



# MEDUSA

DESTINATION REVIEW FROM A SOCIO-ECONOMIC, POLITICAL  
AND ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVE IN ADVENTURE TOURISM

---

# TUNISIA





REGIONE AUTONOMA DE SARDIGNA  
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA

# MEDUSA

---

This publication has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union under the ENI CBC Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of the Official Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Services and Navigation of Barcelona and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union or the Programme management structures.

The European Union is made up of 28 Member States who have decided to gradually link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, during a period of enlargement of 50 years, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders.

The 2014-2020 ENI CBC Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme is a multilateral Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) initiative funded by the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). The Programme objective is to foster fair, equitable and sustainable economic, social and territorial development, which may advance cross-border integration and valorise participating countries' territories and values. The following 13 countries participate in the Programme: Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Palestine, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia. The Managing Authority (JMA) is the Autonomous Region of Sardinia (Italy). Official Programme languages are Arabic, English and French. For more information, please visit: [www.enicbcmed.eu](http://www.enicbcmed.eu)

MEDUSA project has a budget of 3.3 million euros, being 2.9 million euros the European Union contribution (90%).

---

# CONTENTS

---

<b>0. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL PROFILE.....</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1 GENERAL OVERVIEW.....	8
1.2 SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL PROFILE OF BEN AROUS GOVERNORATE .....	13
1.2 SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL PROFILE OF GABES GOVERNORATE.....	15
1.3 SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL PROFILE OF MEDENINE GOVERNORATE.....	17
<b>2. INFRASTRUCTURES AND MOBILITY .....</b>	<b>19</b>
2.1 GENERAL OVERVIEW .....	20
2.2 HARD INFRASTRUCTURE IN BEN AROUS, GABES AND MEDENINE .....	23
2.3 SOFT INFRASTRUCTURE .....	26
2.4 ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION ON HERITAGE AND CULTURE .....	26
<b>3. ENVIRONMENTAL PROFILE.....</b>	<b>27</b>
3.1 GENERAL OVERVIEW .....	28
3.2 PROTECTED AREAS AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROFILE OF BEN AROUS, GABES AND MEDENINE GOVERNORATES.....	30
<b>4. DESTINATION STRATEGY AND MANAGEMENT.....</b>	<b>36</b>
4.1 TOURISM IN TUNISIA .....	37
4.2 THE DESTINATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM.....	37
4.3 TUNISIA'S TOURISM STRATEGY .....	38
4.4 MAIN ATTRACTIONS .....	39
4.5 DESTINATION PROFILE ETIS.....	46



## 0. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tunisia is located in the Maghreb region, on the African continent. The country shares borders with Algeria to the west and southwest and Libya to the east. The north and east coasts of Tunisia – 1,148km – are on the Mediterranean Sea. In 2017, Tunisia had 11.5 million inhabitants, 640,000 of which were living in the capital, Tunis.

The tourism industry in Tunisia has been widely developed since the 1960s. Tunisia's tourist industry "benefits from its Mediterranean location and its tradition of low-cost package holidays from Western Europe."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, tourist products have focused almost exclusively on seaside tourism. For decades, the

considerable natural and cultural heritage of the country has remained largely unknown to its numerous visitors.

The events between 2013 and 2015 (Bardo National Museum attack, terrorist attacks on Sousse beach), marked a sudden halt in Tunisian tourism activity.

Tunisia managed to return to its position as one of the top tourist destinations in MENA shortly afterwards, reaching in 2018 numbers exceeding those of 2010 by 6%, and a record of 8.3 million visitors. In 2019, Tunisia welcomed 9.4 million visitors.

---

1. Nagle, Garrett (2000). Advanced geography. Oxford University Press. p. 417

Adventure tourism has great potential in the country in various landscapes, from the coasts to the mountains and desert dunes. Since 2011, initiatives led mostly by young Tunisians have emerged: hiking, climbing, canoeing, wildlife observation. With the easing of political restrictions on civil society activities, many associations

and local groups are now proposing activities throughout Tunisia. However, these new products target the domestic market. So far, they have not yet managed to attract international tourists. To do this, investment both by public and private sectors, marketing efforts and a solid legal framework will be required.



This study will focus on 3 governorates (administrative regions) of Tunisia:

- **Ben Arous governorate in the North (circled in green on the map), one of the Grand Tunis governorates,**
- **Gabes governorate (blue circle), in the South East, on Gabes Gulf,**
- **Medenine governorate (red circle), in the South East, near the Libyan border.**

As we detail below, Tunisian tourism is still strongly anchored to coastal resorts. The three governorates selected are characterized by sites with strong potential, especially for adventure tourism, but which remain unknown to the general public.

In addition, being coastal governorates, these three are characterized by a dichotomy between maritime areas and hinterland. In these regions, economic activities, population and urbanization are concentrated on the coastal strip. Conversely, the delegations (the administrative level below the governorate) of the interior are less developed and less known, despite the remarkable sites that can delight many visitors looking for an authentic and natural experience.

The untapped potential of these areas, which are easily accessible and exploitable, guided the selection of these three governorates.

- **Ben Arous governorate:** Living area and major economic area of Greater Tunis, Ben Arous has two exceptional sites for the development of adventure tourism (hiking, climbing, trail, caving): Jebel Ressas and Boukornine National Park. The proximity of Tunis would allow the inclusion of new adventure tourism products within discovery routes, and a strong diversification around the destination Tunis / Carthage.
- **Gabes governorate:** just like Ben

Arous, Gabes Governorate is a major industrial cluster for the economy of the country (phosphate factory) and its coast concentrates most of the infrastructure and population. However, an hour's drive is enough to find exceptional places, whether the landscapes, its Berber culture, its architecture straight out of Star Wars and the variety of activities that can be developed, especially in Matmata, Dahar and the Berber villages of Toujene and Tamezret. Experts have already been able to explore the peerless potential of the region and initiatives and projects have been set up with the aim of developing tourism (project by the State, private sector and local associations), but the promotion of the region and of alternative tourism remains limited. Here too, the potential is real but everything remains to be done to fully develop alternative tourism.

- **Medenine governorate:** while the island of Djerba and resorts are in the top 10 of international tourist destinations, the rest of the governorate has experienced virtually no investment or development in tourism, either by the state or by the private sector. Yet here, too, the potential is real. The Dahar mountain range, for instance, which begins in Gabes governorate and continues through Medenine and ends in the Tataouine governorate. Ksar Halouf and Ksar Zammour, citadel-granaries, are two impressive vestiges of the nomadic era of the local Berber tribes. On the cultural level, the governorate counts the Roman site of Gightis, sublime coastal site, and the Mareth line, the line of defence which marked a turning point of the campaign in Tunisia during the Second World War. Today these treasures are appreciated by only a few rare connoisseurs.

## Ben Arous governorate in a nutshell

The governorate of Ben Arous is located southeast of Greater Tunis and is characterized by the combination of various landscapes between sea, mountains and green areas.

Administrative Center	Ben Arous
Area	761 km <sup>2</sup>
Number of Delegations	12
Number of Inhabitants	712 172 (2019)
Rate of Urbanization	90.50%
Foreign Companies Located in the Governorate	349 (2018)
FDI	2,933.99 MDT (2018)
Number of Employment Positions	44,499 (2018)



## Gabes governorate in a nutshell

Gabes governorate, residing in a gulf on Tunisia's southeast coast, is a region that is known by its unique feature of combining three elements, Sea, Oases and mountain landscapes with the Dahar range reaching Matmata. Gabes is considered to be the main pole of Tunisia's phosphate chemical processing, by producing both phosphoric acid and triple superphosphate.

Administrative Center	Gabes
Area	7166 km <sup>2</sup>
Number of Delegations	10
Number of Inhabitants	374,300 (2014)
Rate of Urbanization	69%
Foreign Companies Located in the Governorate	22 (2018)
FDI	1155,8 MDT
Number of Employment Positions	5116 (2018)



Source: OpenStreetmap

## Medenine governorate in a nutshell

Medenine governorate, located on the furthest part of the southeast coast of the country, on the border with Libya, is characterized by its rich landscapes, the sea (Djerba island) and desert mountains, giving it a particular geographical status. Djerba Island, one of the delegations of the Medenine governorate, is one of the main reasons this region is internationally known.

Administrative Center	Medenine
Area	9167 km <sup>2</sup>
Number of Delegations	9
Number of Inhabitants	479,520 (2014)
Rate of Urbanization	78,3 %
Foreign Companies Located in the Governorate	48 (2018)
FDI	544,15 MTND (2018)
Number of Employment Positions	4 056 (2018)



Source: OpenStreetmap

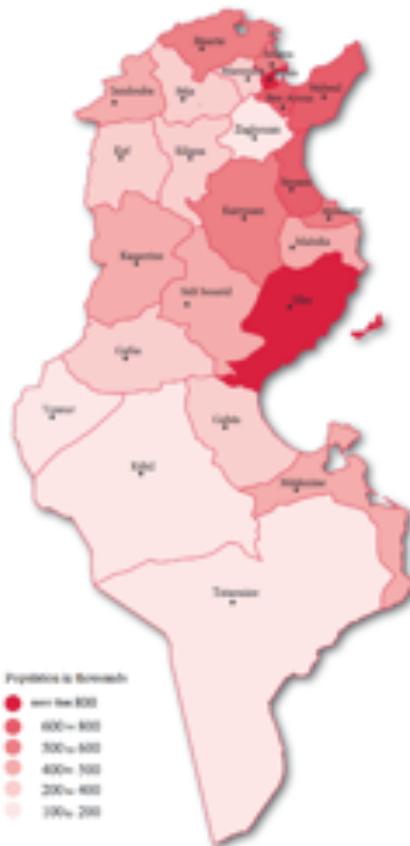


## 1. SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL PROFILE

## 1.1 General overview

### General and Social Information

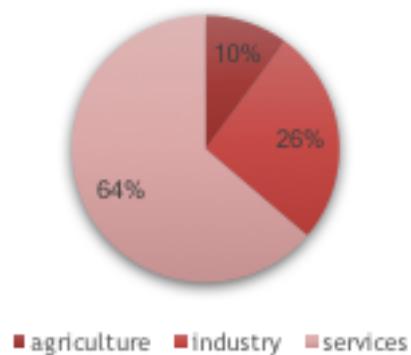
- Extension Area: 155,360 km<sup>2</sup>
- Terrain: mountains in north; hot, dry central plain; semiarid south merges into the Sahara
- Population: 11.783 million (July 2020 est.)
- Population Density: 76 per km<sup>2</sup> (197 people per mi<sup>2</sup>)
- Urban Population: 70.1% (8,280,799 people in 2020)
- Unemployment Rate: 15.427
- Tourist Arrivals: 9.429.000 million (2019)
- Nights: 1.261.200 (in March 2018).



### Economic Information

- GDP (purchasing power parity): US\$137.7 billion
- GDP - real growth rate: 2% (2017)
- International tourism inbound receipts 5.612,2 in MDT (2019)
- Hotel Room Occupancy Rate: 34.3%
- Length of Stay: 3,1 day

GDP composition by sector



## Cultural Information

- Languages: Arabic, French, Berber (Tamazight)
- Origins: ancient North African tribe of Berbers
- Ethnic Groups: 97% Arabs, 1% Berbers, 1.5% Circassians
- Religion: Islam is the state religion of Tunisia.
- Cultural Uniqueness:
  - a. More than three thousand years of history and an important multi-ethnic influx.
  - b. Its strategic geographical location in the Mediterranean, the core of some great civilizations of the Mediterranean Sea.

## Tunisian economy

Tunisia's economy – structurally designed to favor vested interests – faced an array of challenges exposed by the 2008 global financial crisis that helped precipitate the 2011 Arab Spring revolution<sup>2</sup>.

Tunisia remains a country of contrasts: while important progress has been made on political transition towards an open, democratic system of governance—uniquely in the Middle East & North Africa (MENA) region—economic transition has not kept pace. Internal constraints, such as the fragmentation

of the political party system and related difficulties in reaching consensus on key economic reforms, have combined with external constraints, such as conflict in neighboring Libya, to slow down economic recovery and generate growing social dissatisfaction among Tunisians with the lack of employment, among the countries of the African continent.<sup>3</sup>

Despite all of this, Tunisia stands out with a fairly high standard of living, with about 60% of the population being “middle class”.

The Tunisian economy has been in the ranks of the “mostly unfree” for more than a decade<sup>4</sup>, belying the hopes of the 2011 Arab Spring for greater liberalization. GDP growth for the past five years has been fairly tepid for a middle-income developing country. Tunisia’s economic freedom score is 55.8, making its economy the 128th freest in the 2020 Index<sup>4</sup>. Its overall score has increased by 0.4 point due to an improvement in property rights and other rule-of-law indicators. Tunisia is ranked 10th among 14 countries in the Middle East and North Africa region, and its overall score is well below the regional and world averages.

Recent business reforms have included combining different registrations for starting a business and improving protection for minority investors. Interest rates are now all positive in real terms,

2. Tunisia was the birthplace of the Arab Spring protests, which in 2011 ousted long-time President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali

3. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tunisia/overview>

4. <https://www.heritage.org/index>

except for some deposit rates. Inflation is expected to continue declining, provided monetary policy remains focused on its central goals.

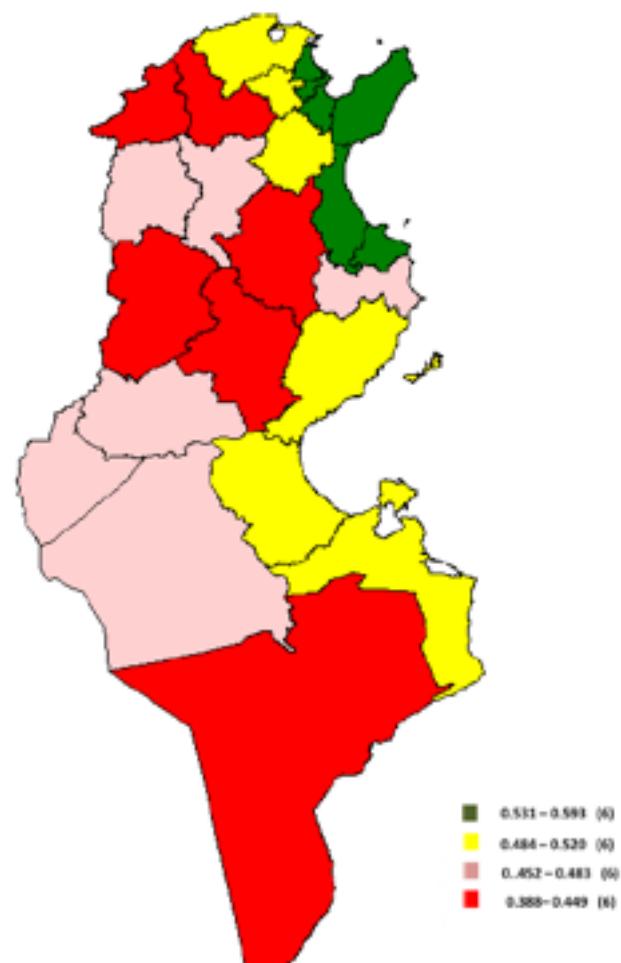
Economic growth in Tunisia expanded modestly by 2% in 2017 and 2.5% in 2018 through sustained agricultural and services growth and the gradual recovery of tourism, phosphate production and manufacturing.

In the medium term, economic growth was projected to pick up gradually to 3.5% in 2019–2020, against a backdrop of an improved business climate as a result of structural reforms and greater security and social stability. However, the global sanitary crisis of COVID-19 will have a huge impact on the Tunisian economy. This crisis will cause unprecedented losses in GDP which can vary from 1.65% to more than five points of GDP compared to the latest IMF growth projections. Tunisia could settle into a deflation marked by a significant decline in growth, a sharp rise in unemployment and an increase in inflation.

## Engines of local economy

Tunisia is still going through economic turmoil. According to A.Gouider and all(3) "this context is enhanced by the territorial inequality between a developed and attractive littoral zone and the inland regions of the country, causing

persistent regional imbalance and proving the failure of the development strategies adopted by the Tunisian government. The map below shows that the two southern governorates (Gabes and Medenine) have a fairly similar development index, while Ben Arous benefits from its geographical location near the Tunis metropolis. The centralized economic growth masks significant regional disparities in terms of investment, employment, and



Map of regional development index , 2018. Source: ITCEQ

5. RDI based on infrastructures and basic equipment; access to medical services ; social dimension, human capital...  
more here : <http://www.itceq.tn/wp-content/uploads/files/notes2018/indicateur-dev-regional.pdf>

especially in terms of quality of life (income, health, access to safe drinking water, education). This has resulted in the dissatisfaction of a large part of the population and accounted for the events of December 2010<sup>5</sup>.

According to data from 2017, the principal economic sectors are: agriculture, which accounted for 10.1% of GDP; industry, including non-manufacturing industries, which accounted for 26.2% of GDP and 33% of employment nationally; and the services sector, which accounted for 63.8% of GDP, with two important subsectors: transportation, which accounted for 9% of GDP, and tourism, which accounted for 7% of GDP (and covered 51% of the trade deficit for 2008).

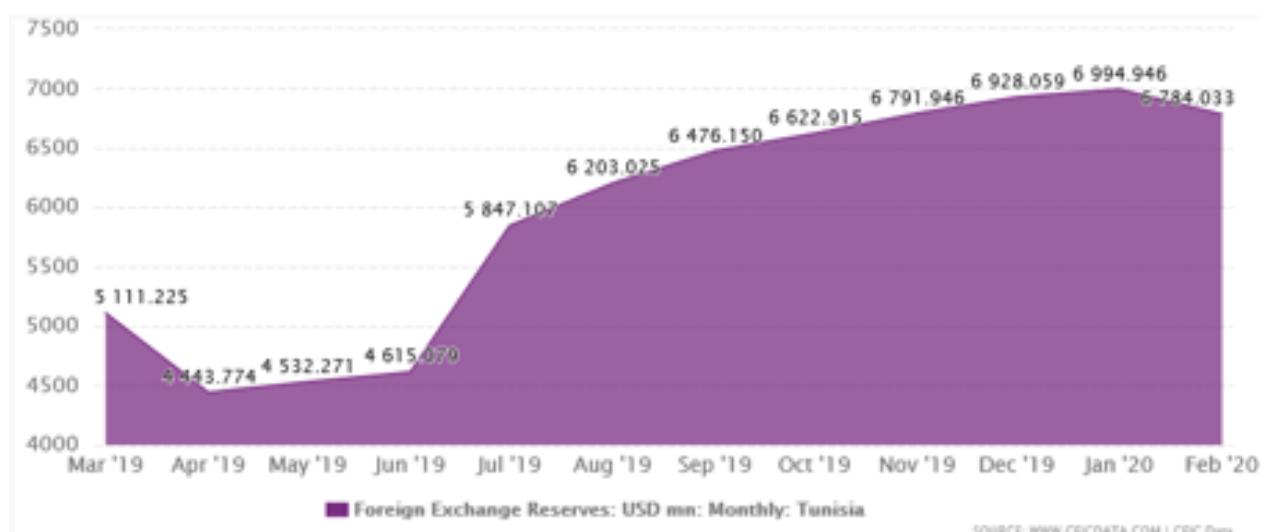
## Focus on the role of tourism in the Tunisian economy

The direct and indirect contribution of Tunisian tourism to the gross domestic product (GDP) was 13.8 % in 2018 (against a forecast of 6.72%) and reached 14.20% in 2019 when tourism revenue

totalled about US\$2 billion. Official government data stated that tourism-related revenue in 2019 exceeded expectations despite the internal political

fluctuations overshadowing the Tunisian economy. The number of tourists increased by 13.6% in 2019 to 9.5 million.

The data indicate a strong return to the global tourism map after years of inactivity because of terrorist attacks in 2015. One of the consequences of the boom in the tourism sector has been a noticeable rise in Tunisia's reserves of foreign currency. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 global pandemic has suddenly stopped this positive change in the Tunisian economy.



Tunisia Foreign Exchange Reserve by month. Source: Tunisia's Central Bank, end of 2019

Thanks to the recovery of Tunisian tourism, foreign currency reserves were 46% higher in 2019 than in 2018. Desert resorts and hotels overlooking the Mediterranean noted an important increase in the percentage of foreign arrivals from European countries and Algeria. However, the country plans to go beyond its classic markets and is looking to Chinese and Russian markets. Before COVID19, authorities were hoping that tourism recovery would kick-start other sectors of the economy. Tunisia boosted efforts to revitalize tourism with a strategy aimed at attracting more than 10 million tourists in 2020. However, the tourism sector has been hit by the health crisis, with an 80% drop-in activity in February 2020 compared to February 2019. The consequences of the crisis will be harmful to the tourism sector throughout 2020: in a return to normal, the tourist clientele will be reluctant to travel across borders and local tourism will certainly be encouraged. We can therefore expect a drastic drop in visits by foreign customers and perhaps stability in domestic tourism and regional tourism.

## Demographic evolution

	Total: 32.7 years.
Median age	Male: 32 years
	Female: 33.3 years (2020)
Population growth rate	0.85% (2020)
Unemployment rate	15.5% (2017)
Population below poverty line	15.5% (2010)

A family planning policy was launched in 1966. The fertility index gradually fell: the number of children per woman fell from nearly six in the 1960s to 3.4 in 1990 and then to two in 1999.

In 2017, the fertility rate was 2.21 children per woman; the birth rate is 18.2 %.

According to the World Fact Book<sup>6</sup> "Unlike many of its MENA neighbours, Tunisia will soon be shifting from being a youth-bulge country to having a transitional age structure, characterized by lower fertility and mortality rates, a slower population growth rate, a rising median age, and a longer average life expectancy."



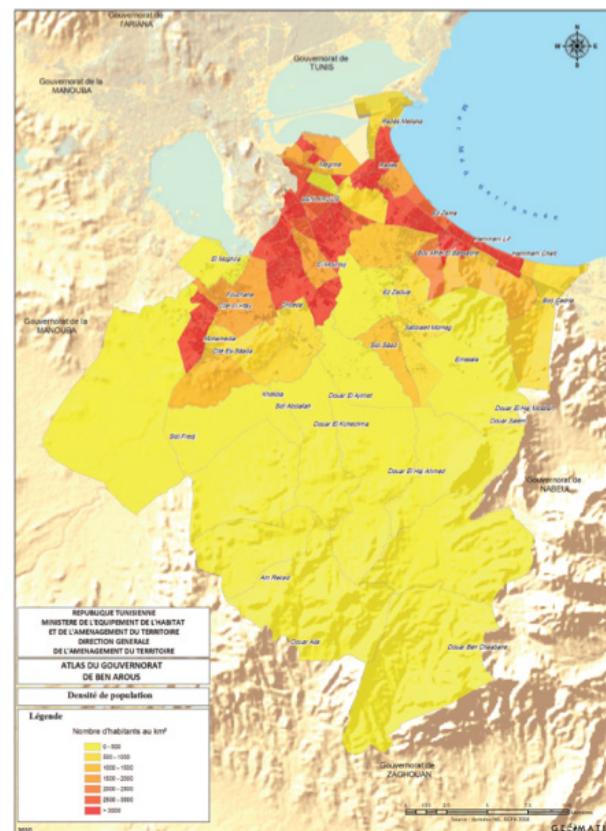
6. [https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print\\_ts.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_ts.html)

## 1.2 Social, economic and cultural profile of Ben Arous governorate

### Social profile

- **Demographic weight:** 712,172 inhabitants (2019), the second most populous governorate after Tunis in the Grand Tunis metropolis
- **Average age of the population:** 32.93 years old
- **Education:** 17.88% of the population graduated from university
- **Unemployment rate:** 13.12%
- **Distribution of the active population in the main sector of activity:** 28.24% of the population works in the fields of education, health and administrative services.

From this map, we can observe a higher population density closer both to the capital Tunis and the coast.



Map of population density. Source: Atlas du gouvernorat de Ben Arous, Direction Générale de l'Aménagement du Territoire, 2010

### Economic profile

- **Engines of local economy:** one of the most developed governorates in the country, Ben Arous appears as a major industrial site with more than 23.84% of the population involved in the manufacturing industry and 580 industrial enterprises (with a workforce of 10 or more employees), including 226 totally exporting units. Most of these companies operate in the sectors of electrical, mechanical industry and textile, clothing and leather industries.

- **Agricultural resources:** the governorate has an agricultural potential with abundant water resources (27 hill lakes, 5 hillside dams, a dam and a sheet of deep ground water of 21.9 million cubic meters), mainly based on arboriculture and floriculture as well as the production of red meat, poultry and milk.
- **Banking network:** the governorate has a financial and banking network of over 54 agencies representing major Tunisian banks.

- **Weight of tourism:** tourism activities remain limited in the governorate to the zone of Borj Cedria in south Tunis. The governorate counts 9 hotel units (with 43,330 beds in 2008, source: Tunisian National Tourist Office ), 4 of which are in the tourist zone of Borj Cedria.
- **Tourism attraction:** the governorate contains cultural and natural sites of significant value:
  - a. The archaeological site of Uthina,
  - b. The house of the Bey of Hammam-Lif.
  - c. The Roman Aqueduct site.
  - d. The Palace of El M'hamdia.(ruined building)
  - e. Natural assets: Boukornine forest, Djebel Ressas (details below)

However, most of these sites remain largely unknown to the public, and tourist activity in the governorate remains very limited.

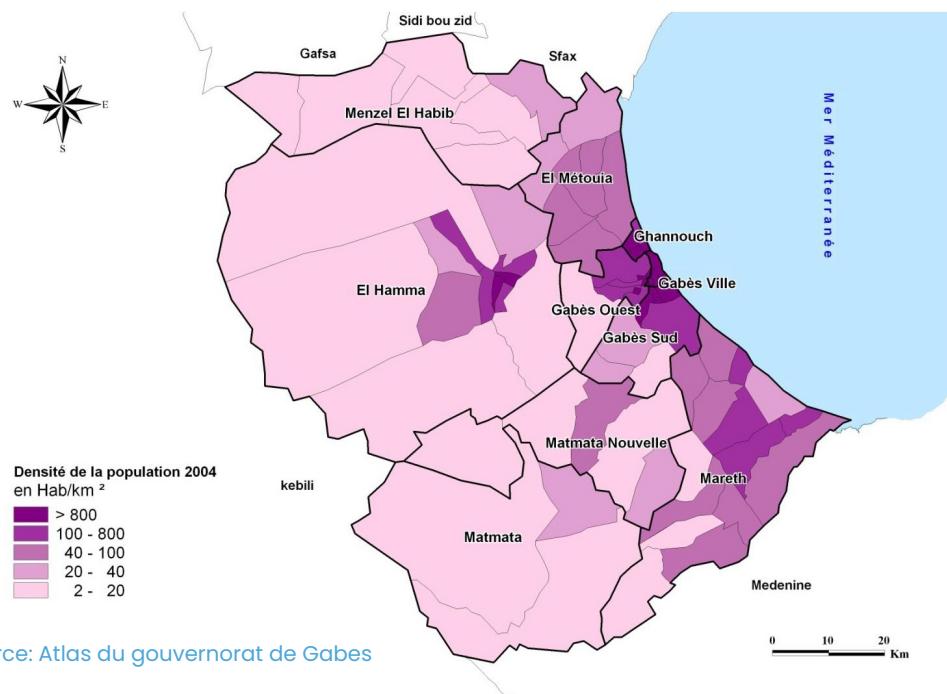
## Cultural profile

- **Archeological site:** Uthina ancient roman site, a museum is under construction
- **Cultural centers:** 8 cultural centers
- **Theaters, festivals:** 5 outdoor theaters: Hammam Lif, Ezzahra, Rades, Megrine and Ben Arous serving as a setting for summer festivals.

## 1.2 Social, economic and cultural profile of Gabes governorate

### Social profile

#### MAP OF POPULATION DENSITY.



Source: Atlas du gouvernorat de Gabes

As shown on the map, the population is denser in the bay area than the inland region, following the strategical choices of ancient inhabitants.

- **Demographic weight:** Gabes governorate, with its 374,300 inhabitants is the 16th greatest demographic weight in Tunisia, with an annual growth rate of 1.8% over the past two decades.
- **The average age of the population:** 32.34 years old
- **Education:** 12.10 % of the population graduated from university
- **Unemployment rate:** 19.6%
- **Distribution of the active population in the main sector of activity:** 14.53% of the population works in industry manufacturing

- **University network:** the governorate has a fairly diversified university network, providing training to over 21,500 students in many disciplines. Several research institutes are present in the region: The Institute of Arid Regions (IRA) and a station of the National Institute of Agricultural Engineering and Forestry (INGRET).

The governorate has 41 vocational training centers (4 public and 37 private centers) with a total capacity of 6,000 positions in various disciplines such as mechanics, electricity, industrial maintenance, refrigeration, jewelry.

## Economic profile

The economic activity of the region of Gabes is mainly based on industry, agriculture and fishing

- **Engines of local economy:** Tunisia is the fifth largest phosphate exporter in the world; as a main actor in this sector, Gabes houses an important industrial center specializing in phosphate processing, food and construction industries. The numbers of enterprises of the region evaluated at 100 companies including 13 of which are totally exporting.

- **Agricultural resources:** with a palm grove of around 300,000 date palm trees and a vast cultivable ground (597,288 ha), Gabes is characterized by its agricultural wealth harvested in oases such as vegetables, pomegranates, fruit trees and dates. The region is also known for its greenhouse early crops, of which production is totally exported, mostly: tomatoes, melons, peppers, cucumbers. With 80 km of coastline, two fishing ports and 2 lakes (Boughrara – 50,000 ha – and Elbibane – 30,000 ha), Gabes is one of the most lively areas in Tunisia when it comes to fishing and is known for the quality of its tuna and seafood like shrimp.

- **Weight of tourism:** Gabes used to be an essential crossroads between the desert and the coast for nomads and merchants. It has diverse and attractive sites (ecological, geomorphological, architectural, cultural) and hot springs that allow it to develop the tourism sector in

the region. Despite this wealth and diversity, achievements remain weak because of several environmental challenges. With 21 establishments (including 11 not classified), the accommodation capacity is 1,892 beds. Arrivals totalled 89,193 in 2009 and overnight stays reached 131,739, resulting in an occupancy rate of 20.9% and an average stay of 1.6 days. It is a transit tourism for tourists who reside in neighboring tourist areas (Djerba and Zarzis mainly) and who take advantage of their stay to visit the coastal oases, mountain villages and dunes of Erg Oriental.

## Cultural profile

- **Museums:** 2 museums
- **Cultural centers:** 7 cultural centers and 15 Youth centers
- **Theaters, festivals:** 3 theaters

## 1.3 Social, economic and cultural profile of Medenine governorate

### Social profile

- **Demographic weight:** the demographic weight of the Medenine governorate (479,520 inhabitants) is the 10th greatest in Tunisia
- **Average age of the population:** 31.7 years old
- **Education:** 10.36 % of the population graduated from university. Five higher education institutions are located in the region. The governorate also has 6 public vocational training centers and 29 private centers with a total capacity

of 3,865 positions. These centers offer specialized training programs in the fields required by the companies and tourism units such as electricity of industrial sanitary equipment, central heating, clothing, specialties relating to hospitality and tourism.

- **Unemployment rate:** 15.09%
- **Distribution of the active population in the main sector of activity:** 22.41% of the population works in the field of education, health and administrative services.

### MAP OF POPULATION DENSITY IN MEDENINE GOVERNORATE (IN 2014).



Source: Office de Développement du Sud, 2019

As shown in the figure above, people are likely to live on the Island of Djerba given its significant employment rate, mostly in the tourism sector.

## Economic profile

- **Engines of local economy:** the region of Medenine has an agricultural potential based on arboriculture, livestock and open fields cultivation of cereal crops and cucurbits. With its 400km coastline, the region is rich in seafood (16 % of the national production).
- **Weight of tourism:** Thanks to the island of Djerba, the Medenine governorate is an internationally renowned tourist spot that continues to expand, with luxury hotel facilities, recreation centers, ancillary services and a modern golf course.

## Cultural profile

- **Museums:** in Djerba and Zarzis
- **Cultural centers:** 7 cultural centers
- **Theaters, festivals:** 7 theatres, 25 festivals, 5 youth centers .



## 2. INFRASTRUCTURES AND MOBILITY

## 2.1 General overview

In Tunisia, trips can be made by road, rail or air.

### The road network

Tunisia has a hierarchical road network, allowing easy movement around the country. However, the interior regions are less well served than the coastal regions, contributing to the isolation of certain territories.

### Motorways and national roads

Tunisia has a quality motorway network, which has grown steadily in recent years. Since 2019, the A1 motorway now links Tunis to Gabes. Ultimately, this highway will allow a north-south axis from the Algerian border to the Libyan border (up to Ben Guerdane, governorate of Medenine).

The national roads (also called "Grand Parcours") support the motorway network. These roads serve several governorates at the same time. With increasing traffic, these routes are used more and more for intercity travel.

### Secondary roads and local roads

Apart from the main axes, the network of secondary and local roads serves all Tunisian cities. These axes are well-maintained and allow easy interurban connections. Less frequented, these routes also allow for the discovery of the beauty of Tunisia's hinterland, and are

passable by car and bicycle. From village to village, crossing wadi and valleys, we meet agricultural workers in olive groves, women dressed in traditional regional clothes, children driving plows full of fruit and vegetables. These routes are clearly an opportunity for an alternative tourist discovery of Tunisia.

In the south of the country, many local roads are not paved and rather have the appearance of tracks. Most are passable with an ordinary vehicle. However, certain tracks require an adapted vehicle (4\*4) in particular in the Saharan desert or in the mountains of Dahar. It is advisable to be vigilant regarding potholes, especially after heavy rains. In Djerba, many local roads are tracks that allow pretty routes for cycling or hiking.

### Road transport

Within the country, it is possible to travel by coach or collective taxis, called "louage".

#### National road transport

- **Coach:** National and international travel is provided by the National Interurban Road Transport Company (SNTRI) which has 41 national lines and 2 international lines (Tunis-Tripoli, Sfax-Tripoli).
- **Shared taxis:** the share taxi is called "louage" in Tunisia. It is a popular form of transportation, barely more expensive than the bus and a little faster. These are vans that leave once full, so there are no schedules, but the frequency is quite high. In each city, there is a collective taxis station, often

near the main bus station. This type of transport is relatively unregulated and many collective taxi drivers do not respect road safety regulations.

### Local transport

Many regional bus and coach companies take over from the national company within the governorates. However, it is not always easy to understand how the bus network works for a passing visitor. Shared taxis also provide local interurban services.

### Tourist transport

Private transport companies as well as travel agencies offer tourist transport whether by taxi within the cities or by minibus for longer excursions.

Many hotels also offer to organize transfers and excursions for their customers.

From Djerba, many excursions are organized to visit the desert and the Ksour region, (the Berber citadels around Tataouine) by normal vehicle or 4x4.

### Car rental

It is very easy to rent a car in Tunisia, where many rental companies are located all over the country. However, during the summer period, it is difficult to find a vehicle available, as many Tunisians resident abroad return during the months of July and August.

To rent a car, you have to be 21 (25 for some companies) and have had a license for more than a year. The national driving license is sufficient. An international payment card, in the driver's name, is essential. Petrol stations are located throughout the country, but are rarer in the south: around Matmata, it is not uncommon to travel more than 100 km before meeting one and few service stations accept cards of payment.

### Driving your own vehicle

To visit Tunisia, it is possible to come with your own vehicle from Europe, traveling by ferry. This option is particularly preferred for safaris in the desert, by motorbike or by car.

## The rail network

Tunisia has a rail network of more than 2,000 km spread over 23 lines.

Tunisian railways are 1.435 m wide normal gauge north of Tunis (a standard that has become international) and one-meter narrow gauge in the center and south of the country. It is quite possible to travel by train. However, the network suffers from numerous failures which lengthen the duration of journeys, which is why most Tunisians favor the road over rail.



## The air network

Tunisia has 9 international airports, the main ones being Tunis-Carthage, Sousse, and Djerba.

The national airline Tunisair operates national flights from Tunis-Carthage airport through its subsidiary Tunisair Express. These connections have become more and more complicated: the company has a limited flying fleet and does not manage to carry out all of the scheduled flights (flights greatly delayed or canceled). This problem affects the tourism sector, in Djerba in particular.

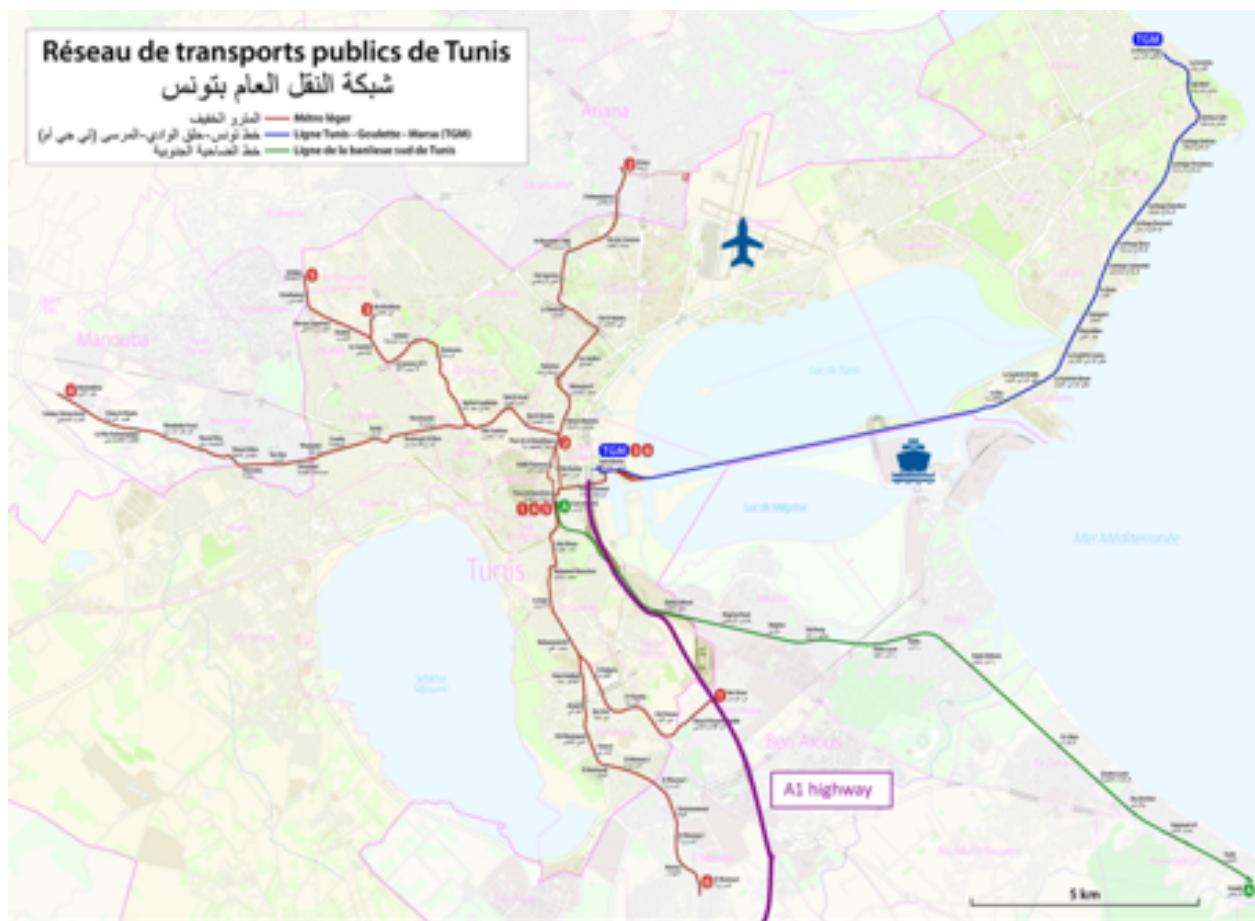


## 2.2 Hard infrastructure in Ben Arous, Gabes and Medenine governorates

### Ben Arous governorate

Ben Arous has good and fast connections to Tunis capital, whether by road or rail. The governorate benefits from its proximity to the country's first international airport. Concerning maritime connections, Rades international port accommodates ferries from Italy and France. It used to be a port of call for cruise lines, before 2011.

#### MAP OF TRANSPORT AND MOBILITY IN BEN AROUS GOVERNORATE



- **Airport:** The International Tunis-Carthage Airport is 30 minutes away by car
- **Highway:** Tunis-Sfax Highway (A1) and three road networks with dense traffic allow quick access to the governorate
- **Road transport:**
  - Buses from TRANSTU for interurban connection
  - Collective taxis inside the governorate and in the direction of Tunis (from Bourguiba avenue, the main artery of Tunis). Collective taxis are the most commonly used transport mode.
  - Taxis: yellow cabs allow transportation in the Tunis region.
- **Railway:**
  - A railway line connects the coastal towns of the governorate to the capital, from Tunis railway station, place Barcelone.
  - The north of Ben Arous governorate is also served by two metro lines: line 1 from Tunis Marine station to Ben Arous; line 6 from Place Barcelone (main station in Tunis) to El Mourouj 6.
- **Port:** port of Radès: commercial and passenger transportation: 90 % of container traffic and 95 % of the rolling traffic of the country. Rades port accommodates ferries from Italy and France. It used to be a port of call for cruise lines, before 2011

## Gabes governorate

### MAP OF GABES TOURISTIC INFRASTRUCTURE



Source ST2I, Atlas of Gabes governorate

- **Airport:** Gabes – Matmata Airport (national): weekly flight between Tunis and Gabes
- **Highway:** A1, Tunis-Sfax-Gabes. Gabes is 365 km from Tunis, 130 km from Sfax
- **Road transport:**
  - Coaches for long journey.
  - Buses inside cities.
  - Collective taxi, for interurban or inter-governorate transportation.
  - Few yellow cabs, only inside the city.
- **Railway:** A railway line connects the governorate to Tunis (Gabes is terminus of the branch railway from the capital). Tunis↔Gabes: the journey takes about 6 hours, with two departures per day in both directions
- **Port:** ports don't accommodate passenger lines. There are two fishing ports, Gabes city and Zarat (40 km from Gabes) and one commercial port in Gabes.

## Medenine governorate

- **Airport:** International Djerba-Zarzis Airport, on Djerba Island
- Highway: extension of A1 highway (Tunis-Sfax-Gabes) is going to open very soon (infrastructure is finished). A network of roads linking the region with neighbouring governorates and Libya
- **Road transport:**
  - Coaches for long journey,
  - Buses inside cities,
  - Collective taxi, for interurban or inter-governorate transportation
  - Few yellow cabs, only inside the city
- **Railway:** no railway
- **Port:** Fishing port of Ajim

## 2.3 Soft infrastructure

Few climbing sites exist in Tunisia. The two best known are:

- On the mountain of Djebel Ressas (Ben Arous governorate) there is a pass which is not easy to access , where it is better to have good equipment and a guide to take you to its summit
- The site of Zaghouan, the best known in Tunisia for rock climbing, which is also an important caving site (in Ben Arous governorate's area of influence).

Hiking trails exist but are quite hard to find for non-connoisseurs; there is an important lack of hiking maps and almost no existing signage. Therefore, most hikers get their information on blogs, local websites. Guided tours are possible in some regions.

Horse ride are quite developed, especially in Djerba, but Tunisia doesn't count specific horse trails.

There is no cycling infrastructure in Tunisia. However, many itineraries are possible using local roads with low traffic, especially in the inland regions. The Mediterranean climate makes it possible to discover the country by bike throughout the year.

## 2.4 Accessible information on heritage and culture

General website & Apps on Tunisia:

- The Tunisian National Tourist Office (ONTT) website:  
<https://www.discovertunisia.com/en/>

Adventure Tourism (blog, websites):

- Sustainable tourism activities:  
<https://idwey.tn/>
- Cultural tourism: Tunisie passion, app:  
<http://tunisiepassion.tn/>
- Hiking:  
<https://destination-tunis.fr/rando>  
<http://www.blog-voyage.tn/category/randonnees-tunisie/>

Website specialised for a specific destination:

- Dahar area:  
<https://destinationdahar.com/>
- Djerba (blog):  
<http://www.madjerba.com/>
- Djerba, museums:  
<http://www.djerbamuseum.tn/index.php?lang=en>



### 3. ENVIRONMENTAL PROFILE

### 3.1 General overview

Since independence a number of codes and laws relating to the protection of the environment have emerged including, for example, the Forest Code (1966 and revised in 1988), the Water Code (1975), the Town-Planning Code (1979 revised in 1994), the 1986 law on cultural property.

Here are the main Tunisian institutions concerned with environmental policy:

- National Agency for Environment Protection (ANPE), created in 1988.
- Ministry for the Environment, created in 1991.
- Agency for protection and development of the Coastline (APAL), created in 1995.

#### CLIMATE ZONES OF TUNISIA



Source: les cahiers d'EMAM, n°21

- National Waste Management Agency (ANGED), created in 2005.

#### Climate and wildlife

Tunisia is characterized by a Mediterranean climate, from humid area to desert area in the south. This climate's diversity is a strong asset for tourism in Tunisia. Indeed, the country benefits from a very varied environmental landscape: beautiful Mediterranean seaside regions, oak tree forests in the north, olive and grapevine growing in the center, and Sahara dunes in the south.

The country is teeming with wildlife. Unfortunately, industrialization and unplanned urbanization has strongly damaged natural habitats. However, it is always possible to admire bird migration, especially in Ben Arous governorate and on Djerba Island. Each area has a specific biodiversity reservoir.

## National parks and Nature reserves

Tunisia counts 17 National Parks and 27 nature reserves.

Tunisian legislation distinguishes national parks from nature reserves according to their management model. A manager is assigned to each national park, which may have other responsibilities and is not solely responsible for one site. National park management focuses on monitoring of animal species, plantations. Some sites have drawn up management plans. Access to national parks is restricted to prior authorisation.

Despite the tourist potential of Tunisian national parks and nature reserves, these areas have been undervalued. Parks and reserves are mainly visited by local tourists. Local populations, strongly attached to these places, go there regularly, often with family; there are also many school visits and environmental classes.

## Legal framework affecting adventure tourism activities

Since 2011 (Tunisian revolution), adventure tourism activities have significantly increased in Tunisia. Mostly young Tunisians are curious about (re)discovering their country: hiking, climbing, canoeing, wildlife observation are all very popular. With the easing of political restrictions on civil society activities, many associations and local groups have emerged, proposing activities throughout Tunisia.

However, these new products widely target the domestic market and do not yet manage to attract international tourists. In order to attract international tourists, to name just a few challenges, installations need to respect international security norms, effective communication channels have to be developed and accommodation must be available in remote areas.

Finally, no legal framework currently exists for many alternative tourism activities, or for specific adventure tourism. In addition, many activities are still forbidden by law or require authorisation from the Ministry of the Interior.

To name just a few examples:

- **Accommodation:**

- The legal framework for guesthouses appeared very recently and has allowed the development of this sector. However, authorization can take several years (around 5 years to obtain the authorization required to open a guest house).
- Home stay accommodation is prohibited for security reasons. This hinders the development of accommodation in certain regions with little offers for tourists.
- There is no legal framework for all types of alternative accommodation: caravans, tree houses and so on, and therefore, it is impossible to develop this kind of project.

- Adventure tourism activities:
  - Subject to authorization from the Ministry of the Interior which hinders the development of this type of activity (hiking, caving, etc.),
  - Many natural areas are not accessible: most of the Tunisian mountain peaks are in military zones.

## 3.2 Protected areas and environmental profile of Ben Arous, Gabes and Medenine governorates.

### Ben Arous governorate

- Semi-arid area, with mild winters
- **Coastal area:** mainly occupied by important industrial zones and the first industrial port of the country, Rades port.
- **Inland area:** rural landscape, mostly olive-growing areas and grapevine growing
- Major environmental problems caused by industrialization and urbanization of the governorate: the water is strongly polluted and it is now forbidden to swim in the Mediterranean Sea for safety reasons.

### National Parks and Nature Reserves

- Djebel Ressas Natural Reserve

The mountain of Djebel Ressas, "the lead mountain", named after the lead mine, still active nowadays, is 800 meters high.

The mine was already in operation in Roman times. The village and the mine could become cultural attractions, the basis for the development of adventure tourism activities in the area

Djebel Ressas is hard to hike; the way is scarcely indicated, it is better to be accompanied by someone knowing the road. Some climbing routes have been equipped. However, it is still few accessible to the general public. Some caves can be accessed for caving activities.



**A site with a high potential for Adventure Tourism. At present it is only visited by connoisseurs.**

## National Park of Boukornine

The National Park of Boukornine covers an area of 1,939 ha. Situated 10 km from Tunis, it is categorized as a peri-urban park.

The Park is easily accessible, by car, on foot or by bike. A large road allows climbing up to the top. The mountain benefits from a beautiful panorama on the Tunis Gulf and Mediterranean Sea. Some ancient traces of Baal Saturne Balcaranensis temple and other ancient ruins exist. In springtime, a traditional visit is made to the source of Ain Zarga. This park remains little known, even by local people.

- Flora: more than 600 species.
- Fauna: birds (50 species) mammals (25 species), and butterflies (25 species).

### A site easy to access for a large audience; the park could be developed.

## Gabes governorate

- Arid area

## Coastal area

These waters are (or were) the seat of an important marine biomass and a high biodiversity. The Gulf of Gabes is one of the few places in the Mediterranean to experience tides, uncovering vast swamps that are home to many migratory birds. Since 1972, the installation of phosphate treatment plants and the artificialisation of soils have caused great anthropic pressures on the coast. For more than fifty years

large quantities of phosphogypsum from the factories of phosphoric acid and chemical fertilizers has been dumped on the shores and at sea, with a devastating effect on the coastal ecosystem, both at sea and on land. Moreover, the permanent scraping of the seabed by trawl nets has led to overfishing of many fish species. The area is characterized by unique coastal oases (Gabès, Chenini-Nahal, Kettana), but also deep soil pollution and gradual abandonment of agriculture.

## Inland area

The inland area lieson the plains between the sea and the mountains of Matmata. Altitudes vary from 400 to 600m and reach 715m at Jbel Zmerten (south of Toujane, in the Mareth delegation). The Dahar plateau covers most of the delegation of Matmata, and is the reverse of the cuesta whose altitudes decline from 400 to 200m from east to west. This plateau is cut by multiple dry valleys whose intermittent streams will get lost in the dunes of the erg.

## National parks and nature reserves

- Nature reserve basin versant ouest de Gabes

Created in 2010, this natural reserve is only 15km from Gabes. This watershed is a very important site for scientific research and the demonstration of the ancestral technique of "jessours". Jessours are the oldest and best known form of the Tunisian systems for collecting and developing runoff water.

They involve building a cascade of earth embankments, sometimes consolidated with stones, in the talweds and depressions, with the aim of retaining runoff and load-bearing materials.

- Ramsar site of Chott el Guetayate et Sebkhet Dhreia et Oueds Akarit, Rekhama et Meleh.

To describe this site, we will quote the Ramsar description of this wetland<sup>7</sup> : "This Ramsar site is situated between Gabes and Sfax governorates. Intertidal marshes situated in an estuarine coastal environment including beaches and bluffs, crossed by several valleys extending to the Gulf of Gabes. The site supports several water bird species including the Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*), Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) and Dunlin (*Calidrisalpina*). Several fish species have been identified here, including migrating species such as the IUCN red-listed catadromous European Eel (*Anguilla anguilla*), estuarine fish species such as the South European toothcarp (*Aphaniusfasciatus*), and marine bivalves. The diversity of habitats encourages the presence of a rich plant diversity including halophytes, perennials and annuals as well as dense tamarisk forests. Its main hydrological values include groundwater recharge, water retention and flood regulation. Main land uses include agriculture and fishing, and it is an important archaeological and cultural site with great historical value."

## Medenine governorate

- Arid area
- Coastal area: extension of the Gulf of Gabes, described below.
- Inland area: extension of Daha mountain, beginning in the Gabes governorate (description below).

## National Park and nature reserves

- National park of Sidi Toui

Opened in 1991, Sidi Toui is some fifty kilometers south of Ben Gardane and some twenty kilometers northwest of the Tunisian-Libyan border. It covers 6,315 hectares entirely fenced on the edge of the Sahara; a djebel peaking at 172 meters, steppes and sand dunes constitute its characteristic landscape. The vegetation is made up of various species including sagebrush. The fauna is characteristic of arid regions with species that survive in extreme conditions. Because of security reason, the park is not authorised for visitors.

7. Annotated List of Wetlands of international importance:  
[https://rsis.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/rsiswp\\_search/exports/Ramsar-Sites-annotated-summary-Tunisia.pdf?1576916235](https://rsis.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/rsiswp_search/exports/Ramsar-Sites-annotated-summary-Tunisia.pdf?1576916235)

## Ramsar sites

Medenine governorate counts 6 Ramsar sites, mostly on Djerba Island:



- Ramsar site of Sebkhet Oum Ez-Zessar et Sebkhet El Grine (9,195 ha)

Defined by Ramsar<sup>8</sup> as an important bird area "Comprising permanent estuarine and shallow marine waters including intertidal marshes, the site supports several bird species including the Eurasian Spoonbill, up to 360 individuals, representing 3% of the population of the West Palearctic bio- geographic realm, and the Greater Flamingo (2,200 individuals). Estuarine fish species have been identified here, including the estuarine European Toothcarp and Thicklip Grey Mullet. Several reptiles and mammals such as the Fennec Fox (*Vulpes zerda*), Shaw's Jird, and the Algerian Hedgehog have been identified with dense vegetation consisting mainly of halophytes. The main hydrological function is groundwater recharge. The

site is remarkable for its natural state with very little human exploitation; the main human activities include traditional fishing and grazing."

- Ramsar site of Bahiret el Bibane (39,266 ha)

This site is a vast lagoon of approximately 33 km by 10 km, near the Libyan border, separated from the sea by two peninsulas (Solb el-Gharbi and Solbech-Charki) which almost touch each other. The site also covers the coastal waters outside the lagoon, the smallest lagoon of Bahar Alouane and two "sebkhas" or salty areas. The lagoon is an important nursery for fish that grow in its rich waters and then migrate to the sea; it is famous throughout Tunisia for the production of fish. A large traditional fishing dam with passes allows fish to

8. <https://rsis.ramsar.org/fr/ris/2100>

enter the lagoon to grow and then leave it. At 3.5 km long, it is the longest dam of this type in the Mediterranean. Bahiret El Bibane is also an important area for nesting and wintering water birds. We find the piping duck (*Anas penelope*), the northern pintail (*Anas acuta*), the northern shoveler (*Anas clypeata*), the common crane (*Grus grus*), the common curlew (*Numenius arquata*) and several species of seagulls such as the black-headed gull (*Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*), pygmy seagull (*Larus minutus*) and black-headed gull (*Larus ridibundus*), as well as Caspian tern (*Sterna caspia*).

•Ramsar site of Boughrara Gulf  
(12,880 ha)

Boughrara Gulf is a narrow lagoon connected to the sea on both sides of the Island of Djerba. It receives water permanently from the Mediterranean Sea as well as tidal currents from the Ajim Channel separating the mainland from Djerba in the west. According to the Ramsar list<sup>9</sup> , "the area is an exceptional site for terrestrial and marine biodiversity. It is considered to be increasingly vulnerable and fragile as a result of insufficient fresh water, shallow depth, limited water circulation, and intense evaporation as well as anthropogenic activities through indiscriminate fishing and the use of destructive fishing machines. The *Posidonia* Herbarium characterizing the vegetation cover favours the settlement of fish, bivalves and other species and also serves as a source of food for plankton and

a breeding ground for fish species. It harbours diverse bird species during winter. Though it has been classified as an Important Bird Area (IBA), there are further potential threats to its sustainability such as organic waste disposal from animal rearing activities, phosphorus waste disposal from surrounding industries, waste water and solid wastes from the peripheries".

• Ramsar site of Djerba Bin El Ouedian  
(12,082 ha)

This site is composed of the southern part of the island of Djerba (514 Km<sup>2</sup>) and the Bin El Ouedian wetland centered on the Al Kantara causeway to the mainland. Djerba has seen a rapid increase in tourism in the past 40 years, bringing an important human pressure, pollution and the removal of sand for local construction purposes. Bin El Ouedian, on the other hand, constitutes a rare portion of the island that has remained almost pristine until now. The influence of the Mediterranean tide, coupled with a characteristic marine hydrology, play a dominant role in the dynamics of this wetland, which supports a remarkable fauna of (shell)fish and waterbirds. The area also contains important archaeological sites such as the old fort of Borj El Kastil and the Roman site of Méninx.

9. <https://rsis.ramsar.org/fr/ris/2100>

- Ramsar Site of Djerba Guellala  
(2,285 ha)

Located on the island of Djerba, the site includes the coastal areas along the southwest corner of the island, facing the mainland. The flora and fauna are characteristic of arid zones, and include among others the pink flamingo (*Phoenicopterus (ruber) roseus*) and the Eurasian spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*), which use the site during their migrations between Africa and Europe. Although the site remains almost intact, there is a small risk of pollution from the ships that use the Ajim ferry port.

- Ramsar Site of Djerba Ras Rmel  
(1,856 ha)

The third Ramsar site in Djerba, Ras Rmel ("sand cape") is a sand bar 10 km long located in the north of the island. The bar protects an area of lagoons east of Houmt Souk that is frequented by numerous migratory bird species including the Eurasian spoonbill, the plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) and the thick-knee (*Burhinus oedicnemus*). The site suffers from intense pressure from tourism, land pollution (plastic wastes), and the extraction of sand for construction.



## 4. DESTINATION STRATEGY AND MANAGEMENT

## 4.1 Tourism in Tunisia

### Tourism, a predominant sector of the Tunisian economy since the 1960s

Since the 1960s, the development of tourism in Tunisia has been a crucial issue, involving private and public partners. In 1962, tourism, with 52,000 entries and 4,000 beds, generated a revenue of two million dollars. By 2006 it had become the main source of foreign exchange in the country with 6,549,549 visitors and an offer of 231,838 beds (of which almost 27% were located in four and five stars hotels).

Hotel capacity rose from 56,000 beds in 1974 to 123,000 beds in 1991. The sector represented 6.5% of GDP at the time and provided 340,000 jobs, including 85,000 direct jobs, or 11.5% of the employed labor force with a high share of seasonal employment.

In 2010 tourism represented 7% of the national GDP, and around 20% of foreign exchange earnings each year. 400,000 Tunisians were employed in the tourism industry and the accommodation capacity was more than 241,000 beds.

From 2011, Tunisian tourism was hit by the events that rocked the country: the Jasmine Revolution in 2011, political unrest and assassinations in 2013, the Sousse and Bardo National Museum attacks in 2015.

Since then, the tourism sector has resumed a high growth rate.

In 2017, TUI and Thomas Cook resumed their trips to Tunisia after more than a year and a half of rupture. The Open Sky, promised for several years, should have been signed in March 2020 between Tunisia and the European Union.

The total number of arrivals in 2019 was 9,429,049 tourists, an increase of 13.6%.

## 4.2 The destination management system

### Tunisia organization and pilot areas organization

At a national scale, the Ministry of Tourism elaborates and implements the policy of the government in the domains of tourism and tourist leisure activities: <http://www.tourisme.gov.tn/en/home.html>

The Tunisian National Tourist Office (ONTT), under the guardianship of the Ministry, implements the state strategy in tourism:

- Develop the tourism sector
- Regulate and control tourist activity
- Promote the product
- Provide hotel and tourist training.

At a local level, Regional Offices of Tourism<sup>10</sup> aim to promote their territories.

10. <https://www.discovertunisia.com/contact/commissariats-regionaux-au-tourisme>

Concerning the 3 governorates:

- Ben Arous: depends on the office of "South Tunis"
- Gabes: has an office for the territory "Gabes-Matmata"
- Medenine: has an office for the territory "Djerba-Zarzis"

- Geopolitical threats

Finally, the resurgence of terrorism has deeply shocked the Tunisian tourism sector. The tourism sector grew by only 0.8% in 2015 compared to 2.3% in 2014, with overall economic growth down -0.2% in 2014 and -12% in 2015.

## 4.3 Tunisia's tourism strategy

### Tunisian tourism weaknesses

The tourism sector fell sharply after 2015. However, weaknesses in this sector date back to the early 2000s:

- Structural weaknesses in Tunisian tourism

The offer is poorly structured and poorly diversified. Tourism policy marginalizes a huge part of Tunisian territory to focus on the seaside offer of coastal regions. Those "forgotten territories" include 13 of the 24 governorates; including Gabes and Medenine governorates (except the island of Djerba in Medenine governorate). Moreover, hotel staff are becoming less and less qualified, because hoteliers are unreasonably seeking to optimize their profits.

- Structural threats

Market competition is increasing. Tunisia suffers from the development of new destinations: Turkey, Egypt, Morocco and other markets offer the same products with more competitive prices and services.

### National tourism sector's strategy

- New boost for tourism communication

Between 2011 to 2015, Tunisian tourism went from an image of paradise - a destination of sunshine all year round, sandy beaches as far as the eye can see, welcoming and friendly people - to an image of dangerous destination, in a tense insecure climate.

The Tunisian National Tourist Office (ONTT) then developed its communication strategy by adding to ordinary elements (participation in international tourism fairs, classic advertising campaigns, etc.) new and innovative elements which integrate the notion of "buzz" as an element of communication. This new communication strategy is also based on digital. In October 2016, the Tunisian Ministry of Tourism launched the new multilingual portal "Discover Tunisia". In the same year, the ministry also ran a campaign under the hashtag #True Tunisia, broadcasting images of Tunisia in real time on connected bus shelter screens in Paris, Berlin, Milan, Brussels and London. The following year, the ONTT invited many influencers to relay a new image of Tunisia, as part of the "#RiseTunisia" campaign.

Tunisian tourist communication also insists on the security offered to visitors, throughout the country and especially in tourist areas.

- [Open Tunisia to new tourist markets](#)

In a few years, visitors' profiles have changed. To compensate the drop in European tourists, Tunisia has bet on domestic tourism, Maghreb tourism as well as on emerging markets. Algerians, Libyans and Russians now represent more than half of the tourists. The country thus hosted some 800,000 Russian tourists in 2019, more than the French visitors. And some 1.3 million Algerians visited Tunisia during the first seven months of the year. Chinese customers are also a growing target for the country: Chinese arrivals in 2019 were around 29,974, an increase of 7.3%.

## 4.4 Main attractions

### Ben Arous governorate

#### More interesting things to discover

##### Mountain of Djebel Ressas

- Beautiful views on Tunis Gulf
- Activities: climbing, hiking, caving
- A site with a high potential for Adventure Tourism. Until now, it is only visited by connoisseurs.

Djebel Ressas is a high and rugged outcropping of Jurassic limestone situated on the horizon southeast of Tunis. Ressas dominant peak is 750m. Along the highway between Tunis and

Hammamet there are excellent views of the mountain as you look south from near the tollbooths, just past the exit to Mornag.

The geologic origins of Djebel Ressas and the neighbouring peaks date to earlier than 100 million years ago. Earliest references in literature indicate the countryside adjacent to Djebel Ressas was possibly the location of a famous military engagement, fought and won decisively by the empire of Carthage against rebel mercenaries and other local enemies, late in the second century B.C.

Most of Djebel Ressas is now an excellent setting for a day of rewarding outdoor activity. But the site hasn't been developed, in any formal sense, as a recreational objective.

##### National Park of Boukornine

- Between Ben Arous and Nabeul governorates
- Activities: climbing, hiking & biking. Few possibilities to be guided, and no existing maps for self-guided tours.
- A site easy to access for a large audience, missing a good enhancement of the park.

The park protects many plant species (some of them are very rare) and animals. The summit of Boukornine mountain rises to 576 m, its lowest part is 10 m. Boukornine Mountain is the northern end of the Atlas.

The park has two main entrances: the most frequented is on the side of the restaurant Le Chalet Vert, the other on the side of the Ain Zargua (a source of fresh water).

## [Uthina, archaeological site](#)



On more than 500 ha, the archaeological site of Uthina reveals the remains of a prosperous Roman city from the beginning of the 3rd century AD. From the amphitheatre, to the capitol via the bourgeois houses and their mosaics, the site of Uthina is representative of the cities of Ifriqiya, Roman Africa. Located in the countryside, the site enjoys a sublime panorama of the region, its olive groves, and the sea that can be seen on the horizon.

## [Zaghuan aqueduct](#)



Roman construction dating from 122 AD, the aqueduct was a total length of 132 km between the waters of the mountain from Zaghuan to Carthage. The aqueduct supplied water to the prosperous city and in particular the

thermal baths of Antoninus, the second largest temple in the empire after those of Rome. The remains of the aqueduct are visible in several places in the governorate of Ben Arous and in particular near the site of Uthina.

These majestic arches stand at the bend of the roads and could be the basis of a discovery route from Carthage to Zaghuan.

## [Sites with potential](#)

### [Hammam Lif](#)



Ancient seaside resort during the Protectorate period, Hammam Lif benefits from a beautiful waterfront, punctuated with houses of character: beylic palace (unfortunately in a dilapidated condition nowadays), casino, Italian and French palaces and houses. However, this important architectural heritage is little known.

Hammam Lif had was an important place during the Second World War. The city was the scene of heavy fighting in 1943, opposing the Allied and Axis troops. A bunker is still visible on Hammam Lif beach and a German cemetery has

graves of WW2 soldiers. The cemetery is between the sea and mountains. This historical heritage can constitute a cultural tourist attraction.

Hammam Lif is at the feet of Boukornine mountain, and a tour can be imagined between sea and mountain, culture and adventure.



## Activities under development

### Wine road

Founded in 1926, the "Cave de la fontaine aux mille amphores" is a wine cellar located in Megrine. The cellar is a place of ageing of grade wines, and one can visit the underground gallery. It is considered to be the oldest wine cellar in Tunisia and should be the starting point for the wine route which continues in the governorate of Nabeul.

## Area of influence

Zaghouan mountains, Tunis

**Ben Arous governorate benefits from the influence of Tunis metropolis but is still unknown, especially for foreign visitors.**

**Ben Arous has many assets for the tourist development of the region, today almost non-existent:**

- **natural mountain areas, where to practice activities such as walking, cycling or climbing**
- **many cultural aspects to highlight: the archaeological site of Uthina, the historic past of the place (WW2, Protectorate, mine, vine growing)**

**Today, most of the visitors are Tunisians or foreign residents in Tunis, hiking in the mountains or discovering Uthina archeological site.**

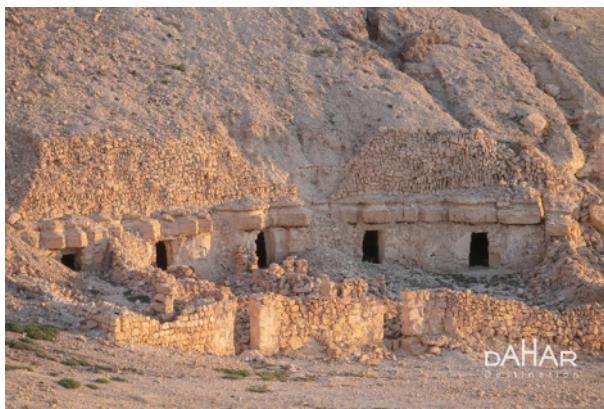
## Gabes governorate

### More interesting things to discover...

#### Dahar mountains

Dahar is probably the most unusual region of Tunisia, close to the beaches of Djerba and the dune desert of the Sahara, the Djebel Dahar is a mountain range with lunar and arid landscapes, interspersed with a magnificent plateau and small fertile valleys.

Rich in a millennial history, it served as a refuge for its Berber inhabitants who knew how to subsist with great ingenuity in the face of their harsh environment, taking advantage of its strategic location on the caravan route, becoming a crossroads for the civilizations that have crisscrossed the region over time.



The inhabitants of Dahar mountains have managed to keep their customs and traditions despite the profound change of lifestyles and the mix of populations. They are known for their warmth and friendliness toward tourists.

With its unique cultural and historical heritage, as well as exceptional geological, paleontological and natural

patrimony. Dahar delights travellers who are interested in discovering, hiking, meeting with the locals and in "scientific tourism".



This destination brings together promoters and residents of Djebel Dahar who want to encourage authentic tourism, for visitors who are interested in discovering a unique land, far from mass tourism.

The Swiss cooperation is developing sustainable tourism in the Dahar region:  
<https://destinationdahar.com/>

#### Berber Culture and troglodyte habitats

Perched on the edge of the Sahara Desert at 600m and overlooking the Dahar Mountains, the mountainous region Matmata is famous for its unique Berber culture and heritage of its indigenous Berber people with troglodyte homes dug into the rock in a series of large pits interconnected with hidden passageways and open-air courtyards. These unique Berber buildings are pleasantly cool in summer and comfortably warm in winter protecting its inhabitants from the scorching sun while retaining heat in the winter.

## Sites with potential



The Amazigh have helped spark an earnest interest in Tamazight, the language of the Berbers, in their fascinating architecture as well as their unique cuisine (thanks to their locally produced olive oil, honey and freshly baked tabouna bread), intricate handicrafts, among Tunisians wishing to learn about their Berber origins, as well as guests interested in exploring the country's cultural patrimony.



Matmata is one of the most popular destinations in the south as the site of the film location of the Star Wars movie. Hotel Sidi Driss was reshaped into Luke Skywalker's home and today welcomes casual visitors and overnight guests in its basic rooms.

### Oasis of Chenini

The Chenini-Gabès and Metouia oases are among the very few coastal oases in the world.

In Chenini, the oasis is home to a 252 hectare palm grove. The date palm is cultivated together with fruit trees, like pomegranate, vegetable and fodder crops, henna, tuna and shrimp fishing. Urban expansion, pollution, soil depletion but also the crumbling of agricultural plots are threats which weigh heavily on the oasis system. An oasis conservation association was formed in 1995, now part of the Network of Oasis Sustainable Development Associations. The tourism development of the oasis could allow a more sustainable management of the places by ensuring the preservation of the oasis system and an economic contribution to the local population.

### Thermal tourism in El Hamma

El Hamma, an oasis town about 30 km west of Gabès, owes its name to the hot springs that have made its reputation since Antiquity. El Hamma was the first thermal station in the country, however, these sources dried up in the 1980s and 90s, the result of deep drilling carried out to supply the cement plant in Gabès with water. The lack of water has also severely degraded the oasis ecosystem of the palm grove.

It is to revive the original vocation of the city that a spa with a capacity of 2,500 visitors must be built in the locality of El Khebayat twelve kilometers from El Hamma. It will include individual and group tourist accommodation, a golf course with an area of 75 hectares, a sports centre, a convention centre, a camping area and green spaces.

#### Area of influence

- Sfax governorate (160km from Gabes), Tunisia's second biggest city, and the second most populous city after the capital Tunis.
- Douz (a town in the Kebili Governorate in the south, 140km from Gabes): Sahara gates, hosts every year the International Festival of the Sahara, a celebration of traditional desert culture.
- The island of Djerba (105km from Gabes)

**Gabes governorate is well known for the Dahar region, where visitors can combine the discovery of cultural heritage (Berber villages and traditions), natural landscape (mountain and sea oasis) and adventure tourism with the possibility of mountain hiking.**

## Medenine governorate

### More interesting things to discover...

#### The Island of Djerba

Djerba is the best known tourist destination in Tunisia. Djerba has about twenty kilometers of sandy beaches which have made its international reputation.

With the arrival of the "Club Med" in 1954 and the development of tourism in the 1960s (construction of the first major hotel in 1961), these beaches became the island's flagship attraction. The eastern coast became highly urbanized to accommodate a large number of hotel complexes, amusement parks, bars and nightclubs. The tourist zone, located between Aghir in the south and Houmt Souk in the north, attracted mass tourism, in search of sun at low prices. In the 1980s, tourism really took off to become the main economic activity of the island. From the 2000s, faced with competition from numerous low-cost destinations and prices that were constantly drawn down, hotel complex was aging, lacking of renovation, and the clientele was falling. The island then seeks to diversify by offering golf, casino, thalassotherapy activities. A marina is under construction and will allow boats to park there without difficulty. The presence of Djerba-Zarzis International Airport remains a major asset, as well as important road infrastructure, allowing easy transportation on the island

## Dahar mountains & the Ksar tour

The Dahar mountain range, which begins in the governorate of Gabes, extends into the governorate of Medenine and Tataouine. In the governorate of Medenine begins in particular the architecture of the "Ksar, ksour", ancient granaries used by one or more tribes. The Medenine governorate has one ksar "ksarhallouf", beginning of the ksar tour, mostly situated in Tataouine governorate.

## Gightis archaeological site

Gightis is located at the bottom of the Gulf of Boughrara, opposite the island of Djerba, on the ancient road linking Carthage to Leptis Magna. Of Punic origin, the site was of interest to the Romans who made it a prosperous trading city, the real economic pulse of the region. Today, the site seems forgotten, melancholy ruins facing the sea. The remains are discovered in a splendid natural setting, facing the sea with migrating birds passing through the Gulf of Boughrara. Walks are possible from the site to the sea and its coastline

## Sites with potential

### Culture & Nature in Djerba

Djerba is nowadays mostly known for thermal tourism. However, a wide cultural and natural tourism can be developed on the island. Djerba has a unique culture that has been preserved for centuries. Habits, architecture, gastronomy, Djerbian people have an extraordinarily rich living heritage, unfortunately unknown to most visitors.

Tunisia had previously requested to seek UNESCO World Heritage status. In addition, Djerba counts Africa's oldest synagogue, Ibadites mosques and Christian churches. This religious melting pot reflects the successive civilisations of Djerba's history.

On a natural level, 3 of the 6 Ramsar sites in the governorate are on the island. The island of Djerba is on the route of many migratory birds which stop there during their journey. The archipelago benefits from a unique ecosystem, due to the position of Djerba within the Gulf of Gabes. Protected by the proximity of the continent, the coasts benefit from a low tide, an exceptional phenomenon in the Mediterranean which has allowed the development of a unique fauna and flora.

**Medenine governorate is mostly known for the large thermal touristic attraction of Djerba island. The interior part of the governorate is linked to the neighboring region (Tataouine with the Ksour, Gabes with the Dahar mountains). The south of the governorate (Ben Guerdane district) can't be visited for security reason, with the Libyan border nearby.**