

# On the Road



## **DONNA WHEELER** Coordinating Author

A Sidi Bou Saïd (p96) rooftop and that beatific smile is hiding a mind in motion: how do I convey just how astonishingly beautiful the Bay of Tunis is? Paul Klee did so very nicely with paint, but can I come up with the words for a thousand hues of blue?



**PAUL CLAMMER** The end of the road, literally – when driving in the great Saharan sand sea (p236), smooth tarmac quickly fades to a memory. Dune-bashing, Tunisian-style: a Berber driver treating his 4WD like a recalcitrant camel – gentle coaxing one minute, hard wrestling the next. And at the end, that perfect moment: watching a setting sun and rising moon.

**EMILIE FILOU** That tiny blob on stage is me. That's how big Dougga's theatre (p162) is. Needless to say I didn't set the camera on timer and sprint down the steps – even Usain Bolt couldn't manage. It's lucky there was another tourist around – the only one I saw that day.



# Destination Tunisia

It may be but a slim wedge of North Africa's vast horizontal expanse, but Tunisia has enough history and diverse natural beauty to pack a country many times its size. With a balmy, sand-fringed Mediterranean coast, scented with jasmine and sea breezes, and where the fish on your plate is always fresh, Tunisia is prime territory for a straightforward sun-sand-and-sea holiday. But beyond the beaches, it's a thrilling, underrated destination where distinct cultures and incredible extremes of landscape can be explored in just a few days. Tunis is refashioning itself as an ambitiously modern Arab capital, though both its long Ottoman and not-so-distant colonial past still have a powerful, palpable presence. In the north, lakes teem with pink flamingos, surprising deep-green forests rise up from the coast, and gently rolling plains are dotted with olive and citrus trees. To the south, the ever-enchanting sands of the Sahara stretch deep into Africa and the traditions of the indigenous Berbers persevere.

Tunisia's position within whistling distance of the Italian peninsula has made it a coveted prize throughout history, and after almost three thousand years of invasion and colonisation, you'll find endless layers of influence – sometimes overt and at other times barely detectable. From the home-decoration techniques of ancient Phoenician Tyre to the lovingly preserved Renault 4 vans hurtling through the streets of Carthage courtesy of the colonial French, it's a fascinating mix. Ottoman domes and the Hafsid minarets that pre-date them fill the old medinas, while Stile Liberty and art deco apartment buildings line the grid of modern towns. Kairouan, one of Islam's most holy cites, is surrounded by countryside strewn with the incredible remnants of Punic and Roman occupation and the crumbling villas of departed Sicilian settlers.

Since gaining independence Tunisia has charted a unique course, escaping the fate of many a freshly decolonised nation and developing a robust economy despite its modest size and lack of natural resources. President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali's face is a ubiquitous presence, beaming from billboards along every high street and in framed photos in all public buildings. His two decades of autocratic rule have seen steady, prudent progress: his government has done much to address poverty, and has clearly prioritised education and healthcare. The World Economic Forum declared Tunisia the most competitive country in Africa, and foreign investment has almost doubled over the last few years. The result is a standard of living and stability that eludes Tunisia's oil-rich neighbours Libya and Algeria. Ben Ali won his fifth five-year term in power in 2009 with just under 90% of the vote. While this represents a small drop in his overwhelming approval rating of the previous elections, with only officially sanctioned opposition parties and little tolerance of public dissent, there's little doubt that Ben Ali will continue to rule for as long as he pleases.

Tunisia can feel very Westernised, particularly in its capital, Tunis. Ben Ali has continued along the tack of the great architect of independence, Habib Bourguiba, who ruled for an equally imperious (but far more radical) 30 years and set the country on its secular course, paying particular attention to enshrining equal rights for women. The Islamic call to prayer divides the day, but women choose whether or not to wear the veil and people drink alcohol if they please. Shopping mall and villa developments in the suburbs of Tunis are booming. Islamic fundamentalism

## FAST FACTS

Population: 10.486 million

Unemployment: 14.1%

Inflation: 5%

GDP per capita: US\$7900

Life expectancy:

77.7 years for women;

74 years for men

Main crops: olives, olive oil, grain, tomatoes, stone and citrus fruit, dates and almonds

Wine production:

2 million bottles a year

Export partners: France, Italy, Germany, Libya, Spain

Birth rate: 15.42 births per 1000 (almost twice that of Italy)

has been quashed. But the Western influence is often superficial. Family is everything, and social mores are enduringly – and profoundly – traditional. Big-name brands are all but absent and there are only a few concessions to global trends (for many travellers, a blessed relief). Young people are well-educated and worldly, but increasingly look to the Middle East rather than to France for cultural reference; Tunisia's Arab-speaking counterparts see the country as a regional player rather than a provincial backwater.

The Tunisian government has long been a pro-Western Islamic voice, walking a tightrope of conciliation and appeasement. You'll find locals will enthusiastically embrace the chance to debate US and European foreign policy, but the desire to talk about politics dries up once you broach domestic issues. Most have learned not to be candid about their feelings regarding the government: free speech may be enshrined in the constitution but it's not actually allowed, with a controlled press encouraged to practise self-censorship, and journalists who are openly critical are liable to end up in prison.

Tunisians by and large are justly proud of their country and appear to believe that democratic freedom is worth sacrificing for what they have achieved in the short time since independence – for the time being, at least. There is a sense, though, that change is inevitable, even in difficult economic times, or possibly because of them. Tunisia is attracting a large number of service-based and innovation-driven foreign companies for whom technological readiness is key; to remain economically competitive, online communication will need to be less tightly controlled and more widely available.

Tourism plays a huge part in the economy but Tunisians are surprised, and charmed, by independent travellers. Although around 7 million tourists arrive each year, unless you're holed up in an all-inclusive hotel in Hammamet, Sousse or Jerba in July, you're probably going to wonder where the 6,999,995 or so others are. While there's precious little that caters specifically for those staying outside resorts, that doesn't mean that travel isn't easy here. You'll discover atmospheric hotels that are pure colonial swansongs, cafes and restaurants where you can gorge on Maghrebi favourites, plates of homemade pasta or perfect pastries for a fraction of the price of those in Italy or France, and often have the unbeatable historical thrill of kicking around a stunning ancient site with just you and the ghosts. The country's public transport is cheap and reliable. Plus there are new breeds of hoteliers, restaurateurs and shopkeepers who have taken their cues from the high-end offerings of Morocco and are creating an increasing number of stylish, atmospheric alternatives to the chain monoliths and tourist souqs – but in true Tunisian style they're both a tad more laid-back and more affordable. North Africa's most relaxed and hospitable country just might turn out to be its most interesting.

# Getting Started

Tunisia is an easy country to visit without much preparation beyond deciding which swimsuit to bring. Tunisia's tourist machine is geared towards selling a fairly one-dimensional version of itself to visitors, so uncovering the country's rich, complex character can be trying. A little research can go a long way to making a fun holiday also a tremendously interesting and rewarding one. Our itineraries (p22) give some pointers about routes, and our Top 10 lists (p20) suggest some highlights.

## WHEN TO GO

The best times to travel in northern and central Tunisia are from April to June, and September and October. At these times, you're almost guaranteed sunny, but not too hot, days, the sea is warm enough to swim in (except perhaps in April and October), and high-season prices and crowds have not yet arrived. The countryside is at its prettiest in early spring, after the winter rains.

However, if you visit in July and August, you are assured brilliantly sunny days, and coastal towns are at their liveliest. The Tunisian tourist authorities also run a number of superb festivals at old Roman sites; see p284 for more details. The downside is that you'll be sharing the beaches with a few million northern European holidaymakers, prices will be higher and accommodation will be chock-a-block.

For desert trips, temperature is an essential consideration. The best times to travel are from late September to November and March to early May. November is just after the date harvest; prices are cheaper, and Douz and Tozeur have desert festivals (see p285). In July and August, the soaring temperatures mean that exploring the Sahara is really only possible overnight. Not only is it baking hot, you'll have to cope with the sandy sirocco – the desert wind. The search for air-con and iced sweets will be all-consuming.

In winter Tunisia is surprisingly cold, and you should pack lots of warm clothes – many places don't have good heating. If you're looking for winter sun in February, it's not guaranteed; it might rain and it'll definitely be too cold for lying on the beach. However, there'll be few other travellers around and prices will be rock-bottom.

See Climate Charts (p281)  
for more information.

## DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- a Swiss Army knife with a bottle opener and corkscrew – in case you buy alcohol from a supermarket
- a hat, sunglasses and high-SPF sunscreen – essential on the beach and in the Sahara
- a small sewing kit – useful for emergency repairs
- a cool pack – good for carrying drinks, essential if you're travelling with a baby
- a collection of cover-ups – such as cardigans, long-sleeved shirts and shawls, and shorts and T-shirt to wear at the beach – for women travelling outside the main resorts
- a small football – a great way to meet local kids (and their families)

Tampons are usually only found in city and resort supermarkets, but most other toiletries are widely available. Condoms are cheap and readily available at pharmacies, though are reportedly not as reliable as their European counterparts.

For a detailed summary of the low-, mid- and high-season periods in Tunisia, see p278.

## COSTS & MONEY

Tunisia is an inexpensive country for Western visitors, particularly compared with Europe.

Scrimpers could get by on TD30 a day, staying in hostels, eating at cheap local restaurants and travelling only every few days.

For a more comfortable stay, midrange travellers will need to spend a minimum of TD50 to TD100 daily: enough to get a comfortable room, travel around and eat and drink well. How much you spend will also depend on your itinerary. Prices in Tunis and popular coastal resorts, as well as really remote spots, are on a slightly higher scale.

At the upper end, if you're staying in top-end hotels, eating at the best restaurants, buying crafts and taking safaris or having spa treatments, expect to spend upwards of TD200 per day, depending on your hotel choice.

## LANGUAGE

The official language of Tunisia is Arabic, but it's essentially a bilingual country. French was the official language of education in the early Bourguiba years, and it continues to be taught from early primary school level, though perhaps not with the same enthusiasm. It's still spoken everywhere and used widely in advertising, publishing, signage and officialdom. English is now taught in schools from the age of 10 years so increasing numbers of urban Tunisians speak some English, as do most people in heavily toured areas. Tunisia's once large Italian population, a generation that grew up watching Italian cartoons on TV, and the many Italian tourists means that Italian is also commonly spoken.

Tunisian Arabic is a colloquial language; children are taught Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) at school. This and the popularity of Middle Eastern media means that its use is on the rise. Unlike in Morocco or Algeria, Berber languages have all but disappeared; Chelha is understood, if not spoken, by only a handful of older people in the hilltop villages of the Ksour.

There's no better way to make friends and impress people in Tunisia than to venture even a few words in Arabic – not to mention the advantage it will afford you when it comes to bargaining. A good grasp of French will also make life much easier, though Tunisians are usually friendly enough to persist with smiles and hand gestures when there's no common language.

## TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

There are few truly green options in Tunisia, but there are some simple steps you can take to lessen the impact of your visit.

Water consumption is a huge issue (travellers tend to use three or more times as much as locals), and especially so on Jerba; see the boxed text, p274 for more information. The meat-and-potatoes of coastal tourism – swimming pools, extensive gardens and golf courses – take their toll, but it can still help to be conscious of your own personal consumption.

Tunisians love to shop, but even the astoundingly popular hypermarkets stock mostly Tunisian-made goods and almost everyone, including the well-to-do, still rely on produce markets and small grocers for the majority of their daily needs. It's far from a chore to follow their lead. When not eating out, try self-catering from markets or street vendors. Similarly,

### HOW MUCH?

*Fouta* (cotton beach sheet) TD5

Hamam visit (bath and basic scrub) from TD4

Tuna, egg, olive and *harissa*-stuffed baguette TD1.6

Bottle of Tunisian wine at a restaurant from TD10

Entry ticket to ancient sites TD4 to TD8

many towns have artisans' co-ops that sell handcrafts made by locals – a great way to pick up souvenirs.

The national train and bus network is very efficient (if not always entirely hassle-free), and using the metro and TGM in Tunis and its northern beach suburbs is cheap and often faster than driving. Using train or bus to get to regional gateways and then locally organising car hire or a driver for less-accessible spots will save you money and have less environmental impact than hopping on a tour bus – and you'll often be supporting a small rural business.

Be extra mindful of the delicate desert ecosystem. There are precious few ecotour operators out there, so we recommend asking if your desert guide will use a gas stove for cooking (rather than firewood) and encouraging them to carry out all rubbish and to leave desert fauna alone.

Likewise, when visiting cultural sites, don't litter, and resist the exquisite temptation to pocket Punic and Roman artefacts – site caretakers often offer up small Roman or Punic tesserae and stones with the hope of a bribe, and in the knowledge that it's illegal to take antiquities out of the country.

Tunisian's famed tolerance extends to travellers' dress codes, but while bikinis on the beach are commonplace, wandering around the street in not much more than your bathers is not OK. Knee-length shorts or skirts and something to cover your shoulders can really change the level of interaction you have with locals (and save on sunscreen) – this applies to men as well as women.

## TRAVEL LITERATURE

There's little travel writing on Tunisia in English, but what there is often captures a particular epoch, provides fascinating cultural insights, and is hugely entertaining. We've listed some relevant fiction by Western writers; see p45 for work by their Tunisian counterparts.

Ibn Khaldun was a prolific 14th-century Tunisian scholar and statesman whose North African travels informed his remarkably accessible *Muqaddimah*, which is peppered with sharp and sympathetic observations.

Daniel Bruun lived with the Berber people in Matmata during 1898, and his *The Cave Dwellers of Southern Tunisia: Recollections of a Sojourn with the Khalifa of Matmata* is a window on a forgotten world, painting an idiosyncratic portrait of Berber Tunisia before the tourists arrived.

*Tunis, Kairouan & Carthage*, by Graham Petrie, who wrote in the early years of the last century, describes the major classical sights, as well as looking at the birth of modern tourism; the title was recently reissued, so is easy to find, and has a number of colour prints of the author's excellent watercolours.

Paul Theroux's *The Pillars of Hercules* (1996) contains a frustratingly brief chapter on Tunisia; he amusingly describes an encounter with a carpet tout as well as visits to Sfax and the Kerkennah Islands.

Less grumpy than Theroux, Michael Palin covers Jerba, Matmata, El-Jem, Sousse and Sidi Bou Saïd in his more entertaining than in-depth *Sahara* (2005), and revisits some *Monty Python's Life of Brian* movie sets.

Robert D Kaplan's *Mediterranean Winter* (2004) is the tale of an off-season Mediterranean journey beginning in Tunisia; the rich, detailed reveries will appeal to history buffs.

*Ma Tunisie* (2009, in French), from Tunisian-born Claudia Cardinale, describes the actor's early life in Tunis, mainly via gorgeously nostalgic photographs.

*Desert Divers* (2002), by Sven Linqvist, is part memoir, part account of the author's Saharan travels and part examination of the work of generations of literary tourists to North Africa, including André Gide and Antoine de St-Exupéry. It's a great companion piece to any number of novels that deal with the West's long Saharan obsession; similarly set in

# TOP 10



## ARCHITECTURAL TREASURES

Tunisia boasts not only the best-preserved Punic bathtubs in the world but also the ramshackle elegance of the capital's Ville Nouvelle, a 20th-century design delight. In between there's a couple of millennia of Roman, Byzantine, Berber and Ottoman lovelies.

- 1 Punic city of Kerkouane (p120)
- 2 Roman colosseum at El-Jem (p203)
- 3 Roman city of Dougga (p160)
- 4 Ribat at Monastir (p192)
- 5 Great Mosque of Kairouan (p198)
- 6 Village of Chenini (p231)
- 7 Ksar Ouled Soltane (p232)
- 8 Troglodyte homes, Matmata (p223)
- 9 Medina at Sfax (p209)
- 10 Tunis' Ville Nouvelle (p76)

## AMAZING EXPERIENCES

If you're after a pinch-yourself travel moment, you've come to the right place. This is a country that has long inspired with poetic natural beauty, a richly sensual cultural life and historical frisson.

- 1 Trek a great sand sea (p240)
- 2 Paddle in the impossibly blue Mediterranean (p278)
- 3 Shed your skin in an ancient hammam (p279)
- 4 Roam Carthage's ancient sites (p89)
- 5 Listen to the call to prayer in the white-washed back streets of the Tunis medina (p69)
- 6 Watch sunset from the Roman city of Dougga (p160)
- 7 Take in the view from the remote plateau fortress of Jugurtha's Table (p173)
- 8 Hike the stunning gorge from Midès to Tamerza (p257)
- 9 See the mirage-like salt sparkle from the Chott el-Jerid causeway (p251)
- 10 Dance at Tabarka's laid-back seaside festival (p141)

## KIDS' STUFF

Tunisians love children, and with its mythic cities, months of beach weather and host of outdoor adventures, children love Tunisia!

- 1 Tamerza's waterfalls (p256)
- 2 Camel rides! (p279)
- 3 Star Wars sets (p25)
- 4 Underground homes (p223)
- 5 Hot springs (p247)
- 6 Beach bonanza (p278)
- 7 Watery sports, from bouncy banana-boating to parasailing (p279)
- 8 El-Jem Colosseum (p203)
- 9 Crocodiles (p274)
- 10 Crazy Chak Wak Park (p251)

Morocco, Paul Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky* (1949) and JMG Le Clézio's *Desert* (1980) are both classics of the genre.

Other novels set (at least in part) in Tunisia itself include André Gide's 1902 *The Immoralist*, where a man on his honeymoon discovers his preference for Arab boys. More existential dread, Tunisian-style, can be found in the crime thriller *The Tremor of Forgery* (1969), by Patricia Highsmith.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

Online research on Tunisia can be a frustrating business, with not much beyond government-ordained tourist-speak and first-generation web offerings. There's also a lack of English-language information, so brush up on your French.

**Adventures of Tunisia** ([www.lexicorient.com/tunisia](http://www.lexicorient.com/tunisia)) Comprehensive site with chatty information and photos of 140 Tunisian destinations.

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) Ask other travellers for tips on the Thorn Tree forums.

**National Heritage & Cultural Promotion** ([www.patrimoinedetunisie.com.tn](http://www.patrimoinedetunisie.com.tn)) The Ministry of Culture's site has basic information on all historical sites, monuments and museums across the country; there's also an online bookshop.

**Travel & Tourism Guide to Tunisia** ([www.tourismtunisia.com](http://www.tourismtunisia.com)) The Tunisian national tourist office (ONTT) website includes festivals, hotel details and destination summaries, though the information is not always up to date.

**Tunisia Guide** ([www.tunisiaguide.com](http://www.tunisiaguide.com)) US Tunisia tourist office website; includes cultural and travel information and a list of tour operators.

**Tunisia Online** ([www.tunisiaonline.com](http://www.tunisiaonline.com)) Government-run site with good sections on the environment, women, history and tourism, as well as Tunisian news in English, French and Arabic.

**Tunisia.com** ([www.tunisia.com](http://www.tunisia.com)) Useful guide with information on flights, tours, hotels, business, culture, shopping and property rental, and an active and helpful online community.

# Itineraries

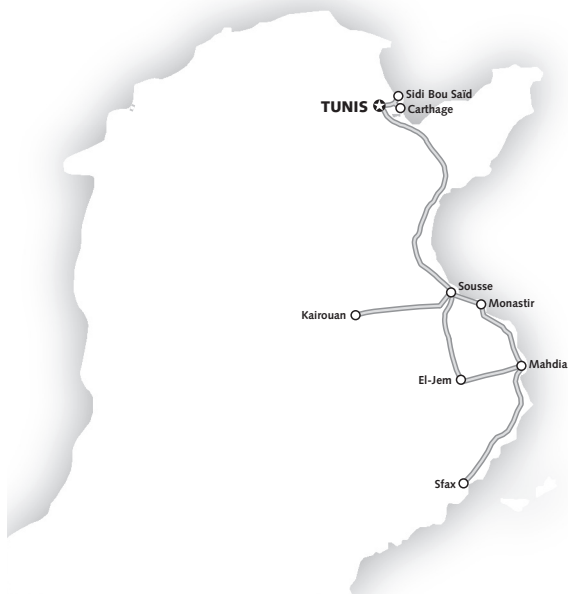
## CLASSIC ROUTES

### MOSQUES, MEDINAS & A COLOSSEUM

12 Days/Tunis to Sfax

Start your stay in **Tunis** (p64), Tunisia's laid-back, cosmopolitan capital, with the exceptional **Bardo Museum** (p76) and Unesco World Heritage-listed **medina** (p69). It's also a good base for day trips to ancient **Carthage** (p89) and the enchanting whitewashed village of **Sidi Bou Saïd** (p96), which also has some charming places to stay. Allow three to four days for Tunis and its surrounds, then head south to **Sousse** (p181), where the buzzing Ville Nouvelle stretches along the popular beach, and the sandcastle medina contains some of Tunisia's finest architecture. From here you can visit **Monastir** (p191) with its superb *ribat* (fortified monastery; scene of much silliness in *Monty Python's Life of Brian*) and mausoleum to Habib Bourguiba; the mystical holy city of **Kairouan** (p195); and the amazingly well-preserved Roman colosseum towering over **El-Jem** (p203). It's worth staying at least overnight in atmospheric, seaside **Mahdia** (p204), the perfect antidote to busy resorts and towns. Further down the coast, **Sfax** (p208) has Tunisia's best-preserved medina, and provides an insight into what the other coastal towns must have been like pre-tourism.

This 300km route wends its way from Tunisia's largest city to its second largest, past an astounding array of architectural forms and fascinating ruins. It takes between 12 and 14 days.



## JERBA, BERBERS, SALT & THE SAHARA 10 Days/Jerba to Ong Jemal

**Jerba** (p263) is a desert island, but a very much inhabited one, with whitewashed, defensive architecture – even the houses look like miniature forts (see the boxed text, p268) – and some good beaches, including **Sidi Mahres** (p274) on the east coast. The island's main town, **Houmt Souq** (p266), is a fascinating mix of covered souqs, good restaurants and vine-covered squares, and you can sleep here in enchanting restored *funduqs* (inns; p270).

From here you can launch off into the south. Amazing stops are the extraordinary underground Berber houses at **Matmata** (p223) and the picturesque Arab-Berber **ksour district** (p232) around **Tataouine** (p226), with their unique architecture, alien enough to attract the makers of the *Star Wars* films to use them as locations. You could spend at least three or four days exploring these areas, which include the stunning abandoned Berber villages of **Chenini** (p231) and **Douiret** (p231) that seem to dissolve into the hilltops, and the alien-looking **Ksar Ouled Soltane** (p232), used to store Berber grain. Via 4WD, you can also visit **Ksar Ghilane** (p247) on the edge of the **Grand Erg Oriental** (p240): an endless sea of sand. Equally you could launch a Saharan expedition from the laid-back town of **Douz** (p238) or from **Tozeur** (p250), with its distinctive brick-pattern architecture, both of which are set amid enormous palm groves. If travelling between them, you'll pass over a 2m-high causeway across the strange flat landscape of the **Chott el-Jerid** (p251) – an experience not to be missed. From Tozeur you can also take a trip to the *Star Wars* Mos Espa set at **Ong Jemal** (p257) or the oasis villages of **Tamerza**, **Mides** and **Chebika** (p256) close to the Algerian border.



It takes a week or two to travel the 540km from the sunny coast to the desert interior via Berber villages, oasis towns, salt lakes, and seas of sand dunes.

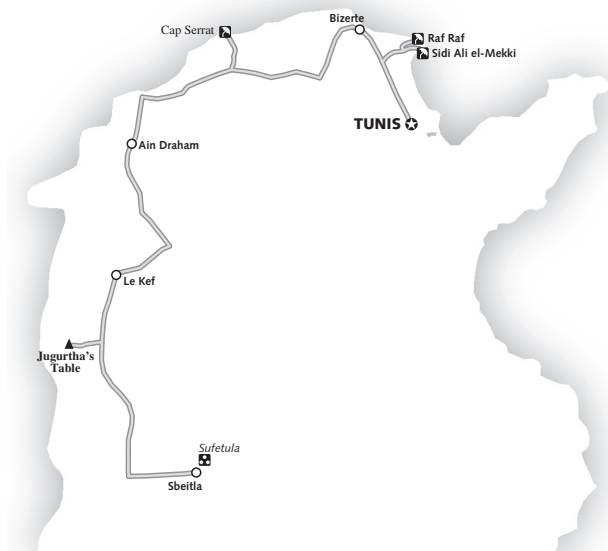
## ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

### NORTHERN SURPRISES

7 Days/Bizerte to Sbeitla

Travelling off the beaten track in Tunisia is surprisingly easy. Relatively few foreign tourists travel outside the main resorts, and beyond these you can find rugged coastline, deserted beaches and lush mountains. From Tunis, head north to **Bizerte** (p127), a bustling port with an old-world feel, from where you can visit (preferably not at weekends) the beautiful beaches at **Raf Raf** (p134) and **Sidi Ali el-Mekki** (p135). Another great coastal stop is hidden-away **Cap Serrat** (p137); then travel up winding mountain roads to red-roofed **Ain Draham** (p143), deep in the forests of the Kroumirie Mountains. From here you can go trekking in the green, green hills or even indulge in a spa on the border with Algeria. Hilltop **Le Kef** (p164) is your next stop, a remote walled town with a lofty kasbah (fort) watching over a beautiful medina of blue shutters and cobbled streets. South into Tunisia's central plains is the natural fortress of **Jugurtha's Table** (p173), a spectacular flat-topped mountain with views to Algeria for those willing to brave the steps hacked into the near-vertical ascent, and the remote Roman site of **Sufetula** (p176), at Sbeitla, where there's also surprisingly good facilities for independent travellers. Covering all these sites could be stretched to two weeks depending on how long you choose to laze on the beach or lose yourself in the hills.

This route takes you away from the crowds to quiet beaches, forested mountains and remote archaeological sites. It will take a week or two and covers around 280km.



## ONCE UPON A TIME...

### 14 Days/Carthage to Tozeur

Tunisia's unique landscapes and rich, rollicking history have long attracted storytellers, from Virgil to George Lucas.

You can't but help be sucked back in time as you stand atop **Byrsa Hill** (p91) – though conveniently you can also pull up a bar stool at **Villa Didon** (p95). This is the site of the ancient city of **Carthage** (p89), mythical home of the Phoenician queen, Dido, and oh-so-dramatic backdrop for Virgil's *Aeneid*. Even catching the train here has historical frisson – there's a stop named **Salammbô**, after the fictional Carthaginian character immortalised in Gustave Flaubert's proto-torture porn novel of the same name.

From Tunis, head to **Jerba** (p263), the sand-fringed island mooted as the Land of the Lotus-Eaters in the *Odyssey*. Even without the seductions of the heady brew of Homer's story, it's such a dreamy spot you'll understand how Ulysses almost lost his crew here.

Next it's to a galaxy far, far away. Not only are many of the settings for *Star Wars* in the south instantly recognisable, but plenty of sets are also still in place. In Matmata is the famous **Hôtel Sidi Driss** (p223), which was used in four movies, including the original *Star Wars*. Anakin Skywalker's *Phantom Menace* home, the Mos Espa slave quarters, was filmed in three locations: **Medenine** (p233), the fabulous **Ksar Haddada** (p231) and, south of Tataouine, the extraordinary **Ksar Ouled Soltane** (p232).

You can then travel to **Tozeur** (p250) where tour operators can help you track down various sites. One of the best is found west of the remote spot of **Ong Jemal** (p257): the evocative town of Mos Espa, a wonderfully well-preserved *Star Wars* set (or Tatooine spaceport if you're a true believer).



**This route takes you from the bustle of the city to sandy beaches and onwards into the desert. Allow a couple of days to see Carthage, at least a week to get around the *Star Wars* circuit, and as long as you can spare on Jerba.**

# The Authors



## DONNA WHEELER

**Coordinating Author, Tunisia, Cap Bon**

Donna Wheeler had long gazed at Tunisia across the Med from Marseille and southern Italy and was thrilled to finally be able to indulge her obsession with *harissa* and fish couscous, as well as poke around the Punic and Roman ruins she'd been dreaming about since high-school Latin classes. But most exciting of all was discovering that Tunisia has a present that's every bit as intriguing as its past. After many years working as an editor, digital producer and content strategist, Donna is now a full-time travel writer, specialising in art, design, history and food. This is her fourth title for Lonely Planet.



## PAUL CLAMMER

**History, Gabès, Matmata & the Ksour, The Sahara, Tozeur & the Jerid, Jerba**

As a student, Paul had his first solo backpacking experience when he took a bus from his Cambridgeshire home all the way to Casablanca. North Africa instantly enchanted him. After an interlude when he trained and worked as a molecular biologist, he eventually returned to work as a tour guide, trekking in the Atlas Mountains and trying not to lose passengers in the Fez medina. He's currently the coordinating author of Lonely Planet's *Morocco*. This is his Tunisian debut.



## EMILIE FILOU

**Northern Tunisia, Central West & the Tell, The Central Coast & Kairouan**

Emilie got hooked on West and North Africa through a series of random family twists involving grandparents settling in Mali and Togo and her parents moving to Morocco. Encouraged by such opportune moves, she pursued her own travels in the region. She studied geography at university and focused on arid environments and Africa (her dissertation was on health-care provision for nomadic people in Niger). She now works as a freelance business and travel journalist in London, specialising – surprise, surprise – on French-speaking Africa. She is notably the Maghreb correspondent of water magazine *Global Water Intelligence* and a contributor to *The Africa Report*.

### LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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## CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

**Rafik Tlatli** wrote the Food & Drink chapter with Abigail Hole and Donna Wheeler. He is the hotelier of Hôtel Les Jasmins and the head chef at Restaurant Slovénia in Nabeul. He has written *Saveurs de Tunisie*, *Delice de Tunisie* and many books of recipes, and made regular radio and TV broadcasts on cooking in France, Italy and Russia as well as Tunisia. He is the founder and president of the National Association of Chefs in Cap Bon, and has organised an annual master chef competition in Tunis for the past 16 years and an annual gastronomic conference in Tunis since 1998. He has also run seminars on Tunisian cuisine in countries ranging from Japan to Sweden.

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