

Lifestyle & Culture



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Diary



Let's be positive about the pandemic!



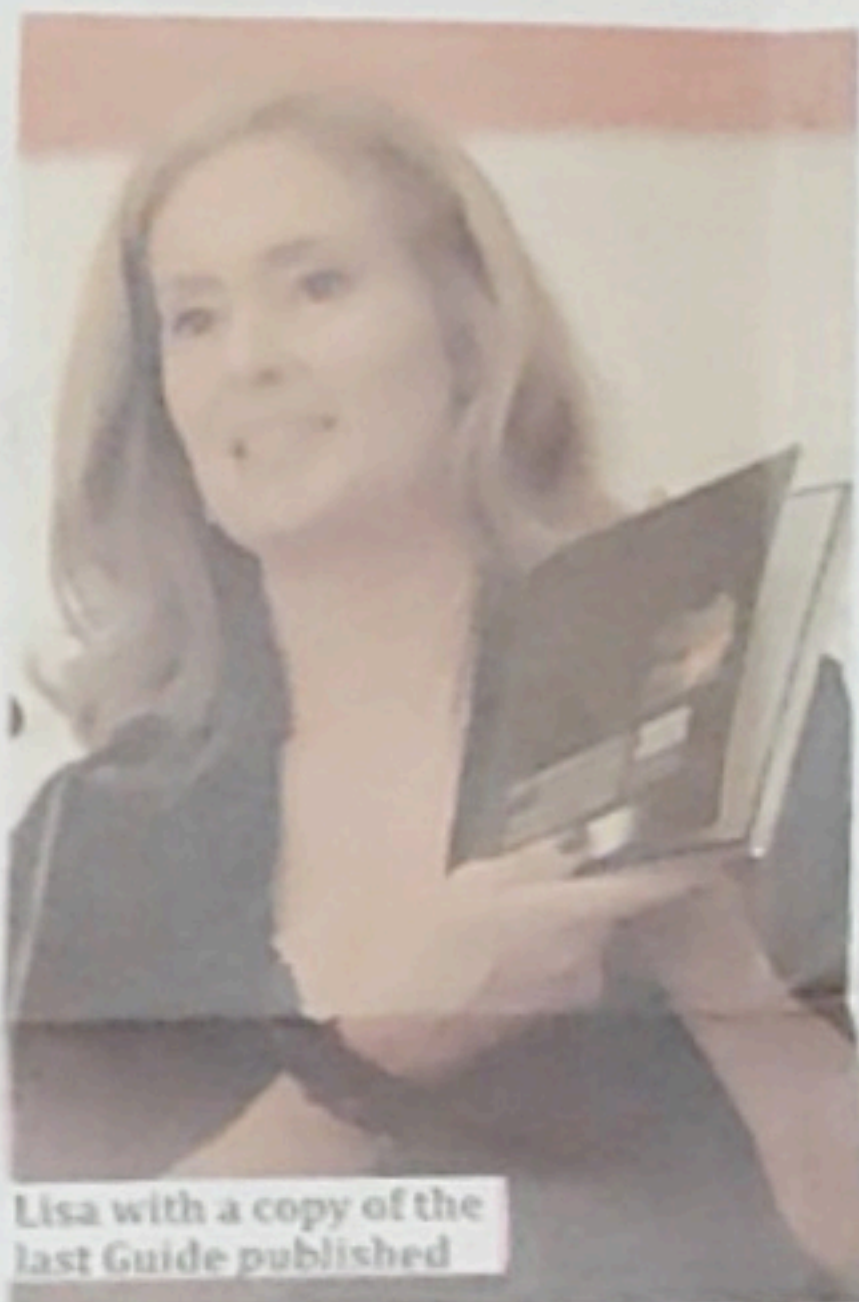
LISA GRECH is the Managing Director of The Definitive(ly) Good Guide Co Ltd. As publisher of Malta's foremost restaurant guide, organiser of offbeat food tours, creator of an essential reference guide for parents locally and curator of Malta Artisan Markets she shares her insight on how grit and diversification have kept her sane during these unprecedented times. As a single mother she will emerge from this *annus horribilis* with honours.

**“W**ell we weren't expecting that!” comes to mind when I was asked to write a Covid diary. What a whirlwind of a year!

March and the lockdown meant that schooling went temporarily online, so without warning my children were home - glued to their computers for the most part of the day trying to keep up with distance learning. Ollie, my teenage son, worked independently and only emerged from his man cave when hunger struck. Lola, my seven-year-old daughter, on the other hand required attention throughout. I suddenly found myself having to learn the art of teaching whilst also attempting to keep on top of a business which was collapsing all around me with revenue streams coming to an abrupt halt. It was an incredibly stressful time but I managed on the whole to focus on the tasks at hand. Any single mum will know the drill - online schooling, working from home, providing three meals and copious snacks throughout the day, coping with errands and chores with no support. My thing was to keep spirits up as much as possible by insisting that each day we were to go out on an 'adventure' by jumping into the car with the dog and exploring the wonderful Maltese countryside (well what's left of it!). We discovered so many lovely places and vistas and spent a couple of hours each day in the fresh air grabbing that Vitamin D we know is so good for us. I also started cooking like no tomorrow whilst got to practice my ukelele and crocheting.

Thankfully, we have been relatively fortunate in Malta since not all sports have been halted so the kids and I were able to continue tennis and Ollie touch rugby. I continued throughout to practice 30 minutes of yoga each morning which I find has helped me physically but also mentally preparing me for the day ahead. Having a very active dog has been a great excuse to get lots of walks in, too.

Once the kids were back at school in September it was not long into the school term that we had to go into quarantine for two weeks since my son's school bubble was affected. The first days of that were hell - getting my head around the fact that we would be stuck in the house. The kids were total stars and adapted brilliantly to this new routine. Thankfully, as much as I despise



Lisa with a copy of the last Guide published

excessive screen time, it did mean that my son was able to communicate daily with his friends from all over the world. From my part it meant that I communicate now with my mother who I haven't seen for over a year and who lives in the UK more than ever before. I am happy to report my mum has been in high spirits from the start and is always jolly and in good form looking as ever gorgeous. She has been the best example of what these situations should bring out in people helping her elderly neighbours with care, shopping and being there for them.



All wrapped up to face the pandemic



Having a snack with her children, Ollie and Lola is the best

It is through these little efforts of giving to others that I feel one can come to terms with how fortunate we actually are. Having our health, a roof over our heads and regular meals is something that I feel so grateful for and I never take for granted. I am very aware while the kids and I live in comfort there are many people who are suffering terribly at this time - refugees struggling to survive living in squalid conditions; whilst many a family at this time cannot afford basic necessities. During this period the kids and I occasionally helped at the food bank which is a wonderful initiative which helps so many people on the island. It is very special in these times to see people pulling together to make things happen for others.

As much as this time has been a challenge I try to focus on the positives and there have been many. My friends have been my godsend and so incredibly supportive, with one group of girlfriends from all over the world including in Australia, Qatar and Austria we would meet up on House party each weekend and have a themed dress code party. Making the effort to communicate was tantamount to keeping sane through this period. Not to say I didn't have a meltdown or two. I am only human... but again an amazing friend came to the rescue at a certain point and came to the house and stayed with my daughter to go through her classes for two mornings while I caught up with work.

Meanwhile my business required much attention. My colleagues have had to work reduced hours while together with our

sponsors we decided to postpone the restaurant guide for a year, after 20 years in publication. Our collaboration with MTA before the pandemic meant that we could plan for bigger and better things for 2021 and I remain optimistic that we will go to print by the end of the year as the restaurants recover and business improves. Otherwise, Malta Artisan Markets came to a halt at the end of last year despite our proposals of social distancing in large open spaces. Public Health declined our request to organise markets much to our dismay - though the local markets continue without the restrictions in place. So as ever we have adapted and we introduced a Christmas market online which was well received by artisans who otherwise would not have had a platform to sell their wares and also by customers who could shop from their sofas in between watching Netflix. Since nothing much has changed this half of 2021, we decided to keep the market online and are concentrating our efforts at the moment to create the number one platform for artisans online at [www.maltaartisanmarkets.com](http://www.maltaartisanmarkets.com)

Our other business branch - Offbeat Malta Food Trails was a great success in 2019, with many bookings for 2020 which unfortunately we had to reimburse. This business has been slow to take off again but we are now focusing on private tours for small bubbles of eight people so a family or group of friends can go on the tour in their own bubble. Thankfully the restaurants are still operating so this is a great way to sample delicious local delicacies whilst feeding the brain with information on the story of cuisine in Malta led by our wonderful licensed hand-picked tour guides.

The good news is that there must be a light at the end of the tunnel. The vaccination is out there meantime we try to avoid unnecessary gatherings. Patience is required. And so I would like to wish all readers a safe journey ahead.



Editorial Note: If you wish to contribute your own Covid diary please email [mboit@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:mboit@hotmail.co.uk)



# The Definitive(ly) Good Guide to Restaurants in Malta & Gozo annual restaurant survey open

THE Definitive(ly) - Good Guide to Restaurants in Malta & Gozo returns after a COVID break last year and will be holding its annual restaurant survey online at [www.restaurantsmalta.com](http://www.restaurantsmalta.com) during the month of September.

This will be its 21st survey which will result in the 21st guide and awards ceremony.

The survey will determine the top rated 150 restaurants which will have a free listing in the guide and the top 40 and other special awards which will be presented in December with the launch of the 21st edition of the guide.

The support of Global Payments Ltd and Nestlé Malta Limited and now also the Malta Tourism Authority and other award sponsors make it possible for the guide to remain

objective by including top rated restaurants at no charge. The Definitive(ly) Good Guide to Restaurants survey is held every year in September on [www.restaurantsmalta.com](http://www.restaurantsmalta.com). Diners can rate on Food, Ambience and Service throughout September restaurants they have dined at during the preceding 12 months. Their ratings will determine which restaurants will be included in

Support your favourite restaurants and win great prizes!




Vote now! survey open till 30th September



the 2022 edition of the guide. Rate the restaurants on Food, Service and Ambience on a scale of 1-10.

Answer additional questions to say who you feel should be the winners of the special awards including Best Maltese Restaurant; Best Restaurant for Business Entertainment; Best Value for Money; Most Romantic Restaurant; Most Child Friendly Restaurant, Best Restaurant Restroom and also most Pet-friendly Restaurant, as well as which have your favourite wine lists and now also a new award - Best Restaurant in Gozo. Send in your funny and informative comments

and you could win one of these fantastic prizes:

- A luxury 2 night stay at the Hilton Malta on a half board & breakfast basis;
  - 1 night including English breakfast at the Phoenicia, Malta;
  - A day at the Hilton San Martin Villa with a special treat with private venue and facilities for up to 10 persons, including lunch;
  - An annual Tapp water system starter pack worth €89;
  - 10 copies of The Definitive(ly) Good Guide to Restaurants in Malta & Gozo with the results of the survey to runners up.
- Help shape the face of Malta's Culinary Scene in 2022. Vote now!