Gstaettner, Lee and Rodger, 2018), and emotionally expressed by included participants, the introduction of such a tour would serve the purpose of possible benefits including both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, such as, excitement/fun, experience spirit of nature, affective pleasures, thrill, insight/self-reflection, source of escapism and stress management. As a result, all participants eagerly recommended this study's tour to be implemented between June and September to avoid weather-related issues. Additionally, they all seem to share the boastful feeling about how Filfla has a unique

beauty through its surrounding seabed, an intriguing history and a legendry story attached to it, which only the locals might know of.

## References

- Bentley, T., Cater, C. and Page, S. (2010). Adventure and ecotourism safety in Queensland: Operator experiences and practice. *Tourism Management*, 31(5), pp.563-571.
- Bentley, T.A., Page, S. and Walker, L., 2004. The safety experience of New Zealand adventure tourism operators. *Journal of Travel Medicine*, 11(5), pp.280-286.
- Dearden, P., Topelko, K. and Ziegler, J., 2008. Tourist interactions with sharks. *Marine wildlife and tourism management: Insights from the natural and social sciences*, pp.66-90.
- Deidun, A. (2016). *Filfla - An incredible Malta Diving Experience*. [online] YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=isFBQFhI\\_s&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=isFBQFhI_s&feature=emb_title) [Accessed Dec. 2019].
- Gstaettner, A., Lee, D. and Rodger, K. (2018). The concept of risk in nature-based tourism and recreation – a systematic literature review. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 21(15), pp.1784-1809.
- Jones, A. (2017). Case study Malta : climate change and tourism : risks, hazards and resilience - an island perspective. In A. Jones & M. Phillips (Eds.). *Climate change and coastal tourism*. CABI Oxon.
- O'Connor, P.J. and O'Connor, N., 2005. Causes and prevention of boating fatalities. *Accident Analysis & Prevention*, 37(4), pp.689-698
- Port and Yachting Directorate 2018. (2018). Transport Malta.
- Portelli, P. (2012). *A secure breeding ground for seabirds*. [online] Times of Malta. Available at: <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/A-secure-breeding-ground-for-seabirds.427103> [Accessed Dec. 2019].
- Regional Statistics Malta 2019 Edition. (2019). National Statistics Office.
- Rickard, L.N., Scherer, C.W. and Newman, S.B., 2011. Exploring attribution of responsibility for visitor safety in a US national park. *Health, risk & society*, 13(6), pp.527-545.
- Sakals, M. E., Wilford, D. J., Wellwood, D. W., & MacDougall, S. A. (2010). Active fans and grizzly bears: Reducing risks for wilderness campers. *Geomorphology*, 115(3/4), 305–314. doi:10.1016/j.geomorph.2009.06.031
- Xu, F., Buhalis, D. and Weber, J. (2017). Serious games and the gamification of tourism. *Tourism Management*, 60, pp.244-256.

## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Interview Questions

Down below are the semi-structured interview questions prepared for boat persons

1. Can you please tell me about your experience as a boat person?
2. Can you please tell me about some positive experiences?
3. Can you please tell me about some negative experiences?
4. Are there any licences needed for the boats you use?
  - a. Prompts: Nautical Licence/Registrations
5. Can you please describe what health and safety measures are related to this job?
  - a. Prompts: first aid boxes/VHF Radio
6. Can you think of any limitations in relation to your job?
  - a. Prompts: at the location/ on the boat/weather force/ age.
7. Can you please describe whether there's any dangerous wildlife along the way to Filfla Island and around it?
8. Can you please open up on weather conditions encountered while working on the sea?
9. Can you recall, and kindly share, any feedback received by the clients after arriving back from a boat-tour?
  - a. Prompts: positive/negative
10. Are there any suggestions that you'd like to recommend to tour guides creating a new trip to Filfla?

Dawn huma 'l-mistoqsijiet preparati ghas-sewwieqa tad-dghajjes (barklori)

1. Taf tgħidli l-esperjenza tiegħek bħala sewwieq tad-dghajsa (barklor)?
2. Tista jekk jghogbok tiddeskrivi ftit esperjenzi positivi?
3. Tista tiddeskrivi ftit esperjenzi negattivi?
4. Hemm xi licenzji li għandkhom bzonn għal dawn id-dghajjes?
  - a. Suggerimenti: Licenzja Nauticali/ Regiztrazzjoni
5. Tista jekk jghogbok tiddiskrivili xi mizuri ta' sahha u sigurta ( health and safety measures) relatati ma dan ix-xogħol?
  - a. Suggerimenti: Kontenituri ta' l-ewwel ghajnuna/ VHF Radio
6. Tista tahseb f'xi limitazzjonijiet relatati ma x-xogħol tagħkhom?
  - a. Suggerimenti: fil-location tagħkhom/fuq id-dghajsa/il-forza tat-temp/ etc.
7. Tista jekk jghogbok tiddiskrivili jekk jezistux xi tip ta hut perikolu (wildlife) matul it-triq lejn Filfla u l-madwar?
8. Tista jekk jghogbok tiftah naqra fuq x'tip ta kundizzjonijiet ta temp tintaqghu mieghu meta tkunu qed tahdmu fuq il-bahar?
9. Tista tiftakar, u jekk jghogbok taqsam mieghi, x'ghamla ta rispons (feedback) tircievu minghand il-klienti (turisti)?
  - a. Suggerimenti: Kemm positivi u kemm negattivi
10. Hemm xi suggerimenti li inti tista twassal/tirrekommenda lit- 'Tourguides' li se jorganizzaw (joholqu) dan il-vjagg għid (tour) lejn Filfla?

## Appendix 2: Consent Form



### Institute for Tourism Studies CONSENT FORM

**Title of Project:** The lived experience of boatpersons in relation to boat tours taking place in the south-west of Malta

**Name of researcher:** Ms. Olympia Sant Mifsud

**Name of Research Supervisors:** Mr. Vincent Zammit

**Institute for Tourism Studies**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect my legal rights. ☐
3. I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential ☐
4. I agree to take part in the semi-structured interview ☐
5. I understand that the interview will be audio recorded and I am happy to proceed ☐
6. I understand that parts of our conversation may be used verbatim in future publications or presentations but that such quotes will be anonymised. ☐

Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Researcher: Olympia Sant Mifsud Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature O.Sant Mifsud

### Appendix 3: Original Quotes used in research project (pre-translation)

#### Individual Factor - Experience Sub-Theme

P1: “Hekk kif hallejt l-iskola ta’eta ta’ sbatax il-sena mort ma’ missieri [fuq id-dghajsa]. [...] Konna niehdu hsieb li l-magni ghandna kollox sewwa ghalihom u jekk jinqalalna xi haga nirrangawha ahna bejnietha.”

P4: “Jien bdejt meta kelli sittax il-sena man-nannu u missieri. [...] Bhala sewwieq ta’ dghajsa tghallimt li dejjem ghandek thares il-quddiem tad-dghajsa speċjalment meta jkun filghodu u kemm meta wahdi u kemm meta mgħobbi bin-nies. Meta naqla minn mal-moll irrid inqum bil-wieqfa kemm bil-mutur u kemm bil-kabina, tara min hemm quddiemek bhal ghawwiem jew dghajsa ohra ghax malajr tagħmel xi accident.”

#### Individual Factor – Wildlife Sub-Theme

P2: “Sa fejn naf jien ma hawnx hut kbir (jitbissem). Hawnhekk meta inqabat shark kien inqabat il-barra hafna minn Filfla u qatt ma rajna hut kbir madwarna iktar”.

P3: “Jien qatt ma iltqajt halli ngħid hekk (jitbissem)...Xi dolphins gieli tara, hut kbir qatt ma iltqajt. Dwar dak is-shark xi erbghin sena ilu kien qabad wiehed il-bogħod hafna imma dan iz-zmien ma għadekx tara hawn”.

#### Environmental Factor – Planning Sub-Theme

P3: “Dwar VHF radio ghandha l-kumpanija peress li nkunu qrib ma nigux bzonn. Ahna ghandna l-mowbajl illum”.

P5: “Illum differenti minn qabel it-temp...tisma l-ahbarijiet tat-temp u jaqtghu xi kun gej minn qabel. Mhux bhal tletin sena ilu missieri kien jghidli oqghod attent ghac-cluni, attent għall-ajrijiet...illum hawn fuq xix taqra.”

#### Environmental Factor – Weather Sub-Theme

P1: “Fil-maltemp ma konniex nahdmu minn habba ir-rih allura jinqala ic-caqlieq. Għal Blue Grotto ma konniex immorru meta jkun ir-rih u aktar lejn Filfla. Bin-nies ma konniex nistghu mmorru”.

P2: “l-aktar problema li ahna ghandna huwa it-temp. Perezempju illum kellna nieqfu ghax telghu l-ajrijiet. Meta tela’ l-ajrijiet bir-rih l-ghar haga ma tafx x’hinu gej for the safety ikollok

tieqaf. Il-problemi l-ohra tat-turisti ghax joqghodu jgergru ‘why you stop, it’s not fair’ u min dawn bhas-soltu”.

#### Management Factor – Licences Sub-Theme

P2: “L-ewwel haga trid permess minghand it-Transport Malta, fejn daww titolbu is-surveyor tad-dghajsa biex turi li d-dghajsa hi tajba ghax-xoghol u plus hekk jitolbu bhas-sistema tal-karozza. Ikollok l-insurance tad-dghajsa ghal sena u t-turisti jkunu inxurjati wkoll. Dik ta’ kull sena bilfors. Imbagħad għandna ohra tal-MTA dik tal-permessi ahna ngħidulha tat-tourist board.”

P4: “il-Licenzja hija bżonjuza tkun taf kif għandek t’opera d-dghajsa, in-nies miegħek u wkoll skont il-kobor tad-dghajsa tista tohrog il-barra.”

#### Management Factor – Laws and Regulations Sub-Theme

P3: “Il-kors tal-health and safety kollha kemm ahna ngħamli. Bħala sigurta’ it-turisti kollha iridu jilbsu l-life jacket waqt it-trip u had ma jrid iqum bil-wieqfa biex inti zzomm kontrol tad-dghajsa. Health and safety kit għandna wkoll anke ta’kontra l-fire. Dwar VHF Radio għandha il-kumpanija mhux ahna personali.”

P5: “Ma tistax jkollok aktar minn disa persuni fid-dghajsa. Il-life jacket dawn l-ahhar ghaxar snin bdiet ligi. Illum għandna l-mowbajl sa tnax il-mil jaqbad.”



## Appendix 4: Correspondence with TM and ERA regarding permission to go around Filfla by boat for this study's tour

### Correspondence:

On Wed, 12 Feb 2020 at 15:07, Cutajar Lorraine at Transport  
<lorraine.cutajar@transport.gov.mt> wrote:

Good Morning Olympia,

Apologies for my late reply but I was away.

With reference to our communication and your below query.

Please note that this office is the unit that processes requests for permits to **navigate** within the limits of Filfla (among other requests), being a restricted zone, one has to also obtain permission from the Environmental Resources Authority.

Once we receive a request from an operator / client, we normally provide a document containing a list of guidelines (attached in this e-mail) that have to be adhered with when in the process of obtaining the necessary clearances to navigate within the proximity of Filfla.

Therefore when the client/operator furnishes this office with E.R.A's permit/Authorisation, we proceed in issuing TM's permission. A template of the permit we normally issue is being attached for ease of reference.

Meantime, E.R.A also have something similar, which I am attaching as I managed to find it in my records, however I suggest that you officially consult them and have them provide it too.

Lastly please be informed that, **access on the land** of Filfla is **Prohibited** and shall only be granted by the Ministry responsible for the Environment for Educational and Scientific purposes **ONLY, as per Filfla Nature Reserve Act Chapter 323.**

I hope the above and attached will suffice and answer your query, should you require further information or clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

Regards,

Lorraine Cutajar

Port Operations Officer

Ports & Yachting Directorate



Port Operations Centre  
23/25 Xatt I-Ghassara tal-Gheneb  
Marsa, MRS 1917  
Malta

Tel: (356) 22914 412

Fax: (356) 22914 419

Email: [Lorraine.cutajar@transport.gov.mt](mailto:Lorraine.cutajar@transport.gov.mt)

## Permit Letter:



**Transport Malta**

Malta Transport Centre  
Marsa, MRS 1917  
Malta

Tel: (356) 2122 2203  
Fax: (356) 2125 0363  
Email: [info.tm@transport.gov.mt](mailto:info.tm@transport.gov.mt)

[www.transport.gov.mt](http://www.transport.gov.mt)

Date of Permit request.

To: Name of operator / client requesting permit

### **Permission to Enter Restricted Waters around Filfla**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Permission is hereby granted to enter restricted waters around Filfla on \_\_\_\_\_ subject to the following conditions:

1. Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) are to be kept informed by telephone or VHF Radio channel 12 of movements of boats;
2. Any instructions or orders from VTS and/or Armed Forces patrol vessel are to be complied with;
3. The service boat is to be certified and licensed by Transport Malta for such use if operated commercially;
4. Any other law or regulation is to be strictly observed.
5. Conditions imposed by E.R.A shall remain to be adhered with.
- 6.

Yours sincerely

**Authority for Transport in Malta**

**Harbour Master**  
Ports and Yachting Directorate  
Transport Malta

## Rules associated with recreational activities in protected sites at sea:

### General Binding Rules for Recreational Activities in Protected Sites at Sea



The aim of this guide is to provide a concise list of conditions that shall be observed when carrying out activities in Natura 2000 sites as designated through the Provisions of the Flora, Fauna and Natural Habitats Protection Regulations, 2006 (S.L. 549.44)

This GBR is applicable to activities in the protected Natura 2000 sites at Sea.

These GBR conditions are subject to the following:

- The conditions apply during the whole duration of the activity. Failure to do so could result in enforcement action and cessation of any related works or activities. The Environment and Resources Authority (ERA) reserves the right to suspend or revoke the activity in case the Permit Holder and does not fulfil or honour any of the conditions or obligations arising from this GBR document.
- These conditions are issued saving third party rights.
- The activity organiser is not exempt from any other legislation or regulations, codes of practice, conditions or requirements imposed by the ERA or any other competent authorities, including the obtaining of permits, licenses, or clearances.
- ERA reserves the right to inspect and monitor the activity and to send officers and/or other on-site monitors appointed by the Authority at the expense of the applicant, to ensure the safeguarding of the natural assets.

The conditions are without prejudice to liability for any accidents or injuries which may occur during the activities being permitted through this Permit. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that all safety measures are taken

#### Conditions

##### 1. General Requirements

- 1.1. All users of the site have a duty to care and protect the environment. It is the responsibility of the activity organiser and the individual persons to ensure that no harm is caused to the environment as a whole or to individual species, either intentionally or accidentally.
- 1.2. All activities are to be supervised by the activity organizer and/or by the assigned coordinator/s who shall be held responsible for the activities;
- 1.3. Individuals participating in the activities are to be made aware of these conditions and are to strictly adhere to these conditions;
- 1.4. The site shall be maintained in its original condition, free from disturbance, litter and waste arising from the activity.

##### 2. Restrictions

- 2.1 No access and/or any other activity whatsoever is to be allowed on the Filfla Nature Reserve as defined through the Filfla Nature Reserve Act (Cap 323; Act XV of 1988). Boats shall keep a distance of not less than 50m from shore;
- 2.2 The provisions of the relevant Notices to Mariners, in particular the following shall be followed:
  - 2.2.1 Notice to Mariners 473 of 1987; and
  - 2.2.2 Notice to Mariners 4 of 2009; Restricted Area between "Ponta tal-Ahrax" and "Dahlet ix-Xilep";
  - 2.2.3 Notice to Mariners 2 of 2010 Restricted Area between "Ponta tal-Ahrax" and "Dahlet ix-Xilep";
- 2.3 Fishing activities in the area using strong lights (lampara, etc) are prohibited;

Protect the environment- keep this document digital!  
Version 2, June 2017

- 2.4 The following activities are strictly prohibited:
  - 2.4.1 Anchoring unless in cases of emergency. Should anchoring be necessary this is to avoid any natural habitats, and shall only occur on sand.
  - 2.4.2 the deliberate picking, collection, taking, cutting, uprooting, harming, destroying or damaging in any way of any specimen of wild flora;
  - 2.4.3 the deliberate hunting, killing, capturing, taking, harming, of any specimen of wild fauna;
  - 2.4.4 pursuing, taking or attempting to take, deliberately killing or attempting to kill, deliberately destroying, keeping, transporting, selling, buying exchanging, offering for sale or for exchange, importing or exporting any specimen of protected species;
  - 2.4.5 the deliberate disturbance of any species of fauna, particularly during periods of breeding, rearing, hibernation and migration;
  - 2.4.6 the deliberate destruction and deterioration of breeding sites or resting places of any species of fauna;
  - 2.4.7 cutting or damaging of reeds, tree branches etc., or removal of features from any buildings or on-site structures, in any manner for use as stakes or barriers, or any other use;
  - 2.4.8 planting of vegetation, shrubs and/or trees or the introduction of any flora or fauna into the site or its environs;
  - 2.4.9 introduction, removal, significant movement and re-engineering, and/or collection of sand, shingle, stone, soil and/or sediment;
  - 2.4.10 The letting off of petards and other fireworks from sea is not allowed in the.
  - 2.4.11 excavation works and any physical modification of the vegetation cover, the ground and landform of the site and its surroundings.

##### 3. Noise, Vibrations and Lighting

- 3.1 No generators, loud music and/or noise and equipment which generates noise and vibration shall be made use of;
- 3.2 Lighting towards cliffs shall be avoided;
- 3.3 Lights, other than lights prescribed in the Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, (COLREGs) have to be switched off and no loud noise, other than sound signals prescribed in the Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972 (COLREGs), from vessels is allowed;
- 3.4 Pleasure cruises operating as "Floating Discos" are obliged to follow the above guidelines and switch off all lights and music while passing area or otherwise keep clear from of the SPA.

##### 4. Waste Management

- 4.1 No dumping of any kind of litter overboard is allowed. All waste generated during the boat trips is to be carried back to the main land (Malta) and disposed of accordingly in accordance with the Waste Management (Activity Registration) Regulations 2007 (S.L. 540.45) and the Waste Regulations 2011 (S.L. 540.63);
- 4.2 All wastes generated shall be collected for recycling/re-use;
- 4.3 All wastes shall be disposed within the designated and controlled storage area(s);
- 4.4 The discharge of any type of effluent (including washwaters, bilges, septic tanks) to land, or sea is prohibited;
- 4.5 Disposal, discharge or spillage of oil, fuel, paint or other pollutants, or of solid waste, ash or combustibles is strictly prohibited. These shall be collected and disposed off accordingly;
- 4.6 Any spillages of oil or other hazardous material shall receive immediate attention to prevent escape to surface water or land.

##### 5. Reporting

- 5.1. The Authority is to be informed of any changes in the proposed dates of the activity prior to occurrence of the activity. Such information is to be communicated through email on to

Protect the environment- keep this document digital!  
Version 2, June 2017

[nature.permitting@era.org.mt](mailto:nature.permitting@era.org.mt). In the case of short-term cancellation of the activity (especially outside office hours), the Authority should be contacted on 99210404.

- 5.2 In accordance with Regulation 48(4) of S.L. 540.44, a brief report of the activities held, including photos, any publications as a result of the activity, is to be provided to ERA by the Permit Holder within one month of the expiry of the permit, and is to be submitted to [nature.permitting@era.org.mt](mailto:nature.permitting@era.org.mt). Information that should be treated as confidential as outlined in Regulation 48 of S.L. 540.44, shall be specified.

A copy of the report template is available at <http://era.org.mt/en/Pages/Nature-Permitting.aspx>

#### Contacts

For additional information contact the Environmental Permitting Services through [nature.permitting@era.org.mt](mailto:nature.permitting@era.org.mt) or 2292 3500.

**Report Reference:** Environment and Resources Authority, 2017. General Binding Rules for Activities in Protected Sites (at Sea). 3pp.

Protect the environment- keep this document digital!  
Version 2, June 2017