

Marsamxett harbour embellishment

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The various suggestions for Marsamxett harbour are good news but there are two points on which I would like to comment.

An important aspect is the suggestion for the lower end of Valletta. Fort St Elmo, with its unique position, is crying out to be resurrected and properly developed. It is worthwhile mentioning that in *The Times Business* (December 6), an entrepreneurial company was reported to have indulged in the refurbishing of a similar fort. Hopefully, the Malta Tourism Authority is aware of the latest craze in hotel accommodation, namely the conversion of old prisons and forts into hotels of great luxury. Taken as a complex, that part of Valletta can become a centre in its own right.

I have my reservations about the cultural aspect. We have seen the limited success of St James Cavalier and "culture" on its own will not achieve the desired goals. The area housing the Police Academy can cater for a number of cultural activities but must be supported by a wider project. Even the hotel earmarked for the Evans Buildings might not be economically feasible.

The wider approach should combine the five main aspects of the zone, namely: (a) cruise liners; (b) a luxurious hotel at Fort St Elmo; (c) cultural activities in the area of the Police Academy; (d) a hotel in place of the Evans Building and (e) the Mediterranean Conference Centre. In fact, it might be best to trust all five aspects under one single management so that the full facilities could be advertised on an international scale.

My second query has to do with the proposed breakwater.

Speaking from experience, I am afraid that the draft design of the two arms will aggravate matters, especially during an easterly wind. The arms do not overlap each other and will, thus, funnel the strong waves with even more force into the inner basins, especial Pietà and Msida.

In one of the studies I was involved in, together with the Malta Maritime Authority, and which was carried out in Wallingford, UK, it was pointed out to us that the short arm of the Grand Harbour breakwater has the wrong design that adversely affects Rinella and Kalkara creeks.

On the same basis, the proposed new St Elmo arm could very well cause the same problems. The proposed two berths for liners will not be usable in certain weather conditions and a strong gregale might even damage the infrastructure and proposed roads. A detailed study with computer and water models is essential. The proposed north arm will only provide limited shelter. There have been other suggestions in the past which might be more costly to build but that are more practical in the long run. The design of breakwaters should be entrusted to the best experts available.

Finally, I understand that there exist some shipwrecks, including HMS Maori, which is a diving attraction beneath Fort St Elmo.
