



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Visit Tunisia Activity Newsletter | March 2023

VISIT TUNISIA



Dear valued readers,

The air is alive with the sweet scent of blooming jasmine, the sun is shining, and the birds are serenading - spring has arrived in Tunisia! It's the perfect time to explore all this vibrant country offers under clear blue spring skies.

This March newsletter highlights some of the exciting progress we've made to promote local economic growth and cultural preservation through tourism development. From new partnerships and initiatives to upcoming events and activities, we look forward to sharing with you the many ways we are working to ensure that tourism remains a vital and responsible part of Tunisian communities.

Join us in congratulating our first Pathways to Professionalism graduates, over 350 trained hotel staff from Hammamet and Tunis, who received their certificates last week. Their successful training signifies a new era of hospitality standards in Tunisia, preparing for the summer season ahead. 500 more will be trained in the next cohort, adding hotel staff from Mahdia and Monastir.

Thank you for your continued support of our project!

Sincerely,

Leila Calnan

Chief of Party, USAID Visit Tunisia Activity

VISIT TUNISIA MARCH OPPORTUNITIES

CALL FOR SMALL TOURISM BUSINESSES

Receive Technical Assistance to Deliver and Market Unforgettable Visitor Experiences

ACCELERATING TUNISIA'S TOURISM GROWTH AND DIVERSITY



The tourism sector is a crucial component of Tunisia's economy, providing employment to over 400,000 people nationwide. However, it has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and other economic challenges. In response, USAID Visit Tunisia Activity has dedicated itself to expediting the recovery of Tunisia's tourism industry and creating a resilient sector. The project's primary objectives are to support SMEs from the private sector, increase employability, expand opportunities for women and youth, and drive investments. If you're interested in discovering more about the project's impactful work throughout Tunisia, read more below!

10 Impact Activities at a Glance!

USAID Visit Tunisia Activity has accomplished several significant milestones since its launch laying the foundation for a sustainable future for Tunisian tourism. Here are the top 10 key activities from our project as of February 2023:

1. **Strengthened the capacity of 83 federations and associations across Tunisia** to accelerate their competitiveness.
2. **Empowered over 200 professionals nationwide** to improve the quality of hotel services.

- 3. Engaged 300 culture-bearers in creating tourism experiences;**
30 key experiences will be selected for intensive market readiness and grant support.
- 4. Generated over 14M views on social media and drove more sales to local tourism SMEs** through the “Tounes Lik” marketing campaign.
- 5. Began the incubation of 6 festivals to improve future editions;** the International Oasis Festival has already increased its visitors by 25% from last year.
- 6. Supplied grants and loans to finance 314 micro and very small enterprises** operating in the tourism sector across Tunisia.
- 7. Initiated 1000 more grant and loan packages** in support to micro and very small enterprises including a tailor-made coaching program to foster their resilience and growth.
- 8. Supported 4 businesses and entrepreneurs in Tunisia’s sustainable tourism industry** with a total fundraising target of **\$14.6M**.
- 9. Selected 9 innovative tourism businesses** to receive grants and technical assistance on product development and marketing under the Tourism Innovation Fund.
- 10. Raised awareness of the importance of environmentally focused tourism** to over 750 children and people with disabilities.

By 2026, the project aims to increase visitor arrivals by 11.5 million outside of the traditional tourism high season. Additionally, it seeks to increase visitor spending by 20%, enhance tourism arrivals to underserved regions by 20%, and create 15,000 sustainable tourism jobs. These goals are critical to driving sustainable economic growth and job creation across the country, ensuring a more prosperous future for Tunisians.

Read more stories **here**.

Explore ongoing opportunities **here**.

Contact us at **info@VisitTunisiaProject.org**

Video/photo credits: © USAID and its partners “The Dreamer”, Manel Jouini “Tanwicha”, Mayssa Ferchichi, Fatma Bououn, Raafat Khiari, Tozeur International Oasis Festival, Mouled festival, Jeunes Chambres International (JCI) Kairouan, Montassar Lassoued, Hadhami Yahia.

RECOGNIZING OVER 350 HOSPITALITY PROFESSIONALS FROM 14 PARTNER HOTELS IN TUNIS AND HAMMAMET



March 21st marked a key milestone for 14 partner hotels from Tunis and Hammamet who successfully completed the Pathways to Professionalism training. The award ceremony in Tunis was attended by more than 350 hospitality professionals from various departments, such as housekeeping, food and beverage, and food production, including young people and women. Additionally, partner hotels were recognized with the prestigious “Employer of Choice” award, which provides them with a significant competitive advantage. More partner hotels will also receive this award in Sousse in May, followed by Djerba at a later date.

Engaging over 280 artisans in Tunisia’s Living Culture workshops



“Since a few years of crisis followed by COVID-19, many hospitality professionals quit their jobs and some shifted careers. Within the current recovery situation on both international and national levels, our biggest challenge is to find qualified staff to ensure high quality service. Turnover and immigration rates are high. It’s crucial to strengthen the capacity of hotels to more efficiently train and rapidly respond to this season’s demand.”

— Dora Milad, President of the Fédération Tunisienne de l’Hôtellerie (FTH).

“The program’s approach rooted in technical competencies sparked our interest. Since our hotel opened in April 2018, our biggest challenge has been to ensure our collaborators meet our client expectations and our hotel group/chain’s standards. It is important they learn how to master their skills to deliver high quality service. The training was a friendly reminder to keep applying the best practices daily. Moreover, new staff acquired the same level of knowledge. It was a great opportunity for colleagues to share information and align their work with our quality standards.”

— Nicolas Pezout, General Manager of the Mövenpick Hotel du Lac Tunis.



Over 350 Hospitality Professionals Trained Through the Pathways to Professionalism Program

USAID Visit Tunisia Activity held a certification ceremony on March 21st to recognize the hard work and dedication of over 350 hospitality professionals working at 14 hotels in Tunis and Hammamet who successfully completed on-the-job training in line with international industry standards. 40% of certified employees are women.



“I completed Level 2 of the Pathways to Professionalism training. I am full of hope to seek better opportunities for myself. I learned the best practices of housekeeping that are compliant with international standards. I am confident to deliver excellent service quality for my employer.”

— Manel Mhadhbi, 30-year-old Hotel Maid working at the Golden Tulip Taj Sultan Hammamet

Successful completion of the program involves a practical exam, an online assessment, and a final interview with their employer.

“The knowledge and skills I learned at the training will help my career by leveling up my Curriculum Vitae and allow me to work with high level hotels.”

— Hamdi Mansouri, a 22-year-old Restaurant Clerk



14 “Employer of Choice” Hotels Gain a Significant Competitive Advantage

In addition to the Pathways award, the 14 partner hotels have been recognized as the “Employer of Choice” for providing good work conditions and opportunities for training and professional development.



“The training was impeccable. I learned new things such as how to improve service quality. I particularly appreciated that the training built team spirit and improved the work relationship between colleagues from different departments (administration, restaurant, etc.) ultimately bringing hotels closer. We are lucky to access such a high-quality training in Tunisia and looking forward to more trainings like this one!”

— Yassine Sahnoun, Banquet Manager at the Barcelo Concorde Hotel

Top 5 Advantages for “Employer of Choice” Hotels

Attaining the status of an “Employer of Choice” can provide a substantial competitive advantage for a hotel’s long-term success, as it offers numerous benefits to the organization and can contribute to:

- Increasing current employees’ engagement
- Attracting and retaining top talent
- Reducing turnover rates
- Enhancing the hotel’s brand reputation
- Improving the employee productivity at work

“I completed Level 3 of the program. Some of the training was different because it provided new knowledge that we don’t normally apply in our service (restaurant kitchen). What we learned will transform the way we work and the way we meet client satisfaction. We know we can do better, and we will.”

Khalil Khchini, 25-year-old Chef Assistant at the Mövenpick Hotel du Lac Tunis.



The certificate award ceremony was a joyful celebration moment and an opportunity to recognize hotels and employees’ success. PHOTOS: © MONTASSAR LASSOUED/USAID

What’s Next for Hotels Professionals in 2023?

The Pathways to Professionalism program is ongoing, and the recognition ceremony will be expanded to partner hotels in Sousse in May, with further awards planned for Djerba at a later date.



“The program helped hotels recognize their employee’s work, evaluate their competencies, motivate them to level up the quality of their service. This will allow us to retain our human resources and make a great impact. The program’s timing is perfect, and acts as a great reminder to apply best practices in preparation of the season.”

— Dora Milad, President of the Fédération Tunisienne de l’Hôtellerie (FTH).

The Pathways to Professionalism program is designed for hotels in Tunisia, offering work-based training using an innovative approach for professionals in the hospitality sector. Its primary objective is to enhance the quality of hotel services and employment opportunities in Tunisia by providing training to 2,500 professionals, including young people and women, by the end of 2023. Pathways to Professionalism is implemented by [USAID Visit Tunisia Activity](#) in cooperation with the [Agence de Formation dans les Métiers du Tourisme \(AFMT\)](#) and the [Fédération Tunisienne de l’Hôtellerie \(FTH\)](#).

ACCELERATING TOURISM BUSINESSES' PROFITABILITY THROUGH CAPACITY-BUILDING WORKSHOPS FOR OVER 140 SMES FROM KEY REGIONS ACROSS TUNISIA



Over 140 tourism SMEs from Tunis, Tabarka, Ain Draham, Medenine, Kairouan, Gabes, Sousse, Sfax, Kebili, Tozeur, Djerba, and Nabeul gained the skills necessary to improve their business operations. These trainings focused on profitability, creating market linkages, developing tourism business in alternative destinations, and generating investment to spur further growth. The SME Training & Assistance program especially encourages tourism start-ups and women-owned enterprises. In the next stage of the program, USAID Visit Tunisia will support 30 selected SMEs through grants and targeted direct technical advisory, and 20 through mentorship support. In addition, all the participating SMEs will be provided continuous access to e-learning courses.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are a vital part of Tunisia's tourism sector and an engine for economic growth. To help SMEs in the tourism industry maximize efficiency, access much-needed financing, and capitalize on alternative tourism opportunities, USAID Visit Tunisia is offering a technical assistance program for SMEs in this industry. 30 selected SMEs will receive additional support in grant and targeted direct technical advisory, and 20 in mentorship support.





“RésaPrivée meets the market’s needs and connects tourism providers with customers who want authentic experiences. The idea of creating a marketplace platform was born from the need of our Tunisie.co community to book experiences and service/product providers to connect with customers. Today’s workshop allowed us to step back, to question ourselves - and it was beneficial! During the training, I also had the opportunity to develop my business and discuss potential partnerships with 3 SMEs!”

— Abir Fares, Co-founder of RésaPrivée participant in the Tourism SME Training & Assistance training in Tabarka on March 2.

Through the Tourism SME Training and Assistance program, Tunisian SMEs gain the skills and resources to improve their business operations and profitability; create market linkages and develop tourism business in alternative destinations; and generate investment to spur further growth. The program’s objective is to support at least two hundred (200) targeted businesses initially, throughout Tunisia, of which at least 30% are women owned.

“My decoration and gift shop offers palm-waste based products. As a growing business, I am looking for assistance and financing support and that is the reason why I participated in the SME Training & Assistance program in Tozeur. We learned many new things. Looking forward to more opportunities.”

— Sana Ben Amor, Founder of a gift shop project based on palm-waste, participant in the Tourism SME Training & Assistance training in Tozeur on February 17.



Building SME capacity in market research, marketing and communication, and access to finance

The workshops were designed to strengthen SME capacity in market research, marketing and communication, and access to finance.

On February 17th and 18th, 66 enterprises operating in Kebili, Tozeur, Gabes, Medenine, Djerba, Sfax, Kairouan, Sousse, Nabeul, and Tunis were certified following the workshops in Tozeur.





On March 2nd and 3rd, 77 enterprises operating in Tunis, Tabarka, Ain Draham, Medenine, Kairouan, Gabes, Sousse, Sfax, Siliana, Beja and Nabeul were certified following the workshops in Tabarka.

Key Insights from the Workshops held in Tozeur and Tabarka

Attaining the status of an “Employer of Choice” can provide a substantial competitive advantage for a hotel’s long-term success, as it offers numerous benefits to the organization and can contribute to:

- The workshop contributed to building bridges between participants and exploring areas of collaboration to create tourism experiences and services leading to new partnerships;
- The participatory approach sparked attendees’ interest and increased their information retention;
- Each business succeeded in learning how to draft efficient and appealing pitches and proposals to engage investment and partners;
- The businesses ranged from tourism accommodations, restaurants, handicraft and souvenir retailers, travel booking/ support providers, event/festival organizers, travel service providers, tourism operators, tourism transportation/ booking providers, and other service providers in the tourism supply chain.



What’s Next for the Supported SMEs?

Following both the SME Training and Assistance workshops, USAID Visit Tunisia will support:

- 30 selected SMEs in grant and targeted direct technical advisory
- 20 in mentorship support, in addition to providing continuous access to e-learning courses for all participating SMEs.

In addition to this program, USAID Visit Tunisia continues to collaborate with the private sector and support entrepreneurs to develop successful and sustainable businesses through:

- A **Market Readiness” program** – ensuring tourism experiences are visitor and market-ready;
- A **marketing campaign** – promoting adventure experiences and providers;
- A **“Tourism Innovation Fund”** – providing grant support to eligible tourism projects;
- An **“Investment Facilitation”** activity – supporting in grant and loan micro and very small businesses through Tunisian Microfinance Institutions
- A **“Festival Incubator”** program – supporting selected festivals & events around the country.

Want to become a Partner? [Explore ongoing opportunities.](#)

The Tourism SME Training & Assistance program is designed for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Tunisia offering technical assistance training and grant support. The program aims to improve their business operations and profitability; create market linkages and develop tourism business in alternative destinations; and generate investment to spur further growth. The Tourism SME Training & Assistance program is implemented by [USAID Visit Tunisia Activity](#).





TECHNICAL MARKETING SUPPORT FOR DESTINATION DAHAR, TUNISIA'S FIRST DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION, BEGINS

Last October, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between USAID Visit Tunisia and FTADD to work together to support the long-term sustainability of FTADD and its member small and medium-sized enterprises. The partnership aims to promote Destination Dahar, increase visitor spending in the area, and improve tourism management and marketing. After months of crafting a destination marketing and content plan, digital marketing efforts officially began on March 1st. Since the inaugural posts under USAID Visit Tunisia, social media impressions have increased by 6,100% on Instagram and 1,200% on Facebook compared to the pages' reach from the previous period.

About Destination Dahar

The development of the FTADD DMO was financed by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and realized by SwissContact, through the Project Destination Sud-Est. The DMO was officially created in March 2018. Destination Dahar (FTADD) is Tunisia's first destination management organization, which unifies 90% of tourism providers in the area under one organization body to collaborate and facilitate better marketing, visitor experience, and tourist impact. The Dahar region, which encompasses portions of three administrative governorates, has been one of the most underserved Tunisian regions in the last several decades.



“Working with USAID Visit Tunisia has been a wonderful experience. Their expertise and support have been invaluable in helping us achieve our marketing goals, and we look forward to continuing our partnership in the future.”

— Ahref Chibani, Marketing Director at the Federation of Authentic Tourism, Destination Dahar

Drafting and Implementing Technical Support Plans to Guide Strategic Growth

Since signing the MOU, USAID Visit Tunisia has been working to develop two guiding organizational documents: a business plan and a destination marketing plan. Significant stakeholder engagement, field visits, and international best practices were employed to produce detailed, informed documents. In February, the marketing plan was the first to be approved by FTADD, and the ensuing marketing efforts were formally launched on March 1st by USAID Visit Tunisia.

Transforming Destination Dahar’s Digital Marketing Efforts

On March 1st, USAID Visit Tunisia kickstarted digital marketing for Destination Dahar, with a focus on creating vibrant and informative **Instagram** and **Facebook** content about the local culture, accommodations, food, landscapes, history, and women entrepreneurs. The campaign employed best practices for multilingual (French, Arabic, and English) captions, hashtags, and geolocations.



The team also redesigned Instagram story highlights to ensure travelers have readily accessible information about traveling through the region. Google Analytics was set up on the Destination Dahar website to monitor the marketing efforts. The team is updating the website’s content to make it more user-friendly for travelers. This effort represents a significant step forward in promoting Dahar as a desirable travel destination, and USAID’s involvement underscores the importance of public-private partnerships in promoting sustainable tourism.

Destination Dahar’s social media channels are set to create a digital community by inviting past visitors, service providers, and locals to connect and share their experiences. Using social media, the destination aims to create a virtual community of bikers, wellness seekers, campers, hikers, Star Wars lovers, and more who have flocked to the page to share their stories of living and traveling in Dahar. This initiative connects travelers virtually, inviting them to tell their stories about the destination and share their photos to attract future travelers. By creating a digital community, Destination Dahar aims to cultivate a loyal following of travelers who will continue to engage with and promote the destination, contributing to its long-term sustainability and growth.



Newly designed Instagram feed for Destination Dahar.

“I would like to extend my gratitude to the USAID Visit Tunisia team for their invaluable assistance. Thanks to their continued marketing support, FTADD has been able to nurture its current marketing strategy with new and creative ideas and plans. I massively appreciate this promising partnership, which has shed light on Dahar Region’s authentic beauty. We look forward to continuing our fruitful collaboration with the Visit Tunisia team.”

— Mohamed Sadek Dabbebi, president of the Federation of Authentic Tourism-Destination Dahar (FTADD)

Importance of Tourism in the Dahar Region

Tourism is vital to the future of Southern Tunisia's Dahar region and could be the key to solving many of the region's issues. Over the past 3 decades, Dahar experienced a dramatic decline in population levels. Matmata lost close to 99% of its population until 2021, and villages such as Guermassa and Douiret are now abandoned, despite having the highest number of inhabitants in the 50s. Tourism can create job opportunities, particularly in remote communities and rural areas with high levels of outmigration. With the development of the tourism industry, locals can be trained to work in roles such as tour guides, hotel staff, and restaurant workers. This not only provides a source of income but also helps to stem the outflow of people from these areas, which can have a detrimental impact on the region's economy.

Ethical and conscious tourism can help improve infrastructure in the region. By attracting tourists, there is a greater incentive to improve roads, water supply, and sanitation. This can make the region more attractive to live and work in, ultimately boosting the local economy. Investing in infrastructure can also improve the lives of locals, creating a better quality of life for them and their families.

Tourism can also promote the preservation of cultural heritage and encourage a sense of pride in the local community. By promoting cultural traditions and assets, the tourism industry can create a sense of pride in the local community, boosting morale and promoting a stronger sense of identity. This can also help to ensure that important cultural assets are protected for future generations.



“We have been working with USAID Visit Tunisia for several months now, and I can confidently say that their support has been instrumental in helping us revitalize our social media presence. With their guidance, we have been able to create engaging, fresh content that resonates with our audience and drives interaction on our pages. We’ve also been able to amplify women’s voices in our region by sharing their stories and experiences. But it’s not just about content creation - USAID Visit Tunisia has also helped us implement much-needed processes for monitoring the impact of our social media efforts. With their guidance, we’ve been able to measure our success and make data-driven decisions about allocating our resources best.”

— Ahref Chibani, Marketing Director at the Federation of Authentic Tourism, Destination Dahar



A Instagram post created and posted by USAID Visit Tunisia for the Destination Dahar Instagram page that highlights the founder of Tadarromt Home, Jazia Talbia. Never having been taught how to read or write, Jazia is a remarkable success story and inspiration for women in the Dahar region.

Connection with the new Visit Tunisia Market Readiness Program

The Market Readiness Program launched mid March will benefit small tourism businesses in Dahar. The program will help these selected businesses improve their products and services, enhance their marketing strategies, and increase their competitiveness in the market. Dahar's tourism experiences and providers will participate in one-on-one workshops, training sessions, and networking events to learn from USAID Visit Tunisia and radically transform their marketing and experience deliverance. The Market Readiness Program will help strengthen the local economy and improve the quality of life for residents in Dahar. Learn more about the program [here](#).

Supporting Destination Dahar

USAID Visit Tunisia's efforts to support and improve the marketing of the Dahar can significantly impact the region and its people. By raising awareness of the destination's cultural and natural assets, tourists can be attracted to the region, increasing tourism revenue and job opportunities for local communities. Moreover, by promoting the region's unique cultural and natural heritage, Destination Dahar can help preserve and celebrate the rich history and traditions of the region.

Through bolstering marketing efforts and providing much-needed technical assistance to small regional businesses in one of Tunisia's most underserved destinations, USAID Visit Tunisia is contributing to the region's economic development in addition to helping to improve livelihoods.

Join USAID Visit Tunisia in supporting the destination marketing efforts of Destination Dahar, and follow the DMO on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).



A Instagram post created and posted by USAID Visit Tunisia for the Destination Dahar Instagram page that highlights Amal Tiss, a powerful voice for the integration of women in Tunisia's tourism industry