

ROLLOS SHORT GUIDE TO TUNISIA

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Useful homepages

www.tourismtunisia.com – Official Tunisian tourist page

www.tunisiaonline.com – Information about Tunisia

<http://wikitravel.org/en/Tunisia> - Wikitravels page about Tunisia

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tunisia> - Wikipedia information about Tunisia

<http://www.tunisia.com/> - A lot of information about Tunisia

<http://www.lexicorient.com/tunisia/> - A lot of useful information about Tunisia



Important and practical information

Electricity

Same sockets as in most of Europe (not UK) and 220v.

Languages

Apart from Arabic many speak French. Signs and menus are often in both Arabic and French. At hotels, restaurants and in larger cities English works fine.

Tip

Giving tip is common when eating at a restaurant. Give tip if you are satisfied. 10% is average.

Security

Tunisia is considered to be a quite safe country to be a tourist in. The police are very visible and there are police stations in all tourist places.

Theft of belongings from hotel rooms and room safes can happen and its best to keep valuables in a secure place, i.e. supervised hotel safe deposit. Don't carry around too much cash; keep wallets and purses close to you where pick pockets cannot reach them.

Persistent persons trying to sell stuff to you are best handled by ignoring them or just smile at them and say something like "Merci, Non!" or "La shukran".

Water

The water in Tunisia is usually drinkable. It contains chlorine so the taste may not be very good. Examples of bottled water are Safia, Sabrine (non sparkling) and Garci (sparkling).

Money

1 € is about 1,745 TND. You cannot buy TND outside of Tunisia. Bring € and exchange them in Tunisia. You can also withdraw money from ATMs. Larger hotels and stores accept the major credit cards.

Try to have a lot of coins and fewer notes. Otherwise prices may be rounded upwards.

In order to be able to exchange back to € you need to keep your exchange receipts.

Useful phrases

General

Yes – Naam or Ey

No – La

Thank you – Shukran

No Thank You - La Shukran

Good - Bahi

Excuse me – Samahni

Good afternoon/hello - Salem Alejkum

Good morning – Sbakhir

Good night - Ala khir

Hi, Hello - Aslama, Ahla or Marhaba

See you, bye - Bislama

How are you? – Chnoua hwalek or Labes?

I'm fine and you? - Labes. Winti?

What's your name? - Sismek?

My name is XX - Ismi XX

Do you speak English? - Tikallam angleez?

Can you translate this for me? - Shnouwa ma'ana hadha?

I don't understand! - Ma nifhimsh

I don't speak Arabic - Ma nitkallamsh arbi

Restaurants

Is this table reserved? - Ettawla hethi mahjouza

Give me the menu please - Atini el menu yaaychik.

I'd like to eat Tunisian food - Nhib nakul akl tunsi?

What's the daily dish? - Chnawa el sahan mtaa lyoum?

It tastes good - Bnin barsha

How much must I pay? - Kadech yelzemni nkhallas?

Tea – Che

Tea with milk – Che bel halib

Shopping

Too expensive - Ghali barsha

Cheap – Rkhis

Expensive - Ghali

Can you lower the price? - Tejm tnaks fi soum

Do you have anything else? - Mandiksh haja okhra?

I want to buy this shirt - Nheb neshri el marioul hetha



Ruins in El Jem

What to eat and drink

Food

Bric

Fried triangle formed thin pastry. Eat it with your hands. Sometimes mixed with tuna and shrimp.

Couscous

National dish in Tunisia. Everyone knows what couscous is.

Ojja Merguez

Lamb sausages with tomatoes and red pepper mixed with eggs. Quite strong!

Chorba

Chroba means soup. Some of the ingredients are harissa, red pepper together with pasta.

Tajine

Tunisian dish based on eggs and artichoke. This dish is made in an oven. In the bottom you put cheese, parsley and garlic. Minced lamb meat and eggs are then added. On the baking tin you put the artichoke in the mince lamb meat and everything is cooked in the oven.

Coucha

Lamb shoulder cooked with spices.

Berber lamb

Lamb cooked with potatoes, carrots in a clay pot

Balbaloni

Fried sweet donut-like cake served with sugar.

Drinks

Celtia

Local beer brand. Celtia on tap is supposed to be good.

Boukha

Tunisian brandy made from figs

Mint tea

Sweet peppermint tea

Coffee

Strong coffee in small cups. Cappuccino is also served strong.

Water

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Shopping

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Water pipes (Nargileh)

In Tunisia you can find a large variety of water pipes in all sizes and qualities. According to Slim you should talk to his brother Karim who knows good quality water pipes.

Interior decorations

Lanterns, pillows and other smaller interior decorations are found in the suuqs.

Other stuff

Sand roses – Stone created by the movement of the sand

Chabb – A stone which is a shaving soap. Supposedly good to relieve cuts

Artisanat

Shops with the name Artisanat means that they sell handicrafts, souvenirs and some ancient (prehistoric) finds. Fixed prices and more expensive than the suuq. Found in the larger cities.

The Suuq in Tunis

'Suuq' is the Arabic name for market; 'medina' is the Arabic name for town. In Tunis today, the suuq is also called medina. And there is a good reason: most of what once was Tunis is today like one enormous shopping centre and handicrafts factory.

Today, the medina is still inhabited, but only a small percentage of the total population of Tunis lives in these quarters.

The suuq is far from randomly arranged. There are areas for goldsmiths, for metal workers, for fabrics etc. And then there are the areas for tourist items. This is of course the area you won't have to search to find. Just start at the Bab el Bahr, take the left entrance to the suuq, and enjoy.

Just remember: there is nothing you find here, that isn't available in other tourist centers. And prices are generally higher here, too.

Just a few streets up from the main mosque, you will come to the gold jewelers' suuq, the Souk des Orfèvres, where gold of high carats is sold (Tunisians think of gold of European style (9 and 14 carat) as junk). The style isn't always very advanced, but in general you won't have to pay through your nose for the work either. Beyond the products, look out for the security measures here: very small shops often just 1,5 meter facing the street, and very narrow alleys, that often are packed.

Avenue Habib Bourguiba

Avenue in Tunis with many stores, cafés and restaurants.

Excursions and activities

Thalassospa

Spa treatments. Alga treatments, massages, beauty treatments and different baths for weigh loss and general wellbeing. Most tourist places have these facilities.

Hammam

Hammams are Arabic bathhouses. Steam-, cold- and warm water pools. Heavy-handed massage. In traditional hammans women are welcome during the day and men during the night.

Visit a barber

For men a visit to the barber can be nice. You will be shaved, washed, have your eyebrows trimmed. Not done with tweezers, instead done with sewing thread.

Desert Safari

Take a trip to the Sahara, usually a 2-3 day tour.

Carthage

The ruins of Carthage. Roman ruins. A UNESCO World Heritage List site.

Matmata

South of Tunis there is a Berber village called Matmata. The Berbers live in man made caves since thousands of years. Underground houses dated as far back as 500 bc.

El Jem

Roman ruins. One of the world's largest amphitheaters from 200 ad is found here.

Other

Ride a camel

Try nargileh (water pipe)

Jetski (at the beach)

Diving (bring your diving certificate)



Sahara

Tunis

Located on the Mediterranean coast but lacking much in the way of beaches, Tunis has been spared the onslaught of package tourism in the resorts to the north and south. With a population of less than 700,000, the entire city feels small and compact. There isn't much in the way of must-see attractions, but Carthage is easily accessed from here and the suuq is one of the most authentic and hassle-free in North Africa.

Bardo Museum

(nearest station Bardo on Metro line 4)

Nov-Apr daily 9:30AM-4:30PM

May-Oct daily 9AM-5PM

Renowned for its extensive collection of Roman mosaics, although the (huge) collection covers Tunisia's entire existence from the prehistoric era until the Ottoman days. Exhibits from Carthage, Mahdia, Sousse, many from the Roman period in addition to presentations of Arabian culture old and new.

Zitouna Mosque

The largest mosque in Tunisia and the closest thing Tunis has to a landmark, this Aghlabite mosque dates back to the 9th century, although the distinctive square minaret is a much later 19th century addition. Modest dress essential, but non-Muslims can only enter the courtyard, not the mosque itself.

Café M'Rabet

Café M'Rabet is an institution in the medina of Tunis. The interior hasn't changed for at least a hundred years. You sit on tatties on deep platforms, and should you forget to slip off your shoes, the waiter will come over and tell (most politely) to remove them. More than anything else, the M'rabet is a cool rescue when the summer heat makes walking the streets of the suuq almost unbearable. The café is built over the tombs of 3 holy men, and the restaurant on top of the café is considered as one of the most exclusive places in all of Tunis. If you visit in the afternoon or evening, expect belly-dancing or live music together with the food.

Bab el Bahr

Bab el Bahr means "Gate to the Sea". Before the French came in the 19th century, that was exactly what it was too. Then there was just open grounds here, leading down to the lake of Tunis.

For the French the Bab el Bahr became a symbol, as the gate between the Oriental part and the European part of Tunis. Hence its other name came to be "Porte de France".

Halfaouine

Halfaouine is one of two important food markets of Tunis, as well as a part of town with a distinct identity of its own. It was at first placed outside the city walls, outside both Bab Souika and Bab el Khadra.

In the Tunisian film Halfaouine (1990) life in Tunisia in the 1960's has been depicted with a nerve seldom before seen in North African movies.