

Historic Tunisia Offers Much More Than Beaches

By Ian Stalker

The Canadian director of the Tunisian National Tourist Office is inviting those vacationers who are traditionally drawn to his homeland by its long Mediterranean beaches to step back from the coast for at least part of their journeys.

Neji Gouider is quick to agree that Tunisian beaches – and the resorts that have sprung up along them – are a huge plus for his country's tourist trade but adds they are only one side to the North African country.



Colin Antill - fotoseeker.com - Port el-Kantaoui

Desert safaris



Tunisia Desert

"Tunisia is not just a beach destination," he insists. "We offer many products, such as culture, thalassotherapy spas, golf, desert safaris, medical tourism and ecological tourism. And don't forget our gastronomic tourism, 1,300 kilometers of beaches and the Sahara. Tunisia is the second most important destination in the world for thalassotherapy. We have around 37 thalassotherapy centers. We also have 10 golf courses. And people should visit (the Tunis-area community of) Sidi Bou Said. All the buildings and homes are white and blue and visitors will see orange and lemon trees and bougainvillea everywhere. It's very pretty. There is a famous cafe where everybody drinks mint tea and enjoys a beautiful view of the Mediterranean Sea. Every tourist should visit Sidi Bou Said."

Years of catering to foreign tourists has led to the development of more than 825 hotels throughout Tunisia, most of them four and five stars. Each tourist zone has numerous hotels staffed by people who speak Arabic, French, English and other European languages. That good hotel infrastructure extends into the Tunisian Sahara, with Gouider saying at least part of a Tunisian vacation should include time spent in part of the world's greatest expanse of desert. "It's exotic," he says of the Sahara. "It's another world, with camels and endless sand dunes. Part of Stars Wars was filmed in the Tunisian Sahara. You feel another type of sensation when you visit the desert. I suggest that all who visit Tunisia visit the Sahara."





Tunisia has also made inroads in the medical tourism market, attracting around 150,000 people each year for different treatments. Most of them are European, drawn by the likes of cardio-vascular treatments, orthopedic and aesthetic treatments, liposuction, and dental surgery. Tunisia has more than 80 private clinics with 2,500 beds and sophisticated medical equipment, Gouider reports. The doctors are Tunisians who have

worked in France.

"Tunisia is about 3,000 years of history, from the north to the south," he reports. "There are so many historical sites. Each city has history and each city has museums. There is Carthage, Sidi Bou Said and Roman ruins. We have excellent Roman ruins that tourists can visit. And Jerba is the island Homer says in the Odyssey where Ulysses landed to look for the lotus," he points out.