

The Minaret of Great Mosque of Kairouan.

منارة الجامع الكبير بالقيروان

Green Tunisia is Gaining Even More Cheerful Colors

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"Green Tunisia" is a common description of Tunisia in the Arab language. Keep in mind, though, that Tunisia is not merely the green mountains of Ain Draham and the green of the olive trees around Souse. Tunisia is like a rainbow: the blue of Jerba's sky and of the windows in Sidi bou Said, the yellow of the sands in Douz and of the old buildings in Kairouan, the red of the ripe cactus figs near Dougga and of the roofs of the houses in Tabarka, the sunset orange in Hammamet and the purple of the beautiful traditional Berber women's dresses. Tunisia is indeed a festival of colors and of tourists. Wherever you go, tourists from various countries are there. They have-discovered the ancient Punic and Roman ruins of Carthage and Dougga, the Arab-Islamic heritage in the holy city of Kairouan and innumerable well-preserved medinas, the old Berber villages around Medenine, and they enjoy the magnificent Mediterranean beaches and the oases of the Sahara.

The Tunisian tourist market faced difficult times in the last three years, not only due to the crises of international tourism after 9/11, but because of the terrorist attack on European tourists in Jerba, in April 2002. The majority of the victims were Germans and Germany was then the biggest tourist

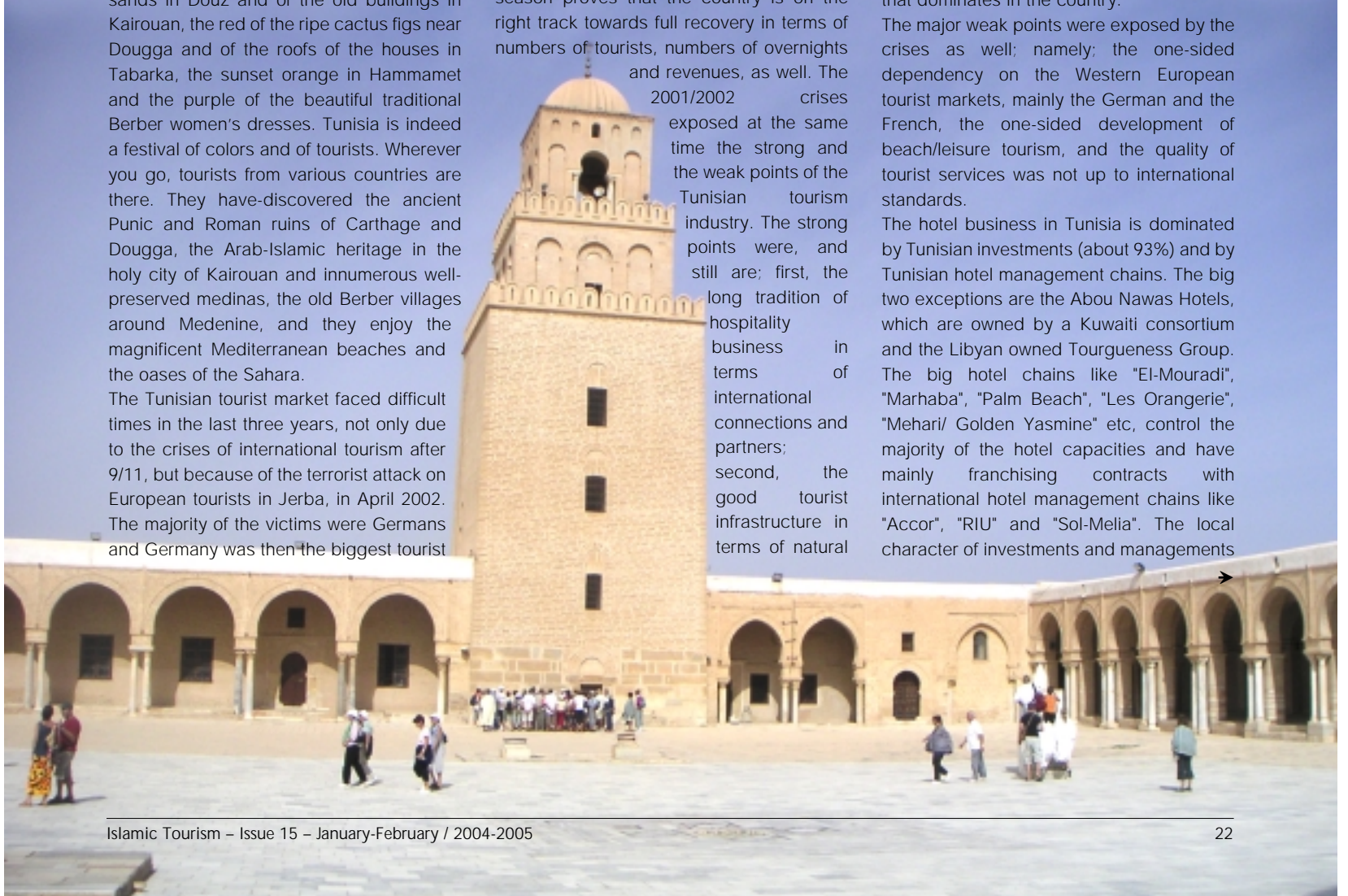
income country for Tunisia. More than one million German tourists used to spend their holidays here yearly. The number has decreased dramatically to less than 600,000 tourists per year since then. Nevertheless, the Tunisian tourism industry has been recovering rapidly and the 2003/2004 season proves that the country is on the right track towards full recovery in terms of numbers of tourists, numbers of overnights and revenues, as well. The

2001/2002 crises exposed at the same time the strong and the weak points of the Tunisian tourism industry. The strong points were, and still are; first, the long tradition of hospitality business in terms of international connections and partners; second, the good tourist infrastructure in terms of natural

and cultural recourses as well as accommodation and transportation; third, the exceptional organization of the private and public players in tourism, in which the local hotel chains play a very important role; and forth, the general atmosphere of openness and tolerance towards tourists that dominates in the country.

The major weak points were exposed by the crises as well; namely: the one-sided dependency on the Western European tourist markets, mainly the German and the French, the one-sided development of beach/leisure tourism, and the quality of tourist services was not up to international standards.

The hotel business in Tunisia is dominated by Tunisian investments (about 93%) and by Tunisian hotel management chains. The big two exceptions are the Abou Nawas Hotels, which are owned by a Kuwaiti consortium and the Libyan owned Tourgueness Group. The big hotel chains like "El-Mouradi", "Marhaba", "Palm Beach", "Les Orangerie", "Mehari/ Golden Yasmine" etc, control the majority of the hotel capacities and have mainly franchising contracts with international hotel management chains like "Accor", "RIU" and "Sol-Melia". The local character of investments and managements



City Tourism



The Marina Quarter in Yasmine Hammamet. المارينا في ياسمين الحمامات



New Hotels in the Oasis of Tozuer. الفنادق الجديدة في واحة توزر



A Hotel in Tozuer.

فندق في توزر



A Panoramic View from Carthage Hill.

منظر بانورامي من تلال قرطاج

allow effective cooperation and coordination in marketing, promotion and strategy-building processes with governmental organizations on various levels in times of crises. The awareness of the existence of the above-mentioned weaknesses by the main private and public players before the crises has allowed the tourism industry to cope quickly and efficiently with the new conditions. New action programs with various strategies were implemented to achieve positive results in both the short and long terms.

A combination of, on the one hand, a diversification strategy of income tourist markets and local tourist offers, and on the other hand, programs and initiatives to upgrade the quality of services, is intended

to secure the short-term recovery and the long-term success of the tourism industry. To compensate the huge decrease in the German market, aggressive and innovative marketing and promotion campaigns were implemented in Western European markets, especially in France, Belgium, Italy and Spain, which are traditionally familiar with the country and easy-to-reach by air and sea. New international markets were also addressed to achieve a wished-for long-term diversification. The Czech Republic, Poland, Portugal, Denmark, Russia and even Turkey, Japan and China are among the new expanding markets.

Their discovery of the neighboring markets of Libya and Algeria as well as the market of the Tunisian and other North African

expatriates gave a healthy push to the tourist industry as well. The diversification of the offers and the tourist facilities has been emerging on different tracks: first, to develop further the infrastructure of sport and spa tourism; golf clubs, marinas and thalasso-spas are the key words here. The second track is developing medical tourism, especially for a growing number of Libyan customers. The third track is to push MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) tourism, among others in "virgin" areas like Tozuer in the south and Tabarka in the west. The fourth track is to offer more entertainment spots for family tourism. Carthagoland in the new fully-integrated tourist complex of Yasmine Hammamet is an example for such entertainment facilities. ➤

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A Panoramic View from the Terrace of Les Mimosas Hotel in Tabarka.

منظر بانورامي من شرفة فندق ميموساس في طبرقة

The fifth track aims to offer new accommodation types beside the "normal" hotels and tourist villages. The trend is to encourage, on the one hand, "Hotels de Charm", which are small, luxurious and cozy hotels that offer high-quality and personal services for wealthy tourists, on the other hand, "Apartment and Villa Hotels" (Residential Hotels) that satisfy the demands of long-term and family tourism. Within the context of upgrading the quality of tourist services, which started before the crises, the construction of the new fully-integrated tourist complex of Yasmine Hammamet is to be seen.

Twenty years after the launching of the first

fully-integrated tourist complex in Tunisia and in the whole Arab World in the mid 70s, namely Port El Kantaoui, the second such huge project is, in principle, ready today to guest tourists. Yasmine Hammamet, which is located 10 km to the south of the city of Hammamet and a 100% Tunisian investment, offers about 14,000 beds in mainly four and five stars hotels, two golf courses, an ice-skating rink, a casino, a marina with 740 berths, centers of thalasso therapy and balneo therapy treatments, a Disneyland-like attraction park "Carthagoland", two convention centers and a shopping-dining-entertainment-housing area with an Oriental-Mediterranean setting,

called the "Medina". This new complex crystallizes the vision of the future mass leisure family tourism as it is seen by the main Tunisian players in tourism, with accents on sport, spa and high-quality services. The long-term aim is to promote Tunisia as a family-friendly tourist destination that provides a mixture of high-quality and unique services in an open-minded and secure atmosphere. For tourists interested in cultural and ecological tourism as well as for MICE and medical tourism, the main strategy aims to develop these types of tourism not only as options for all-round family tourism offers, but as core elements of a diversified tourist market. ■