AFRIQUE UNIE · TRAVEL NOTEBOOK

Tunisia in 12 days: a day-by-day itinerary

Tunisia packs three thousand years of history, living medinas, oases and the first dunes of the Sahara into a few hundred kilometres. This twelve-day route starts in Tunis and Carthage, follows the Sahel coast to Sousse, Kairouan and El Jem, heads down to the cave houses of Matmata, Douz and the Chott el Djerid, then ends at an easy pace on the island of Djerba. Here are the stages, the driving times and the points to check before you go.

Day by day

Days 1-2 · Tunis, the medina and the Bardo Museum (night : Tunis)
Settle into Tunis and start on Avenue Habib Bourguiba, with its cafés and colonial façades, before walking through the Porte de France into the UNESCO-listed medina. Follow the covered souks to the Zitouna Mosque, whose courtyard non-Muslims can glimpse at certain times, then look for the café terraces that open onto the rooftops. The next morning, visit the Bardo Museum, home to one of the world's finest collections of Roman mosaics; check its opening hours, which have changed often in recent years. Finish with dinner in a medina restaurant, over a fish couscous or a brik.

Day 3 · Carthage and Sidi Bou Said (night : Tunis or Sidi Bou Said)
The TGM, a small suburban train, links central Tunis with the sites of Carthage and Sidi Bou Said in about half an hour. The remains of the Punic and then Roman city are spread out: a combined ticket covers Byrsa Hill and its museum, the Antonine Baths facing the sea, the Punic ports and the tophet. Allow a morning, starting early in summer as shade is scarce. In the afternoon, head up to Sidi Bou Said, a white village of studded doors and blue shutters perched above the gulf. Have a pine-nut tea at the Café des Délices or the Café des Nattes, and stay for the evening light over the bay.

Days 4-5 · Sousse and the holy city of Kairouan (night : Sousse)
About two hours of motorway take you to Sousse, on the Sahel coast. Its UNESCO-listed medina is one of the most authentic in the country: climb the ribat, an eighth-century religious fortress, for the view from its tower, then visit the archaeological museum in the kasbah and its mosaics. The next day, make the round trip to Kairouan, an hour's drive inland. Regarded by many believers as the fourth holy city of Islam, it has the Great Mosque, whose courtyard and prayer hall can be seen from the entrance, the Aghlabid Basins and a medina famous for its carpets. Try makroudh, small semolina and date pastries, the local speciality.

Day 6 · The amphitheatre of El Jem, then Matmata (night : Matmata)
Set off early for El Jem, about an hour from Sousse. The Roman amphitheatre, one of the largest of the ancient world, rises from the middle of the small town: walk its galleries, go down into the underground passages where the wild animals were kept, then climb to the upper tiers. The small museum nearby displays fine mosaics and a reconstructed villa. Then take the road south via Sfax and Gabès: allow three and a half to four hours to Matmata. This Berber village is known for its cave houses dug around circular courtyards, one of which served as a set for a famous science-fiction film. Spend the night there, in one of them if you can.

Day 7 · Douz, gateway to the Sahara (night : Douz)
An hour and a half's drive west brings you to Douz, an oasis town that calls itself the gateway to the Sahara. On Thursdays, the market draws herders and traders from the whole region. In the late afternoon, head to the first dunes of the Grand Erg Oriental, just outside town, for a camel ride or a walk at sunset. Stay close to town: French official advice strongly advises against travel in desert and border areas, and the Saharan region further south, towards Libya and Algeria, is a military zone where travel requires prior authorisation. In late December, the International Festival of the Sahara fills the town with horse races and traditional songs.

Days 8-9 · The Chott el Djerid and the oases of Tozeur (night : Tozeur)
Beyond Kébili, the road crosses the Chott el Djerid on a long causeway: a vast salt flat, white or pinkish depending on the season, where mirages are common. Allow about two hours to Tozeur. The town is famous for its old Ouled el-Hadef quarter, with ochre brick façades laid in geometric patterns, and for its palm grove, which you can explore by horse-drawn carriage or by bike. The next day, visit Nefta and its palm-filled basin, about 20 kilometres away, then return to stroll through the medina of Tozeur and watch the sunset over the chott. The mountain oases of Chebika and Tamerza, less than ten kilometres from the Algerian border, are not part of this route: the UK advises against all but essential travel to that border strip.

Days 10-12 · The island of Djerba, then home (night : Djerba)
The drive to Djerba is long, about four and a half to five hours via Kébili and Gabès, then by the Jorf ferry or the El Kantara causeway. After that, take time to slow down. Houmt Souk, the small island capital, has kept its fondouks and its Ottoman fort facing the sea. In Erriadh, the murals of the Djerbahood project cover the walls of a whole neighbourhood, close to the El Ghriba synagogue, a very old place of pilgrimage where security checks are strict. Spend the last day on the beach, on the east coast, or cycling between the menzels, the island's white fortified farmhouses. Flights home leave from Djerba-Zarzis airport, or from Tunis after a domestic flight.

Getting around

The most practical option is to hire a car in Tunis: the motorway runs through the Sahel to Sfax and Gabès, and the roads in the south are good and quiet. Stay on the main roads, as French official advice recommends for reaching the south-west, avoid driving at night, expect frequent police checkpoints and always keep your documents with you. Without a car, the train links Tunis with Sousse, El Jem, Sfax and Gabès, and louages, shared taxis, serve every town on the route. A domestic flight between Djerba and Tunis saves the drive back. The border areas with Libya and some areas near the Algerian border are advised against: check your government's official map before you leave.

When to go

Spring, from April to June, and autumn, from September to October, are ideal: pleasant temperatures in both north and south, and the sea already or still warm in Djerba. In summer, the heat becomes intense in Kairouan, Tozeur and Douz, and sightseeing is best done early in the morning. Winter stays mild on the coast and sunny in the desert, but nights there are cold. During Ramadan the route remains feasible, with adjusted restaurant and opening hours.

Practical information

Tunisia

Entry	Depends on your passport: visiterafriqueunie.com/en/visa/tunisia/
Yellow fever	Certificate not required
Malaria	none
Currency	Tunisian dinar (TND)
Languages	Arabic, French
Plugs	type C, E · dialling code +216 · UTC+1
Emergencies	police 197 · ambulance 190 · fire 198

Departure checklist

Documents

☐ Passport valid for at least six months after your return, with blank pages
☐ Visa or e-visa (printed if required)
☐ International vaccination certificate (yellow fever if required)
☐ Travel insurance certificate and assistance number
☐ Paper and digital copies of your passport and bookings
☐ Tickets, bookings and addresses saved offline
☐ International driving permit if you are hiring a vehicle

Health

☐ Travel consultation done and vaccinations up to date
☐ Malaria tablets if your doctor recommends them
☐ First-aid kit: plasters, antiseptic, anti-diarrhoea tablets, rehydration salts
☐ Mosquito repellent suitable for the tropics
☐ Sunscreen, hat and sunglasses
☐ Personal medication and prescriptions

Money and connectivity

☐ Bank told, Visa or Mastercard (and a backup card)
☐ Cash in euros or dollars, recent notes in good condition
☐ eSIM or local SIM card sorted
☐ Plug adapter for the country
☐ Power bank and cables
☐ Offline maps downloaded
☐ Afrique Unie app installed

In the bag

☐ Light clothes that cover up (sun, mosquitoes, places of worship)
☐ A fleece for evenings, dawn safaris and altitude
☐ Walking shoes and sandals
☐ Head torch
☐ Water bottle (ideally with a filter)
☐ Small daypack and waterproof pouches
☐ Luggage padlock

Before you close the door

☐ Your government's travel advice reread
☐ Trip registered with your consular service (if it offers this)
☐ Itinerary and contacts left with someone close
☐ Online check-in done and baggage allowance checked

Notebook made from visiterafriqueunie.com/en/itineraries/tunisia-in-12-days/ · information checked in November 2026 against official sources. Entry, health and safety rules change: check them again before you leave (your country's official advice, the embassy of the country you visit).