



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Visit Tunisia Activity Newsletter | January 2023

VISIT TUNISIA



Welcome to 2023!

In 2022, we achieved significant progress in our key goals: helping Tunisia to rebuild its reputation as a world-class destination, creating unique products around vast natural and cultural attributes, and developing a sustained growth business environment.

From very well-attended international festivals to far-reaching domestic marketing campaigns, detailed strategies guiding the future of the industry, and in-depth professional trainings, our accomplishments were varied. This success could not be possible without the commitment of the Ministry of Tourism, ONTT, and the Ministry of Culture, plus our collaboration with Tunisia’s resilient and incredible private sector.

We are even more optimistic about the tourism industry heading into a brand-new year. Domestic and international tourism trends only point forward. Tunisia is appearing on travelers’ bucket lists globally, and the sector is rebounding to unseen heights after the devastating pandemic.

We are thrilled to continue our work in a beautiful country with such kindhearted, hardworking people. I look forward to sharing our monthly updates as every day, we work to diversify Tunisia’s tourism, generate sustainable jobs, and increase tourism revenues. Thanks for following along - the best is yet to come!

To an excellent 2023,

Leila Calnan

Chief of Party, USAID Visit Tunisia Activity

NEW CALL FOR FUNDS

Get up to 40 thousand in loans & up to 1,250 TND in grant!

Calling all small businesses operating in the Tunisian tourism sector! Submit your applications to access micro-finance grant and loan support from the USAID Visit Tunisia Activity to accelerate local economic recovery and growth. **APPLY NOW!**

10,000 VISITORS ENJOY THE USAID-SMITHSONIAN FOLKLIFE SUPPORTED TOZEUR INTERNATIONAL OASIS FESTIVAL

Between December 24 and 27, the International Oasis Festival attracted 10,000 visitors to Tozeur — an increase of 25% from last year. The support provided to the festival by USAID Visit Tunisia in partnership with Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage included security management, volunteer management, business planning, and marketing under the “Festival Incubation” program.

The Festival Incubation program – supporting Tunisian festivals

In partnership with [the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage](#), USAID Visit Tunisia launched the Festival Incubator, a technical assistance/mentoring program to help Tunisian event and festival organizers better design, organize, and market their events.

When the call for participation was launched in April 2022, over 100 festivals applied, with six ultimately selected to join the incubator program: Kairouan’s Mouled Festival, Tozeur’s International Festival of Oasis, the Zaghouan Mountain Film Festival, Matmata’s International Festival, Month of Heritage (AMVPPC), and the Roman Days of El Jem. Together, these events and festivals attract more than one million annual domestic and international visitors.

The multi-year Festival Incubator program has been designed to provide custom technical assistance and one-on-one mentoring with industry experts to improve programming, community engagement, design, and marketing for unique cultural heritage festivals throughout Tunisia.

“Our ambition is to evolve, improve and renew the festival’s offerings. This year, we succeeded in creating new content, new format, new creations, and new artistic additions.”— Nassreddine Chebbi, Director of the International Oasis Festival in Tozeur.



PHOTO © Raafat Khiari / USAID

The first event to take place after receiving technical assistance was the Mouled Festival. Over 1.2 million visitors traveled to Kairouan in October 2022 to enjoy the festivities during this multi-day event.

Lessons from the Mouled Festival were channeled into supporting the 43rd edition of the International Oasis Festival in Tozeur, the incubator’s second festival to take occur.

Tozeur International Oasis Festival's 2022 Edition - Huge Success!

Between December 24 and 27, the **International Oasis Festival** attracted 10,000 visitors to Tozeur (a 25% increase from last year). The support provided by USAID and Smithsonian included security management, volunteer management, business planning, and marketing.

“I believe we succeeded in delivering a great edition based on the number of visitors I’ve seen when circulating in Tozeur. All the guesthouses, hotels and restaurants were full. It’s great to see the economic recovery of the region. With the support of USAID Visit Tunisia and Smithsonian Folklife, we hope to improve our next edition’s communications and marketing and include more Tozeur’s traditional culinary heritage.”

— Rayan Bouabidi, Creative Director of the International Oasis Festival in Tozeur

“Our festival is fun. The program is amazing, especially the closing night with Blingos and Samara.”— festival participant on **national television**.

The festival received coverage on national television with positive testimonials from attendees and the artists who showcased their cultural heritage.

USAID Visit Tunisia will continue to support the festival through the incubator program through 2023. This year’s goal is to attract 15,000 visitors to enjoy the wonders of the festival!



Why did we select the Festival of Tozeur for the Festival Incubation program?

The Festival International des Oasis de Tozeur is the largest cultural and tourist event in southern Tunisia, whose engaging multi-day activities provide a unique insight into the civilization, culture, arts, and history of the Djerid region. Tozeur is one of USAID Visit Tunisia's priority regions and one of the country's most culturally lively and rich. The event is a perfect portrayal of a culmination of Tozeur's unique heritage: several days filled with showcasing food, dancing, music, and more!

The festival dates back to 1938, first called the Festival of the Date Palm. Tozeur's rich date palm groves are some of the world's most well-known! Though it was interrupted for several years during World War Two, the beloved event was resurrected at the dawn of Tunisian independence and evolved into an international festival in 1991. Each year, it has continued enchanting international and domestic tourists alike, eager to learn about and absorb the rich cultural heritage of the Tozeur region, a desert oasis gem of Southern Tunisia.



Follow along with our project this year as the USAID Visit Tunisia Smithsonian Folklife Festival Incubation continues to assist four culturally rich and impactful festivals and events across Tunisia to showcase the country's immense cultural and natural wonders: The Zaghouan Mountain Film Festival, the International Festival of Matmata, Month of Heritage (AMVPPC) and the Roman Days of El Jem.

Want to keep up with the Tozeur International Oasis Festival for next year? Follow them on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#). Don't miss out on next year's fun!



SUPPORTING OVER 280 ARTISANS AND CULTURE-BEARERS IN CREATING TOURISM EXPERIENCES IN GABES, KAIROUAN, TOZEUR AND TABARKA



In partnership with the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, the USAID Visit Tunisia Activity implemented workshops in Gabes, Kairouan, Tozeur and Tabarka with over 280 tradition bearers – artisans, cooks, musicians, and others who keep Tunisia’s cultural practices alive from one generation to the next — to create touristic experiences around artisan craft, foodways, fishing and agriculture, music and dance, and storytelling. 30 key experiences will be selected among the participants for intensive market readiness and grant support.

Engaging over 280 artisans in Tunisia’s Living Culture workshops

Tunisia’s Living Culture is a tourism product development initiative, designed by USAID Visit Tunisia Activity in partnership with [the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage](#). While Tunisia has rich and diverse cultural heritage and thousands of heritage sites, its living culture is not experienced in the current tourism offer. Recognizing the Tunisia’s wealth of tradition bearers - the individuals who keep a cultural practice alive from one generation to the next - Tunisia’s Living Culture (TLC) aims to bring these individuals and their communities into the tourism supply chain. TLC combines research, training and one-on-one mentorship to establish new, market-ready cultural heritage tourism experiences and share them with the world through domestic and international marketing campaigns.

The TLC “Creating Tourism Experiences” workshops took place January 3 to 13, in Gabes, Kairouan, Tozeur and Tabarka, engaging over 280 tradition bearers — artisans, cooks, musicians, and more who keep Tunisia’s cultural practices alive from one generation to the next — to create touristic experiences around gastronomy, craft, music, dance, and storytelling.



“My project Go back to nature is about reconnecting with nature and selling natural and bio products based on oil distillation and extraction from herbs and plants, such as rose and geranium floral water. I participated in TLC workshops to learn new things and technics to grow my project. I absolutely loved it. The training helped me explore innovative ideas and meet like-minded people in the sector.”
— Sawsan Trabelsi, owner of bio essential oils shop in Ghomrassen, Tataouine.

The objective of “Creating Tourism Experiences” training was to introduce tradition bearers to the tourism sector. The workshops kicked off with an overview of cultural heritage tourism and key definitions and examples of cultural heritage tourism experiences. Participants learned the difference between passive, interactive and immersive tourism experiences, and explored best practice examples that combine demonstration, hands-on activities, and storytelling. These discussions were followed by exercises that took the participants through each step of creating their very own tourism experience. By the end of the workshops, each participant developed a stronger grasp of what it takes to engage in the tourism sector, and what they personally could offer.

“Craft is part of Tunisia’s vibrant intangible cultural heritage. After hearing all about immersive, and experiential tourism, I experienced a major shift in mindset. In fact, I believe TLC training succeeded in implementing the seed of change and suggesting news ways of thinking and marketing beyond the creation of products, especially in this sector, in Tunisia. It was difficult at first, but we overcame this challenge by the end of the training. Bringing together artisans and craftsman from diverse regions across Tunisia, with diverse stories and enabling me to discover their rich stories strengthens my research work.”

— Mohamed Ali Rtimi, cultural heritage researcher in Gabes.



The two-day training generated enthusiasm and exceeded our initial target of 200 by 80 participants. Key stakeholders took also part in some of the activities. During the final workshop in Tabarka for instance, the Minister of Tourism made a visit, greeted and encouraged the participants. Representatives of the Ministry of Culture (AMVPPC) and the National Heritage Institute (INP) also participated as observers.



“The TLC workshops helped me see more clearly my project’s vision and growth. The training was different from the ones I attended in the past, and provided fresh perspective, and hands-on activities, and fostered the exploration of new ideas to create experiences that attract visitors, make them love the products, understand the cultural heritage they represent, and ultimately generate more sales. My dream is that my market-ready business breaks into the international market in an efficient way and aligns with my ambitious vision. TLC training gave me confidence that this can be achieved”

— Najoua Dhiflaoui, President of Tahadi, a women’s agricultural cooperative in Menzel Mhiri, Kairouan.

Five Key Takeaways from “Creating Tourism Experiences” Workshops in Gabes, Kairouan, Tozeur and Tabarka

The workshops on how to create a tourism experience over the four locations provided interesting insights for both the participants and the implementation team. Here are the five main takeaways:

- 1. Tunisia has a lot of cultural diversity.** From north to south, the coast to the interior, Tunisia’s living culture is as diverse as its landscapes. Including this diversity of cultural heritage in the tourism offer will contribute to a shift in recognizing Tunisia as a world-class cultural heritage destination.
- 2. Immersive, experiential tourism is a radically new concept in Tunisia.** It was a major shift in mindset for workshop participants to understand that their knowledge and skills have value beyond the creation of products. Once they understood this, they were extremely motivated and excited about the opportunity.
- 3. Artists and artisans are eager to learn new ways to engage in tourism.** Participants spoke about the value of tourists for their businesses and recognized the relationship between tourism markets and their livelihoods.
- 4. Good humor and hospitality are in steady supply in Tunisia.** Workshop participants shared their creativity with a healthy dose of humor - a good laugh is an excellent way to connect despite language barriers. Our workshops were filled with spontaneous performances of song, dance and poetry.

5. It's going to be hard to choose from the participant concepts. In each location of the workshop, participants completed worksheets with descriptions of their proposed experiences. As our team worked on the concepts with the participants, we felt excited by the creativity and diversity of ideas. It will be hard to choose, but without a doubt, the final selection of experiences will be top notch.



“My handbags and backpacks products are based on traditional Tunisian materials mainly such as “margoom”, palm fronds and leather marketed over three regions in Tunisia. By participating in these workshops, I wanted to extend my network and horizon. The training atmosphere was great and enabled me to open my mind and gain new perspective. I started looking at my project more from a tourism point of view. I learned that an experience is more likely to leave a mark in a tourist’s mind than a product, and to raise awareness of Tunisia’s cultural heritage.”

— Rayhane Boukil, archeology student from Kairouan.



TLC workshops held in Tozeur early January 2023. Photo ©USAID/Smithsonian





“I came to the training with my son to involve him in our family tourism-sector business. The 2-day training provided technics and knowledge on how to create value for our products, and how to market them. We learned how to craft a touristic experience narrative that attracts visitors, based on our assets such as the location, and the benefits for our visitors.”

— Hichem Gassab, owner of Dar Dhiafa in Ouaslateya, and Dar El Henchir, Kairouan.

What's Next: Intensive Market Readiness and Grant Support for 30 experiences

Thirty key experiences will be selected among the 280 initial experiences for intensive market readiness and small grant support. Five experiences will be selected in each of the six USAID priority destinations: Tozeur, Kebili, Gabes, Tataouine, Kairouan, Jendouba.

USAID Visit Tunisia Activity discussed eligibility criteria with the TLC Scientific Committee, which provides critical expertise on intangible cultural heritage. Eligible experiences must be in one of the six USAID priority destinations. USAID Visit Tunisia Activity and the TLC scientific committee will review concepts and conduct site visits for evaluation. In the evaluation, the team will consider factors like a compelling personal story; a simple, engaging, conversational storytelling style; a comfortable, clean, accessible, and visually appealing environment; connection to place and other types of living culture; hands on activities; memorable moments of laughter, learning, curiosity, and hospitality; and positive environmental impact.

Stay tuned for more on Tunisia's Living Culture experiences to explore!

Tunisia's Living Culture in the media spotlight

Tunisia's Living Culture workshops on creating tourism experiences received media coverage on Tunisian outlets in Arabic. Listen to a [radio interview](#) conveyed to Tataouine FM, and [national television](#) featuring testimonials from the artisans and local key stakeholders.

For media and interview inquiries, please send an email to info@VisitTunisiaProject.org.

PROVIDING LOAN AND MICRO-FINANCE GRANT SUPPORT TO 800 MICRO AND VERY SMALL TUNISIAN BUSINESSES ACROSS TUNISIA



Pottery handicraft as part of the eligible tourism-sector businesses for the USAID-Microcred support ©Shutterstock

The USAID Visit Tunisia Activity partnered with Microcred, a microfinance institution, to assist 800 Tunisian micro and very small enterprises (MVSEs) in the tourism sector facilitate access to finance and recover from the devastating economic crisis in the wake of COVID-19. Its focus is women and/or youth-led businesses in underserved Tunisian regions. So far, 196 businesses have received a package of loans and grants and there can still be many more beneficiaries. The call for applications will be open until the end of June 2023.

Helping Small Businesses Accelerate their Growth through Microfinancing

The USAID Visit Tunisia Activity partnered with the international microfinance institution Microcred (formerly “Baobab Tunisie”) to assist 800 micro and very small enterprises (MVSEs) in the tourism sector to recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis and facilitate their access to finance. Its focus is on MVSEs operating in the tourism sector in Tunisia’s underserved regions, particularly those owned by women and/or youth.

The program was launched on October 19th by Microcred’s digital campaign. In this first round, 151 MVSEs benefited from a package of loans and grants in mid-November, less than one month after the program was launched. In December, another outreach campaign generated 146 applications to the program, with 45 businesses receiving the package loan and grant support.

What is the USAID-Microcred funds package?

The USAID Visit Tunisia Activity and Microcred designed the grant to align with the Microcred's existing practices, select beneficiaries against USAID Visit Tunisia's criteria, and maximize the leverage of USAID funds to private loan capital. The assistance package provided to MVSEs under this project consists of the following:

- A loan between TND 1,500 and TND 40,000 financed by Microcred; and
- A microgrant financed by USAID Visit Tunisia up to TND 1,250.

Who can benefit from USAID-Microcred micro-finance grants and loans?

Eligible tourism-sector* micro and very small enterprises must meet at least one of the following three criteria:

1. Impacted by COVID-19
2. Operating in underserved regions**; and
3. Owned by and employing women and/or youth (under 35).

* The type of business considered as part of the tourism sector are food and beverage, transportation, travel services, handicrafts, accommodation, entertainment, and car rental.

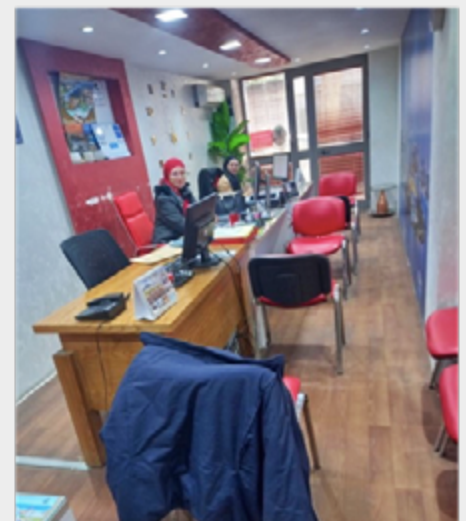
** The underserved regions in Tunisia include the governorates of Medenine, Tozeur, Kebili, Mahdia, Kef, Gafsa, Zaghuan, Siliana, Beja, Sidi Bouzid, Jendouba, and Kasserine; including Bizerte, Tabarka, El Kef, Sbeitla, Kairouan, Tozeur, Nefta, Douz, Tataouine, Gabes, and Matmata.

Why should micro and small tourism businesses apply?

USAID and Microcred bring you stories directly from the supported businesses to hear their motives for applying and how the program has positively impacted their businesses, helping them recover from the pandemic and accelerate growth.

Meet Malek Ayadi, owner of a travel agency in Sfax

Malik Ayadi manages the **El Dorado travel agency** in the governorate of Sfax, operating in the tourism sector for 22 years. During the COVID-19 pandemic, his business encountered several difficulties due to trip and reservation cancellations. Thanks to the microfinance support of 15,475 dinars in loans and 1,250 dinars in grants, Malik was able to pay his rent, his employees' salaries, and relaunch his business activity.





Meet Taoufik Ayed, a craftsman in Nabeul

Taoufik Ayed is a craftsman who makes traditional baskets and all other products based on organic straw from palm leaves. He has been practicing this activity for 15 years in Nabeul. During the COVID pandemic, he faced difficulty purchasing raw materials and was forced to close his shop. Through this program, he received a 5139-dinar loan and a 734-dinar grant. This financial support enabled him to resume his business by buying the necessary raw materials and honoring his debts to his suppliers.

USAID, in partnership with Microcred continues to award financial support to additional businesses until the call for participation is closed at the end of June 2023.

How can micro and small tourism businesses verify their eligibility and apply?

To potentially receive a loan and micro-finance grant support under this program, all micro and very small businesses operating in the tourism sector have three options:

- Apply online through [this form](#);
- Call Microcred's free help number **80 10 20 00**; or
- Visit the closest branch to their homes.

The addresses can be found on the map here: <https://baobabgroup.com/tn/>

Agence Ariana	Catégories: Agences
Agence Béjà	Catégories: Agences
Agence Ben Arous	Catégories: Agences
Agence Bizerte	Catégories: Agences
Agence Djerba	Catégories: Agences
Agence El Fahs	Catégories: Agences
Agence El Kef	Catégories: Agences
Agence Ezzahrouni	Catégories: Agences



Microcred agents provide customized assistance via phone and in-person at the twenty regional Microcred branches (see map above). to organize a personalized visit from dedicated regional Microcred portfolio managers to help the businesses with their applications.

CALL FOR FUNDS

Get up to 40 thousand in loan & up to 1,250 TND in grant*!

Calling all small businesses operating in the Tunisian tourism sector! Submit your application to access micro-finance grant and loan support to accelerate your economic recovery and growth. **Apply now!**

*All multisectoral micro and very small enterprises (MVSEs) across Tunisia are eligible to a loan. Only small businesses operating in the tourism sector are eligible for a grant, in addition to the loan. Some eligibility conditions may apply.



منحة توصل حتى **1250 دينار***

في **5 أيام**

قرض حتى **40 مليون**

مخبزة أو مرطبات

مطعم أو قاعة شاي

وكالة أسفار

دار ضيافة أو نزل

والعديد من المشاريع الأخرى

قدم طلبك للإنتفاع ب

ماتضيعش الفرصة و تعرف على شروط الإنتفاع بهذا البرنامج

توجه لأقرب فرع ليك أو عمر الإستشارة أو إتصل بينا على 80 10 20 00

For media inquiries, please email info@VisitTunisiaProject.org