



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Activity Newsletter | August 2022

Visit Tunisia



### Greetings friends and supporters of Tunisian tourism,

At the end of August, we reflect on the month as an important indicator of the industry's health, as it is typically the month with the greatest number of visitor arrivals. This August heralded proof of a comeback for Tunisian tourism, with arrivals up 80% compared to the last two years and almost at pre-pandemic levels.

As we welcome September and cooler temperatures, we are thrilled to support Tunisia's southern destinations ending their summer hiatus and welcoming visitors to authentic desert experiences once again. For the USAID Visit Tunisia team, autumn also represents significant milestones for our project. This fall, we look forward to supporting numerous festivals in our incubation program, announcing our selected priority infrastructure projects, awarding grants under our Tourism Innovation Fund, and continuing collaboration with key industry stakeholders around the country.

We hope you enjoy this very special newsletter edition about women in tourism, a topic near and dear to my heart. The success and strength of a country's tourism industry relies on the active participation of women. After reading the stories of the inspiring women leaders highlighted below, you'll soon see that the future for Tunisia's tourism industry is bright indeed.

Onward to September,

**LEILA CALNAN**

Chief of Party, USAID Visit Tunisia Activity

## USAID VISIT TUNISIA ACTIVITIES & NEWS



### Rediscovering Tunisia's Vast Cultural Heritage

Tunisia's Living Culture is an initiative to identify, develop, and market Tunisia's undiscovered intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Learn about our plans to support Tunisian gastronomy, craft, music, dance, storytelling, and more.

[Learn more](#)



### Partnership with Baobab to Provide Critical Funding to 800 Tourism Entrepreneurs

In collaboration with Baobab, a local microfinance institution, our project will support 800 tourism entrepreneurs that have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Learn more](#)



### Meet the Tunisian Women at the Forefront of Tunisia's Tourism Industry

In celebration of National Women's Day, we highlighted six Tunisian women doing remarkable work to highlight Tunisia's past, enrich its present, and brighten its future through their dedication to making the tourism sector more inclusive and sustainable.

[Read their stories](#)

# REDISCOVERING TUNISIA'S VAST CULTURAL HERITAGE



At the crossroads of Africa, the Middle East, and Europe, Tunisia has thousands of well-preserved archaeological and cultural sites that are a testament to its rich heritage and history. Each year, tourists from around the world are excited to visit these UNESCO-recognized centers – such as the Amphitheater of El Jem, the Carthage ruins, and the holy Islamic city of Kairouan.

However, Tunisia's vibrant intangible cultural heritage (ICH) — gastronomy, craft, music, dance, and storytelling -- is underdeveloped, and, in some cases, entirely missing from the tourist experience.



A Tunisian woman shapes traditional decorative baskets made of Halfa, a strong grass fiber found in the Mediterranean region.

To bring these invaluable assets to the forefront of Tunisian tourism -- and empower the culture-bearers that faithfully preserve them -- USAID Visit Tunisia Activity is introducing *Tunisia's Living Culture*, an initiative to identify, develop, and market Tunisia's undiscovered ICH.

To set this initiative in motion, USAID Visit Tunisia Activity, in collaboration with the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Tunisia's Heritage Enhancement and Cultural Promotion Agency (AMVPPC), and Tunisia's National Heritage Institute (INP), is hosting an academic symposium featuring Tunisia's ICH assets in underserved regions.



VISIT TUNISIA



The symposium, to be held in Gabes from September 10-12, will feature at least 30 prominent ICH researchers presenting on themes such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices/ rituals, and traditional craftsmanship.

Researchers focused on the regions of Tabarka-Ain Drahem, Kairouan, Gabes, Tozeur, Kebili-Douz, or Tataouine are **invited to submit their contributions** by August 22.

The presentations' themes will help USAID Visit Tunisia Activity identify distinctive living cultural traditions to support in underserved regions. The project will then provide tailored training and marketing support to local artisans and other culture-bearers preserving these traditions, helping them better shape and promote their tourism products to a broad audience. In addition, the project will provide up to 30 of these tourism enterprises with small grants to further enhance their products and experiences.

Finally, USAID Visit Tunisia Activity will feature these compelling tourism experiences in its domestic and international marketing campaigns, introducing visitors to a new side of Tunisian culture and bringing critical jobs and revenue to underserved regions.

Halle Butvin, Smithsonian's director of special projects who will lead training workshops for local scholars and tradition bearers, has high expectations for the program -- not only will it enrich Tunisia's tourism ecosystem, she says, but it will empower the often-overlooked communities that keep its diverse traditions alive.

"Tunisia Living Culture will support tradition bearers and their communities to create tourism experiences, where they can share cultural practices with visitors and directly benefit from tourism revenues," says Butvin.



## USAID VISIT TUNISIA/BAOBAB PARTNER TO PROVIDE CRITICAL FUNDING TO 800 TOURISM ENTREPRENEURS

USAID Visit Tunisia Activity is joining forces with **Baobab Tunisie**, a local microfinance institution, to support 800 entrepreneurs in the tourism industry that have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The program, set to launch in September, will provide the beneficiaries with a total of 1.07 million TND in grants from USAID Visit Tunisia and 7 million TND in loans from Baobab, helping them recover from the impact of COVID-19 and grow their businesses.

Tunisia's tourism industry, which contributes to 14% of Tunisia's gross domestic product, suffered as much as any sector during the health crisis. In early 2020, international travel ground to a halt, and lockdowns and travel restrictions devastated many local tourism operators. The crisis continued into 2021, which still brought in **far fewer international tourists** than before the pandemic.

As the industry picks back up in 2022 and beyond, USAID Visit Tunisia/ Baobab's assistance program will help some of these hard-hit entrepreneurs make a strong comeback and reach their full potential. Baobab will use its microfinance expertise to select 800 promising businesses to support in the tourism sector, prioritizing those led by women/youth and in underserved regions.

All beneficiaries will receive their full loan/grant package by June 2023 – helping them sustain and grow their businesses and leading to at least 160 jobs in the tourism sector.

“Tourism is a key sector in Tunisia, and we are happy to partner with Baobab Tunisie to bring funding for sustainable tourism to disadvantaged regions,” said USAID/Tunisia Mission Director Scott Dobberstein at the program's **official signing ceremony** on July 27. “Supporting women and young entrepreneurs in the private sector brings economic growth and diversity to the Tunisian economy.”

Baobab CEO Emmanuel Decamps added: “We are honored to continue this collaboration with USAID by focusing on a vital sector for Tunisia tourism. Through this program, we will spare no effort in our contribution to help microentrepreneurs bounce back and ensure the viability of their activities and their jobs.”



## MEET THE TUNISIAN WOMEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF TUNISIA'S TOURISM INDUSTRY

Today, on National Women's Day, we have the privilege of highlighting six inspiring women working tirelessly to improve Tunisia's tourism industry. These featured women have varying occupations in regions throughout the country. And yet, despite their different roles, each is doing remarkable work to highlight Tunisia's past, enrich its present, and brighten its future through their dedication to making the tourism sector more inclusive and sustainable. Their stories and individual accomplishments can each stand alone, but, when told together, they represent a striking force in the future of the country and the futures of their respective regions. They are innovators, business owners, policy makers, content creators, social entrepreneurs, conservationists, culture heritage experts and more. It is our pleasure and honor at the USAID Visit Tunisia Activity to call them our partners. Read their stories and prepare to be inspired!



## Mouna Ghliiss

Mouna Ghliiss currently serves as the **Head of The Office of Studies and International Cooperation for Tunisia's Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts**. In her position, she supervises and supports many tourism projects, entities, businesses, and organizations ranging across the country. With an innovative approach to adopting and supporting new ideas, Mouna considers the many components of a thriving tourism industry and works to support them all, from the granular to the large-scale, while always keeping Tunisia's tourism vision in mind.

## Leila Ben Gacem

Leila Ben-Gacem is a **Tunisian social entrepreneur and conservationist focused on creating innovative opportunities for Tunisians related to cultural heritage and history**. Her passion for her people helped her found

Blue Fish, an organization that supports women artisans through training and connecting their goods and work with the private sector. Since her company's launch in 2006, she has continued to build and sustain flourishing tourism institutions such as hotel Dar Ben-Gacem in the Tunis Medina and Dar el Harka, a cultural hub and coworking space.



## Hadda Jinnaoui

Hadda runs a **mountaintop pottery workshop in Ain Draham with a wood-fired kiln**. She makes pieces in the traditional style, using local minerals as a glaze. Hadda learned the practice from her husband's family, and her passion and commitment for the craft shine through in her work. She's keeping this tradition alive and creating beautiful pottery as a result. Visitors can enjoy a demonstration of the traditional process and enjoy the presence of a truly talented artisan on a visit to her studio.

## Dora Milad

Dora was recently elected as **the first woman President of the Tunisian Hotel Federation**. She is an advocate for the tourism industry, endlessly working to protect hotels and small business owners through the economic challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Though she works with hotels, she acknowledges that accommodation is just one piece of Tunisia's tourism puzzle. She is known as an advocate for uniting the private and public sectors under a common dream. Dora hopes to build a tourism industry where Tunisians feel proud to welcome visitors to their homeland. This requires cooperation and unity, and she is the perfect person to lead this charge for change.



## Amel Hachana

**Amel is a lawyer and linguist with a rich background in cultural heritage.** As the General Director of Tunisia's Agency for the Development of Heritage and Cultural Promotion (AMVPPC), she contributes to the country's management, development, and promotion of cultural and archeological heritage. Amel is an expert in cultural preservation with previous experience working with UNESCO and Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) on various projects. She is extremely passionate about sharing her heritage with others and has dedicated her life to making sure that her traditions are not only passed down to the next generation, but shared with the world.



## Manel Jouini

Also known by her social media name, Tanwicha, Manel Jouini is a **Tunisian influencer and vlogger who strives to conserve and share traditional Tunisian recipes and dishes from all over the country.**

In doing so, she promotes Tunisia as an internationally undiscovered culinary treasure with endless opportunities to explore through taste. She is known for her colorful videos and lively commentary that inspire foodies worldwide to add Tunisia to their bucket lists.

