

Directory

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ACCOMMODATION

As a well-established tourist destination, Tunisia has accommodation ranging from rock-bottom basic to five-star glitz. Recently it has acquired a number of smaller, chic, boutique hotels – welcome additions to the market. Throughout this book, accommodation is divided into three price categories: budget, midrange and top end. Some hotels add an air-con supplement to their prices in summer – this is usually around TD5 to TD10. To make things simpler, we have included this supplement in the prices listed where appropriate.

Although it can vary from town to town, budget accommodation includes camping, hostels and cheap hotels – where a bed will usually range from TD3 per person to TD30 for a double. In the cheapest places, your few dinars won't get you much more than a dorm bed or a cell with a shared bathroom. At the upper end of the scale you'll probably get somewhere quite pleasant with a private bathroom of some description. Lone women travellers will feel

PRACTICALITIES

Newspapers & Magazines

Daily newspapers include the French-language *La Presse* (www.lapresse.tn, in French only) and *Le Temps* (www.letemps.com.tn), and Arabic *Assabah* (www.tunisie.com/Assabah, in French only) and *Al-Houria*. In English, *Tunisia News* is available weekly, plus (two-day-old) major European and US papers, and (week-old) *Time* and *Newsweek*.

Radio

Tune in to local French-language Radio Tunis (98FM; www.radiotunis.com) or BBC World Service on short wave (15.070MHz and 12.095MHz).

TV

The French-language TV station (www.tunisiatv.com) includes 30 minutes of news at 8pm daily; satellite TV (CNN etc) screens in top-end hotels.

Video Systems

Like Europe and Australia, Tunisia uses PAL, which is incompatible with the North American and Japanese NTSC system.

Electricity

Almost universal and reliable, electricity is 220V; wall plugs have two round pins (as in Europe).

Weights & Measures

Tunisia uses the metric system (weight in kilograms, distance in metres); conversion charts are on the inside back cover of this book.

uncomfortable in the lowest-end cheapies, though exceptions are specified throughout the book; youth hostels are usually a good bet. Classified hotels are those that have been inspected by the government and awarded from one to five stars. Non-classified hotels haven't been inspected (these are indicated by the initials NC – *nonclassifié* – on accommodation lists handed out by tourist offices). They can still be very good though – they tend to be the most budget places and many are listed in this book. At classified hotels prices usually include breakfast, while at non-classified hotels you normally have to fend for yourself.

Midrange accommodation can start at TD30 per double, rising to TD100. In this price range, you'll usually have a private bathroom, more space and higher standards of cleanliness than some budget places, and – on occasion – charm, views and a pool.

For top-end rates (from TD100 for a double), you can expect luxurious rooms with satellite TV, fluffy towels, direct-dial telephone and a bathtub. Most places in this price bracket also have a pool, spas and a *hammam* (bathhouse).

Camping

There are few camp sites in Tunisia and facilities tend to be basic. Most charge between TD3 and TD7 per person, and some in the south rent on-site Bedouin tents if you don't have a tent. Showers are either free or around TD1.5, while those with cars and campervans pay a few extra dinars for water and electricity. The best camp sites are those in Tozeur (p258), Ksar Ghilane (p251), Douz (p246) and near Kélibia (p116).

Camp sites apart, it should be possible to camp anywhere as long as you obtain permission from the landowner. You can also ask locals where good camping spots are. Sleeping on the beach is the accepted

thing at Raf Raf and Ghar el-Melh in the north. The same does not apply, however, to the resort beaches around the Cap Bon, Jerba and Sousse.

Hostels

Hostels fall into two categories: *auberges de jeunesse*, affiliated to Hostelling International (HI); and government-run *maisons des jeunes*.

The *auberges de jeunesse* are thoroughly recommended. Most have prime locations, such as a converted palace in the Tunis medina (p80) and an old *funduq* (*caravanserai*; inn) in Houmt Souq on Jerba (p276). Others are at Remel Plage (p128) outside Bizerte and at the beach in Nabeul (p112).

You must be a member of Hostelling International to stay at an *auberge de jeunesse*. The hostels generally charge about TD6 to TD8 per night, with breakfast available for TD1 and other meals for TD3 each. Many impose a three-night limit during high season.

Maisons des jeunes, on the other hand, often have all the charm of a barracks, though there are exceptions, such as Hammamet's central beachside option (p106). Almost every town has one, but they can be far-flung and hard to reach without private transport. However, they're sometimes the only budget accommodation option. They all charge around TD5 for a dorm bed.

There are a few places where the *maison des jeunes* concept has evolved into a *centre des stages et vacances*, combining hostel and camp site. These are on the beach at Aghir on Jerba (p281), and in the oasis at Gabès (p226). Camping charges are usually TD3 per person. Power and hot showers are available for a few dinars extra.

Hotels

Tunisian hotels fall into two main categories: classified hotels, which have been awarded between one and five stars by the government; and nonclassified hotels, which haven't. The latter are indicated by the initials NC (*nonclassifié*) on tourist office accommodation lists.

Most budget places recommended in this book are nonclassified and some are excellent. The cheapest are in the town medinas. They're basic, often with no showers, and you pay for a bed in a shared room. These

APARTMENT RENTAL

For longer-term lettings, particularly in and around Tunis, and at resorts such as Hammamet and Sousse, try the following websites.

- <http://properties.tunisia.com>
- www.homelidays.com
- www.oasisimmobilier.com (in French only)
- www.meteotunisie.com/annonce (in French only)
- www.oleaimmobilier.com (in French only; for Hammamet rentals)

hotels are totally unsuitable for women travellers. However, there are plenty of nonclassified places that are more appealing.

One- and two-star hotels tend to be small, and often built in colonial times. They're generally clean, if rundown, and are popular with local business travellers and tourists who want a decent double room with private bathroom and hot water. A three-star rating usually indicates a hotel built to cater for tour groups. Four- and five-star hotels have the facilities you would expect, but people often find that four- and five-star places here, though often splendid, fall short of international standards.

Hotel prices are normally listed according to three seasons – *haute* (high), *moyenne* (middle) and *basse* (low). High season usually corresponds with the European summer (from 1 July to 15 September) and Christmas holidays. It's the same in the south, despite the incredibly hot temperatures. Low season is from 1 November to 15 March (excluding the Christmas holidays), and the rest is middle season. Generally low-season prices for top-end places can be remarkable: between 30% and 60% less than high-season rates. Differences are less marked at midrange places and only a few dinars cheaper at budget hotels. Prices listed in this book are high-season rates.

At classified hotels, room rates usually include breakfast; at nonclassified hotels and at top-end places, breakfast is often quoted separately, so make sure you ask. At budget and midrange level, you'll soon tire of the typical hotel breakfast, which

consists of coffee, French bread, butter and jam, and occasionally a croissant. Hotels catering for package groups normally offer a buffet breakfast. At top-end places you'll usually be brought a sumptuous feast that includes pastries, eggs, fruit, yoghurt and so on.

Resorts

Tunisia's coastline is awash with resort-style hotels, generally clustered together in what's known as a Zone Touristique. These are not aimed at the independent traveller, for whom the prices quoted are the full five- or four-star rates – still cheaper than European prices but expensive for Tunisia. Most people who stay at resorts do so as part of an airfare-and-accommodation package where prices are great value. Most resort hotels will have bars, restaurants, at least one swimming pool, a travel desk and shops, as well as a *hammam*, games room, private beach, gym and activities club. The most popular resorts are at Hammamet (p106), Sousse (p191), Port el-Kantaoui (p195), Monastir (p198) and Jerba (p280).

ACTIVITIES

Although the lure of the beach is hard to fight, Tunisia has a surprising range of activities besides lounging on the sand and plunging in the sea. Most popular are camel trekking, 4WD Saharan excursions and water sports. Trekking in the north is another great option – all the better because this is little-explored territory.

Beaches & Swimming

Roman remains, the Saharan desert and *Star Wars* sets may be temptations, but beaches remain Tunisia's main tourist draw. Beaches ring Cap Bon, including the remarkably clear waters at Mansourah Plage (Kélibia) and beyond, with another great option at El-Haouaria. Hammamet has grown up around its glorious curve of golden sand, which begins in the shadow of a picturesque old kasbah (fort) and stretches for miles along the coast. More good beaches lie all along the central coast. The best beach in the south is Sidi Mahres on Jerba.

There are also some fine spots in the north. Sidi Ali el-Mekki, between Tunis and Bizerte, is particularly lovely and much

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

loved by Tunisian holidaymakers. Cap Ser-rat, at the centre of the rugged north coast, shelters a glorious small sandy bay that's all but deserted for most of the year.

If you can't afford to stay at top-end *zone touristique* hotels, rest assured that it's easy to use their pools if you look like you belong there.

Bird-Watching

Tunisia is a great place for bird-watchers. You can spot rarities, such as Audouin's gull and local species such as Levaillant's woodpecker and Moussier's redstart.

Spring and autumn are the best times to see a wide range of migratory birds resting on their way elsewhere. In winter, the Unesco-listed Ichkeul National Park wetlands (see p132) are home to migratory waterfowl from all over Europe, including the rare greylag goose. Winter is also the time for flamingos that visit the northeast coast of Jerba and the beautiful 15km-long Korba Lagoon on Cap Bon.

At El-Haouaria on Cap Bon, May and June are when to spot Europe-bound migratory species.

For more information about birds in Tunisia, see p55. **Nature Trek** (☎ 01962-733051; www.naturetrek.co.uk) offers specially tailored bird-watching tours.

Camel Trekking

The Saharan town of Douz is the main camel-trekking centre (see the Desert Expeditions boxed text, p248). You can organise anything from a one-hour ride (TD4) to an eight-day, oasis-hopping trek to Ksar Ghilane and back (from TD40 per day).

Diving & Water Sports

The best place to go diving or snorkelling is Tabarka on the north coast (see p137), which has three good diving centres. Other places to try include Mahdia (p212), Bizerte (p127), Hammamet (p105) and Port el-Kantaoui (p195). At each place, there are agencies that organise trips, rent equipment and run courses for beginners.

Prices for snorkelling start from TD15 per hour, while diving costs about TD35 per dive.

The big tourist resorts (Hammamet, Sousse, Monastir and Jerba) are where to go for water sports, with plenty of places of-

fering everything from windsurfing to waterskiing and paddleboats to parasailing.

Dune Skiing, Go-Karting & Microlight Flights

The thrill of sand-dune skiing is only possible in the tiny oasis village of El-Faouar, 30km southwest of Douz, at Hôtel Faouar (see p249).

Go-karting-type rides are also available in Douz (see p245), and you can take a short microlight flight over the desert from here too.

4WD Trips

The most popular way of exploring the desert, particularly for those with little time, is by 4WD. Although the coastal resort hotels can set things up, independent travellers may prefer to organise their own tour. Costs work out roughly at TD50 per person (vehicles take up to seven people), if you're in a group, per day. The most popular expedition is from Douz to Ksar Ghilane. For more information, see the Desert Expeditions boxed text (p248).

Golf

Tunisia is a popular place to play golf, particularly in winter when the fairways of northern Europe are covered in snow, and there are some excellent facilities.

Hammamet is the best served, with two beautifully manicured courses; see p105. There are also good layouts at Jerba (p281), Port el-Kantaoui (p195), Tabarka (p137) and Carthage (p95). Green fees cost about TD85 for 18 holes. Usually a handicap of around 36 or over is required.

Hammams

The Tunisian *hammam* (public bathhouse) experience is just about vigorous enough to qualify as an activity and should be tried at least once. Every town has one – some of the best and most historic are in Tunis.

The standard service (TD1 to TD2) includes a rubdown with a *kassa* – a coarse mitten that is used to remove the grime and dead skin after your stint in the steam room. It's usually possible to have a massage as well. It's a good idea to bring along a towel and shorts for moving around the *hammam*, as nudity is a no-no. The idea is to wear a pair of underpants while washing, so bring a

second dry pair. And be warned: a rubdown with the *kassa* and the massage are not for the faint-hearted; it can be quite vigorous.

For a description of the *hammam* experience see the boxed text Steam & Sociability, p71.

Hiking/Mountain Biking

Walking in the hills is a newly developing pursuit in Tunisia. The Kroumirie Mountains forests around Ain Draham have enormous potential as a trekking destination; the region is stunningly beautiful and conditions are perfect for walking in spring and autumn. The potential is limited by the lack of detailed maps required to venture off the beaten track independently. **Siroko Travel** (☎ 71 965 267; www.sirokotravel.com) offers trekking holidays in both the north and Saharan south. Royal Rihana Hôtel (p141), in Ain Draham, also runs trekking and mountain-biking trips with overnight stays in Berber tents.

Horse-Riding

Sitting astride a horse is an excellent way to see the landscape. Horse-riding is available in Tabarka (p137), Hammamet (p106) and Tozeur (p258).

Quad-Biking

You can have off-road desert fun in Tozeur (see p258).

Sailing

Berthing in Tunisia is remarkably cheap compared with the northern Mediterranean, and there are lots of conveniently placed marinas along the coast. The largest are at Monastir, Port el-Kantaoui, Sidi Bou Saïd, Tabarka and Zarzis. You can hire a yacht at Sidi Bou Saïd (see p96). For information on Tunisian sailing, go to www.noonsite.com/Countries/Tunisia.

Thalassotherapy

Many upmarket hotels are equipped with spas specialising in thalassotherapy – from the Greek for sea treatment – a range of therapies using seawater to relax, revive and relieve pain, including seaweed wraps and water-jet treatments. In Tunisia you can indulge in these for a fraction of the cost of the same in Europe. The best include Hasdrubal Thalassa (p107) in Hammamet,

La Residence (p99) in Gammarth (Tunis) and Villa Didon (p96) in Carthage. You can also indulge in water treatments in Korbous in Cap Bon (p121) and El Moradi at Hammam Bourguiba (p142).

BUSINESS HOURS

See the inside front cover for a summary of countrywide opening hours for shops, post offices, banks, offices and restaurants. Note that during July and August, many businesses open earlier and close around noon. Hours also change dramatically during Ramadan (October/November), when most museums close at around 3pm, and businesses open for the morning only, with some re-opening for an evening session. In tourist areas, one bank is rostered to open on Saturday morning. Souvenir shops tend to stay open as long as there are tourists around.

CHILDREN

Tunisians adore children. Everyone finds Tunisians friendly, but the welcome's even warmer for those travelling with kids. The extended family is the centre of Tunisian life. Expect to be stopped in the street, to have your child kissed, admired and doted upon, and to have an extra special effort made to make sure you're comfortable. On beaches popular with locals you are bound to acquire new friends.

Practicalities

Although the benefits of travelling with children almost always outweigh the hassles, there are a few practical matters to bear in mind.

Airlines usually allow children up to two years old to fly for 10% of the adult fare or free. For children from two to 12, the fare on international flights is usually 50% of the regular fare or 67% of a discounted fare.

Breastfeeding is a private affair in Tunisia; doing it in public will attract lots of stares.

Safety seats in hire cars are more likely to be available from international companies, though it's always worth asking, while high-chairs in restaurants are only occasionally available. Hotels often charge a daily rate for cot rental, anything from TD5 to TD30 per night.

Baby products (baby food, nappies etc) are widely available although they can be expensive. Baby wipes cost from TD8 to

TD11 for a pack of 72, and pots of prepared baby food cost around TD3. Disposable nappies are cheaper than in Europe, the most popular brand being Pseudouce at around TD9 for a pack of about 25, but these are plastic-sealed so they're a bit less breathable than brands such as Pampers.

Many recognised brands are available in Tunisia, but expect to find them only in larger cities.

Sun lotion for babies and children is widely available but can be expensive, so bring a good supply.

For more comprehensive advice on travelling with children, get Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* by Cathy Lanigan.

Sights & Activities

With beaches galore, swimming pools, camel rides, the Saharan desert and *Star Wars* sets, there's a lot to keep children happy here. That said, there are few organised forms of entertainment, though most of the resort hotels have some form of dedicated playgroup or playground (and many have child-care services). Impromptu football games spring up on just about any open patch of ground most evenings; everyone's welcome.

For activities in Tunis, see Tunis for Children, p79, and for the best across the country, see Kids Stuff in the Top 10s boxed text (p15).

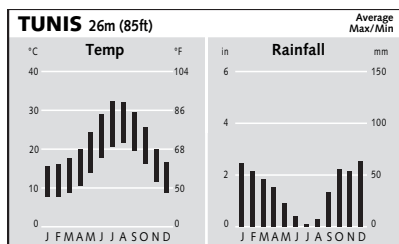
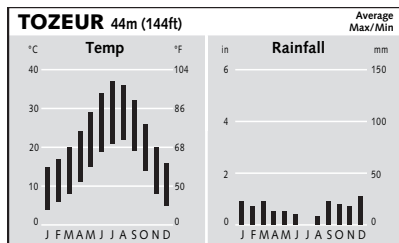
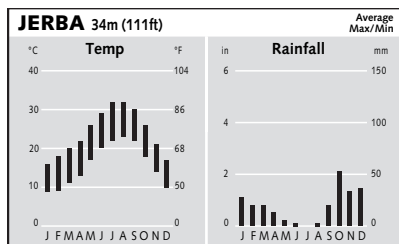
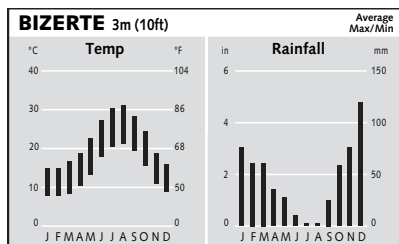
CLIMATE CHARTS

Northern Tunisia has a typical Mediterranean climate, with hot, dry summers (June to September) and wet winters (November to March) – which are quite mild by northern European standards. However, be warned that it can feel chilly in winter, and few places have adequate heating. The mountains of the northwest occasionally get snow.

The further south you go, the hotter and drier it gets. Annual rainfall ranges from 1000mm in the north down to 150mm in the south, although some Saharan areas go for years without rain. Desert nights can get very cold.

COURSES

The Institut Bourguiba des Langues Vivantes in Tunis runs courses in classical and Tunisian Arabic, while Langue Arabe pour Étrangers and Université Libre de Tunis (ULT) offer lessons in Modern Standard



Arabic (see p79). Courses in Arabic are available in Bizerte (p128).

CUSTOMS

Baggage searches at Tunisia's airports are rare, but those arriving or leaving with their car by boat often find that every bag is opened and searched – a process that can take hours and includes completing forms listing valuable items. Apart from

prohibited goods (such as illicit drugs and excessive amounts of alcohol), officials are also keen to ensure that you don't intend to sell goods from Europe while in Tunisia – hence the list, which must be presented on departure from the country.

The duty-free allowance is 400 cigarettes, 2L of wine, 1L of spirits and 250ml of perfume.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Tunisia is a generally safe place to travel and attacks on Westerners are extremely rare. One exception was in April 2002, when a suicide bomber blew himself and 19 others up at Erriadh's El-Ghriba Synagogue on the island of Jerba. The Tunisian government has spent decades cracking down on Islamic fundamentalism and such acts, claimed by Al-Qaeda, are extremely rare, but always do your research before going to Tunisia to get an idea of the risks as assessed by Western intelligence services.

Americans and other English-speaking visitors are likely to hear frequent comments expressing opposition to American foreign policy. In most cases, these are made in a friendly way, with the speaker emphasising that they differentiate between the US government and the American people. In extremely rare cases (we've heard one report),

outrage at US foreign policy can become personal and result in heated argument.

Mosquitoes

In some of the southern oasis towns (such as Tataouine, Tozeur and, to a lesser extent, Douz), sleeping with your window open is a good way to wake up the next morning covered in mosquito bites.

Rubbish

Rubbish, particularly plastic bottles and bags, scattered over the countryside is a distressing problem in Tunisia. Some small towns have no rubbish-collection system in place and rely on tips in public spaces – not a pretty sight. Don't add to the problem.

Sexual Harassment

Both female and male travellers have reported varying degrees of sexual harassment. For men, this seems to take place mostly in *hammams*, whereas women will soon realise that unwanted attention is a frequent occurrence whatever your location; see Women Travellers p300.

Smoking

Tunisians make the Chinese look like doctors of the National Cancer Institute. There are few public non-smoking areas – restaurants will often be very smoky – and the prevalence of smoke can be extremely aggravating for those who are bothered by second-hand smoke.

Stone-Throwing Children

Some readers have reported children throwing stones, particularly in some of the *ksour* (fortified strongholds) around Tataouine, the *palmeraie* (palm groves) around Gabès, and near the entrance of the medina in Sfax. Don't throw back.

Taxi Cons

Some cab drivers fiddle with their meters to increase the fare. This is mostly likely when you take a taxi from Tunis-Carthage airport, at large resorts, or when taking a taxi around tourist sights. For more information see the Tunis chapter, p70.

Theft

Tunisia has low levels of street crime. Still, it pays to take precautions, particularly in busy

GOVERNMENT TRAVEL WARNINGS

Before setting out, it's always wise to check on the prevailing safety and health situation. Most governments have travel advisory services detailing potential pitfalls and areas to avoid. Some of these include the following.

- **Australian Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade** (☎ 1300 139 281; www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Tunisia)
- **Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs & International Trade** (☎ 800-267 6788; www.voyage.gc.ca)
- **UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office** (☎ 0845-850 2829; www.fco.gov.uk/travel)
- **US Department of State** (☎ 202-501 4444; www.travel.state.gov/travel)

areas like the medinas of Tunis and Sousse. There have also been a few reports of beach thefts, so don't leave your belongings unattended. Crimes such as mugging are very rare. One reported scam, which might be a problem in resorts, is where you are asked to exchange currency for a euro or a pound, but if you produce your wallet, the person will grab the contents and run away.

The best place to keep your valuables (passport, travellers cheques, credit cards etc) is in a moneybelt or pouch around the neck under your clothes where, hopefully, you will be aware of an alien hand before it's too late. Put your valuables in a plastic bag first, otherwise they'll get soaked in sweat as you wander around in the heat of the day.

Touts

Touts are not a major hassle in Tunisia, but you sometimes might get someone warmly professing recognition and claiming to be a waiter at your hotel, then leading you to a local shop.

In Kairouan, people sometimes attach themselves to tourists as guides and are so persistent that people end up following them and giving them a few dinars, only to find they need another guide (who magically appears) to get them back from where they have been guided.

Unethical salespeople

At Tunisia's archaeological sites, you may well meet shifty men offering ancient coins for sale to tourists. Buying looted ancient artefacts is unethical and illegal, and if this does not deter you, bear in mind that they may well be fakes.

DISCOUNT CARDS

Hostel Cards

You need to be a member of **Hostelling International** (HI; www.hihostels.com) if you want to stay at any of Tunisia's four affiliated *auberge de jeunesse* hostels; see under Accommodation, p284, for their locations. You can join on the spot at the hostel in Tunis (p80).

Student & Youth Cards

There are no advertised discounts for students, although it never hurts to ask. An international student card can get you in

free to various monuments, including the Colosseum at El-Jem and Great Mosque at Kairouan. Note that most museums are free for under-18s. Most internet cafés offer small student discounts.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

It's important to realise what your own embassy can and can't do. Generally speaking, it won't help much in emergencies if the trouble you're in is remotely your own fault. Embassies will not be sympathetic if you end up in jail after committing a crime locally, even if such actions are legal in your own country. In genuine emergencies you might get some assistance, but only if other channels have been exhausted (the embassy would expect you to have insurance). If you have all your money and documents stolen, it might assist with getting a new passport.

Tunisian Embassies & Consulates

Following is a list of Tunisian embassies and consulates abroad.

Australia (☎ 02-9327 1258; GPO Box 801, Double Bay, Sydney, NSW 2028)
Belgium (☎ 2-771 7395; 278 ave De Tervueren, Brussels 1150)
Canada (☎ 613-237 0330; 515 O'Connor St, Ottawa, Ontario K1S 3P8)
Egypt (☎ 2-735 8962; 26 El-Gizera St, Zamalek, Cairo)
France (www.amb-tunisie.fr, in French only) Paris (☎ 01 45 55 95 98; 25 rue Barbet de Jouy, 75007); Lyon (☎ 04 78 93 42 87; 14 ave du Maréchal Foch, 69453); Marseilles (☎ 04 91 50 28 68; 8 blvd d'Athènes, 13001); Nice (☎ 04 93 96 81 81; 18 ave des Fleurs, 06000); Toulouse (☎ 05 61 63 61 61; 19 allée Jean Jaurès, 31000)
Germany Berlin (☎ 30-364 10 70; Lindenallee 16, 14050); Munich (☎ 089-55 46 35; Herzog-Heinrich-Straße 1, 80336)
Italy Rome (☎ 06-860 30 60; Via Asmara 5, 00199); Palermo (☎ 091-32 12 31; 24 Piazza Ignazio Florio, 90139)
Japan (☎ 3-3511 6622; 3-6-6 Kudan-Minami, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-0074)
Libya (☎ 21-607181; Ave Jehara, Sharia Bin Ashur, Tripoli 3160)
Morocco (☎ 37-730 636; 6 Rue de Fès & 1 rue d'Ifrane, Rabat 1000)
Netherlands (☎ 70-351 22 51; Gentestraat 98, the Hague 2587 HX)
South Africa (☎ 12-342 6283; 850 Church St, Arcadia, Pretoria 0007)
UK (☎ 020-7584 8117; 29 Princes Gate, London SW7 1QG)
USA (☎ 202-862 1850; 1515 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington DC 20005)

Embassies & Consulates in Tunisia

There is a bevy of foreign embassies and consulates concentrated in the capital, Tunis, including the following.

Algeria (Map p69; ☎ 71 783 166; fax 71 788 804; 18 rue du Niger, 1002 Tunis)
Australia The Australian embassy in Egypt and the Canadian embassy in Tunis handle consular affairs in Tunisia for the Australian government.
Austria (☎ 71 751 091; fax 71 767 824; 6 rue Ibn Hamdis, 1004 El-Menzah)
Belgium (☎ 71 781 655; fax 71 792 797; 47 rue du 1 Juin, 1002 Tunis)
Canada (Map p69; ☎ 71 104 000; fax 71 792 371; 3 rue du Sénégal, 1002 Tunis)
Denmark Consulate (Map p69; ☎ 71 792 600; fax 71 790 797; 5 rue de Mauritanie, 1002 Tunis)
Egypt (☎ 71 792 233; fax 71 794 389; rue 8007, Montplaisir 1073, 1002 Tunis)
France (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 105 111; fax 71 105 100; 1 place de l'Indépendance, ave Habib Bourguiba, 1000 Tunis) Consulate (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 105 050; 1 rue de Hollande, 1000 Tunis)
Germany (☎ 71 786 455; fax 71 788 242; 1 rue el-Hamra, 1002 Tunis)
Italy (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 321 811; ambitalia.tunis@email.ati.tn; 37 rue J Abdennasser, 1000 Tunis)
Japan (☎ 71 791 251; eog.tunis@planet.tn; 10 rue Apollo 11, 1002 Tunis)
Libya (☎ 71 781 913; fax 71 795 338; 48 rue du 1 Juin, 1002 Tunis)
Morocco (☎ 71 782 775; fax 71 787 103; 39 rue du 1 Juin, 1002 Tunis)
Netherlands (☎ 71 797 724; tun@minbusa.nl; 6-8 rue de Meycen, 1002 Tunis)
South Africa (☎ 71 801 918; sa@emb-safrica.intl; 7 rue Achtart, 1002 Tunis)
Spain (☎ 71 782 217; fax 71 786 267; 22 rue Dr Ernest Conseil, 1002 Tunis)
UK (☎ 71 108 700; www.britishembassy.gov.uk; rue du Lac Windermere, 1053 Berges de Lac)
USA (☎ 71 107 000; <http://tunis.usembassy.gov>; route de la Marsa, Zone Nord-Est, 2045 Berges de Lac)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Colourful local festivals celebrate everything from fishing to falconry, and in addition Tunisia has some major international cultural festivals as well. July and August are prime festival months, with classical music and drama at some of the country's best-known ancient sites. A useful site listing upcoming events is www.tunizik.com (in French only). You will find a full listing of festivals, com-

plete with dates, on the ONTT's website: www.tourismtunisia.com/culture/festlist.html.

For those keen to see as many festivals as possible, see the Following the Festivals itinerary, p21.

MARCH

Octopus Festival (Kerkennah) People dress up in octopus costumes to celebrate the many-legged.

JUNE

Falconry Festival (El-Haouaria) Displays of falconry, sailing competitions, street stalls and concerts.

JULY

El-Jem International Symphonic Music Festival (www.festivaleljem.com) Uses the town's magnificent floodlit colosseum to great effect.

Festival of Malouf (Testour) Tunisia's musical emblem, *malouf* resonates in rural Testour.

Tabarka International Jazz Festival (www.tabarka.jazz.com, in French only) Staged in early July, is one of Tunisia's best-loved events.

JULY/AUGUST

Carthage International Festival (www.festival-carthage.com.tn) Features events at Carthage's Roman Theatre and French-built cathedral, as well as Dougga's Roman theatre.

Hammamet International Festival (Hammamet) Attracts an impressive cast of international musicians and theatre groups to its coastal amphitheatre.

AUGUST

International Short Film Festival (Kélibia) Showcases up-and-coming Tunisian movie-makers.

World & Latin Music Festivals (www.tabarkajazz.com, in French only) In Tabarka.

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER

Raï Music Festival (www.tabarkajazz.com, in French only) In Tabarka.

OCTOBER

Carthage International Film Festival Biennial event, screened even-numbered years in Tunisia (other years this prestigious festival is held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso); two weeks of international film, with an Arabian and African emphasis.

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER

Medina Festival During Ramadan expect memorable concerts of traditional music in the Tunis medina.

NOVEMBER

Festival of the Ksour (Tataouine) Performances of Berber dance at nearby Ksar Ouled Soltane.

Sahara Festival Held in Douz, in early November, expect camel racing and displays of traditional desert skills, as well as music, parades and poetry reading.

Oasis Festival Held in Tozeur; mid-November.

FOOD & DRINK

For a comprehensive insight into Tunisian food written by an expert, see the Food & Drink chapter, p58.

Throughout this book, restaurant information includes whether the restaurant opens for breakfast, lunch and/or dinner, and the main-course price range. For more information about meal times, see the inside front cover.

Alcohol is generally only available at more expensive restaurants. Some supermarkets sell alcohol, but usually only in larger towns and resorts. Most towns will have a bar or two serving alcohol, but these are the preserves of men only.

Vegetarians may have difficulty finding purely vegetarian dishes, as the idea of not eating meat or fish is anathema to many Tunisians. Salads often come with tuna sprinkled on the top. You'll usually end up having to pick the meat or fish out of many dishes, which can make eating difficult for strict vegetarians.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

While the Tunisian lifestyle is generally liberal by Islamic standards, Tunisian society has yet to come to terms with overt homosexuality, which remains illegal under Tunisian law – in theory you can go to jail and/or be fined. However, although it's not openly admitted or shown, male homosexuality remains relatively common (men are occasionally propositioned in *hammams*) and there is a long tradition of gay male travellers visiting Tunisia. These days Tunisians seem relatively easygoing on the subject and, certainly in touristy places, they are finding it less bizarre to see gay couples. Some harassment has been reported, in the form of unpleasant stares and laughter, but this appears fairly unusual.

In some of the more touristy areas, local 'beach gigolos' looking to pick up foreign men are common, and some foreign men

travel here specifically to seek out such action.

Lesbianism, on the other hand, is completely taboo and lesbian travellers will not find any kind of scene going on.

Regardless of your sexual orientation, discretion is the key.

HOLIDAYS

Some of Tunisia's secular public holidays, such as Women's Day and Evacuation Day, pass without notice. On others (particularly Islamic holidays), everything closes and comes to a halt (although transport still runs). On some long weekends, such as the Eid al-Fitr (celebrating the end of Ramadan), public transport is strained to the limit as everyone tries to get home for the festival.

As the Gregorian (Western) and Islamic calendars are of different lengths, the Islamic holidays fall 11 days earlier every Western calendar year.

Ramadan is the main holiday to watch out for, because for the whole month opening hours are disrupted (as well as the patience of many officials). Most places work a half-day, but then some places are open much later at night. It's an extraordinary time to be in Tunisia. The days are subdued but after dark the streets come alive and shops are often open till midnight, with impromptu concerts in cafés.

Islamic Holidays

Hejira Year	Ras as-Sana	Moulid an-Nabi	Ramadan Begins	Eid al-Fitr	Eid al-Adha
1428	20.01.07	29.03.07	13.09.07	11.10.07	19.12.07
1429	10.01.08	20.03.08	02.09.08	02.10.08	09.12.08
1430	29.12.08	09.03.09	22.08.09	21.09.09	28.11.09
1431	18.12.09	26.02.10	12.08.10	10.09.10	17.11.10

Other Public Holidays

New Year's Day 1 January

Independence Day 20 March

Youth Day 21 March

Martyrs' Day 9 April

Labour Day 1 May

Republic Day 25 July

Public Holiday 3 August (celebrates the birthday of Habib Bourguiba)

Women's Day 13 August

Evacuation Day 15 October

Anniversary of Ben Ali's Accession 7 November

INSURANCE
Travel Insurance

A travel insurance policy to cover theft, loss, damage, cancellations and medical problems is essential if you want to avoid potential nightmare bills.

If you have a medical insurance policy at home, you may be covered for travel abroad – ask your provider. Likewise home contents insurance policies sometimes cover items lost abroad.

Check the small print: some travel insurance policies specifically exclude dangerous activities, which can include scuba diving, motorcycling, even trekking. Also ensure that the policy covers ambulances or an emergency flight home.

With most policies, you have to pay on the spot and claim later, so make sure you obtain the appropriate documentation and retain it for when you claim.

For more information on health issues, see the Health chapter (p314), while for details on car insurance see p310.

INTERNET ACCESS

Public access to the internet in Tunisia is handled by Publinet, which has at least one internet café in every medium-sized town in the country; addresses are listed throughout this book. Connections are usually slow, some are reasonable, none are super-fast. The normal cost is TD1.5 to TD2 per hour.

WHERE'S THE @ SIGN?

Your first encounter with a Tunisian computer keyboard is likely to be frustrating, especially for touch-typists. Most letters are where you always thought they were, but the few that are not make typing a tricky business. You'll soon get used to the changes, but here are some helpful tips.

- If you're trying to insert the '@' symbol for an email address, use the 'Alt Gr' key plus the number '0'
- Numbers require the 'shift' key
- dash ('-') can be accomplished with '6' (without using the 'shift' key)
- The apostrophe also doesn't require the 'shift' key; simply press '4'
- A full stop needs the 'shift' key plus ';

Previously Hotmail accounts were not accessible in Tunisia, but this was no longer a problem at the time of research. However, just for insurance, if your normal account is Hotmail, it may be worth setting up an alternative web-based email (eg Google Mail; www.gmail.com) before you go. Web pages considered subversive or corrupting (politics and porn) are blocked.

If you wish to have access to your home email account, you'll need to carry three important pieces of information with you: your incoming (POP or IMAP) mail server name, your account name and your password. With this information, you should be able to access your internet mail account from any Net-connected machine in the world.

If you're travelling with a portable computer, internet access from your hotel room is possible only in top-end hotels. Most international ISPs with global roaming facilities do not have agreements with Tunisian service providers. You may also need to buy a reputable 'global' modem before you leave home, or to buy a local PC-card modem; contact **Planet Tunisie** (www.planet.tn, in French only), Tunisia's service provider. However, unless you plan to be in the country for an extended period of time, it's not worth the hassle. Wi-fi is available in a few top-end hotels in Tunis only.

If you intend to use your computer in your hotel room, always check that there are power sockets as even a few midrange hotels don't have any.

See Internet Resources, p16, for useful websites relating to Tunisia.

LEGAL MATTERS

Tunisian police are everywhere, and if you behave oddly you are likely to attract their attention. They are prolific, keeping a keen eye on the population's behaviour and regularly checking locals' paperwork. However, as a tourist, it's unlikely that you'll encounter any difficulties. Incidents of visitors being approached by police or asked for identification are rare. At Erriadh's El-Ghriba Synagogue in Jerba, scene of the April 2002 bombing, independent travellers may be asked to show identification and be asked a few questions. And if

travelling close to the Algerian border, you might also be stopped.

I visited Jugurtha's Table, and I was stopped by military police every few kilometres. Usually it was just a friendly talk where they asked if everything was OK, but in one case we had to show our passports.

Ada Valencic, Slovenia

Drug laws are very strict, and possession of even the smallest amount of cannabis resin is punishable by one year in jail and/or a hefty fine.

In Tunisia, the legal age for voting, driving, drinking and having sex is 20; in the last case, the dictates of traditional family mores render the legal position somewhat irrelevant.

MAPS

If you plan on driving in Tunisia, it's a good idea to buy a map before you go, though they are also available locally at bookshops in larger towns. The Michelin *Tunisia 744* (956; 1:800,000) is probably the best, although Freytag & Berndt's *Tunisia* (1:750,000) is also comprehensive.

The best locally produced maps come from the Tunisian **Office de la Topographie et de la Cartographie** (OTC; www.otc.nat.tn). It produces the *Carte Touristique et Routière* (1:750,000), which is the most up-to-date road map around. The OTC also produces a series of street maps of major cities, including Tunis, Sfax and Sousse (all 1:10,000); Kairouan (1:8000); and Hammamet and Nabeul (1:5000). At the time of research, you could buy these at the OTC office in Tunis (see p67 for details) and the various regional offices listed on its website, as well as from some bookshops.

The government-run Office National du Tourisme Tunisien (ONTT) supplies a reasonable (and free) 1:1,000,000 road map, but it's more of general use than a helpful navigational tool. Most local ONTT offices also hand out free town maps. They range from the useful to the barely comprehensible.

MEN TRAVELLERS

Men travelling in Tunisia will encounter few pitfalls; it's certainly easier than travelling as a woman (see Women Travellers, p300).

In most Arab countries the only people you'll get to speak with are men, but Tunisian women have greater freedoms and often enjoy talking to foreigners, whether male or female. Although men should never be the one to initiate contact with a Tunisian woman, proximity in shops and particularly on transport will sometimes lead to women starting a conversation.

Low-level sexual harassment from other men in *hammams* occurs occasionally.

MONEY

The unit of currency is the Tunisian dinar (TD), which is divided into 1000 millimes (mills). There are five, 10, 20, 50, 100 and 500 mills coins and one- and five-dinar coins. Dinar notes come in denominations of five, 10, 20 and 30. Changing the larger notes is not usually a problem, apart from in the occasional small shop.

The TD is a soft currency, which means that exchange rates are fixed artificially by the Tunisian government (thus rates are the same everywhere). It cannot be traded on currency markets and it is also illegal to import or export it, so you will be unable to equip yourself with any of the local currency before you arrive. It is not necessary to declare your foreign currency on arrival.

Within the country, the euro, UK pound and US dollars are readily exchangeable, while the Canadian dollar and Japanese yen should be fine in most banks. Australian and New Zealand dollars and South African rand are not accepted.

Tunisian banks will usually want to see your passport when you change money, especially for travellers cheques, and may want to see your receipt for the cheques. Post offices change cash only.

When leaving the country, you can re-exchange up to 30% of the amount you changed into dinars, up to a limit of TD100. You may need to produce bank receipts to prove you changed the money in the first place.

Note that the Tunis-Carthage airport duty free does not accept dinars so don't count on using up any surplus there.

You should be able to change money after leaving the country – ie on arrival at any large international airport – but the rate will be terrible.

ATMs

ATMs are found in almost all medium-sized towns, and certainly in all the tourist areas. If you've got MasterCard or Visa, there are plenty of places to withdraw money. Many of them will allow you to access international savings accounts; look for the Cirrus or Visa Electron logo. However, it pays to plan ahead and have enough to tide you over in case an ATM is out of order – they often are and some only operate during office hours.

Cash

Nothing beats cash for convenience – or for risk. If you lose it, it's gone for good and few travel insurers will come to your rescue. Those who do will normally limit the amount to about US\$300. Don't carry too much cash on you at any one time, and set aside a small amount of cash, say US\$50, as an emergency stash.

Credit Cards

Credit cards (mostly MasterCard and Visa) are accepted in a few places in major towns and tourist areas. They can be used to pay for upmarket meals, top-end accommodation, car hire, some souvenir shopping and very occasionally at petrol stations. However, compared with other countries, credit coverage is not widespread. Outside major centres you won't be able to use them much, and less in the south than in the north.

Credit cards can also be used as cash cards to withdraw dinars from the ATMs of affiliated Tunisian banks in the same way as at home. The issuing bank sets daily withdrawal limits. Cash advances are given in local currency only. Both MasterCard and Visa say they can replace a lost card in Tunisia within 24 hours, and will supply you with a phone number in your home country that you can call, reverse charges, in an emergency; ask your bank for details.

The main charge cards are American Express (Amex) and Diners Club, which are accepted in a few places in tourist areas, but unheard of elsewhere.

Tipping

Tipping is not a requirement but underpaid waiters often appreciate small change; cafés and local restaurants provide a saucer for customers to throw in their small change.

Waiters in tourist restaurants are accustomed to tips: 10% is plenty. Taxi drivers do not usually expect tips, but will appreciate them.

Travellers Cheques

The main reason for carrying your funds as travellers cheques rather than cash is the protection they offer against theft. They are, however, losing popularity as more and more travellers opt to withdraw their money from ATMs as they travel.

Amex, Visa and Thomas Cook cheques are widely accepted and have efficient replacement policies. Maintaining a record of the cheque numbers and when you use them is vital when it comes to replacing lost cheques. Keep this record separate from the cheques themselves. US dollars and euros are the best currencies. It's wise to have the customer purchase record with you, in case the bank wants to see it. STB Bank is your best bet for cashing cheques in smaller towns.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Name-brand film, such as Kodak and Fuji, is widely available and reasonably priced. Expect to pay about TD4.5 for 24-exposure 100 ISO film, and TD5.5 for 36 exposures. Slide film is increasingly available in more touristy areas (expect to pay around TD10 for a 36-exposure 100 ISO roll) but always check the expiry date. Never buy film that has been sitting in a shop window in the sun. Digital equipment, such as memory cards, is rarely available. You can sometimes download pictures onto CDs in Net cafés, usually those in larger towns.

You should always ask permission before taking photographs of people. While Tunisians expect every tourist to carry a camera, most don't like to have the lens turned on them. This applies particularly to Tunisian women and to people in rural areas.

It's forbidden to take photographs of airfields, military installations, police stations and government buildings. Soldiers, police and security around official haunts don't appreciate being snapped.

For detailed technical advice, get hold of Lonely Planet's *Travel Photography: A Guide to Taking Better Pictures*, written by internationally renowned travel photographer, Richard I'Anson. It's full colour throughout and designed to take on the road.

POST

Post offices are known as PTTs. See the inside front cover for opening times.

Air-mail letters cost 600 mills to Europe and 700 mills to Australia and the Americas; postcards are 100 mills cheaper. You can buy stamps at post offices, major hotels and some general stores and newsstands.

Receiving Mail

Mail can be received *poste restante* at any Tunisian post office. It should be addressed clearly, with your family name in capitals. Address mail to: (Your Name), *Poste Restante*, PTT Central, City Name, Postcode, Tunisia. Ask the clerks to check under your given name if you think mail is missing. There's a collection fee of TD0.5 per letter.

Sending Mail

The Tunisian postal service is slow but reliable. Letters to/from Europe generally take about a week to arrive; for further afield expect about two weeks. If you want to ensure that your mail arrives quickly, the *Rapide Poste* service guarantees to deliver anywhere in Europe within two working days (TD25 for up to 1kg), or within four working days to the Americas, Asia and Oceania (TD35). The service is available from all post offices. Posting your letter from a big city post office will ensure it arrives more quickly.

Parcels that weigh less than 2kg can be sent by ordinary mail. Larger parcels should be taken, unwrapped for inspection, to the special parcel counter.

SHOPPING Bargaining

Handicrafts and medina souvenirs are about the only items you'll have to bargain for in Tunisia. To be good at bargaining, you need to enjoy the banter. Once you get the hang of it, it can be a lot of fun, and kinder on your wallet – often you can get things for less than a third of the price quoted. Knowing a few words of Arabic really helps smooth the way. If you don't like bargaining, you can buy your souvenirs from the Socopa stores (see *Where to Shop*, opposite for details).

What to Buy

CHECHIAS

Chechias are the small, red felt hats sported by older Tunisian men. The Grande Souq

de Chechias in Tunis (p76) is the obvious place to look, and you'll doubtless also get an interesting demonstration of how they were made – they start off life as a loosely knitted, saggy white bag. Quality varies, but an average price is around TD6.

COPPER & BRASS

You'll see people engraving beaten copper and brass items in the medina shops. Beaten plates make good souvenirs and can be anything from saucer to coffee-table size, though you might find the latter rather weighs down your luggage.

ESPARTO GOODS & BASKETWARE

Rectangular, woven esparto baskets are practical and cheap. Some are pure tack, with pictures of camels and desert scenes, but there are plenty of other simpler, less cheesy designs. Most esparto items come from Gabès and Jerba in the south. See the *Esparto Grass* boxed text (p180) for more details.

You can also buy the attractive large baskets that local people use for going to the market – a large one costs around TD4. Straw hats – as seen on Tunisian farm workers everywhere – and fans are other popular, practical pieces to snap up.

JEWELLERY

Arabic jewellery (particularly from gold) is often extremely ornate and glitzy, but there is also plenty more tourist-friendly silver folk jewellery on sale here. A traditional Arabic motif is the Hand of Fatima (daughter of the Prophet) or *khomsa*, used in everything from small earrings to large neck pendants, and usually made of silver. In pre-Islamic times this same design represented Baal, the protector of the Carthaginians. It's thought to ward off the evil eye (of envy), an enduring superstition.

Other traditional pieces of jewellery include the *hedeyed*, which are wide engraved or filigree bracelets made of gold or silver, and *kholkal*, which are similar but worn around the ankle. In Carthaginian times *kholkal* were commonly worn to signify chastity; today they're still a symbol of fidelity and are often part of a bride's dowry. You'll also see *khlal* brooches. Made from silver, and usually a triangular or crescent shape with a pin, these are used to fasten clothes.

The quality of pure silver and gold jewellery can be established by the official stamps used to grade all work, and the quality of unstamped items is immediately suspect. The stamps in use are: the horse's head (the Carthaginian symbol for money and used to mark all 18-carat gold jewellery); the scorpion (all nine-carat gold jewellery); grape clusters (silver graded at 900 mills per gram); and the Negro head (poorer-quality silver graded at 800 mills per gram).

LEATHER

There's a huge variety of leather goods on sale, but check the quality, as often stitching can be on the shoddy side.

Kairouan is the country's leading producer of leather goods, supplying the nation's souvenir shops with belts, wallets, purses and handbags embossed with camels and palm trees.

Other articles for sale include traditional pieces such as camel and donkey saddles, water skins and cartridge pouches.

In Douz, and elsewhere in the south, you can slip on comfortable camel-leather sandals.

OILS & PERFUME

Cap Bon is famous for the production of essential oils, especially orange blossom and geranium. Most of the output goes to the international perfume market, but some is kept and used to make the scented oils that are sold in tourist shops everywhere. Prices start at TD1.5 for 5mL.

POTTERY & CERAMICS

Ceramics is big business in Tunisia, and the main centres of production are Nabeul (p109) in Cap Bon, and the town of Guellala (p278) on Jerba. Styles range from simple terracotta to bright Andalusian-style vases and tiling.

The Berber villages around the small northern town of Sejnane (p134) are famous for a primitive style of pottery, producing unusual moulded bowls and naive figures decorated in ochre and black. It's found in the Tunis medina at Hanout Arab (see p85), and stalls around Sidi Mahres (p75).

RUGS & CARPETS

There are some really beautiful rugs and carpets for sale, though they are not especially

cheap. The main carpet-selling centres are Tunis, Kairouan, Tozeur and Jerba.

Look for traditional *alloucha* (thick-pile Berber rugs) in Ain Draham, where they are produced by a small women's cooperative called Les Tapis de Kroumirie (see the boxed text, p141). They are also sold in Tunis at Mains des Femmes (p85).

All types are sold at the government-run Socopa emporiums (see *Where to Shop*, below) found in the major tourist centres. They have been inspected by the Organisation National de l'Artisanat (ONAT) and classified according to type and number of knots. They come with an affixed label giving this information.

SAND ROSES

Sand roses are the speciality of southern Tunisia, although they're sold all over the country. They are formed of gypsum, which has dissolved from the sand and then crystallised into spectacular patterns that resemble flower petals.

They range from about 5cm in diameter up to the size of a large watermelon. They do make good cheap souvenirs, but carting around a great chunk isn't much fun.

SHEESHAS

The ubiquitous water pipes are everywhere in souqs and tourist shops, just ready to clutter up a corner of your sitting room. They range in price from around TD4 for a small, cheap one up to TD70 for a good-quality, full-size version.

Where to Shop

These Tunisian crafts are available from souvenir shops all over the country. The problem is finding the right price. The tourist shops in the big medinas are the worst place to start, especially if you have no idea what you should be paying. First prices are sometimes 10 times higher than the real price.

Best is to head first to one of the government-run Société de Commercialisation des Produits de l'Artisanats (Socopa) emporiums found in all the major tourist centres. Expert bargainers may be able to find cheaper prices elsewhere, but not the guarantee of quality that Socopa provides. Sales staff in these shops are paid to assist shoppers, not to apply hard-sell techniques. Even if you don't buy, it's an excellent idea

to visit a Socopa shop to mug up on prices before heading into the fray.

If you do opt to shop in the medina, be careful – many a TD100 carpet has been sold for TD500 on the strength of a practised patter and complimentary cup of mint tea.

There are a few cooperatives and organisations around that help rural artisans and sell quality goods at fixed prices. These include Les Tapis de Kroumirie (p141), Mains des Femmes (p85) and Cooperative des Tisserands El Faouz (p114).

Tunis has crafts from all over the country (as well as junk from Egypt, India and China) in its markets, while Houmt Souq and Midoun on Jerba are also fantastic places to buy Tunisian odds and sods.

MARKETS

Town and village life often revolves around the weekly markets. Market day is the liveliest day to be in a town, as it'll be packed with traders and shoppers from all around the region.

A few markets have become tourist traps, such as that in Nabeul, but this also means they have more souvenirs geared for tourists than at the usual weekly market. At a regular market, you may find some quality handicrafts, but it's mostly cheap clothes and mundane household goods that heap the stalls. See Market Days, below, for the dates of the main town market days.

SOLO TRAVELLERS

Tunisia is a friendly, manageable country to travel around, and doing so on your own should present few problems, although it's much easier for men than for women (see Women Travellers, p300).

If you are counting the dinars, it's more expensive to travel alone. In hostel dorms

the price is per bed, but in hotels single rooms are usually over half the price of a double, so it's cheaper if you hook up with other solo travellers and share a room. Another cost consideration will arise if you want to rent a taxi for the day in places like Tataouine and Jerba, or a 4WD in Tozeur or Douz to explore surrounding sites inaccessible by public transport. Sharing a taxi reduces costs considerably (the price quoted by taxi drivers is for the car, regardless of the number of people), while 4WD tours or expeditions will be expensive for a single person. If you want to share the cost of a trip, you'll need to gather a group together, which can involve a few days of waiting around, particularly during the low season; always ask at a number of agencies to increase your chances.

Unless you're on one of the private hotel beaches, travelling alone means having no-one to watch your belongings on the beach while you go for a swim – petty theft can be a problem on some of the busier public beaches, so leave any valuables locked up in your hotel.

Solo travellers will encounter some curiosity as it's quite rare for Tunisians to travel without a friend. This is especially the case for women.

On the plus side, you are more likely to meet local people and be outgoing if you're on your own and don't have a readily available companion to talk to. As Tunisia is a friendly place, you're unlikely to be lonely for long.

TELEPHONE & FAX

The telephone system is fairly modern and straightforward. Few people have a phone at home, so there are lots of public telephones, known as Taxiphones. They accept

100-mills, 500-mills, one-dinar and five-dinar coins. Look out for Publitel offices, which are prevalent across the country and contain rows of telephone booths. Some are open 24 hours.

In 2001, local telephone codes were incorporated into telephone numbers, so there are no longer any local telephone codes – you have to dial the entire 8-digit number when calling locally. Landline numbers start with '7', while mobile numbers usually start with '98' or '21'.

Fax

Almost every classified hotel has a fax machine, but it costs less to use the public facilities at telephone offices and some post offices in major towns. Telegrams can be sent from any post office.

International & Local Calls

All public telephones can be used for international direct dialling. Taxiphone offices usually keep a copy of **Yellow Pages** (Pages Jaunes; www.pagesjaunes.com.tn), published in both Arabic and French, and have information on international area codes.

Rates for local and international calls are 10% cheaper between 8pm and 6am.

Mobile Phones

Mobile phones of most European carriers function in Tunisia, although it's a bit more hit-and-miss with North American and Australian mobile companies. Contact your phone company before setting out to check that it has reciprocal arrangements and that you don't have to activate a global roaming facility. Coverage is almost universal throughout the country, save for more remote desert locations such as Ksar Ghilane.

A cheaper option than using your home mobile company is to set up a Tunisian number while you are here. You can buy a SIM card for TD5 from either Tunisie Telecom or Tunisiana – both of which have branches in most medium-sized towns. You'll need your passport, a photocopy of your passport details, and a completed form. You can buy phone credit at most small grocery shops advertising top-up cards. A recharge card of TD5 is valid for five months, TD10 or TD25 are valid for six months. Check that your phone operates with a different SIM card before you leave home.

TIME

Standard time is one hour ahead of Greenwich Meantime/Coordinated Universal Time (GMT/CUT); it's two hours ahead from April to October. That means that when it's noon in Tunisia, the time elsewhere is:

Cairo – 1pm
London – 1pm
Paris – noon
New York – 6am
Sydney – 8pm

TOILETS

Public toilets are almost unheard of, except in places like airports and major bus and train stations. If you're caught short, your best bet is to go to a café: you'll be expected to buy something, unless it's really busy and they don't notice.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The government-run **Office National du Tourisme Tunisia** (ONTT; ☎ 80 100 333; www.tourismtunisia.com) handles tourist information. The standard of service from tourist offices inside Tunisia varies from efficient to barely awake. Most can supply no more than glossy brochures in half-a-dozen languages and a map. Some can supply an accommodation list and one or two have transport details. Some have no qualms about giving you incorrect information, so it's always wise to check things out yourself.

Many towns also have municipal tourist offices, called *syndicats d'initiative*, which usually open only in the high season.

For tourist office details, see the Information section of the relevant town throughout this book.

The ONTT's foreign representatives tend to be better equipped, and more enthusiastic, than their domestic counterparts. Have a look at www.tourismtunisia.com/adresses/international.html for a full listing of overseas addresses, which includes the following.

Belgium (☎ 2-511 11 42; tourismetunisien@skynet.be; Galerie Ravenstein 60, Brussels 1000)

Canada (☎ 514-397 1182; tunisinfo@qc.aira.com; 1253 McGill College, Quebec, Montreal H3 B2 Y5)

France Paris (☎ 01 47 42 72 67; ontt@wanadoo.fr; 32, Ave de l'Opéra, 75002); Lyon (☎ 03 78 52 35 86; 12, rue de Séze, 69006)

MARKET DAYS

Day	Location
Monday	Ain Draham, El-Jem, Houmt Souq, Kairouan, Kélibia, Matmata and Tataouine
Tuesday	Ghardimaou, Kasserine and Kebili
Wednesday	Gafsa, Jendouba and Sbeitla
Thursday	Douz, Hammamet, Le Kef, Nefta, Remla (Kerkennah), Sejnane and Tebourouk
Friday	El-Haouaria, Mahdia, Nabeul, Sfax, Tabarka, Tamerza and Zaghuan
Saturday	Ben Guerdane, El-Fahs, Gabès and Monastir
Sunday	Hammam Lif and Le Kef

Germany Berlin (☎ 30-885 0457; Kurfürstendamm 171, 10707); Düsseldorf (☎ 211-880 0644; Flingerstrasse 66 23, 40213); Frankfurt (☎ 29-706 40; Goethplatz, 60313); Munich (☎ 29-16 36 85; Bürgerstrasse 12, 80331)
Italy Rome (☎ 06-42 01 01 49; Via Calabria 25, 00187); Milan (☎ 02-86 45 30 44; Via Baracchini 10, 20123)
Spain (☎ 01 548 14 35; tunceturismo@mad.servicom.es; Plaza de Espana 18, Torre de Madrid, Madrid 28008)
UK (☎ 020-7224 5598; mtolondon@aol.com; 77a Wigmore St, London W1H 9LJ)
USA (☎ 202-466 2546; tourism@tunisiaguide.com; 1515 Massachusetts Ave, Washington DC 20005)

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

If mobility is a problem, the hard fact is that most Tunisian hotels, museums and tourist sites are not wheelchair-friendly, though some upper-range places do have rooms adapted for disabled travellers.

Take heart in the knowledge that disabled people do come to Tunisia and that the absence of infrastructure is compensated for by the friendliness and willingness to help of most Tunisians. However, the trip will need careful planning, so get as much information as you can before you go. The British-based **Royal Association for Disability & Rehabilitation** (Radar; ☎ 020-7250 3222; www.radar.org.uk; 12 City Forum, 250 City Rd, London EC1V 8AF) has links to and can recommend organisations facilitating travel abroad. It publishes a guide to nonlocal transport *There & Back*, with information on air travel (see the website for details). Also British-based, **Canbedone Ltd** (☎ 020-8907 2400; www.canbedone.co.uk; 11 Woodcock Hill, Harrow HA3 0XP) and **Katalan** (☎ 01494 580816; www.katalantravels.com) can arrange tailor-made holidays.

VISAS

Visas are not a problem for most visitors. Nationals of most Western European countries can stay up to three months without a visa – you just collect a stamp in your passport at the point of entry. Americans can stay for up to four months.

Australians and South Africans can get a three-month visa at the airport for UK£20. There's a separate counter for visas, so don't join the queue for an entry stamp until you've been to the visa desk. At most entry points, you'll need to leave your passport at the visa counter and talk your way through immigration and customs (without your passport) to reach a bank to change money, then go all the way back through to pay the

visa fee and collect your passport. It's usually easy enough but can take a while.

Other nationalities need to apply before arrival; the visa costs around UK£20, takes 14 to 21 days in person or via post, and the length of stay is up to the embassy. Israeli passport holders can visit Tunisia (subject to visa approval, like everyone else).

Visa Extensions

Avoid having to extend your visa if you can. Applications can be made only at the **Interior Ministry** (Map pp72-3; Ave Habib Bourguiba) in Tunis. They cost TD1.5 to TD10 (payable only in *timbres fiscales* – revenue stamps available from post offices) and take up to 10 days to issue. You'll need two photos, and may need bank receipts and a *facture* (receipt) from your hotel, for starters. An easier, though costlier, way to extend your stay is to leave the country and return.

Visas for Onward Travel

The Algerian and Libyan embassies in Tunis do not issue visas. If you want to visit either country from Tunisia, you should apply to the Algerian or Libyan representatives in your home country. Australians and New Zealanders can apply in London. Don't leave it until the last minute – it can be a lengthy process. For both countries you usually need an invitation to visit the country, obtained from a citizen or through a travel agency.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

What to Expect

Even if Tunisian men have female friends or girlfriends, restrictions on unmarried men and women mixing, on people having relationships before marriage, and the expectation that women should be virgins when they marry mean that pre-marital sex is a minefield. The expense of getting married also means that, for many, male-female sexual relationships are delayed further.

Despite the freedom enjoyed by Tunisian women, it's undeniable that foreign women are almost always much freer. They also exist outside the social structure, and hence, from the point of view of Tunisian men, are a separate species, tantalisingly related to the free-and-easy types that appear on satellite TV or in foreign films.

The country's beach resorts are the territory of Casanovas, who spend their summers

attempting to charm their way into the bedrooms of female (and male) tourists. Plenty of foreign women do have holiday romances with local men and the mythology arising from these encounters fuels expectations.

These factors mean that sexual harassment is par for the course and the tidal waves of testosterone that women encounter in some places can be intimidating and unpleasant. However, unpalatable though it is, harassment is usually low key, taking the form of being stared at or subjected to slimy chat-up strategies. Don't be surprised to receive proposals of marriage, swooning statements about your incredible beauty, and declarations of undying love (or considerably less noble suggestions). Physical harassment is rare, but does happen occasionally.

Among those women who wrote to us was the following perspective.

We quickly learnt to be on our guards. Although Tunisians are a very friendly bunch and most will bend over backwards to please you, at times the stares, calls and propositions were overwhelming and discouraging. However, that said, we never felt in danger and learnt that a firm 'no' or simply walking away was all that was needed. We were disappointed not to be able to communicate more with the local women (at times, we weren't even sure if they existed) and we wish that we had a better overall understanding of women in an Islamic culture... Our two weeks in Tunisia have been fantastic. The amazing things we've seen, tasted, heard and experienced definitely outweigh any negatives. A country not to be missed.

Ruth Gould & Monique Menard,
Australia

Strategies

You can try a few strategies to reduce your hassle quota.

If you're travelling alone or without a male companion, Tunisian men usually will be befriending you with one intention in mind. The simple and obvious rule is to be careful. If you get a bad vibe, then get away immediately. Don't be afraid of completely ignoring people or asking them to stop bothering you. Most men will immediately leave you alone. If someone does touch you, shout.

The best policy is to ignore sexist remarks and sound effects, and sunglasses can form a good way of avoiding eye contact (many men try out the staring-you-into-submission technique). It can be advisable to sit next to other women on buses and lounges, sit in the back seat of taxis, and avoid staying in cheap Medina hotels. Books are useful props on trains, at restaurants and cafés and so on, as you can immerse yourself and ignore any unwanted attention.

Dressing modestly – cover your shoulders, upper arms and legs, and a headscarf can be useful to indicate modesty – makes a difference and you'll gain more respect by doing so, especially in rural areas. That said, dressing conservatively doesn't necessarily mean that you won't be hassled. What local women are wearing is also a reasonable guide to prevailing attitudes wherever you are. It's also a good idea to take some extra items to wear on the beach if venturing outside the main resorts – most local women wear a pair of knee-length shorts (and maybe a T-shirt) over their bathing costume to go in the sea, and you might feel more comfortable doing the same.

Transport

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

ENTERING THE COUNTRY

Most people face few bureaucratic obstacles when entering the country. Arriving by air is the easiest method, with immigration and customs completed with a minimum of fuss. It takes longer for those who have to apply for a visa on arrival (see p300 for details), but is still relatively easy. Note that a few nationalities have to get a visa prior to arrival. On board your flight to Tunisia, you

THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

should be given an arrivals card (keep the departures section until you leave the country as immigration will require it), which asks for all of the usual passport details.

Those arriving by sea with a car can expect a tedious three or four hours taking care of bureaucratic matters on arrival, though police are helpful and tourists receive prior attention. Bags and vehicles are often searched thoroughly on arrival or departure. In addition, if the boat is running late, it can mean that you enter the country in the wee hours; you should be able to find a few petrol stations and shops open late, but to be on the safe side come prepared with a full tank.

Land borders with Algeria and Libya are not really an option, as most are closed to foreigners, with the exception of Ras al-Jedir in Libya; expect long queues of vehicles.

Flights, tours and rail tickets can be booked online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

Passport

It's not usually a problem to enter the country if you have an Israeli stamp or evidence that you have visited Israel in your passport, and Israeli passport holders are allowed into the country subject to visa approval (like all other nationalities requiring a visa). For more details on visa requirements see p300.

AIR Airports & Airlines

There are six airports handling international traffic in Tunisia. The Tunisian Civil Aviation and Airports Authority (OACA) website (www.oaca.nat.tn) contains general information on each airport.

7 Novembre-Tabarka (TB); ☎ 78 680 005

Jerba-Zarzis (DJE); ☎ 75 650 233

Monastir-Habib Bourguiba (MIR); ☎ 73 520 000

Sfax-Thyna (SFA); ☎ 74 279 007

Tozeur-Nefta (TOE); ☎ 76 453 525

Tunis-Carthage (TUN); ☎ 71 755 000

AIRLINES FLYING TO/FROM TUNISIA

The national carrier is **Tunisair** (airline code TU; Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 330 100; www.tunisair.com.tn,

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

FLYING & CLIMATE CHANGE

Pretty much every form of motorised travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

CARBON OFFSET SCHEMES

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow travellers to offset the level of greenhouse gases they are responsible for with financial contributions to sustainable travel schemes that reduce global warming – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, support the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: www.lonelyplanet.com.

in French only; 48 ave Habib Bourguiba, Tunis; ☎ 8am-6.15pm Mon-Sat, 7am-12.45pm & 4-6.45pm Mon-Sat Jul–mid-Aug, 7am-6.45pm Mon-Sat, 8am-12.45pm Sun Sep–Aug). It has offices throughout the country and an excellent safety record.

Other airlines flying to and from Tunisia include the following.

Air Berlin (airline code AB; www.airberlin.com)

Air Europa (airline code UX; ☎ 71 285 144; www.air-europa.com; ave du Japon, 1073 Montplaisir, Tunis)

Air France (airline code AF; Map pp72-3; ☎ 71-105 324; www.airfrance.com; 1 rue d'Athènes, Tunis)

Air Malta (airline code KM; ☎ 71 235 822; www.airmalta.com; Tunis-Carthage Airport)

Alitalia (airline code AZ; ☎ 71 767 722; www.alitalia.com; Tunis-Carthage Airport)

British Airways (airline code BA; ☎ 71 963 120; www.british-airways.com; rue du Lac Michigan, 1053 Berges du Lac, Tunis)

EgyptAir (airline code MS; Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 341 182; www.egyptair.com.eg/docs/home.asp; 49 ave Habib Bourguiba, Tunis)

GB Airways (airline code GT; www.gbairways.com)

Interflug (airline code IF; www.interflug.de, in German only)

Karthago Airlines (airline code KA); ☎ 71 940 540; www.karthagoairlines.com, in French only; 8 bis, rue Mustapha Sfar, 1002 Tunis Le Belvédère)

Lufthansa Airlines (airline code LH; ☎ 71 751 096; www.lufthansa.com; Tunis-Carthage Airport)

Nouvelair (airline code BJ; ☎ 73 520 600; www.nouvelair.com, in French & German only; Monastir-Habib Bourguiba Airport)

Royal Air Maroc (airline code AT; ☎ 71 847 051; www.royalairmaroc.com; 6 ave Kheireddine Pacha, 1073 Montplaisir, Tunis)

Royal Jordanian (airline code RJ; ☎ 71 754 000; www.rj.com; Tunis-Carthage Airport)

Turkish Airlines (airline code TK; ☎ 71 787 033; www.thy.com; Complex el-Mechtel, ave Ouled Hafouz, Tunis)

Tickets

If you're looking for bargain airfares, go to a travel agency rather than directly to the airline, which generally only sells fares at the official listed price. The exception is the expanding number of 'no-frills' carriers operating in the USA and Europe, which sell direct to travellers (many of them sell tickets over the internet).

Some reliable online flight-booking sites include the following.

- www.cheapflights.co.uk
- www.deckchair.com
- www.ebookers.com
- www.expedia.co.uk
- www.lastminute.com
- www.opodo.com
- www.travelocity.co.uk

However, online super-fast fare generators are no substitute for a travel agency that knows all about special deals and can offer advice on other aspects of your trip.

Tickets to Tunisia are also invariably cheaper if you buy some sort of flight-and-accommodation package through a travel agency. Departure tax is included in the price of your ticket. High season usually corresponds with the European summer (from 1 July to 15 September) and Christmas holidays. It's the same in the south, despite the incredibly hot temperatures. Low season is from 1 November to 15 March (excluding the Christmas holidays), and the rest is middle season.

From Africa & the Middle East

EgyptAir and Tunisair both operate between Cairo and Tunis (from TD600), while Royal Air Maroc and Tunisair share the route between Tunis and Casablanca (from around TD560). Tunisair also flies to Tripoli (Libya). Tunisair and Royal Jordanian Airlines connect Tunis with Amman, which has good connections throughout the Middle East, and Tunisair flies to Jeddah.

Recommended agencies in the region include the following:

Al-Rais Travels (www.alrais.com; Dubai)

Egypt Panorama Tours (www.eptours.com; Cairo)

Orion-Tour (www.oriontour.com; Istanbul)

Tunisia is not well connected with sub-Saharan Africa and you'll usually need to change in Cairo or Casablanca. Tunisair flies to Nouakchott (Mauritania), Bamako (Mali) and Dakar (Senegal), via Nouakchott.

From Australia & New Zealand

There are no direct flights between Australia or New Zealand and Tunisia. The easiest option is first to travel to Europe or Egypt, then fly to Tunis as a side trip. Qantas, Singapore and British Airways fly to Cairo, while Singapore, British and Malaysian fly to Rome. Alitalia, Air France and Tunisair fly Cairo to Tunis and Alitalia and Tunisair fly Rome to Tunis.

In Australia, **STA Travel** (☎ 134 782; www.statravel.com.au) and **Flight Centre** (☎ 133 133; www.flightcentre.com.au) are both good places to check on ticket prices. Both agencies have offices throughout Australia; call or visit

the websites for office locations. For online bookings, try www.travel.com.au.

In New Zealand, both **Flight Centre** (☎ 0800 243 544; www.flightcentre.co.nz) and **STA Travel** (☎ 0800 474 400; www.statravel.co.nz) have nationwide branches. The site www.travel.co.nz is recommended for online bookings.

From Canada

There are no direct flights between Canada and Tunisia. You can either use one of the major European airlines and take a connecting flight to Tunis, or fly to Europe or Egypt as cheaply as possible and then shop around.

Travel Cuts (☎ 1-866 246 9762; www.travelcuts.com) is Canada's national student travel agency. For online bookings try www.expedia.ca and www.travelocity.ca. For tailored packages try **Adventures Abroad** (☎ 1-800 665 3998; www.adventures-abroad.com) or **Goway.com** (☎ 416-322 1034; www.goway.com).

From Continental Europe

Just about any European travel agency that's worth its salt can drum up a cheap airfare-and-accommodation package to Tunisia. Expect to pay at least €300 for a simple return flight in the high season. Charter flights are cheaper; you may get tickets for as little as €250 in the high season for a return flight plus an extra €100 to €150 for seven nights' accommodation, although the deals vary widely.

FRANCE

Unsurprisingly, France has excellent connections with Tunisia. Air France and Tunisair between them have regular flights to Tunis, Sfax and Tozeur from Paris, Lyon, Marseille, Nice and Bordeaux.

Recommended agencies include the following:

Anyway (☎ 0892 302 301; http://voyages.anyway.com)

Lastminute (☎ 0899 785 000; www.lastminute.fr)

Nouvelles Frontières (☎ 0825 000 747; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr)

OTU Voyages (☎ 0155 823 232; www.otu.fr) This agency specialises in student and youth travel.

Voyageurs du Monde (☎ 0173 008 188; www.vdm.com)

GERMANY

Lufthansa have direct flights from Frankfurt (with connections onto Berlin) for €300.

Recommended agencies include:

Expedia (☎ 018 050 071 46; www.expedia.de)

Just Travel (☎ 089 747 3330; www.justtravel.de)

Lastminute (☎ 018 052 843 66; www.lastminute.de)

STA Travel (☎ 069 743 032 92; www.statravel.de) For travellers under the age of 26.

ITALY

Alitalia and Tunisair offer some good direct flights, costing around €200 to €300 return in the high season. In Italy try **CTS Viaggi** (☎ 06 462 0431; www.cts.it), specialising in student and youth travel.

THE NETHERLANDS

Alitalia and Lufthansa have return flights from Amsterdam for around €300. A useful online agency serving the Netherlands is **Airfair** (☎ 090 077 177 17; www.airfair.nl).

SPAIN

Air Europa flies Madrid to Tunis direct.

Recommended agencies include **Barcelo Viajes** (☎ 902 200 400; www.barceloviajes.com) and **Viajes Zeppelin** (☎ 915 425 154; www.v-zeppelin.es).

From the UK

GB Airways (a subsidiary of British Airways) and Tunisair operate scheduled flights from London to Tunis. Alitalia also flies from London, with a change at Milan. Expect to pay from around £240 for a high-season fare, although these fares can sell for as low as £140.

Charter flights offer a much wider choice of departure points, and most tickets are for a two-week stay. Try the **Charter Flight Centre** (☎ 0845 045 0153; www.charterflights.co.uk).

Discount air travel is big business in London. Advertisements for travel agencies appear in the travel pages of the weekend broadsheet newspapers, in *Time Out*, the *Evening Standard* and *TNT*.

Recommended travel agencies include:

Ebookers.com (☎ 0800 082 3000; www.ebookers.com)

Flight Centre (☎ 0870 499 0040; www.flightcentre.co.uk)

North-South Travel (☎ 01245 608 291; www.northsouthtravel.co.uk) Donates part of its profit to projects in the developing world.

Quest Travel (☎ 0871 423 0135; www.questtravel.com)

STA Travel (☎ 0870 163 0026; www.statravel.co.uk) For travellers under the age of 26.

Trailfinders (☎ 0845 058 5858; www.trailfinders.com)

Travel Bag (☎ 0800 082 5000; www.travelbag.co.uk)

Agencies offering packages to Tunisia include:

Adventures Abroad (☎ 0114 247 3400; www.adventures-abroad.com)

Cadogan Holidays (☎ 0800 082 1006; www.cadoganholidays.com)

Dragoman Overland (☎ 01728 861133; www.dragoman.com)

Explore Worldwide (☎ 0870 333 4001; www.exploreworldwide.com)

Imaginative Traveller (☎ 0800 316 2717; www.imaginative-traveller.com)

Panorama Holidays (☎ 0870 759 5595; www.panoramaholidays.co.uk)

Thomson Holidays (☎ 0870 165 0079; www.thomson-holidays.com)

Tunisia First (☎ 01276 600100; www.tunisiafirst.co.uk)

Wigmore Holidays (☎ 020-7836 4999; www.aspectsoftunisia.co.uk)

From the USA

New York has both the cheapest airfares and the largest choice of airlines. The cheapest option is to buy a discount ticket to Europe and then to shop around (London is the ideal place to head, but there's not much point in doing this unless you want to spend a few days hanging around).

Discount travel agents in the USA are known as consolidators. San Francisco is the ticket consolidator capital of America, although some good deals can be found in Los Angeles, New York and other big cities.

The following agencies are recommended for online bookings:

- www.cheaptickets.com
- www.expedia.com
- www.lowestfare.com
- www.orbitz.com
- www.statravel.com (travellers under 26)
- www.travelocity.com

Package operators include the following.

Adventures Abroad (☎ 1-800 665 3998; www.adventures-abroad.com)

Adventure Center (☎ 1-800 228 8747; www.adventurecenter.com)

Far Horizons (☎ 1-800 552 4575; www.farhorizons.com)

Goway.com (☎ 800 387 8850; www.goway.com)

Promo Tunisia (☎ 1-888 701 3202; www.promotunisia.com)

TunisiaUSA (☎ 610 995 2788; www.tunisiausa.com)

LAND Border Crossings

The only land border crossing open to foreigners is between Tunisia and Libya at Ras al-Jedir; see From Libya below. All other crossings from Tunisia to Libya or Algeria were closed to foreigners at the time of publication.

Car & Motorcycle

Those driving their own cars and motorcycles will need their vehicle's registration papers, liability insurance and a drivers licence (preferably an international drivers' permit in addition to their domestic licence, although usually the latter is sufficient). There's no need for a *carte de passage en douane* (effectively a passport for the vehicle and acts as a temporary waiver of import duty). Contact your local automobile association for up-to-date details about the documentation required. See p309 for information about driving in Tunisia.

From Algeria

Algeria has been effectively out of bounds to travellers since the start of the civil war in early 1993. The conflict has forced the cancellation of all bus and train services between the two countries.

Louages (shared taxis) are the only form of public transport still operating between the two countries. They operate from place Sidi Bou Mendil in the Tunis medina to Annaba and Constantine.

From Libya

The only crossing point open to foreigners is at Ras al-Jedir, 33km east of Ben Guerdane. For a tourist, the main obstacle is obtaining a visa, which is difficult; the best approach is to take a tour to Libya with an agency that will arrange a visa for you.

There are daily buses to Tripoli from the southern bus station in Tunis. The trip costs TD29.6 and takes up to 16 hours. You should reserve three days ahead. There are also services from Sfax (TD17.8).

Louages are faster and more convenient than buses. There are regular (though not daily) services to Tripoli via Ras al-Jedir from many Tunisian towns, including Tunis, Sfax, Gabès, Medenine, Houmt Souq and Ben Guerdane. The louages that work these routes are yellow with a white stripe.

SEA

Crossing by ferry from Italy or France is a popular option, with ferries operating year-round. Ferries are heavily booked in summer, so book well in advance. If you're arriving with your vehicle, see Entering the Country p302. Child fares usually cost 50% of adult fares.

Shipping agents and ferry companies that operate on these routes include:

Compagnie Tunisienne de Navigation (CTN; www.ctn.com.tn) Tunis (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 322 802; fax 71 354 855; 122 rue de Yougoslavie); Marseille (☎ 04 91 56 30 10; fax 04 91 56 35 86; 61 blvd des Dames)

Linee Lauro (☎ 081-497 2222; www.lauro.it, in Italian only)

SNCM (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 338 222; www.sncm.fr; 47 ave Farhat Hached, Tunis)

Tirrenia Navigazione (☎ 39 081 017 1998, 892 123 from within Italy; www.tirrenia.it)

Viamare Travel (www.viamare.com) London (☎ 0870 410 6040; 1230 High Rd, Whetstone N20 0LH); Tunis (☎ 71 737 3 07; Biglietteria Medmar, Agenzia Marittima Unima, Stazione Marittima di La Goulette)

From Italy

Throughout the year, ferries run between Tunis and the Italian ports of Genoa, Naples, Civitavecchia, Palermo (Sicily), Salerno and Livorno. **Viamare Travel** (www.viamare.com) has a full listing of services and fares.

GENOA-TUNIS

The route between Tunis and the northern Italian port of Genoa is operated by CTN and Grandi Navi Veloci (Viamare). The frequency of services ranges from four a month in winter to one every couple of days in July and August. The trip for an adult/child costs around €116/58 and takes between 22 and 24 hours. For small vehicles it costs about €426 one way.

CITAVECCHIA-TUNIS

From Civitavecchia in northern Italy, ships take around 24 hours, operated by Grandi Navi Veloci (Viamare). Fares for an adult cost €116, while a small vehicle costs €182.

PALERMO-TUNIS

Grandi Navi Veloci (Viamare) operates ferries to/from Palermo, which take about 10 hours. Passenger fares for an adult start at €62, while a car costs €123.

NAPLES-TUNIS

Medmar (Viamare) runs around one ferry per week from June to September (there is no service at other times of the year) to/from Naples (about 24 hours). Tickets for an adult cost from €90; a car costs €125.

SALERNO-TUNIS

Grimaldi Ferries (Viamare) operates ferries between Salerno and Tunis (24 hours); a passenger fare costs €99, while a car costs €129.

LIVORNO-TUNIS

Medmar (Viamare) runs ferries to/from Livorno (24 hours). Passengers cost €88, and cars €176.

From France

CTN and the French company SNCM operate ferries year-round between Marseilles and Tunis. Between them there are at least

two ferries a week, even in the middle of winter. There are sailings almost every day between late June and the middle of November. The trip for an adult/child costs around €126/63 and takes around 21 hours. For small vehicles it costs about €578.

GETTING AROUND

Tunisia has a well-developed, efficient transport network that includes buses, louages, trains and ferries. Just about anywhere that's anywhere has daily connections with Tunis.

AIR

Tunisia's domestic air network is fairly limited.

Domestic flights are operated by Tunisair subsidiary Tuninter (www.tuninter.com.tn, in French only), which did have an

TOP 10 TIPS FOR GETTING AROUND TUNISIA

Travelling around Tunisia is generally hassle-free, but there are some things you can do to avoid getting stranded or getting cramp, and to show the locals that you're as savvy as they are.

- A 1st-class train ticket on a popular summer route doesn't mean you have a reserved seat; 1st-class carriages have quotas for standing passengers, so get there early and fight for your (or any) seat.
- Always check whether the bus you're waiting for originates elsewhere; if so, chances are it will be full when it arrives.
- In the old louages (shared taxis, usually Peugeot station wagons), avoid the back seats unless you're under 5ft tall.
- In the new louages (eight-seater 'people-mover' vans), avoid the middle front seat where the combination of dashboard, radio and gearstick can play havoc with knees.
- In the new louages, don't choose a back seat until you've seen how much luggage will be piled in behind you; suitcases can considerably diminish head space.
- Don't expect louages to run after 7pm.
- If the sun is sinking low, always consider paying for the last empty louage seat(s) (or sharing the cost with other passengers) to get it going; it's better than not leaving at all or arriving late at night.
- If you want to see the El-Jem colosseum at sunset, see the boxed text on p208.
- A louage linking Town A with Town B will leave only when completely full of passengers going all the way to Town B. As a result, if you want to get off en route you may have to pay the fare all the way to Town B. And if you're waiting for transport on a remote bit of highway between Town A and Town B, almost all the louages passing by will be full. It's in such circumstances that you'll be glad you checked the schedule for buses, which can always squeeze in one more passenger.
- Watch out for rogue cyclists, maverick moped drivers and wildly unobservant pedestrians when driving.

excellent safety record up until August 2005, when one of its planes crashed near the Sicilian coast, with 16 fatalities.

There are direct flights between Tunis and Jerba (TD85, up to four daily in summer), Tozeur (TD65), Sfax (TD58), Gafsa (TD99) and Tabarka (TD26).

BICYCLE

Tunisia is developing a good reputation as a cycling destination. The road network is extensive and well maintained, and most of the country's roads are flat, although it's too hot in summer and can get very cold in winter in the north. The rest of the year conditions are ideal. It's also possible to put a bike on the train if you want to skip a long stretch or get yourself back to Tunis quickly (it may be necessary to send the bike the day before or afterwards by freight train; check in advance). All louages are equipped with roof racks and can also carry bikes.

The downside of riding a bike in Tunisia is that you share the road with motorists. Most Tunisian drivers aren't accustomed to driving alongside cyclists (some barely manage to avoid larger vehicles). Bicycle lanes are nonexistent and most roads are two-lane stretches of tarmac with no hard shoulder. Traffic on the coastal routes and roads into and out of Tunis can be very heavy, though elsewhere roads are generally quite empty. Your experience will be entirely different – more pleasant and less dangerous – if you keep off major roads; they're not only busier but also more boring.

Though most people you pass on the way will be wreathed in smiles, rock-throwing kids can be an annoyance – this seems to be most prevalent in the north.

If you want a decent touring bike, you should bring your own; check with the airline before buying your ticket to see if your bicycle can be carried as checked baggage. For safety, you should also pack high-visibility clothing, good lights and so on. While it is not compulsory to wear a helmet in Tunisia, we recommend that you bring your own.

Before you leave home, go over your bike with a fine-toothed comb and fill your repair kit with every imaginable spare, as you won't necessarily be able to buy spares for your machine if it breaks down in the middle of nowhere.

Hire

There are a few places that rent bicycles and it can be a great way to explore a town, especially if it's very spread out. This is particularly the case with the massive *palmeriaies* (palm groves) in the south. Most charge TD2.5 to TD4 per hour, but you can usually negotiate cheaper day or half-day rates. Note that this does not include helmet or lock. Never take the first bike offered to you – check through the bikes to find the best one, and make sure that the brakes work.

BOAT

There are two regular scheduled ferry services in Tunisia. The first connects Sfax with the Kerkennah Islands (p219), about 25km off the coast. In summer, there are up to 11 crossings daily, dropping to four in winter.

The second service runs from El-Jorf on the mainland to Ajim on the island of Jerba (p271) throughout the day and night.

BUS

The national and regional bus companies normally operate from a communal bus station (ask for the *gare routière*), although there are exceptions (eg Tabarka and Tataouine).

Buses are preferable to louages if you're on a longer journey as they are more comfortable.

National Buses

The national bus company, the Société Nationale du Transport Rural et Interurbain (referred to as SNTRI and pronounced 'sintri'), operates daily air-conditioned buses from Tunis to just about every town in the country. Frequency ranges from one daily bus (small towns) to half-hourly (to major cities like Sousse and Sfax). The buses run pretty much to schedule, and they're fast, comfortable and inexpensive.

In summer, many of the long-distance departures are at night to avoid the heat of the day, which means you don't get to see any of the country you're travelling through. Booking ahead is usually recommended.

Regional Buses

Besides the national company, there are regional bus companies that run buses around their area and to nearby cities in neighbouring regions.

These buses are reliable enough, but most have seen better days, are slow and never air-conditioned. Coverage of routes is good; in some cases, they're the only form of transport to smaller towns. The only way to be sure of bus schedules is to go to the bus station and ask. Some larger towns are served by two or three regional companies.

Costs

Buses cost around the same as louages. Sample long-distance fares from Tunis include Jerba (TD21.2), Sfax (TD12.5) and Tozeur (TD20.8).

Reservations

Almost every bus station has a SNTRI booking office for reservations. Regional companies maintain similar windows but they often open only an hour or so before departure, so advance reservations can be difficult.

CAMIONNETTE

Camionnettes (pick-ups used as taxis) go where buses and louages fear to tread. There aren't many and they make few pretensions to comfort, but they're indispensable if you want to get to some of the out-of-the-way places in the south (especially around Tataouine). Try to establish what the locals are paying before you pay, and remember that they don't operate much beyond mid-afternoon.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE Automobile Associations

The **Touring Club de Tunisie** (☎ 71 323 114; fax 71 324 834; 15 rue d'Allemagne, Tunis 1000) has reciprocal arrangements with many European automobile clubs, including the UK's Automobile Association. If your car conks out, it can direct you to an affiliated breakdown service.

Bring Your Own Vehicle

For an explanation of the documents required if you're bringing your own car, see p306.

Driving Licence

Your own country's driving licence is sufficient for driving (or hiring a car) in Tunisia, but international driving permits are also acceptable, and recommended if you come from a country outside Western Europe.

Fuel & Spare Parts

Fuel is very inexpensive by European standards and prices are the same everywhere: 740 mills per litre for diesel and two-stroke mix, and TD1.1 per litre for super (high octane), regular (low octane) and unleaded fuel.

Spare parts are generally available in Tunisia for most well-known European cars (especially French ones), but that really only applies in larger towns; get your car comprehensively serviced before leaving your home country.

ROAD DISTANCES (KM)

Bizerte	---																				
Gabès	375	---																			
Gafsa	409	149	---																		
Houmt Souq	547	106	255	---																	
Kairouan	220	215	209	321	---																
Nabeul	130	357	323	463	114	---															
Sfax	332	137	197	243	136	220	---														
Sousse	208	264	277	132	68	96	127	---													
Tabarka	147	496	347	602	277	239	441	317	---												
Tataouine	563	122	271	118	337	479	259	259	672	---											
Tozeur	502	242	93	348	302	416	290	370	440	364	---										
Tunis	66	375	343	481	154	64	266	142	175	497	436	---									
	Bizerte	Gabès	Gafsa	Houmt Souq	Kairouan	Nabeul	Sfax	Sousse	Tabarka	Tataouine	Tozeur	Tunis									

If you're bringing your own motorcycle, make sure you carry some basic spare parts. These are virtually impossible to find within the country.

Hire CAR

Hire cars are the best way to see more of the country at your own pace, but they're relatively expensive to rent. Some international agencies include:

Avis (www.avis.com)

Hertz (www.hertz.com)

Europcar (www.europcar.com)

Details of local agents for these are given in the individual chapters.

International agencies typically charge from about TD30 per day plus 250 mills per kilometre, or TD54 per day for unlimited kilometres and a minimum of seven days for the smallest cars (eg Fiat Uno). On top of these rates you'll usually have to pay 18% tax, insurance of at least TD8 per day, contract fees and so on. Medium-sized, air-con cars (Renault Clio or VW Polo) are listed as costing about TD65 per day plus 325 mills per kilometre.

Both international and local companies are usually willing to offer cheaper rates than those listed. In winter, it may be possible to find someone willing to hire a Renault Clio with air-con (all-inclusive with unlimited kilometres) for less than TD350 per week, and for TD450 per week in summer. Tunis, Sfax and Houmt Souq (on Jerba) are the best places to look for bargains. You'll get a much better deal if you

hire on arrival rather than booking a car from abroad. Agencies often try to charge a surcharge for dropping off at a different location to where you pick up, but you may be able to avoid this by informing the agency that you want to drop off at a different point towards the end of your trip rather than when you hire the car.

Child seats are usually available, at a cost of around TD5 to TD10 per day extra.

A deposit of roughly the equivalent of the rental is usually required (unless you're paying by credit card). Rental companies require that drivers be aged over 21 and hold a driving licence that has been valid for at least a year.

When you hire the car, make sure that an accident-report form has been included with the car's papers; in the event of an accident, both parties involved must complete the form. If the form is not completed, you may be liable for the costs, even if you have paid for insurance.

MOTORCYCLE

A few places rent scooters or mopeds for which no licence or insurance is required, although for a machine of more than 50cc you need to be over 21 years old and held a valid motorcycle licence for more than one year.

Insurance

If you hire a car, you usually pay an extra charge for insurance – check this part of the agreement carefully to understand what protection you have. If you're travelling with your own vehicle and have insurance with a

European company, ask your insurer about the possibility of an extension to your home-insurance cover. If you take out travel insurance, this may also cover vehicle damage or accidents – again, check the small print.

Road Conditions

Tunisia has a good road network. All but the most minor roads are tar sealed, though smaller roads can be bumpy. Potholes are more common in the south. Many of the roads that are marked as unsealed on maps have now been sealed, particularly in the south where the army has heavily involved itself in the road-building effort. Of the unsealed roads in the south, most are graded regularly and can usually be negotiated easily with a 2WD vehicle (see the regional chapters for more details). Of course, negotiating unsealed roads wherever you are in the country depends on the weather conditions.

There is only one *péage* (road toll) in Tunisia – the new A1 expressway between Tunis and Msaken, south of Sousse. The trip costs TD1.2 by car. There are plans to extend the system north to Bizerte and south to Sfax and Gabès.

Police officers rarely stop foreigners, but it's best to ensure you have your passport, licence and car registration papers handy at all times.

Road Hazards

If you're used to driving in Italy or France, you'll have no trouble adapting to Tunisian roads. Those coming from the highways of Britain, Germany or the US may find it trickier to assimilate to road etiquette here. However, Tunisian drivers are generally well behaved, and drive fairly predictably, if sometimes badly. Overtaking manoeuvres are often launched with little regard for what's coming the other way, and frequently on bends or when approaching a hill. Yet the worst hazards are moped riders, who weave suicidally in and out of traffic, and pedestrians, who think they have an inalienable right to walk on the road regardless of traffic conditions. In country towns, watch out for animals and small children making unexpected forays onto the road.

Road Rules

The road rules in Tunisia are much the same as in continental Europe. You drive on the

right and overtake on the left. Speed limits are 50km/h in built-up areas and 90km/h on the open road. The only exception is on the toll road from Tunis to Sousse, where the speed limit is 110km/h.

The regulation that causes the most problems for tourists is the one giving priority to traffic coming from the right in built-up areas. This also extends to roundabouts, where you are obliged to give way to traffic approaching from the right even if you are already at the roundabout.

The special intersections for turning left off major roads are another curiosity of Tunisian driving. Instead of using a turning lane in the centre of the road, the Tunisian system involves a special lane leading off to the right, which loops back and crosses the main road at right angles. It can be very confusing if you're driving along looking for a sign pointing to the left – and then find a sign telling you to turn right.

Seat belts are not compulsory in cities or towns, but are obligatory for front-seat passengers on the open road. That said, it's highly recommended to wear seat belts at all times.

It's almost unheard of for a tourist to be booked – unless the infringement causes an accident, when the police are obliged to act.

HITCHING

Many local people hitch as a matter of course, and picking them up can be a good way of having local contact. However, before sticking your own thumb out, remember that hitching is not an entirely safe method of transport and comes with an element of risk. Women should never attempt to hitch without a male companion.

LOCAL TRANSPORT

Most towns are small enough to get around on foot. The problem comes in summer, when it's too hot to walk far during the day.

Taxis are the best alternative. They can be found in all but the smallest towns and are cheap by European standards. The day rate (tariff A or tariff 1) applies from 5am to 8pm; flag fall is 340 mills, and fares work out at about 500 mills per kilometre. At night the flag fall is 510 mills and fares are 50% higher. Most taxis are only allowed

WITH A SMILE AND A WAVE

All along Tunisia's roads you'll come across policemen keeping watch over the nation's safety. While that may be reassuring, not all Tunisians see it that way. Anyone who has spent any time in a *louage* will know the ritual well.

As the driver approaches the intersection or police checkpoint, or an area where his local knowledge tells him that there may be one, he slows the car almost to walking speed, puts on his seat belt and asks front-seat passengers to do the same. At a snail's pace, he draws near, pretending not to look at the police, yet unable to take his eyes off them. When he catches their eye and receives the shrug indicating permission to pass, the driver smiles innocently and waves genially in the direction of the men in uniform, all the while muttering dark curses about scorpions under his breath.

As a driver in Tunisia, you'd be well advised to follow the same procedure (except that you should wear your seatbelt at all times), although before you curse the police, remember that your status as a foreigner almost always guarantees you unimpeded passage.

to take three passengers, though some will take more without a murmur, while others will negotiate a fixed price for taking more passengers. Police usually turn a blind eye.

Major towns like Sousse, Sfax and Tunis have local bus networks. Tunis also has a modern tram network and a suburban train line (TGM) connecting the city centre with the northern suburbs.

Some towns, including Gabès, Houmt Souq, Nabeul and Tozeur, have *calèches* (horse-drawn carriages) for hire. All charge TD10 per hour.

Louage

Louages (long-distance shared taxis – usually white with a red, blue or yellow stripe) are the workhorses of the Tunisian road and by far the simplest and fastest means of public transport, as well as a good way to meet local people. Fares cost around the same as buses (working out around TD3 per 100km). Louages leave when full rather than to any timetable, but you'll rarely have to wait more than 45 minutes. However, don't leave your run too late – most louages stop running after 7pm, sometimes earlier.

In most towns, the louage station is close to, or combined with, the bus station, enabling you to choose between the services. At the louage stations, drivers stand by their vehicles and call out their destinations. A foreigner is sure to be asked their destination and given assistance. Occasionally you have to buy your ticket from a booth beforehand, but usually you pay the driver on board. If it's the latter, ask the fare before you get in. If you think you're being ripped off, ask to see the list of tariffs (set by the government) that all drivers are required to carry.

Most of the old Peugeot or Renault station wagons (with an extra bench seat in the back and licensed to carry five passengers) are being replaced by more comfortable people-carrier vans, which are licensed to carry eight passengers. Fares are quoted *par place* (per person). There are no discounts for children. There is a small charge for luggage. At least in Kasserine, taxi regulations provide for an extra fee of TD0.4 for each bag over 10kg.

Although some louages are licensed to operate nationwide, most can operate only within their local government area on a

specific route. The town name on the roof of each louage indicates where it's licensed, which is not necessarily where it's going.

TOURS

For information about package tours from abroad, see Air p302.

Most sites in Tunisia can be reached by public transport, but there are two types of organised tour that will be of use to travellers.

The first is a Sahara desert tour. Indeed, unless you have your own vehicle, a tour is the only way to see the desert. Options range from overnight camel treks to week-long 4WD expeditions. Douz (p245) is the main base for launching desert tours, although good operators also work from Tozeur (p258). Many resort hotels from the coast (especially Jerba) can also make the arrangements for a desert exploration. Be aware that tours leaving from resorts such as Hammamet, Nabeul and Sousse will entail a lot of time on the road as it's quite a journey to get to the south. For more information on what sort of trip is possible, see Desert Expeditions, p248.

The second type of tour is a day trip. This usually involves a hotel or agency rounding up enough people to make the trip viable. This is a popular way of visiting Matmata, the oasis villages near Tozeur or the sights in and around Tunis. To get the most out of a tour, check that it's not covering too much in one day – those taking in Carthage, the Bardo and the Medina in Tunis, for example, will feel rather rushed.

Chartering a taxi privately is a popular do-it-yourself alternative for exploring Jerba or the Berber villages and *ksour* (fortified strongholds) around Tataouine – it's best to bargain for a fixed price before you set out.

ECOTOURS

Guides with a good understanding of ecology are hard to find in Tunisia, and ecotours are rarely on the agenda.

One company worth seeking out is **Becasse** (☎ 71 960 314, 97-462 460; www.becasse-ecologie.com; apt 10 1002, 38 bis, rue de Cologne, Tunis), which specialises in small-group nature and bird-watching tours to areas of outstanding natural interest. It is affiliated with Hammamet-based agency **Visit Tunisia** (☎ 72 280 860; www.visit-tunisia.com).

TRAIN

Trains are run by the **Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Tunisiens** (SNCF; ☎ 71 345 511; www.snctf.com.tn). The rail network is extensive (though not comprehensive) and train travel is comfortable (unless you are standing), but trains are slow, and can run late. For shorter journeys you're usually better off taking a bus or a louage.

The main train line runs north–south between Tunis and Gabès via Sousse and Sfax, and there are frequent services along this route. One train per day branches off at Mahres, south of Sfax, to Gafsa and Metlaoui. There are also lines to Bizerte, via Mateur; Ghardimao, via Jendouba; and Kalaat Khasba (halfway between Le Kef and Kasserine).

Cap Bon is serviced by a branch line from Bir Bou Regba to Nabeul, while the Metro du Sahel network operates south from Sousse to Monastir and Mahdia. Both these lines are linked to the main north–south line. Other rail lines shown on maps are for freight only.

The *Lezard Rouge* (Red Lizard) is a restored train that belonged to the former bey, who used it to go on pleasure trips into the mountains. It runs between Metlaoui and Redeyef five days per week, offering great views of the Seldja Gorge. For more details, see p267.

Classes

Passenger trains offer three classes: 2nd, 1st and *confort*. Second class costs about the same as a bus, and is normally packed with people, parcels and livestock – a circus that can be fun to experience for a short journey. Unless you get on at the start and have sharp elbows, you're unlikely to find a seat.

First class has reclining, upholstered seats, and a better chance of actually sitting in one. *Confort* doesn't offer much more apart from a smaller, slightly more exclusive compartment. Most mainline trains have a restaurant car, which sends out a regular supply of sandwiches, soft drinks and coffee.

Costs

Sample fares from Tunis to:

Destination	1st class	2nd class	confort
Sousse	TD6.5	TD8.6	TD9.2
Sfax	TD10.5	TD14.1	TD15
Gafsa	TD14.35	TD19.25	TD20.45
Monastir	TD37.85	TD10.35	TD11

Reservations

Trains can get crowded in summer, especially going south. To get a seat, it's a good idea to make a reservation the day before, which can be done at train stations in any medium-sized town around the country.

Health Dr Caroline Evans

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Prevention is the key to staying healthy while travelling in Tunisia. A little planning before departure, particularly for pre-existing illnesses, will save you trouble later: see your dentist before a long trip to sort out any loose fillings; carry spare contact lenses and glasses and take your optical prescription with you. Infectious diseases can and do occur in Tunisia, but they are extremely rare. Medical facilities can be excellent in large cities, but in remote areas they may be more basic.

BEFORE YOU GO

It's tempting to leave it all to the last minute – don't! Many vaccines don't ensure immunity for two weeks, so visit a doctor four to eight weeks before departure. Ask your doctor for an International Certificate of Vaccination (otherwise known as the yellow booklet), which will list all the vaccinations you've received. This is mandatory for countries that require proof of yellow fever vaccination upon entry, but it's a good idea to carry it wherever you travel.

Travellers can register with the **International Association for Medical Advice to Travellers** (IAMAT;

www.iamat.org). Its website can help travellers to find a doctor with recognised training.

Bring medications in their original, clearly labelled containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity.

INSURANCE

Find out in advance if your insurance will make payments directly to providers or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures (in many countries doctors expect payment in cash); it's also worth ensuring that your travel insurance will cover repatriation home, or to better medical facilities elsewhere. Your insurance may be able to locate the nearest source of medical help, or you can ask at your hotel. In an emergency contact your embassy or consulate. Your travel insurance will not usually cover you for any dental work other than emergency treatment. Not all insurance covers emergency aeromedical evacuation home or to a hospital in a major city, which may be the only way to get medical attention for a serious emergency.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

The World Health Organization recommends that all travellers regardless of the region they are travelling in should be covered for diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella and polio, as well as hepatitis B. While making preparations to travel, take the opportunity to ensure that all of

TRAVEL HEALTH WEBSITES

It's usually a good idea to consult your government's travel health website before departure, if one is available.

Australia (www.dfat.gov.au/travel)

Canada (www.travelhealth.gc.ca)

UK (www.dh.gov.uk) Click on the links for 'Policy and Guidance' and then 'EHIC and Health advice for travellers'.

US (www.cdc.gov/travel)

your routine vaccination cover is complete. The consequences of these diseases can be severe and there is a small risk of contracting them in Tunisia.

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

Following is a list of items you should consider packing in your medical kit.

- Antibiotics if travelling off the beaten track
- Antidiarrhoeal drugs (eg loperamide)
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or aspirin
- Anti-inflammatory drugs (eg ibuprofen)
- Antihistamines (for hay fever and allergic reactions)
- Antibacterial ointment (eg Bactroban) for cuts and abrasions
- Steroid cream or cortisone (allergic rashes)
- Bandages, gauze, gauze rolls
- Adhesive or paper tape
- Scissors, safety pins, tweezers
- Thermometer
- Pocket knife
- DEET-containing insect repellent for the skin
- Permethrin-containing insect spray for clothing, tents and bed nets
- Sun block
- Oral rehydration salts
- Iodine tablets (for water purification)
- Syringes and sterile needles if travelling to remote areas

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel-health advice on the internet. For further information, the **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com) website is a good place to start. The World Health Organization publishes a superb book, *International Travel and Health*, which is revised annually and is available online at no cost at www.who.int/ith. Another website of general interest is **MD Travel Health** (www.mdtravelhealth.com), which provides complete travel health recommendations for every country, updated daily, also at no cost. The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (www.cdc.gov) website is a very useful source of travellers' health information.

FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's *Healthy Travel* is packed with useful information including pretrip planning, emergency first aid, immunisa-

tion and disease information and what to do if you get sick on the road. Other recommended references include *Traveller's Health* by Dr Richard Dawood (Oxford University Press), *International Travel Health Guide* by Stuart R Rose, MD (Travel Medicine Inc) and *The Travellers' Good Health Guide* by Ted Lankester (Sheldon Press), an especially useful health guide for volunteers and long-term expatriates working in the Middle East.

IN TRANSIT

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Deep vein thrombosis occurs when blood clots form in the legs during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The longer the flight, the greater the risk. Though most blood clots are reabsorbed, some may break off and travel through the blood vessels to the lungs, where they may cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of deep vein thrombosis is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle, or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and difficulty breathing. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of deep vein thrombosis on long flights you should walk about the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie contract the leg muscles while sitting), drink plenty of fluids, and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

Jet lag is common when crossing more than five time zones; it results in insomnia, fatigue, malaise or nausea. To avoid jet lag try drinking plenty of (nonalcoholic) fluids and eating light meals. Upon arrival, seek exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep etc) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine) and meclizine (Antivert, Bonine) are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. Their main side effect is drowsiness. A herbal alternative is ginger, which works like a charm for some people.

IN TUNISIA

AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTHCARE

The healthcare system in Tunisia varies. Medical care can be excellent in larger towns (eg Tunis, Sousse, Sfax and Houmt Souq, where many of the doctors completed their studies in Europe). Reciprocal arrangements with countries rarely exist and you should be prepared to pay for all medical and dental treatment. Charges are less expensive than European countries but medical insurance is always advisable.

Medical care is not always readily available outside major cities. Medicine, and even sterile dressings or intravenous fluids, may need to be bought from a local pharmacy. Nursing care may be limited or rudimentary as this is something families and friends are expected to provide. The travel assistance provided by your insurance may be able to locate the nearest source of medical help, otherwise ask at your hotel. In an emergency contact your embassy or consulate.

Standards of dental care are variable and there is an increased risk of hepatitis B and HIV transmission via poorly sterilised equipment. Keep in mind that your travel insurance will not usually cover you for anything other than emergency dental treatment.

For minor illnesses such as diarrhoea, pharmacists can provide valuable advice and sell over-the-counter medication. They can also advise when more specialised help is needed and recommend good local clinics.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Diphtheria

Diphtheria is spread through close respiratory contact, causing a high temperature and severe sore throat. Sometimes a membrane forms across the throat requiring a tracheostomy to prevent suffocation. Vaccination is recommended for those likely to be in close contact with the local population in infected areas. The vaccine is given as an injection alone, or with tetanus, and lasts 10 years.

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is spread through contaminated food (particularly shellfish) and water. It causes jaundice, and although rarely fatal, it can cause prolonged lethargy and delayed recov-

ery. Symptoms include dark urine, a yellow colour to the whites of the eyes, fever and abdominal pain. Hepatitis A vaccine (Avaxim, VAQTA, Havrix) is given as an injection: a single dose gives protection for up to a year while a booster 12 months later will provide a subsequent 10 years of protection. Hepatitis A and typhoid vaccines can also be given as a single dose vaccine (hepatyrix or viatim).

Hepatitis B

Infected blood, contaminated needles and sexual intercourse can all transmit hepatitis B. It can cause jaundice, and affects the liver, occasionally causing liver failure. All travellers should make this a routine vaccination. (Many countries now give a hepatitis B vaccination as part of routine childhood vaccination.) The vaccine is given singly, or with the hepatitis A vaccine (hepatyrix). A course will give protection for at least five years. It can be given over four weeks, or six months.

HIV

HIV is spread via infected blood and blood products, sexual intercourse with an infected partner and from an infected mother to her newborn child. It can be spread through 'blood to blood' contact such as contaminated instruments during medical, dental, acupuncture and body piercing procedures, and sharing used intravenous needles.

Poliomyelitis

This disease is generally spread through contaminated food and water. It is one of the vaccines given in childhood and should be boosted every 10 years, either orally (a drop on the tongue) or as an injection. Polio may be carried asymptotically, although it can cause a transient fever and, in rare cases, potentially permanent muscle weakness or paralysis.

Rabies

Spread through bites or licks on broken skin from an infected animal, rabies is fatal. Animal handlers should be vaccinated, as should those travelling to remote areas where a reliable source of post-bite vaccine is not available within 24 hours. Three injections are needed over a month. If you have not been vaccinated you will need a course of five injections starting within 24 hours or as soon as possible after the injury. Vaccination does

not give you immunity, it merely buys you more time to seek appropriate medical help.

Travellers' Diarrhoea

To prevent diarrhoea, avoid tap water unless it has been boiled, filtered or chemically disinfected (iodine tablets); only eat fresh fruits or vegetables if cooked or if you have peeled them yourself and be wary of dairy products that might contain unpasteurised milk. Buffet meals are risky, as food should be piping hot; food freshly cooked in front of you in a busy restaurant is more likely to be safe.

If you develop diarrhoea, drink plenty of fluids, preferably an oral rehydration solution with lots of salt and sugar. A few loose stools don't require treatment, but if you start having more than four or five stools a day you should start taking an antibiotic (usually a quinolone drug) and an anti-diarrhoeal agent (such as loperamide). If diarrhoea is bloody or persists for more than 72 hours or is accompanied by fever, shaking chills or severe abdominal pain, seek medical attention.

Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis (TB) is spread through close respiratory contact and occasionally through infected milk or milk products. BCG vaccine is recommended for those likely to be mixing closely with the local population. It is more important for those visiting family or planning on a long stay, and those employed as teachers and healthcare workers. TB can be asymptomatic, although symptoms can include cough, weight loss or fever months or even years after exposure. An x-ray is the best way to confirm if you have TB. BCG gives a moderate degree of protection against TB. It causes a small permanent scar at the site of injection, and is usually only given in specialised chest clinics. As it's a live vaccine it should not be given to pregnant women or immunocompromised individuals. The BCG vaccine is not available in all countries.

Typhoid

This is spread through food or water that has been contaminated by infected human faeces. The first symptom is usually fever or a pink rash on the abdomen. Septicaemia (blood poisoning) may also occur. Typhoid vaccine (typhim Vi, typherix) will give protection for three years. In some countries, the oral vaccine Vivotif is also available.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Heat Illness

Heat exhaustion occurs following heavy sweating and excessive fluid loss with inadequate replacement of fluids and salt. This is particularly common in hot climates when taking unaccustomed exercise before full acclimatisation. Symptoms include headache, dizziness and tiredness. Dehydration is already happening by the time you feel thirsty – aim to drink sufficient water such that you produce pale, diluted urine. The treatment of heat exhaustion consists of fluid replacement with water and/or fruit juice, and cooling by cold water and fans. The treatment of the salt loss component consists of salty fluids as in soup or Bovril, and adding a little more table salt to foods than usual.

Heat stroke is much more serious. This occurs when the body's heat-regulating mechanism breaks down. An excessive rise in body temperature leads to sweating ceasing, irrational and hyperactive behaviour and eventually loss of consciousness and death. Rapid cooling by spraying the body with water and fanning is an ideal treatment. Emergency fluid and electrolyte replacement by intravenous drip is usually also required.

Prickly heat is a heat rash that occurs when sweat-gland pores get clogged, resulting in a red rash and sometimes small water blisters. It can feel quite itchy or prickly. Wearing loose cotton clothing will help prevent or reduce the rash, as will having frequent cool baths or showers. Calamine lotion may soothe it, or you can try antihistamines to relieve the itching. If it persists, see a pharmacist or doctor.

Insect Bites & Stings

Mosquitoes may not carry malaria but can cause irritation and infected bites. Using DEET-based insect repellents will prevent bites. Mosquitoes also spread dengue fever.

Bees and wasps only cause real problems to those with a severe allergy (anaphylaxis). If you have a severe allergy to bee or wasp stings you should carry an adrenaline injection or similar.

Sand flies are found around the Mediterranean beaches. They usually only cause a nasty itchy bite but can carry a rare skin disorder called cutaneous leishmaniasis. Bites may be prevented by using DEET-based repellents.

Scorpions are frequently found in arid or dry climates. They can give a painful bite which is rarely life threatening.

Bed bugs are often found in hostels and cheap hotels. They lead to very itchy lumpy bites. Spraying the mattress with an appropriate insect killer will do a good job of getting rid of them.

Scabies are also frequently found in cheap accommodation. These tiny mites live in the skin, particularly between the fingers. They cause an intensely itchy rash. Scabies is easily treated with lotion from a pharmacy; people who you come into contact with also need treating to avoid the spread of scabies between asymptomatic carriers.

Snake Bites

Avoid being bitten – do not walk barefoot or stick your hand into holes or cracks. Half of those bitten by venomous snakes are not actually injected with poison (envenomed). If bitten by a snake, do not panic. Immobilise the limb with a splint (eg a stick) and apply a bandage over the site, firm pressure, similar to a bandage over a sprain. Do not apply a tourniquet, or cut or suck the bite. Get the victim to medical help as soon as possible so that antivenin can be given if necessary.

Water

Tap water is safe to drink throughout Tunisia, with the notable exception of Jerba where salt water has seeped into underground water sources; stick to bottled water, boil water for 10 minutes or use water purification tablets or a filter. Do not drink water from rivers or lakes, as this may contain bacteria or viruses that can cause diarrhoea or vomiting.

TRAVELLING WITH CHILDREN

All travellers with children should know how to treat minor ailments and when to seek medical treatment. Make sure the children are up to date with routine vaccinations, and discuss possible travel vaccines well before departure as some vaccines are not suitable for children aged under one year.

In hot, humid climates any wound or break in the skin may lead to infection. The area should be cleaned and then kept dry and clean. Remember to avoid contaminated food and water. If your child is vomiting or experiencing diarrhoea, lost fluid and salts must be replaced. It may be helpful to take

rehydration powders for reconstituting with boiled water. Ask your doctor about this.

Bear in mind that children are more susceptible to heat than adults, and should drink plenty of fluids in hot weather. They are more prone to prickly heat (see p317); discuss any treatment with a doctor before you apply it.

Children should be encouraged to avoid dogs or other mammals because of the risk of rabies and other diseases. Any bite, scratch or lick from a warm-blooded, furry animal should immediately be thoroughly cleaned. If there is any possibility that the animal is infected with rabies, immediate medical assistance should be sought.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Emotional stress, exhaustion and travelling through different time zones can all contribute to an upset in the menstrual pattern. If using oral contraceptives, remember some antibiotics, diarrhoea and vomiting can stop the pill from working and lead to the risk of pregnancy, so remember to take condoms with you just in case (they're readily available over the counter in pharmacies in Tunisia). Condoms should be kept in a cool dry place or they may crack and perish.

Emergency contraception is effective if taken within 24 hours after unprotected sex. See the **International Planned Parent Federation** (www.ippf.org) website for details on the availability of contraception in Tunisia. Tampons are usually only found in supermarkets, and can be hard to find outside medium towns.

Travelling during pregnancy is usually possible but there are important things to consider. Have a medical check-up before embarking on your trip. The most risky times for travel are during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, when miscarriage is most likely, and after 30 weeks, when complications such as high blood pressure and premature delivery can occur. Most airlines will not accept a traveller after 28 to 32 weeks of pregnancy, and long-haul flights in the later stages can be very uncomfortable. Antenatal facilities should be relied on only in larger cities. Taking written records of the pregnancy including details of your blood group is likely to be helpful if you need medical attention while away. Ensure your insurance policy covers pregnancy delivery and post-natal care, but remember insurance policies are only as good as the facilities available.

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