



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

VISIT TUNISIA

Activity Newsletter | November 2022



Greetings friends and supporters of Tunisian tourism,

We have much to celebrate and be grateful for this month! After many months of planning, USAID Visit Tunisia is thrilled to have had the first editions of both our Associations Strengthening and Pathways to Professionalism trainings. Nurturing talent within a strong force of Tunisian tourism industry professionals ensures visitors can fully appreciate and enjoy the rich offerings of this country and its cultures.

On an international stage, November has also been a big month for Tunisia! Between November 19-20, Djerba hosted the Francophone Summit, drawing visitors from over 50 French speaking countries. Notable attendees in the Tunisian Island were Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and French President Emmanuel Macron. On November 22nd, fans across the world cheered on Tunisia as they played Denmark in their first game of the FIFA World Cup. Our fingers are all crossed for the team as they take on France this afternoon.

Closer to home, USAID Visit Tunisia continues to promote our domestic tourism campaign.

All the best,

LEILA CALNAN

Chief of Party, USAID Visit Tunisia Activity

USAID VISIT TUNISIA ACTIVITIES & NEWS



First Regional Destination Development Plan Unveiled to Tozeur's Stakeholders

After a lengthy process of writing Tozeur's 81-page Destination Development Plan, it was formally revealed to an advisory panel of 15 stakeholders who shared their insights about next steps in adopting the document to deliver much needed benefits to the region. This is the first of six DDPs developed by USAID Visit Tunisia.

[Learn about our DDP writing and validation](#)



27 Certified Professionals Ready to take their Tourism Federations and Associations to the Next Competitive Level

The UPSKILL program brought together 27 professionals from eight Tunis-based federations and associations for a three-day certification workshop designed to strengthen programming and project implementation capacities and accelerate the competitiveness of Tunisian sustainable tourism.

[Read more about UPSKILL's impact](#)

FIRST REGIONAL DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT PLAN UNVEILED TO LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS IN TOZEUR

Through 2022, the USAID Visit Tunisia team has worked to formulate six Destination Development Plans for the project's six priority regions. Each DDP development process involved desk research, field research, and a dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders: local government, tour operators, accommodation providers, small business owners, NGOs, residents, and more.

A decline in visitor arrivals in recent years and the deterioration of tourism infrastructure and services have created a crisis in Tozeur's local tourism industry. Many hotels currently sit empty, and the tourism businesses that remain open struggle to stay afloat. The 81-page Tozeur DDP was created to address these concerns and safeguard the future of the region's tourism industry.

The next step towards implementation was presenting the DDP through a validation workshop to an advisory panel on November 18th in the Tozeur CRT office. In attendance were Regional Directors of the CRT, Culture, Handicraft, Development, Environment, and Agriculture; the Regional Presidents of Travel Agencies, Hotels, and Tourism Promoters for Museums and Accommodations; and active regional tourism NGOs.



Part 1 of the DDP provides an overview of the tourism situation in Tozeur, describing its history in the region and how it has become an essential component of the region's economy. Part 1 also builds a shared understanding of Tozeur's tourism sector trends, including its assets, visitor profile, infrastructure, services, access, human capital, level of technology adoption, and impact on the environment and cultural heritage.

Part 2 of the DDP outlines the 2035 vision for Tozeur's tourism sector, strategic objectives, targets and key performance indicators, strategic initiatives, and a detailed action matrix.

The panel provided the following feedback:

1. Local stakeholders are concerned about investment availability. They mentioned many obstacles to financing tourism initiatives in the region, but are optimistic about USAID Visit Tunisia's Crossboundary partnership to finance PPPs.
2. Accessibility is a significant problem. A priority must be helping domestic and international tourists access the region, through direct flights from Europe to Tozeur's airport and increased domestic flights.
3. Marketing must be a priority. The advisory panel wants more attention paid to the marketing of Saharan and Oasis tourism and looks forward to collaborations.
4. The region currently lacks quality training. Professional training is urgently needed.

The USAID Visit Tunisia team feels confident about addressing the main identified points, with each being targeted under the existing activities of the project.

As Nabil Gasmi, Project Engagement Specialist, noted about the validation session, "The group really appreciated our work, and now are excited to continue onto the next steps outlined in the DDP. They agree with the challenges that the industry faces, and we have come together on clear priorities and action steps needed to improve Tozeur's tourism."



UPSKILL: 27 CERTIFIED PROFESSIONALS READY TO TAKE THEIR TOURISM FEDERATIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS TO THE NEXT COMPETITIVE LEVEL



UPSKILL — the first program of its kind in the Tunisian tourism sector — brought together 27 professionals from 8 Tunis-based federations, and associations for a three-day certification workshop designed to strengthen their programming and project implementation capacities and accelerate the competitiveness of Tunisian sustainable tourism. The UPSKILL program was held from November 16 to 18, 2022 in Tunis and will be extended to federations and associations in other regions starting from January 2023. Tozeur and Tabarka are next.

Mehdi Hachani, President of the Fédération Tunisienne des Guides Agréés du Tourisme (FTGAT) / PHOTO: © MONTASSAR LASSOUED / USAID

Unleashing Tunisian federations and associations' potential

Federations and associations play a significant role in strengthening the tourism sector in Tunisia and improving its products and services. Their collaboration is key to influencing and leading positive change. The Tourism Industry Federation and Association Strengthening Program (UPSKILL) built a bridge between these federations & associations and provided them with the opportunity to explore and tap into their unleashed potential.

Almost thirty participants from eight different federations and associations actively participated in a three-day strengthening workshop focusing on targeted modules: creating and nurturing an organization, governance and financial planning, business planning, visibility and communication, resource mobilization, fundraising and grants, data management, and professional development. At the end of this training, everyone has been certified and is now ready to take their federation or association to the next level.

To build their capacity, the UPSKILL workshop addressed the most faced challenges by federations and associations, and provided knowledge and tools to meet their needs for:

- Better management structures and governance;
- Well-tailored work plans with time-bound objectives and financial budget;
- Strengthened database systems and management;
- Improved relationships with local media, including print, radio, and social media;
- Established or improved member services with an added value for members;
- Increased promotion of the provided services;
- Mobilized resources (because most are dependent on government assistance).

TOP 5 Key Takeaways from the Workshop

1. All federations and associations acknowledged the need for collaboration between federations and associations in the tourism sector in Tunisia;
2. All participants committed to ensuring their legal compliance of the National Registry of Entreprises (RNE);
3. The workshop's participatory approach generated interest, and increased participants' learning and information retention;
4. Based on a capacities assessment (organizational, managerial, planning, etc.), each association and federation developed its vision and mission resulting in an established or well-refined strategic plan;
5. By the end of December 2022, five federations and/or associations will be selected for customized mentorship and technical assistance programs, in addition to access to USAID Visit Tunisia Activity grants.

Voices from the sector: Meet Imed Lagha, President, Interprofessional Federation of Tunisian Tourism (Fi2T)

1. Tell us about the Fi2T — What is your organization's mission?

The [Interprofessional Federation of Tunisian Tourism](#) is among the main operators in sustainable tourism in Tunisia. It is a young federation created in 2016 and composed mainly of travel agents carrying a different vision of traditional Tunisian tourism. Our federation is cosmopolitan, and its DNA is unique. Fi2T is made up of 12 groups ranging from alternative accommodation to health tourism, including travel agents, tourist guides, archeology, and events.

2. What is the biggest challenge you seek to overcome with our program's support?

Tourism has evolved, and it is crucial that WE also evolve to fulfill our mission and meet new emerging needs and expectations. To achieve this, we need coaching and capacity building.



PHOTO: © MONTASSAR LASSOUED / USAID

3. What will our training help you achieve

Upskill is a well-tailored strengthening program for federations. It will allow us to move upmarket, diversify our products and conduct an audit to better position the federation on the Tunisian chessboard. We hope to be able to determine and establish the best development strategy for the federation, implement our ideas, and determine the appropriate means to be successful throughout Tunisia — for example, by creating new offices, developing our network of partners, and supporting all our group members.

Voices from the sector: Meet Moncef Riabi, President, Association of Cruise Tour Guides (AGTC)

1. Tell us about the AGTC — What is your organization's mission?

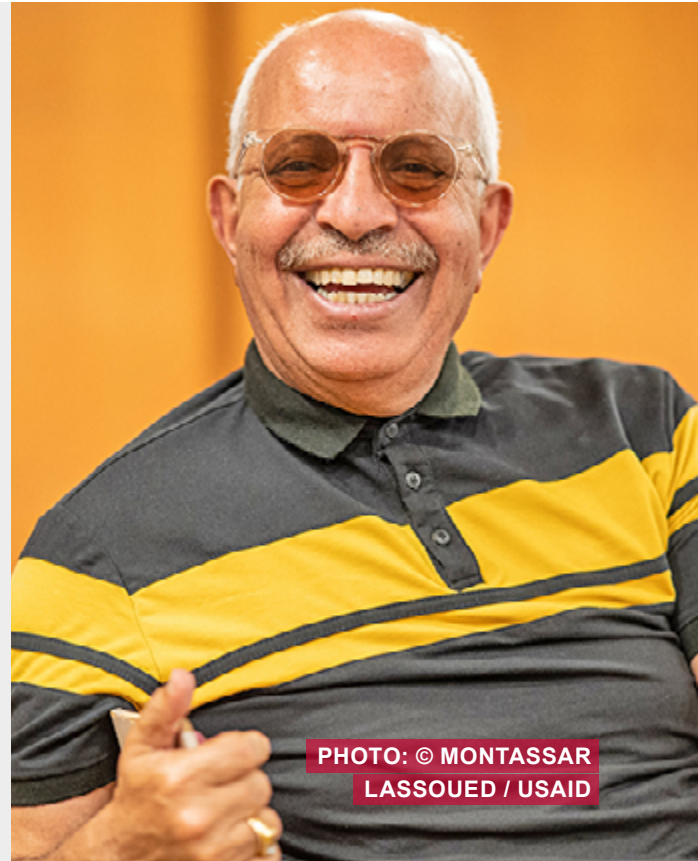
The Association of Cruise Tourism Guides was created in 2014. It is a young association, and yet very dynamic thanks to its members. The AGTC works hard towards promoting the role of guides as well as this profession in tourism development and improving the visitor experience in collaboration with authorities and stakeholders in the sector.

2. What is the biggest challenge you seek to overcome with our program's support?

The UPSKILL training is high-quality, and I am very happy to participate. We thought we knew how to do things, but we quickly realized that there are opportunities for improvement on several levels.

3. What will our training help you achieve?

Our goal is to improve, find and get funds, in order to move forward. While financial support is very much needed, we do not - and will not - sit with crossed arms. We will continue to work towards improving the Tunisian tourism service, and the cultural side of the guide profession. The training will help us, even more, to explore new horizons.



Voices from the sector: Omar Riahi, Executive Director, Tunisian Federation of Tourism and Travel Agencies (FTAV)

1. Tell us about the FTAV — What is your organization's mission?

The [Tunisian Federation of Tourism and Travel Agencies](#) was created in 1964 and counts 780 travel agents as members. We are a strategic partner in the UPSKILL program which is part of the Tunisian tourism development strategy.



2. What is the biggest challenge you seek to overcome with our program's support?

What will our training help you achieve? Thanks to these three days of training, we intend to build our capacity by improving our skills in communication, fundraising, financial management, and good governance.

Voices from the sector: Mehdi Hachani, President, Tunisian Federation of Certified Guides (FTGAT)

1. Tell us about the FTGAT — What is your organization's mission?

The [Tunisian Federation of Certified Guides](#) was created in 1975. We are present across Tunisia in almost all touristic regions: Tunis Center, Nabel, Hammamet, Sousse, Djerba, Gabes and Tozeur.

2. What is the biggest challenge you seek to overcome with our program's support?

Our federation is mainly composed of volunteers, who are leading the communication, marketing, and financial resources. With this workshop, we wanted to provide them with the appropriate tools and knowledge to engage with donors, and stakeholders and take part in key programs because this will reflect positively on our members.

3. What will our training help you achieve?

We aim at strengthening the federation's capacity with a focus on communication and financial management. This three-day workshop was a great opportunity for all of us [Tunisian federations and associations working in the tourism sector] to meet and exchange about our visions within a common program. We are a young yet hard-working federation, motivated to implement more sustainable activities in the long run.



PHOTO: © MONTASSAR
LASSOUED / USAID



PHOTOS: © MONTASSAR
LASSOUED / USAID





NEW CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

Get certified in Tozeur or Tabarka in January 2023!

The UPSKILL program is on its way to Tozeur and Tabarka regions. Tourism associations with cultural, touristic, societal, and environmental vocations, working in the tourism industry are invited to participate in our strengthening program in January 2023 in Tabarka or Tozeur regions.

Tozeur: from January 13-14, 2023 — for associations based in Tozeur, Kebili, Douz and Gabes.

Tabarka: January 24-25, 2023 — for associations based in Tabarka, Ain Draham and Kairouan.

Apply before December 9!

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Imed Lagha, President of the Interprofessional Federation of Tunisian Tourism (Fi2T), shares his experience during UPSKILL, our strengthening program for federations which was held from November 16 to 18 in Tunis.



1. TELL US ABOUT THE FI2T — WHAT IS YOUR ORGANIZATION'S MISSION?

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Fi2T is made up of 12 groups ranging from alternative accommodation to health tourism, including travel agents, tourist guides, archeologists, and events.

2. WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOU SEEK TO OVERCOME WITH OUR PROGRAM'S SUPPORT?

Tourism has evolved, and it is crucial that WE also evolve to fulfill our mission and meet new emerging needs and expectations. To achieve this, we need coaching and capacity building.

3. WHAT WILL OUR TRAINING HELP YOU ACHIEVE?

Upskill is a well-tailored strengthening program for federations. It will allow us to move upmarket, diversify our products and conduct an audit to better position the federation on the Tunisian chessboard.

We hope to be able to determine and establish the best development strategy for the federation, implement our ideas, and determine the appropriate means to be successful throughout Tunisia — for example, by creating new offices, developing our network of partners, and supporting all our group members.

[Read the full story here](#)

Tunisia Targets More Uk Flights To Grow Visitor Numbers

TRAVELWEEKLY



BY HARRY KEMBLE | The Tunisia tourism chief has appealed to airlines to add more capacity as the country targets a 50% increase year on year in British visitor numbers in 2023.

Nizar Slimane, general director at the Tunisian National Tourist Office, believes the country was slow to reopen to tourists despite around five million visitors – including 105,000 Britons – travelling to the African country.

To put this into context, five million visitors is around 65% of the total number that came in 2019.

Slimane hopes to increase British visitor numbers by 50% over the next 12 months.

Slimane (pictured) said: “We hit our target this year. For us our aim was to get to 65% of the numbers in 2019, which was a bumper season for us.

“The [lower numbers] were due to the fact that other countries were quicker to announce that they were reopening.

“The issue is capacity, but there is no reason why we cannot be as competitive as we used to be.

“There are more people who want to go to Tunisia than capacity available.”

Four of the five carriers that offered flights from the UK to Tunisia in 2019 are still flying to the country today. Nouvel Air, Tunisair, easyJet and Tui currently fly between the UK and Tunisia.

However, Slimane added: “We’ve have less airlines flying from the UK to Tunisia but more flights because of Thomas Cook’s collapse.”

He said he believes 2023 will bring a “substantial increase” in capacity and visitor numbers.

“All the tour operators are now looking at Tunisia with more confidence than in the past,” he added. “We’re pretty confident that Brits will respond if we had more capacity.”

Slimane said discussions would start soon with airlines such as Wizz Air and Ryanair about offering flights to Tunisia. “There is interest from these airlines,” he said.

“We can build up again, but it takes time.”

Discovering Tunisia: A Real Arabian Fantasy From the Sahara to the Tunis Medina

7x7



BY CHLOÉ HENNEN

When I close my eyes at night, I still dream about Tunisia.

I see the Sahara, a gold expanse like the vastest beach; the people we met there drinking mint tea and eating the local dates on brightly colored blankets in the sand. The camels lounge contented as if they'd finally found the sea.

When I open my closet door, I can smell the Medina of Tunis, whose many-flowered perfumes hitched a ride home on my skull-printed scarf, the one I had used to cover my head to the amusement of the faithful women at Ez-Zitouna mosque, the oldest and grandest in the Tunisian capital. I may have appeared strange to them in my black cat-eyed sunglasses and shock of bright blonde bangs, but the women welcomed me to sit with them in the courtyard where they laid out their prayer mats and slipped off their babouches, encouraging me to peek inside where countless crystal chandeliers cast a romantic light over elbow-to-elbow supplicants, crowded among hundreds of columns once brought from ancient Carthage.

In the mornings now when I slather myself in the smoky, Tunisian vanilla oil that had seduced me in the hotel spa, it's overpowering, a fragrance better suited, I think, to holding its own against the warring scents of the medina than for sitting alone

with my laptop at my kitchen's breakfast counter. I wear it anyway, a visceral reminder of the most surprising discovery of my recent life.

I didn't discover Tunisia, of course. It's been sitting at the Mediterranean edge of North Africa since time eternal, inhabited by the indigenous Amazigh since antiquity and later ruled by the Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs, and French. I visited Tunisia in late September and happened upon perfect weather, with temperatures in the 80s and a once-in-five-years rain over the Sahara that delighted the locals and the camels too, being the beneficiaries of the suddenly lush green scrub that sparkled against the dampened sand.

I confess that my stop in Tunisia was meant to be an add-on to a bucket list trip to Morocco that didn't come to be. "While I'm in North Africa," I thought. What I found, though, was an unsung destination in its own right, one that captivated me in a way I just didn't see coming.

"Discover" is a word we heard often from our Tunisian friends, and while I think this was largely due to a formality in their translation for the more casual "see" or "find," its charm felt significant: These Tunisians were earnest in their wish that we should drink their culture up, as if down to the grinds of their rich Arabic coffee, fall in love with it, and take it home to share.

We began our journey in the desert resort town of Tozeur, seated between the edge of the Sahara and the Chott el Djerid, one of the largest (if not the largest) salt "lakes" on the



Date palms rise from the natural mountain oasis of Chebika, where an ancient Roman fortress turned now-abandoned Berber village is open to the public for hiking and exploration. (Courtesy of Anantara Sahara Tozeur Resorts and Villas)

African continent, a mostly dry flat whose color shifted from white to pink according to the light, and then to a deep blue after the rain. If I didn't know better, I would have thought our desert villa enjoyed an ocean view. We had checked in at Anantara Sahara Tozeur, a luxury resort completed just before the pandemic which now sat somewhat quietly, like a mirage in the dunes, waiting for the arrival of high tourist season in winter.

A reductive view might liken Tozeur to the West Coast's Baja California Sur; an easy weekend jaunt for Western Europeans and wealthy Middle Easterners seeking fun in the sun and sand plus plenty of high-end amenities. The Anantara property is truly splendid, complete with villas fit for sheiks, three swimming pools surrounded by palm trees, fledgling roses and bougainvillea, and one of the finest spas I've had the pleasure of being pampered in lately. Arabian-style nights filled with traditional music and hookah smoke are a primary draw along with camel and horseback rides overlooking Chott el Djerid, desert adventures like fat bikes and stargazing, and excursions to the mountain oasis Tamerza, the ancient Roman-turned-Berber village of Chebika, and the Star Wars film locations at Mides Canyon and Ong Jemel.

Though a direct flight from Paris is reportedly coming soon, Tozeur is currently only accessible through Tunis via a one-hour flight offered just three days a week. This makes it a less than obvious destination for Americans (we arrived by way of Rome), but it made our being here feel all the more special, and the people of Tozeur seemed all the more delighted to see us. It was a theme that popped up repeatedly during our visit. Tunisians actually like Americans, calling us friendlier and more curious than their frequent visitors from Europe. Having spent decades traveling in Europe and wishing I were Canadian (and sometimes saying I was depending on who was president), it was a treat to feel really welcomed for once.

There are women here with such stunning makeup it deserves the prettier French term *maquillage*; they smile brightly and often giggle when they speak as if humbled to have our attention. But modesty aside, they are well educated, opinionated, and posting crop-topped selfies to Instagram like everybody else. The men are genteel and mostly keep their distance until our American personalities get them going—they are skilled in repartee and rarely miss a joke regardless of the language in which it's delivered. Most are proficient in English, all are


fluent in French, and many were eager to teach us words in their native Arabic, though quick to point out that Tunisia has its own dialect. Tunisians, we learned, are proud to be distinct from the rest of the Arab world. When the country gained its independence from France in the 1950s, the French went away but left their culture behind. The result is a populace that is more modern and open-minded than other Islamic nations, essentially more European. Women are treated equally and head coverings are optional. It was the Tunisian Revolution of 2011, after all, that gave rise to the Arab Spring.

To my American ears, French is spoken here as much as Arabic, and you'll hear some Italian, German, and a little Spanish too. Even when we are unable to communicate verbally, which is rare, we pretend to understand with the conviviality of old friends.

"They're so free with their laughter," said Natalie, my sister and travel companion, noticing that so many people we encountered seemed genuinely delighted by the most basic of daily exchanges. And while we found many Tunisians to have a wonderful sense of humor, their warmth is wholly sincere. Wish the young woman at the next table a happy birthday and she'll share her hazelnut cake; crack a joke about coming over for dinner and her family will readily invite you to their home.

"We are the losers of history," said Amar, a vendor in Tunis' Grand Souk Chechias with a broad yellowed smile, thinking eyes, and a serious story to tell. Natalie and I would later joke that you should not make eye contact with a Tunisian unless you have half an hour to spare, but Amar was the first to wave us into his shop in the medina that day, and though he was surrounded by a hodgepodge of traditional and contemporary pottery, hand-painted ceramic tiles, leather goods, and stone pieces all beautifully made here, there was nothing he cared more to sell us than his pride for his country and his people.

Our attention was his as he recounted the history of Tunisia's indigenous Amazigh, the ancient matriarchal society known wrongly, and rudely, the world over as Berbers. Amar was neither the first nor the last to explain the etymology of the word that has its root in ancient Greece where all non-Greek speakers were referred to as barbaros. These originally included the Romans, who later applied the term to the Goths and Vandals and Huns and any other tribe who, to their minds, lacked the civility of Greco-Roman tradition. When the Arabs conquered Kairouan and Carthage in the seventh century, they called the indigenous holdouts Berbers, though the Amazigh have never, would never, adopt the word themselves. The term, of course, eventually became the English barbarian.



Camels are everywhere in Tozeur—combing the dunes of the Sahara, on the side of the highway, and available for excursions both in the desert and on property at Anantara. (Courtesy of Anantara Sahara Tozeur Resorts and Villas)

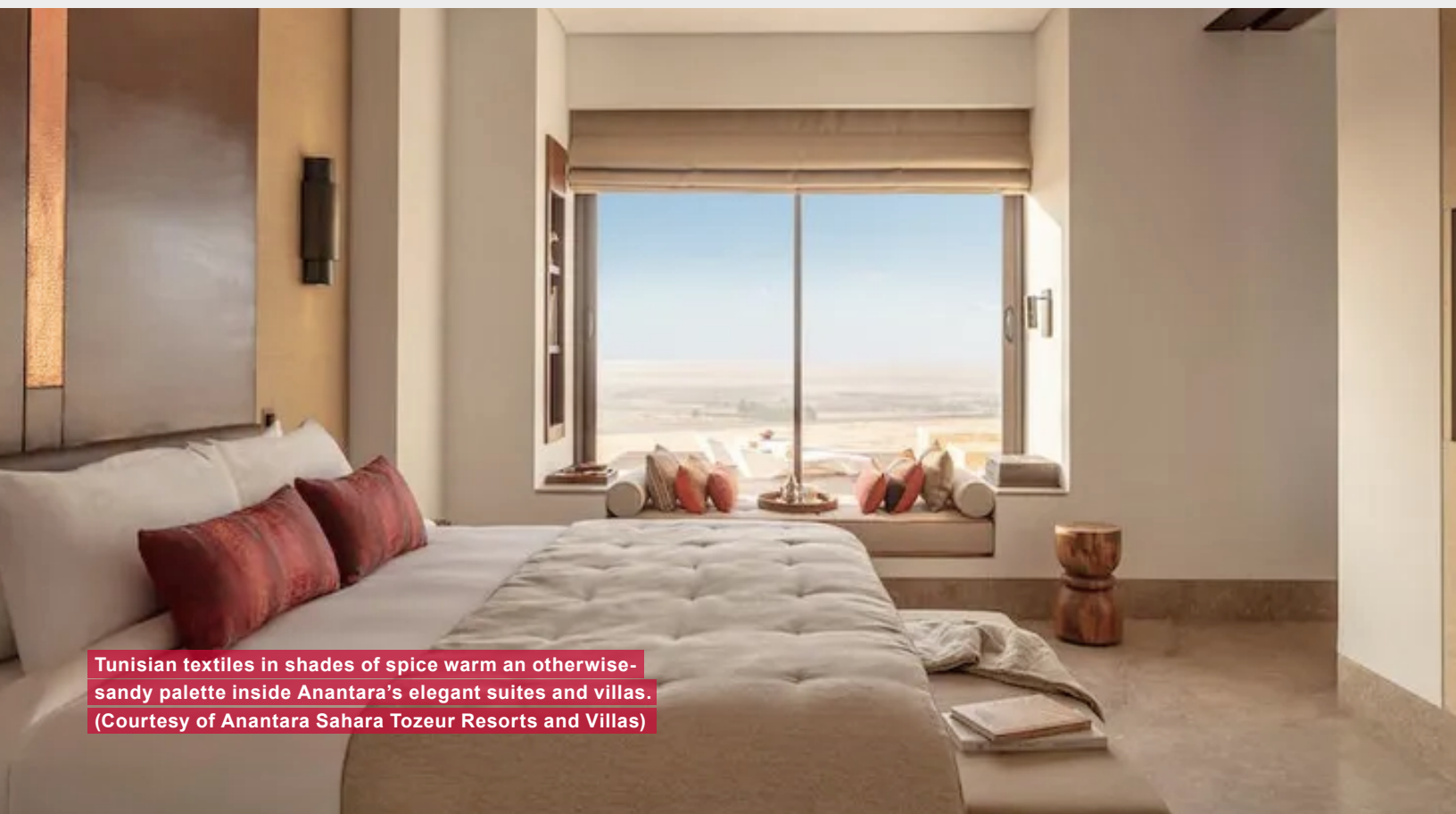
Whether Amar—or any of the others who shared this bit of history with us—is of Amazigh descent, I do not know. Like the many Americans who are leading the movement toward better respecting and defending the cultures of our own indigenous people, Amar and his ilk are taking up the mantle to ensure their people and their heritage get seen.

It is still less than a century since the nationalist Habib Bourguiba led the country to independence from France; less than 70 years since he, as Tunisia's first prime minister and then president (from 1957 to 1987), first pushed reform for women's rights, raising the legal age for girls to marry, expanding access to divorce, and prioritizing education for the entire population. This makes Tunisia a country with ancient history and an increasingly modern intellect, and perhaps it is only through telling their stories again and again, by handing them forward through the next generations—just as they have their traditions of religion, hospitality, and craft—that the page might turn on the narrative of Tunisia as history's loser.

As Amar pointed out, Tunisia doesn't enjoy the caché of nearby Italy or Greece. Nor does it compete with Morocco, its North African neighbor that so captures the global imagination and all those tourist dollars. (For comparison, tourism brought Tunisia just \$2.68 billion in revenue in the year 2019 compared with Morocco's \$9.9 billion, according to World Data.) But this isn't to say that it never will. Perhaps age-old Tunisia is really just in its spring.

There is much to discover in this country, its humanity most of all. I won't soon forget the tale of scandal and intrigue my writer's mind weaved as we anxiously followed a stranger through the labyrinthine Medina of Tunis, my eyes catching those of men lingering in the doorways of the souks lest someone remember the blonde American who was never seen again. Instead, my melodrama ended with the same spectacular rooftop view of the city we'd been promised and a few coins of gratitude to our ersatz guide. "I hope you enjoyed your discovery," he said.

I see you, Tunisians, and can't wait to discover you again.



Tunisian textiles in shades of spice warm an otherwise-sandy palette inside Anantara's elegant suites and villas. (Courtesy of Anantara Sahara Tozeur Resorts and Villas)

Discover the Tunisian Sahara + More in Tozeur

Check in at Anantara Sahara Tozeur Resorts + Villas.

If you're flying into Tozeur from Tunis and it's a good chance you are, there is also a good chance you'll arrive at this five-star property well after nightfall. You'll see nothing but the back of your driver's head on the black ride over, which perhaps makes the opening of the hotel's double doors all the more breathtaking. The lobby is grand but sophisticated and subdued, made warm with pops of color in Tunisian textiles, copper-topped tables, and handwoven baskets brimming with local bounty—dates, rosebuds, herbs, and the red chilies used to make the addictive harissa spread you'll find in the onsite restaurant Sarab. But there's nothing so inviting as the bright smiles you'll receive from the staff who are consistently delightful here. Rose petals, candles, and playful balloons welcomed us to our villa, elegantly designed with North African influences and thoughtful books.

Sunrise reveals what midnight concealed: the veritable mirage that is the expanse of desert and the salty Chott el Djerid sprawling from the foot of our private patio. Though young, the whole property seems to have sprung up like an oasis from the sand, with lean palms bending gently over three glimmering swimming pools, all unnaturally blue against the resort's desert palette. There are 93 suites and villas here, which seems surprising given the highly intimate feel. Each has a spa-like bathroom and oversized windows for maximizing the view; we recommend reserving a one-bedroom pool villa for enjoying a private late afternoon soak after a day of exploring the Sahara.

A gym and yoga studio, tennis and basketball courts, and kids club complete the property. // Suites start at \$350 per night; for more information and reservations, go to anantara.com.

Explore Tozeur, the Sahara, and its surrounds.

Staying at the luxurious Anantara is like having your own personal genie of the lamp: Your wish is their command. Whether you're more into trekking the otherworldly Chott el Djerid, wandering the intricately bricked corridors of the Tozeur Medina, or exploring ancient landmarks, the team here will arrange it. Of course, your primary objective is to meet the majesty of the Sahara, and she doesn't disappoint. Schedule a quad biking adventure or camelback excursion followed by a sunset refreshment in the dunes.

Star Wars diehards make the trek for photo ops at notable film locations, but the region is best represented in a hike through the mountain oasis of Chebika, a Roman outpost in antiquity and later an Amazigh refuge, where you can get a bit of history along with a waterfall breeze in the natural palm oasis. Buy a bag of the local Deglet Nour dates to take home, and don't miss a cup of freshly squeezed pomegranate juice at the cafe which is pleasantly overrun by cats.

Remember, it is Tunisia's people that will make your trip, so take every opportunity to chat them up—they are eager to share their culture. Our first taste of this was through our guide, Khmaïs Ouled-Abdessayed, who punctuated our itinerary with discoveries off the beaten path—we witnessed the special art of Tozeur brick-making, then learned a bit about Tunisian politics over traditional Arabic coffee in the medina. With decades of experience and impeccable English learned at Cambridge, Khmaïs' deep knowledge of history, philosophy, and literature could fill a library of books—and several pages of my travel journal with his keen personality and wit. Request him personally, you won't regret it.

Relax at the Anantara spa.

Had we visited the spa—named the best in Tunisia by World Spa Awards—on the first day of our trip rather than the last, we would have

booked a treatment every single day. We are greeted by two gorgeous therapists, Salwa and Hawa (have I mentioned the people here are stunning?), and a plate of the local dates which they say are terrific for your skin, especially when you eat seven of them each morning. While I wonder about their blood sugar, there is no denying their faces are flawless. Their care is equally tender as they guide us through our journey, from steam room and sauna to cold pool and, at last, to the petal-strewn and candlelit couples suite where we blissed out during a combined massage and facial. After scooping up some delicious handmade body oils to take home, we reluctantly depart in a shower of hugs and red-lipsticked kisses, wishing we could take Hawa and Salwa home as souvenirs.
// anantara.com/en/sahara-tozeur/spa

Dine on global flavors.

The array of food options at Anantara is reflective both of the hotel brand's international pedigree and of Tunisia's location at the northern tip of Africa, with easy reach to Mediterranean Europe as well as the Middle

East. At breakfast, Sarab serves a classic buffet including flaky croissants and fresh-squeezed orange, date, and lemon juices; at dinner, more local flavors shine in dishes such as couscous and a stunning selection of mezze. The design-rich restaurant Mekong plates a fusion of Asian flavors, and there's pizza to be had by the pool. But the shining offerings here are the ones you'll see on Instagram: Anantara's Dining by Design experience will set up your private supper in Berber fashion in the sand, and its newly opened Arabian Nights lounge (\$55USD with advance reservation) mingles spicy aromas with live performances around fire pits beneath the stars.

Shop

Save some dinar (cash is preferred) and prepare to make difficult choices (unless you brought an empty suitcase): The lobby shop at Anantara brims with exquisite locally made goods. While the hammered silver tea pots and serving trays and palm-woven baskets called to us, it was the fringed silk and linen scarves, small leather bags, and handcrafted soaps that made their way into our luggage.



A rooftop view of Ez-Zitouna's minaret and the Medina of Tunis.
(Chloe Hennen)

One Day in Tunis: Check in at Dar El Jeld + Wander the Medina

We closed our week in Tunisia with one madcap day in the capital—hats off to Harry Criswell of Altour who insisted we must at least spend the night. Our only mistake: that we didn't stay an extra week.

Where to Stay + Dine in Tunis

Think of a dar as Tunisia's version of the Moroccan riad: a boutique hotel inside a converted home, usually with a central courtyard. Tucked behind a traditional studded yellow door on a narrow stone lane in the medina, Dar El Jeld(5-10 Dar El Jeld St.) feels like a well-kept secret. Like the medina itself, there are delights around every corner: intricately tiled walls and vaulted plaster ceilings; cozy European-style salons with antique furnishings and crystal chandeliers; and an extensive art collection ranging from delicate glass vessels to chunky African urns, whimsical nudes to moody oil paintings. Sixteen newly constructed suites are modern, spacious, and an excellent value—you can book the grandest of them all for under \$200 a night. There is also a lovely little hammam and a rooftop restaurant serving breakfast and cocktails with a 360-degree view.

Make reservations in advance if you hope to dine at the hotel's namesake restaurant, located in another exquisite mansion just next door. A foyer and sitting room are lavishly painted scarlet and hung with art in gilded frames. The dining room is breathtaking with elaborate carvings, marble pillars, Persian rugs, and a galaxy of glittering pendants hanging from a two-story atrium ceiling. The menu is all Tunisian and exceptional, with highlights including an epic sampling of mezze and a whole grilled fish. The atmosphere feels fancy; the food is plentiful and affordable; and the mood is lively. On our visit, tables clapped and sang along to tunes from a live qanun player. // dareljeld.com

The Medina of Tunis

If you have just one day as I did to get a taste of the Tunisian capital, the Medina of Tunis is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the stuff of your most aromatic North African dreams. Its ancient alleyways unfurl into an endless maze of souks, cafes where men smoke shishas, and historic palaces and mosques with architectural influences ranging from Andalusia to Arabia. The walk from Dar El Jeld to the monumental Ez-Zitouna mosque is barely five minutes if you can keep from getting distracted. Situated on over an acre, it has nine entrances, an iconic minaret, and dates to 698 CE though some of its building materials were hauled up from ancient Carthage. (The seaside archeological site, founded by the Phoenicians in the first millennium BC, is must-visit if you have an extra day).

Even a seasoned shopper could lose all sense in the Tunis medina: If buttery leather babouche slippers, dazzlingly beaded Berber wedding gowns, colorful woven poufs, amber and silver jewelry, and handmade pottery turn you into a star-eyed emoji, then this is basically your Disneyland. Orient yourself around the Rue Sidi Ben Arous where you'll find the wonderful Eddar(8 Rue Sidi Ben Arous), a merchant of true artisan handcrafts and antiques inside a cavernous converted manse. They purport to have one of the largest collections of Amazigh wedding shawls in the world as well as a can't-miss rooftop garden. Just around the corner in the Grand Souk Chechias, you can pick up a traditional red wool hat from the jewel box shop of Fathi Blaich(4 Grand Souk Chechias). The refined Fondouk El Attarine is a curated gallery of more modern Tunisian-made fashions and housewares and has a tearoom and restaurant for when you get peckish. You will also find a smaller outpost of El Attarine inside Dar El Jeld. The babouches here are a bit pricier than elsewhere in the medina but, in a rainbow of shades delicious enough to eat, they are the finest we saw and make for a perfect memento.

Royal Air Maroc Expands Operations in Tunisian Market



BY MARIYA SAHNOUNI

Royal Air Maroc has increased its flight frequency to 14 weekly trips between Morocco and Tunisia.

Rabat- Morocco's national air carrier Royal Air Maroc (RAM) held a workshop with Tunisian travel agencies on Saturday to showcase its goods and services. Following the October 29 increase to 14 weekly flights between Morocco and Tunisia, the meeting provided an opportunity to advertise RAM's network and provide customers traveling between the two countries with a variety of options.

Additionally, customers from the Tunisian market now have numerous route options connecting them to 16 Moroccan cities, 23 African networks services, four American networks, six Iberian Peninsula destinations, and the Canary Islands, according to converging reports.

Royal Air Maroc's regional representative in Tunisia Mohammed Issam Mosseddaq highlighted the benefits of the Oneworld alliance, while showcasing a variety of innovative products and services offered by Royal Air Maroc.

Development Manager of Morocco, Middle East, and Asia Department Hassan Benbrahim was present at the event as well as employees of the regional representation of Royal Air Maroc in Tunisia and 100 partners.

Mosseddaq noted that Royal Air Maroc connects Tunisia to an incredibly wide network through this alliance.

"This event is also an opportunity to highlight the membership of Royal Air Maroc to the prestigious oneworld alliance and the benefits it provides to customers in the Tunisian market," he added.

He also emphasized RAM's network expansion through the company's opening of operations in Luanda, Angola, and three services in the Iberian Peninsula and the Canary Islands (Porto, Seville and Tenerife).

In April 2020, Royal Air Maroc officially joined the oneworld Alliance, becoming the first African member of the global airline alliance. RAM added 39 new destinations in 23 countries to the alliance's network.

The oneworld network serves more than 900 destinations in 170 territories with hundreds of airport lounges. The alliance offers smoother transfers for passengers traveling across member airlines, a greater range of frequent-flyer rewards, access to more airport lounges, and more codeshare agreements between member airlines.

In June, Royal Air Maroc's CEO Abdelhamid Addou announced the company's plans to transform the national carrier into a global connector between Africa and Europe in the post-COVID era.

Addou stated that the national carrier is preparing to launch a new tender for 22 regional, short-haul, and long-haul aircrafts, stressing that the national carrier needs to "invest in more planes and have an airport with a much larger size, a more efficient quality, and a better customer experience."

Tunisia: Francophonie Summit Adopts Djerba Declaration



TUNIS AFRIQUE PRESSE (TUNIS)

Tunis/Tunisia — The 18th Francophonie Summit, hosted November 19-20 in Djerba under the theme: “Connectivity in Diversity: The Digital, Vector of Development and Solidarity in the French-speaking World” marking the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the International Organisation of la Francophonie (OIF), was crowned by the adoption of the “Djerba Declaration.”

The participating 31 Heads of State and Government and 35 Foreign Affairs Ministers notably discussed the adoption of the 2022-2026 Digital Francophonie Strategy, the importance of developing a culture of digital utilisation in formal and non-formal education, the need to provide the right conditions to improve people’s mobility, calling for dialogue and the peaceful settlement of conflicts within the Francophone space according to internationally agreed negotiation standards.

The “Djerba Declaration” paid tribute to the founding fathers of the Francophonie, namely Habib Bourguiba (Tunisia), Léopold Sédar Senghor (Senegal), Norodom Sihanouk (Cambodia) and Hamani Diori (Niger) as well as to first Secretary

General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, endorsing the new impetus given by the OIF Secretary General “for a renewed Francophonie at the service of peoples.”

The event further offered the opportunity for the participants to reaffirm their support to the OIF’s new orientations, including the major work undertaken towards its transformation, the refocusing of the Francophonie’s actions on strategic issues such as the French language, democracy and respect for human rights, equal access to quality education for all, higher education and research, training, culture, the economy, digital technology, preservation of the environment, and sustainable development.

The Djerba Summit and its subsequent declaration reaffirmed commitment to promoting gender equality as a universal value and a key condition for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and determination to move forward with concerted action in this regard.

Besides, the participants welcomed the commitment of the OIF S-G and the actors of La Francophonie for a concerted and joint management of the health crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic for the benefit of the Francophone space populations, urging to

mobilise so as to facilitate fair access to health services, treatments and vaccines. They further called States and governments to adopt these principles in the event of a new pandemic.

They also reiterated commitment to the French language and respect of cultural and linguistic diversity within States and Governments in the Francophone space, as the bedrock of the Francophonie.

In another vein, the Djerba Declaration regrets the recurrence of crises and conflicts in the French-speaking world and calls for dialogue and the peaceful resolution of these situations in compliance with the internationally agreed negotiation formats, in keeping with the goals and principles of the United Nations Charter and with respect for democracy, human rights, the sovereignty of States and international law.


In this regard, the Declaration decries the global energy, food, economic and humanitarian implications as well as the growing inequalities arising from the war in Ukraine, calling on the States and governments of the French-speaking world to show solidarity and inviting the international community to do its utmost to swiftly mitigate their deleterious impact on the affected populations.

Signatories of the Declaration also condemned terrorism under all its forms, notably in the Sahel region, calling for a joint action to combat this scourge and prevent the violent radicalisation and extremism that could lead to terrorism.

Aware of the realities and challenges facing the Francophone space, of the need to bolster the cohesion of its societies and keen to meet the legitimate aspirations of its populations, the OIF welcomed in particular the adoption of the Francophonie Digital Strategy 2022-2026, which provides a framework for action to speed up the digital transformation of the Francophone space and its integration into the global digital economy, while respecting human rights and democracy.

Commending the relevance of the theme chosen for the Djerba Summit, the OIF points out the tremendous prospects for cooperation, development and innovation offered by digital technology, so as to ensure effective connectivity between the populations of the French-speaking world and to promote the spread of the French language while respecting cultural and linguistic diversity.

DID YOU KNOW?



One of the stunning landscapes you can expect to see while hiking the GTD. Photo by Anaïs Prado Cornaro, an intrepid 19-year old Swiss woman who just solo hiked the trail. Congratulations to her!

The Grande Traversee Dahar du Dahar (referred to as the GTD) is Tunisia's first official trans-village hiking trail. Stretching 194 km, the trail is divided into 12 stages, and takes travelers to some of the country's most charming and authentic villages in the Dahar region. Along the trail, travelers can experience mountainous Dahar's striking natural landscape and immerse themselves in its rich Amazigh cultural heritage.

Starting in Tamezret and ending in Douiret, the trail winds its way through valleys over hilltops decorated with

ancient, partially abandoned Amazigh villages, geological fossil sites, advanced water systems, the occasional oasis, and must-see towns like Chenini.

Want to learn more about the trail? Check out Tunisia's first DMO, Fédération Tourisme Authentique Destination Dahar (FTADD), for more information about visiting the region and completing trail. USAID Visit Tunisia signed an MOU with FTADD in September and will be assisting their marketing efforts.

Visit their website at
[DestinationDahar.com](https://www.destinationdahar.com)