

Episode 37: Losing Nature

Summary

Nick and Wendy talk about their recent visit to Malta. In particular, they talk about visiting the site of Gozo's famous Azure Window, which collapsed and disappeared a few weeks earlier.

Transcript

Nick: We've been talking in several recent episodes about travelling through southern Italy, and for the last part of that trip we took a ferry across to the country of Malta, and that's where we are now. And we've spent the last week or so on the main island of Malta and on the secondary island of Gozo, which has been a really nice way to end the trip.

Wendy: Yeah, it's been great. Umm, I mean Italy is a country that we know very well and, uhh, some of the places that we went to on this trip in Italy we had never been to before, but others were familiar to us. And the country and the culture and the food in general - all of those things, we know very well, whereas Malta was a very new experience and, uhh, we weren't quite sure what to expect, and we learned a lot about Malta and Maltese history and culture and it's been really interesting.

Nick: Yeah, it's, uhh, quite a mix of cultures and different things. It's a Mediterranean environment, you have a little bit of influence from North Africa, you also have British influence as a late British colony and things like that. So it's a bit of a mix all thrown together but, uhh, yeah, it's a really interesting destination.

Wendy: Yeah, and a lot of influence from Italy and from Sicily in particular. Umm, yeah, so the language, for example, you mentioned. To me, just listening to it, it sounds like Arabic, uhh, and apparently it is very closely related to certain types of Arabic, particularly in the Maghreb - Arabic that's spoken in, uhh, North Africa, like you said, in Tunisia and Algeria and those countries. But, really, it's most closely related to the Arabic that was spoken in Sicily during the medieval period, umm, when Arabs were living in Sicily, which I find pretty fascinating.

Nick: For sure. And so we've talked in a couple of previous episodes about the loss of cultural heritage in places like Syria because of war, in places like Italy because of a lack of resources and lack of funding. And today we're going to talk about the loss of natural heritage in Malta, which is something a little bit different. But just a

month ago, uhh, as we're recording this, and so just before we came to Malta, the ... one of the principle attractions of Malta disappeared.

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: And so it's on the island of Gozo, the second island of Malta, and it's the number one attraction, or it was the number one attraction, on Gozo, and it was a rock arch that jutted out¹ from the cliffs² into the sea and it was called the Azure Window. And it was this beautiful arch and you could look through it, you'd see the water underneath it, you'd see all the cliffs on the other side. And now it's gone.

Wendy: Yeah, and it's completely gone. I mean, we had heard before we came here that it collapsed, that there had been a big storm and that the Azure Window, which is this natural rock formation, was no longer there. But I thought that maybe, you know, it had just broken in two, so that you no longer had the complete arch, but that ... I thought you would still see something there, but it's really completely gone, you really see nothing at all. And we took a boat trip around that area and the boatman brought us to where it was, and we could see that the rock was a different colour, you know. It was kind of ... when you knew, it was ... you could see that, uhh, something used to be there and now it's not there. But apart from that there's really no trace³ of it. And, uhh, I find it very strange. I don't understand exactly how that happened.

Nick: Yeah, and so it's ... I think it's taken the whole tourism industry by surprise and it's just this strange thing, because it's just gone. And all throughout both Malta and Gozo, you see images of it everywhere, uhh, they've already printed calendars for next year and it's on the front cover of some of these calendars. You know, all the tour buses and everything have pictures of it and it's everywhere, and now it's just not there. Umm, and yeah, like you said, it's just completely gone. And so, we had planned to go and see it, and then discovered that it was gone, and so we wondered, 'Should we go to this area at all?' Because it's part of this area, uhh, which is called Dwejra, and it's this coastal area with a lot of cliffs and, you know, there's supposed to be this spectacular scenery. But it's all completely dominated by the Azure Window, and that's what everybody talks about and that's what all the pictures show and things like that.

Wendy: At least the promotion has always been dominated by the Dwejra (Azure) Window. I mean, as it turns out, we went there and we discovered that there is a lot more to see and it was absolutely worth going, uhh, even despite the fact that the

¹ jutted out: extended beyond the normal boundary. Note that Nick, who was suffering from a cold while recording this episode, accidentally said 'jetted' (which is also a word) instead of 'jutted'.

² cliffs: tall and steep rock faces that often go into the ocean

³ trace: surviving sign or evidence

Dwejra (Azure) Window was no longer there. But that has definitely been, you know, the main centrepiece⁴ of the promotion used to promote Gozo tourism.

Nick: Right, so when you go down there as we did, uhh, just a couple of days ago, you can take a boat as you mentioned, and it starts from this inland sea, and you go into these caves, and you can go basically through the caves out into the ocean on the other side. And so you're in and out of these caves, you have this really dramatic rock scenery, umm, very high cliffs around you, and it's really spectacular.

Wendy: Yeah, it was beautiful. And, you know, I think it'll just take a little while for the tourism industry to catch up with recent events and to come up with different ways of promoting the area. But, uhh, it's absolutely still worth visiting, even if the Dwejra (Azure) Window had never been there, it would still be a spectacular sight.

Nick: Right, and so at the moment the big, uhh, the big selling point is, 'Oh, we'll show you where the Azure Window *was*.' You know, you can see where it used to be and is no longer there. And I guess as the ... as time passes or as the years pass, umm, yeah, people will be less and less interested in where it was or how it looked and they'll just focus more, like you said, on some of the other, umm, formations and some of the other beautiful landscapes of the area. Umm, but yeah, for right now, it's a bit unusual because there's quite a large car park and it's where all the tour buses and everything go, and then people get out, and you scramble⁵ across the rocks and you used to have this view of the Azure Window right from there. And now people, yeah, they don't really know what to do.

Wendy: Yeah, people are still going to the same spot and standing there, and looking at the place where the Azure Window used to be, and it's not there. And it ... from what we could tell, most of the people who had arrived on the tour buses in these large groups, they're just staying there at that viewpoint and not really exploring the rest of the area, which is a real shame, 'cause we, you know, we took this boat trip like we mentioned, and we also walked around, umm, that area quite a bit and there are some other really beautiful viewpoints. Uhh, there's a rock, kind of a small island, an islet, nearby, that's called Fungus Rock because there was this fungus that grows there was thought to have medicinal properties and so it used to be harvested there. Umm, and there's a tower that's on the mainland that was built by the Knights of Malta when they were harvesting⁶ this fungus and they were, uhh, earning a lot of money from selling this fungus and, you know, and their, umm, pharmaceutical concoctions⁷ that they were, umm, making and so they actually built

⁴ centrepiece: main aspect or attraction

⁵ scramble: to walk using hands and feet on rocks or uneven ground

⁶ harvesting: gathering or collecting agricultural produce (crops) when it's ready

⁷ concoctions: stews, soups or even magic potions prepared by combining different ingredients

the tower to protect the fungus on the rock because they didn't want anyone else to come and harvest this fungus. So there's lots of interesting history and, you know, natural beauty and lots more to see and discover there. But, uhh, unfortunately it seems like, right now, the focus is still on the Azure Window even though it's not there anymore.

Nick: Right. And as you said, the collapse of the window was caused by a storm, but, it's just part of the long-term process of erosion⁸. And I read in articles when it happened that the Maltese officials believed that it was actually going to collapse in about six years from now.

Wendy: Wow.

Nick: And they thought they had six years left.

Wendy: Really?

Nick: But they had predicted that it would collapse eventually because of erosion. But it brings up an interesting point related to climate change which is that other countries ... other attractions in other countries might be lost in the future as well, uhh, in this same way. So it's almost like a case study⁹ to see how the government now reacts and rebrands themselves in terms of their tourism, umm, for Gozo.

Wendy: Yeah, that's a very good point. And in the case of the Azure Window, I don't think that this was human-induced in any way. Uhh, I don't think ... it wasn't because of climate change, it's just a natural process, this, umm, erosion, you know, because of the salt and the sea and the waves, uhh, coming up against the rock. Umm, you know, that's ... that was always going to happen. But, uhh, as you said, there are lots of other things, umm, like for example, the coral reefs, the Great Barrier Reef is being blanched, and that's, umm, that is very much human-induced climate change. So, yeah, lots of places are going to have to adapt to changes in our environment.

Nick: Yeah, but getting back to Malta and Gozo, I think what we learned was that Dwejra is still a spectacular area to visit, so hopefully people keep going to see it.

Wendy: Yeah, I hope they do. Umm, not too many, because Gozo is a very special place, and it's a small place, so it can't really handle mass tourism. Umm, I think, yeah, the numbers should be kept, umm, you know, regulated¹⁰ somehow. But it's definitely worth seeing, so, yeah, I encourage people to go see it.

⁸ erosion: when part of the earth is worn away by natural processes. The verb is 'to erode'.

⁹ case study: an example to be studied

¹⁰ regulated: controlled

Comprehension Questions

1. What did Wendy find interesting about the Maltese language?
2. What was the Azure Window and what happened to it?
3. According to Nick and Wendy, what else is there to do in the Dwejra area now that the Azure Window is gone?

Exercises

Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.

1. No one knows what happened to him. He just vanished without a _____.
2. If you climb a volcano, you sometimes have to _____ over some rocks near the top.
3. At some natural attractions, the number of visitors is _____ to help protect the area.
4. In the Harry Potter books and films, the Hogwarts students create a lot of _____ using strange ingredients in Potions class with Professor Snape.
5. The pole _____ from the building onto the street. It was dangerous for people who were walking or driving past.
6. If you take a boat from England to France, you can see the famous _____ of Dover on the English coast.
7. The [Twelve Apostles](#) rock formation on the Australian coast near Melbourne has now been reduced to only eight 'apostles' because of _____. Four of the apostles have collapsed.
8. In the United States, turkey is usually the _____ of Thanksgiving dinner.
9. The farmer was out in his field _____ his crops when he saw a UFO flying overhead.
10. After the Russian Revolution in 1917, the Soviet Union became a _____ for the practical application of communism in a society.

Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Have you been to Malta and if so, did you enjoy it? If not, would you like to go? Why or why not?
2. Nick said that officials in Malta already knew before the Azure Window collapsed that it was endangered. What other natural sights can you think of that are endangered?
3. What do you think Maltese tourism should do to promote Gozo now that the Azure Window is gone?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. She thought it was interesting that it sounded like Arabic, and that it is based on the Arabic that was spoken in medieval Sicily.
2. It was a natural rock arch on the coast that collapsed into the ocean when a big storm hit the area.
3. They said you can take a boat trip through the caves and below the cliffs and you can walk on the rocks to see other viewpoints and other attractions like Fungus Rock and the nearby tower.

Exercises

1. trace
2. scramble
3. regulated
4. concoctions
5. juttred out
6. cliffs
7. erosion
8. centrepiece
9. harvesting
10. case study