



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Activity Newsletter | May 2022

Visit Tunisia

DEAR TUNISIAN TOURISM FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS,

Welcome to our second USAID-Visit Tunisia Activity Newsletter. This May concludes the first year of our project, and we are thrilled to reflect upon all we have accomplished in this time. Since our last newsletter, our team has continued to execute major initiatives, launch programs, and host events, allowing us to meet and gain feedback from incredible Tunisians from all across the country.

As Tunis warms up and more tourists arrive to enjoy the high season, our passion for a thriving tourism industry continues to grow. We hope you enjoy reading about the successes of the last month, as they are stepping stones for the coming years of the project. We look forward to checking in again next month, with continued updates about the progress made to support a vigorous Tunisian tourism industry.

Warm regards,

Leila Calnan, Chief of Party
Visit Tunisia

USAID VISIT TUNISIA ACTIVITIES & NEWS



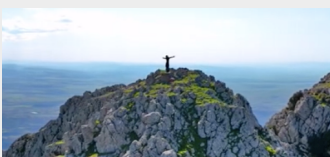
Supporting Innovative Tourism Products and Experiences

The Tourism Innovation Fund, the Visit Tunisia activity's first open call for applications, will provide \$15,000-\$50,000 grants to at least 10 tourism businesses and organizations seeking to create diverse tourism products, services, and experiences. [Learn More](#)



Momentum Builds for New National Tourism Strategy

In collaboration with the National Tourism Office (ONTT) and the Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts (MOTH), an inclusive National Tourism Strategy (NTS) continues to be developed and improved to grow and diversify the sector. [Learn More](#)



Inspiring Local Travelers to Explore Tunisia's Wonders

Visit Tunisia supported the National Tourism Office (ONTT) to launch a nationwide marketing campaign to encourage local travelers to venture out to their country's diverse tourism destinations. Check out some of the marketing content [here](#).



Opening Doors for Tunisian Event and Festival Organizers

Visit Tunisia and its partner, the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, are working closely with six heritage-focused event and festival organizers to improve their management and increase the impact and income of events through an intensive capacity-building program. [Learn More](#)



USAID Launches Investment Facilitation Support to Grow Tunisia's Tourism Sector

Visit Tunisia has partnered with CrossBoundary, a global investment advisory firm, to provide transaction advisory support to Tunisian tourism companies and projects seeking to raise private capital. The initiative aims to support 12+ businesses and mobilize at least \$20 million of capital. [Read more](#)

SUPPORTING INNOVATIVE TOURISM PRODUCTS AND EXPERIENCES

The USAID Visit Tunisia Activity is launching a new grant/technical assistance program to help innovative tourism businesses and organizations develop their activities.

The Tourism Innovation Fund, the project's first open call for applications, will provide \$15,000-\$50,000 grants to at least 10 tourism businesses and organizations seeking to create diverse tourism products, services, and experiences.

The fund aims to strengthen Tunisia's appeal as a cultural, natural, and beach holiday destination, particularly in underserved, less-visited regions and outside of peak tourism seasons. It will prioritize proposals that benefit local communities, support women and youth, generate jobs, promote sustainable resource management, and create synergies with other tourism stakeholders. In addition to grants, beneficiaries will receive tailored technical assistance from Visit Tunisia's team of tourism development, marketing, and management experts,



“There are still many unknown places and spots to be discovered around the country, even for Tunisians.”

Boutheina Gharbi

Visit Tunisia's Product Development Team Lead

Tourism Innovation Fund

الوكالة الأمريكية للتنمية الدولية
الذي يدعم المشاريع والمنظمة
على تطوير منتجات وتجارب سياحية

Visit Tunisia publicized the grant fund on its website and social media pages, through interviews with local press, and through two informational sessions that reached more than 150 people. The opportunity quickly received broad interest from Tunisian tourism actors, generating more than 300 applications from around the country. By July 31, Visit Tunisia's team will review the submissions and invite pre-selected applicants to a “co-creation” phase, in which they work with Visit Tunisia's team to refine their development plan and discuss potential assistance. Final applicants will be selected and awarded the grants by October 31.

The support is part of Visit Tunisia's ambitious goals to significantly increase tourism arrivals, especially to underserved regions, and industry jobs. By 2026, Visit Tunisia aims to increase visitor arrivals to 11.5 million beyond the traditional high season, increase visitor spending by 20%, increase tourism arrivals to underserved regions by 20%, and generate 15,000 jobs in the sustainable tourism industry.

“Tunisia has a rich natural, cultural, and historical heritage,” Boutheina Gharbi, Visit Tunisia's product development team lead, said of the grant fund's impact.

MOMENTUM BUILDS FOR NEW NATIONAL TOURISM STRATEGY

Visit Tunisia continued to support the National Tourism Office (ONTT) and the Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts (MOTH) to develop an inclusive National Tourism Strategy (NTS) that will grow and diversify the sector.

Following a successful NTS kickoff event on March 28 under the patronage of Tunisia's prime minister, Visit Tunisia helped organize and prepare for regional consultation workshops to draw input from regional tourism actors. The workshops, scheduled for May 12-23 in Djerba, Gabes, Sousse, Kasserine, Tozeur, and Tabarka, are helping to outline the strategy's implementation process, including its budget and monitoring mechanisms, flesh out its strategic objectives, and designate stakeholders' roles and responsibilities. The project helped put on the first of these workshops in Djerba on May 12, attended by 52 tourism representatives, including former Tunisian Tourism Minister Rene Trabelsi.



Former Tunisian Tourism Minister Rene Trabelsi speaks to participants of an NTS regional workshop in Djerba, on May 12, 2022.

Trabelsi, a native of Tunisia's southern island of Djerba who has been instrumental in promoting tourism to the region, delivered a message of hope and innovation for the sector.

"There's always a recovery after any crisis and we must seize the opportunity to recover the 2022 season and the years after," Trabelsi said at the meeting. "Tunisia is very rich in everything and has all the tourism components that travelers are seeking.... I'm optimistic that we will soon be able to turn the corner."

"The message that I want to give is that we need to continue to work, think and invent," he added.

Additional NTS workshops were held in Gabes on May 13, Sousse on May 16, and Sbeitla on May 17. The last workshops will take place in Tozeur on May 20 and Tabarka on May 23.

Based on stakeholder's feedback, the MOTH plans to finalize and publicly share the strategy by September 27. The new strategy is expected to significantly increase tourism arrivals and expenditure this year.



Participants of an NTS workshop in Gabes on May 13 discuss tourism strategy.

INSPIRING LOCAL TRAVELERS TO EXPLORE TUNISIA'S WONDERS

Visit Tunisia supported the National Tourism Office (ONTT) to launch a nationwide marketing campaign to encourage local travelers to venture out to their country's diverse tourism destinations.

The #Weekend_Tunisia campaign – part of the ONTT's Domestic Marketing Campaign, "Tounes Lik" -- kicked off with captivating videos and social media content promoting some of the country's unique and under-visited tourism spots, such as the mountain town of Kef, the holy city of Kairouan, the medina of Tunis, and the natural springs of Zaghouan.



A video by content creator partner DreamerWildandFree shows the mountains of Zaghouan, a dream destination for hikers and climbers.

The campaign will create additional buzz through an interactive weekend getaway competition that invites local travelers to create and share their own weekend travel experiences.

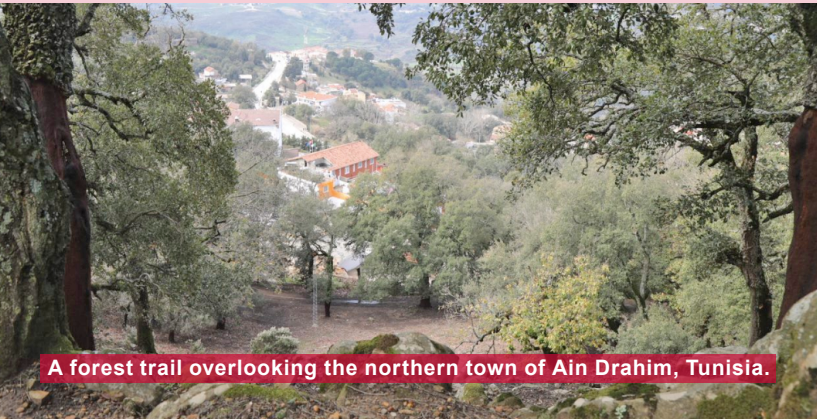
Visit Tunisia's support for the campaign is helping to reach some of its key objectives -- to increase domestic tourism and promote brand awareness of the country as a diverse tourism hub. Tunisia is much more than a sun and sea destination – it has a range of stunning attractions, from vast desert, to green oases, to ancient archeological relics.

The videos, which highlight these regions' natural beauty, cultural heritage, culinary offerings, and adventure activities, were produced by partner content creators DreamerWildandFree and Tanwicha, and have already made a big splash. To date, the #Weekend_Tunisia content has generated more than 1.5 million views on Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, and appears to be accomplishing its goal of driving enthusiasm for domestic tourism.

"Thank you for these videos that make us love our country even more!" said one Tunisian viewer on Facebook.



A video by partner content creator Tanwicha highlights fresh pastries and sweets in the medina of Tunis.



A forest trail overlooking the northern town of Ain Drahim, Tunisia.

In the coming months, the campaign will roll out additional promotional content for more Tunisian destinations, such as Bizerte, Tabarka and Korbus.

OPENING DOORS FOR TUNISIAN EVENT AND FESTIVAL ORGANIZERS

Visit Tunisia and its partner, the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, are working closely with six heritage-focused event and festival organizers to improve their management and increase the impact and income of events through an intensive capacity-building program. The program – the Visit Tunisia Smithsonian Folklife Incubator -- will provide these organizers with custom technical assistance and one-on-one mentoring with industry experts improve their programming, community engagement, design, and marketing. The program will kick off with an in-person learning exchange visit to the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC in June 2022, sponsored in partnership with the United States Department of State.



The festival, an exposition of living cultural heritage attended by more than 1.5 million worldwide guests, will provide Tunisian organizers with critical insight into event/festival organization and best practices in cultural heritage representation. Participants will be involved in festival preparations/build out, may volunteer during the event, and will be invited to meetings with Smithsonian staff and festival team members. Participants will also visit select Smithsonian museums and experience the culture of Washington, DC. Smithsonian will coordinate and facilitate non-Folklife Festival visits/experiences for participants, along with their direct participation in the festival.



Visitors attend the 2014 Smithsonian Folklife Festival.
(Francisco Guerra/ Smithsonian Institute)

Visit Tunisia selected the six participants based on criteria such as their demonstrated commitment to community engagement and cultural heritage representation, potential economic impact, and geographic representation. Applications were open to all Tunisian event/festival organizers who took part in Smithsonian's training workshops throughout Tunisia in March.

After the Smithsonian Folklife festival, Visit Tunisia and Smithsonian's teams will work with the Tunisian organizers to co-create a plan with targeted areas of improvement and impact. We expect this capacity-building program to help Tunisian event/festival organizers improve the standards of their events, including through good management techniques and visitor engagement, positively impacting tourism development and visitors' experience in Tunisia.

The program is a fruit of Visit Tunisia's partnership with the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, one of the world's premier cultural heritage centers. Drawing on its previous tourism support in Armenia and Bosnia, Smithsonian will provide participatory workshops, mentorship programs, and exchange opportunities for Tunisian tourism stakeholders throughout the five-year activity, while working with in-country partners to create cultural heritage tourism experiences that benefit both visitors and communities.

"Tunisia's living culture is as diverse as its natural landscapes" said Halle Butvin, director of special projects at the center. "We are so excited to support communities in sharing their stories with the world—through local festivals, tourism, and Smithsonian platforms."

Tunisian event and festival organizers should stay tuned for additional partnership and support opportunities, including an upcoming Festival and Events Management Online Course. Complete this brief survey to be included in the 2022 Calendar of Tunisian Events and Festivals, and to receive information about upcoming training, workshops, and grant opportunities.

USAID LAUNCHES INVESTMENT FACILITATION SUPPORT TO GROW TUNISIA'S TOURISM SECTOR

Visit Tunisia has partnered with CrossBoundary, a global investment advisory firm, to provide transaction advisory support to Tunisian tourism companies and projects seeking to raise private capital.

Founded in 2011, CrossBoundary aims to unlock capital for sustainable growth and strong returns in emerging and underserved markets. To date, the group has facilitated more than \$800 million in transactions worldwide.

CrossBoundary's advisory supports helps accelerate the growth of SMEs in a wide range of sectors, including agriculture, health, education, and information and communication technology.

Under Visit Tunisia, CrossBoundary plans to support more than twelve high-potential Tunisian SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) to increase their access to capital and mobilize at least \$20 million of capital in Tunisia's tourism sector. The firm's comprehensive support, to both capital-seekers and investors, includes preparing marketing documentation, financial models, market research, feasibility studies, investor matching, deal structuring, and more.

CrossBoundary's target capital seekers include alternative accommodation providers, adventure tourism companies, cultural tourism companies, handicrafts businesses, tourism technology-enabled businesses, tourism transportation service providers, hospitality suppliers, and tourism education institutions.



To reach its ambitious objectives, CrossBoundary has divided its support into three phases – project launch and landscaping, identification, and implementation.

In the first phase, CrossBoundary consulted stakeholders and investors in conversations and surveys to map Tunisia's tourism landscape. It then developed a tourism capital map and conducted comprehensive analysis of the investment landscape, including investment barriers and opportunities. This informed a work plan detailing its planned approach, defining strategic priorities, and presenting innovative financing interventions in the tourism sector. This work plan will inform CrossBoundary's activities over the course of the Visit Tunisia project.

Le programme Visit Tunisia démarre ses activités de soutien à l'investissement touristique

A screenshot of the Visit Tunisia website. At the top, there are navigation tabs: COURS, GRAPHIQUES, HISTORIQUES, ANALYSE ET CONSEILS, ACTUS, and FORUM. Below the tabs, there is a header for 'TUNINDEX' with a value of 7294.73 and a change of +0.16%. A line chart shows the index over time, with a 6-month view selected. The chart shows a general upward trend from 1981 to 1993. Below the chart, there is a red banner with white text: 'Tunisian finance site ilBoursa covers Visit Tunisia and CrossBoundary's investment facilitation support program.' The main content area features the USAID logo and the text 'VISIT TUNISIA'.

In its second phase (identification), CrossBoundary prioritized potential interventions to address working capital and other specialized financing needs of Tunisian tourism organizations, such as asset financing. The firm also identified potential SMEs that could benefit from such financing support by conducting outreach to groups identified through the landscaping process and their vast network, while Visit Tunisia published a digital expression of interest on its website to attract potential beneficiaries. The initiative was also featured in major Tunisian press outlets, such as finance website ilBoursa.

CrossBoundary/Visit Tunisia then evaluated potential beneficiaries based on criteria such as their sustainability, compliance with local regulations, impact on local communities, target transaction size, transaction timeline, and debt history. (Find out more information about partnership eligibility here).

To date, the initiative has identified 41 potential SME partners and evaluated 25, including highly promising candidates.

In CrossBoundary's final support phase (Implementation), it will provide targeted transaction support to select SMEs. Transaction support will be flexible and may be provided in multiple forms, such as investment facilitation, capital raise for public private partnerships (PPPs), or structuring of innovative interventions.

To stay up to date about SMEs receiving support through Visit Tunisia and CrossBoundary's partnership, follow Visit Tunisia's website and Facebook page, where we will post inspiring stories of tourism SMEs and initiatives throughout the country.