

# Tunisia

## Its Mediterranean charms aren't all history

Try mentioning the name Hannibal to anyone and they'll either say Lector the movie cannibal or Hannibal Smith and the antics of his wacky A-Team. Now, when I was in school, Hannibal was the name of the legendary Carthaginian general who set off with his mighty army and a string of elephants to launch his attack on Rome.



© Peter Ellegard

Roman Ruins



Of course, the once mighty Roman Empire is now a mere footnote in history and the legendary citadel of Carthage an upmarket suburb of Tunis with just its many sites of Roman ruins giving a clue to its former glory in a country where tourism has become an essential part of the economy.

Modern Tunisia is a tolerant, stable and forward-looking North African, Arab country with its head touching the sparkling Mediterranean; its feet deep in the sands of the dramatic Saharan desert landscape, while at its heart are its friendly welcoming people.

There's something else pretty important you should know about Tunisia. It has bustling marinas, superb resort hotels, some of the best spas in the world, 700 miles of magnificent beaches...oh and golf courses too, very fine ones.

Tunisia lies on the opposite coast of the Mediterranean from the glitzy French Riviera, the crowded Spanish costas and Italy's mediaeval cities, but each of these countries has influenced the cultural development, which is reflected in its Spanish and Moorish architecture, its French heritage (most people speak fluent French) and its food with pizza and spaghetti appearing alongside North African favourites in many restaurants.

It is a fascinating mix of the modern and the almost biblical. There are bustling souks lining the narrow streets of ancient medinas selling spices and vegetables alongside hookah pipes and flowing Arab robes. And in between the stylish hotels you'll see shepherds tending their sheep while mosque, Christian church and synagogue all live happily next door to each other.

Tunisia is an up-and-coming golf destination. Latest facilities are the Oasis Golf Course in the Sahara desert oasis of Tozeur, which opened in November 2006, and the new Residence Golf Course in upmarket resort Gammarth, near Tunis. When fully open in spring 2008, it will give Tunisia 12 golf courses at 10 clubs, with another 10 opening by 2010.



Oasis Golf Course clubhouse

Oasis Golf Course at Tozeur

### Carthage Golf Club

Other than Tozeur, Tunisia's golf is scattered across the northern part of the country, between Tabarka on the northern border with Algeria and the Gulf of Hammamet.

However, the quality of its courses rival those of Spain and Portugal, and the infrastructure of hotels, attractions and resorts all add up nicely to a decent golf break with the bonus of uncrowded fairways, green fees costing as little as £25 and a very different but welcoming culture. Service is friendly but not overwhelming, soft spikes are worn everywhere and the dress code is smart, but casual, on and off the fairways.

Tunisia now boasts 36 world-class thalassotherapy spa centres. Thalassotherapy is hot treated sea water which is pumped into jet baths and Jacuzzis and used in seaweed wraps and detoxifying treatments. It is a fabulous cure for rheumatism, arthritis and stress as well as a great source of relaxation and rejuvenation.

**The quality of its courses rival  
those of Spain and Portugal**

Tunisia's Mediterranean climate offers perfect year-round conditions for playing golf, although when the thermometer hits 40-plus in July and August, it's perhaps better to keep off the fairways and enjoy a leisurely poolside drink, unless you venture out very early or late in the day. Ideal golf holiday time is September through to March.

French colonists, who ruled the country until 1956, introduced golf to Tunisians when, in 1927, they opened Carthage Golf Club, the oldest club in the country and one of the oldest in Africa. It's a real members' club, very friendly and welcoming to golfers of both sexes and all ages and is handily situated some 10 minutes from Tunis-Carthage Airport and another 10 from the wonderful beaches of the Carthaginian coast.



This short, tactically tricky par-66 course of 4,524 metres enjoys a panoramic layout, wandering through shady 100-year-old eucalyptus, palm, olive and orange trees and between lakes. The club has full practice facilities, a team of fully-qualified golf professionals and a charming terraced restaurant overlooking the course.

Tunis and Carthage are worthwhile spending some time in with lots to see. Visit boutique Dar hotels Dar Said in the beautiful blue and white village of Sidi Bou Said, where you can explore the lively souk which wanders through its winding streets, and Dar El Medina in the ancient 8th century UNESCO-listed medina in Tunis.

In Carthage, visit the ancient Antoine Baths and Byrsa Hill sites, and don't forget the famous Bardo Museum with its world-renowned collection of Roman mosaics.



Tabarka Golf Course

Tunisia's own Costa del Sol, between Hammamet and Monastir, is where the lion's share of the courses lie. But one lovely golf course sitting proudly on its own, at Tabarka in the northwest, deserves a visit.

Tabarka, dubbed the Coral City, is also Tunisia's "coolest" destination in the artistic sense, hosting no fewer than four international music festivals. Jazz musician Dizzy Gillespie also wrote a guitar piece called A Night in Tunisia. Now I'm not sure whether he was in Tabarka when he penned it, but something about its laid back melody tells me he must have been.

Clear blue Mediterranean waters and green pine-studded hills make this one of Tunisia's most beautiful and unspoilt holiday places. The golf course, designed by Ronald Fream, is more West Coast California than North Africa, with seven spectacular holes running alongside the sea and narrow fairways meandering through eucalyptus forest, oaks and pines. Its par-72, 18 holes measure 6,400 metres and plans are underway to extend it to 27 holes. This is a course which will appeal to the more experienced golfer and those who appreciate the finer things in life.

But it is south to the coastal villages of Hammamet and Monastir where the holidaymaker will find resorts, hotels, holiday attractions and golf courses nestling between the fine sandy beaches and orange groves.



© Peter Ellegard

Hammamet Cafe

Hammamet Beach

© Peter Ellegard

Oscar Wilde, Winston Churchill and even the glamorous Sophia Loren have visited Hammamet and its popularity is rapidly growing with European tourists keen to enjoy its mix of sea, sand and sun at a very attractive price. It's become a very stylish resort, reminiscent of the French Riviera with well-appointed resort hotels lining a handsome esplanade complete with casino. It all contrasts attractively with the winding, ancient alleyways and souks of the heavily fortified 15th Century Medina.

Sparkling yachts and boats of all sizes line the pretty harbour at Port El Kantaoui. This lively and cosmopolitan marina is handsomely surrounded by Arabo-Moorish whitewashed village houses, which are mainly well-equipped holiday apartments or second homes for well-to-do Tunisians.

This is a wonderful place to enjoy a leisurely lunch or dinner. We dined at the beautifully-appointed La Dorade restaurant on the quayside where a wide variety of freshly caught fish and sea-food was on offer, but there is a good choice of restaurants, bars and even British-style tea-rooms and gifts shops.

Across the Gulf of Hammamet lies Sousse, an equally stylish but much more vibrant holiday resort with lively bars, restaurants, casino and nightlife. It attracts a much younger set than Port El-Kantaoui, which is favoured mainly by families and couples looking for a peaceful holiday destination.



### The Magic Life Golf Yasmine Course

It was also Ronald Fream who created the attractive 36-hole El Kantaoui Golf Course in 1979; its sloping course ends close to the water's edge and offers views from the fairways towards the Port and the resort itself. The club has two 18-hole championship layouts: the Panorama and the Sea courses – with the Panorama seeming to have the edge in terms of design and challenge.



El Kantaoui Golf Club

El Kantaoui has played host to the PGA European Tour's Tunisian Seniors Open from 2001-2003, reflecting the excellent standard of the course and the level of challenge it offers. Panorama enjoys a rolling, reasonably easy to walk layout through shady fig and eucalyptus trees and offers a challenge to players of all handicap levels.

Fream really made a name for himself in Tunisian golf course design, as he is also the name behind both Citrus and Yasmine golf courses at Hammamet. These two clubs are near neighbours on the outskirts of the town and offer some of the best golf in the country.

*It is a delight to play and the scenery is inspirational.*

Yasmine is a lovely golf course. Green, in good condition and undulating across a hillyish site, it gives views of both sea and deep forests. Water hazards in the form of small lakes, plus hills, trees and tricky doglegs all come into play during the course of a round on this 18-hole, par-72 layout. There is also a good 9-hole course, which will suit players of all levels of ability, in particular those who are learning the game or improvers. The club has good practice facilities and a team of well-qualified teaching pros who are happy to give individual and group lessons.

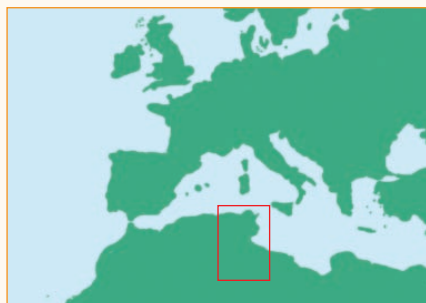
Literally across the road from Yasmine is the Citrus Golf Club with its two courses – the Forest and the Olive Tree. The Forest is just spectacular with magnificent and often dramatic hillside views and some beautiful and challenging golf holes. It is a delight to play and the scenery is inspirational.

Less arduous and flatter in layout, though none the less attractive for it, is the Olive Tree, yet another 18-hole championship course. The front nine holes wander through lovely old olive groves and contrast beautifully with the back nine, which rises through green hills and between water hazards – the 300-acre layout at Citrus features six lakes in total. Citrus also has a very comprehensive practise set-up with a 9-hole executive course, the biggest driving range in Tunisia and five pitching and putting greens.



Citrus Golf Club

Golf Club	Holes	Par	Length (m)	Green Fees (Dinars/Euros)	Buggy Hire (Dinars/Euros)	Visitor Access
Tabarka Golf Club	18	72	6400	42	25	Visitors welcome
Carthage Golf Club	18	66	4524	57	No Buggies	Visitors welcome
GOLF CITRUS						
The Forest Course	18	72	6128	100	40	Visitors welcome
The Olive Course	18	72	6144	100	40	Visitors welcome
Magic Life Golf Yasmine	18	72	6062	64-80	36	Visitors welcome
EL-KANTAOUI GOLF CLUB						
Panorama Course	18	72	6045	80	40	Visitors welcome
Sea Course	18	72	6253	80	40	Visitors welcome
Flamingo Golf Club	18	72	6140	€41 €38	€22	Visitors welcome
Palm Links Golf Club	18	72	6076	68 (high season) 56 (low season)	40	Visitors welcome
Djerba Golf Club	18	73	6169	50	40	Visitors welcome
Oasis Golf Course, Tozeur	18	72	6345	58-70	36	Visitors welcome
Residence Golf Course (9 holes from Jan 2008, 18 by Mar 2008)	18	72	6456	€60 residents €75 other hotels	€30	Visitors welcome



- 1 Tabarka Golf Club
- 2 Carthage Golf Club
- 3 Yasmine Golf Club
- 4 Golf Citrus
- 5 El-Kantaoui Golf Club
- 6 Palm Links Golf Club
- 7 Flamingo Golf Club
- 8 Djerba Golf Club
- 9 Oasis Golf Course, Tozeur
- 10 Residence Golf Course

Oasis Golf Course at Tozeur



There are two popular golf courses close to Sousse and Monastir. The 18-hole Flamingo Golf Club opened in 1989 and the shorter and tighter Palm Links, which is 10 years old. Flamingo – yet another Ronald Fream layout – was built on a wide plateau between lakes and the sea and is shaded by gnarled olive trees. Wadis run through the course, creating lakes which come into play during the course of a round. There are five tee positions at each hole, giving plenty of choice off the tee, and lovely sea breezes make this a delightful place to play golf even on a hot North African day.

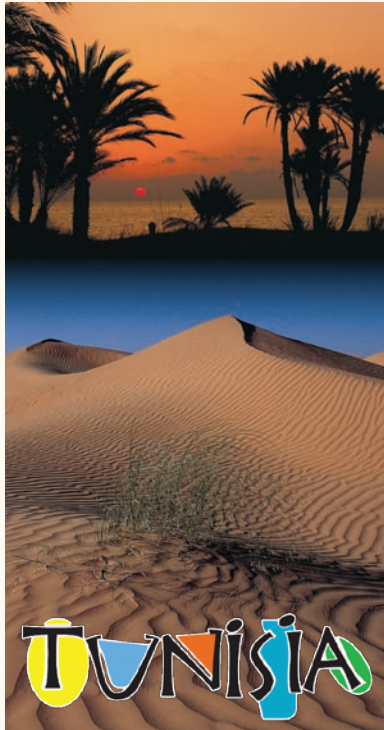


Flamingo Golf Course

Palm Links has recently undergone improvements and offers a short and quite tight layout, running through undulating sand dunes close to the sea shore but is not a true links in the Scottish sense.

Djerba Golf Club doesn't have the name Fream on it, but that of Martin Hawtree instead. Its 27-hole layout lies on Djerba Island and enjoys a picturesque palm tree and acacia-dotted location between the sea and sand dunes. Djerba is a beautiful garden island enjoying a superb climate where life ticks by on very traditional lines with whitewashed houses, weaving workshops and the oldest synagogue in Africa.

Before the opening of the new 18-hole Oasis Golf Course in Tozeur at the end of 2006, the Sahara Desert was considered off the beaten golfing track. Another Ronald Fream creation, it is set in an oasis and overlooks palm groves and desert. The 3rd hole has nine different tee positions, giving a unique Saharan golfing experience.



Tozeur is a beautiful palm-fringed oasis town irrigated by 2,000 springs and famous as a movie set. Many scenes for Star Wars were shot in the desert here while other movies filmed on location in the area include Indiana Jones and the English Patient.

Tozeur is a very attractive add-on to a Tunisian holiday with camel rides into the desert or sand safaris, go-karting and quad bikes. It is also a place of fabulous sunsets, shimmering salt lakes and desert mirages and an altogether unforgettable experience. You can spend the night in a Bedouin tent under the stars or take the Red Lizard Train from Reddayef to Metlaoui across the Selgja Gorge and see the magnificent scenery of Tunisia's Grand Canyons too.

Tunisia's latest golf course is the Residence Golf Course, in Gammarth. It belongs to the five-star Residence Hotel, part of the Leading Hotels of the World Group, with a thalassotherapy spa and beach facilities, just 20 minutes from the centre of Tunis. The 18-hole, par-72 course fully opens in March 2008 following the opening of the first nine holes by the end of 2007.

With good-value green fees and prices in general, visitors can have a very enjoyable golf holiday in Tunisia which won't leave a nasty hole in their bank balance.

Anne Harper 