

Facts about Gibraltar

Fact Number 1

The road into Gibraltar gets closed down every time a plane lands at the territory's airport. Why? Well because the road into town is also the runway!

The runway basically runs the whole width of Gibraltar alongside the border with Spain and you can walk right across it when there are no planes coming or going.



Fact Number 2

Speaking of crossing the border, can you believe that it can sometimes take up to 8 hours to get through immigration control? That's an extreme case but it is not unusual to have to wait a couple of hours.

There are a few reasons – one is because Gibraltar has different customs rules so the Spanish authorities want to check people aren't smuggling goods into their country.

But there's also a theory that it is for political reasons and the Spanish often just slow things down to annoy the British!



Fact Number 3

There is basically no tax on goods in Gibraltar. I know, pretty fantastic, right? You should see the number of people buying cigarettes and booze at the shops on the way out of the country.

A packet of 20 cigarettes in the UK will cost you about £10 but in Gibraltar it is about £2. A large bottle of good gin might cost £25 in the UK but will cost about £10 in Gibraltar. It's almost worth the airfare to stock up on alcohol!



Fact Number 4

Gibraltar has applied to be a part of the Olympics but so far hasn't been accepted (and probably never will under the current rules).

It has, however, competed at 15 Commonwealth Games but is yet to win a single medal.

It is also trying to become a full member of FIFA but, for the moment, has to settle to be a part of UEFA, in which it was granted membership in 2013 (although Spain opposed it). Out of the 12 UEFA matches that Gibraltar has played, it has only won one (against Malta 1-0).



Fact Number 5

Just like in the UK, the phone boxes and the post boxes in Gibraltar are painted red. Not much more to be said about that. But they look cool!



Fact Number 6

What is really interesting is that there are more than 50 kilometres of tunnels dug into the Rock of Gibraltar and there's a rumour that they are protected from radiation or the effects of a nuclear bomb. I can't find any evidence of this but more than one local person told me this.

Along with this rumour is a theory that the UK would use the tunnels in the rock as a secure bunker for important British identities (the government and the royal family) in the case of a nuclear attack.

Probably not true but it does make the place seem a bit more mysterious. Who knows what secret bunkers have been built in the tunnels?

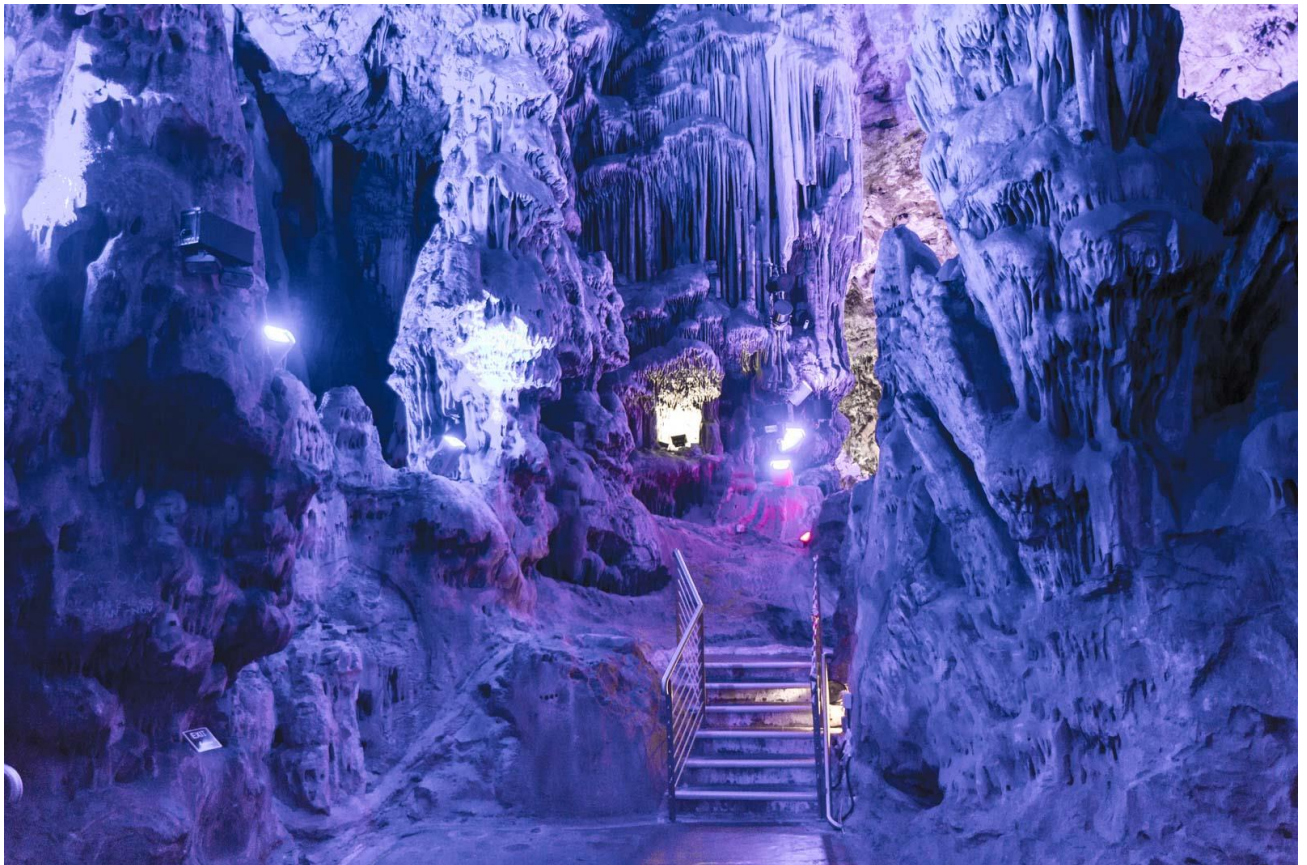
You can read my story [here](#) about the World War II bunkers and other sights on the Rock of Gibraltar.



Fact Number 7

Speaking of rumours, there is also a legend that there is a secret natural tunnel from Gibraltar to Morocco and it's accessible from deep inside St Michael's Cave. Who knows if this is true but there are all sorts of stories of people going missing down in the caves and never being seen again.

One of the versions of the legend says that the apes in Gibraltar came from Africa and must have come through a tunnel. While it's true they probably came from Africa, it's much more likely they came on boats with some early explorers.



Fact Number 8

The apes bring me to the next fact about Gibraltar.

Firstly, it should be noted that they are actually macaques, even though they are usually referred to as Barbary apes. Although they are an iconic part of the territory, they came very close to being wiped out.

During the Second World War there were just 7 of them left but the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, ordered that new ones be brought across from North Africa to replenish the colony. Now there are about 300 of them wandering around the rock, stealing food from unsuspecting tourists.



Fact Number 9

The national dish of Gibraltar is considered to be the

'calentita'. It is a rather plain food that looks like a baked pancake. It is made from chickpea flour, water, olive oil, salt and pepper.

Although there's nothing special about it, the calentita represents Gibraltar's history well. The territory really doesn't have any agricultural land so the food that people survived on for a long time was simple, filling and cheap.

The annual food festival in Gibraltar is now called Calentita and you can read my story about it here!



Fact Number 10

Although about 78% of the population in Catholic, Gibraltar has a significant population of Muslims, Jews and Hindus.

The churches, synagogues and mosques all fit together into the small city in the territory with a level of religious tolerance that is very impressive.

Interestingly, the Ibrahim-al-Ibrahim Mosque at the very tip of Gibraltar is the southernmost mosque in mainland Europe and one of the most beautiful buildings in the territory. It is one of the largest mosques in a non-Muslim country and cost about £5 million pounds to build (it was a gift from King Fahd of Saudi Arabia). It opened in 1997.



Fact Number 11

Anyone can get married in Gibraltar with just a day's notice – and it will be recognised worldwide.

That's right, if you decide suddenly that you want to elope then Gibraltar could be the place for you. If you fly in one day and lodge your papers, you can get married the next day.

For this reason it has been popular with celebrities over the years. Sean Connery has been married in Gibraltar (twice) and this is where John Lennon and Yoko Ono tied the knot as well.

This is becoming so popular with tourists, the local authorities are now letting you get married outside the registry office for something special in the botanical gardens, for instance.



Fact Number 12

There are six beaches along the coastline of Gibraltar (which is great if you're a tourist in summer!). The odd thing, though, is that Gibraltar didn't always have all these beaches.

The Sandy Bay beach, for instance was 'built' in just 2014 by importing about 50,000 tons of sand to create a new recreational area for residents and visitors of the territory. Oh well, I guess you've got to do something with all that coast!

