



PRESS RELEASE

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Gibraltar Upper Rock Nature Reserve transformed into ‘jewel in the crown’ of Gibraltar’s tourist product, says Sacramento

Gibraltar’s ‘jewel in the crown’ tourist site, the Gibraltar Upper Rock Nature Reserve, has undergone a dramatic transformation during the past four years of this administration. There has been an unprecedented investment in both the tourist sites and the Upper Rock, to turn what was largely a neglected and underfunded part of Gibraltar, into the star attraction of a much improved overall tourist product.

The increase in visitors to the Upper Rock since 2012 is a result of the massive capital expenditure invested in improvements and the infrastructural enhancements that have been carried out.

The concerted inter-ministerial drive to ‘rescue’ the Upper Rock from oblivion has provided safer, user-friendly, universally-accessible services and innovative amenities to the general public. This reflects the Government’s political commitment to prioritise tourism as one of the main sources of revenue of Gibraltar’s economy. Both the Gibraltar Tourist Board and the Ministry for the Environment have set up a close working partnership to achieve these common objectives.

Notable among these is the recently constructed east side pedestrian track linking Europa Point with the Nature Reserve, and a spectacular proposal for a new suspension bridge at Royal Anglian Way.

Formerly derelict areas of historical interest will also be reopened to the general public and key heritage sites restored.

But before any of these improvements could be accomplished, a colossal cleaning operation was carried out, which included the clearance of abandoned areas such as Genoese Battery and Royal Anglian Way. This effort was combined with the implementation of efficient, continuous maintenance programmes backed by anti-litter measures to counter vandalism. CCTV cameras were also deployed across all tourist sites within the Upper Rock.

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Gibraltar's 'forgotten' country walks and pathways have been upgraded and properly demarcated, for instance, at Devil's Gap Battery, the trail will be renovated and a footpath connection to Queen's Road made available, together with an all-round enhancement of safety and accessibility features.

The potential for clearly branded, themed pedestrian trails and routes has been developed catering for different interests and fitness levels. Up to four different walks have been identified, focussing on historic-military content, the more vigorous thrill seeker, the nature lover, and the Apes Den.

Additionally, signage, graphic styles, guide maps and interpretation centres are being redesigned to improve efficiency and create a standardised aesthetic. The improvements will be extended to the balustrades, seating and the provision of better lighting.

New recreational facilities will also be delivered at the Upper Rock, together with picnic and rest areas for tourists. In keeping with technological advances, a nature reserve application for smartphones will also be launched.

The expansion of the Nature Reserve to include new areas such as Europa Foreshore, the Mount and the Northern Defences has resulted in significant ecological improvements. The hugely successful Barbary Partridge and Wild Rabbit re-population programmes are going from strength to strength as well as the High Maquis clearance programme, which is improving the biodiversity of the reserve for the benefit of all.

100 TON GUN

At the 100 Ton Gun, the Gibraltar Tourist Board has carried out works to provide new railings in compliance with Health and Safety standards, an accessibility ramp so that visitors can gain a much better view of the gun itself – in the past they only had access to the exhibition – and beautification of external areas. A fire alarm and LED lighting system has also been installed.

ST. MICHAEL'S CAVE

In Upper St Michael's Cave railings have been replaced with modern stainless steel balustrades to achieve a contemporary look. The steps have also been fitted with lights and a new, spectacular 30 minute light and sound show, which runs on a loop all day, enhances the dramatic geological features and striking views of the caverns' interior. To complement this, an instructive commentary narrating some of the more salient aspects of the cave's history provides visitors with valuable information. The installation of a lift will also make the site accessible for wheelchair users.

O'HARA'S BATTERY

At O'Hara's Battery the gun emplacement and exhibition area have been refurbished and new features have been introduced to enliven the material on display. This includes interactive information panels, a film documentary and mannequins.

THE GREAT SIEGE TUNNELS



New mannequins in historical costume, and existing restored ones, have been located at all the gun embrasures of The Great Siege Tunnels – also known as The Galleries – adding a realistic feel to the site. The figures complement the information panels and props that were put in place in 2014.

The section of The Galleries known as the Holy Land Tunnel has been reopened and its viewing platform subjected to much needed structural works, thus affording impressive vistas of the Strait of Gibraltar and the Mediterranean Sea. It also allows visitors to traverse the insides of the Rock from end to end. There is also a display of a World War Two soldier in a trench.

CITY UNDER SIEGE

The City Under Siege exhibition has undergone an overall refurbishment of the site, which includes new picnic area. Mannequins, signs and new sound and light installations enhance the experience, which incorporates a ten minute film documentary.

WW II TUNNELS

The World War II Tunnels have benefitted from new exhibits depicting soldiers in their sleeping quarters, the Nissen Huts and storage facilities. As part of the refurbishment, new accessible toilets for disabled persons have been constructed. Improved facilities for staff have also been provided.

APES DEN

At the Apes Den, numerous zones for feeding and effective separation of the animals from contact with the public will be introduced, together with new toilets for the public.

JEW'S GATE

The viewing platform at Jew's Gate has also been resurfaced and new toilet facilities provided.

NORTHERN DEFENCES

The first two phases of the Northern Defences project have been completed and work on the next stage continues at King's and Queen's Gallery. The Defences are an impressive network of military fortifications carved into the Rock by Royal Artificer Corps, in late 18th century. Popularly known as "the jungle", the area neglected for decades has now been transformed with many of its historical and heritage features restored. Tons of debris and vegetation were cleared, revealing for the first time a thousand years of military history ranging from medieval fortifications to WWII installations which can now be safely explored. The Government, in association with the Heritage Trust, has provided a series of guided tours of these Defences. They will be an important tourism and leisure asset once the works are complete.

Minister for Tourism, the Hon Samantha Sacramento, expressed satisfaction at the extensive refurbishments carried out at the Upper Rock, highlighting the Government's conviction that Tourism was a key industry for the development of the local economy.



Minister Sacramento said: “It is my responsibility to ensure that Gibraltar is transformed into an internationally recognised, truly first class tourist destination. The spectacular beautification of the Rock’s natural assets in a thoughtful, environmentally friendly manner has greatly assisted us in our endeavour to provide a truly memorable experience for visitors. It has also given us the confidence to successfully market and promote Gibraltar at travel trade fairs throughout the world, to proudly show off our excellent tourist product and to attract more and more business for our expanding tourist and cruise industry every year.”