

Tunisia's Newest Golf Course

> By Ian Stalker
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Those who designed the newest golf course in Tunisia wouldn't have been at a loss to find the sand needed for sand traps. The North African country has gained its 13th course, this one found in the southern city of Tozeur, in the Tunisian Sahara, a region tourism authorities have increasingly been encouraging Mediterranean coast-loving tourists to explore for at least part of their vacations.

Tozeur, found in an oasis, is a focal point of southern Tunisia's tourist trade, and Mohamed Jerbi, North American director of the Tunisian National Tourist Office, says the 18-hole Oasis Golf Course underscores the diversity of area attractions, and features a dramatic setting.

"When you hit your ball, you may end up looking for it in dunes or greenery," he says. "It [the course] offers all the services needed by golfers. With this 13th golf course, Tunisia has become a golf destination."

Tunisian golf courses attract large numbers of northern Europeans during winter, a season when golf isn't available in their own countries. The country's other courses -- all of which differ in some manner -- are near its Mediterranean coast, which lures millions of beach-loving Europeans each year. One course is on the island of Jerba, linked to mainland Tunisia by a Roman causeway and identified by Homer in *The Odyssey* as the place where Ulysses landed to have his companions taste the lotus. Jerba's unique character is underscored by no building being taller than a mature palm tree.

But Jerbi says tourists should consider visiting the southern part of his homeland, citing exotic landscapes that have led to the region being used as a setting for *Star Wars* and other films.

Tozeur-- which Jerbi says is in "the heart of the desert"-- has a well-developed tourism infrastructure, with Jerbi pointing to the

likes of a five-star Sofitel property. Those seeking more adventurous ways of overnight can camp beneath a starry sky, with desert safaris available.

Meanwhile, Jerbi says that Tunisia, home to Carthage and shaped by the Romans and others over centuries, provides many exotic experiences.

"Tunisia is a land of contrasts, a land of thousands of years of history," he says.

Tunisia's long-standing ties with France mean French is spoken throughout the country but Jerbi adds English-speaking tourists will find plenty of people in the country's tourism trade speak English. ■

