

## **Geography Study Adventure In Tunisia – 7 Days**

### **Day 1 Depart UK, Arrive Tunisia**

This morning you will fly to Tunisia. When you arrive at Tunis Airport you will be transferred to the northern suburb of Tunis: Carthage. When you reach the northern suburb, you will be able to check into your hotel and freshen up.

### **Day 2 Tunis/ Bardo Museum – The Souks & The Medina**

After breakfast you will depart for Tunis Medina, the 12th Century old town. This is a site not to be missed. It is a UNESCO world heritage site and home to bustling souks, a confusing maze of colourful streets. As well as the revered Zitouna Mosque, where worshippers have been called to prayer for more than one thousand years. Housed within a magnificent 13th century building, the Bardo museum contains one of the world's largest collections of mosaics. These mosaics, gathered from throughout Tunisia, have been ordered into the various periods of Tunisia's history: prehistoric, Carthaginian, Roman, Christian and Islamic.

After all your sightseeing you will return to your hotel where the evening will be at your leisure.

### **Day 3 Kairoun - Sbeitla - Tozeur**

This morning you will discover Kairouan "the city of 50 mosques". The spiritual home of all Tunisians, the city itself rises like a dream of ochre and tawny beige, serene in its 13 centuries of Islamic culture, authentic and proud of the wondrous beauty of its mosques, the symphony of its columns and arches, the exquisite delicacy of the stone work. The towering and sober dignity of the Great Mosque seems to embody the spirituality that has inspired artists and poets from its creation until the present day.

Later this afternoon you will visit Sbeitla. Emperor Vespasian and his sons began to develop Sbeitla after the Third Augustan Legion established a garrison at Ammaedara. The town found success in the olive industry during the 2nd century BC and continued to be prosperous through to the 3rd and 4th centuries despite the decline of the Roman Empire in many other provinces. During this time many churches were built in Sbeitla, some belonging to Rome and other to the Donatist section. Many of these churches still stand and are viewed as some of the most impressive monuments left by the Roman Empire.

### **Day 4 Tozeur – Study Visits**

Today we have many educational study visits planned with the following options:

#### **Oasis & Date Farm**

The 250,000 date palms, and all the vegetation in between, get the water from 200 springs. The entire oasis is about 11 sq km, with Tozeur as the large centre, but there are small settlements scattered around the area. Around the city, nature is far from flat, and tiny valleys and riverbeds are found all over. Between the palms that are penetrating the city from all sides, a complicated irrigation system is found, together with plants and trees, that give plums, grapes and strawberries. In older times, Tozeur had a very strict system of sharing water between plantations. In modern times, water pumps have made it possible with more intense agriculture. The sad result so far is a fall of the water table.

## **Hot Springs**

The best view of the oasis in Tozeur is to be had from the Belvédère, a viewpoint on the Ras el Aioun (alt. 20m/65ft), a pile of boulders 3km/2mi west of the town on the edge of the oasis. At the foot are the numerous springs (aioun), including one at a temperature of 30°C/86°F, from which the rocks take their name. From the top there are fine views of the town, the oasis and the surrounding desert.

## **Olive Oil Farming**

Tunisia's 1.6 million hectares of olive trees represent almost 19% of all olive tree orchards worldwide, in second place behind Spain but ahead of Italy and Turkey.

Tunisian olive oil has so many advantages and strong potential

- 1.6 million hectares of olive lives
- 56 million olive trees
- 745,000 tons of olives produced annually on average
- 173,000 tons of olive oil produced annually on average
- 115,000 tons of olive oil exported annually on average
- 1140 oil presses

Tunisia has the second biggest area planted in olive trees in the world. The production of olive oil holds a strategic position in Tunisian agriculture, representing one third of all cultivatable land on which 56 million olive trees stand. 32% are new plantings and 68% are in full production.

## **Processing of olive oil**

Tunisian olive oil is not identified as such on foreign markets, since most of it is exported in bulk. There is potential to invest in one of the most promising areas for development of Tunisian olive oil : processing in assorted quantities (0.5 to 20 liters) and packaging (glass, metal).

## **Vineyards – Processing and Degustation**

In Tunisia, the art of vine growing and winemaking dates back to the earliest antiquity. The agronomist Magon, who lived in Carthage at the time of the Phoenicians, recorded in his Treatise of Agronomy viticulture, wine-producing practices that are still in use nowadays. In the Roman mosaics, Dionysos-Bacchus, the god and guardian of wine, contributes to ride high in triumph.

Today, Tunisian wine continues to boast the high repute that the sun, soil and time-honoured Tunisian traditions have conferred on it. Well situated on the most fertile lands, the vineyards extend over an area of some 10.000 hectares (for desert grapes) and of 15.000 hectares (for wine grapes.) They grow on hillsides blessed with an average annual temperature that never rises above 20° and with a rainfall ranging between 250 and 500 mm a year.

The quality of the Tunisian wines is rich in alcohol content, without excess of acidity, and soft, with the character of new wines and an alcohol percentage of 11 to 12° for both red and rosé, and a slightly lower percentage for white. The yield is of the order of 480.000 hl, with 60 to 70 % rosé, 25 to 35 % red, and 5 to 10 % white.

## **Date Farming**

The date farming projects are located at the northern edge of the Sahara near the great Chott el Djerid salt lake. The region is popular among tourists for its oases, camel rides and the old town of Tozeur and Douz. While the date is a symbol of the intrinsic wealth of the region, date farmers are faced with challenging growing conditions and falling yields.

There are approximately 80 Tunisian date farmers that produce the bio and fair date clusters come from the oases of Bargouthia and Derjine. Gebana Maghreb provides the small farmers with support and education in organic farming, offers pre-financing and pays prices that afford a viable economic existence. The dates move on to be processed at Gebana Maghreb in Kebili.

The date growing season traditionally begins in January when the remains of the previous harvest are cleared off the palms. Date palms are dioecious, i.e. male and female plants exist separately. For each male palm, 100 female palms must be planted. In March, when the spadices are ready, the flowers must be pollinated manually. This is done by pulling cloth saturated with pollen over the flower clusters. A few months later, as the fruit clusters grow heavy and the harvest approaches, they are hung in a way that encourages the fruit to further develop. Ripe dates are very sensitive to moisture and to protect the ripening fruit from rain the clusters are covered from September onwards with reusable plastic bags.

At the end of October the harvest begins and the dates are gathered by hand. The palms must be climbed to be harvested and also to provide any care or maintenance: this can amount to 10 ascents per palm, per year!

We will take an evening Caleche Ride through the Palm & Olive Groves of Tozeur Hotel 3\*: Tozeur

## **Day 5 Tozeur - Chott El Jerid - Douz**

This morning visit the Oasis of Mountains by 4 wheel drive. The original Star Wars trilogy attracted thousands of additional visitors to the spectacular desert region and the structures are still intact.

After lunch we explore the shimmering Chott El Jerid salt lake and the remote mountain oasis of southern Tunisia. We continue to Douz, the oasis town known as the “Gateway to the Sahara”. A camel trek over the majestic sand dunes of the Sahara desert is an exciting conclusion to the day.

## **Day 6 Gabes – Matmata - El Djem - Hammamet**

Today we will visit Gabes-Matmata, while we are there we will have a visit to the Troglodyte underground houses, which date from the fourth century BC and were used in the Star Wars films. The troglodyte houses form a circular crater and you can actually stand on the edge of them and look down on them.

This afternoon will be spent at El Djem, which represents the glory of the Roman Empire. It is the third largest colosseum in the Roman world, dominating the local town and nearby countryside.

Hammamet is possibly the best-known resort in Tunisia. It has changed greatly from the small fishing village it once was, evolving into a sought-after holiday resort. In the afternoon you will be able to relax by the seaside. This evening will be at your leisure.

## **Day 7 Depart From Tunisia, Arrive UK**

There may be time for last-minute shopping before transferring to the airport for the flight home, which lands later the same afternoon.