

HARVARD

ALUMNI TRAVELS



EXPLORING TUNISIA: ROYAL CITIES, BERBER VILLAGES, AND DUNES OF TUNISIA SEPTEMBER 8-19, 2022 DETAILED ITINERARY

SCHEDULE BY DAY

B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, R=Reception, D=Dinner

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 8

DEPART U.S.

Depart the U.S on independent flights to Tunisia today.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

ARRIVE TUNIS, TUNISIA

This evening, arrive in Tunis and meet your local guide and driver. Continue to your hotel, Dar el Jeld, for check in.

Enjoy a light dinner on arrival.

Overnight: *Dar el Jeld (D)*

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

TUNIS

Begin today with a visit to Tunis old quarter. Stop in at Dar Lasram. Once home to the Lasram family, who provided the beys with scribes, this magnificent building dates from the early 19th century and was one of the first historic mansions restored under the auspices of the Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina de Tunis, the offices of which are now based here. The interior features magnificent, richly tiled rooms and courtyards. A small collection of materials

documenting the Association's work preserving the historic fabric of the medina is on display. The group will be met and given a briefing on the project.

As in all Arab cities that developed during the Middle Ages, streets around the Great Mosque contain souks dealing in anything from Chechias (traditional Tunisian hats) to perfumes and carpets. Walk through the Souk el Attarine (Perfume Souk) dating back to the thirteenth century. Here one can still find some original shops painted in gold and green and stocked with stoppered bottles and jars of incense. Continue through the Souk of the Turks and stop at the seventeenth century Youssef Dey Mosque which, with its octagonal minaret, reflects early Turkish influences in the city. Wander through the Souk des Femmes (Women's Souk) where local women buy their fabric to make the traditional sifsaris. Pass by the goldsmith and carpet shops and conclude the tour at the Dar ben Abdallah Museum, devoted to the "daily life of Tunis in the nineteenth century." It is located inside a nineteenth century palace and features Italian influenced architecture of that time. The entrance leads into a stone hallway, which in turn opens into a colonnaded marble courtyard complete with Italian fountain. The walls are colorfully tiled and surmounted by intricate stucco. Current exhibits include costumes, household furniture and jewelry.

Lunch today will be at Essaraya.

Continue on to visit to the Bardo Museum, once described as "The Bey's Fairytale Residence." The earliest exhibits dating back to the seventh century B.C. are Punic remains such as pots, lamps, stelae and masks. It is from those pieces that archaeologists have put together a picture of Carthaginian society and what it owed to the

civilizations of the Egyptians and Greeks. The Bardo's most exquisite exhibits are the Roman and Byzantine mosaics taken from sites all over Tunisia. Whole floors and walls are paved with mosaics, many virtually intact dating from the second century B.C. to the seventh century A.D. The museum also includes a well displayed Islamic section with examples of early Koranic scripts, jewelry and sixteenth century prints of Tunisia.

End the day at the American Embassy and learn more about the USAid program here. The 2011 revolution was a powerful expression of Tunisians' desire to have their voice heard in the economic and political life of their country. Following the 2011 Revolution, the Tunisian government embarked on a series of efforts to improve the quality of governance, advance administrative reforms, fight corruption, increase social inclusion, and reduce regional disparities. USAID Tunisia supports these efforts through economic and governance assistance programs to promote both economic participation, (e.g. by helping small firms create jobs for youth and marginalized populations) and democratic consolidation.

Welcome dinner this evening at an eighteenth century palace where superb food is served in beautiful surroundings.

Overnight: *Dar el Jeld (B, L, D)*

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 11

TUNIS

Begin the day with a morning briefing to learn more about recent issues of freedom of speech and the media (print and internet) in Tunisia.

Continue on to Carthage, founded around 800 B.C. by the Phoenicians. At that time the Phoenicians had established a trading empire throughout the Mediterranean and had developed many important port cities along the Tunisian coastline. According to archaeological records, Carthage flourished for centuries until the Romans in 149 B.C. ordered the Carthaginians to evacuate their city. When they refused, the Romans laid siege for three years. In 146 B.C. the sacking of Carthage by the Romans and the slaughter of many hundreds of thousands ended with a complete destruction of the city and with a final devastation as the Romans ploughed salt into the city's soil. It was not until 46 B.C. that the

Romans rebuilt the city and ruled it directly from Rome as its nearest African province. After passing through the hands of the Byzantines, the city finally ended up under Arab rule in the seventh century and became a quarry. Marble and its columns were carted off for use in mosques all over Tunisia.

Begin the tour of Carthage with a visit to the Archaeological Museum with its unparalleled collection of Punic artifacts. Continue to the Tophet (Sanctuary Punique) where the temples of the Carthaginian gods, Tanit and Baal once were located. It is the site of human sacrifice which was practiced here for more than half a millennium. Burial pits and funerary urns were unearthed at this location and commemorative stelae are piled up to the side.

Descend from the Tophet to the remains of the amphitheater and a group of huge cisterns that formed part of Carthage's fresh water system. From here walk to the site of the Antonine Baths, marked by a towering pillar. The remaining foundation covers an area of nine acres. An area of this size is directly related to the population and demonstrates the vast extent of Roman Carthage. Within the foundation the ruins of the Christian Basilica can be found. Wander through the ghostly remnants of Carthage's past to the site of the Trophee where Dido (Aeneas's rejected lover) is said to have thrown herself to a fiery death. Elsewhere are stores for fuel and remnants of pipes that carried heated water and steam.

Enjoy a delightful lunch at Les Umbrelles overlooking the water

The final stop for the day will be at the cliff top village of Sidi Bou Said. Its gleaming houses and stunning location commanding the Gulf of Tunis make a wonderful spot. Enjoy some tea at Cafe Des Nattes and wander through the maze of lanes and alleys that resolutely guard their shuttered ambience surrounded by white mute walls and studded blue doors. For centuries Sidi Bou Said has attracted generations of European artists and writers and today can be called a "living museum."

At leisure for dinner.

Overnight: *Dar el Jeld (B, L)*

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

KAIROUAN

After breakfast drive to Dougga, the City of Temples, perched on a craggy hillside above fertile hills of groves in central Tunisia. Despite its status as a preserved Roman town, the settlement is actually quite a bit older than that – the discovery of dolmens (Bronze Age burial structures) within the city limits indicates a human presence since at least 2000 BCE. Though most of what remains of the city is from the Roman era, there are several significant Numidian structures including the Punic-Libyan Mausoleum. It was during this time that the site was known as Thugga.

The site owes its state of preservation to remoteness and lack of modern encroachment. Among its structures is a theater that could seat practically the entire population of the town – around 3,500. There is also a circus for chariot racing, a large villa, several baths dating from 300 CE, and two triumphal arches.

Walk to the Temple of Saturn; in its foundations was evidence of a pre-Roman sanctuary dedicated to the Carthaginian God Gal and continue on to the Temple of Augustan Piety and the Temple of Mercury. The most dominating structure however is the Capitol, dedicated to the gods Jupiter, Juno and Minerva and to the glory of co-emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucus Verus. It was erected during the second century A.D. and offers magnificent views of the entire site. Located on the Western side is the Temple of June Caelestis known for its semi-circular colonnade which adds to Dougga's deviations from the Roman norm.

Continue on to Le Kef which means "rock" in Arabic and refers to the town's dramatic setting on a rocky outcrop just below the summit of Jebel Dyr. Considered to be the capital of the Tell Region which covers much of Tunisia, Le Kef is Tunisia's most significant inland center after Kairouan. It was a fortress town formed in 450 B.C. and tools have been found in surrounding caves and woodlands dating back 50,000 years. In Roman times, Le Kef became an important trading post. Le Kef has two Kasbahs which are linked by a drawbridge and enclosed by a wall. Jemaa el Kebir is one of the oldest mosques in Tunisia. The group will be met here by staff from the Association for the Protection of the Medina and led on a private tour of this gem.

Arrive in Kairouan late afternoon and drive to the Hotel Kasbah, built in a fort in the walls of the holy city.

In the center of the country one finds the country's Islamic heartland. Here, the rhythms of the day come from the call to prayer that rings out five times a day from the minarets of the mosque.

Dinner at the hotel this evening.

Overnight: Hotel Kasbah (B, L, D)

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

KAIROUAN

Kairouan has always been an important religious center and not only for the Tunisians. It was in Kairouan that the Malikite School of Sunni Muslims developed, and it is the fourth holiest city in the Muslim world. A full day sightseeing of this first North African holy city begins with a walk through the heart of the city's medina where a thriving community has been buying and selling much the same way since the city was founded. Walk past sellers of carpets, leather goods, brass work and spices to the Great Mosque with its enormous buttressed walls, sturdy ornamental gates and three tiered minaret. Standing at the nexus of 15 different thoroughfares, in the center of the country between the mountains and the sea, it is considered the fourth holiest site in Islam after Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem

As you walk through the courtyards of the mosque, you are treading across over a millennia of history. The magnificent structure — the oldest Muslim place of worship in Africa, founded in the year 670 — illustrates the mixed influences of pre-Islamic, Roman, and Byzantine architecture.

Walk along tiny, twisting streets to the Mosque of the Three Doors which is closed to visitors but has an impressive carved facade with three pointed horseshoe arches. Several bands of inscription are topped by a cornice on 25 supports. Nearby is the fourteenth century Zaouia of Sidi Abid Al Ghariani Sahab, the burial place of Sidi Abid a thirteenth century saint. Of particular interest is the room with the mausoleum. The ceiling is extremely finely worked with fine plaster all around. The building itself is very beautiful, based around three courtyards. Continue by foot to a medieval well

where water is pumped out by a camel walking around in circles.

The final stop for the morning will be at the courtyard of the Zaouia Sidi Sahab which is perhaps one of the most beautiful mosques in North Africa. Its ornate and intricate decoration could not be in greater contrast to the austere grandeur of the Great Mosque. A seventeenth century minaret stands at one corner of the main courtyard. Beneath it a tiled archway leads into a series of antechambers, each of which is tiled with complex, colored designs based on stylized plant, urn and arch motifs. Green benches, positioned for the many pilgrims that come here, line walls topped by restrained stucco plasterwork. (Non-Muslims are not permitted inside the mosque)

After lunch visit the Aghlabid Pools built to hold water carried more than 20 miles. The ancient town of Kairouan is located in a semi-arid region and water supply and storage has been a problem for more than a thousand years. The solution took the form of the majestic Aghlabid Basins, a huge and highly advanced work of engineering during the Middle Ages. The hydraulic ensemble, built in the 9th century by the Aghlabid Dynasty, has provided water for townspeople for more than a millennium. The Aghlabid Basins are composed of two connected cisterns which together form an open-air reservoir, fed by a 36-mile aqueduct that sources water from the hills beyond town. Water flowed into the smaller pool, which serves as a sort of filter, collecting stray sediments before the water is transferred to the larger basin, which is an impressive 16 feet deep and 420 feet in diameter.

The final stop for the day will be at a bakery where we have arranged a presentation to see how Makrouth, the famous sweet made in Kairouan is made. Makrouth is a very sticky pastry filled with date or fig paste and cooked with thick syrup. Return to the hotel for dinner and overnight.

Dinner at the hotel this evening.

Overnight: *Hotel Kasbah (B, L, D)*

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14 DJERBA

Full day drive to Djerba. En route stop at El Djem, one of the most extraordinary sites in Tunisia, thanks

to the marvelous ancient amphitheater located in the heart of the town. The amphitheater here is one of the largest Roman amphitheaters ever built designed to seat a crowd of 35,000 people/ Today it is both the largest and the best-preserved Roman amphitheater in Africa. The precise construction date is debated, but most historians believe construction began in the year 238. This was not exactly an auspicious year for the Roman Empire, 238 came to be known historically as the "Year of the Six Emperors." In just one year, six different people were proclaimed Emperors of Rome. Locally, the year 238 was particularly tumultuous, as it included a revolt by the population of Thysdrus (El Djem), who opposed the enormous taxation amounts being levied by the Emperor Maximinius's local procurator. The procurator was assassinated and soon after the uprisings, Gordian the First was appointed Emperor, along with Gordian the Second, his son, to co-serve as Roman leaders. Although their rule was brief—they only ruled for about 20 days—it was long enough to start the construction of the imposing amphitheater.

From historical sources it appears that El Djem also had a colossal temple and one can estimate that the population of the town was around 100,000 in its heyday, second only to Carthage. The key to the city's prosperity was water which the Romans were able to conserve by constructing a vast complex of reservoirs and underground cisterns. With this supply of water, wealth was assured and eight years after the construction of the amphitheater, in 238 A.D. the city almost pulled off a revolt against Rome. The theater really is a superb monument and the sheer size of the ochre stone walls rising above the ordinary dwellings is an experience not to be missed.

A short drive away is the Museum of El Djem which the group will visit. It houses many lovely mosaics as well as the remains of some luxury villas which are still being excavated.

Stop for lunch at Le Corail Restaurant in Sfax. Sfax has an attractive city center and was founded in 849 near the site of a small Roman town. It quickly became prosperous by trading in the products of the Sahel's olive trees. Remaining largely independent until the beginning of the seventeenth century, it strongly resisted the imposition of the French Protectorate but was later, in 1881, invaded by the French who stormed the city, defacing many of the mosques. Hedi Chaker and Farhat Hached, two of Tunisia's trade union leaders involved in securing the

country's independence and whose names are seen on street signs across the country, both came from Sfax.

After lunch continue on to Djerba and the *Dar Dhiafa Hotel*. This small hotel closeted away in an old Jewish village, announces itself with a pair of flaming torches flanking a door in a blank wall. Within, four traditional houses have been knocked together to create a labyrinth of narrow passages, small courtyards and secluded corners.

Dinner at the hotel this evening.

Overnight: *Dar Dhiafa Hotel (B, L, D)*

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

DJERBA

Djerba has an ancient history and, according to legend, is the mythical land where Homer's Odysseus ate the 'fruit of forgetfulness'. In spite of its small size, Djerba has 246 mosques. Many of its women are traditionally dressed in white or somber colors with a veil and straw hat on top. Djerbans are amongst the most conservative Tunisians and make great efforts to keep their particular identity intact.

Begin with a visit to Ghriba synagogue, a place of pilgrimage and the most important Jewish shrine in North Africa. The group will be met here by Perez Trabelsi, head of Djerba's Jewish community. The history of the Jews goes back to the time of the Berber tribes who have been notably pragmatic in the matter of religion with many of them, all over Africa, having accepted Judaism. One finds in certain pockets of North Africa, including parts of Libya, Berber communities from whom Judaism is still an important part of their life. Historically, Jews came to Djerba as a result of the successive waves of refugees from Jewish persecution in Europe who found comparative safety in Tunisia under both Arabs and Turks. Although once estimated at 67,000 people, the size of the Jewish population in Tunisia today numbers around one thousand individuals. The present synagogue was built in the 1920's, but the original was supposed to mark the spot where a holy stone fell from heaven in 600 B.C. The synagogue's interior is surprisingly brightly tiled and painted with a wall displaying one of the oldest Torahs in the world. Perez Trabelsi will talk a little about the synagogue, the Jewish community and the April 11, 2002 suicide attack. Each year in May

thousands of Jews flock to La Ghriba Synagogue to participate in an annual pilgrimage.

Continue on to visit the charming and informative Guellala Museum which houses an excellent display of exhibitions on traditional Tunisian life.

Enjoy a special lunch at Restaurant Chef Haouari. Haouari trained in Europe and then returned to Djerba to open a modest and superb local restaurant. Set just inland from the eastern coast, it serves a handful of traditional dishes including a Jewish influenced dish featuring couscous, fish and quince. (Might have closed so instead would be Dar Hassine)

Continue on to Hmout Souk where all of Djerba's collection of distinguished mosques can be found. Although visitors are not admitted into the interior, the exterior of the mosques are worth seeing because of the unusual shapes of their domes and minarets. One of the most unique buildings is the El May Mosque which resembles a tiny, whitewashed castle, with enormous buttresses and an acorn shaped minaret.

Overnight: *Dar Dhiafa Hotel (B, L, D)*

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16

KSAR GHILANE

Cross back into the mainland and explore Tunisia's fortified villages by four-wheel drive vehicles. All hill villages in this area had a ksar – a fortified communal granary – built to store and protect the Berber's grain. These ksour (the plural form) consisted of a number of curved cells – ghorfas – where the grain and other produce were kept safe. While most ksour have been pulled down or are crumbling, some have survived intact. Stop first at the oval fortification of Ksar Ouled Soltane. Here, rounded, protected structures built completely of cracked, dry mud face the center of the castle-like granary, while steep outdoor staircases give the area the appearance of another world entirely. Constructed by Berber people, the ghorfas, or stacked grain-holding buildings have survived the hot climate since the 15th century. Although they have now been abandoned for many years, the Ksar was built for protection from raids, and designed to remain cool during arid weather near the Sahara Desert. Star War fans will undoubtedly recognize Ksar Ouled as the slave quarters where Anakin and his mother

lived in the Phantom Menace. Even more surprising for fans of Lucas' films, is that the area of Tunisia is actually called Tataouine, styled as Tatoonine for the films.

Enjoy lunch at Hotel Sangho or Realais Dar Guermadssa

Continue on to Chenini and visit a local house. A large wooden door leads into a small courtyard where olive oil is still produced by traditional methods. Camels are attached to a mill wheel that squeezes large piles of olives. Villagers then spread wicker trays with the squashed olives and stack them on top of each other. Through a simple but ingenious pulley system and the use of a 300 year old log, the wicker trays were crushed and the resulting olive oil pressed into a large container. Chenini was once a trading center for pottery and agricultural produce and from the ridge one can still see an old caravan path snaking over the neighboring hill. At the local school the 200 children who live in the village, speak Berber at home but learn Arabic and French at school.

End the day at Ksar Jouamaa which is rarely visited and offers an excellent introduction to these ksars.

Overnight will be the *Pansy Tented Camp Hotel* located among a sea of sand dunes in the oasis of Ksar Ghilane, on the edge of the Grand Erg Oriental. Wave upon wave of sand dune reaches to the horizon and beyond. Within this landscape sits a walled enclosure of alternating white canvas tents equipped with private bathrooms and decorated with striking kilims.

Overnight: *Pansy Tented Camp Hotel (B, L, D)*

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

TOZEUR

For early risers the reward will be a camel ride to view the sunrise from the walls of the crumbling ancient fort at Ksar Ghilane, one of the southernmost points of the Roman Empire. From here the Romans kept watch on desert nomads.

After breakfast, drive to Matmata, the most famous of several villages that consist of troglodyte houses. The local people first dug out their underground homes in the 4th century BC. Warm in winter and cool in summer, the homes were the perfect way to live in an area with no trees to provide building

material. One or two pits dug into the ground served as courtyards, and living quarters were hallowed out of the walls of these pits, sometimes on two levels. Driving through the atmospheric lunar landscape will remind one of the Star Wars movie, much of which was filmed in this area. Stop at Toujane which appears suddenly and looks as if it is clinging to a mountainside. It is a beautiful village on an exceptional site and there will be a chance to wander through the village admiring kilims and carpets.

Continue on to the Berber village of Tamezret where the scenery is quite extraordinary, a mixture of the moon and the Grand Canyon. The village is built on the side of a mountain and the houses which are built of dried earth blend perfectly with the scenery. Stroll through the narrow streets and walk to the top of the village from where there is a marvelous view across the desert. Nearby is Toujane, a Berber hill top village less touched by tourism.

After lunch at Douz arrive at Kébili oasis, a town which gained notoriety by being the main dropping off point for slaves captured further south. Indeed, the slave market here closed barely 100 years ago. A large part of the oasis town's population are Sudanese.

When thousands of years ago, the Mediterranean flooded much of low lying North Africa, the hinterland of Tunisia was severely affected, and when the sea retreated into the Gulf of Gabes, it left a legacy of salt lakes or chotts. The largest was Chott el Djerid, which split Tunisia in half. For a lake, the Chott possess very little water and would be of no interest if it were not for the fascinating sight of one mirage after another. Sunlight, reflective salt crystals and the flat surface as far as the eye can see, create images of palmeries where the map denotes only desert.

Arrive in the ancient Roman frontier town of Tozeur late afternoon and transfer to the lovely *Anantara Tozeur Resort*. A modern fusion of Moorish and Berber architecture, Anantara Tozeur is a true desert sanctuary, with desert tones and desert views.

Dinner at leisure this evening.

Overnight: *Anantara Tozeur Resort (B, L, D)*

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

TOZEUR

This morning begin exploring the delightful town of Tozeur. Stop in at the Dar Cherait Museum whose exhibits depicting life among the area's different social groups

Continue by four-wheel drive vehicles to the beautiful mountain oases of Tamerza, which, like its desert counterparts, were determined by the force of water. Most of the oases in this area are located in ravines and narrow gorges. After a lovely lunch at the Tamerza Palace Hotel, set out for Belvedere Rock, which has wonderful views of the oasis where it's surrounding gushing springs serve as bathing spots for the local boys and stop at Chebika.

End the day at Mides, one of the most attractive of Tunisia's mountain oases, with a stunning gorge stretching for 3 km. The gorge was used as part of the village's natural defense in older days.

The gorge is distinct with its round shapes, and strong contrasts in colour. The modern village is no more than number of white houses scattered around the barren hill above the oasis. It is like the locals didn't know how to arrange themselves when external threats were gone in modern times.

The traditional village was abandoned in 1969 when a flood after 22 days of rain destroyed many of the houses.

Enjoy a delightful farewell dinner this evening.

Overnight: *Anantara Tozeur Resort (B, L, D)*

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 19

DEPART

Depart this morning for independent flights home.