

Beyond Nadur’s Intricate Carnival Mask

WITH CARNIVAL FESTIVITIES JUST ROUND THE CORNER, NADUR IS DEFINITELY THE PLACE TO BE, HOWEVER STRIPPING OFF NADUR’S CARNIVAL MASK REVEALS THE LOCALITY’S TRUE FEATURES.

Strolling along the quiet, quaint streets of Nadur on a bright sunny winter morning, I am immediately drawn to the intricate stone works in the variety of facades. Despite being damp from the previous day’s bout of rainfall, the dark yellowish limestone lends itself to a display of meticulously carved, designs and decorative stone works. The elaborate designs are indeed the result of hard work, patience and craftsmanship.

It is precisely this intricate detail which brings to my attention, deft fingers manoeuvring a multitude of bobbins hanging down from a cylindrical lace pillow. An artistic creation is under way as each bobbin dances to the rhythm of the nimble hands moving them. A grey haired, middle-aged, Gozitan lady, wrapped up in woollen winter clothes and sitting on a wooden-framed wicker chair is patiently plaiting a new piece of lace.



I am intrigued and instantly walk closer to Giovanna and watch her work intently. “Bongu”, she says smiling. I return her greeting, surprised that she is

aware of my presence despite being deeply immersed in her work. It is not long before we engage in what proved to be an interesting conversation about lace making.

Giovanna explains that she has been making lace items for quite a number of years. Unfortunately this intricate art work, handed down to us by the Knights, requires time and patience – both of which have become priceless today. Our fast moving lifestyles do not allow us enough time to sit down and indulge in such hobbies.

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The neighbour’s door opens quietly and a young girl peeps out. She gives Giovanna a sheepish smile and promptly, comes out with her own lace pillow, which is smaller in size and sits herself down on

another wooden chair beside Giovanna. She too, has her own piece of lace work which she has just started. Giovanna nods and adds that lace making was dying a natural death until recently, when some interested lace makers, got together and started teaching lace making at the School of Arts in Gozo. In fact she recalls proudly that it was only in the last decade that lace making started regaining popularity. The surprising thing was that although hand-made lace products are always in demand, the lace makers are still not that common to find.

As Giovanna shows her concern about the dying trade, I observe the threaded bobbins moving from one corner to another, each of them swiftly picked up and twisted and moved over or under another piece of thread and then let go again. A process which happens repeatedly in the course of the conversation. At the same time, the threads are being shaped exactly into the pattern drawn on the lace pillow and before I could utter a word, I could

see the formation of what I thought was a leaf pattern.

I was immediately told that this was the 'Moska'. The detail is crucial and when the time spent on each pattern is considered, then the actual work is completely priceless.

In the meantime, another middle-aged woman comes out to speak to Giovanna. I soon learn that she is Giovanna's sister. She smiles at me and immediately asks me in to see a very important tool used by the lace maker. I am overwhelmed by the hospitality and as I walk in, I am shown the 'raddiena' which is very similar to a wooden spinning wheel.



The 'raddiena' is used to thread bobbins before they are used on the lace pillow. "You see", she says gently, "there is a lot of preparation before". Naturally, all bobbins to be used for a particular pattern need to be ready beforehand. I am undoubtedly mesmerised, by the amount of work required to create a lace doily.

As I make my way out of the house, the local Parish Church bells, chime noon and I realise that I should be on my way to the infamous bakery for a scrumptious traditional ftira, forgetting all about the traditional open air market, that I had originally intended to visit.

I could have probably watched Giovanna at her work all day. Watching this highly artistic traditional craft

from such a close distance is an experience in itself, as a priceless masterpiece unfolded before my own eyes.

Although undoubtedly this Gozitan village has become highly associated with vibrant carnival celebrations over the past few years, Nadur is definitely not just about carnival.



Panoramic view from Nadur belvedere

Walking past the panoramic belvedere on the high plateau and into the traditional village centre is indeed stimulating. Who knows? Maybe you too can stumble upon Giovanna, swiftly shuffling bobbins on the traditional lace pillow, creating some of the most elaborate lace designs. Either way, a visit to Nadur on a winter's day can prove to be warmly pleasing.

Fact Box - Nadur

Population	4,181
Area	7.2 km ²
Attractions	<i>Kenuna Tower</i> <i>Chapel of the Immaculate Conception</i> <i>Lunzjata Valley</i>
Bays	<i>San Filep</i> <i>San Blas</i> <i>Dahlet Qorrot</i> <i>Ramla l-Hamra</i>